

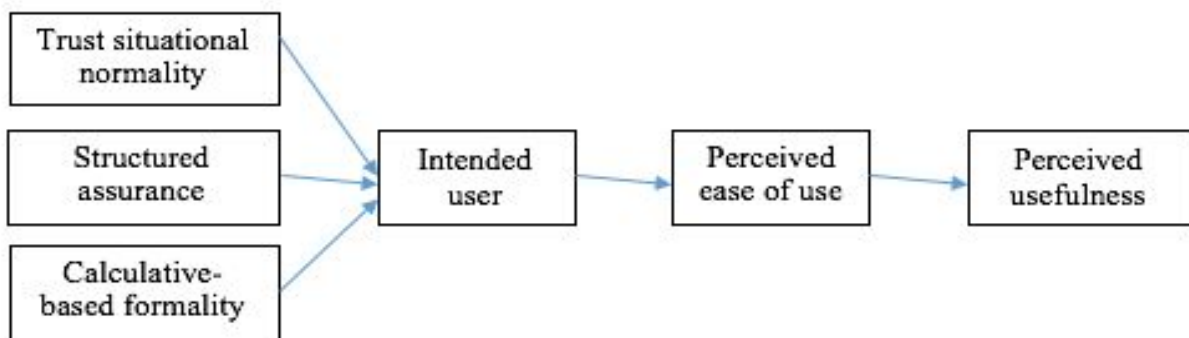
Literature Review

Research Question

How much do users trust of Instagram as an electronic vendor affect their intention to buy for English speaking respondents in Qatar?

Introduction

Various focused analyses on the use of social media in Qatar have indicated that Qataris generally tend to prefer using Instagram as a business growth enhancement tool



*Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1: Research Model*

(Taehwan, 2013). There is a significant amount of evidence that seems to suggest that some of the more popular international commercial sites such as E-bay and Amazon generally fail to provide the diversity that is demanded by the Qatari population (Taehwan, 2013). Contrary to the promotion of products via e-commerce sites such as Amazon, the promotion of products by individuals and organizations via Instagram is argued by Taehwan (2013) to be efficient in the provision of some much-needed visual appeal that then translates into increased motivation on the part of the clients to purchase specific products (Taehwan, 2013). This aspect is seen to aid in demonstrating the reason as to why Qatari retailers perceive Instagram as not just being a communication channel, but also an effective business promotion tool that is able to greatly revolutionize their business activities within the Qatari market. Despite the popularity and increased use of Instagram shopping in Qatar, there exists

a significantly large research gap because no studies have been conducted to highlight the sociocultural factors and values that serve to inform the rather high rate of Instagram acceptance within Qatar (Pymnts.com, 2016). In addition to this, it is also important to identify the sociocultural factors that are serving to impede the use of Instagram shopping, if measures are to be implemented to successfully sustain its growth. To delve deeper into this case, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) will be used. The structure of the model is simple but detailed. As shown below, the structure of the model has several phases—from trust-situational normality, structured assurance, calculative based-formality, to the intended user, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness.

According to Gefen, Karrahana, and Straub (2003), TAM is used to identify the IT acceptance in the context of work-related activity in which the theory is applicable and has been successfully applied to diverse non-organizational settings” (p. 54). From this sense, it can be said that the TAM is specifically utilized to explore how the users accept the technology for their decision-making process, particularly when purchasing online. Using this model, this study will seek to fill this research gap by conducting an analysis of the sociocultural factors that have served to inform the increased use of Instagram shopping in Qatar as well as those factors that are serving to impede this increase.

