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Evaluating Brand Recall and Engagement in Social Media Ads: A Case Study of Saudi Students

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of social media advertisements on brand recall among students at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. Focusing on various social media platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, the research examines the frequency of ad exposure, interaction levels, and the ability of students to recognize brand logos and identify design errors. Using a survey methodology, data was gathered from master's students in the College of Business Administration, offering insights into how social media advertisements capture attention, foster engagement, and aid in memory retention of brand elements, even among a busy audience. Findings reveal that the most frequent ad exposure occurs on Twitter, followed by Snapchat and Instagram. Interaction types vary by platform, with "likes" dominating on TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram, while Facebook and YouTube saw higher levels of comments and likes, respectively. The results demonstrate that students not only engage with ads but also show a high capacity for distinguishing accurate brand logos from those with minor modifications, as evidenced by their high correct response rates in recognizing logo errors in brands like McDonald's, IKEA, and Nike. This study concludes that social media advertisements play a significant role in enhancing brand recall and recognition. It recommends that global brands leverage social media platforms and influencers to maximize engagement and brand retention. Additionally, the findings underscore the potential for Saudi and local brands to increase visibility and brand loyalty by targeting social media users with thoughtfully designed ad campaigns. This research provides a foundation for future studies on effective practices in social media advertising and audience memory retention in digital marketing.

Keywords: Brand Recall; Social Media Advertising; Audience Engagement; Brand Recognition; Digital Marketing; Social Media Platforms.

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Introduction

Global companies strive to reach their target audiences, influence them, build loyalty, and establish their brand logos in consumers' minds (Pitta, 2008). They make significant efforts to develop strategies for logo design, utilizing various colors, fonts, and sizes to convey their goals and values to society. In addition, companies employ methods to enhance brand recall, a topic that has been extensively studied (Al Tawalbeh, A., Moharam, M. M. R., Allaymoun, M., & Shabnah, M. Q., 2024). With the widespread use of social media platforms and the continuous rise in users across all age groups, one of the primary attractions of social media is its ability to facilitate online identities, allowing users to express themselves, entertain, communicate, build relationships based on shared interests, interact across geographical boundaries, and learn about various topics (Moharam, M. M. R., Hamad, M., & Isa, A. N. H., 2024).

Researchers have also explored demographic factors that influence social media usage and connected these factors to advertising success on these platforms. Comparisons have been made across different platforms to identify their audiences and analyze how each platform effectively delivers and influences messages (Altaher, A. E., Moharam, M. M. R., Hamad, M., & Alsardieh, A. R. M., 2024). Recent studies indicate that Instagram has become a powerful platform for capturing attention through advertisements, particularly among young people in their twenties, who show awareness and positive attitudes toward products. Some studies have also highlighted the influence of social media influence on audience perceptions. (Badran, S., Moharam, M. M. R., Allaymoun, M., & Mohamed, F. A., 2024)

The rapid development of social networking sites, combined with the flexibility and ease they offer, along with news content from major media channels, has led to increased public interest in following these platforms daily (Sahneh, E. S., Nogara, G., DeVerna, M. R., Liu, N., Luceri, L., Menczer, F., ... & Giordano, 2024). Additionally, the creativity of advertisers and designers has brought about innovative ideas that incorporate humor and entertainment, making advertisements more engaging and memorable. For example, a McDonald's advertisement from eight months ago featured actors moving their eyebrows to mimic the McDonald's logo and used the hashtag #Say_it_with_your_eyebrows, which successfully reinforced brand recall of the "M" logo. This approach has shifted viewers' perceptions of ads, making them a source of entertainment, and current advertising research trends now focus on understanding the future of advertising, the impact of logo design on brand reception, and the importance of this topic for companies and customer relations [7,8]. (Foroudi, 2012) (Wheeler, 2012)

Literature review

In this section, an analysis of Arab and international studies related to "The Impact of Social Media Advertisements on Audience Brand Recall" is presented, aiming to highlight key findings and recent results. The studies are reviewed in chronological order, from the most recent to the oldest, with each study individually analyzed to identify similarities and differences with the current research.

