OPINION LEADERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOR IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

Current thinking on opinion leaders varies with respect to key features distinguishing these individuals. Some studies emphasize influence as the crucial determinant, others stress knowledge, and still others focus primarily on information transmission. Most research, however, see a combination of knowledge or expertise and influence as characterizing the opinion leader. From a marketing perspective in some product categories, opinion leaders appear to be more knowledgeable about and involved with the product class. This study examines the existence of TV opinion leadership and the purchasing of TV sets in Saudi Arabia, and the characteristics opinion leaders and non-leaders have. In addition, the study re-examines the Two-Step Flow model to assess its validity in Saudi Arabia. The findings reported in this article indicated that the concept of TV opinion leadership exists in Saudi Arabia. And those opinion leaders were more likely to have some social characteristics than followers. In addition, those opinion leaders were found to be both information givers and seekers. The validity of the Two-Step Flow model of communication was also re-examined in Saudi Arabia. The findings support the existing literature on the inaccuracy of this model and, therefore, a multi-step model of communication would be relevant for the Saudi context.

JEL: C80; D91; M16; M31

KEYWORDS: Data collection, consumer choice, international business administration, marketing and advertising

INTRODUCTION

This introduction provides a background on the Saudi environment to help the reader appreciate the study, followed by major sections on literature review, data and methodology, empirical results, and conclusion.

Until in the late 1980s, most Saudis observe traditional Saudi gender roles. Men are more active in public and commercial spheres, and women are engaged in the home and family environment. Early in the 1990s primarily as a result of the intense economic developments in the urban centers in Saudi Arabia, and internal migration from rural areas to major cities in search of better work opportunities have impacted the Saudi society. As more families migrate to urban centers, rural areas experience population decline. This population shift strained the traditional values within the Saudi home, and has added to altering women's role into a participant in economic development. The socio-economic developments in the Saudi society have also been affected by the tremendous improvement in the educational sector. The educational system in Saudi Arabia has been broadened and modified to conform to new standards. Schools were opened in even the remotest parts of the country. The number of schools, community colleges and universities (Public & Private) has increased dramatically. The Saudi government and families encourage women to enroll in higher education and, therefore, women's role in socio-economic development has been enhanced. The educational progress in Saudi Arabia must be recognized as being both positive and remarkable for males and females. As in many other countries, the impact of modernization on Saudi Arabia is seen as in the best interest of the country. Radical change has been

introduced in many areas of the Saudi economy and society. The strict social divisions between men and women are becoming less emphasized. At wedding celebrations, for example, wealthy families with members educated at Western institutions are more likely to relax social restrictions.

Even though the public workforce in Saudi Arabia is still dominated by men, many Saudi women can be found working in various occupations such as secretaries, administrative assistants, bank tellers, school teachers, physicians, professors and in an expanding realm of jobs outside the home. There is a large and growing number of young Saudi women enrolled in universities throughout the country and abroad, studying a variety of subjects including, business and medicine. Nevertheless, Saudi families are proud of their traditions and thus Saudi women wear long-black-dresses (black Abayah) with dark scarves covering their hair, which leave no part of their bodies visible to the eye. Foreign women residing in Saudi Arabia are not expected to dress in this manner. They, however, should be prepared to act in a reserved and conservative manner while in public, consistent with society's values and traditions.

With this state of socio-economic development in mind, this study was conducted in Saudi Arabia on opinion leadership of home appliances (TVs). The study was conducted to find out the differences, if any, between information givers and seekers with regard to certain social characteristics such as innovativeness and the level of influence on others' purchase decisions; determine whether or not the concept of TV opinion leadership exists in Saudi Arabia based on a certain social characteristics; and re-examine the validity of the Two-Step Flow model in Saudi Arabia.