Background of Social Media

According to Hajli (2014), the advancements that have been made in Internet technology over the past few years have had the effect of creating new business systems such as online communities and social media. The increased availability of Internet access has allowed organizations to use various social media platforms ranging from Instagram to Twitter and Facebook, as effective marketing avenues. Some of the applications of social

media for business purposes include the ability to enhance brand popularity; increase sales; facilitate increased word-of-mouth communication; the sharing of information in a business context; and the generation of social support for consumers. According to Dun, Kalaji, and Mutassem (2012), social media sites have changed the nature and quality of interaction between friends and families. Facebook, for instance, has been shown to promote connectedness between individuals who are far apart thus making it a strategic business tool aimed at exploiting the psychosocial connection between different persons. Masoudi, Shekarriz, and Farokhi (2015) affirm these observations by highlighting the fact that similar, or even greater, the appeal can be realized through Instagram as the platform can be used by individuals and companies in their efforts to either brand or rebrand their products at what can be considered to be much lower rates. This aspect is noted to highlight the reason as to why more e-commerce firms are adopting Instagram as the cost-saving alternative resulting in the increased use of the social media platform for shopping in Qatar.

Indrupati and Henari (2012) argue that in the case of Qatar, the use of various social media platforms is noted to be escalating as a result of rapidly increasing consumer awareness of social media platforms. Each of these platforms is noted to aid in the satisfaction of different types of consumer needs. The arguments by Indrupati and Henari (2012) are similar to those made by Kamal, Chu, and Pedram (2013) who argue that most businesses in the Arab World, including Qatar, have in recent years taken note of this fact and have been quick to adapt so as to keep up with the changes that are now taking place in the various consumer markets. Instagram has in recent years grown to become one of the most commonly used shopping applications among young Qataris (Kamal, Chu, and Pedram, 2013).

In light of the increased popularity of social media platforms such as Instagram for shopping, it automatically follows that business organizations in Qatar have been quick to adopt the use of this media. This aspect is demonstrated by the fact that the observations made by Hajli (2014) pertaining to the use of social media for business objectives are seen to be similar to those made by Pate and Adams (2013) who point out that as a result of the increasing amount of time that is being spent on social media platforms by millennials and their use of these platforms as the primary means of communication, advertisers, retailers, and manufacturers are now starting to realize that using social networking sites is the best way in which to reach millennials. It is estimated that over 55% of young adults and teenagers regularly use social networking sites. Pate and Adams (2013) comment that manufacturers and retailers have been quick to ensure that they include the different social networking sites in their promotion mix so as to not only engage their customers but to also successfully attract new ones. It is this aspect that has led to the increased use of Instagram shopping in Qatar

Given the popularity of social media platforms among millennials and the increased use of these platforms by manufacturers to reach these millennials, it is estimated that in the near future, the total amount of revenue that is created by the use of various social networking sites such as Instagram will be nearly 5% of that which will have been created by all user-generated content sites. Most manufacturers, designers, and retailers have now taken to developing their own Instagram pages, Facebook pages, YouTube channels, and Twitter feeds for use in updating their customers. A 2015 report issued by the World Bank that sought to examine the use of social media by Qataris is seen to support the observations made by both Hajli (2014) and Pate and Adams (2013) pertaining to the increased use of social media. The results of the study by Worldbank.org (2015) indicated that among Qataris,

Instagram is the second most popular social media after WhatsApp. Similar results to those pertaining to the popularity of Instagram were noted by Abdul-Muhmin (2010) who points out that Instagram continues to maintain its popularity as the second most popular social media platform in the country and it is for this reason that the platform is considered to be a prime brand development and business promotion tool for most organizations.

Given the increased use of social media in retail trade, Masoudi, Shekariz, and Faroukhi (2015) point out that a close analysis of the Qatari retail industry suggests that e-commerce has enjoyed significant growth over the past decade. The impressive growth that has been recorded in this sector has been linked to the growing internationalization of Qatari youth that has allowed for Western trends and influences to rapidly find their way into the country (Khang, Ki, and Ye, 2012). The popularity of this sector has proven to be a highly attractive profit avenue for most individuals and companies that wish to maintain their growth and success because e-commerce has the benefit of aiding them in the creation of what can be perceived to essentially be a youth-focused identity for their markets and as a direct result provide them with ample room that will allow for the progressive growth of their brands. Numerous multinational organizations have been able to remodel their brands such that they are now able to fully take advantage of the rapidly evolving youth culture across the globe.

