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Strengths, Opportunities and areas of Improvements for Maroof Platform in Saudi Arabia

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Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Maroof is a new third-party platform that is managed by the Saudi Ministry of Commerce. Maroof is designed to evaluate, regulate, and organize stores and E-commerce practices in Saudi Arabia. This paper will examine the platforms' strengths, opportunities, and recommendations for improvements. Maroof was designed to help buyers make purchase decisions and issue certificates to registered stores. A major strength of the platform is that sellers are encouraged to sign up with their social security number, which makes them "known" to the Saudi Ministry of Commerce. Additionally, it legitimizes the store owners' credentials. Therefore, Saudi citizens can feel more confident when purchasing goods from social media accounts that are registered with Maroof. Utilizing Maroof is one of the factors that increase trust in buying in Saudi Arabia, especially in E-commerce. The purpose of Maroof is to prevent any fraudulent activities as the platform allows buyers to report a claim easily.

On the other hand, the Maroof is a new platform with a major shortcoming, and thus there are several opportunities to improve Maroof's usability. The major area that could use improvement is the comments section. For instance, a registered sign in username and password is not required to post a review. The platform simply allows users to anonymously write product reviews and comments along with ratings of sellers or stores using their social media accounts. This paper's aim is to review these comments on the Maroof platform, which is a supposed, reliable, and trusted governmental website. Although the Maroof team claims they are continuously working on detecting fake reviews, and the Ministry of Commerce states that Maroof

provides authenticated reviews, findings of this paper show that there are many fake positive reviews on Maroof. As a result, the Saudi Ministry of Commerce should make it clear that ratings do not always represent the quality of a product, even on a governmental website.

Introduction

Using Social Media in Saudi Arabia

With the spectacular development of Web 2.0, social media applications have become an essential way of connecting people. Social media applications incite individuals to go online and interact with others. It also allows users to share knowledge, creativity, and easily communicate with friends and family. Saudi citizens are highly interested in social media because Saudi Arabia is naturally a collectivist culture that extensively values family and social groups (Triandis, 2001). The number of Saudi users of social media applications has doubled in the past years, from 8.5 million to 12.8 million users, which is equivalent to 58 % of the Saudi population. According to the Saudi Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT), in 2020, there are more than 18 million users of social media applications in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is one of the top-ranked countries in social media applications use. For example, Saudi Arabia ranked as the second country worldwide in the use of Snapchat. Also, by 2018, there were more than 12 million Instagram users in Saudi Arabia, which is 36.5% of its entire population. (Napolen, 2020). Due to this extensive usage of social media in Saudi Arabia, merchants took advantage of this use to reach their potential customers through social media applications.

Social Media for Business

The ease of using the internet created electronic commerce, E-commerce, and consequently with the surging use of social media lead to Social commerce, S-commerce (Hajli, 2015). S-commerce is a subset of E-commerce that uses social media applications for social interactions and user contributions to enhance online purchasing of different products and services

(Kim et al., 2013). Stephen et al. (2010) define S-commerce as social shopping that allows people to participate actively in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities. Social media is a new phenomenon that has changed the way business environments operate. Social media plays a significant role in economic development and has increased opportunities for marketers and businesses. These social media applications are increasing in popularity due to qualities such as the convenience of use, availability of products in multiple types, and social aspects (AlArfaj et al., 2019).

There are many benefits of using S-commerce for businesses of all sizes. Firstly, it increases the customer base and exposure to reach targeted audiences. Secondly, it is a cheap and effective marketing tool to reach people because millions use social media daily. For example, small and medium enterprises continually use the popular Facebook website as a marketing tool and platform to reach their customers (Ho et al., 2015). Thirdly, using social media for business can enhance a business's reputation and brand loyalty (Casaló et al., 2009). Reputation and brand loyalty are essential for businesses and can be competitive advantages. If customers have brand loyalty, they are less concerned about the product price and are willing to pay more. Consequently, gaining this loyalty results in selling more items and thus increased profits. In sum, S-commerce contains a broader range of business benefits to buying and selling online.

Social media has provided a lot of opportunities for young people to become entrepreneurs. In Saudi Arabia, entrepreneurs have used social media applications, such as Instagram, one of the photo-based mobile apps, to start their small online businesses (AlArfaj et al., 2019). In recent years, Saudi Arabia has particularly witnessed rapid growth in S-commerce. There are large numbers of family owned businesses that use social commerce for selling unique items such as clothing, handcrafts, and foods to create a personalized shopping experience for their customers.

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In Saudi Arabia, 5.4% of the population is involved in a family business (Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Attitudes Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Report 2018/2019, 2019). Worldwide, there are more than 1 Billion Instagram active users who are active, and 90% of these accounts follow at least one business Instagram account (Instagram Business, 2020). However, as S-commerce increases, its challenges and issues like fraudulent practices are on the rise.

