Consumer Online Brand Trust and Determinants in Qatar

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Abstract--The paper theorizes and examines consumer online brand trust (COBT) and its salient determinants in Qatar in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. Results from a sample of 178 respondents in Qatar indicate consumer online brand familiarity, consumer satisfaction with the online brand and website, word-of-mouth communications between online consumers and information on the online brand are positively related to COBT, whilst web design of the brand's website and is not. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keyword – Online brand trust, antecedents to online brand trust, GCC region

I. INTRODUCTION

As consumers are increasingly shopping online worldwide, scholars are paying more and more attention to COBT research [1]. The contention is COBT is a strong predictor of consumer online shopping behaviors [2]. Hence scholars have advanced a variety of drivers of COBT [3]. However, extant research connecting antecedents to COBT is mostly without any theoretical basis. Also, COBT research in culturally diverse developing countries such as the GCC region is scanty limiting the generalizability of existing findings. Today, GCC is the largest consumer market between Europe and Far East [4] and online shopping is increasingly becoming a reality in the area [5]. Within GCC, Qatar is now the richest (per capita income is USD 102,100) and one of the fastest growing economies in the world [6]. Culturally the entire region is distinctive from the rest of the world. The dominant Arab culture permeates through the entire region. Conservatism, Islamic traditions and values, strong family value and family honor, group orientation, Arab aesthetics and subdued view of materialism and consumption culture run through the fabric of Arab culture [4]. A COBT research in Qatar can validate existing research, extend the generalizability of present findings, contribute to comparative marketing research stream, and provide insights for online marketers.

II. BACKGROUND

Five predictors of COBT are adopted from the literature namely consumer online brand familiarity, web design of the brand's website, consumer satisfaction with the online brand and website, word-of-mouth communication between online consumers, and information on the online brand.

Consumer online brand trust is defined as the degree to which an online consumer is confident on the brand's ability to produce the expected performance [7]. Consumer online brand familiarity is described as the extent to which an online consumer has accumulated favorable knowledge about an online brand and/or a website based on experience [3]. Web design of the brand's website is the appeal of the overall visual design of the website [8]. Consumer satisfaction with the online brand and website is the degree to which an online consumer is content with his/her previous shopping experience with the online brand and the website [3]. Word-of-mouth communication between online consumers is defined as informal communications between online shoppers [9]. Finally, information on the online brand is the series of data offering knowledge about the online brand [10].

The social theory of trust alleges familiarity, confidence and trust are three modes of forming expectations about the future. In a certain environment, familiarity or confidence can effect a purchase action, whereas in an uncertain environment, trust is necessary for the purchase action to ensue [11] [12]. [9] found support for the consumer online brand familiarity-COBT linkage. Also the link between web design of the brand's website and COBT can be supported by design persona perspective, which purports aspects of a web design including layout, typography, color schemes, and graphics portray a personality (e.g., serious, capable, competent, and reliable) of the website These attitudes and emotions create a feeling of comfort and a sense of confidence in the website, which result into trust (Walter 2011). This linkage between the web design of the brand's website and COBT is empirically supported [8]. Further the relationship between customer satisfaction with the online brand and website and COBT is generally evident in the literature [13]. The conceptual foundation stems from [14]'s exit-voice theory, which posits a dissatisfied customer stops buying (exit) or voices a complaint. As satisfaction increases not only both exit and complaint decrease but also the level of satisfaction reaches a point where the customer feels confident and in turn gains trust [15]. In addition, scholars have found empirically support for the linkage between word-of-mouth communication between online consumers and COBT [1]. Social proof thesis asserts when people are faced with ambiguous situations, they tend to follow others' leads and trust others' interpretations of the situation. Finally, existing research has found support for the influence of information on the online brand on COBT [16]. The positive psychology theory affirms in a relational context the perceived communication abilities, e.g., quality, content,

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and credibility, can trigger positive emotions such as confidence, hope and trust in the communicated object [17]. Hence,

> Hypothesis: (i) Consumer online brand familiarity, (ii) web design of the brand's website, (iii) consumer satisfaction with the online brand and website, (iv) word-of-mouth communication between online consumers, and (v) information on the online brand are positively correlated to COBT.

