

University of Economics, Prague

Master's Thesis

University of Economic, Prague
Faculty of Business Administration
Field of study: Corporate Economics and Management



Thesis Title:

Cross-cultural analysis of consumer social media engagement

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the Master's Thesis presented herein is my own work, or fully and specifically acknowledged wherever adapted from other sources. This work has not been published or submitted elsewhere for the requirement of a degree program.

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Title of the Master's Thesis:

Cross-cultural analysis of consumer social media engagement

Abstract:

This paper aims to improve understanding of cultural differences in engagement with the brand's social media pages on different platforms and analyze different perspectives on the key areas of social media engagement and social media advertising. In the theoretical part, the author aims to identify social media platforms, define social media use motivations and motivations for content engagement. The further author investigates the cross-cultural impact of social media on consumer behavior and describes cultural values and practices in researched countries. The results of the L'Oréal brand social media pages analysis made with the Socialbakers suite are presented in the practical part of this paper and are discussed in relation to the cross-cultural differences, in order to help to relate the theoretical findings to findings obtained from the tool.

Key words:

Social media, Cross-cultural analysis, Engagement

Název diplomové práce:

Interkulturní analýza zapojení spotřebitelských sociálních médií

Abstrakt:

Cílem diplomové práce je zlepšit porozumění kulturních rozdílů v interakci se stránkami sociálních médií značky L'Oréal na různých platformách a analyzovat různé pohledy na klíčové oblasti angažovanosti v sociálních médiích a reklamě v sociálních médiích. V teoretické části se autorka snaží identifikovat existující platformy sociálních médií, definovat motivace k použití sociálních médií a motivace k angažovanosti. Dále autorka zkoumá interkulturní dopad sociálních médií na chování spotřebitelů a popisuje kulturní hodnoty a praktiky ve zkoumaných zemích. Výsledky analýzy sociálních médií značky L'Oréal provedené v softwaru Socialbakers jsou uvedeny v praktické části této práce a jsou diskutovány v souvislosti s mezikulturními rozdíly, aby pomohly spojit teoretické nálezy s poznatky získanými z nástroje Socialbakers.

Klíčová slova:

Sociální média, interkulturní analýza, angažovanost

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Theoretical Part

1 Introduction

Today social media platforms have become one of the most important channels for companies for maintaining their presence on a global market while gaining and engaging customers. The emergence of social media affected consumer behavior and changed the traditional relationship between brands and consumers. Social media platforms such as blogs, vlogs, and social networks put the consumer in a clear powerful position, as they offer an electronic word of mouth opportunity. Companies realize they need to allocate more of their spending on social media marketing programs.

As of the year 2018, the total worldwide population is 7.6 billion, the internet has 4.021 billion users, and 3196 billion of them are active social media users (<https://www.internetworldstats.com>). On a daily basis in present-day, 1.3 million pieces of content are shared on Facebook every minute, 40 000 search queries are made on Google every second, 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute and over 95 million photos are shared on Instagram each day (<https://www.brandwatch.com/>). This represents enormous opportunities for brands to interact with their consumers and to collect big data about them.

However, many factors may influence consumer social media engagement. Recently marketing communication studies recognized culture as one of the major factors to influence not only the way brands communicate with consumer (Baek and Yu 2009; Ji and McNeal 2001) but also to help anticipate consumers' preferences in communication styles and social media content preferences (Barnett and Sung 2005; Kim, Coyle, and Gould 2009).

The existing literature provides a vast amount of published studies on the topic of cultural differences in marketing research. However, there is a little available on how brands differentiate their social media marketing strategies based on cultural preferences of the markets. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze L'Oréal's performance on social media platforms in two different countries, in order to understand how individuals, contribute and consume content in social media platforms across cultures, and what are the possible actions that could maximize the value of social media initiatives of a company. While many pieces of research have been done on the similar topic, a lot of them do neglect cross-cultural factors that could influence the outcome. The thesis also examines how social media can be used for branding strategies.

1.1 The research problem

With an advent of social media worldwide usage and the opportunities, it provides for brands to collect information about consumers (Baird and Parasnis, 2011), trying to understand consumer behavior and motivations can help build a suitable and relevant marketing strategy and consequently target the right customer (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004). Awareness of how individuals behave and consume the content, identifying their motives is very important for marketers (Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden, 2011). Moreover, many studies have demonstrated that culture should not be ignored in marketing even on social media. The study by Goodrich and De Mooij revealed that culture could influence motives for participation on social media, therefore the way people interact with the brand (Goodrich and De Mooij, 2013).

International companies that want to stay competitive in a global market need to recognize the differences between cultures and consumer behaviors in countries where they run their businesses. Therefore, every company should take into consideration a cross-cultural environment when they measure their performance and optimize it according to these factors as well. As companies spread across the world and enter new markets, the need for researching these factors grows. Any company that wants to analyze and optimize its social media performance and customers' engagement according to their needs can benefit from this research findings.

1.2. The purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to improve understanding of cultural differences in engagement with brand's social media pages on different platforms; to analyze single company's performance on social media platforms in two different countries, in order to understand how individuals, contribute and consume content on social media platforms across cultures, and what are the possible actions that could maximize the value of social media initiatives of a company.

1.3. The objectives of the study

The main goal is to examine the way L'Oréal social media fans engage with the content posted on brand's pages and what are the differences between the brand's audiences' behavior in the two researched countries: France and Saudi Arabia. Based on the research outcome, there is a possibility to discover new social media strategies, find more relevant and attracting content considering cultural characteristics and results of the analyzed social media behavior.

1.4. The research questions

RQ1: What are the most engaging post types on L'Oréal French and Middle Eastern Facebook pages? How does the company engage its fans through these posts?

RQ2: What type of promotional techniques are used by L'Oréal on their Facebook? How these techniques differ in the researched regions?

RQ3: How does L'Oréal integrate across other social media channels to increase brand awareness and brand image?

RQ4: To what extent the content posted on L'Oréal's French social media pages differs from the content posted on L'Oréal's Saudi social media pages?

RQ5: What are the manifestations of cultural differences of the brand's followers in researched countries on social media?

RQ6: Is the degree of users' engagement with brand's social media content different within individualistic/collectivistic cultures? How culture impacts consumer social media behavior?

2 Literature review

Since social media networking is growing rapidly worldwide, marketers had to deploy their strategic campaigns on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat etc. As of the fourth quarter of 2017, Facebook had 2.2 billion monthly active users, and six million active advertisers using the platform to promote their products and services, today it is the leading social media networking site in terms of the number of users (<https://www.statista.com/>). As of September 2017, Facebook is followed by Instagram with 800 million monthly active users and two million monthly active advertisers. (<https://www.statista.com/>)

Social media platforms allow brands to create, publish and distribute their content on social network sites, which helps to interact and communicate with their brand followers. Companies post brand-related content, such as videos, coupons, other promotional materials, on their pages that can be shared and consumed by their fans (De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang 2012).

While the topic of “social media” became popular in the last decade, most of the published literature consists primarily of general recommendations and does not fully consider the cross-cultural impact on the brand performance. The emerging cross-cultural literature has found that there are differences in the communication style, in marketing contents and in consumers’ online communication preferences (Barnett and Sung, 2005; Kim, Coyle, and Gould 2009). For example, although advertising featuring celebrities is very popular today, the differences of communication preferences that occur in individualistic versus collectivistic countries might dictate different approaches in these two culturally diverse environments (Choi, Lee, and Kim 2005). Therefore, it is important to understand what type of content motivates fans to interact with posts and drives more engagement and how it differs in researched countries.

Today social media networks also serve as platforms where a brand can establish a relationship with a consumer and consequently bring big value to the business. That is one of the reasons for a brand to identify how, when and where to network in the most efficient way to attract new customers and sustain the relationships with the right groups of customers. Therefore, it is important to identify what are the motives in individualistic/collectivistic cultures to engage with the brand’s content and further differentiate social media marketing strategies in different countries. According to Luo (2014) research members of collectivistic cultures tend to easily follow someone’s advice and to spread eWOM, unlike members of individualistic cultures which do not concern about opinions of others (Luo, 2014). One of the features of the tool used

for this research is to find relevant influencer on social media for brand's marketing and reaching out for brand promotion. According to Dholakia (2004) by reacting to brand's content on social media (commenting, liking, etc.), consumers show and share their preferences to the public, and as follows interact with their friends and other users (Dholakia, 2004). Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011) categorized consumers' online brand-related activities into three dimensions, that will further be discussed (Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit, 2011). Other than personal motives, that can impact customers' social media engagement behavior, group norms, and traditions, social influence can also prompt certain actions. Moreover, cultural values to a large extent determine individuals' perception (Markus & Kitayama 1991) and further shape consumer behaviors as well as online purchasing behavior.

However, the literature has yet to address important theoretical considerations regarding the cultural impact as one of the factors that drive consumers' interactions with businesses on brands' social media pages. Therefore, this thesis tries to contribute to this topic and defines the hypothesis as follows:

“Content posted and displayed on researched social media pages of L'Oréal brand and the degree of users' engagement toward this content may differ within French (individualistic) and Saudi Arabian (collectivistic) cultures.”

3 Methodology

This study has employed a quantitative research method to examine the distinctions in engagement with the brand's social media pages between two different cultures – Saudi Arabia and France. The research is conducted with the help of Socialbakers social media analytics tools. This study attempts to analyze L'Oréal brand's social media strategies and engagement with the company's existing social media pages during the period from January 1st of 2017 to January 1st of 2018.

L'Oréal is one of the world's largest cosmetics companies, that was found in 1909 by French chemist Eugène Paul Louis Schueller. L'Oréal often has the majority of markets where it invests. L'Oréal operates in more than 150 countries and employs more than 89,300 people. 24 percent of the company's employees work in France (<http://inpublic.globenewswire.com/>). In 2015 L'Oréal chief marketing officer announced that they have a team of 400 people who post content to Facebook every day (<https://www.vanityfair.com/>). Therefore, company's worldwide extension, both on market and across social media platforms, provides a perfect research environment.

For the purposes of this study two brand pages on every social network (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) were chosen. These pages were subjected to quantitative analysis using online Socialbakers Analytics tool and compared based on defined indicators. Cultural analysis is exhibited using Hofstede study findings, acknowledging study's limitations. In addition, content analysis of the most engaging posts published on the brand's social media pages is exhibited.

4 Engagement with brands' social media, social media environment across cultures

4.1. Social media environment

The history of social media started in 1989. That is when the World Wide Web was introduced (<https://www.w3.org>). The first blog was created in 1994 (<https://www.sfgate.co>). In three years in 1997, the first social network was launched (<http://historycooperative.org>). After blog platforms were launched in 1999, creating user profiles and becoming friends with others became possible (<https://www.livejournal.com>). In 2003 Social networking sites were launched. Facebook, the most popular social networking site that is used for everyday communication since then, was launched in 2004. Next year YouTube was launched, and this was the first media (such as videos, audio clips, etc.) content sharing type of social media site (<https://royal.pingdom.com>). In 2011, social media became a social business. Because of the increase in popularity of social media, traditional media have faced many challenges and decrease in popularity as follows. Palmer and Lewis (2009) found a correlation between the decline of traditional media usage and the rise of marketing and brand management on social media (Palmer and Lewis, 2009). Eventually, companies have allocated most of their budgets especially marketing budgets on social media and online channels.

First, the researcher will define social media and then outline those networks that can be analyzed by the social media suite used for the research and that are driving the debate.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) regard social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). According to Palmer and Lewis, the main characteristics of social media are online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content (Palmer and Lewis, 2009). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that the main characters of social media are participation, collaboration, interaction, relationship, and sharing (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre the definition is the following "social media employs mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-

generated content" (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre, 2011). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media can be classified into six different groups:

- collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia, WikiTravel, WikiBooks)
- blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter)
- content communities (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Flickr)
- social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)
- virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)
- virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)

Social media is evolving every day, it extends into diverse fields and regions. More and more businesses invest in social media to spread the word about themselves, improve their social media presence and gain new customers. Therefore, in order to have a positive return from an investment, it is crucial to understand how social media landscape functions (Taprial and Kanwar, 2012).

Presence of internet and social media totally changed rules of communication markets (Juslén 2009). Gunelius (2011) defined the five most common goals of social media marketing:

1. Relationship building: with engaged consumers, online influencers, peers.
2. Brand building: increasing brand awareness, boosting brand recognition and recall, and increasing brand loyalty.
3. Publicity: social media as a platform for sharing information and modifying negative perceptions.
4. Promotions: providing discounts and opportunities to a brand's audience in order to make consumers feel appreciated.
5. Market research: creating demographic and behavioral profiles of a brand's social media pages followers, analyzing consumers' needs and wishes, learning about competition (Gunelius, 2011).

In this research, only social media networks that serve as advertising media platforms for marketers will be analyzed.

4.1.1 Facebook

As already mentioned before, Facebook is currently the largest social network platform. Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes and has more than 2.2 billion monthly active users as of January 2018 (<https://newsroom.fb.com>). Facebook is available in more than 100 languages with over 300,000 users helping with translation. An average Facebook user has 155 "friends" and is

connected to more than 100 pages, groups, and events. In 2017 Facebook exceeded \$500 billion in market value. There are six million active advertisers using the platform to promote their products and services (<https://www.omnicoreagency.com>).

Facebook is one of the most powerful tools for marketing today. In April 2011, the new portal for marketers was launched by Facebook in order to establish and develop brand promotions opportunity, which enabled Facebook to stimulate economic activity. Facebook is now a direct competitor of Google in online advertising (<https://www.facebook.com>).

4.1.2 Twitter

Twitter is a social networking service where users post messages, known as "tweets." Originally length of tweets was restricted to 140 characteristics, but in 2017 Twitter enabled the new length of tweets of 280 characteristics. On Twitter users can follow not only posts by their friends but they also can find any public stream that interests them and follow in the conversations (<https://blog.twitter.com/>). Twitter was created and launched in 2006 by Jack Dorsey (<https://twitter.com>).

From 2010 to 2017 Twitter's growth had slowed compared to its biggest competitors. During these years it gained only 313 million users. Although Instagram was launched in 2013, by the year 2014 it surpassed Twitter by the number of users (<https://www.statista.com>).

Nevertheless, Twitter now allows businesses to share their latest news or information to the large engaged audience following the brand. Companies' strategic point of connecting with potential customers over Twitter is to position the brand and to gain insight into customer needs through feedback in order to inform their marketing strategy and target customers with relevant services and products.

4.1.3 Instagram

Instagram is a free social networking application that allows users to post pictures and videos on their profiles either publicly, or privately. Photos and videos and brands' users follow appear on their news feed. Instagram was created and launched in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Originally it was available exclusively to the iOS operating system users (<https://techcrunch.com>).

Instagram's features include uploading photos or videos to the service; applying a variety of digital filters to their images and adding locations through geotags. Users can add hashtags to their posts, which helps to link the photos up to similar content shared by other users on

Instagram. Instagram enables connecting user's account to their social media profiles on other platforms and lets them share photos there as well (<https://en.wikipedia.org>).

Instagram instantly gained popularity after its launch, there were 10 million users registered within the first year. As of January 2018, there are more than 800 million users and over 40 billion photos shared on Instagram. The figure below gives a picture of how fast the number of users on Instagram was growing (<https://www.statista.com/>). As of December 2017, there are 300 million Instagram Stories daily active users. Today there are more than 25 million businesses on Instagram. In April 2012 it was bought by Facebook for \$1 billion in cash and stock (<https://www.omnicoreagency.com>).

