

Arab Influencers in The Middle East Region on Instagram Stories

Politecnico di Milano
School of Design
Communication Design

Academic Year 2019/2020

Master's Degree Thesis
Supervisor Matteo Ciastellardi

Zina Nadery
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Abstract

Instagram launched a new feature in 2016 called Instagram Stories. This feature gained immediate popularity due to its characteristics and raw purpose.

Being an Arab living in an Arab country in the Middle East means a lot of chaos, different political situations every day, a deeply rooted yet sensitive culture that needs some care and love, and a mentality that sometimes can be easily manipulated. This is where Instagram Stories might be useful due to its characteristics and uses. This research aims to explore and understand the power of social media *influencers*, more specifically the *Arab influencers* in the Middle East region, and study the different ways in which they use this feature: Marketing, advertising, personal experiences, daily lives, awareness, making a change, and more.

Can these *Arab influencers* of the Middle East use their social media platform, more specifically Instagram Stories feature, to protect this culture in all its angles? and can they have a good impact on Arab citizens and their followers or will they only drive the situation to a dead-end road? It is important to find ways of directing this power to the right path that can add value to the culture and the overall situation of the Arab countries and the Arab mentalities.

Abstract

Instagram ha lanciato una nuova funzionalità nel 2016 chiamata Instagram Stories. Questa caratteristica ha guadagnato popolarità immediata grazie alle sue caratteristiche e al suo scopo evidente.

Essere un arabo che vive in un paese arabo in Medio Oriente significa affrontare molto caos, situazioni politiche diverse ogni giorno, una cultura profondamente radicata ma sensibile che ha bisogno di cure e amore e una mentalità che a volte può essere facilmente manipolata. È qui che le storie di Instagram potrebbero essere utili per le loro caratteristiche e usi. Questa ricerca ha lo scopo di esplorare e comprendere il potere degli *influencer* dei social media, in particolare degli *influencer* arabi nella regione del Medio Oriente, e studiare i diversi modi in cui usano questa funzione: marketing, pubblicità, esperienze personali, vita quotidiana, consapevolezza, sensibilizzazione, favorire cambiamenti e altro ancora.

Questi *influencer* arabi del Medio Oriente possono usare le loro piattaforme di social media, in particolare le funzionalità di Instagram Stories, per proteggere questa cultura in tutti i suoi aspetti? E possono avere un buon impatto sui loro follower e sui cittadini arabi o guideranno la situazione solo su una strada senza uscita? È importante trovare il modo di indirizzare questo potere sulla retta via che possa aggiungere valore alla cultura e alla situazione generale dei paesi arabi e di mentalità araba.



fig. 0.1
Petra and Camels,
2013



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01 Introduction

Social Media has become one of the most important aspects of our daily life. Sharing, documenting, archiving, and communicating through Social Media and different applications has become fundamental to almost everyone. The year 2020 is one of the most important years in changing the turns of the world due to all the events that have been happening. Starting with the Lebanese Revolution, moving to the pandemic virus Covid-19, leading to the Black Lives Matter movement that has started in the United States of America and is spreading to the world as people are standing in solidarity. All these events, crisis, and chaos that have been happening can be spread through social media for mass awareness, more specifically through Instagram and a feature they adapted in 2016, Instagram Stories.

The following chapters will give a briefed history background on the experience of storytelling and its purpose in different domains and in Social Media, then it will dive through the creation of the Instagram application, why it was created, when, who created it, what was the purpose behind its creation, and how it shifted to something completely different that is the opposite of what it was made for. We will then be exploring the feature that was adapted by Instagram, Instagram Stories, and the reaction and thoughts of the users towards this new feature. After, we get to understand the meaning of “Influencer” and marketing influencer, when it was originated and how an influencer can be this powerful and important, as well as the Influencers’ presence on Social Media and the different ways they use Instagram Stories. For this research, it is important to understand the Arab world. How it functions, its political and cultural situations, and most importantly the rest of the Influencers

worldwide.

After following more than 50 Arab influencers on Instagram, watching and studying their stories and posts, getting in contact with them, we will be going through all the interviews, polls, and surveys conducted in chapter 5, to go deeper in understanding them and their job, as well as going through the efficient ways that some of them are using Instagram Stories by.

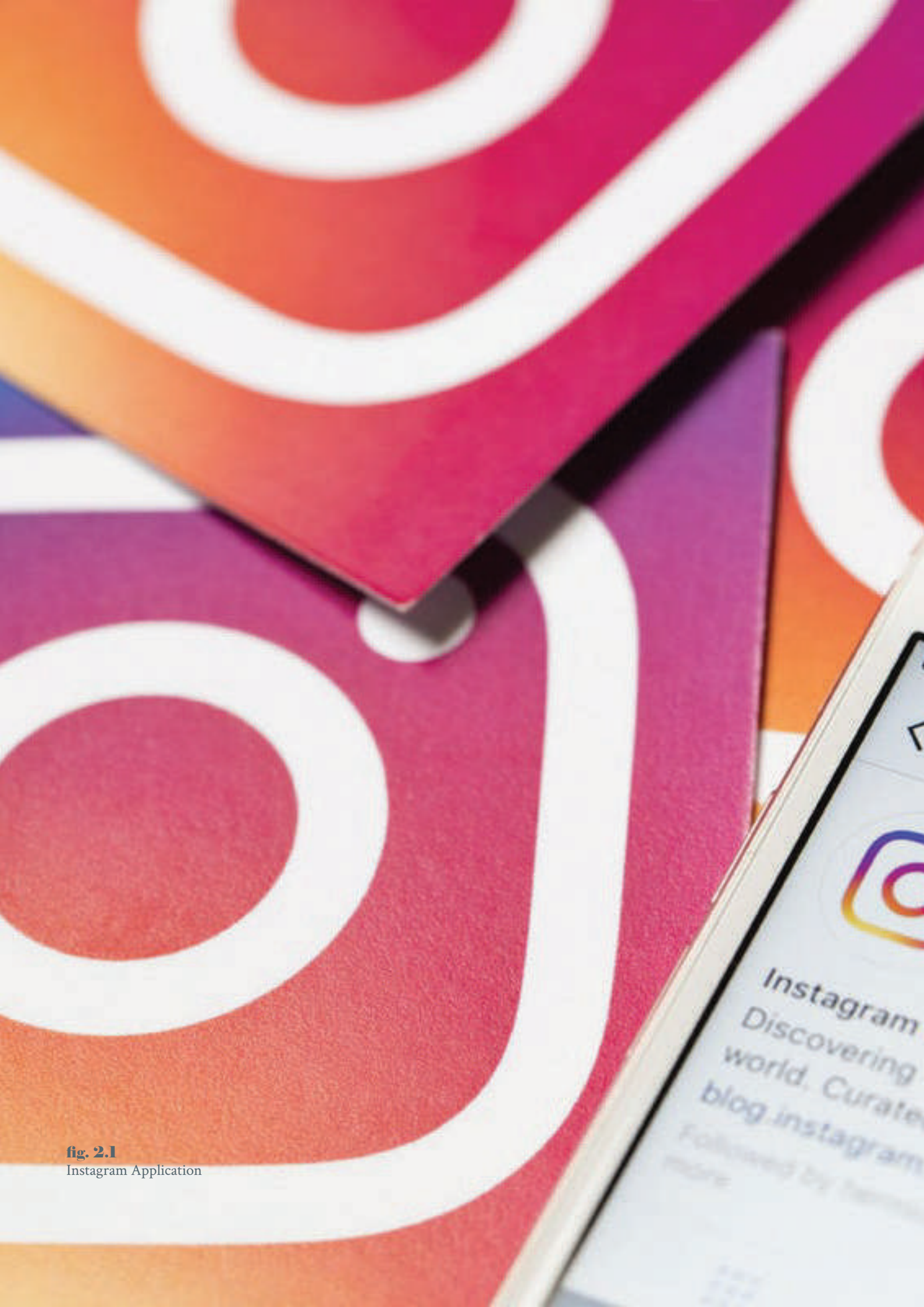


fig. 2.1
Instagram Application

vodafone UK

18:51

instagram

3,865
posts

201 M
followers

192
following

Follow

— and telling — stories from around the
d by Instagram's community team
.com

02 Instagram Stories

2.1. Sharing data, a storytelling experience

Human beings have been telling stories ever since they came to life. Different kinds of stories for different purposes and different situations. Myths, arts, dance and choreographies, music, poetry, narratives and many more.

Storytelling has been an important feature and tool in the world to spread knowledge and protect cultural heritage between generations. Storytelling became a digital feature when Ken Burns, Dana Atchley, Joe Lambert and Daniel Meadows first used it in 1990 to document the film *The Civil War*. (Yilmaz, Erdem, & Resuloglu, 2018)

There are seven important steps to digital storytelling. First step is deciding on the topic; what is the story going to be about? Second step is deciding on the emotions included in the story. Third step is defining the moment where things in the story change. Fourth step is determining and using images that reflect the story. Fifth step is recording and listening to the story, hearing if the emotions are portrayed perfectly and the story is well connected. Sixth step is combining and editing all elements and creating the final version of the story. And the seventh and final step is sharing the story with the audience.

Storytelling has been a requirement in the past three decades in different

domains such as advertising and marketing, corporate communication, journalism and broadcasting, education, and many more areas. “Within this context, it could be said that the stories are everywhere and they can be read and used in many different platforms via technology”. (Tilmaz, Erdem, & Resuloglu, 2018: p:21)

When it comes to the bloggers, reaching followers and making sure that their message and content are being effective in the communication process, it is a requirement for them to use transmedia storytelling, which is the technique of communicating a story or an experience through technology and media platforms. In this specific case we are discussing, our platform would be Instagram and Instagram Stories in particular. According to the studies made and discussed in the *Handbook of Research on Transmedia Storytelling and Narrative Strategies*, blogger mothers use transmedia storytelling in order to successfully influence their followers. (Yilmaz, Erdem, & Resuloglu, 2018)

Instagram is used to share photos that have not been edited or that have been filtered into old vintage effects and polaroid-like photographs or even modern saturated colors, different vibrances, highlights and shadows. (Verdina, 2013) The number of pictures that are shared on social media shows that people like to communicate and express themselves through one single device connected to the internet whenever and wherever they are. Individuals are keener to document and represent themselves through these devices, share their stories and create their own storytelling experiences. But how was Instagram launched? And why are people connected and addicted this much to an application on their phone?

2.2.

The creation of Instagram application

Instagram was and still is a very successful application, where it gained over one million users in just two months after it was launched as an application for iPhone IOS on the 6th of October 2010 by Mike Krieger, a Brazilian-American entrepreneur and software engineer, and Kevin Stystrom, an American computer entrepreneur and computer programmer.

What differs Instagram from other communication platforms is its use. Instagram was created for sharing unfiltered pictures, communicating through visual photos. *Google* was created to retrieve information, *Twitter* was created to share news, *Facebook* was created to socially communicate with others, and *Instagram* was created for aesthetic visual communication.

This application was a new era of mobile photography different than other platforms that were available on the world wide web such as Tumblr. The main purpose of this application was to post pictures and photographs on-the-go, depicting real life moments that are worth documenting and sharing with family and friends, hence the reason why people couldn't upload pictures directly from the web. (Manovich, 2017)

As time passed by, the number of people that used Instagram in a different way than it was meant to be when was first launched was rising. Professional, edited, filtered, and planned images and photos were being shared. More and more people started using special applications to edit their photos such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Lightroom, VSCO, Facetune, Afterlight, and many more.

As professional photographs started dominating the explore page of this application, the purpose, the original aim, and the image of Instagram was shifted to something that is completely opposite. The style of the images that were being posted back in 2010 and 2015 were influenced by social, cultural, and aesthetic values of a specific demographic of location. (Manovich, 2017)

As aesthetics started emerging on Instagram, people started defining their identities, lifestyle, and social and economic status. They started using visual strategies in their designed photos to make their feed look as polished and as aesthetically appealing as possible. If you would want to create a visually appealing feed, you have to follow the following rules of visual strategies: Use only one style and filter for all the photos posted and reserve other styles for specific objects; do not post photos of the same photoshoot, same outfit, same makeup, or any other subject after each other, as they should always be separated by other pictures; and lastly, do not post casual photos as all of your photos should be perfectly polished. (Manovich, 2017) This is how Instagram was turning into with time as the number of planned feeds was increasing due to the increasing number of influencers on this platform and businesses that use it to promote their products.

As this platform was changing and getting updated and upgraded with time, Instagram added a feature to help business owners to try promoting and selling their products on this application. Business owners could mark their accounts as business and connect it to other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as adding sponsored posts which was used for the first time by the fashion brand *Michael Kors*. With the insights feature added, business account users could check how many people saw their posts, saved them, shared them, how many people opened their profiles, the percentage of their audience's gender, and many other information that help with advertising and studying the brand's success and weak points, and thus working on them and expanding their growth.