E-commerce Scams and Frauds

With E-commerce reaching worldwide audiences, fraud has become a problem and disadvantage to consumers and businesses. E-commerce sales are expected to reach more than 639 billion US dollars by 2020 (Wilson, 2019). Previous studies have found that a lack of trust is one of the essential reasons why consumers hesitate to shop online or use S-commerce (Kim et al., 2013). Fraudulent activity exists around the globe, and there is a large number of online fraud victims of E-commerce everywhere. According to data released by an information services company, Experian, in 2017, 6.6% or 16.7 million people have been victims of E-commerce fraud in the United States. The data shows a 30% increase in E-commerce fraud attacks since 2016. There is a clear correlation between E-commerce growth and E-commerce fraud.

A study conducted by Sahetapy, 2016 showed that there are many types of fraud consumers experienced when it comes to E-commerce. The participants' responses in this study revealed some forms of fraud they experienced with E-commerce shopping, which included: receiving products different from the photos posted (48.65%), goods arriving late (11.35), not as described (28.65%), paid for products but never received them (11.35%). Fraud is an unfortunate instance consumers may experience and not be aware of while purchasing items online.

One of the common forms of fraud comes in the way of writing fake reviews. This is when random users intentionally write positive reviews to bolster a seller's sales "Fake reviews are one of the most popular unethical methods which are present on sites such as Yelp or TripAdvisor."

(Barbado et al., 2019). Doing business online needs promoting products and services, which may lead some sellers into paying fake review writers to achieve high rankings. Trusting a fake comment may result in consumer disappointment and distrust. Moreover, writing fake reviews online is against most platforms' rules and regulations. For example, when signing up for an account on TripAdvisor, the disclaimer states:

> You expressly agree not to post, upload to, transmit, distribute, store, create or otherwise publish through the Services any Content of yours that:

a.   Is false, unlawful, misleading, libelous, defamatory, obscene, pornographic, indecent, lewd, suggestive, harassing (or advocates harassment of another person), threatening, invasive of privacy or publicity rights, abusive, inflammatory, fraudulent or otherwise objectionable; (TripAdvisor, 2018).

However, this type of scam is present everywhere, not just in the United States. They can be found in Saudi Arabia as well, in sites like Maroof, which this paper will be reviewing and discussing below.

Saudi Government and its Vision of 2030's Role in the Saudi Economy

S-commerce transactions have been quickly rising in Saudi Arabia. The government of Saudi Arabia is playing a significant role in improving both E-commerce and S-commerce. There are many essential players that provide the needed support and enablement to drive the growth and development of S-commerce in Saudi Arabia. According to The Saudi Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) report (2017), some of these include government and regulatory bodies, payment service providers, logistics companies, technology providers, venture capitalists, and investors. This type of government involvement illustrates how government intervention can benefit E-commerce activities in Saudi Arabia (AlGhamdi et al.,

2013). These provided facilities allow small business owners in Saudi Arabia to use S-commerce as a starting point to their business, which ultimately improves the economic growth of the country.

In order to efficiently utilize S-commerce, strict rules and supervision must be put in place to prevent fraud and create a user-friendly environment. One of the most important ways Saudi Arabia is combating this problem is through "The Saudi Vision of 2030", which is based on three key pillars: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. The main goal of the vision is to promote economic growth by empowering Saudi entrepreneurs (Prince Mohammed bin Salman, n.d.). Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman stated that "The 2030 vision is an ambitious yet achievable blueprint, which expresses our long-term goals and expectations and reflects our country's strengths and capabilities" (Vision2030.gov). The government's oversight and new regulations and rules in E-commerce help in preventing fraud. The Saudi Ministry of Commerce (MC) and (CITC) thoroughly recognize their essential role in the kingdom's Vision of 2030. As a result of these efforts, Maroof platform was launched to support E-commerce and hinder fraud or scams.

Maroof platform

Since the increase in social commerce transactions in Saudi Arabia, Maroof has become a trusted third-party platform between buyers and sellers to reduce fraud. Its main objective was to evaluate the accuracy of online and physical stores' sales. There are four main features of the platform; search for stores, share them with friends and family, read others' reviews, and write your comments about your experience buying from the registered stores. Maroof was built to increase consumer trust in electronic shops and simplify communication between entrepreneurs and customers (Ministry of commerce, 2016). It is a free e-service that allows sellers to register

and get the Maroof certificate to link it into their social media accounts. This certificate will enhance the sellers' trust, and reliability as Maroof is a governmental service.