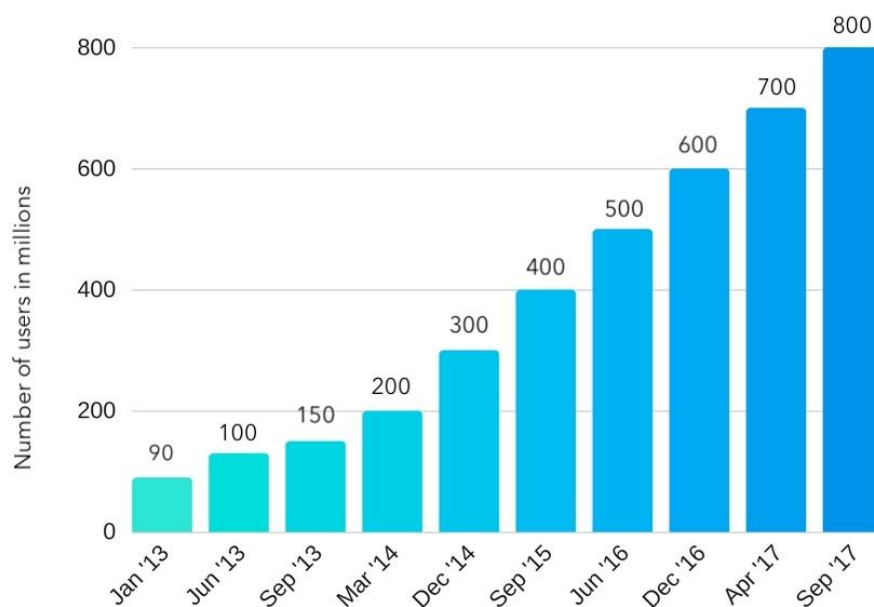


Figure 1: *Number of monthly active Instagram users (adapted from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/>)*

In October 2013, Instagram began its monetization efforts. In March 2015, "carousel ads" were allowed for advertisers. Uploading up to five images that could be swiped through with an option for visiting a brand's website or going through additional content was enabled. In May 2016, new tools for business accounts were introduced. Brands could transfer their accounts to the business profile, Insights analytics and the option post ads that would reach their audience directly from the Instagram app itself were implemented (<http://www.adweek.com>). Instagram

ad revenue reached \$4.10 billion in 2017 and is predicted to reach \$10.87 billion by 2019. (<https://www.emarketer.com/>). Instagram has been recognized as "one of the most influential social networks in the world" (<http://www.soravjain.com/>).

4.1.4 YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing website, created by three former PayPal employees—Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim—in February 2005 (<http://whois.domaintools.com>). Today it is the second most visited website in the world following Facebook. YouTube allows users to share and view informative and inspirational videos that are uploaded from around the globe. YouTube serves as a platform for distributing contents such as music videos, video clips, documentaries, TV shows. Such content as educational or tutorial videos and especially video blogging is also being spread through YouTube and are extremely popular there (<https://en.wikipedia.org/>).

Google acquired YouTube in November 2006 for \$1.65 billion, in order to combine Google search and other Google features and competencies with YouTube's extensive video library. Therefore, YouTube now operates as one of Google's subsidiaries (<http://money.cnn.com/>). Today there are more than 1.5 billion users on YouTube, 50 million of them are users creating content. Every day almost 5 billion videos are watched on YouTube. It is estimated that more than 30 million users visit YouTube every day and 400 hours of video uploaded every minute. Annual cost to run YouTube is \$6.35 billion, while annual revenue to Google is around \$13 billion (<https://merchdope.com>).

YouTube also serves as a platform for advertisers. Pictures and videos, of course, have an impact in creating an image in people's minds. That is inevitably what gives YouTube a certain competitive advantage in online marketing. More and more businesses use YouTube for marketing advertising campaigns, each year the number goes up by 40 percent. Highest paid YouTube vloggers and stars made a combined total of \$127 million in 2017 (<https://www.forbes.com>).

4.2 Social media environment analysis

As mentioned before, there are 4.021 billion global Internet users and this number is constantly growing (<https://www.internetworldstats.com>). It's not only the number of internet users that grows every year, but also the amount of time that people spend on the internet. According to the latest data from GlobalWebIndex the average internet user spends at least 6 hours a day online (<https://www.globalwebindex.com>). Over the past year, nearly 1 million people started

using social media for the first time, which means 11 new users every second were joining social media. The total number of social media users has grown by 13 percent over the last year. Saudi Arabia, that is one of the researched countries, has shown 32 percent individual country growth, which was the fastest of the focus of 40 economies (<https://wearesocial.com>). Majority of the market share belongs to Facebook with more than 2 billion users. Second place used to belong to the Facebook-owned WhatsApp messenger, yet in 2017 YouTube replaced it with 1.5 billion active users.

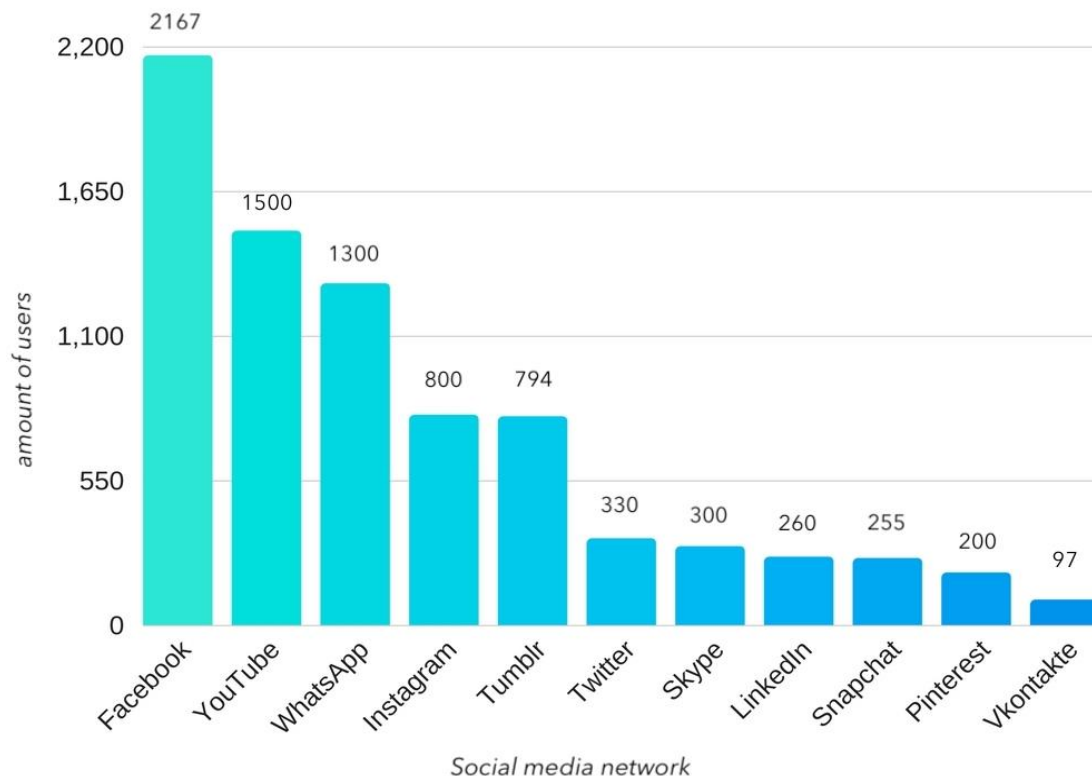


Figure 2: Most famous social network sites worldwide as of January 2018 (adapted from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>)

However, messengers will not be part of this research, as they mostly do not serve to brands as an advertising platform. Following are the statistics of platforms used by marketers for advertising (<https://www.statista.com>). 96 percent of marketers claim their business is actively using Facebook for advertising. It is followed by Twitter with 89 percent of respondents, even though Twitter recently has fallen behind its competition (<https://blog.bufferapp.com>). Although, from Q3 2015 till Q3 2017 the number of monthly active users on Twitter had only increased by 23 million, compared to an increase of 461 million on Facebook (<https://www.statista.com>).

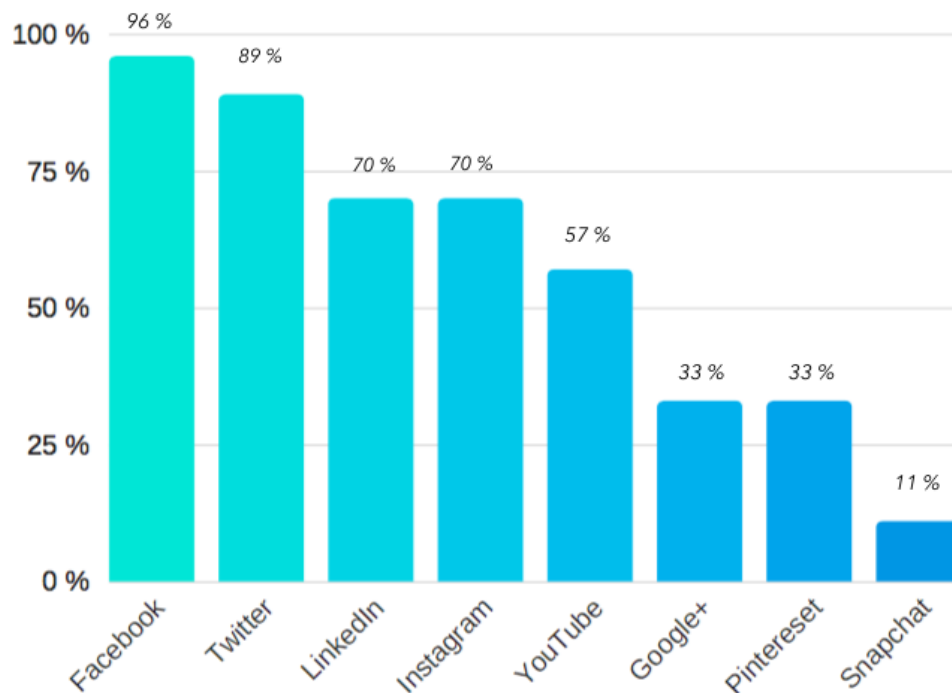


Figure 3: *Most popular platforms used by marketers for advertising*
 (<https://blog.bufferapp.com/state-of-social-2018>)

Fausser, Wiedenhofer, and Lorenz (2011) stated that not all social media networks are equally suitable for marketing and advertising, because not all of them are right for collaboration, spreading information, or cultivating a brand-customer relationship (Fausser, Wiedenhofer and Lorenz 2011). The main purpose of social networks is communication and sharing ideas. However, according to Gummesson (2002) marketers can develop long-term brand-customer relationship exactly by frequently communicating and engaging the customer on social media (Gummesson, 2002). Consequently, managing and successful interpretation of brand's social media performance have become one of the main objectives of industries, especially beauty industries, that need to actively communicate with consumers and social media pages followers on a daily basis.

4.3 Social media use motivations

According to Boyd main motivators for traditional media usage, such as entertainment, social integration, personal identity, can also be applied to social media usage (Boyd, 2008). In general terms, as a result of unfulfilled needs, consumers are motivated for an action (Jackson and Shaw, 2009). By fulfilling their needs consumers behave in a certain way, which means

that motivation determines their actions. Those needs and further consumer behavior depends on several factors, such as their personality, perceptions, previous experiences and attitudes (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010).

Three main motivations identified by Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade (2004) are also information, entertainment and social aspects (Stafford, Stafford and Schkade, 2004). In research by Shao (2009) this list extended with two more motives for social media usage: self-actualization and self-expression (Shao, 2009). In 2011 Universal McCann published a study, that claimed that another reason people actively participate in social network communities is to promote themselves, to socialize and spend their free time (UM, 2011). In general consumers' motivations can be categorized into two groups: emotional and rational (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2009). Emotional motivations assume that consumers select their goals according to their personal subjective criteria (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009). Creating new relationships and connecting with friends, family or other social network users means making a social connection; self-expression is mainly associated with amusement and enjoyment (Heinonen, 2011). Whereas consumer that exhibits rational thinking takes into consideration all alternatives and chooses those that bring them the greatest utility. (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009). In the scope of social networks, Krishnamurthy and Dou (2009) categorize rational motivations those consisting in sharing knowledge with others and advocate an opinion toward an issue.

4.4 Defining consumer engagement

Schultz and Peltier (2013) conclude in their research that consumer engagement is a relatively ambiguous construct and that marketers should improve their definition and operationalization with this measure of relationship strength. They also state that engagement can be evaluated by such related constructs as brand loyalty, customer relationship management, relationship marketing, and social networks (Schultz and Peltier, 2013). According to Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014), combining these constructs into a consumer context, consumer-brand engagement can be defined as “a consumer’s positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions” (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie, 2014). Brodie defines engagement (2011) as “A psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. brand) in focal service relationships. It occurs under a specific set of context-dependent conditions generating differing customer engagement levels; it exists as a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships in which other relational concepts (e.g.

involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in the iterative customer engagement process. It is a multidimensional concept subject to context- and stakeholder-specific expressions of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions" (Brodie, 2011).

As mentioned in the definition above, customer engagement consists of cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social activities. In terms of behavioral activities, social media content active engagement actions include reacting to content (clicking 'like', hearts, etc.), sharing content, commenting on content and posting user-generated content, such as product reviews. Besides active, consumers can exhibit passive engagement (Heinonen, 2011; Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009). Users who passively engage with the brand's content, absorb it through reading, watching videos and pictures (Shao, 2009).

4.5 Motivations for content engagement

4.5.1 Consuming brand-related content

It is very important for brands to know how to behave and what to post on social media as it consequently might affect users' actions in terms of following and engaging with a brand's content or even acquiring the product. Therefore, to provide relevant content on a brand's social media pages, it is necessary for marketers to recognize what motivates consumers to visit, "like", comment on these pages.

There are studies that suggest that it is the engagement with the brand's social media pages what motivates a consumer to visit, like and comment, meaning that engagement itself is an antecedent to those effects (Calder, 2009). However, in this study author disagrees with this point of view and argue the opposite point of view by applying the outcomes of the research conducted by Barger and Peltier (2016). They listed a number of reasons that serve as antecedents for consumer engagement, they were further categorized in the following groups: brand, product, consumer, content, and social media factors. The figure below is an adapted version and demonstrates the possible antecedents and consequences of consumer engagement according to Barger and Peltier (2016) and could be relevant to this research (Barger and Peltier, 2016).