Instagram has experienced a phenomenal growth during the years where it reached 1 billion monthly active users in June 2018 according to Statista. (Clement, Number of monthly active Instagram users from January 2013 to June 2018, 2019)

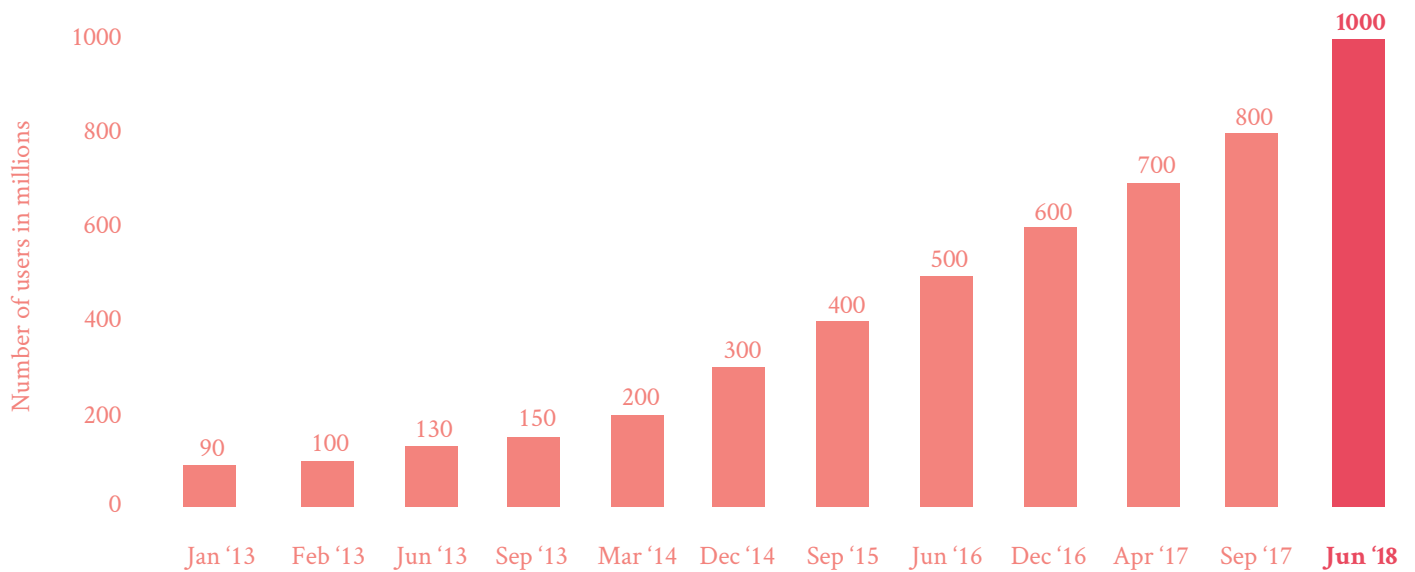


fig. 2.2
Number of monthly active
instagram users from
January 2013 to June 2018

As for the Arab countries, according to Statista, Saudi Arabia comes in the 17th position of the leading countries based on Instagram audience size as of April 2020 with 13 million Instagram users; and Egypt comes in the 22nd position with 11 million Instagram users. (Clement, Leading countries based on Instagram audience size as of April 2020, 2020)

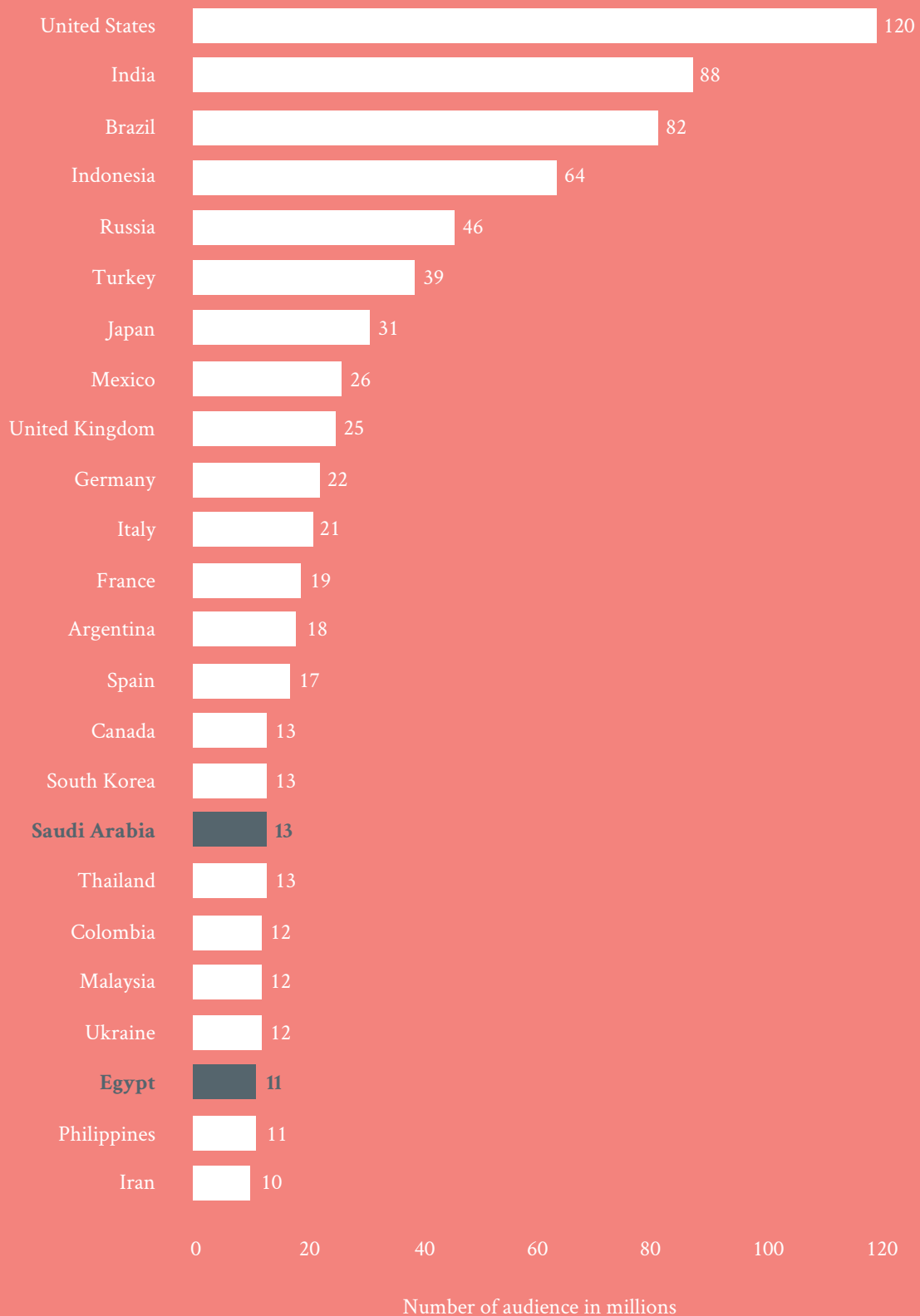


fig. 2.3
 Leading countries based on
 Instagram audience size as
 of April 2020

2.3.

The creation of Instagram Stories feature

In 2016, Instagram launched a new feature that was invented first by Snapchat, another platform to share photos and videos between friends that will last for 24 hours only. This feature is called Stories. In an interview with Josh Constine in 2016, Instagram CEO Kevin Systrom admitted that Instagram Stories was not his invention and that it was a copy from another company however, he stated that “this isn’t about who invented something. This is about a format, and how you take it to a network and put your own spin on it.” (Constine, 2016)

Since Instagram has become way too glamorous with perfectly polished photos, people started to get intimidated about posting a normal unpolished picture because the standard was being set very high. Posting unfiltered, raw photos will keep them thinking that this post is staying on their feed forever. This is when Instagram decided to launch Instagram Stories. What are Instagram stories? They are pictures and videos that can be viewed for 15 seconds and stay on the user’s feed for only 24 hours. Once someone posts a story, a highlight ring will appear around their profile picture and it will be seen on top of their main feed with all the available stories of their followings as a horizontal line. The reason why people liked this feature was because these photos and videos were only available for a limited duration and they do not need to be polished, which gives them the characteristic and the aim of Instagram when it was first created: Pictures and videos on the go.

Instagram Stories did not only help *normal* users to post unpolished content, but it also benefited celebrities, bloggers, and influencers that will potentially gain people’s trust by seeing and watching special, personal, and real moments of their lives, not only a perfect photo uploaded on their feed. Having said that, it does not mean that they cannot polish them. Some influencers used this feature also as an opportunity to created more diverse designed and edited content that matched their feed, while expressing themselves and sharing moments of their lives.

Despite the fact that the Stories feature was not created by Instagram and was launched first by Snapchat, still the daily active users on Instagram Stories quickly surpassed the daily active users on Snapchat in a short period of time. When Instagram Stories was launched in August 2016, the daily active users on Snapchat were nearly 154 million. In mid-January 2017, the number of daily active users of both applications and features crossed path, however the number of daily active users on Instagram Stories kept growing in an accelerating pace while the number of the users on Snapchat was almost stable. (Richter, 2017)

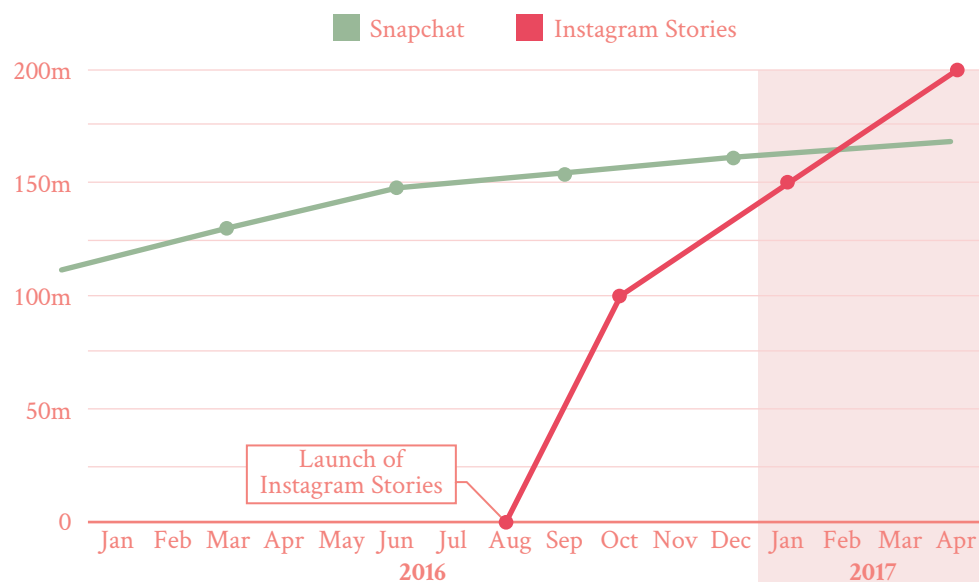


fig. 2.4
Instagram Stories blows past Snapchat, 2017

People were big fans of this feature that it reached 400 million daily users in 2018, and 500 million daily active users in January 2019 according to Statista, where it quickly proved popularity. (Clement, Number of daily active Instagram Stories users from October 2016 to January 2019, 2020)

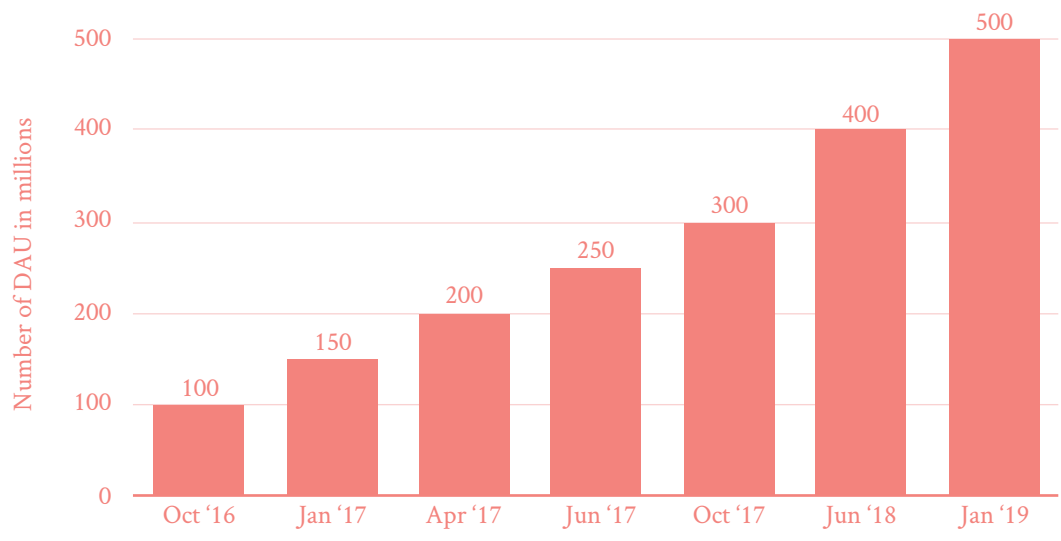


fig. 2.5
Number of daily active Instagram Stories users from October 2016 to January 2019 (in millions), 2019

2.4.

Instagram Stories in Different Countries

To furthermore comprehend the uses of Instagram Stories and what people enjoy and appreciate in this feature, *Facebook IQ* created a survey and launched it in Indonesia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America and collected information from a group of experts from the mentioned countries that use Instagram at least once per week, and these users are aged between 13 and 55 years old. (Team, 2018) The results showed that Instagram users use feed and stories in different ways, as well as more than half the users on Instagram use these 2 features on daily basis.

The results of a survey that was made to understand what people value about Instagram Stories revealed the following: 47% believe that Instagram Stories improved their communication with friends and brands, 44% were happy that the content disappears within 24 hours and that the format of Instagram Stories helps in being authentic and real, and 29% said that they have become more interested in a brand or a product after seeing it on Instagram Stories. (Team, 2018)

Hence, when Instagram asked the users for what purpose they use Instagram Stories, most of the answers were categorized in two situations. The first purpose was related to seeing what their friends and family are doing at that specific moment, and the second purpose was related to seeing unfiltered and authentic content.

The answers of users regarding Instagram Stories and Instagram feed differed from one country and another. These answers were picked in order. In Brazil, the things they appreciated about Instagram Stories are the uplifting content, creativity, and the visual beauty; as for the feed, they appreciated the visual beauty, creativity, and the uplifting content. In Indonesia, the things they appreciated about Instagram Stories are the creativity, authentic content, and the freedom of expression; as for the feed, they appreciated the visual beauty, creativity, and the uplifting content. In the United Kingdom, the things they appreciated about Instagram Stories are the creativity, freedom of expression, and the expression of passion; as for the feed, they appreciated the creativity, visual beauty, and the freedom of expression. Lastly, in the United States, the things they appreciated about Instagram Stories are the creativity, visual beauty, and the freedom of expression; as for the feed they appreciated the creativity, visual beauty, and the freedom of expression. (Team, 2018)



fig. 3.1
Arab Influencers
of The Middle East,
2020



03

Instagram Influencers

3.1.