To effectively provide the necessary information by Saudi consumers, marketers need to know how much Saudis know about finding information, product knowledge, information use, and ability to search for information. This knowledge could help in designing an effective information strategy for Saudi consumers. A proper assessment of Saudi needs of product information must be carried out before the development of any marketing strategy. In the planning stages of designing an information strategy for Saudis, marketers may not find the required data to guide their thinking on what type of information Saudis need. It is also not known how Saudis go about gathering information in order to make their purchase decision. This study investigates the following research questions: Does the concept of TV opinion leaders exist in Saudi Arabia? Do TV opinion leaders differ from non-leaders (follower) regarding certain social characteristics? To what extent do information givers have opinion leaders' characteristics? What differences exist between TV information givers and non-givers regarding opinion leadership characteristics? Is the Two-Step Flow model of communication valid for Saudi Arabia, as this concept was never examined in this country? What are the demographic differences between opinion leaders and followers (opinion seekers)?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The implicit assumption, when examining the personal influence of opinion leaders, is that they are motivated to talk about the product because of their involvement with it. Frank van Rijnsoever and Rogier Donders, 2009; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2006; Tanawat Hirunyawipada and Audhesh Paswan 2006; Barbara Lyons and Kenneth Henderson, 2005; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2005 view opinion leadership as a manifestation of enduring involvement in a product class. Though some writers have criticized this orientation, as undervaluing the communication component and overvaluing the product interest component of opinion leadership, product involvement remains the predominant explanation for opinion leaders' conversations about products. Consequently, opinion leadership has been viewed as being product class specific (Kelly Cowart, Gavin Fox, Andrew Wilson, 2009; Alexander Serenko, Nick Bontis and Brian Detlor, 2007; Barbara Lyons and Kenneth Henderson, 2005; Byoungho Jin and Yong Gu Suh, 2005; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2005; Gianfranco Walsh, Kevin Gwinner and Scott Swanson, 2004; and David Atkin, Kim Neuendorf and Leo Jeffres, Paul Skalski, 2003). There is evidence to support that interest in a number of products

can lead to opinion leadership to more than one product category, but research suggests there is no general (i.e., multiple product category) opinion leader (Devon Johnson, 2009; Jiyeon Kim and Sandra Forsythe, 2009; David Burns, 2007; Heath McDonald and Frank Alpert, 2007; Martin Schreier, Stefan Oberhauser, Reinhard Prügl, 2007; Barbara Lyons and Kenneth Henderson, 2005; Maria Saaksjarvi, 2003; M. McCarthy, O'Reilly, and M. Cronin, 2001; and David Burns 1992).

It could be said that buyers are more likely to seek product information when they have little knowledge or experience to make a purchase decision. Although the level of information search may vary from one person to another, this relationship has been widely documented (Monica Hernandez, Yong Jian Wang, Michael Minor and Qian Liu, 2009; Martin Schreier, Reinhard Prügl, 2008; Jana Bowden and David Corkindale, 2005; Helen Salavou, 2004; Raji Srinivasan, Gary Lilien, and Arvind Rangaswamy, 2002; and Pamela D. Morrison, John H. Roberts, and Eric von Hippel, 2001). This factor was found to be one of the most important motives for western consumers to search for product information.

Previous research has indicated that buyers make much use of personal sources because they are non-purposive, flexible, trustworthy and entail minimal cost in both time and money(Frank van Rijnsoever and Rogier Donders, 2009; Yu Henry Xie, 2008; Heath McDonald and Frank Alpert, 2007; Subin Im, Charlotte Mason and Mark Houston, 2007; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2006; Sangeeta Singh, 2006; Barbara Lyons and Kenneth Henderson, 2005; Gianfranco Walsh, Kevin Gwinner and Scott Swanson, 2004; and David Atkin, Kim Neuendorf and Leo Jeffres, Paul Skalski, 2003). It was also reported that the social integrity of individuals within their community and their social contacts/relationship to friends, will affect the nature of their information search. Therefore, it is quite reasonable for researcher to argue that buyers would choose sources which yield an optimum combination of information cost and value. Cost depends on time and effort and financial outlay, value depends on the amount and type of information needed, as well as the buyer's perception of source adequacy, competency and trustworthiness.

Advertising is frequently used to create awareness, cultivate interest and prompt product inspection. Due to ease of access, advertising is likely to be widely heard or seen. However, advertising content is limited by space time and cost constraints, in addition to advertiser objectives and criteria for communication effectiveness. Consumer may regard information in advertising as accessible and easy to see or hear but not necessarily trustworthy because it represents the seller (Hye - Jung Park, Leslie Davis Burns and Nancy Rabolt, 2007; Jonathan Hartman, Soyeon Shim, Bonnie Barber and Matthew O'Brien, 2006; Walfried Lassar, Chris Manolis and Sharon Lassar, 2005; and Carolyn Lin, 2003). Books, pamphlets and articles may provide good information but their use requires time and patience coupled with the ability to comprehend and evaluate them.