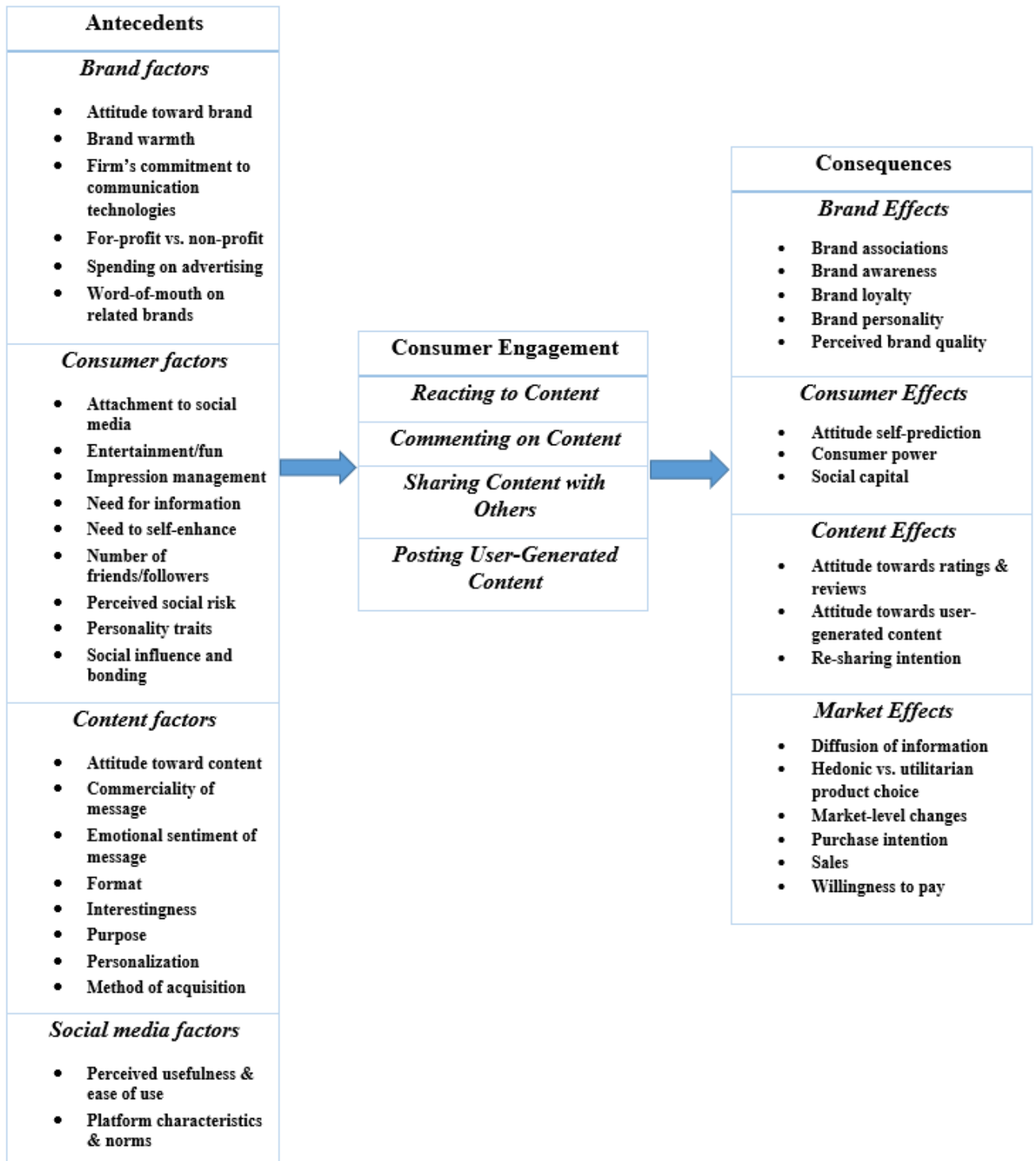


Figure 4: *Antecedents and consequences of consumer social media engagement*

(Source: The author's research. Adapted from Barger and Peltier, 2016)

Dei Worldwide trade publication stated in its 2008 research that for information search about the brand or product consumers primarily use social media, rather than corporate websites (Dei Worldwide 2008). This research also agrees with Boyd (2008), who concludes that key motivators for usage of traditional media (e.g., entertainment, social integration, personal

identity, information) are the same as for social media usage (Boyd, 2008). However, motivators for consumers' brand-related social media use have emerged from remuneration and empowerment (Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit, 2011). Consequently, this research suggests that general social media participation and interaction with brand-related content and brand's social media pages may not always align.

Muntinga et al. (2011) categorized consumers' online brand-related activities into three dimensions: consuming, contributing and creating. At the first level users passively consume content on brands' social media pages (viewing videos and pictures, reading product reviews and comment, and downloading widgets). The second level of activeness implicates contributing to brand-related content, such as rating products and/or brands, engaging in branded conversations, and commenting on the videos or pictures posted on brands' social media pages. The creating brand-related content is the ultimate level of activeness. It involves creating user-generated content such as publishing brand-related weblogs, producing and posting branded videos, writing brand-related articles and product reviews.

So according to the research by Muntinga et al. (2011) motivations for consumers' online brand-related content activities could be classified according to the three above mentioned dimensions (Muntinga et al., 2011).

Type	Motivations			
Consuming	<i>Information</i>	<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>Remuneration</i>	
Contributing	<i>Personal identity</i>	<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>Integration and social interaction</i>	
Creating	<i>Personal identity</i>	<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>Integration and social interaction</i>	<i>Empowerment</i>

Table 1: *Motivations for consumers' online brand related content activities*

(Source: The author's research. Adapted from Muntinga et al., 2011)

Information is one of the motivations for users to consume brand-related content. People go online to read other people's reviews of the product, check out the latest collections of their favorite brand, or find relevant upcoming events. It involves four sub-motivations: surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information and inspiration.

Remuneration was mentioned as another motivation for consuming brand-related content, which means that consumer online activities could be driven by all type of rewards, such as financial or job-related benefits.

All consumers' online brand-related activities types include the entertainment motivation. For consuming brand-related content, entertainment motivation covers such sub-motivations as enjoyment, relaxation (distraction from everyday life) and pastime (browsing brand profile out of boredom). For the contributing to brand content, it covers only enjoyment and relaxation sub-motivations, while for creating brand-related content type, enjoyment and pastime motivations are covered.

Personal identity is a motivational driver for both the contributing and the creating COBRA type. In terms of both contributing and creating brand-related content, there are three sub-motivations that are covered: self-presentation, self-expression, and self-assurance (receiving another members' recognition).

Integration and *social interaction* motivation also occur as motivation for both the contributing and the creating dimensions. As for contributing to brand-related content, integration and social interaction cover three sub-motivations: social interaction (to meet like-minded people), social identity and helping (to each other). Regarding creating brand-related content, this motivation covers same sub-motivations as for contributing, except for helping which is replaced with social pressure (people upload brand-related content because other people do) (Muntinga et al., 2011).

The last motivation according to Muntinga et al. (2011) is *empowerment*, which only serves to the creating consumers' online brand-related activities type. People, who articulated this motivation, were very enthusiastic about the brand and enjoyed persuading others to use it.

Self-presentation and reputation building serves as a motivation for content contribution on brands' social media pages according to several of other studies as well (Henning-Thurau et al. 2004; Nov et al. 2009; Teichmann et al. 2015). The main point of self-presentation is to build one's reputation and build up one's status in the community. It additionally might express the desire to be different. Self-presentation may positively improve engagement with a brand's social media, as it drives electronic word-of-mouth (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998).

4.5.2 What attracts/distracts users (how brands can motivate consumer to engage)

According to Barger and Peltier (2016) consumer engagement with brands social media can play significant role in building brand personality, user generated content has powerful impact on brand awareness and associations (Barger and Peltier, 2016) Therefore, it is crucial to understand which brand actions could prompt consumer to purchase and which are irritating for them. According to the survey conducted by Sprout Social in 2017, answering customer's question motivates 48 percent of consumers to purchase, 46 percent are prompted by promotions and contests placed by the brand, and 42 percent are interested in educational content. You can see that only 27 percent of consumers would be motivated by brand's behind the scenes content shared on social media. Even though 75 percent of consumers believe brands should be funny, only 36 percent would be motivated to purchase from them (<http://SproutSocial.com>).

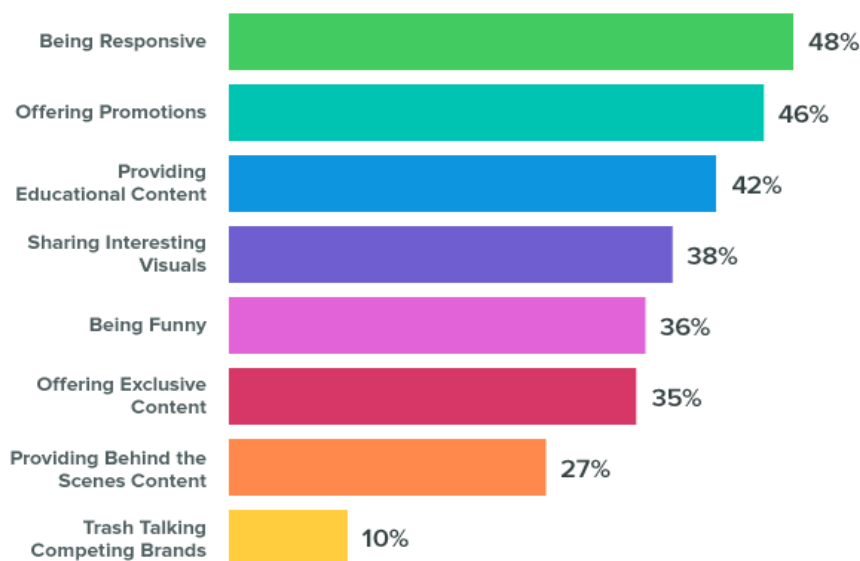


Figure 5: Brand actions on social that prompt consumers to purchase (Source: Adapted from *sproutsocial.com*)

51 percent stated they would unfollow brands on social media if they were annoying, while 27 percent would mark content as spam or report the brand. 23 percent would even walk away from the brand completely.

Survey also found out what are the most irritating brand behaviors on social. 88 percent of consumers think that making fun of customers is annoying. 71 percent of consumers find

brands talking about politics disturbing. 69 percent, which is nearly 7 out of 10 people, find slang from brands irritating, although millennials are 25 percent more forgiving of this kind of behavior. 67 percent doesn't like when brands make fun of their competitors.

Another important matter for brands is where to display their personality. According to Sprout research, 83 percent of consumers prefer seeing primary brand's personality characteristics on Facebook, since it provides businesses with the ability to mix their content and target relevant audiences. 48 percent of respondents prefer brands to display their personality on YouTube through video content (<http://sproutsocial.com>).

4.6 Social media in Saudi Arabia and France

4.6.1 Saudi Arabia

The research conducted by Al-Saggaf (2004) revealed that social media had a big impact on Saudi culture. Access to social networks changed attitudes of both male and female population of KSA, they became more open-minded and tolerant. According to Al-Saggaf, the most significant change was noticeable among Saudi women, specifically in the way they perceive their culture, identities, and beliefs (Al-Saggaf, 2004). With the widespread social media popularity, they are now able to freely express their opinions and ideas online. A lot of today practices in Saudi Arabia, such as allowing women drive cars, are at some point results of the influence of the social network.

Even though North America has a leading role in internet penetration rates, connection in the Middle East is also increasing every year. Currently, its' internet penetration is at 60 percent of the total population penetration, which is above the world average. Saudi Arabia with a population of around 32 Million has a social media penetration of 75 percent. As for January 2018, Saudi Arabia has displayed the fastest individual country users' growth rate at 32 percent (<https://wearesocial.com>).

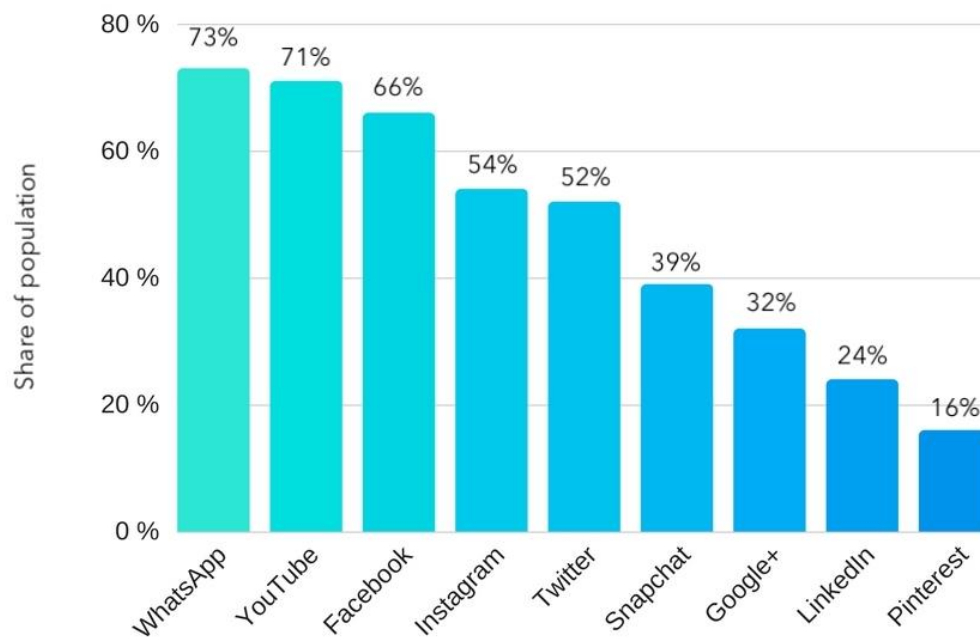


Figure 6: *Penetration of leading social networks in Saudi Arabia (adapted from <https://www.statista.com>)*

The statistic above represents the social network penetration in Saudi Arabia according to the information from Statista. As of 3rd quarter 2017, WhatsApp is the most popular social network among 73 percent of population, while 75 percent of total population were actively using social media during the same period. It is followed by YouTube with 71 percent of population, specifically 23,61 million users. Facebook takes third place with 21.95 million users. Instagram and Twitter have around 17 million users in KSA (<https://www.statista.com>). Despite the increase in social media and internet services, which was mainly caused by the increased usage of smartphones, Saudi Arabia, with index 72, received a “not free” status from the International organization in internet freedom rating (censorship practices).

In the research conducted by Abeer Abdullah Al-Saud (2013) regarding the role of social media in brand development, it is revealed that most of Saudi consumers make their purchases based on recommendations from family or friends and moreover traditional media still plays a tough role in their lives, although role of the social networks was starting to catch up at the time (Abeer Abdullah Al-Saud, 2013).

Furthermore, research conducted by WPP in 2015 revealed that social media has such impacts on the Arab society as carrier opportunities, entertainment, it enables open communication and spreads knowledge. However, on the flipside there are concerning consequences of the

excessive usage of social media in Arab world. It has caused such issues as lowering the frequency of personal visits, which resulted in weaker connections; number of individuals spending more time on the Internet with virtual friends than with family and real friends has grown; it has also distanced users from such duties as prayers, going out with parents and friends, etc. Therefore, from this point of view social media is considered destructive to the cultural and family values of Arab world (Arab Social Media Report, 2015).

4.6.2 France

More than 50 percent of the population in every country in Europe are now registered on Facebook. Almost half of them use it as a source of daily news and information, specifically more than 50 percent of young people (under 35). France is not an exception. Digital advertising surpassed TV advertising in France in 2017. 88 percent of French people use Internet (74 percent on daily bases), 56 percent of which are members of at least one social network. In 2018 the total number of monthly active social media users is estimated to be 38 million.

As for December 2017, France has for third largest number of internet users in Europe (60,5 million), and ranks 15th for the number of internet users globally. Internet penetration reached 86,8 percent in 2017. The total number of monthly active social media users was around 33 million (<https://wearesocial.com>).