Brief History of Influencers

This chapter starts with one simple question: What is an influencer? The very basic and primary definition would be that an influencer is someone who influences others. It is really this simple. However, influencing can happen on many different levels and domains. People can get influenced to live a certain lifestyle, to purchase a product, to have a certain opinion about a matter because the person they are following charms them into doing so, and so on. In this regard, we shall not confuse influencing with motivating and inspiring. Influence is related to effect result, shape power, mold public opinion, using the charm power in determining a factor. (Lieberman, 2014) As for motivation and inspiration they are related to divine guidance, thought intuition, idea inhalation, and aspiration. (AHFE, 2017) Therefore, inspiration can create an emotion, it gives hope and new ideas that lead to faith and the sense of possibility. As for influence, it applies a specific directive force to evoke difference on a daily or a consistent basis. Hence, Influencer Marketing is the number one factor in a company or a brand's growth due to its force, sway, and impact. It's the connection that will link brands to the audience and potential customers. Moreover, the term *Influencer* has become tragically misused, since any person that starts a blog, posts a vlog, or has an Instagram profile with a nice feed is now being referred to as an influencer. Real Influencers and Marketing Influ-

encers are Content Creators. They take videos and photos, edit them, use their filters, create a story behind them, choose the perfect caption to their post, work nonstop on their content, and get many followers and engagement. All the steps listed above are usually done with an intention of gaining the followers' trust, gaining credibility. (Hennessey, 2018)

Looking at the history of Influencer Marketing, how did really begin? Where did it originate? Answering these questions will form a very clear image of the influencer's job and importance in the world of marketing. Going back 300 years in time to Staffordshire in England where the first influencer marketing occurred. Josiah Wedgwood was born in 1730, he was a potter and an entrepreneur who industrialized pottery manufacturing. He knew how to sway people, how to convince them of a matter, and how to engage with others. He essentially had the characteristics mentioned earlier of an influencer. "A Steve Jobs of the 17th century". (Levin, 2019: p:18) Josiah created the world's first affordable luxury brand and knew how to market it very well as he was ahead of his time and credited the inventor of modern marketing. Since we're discussing England, tea drinking is very important in this culture; especially 300 years ago, the Royal Family, nobility, and upper class were the only ones who could drink tea from very expensive ceramics. Josiah, being a perfectionist, created a perfectly made luxury ceramics and sold them for an affordable price which made *Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz*, the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland back in the day, commission Josiah into making a ceramic range of cream-colored tableware with colored decoration. Josiah's great plan was to use the Queen's name for this line of tableware as he named it *Queen's Ware* in order to gain credibility in the market. This instance led to his exposure in the market and on newspaper to promote this line of tableware, as well as opening an exclusive showroom for his work in London. Josiah's success was so great, and it was credited to his genius marketing mind of the usage of great influence, newspaper advertising, and the word of mouth, since people wanted to

buy his line in aspiration to live like royalty. (Levin, 2019)

A good example of Influencer Marketing usage of our days would be back in November 5, 2015. Olivier Rousteing, the creative Director of *Balmain*, a luxury French fashion house, collaborated with *H&M*, a more affordable fashion brand to release a special collection. Olivier walked on Josiah's path when he contacted several celebrities and public figures, to name some: Singer Rihanna, Public figure and entrepreneur Kylie Jenner, and international model Gigi Hadid. These three highly influential figures teamed up with Olivier and were part of his marketing strategy to reach millions of their followers on social media, as currently on Friday 5, 2020, Rihanna has 83.2 million followers, Kylie Jenner has 179 million followers, and Gigi Hadid has 54.4 million followers. When the collection was launched and *H&M* opened their store in London, 3,000 people were fighting to get into the store and buy the fashion pieces of this collection. As for his marketing campaign he teamed up with some of the most influential and international models like Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid. Global Chief Marketing Officer of *H&M* declared that the power of influencer marketing was "almost too effective". (Levin, 2019: p:21)

These two case studies prove that people influenced by content creators, public figures, and celebrities can be persuaded into purchasing anything out of aspiration and not necessity.

Between 15 and 25 January 2019, 162 marketers from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Republic of Ireland, Germany, and France, were interviewed and surveyed about the best formats for influencer marketing. These formats included the following platforms: Instagram, YouTube, Blog, Facebook, Twitter, Twitch, and "Other". The results showed that 78% of marketers favorite Instagram Posts as a way for marketing, followed by Instagram Stories with 73% of the voting. The interview revealed as well that 80% of marketers find Influencer Marketing effective for driving ROI (Return on investment), hence 17% of companies and brands will invest half of their marketing budget on Influencer

cer Marketing. (Mediakix, 2019)

But how do influencers adopt a product or an innovation and spread it to their followers and the world? Influencers are considered the early adopters in the *Diffusion of Innovations* theory by Everett Rogers. This theory explains the adopters of new innovations and products as they are separated into five groups or phases. The first group or phase is the Innovators (2.5%), they usually take the risk and are the first to try the product. The second group or phase is the Early Adopters (13.5%), they are usually the trendsetters and those who come with high influence over others; this phase is where the influencers belong. The third group or phase is the Early Majority (13.5%), they need more reassuring to try a new product as well as they avoid risks. The fourth group or phase is the Late Majority (34%), they need full certainty that a product works before they get it. And the fifth and final group or phase is the Laggards (16%), they are not big fans of innovations and tend to isolate themselves from opinion leaders.

- Innovators
- Early Adopters
- Early Majority
- Late Majority
- Laggards
- Influencers

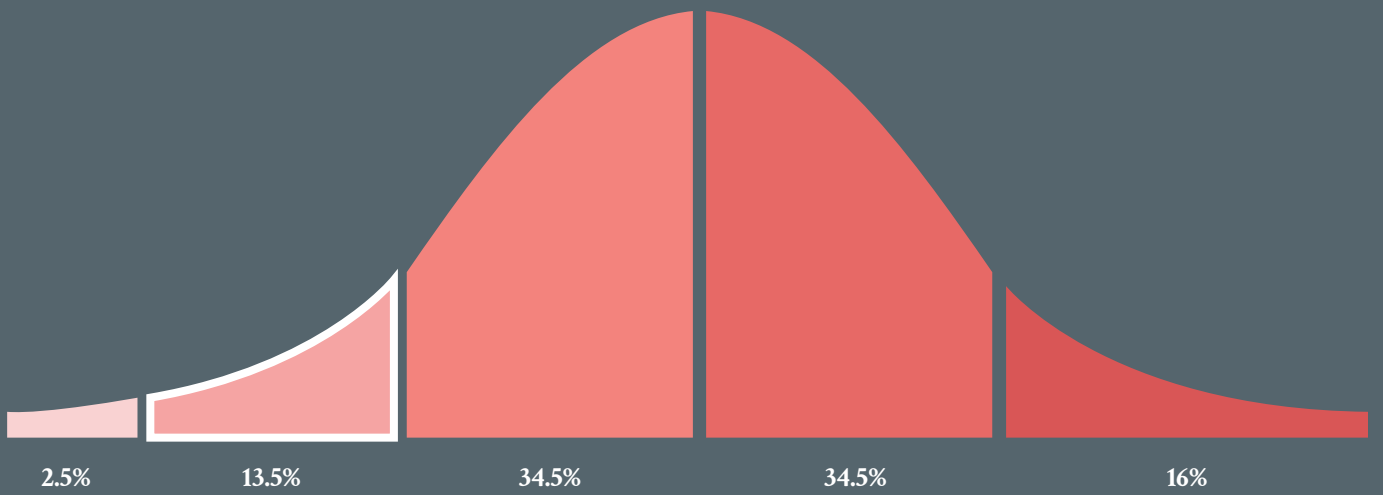


fig. 3.2
Diffusion of Innovations
theory, Everett Rogers.

3.2.

Influencers on Social Media

Other traditional and digital advertising mediums and platforms such as magazines, radio and television are declining since most of the digital advertising budgets of a brand are being spent on social media advertising, more specifically Influencer Marketing and Social Media sponsored posts, not the traditional online advertising such as banners.

Why not the classic internet advertising? Because people got tired of them. A study in 2018 showed that people think of digital advertisements as “Too aggressive in following me on every device or browser”. In the same year a survey conducted by Pressboard showed 27.2% of the United States of America’s respondents use Ad Blockers. (Levin, 2019)

People trusted their friends and families more than these ads. They appreciated the word of mouth which could move them and make them purchase a product. 78.6% of the same respondents from the previously discussed survey said that their family and friends’ word of mouth was far more important in influencing their purchase decisions. This is primarily the job of Social Media Influencers. A D2C survey in 2019 showed that 44.7% of United States Internet users purchase a product or a service that as recommended by an influencer on YouTube or Instagram. (Levin, 2019)

The following case study shows the power of having a mass following number of people on Instagram. Sophie Turner, *Game of Thrones* actress, stated in an interview with Porter Magazine in 2017 that most of her achievements were because of big social media following.

“ I auditioned for a project and it was between me and another girl who is a far better actress than I am, far better, but I had the followers, so I got the job. It’s not right, but it is part of the movie industry now ”

(Levin, 2019: p:34)

Even in the movie industry, studios started to have background checks of people’s social media pages and accounts. It is all part of the advertising and marketing plan of their project. Recruiting Sophia for a part in *Game of Thrones* will guarantee the movie makers and producers a large number of viewers and followers, hence a big amount of revenue. (Levin, 2019)

It is essential to realize that Social Media influencers and creators phenomenon is not a fad. It is far more important than that. It’s the modern and genius way of advertising as people will purchase a product or service when they see it in action and when someone they admire and trust promotes it. Why and how do these creators effect our purchasing behavior and our decisions? Well, according to the book *Influencer Marketing for Brands*, there is a formula for this specific matter:

Influencer = Audience Reach x Affinity (Expertise, Credibility) x Strength of Relationship with Audience (Engagement).

(Levin, 2019)

Influencers have the expertise and the credibility of a matter or of a specific topic. If it was a product, then they have used it over the years or over a specific amount of time that will authorize them to advertise it and let their followers know about it. The most important thing would be credibility. Because if the followers trust this person and know deep down that what they are recommending is worth their money and time, then they will purchase it. This brings us to the strength of the relationship between the influencer and the followers. Once the influencer opens up about personal things, their expertise, their life, or even their personality, then their followers will feel attached to them and their relationship will grow stronger. Lastly comes the important aspect which is the audience reach. The higher the number of followers, engagement, and reach, the better. The number of people that a creator can reach defines the power of that creator; in this context, power means the power of persuading and advertising and marketing, not the physical power.

3.3.

Usage of Instagram Stories by Influencers

As previously discussed, the strength of influencers' relationship with their followers is very important, and thus Instagram Stories plays a major role in growing and guarding this relationship and the creator's credibility. It all revolves around to the influencers if they are willing to seize the opportunity and work on being close to their audience and transparent on Instagram stories. Their decision and the

way they use this feature can affect their transparency, authenticity, and credibility.

The reason why Instagram Stories can attract more audience and reach is because of its limited duration of 24 hours. For this specific reason, people are eager to see what another person posted on their story before it disappears. The importance of this feature is sharing a storytelling experience, being interactive with the audience, have conversations with followers and sharing opinions, and re-sharing posts and stories. This is a good advertising strategy for both influencers and brands. Micro-influencers can benefit by using a brand's product and tag them on their stories while the brand can share their story, which leads to a higher reach of these influencers, thus the increase of followers. More followers for the influencers means that other brands can benefit in return from this exposure to new audience. We see influencers unboxing new products on a daily basis on their stories, products that are being sent to them by brands; this acts as a *thank you* note as return for all the products being gifted. Joelle Mardinian @joellemardinian a Lebanese Influencer, Entrepreneur, and TV host based in Dubai with 13.4 million followers on Instagram, posts regularly unboxing stories of all the products she receives from brands. She frequently says on her stories that she is blessed to have a platform with big number of audience so she can help startup companies and small brands, as well as give back to people. She appreciates the brands hard work and loves to give them exposure.

Some influencers like to share their daily lives on Instagram like Joelle. They appreciate special moments of their life and share them with the people that hold nothing but love for them. But with this comes business. And it is a great and smart way to mix business in a fun daily unfiltered matter. Taking this into account, there are four Instagram influencer marketing strategies related to Instagram Stories that are worth being recognized. The first strategy is *Story-Only Campaign*. This strategy is used when the brand wants to get to the influencer's followers in a raw and unfiltered way. The way this strategy works is by the influencer demonstrating how

to use a product on stories in which they will be doing a live experience on how to use it. A good example of this strategy would be the Iraqi influencer Dima Al Sheikhly @dimasheikhly with 568k followers on Instagram. *Jergens Arabia*, a body care brand that sells body moisturizers launched a new Oud scent. They got in contact with Dima who did several unfiltered stories about this product where she started describing how good the scent is, and how moisturizing and nourishing the product is, as well as how she uses it daily in the morning and evening. She also added on some of her stories a swipe-up link, which is a feature on Instagram stories that allows any user with more than 10k followers to add a separated link of a website to their story, that allowed her followers to go check their website and potentially buy the product. Dima's stories were totally unfiltered, transparent, and authentic. *Jergens* afterwards added Dima's stories to their highlights as a credible customer testimony.

