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YouTuber's as Role-Models: A Study of the Ways YouTubers Influence Teenagers in the UAE.

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Abstract:

The aim of this research is to give an overview of the current YouTube community, including what influence YouTubers have on their teenage viewers in the UAE and to what extent this influence on their life is considered positive or negative. YouTubers are seen as role models and are often followed by their teenage fans. However, parents often do not know about the online behavior of their children and the YouTubers they follow. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative study approach with a semi-structured interview technique. The sample consists of 30 teenagers based in the UAE. The research shows that YouTube has become part of the daily life of many teenagers. YouTubers do have influence on the behavior of teenagers, of which teenagers and their parents are unaware. This influence might not be completely negative but the lack of awareness might be.

Keywords: YouTubers, Vloggers, Teenagers, Social Influence, Online Behavior, Digital Communication.

1. Introduction:

A new Internet hype called Web 2.0 appeared a few years ago, resulting in a major shift from relatively passive and consuming use of the Internet to a hype of networking as a revolutionary type of large scale cooperation and economic democracy (Meijer, Boersma and Wagenaar 2009). According to Smith (2009), this major shift towards user-driven technologies such as blogs, social networks and video-sharing platforms enabled a revolution of User-Generated Content (UGC). UGC term refers to all different types of media content created or produced by the general public, excluding paid professionals (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008). Constantinides, Romero and Boria, (2009, p.2) define UGC as the process of 'extracting value by generating, reviewing, editing and disseminating content'. To Smith (2009), this revolution of UGC is recently being referred to as social media. UGC is also stated to be the next restoration of Word-of-Mouth (WOM) (Huang & Benyoucef, 2012). Traditional (offline) WOM has proven to play a major role in the customers' decision-making process (Richins & Root Shaffer, 1988). The so-called WOM is 'any positive or negative statement made by (potential) customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet as stated by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Gremler and Walsh (2004, p. 39). Consumers can share their own experiences and opinions online, minimizing the biased product information people gather from other consumers online. People are now able to create their own information and participate in all kinds of applications and platforms like weblogs, social networks and online journalism sites or apps. Some users even create online content on a daily basis. They share their experiences and thoughts about everything; from product reviews, services to homework, make up and game tutorials. It usually starts as a hobby, but creating online content on a blog or channel

can sometimes become a full-time job.

Moreover, creating content on a daily basis, builds up large communities with thousands of loyal followers. New followers and subscribers can beapproached every day. YouTube is an example of a one very popular platform on which creators share their content. A single video can possibly reach millions of people. Other popular channels are Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. These channels can be used as real-time communication means with YouTube subscribers, as this is not always possible on YouTube itself. Successful content creators become social influencers with usuallya persuasive influence (Wilma Westenberg, 2016). This influence and fame can be compared to traditional celebrities. The content non-traditional celebrities share via social media can have an influence on viewers, for example on viewers who are looking for information on products to support their purchasing decisions (Dellarocas, 2003). Although YouTube is used by all ages, the platform is very popular among teenagers specifically. One research found that 96% of the youngsters aged between 13 and 24 regularly spend time using YouTube (Defy Media, 2015). They consume online videos via different social media sites for an average of 11 hours a week, making it their most visited and popular website. This popularity is reflected again in the amount of YouTubers that target teenagers. The influence YouTubers have on the behavior of teenagers is surprising, increasing and unprecedented. Some teenagers view them asrole models and usually recognizethem outside the online world. However, outside this online world, YouTubers are as normal as most people. Parents may not be aware of the online behavior of their teenage children and the YouTubers that children follow. This results in confusionfor other people who do not recognize/know those YouTubers. A well-known Dutch beauty YouTuber explained once that when she is in public, for example when visiting a

shopping mall or eating at a restaurant, fans recognize her from YouTube and ask with excitement to take pictureswith her.

However, other people walking by are usually confused and not sure why these people(teenagers)are taking pictures. This example shows the undefined impact of social influencers on teenagers of which most adults do not even know exist (Wilma Westenberg, 2016).