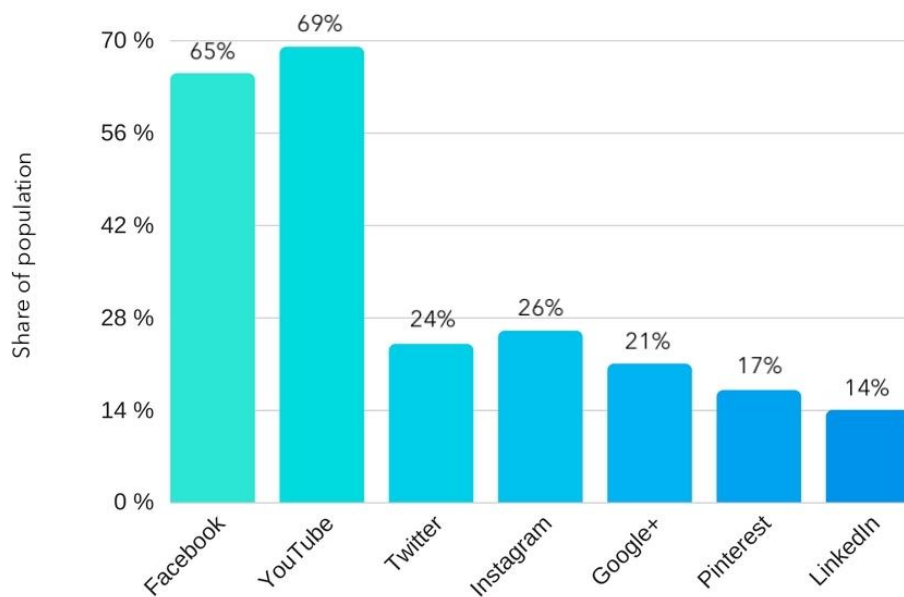


Figure 7: *Penetration of leading social networks in France (adapted from <https://www.statista.com>)*

Statistics above represents the social network platforms penetration in France as of 4th quarter of 2017. As of January 2018, 58 percent of population were active social network users. YouTube is the most popular social media platform with 69 percent of population (around 40 million users). It is followed by Facebook with a 65 percent penetration rate and 35 million users. Facebook brand pages in France show an increase of likes of 0.18 percent per month on average, with a reach of 18.4 percent of users. One-third of brand pages use paid-advertising to boost their publications. Video posts remain the most engaging type of post (reach of 8.29 percent per post on average), followed by statuses (8.03 percent) and posts including photos (6.76 percent). The average reach rate of all types of posts combined is 4.95 percent. Micro blogging through Twitter is not very popular among French people, it displayed only 24 percent penetration rate. Instagram is used by 26 percent of French population which represents around 14 million people (<https://wearesocial.com>).

Nevertheless, traditional media sources have remained popular among French people. The rise of people willing to pay for such services as streaming is more obvious in France, than in UK, Germany or Spain (<https://adcombo-blog.com>).

5. Cross-cultural impacts of social media on consumer behavior

The cultural background of the presented research will be covered in this chapter. Because social media has a global reach capacity (Okazaki and Taylor, 2013), consumer across different countries have access to online communities. Therefore, for companies operating on a global market, it is essential to understand what role culture plays in consumer social media behavior. Thus, this research provides an overview of cultural dimensions identified in the study by Hofstede (1984) and its main characteristics and concepts (Hofstede, 1984). The author recognizes all the limitations of such approach; however today there is no other framework that would be more accessible and easier to apply to this research.

5.1 The concept of culture

Depending on one's cultural background, people can have different beliefs, behaviors, differently perceive life, the purpose of living, world. That can determine not only daily life but also how they behave on social media, what motivates them to purchase, consequently how effective is the content they are targeted with.

According to Hall culture cannot be genetically inherited, and cannot exist on its own, however, it is shared by the members of the society (Hall, 1976). Hofstede (1980) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another”, and it can also be defined as the characteristics of a particular group of people who share common values, morals, a written and spoken language, customs, and lifestyles (Hofstede, 1980). Another definition from Spencer-Oatey (2000) states that "culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior". Which means that culture not only determines one's behavior but also impact how people interpret another people's behavior and the environment. GLOBE researchers define culture as “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations” (House, 1999).

5.2. Social networking and culture

The way the Internet is used varies worldwide. It applies not only to the usage frequencies, the popularity of social media platforms and number of users there, content and interactivity. For instance, topics that are dominant in blogs and social media in Asia are not necessarily the same

as those in the West. Research across 22 countries including North America, Asia, and Europe conducted by Su et al. revealed that social media users and bloggers were not only covering different topics but also had different motivations. Hobby and recreation topics were dominant among Japanese users, while personal and lifestyle were prevailing in the rest of cultures. (Su et al. 2005)

A number of prior studies (Cho, 2010; Kim, Sohn, and Choi, 2011) confirmed that members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures display different social media behavior. Cho (2010) surveyed social media users in USA and Korea and analyzed the content of Facebook and Cyworld social media profiles; findings state that users in the respective countries prefer communication styles that reflect their cultural characteristics (individualism-collectivism). Although users of Cyworld were unwilling to provide personal information and introduce themselves, they willing to disclose minute details of their lives. On the contrary, American Facebook users were willing to share personal information, but not their feelings and life details (Cho, 2010).

Research by Kim et al. (2011) also analyzed how culture can impact the usage of social media and motivations of college students in the USA and Korea. According to the results, although both American and Korean students spent the same amount of time on SNS, American students had five times larger social networks compared to Korean students. American students reported higher entertainment motivation than Korean. The motives for Americans to use social media was to expand their network, while the main reason for Koreans was to maintain the existing network. Which proves motivational drivers can also differ across cultures. In general, given greater devotion to family matters, friends, representatives of collectivist cultures like South Korea are likely to spend less time on social media, and likely to consider social media less important and consequently have fewer friends than Western cultures users. On the contrary members of individualistic cultures tend to have a greater investment in themselves. As social media platforms serve as a great venue for self-promotion, individualistic societies members tend to spend more time there (Kim et al. 2011)

Another important matter, that could be the reason for the difference in social media usage and engagement, is social media's role in the consumer decision-making process. Specifically, whether SNS are used as a source of information or the content displayed on social can have an impact on consumers' assumptions about the product the same as word-of-mouth.

Furthermore, the level of technology adoption varies in different countries (Steers, Meyer, and Sanchez-Runde 2008), as well as popular topics on social (Su et al. 2005), level of trust to online sources, frequency of social media usage and time spent there (Goodrich and De Mooij 2013), variety of activities exhibited on social media networks (Sung, Kim, Kwon, and Moon 2010).

In this research individualistic (France) and collectivistic (Saudi Arabia) countries and their performance on the brand's social media networks are researched.

5.3 Cultural impacts on social media engagement motivations

According to Dholakia (2004) by reacting to brand's content on social media (commenting, liking, etc.), consumers show and share their preferences to the public, and as follows interact with their friends and other users. Other than personal motives, that can impact customers' social media engagement behavior, such factors as social influence and norms, traditions, can also stimulate certain actions.

Culture shapes people's attitudes and perceptions, it also predisposes motives of certain behavior and shapes consumer behaviors (Okazaki and Mueller 2007). Cultural values often affect and determine our perceptions, consumer behavior, especially those cultural values that are acquired in the early stages of life (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Therefore, the way advertising of a certain company is perceived in a specific culture depends on how important cultural values in this specific society are, as well as whether those values are practiced in this society (Okazaki and Mueller 2007).

A number of studies confirmed that culture can also impact motives for participation on social media (Goodrich and De Mooij 2013). Research by Goodrich and De Mooij explained what role culture and social media networks play in consumers' purchasing decision making. They state that using social media for making purchasing decisions is more popular among members of collectivistic cultures, than in individualistic cultures. Their findings also suggest that there is an essential difference across cultures between the role of word-of-mouth (or eWOM) and search engines and websites. Cultures with low UA prefer human sources of information, while cultures with high UA score prefer to trust fact-based sources such as search engines. Furthermore, results showed that collectivistic and high PDI cultures are more likely to engage in negative word-of-mouth within their groups than members of individualistic and low PDI cultures. This suggests marketers analyze such consumers' feedbacks on social media, through

surveys or somewhere else, because they are unlikely to provide their complaints to brand representatives (Goodrich and De Mooij 2013).

Research of individualistic and collectivistic countries social media users' behavior by Tsai and Men revealed that information seeking, and entertainment was a common motivation in these two cultures, both considered social media as one of the main sources for product and brand information. Furthermore, while communicating with like-minded peers was more important for collectivistic culture, obtaining coupons and other benefits were more motivating for individualistic culture (Tsai and Men, 2014). This proves that consumers belonging to different cultures likely to have different motives to engage with brand's media; they are also likely to expect different communication styles and content that is relevant in terms of their cultural orientations, which determines their interactions on social media.

5.4 Measuring culture

5.4.1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Cultural dimension identified by Hofstede (1984) provides a valuable insight into the cultural characteristics of different nations not only to scholars and practitioners but also to marketers. Initial research was conducted by Hofstede in 1983 and established four basic value dimensions: collectivism–individualism, masculinity-femininity, power distance (equal–unequal), and uncertainty avoidance (present-absent). In the year 1984 Hofstede and Bond establishes a fifth value dimension - orientation toward life (long-term versus short-term). A lot of the researches indicate that collectivism–individualism dimension brings the best insight into the differences across cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibase, Choi, and Yoon, 1994; Oyserman et al., 2002).

The *individualism-collectivism* dimension of culture indicates the extent to which individuals in a society are integrated into groups (Hofstede, 1984). Individualistic cultures value the needs, achievements, and freedom of an individual over the needs of the group. Collectivistic cultures value group needs over an individual, and an interpersonal relationship is an important aspect for them, that requires the development of trust between one another (Rothaermel, Kotha, and Steensma, 2006). Moreover, members of collectivistic cultures are less tolerant towards people whose behavior deviate from group norms (Triandis and Bhawuk, 1997). Consequently, when members of collectivistic culture face choices, they always reconsider the group's reaction and most often choose whatever the group goes for. On the contrary members

of the individualistic culture, tend to make most of the choices without considering other people's reactions and mostly do not accept influence from others.

The *power distance* dimension of culture indicates the extent to which equality is distributed among members in a society (Hofstede, 1984). Power distance is determined by the "extent to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally" and by the level of hierarchy societies (Jones and Alony, 2007). Cultures with high power distance allow inequities in power, status and wealth, while in low power distance cultures there is relatively low inequality of power and wealth (Hofstede, 1984; Rothaermel et. al, 2006). In high power distance cultures, individuals are likely to be influenced by opinion leaders, experts, even in online social media communities, whereas in low power distance cultures people tend to make their own decisions, no matter what opinions of influencers are.

The *uncertainty avoidance* dimension refers to the degree to which individuals are tolerant of uncertainties in their thoughts and actions. Members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer following formalized policies, procedures, instruction, and rules in their work and life. Unlike people exhibiting characteristics of low uncertainty avoidance, those with a low-level tend to follow informal norms and behaviors in interaction with others. Individuals that are part of high UA societies will use social media in order to find more information that will reduce their uncertainty and complexity. Uncertainty avoidance index can also explain if members of high/low UA societies trust in online sources (search engines).

5.5 Cultural values and practices in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabian culture consists of a combination of Islamic (religious) values and Arab traditions, all of which defines the behavior of the society (Al-Saggaf, 2004). A study of Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) revealed that most people in these countries admitted that they are primarily guided by Islamic values (Rice and Al-Mossawi, 2002; MERAC,1987), although they perceive both religious and secular sides of life without making any distinctions (Kavoossi, 2000). Apart from religious ideology, Islam is also a comprehensive system which has detailed instructions for entire life (AlMunajjed, 1997). Middle Eastern culture is a combination of historically formed patriarchal social system and of Bedouin traditions and social codes. Nevertheless, Islamic culture in Saudi Arabia is stricter than in the rest of Arab countries and is enforced by the means of Shariah law (Hickson and Pugh, 1995). Unlike such countries as Kuwait or Oman,

where gender segregation is not practiced anymore, it is still enforced in Saudi Arabian workplaces and other social institutions (Robertson and Christopher, 2008).

It is evident that Saudi Arabia with a score of 25 is a collectivistic society. Members of such a community exhibit loyalty and close long-term commitment to the "group", family or friends. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is more important than any other societal rules and regulations. An offense in Saudi Arabia leads to shame, even the relationship between superiors and subordinates are perceived almost as family ties. Arab and especially Islamic culture is known for prioritizing family ties.

Saudi Arabia scored 95 in power distance, which means the Saudis accept the fact that power in the country is distributed unequally and that they are placed in a hierarchy with no further justification. Subordinate members of such culture expect to be told what to do. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia scored 80 on uncertainty avoidance, which means members of this culture prefer to avoid uncertainty and are intolerant of untraditional behavior and unusual ideas.

Saudi Arabia scores 60 on masculinity dimension and indeed is considered a Masculine culture. Members of this society are driven by success and achievement, leaders are supposed to be decisive and assertive (<https://www.hofstede-insights>).

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Score</i>
Power Distance	95
Individualism	25
Uncertainty Avoidance	80
Masculinity	60

Table 2: *The dimension scores in the Hofstede model (Source: The author's research)*

5.6 Cultural values and practices in France

According to French researcher Philippe d'Iribarne (1989) it is the logic of honor that is in power in French society. Members of French society have a very strong sense of honor. It is more important for them than money, career, etc. The main point of this logic is to do the job well, to accomplish the duties, that further characterize the groups (D'Iribarne, 1989).

With a score of 71, which ranked France between 10 and 11 places across world, it is shown to be an individualistic society. However, France is more collectivistic than for instance USA. French are not good team players in comparison to Americans, they are not opinion followers

and don't like to follow the crowd (Hall, 1990). It is important to recognize the pride and self-respect of French society to find way to motivate people to engage because France is the country of individualists. Parents tend to foster independence in their children regarding groups in which they belong. Therefore, members of French society often face difficulty in recognizing and proceeding decisions made at a group level (<https://www.hofstede-insights>).

France scored 68 in Power Distance dimension, which means that in French culture certain degree of inequality is accepted. A lot of studies confirm Hofstede's conclusions. For instance, Barsoux and Lawrence (1991) claim hierarchical rigidity, respect for authority, and centralization take place in French society for a very long time (Barsoux and Lawrence, 1991). The high score both on Powers Distance and on Individualism is considered unique. This combination is found only in France, Belgium and, to some point, in Spain. In French culture, family relationships are still more cohesive than in other individualistic cultures, which reflects the high score in Power Distance with its respect for the elderly.

The score of 86 in Uncertainty avoidance reflects need for formal regulations of rules of members of French culture. However, it doesn't mean that French people will follow those rules (<https://www.hofstede-insights>).

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Score</i>
<i>Power Distance</i>	68
<i>Individualism</i>	71
<i>Uncertainty Avoidance</i>	86
<i>Masculinity</i>	43

Table 3: The dimension scores in the Hofstede model (Source: The author's research)

6. Social media as a branding tool

6.1 Brand characteristics

Social media can serve as a tool to strengthen and build a brand image; therefore, it is necessary for brands to constantly manage and update their presence on social media (www.forbes.com). According to the American Marketing association brand is defined as "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of a seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". Brand equity is another important concept, it is characterized by Aaker (1991) as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers". According to Aaker brand equity consists of four fundamental elements: (1) perceived quality, (2) brand associations, (3) brand loyalty, and (4) brand awareness (Aaker, 1991). Keller and Aaker agree that the stronger is the brand equity, the more it increases brand loyalty and brand preference (Aaker 1991, Keller 1993). It was revealed by Kim and Ko (2012) that social media marketing activities help to create brand equity, which as a result causes positive consumers' purchase behavior.

Brand awareness plays a crucial role in developing strategy, consumer behavior, advertising, and brand management. It is defined as "the ability for a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category..." (Aaker 1991, Keller 1993).