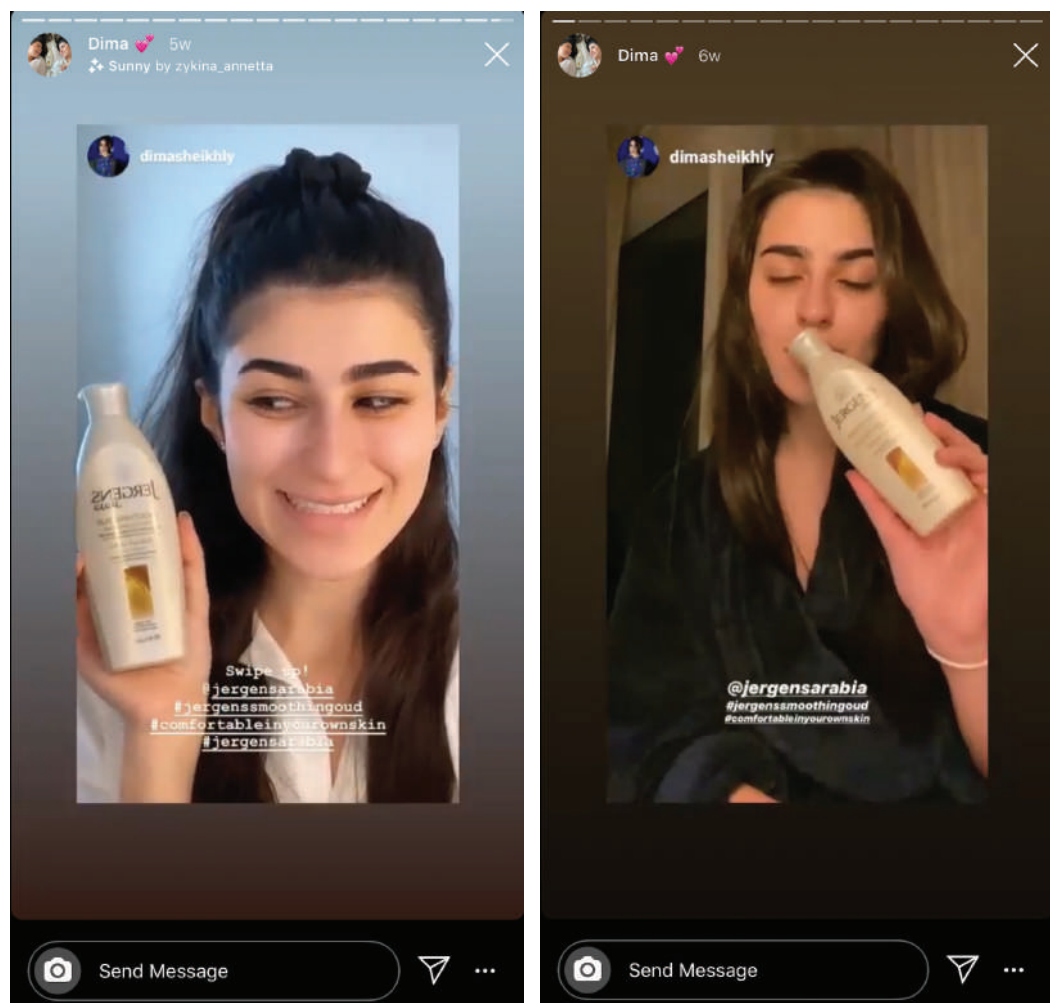


fig. 3.3
Dima Al Sheikhly x
Jergens Arabia,
2020

The second strategy is *Pairing Feed Posts and Stories*. This strategy is used when brands want to portray themselves in both filtered and unfiltered ways. It shows the brand's professional and aesthetic image as well as its raw products being used in a transparent way. As an example for this strategy, the Lebanese beauty influencer Maya Ahmad @themayaahmad with 1.2 million followers posted a filtered and edited photograph of the new *Fenty Beauty* mascara describing in the caption section how good this product is, where it is available, and a call to action to go check her stories where she did a full face of makeup using only Fenty Beauty products while highlighting on their new launch, the mascara.



fig. 3.4
Maya Ahmed x
Fenty Beauty,
2020

The third strategy is *Amplifying Brand Experiences*. Some brands look aesthetically pleasing; however, you cannot understand the full story of this brand by looking at their feed and installations. This is where the influencer's job becomes helpful and beneficial. In this case, influencers can describe this brand or event before, during, and after using the products or attending the event and express their feedback by telling the raw story behind it. As an example, *Ole Henriksen*, a skincare brand, was launched in March in the Middle East. As part of their marketing strategy for their launch, they invited 8 Arab influencers based in Dubai to a camp they organized called *The Glow Camp*. *Ole* organized many activities for the influe-

ncers, they taught them about this brand, the story behind it, the correct way by which they should be using their products, and their ingredients and the creation process of the products. During this camp influencers were posting their experience on Instagram and Instagram Stories, and sharing everything about *Ole*, their products, and story on their account.



fig. 3.5
The Glow Camp,
Ole Henriksen,
2020

The fourth strategy is Driving Consideration Through Polls. This strategy mainly uses a feature on Instagram Stories called Poll. What influencers will do as an example is post a story a product and add the poll feature where they can ask their followers a question and add two optional answers. This is a direct and fast way to receive the opinion of the audience, as well as it will also help the brands test what their clients like and dislike about their products.

Arab Countries of The Middle East Region

Bahrain

Egypt

Iraq

Jordan

Palestine

Kuwait

Lebanon

Oman

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Syria

United Arab Emirates

Yemen

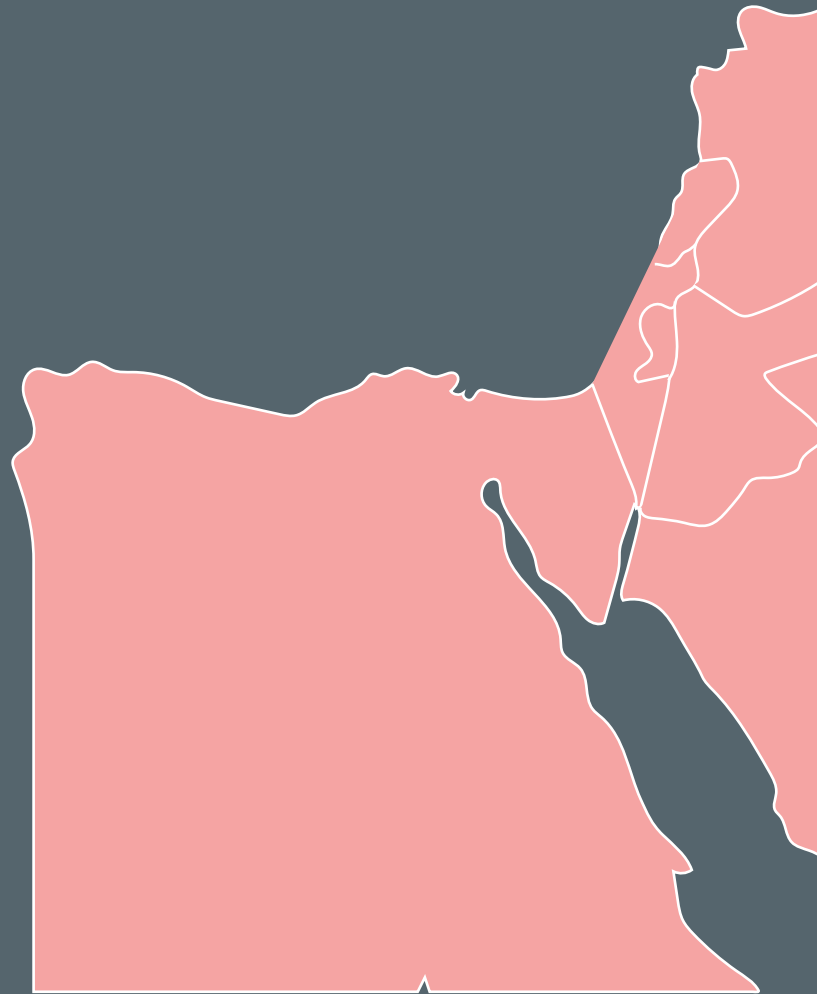
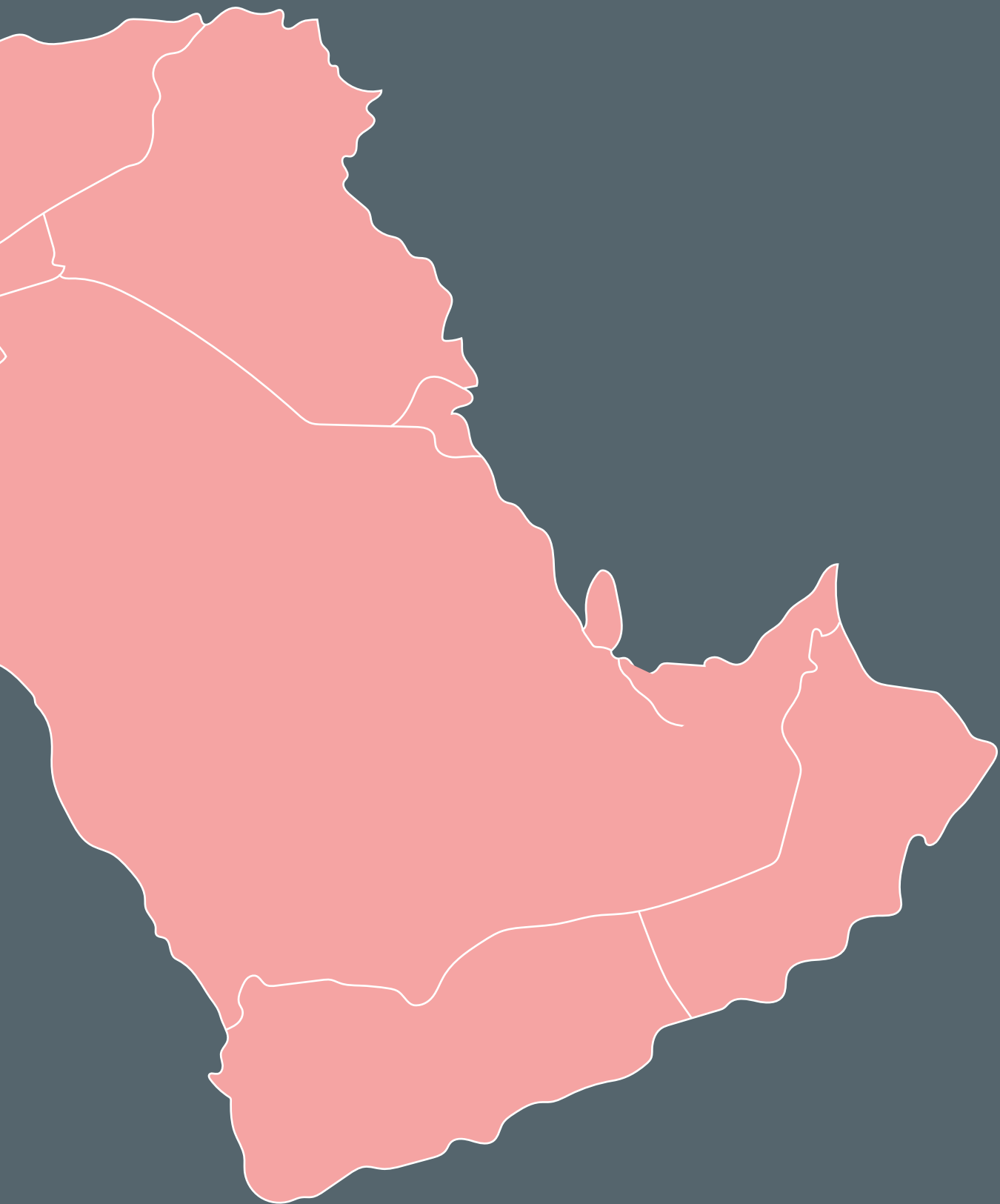


fig. 4.1

Arab Countries of
The Middle East region



04 Arab countries of the Middle East

4.1. The Arab world is less than perfect

Occupation, corrupted governments, wars between countries, civil wars, religious wars, political wars, divided political parties and interests, and so on. These are some of the problems the Arab world has been facing for years.

Palestine has been occupied by the Israelis since 1967. Some Arab countries are divided which lead to wars like the ongoing war between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Syria has been in war for more than 10 years which lead to the migration of millions of Syrians to neighboring and European countries; this migration has caused a variety of problems to the welcoming countries especially the increase of unemployment of the country's citizens due to Syrians' cheap labor. Corruption has been going on in several countries for years, especially in Lebanon where corruption became the norm; the judicial system is corrupted, official governmental services and all public services work efficiently only if they are bribed, irregular payments, lack of basic rights, official public figures in the government conspire under the table and steal people's money in many different ways, eight main political parties that are constantly fighting and dragging their people with them, and many

other disfunctions.

All these problems and many more related to cultures, countries, and religions, that the Arab citizens of the Middle east have been facing for years have shaped their mentality and their need to escape reality and go to another world made perfect, without nuisance, headache, and difficulties.



fig. 4.2
Christina Atik,
Lebanon bribes,
Feb 2020



fig. 4.3
Arab Spring, Egypt,
2011

4.2.

The Arab Spring through Social Media

The *Arab Spring* started in 2010, and was a series of protests in different Arab countries, citizens rebelling against their vile governments asking for a change. The countries that took part of the *Arab Spring* and protested against their rulers were Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Bahrain. According to the book *Media in the Middle East* and our own notes and readings of the situation at hand, the number one factor that has contributed in the varying outcomes of the Arab Spring was *Cyberactivism*. *Cyberactivism* is when people start using different social media channels in hopes of making socio-political, economical, and certain taboos transformations. It is an advanced and fast way to be heard worldwide by a large number of people that have not been aware of the certain issue being expressed or have not been giving it the appropriate attention.

The Arab Spring was mainly expressed through social media in addition to the streets and portrayed live by people at the event. These people that have been activists on the different social media platforms spreading videos, images, and news happening around them, are called citizen journalists. The importance of these citizen journalists is supplying reliable coverage and documentation of some of the most important events that have been happening. An example of a television channel that relied mainly on citizen journalists in the *Arab Spring* was *Al Jazeera*. Most of *Al Jazeera's* content regarding the Arab Spring was taken from citizen journalists. (Lenze, Schriwer, & Abdul Jalil, 2017)

Despite the fact that social media plays a major role in such situations, yet sometimes social media has its own limitations. After the *Arab Spring* ended, we are still able to record humanitarian crisis in Syria that *cyberactivism* did not solve, as well as countries going back to military rule such as Egypt, after they democratically elected a president in 2013. This concludes that cyberactivism is not enough. Social awareness and change among the citizens are what is most important. This is where the role of Influencers on social media might be helpful in such times. Influencing the citizens and the people of said country and spreading awareness on a specific topic is very crucial. Social media and *cyberactivism* can be the tool, yet the answer is by educating and raising knowledge and awareness amongst the citizens. If these platforms were being used in a wrong way by the spread of fake news, and users being more involved in posting on social media and raising awareness about the situation while forgetting to change, improve the reality, and go to the streets, then it will have a negative effect on the ground. The key is to balance between both and Lebanon was able to do it only at the beginning of the Lebanese Revolution.



fig. 4.4
Arab Spring, Algeria,
2010-2012



fig. 4.5
Nour Flayhan,
Notable moments of
the Lebanese Revolution,
2019

4.3.

The Lebanese Revolution through Social Media

Moving to present days, the Lebanese Revolution that started on the 17th of October, 2019 relied 100% on social media hoping for a socio-political and economical change, after the failure of the government to provide basic services, stealing from the Lebanese citizens for 30 years, as well as many other issues. The protests called for resignation of all governmental figures and the demand for independent specialists in the government.