Sayed and Mustafa (2023): This descriptive study examined the effects of electronic advertising on consumer behavior in the Kurdistan Region, focusing on telecommunications companies such as Asiacell, Korek Telecom, and Zain. The study used a media survey method and targeted university professors as a sample group to assess the

potential impact of electronic advertising. The researcher collected data through 380 questionnaires, both paper and electronic. Findings indicated that electronic advertising significantly attracted respondents' attention, increased their interest, and strengthened their purchase intentions for telecommunications services and preferred brands. (Sayed, Sheelan, Mustafa, Abdelkhaleq , 2023)

Al-Shorbagy (2022): This research explored the relationship between social media influencers' characteristics and consumers' admiration for e-commerce brands in Egypt. Using multiple regression analysis, the study employed a quantitative, deductive approach with data collected from e-commerce site customers in Egypt. A total of 382 responses were gathered, of which 361 were valid. Results revealed a positive, significant correlation between influencer characteristics and brand admiration, reflected in brand love, trust, and respect. The study also found notable differences in brand perception based on gender, age, website experience, and frequency of following influences. (Al-Shorbagy, 2022)

Bajaber (2022): This descriptive study investigated Snapchat users' awareness of native ads in Saudi Arabia and compared their impact on brand attitudes with other social media ads. An electronic questionnaire was distributed to 453 participants using a snowball sampling method. Results showed a relatively high level of awareness regarding native ads and a slight preference for them over standard social media ads, with native ads fostering a more positive brand attitude. (Bajaber, 2022)

Costa (2021): Costa's quantitative study examined how brand names and logo designs influence consumers' emotional and cognitive responses. A sample of 275 participants was randomly divided into nine experimental groups and exposed to manipulated logos. Findings indicated that organic logos inspired by nature (e.g., animals, flowers, fruits), like the Lacoste logo, positively influenced emotional responses and enhanced brand recall. The study also explored various logo styles and their creation process. (Costa, 2021)

Jiaoju, Yuepeng, Xiaofeng, & Guoxin (2021): This experimental study developed a theoretical framework to examine the impact of social media advertising, specifically user-generated short video ads, on product sales. Using data from e-commerce platforms Taobao and Douyin, the study highlighted that short video ads featuring music and gender-specific content shared via mobile phones were particularly effective for boosting sales. Increased audience engagement and comments on social media further enhanced product sales. (Ge, J., Sui, Y., Zhou, X., & Li, G. , 2021)

Problems and importance of study

The current study focuses on the student community at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Saudi Arabia to explore the impact of social media advertisements on audience recall of brand shapes, colors, and distinct features. With the abundance of ads on social media platforms like Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and others, and the vast number of followers due to their ease of use and flexibility, this study aims to examine how these ads affect brand recognition. Creative thinking in advertising has advanced significantly, leading to innovative displays that capture attention even with limited resources, such as small businesses on TikTok [14]. Ads have become more engaging, often incorporating elements of fun and enjoyment, which makes it easier for followers to remember brands without the resistance they might have had in the past. This study highlights how social media users distinguish brand colors or shapes and recognize the correct brand appearance, even when colors or letters are altered.

Importance of Study:

The study's significance lies in the current relevance of advertising and social media for global companies.

Cognitive Importance: This study contributes new insights into how social media advertisements influence audience recall, especially among young people and above, by examining Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University students in Saudi Arabia. It also emphasizes the importance of logo design in terms of color and shape, which previous studies have shown are crucial for distinguishing brands and aiding memory.

Applied Importance: The study offers a clear perspective for global companies on the importance of managing social media accounts and advertising through these platforms, as they are closest to and most accessible for audiences, regardless of how busy they may be. The chosen sample—students of Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University—regularly engages with social media despite low costs compared to other marketing methods. This underscores the role of creativity in capturing audience attention instantly and embedding the brand in their memory.

Study Objectives:

- Determine the level of brand recall and recognition among Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University students for brands advertised on social media.
- Identify the best practices that enhance audience recall of brands.
- Explore audience engagement with social media ads from various brands.
- Assess the impact of visual elements in ads on shaping brand recognition.

The study will also provide recommendations for global brands to improve ad effectiveness in achieving recall and awareness.

Study Questions:

- What is the level of exposure of Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University students to social media advertisements?
- How do Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University students interact with social media advertisements?
- What is the level of brand shape recall among Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University students?
- How accurately can Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University students recognize design errors in brand shapes created for the survey?

Study Hypotheses:

- There are no statistically significant differences in brand distinctiveness among the study sample for fast food brands.
- There are statistically significant differences between demographic variables and the level of attraction to advertisements.

Research Methodology

The current study employed a survey method, chosen as it is highly suitable for descriptive studies that seek to answer specific research questions and aim to record, interpret, and

analyze phenomena based on current data. This method involved surveying a sample of male and female students from Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Saudi Arabia to determine their frequency and mode of social media use, their interaction with these platforms, and their ability to identify brand logos, including their recognition of intentional errors designed into the data collection tool (questionnaire).