Benefits for Maroof buyers and sellers

Based on their website (Maroof, 2016), there are some benefits to both consumers and buyers in using Maroof. First, buyers are provided with important information about registered stores before making a purchase. Buyers feel protected from the risk of purchasing fake goods or inauthentic items since sellers are "well- known" to the Saudi Ministry of Commerce. Second, buyers can find previous customers' evaluations and reviews of products that can help them in their buying decision. Maroof also features recommended businesses, brands, and restaurants that are trusted to assist buyers. Also, Maroof allows buyers to rate stores and write comments. In turn, these ratings create a list of ranked stores (from top to low rated) based on their reviews. The Maroof team is passionate about fulfilling their goal because trust amongst consumers and businesses is conducive to a healthy and productive community.

On the other hand, there are also some benefits for sellers who register with Maroof. First, Maroof is an Arabic word that means "well-known," and the platform shows that a seller is well-known and trusted upon registering. Maroof issues a certificate to authenticate the business as a trusted vendor to registered users. Sellers can then link this certificate to their profiles. The certificate allows sellers to boost their business confidence and legitimize their presence online because consumers prefer to buy from sellers who are signed up with Maroof. Second, Maroof helps sellers reach more consumers. After registering with Maroof, sellers are able to share their stores' social networking accounts and contact information. Lastly, buyers' reviews and comments help improve the seller's products and services. Consequently, Maroof enhances user's usability by building trust between sellers and buyers while providing the ability for sellers to be involved in a community where they can be reviewed by consumers (Maroof, 2016). In other words, it

allows consumers to exchange social commerce experiences in a trustworthy way (Maroof, 2016). Moreover, Maroof also allows sellers who don't have a physical location, using S-commerce and those business owners who have physical locations to sign up and provide their products or services at Maroof. For instance, any salon, restaurant, or clothing store in Saudi Arabia can register to benefit from Maroof as Maroof's certification and ranking lead to reaching more consumers. By 2018, there were more than 25 thousand stores registered at Maroof

With the assistance of Maroof, since its launch, the Saudi Ministry of Commerce received more than 19 thousand consumer complaints from online purchases, possibly due to the convenient way of reporting claims. On the Maroof's homepage, there is a link (as shown in Figure 1.1 below) for customers to click on to file claims against any store.
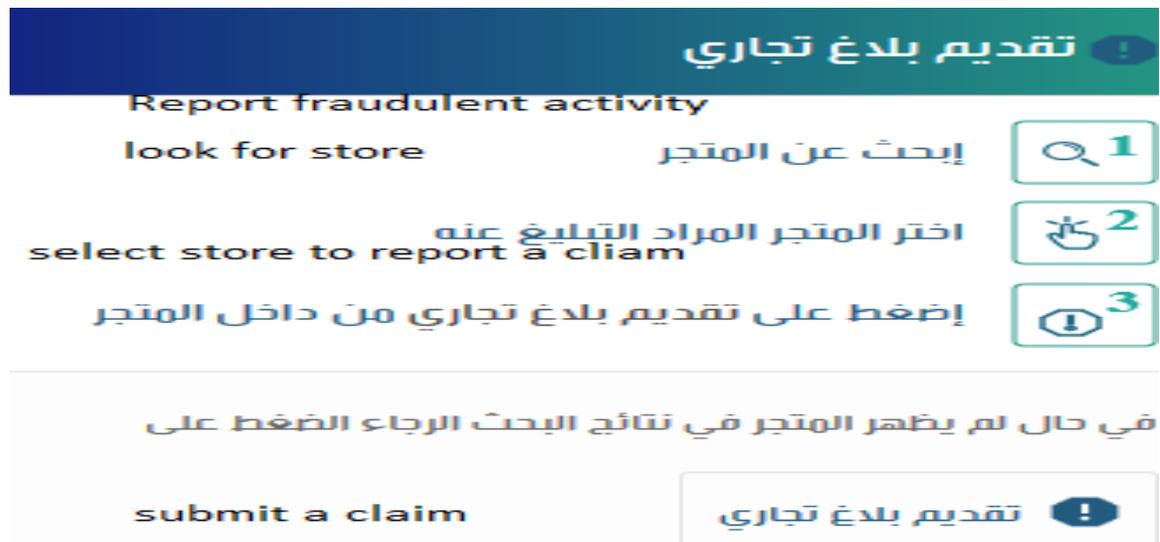
Figure 1.1 a picture of the web page for reporting fraudulent activities

Furthermore, upon clicking on the "Submit a Claim" button, users are directed to another webpage and prompted to fill out a complaint form (see Figure 1.2). On the form, users are asked to provide the sellers' social media accounts so that they can be tracked via Maroof's database. Then, after describing the product or service, the buyer is asked to describe the incident (i.e., what

happened, why, and how). Finally, the report is sent to the Ministry of Commerce to review and resolve.