Citizen journalists were everywhere, hundreds of pictures and videos were being documented and posted on Instagram. Influencers stopped posting their usual content and decided to join the protest, even singers, actors, writers, and a high number of Lebanese citizens went to the streets and started posting content based around the revolution. According to *WeAreSocial*, there was a 6.8% increase in social media users in Lebanon between April 2019 and January 2020, and a 5.01% increase on Instagram between September 2019 and October 2019 according to *StatCount*, right when the revolution began. (Statcounter, 2020)

Influencers had a major role in this revolution. With this crisis came the increase of unemployment, hunger, poverty, and up to this day the Lebanese Lira has lost 80% of its value. Christina Karam Ramia @ceekaram, a Lebanese influencer with 123k followers on Instagram, deleted all of her content on this application on the 12th of December, 2019 and decided to take her position and reach into action to help those who are less fortunate. Christina posted a series of Instagram Stories where she later on added them on IGTV, explaining her plan and initiative.

“ I have decided to stop everything I usually do on my page for a while because there is something far more important happening, and I should be talking about it. Since October 17 we have been going to the streets to demand our basic rights, and at the end of the day we go home, eat, and sleep. But meanwhile, there are people who will stay in the streets because they don't even have a house or money to eat. Unfortunately, we do not know when this situation will end as it is getting worse. There are people who are still losing their jobs, others that will lose their jobs soon, and the poor is becoming poorer. We have been trying to help as much as we can for a while, but of course if we all cooperate, we can make a bigger change. Thus, I ask whoever is able and wants to help and doesn't know how, contact us. You can donate food, clothes, blankets, even money, because we are trying to help families pay their house rentals and school tuition fees. So, thank you in advance, and hopefully we can make a big change together.”

Christina Karam

Another example would be Rita Dahdah @riri_dada a Lebanese influencer living in Doha, Qatar with 184k followers on Instagram. Her attachment to Lebanon and love for her country is beyond what words can explain. She frequently shares on Instagram Stories how she would love to go back to Lebanon, live in her country surrounded by her family and friends, yet due to the unfortunate situation and corruption in the country she is not able to. Rita is looking for a better future for her son Brandon, and she knows well that a bright future for Brandon requires living abroad. When the revolution started and was ongoing, Rita was one of the many influencers who would use Instagram Stories on daily basis defending the people on the streets, motivating others to go to the streets, sharing her frustration, and discussing all the rights that Lebanese citizens do not have.

When asked about the current Lebanese situation and how it has been affecting her, Jessica Kahawaty @jessicakahawaty, a Lebanese Influencer with 1M followers living between the United Arab Emirates and Australia, answered through Instagram Stories: "I am extremely sad for Lebanon. I love this country and its people, and I hate what this government did to it. It destructed the coming generations because of greed and short sight".

These are a few of the many examples of influencers using their voice and power through Instagram Stories trying to reach as many people as possible and spreading awareness, as well as motivating and influencing people to do good.

The result of the revolution was the resignation of the Prime Minister, thus the government. The new government in charge consisted of independent specialists elected and picked by the government, not by the citizens. Hence, it was not accepted by the citizens which kept them protesting. Till present day, the revolution is still ongoing, however with the rise of the new pandemic Covid-19, people are trying to stay active via social media, spreading awareness of the importance of social distancing and promising of a comeback after the situation at hand is back to normal.



fig. 4.6
Lebanese Revolution Fist,
2019



4.4. The Arab Mentality

A tale of two Lebanons is an article in *An-nahar* e-newspaper written by Dani Azzi that says:

“If you hang out exclusively in this world, watching sunsets at *Iris* or enjoying a show at *Music Hall*, you’ll be forgiven for believing the country is doing fine, because your economic analysis is derived from that personal experience. “What are you talking about? there’s a recession? Yesterday I couldn’t get a reservation at *Latest Rooftop* a week in advance.” The truth is that there are two Lebanons, *Marie-Antoinette’s “They have no bread, let them eat brioche” Lebanon* and *Nadine Labaki’s Capernaum Lebanon*. They both exist, simultaneously...”

(Azzi, 2019)

To better understand this article, it is important to understand the places that are being referred to. *Iris* is a lounge located in Beirut Waterfront, where most of the clubs and nightlife is situated. It is famous for its beautiful sunset views, atmosphere, and music. Yet, as can anyone understand from the article, *Iris* is expensive, as well as *Music Hall*, which is a nightclub located as well in Beirut Waterfront.

This article reflects the reality of Lebanon and the Arab world perfectly. You can find yourself being nonchalant, enjoying your life to the fullest while everything else around you is falling apart without recognizing it because of the people and society you surround yourself with or born and raised in, or because you don't want to recognize it and could be living in disbelief. Or, you can be aware of the torture of those who are less fortunate, or be one of them. Let us emphasize on the people that are happy, working on their growth, achievements, themselves, the people who use Instagram and follow social media influencers and watch their every step. They are the people who like to show off, to be noticed and seen.

An article called *15 Countries Where the Rich Flaunt Their Money the Most* ranked the United Arab Emirates number 1, Saudi Arabia number 2, Qatar number 6, and Bahrain number 11. (Hensiek, n.d.) As an Arab living in an Arab country, I can fully agree with the Arab countries mentioned in this article in spite of the source not being credible.

Showing off has become one of the requirements of being an Arab, yet not all Arabs. Let us take a normal lunch at a fancy Lebanese restaurant as an example. Middle class and high-class people having lunch at *Em Sherif*, one of the luxury dining restaurants in Beirut that would cost approximately LBP225000 about USD148 for two, enjoying the food, the ambiance, and the people around them. Everyone wearing fancy clothes and fancy jewelry where all the brands are expensive. Why, would someone ask? It all revolves around the fact that people like to show off. Not because they can afford it like affording any basic t-shirt at a startup or fast fashion store, but because they want everyone to see the Rolex watch they are wearing, the Dior bag resting next to their plate on the table, and the big diamond bracelets and rings worn with sport-chic outfits. In Minet El Hosn area in Beirut, where some expensive restaurants are located and visited by people from middle and high-class societies, the first thing you spot as soon as you pass by this area is the cars parked in front of the restaurants. Ferraris, G Class Mercedes, Porsches, Range

Rovers, any high-class car someone can think of, whereas the normal cars are parked in a parking area close to these restaurants not visible to the passing vehicles.

This is the problem we face in the Arab world. If someone sees another person wearing something that they don't have they go and buy it in hopes of fitting in or showing that they are as wealthy as the other person. This phenomenon or issue did not arise suddenly. If we go back in history to the Middle Ages, we can clearly see that Arabs had an attitude of lavishness and extravagance, and it is still present till this day. It was visible in the architecture, the palaces, the outfits of women where they used to wear the finest silk and gold, as well as decorating the camels and horses with the same materials.



fig. 4.7
Arches of Sheikh Sayed
Grand Mosque,
Abu Dhabi, UAE



fig. 4.8
Zaytouna Bay,
Beirut, Lebanon



To discuss this issue furthermore, an interview was conducted with Mouza Al Hameli @mouza_alhameli24, an Emirati influencer on Instagram with more than 10k followers. Mouza's mission is to share her knowledge after she found her true self, her happiness, and her purpose in life. She has her own podcast hosting a number of influential people to talk about life success, happiness, and different topics. Mouza was picked to be one of the influencers to represent United Arab Emirates, and to be the digital face of this country through the *New Media Academy*. This academy was launched in 2020 by *Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum*, vice president and ruler of Dubai, and it aims to train creators to be leaders in the field of digital marketing. It is an educational center for everything related to New Media. *Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid* tweeted: "The academy will train media professionals in the public and private sector and develop social media content creators". The interview with Mouza went as follows:

Question 01: There is a lot of showing off in the Arab world, especially in UAE and Saudi Arabia where people like to be seen. How do you see the Arab mentality?

Answer 01: I do not agree 100% that this issue is only in the Arab world. In my opinion, the world is created around balance. There is the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, all the oppositions are available in the world. We as humans decide on what to focus on. For example, when I entered the world of social media, I used to always hear the negative comments towards this world; people like to curse and show-off, and so on. But when I opened my own account, I had the choice to follow the people I want, so I did not come across all this negativity. Other girls used to complain about bad comments but for me, I never experienced it. I was the one deciding who I want to follow and who follows me. As for the show-off subject, it is there for sure, even the bad influence, we cannot cancel their presence. The phenomenon of the show-off in the Arab world is being over the top that it is starting to affect the younger generation. For example, girls started following fashionistas and

see the gifts they receive from expensive brands such as jewelry, watches, bags, and so on, and this is actually one of the discussions that we usually have at home. Arabs started to feel like education is not as important anymore. In their opinion, studying and spending years of their lives in school and university is not a requirement to enjoy life and spend money, because at the end of the day, these girls that have no degree and lack proper talking got all these open doors for traveling and going anywhere they want. It became a comparison. I, as an adult woman, this might not affect me; but I cannot deny that it is affecting many of the younger generation and teens. I have teens at home that think they are not “living” because they are not wearing the expensive watches that these influencers and celebrities are wearing, and they are not going out all the time partying all night. They feel like they are missing out. Yes, I agree that negative people are there, but I believe that you can control who you want to see and follow. People that are happy with their life and are truly convinced with what they have are there, but who’s voice is higher? They do not have a voice on social media. This is the reason why I started my Instagram account and go in my own direction, because I had this idea that social media is full of negative people. So, I asked myself “Ok Mouza, you consider yourself a positive person, why don’t you go and let your voice be heard?”. I, as well as Arab people in general, are afraid of being judged and attacked if we raise our voice. For example, I cannot post something on social media while someone I do not know critic me. Some celebrities and influencers enjoy being criticked and judges, cursed, and attacked, because it adds to their fame and reach. So, to conclude, positive people are there, but perhaps we were not trained to go on social media in a way that will not offend us, our society, and other people. This is my own opinion.

Question 02: You think that this show-off mentality is not only in the Arabic world, you can see it also worldwide. But don’t you think that it is a bit too excessive in the Arab world?

Question 02: You think that this show-off mentality is not only in the Arabic world, you can see it also worldwide. But don't you think that it is a bit too excessive in the Arab world?

Answer 02: Perhaps we see it more here because of everything that the Arab world is passing through from wars, poverty, and lack of education. This is why the comparison increases in the Arab world. It is like an escape from restrictions, because people are convinced that they are not living, they think that in order to live they must travel and look in a certain way. This is due to the situation and the lack of satisfaction for everyone. If you notice, Influencers probably don't form 10% of the whole society, but it this is all due to their louder voice. Before Corona Virus, women for example used to work more, wear the best clothes from the best brands, and travel anywhere, and they would still say "we are not living", because life was portrayed as traveling in a private jet, leisure, spending money, and so on. So, in the Arab world we have dissatisfaction and anger, even women feel like they are stuck because of the mentality of their brothers and husbands and men; these were all accumulations even before social media, and in the world of social media, all these feelings came to the surface. Another reason why showing-off is seen more in the Arab world is because we pretend to be perfect. We are too disciplined in religion, we have strict rules, heaven and hell, and habits and traditions that we only like to show them off yet deep inside we detest them all, so we try to fight them. Our emotions are clashing. If you go critic and judge an influencer, don't like her, and think that what she is doing is wrong, then why do you follow her? No one answers this question. People like to feed their ego and believe that they are better than these influencers by following them and judging them.

Question 03: Do you think the Arab influencers are taking advantage of this in order to gain more fame and followers? And do you think that all Arab influencers have a bad image or are there some that use their platform to do good?

Answer 03: I will first talk about the negative influencers and then the positive ones because I also do want to focus on the positive influencers. Yes, people who take advantage of social media to gain more followers and more income on the expense of others will probably do anything to get to a specific target. They might market products that they are not convinced in, pick a fight with someone for no reason, create drama and action in their own homes and publish personal matters on social media that should not be published just to gain more followers. And some people believe them! This is why I don't blame the dancer; I can only blame the ones who clap for the dancer. I cannot blame these people because they have their own market, teenagers fight for them and defend them; they take advantage of people's love and positive emotions towards them. Thus, we cannot disregard the fact that they have their own followers and fans. As for the positive people, there is many of them yet we did not used to see them before. Their content might be different and targets special groups of people, but for me honestly, I see that people are more aware now of all these problems. I have a 14 years old daughter that I watch her stories on Instagram sometimes, and I see that her interests are now projected more towards human rights and nature, I even started learning from her. They do see the negative posts on social media but they are more aware of them now and they are lucky for this matter because they are choosing to defend specific topics. Sometimes my daughter tells me that she knows that what an X person is posting is wrong, but she only follows them for fun, and at the same time she has other interests. Positive people are of course there but they have a lower voice because they don't look for fast income, random fame, and drama. This is why their influencer might be less reached, yet for the long term, their voice is stronger.

Question 04: Paola El Sitt, a Lebanese Influencer posted on Instagram stories that if she could have one wish it would be to educate the whole world, because she believes that by educating the whole, all of our problems would vanish; we wouldn't

have wars, poverty, hunger, and other problems. Do you think that education is the solving key for all our problems even picking the right influencers?

Answer 04: I agree with her; education is very important. The brain is like a garden, if you take care of it, it will bloom and give you green plants and trees, and be a beautiful place for you to stay in. But if you don't take care of it, it will be a disaster. I usually focus on conscience which is also related to education. Unfortunately, our educational programs only focus on math, science, language, sports, and other subjects, but they do not teach the generations different living skills. For example, social media is now a reality that we cannot change. Why don't I teach people who and what to follow, and how social media can affect their brain? When you plant all these negative things in your brain, then you should not expect to be better than other people, reach your goals, and be successful. Education, conscience, and discussion are very important. Our education programs are old and they need to be updated to prepare children and kids for their future in order for them to get through life while taking care of their mental health also that can be affected by social media. These generations are going through tough situations that are even harder than what we went through in our generations before social media.

Question 05: You have more than 10k followers on Instagram and you are considered an influencer. How do you use your social media platform to do good and be a good influence for people?

Answer 05: It took me 6 years to get to 10k followers. When I entered social media, I was a lot into fashion and styling and taking pictures. I used to post photos of my clothes, styles, and what I buy while cropping my face out of the pictures. In less than a year I reached more than 5000 followers. At the time I was working in the government which is a very sensitive job, I was hearing side talks that I have an Instagram account and I'm on social media doing this and that, so I switched my

account to private mode. After a while, I started feeling like this is not me, and that I have content that is far more important and richer than what I was posting. I used to read a lot of books for example but I never shared them because I thought people might not accept this content as it can be boring to them. I decided that this is not what I am and what I want to be, so I opened another account and mentioned it on my old one, yet no one followed me from my previous followers because my content was related to books I was reading and positive quotes; there was no engagement whatsoever. I feel like this was my journey and this was a change in my life. Whoever was following me from the beginning saw how I changed, worked on myself, grew my personality, and reached my goals. This is where I built credibility. I started in 2019 my gratitude journals on Instagram and I received a lot of engagement and followers, which gave me a push to continue with what I am doing. I found my love to share my knowledge with others and give lectures on finding one's self as it is my passion. I was focused more on teenagers and the younger generations because I didn't want people to find themselves when they get to their 40s. I don't like to play the role of someone who knows everything and gives lessons on life, instead I share my knowledge and share what I read and learn.