Data Collection Tools:

The primary data collection tool was an electronic questionnaire consisting of several sections designed to address the study's research questions. To ensure linguistic accuracy and relevance, the questionnaire was reviewed by three media experts from Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, who provided feedback on linguistic clarity and alignment with relevant literature and studies. The final version of the tool included six sections:

Section One: Demographic questions on age, gender, and marital status, comprising three questions.

Section Two: Questions about the most frequently used social media platforms for advertising, with one question.

Section Three: Questions on advertisement engagement and interaction rates, with four questions.

Section Four: Questions on respondents' recollection of advertisements, containing three questions.

Section Five: Questions on respondents' ability to detect errors in brand designs, containing two questions.

Study Population and Sample:

The study targeted master's students from the College of Business Administration at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, encompassing a range of administrative specializations. This group was selected due to their demanding schedules, making them a fitting population for the study's objectives. Out of approximately 1,000 individuals in this population, data was collected from 306 respondents. The researcher used a non-probability sampling method, specifically a convenience sampling approach, selecting readily available participants. This method, often referred to as accidental or incidental sampling, allows easy access to participants. The researcher also specified that the sample members be master's students employed in various public or private sectors, as most of them work within these fields, meeting the study's criteria.

Results and Discussion

The figure 1 below shows that 315 responses were collected, with female respondents accounting for 53.3% and male respondents making up 46.7%.
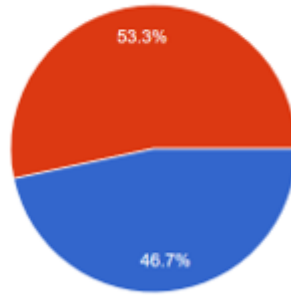
Figure 1: Gender distribution.

Figure 2 illustrates the age distribution among respondents, where the largest group (51.1%) is aged 30 to 40, followed by 38.3% who are under 30. Those aged 40 and above constitute 9.9%, and a small portion (0.6%) fall within the 24 to 30 age range.
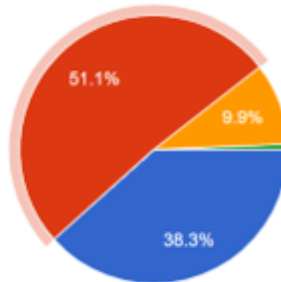

Figure 2: The age distribution among respondents.

Figure 3 indicates the marital status of the respondents, revealing that the largest group (43.3%) consists of married individuals without children, while 28.3% are married with children. The remaining respondents include 25.1% single individuals and 3.3% who are separated.
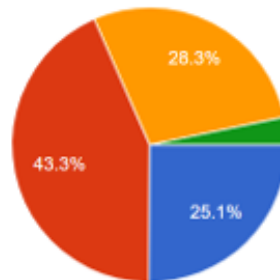

Figure 3: The marital status of the respondents

Figure 4 outlines the platforms through which respondents encounter advertisements on social media. Twitter ranked highest, with 231 respondents indicating "always," 50 "sometimes," 27 "rarely," and 5 "never." Instagram followed, with 202 respondents

choosing "always," 71 "sometimes," 31 "rarely," and 6 "never." Snapchat and TikTok also had high engagement, while Facebook and YouTube ranked lower in terms of regular ad exposure.
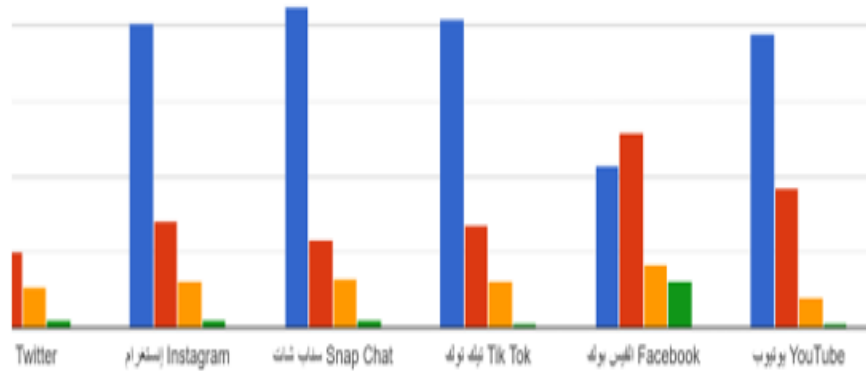

Figure 4: The platforms through which respondents encounter advertisements on social media

Figure 5 showing the frequency of daily ad exposure indicates that 40% of respondents see ads 3 to 5 times per day, 30.5% see ads 1 to 3 times, 20.3% view ads more than five times, and 7.9% report no daily exposure.
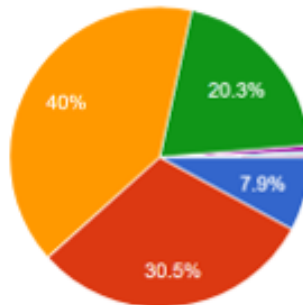

Figure 5: The frequency of daily ad exposure indicates.