The literature reviewed indicated a positive relationship between social contacts and information search. Further, studies of consumer satisfaction have reported that consumers who are dissatisfied with products they have purchased would complain, thus dissatisfaction and complaint behaviors are positively linked (Martin Schreier, Reinhard Prügl 2008; Byoungho Jin and Yong Gu Suh, 2005; Chuan-Fong Shih and Alladi Venkatesh, 2004; David Atkin, Kim Neuendorf and Leo Jeffres, Paul Skalski, 2003; and M. McCarthy, and O'Reilly, M. Cronin, 2001). Also, the literature indicated that consumers continue to both buy and tell others about products with which they are satisfied.

Numerous researchers have acknowledge the impact of social groups on consumer behavior (Martin Schreier, Reinhard Prügl, 2008; Martin Schreier, Stefan Oberhauser, Reinhard Prügl, 2007; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2006; Sangeeta Singh, 2006; Byoungho Jin and Yong Gu Suh, 2005; David Atkin, Kim Neuendorf and Leo Jeffres, Paul Skalski, 2003; and M. McCarthy, O'Reilly, and M. Cronin, 2001). They have reported that individuals do compare themselves to others and employ certain criteria when selecting a referent for comparison. It was also indicated that factors such as income,

occupation, education and opinions or values are usually considered by individuals (with some variation) when selecting a referent for such a comparison. The existing literature indicates that opinion leaders are more frequently exposed to different sources of information and in greater depth than those who are information seekers (Heath McDonald and Frank Alpert, 2007; Martin Schreier, Stefan Oberhauser, Reinhard Prügl, 2007; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2006; Barbara Lyons and Kenneth Henderson, 2005; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2005; Gianfranco Walsh, Kevin Gwinner and Scott Swanson, 2004; Stacy Wood and Joffre Swait, 2002; and Ronald Goldsmith, François d'Hauteville and Leisa Flynn, 1998).

The literature on demographics did not indicate clear differences between opinion leaders and other individuals/followers with regard to the above. There is a great deal of documentation on the dependence of opinion leader characteristics on social situation and product category (Frank van Rijnsoever and Rogier Donders, 2009; Martin Schreier, Stefan Oberhausen, Reinhard Prügl, 2007; Ronald Clark and Ronald Goldsmith, 2005; Barbara Lyons and Kenneth Henderson, 2005; Gianfranco Walsh, Kevin Gwinner and Scott Swanson, 2004; and M. McCarthy, O'Reilly, and M. Cronin, 2001).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study is part of an ongoing research in the area of consumer behavior in Saudi Arabia. This study focuses on the above four research questions. To address these questions, the scope of the study was narrowed to address specifically the TV opinion leadership, then a questionnaire was developed, followed by data collection. The following are the reasons why the scope of this study was narrowed to TV opinion leadership. First, it was believed that a single study like this could not cover all issues related to durable goods as each one of them requires a separate study (e.g., cars differ from televisions) and, therefore, it would be better to narrow the scope to a single product. It was hoped a narrow scope would make the findings of this study more clear, reliable and accurate. The second item is related to the subject matter itself. Again, a single study like this one could not cover all issue related to opinion leadership of durables/appliances (e.g., impact of interpersonal communication and reference groups on the purchase of durables/appliances). Further, being focused on a single issue should be of great importance to Saudi manufacturers and sellers if they wish to successfully compete with foreign products. Saudis view locally-made products as inferior to their imported rivals. Saudi manufacturers and sellers need to gain better understanding of their advertising campaigns in order to successfully market their locally-made products.

Questionnaire development. The constructs used in this study were borrowed from previous research or operationalized being guided by their previous uses and definitions in the literature. In addition, personal interviews were carried out by the researcher with marketing/sales managers and customers, to ensure that all constructs are developed in the proper manner and suitable for the Saudi context. This action has secured an acceptable level of validity and minimized measurements' errors. Reliability analyses were carried out and the results were promising (Alpha value were >0.72). The questions used in the questionnaire were, mainly, 5-point rating scales, and "yes and no" type of questions (dichotomous).