Question 06: Can you tell me about New Media Academy, your participation and your role in this program?

Answer 06: I was working on my podcast for a year; I rented a studio, filmed and recorded it in a professional way, and hosted several people where we would talk about positive subjects and finding your true self and happiness. One day during this Ramadan, I received a message on Instagram from a person saying that “we like your content and your podcasts, and we would like to sponsor you”, and she was very professional with the way she approached me. At the time, I did not know anything about it, nor who she was. After hesitating I contacted her and we had a chat without her giving me details and specifics, she only said that she would like to

have a video call with me and her manager who is a local. I thought that this might be serious and real since the manager is Emirati from Dubai, I asked my sister who is a lawyer to join us, and we had the virtual meeting. The first thing I said when we were in the meeting was that I am not a fashionista, and I do not post fashion, beauty, and styling content; I have a mission and this is what I will be continue doing. They liked what I said as if it was a test from their end. We revised all the legalities and I signed the contract. After a while I knew that this was the New Media Academy and I got very happy and excited because I will be one of the positive influencers and representors of UAE. I remembered that Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid tweeted last year that they wanted to create a new generation of influencers on social media, work with them and educate them so they become the face of United Arab Emirates for the world. At the time, I thought that I do deserve to be one of them, I have a positive content and I can be a good representative of my country. This is my biggest success story I could ever share with anyone.

NEW MEDIA ACADEMY



fig. 4.9
New Media Academy
Dubai, June 2020

05 Methodologies

5.1. Arab Countries and Social Media

To understand what could possibly be the power of influencers in the Arab countries of the middle east, it is important to understand how the Arab countries of the Middle East use social media. *WeAreSocial* is a global, socially-led creative agency that promotes social thinking and give insights to drive the business value; they publish annual digital reports of insights on different social and internet aspects globally.

The data collected and studied is between January 2019 and January 2020 for all 13 Arab countries of the Middle East region. This data includes the total population of the country, the median age, as well as social media users and the number of people reached by Ads on Instagram. (WeAreSocial, Digital in 2019, 2019) (WeAreSocial, Digital in 2020, 2020)

The population of the Arab countries of the middle east varies according to each country. This variation affects the users on social media, especially the political and economic situation and crisis of each country. For example, In Syria, it is noticeable that the number of population decreased, and this is due to the war in the country. For both countries Yemen and Syria who suffer from a continuous war, we can clearly see that there is a big difference between the number of social media users versus the number of population, unlike other countries, and this is understandable due to their current situations. We can also conclude that the median age can affect the number of users on social media in these countries. Whenever the median age is 30 and higher, the number of social media users increases in accordance with the number of the total population of the country. As an example, the percentage of social media users in Qatar is 99% in 2019 and 2020 with a median age of 32.3, as for Iraq, the percentage of social media users varies between 45% and 53% in 2019 and 2020 with a median age of 21. In the majority of the countries, we can see that the number of people reached by ads on Instagram is either consistent or rising between January 2019 and January 2020. As a total, in January 2020, the total population of all Arab countries of the Middle East is 268.16 million, the average median age of all Arab countries of the middle east is 27.8, the total number of social media users of all Arab countries of the Middle East is 129.96 million (48%), and the total number of people reached by Instagram ads of all Arab countries of the Middle East excluding Syria is 46.58 million.

5.2.

Influencers followed and studied

On the 6th of March 2020, more than 50 Influencers from different Arab countries were followed and studied in order to collect the data needed and form a research upon their content. The content these Influencers would post on daily basis varied according to their specialty and the purpose behind their page. Some of them are stylists and fashion oriented, some of them are beauty and makeup oriented, some are comedians in a way that they critic different situations in a funny way, some are chefs that would post about different food topic and food recipes, some are lifestyle and family oriented, and some are politically oriented where they discuss different political situations and opinions. These influencers varied between micro-influencers, and macro-influencers where the least following number was 10k, and the most following number was 6M.

Many of these Influencers used the Instagram Stories feature in a similar way, and some were different. They would post videos of themselves discussing a certain matter, show the PR packages that they have received from different brands and unbox them on the spot with their followers, show snippets of their daily lives, film their kids playing or saying something funny, marketing and advertising a product, repost mentions of them by their followers, have conversations with their followers through the Instagram Stories stickers such as the questions sticker and the polls, repost inspirational photos, discuss styling tips, create makeup looks, and more.

Some of the influencers followed try as well to understand their followers

and observe what their followers are interested in, what they like, and what they do not appreciate from an influencer by also using polls and question stickers that are available on Instagram Stories. Ola Farahat @olafarahat, a Palestinian Influencer living in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, with a 1.2 million followers on Instagram posted on May 20, 2020 a series of stories using the question sticker. These stories were posted to understand her followers' opinions regarding Influencers on Instagram in general. Some of the questions were about their favorite Influencers on Instagram, the things they love about some Influencers, and the things they dislike about some content that Influencers share. The answers of these questions varied between people believing that each Influencer have their own touch and identity; it shows when an Influencer is posting content just for the numbers and targeting attention; there are personal things that they can relate to the Influencer with which makes them connect to that person; a lot of the influencers post only about a happy life and *amazing* products which is not the reality of the world we are living in; and talking about a product they do not like yet they do so because they get paid for it. When a follower of Ola asked her about insights, misconceptions, and stereotypes towards Influencers, she answered: "I feel the general view is that influencers are just not intelligent and mostly shallow".

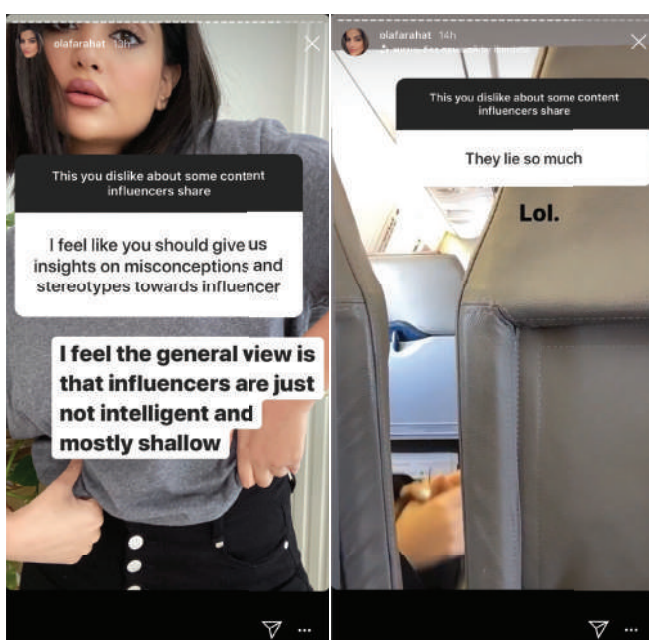


fig. 5.2
Ola Farahat on
Instagram Stories,
2020

Another example of Influencers using the questions sticker on Instagram Stories to connect with their followers would be Jessica Kahawaty @Jessicakahawaty. Jessica is an influencer, model, philanthropist, TV host, Miss Australia 2012, and third runner-up in Miss World 2012. On June 13, 2020, she asked her followers to ask her anything and she would answer 10 questions. Some of these questions were about modeling tips since she is an international model, how she would take care of her hair, skin and body, her advice to young girls, and how to choose the right path in life. Jessica answered all these questions in an authentic and direct way, connecting with her followers, and giving them her tips and tricks.

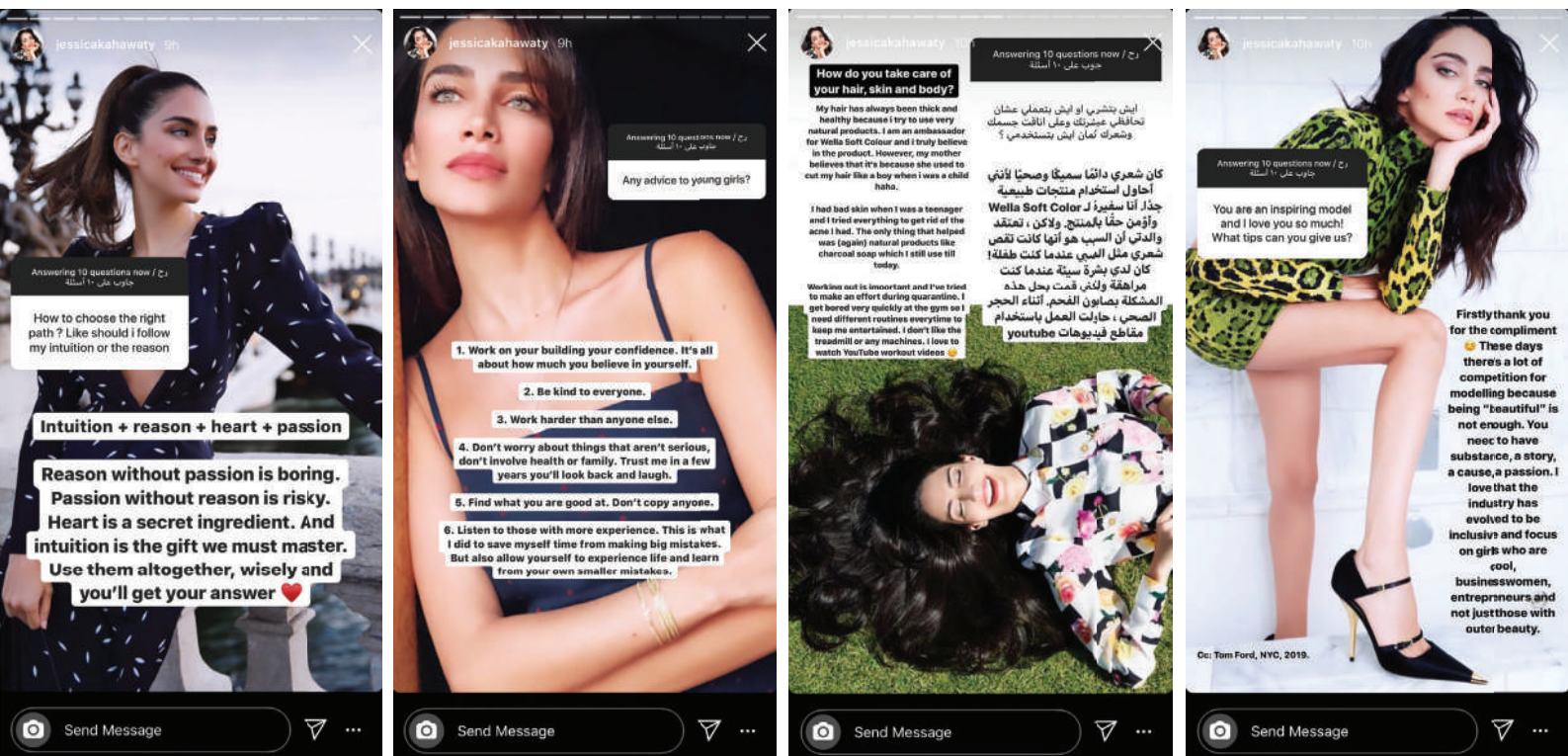


fig. 5.3
Jessica Kahawaty on Instagram Stories, 2020

5.3.

Instagram Stories poll survey conducted

To understand how Instagram users perceived the Instagram Stories feature and Arab Influencers in the Middle East region, I conducted a survey on Instagram Stories to collect the answer of my followers and study the engagement on my stories @zinanadery, using different features made by Instagram such as Polls, Questions, and Quiz serving as a multiple answer question. The number of followers was 1934, 66% from Lebanon, 3% from the United Arab Emirates, 3% from the United States of America, 2% from Saudi Arabia, and 2% from Egypt. 51% of these followers are women and 49% are men, and they are mostly aged between 18 and 34 years old. These insights were retrieved from Instagram Business Account Insights. As for the number of stories created for this survey was 18; of which 3 stories for the introduction, 14 questionnaire stories, and 1 story as a thank you note. After 24 hours, I have collected all the answer and tracked the number of views on these stories. The findings showed that 566 of my 1934 followers viewed the first story of the survey, and this number declined to 418 views on the last story.

Question 01: Do you follow Influencers on Instagram? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 01: 121 people (79%) voted Yes, and 33 people (21%) voted No.

Question 02: What makes you follow an influencer? (Using Question sticker)

Answer 02: 30 answers were documented. Most answers were common and similar. People would follow the influencers according to: their content, if it is relat-

able and of an interest to the user; their fun personality, the ease of getting to know about the latest trends in fashion, style, makeup; their political opinions and political updates; their lifestyle and family, especially if they have kids; for inspiration; and some people follow them just for fun and entertainment purposes.

Question 03: Do you engage with the Influencers you follow? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 03: 34 people (28%) voted Yes, and 89 people (72%) voted No.

Question 04: Do you think there is a difference between Arab Influencers and International Influencers? Kindly elaborate. (Using Poll sticker and directing the answer to the direct messages)

Answer 04: 83 people (70%) voted Yes, and 35 people (30%) voted No.

4 answers were documented from the direct messages in which all of them votes Yes. The answers are the following: "Some Arab Influencers have no purpose and are just there for the fame which they get from copying International Influencers."; "Unfortunately the competition in the Arab region is unfair, and the element of copying is there. Also, the Arab mentality we grew up in, in my opinion, is so destructive and therefore, as Arabs, Influencers have to always tweak, rework, or delete their content, or at least think twice (or 50 times) before posting. Whereas it looks and feels fresher and realer when it comes to International Influencers. Maybe their surrounding is more supportive."; "Arab Influencers tend to include the values they were brought up with into their feeds ex: Karen Wazen, family oriented and wife values."; "International Influencers get more recognition for some reason. It's like the algorithm favors Americans more. I'm convinced it's a conspiracy. Tiktok is a Chinese app yet the most popular users are American Influencers (always promoted content)".