Figure 1.2 the form for submitting a fraudulent seller from the ministry of commerce web page

Maroof is a Saudi platform that was launched in 2016 and is currently one of the key components of the Saudi E-commerce ecosystem. The Saudi Ministry of Commerce, in conjunction with Thiqah Business Services, managed and supervised the operation and development of the platform. According to the Saudi Consumer Protection Association (2010), it aims to protect consumers against all kinds of adulteration, fraud, deceit, counterfeit, falsification,

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and exaggerated prices; and promote consumer awareness and rationalized consumption. Because of that, Maroof platform was designed to avoid any type of disappointment when buying in Saudi Arabia.

Statement of the Problem

This paper primarily aims to examine the effectiveness of Maroof as a third-party platform that was built to increase trust and support buying decisions for customers. Thus, the main questions this paper attempts to examine are:

1. Does misleading information exist on Maroof?
2. Is all information on Maroof trustworthy?
3. Should consumers trust the product ratings and reviews on Maroof?

Literature Review

Impact of Maroof certification on Saudi Users

The literature on Maroof's advantages centers around the question of "what factors impact S-commerce success in Saudi Arabia" (Alarfaj et al. 2019; Alkhathlan et al. 2019), and explores how Maroof certificates impact buyers' perception of the sellers' trustworthiness. These studies point to the importance of Maroof to Saudi citizens as a trustworthy third-party platform provided by the government. These recent studies found the power and impact of Maroof certificates on consumers' trust and purchase intentions. A study conducted by Alarfaj et al. (2019) investigates Saudi citizen's routines and behaviors in using S-commerce in Saudi Arabia using interviews with 24 participants. Participants were from different age groups, education levels, and buying experiences. They were asked about their trust mechanisms when buying from stores on Instagram. Checking sellers' practices was one of these mechanisms that has been used by participants. The study's findings showed that 46% of the participants checked sellers' practices by searching for

their accounts on Maroof. Participants trusted the products of the accounts that were linked to Maroof. The study also showed that with Maroof, consumers' level of trust increased because the government manages and oversees the platform. Saudi people trust their government, and citizens need to have a clear policy and regulation to trust sellers (Alarfaj et al., 2019). They trust Maroof because the government regulates it. The study suggests that since sellers include their Maroof link into their profiles as a practice, this enhances trust and therefore increased sales.

Moreover, Alkhathlan et al. (2019) study identified factors that influence consumers' purchase intention from Instagram stores in Saudi Arabia, and Maroof was one of these factors. Purchase intention was defined as the willingness of an individual to make purchases from an S-commerce platform (Hajli et al., 2017). The study used Maroof as a special and unique factor that impacts Saudi consumers' trust and purchase intentions to buy from an Instagram account that is registered on Maroof. The study was based on a survey of 225 Saudi citizens who had recently used Maroof. Participants were males and females ranging in different ages and levels of education. The findings showed that acquiring a Maroof certification was directly associated with higher purchase intention, and Instagram stores with a Maroof certificate enjoyed higher sales. Also, the study suggested that vendors intentionally registered with Maroof in order to increase their profits.

Since Maroof is a fairly new platform, studies are limited and almost non-existent. Upon extensive search on the topic, very few results were found. Moreover, these few yielded results were promotions of the platform and thus tended to shed a positive light on its use. Despite this limitation, this paper will report Maroof's strengths, opportunities, and areas of Improvements.

Reviews impact buying decisions

Buyers have different strategies when it comes to looking for information about a product or service before buying. Currently, reading product reviews and ratings is a common strategy consumers use to evaluate a product or service(Wahyuni et al., 2016). The importance of Word-of-mouth (WOM) remains the most significant way of promoting an item or service(Richins et al., 1988). WOM allows us to learn from others' past experiences. In the past, customers relied on expert reviews to help them with their purchasing decisions. In today's world, WOM has been replaced with the increased usage of social media. This transformation of face-to-face WOM has created a new platform called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)(Hankin, 2007). Users now have access to an abundance of information by way of having product reviews at their fingertips.

Presently, users have a large amount of information about products or services from consumers who have previously purchased and used the product or service. For example, consumers may decide to talk about a product's features, quality, or strengths and weaknesses. E-commerce and/or S-commerce practices allow customers to write reviews related to products or services on social media to express their views or opinions on the product. When it comes to S-commerce, one noticeable development is the large number of product reviews that are being used as an essential source of information for buyers, which therefore influences their purchase intention (Bai et al., 2015). The impact of these reviews and their influence on buyers has been examined in numerous studies. For example, one study found that consumers are heavily relying on online product reviews as a source of information to mitigate the risks that are associated with buying online (Hankin, 2007). These online reviews can change the opinion of a customer about the product (Sinha et al., 2018). Therefore, trust plays a crucial role in the S-commerce context (Alkhathlan et al., 2019). If most of the reviews are positive, they are more likely to purchase the product. Meanwhile, if reviews are negative, consumers will most likely look for another product

to purchase. Not surprisingly, studies show that online reviews serve as a valuable source of information. These reviews are used by potential customers and impact their buying decision. Consumers rely heavily on product reviews when making decisions about online purchasing (Malbon, 2013). A study conducted by Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group in 2013 showed that 52% out of 5,000 participants chose online ratings and reviews as an essential source of information they use for making buying decisions.