Data collection. 1500 questionnaires were distributed evenly to five shopping centers in various parts of Saudi Arabia. Questionnaires were hand-delivered to every third shopper (i.e., 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, etc). The completed questionnaires were returned to a specific person/location in every shopping center. The first two years (2007-2008 inclusive) were spent on designing the questionnaire and collecting the data. The statistical tests were run and results were analyzed in 2009. The paper was completed in August 2009, and revised in January 2010 and again in March 2010. Of the 1500 distributed questionnaires, only 495 were usable. Further, some imputations had to be conducted to handle some questionnaires with missing data of less than three values. Therefore, any questionnaire with 3 or more missing values was eliminated. Thus, 495 questionnaires were used in the statistical analysis, which means that the response rate was 33 %.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

To investigate the characteristics of information givers and information seekers, Saudi TV buyers were asked different questions. Table 1 indicates that the majority, i.e., 73.9% of respondents gave information to their friends, relatives, colleagues or neighbors about their TVs. These findings show the intensity of word-of-mouth communication used by Saudi TV buyers, and the importance that they place on the purchase of such a product.

Table 1: Saudis Giving Information to Others (Friends, Relatives, Colleagues or Neighbors)

	Response			
Issue	**Yes**		**No**	
Giving TV Information	366	73.9	129	26.1

495 cases, 0 missing value This table shows that 74% of respondents gave information to their friends, relatives, colleagues or neighbors about their TVs.

Table 2 summarizes Saudis' answers of measuring the level of information given by respondents to other people when they were considering buying their latest TVs.

Table 2: Level of Information Given by Saudis to Others

Level of giving information	**A very large amount**		**A large amount**		**Uncertain**		**A small amount**		**Not at all**		**N**	**Mean Value**
Those who gave information	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**		
Friends, relatives, colleagues, neighbors, etc.	195	39.4	149	30.1	80	16.2	19	3.8	52	10.5	495	3.84

N = 495 cases, n= number of valid observations, 0 missing value. This table summarizes level of information given by respondents to other people when considering buying TVs.

It is clear from Table 2 that the majority of respondents have given what they consider to be a great deal of information to their friends, relatives, colleagues, or neighbors when they were considering buying their latest TVs. As the same Table shows, 69.5% stated that they did this with a mean value of 3.84.

Characteristics of Information Givers and Seekers in Saudi Arabia

Before proceeding to identify the characteristics of information givers (among the respondents), it should be noted that in order to identify information givers, a comparison between information givers and seekers must be made with respect to the validity of opinion leaders' characteristics. To identify information givers (among respondents) according to special characteristics, the literature suggested that, in general, opinion leaders have certain special characteristics. Compared to non-leaders or "followers," opinion leaders are seen to have greater exposure to mass media and greater social participation. They are also regarded as more innovative or early adopters or buyers of new products, more influential, more experienced, have a higher level of self-confidence, and take more interest or tend to know more about an area of interest than non-leaders. However, it has been suggested that no differences exist between opinion leaders and non-leaders with respect to certain demographic traits. Table (3) shows Saudis' answers regarding certain characteristics of information givers.

Table 3 reveals the findings in order of frequency of mention and the mean values. These findings will be used, in turn, when investigating if there are any differences between information givers and seekers regarding opinion leaders' characteristics.