Question 05: How often do you post on Instagram Stories? (Using Quiz sticker with a disclaimer that there will be no correct answer)

Answer 05: 64 people answered “1-2 times a week”; 56 people answered “I rarely post”; 26 people answered “Everyday”; and 3 people answered “I never post”.

Question 06: Do you prefer posting on Instagram Stories or Instagram Posts? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 06: 112 people (83%) voted Stories, and 23 people (17%) voted Post.

Question 07: Which do you check first when opening the Instagram App? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 07: 122 people (86%) voted Stories, and 20 people (14%) voted Post.

Question 08: Instagram Stories was launched in 2016 to share raw, unfiltered photos and videos with families and friends for 24 hours. In your opinion, do Arab Influencers use Instagram Stories in a raw, unfiltered way, or do they plan and edit their stories? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 08: 20 people (16%) voted Raw, and 104 people (84%) voted Edit.

Question 09: Do you prefer watching raw, unfiltered stories or designed and aesthetically pleasing stories? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 09: 94 people (73%) voted Unfiltered, and 34 people (27%) voted Designed. As well as a number of direct messages received that people would like to see both unfiltered and designed.

Question 10: In your opinion, does Instagram Stories help with the Influencer’s credibility and authenticity? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 10: 98 people (81%) voted Yes, and 21 people (18%) voted No.

Question 11: Do you prefer to see Influencers' content on IG Stories or normal Posts? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 11: 61 people (50%) voted Stories, and 60 people (50%) voted Posts.

Question 12: Would you purchase a product used and recommended by an influencer? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 12: 80 people (66%) voted Yes, and 42 people (34%) voted No.

Question 13: Would you purchase the product after seeing it on the Influencer's Stories or in a Post? (Using Poll sticker)

Answer 13: 82 people (73%) voted Stories, and 31 people (27%) voted Post.

Question 14: The results of a study made by Facebook showed that most people appreciate Instagram Stories for several reasons: Improved communication with friends and family, helps in being authentic and real, content disappears in 24 hours, and become more interested in a product or a brand after seeing it on IG Stories. What are your thoughts regarding this feature? (Using Question sticker)

Answer 14: 8 answers were documented, where people showed their appreciation for Instagram Stories due to its authenticity, some of them agreed with the results of the survey conducted by Facebook, however they said that there is a big number of people that are real on IG Stories but not everyone. They also appreciate the content they see on this feature as long as the communication is relatable, useful, and not repetitive or too long. Others also appreciated the creativity and the artistic touch they see on Instagram Stories.

We can conclude from these results that Instagram Users do not like to see a big number of stories by the same person, as well as it depends on the topic being discussed or the type of photos and videos being shared on Stories. In addition,

most Instagram Users do not prefer engaging in a direct way such as direct messages or comments, since there was a major difference between the number of replies and answers documented on polls versus questions or direct messages. They usually prefer engaging with likes and quick, one-click, answers such as polls.

According to the answers documented, we can also conclude that people follow these influencers based on their content, personality, and updates. Most people like to follow these content creators for fun which might take their minds off of what is happening around them and the problems they might be facing or the different situations that might be happening in the world. In addition, some of them think that Arab Influencers copy International Influencers, which is understandable from the Arab mentality and personality.

Some people think that English speakers and Americans have high number of followers and engagement on social media and they think that it might be a conspiracy, that Americas are taking over the world, and some people believe that it is because of language reasons since English is the most spoken language in the world, hence followers can understand and relate to this figure.

As for the Instagram Stories feature, most people tend to appreciate it, as most of the followers use this feature almost every day or at least twice a week for its authenticity, and viewing shared photos and videos in the moment. They prefer to see a mixture of stories and posts of their favorite Influencers, and a mixture between raw and unfiltered, and designed and aesthetically pleasing photos and videos, because users usually like to get inspired by visual aesthetics as well as see the raw, unfiltered life of the person they follow. The last thing to conclude by these results is that most people do purchase products recommended by Influencers they follow, and most of them said that they do purchase the product after seeing it on their Instagram Stories rather than Instagram posts.

5.4.

Interviews with Arab Influencers

In order to do a research and form an opinion, it is important to understand different perspectives and point of views. Thus, it was important for me to interview and question not only regular Instagram users, but also the Influencers of the Arab countries of the Middle East region.

Twenty-nine emails were sent to 29 different influencers. These emails included an attached document of 16 interview questionnaire discussing the thesis topic. From these 29 influencers, one collaborated and sent back the document filled with answers, one did not receive the email due to change of email account, one refused to accept a connection from my email system; thus the email was never received, one replied by an email from the management saying that they will try their best to get answers from the influencer, and the rest 25 emails are still pending till this moment.

Natalie Sallaum @nataliesallaum, a 22-year-old Lebanese influencer with 347K followers and 3.57% engagement rate on Instagram replied to 16 questions related to Arab influencers and Instagram Stories.

Questions 01: There is a misconception of the word “Influencer”. How would you define it?

Answer 01: “An influencer in my opinion is anyone, on and off social media, that influences others to be and do better.”

Question 02: In which category/ies do you see yourself influential in?

Answer 02: “I started out as a beauty vlogger and eventually built a presence in the lifestyle category as I vlog my daily life and share it with my online family.”

Question 03: In your opinion, is there any differences between an Arab Influencer and an International Influencer? Kindly elaborate.

Answer 03: “Of course, there is a difference in each and every influencer, not depending on the race or ethnicity but on their ethics and aesthetic. However, there is a difference in principles between Arab and international influencers. An example would be the level of nudity shown online. In the west, it may be the norm, yet in the Middle East most influencers tend to be more conservative since this is the norm here. The Arab audience are quick to judge any type of western behavior as long as it comes out of an Arab woman, yet some do not mind following international influencers that do not align with their morals.

In my opinion it is so important for new Arab faces to come out in order to inspire young girls and women who might believe they are not destined for great things. Seeing someone from the same origin as you making big things happen suddenly doesn't make triumph feel impossible anymore, and this is why more Arab girls and women need to share their success stories in our region.”

Question 04: As an Influencer, you have a lot of power and responsibility at your hands. In what ways do you use this power with your followers?

Answer 04: “It took years to gain the trust of my audience and I will forever stay true to myself and them. People are becoming smarter day by day and notice when a certain influencer ‘does it for the money’ and when an influencer is genuinely giving her/his opinion. I stand by inspiring girls and women to always be kind and always be grateful. I think my strongest point in influence would definitely be the fact that by 22, I was able to establish a loyal and engaged audience, built my

beauty brand in my teenage years and work with big brands who believe in my content. When I ask my followers about what inspires them the most from my content, the most repeated answer is about all my achievements at such a young age as an ARAB. It is so important to me to be able to inspire young girls and even older women to pursue their passions and make it their job. Everything seems impossible until the girl next door makes it, and this is how my audience refers to me. I do not project a false image of myself or my life and therefore am very relatable to many girls and women.”

Question 05: In 2016, Instagram launched a feature called Instagram Stories. It was created to post raw, unfiltered photos and videos for 24 hours. How do you perceive this feature? In your opinion, does it serve as a place to be natural or is it another place to get creative on?

Answer 05: “Instagram stories definitely upped the game on the app. When you see the perfect profile you say “cool feed, I like looking at it” but when you watch someone engage with you and show you more about themselves and their personality you say “I like her, I want to follow and stay.” The followers that turn into lovers because they love you as a person is worth more than following someone for that perfect feed and then muting their stories. What I am trying to say is that Instagram lacked that one feature that made people see more of you, in an unfiltered way.”

Question 06: What is the average number of Instagram Stories you post per day?

Answer 06: “Of course, there are days one just does not feel like posting, but on usual days where I have things to share it is about 12-20 stories.”

Question 07: Do you edit your Instagram Stories? If yes, in what ways?

Answer 07: “I think editing Instagram stories removes the whole concept of

‘unfiltered’. I do not plan nor edit (except it is a brand collaboration where content has to be approved prior to posting). However, the in-app Instagram stories filters (that have recently become cooler) are very fun to play around with and get creative. This tool also gives content creators the chance to be creative by creating custom filters that others can use.”

Question 08: What type of content do you share on Instagram Stories?

Answer 08: “On IG stories I usually share the daily events that happen to be either at work or with the family. I noticed people love to see what really happens during the day in the moment. When I have a new product I started using, whether it is a makeup or skincare product, I review them and let my audience know what worked for me. Keep in mind that this does not necessarily mean I am talking about a sponsored or gifted product. However, both ways it does not really matter since a real influencer only reviews products he/she really likes and actually uses in their routine, whether it is product they bought or a sponsored product.”

Question 09: According to your observations, did Instagram Stories help maintain your credibility, authenticity, and your relationship with your followers?

Answer 09: “Yes, definitely. I remember when the IG stories feature came out, I got plenty of messages from people telling me “I did not expect you to be like that” or “wow, you really are just a normal girl pursuing her dreams.” That being said, one can easily judge a book by its cover (aka the perfect feed and pictures), yet knowing how a person thinks and acts really puts things into perspective, hence creating a more loyal audience.”

Question 10: In your opinion, is the Instagram Stories feature able to show the real personality of the Influencer?

Answer 10: “This all depends on the person. One can always show another

side or only 'the good side'. However, I feel like people are getting smarter with identifying genuine and not so genuine influencers.”

Question 11: Did you notice a difference in reaching out to your followers before and after Instagram Stories was launched?

Answer 11: “Yes, people can directly reply to your stories and you can therefore track the amount of people watching and reaching out.”

Question 12: Where do your followers engage most with your content? On Instagram Stories or on an Instagram Post?

Answer 12: “I would say both, which isn't the case for everyone. At the same time, the people who choose to engage on stories might not necessarily engage on the Instagram post and vice versa.”

Question 13: Would brands usually prefer working with you on Instagram Posts or Instagram Stories?

Answer 13: “Brands usually take a package of both posts and stories together as they are aware that the perfect Instagram post is just not enough to spread the message about their product or service; the combination of an IG post along with talkative stories is the perfect marketing mix.”

Question 14: According to your observations, where do your followers get most influenced on purchasing a product after you market it? On Instagram Stories or Instagram Post?

Answer 14: “This is not something I can know for sure, yet I think the combination of both can double the chances of creating customers for the chosen brand. The analytics on how many people swiped up on your Instagram stories and how many people clicked the link in bio help you determine which might work better.

However, a post is long-term for future potential customers, whereas stories last for 24 hours and usually target impulsive buyers who might purchase the product/service in the moment.”

Question 15: In your opinion and as a content creator, what are the benefits of Instagram Stories? In what ways did it serve your platform?

Answer 15: “The main benefit of Instagram stories is being able to talk and engage with my audience. If there is any certain topic I need to discuss, I would rather talk on my stories than in a written Instagram post caption. I also think it is an important tool for brands to see the amount of people watching, engaging and clicking on mentioned accounts as well as the swipe ups. This is important due to the rise in purchasing ghost followers who do not watch stories. It basically proves your credibility to the brands who choose to collaborate with you.”

Question 16: Since the end of 2019 until this moment, we have and are still experiencing many devastating events around the world as a whole and in the Arab world and Lebanon specifically. Did you use your platform and power in directing people’s opinions and behaviors, and spreading awareness? Kindly elaborate.

Answer 16: “Yes, I did and will continue to do so. It does not matter if my niche is beauty and lifestyle, it is my responsibility as a person with a platform to raise awareness of current events and share different ways to help and donate. I must admit things were difficult in the beginning as I, and many fellow influencers, felt the need to pause on the usual content as it felt insensitive to share normal activities while our country went through a hard time. I also felt demotivated to share anything because of the sadness I felt. Eventually, we had to go back to creating content since we noticed we might be helping others put their minds off the problems for a while and simply enjoy content they love. It was definitely a dilemma of not posting and posting but eventually we had to go on as this is our work. Many

people took it in a bad way and felt offended on why influencers were posting lifestyle, fashion and beauty content while their country is going through so much. And they were right up to a certain point. We cannot simply stop or shut down our socials as this is our work, which I think many people don't believe that this is the case. They think social media is just a place for people to hang out on as a hobby, not knowing that it might be the only source of income for some. It is like basically telling someone to stop going to the office. Our work on social media will always be conceived as 'not that serious', where in reality a lot of hard work goes into it; if done right."



fig. 6.1
Jessica Kahawaty,
Visiting refugee camp
in Jordan, Apr 2019



06 Arab Influencers of the Middle East

6.1. Arab Influencers are different than International Influencers

As the answers of the survey conducted on Instagram Stories showed the difference between Arab and International influencers, as well as Natalie Sallaum's answer regarding this specific topic, we can conclude that there is a major difference between these two types of influencers, and the main reason is the Arab culture and the Arab mentality, as previously discussed.

Rawan Bin Hussain *@rawan*, a Kuwaiti Influencer with 4.6M followers was interviewed by the TV host Jaafar Tail in his program Jaafar Talk in May 2020. When asked about the audience accepting certain things and posts from a male influencer and rejecting them from a female influencer, Rawan answered the follows: "This audience you are referring to are conservative Muslim audience" and continues "I, as an influencer coming from a Muslim Arab society, and most importantly conservative, I have to create red lines to everything I work on. I am not American neither European. They have their own mentality and habits. For me, as an example, I cannot show up in a picture wearing a swimsuit, on a similar note I cannot share a personal video of me and my husband on social media". (Jaafartalk, 2020)

This part of the interview explains well the difference between Arab Influencers and International Influencers. In addition, it is important to understand that not all Arab countries or Arab societies have the same mentality when it comes to conservativity and habits. Some Arab societies are more conservative than others. For example, as a comparison between Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, there are many differences in terms of the way the people of these two countries think; since Saudi Arabia is considered one of the most conservative countries in the world, and Lebanon is considered the most open-minded country between all Arab countries, as it is nicknamed *Paris of the Middle East* and *Switzerland of the Middle East*.

6.2.

Understanding that Arab Influencers are doing their job

As Mouza al Hameli's story was previously discussed, Influencers have a very important job and a very sensitive one regarding this topic. Their job is to advertise the products they receive from brands that they personally think of as worth advertising and believe that these products do work, or they are as good as the brands says, as well as to suggest to people that this product exists and is worth buying. Yet of course, the buying term falls under the *need to buy* rather the *want to buy*. As the time passes by, the needs of a human being progress. Historian Daniel Boorstin once said: "the need for the unnecessary is another name for human progress". While all these influencers are unboxing and giving feedbacks regarding products on their

stories and social media platforms, people will have to pick and choose between all these products that are being sent to them for free, to buy their needs.