Although there is some research made on the influence traditional media have on youngsters, it is important to know what certain positive or negative influence new media have on teenagers. Up to now, only few research has been made about the influence of YouTubers on teenagers. Previous research wasmostly concerned about YouTube being only a part of several more platforms (e.g. Dellarocas, 2003) or the difference between YouTube and watching traditional television (e.g. Defy Media, 2015; Variety, 2014). Furthermore, studies in the Arab World are almost non existing as studies were mainly conducted in Europe and the US, which is why this research focuses on especially teenagers in the UAE. Accordingly, the research questions for this research are as follows: Q1. Do teenagers in the UAE perceive YouTubers as role-models? Q2. How do YouTubers influence teenagers in the UAE? Q3. Are parents in the UAE aware of the impact YouTubers might have on their children? The research will use the semi-structured interviewing method on 100 teenagers in the UAE to investigate changes in teenagers behaviors, how teenagers identify and perceive YouTubers and whether or not parents are aware of the phenomena.

The following three themes guide throughout the research: (1) perception; how teenagers perceive YouTubers and think about them, (2) influence; what influence YouTubers have on the behavior of teenagers and (3) awareness; if

parents are aware of the influence and the commercial market behind YouTubers. First the paper starts with a review of the literature followed by a theoretical framework.

Second, the research design and methodology will be further elaborated, followed-up by the results. Finally, a conclusion will summarize the most important findings and answers to the research questions.

2. Review of Literature

Most scholarly research up-to-date has focused on YouTube content (i.e., types of videos created and/or shared), the commercial and marketing aspects of YouTube, specific groups in YouTube and their political views and activities, and of course the unusual videos that go on trend. Most research studies reported in this matter, employed a Uses and Gratifications (UG) framework grounded in Cultural Studies (CS). Few studies analyzed YouTube user's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to YouTube.

2.1 Teenagers Social Media Use And Social Action

Social media refers to online-based applications that allow people to exchange and create content using digital network technologies (boyd and Ellison, 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). A survey of US teens by the Pew Research Center found that the proportion of teens with Internet access has increased from 87% in 2004 to 95% in 2012, and the proportion of teens engaging in different forms of social media usage has increased from 55% in 2006 to 83% in 2012 (Lenhart, 2012 &Duggan and Brenner, 2013). Online behavior of these digital natives – the generation born after the general introduction of digital technologies and that has grown up submerged in and familiar with those technologies – was studied in many different contexts, including identity, civic engagement and

social inclusion (e.g., Palfrey and Gasser, 2008 &Bennett et al., 2011). YouTube for instance, is one of the most frequently used platforms for watching and downloading videos and is preferred by around 55% of young Europeans (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014).

In the case of Spanish adolescents, YouTube takes the second place (around 70% of adolescents between 14 and 17 prefer this network) after Facebook (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2015). Whereas only a small percentage of adolescents and young people are considered active users (Gallardo & Jorge, 2010) and the viewing of videos constitutes one of the most extended and recognized habits among European adolescents (Holloway, Green, & Livingstone, 2013).

In the Arab world, YouTube has introduced a new culture in the Saudi society where it has turned into a platform to raise issues without hesitation, especially since control of this program is relatively weak. There are some red flags in terms of ethics and security. Despite the red flags, the Saudi society takes advantage of YouTube and its content frequently and this is what has been observed through field study and monitoring the effectiveness of YouTube in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, and with the availability of Internet services at good speeds and acceptable prices, Saudi Arabia ranked the first place among the Middle East communities in the use of YouTube, as for Jordan the use of the Internet in general includes (Facebook, WhatsApp, online chatting, Skype, etc.).

In other words, Internet use is confined to the field of social networking over the use of YouTube. It should be noted that both communities also use the Internet for job hunting, academic research, and other purposes. When the topic of YouTube is discussed, the first place always goes to the Saudi society compared with any other society, not to mention the Jordanian

community, which occupies the bottom so far in terms of ranking and not in terms of the way, YouTube is, used (Hiyam S. Ensour, 2015).