Another important component of brand equity is a brand image. Keller (1993) defined a brand image as follows: "Consumer perceptions of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumers' memory". A brand image consists of several associations, which Keller (1993) classified into three groups: attributes, attitudes, and benefits. In terms of brand awareness traditional media have a stronger impact, but in terms of brand image social media communication plays a bigger role here (Keller, 1993)

The next component of brand equity is brand loyalty, which is reflected in a customer's positive experience that results in a long-term commitment to a brand (So, Andrew and Yap, 2013). American Marketing Association dictionary defines brand loyalty from the perspective of sales promotion, as well as from the perspective of consumer behavior: "the situation in which a consumer generally buys the same manufacturer-originated product or service repeatedly over time rather than buying from multiple suppliers within the category" and "the degree to which a consumer consistently purchases the same brand within a product class" (Brand Loyalty term,

AMADictionary, 2012). It is critical for companies to be persistent in engaging with their targeted audience by researching their online behavior and requirements, because that helps to shape online brand loyalty, and it consequently has a positive impact on companies' profitability (Dawes, 2009).

6.2 Social media branding strategies

Social media not only strengthens the relationship between brand and customer but also facilitates the rise of brand awareness through diverse interactions (Gallaughier and Ransbotham, 2010). The main goal of establishing and developing social media branding strategies is to build brand loyalty.

In order to acquire new customers brands often promote themselves on social media by participating in different discussions, which helps them to be associated with certain topics. However, relevant and interesting content is the main way to attract potential customers (www.forbes.com). Research conducted by Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) revealed that two most frequent activities companies have on their social are making competitions with prizes (discounts, gift products, coupons) and daily communication with their followers, which even includes messages like "Good morning", "Have a nice week". Another popular activity is presenting new products and services (announcing prices, technical characteristics, and points of sale. Furthermore, researched companies try to give advice and provide useful information and tips on their pages. Some of the brands even initiated providing customer services and handling complaints (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Study of beauty brands by Shen and Bissell revealed that researched companies preferred activities with the help of which they could engage with the customer, such as Q&A or beauty polls, to promotional posts. However, surveys appeared to be the most engaging type of posts, they drove users to make more comments. Although some of the researched posts included promotional information (discount code, gift with purchase), research concludes that finding out consumers' feedbacks, thoughts and advice through Q&A is more valuable in terms of establishing a long-term relationship and building brand loyalty (Shen and Bissell 2013)

Above mentioned activities can potentially drive such outcomes as increasing brand awareness, increasing engagement, driving electronic word-of-mouth, gaining new customers, increasing brand loyalty and sales (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014).

According to Perkins (2014) having suitable “visual branding strategy” can also boost engagement with brands' social media (Perkins, 2014) Nevertheless, brands should adapt content on their social to the characteristics of the platform while staying consistent in their communication style (www.forbes.com).

Practical part

7 Research findings

7.1 Company's profile

L'Oréal is one of the world's largest beauty cosmetics manufacturing companies with a headquarter in France. Company's product categories include skincare, hair care, makeup, fragrances and hygiene products. L'Oréal annual report has shown it ranked first in sales in the year 2017 with US\$28.6 billion, surpassing Unilever (US\$20.5 billion) and Procter & Gamble (US\$15.4 billion). 31,2 percent of sales accounted for Western Europe, while only 2,7 percent accounted for the Middle East. Although there was no growth in sales in the Middle East, the company is improving in its performance in the Gulf countries. 8 percent of the sales (€ 2.1 billion) in 2017 accounted for e-commerce, which shows 33,6 percent growth in comparison to the previous year. Today L'Oréal runs its business in more than 150 countries and employs more than 89,300 people. 24 percent of the company's employees work in France.

7.2 L'Oréal's Multicultural Marketing Strategies

As the company operates in a big amount of countries, marketers need to adapt their products and services, as well as their marketing strategies to the local needs. Therefore, they need to understand the different types of cultures, what motivates their target audience in this specific region. L'Oréal recognizes the need for the understanding of cultural differences. The French beauty brand diversified its portfolio with products and brands from a variety of cultures: French (L'Oréal Paris, Garnier, Lancôme), Italian (Giorgio Armani), British (The Body Shop), American (Maybelline, Kiehl's, SoftSheen-Carson), and Japanese (Shu Uemura). The company was always selling products based on the consumers' demand, rather than selling the same set of products around the world.

So far L'Oréal has been successful in satisfying the needs of consumers not only from different countries but also from the different level of incomes, as the company positions itself as "affordable luxury". Company's marketing strategies could be classified into three groups: digital marketing, content marketing, collaborations.

7.2.1 Digital marketing

L'Oréal is investing 38 percent of its media budget in digital platforms; its website is visited by a billion people every day and its social media networks have gained more than 250 million

followers. Therefore, L'Oréal is trying to stay acquainted and adapt its content to updates in the digital world. L'Oréal is always striving to build and improve communication channels with its customers. The digital strategy of the company included launching an application (Makeup Genius) with makeup tutorials, as well as managing social media pages almost on every platform and building relationships through ambassadors who promote the brand on their social networks.

Social media serves as a crucial tool for driving engagement with the brand. Beauty topics are highly discussed on social media, the company uses those platforms to provide customers with content that will answer their questions. L'Oréal social media management team always aims to answer consumers' questions and provides them with experiences as well as with information and dermatological advice regarding the issues that concern the customer. For instance, La Roche-Posay simplifies the work by producing targeted content according to the skin problem to be resolved: acne (#stopspots), dryness (Lipikar families), cancer care (Better skin throughout cancer), moles (Skin Checker), etc.

Social media presence also allows the company to offer complementary services (experiencing the product), which unquestionably helps to build trust. As an example of such engagement, a lot of L'Oréal brands offer skin diagnostics online as well as in stores, and daily personalized skin care programs such as “J'aime ma peau sensible” (“I love my sensitive skin”). The company also launched an online shopping option, in order to improve customer online experience.

Moreover, L'Oréal recently came up with a new digital service. They developed online “beauty companions”- an online guide for consumers, that helps them choose the right product for consumers. Services provided through this platform include targeted pieces of advice, testing products virtually, such as 3D makeup and hair color testers, complexion detectors, skin assessments, etc. YouCam Makeup augmented reality app was launched by L'Oréal and Perfect Corp. in order to promote and integrate L'Oréal Group's products. Today this application with 3D hair color tester option is used by consumers and hair stylists.

Thanks to company's adaptive strategy to the specifics and diverse practices on each market, L'Oréal succeeded in distributing its e-commerce channels.

7.2.2 Content Marketing

Beauty industry provides a great environment for content marketing, as there are a lot of bloggers and influential beauty experts on social media, who have millions of followers. This

gives brands an opportunity to engage consumers in a genuine way. L'Oréal is not an exception, it partners with several popular YouTube bloggers across the world as well it has a number of very popular celebrities among its brand ambassadors. Furthermore, in 2011 L'Oréal launched Makeup.com, where company daily shares beauty hacks and tips, makeup tutorial videos, and expert opinions.

However, people around the globe want to see personalized content. One of the strategies L'Oréal uses to personalize content to a specific context and to motivate a customer to purchase is the precision marketing program. This program helps to identify audiences that had searched for brand's products or that had a certain interest in beauty products and ensures that the right message is sent at a right time.

7.2.3 Collaboration

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, L'Oréal made a lot of campaigns with famous celebrities, beauty bloggers and even with designers by providing their services during fashion weeks. L'Oréal also has a lot of ambassadors of all ages, colors, and genders. This helps the company to grow brand awareness and build trust through well-known empathetic people.

7.3 L'Oréal social media presence

The general motivations for using social networks and engaging with the brand's content were described in previous chapters. Furthermore, the most popular social networks and their potential for corporate use were presented in more detail. Today, companies are aware of these facts, therefore social media has become a part of the communication mix and is used by brands and companies around the world for marketing purposes.

The following chapter focuses on comparing L'Oréal's social media pages administrated in the Middle East and France, activities on these profiles, content, and level of engagement.

	<i>L'Oréal Paris - France</i>	<i>L'Oréal Paris-MEA</i>
<i>Facebook</i>	✓	✓
<i>Twitter</i>	✓	✗
<i>YouTube</i>	✓	✓
<i>Instagram</i>	✓	✗

Table 4: *L'Oréal social media presence*

(Source: The author's research)

As it is seen from the Table above, L'Oréal has local pages for France and Middle Eastern region only on Facebook and YouTube. As mentioned in previous chapters, these are also the most popular platforms among users. It is clear, therefore, that companies try to communicate with their audiences over the most engaged social media platforms in order to achieve the greatest possible reach. However, the table also shows that L'Oréal still does not have personalized pages for Saudi and France on Instagram. There is also no Twitter page for the Middle East. Regarding the use of new social networks such as Pinterest or LinkedIn, it is obvious that the company is more likely to wait for greater user penetrations, as it is possible that investing in communication on these networks would not bring the desired result. Due to the specifics of the use of social networks by beauty companies, the work in further analyzes is dedicated only to Facebook, which also has the greatest penetration among users.

Analyzed social media pages always regard specifically L'Oréal brand, not the entire company, as L'Oréal owns such beauty brands as La Roche Posay, Lancôme, YSL, Giorgio Armani, Biotherm, Cacharel, Kiehl's, etc. These brands have separate social media pages, however, they are administrated by L'Oréal (www.loreal.com/)

Both the Saudi and the French Facebook pages are further analyzed and compared based on the following indicators using Socialbakers Suite. All data is for the period from January 1st of 2017 to January 1st of 2018. Indicators used are:

- The relative increase in the number of fans
- The number of posts and their type
- Distribution of fans
- Engagement rate by type of contribution
- The total number of interactions
- Response Rate

In addition, Socialbakers analytics provides benchmarking by industry or location. For the purposes of this thesis, benchmarks are used.

As for Q1 of 2018 according to the report conducted by Socialbakers, L'Oréal was in the top 5 biggest communities of France with 878 378 followers. Middle Eastern L'Oréal Professional Facebook page posts were second among Top organic content (Q1 of 2018). As for today L'Oréal Facebook page in the Middle East is not the biggest community, although one of

L'Oréal brands, Maybelline, is in the Top 5. However, L'Oréal Professional is in the Top 5 of most engaged beauty brands pages on Facebook with 60 037-page post interactions.

7.3.2 L'Oréal French Facebook page

As for the outcomes for the researched period, according to Socialbakers Suite, we can see in the graph below that L'Oréal Facebook page in France had in total 872K followers by the end of the year 2017. However, there was a significant loss of 169K followers in March 2017, which accounted for almost 20% of the total number. This can happen when brands organize some sort of competition with prizes and coupons when one of the conditions is to follow the brand's page, afterward, users unfollow the page. Socialbakers considers such countries as Algeria and Tunisia a French territory and works with them as one region. Therefore, fans from these countries are also counted for this region. Almost whole amount of total number unfollowers were distributed among Algeria (83K) and Tunisia (94K). Later in May 2017 brand gained back around 100K followers, which resulted in the loss of total 51.2K followers during the year 2017.



Figure 8: Growth of total fans. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite
(www.socialbakers.com)

In order to understand what could cause such loss of followers, content posted by L'oreal Paris on French page during March 2017 was analyzed.

The average amount of posts per month in 2017 was 94.92, which lead to a total number of 1251 of posts during the year. The most active posting was in May 2017 which could be the cause of gaining 100K followers. The sum of user posts was 165, with the maximum amount

of 30 posts in February 2017. L'Oréal French page also received 28 questions from users in 2017, 21 of them were responded. Most of these questions were answered in the first 48 hours. The content of the researched page's posts included photos, videos or links. Distribution of the post types is illustrated in the graph below.

Distribution of Page Post Types

Jan 01, 2017 - Jan 01, 2018



Figure 9: *Distribution of page post types. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com)*

It is obvious from the chart that posts including photos considerably exceed the other types of posts with more than 70 percent. Photo content also appears to be the most engaging type of posts with an average of 2.36 interactions per every 1000 fans, while videos have an average of 1.1 interactions.

The chart below demonstrates the monthly number of interactions per every 1000 followers during the researched period. The maximum amount of interactions happened in November 2017 which in total amounted to 114K or 132.7 interactions per 1000 followers. The total amount of interactions for the researched period amounted to 965K.

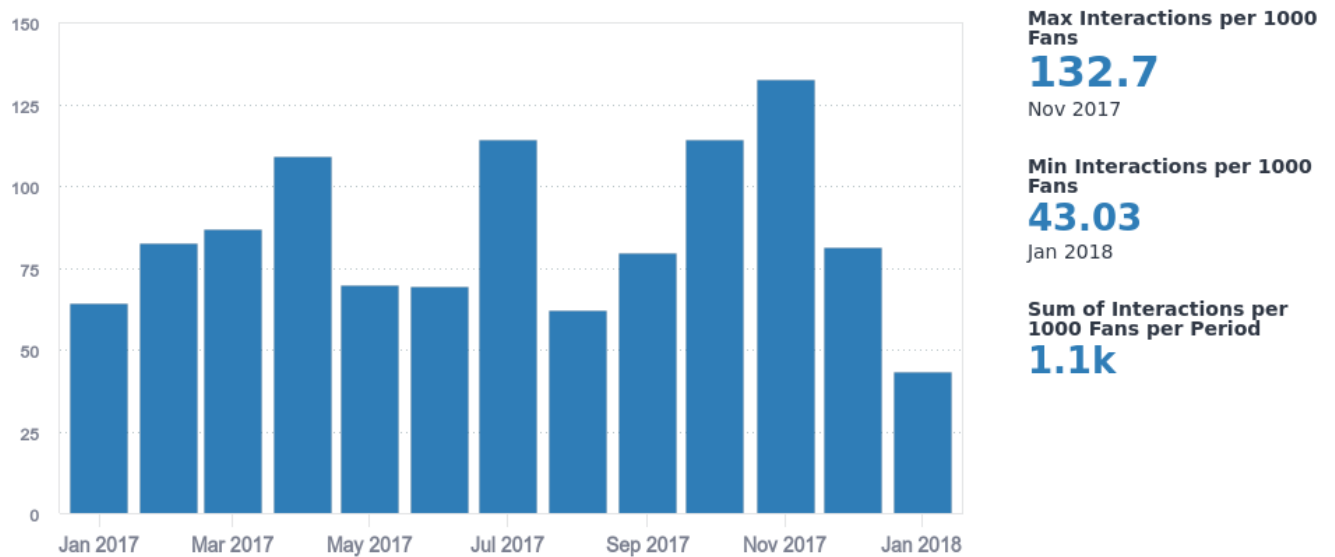


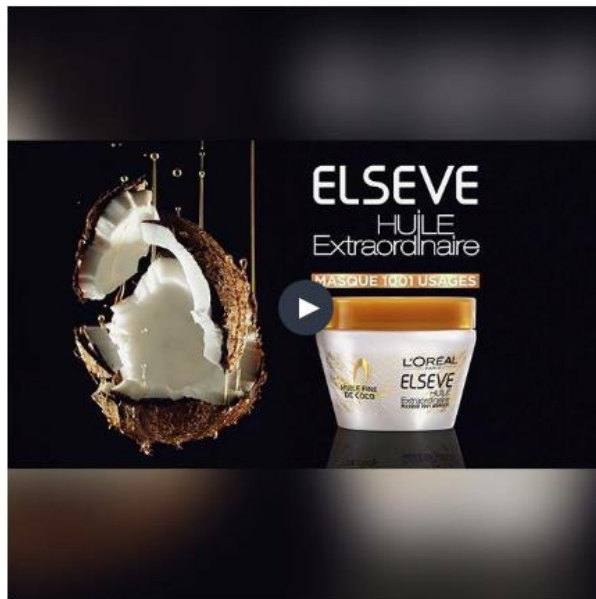
Figure 10: *Number of interactions per 1000 fans. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com)*

The types of interactions for whole period were distributed as follows: 86,29 % of reactions (includes likes, love, smiles-haha, wow, sad, angry, etc.), 9.6 % of comments and 4.11 % of shares.