Electronic Commerce and Instagram Shopping: Intended Users

Internet shopping is defined by Jawa and Chaichi (2015) as essentially being a form of transaction that allows for individuals to easily exchange various goods and services online. Che, Cheung, and Thadani (2017) suggest that the ever-increasing popularity of online shopping along with the increasing adoption of social networking sites has led to the development of a new paradigm in e-commerce that is popularly referred to as social

commerce (s-commerce). S-Commerce is essentially perceived as being a subset of e-commerce that primarily makes use of social networking sites in the enhancement of interaction between sellers and consumers. The suggestions made by Che, Cheung, and Thadani (2017) are similar to the comments made in a study by Bohra and Bishnoi (2016) who made note of the fact that there has been a shift in business trends and especially so in respect to shopping as today's young generation has made a shift from window shopping to online shopping using various social networking sites.

Instagram is essentially a photo sharing application that has over the years grown to capture millions of active users across the globe. Despite the fact that Instagram is yet to incorporate a sales and advertisement feature, an increasing number of individuals and companies are actively using the application in the promotion of their service offering (Che, Cheung and Thadani, 2017). An increasing number of Qataris are now using Instagram for the exhibition of various items ranging from clothes for adults and kids to food and cosmetics Che, Cheung and Thadani (2017). A key benefit of the application is that it is not limited to use in a single country and interested Qataris are able to shop for products that are being advertised by retailers across the globe. Che, Cheung, and Thadani (2017) assert that individuals and companies that use the application for marketing purposes first open an account before posting sample pictures of what is available for sale accompanied by a short description of these product offerings. They then encourage their Instagram followers to shop online for goods and services. After perusing through the product offerings, consumers are able to demonstrate their interest by leaving messages on the posts that they happen to be interested in or by contacting the store owners via the use of various messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Line or WeChat. Payment for the products on offer is then made using PayPal or other traditional methods that the vendor and buyer agree to. The increased popularity of

selling products in what is essentially a virtual store on Instagram is seen to represent a new shopping mode for most Qatari consumers.

According to the 2015 Qatar e-commerce roadmap that was released by the Qatar Ministry of Information and Communications Technology in 2015, Qatar is host to a relatively large number of 'grey-market' e-commerce enterprises that mainly use social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest to market their products. These enterprises are characterized by their typically being home-based as well as their not having any company registration and as such tend to operate outside the country's commercial and legal context (Qatar Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, 2015). It is the operations of these 'grey-market' e-commerce enterprises that has led to the increased use of Instagram shopping in Qatar.

A similar assertion to that made by Che, Cheung, and Thadani (2017) is seen to be made by Bohra and Bishnoi (2016) who report that Instagram has today grown to be more than a simple photo sharing application and is being used for self-expression, activism, and shopping. From rare vintage finds to international luxury labels, Instagram has grown to become a place where Qatari shoppers are able to discover trending products as well as acquire items that few other individuals are in possession of. Shopping on Instagram is enhanced by the fact that it offers a community feel by allowing customers to communicate with sellers through the comments section which results in the online shopping experience becoming personal and close. Bohra and Bishnoi (2016) confirm the validity of the assertion made by Che, Cheung, and Thadani (2017) when they make note of the fact that in the Instagram shopping, orders can be placed via WhatsApp or in the comments section. Bohra and Bishnoi (2016) point out that some retailers allow for customers to purchase items simply

by leaving a comment while others provide their email addresses or WhatsApp numbers for the placement of orders for the items that they fancy.

Trust and E-Commerce

A wide variety of studies are conducted on the sign of trust in the e-commerce (Shahibi, Ali, & Zaini, 2011; Corbitt, Thanasankit, & Yi, 2003; Habibi & Hajati, 2015; Belanger, Hiller, & Smith, 2002). With the growing power of electronic business, various studies aim to explore how the consumers become trustful with the e-commerce, considering that some of these businesses do not have a specific location and are prone to theft and scams. According to Shahibi, Ali, and Zaini (2011), there are different elements of trust in e-commerce. These elements include the reputation, technology, experience, and relationship building. These elements are related to one another in a process that defines the concept of e-commerce. The reputation of the business is strengthened by technology, especially if the business is new. Through technology, the business will be able to expand its market easily. From this, the reputation of the business can increase. However, the reputation is based on how the online managers or customer service build a relationship with the consumers that serves as their experience. In the study conducted by Eid (2011), it is stated that there are various determinants of customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty in e-commerce in the context of the Saudi Arabia consumers. This study has a significant similarity with the proposed topic though it focuses on Saudi Arabia. This study argues that customer loyalty has a strong connection or influence to the customer trust (Eid, 2011). The customer loyalty is perceived through their experience that builds their trust in the business. This is an interesting point to consider because it exemplifies the impact of trust in the e-commerce that makes this industry productive and alive.