III. METHODOLOGY

Qatar is suitable for the study of consumer online brand trust. It is a burgeoning consumer market in the GCC region [18] [6]. The high income, an increasing emphasis on digital technology, and the growing fast-paced lifestyle are enticing consumers into online shopping [5].

The data were collected from consumers of Doha, the main urban area with a population size of 5,67,000 [6]. Most of the internet hosts and internet users in the country are in Doha. Consumer studies in the GCC region are mostly based on subjective/judgmental samples primarily because of the non-existence of sampling frames [19]. Hence this study's sample was also drawn judgmentally. An online survey firm, Survey Monkey, posted the survey on its website. A link to the survey was sent to a judgmental sample of 178 respondents via email, Face book, SMS, and Twitter. The profiles indicate the 67 percent was females 69 percent was non-Qatari residents, 50 percent was in the age group between 25 and 44 years, 64 percent had a bachelor or above degrees and 56 percent had an income over Qatari Riyal 15,000 per month.

All scales were adopted from the literature and they were in the Likert format ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. The reliability scores of the scales range from α=0.641 to α=0.761, the mean values span from 3.711 to 4.517, and the standard deviations extends from 0.512 to 0.767.

In addition to descriptive statistics, frequencies and reliability scores, a bivariate correlation analysis was undertaken to observe the nature of the correlations between antecedents and COBT.

IV. RESULTS

The means of COBT, consumer online brand familiarity, web design of the brand's website, consumer satisfaction with the online brand and website, word-of-mouth communication between online consumers, and information on the online brand are 4.517, 4.496, 3.711, 3.897, 3.885, and 4.226 respectively. Thus on an average consumers trust online brands, are familiar with the online brands, place importance to the appeal of the website, are moderately satisfied with online brands and websites, do recommend online brands and websites to others, and do look for information about brands on the website and are influenced by it.

The correlation table shows COBT is correlated to (i) consumer online brand familiarity, (iii) consumer satisfaction with the brand and website, (iv) word-of-mouth communication between online consumers and (v) information on the online brand but not to the (ii) web design of the brand's website.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study theorized and examined relationships between COBT and its five antecedents in Qatar in the GCC region. The relationships were theoretically justified using theories drawn from social, psychological, behavioral and communication sciences. The results were mostly consistent with the predictions with a lone exception related to web design of the brand's website.

Consumer online brand familiarity, consumer satisfaction with the online brand and website, word-of-mouth communication between online consumers, and information on the online brand positively impacted COBT as expected. These findings are consistent with social theory of trust, exit-voice thesis, social proof perspective and positive psychology theory respectively. Past empirical studies provided support for these linkages [1] [3] [8]. The inconsistent finding related to web design of the brand's website could be because with an internet penetration of 95 percent and an extensive use of the web consumers in the GCC area may have reached a level of comfort with the web where websites lost their discriminating trait in the perceptions of these consumers. Also it could be the case the culture in the region has become a low-context culture [20]. Consumers are more focused on the brands they are seeking to purchase instead of the contextual framework, a low-context cultural characteristic.

Online marketers can take lessons. Enhancing brand familiarity through mass communication approaches is worth pursuing to build customer trust. Efforts toward enhancing customer satisfaction will result into increasing brand trust. By facilitating word-of-mouth communications online marketers can gain customer trust. Managing information on online brands, online marketers can achieve customer trust.

The use of non-representative sample limits the generalizability and, hence,
future research should utilize representative samples from the region and beyond. The use of scales with limited number of items can weaken the findings. Further scale development efforts for the constructs should be undertaken. Efforts should continue to include various other potential predictors of COBT. Finally the development of theoretical perspectives for explaining the relationships between COBT and its correlates should continue.

Table - Correlations

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Online Brand Trust	1					
2.	Familiarity	.297**	1				
3.	Web Design	-.006	.146	1			
4.	Customer Satisfaction	.351**	.231**	.310**	1		
5.	Word-of-Mouth	.298**	.193*	.180*	.345**	1	
6.	Information	.224**	.373**	.179*	.257**	.271**	1
	Means	4.517	4.396	3.711	3.897	3.885	4.226
	Standard Deviations	0.512	0.574	0.767	0.596	0.576	0.642
	Cronbach's Alpha	0.761	0.653	0.677	0.661	0.641	0.703

Notes: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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