Out of around 1200 posts on L'Oréal's French Facebook page, 28% (344 posts) were promoted while 71 % were organic (853 posts), the rest undetected. However, most of the interactions appeared to be with promoted posts amounting 73.72 percent of total 965K, which means that promoted posts were 7 times more efficient.

An overview of the most engaging posts' content had shown that the most engaged post included a video with an introduction of a new product and was the promoted type of post. It had more than two thousand comments and more than one thousand shares, total interactions of 13K.

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 #Coco est le nouveau masque à adopter de toute urgence ! 🍫
 > <http://bit.ly/2tWyjJ>



Interactions

13.7k

Interactions per 1k
 Fans

15.82

Interactions



Comments 2 044

Shares 1 006

Total Interactions 13 660

Figure 11: Most Engaging Posts Overview. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in *Socialbakers Suite* (www.socialbakers.com)

The most engaged organic type of post also included an advertising video, however of an entertaining type with a famous actress Eva Longoria putting makeup in the car on her way and using L'Oréal products. This post got more than 10K interactions without any promotion. However, there are very few posts with the participation of celebrities, influencers or ambassadors. There are a lot of posts with tips for makeup, even how to use L'Oréal cosmetics to cover tattoos. Many posts include advertising of hair dye of bold expressive colors, which does not appear on the Middle Eastern page. The brand was also actively promoting discounts for Cyber Monday and Black Friday in November.

7.3.3 L'Oréal Saudi Arabian Facebook page

As for Middle Eastern L'Oréal Facebook page, it doesn't have as many followers as the French, but it is stable in its performance. Usually, brands do not have separate pages for each country in Middles East, L'Oréal was not an exception. Out of 530K of followers, that page gained by the end of the year 2017, 215K were from Saudi Arabia, which accounts for more than 40 percent of followers. The growth of fans in Saudi Arabia for the year 2017 was almost 18K. The rest of the fans are distributed among the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Iran, Oman, Bahrain. There was a significant increase in followers in August 2017. Although, there

were a couple of months when the change in fans was negative, the total change of fans for the year 2017 was positive - an increase of 96K. In order to understand what caused such a rapid increase of fans in August the content of Middle Eastern L'Oréal Facebook page was analyzed and described in this chapter.

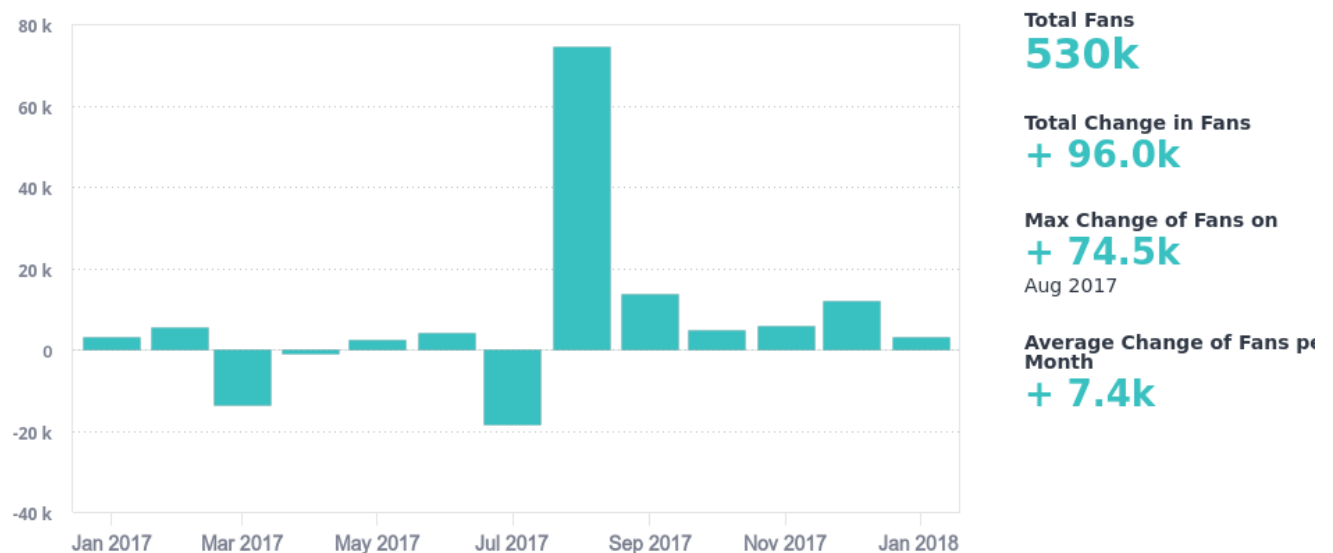


Figure 12: Growth of total fans. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com)

An average amount of posts on Middle Eastern L'Oréal page was 18.69 per month, there were 243 posts in total during 2017. Although May and September were the most active months in terms of posting, it caused neither an increase nor a loss of followers. There were 30 users' posts, 5 questions from the fans and 4 responded on the researched page.

Distribution of Page Post Types

Jan 01, 2017 - Jan 01, 2018

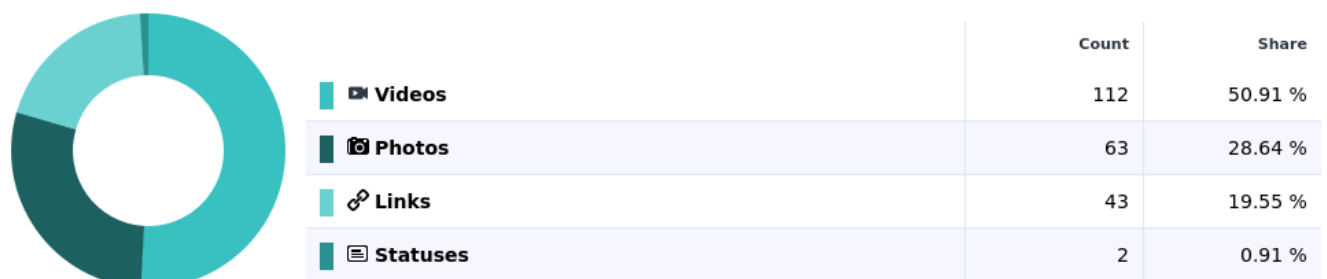


Figure 13: Distribution of page post types. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com)

The distribution of the content types is displayed in the graph above. Unlike the content of posts on French L'Oréal Facebook page, 51 percent of Middle Eastern posts include videos, while only 29 percent of posts include photos and 20 percent include links. However, posts

including photos are the most engaged type of post with an average of 10.94 of interactions per every 1000 fans, while videos engage 2.54 following links with an average of 6.09.

The chart below shows the monthly number of interactions per every 1000 followers of L'Oréal Middle Eastern page during the researched period. The maximum amount of interactions with the posts was in December 2017 which in total amounted to 174K or 333.3 interactions per 1000 followers. The total amount of interactions for the researched period amounted to 512K.

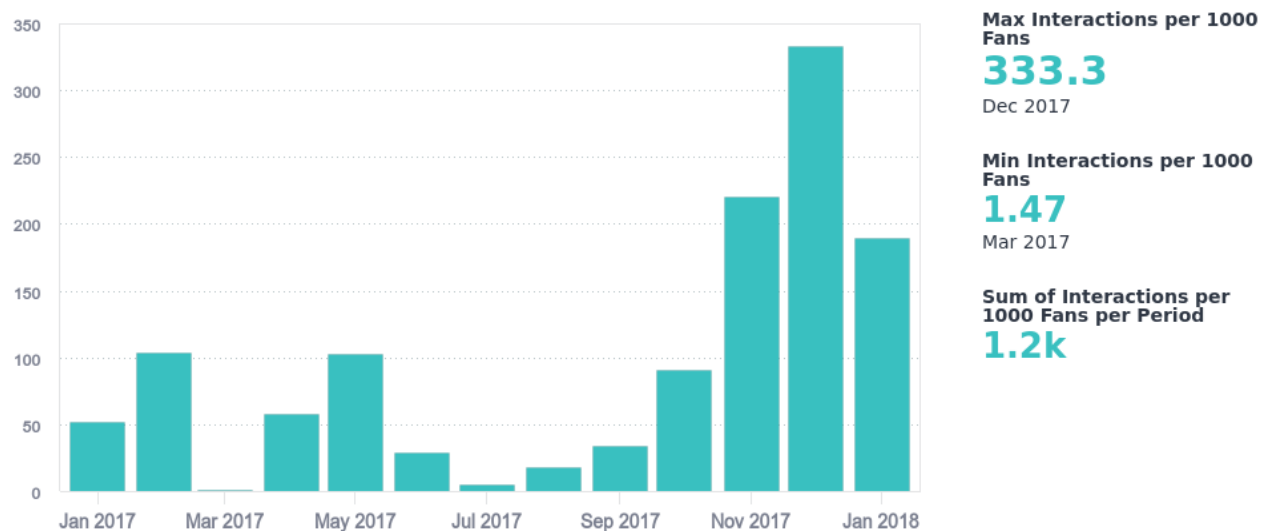


Figure 14: Number of interactions per 1000 fans. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com)

The types of interactions for the researched period were distributed as follows: 93.38 % of Facebook reactions, 4.04 % of comments and 2.57 % of shares.

Out of 220 posts on L'Oréal's Middle Eastern Facebook page 49.09 % (108 posts) were promoted while 50.45 % were organic (111 posts), the rest undetected. Promoted posts drove the biggest engagement with 96 percent of interactions of total 512K, which is 30.5 times more efficient than organic posts.

The post with the biggest amount of interactions included an ad of haircare products. It had more than four hundred comments and more than three hundred shares, total interactions of 35K. However, the content displayed on the Middle Eastern page differs from the content on the French page. There are a lot of posts promoting mascaras for an increased eyelashes volume for a smoky eye look, which is very popular among Arab women. There are also a lot of posts promoting eyebrow makeup products, as Arab women known to have expressive brows and a lot of women do not pluck them, as it is not permissible in Islam (Fig. 15). Posts with Middle

Eastern ambassadors promoting the products are shared more often than posts with worldwide known celebrities' participation. Middle Eastern ambassadors and influencers such as Ola Alfares (Arab TV host), Yalda Golsharifi (Iranian influencer), Fahriye Evcen (Turkish actress), etc. are more popular within the Arab community.

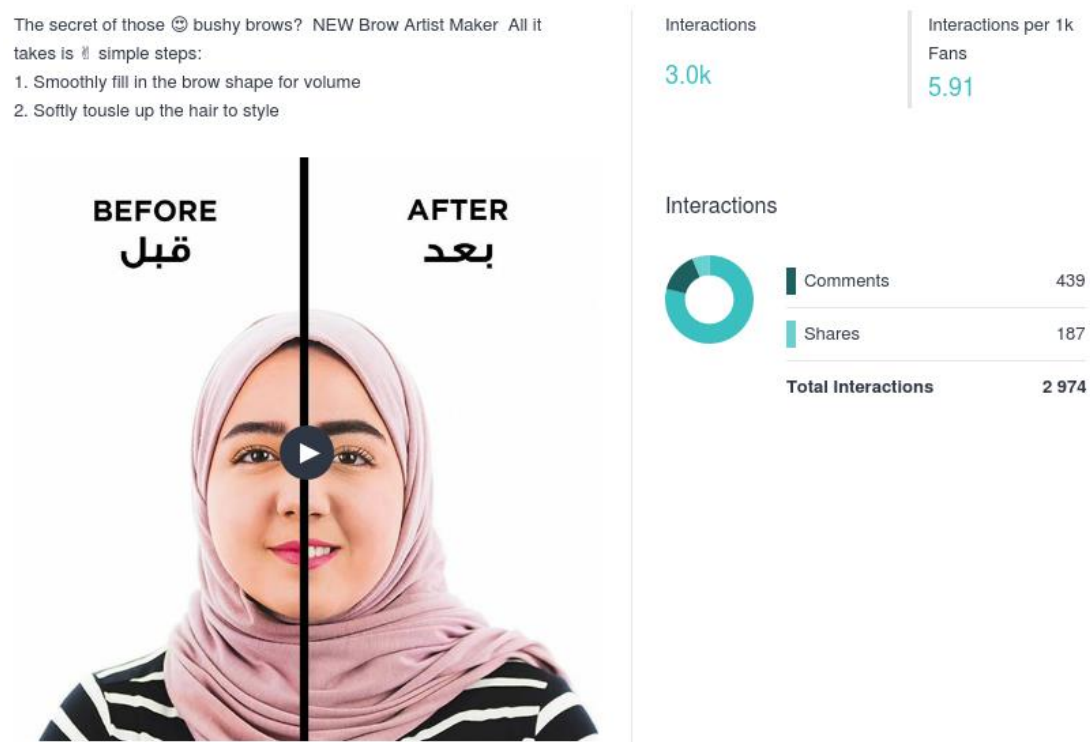


Figure 15: Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite
(www.socialbakers.com)

The content of the posts for October, November, and December was analyzed, as the number of interactions started growing during these months. At the end of September, the brand started offering favorable deals such as buys two newly introduced products get one for free. They were also promoting the L'Oréal Paris Fashion Show and streaming it online on Souq.com on the 1st of October. Later products used for the makeup of the L'Oréal Paris Fashion Show models were shared as well. The next way to drive engagement used by the L'Oréal Social media team in December was to make a contest when users could win 5 products just by commenting and saying what they use the product for. The most shared post included a giveaway of L'Oréal products for sharing followers' feedback on "L'Oréal Elvive Keratin" product line. Another largely shared post included an experience with Ola El Fares, where three winners could win a Facebook live stream with the TV host just by commenting and sharing their experience with the product.

L'Oréal Middle East is also consistent at recognizing and congratulating its Muslim followers on their religious occasions. Sometimes they promote their products offering consumers to get them as a present or to simply get prepared for this occasion.

7.3.4 Benchmark of French and Middle Eastern Facebook profiles

Although French page has much more followers, its performance in the year 2017 was worse, as the brand lost more than 50K followers in total, while the total amount of fans on Middle Eastern page increased by 96K. The max change of fans was positive in the Middle East with 74.5K of new fans, while French L'Oréal page lost 169K of followers. Therefore, the overall performance of Middle Eastern page was better in comparison to the French page.