Trust is important in electronic commerce because it can lead the business to economic growth and stability. In the study conducted by Corbitt, Thanasankit, and Yi (2003), it is said that the level of trust plays an important role in determining the perceived market orientation of the consumers. Trust is related to the customers' experiences, site quality, and technical worthiness of the online business. Habibi and Hajati (2015) also argue that the discussion of trust in e-commerce is not widely explored, which creates a missing link in the online business culture. The researchers argue that the confidence in the e-commerce can only be achieved through stable and perceived trust from the consumers (Habibi & Hajati, 2015). It is also said that one of the most significant but common definers of trust in e-commerce is the experience. The consumers' word-of-mouth, testimonials, or feedback can affect the trust of the consumers—whether to purchase online or not (Sun, Lu, Han, & Finnie, 2004). This is an important point to consider because it shows that the concept of trust in the online business wherein the trustworthiness of e-commerce depends on the experience of the consumers as well as their feedback to the sellers. In Lu and Fan's (2013) study, it is argued that social presence, social commerce, and trust are three significant aspects in defining the consumers' purchase intention. The result of their empirical research shows that technology plays a vital role in building trustworthiness in the online business (Lu & Fan, 2013). By using technology, the businesses are able to increase their profit because they are able to expand in a variety of online media platforms.

Trust Issues in E-Commerce

It is true that trust is important in e-commerce; therefore, any wrong decision can affect the trust of the consumers that can lead to the decrease of opportunities for the businesses to expand and survive. There are various aspects to consider when building trust with online businesses. According Belanger, Hiller, and Smith (2002), privacy, security, and

site attributes are the common considerations when building trust in the e-commerce. The researchers explain that trustworthiness can be achieved by considering the privacy and security of the consumers when checking out and using their financial accounts, as well as the clarity and transparency of the website. In Kini and Choobineh's (1998) study, they examine the definition and theoretical considerations of electronic commerce. They explain that trust is not gained immediately because of the various ethical considerations when purchasing online. The credibility and reliability of the world wide web are affecting the business, especially the cases of theft, scamming, and phishing (Kini & Choobineh, 1998). With this, the researchers believe in the significance of discussing not only the opportunities of e-commerce but also its trust issues. In Ferraro's study (1998), it is argued that various trust issues are identifying in the consumer relationship in e-commerce. Privacy and security, online abuses, and problems of identification, authentication, and authorization are some of the common challenges in building trust (Ferraro, 1998). Considering this argument, it can be said that trust can be obtained through proper management and strong customer support and service in e-commerce.

In Paakki's (2004) study, he argues that trust issues must be considered valid and significant in e-commerce because it can profoundly affect the business. The inability of the consumers to trust the online business can affect not only to the business but also to the whole industry (Paakki, 2014). This is the same perspective of Al Rawabdeh, Zeglat, and Alzawahreh (2012) wherein they argue the correlation between trust and security issues in e-commerce. The researchers argue that trust and security issues are vital in the Arab World because of the various considerations. According to the researchers, stable and good security can increase the trust of the consumers (Al Rawabdeh, Zeglat, & Alzawahreh, 2012). In Ghayoumi's (2016) study, it is shown that security and privacy are the two common issues of

trust in e-commerce. It is not the location or web facilities of the business but the design of security and privacy since the consumers are using their personal and financial information when purchasing products or services. These are important points to discuss because they reveal significant and necessary information that identifies the issue of trust and how it can be resolved in order to continue the progress of e-commerce.