YouTube however, distinguishes between "standard YouTubers": those who create and share different videos with friends or family and "special YouTubers": who communicate and interact with the community on line, receive and view comments and have subscribers in addition to offering suggestions and recommendations to their subscribers (Ramos-Serrano, & Herrero-Diz, 2016). YouTube channels provide a space for artistic and creative expression, thus providing a social connection with different other YouTubers and followers (Chau, 2010). The majority of YouTubers actively interact with their real and imaginary audiences (Ding & al., 2011).

The audiences are active, as they can directly interact with the YouTuber who is followed and liked and the proximity to the user is the key to success (Berzosa, 2017). The followers' identification and perception with YouTubers may vary and must be addressed.

2.2 Understanding YouTubers: Identification with Teenagers

In a study conducted by Sehdev (2014), many YouTubers were considered to be more engaging and appealing than traditional celebrities. For example, a YouTuber called 'PewDiePie'who's one of the most famous YouTubers, has an endearing attitude towards his fans. He interacts on different social media and lovingly refers to his subscribers as 'bros' (Marrs, 2015). Personal interaction makes YouTubers more beloved and respected. The reach and impact of online WOM networks such as YouTube has expanded massively (Dellarocas, 2003) and with the possibilities of social media it is now easier than ever to become a YouTuber.

According to many studies on American teenagers, relatability and attainability are two of the biggest reasons teenagers are influenced by YouTubers (Defy Media, 2015; The Intelligence Group's Cassandra report, 2013, as cited in Adweek; Variety, 2014). Teenagers feel more related to YouTubers, because they are perceived as equal as them. They are 'just' average peoplecreating unique content online and can be the boy or girl living next door or a kid from the same school. The attention they get is gained for their personalities, special talents and creativity, which teenagers strive to achieve.

They started their way from the bottom to the top and grew follower by follower. The personal stories about personal lives make them seem approachable and trustworthy. According to a study by Variety (2014), not many teenagers can relate to the lifestyle of Hollywood celebrities like Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber or the amount of money they earn. YouTubers that are influenced by Hollywood are in danger of becoming less authentic versions of themselves and teenagers will notice this right away(Wilma Westenberg, 2016). Moreover, YouTubers are usually about the same age as their audience, which makes it easier for them to create content that fits with the current frame of reference for teenagers. People tend to copy behavior of people they like, or share the same behavioral style with (Bentley, Earls & O'Brien, 2011). According to researchers of the Stony Brook University (2015), beliefs and behaviors are more contagious among those with shared social connections. Imitating others can lead to social benefits, like grouping together on social groups. YouTubers in specific are seen as authentic when reviewing a product or brand (Influencer Marketing, 2012). Followers believe that recommendations or discouragements are honest and that information in consumer reviews that is not originated by the company

or brand is seen as more credible than marketer-sponsored information (Wilma Westenberg, 2016). Therefore, the influence of YouTubers can be measured by the number of subscribers and video views on their channel (Burges & Green, 2009).

2.3 Influence of YouTubers on Teenagers' Behavior

Social influencers like YouTubers tend to send messages rapidly to their large-scale networks of loyal followers forlow costs. In the decision-making process, consumers are more likely to copy others.Influencer marketing is a type of marketing that focuses on the decision-making process (Brown & Hayes, 2008, p. 32).