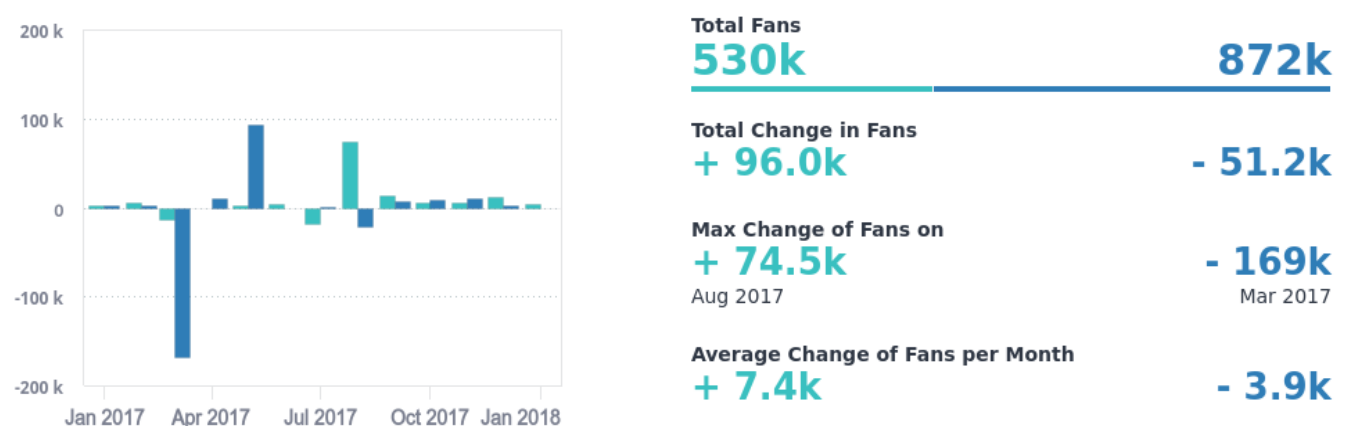


Figure 16: Benchmark of growth of total fans on Facebook pages. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com)

French L'Oréal social media team was more active in posting with an average of 95 posts per month as opposed to 18 posts per month by the Middle Eastern team. Posts including photos were the most popular type of posts on French page with 71 percent as opposed to only 28 percent on Middle Eastern Facebook page, while videos were used in 23 percent and 50 percent of posts accordingly. Nevertheless, photos were the most engaging type of post for both regions.

While 49 percent of posts were promoted on L'Oréal Middle East page and it drove 96 percent of engagement, French L'Oréal Facebook page promoted only 28 percent of its posts and it drove 78 percent of engagement. The French page used to be more active in posting, it is impossible to promote every single post and there was no need for them to do so; 344 posts out of 1197 were promoted, as opposed to 108 out of 219 on the Middle Eastern page.

What seemed interesting is that in November 2017 both pages had 114K of interactions. Nevertheless, the content of their posts was different, the French page was actively promoting Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals, while Middle Eastern was introducing new products. Also, most of the posts on the French page are written only in the French language, while on the Middle Eastern page both the English and Arabic versions of almost every post are observed. The difference between the promoted products is observed. Middle Eastern page had a significantly larger amount of advertising posts with brand ambassadors' participation, which could mean that they tend to be influenced by a third party's opinion.

7.3.5 Analysis of YouTube social networking use

Both Middle Eastern and French YouTube pages are analyzed and compared based on previously applied indicators using Socialbakers Suite. All data is for the period from January 1st of 2017 to January 1st of 2018.

7.3.6 L'Oréal French YouTube channel

L'Oréal French YouTube channel is not as active as Facebook profile, because Facebook is a platform where several types of content can be shared, unlike YouTube. The researched account had 144K of subscribers by the end of the year 2017. The maximum change of subscribers happened in February 2017, when channel gained 9.6K followers. The total change of subscribers by the end of the year was an increase of 39.4K.

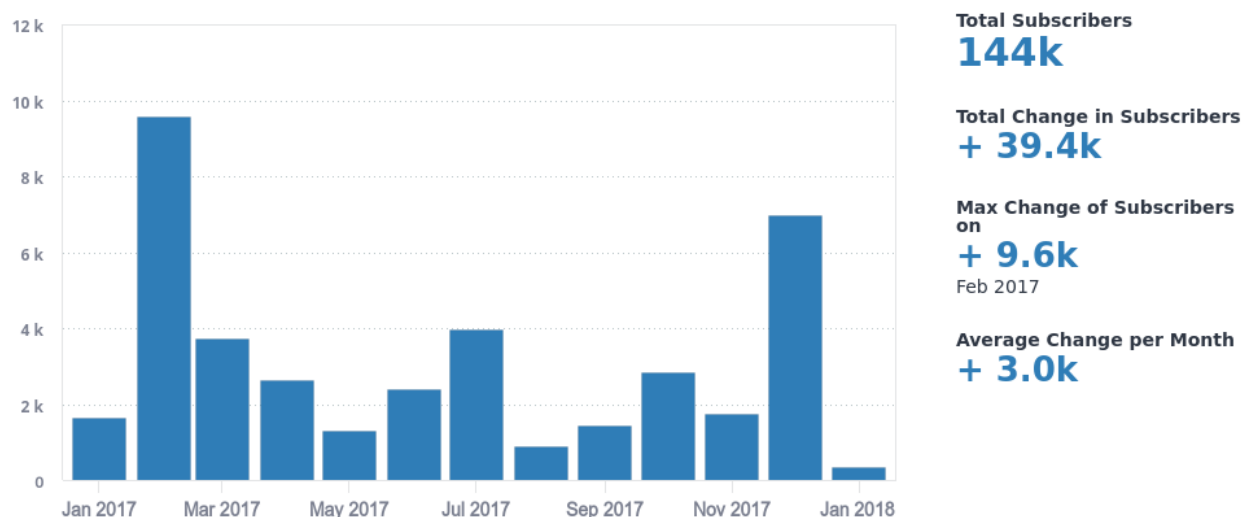


Figure 17: Growth of total fans. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite
(www.socialbakers.com)

In total 95 videos were posted by the end of the year 2017, which in total gained 33.4 million views. Videos that were posted during July 2017 gained the biggest amount of views - 5.1

million. However, these videos did not get as many interactions – only 6.7K of likes, dislikes, and comments. Maximum interactions with published content that amounted 13.K happened in February 2017, while the videos gained only 3.1 million views. The chart below shows the monthly number of interactions per every 1000 followers of L’Oréal French YouTube channel page during the researched period. As already mentioned the maximum amount of interactions with the posts was in February 2017 – 120.6 interactions per 1000 followers. The total number of interactions amounted to 78.8K.

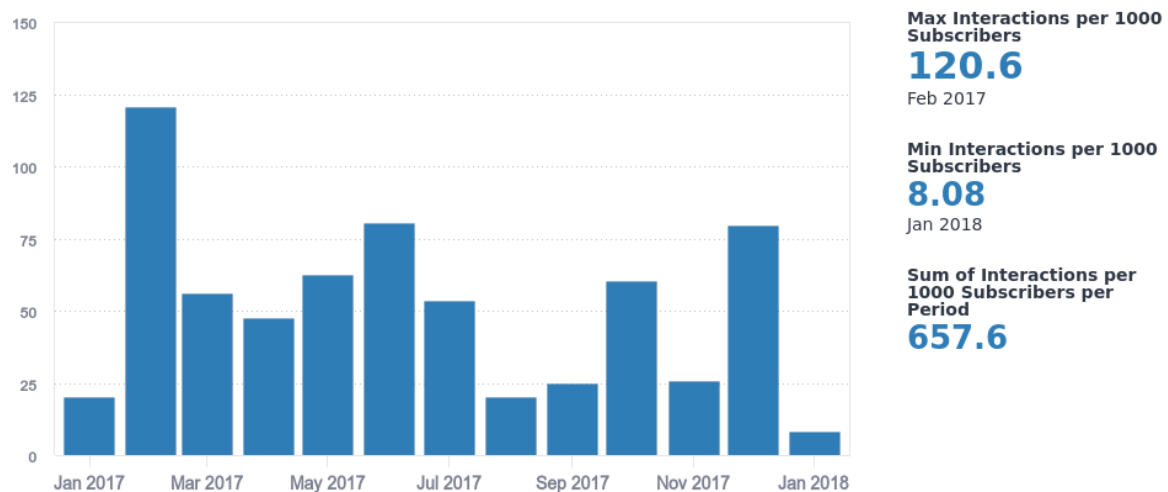


Figure 18: Number of interactions per 1000 subscribers. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com)

The types of interactions were distributed as follows: 65% of likes, 24% of dislikes, and 11% of comments. Content posted in June 2017 got the biggest amount of dislikes in a total amount of 4K, as opposed to content posted in February that was the most favorable with 9.2K likes in total.

Videos that had the highest view counts were posted in July and were both introducing new product. The video that had the highest amount of dislikes was an introduction of a new project called "BeautyTUBE" initiated by L'Oréal and YouTube, where 10 talented makeup artists were chosen to be trained, to improve their skills and to help them set up and develop their YouTube channels.

Otherwise, there were many tutorial videos on how to color your hair and put makeup using L’Oréal products with French influencers' participation. Nevertheless, most videos in 2017 were dedicated to the BeautyTUBE project.

7.3.7 L'Oréal Middle Eastern YouTube channel

L'Oréal Middle Eastern YouTube channel has a significantly smaller audience than French channel. The following account had only 28.7K of subscribers by the end of the year 2017, which is five times less than on French channel. The biggest change in audience happened in September 2017, when channel obtained 1.7K new subscribers. The total change in subscribers resulted in an increase of 6.9K.

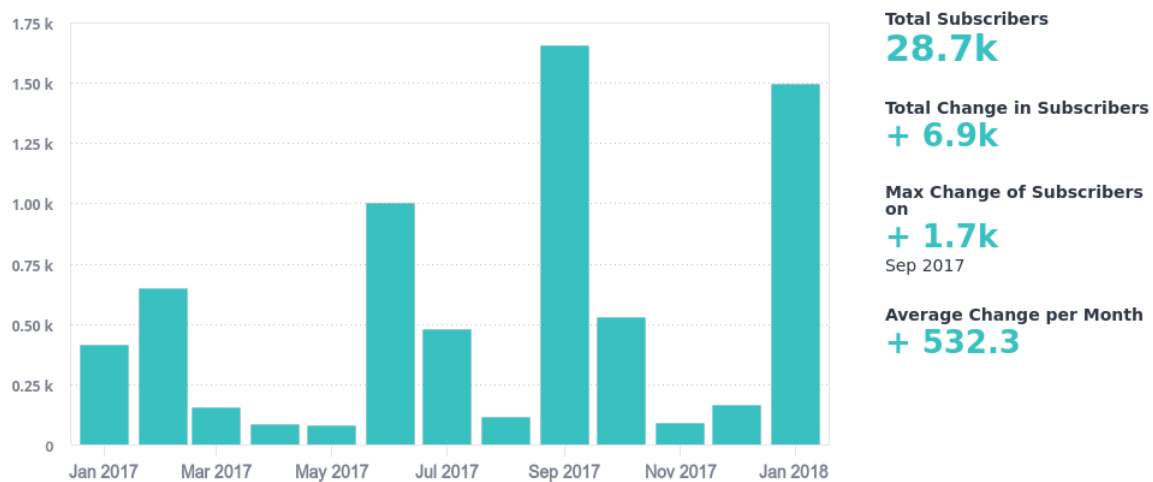


Figure 19: Growth of total fans. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite (www.socialbakers.com).

Channel posted 32 videos in total during the year 2017, which obtained 24.8 million views. Videos that were posted in September 2017 were most popular and gained 8.6 million views. Nevertheless, content posted in September did not get as many interactions as content posted in April 2017- 64.96 interactions per 1000 subscribers or 1.5K in total. Although, reactions to content posted in April were mostly negative-104 likes, 1.4K dislikes; while the majority of reactions to content posted in September were positive. The total amount of 4.4K of interactions happened in the year 2017. Types of interactions were distributed as follows: 53.01% of likes, 46.37% of dislikes and 0.62% of comments.

First, three videos with the highest amount of views were introducing L'Oréal Pure Clay Masks line of products. They were uploaded one after another, which could be irritating for the subscribers because the content of the videos was not any different and could be the reason for dislikes.

Another very popular video series that obtained a lot of dislikes was an experiment with Arab TV host Ola Alfares (brand's ambassador) conducted in a supermarket. She was approaching

women, who chose L'Oréal's shampoo. The chart below shows the engagement overview with one of the videos when the experience was conducted.

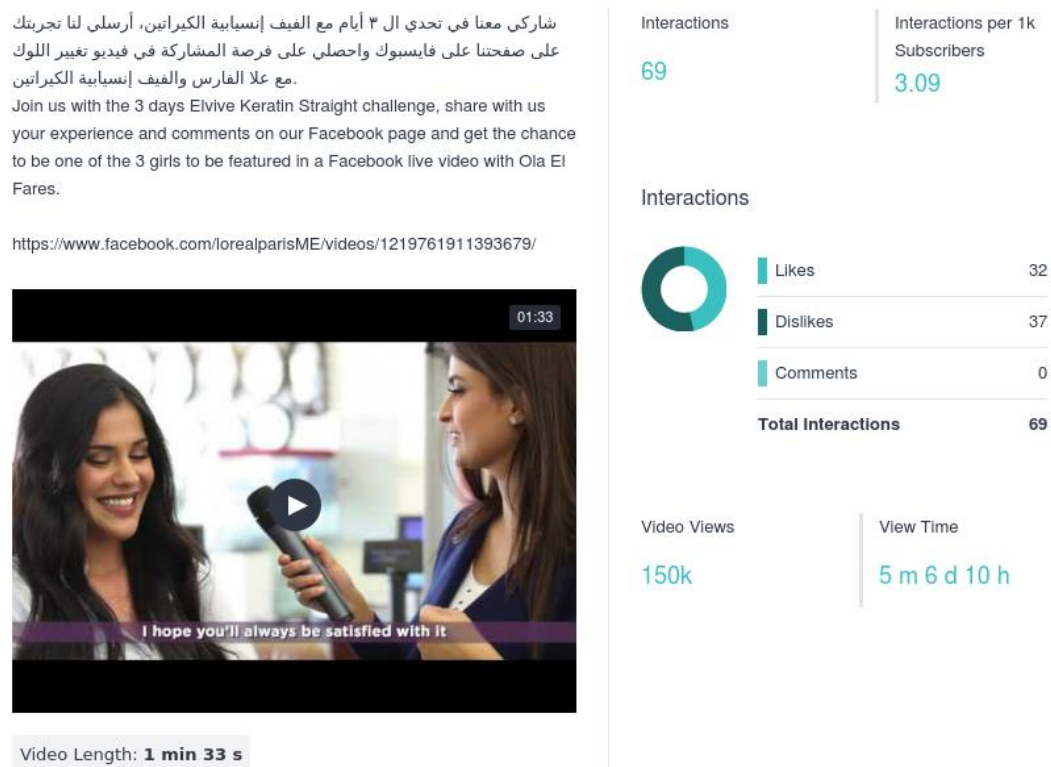


Figure 20: Chart created using data-driven intelligence in Socialbakers Suite ((www.socialbakers.com)).

The series of these videos included a video of a woman that was asked what her associations with the brand's product line were, the first thing she mentioned was "Ola El Fares". She also said that the " L'Oréal Elvive Keratin" was recommended to her by a friend and she later went to google it and read the reviews, that was how she got to L'Oréal Facebook page. Videos incorporating this experience were encouraging consumers to engage with the post by commenting and sharing their experience with the product. Three winners would be featured in a Facebook live video with Ola El Fares.

7.3.8 Benchmark of French and Middle Eastern YouTube channels

French YouTube channel has significantly more subscribers than the Middle Eastern channel. The channel gained much more subscribers during 2017 and was more active in posting new content. There were 95 new videos on the French channel as opposed to 32 videos on the Middle Eastern channel, which is almost three times less. Nevertheless, during some months in 2017 Middle Eastern channel videos obtained more views than French channel. The chart below displays the monthly number of view's comparison.