In terms of ad preferences as Figure 6, 27.1% of respondents chose "other," while 21.3% prefer fast food ads. Other popular categories included travel ads (14%), shopping ads (10.2%), real estate ads (9.9%), beauty ads (9.2%), and job ads (8%).
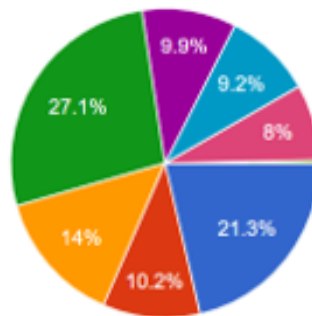

Figure 6: Ad preferences.

Figure 7 analyzing interaction with ads shows that on Twitter, 175 respondents interact with ads by liking them, while others respond through comments, shares, and reposts. Instagram saw 205 respondents using likes, followed by comments and dislikes. Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube also had high levels of engagement but with varying response types.
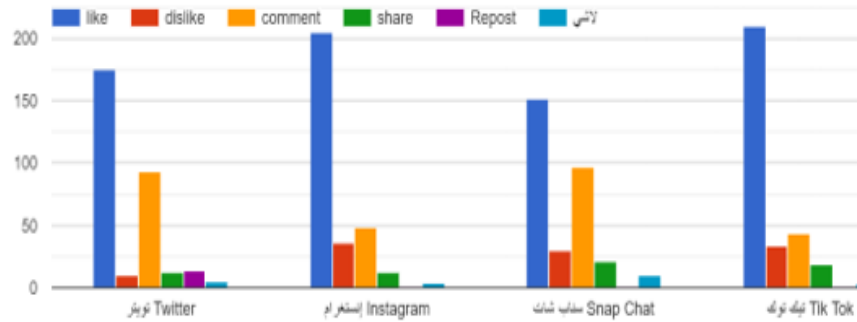
Figure 7: Analyzing interaction with ads.

According to another chart, 88.2% of respondents believe that ads are entertaining and capture attention through creative content, while 11.8% do not share this view.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- Ad Exposure Frequency: The study found that the majority of male and female students from Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University are exposed to social media advertisements 3 to 5 times per day, making up 40% of respondents. Another 30.5% reported seeing ads 1 to 3 times per day, while 20.3% indicated exposure "five times or more," and 7.9% reported "no exposure."

- Platform-Specific Interaction: Interaction with ads varied by social media platform among master's students from the College of Business Administration. The highest interaction type on Twitter was "likes," totaling 175, while Instagram showed even higher engagement with 205 likes. Snapchat interactions also leaned heavily towards likes, totaling 151, and TikTok recorded the highest with 210 likes. On Facebook, comments were the most common form of interaction (88), while YouTube also saw strong engagement with 180 likes.

- Brand Recall and Error Recognition: The results demonstrate a strong ability among students to recognize correct brand logos and detect intentional design errors. For the McDonald's logo, 92.1% of respondents correctly identified the error, and for the IKEA logo, 97.1% provided the correct response. Similarly, 89.4% correctly identified the error in the modified Nike logo.

Recommendations:

The study highlights that social media ads are well-received and actively engaged with by the study sample—master's students from the College of Business Administration at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University—who were carefully chosen to represent individuals with busy schedules. This finding emphasizes that, despite a busy lifestyle, viewers are

attracted to ads and tend to interact with them. Additionally, the sample demonstrated a strong ability to distinguish errors and accurately recall correct brand logos.

Global companies should prioritize maintaining a social media presence and leveraging influencers, as the study sample's feedback indicates that influencer ads are effective in solidifying the advertising concept in viewers' minds. Attention to the presentation of ad ideas also aids brand recall, as suggested by participant responses.

This study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of social media advertising, especially regarding audience recall and error recognition. The results also offer a clear perspective for emerging Saudi brands and small business owners on the significance of advertising on social media platforms, given the high levels of engagement and attraction these platforms generate among the public.

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