Before Web 2.0, consumers based their purchasing decisions on professional advices and advertisements (Dellarocas, 2003). Nowadays, purchasing decisions are more often based on online reviews (Dellarocas, 2003). Before buying expensive make up or a new phone, consumers search the Internet for reviews and experiences, making YouTube a perfect medium to promote products, brands and services against relatively low costs. However, societies around the world currently live in a network society in which people are exposed to a high number of information exchange and changing activities (Van Dijk, 2006). So, with this overload of information and communication, it is difficult for users tobe exposed to everything on the Internet and therefore they will have to select what to read or what not to read. According to a study by Wilma Westenberg in 2016, "Content has to be unique and must be of value for its audience in order to be read, and shared. A way in which organizations and brands can draw attention by making use of social influencers, also called celebrity endorsement. Traditional sales barriers are minimized by involving people with a high level of influence over potential consumers". According to

McCracken (1989), celebrity endorsement occurs when people with high public recognition use this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement (p.310). Nowadays customers are becoming more sophisticated, educated and selective and the competition is increasing rapidly. Consumers want to improve their self-image by choosing brands that have relevant meanings to their self-concept (Ghani & Kakakhel, 2011). Celebrities like YouTubers, singers, movie actors, famous athletes and professionals appear in advertisements to influence consumers' brand choice and behavior. "YouTubers are used to create awareness and signal benefits to others within their social network" states Wilma Westenberg, 2016. They are influential in encouraging trial and adoption of new services and products(Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003).

YouTubers are typically successful because of their popularity, expertise and reputation (Influencer Marketing, 2012). Companies provide marketing activities to these influencers to increase sales. Now that influencer marketing and WOM also take place online (eWOM), messages can be spread on a larger scale with lower costs (Dellarocas, 2003). A survey conducted in the United States of America, showed that YouTube influencers took eight spots in the top ten survey of influencers, overtaking movie stars and musicians(Newberry 2016.).Youtubers know what their audience want and therefore know how and what to market to them. With the help of YouTubers and their knowledge of their audience, marketers can reach a wide target audience in a way that is not going to impact how the audience engages and watches videos (Pasco 2015).YouTubers are usually asked by brands and companies to try out products or services and review them. Reviews include product information based on personal experience and taste. Based on that, the YouTuber can recommend the product or service to viewers or discourage them. In return, YouTubers are

offered free items and financial compensation in exchange for the review. But although YouTubers may get free items or financial compensation, the viewers may believe reviews made by YouTubers are true and authentic. On the other hand, YouTubers can also have an influence on social behavior of teenagers. Teenagers adopt behaviors of YouTubers they see in videos, imitating their language, clothing or actions. Some YouTubers are older than their viewers or are coming from different backgrounds or cultures. This causes a problem for the kids and their parents if the kids copy the language or bad behaviors, for example an online game thatmany YouTubers play is a game called Minecraft. Minecraft is a game in which players fight monsters and create houses using bricks that look like Lego. Minecraft is very popular among children in elementary schools who watch Minecraft videos on YouTube seekingadvice or strategy.

But because many parents realized that there was a problem and sought online help, websites and platforms have created top ten lists for Minecraft YouTubers that are children-appropriate (e.g. thetoptens, brightpips, commonsensemedia, autcraft) (Wilma Westenberg, 2016).

2.4 Awareness of teenagers online

Children are not always aware of the difference between the online world and the real world. As a result, young children can often be deceived into believing something that is false (Moore & Lutz, 2000). And if parents are not always supervising the use of their children online, problems may arise. Media awareness is defined as the 'understanding of the different methods for presenting information in newspapers, on television and on the Internet and of the possible uses and dangers of these methods' (Cambridge University Press, 2016). According to a published report by the Dutch Ministry of Health and Consumers Association (2016), children

can be negatively influenced by some videos that result in eating too much unhealthy food. Older children on the other hand are more able to know that advertisements are not always true and therefore are more skeptical to the messages that are delivered to them (Moore & Lutz, 2000). Although YouTubers are seen as celebrities, there are no rules and restrictions yet in the UAE about what YouTubers might do and say in their videos, as it is difficult to measure the actual age of the viewers and to control all the content on YouTube. However, in an aim to regulate this young industry, the UAE's National Media Council (NMC) announced new measures in March, 2018 that makes it mandatory for all paid influencers to obtain an e-media license, as well as a trade license if they are not working through an agency. Those who simply wish to blog as a hobby or pastime will not need a license. But influencers who receive payment for promoting a brand or product must have a license, which are available in three categories and cost about 4,000 dollars.