Equally important is a sellers' ranking, which impacts consumers' level of trust in online shopping. (Hankin, 2007). Due to the lack of physical contact between seller and buyer in online shopping, buyers tend to rely on each other's comments, reviews, ratings, and recommendations in their purchase decision to establish their trust in the seller. Moreover, online reviews play an important role in consumers' level of trust in the seller and make their purchasing decisions based on the seller's rating (Hankin, 2007). When buyers are looking for a specific product, they are likely to read previous customer reviews before making a purchase. Thus, online product reviews are necessary for sellers and have a major impact on selling items online. However, online reviews have opened the doors for some new businesses to fabricate reviews in an effort to promote something (Hatwar et al., 2019).

Fake reviews exist

With the rise of E-commerce, online product reviews have been a trending research topic (Barbado et al., 2019), (Lappas, 2012). Nonetheless, online reviews are a double-edged sword, and if the reviews are to be trusted, then they can help users select the best products based on what they are looking for. On the other hand, if these reviews are fake and inaccurate, then this can mislead users. Unfortunately, there are many fake reviews out there (Barbado et al., 2019). One of the issues of E-commerce is getting duped by deceptive or fraudulent reviews into buying an inferior product. Due to the option of being anonymous in today's online world, along with the

impact of online reviews of users' purchasing decisions, writing fake reviews is becoming a prime target for malicious attacks. (Lappas, 2012). These fake reviews seem to be driven by financial gains.

The goal of those who write fake reviews is to increase the popularity of products or discredit the product of competitors. In other words, fraudsters write fake reviews to promote their products and persuade customers to buy more, while discrediting other products due to the financial benefits they can receive (Wahyuni et al., 2016). "Positive opinions often mean profits and fame for businesses and individuals" (Li et al., 2014), which leads to writing fake reviews. "For consumers, a fraudulent review can lead to negative outcomes" (Kugler, 2014). Fake reviews can lead to purchasing unwanted products that buyers are not interested in, which ruins the online shopping experience. "Writing fake reviews is considered to be a type of attack, performed to purposefully harm or boost a product's reputation" (Lappas, 2012). The issue is that the internet is filled with fake reviews, which means having high reviews does not always constitute being the best product.

Fake reviews cannot be easily spotted

Fake review detection has been an exciting topic for many researchers (Hatwar et al., 2019), (Wahyuni et al., 2016). Some methods to detect fake reviews that have been considered and studied include reviewing a rater's behavior, suspicious ratings, and review content. However, these attempts face challenges. For example, by using trained algorithms, researchers found that they can spot some but not all fake reviews. Even though researchers found many ways to spot and detect fake reviews, it is hard to detect them all." We found that spotting the individual fake reviews was quite a difficult task " (Hatwar et al., 2019). Due to the fact that many of the fake reviews are written by humans not by bots, it makes them hard to detect. Spammers who write these fake reviews can disguise themselves so that some algorithms cannot spot them. Detecting

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fake reviews is difficult because it is hard to filter out, even manually, a spam review or capture spammers' behavior (Mrudula et al., 2018). "Unlike other types of spam, such as web spam or email spam, spam on a review is far more difficult to detect." (Wahyuni et al., 2016). Unfortunately, with all the researchers' efforts, detecting fake reviews remains a challenge. In short, these solutions are not enough as they cannot completely identify hidden fake reviews.

Methodology

This paper followed a qualitative method approach in order to explore sellers' reviews and comments on Maroof stores. In order to better understand a seller's information, ratings, product reviews, and comments on Maroof, a top-rated store was manually selected for review

Data Analysis

The data (323 comments) was analyzed through thematic analysis as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). More specifically, thematic analysis was used to locate patterns within the data. First, I located patterns through familiarization of data from reviews. Accordingly, I coded the reviews and developed emerging themes. Finally, I revised the themes by revisiting the data from the reviews.

Sample and data collection

A female only salon that is registered on Maroof was randomly selected for this paper. The main salon is located in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, and it has more than five branches. This salon was ranked as number 2 of the top Maroof recommended stores. It has been rated as 9.8 out of 10 by 629 people. There were 323 comments by the time the data was retrieved. All the comments, from 2017 until recently, were written in Arabic.