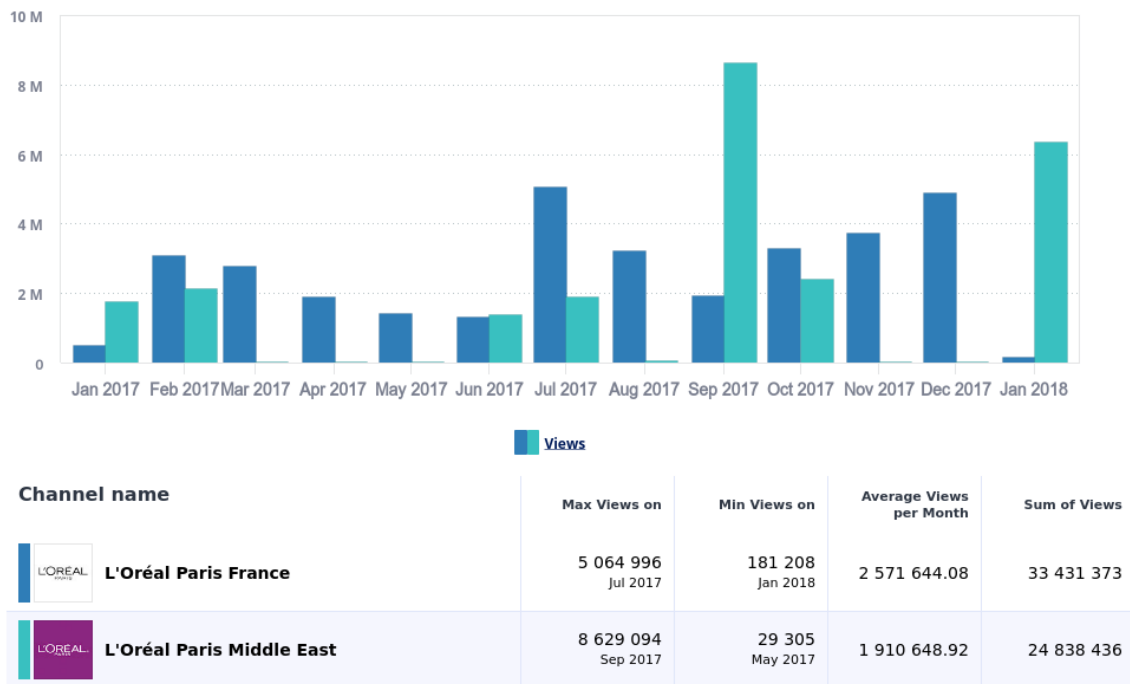


Figure 21: Number of view's comparison. Chart created using data-driven intelligence in *Socialbakers Suite* (www.socialbakers.com).

We can also see from the chart, that although the French channel had three times more videos, the gap between the sums of views of these channels' videos is not so significant, as one video on Middle Eastern gained on average 3.125 views, while one video on French channel gained 1.052 views.

The average number of interactions on French channel exceeded three times interactions on the Middle Eastern channel – 6149.77 as opposed to 402.08 interactions per month, or 657.6 as opposed to 213.3 interactions per 1000 subscribers per period.

The content posted on these two channels was different. Content on the Middle Eastern page was often duplicated with the only change of language from Arabic to English in the video description. Unlike the French channel, there were no beauty projects or tutorial videos posted on the Middle Eastern channel.

7.4 Evaluation of findings

This chapter introduces the findings of the conducted quantitative research. It is structured as follows: the most engaging post types on researched Facebook pages, promotional techniques used by the brand on its social media pages, differences between the content of French and Middle Eastern social media pages, brand's integration across other social media channels, and

manifestations of cultural differences of brand's followers' social media behavior in researched countries.

7.4.1 Most engaging post types

Most engaging posts type on Middle Eastern Facebook page included photos more often than videos or any other content. Analysis of the most engaging posts showed that the most shared posts included some activities with rewards, most of the time they required sharing the post to a user's page. Most commented posts included open-ended questions, which is a frequently used method to engage the audience and spread eWOM by the brand. 790 (63%) out of 1251 posts on French page contained a question, as opposed to 69 (28.4%) out of 243 posts containing questions on the Middle Eastern profile. Top three most commented posts on Middle Eastern page required followers to comment and share their experience with particular L'Oréal product, or guess what products were inside the bag that the winner could get. There were 65 (8.2%) posts on French profile during the year 2017 announcing a contest, as opposed to 11 (4.5%) announcements on the Middle Eastern page. It is almost two times more, which means that this approach to the French audience might be more motivating for purchase. These types of posts were not promoted, usually, such activities drove organic engagement. This type of viral marketing attracts many social media users who seek entertainment and amusement.

In terms of most shared and commented posts analysis of French and Middle Eastern Facebook profiles showed relative homogeneity. However, on French Facebook profile apart from commenting and sharing brand was also often requiring its fans to "like" the page or to tag a certain amount of people in comments. These methods are frequently used as the effective way to appear in potential consumers' newsfeed.

Promoted posts obtained the biggest amount of reactions on both pages. Most of them were introducing or promoting L'Oréal products, French page was often posting hairstyle photos or makeup tutorials. It seems also that L'Oréal, in general, is more engaged in the French brand page, compared to the Middle Eastern one, which could be for many reasons.

7.4.2 Promotional and entertainment techniques

The main purpose of promotional posts is to encourage consumers' demand. Mainly brands share coupons or discount codes, extra or sample product with purchase, giveaways. Only 4 posts were observed to contain promotional information on Middle Eastern Facebook page, as opposed to 26 posts on French Facebook page. All of the posts were announcing e-shop discounts and sales, or favorable deal offers (2+1). Both Facebook profiles shared a direct link

to e-shop in almost every post. On neither of the researched profiles, coupons or promo codes were shared.

As already mentioned before entertaining types of posts contained tutorial videos or beauty tips, beauty polls, questions to profile followers, activities with rewards, etc. Apart from tutorial videos, French YouTube channel was also posting “BeautyTUBE” project series. There were experiments with celebrities’ participation on Middle Eastern YouTube channel, that was often reposted to the Facebook page. The results also suggest that the most engaging entertainment that urged an individual to make comments was an activity with reward and open-ended questions (Q&A).

7.4.3 Differences between the content

Differences between the content displayed on researched pages both Facebook and YouTube were significant. Posts on the Middle Eastern page and channel often included brand ambassadors, which could be interpreted as a sign of possible tendency of collectivistic cultures to be influenced by someone else's opinion. However, it is important for members of collectivistic societies to trust the person they accept advice from. Ambassadors that were posted on Middle Eastern profiles were most of the time Middle Eastern, there was no post including European or American L’Oréal ambassador, except for Eva Langoria (American-Mexican actress).

Unlike Middle Eastern communities, French channel and page did not share as many posts with celebrities' participation. They were very often promoting other L’Oréal brands (luxury products-Balmain, Botanicals, etc.) and were more frequently using beauty polls and open-ended questions, asking page fans' opinions. The fact that they were not usually posting content with brand's ambassadors' participation means that this way of advertising does not have expected impact within individualistic cultures, as they are less likely to be influenced by someone else's opinion.

Very often the types of makeup tutorials or promoted makeup products were different, as Arab and French women prefer different types of makeup. Arab women prefer expressive makeup, especially highlighted eyes, while European women prefer the very natural daily look. These types of posts can be considered a socializing post, created in order to engage the fans, with no advertising content.

7.4.4 Brand's integration across other social media channels

Both brands were very often incorporating other links to their posts both on Facebook and YouTube. L'Oréal uses separate e-shops in France and Middle East. L'Oréal has also set up and active profiles on Instagram, Pinterest, google+, and Twitter. However, since recently accepted restriction by social media companies, suite used for this research is no longer capable of deriving demographical data from these social media networks. A year ago, L'Oréal had separate accounts on Instagram and Twitter for Middle East and France, however now brand does not differentiate its branding strategies on these networks.

Nevertheless, L'Oréal has an impressive social media presence on these networks. L'Oréal has more than 4.7 million followers on Instagram and more than 5.6K posts, almost 110K of followers on Twitter, almost 200K of followers on Google+, and 45K of followers on Pinterest. L'Oréal also collaborated with Snapchat by creating animated lenses for new products promotion.

7.4.5 Manifestations of cultural differences of brand's followers' social media behavior

As already mentioned before L'Oréal Middle East brand pages fans are members of collectivistic cultures, while French audience belongs to individualistic culture. The cultural differences are expressed by the reactions to the content posted on social media in both countries. Posts including brand ambassadors didn't drive such engagement on French pages as opposed to Middle Eastern pages. The fact that brand didn't post content including brand's ambassadors' means that this way of advertising most likely is not effective within individualistic cultures, as they are less likely to be influenced by someone else's opinion. Unlike Middle East, where influencer marketing is very spread and effective. Posts with brand ambassadors drove a lot of engagement, whether positive or negative.

Posts announcing contests appeared two time more often on French Facebook page, which means that this approach to the French audience might be more motivating for purchase. Also, on French social media profiles apart from commenting, the brand was also inspiring users to "like" the contest posts, which is one of the effective methods to appear in potential consumers' newsfeed. This could be an expression of an unobtrusive advertising, that is preferred by the French audience.

Another possible manifestation of cultural differences was the types of makeup tutorials and promoted makeup products on brand's Facebook and YouTube profiles. Arab and French women prefer different types of makeup. Arab women prefer expressive makeup, especially

highlighted eyes, while European women prefer the very natural daily look, therefore brand promotes products and posts tutorials accordingly.

8 Discussion

This research initiated an investigation on how L'Oréal employs social media networks, whether the beauty brand differentiates its social media strategies in researched regions, ways it increases brand awareness with the help of social media, and what are the cultural impacts on consumers' social media behavior. There is no doubt that with the advent of social media consumers' consumption patterns of media changed, and companies had to reconsider their marketing and branding strategies. Specifically, the study focused on the theoretical and practical implications of consumer social media engagement and social media marketing in branding strategies of L'Oréal beauty brand in multicultural settings.

Researched social media networks, Facebook and YouTube, are used by more than 1.5 billion and 2.167 billion people worldwide. These platforms have become one of the most efficient ways for companies to promote their products and also enabled them to get almost immediate feedback from consumers. With social media networks presence of electronic WOM in consumers' decision-making process increased.

The analyzed Facebook pages owned by L'Oréal Paris beauty brand preferred such activities as open questions or activities with rewards to such activities as products reviews or beauty polls when planning their Facebook content. Furthermore, activities with rewards were most engaging on both Facebook pages, this type of posts had the biggest number of shares, as it is usually required by the brand in order to be able to win the prize. Other than activities with rewards, most commented types of posts included open questions. Additionally, very few posts included discount codes, although on both pages 2+1 deals were frequently announced. As for reactions to the posts, French audience tended to be more expressive of their negative feelings to the content - both French YouTube and Facebook pages had significantly more dislikes or "angry" reactions than the Middle Eastern profiles.

Furthermore, content on the Middle Eastern page includes a lot of posts with brand ambassadors of Arab origin, that drive a lot of engagement comparing to other types of posts. This can suggest that members of collectivistic countries, such as Saudi Arabia tend to follow influencers' suggestions and acquire products recommended by someone they trust. Some of the brand customers even claimed they acquired the product because of their friend suggestions

and the brand ambassador was their first association with the L'Oréal brand. Which proves that in collectivistic countries influencer marketing is very effective. Therefore, the author concludes that members of French society prefer and follow unobtrusive advertising.

Research findings regarding the type of entertainment suggest that the two-way interaction in social media may give brands/companies better engagement control and allow them to react quickly to market developments. Eventually, not only brand customers but also random social media users interact with brand's posts because of an entertaining content. Brands that effectively employ creative communication skills in creating entertaining content on social media can improve by increasing brand awareness, strengthening brand image and by increasing their sales.

This research finding suggests that consumer-brand relationship can be controlled by the company, the brand can easily acquire information about consumers' needs and adjust its strategies to these requirements and to the cultural differences of the targeted audiences.

8.1 Recommendations based on findings

Active posting on Twitter and Instagram, consider regional separation of those accounts – L'Oréal's Twitter account is not persistent in posting content, therefore does not have such a big number of followers (110K), as on other platforms. I would recommend them to be more active on this platform, because it keeps evolving, although very slowly.

The reason I would recommend separating their strategies on Instagram and Twitter platforms based on the regions is that the research proved that relevant content can help the brand gain new followers: some type of content that is engaging in one region does not have to be engaging in another. Therefore, global pages might not be as successful as regional. Although author could not research the internal motives of the brand followers for content engagement due to the method of the research, the fact that brand separates its strategies on Facebook according to the region and it is quite effective proves that it would be as successful. It would also help the brand to keep track of relevant fans and customers because the new privacy restrictions of Facebook and Instagram do not allow any software or brand to derive this data from the platform. This would also allow the brand to keep the customer updated on the regional events, contests, and giveaways.

Using influencer marketing on Instagram and Twitter – one of the new features of Socialbakers analytics tool is finding relevant influencers for brand advertising according to

the industry and region. The influencer has an audience that could potentially bring value to the brand and help craft better campaigns. Brand does not always have to choose an influencer with a big number of followers, it can be a micro influencer, but with a dedicated audience. If the influencer is trusted, then the content drives a considerable engagement. User engagement with brands on Instagram is 10 times higher than on Facebook, by virtue of influencer marketing as well.

Adjusting content according to the type of engagement - The author would also recommend paying more attention to the posts that drive negative engagement and reduce the irrelevant or duplicated content. There were a lot of posts that had negative comments and a lot of dislikes on the brand's Facebook and YouTube, that did not get any response or reaction. The author would suggest establishing response time because negative reactions can soar unless users get answers. It is necessary to react to a positive feedback as well, it can help to strengthen the brand's relationship with the customer.

L'Oréal is the best performing beauty brand on social media. The brand knows how to use influencer marketing, viral marketing and adjusts its content to its audience's needs. The cultural impact on the level of engagement toward the brand's social media content is indisputable. The brand is successfully selecting relevant content for Facebook and YouTube profiles and takes into consideration the cultural differences of the targeted audiences.

9 Conclusion

Understanding consumer social media behavior and what content motivates users to engage with brands social media pages might be helpful not only to create more relevant content and improve social media engagement. Detecting what are the cultural differences of the markets, where brands run their business could help brand and marketing managers to develop better social media and communication strategies. The research was conducted based on its design and provided insights to originally stated research questions. Gathered research data met the intended topics. Scholars and marketers can also benefit from analyzed social media consumption and engagement patterns of beauty brand fans.

Despite the lack of generalizable results due to limitations of Hofstede method and privacy restrictions of some of the social media platforms, outcomes of the study are insightful. Another important issue is that the author was conducting external analysis using Socialbakers analytics tool; research did not include the actual brand customers' interviews and analysis of their internal motivations. The research was conducted for the period from 1st of January 2017 to 1st of January of 2018. The analysis supplied valuable data that helped to build up a list of possible recommendations for the L'Oréal brand's social media marketing improvement. Also, research provided valuable insights on how brand's customers behave on social media and helped understand how individuals, contribute and consume content on social media platforms across two cultures.

In this study author researched brand's social media presence in two countries: Saudi Arabia and France. It is evident from the research findings that content posted in individualistic and collectivistic societies is different, as well as the level and type of engagement towards that content. By examining how consumers behave on social media in different regions, marketers can have in-depth insights into ways of marketing differentiation. As a result, beauty brands will be able to reach their online consumers with highly proper content and share relevant information for certain region.

This topic has proven to be interesting for future research. The scope of the study can be widened to another countries, cultures or industries. This would possibly give a better overview of social media behavior trends and differences not only across cultures, but also industries, and provide us with more representative findings.

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