The e-media license has to be renewed each year at the same price. Penalties for failing to do so include fines of up to 1500 dollars, verbal or official warnings, and/or closure of the website or account (Jennifer Bell, 2018). And because many teenagers enjoy junk food and candies, this can present an interesting topic for YouTubers and the brands they deal with. In their videos, many YouTubers consume candies and non-healthy products in front of the camera and try out products that are mostly exported abroad. Similarly, other popular videos are the so-called do-it-yourself videos, in which YouTubers explain how teenagers can make special and unique treats themselves (Wilma Westenberg, 2016). Younger viewers may not be aware that most of the time YouTubers are asked to promote the products they are showing, in exchange for free goods or compensations. Since January 2016 the Dutch government has started interfering in this type of advertising

videos and blogs by placing YouTubers under the political agenda category.

3. Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is the theory of learning and social behavior that proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others.It states that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur merely through observation or direct instruction (Albert Bandura ,1971). In addition to the observation of behavior, social learning also occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments, a process known as vicarious reinforcement. When a particular behavior is rewarded constantly, it will most likely persist; conversely, if a particular behavior is regularly punished, it will most likely desist (Renzetti, Claire, Curran, Daniel, Maier & Shana,2012).

The theory expands on traditional behavioral theories, in which behavior is governed purely by reinforcements, by placing emphasis on the important roles of different internal processes in the learning individual. The theory emphasizes learning from social environment and focuses on learning by observing others which occurs within a social context (Hurst, 2016). Bandura in 1997, expanded the proposition of social learning. His famous Bobo doll experiment showed why and when children display aggressive behaviors and demonstrated the value of modeling for novel behaviors (Evans & Bandura, 1989). The theory is applied in many different areas like mass communication, humanities and marketing. The use of celebrities, such as YouTubers, to introduce and endorse products to certain demographics is an example of the application of this theory, because YouTubers illustrate the influence the media

possesses have in shaping audience actions and behaviors (Pal, 2011). According to the theory, learning usually occurs when teenagers have a good self-efficacy, which is the belief someone has in their own ability to reach goals and complete tasks (Ormrod, 2006). Self-efficacy has influence on the motivation, affect and action of people (Bandura, 1989). People with high level ofself-efficacy are more likely to believe they can solve problems. Low-efficacy often means people are less confident and don't believe they have the ability to perform well and therefore avoid challenging tasks. Moreover, the theory states that learning depends on whether there is a close identification with the model or not. Students use online social networks to fulfill essential social learning functions, meeting a range of interpersonal needs, including appreciation and validation of creative endeavors, peer support from former and current classmates, and targeted help with school-related tasks. Within their SNS, teenagers are engaged in a complex array of communicative and creative endeavors that demonstrate attention to audience, tone, style, subject matter, and writing process.

Their ability to craft an online performance and ''read'' the multimodal, multilayered ''texts'' of those they sought to communicate with required cognitive skill and visual acumen that educators (and researchers) are still trying to understand. Moreover, the fact that students identified important academic support and life-transition functions for these technologies but perceived them as little valued by or connected to ''school'' suggests that we have some work to do(Christine Greenhow&Beth Robelia, 2009). Specifically, we need to better understand the overall formal and informal learning ecology (Barron, 2006) such young people inhabit if we are to progress in evolving educational practices and literacy frameworks that are relevant, meaningfuland connected to kids(Christine Greenhow&Beth

Robelia, 2009). So people learn by observing others, which demonstrate behavior (Bandura, 1986). There are different types of models from which teenagers can learn behavior. The first are live models, which are individuals from whom we observe behavior in real life like parents and teachers. There are also symbolic models, which are real or fictional characters from movies, books and other media like YouTube. Teenagers are surrounded by many influencing models and encode their behavior (McLeod, 2016). Copying behavior from models like YouTubers is more likely to happen when people perceive themselves similar or related to the model (McLeod, 2016). Consequently, behavior is more likely to be imitated from models of the same gender. Also reinforcements and punishments from the environment determine if someone will continue in performing the behavior. People identify with models and adopt their values, behaviors, beliefs and attitudes (Bandura, 1986). Identification is not the same as imitation, as imitation usually means copying a single behavior while identification involves a number of behaviors being adopted (McLeod, 2016). If a YouTuber possesses qualities that teenagers adore, it is more likely that teenagers identify with them and thus copy their behavior.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Research Design