Findings

All comments were thoroughly read and analyzed. After reading the complete amount of 323 comments, based on the emerging themes they were manually separated into the following five categories: positive comments, negative comments, suspicious comments, meaningless comments, and others. The results are presented in the chart below. :
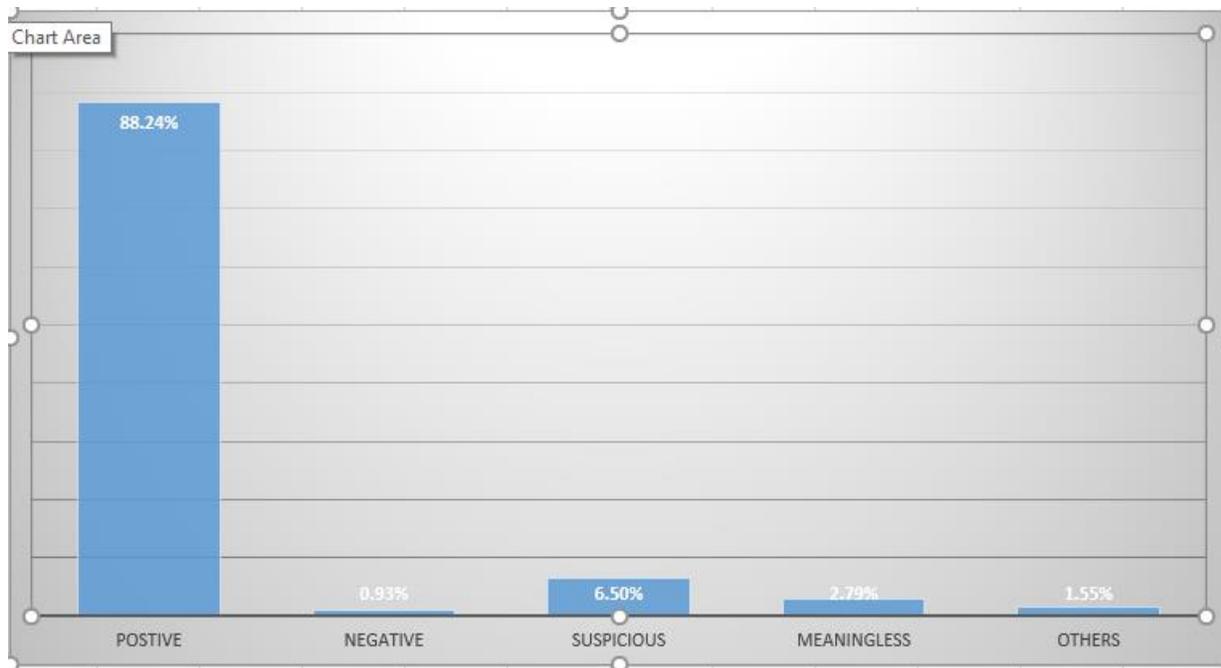

Figure 1.3 the results for the categories of comments for one store in Maroof

- Positive comments were 285 out of 323 (or 88%)

- Negative comments were only 3 out of 323 (or 0.90%)

- Suspicious comments were 21 out of 323 (or 6.5%)

- Meaningless comments were 9 and accounted for (2.80%)

- The "others" category comments were 5 or (1.55%)

Analysis

Positive comments

There were a total of 285 positive comments praising the salon as being the best salon. Many reviewers thought the pricing was reasonable and their work was of high quality. Some comments were about the owner who they felt was nice to customers and smiled all the time. Also, several comments were about workers being on time and doing their work quickly with great results. Commenters also thanked the salon owner for her outstanding service.

Negative comments

There were only three negative comments out of a total of 323 comments. One reviewer said that she was there to dye her hair, and they did not dry it after washing the color because they told her using the hairdryer after the color will result in color fading. She added that it was cold that day, and she had to go home with wet hair, which resulted in a headache and catching a cold/flu. The second negative comment was about the manager who yelled at an employee for not doing her work properly. Apparently, the salon had too many customers that particular time and workers scrambled to serve them, but resulted in lower quality work. The third negative comment was about the prices being higher than other salons, although their service was no different and thus did not justify the price.

Suspicious comments

- The first reason for suspicious comments:

    The first reason these twenty one comments were categorized under suspicious is because they were posted by male users. Maroof allows users to write comments by signing into their social media accounts. Yet, the salon is restricted to female patrons only. Fourteen comments were written using males' social media accounts mentioning that it is the best salon they have ever visited. These fourteen accounts

were under popular male names like Mohammed, Rakan, Faisal, and many other Arabic" male" names. Accordingly, since in Saudi Arabia, men are not allowed to enter female places and salons are separated by gender, these comments showed deception. Further, these comments could have been written by females with male accounts. Finally, it's worth mentioning that there were many positive comments written by accounts that signed up with nicknames, but their gender was unable to be determined and so they were not counted as suspicious.