Analysis of the Perceived Usefulness of the Instagram Shopping in Qatar

A report by Qatar Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (2015) is seen to support the claims made by Khang, Ki, and Ye, (2012) in regard to the rapid growth of e-commerce as it points out that Qatar currently enjoys a highly favorable environment that actively supports the adoption of e-commerce. This includes it having high fixed, mobile and Internet connectivity; high levels of disposable income; as well as elevated ICT maturity levels. The report goes on to further assert that as a result of the business-to-consumer market in 2014 clocking at US\$1.02 billion, Qatar was able to emerge as the largest B2C market in the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition to this, the attractiveness of the Qatari market to online international retailers is enhanced by the fact that the Qatari economy is recognized as being one of the fastest growing economies in the MENA region in addition to the country also boasting of having the highest levels of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the MENA. These factors make a significant contribution to promoting the increased use of Instagram shopping in Qatar.

The highly favorable environment in Qatar that actively supports the adoption of e-commerce has resulted in the development of a free market economy in the country. This has allowed for Qatar to open its business landscape to its western allies has contributed towards the changes in the retail sector, with more western firms venturing in the country and targeting younger generations that can be equated to the American millennial generations.

The rapid growth of the e-commerce sector, which is currently worth hundreds of billions of US dollars, is likely to be a game changer not just for the western powers but also the Middle East and Asian allies of the west and serve to further promote the increased use of Instagram shopping in Qatar.

Conventionally the favorable market environment and free market economies of countries such as Egypt and Qatar have seen them benefit from their close ties to the west and their focus on online freedom, which has created a positive business environment and served to promoted increased Instagram shopping in Qatar. It is arguable that sustaining the positive business landscape requires all the parties to proactively engage each other and identify strategic channels for improvement. Tourism firms have been able to exploit social media tools such as Instagram to share images on their products and services, and hence expand international market for their specific products and services. This shows that the application of social media tools in business has widened significantly in line with the ideological changes in the society, which are prompted by the internationalization and globalization trends.

Another important sociocultural factor promoting increased Instagram shopping in Qatar is that retailers in the country are experiencing reduced brand loyalty (Pymnts.com, 2016). For retailers, brand retention and the building up of a loyal customer base is of critical importance and this is found to be especially so in light of the heightened competition levels that are often noted in online shopping. Pymnts.com (2016) points out that a recent study conducted by Accenture found that as a result of Internet shopping, 56 percent of consumers have increased the total number of brands that they took into consideration when making purchases over the past decades. In addition to this, 50 percent of the consumers interviewed in the study confirmed that they would be considered likely to switch brand in the event that

convenience and need were to merit such a switch. The reduced customer brand loyalty is thought to stem from the fact that online shopping makes it considerably easier for consumers to conduct price comparisons on the same product. In addition to this, the reduced brand loyalty has also affected the growing tendency among most online shoppers to spend a considerable amount of time online before they finally make a purchase as opposed to their simply being lured in by a well-decorated window display.

Reduced brand loyalty among retailers in Qatar is closely linked to the observations made by Bhuian et al., (2013) who point out that when consumers believe that online shopping will have the effect of improving their shopping experience, these consumers are more likely to opt for the use of online shopping in the evaluation of possible alternatives for the items and services that they intend to purchase. A similar observation is also noted to be made by Bhuian (2016) who observes that the young users of online shopping platforms rely on the online reviews as well as the visual appeal of the messages in the online platforms to advance their buying behaviors. Therefore, companies must harness the observed trends to enhance their brand loyalty, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability within the Qatar business landscape. The growth of the tourism sector, as well as the transfer of technologies from the west to the Middle East, can also be directly linked to the changes in the social media use within Qatar.