In order to answer the stated research questions, this study has a qualitative study approach. Since the research objective is primarily exploratory in nature, a semi-structured interview technique was chosen. Semi-structured interviews often assess the preferences and attitudes of individuals. Researcher Gill in 2008 defined this approach as an interview that has several key questions that help define the areas to be explored,

but also allow the researcher the flexibility to pursue an idea in a response in more detail, this is a medium between structured and unstructured interviews.Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research. For example, in household research, such as couple interviews, this type of interview is the most common. A semi-structured interview involving for example two spouses can result in "the production of rich data, including observational data (Bjørnholt, M. & Farstad, G.R. (2012). In the case of teenagers and young adolescents, a semi-structured approach seems to be the most appropriate because it allows elaboration with kids and questions can be adjusted according to the level of understanding in children.So given the time allowed and nature of this study, the sample used mainly convenient sample method and the data consisted of 100 teenagers in the UAE. The results of the participantswere kept anonymous.

4.2 Participants

The study was conducted in 2018 and 30 teenagers in the UAE aged between 13 and 19 years old who follow YouTubers participated in this study. Despite that teenagers age may vary according to different countries and studies, this age range was chosen based on a study by the Ministry of Economy in the UAE that found that teenagers aged between 13 and 19 constituted the largest age group in the UAE (Emirates 24/7, 2009).

Although, despite the age requirements of social networks, most teenagers are already active on social media starting at the age of 10 (BBC Newsround, 2016). The gender distribution was 18 girls (60%) and 12 boys (40%). The interview took place at the mall, participants house and at schools. Non-probability convenience sampling and some snowballing sampling were applied for the selection of participants. The network of the researcher was used to invite teenagers to participate in the interview.

4.3 Procedure

The interview questions focused on four themes: (1) Perceptions, (2) influences and (3) awareness.First, how teenagers perceived YouTubers and thought about Youtubers. Questions focused on asking teenagers if they enjoy watching YouTubers videos, if they wanted to become YouTubers themselves, and if they trusted YouTubers more than traditional celebrities and see them as role-models. Second, what influences YouTubers had on the behaviors of teenagers. Questions included statements asking if teenagers adopted and learned any new terms, behaviors or ideasand if they've changed any behaviors or attitudes because of YouTubers. Finally, if parents were aware of the influence and the commercial market behind YouTubers.Questions asked if the parents were aware of the time teenagers spent watching YouTubers and if parents had an idea of the favorite YouTubers kids had and the products YouTubers promote.More questionstried tomeasure how active teenagers are on YouTube and focused on the amount of time spent on YouTube, if they followed fan accounts or maybe even own one themselves. Interview questions also asked if teenagers postpone homework or have less sleep because they watch YouTubers videos, if they have spent money because of YouTubers and if YouTubers have influence on their buying behavior.Lastly, if YouTubers give their honest opinions about products and if the teenagers are aware that many content is sponsored.

5. Results, Main findings and Limitations

5.1 Results and Main Findings

As an answer to the three research questions of this study, the results show that YouTube is actually part of the daily lives of teenagers in the UAE