- The second reason for suspicion comments:

    There were seven comments stating they hoped to win the Snapchat competition. Based on the comments, it was inferred that on their Snapchat account, a competition was set up by the salon where followers had to write positive comments in Maroof in order to enter a drawing for a monetary prize. Writers of these positive reviews could be people who never visited the salon and just wanted a chance to win a cash prize. These comments were flagged as suspicious because they were not written by someone who tried the salons' service.

Meaningless comments

- The first reason for meaningless comments

    Four users posted the same exact positive comments several times by copying and pasting the same review. There were a total of eight positive comments who gave the salon five stars, but since they were duplicated, they were really only four. In conclusion, these four meaningless comments did not add value to the salon.

- The Second reason for meaningless comments

    There were five comments that wrote random symbols and letters such as "AAAAAA" or "HHHHHHH." There was no purpose for these senseless

comments, other than to increase the number of reviews and give five stars to improve the business' ranking. While the reviewers gave the salon five stars, their comments did not address the salon's quality or service. These useless comments have been included in the comments section since 2017 and have not been deleted.

Others

There were five reviewers who posted advertisements for other stores under the comments section. The comments asked customers to visit their profiles on Maroof and Instagram. These comments gave the salon five stars and were not related to the salon's service whatsoever.

Discussion

Consumer's perception of the source

Many studies found that the source of where information is written matters to users. Burgess et al., 2009 focused on the level of trustworthiness of online travel information from different sources. Surveys were used to ask 12,000 Australians travel consumers about their level of trust from various sources that provide travel information. Results showed that people tended to agree that the highest level of trust was from information provided on state government tourism websites. Therefore, users' perception of the sources plays an essential role in their trust of the online reviews and ratings. Recently, many third-party platforms, like Yelp, which allow their members to provide information that can be used to guide other users, have emerged as an online knowledge-sharing community. However, the user's level of trust differs from what they consider helpful or trustworthy. In conclusion, it can be said that ratings at Maroof are trusted since they are provided on a governmental website.

Why Saudi people trust Maroof

Product review comments on Maroof are trusted by Saudi readers for two logically deduced reasons. First, Saudi citizens believe and trust in the government, and accordingly, they highly trust Maroof because it is managed by the ministry (Alarfaj et al., 2019). So, we can logically assume that Saudi people trust these comments because Maroof is a governmental website. As a result, it can be said that product reviews and comments on Maroof are trustworthy from Saudi people's point of view and can impact buying decisions. The Saudi Ministry of Commerce states that "Maroof provides authenticated customer reviews". Therefore, it is understood by Saudi people that all information shared on Maroof is highly secure, and all services and products provided by these stores are regulated by the Ministry of Commerce (Maroof, 2016). The Maroof team also states that they are continuously working on filtering reviews and deleting unauthenticated ones in order to provide users with more reliable review information. For example, a restaurant in Saudi Arabia may have reviews written by Google or Yelp users, but Saudi people may more likely trust a review from Maroof because it is managed and endorsed by the Saudi Ministry of Commerce.

The second reason that Maroof comments are regarded as trustworthy by Saudi people is that Maroof does not allow sellers to delete negative comments. Unlike Instagram, Maroof does not allow sellers to remove any comment/review under their posts/products that may negatively affect them or decrease their profits. When reviews are written on Maroof, only a Maroof team member has the ability to delete a suspicious review. Therefore, Saudi people assume that ratings and comments are checked for validity by the Maroof team, as mentioned on their website by the Ministry of Commerce.

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Maroof's Strengths

Purchasing items online is risky due to the considerable difficulties consumers may face in enforcing their legal rights (Malbon, 2013). Online transactions between buyers and sellers require trust because customers can't touch or feel the product before paying. However, trust is not needed in the physical-store (Tadelis, 2016). With E-commerce transactions, there is an absence of the sellers' identity, which may decrease a buyer's confidence when making a purchase. Buyers and sellers can not be blamed for feeling uncomfortable when interacting with each other because both are strangers who might be thousands of miles away from each other (Tadelis, 2016). Uncertainty is a central issue in online commerce environments, especially when sellers are unfamiliar to the consumer (Featherman et al., 2016). However, Maroof resolved this issue in Saudi Arabia by presenting itself as a trusted source of E-commerce. Maroof is one of the factors behind the success of social media-based businesses in Saudi Arabia (Alkhathlan et al., 2019) (AlArfaj et al., 2019). Using Maroof, sellers can sign up by providing their name, address, social security number, and social media accounts where they advertise their products. This information is securely stored on Maroof's official website, where sellers' information can be looked up when necessary. Signing up with Maroof increases the store's reliability, and buyers would be safer when buying things online. This is due to the fact that online stores that sign up with Maroof can easily be tracked by the government. Additionally, identifying unauthorized products or scams can also be traced. This way, buyers can shop with confidence knowing that they can easily report a fraudulent seller or scammer on Instagram through Maroof, and the Saudi Ministry of Commerce will resolve their issue(s).