Ahmad, Omar, and Ramayah (2010) posit that a key factor that has served to increase Instagram shopping in Qatar is the drastic lifestyle changes that have been evidenced among Qatari consumers in recent years. This lifestyle change has seen consumers have become increasingly reliant and attached to online shopping. Online shopping, such as Instagram shopping, has allowed for individuals to change how they shop and over the past 10 years, the online purchase of goods has gone from being virtually non-existent to now become worth

billions of dollars each year. Whereas Qatari consumers previously used to go to regional shopping centers or into town to do their shopping, they are now able to stay at home and surf for products and offers on Instagram. The lifestyle changes adopted by Qataris that have resulted in the increased use of home computers and smartphones, the impressive high-speed Internet penetration in Qatar as well as the massive number of both local and international retailers that are now offering their goods and services on online platforms such as Instagram have led to the development of the shopping revolution that has alternated the lifestyles of consumers. Consumers are now taking shopping for granted because they can be able to do all their shopping from the convenience of their homes without having to set foot outside. While agreeing with the views presented by Ahmad, Omar, and Ramayah (2010), a study conducted by Hasan (2010) on Qatari online shopping makes an interesting observation when it points out that Qatari men are more likely to use Internet shopping as compared to women due to the benefits that it offers that include convenience, efficiency, and economy. On the other hand, women tend to prefer conventional shopping over online shopping because of the lack of interpersonal and social interaction in online shopping.

The lifestyle changes among Qatari consumers can be argued to be responsible for the growing trend among Qatari consumers to go through online reviews at offline points of sale. This factor can be argued to have helped to increase the popularity of Instagram shopping in the country. Lee, Park, and Han (2011) note that e-commerce reviews are widely acknowledged to be helpful in aiding consumers in making informed decisions when they are looking to make a purchase. With their ever-present smartphones, Qatari consumers are able to quickly tap into online reviews via Instagram and compare different products even in those instances when they find themselves in the process of combing down the aisles of retail stores. The findings of these online reviews can prove to be a critical tipping point for those

consumers that happen to be struggling with different options or similar production in the making of a purchase. It is not uncommon for consumers to opt out of making an offline purchase at a retail store when they find a better-quality product or price offer on a social media platform such as Instagram. The arguments presented by Lee, Park, and Han (2011) pertaining to the importance of online reviews are, however, contradicted by arguments made by Amblee and Bui (2011) who posit that while ratings, reviews, and recommendation systems have grown to become popular social shopping platforms, electronic word of mouth, where social media users use the platform to share their shopping experiences with others, should be considered by both shoppers and retailers to be the primary source of social buying experience and as such have a more profound impact on the decisions made by buyers on whether to make an online purchase.

Perceived Issues and Negative Effects of Instagram Shopping in Qatar

The number of Internet users in Qatar has been steadily increasing over the past two decades as Internet connectivity was spread throughout the country. Indrupati and Henari (2012) note that online shopping, such as Instagram shopping, allows for small-scale retailers in the country to improve their marketing and advertising reach as well as save on the often-high cost of purchasing or renting commercial office space. However, the rapid increase of Instagram shopping in Qatar can be argued to be fueling increased concerns among most Instagram shoppers over the fear of losing touch and this could negatively affect Instagram shopping in Qatar in future. The increased domestic use of communication and information technologies such as Instagram has been observed to have a mix of both harmful and beneficial effects. Social media integration remains an area that requires improvement in many countries, especially in the wake of Internet censorship and social media control by state entities. Dainotti et al., (2011) are noted to agree with the views on Internet censorship

and the effect that this has on users in the Arab World when they point out that Internet censorship is a thorny issue that is noted to continually be affecting the relationship between retailers and consumers in Middle Eastern countries such as Qatar, in light of the fact that only Algeria, Morocco and Palestine have been able to avoid implementing any form of censorship on their populace. The continued internet censorship and social media control in Qatar can be argued to be hampering the increased use of Instagram for shopping in the country.

A key negative impact of increased use of online shopping media such as Instagram in Qatar is that the transition from the Paper Age to the New Digital Age where nearly all transactions can be done online has brought with it a myriad of new issues that are seen to surround personal privacy. Personal privacy when using the Internet for activities such as Instagram shopping has grown to become a major concern not only within Qatar but also across the globe. The rapid increase and advancement of intrusive Internet technologies have resulted in increased global awareness about the importance of privacy. There is a steadily increasing degree of pressure that is being placed on companies and individuals that conduct business online, such as Instagram vendors, to develop and implement privacy policies that will guarantee that the privacy of consumers that are liberally sharing their personal information online is adequately protected. The rush by large international companies to engage in e-commerce using platforms such as Instagram has resulted in an increasing volume of personal information being gathered, sold, shared, and disseminated. Social media users wary of their privacy might opt out of using social media platforms to conduct their shopping. This can have a negative effect on Instagram shopping in the country.