as they enjoy it, learn from it and use it to communicate with others. The firstpart involved questions about the time they spent watching YouTubers daily, platform, number of subscriptions and the type of YouTubers they preferred the most. The numbers show that 76% of teenagers (23 boys and girls) watch YouTube videos daily on laptops and T.V mostly, have more than 10 subscriptions and prefer vloggers, pranks and challenges, and DIY videos. The majoritytrustsYouTubers more than traditional celebrities. This was also found in previous research when Defy Media (2015) and Variety Magazine (2014) showed that teenagers nowadays consume more digital content from sites like YouTube with an average of 11 hours a week and are more likely to identify with YouTubers than with traditional movie stars. However, although YouTube plays such a big role in the lives of teenagers, the results also showed that according to the teenagers, 53% of parents (16 teenagers' parents)are not aware of their children usage of YouTube, especially when then prefer to have less sleep or postpone homeworks to watch their favorite YouTubers. Many have also claimed that parents can't recognize their children' favorite YouTubers, what fan chats they are active in and the time their children spend watching YouTube. In a research by Wilma Westenberg in 2016, it was found that YouTubers get a lot of messages from fans, and most of the time these messages are positive, but in some cases they were full with hate and threats.

The reason might be that teenagers think they are anonymous online and can therefore say whatever they want while parents are not aware of those behaviors. Furthermore, the results also show that 66% of teenagers (8 boys and 12 girls) imitate behaviors of YouTubers, such as wearing the same clothes and make-up, and style. These findings are consistent with previous literature. And although the social learning theory appeared in the 1940's, it can still be applicable to today's world of social influencers.

According to the theory, people learn by observing others and copy behavior from models like YouTubers when they perceive themselves similar to them (McLeod, 2016) and when YouTubers possess qualities they like. In the UAE, many teenagers view YouTubers as role-models and dream of becoming YouTubers themselves. But the question that arises here is wither the parents will allow their children turning to social media celebrities or not. Parents are expected to fear their children getting bullied or even getting bad habits or behaviors once they become famous and rich. On the other hand, teenagers in the UAE proved that they are learning a lot from videos they watch by YouTubers. It is encouraging their creativity, training new skills, cultures and languages. Teenagers can find ways in expressing themselves through social media in general and YouTube in specific and can also learn how to make cross-cultural networks. If kids managed to become YouTubers themselves, they can improve their level of self-confidence by dealing with people from all over the world. Further results show that YouTubers influence 36% of teenagers (3 boys and 8 girls) in the UAE when it comes to buying behaviors. They believeYouTubers are honest about the products they promote and often want to buy things that YouTubers own. This finding corresponds to previous research claiming that consumers copy others in the decision making process (Brown & Hayes, 2008) and social influencers are used to spread messages rapidly among their loyal followers because they are influential in encouraging trial and adoption of new services and products(Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003) and seen as authentic when reviewing a brand or product (Influencer Marketing, 2012). However, although most of the teenagers' state that YouTubers did not have an influence on them, they have in fact bought products based on YouTubers' recommendations and copied their behavior. They also thought they can recognize sponsored content right away, but when they were asked

about the goal of a sponsored message, they did not mention promoting reasons. This is consistent with previous research that found that children do not have the ability to distinguish advertisements from reality, and as a result, young children are often deceived into believing something that is false (Moore & Lutz, 2000). Furthermore, many teenagers said they were interested in buying products because they were consumed by YouTubers.

5.2. Limitations & Future Research

Although limitations are minimized as much as possible, several limitations of this study can be considered in future research. First of all, some teenagers were influenced by their friends who were accompanying them, which might have added answers that are not really honest. Further research would benefit from a larger sample of interviewees to make the results more reliable. Second, convenience and snowball samplings were used in this study as sampling methods. This might have resultedin an unequal amount of teenagers reached in terms of geographic areas and ethnic differences. Most teenagers live specific parts in the UAE and some ethnicities might be underrepresented. Also, all teenagers that participated in this research were selected on the fact that they are active on YouTube. Only teenagers that watch or follow YouTubers were invited to participate and non-users were left out. This was necessary to get useful input about their watching behavior, which this explorative research needed to create an overview of the YouTube community.