Maroof's Limitations

Fake reviews existence

Although Maroof has made great strides in maintaining a trustworthy platform, this valuable resource is not foolproof. The major existing problem is that there could be misleading

information in the comments and reviews of registered stores on the platform. This may be due to the fact that Maroof simply allows anyone with a social media account to write a review about a product or service. For example, users can use a Twitter account to login at Maroof and write comments. Also, Maroof does not require the user to prove that he or she has actually purchased the product. As a result, many sellers can take advantage of this and post fake reviews to promote their products and acquire high ranks on Maroof. Though the websites' goal is to increase trust, sellers may be tempted to write deceptive comments for financial reasons. Hence, having the ability to write reviews using any social media account makes it easy for fake review writers to write several fake comments.

Nowadays, consumers can easily provide feedback and write reviews on products and services. However, increasingly having this ability to share one's opinions and reviews of products and services may backfire. For instance, based on the findings from this report's data sample of a top-rated salon on Maroof, it was found that fake reviews exist on the platform. The Maroof team can minimize the number of fake reviews, but can not spot them all. Although Maroofs' review detection algorithm remains a secret, it can not be 100% accurate. Also, based on the literature, there is no such thing as a 100% authenticated customer review. In addition, Maroof's comments under products may not provide an accurate representation of the product's quality and can thus be a misleading review to others.

The literature also suggests that online product reviews influence customer's buying decisions. This report found that Saudi people extensively trust Maroof. Therefore, we can conclude that product review comments on Maroof are trusted by Saudi readers and can impact their purchase decisions. This means that consumers buying decisions based on Maroof certification or ranking may not be accurate.

Maroof vs. Better Business Bureau

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) is a private, nonprofit organization that was founded in 1912 and based in the U.S and Canada. "It's vision is to be the leader in advancing marketplace trust." Unlike Maroof, BBB is not affiliated with any governmental agency. In comparison, Maroof and the BBB have similar missions. They both exist to improve customer satisfaction and confidence." They also provide recommendations and give ratings to different stores that can guide consumers with their purchasing decisions. However, like Maroof, BBB also has its imperfections. One, since BBB is not a government agency, there is no oversight, and thus they can not force consequences on companies. Two, an A+ rating does not necessarily mean a business is trustworthy. "It simply means that the company has upheld its obligation to the BBB and followed their membership rules.". Last but not least, like Maroof, BBB has its flaws. A 2015 report from CNN Money found that more than 100 businesses with a rating of A- or higher were not as credible as reported. Many of them were under investigation by the government for fraudulent or other illegal activity. (Ellis et al., 2015). This report suggests that The BBB ratings do not accurately represent a business's quality of products and services. Similarly, we can imply this conclusion to Maroof as well. All in all, with regards to all the efforts being made by the Maroof team, inevitably defects occur.

Recommendations for Areas of Improvement

In recent years, Maroof has established itself as a reputable platform that Saudi entrepreneurs and consumers rely on and trust. Nationwide it is considered a successful enterprise with a positive public image. However, in order to maintain this high admiration, this report recommends the following recommendations:

- The Maroof team should include a warning feature to report questionable reviews and thereby allow users to flag suspicious comments. For Maroof to remain an exemplary leader, they should not be associated with fake reviews. Maroof can take proactive steps to establish an authenticated rating system. For example, Maroof can add a button such as "flag" or "report abuse" for users to click on and report any suspicious comments.

- Another recommendation for Maroof is to have a program supported by the government and industries together to educate people about the existence of false comments. Due to the fact that fake reviews may exist, misleading information can be present on Maroof. Consequently, consumers should be aware of this and not fully rely on Maroof's product rating and reviews. Fake reviews are an adverse reality that threatens platforms like Maroof.

Conclusion

In summary, Saudi people trust Maroof because they trust the government. The main idea of the paper was to highlight that even though Maroof is an official government website, hidden fake reviews can still exist because detecting all deceptive and suspicious reviews is impossible. The data provided in this report proves that Maroof has at least some fake reviews. Accordingly, consumers should be aware of this and should not fully rely on the comments written on the platform. Maroof teams should work together with consumers to allow them to report suspicious reviews as part of their detection process.

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