Privacy concerns pertaining to the use of Instagram shopping in Qatar is noted to be critical importance due to a recent report released by the Northwestern University in Qatar

that argues that amid concerns about the use of social media and online privacy, the use of social media across Middle Eastern countries such as Qatar is now shifting from traditionally strong platforms such as Facebook and Twitter towards direct-messaging platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. The report indicated that a survey conducted to check on the impact that privacy concerns have had on Qataris revealed that 46% of Qataris indicated that privacy concerns have had the effect of causing them to change the manner in which they tend to use social media. A key finding that was made in the report is that the use of Instagram across the Middle East has undergone a marked increase of 24 percentage points in the period ranging between 2013 and 2016. These statistics are especially concerning in light of the fact that the popularity of Facebook has reduced by an estimated 6 percentage points over the same duration while Twitter has recorded an even larger reduction in usage at 17 percentage points with a staggering 12 percentage point drop in the period between 2015 and 2016 alone.

In addition to privacy concerns, another major challenge that has emerged with the adoption of e-commerce in different countries is the effectiveness and quality of interaction between the retailers and their clients. This is an area that the players in the sector have progressively worked to address, and is likely to be overcome through the integration of social media in the operations of the various firms. Critical insights into the players in the industry in Qatar and globally show that virtually all firms that specialize in e-commerce have dedicated Facebook and Instagram pages, as well as YouTube channels (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012). This observation supports the fact that firms are committed to expanding their territories by increasingly engaging more people and also ensuring that they respond to questions and concerns raised by their clients in real-time. This creates a sense of focus and preparedness to tackle the challenges faced by the firms.

Closely tied into the issue of reduced effectiveness and quality of interaction between the retailers and their clients is that some research studies, such as the ones conducted by Yao and Zhong (2014) and Weinstein and Lejoyeux (2010), suggest that the increased use of the Internet is closely associated with social isolation as a result of decreased face-to-face social interactions. As the use of the Internet continues to grow among Qataris, it automatically follows that Instagram vendors end up spending progressively less time with their friends and family by engaging in social activities and more time with potential customers as they attempt to close possible sales. Individuals that work from home often tend to put-in more work hours as compared to those that work from offices and this results in increased levels of social isolation (Weinstein and Lejoyeux, 2010). While the advent of e-commerce and online shopping technologies such as Instagram shopping allows consumers to purchase all of their needs from the comfort of their homes, this can nevertheless result in social isolation. In the case of Instagram shopping, the only human interaction arises when the customer signs for the packages or when they call the vendor directly. The threat of social isolation is noted to be especially critical in the case of older pensioners that already have reduced human interaction (Yao and Zhong, 2014).

The arguments presented by Yao and Zhong (2014) as well as those presented by Weinstein and Lejoyeux (2010) are contradicted by the results of some studies such as conducted by Hampton, Sessions, and Her (2011) who argue that the increased use of the Internet has not had any effect on social isolation since 1985 but has instead had the effect of significantly strengthening family bonds and the formation of friendship due to the fact that the use of social media networks such as Instagram foster increased interaction and communication between family members and friends. In spite of the challenges that face social networking in many countries, focused review of the role of social media in the Middle

East shows that they are effective channels for sharing information between different parties (Lee, Park, & Han, 2011). Masoudi, Shekarriz, and Farokhi, (2015) are noted to hold a similar position to that held by Lee, Park and Han (2011) as they make note of the fact that in the UAE and Qatar, social networking sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have evolved to become critical business tools that can be relied upon to increase traffic and hence profitability of business ventures. Masoudi, Shekarriz, and Farokhi (2015) go on to posit that this observation is particularly true for the younger generations who consider social media as the ideal arena to identify products and services to purchase.

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