Further research could use another sampling method taking into consideration the geographic areas and ethnic differences into account. Third, most of the questions focused on behavior and feelings. Answers to these questions may be biased, because of social desirability and because teenagers may have a difficulty understanding the questions. This means

that teenagers might have answered questions in a certainmanner to appear more favorable by others. Also, teenagers are often not aware of the influence YouTubers have on them or they feel embarrassed to reveal to truth.Therefore, it could be beneficial to conduct further research with other approaches using the help of psychologist and social scientists. By involving parents, answers might be more accurate. Lastly, YouTube and many other social media platforms are constantly changing. In September 2016, YouTube announced its own social network called YouTube Community on which YouTubers can strengthen the bond with their viewers. YouTube Community gives a new way to engage with viewers beyond video and make YouTubers even more powerful than ever before. The influence of YouTubers on teenagers can be further investigated in the future including the new possibilities of YouTube Community. Additionally, role modeling is a timeless phenomenon that will always occur. Further research couldbenefit from a larger sample to make the results more reliable, focus onusing other psychological and social approaches to measure the impact of YouTubers on the feeling, the awareness and the behavior of the teenagers, eliminate the impacts of the impacts of others, and the social desirability on the teenagers' answers, andalso investigate the influence of role models on other popular (video) platforms, such as Vine, Musical.ly and new social media platforms that will be trending in the future.

6. Conclusion

If YouTube is the new TV, then YouTubers are the new TV stars. They have their own YouTube channels on which they publish videos on regular basis. YouTubers speak directly to their fan base that consists of thousands, sometimes even millions of subscribers. Most YouTubers are often teenagers or young adults, who speak honestly and authentically to their fellow youth.

Unlike television or pop stars which are removed from their audience, YouTuber can get in direct contact with their audience and meet them where they are. It is this proximity that children and adolescents often perceive their YouTube idols as "real friends", "idols" or "big brothers and sisters". The trend does not only apply to the Western world where most YouTubers come from, but it actually applies to almost anywhere with teenagers. In the UAE, it is no different. If anything, it might be a serious issue as mostly Arab teenagers are exposed to content from across the world and mainly Western. YouTube and YouTubers can be considered a double-edged sword depending on the way they are used. This paper managed to answer the three research questions through a semi-structured interview method on a sample of 30 teenagers in the UAE. The study found that teenagers do in fact perceive YouTubers as role-models and trust them. Second, teenagers in the UAE are influenced by YouTubers in many ways including adapting behaviors from them (Language, ideas, tricks, style, etc.) and buying behaviors (purchasing products consumed by YouTubers). And finally, many parents are not aware of the impact YouTubers have on their children. Some impact is considered bad because children can learn bad words or behaviors. But it can also be a good impact when children learn new skills or are exposed to new ideas or people.

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مشاهير اليوتيوب باعتبارهم قدوة للمراهقين: دراسة على الطرق التي يؤثر بها مشاهير اليوتيوب على المراهقين في دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة

ندى جمال الزرع

كلية الاتصال – جامعة الشارقة

الشارقة – الإمارات العربية المتحدة

ملخص البحث:

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى تسليط الضوء على منظومة اليوتيوب الراهنة، بدراسة تأثير مشاهير اليوتيوب على رواد اليوتيوب من مراهقي دولة الامارات والى أي مدى هي إيجابية أو سلبية هذا التأثير، حيث يتخذ بعض المراهقين من مشاهير اليوتيوب قدوةً لهم، بعيداً عن نظر الأسرة والأقرباء. لذلك، تعتمد هذه الدراسة منهج المقابلة الشبه منظمة على 30 مراهق ومراهقة في دولة الامارات. وتصل نتيجة البحث الى أن اليوتيوب بات جزءً لا يتجزأ من حياة الكثير من المراهقين في الدولة، وأن مشاهير اليوتيوب لهم بالفعل تأثير على سلوكياتهم. هذا التأثير قد لا يكون بالضرورة سيئاً، ولكن غياب الوعي وسوء الاستخدام قد يؤديان الى عواقب غير متوقعة.

الكلمات الدالة: يوتيوب، مدوني الفيديو، المراهقين، التأثير الاجتماعي، السلوك عبر الانترنت، الاتصال الرقمي.