Plato and Aristotle related humanity to rationality; animals follow their instincts, yet human beings follow desire and decisions based on reasoning. The basic needs start with food and drink, shelter, protection, procreation, and preservation. Yet they also extend beyond these very basic needs that are shared with animals and it is part of what distinguishes us from animals. (Varey, 2013) As explained in *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*, it starts with the basic needs that are shared with the animals, and extends to the needs that distinguish us from animals which are the psychological and self-fulfillment needs. As for wants, which most people sign up to when following social media influencers, are things that people desire to have without the need to have, even if they are not able to obtain it physically, economically, and emotionally.

Thus, it is important to understand and believe that the products influencers post and advertise are not necessities, yet they are extra goods and services that a person can afford. These products might not shape the Influencer and form his personality.

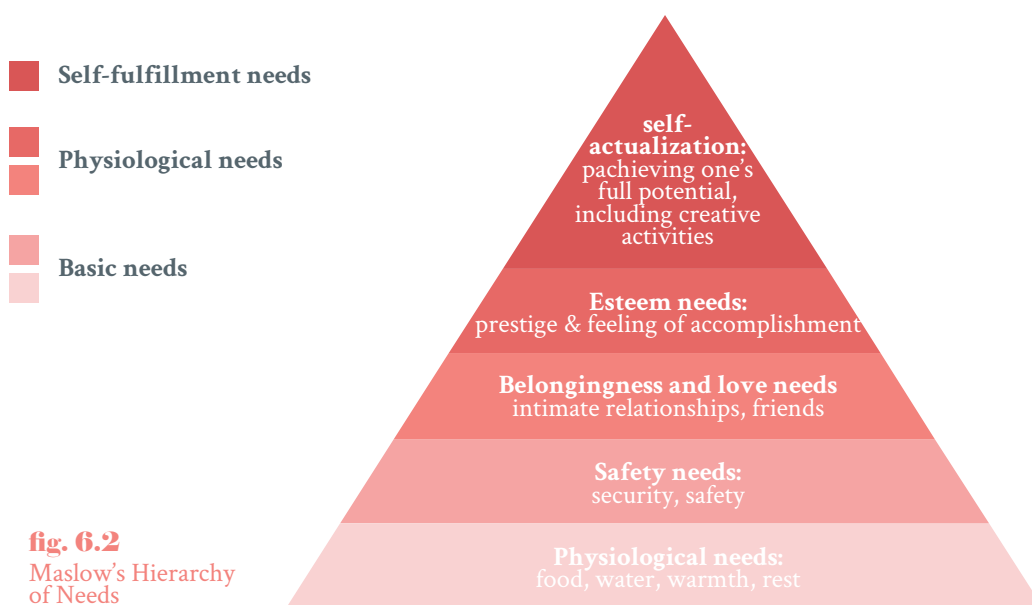


fig. 6.2
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

6.3. Arab Influencers using Instagram Stories efficiently

There is a rise in the number of Instagram users that call themselves Influencers, and a rise in the number of Instagram users that want to be an Influencer solely for the fame and exposure, and for the gifts that they receive from international and big brands. However, real Influencers that I have followed during this journey of studying and data collecting and observation, are people who try to use their platform to benefit others and work hard behind the scenes to bring the final and perfect image on Instagram and Instagram Sorties in order to help their followers in a specific situation or a specific matter. And this is where the job of the influencer in using authenticity on social media platform is crucial. In one of her recent interviews, the Lebanese influencer Maya Ahmad said:

“Authenticity is something that people appreciate in an influencer especially with “new faces” who are trying to make it without having something interesting to offer”

(Hakmi, 2020: p:74)

The two following examples demonstrate efficiently how some of the Arab Influencers use their Instagram Stories platform to help others and spread awareness amongst their followers. The first Influencer is Rita Dahdah @riri_dada who has 185k followers on Instagram. On June 11, 2020, Rita posted a series of stories about an Egyptian woman who has been suffering from domestic abuse. She used her Instagram Stories platform in an efficient way to highlight this story for her followers and try to help the woman's case. "Hello everyone, I need help of my Egyptian followers please." Rita continued, "One of my female Egyptian followers is a victim of domestic abuse and she has reached out to me for help. I cannot help her on the ground since I am all the way in Qatar. If any of you know of any NGOs there that help domestic abuse victims, please DM me as soon as you can with ways to help." Once Rita posted these series of stories, she not only received messages of possible solutions, but she also received messages of several similar cases from her followers. As she said: "Sadly, after yesterday's post, several other women reached out to me for help. Women also undergoing abuse at home. I feel sick to my stomach reading the stories, but there's one in particular I will also need your help with. This time, in Sharjah, UAE." And she continued with what will be needed in order to help these cases as she was trying to give solutions to her followers "What is needed: pro bono psychiatric help, recommended clinics to contact (authorities, NGOs)".

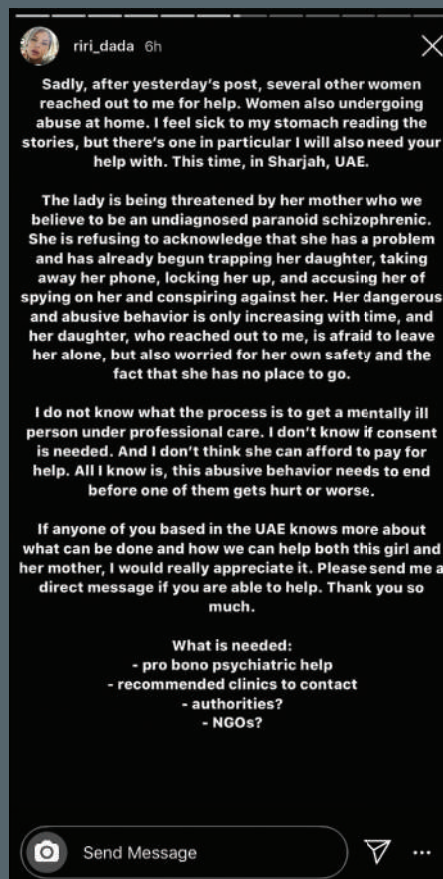
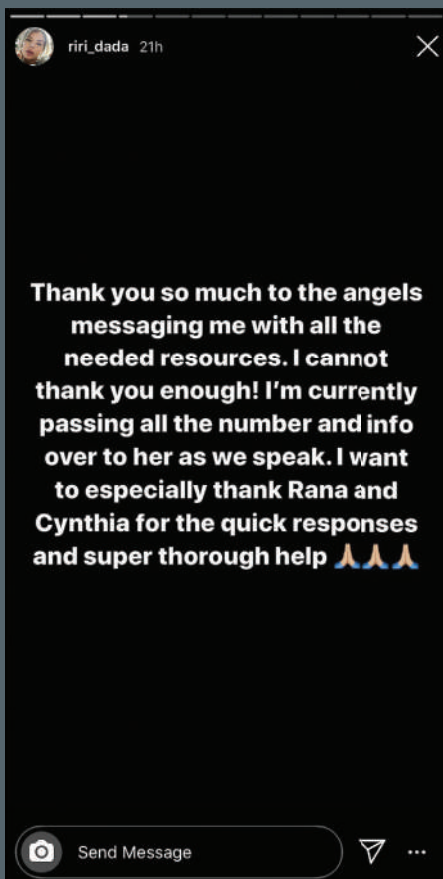


fig. 6.3
Rita Dahdah,
Instagram Stories,
2020

The second Influencer is Paola El Sitt @mle_paola who has 422k followers on Instagram. Paola launched on June 13, 2020 her initiative to support business on Instagram Stories. She shared with her followers the purpose and the aim of this initiative, as well as how to take part of it. Paola said that what she is doing is part of her beliefs and values. Her goal is to support small startups and businesses that are struggling in the current political and economic situations. People can send her the story behind their business and she will share them on her stories with all her followers in order to give them exposure and get inspired and motivated at the same time from all the new ideas that may benefit her and others.

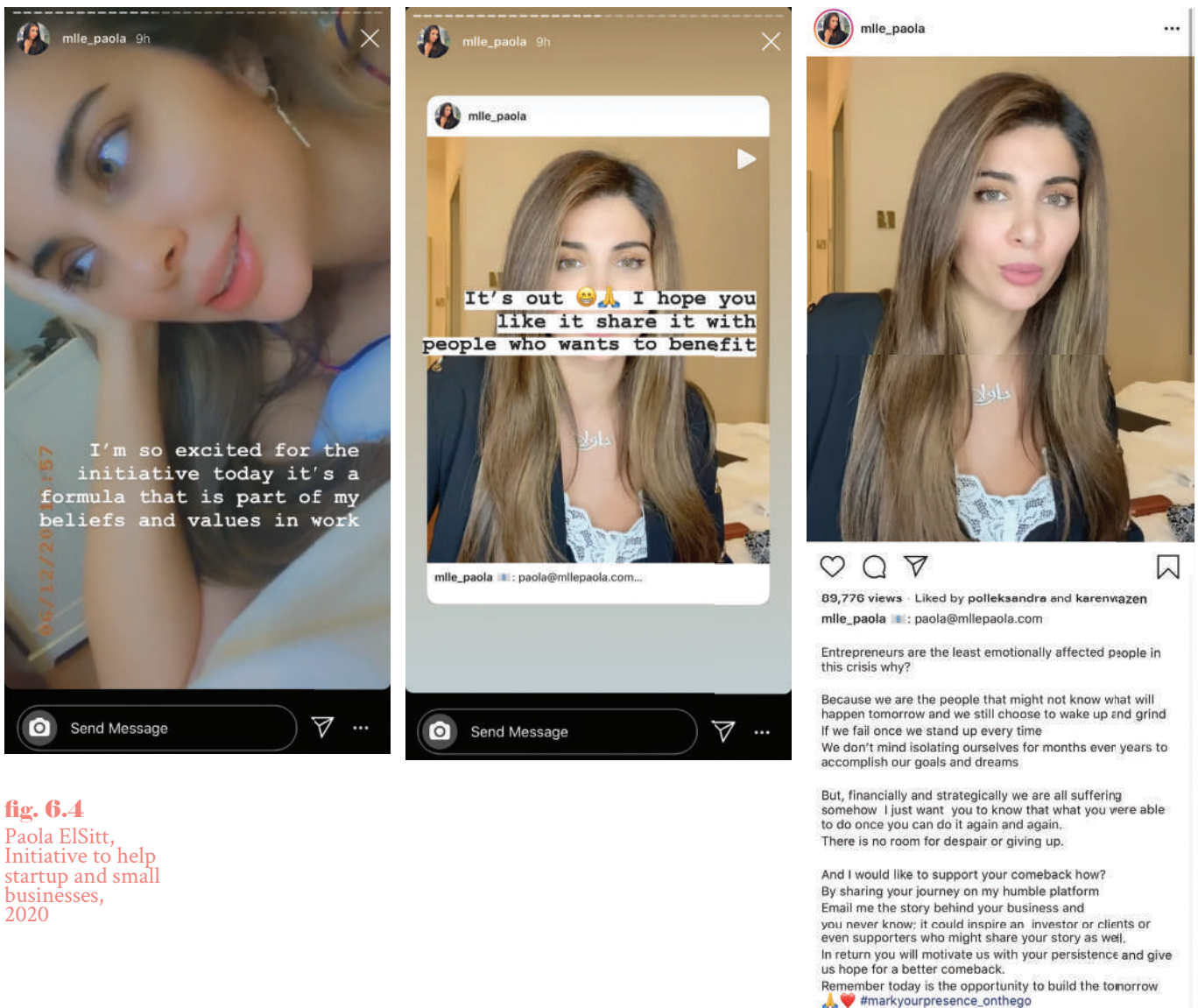


fig. 6.4
 Paola ElSitt,
 Initiative to help
 startup and small
 businesses,
 2020

These two of many examples that touch the Influencers' followers in a personal and ethical way. When Instagram users see this side of an influencer as well as how they are trying to use their platforms to help others, will make them even more credible and authentic in the eyes of their followers. When the standup comedian Nemr Abou Nassar asked about using the platform in a way to amplify the people's voice on his podcast, Jessica Kahawaty @jessicakahawaty answered:

“ We have a social responsibility. Being on Instagram and having a certain number of followers shouldn't just be ignored. There is a responsibility that comes with it. You have reach, and it's your responsibility to educate people if you can. It's about being entertaining, informative, educational, the whole thing” she continued “it is important for us to never forget what is happening in the world”

(Kahawaty, 2020)

07 Conclusion

This thesis started with one question: Can Arab influencers of the Middle East region use their social media platform, more specifically Instagram Stories feature, to protect this culture in all its angles? and can they have a good impact on Arab citizens and their followers or will they only drive the situation to a dead-end role? Throughout this thesis and the different data collected, survey conducted, and interviews made, there are two ways in which Arab influencers use Social Media and Instagram Stories. There is the good, and the bad. Just like in any country there are the good citizens and the bad citizens. We cannot deny the presence of Influencers on Instagram Stories showing off what products they receive and marketing products that they don't believe in for the money. Arabs like to escape from their realities and problems they are facing on daily basis. This escape is projected through the world of social media, following and watching Arab influencers on Instagram Stories, and feeling the need to have a life similar to theirs starting by buying many expensive accessories and clothing to traveling the world. By doing this they will feed their ego as they want to be seen and live their life to the fullest even though they are actually living without realizing it. Here is where the role of these Influencers comes in order to understand this issue in the Arab world and direct it towards a clearer road. Since last year where different crisis and problems emerged in different countries of the Arab world such as the Lebanese Revolution and Iraqi Revolution, even the Covid-19 virus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement that emerged in the United States and affected the whole world, we can see that some of the Influencers are getting more educated and more aware of what

is happening around them, and thus they are redirecting their platform towards a better road, a road where they try their best to also educate their followers, spread awareness, and use their high reach to be the voice of the weak. We are witnessing change that needs more effort and hard work, yet with education and life experiences we are able to change this sad reality where some Influencers think of the money that will be made rather than protecting their culture and people. Which is why the ruler of Dubai, UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum launched the New Media Academy to produce better educated influencers that protect their culture and can proudly be the face of the country. This is an opportunity to help, reform, and protect social media influencers.

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Nour Arida, https://www.instagram.com/p/B_9xuqLn10_/

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