Table 3: Characteristics of Information Givers in Saudi Arabia

Level of agreement / Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Uncertain		Quite Disagree		Strongly Disagree			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	Mean Value
a. I always listen to radio and watch TV programs.	157	31.7	134	27.1	66	13.3	62	12.5	76	15.4	495	3.47
b. I always read newspaper, and magazines (e.g., hard & electronic copies).	178	36.0	113	22.8	63	12.7	62	12.5	79	16.0	495	3.50
c. I always attend or participate in social events (e.g. Weddings, and birthdays) my friends, relatives, colleagues or neighbors have.	210	42.4	157	31.7	45	9.1	37	7.5	46	9.3	495	3.91
d. I always attend national ceremonies (e.g., Saudi's Independence Day, graduation ceremonies).	222	44.8	148	29.9	49	9.9	38	7.7	38	7.7	495	3.97
e. I would like to belong to a social club (e.g., The Muslim Youth Club, Employees Social Club).	223	45.1	133	26.9	57	11.5	36	7.3	46	9.3	495	3.91
f. I like to buy the latest model of TVs.	222	44.8	142	28.7	52	10.5	32	6.5	47	9.5	495	3.93
g. I always plan to replace my TV with a new one.	202	40.8	154	31.1	53	10.7	34	6.9	52	10.5	495	3.85
h. I normally influence my friend's, relative's or neighbor's decision of buying their TVs.	201	40.6	147	29.7	52	10.5	38	7.7	57	11.5	495	3.80
i. My friends, relatives or neighbors always take my advice into consideration when buying their TVs.	*211*	*42.6*	*145*	*29.3*	*61*	*12.3*	*29*	*5.9*	*49*	*9.9*	*495*	*3.89*
j. I have a great deal of experience in selling and purchasing TVs.	218	44.0	140	28.3	56	11.3	32	6.5	49	9.9	495	3.90
k. I have a great deal of experience in repairing TVs.	199	40.2	141	28.5	72	14.5	36	7.3	47	9.5	495	3.83
l. I am always confident about my abilities when buying TVs.	195	39.4	160	32.3	45	9.1	42	8.5	53	10.7	495	3.81
m. I am always confident about myself in terms of judging TVs.	212	42.8	150	30.3	46	9.3	36	7.3	51	10.3	495	3.88
n. I always like to join discussions on TVs.	211	42.6	145	29.3	66	13.3	29	5.9	44	8.9	495	3.91
o. I always like to gather information and know about the latest makes of TVs (I, therefore, collect information from hard & electronic sources).	212	42.8	136	27.5	62	12.5	38	7.7	47	9.5	495	3.86

N = 495 cases, n= number of valid observations, 0 missing value This table reports the levels of agreement which have been subsequently used to determine if there is a difference between information givers and seekers regarding opinion leaders' characteristics.

To examine whether information givers have the characteristics of opinion leaders (greater exposure to mass media, greater social participation, more innovative or early adopters or buyers of new products, more influential, more experienced, have higher level of self-confidence, and take more interest or tend to

know more about the area of interest) than information seekers, a cross-tabulation analysis was carried out between Saudis who searched for information and those who gave information to others. This was done to identify information givers and seekers. Table 4 shows the following results:

Table 4: Saudis' Who Searched for Information by Saudis' Who Gave Information

Search For Information / Give Information		Yes	No	Total
Yes	*No.*	*254*	*89*	*343.0*
	% of total	*51.3*	*18.0*	*69.3*
No	No.	112	40	152.0
	% of total	24.8	5.9	30.7
Total	No.	366	129	495
	% of total	73.9	26.1	100.0

495 cases, 0 missing value *This table reports the categories of questionnaire respondents.*

Table 4 indicates that the respondents fall into the following categories, respondents who give and seek information from others (254 respondents); only seek information from others (89 respondents); only give information to others (112 respondents); and, . Neither gives nor seeks information from others (40 respondents). A t-test was carried out between information givers and seekers to see if there are significant differences between them against opinion leaders' characteristics (these characteristics are mentioned earlier in this paper). Table 5 shows the following results

Table 5: Information Givers by Opinion Leaders' Characteristics

Attributes	Level of Influence	N	N	t-Value	Df	Level of Significance
a-Exposure to Mass Media	H	201	112	1.396	199	NS
b- Social Participation	H	201	112	1.422	199	NS
C-Early Adopters or Buyers of New Products	H	201	112	2.351	199	*
d- Level of Influence on Others	H	201	112	4.882	199	**
e- Experience	H	201	112	4.336	199	**
f- Self Confidence	H	201	112	2.388	199	*
g – Interest in the Product	L	201	112	1.234	199	NS

*N = 495 Case 0 Missing value n = number of valid observations NS indicates no significant difference H = High L= Low ** Significant difference at the 0.01 level * Significant difference @ 0.05 This table shows the level of statistical significance between information givers and seekers.*

Exposure to mass media. The A and B statements in Table 3 were designed to investigate respondents' exposure to mass media within the Saudi context. As can be seen from Table 3 the majority (58.8% and 58.8%) of respondents agreed with statements A and B with an overall mean value of 3.48 for the two statements. In order to decide whether to examine exposure to mass media using those scales individually or combined together, reliability analysis was carried out and the results suggested the use of the responses to the scales (i.e., A and B) combined together. The analysis gave a Cronbach Alpha of 0.74.

Table 5 shows that a T-test was used to examine if there is a significant difference between information givers and seekers regarding their exposure to mass media. The results showed no significant difference. This insignificant difference between TV information givers and seekers might be related to the general lack of technical TV information in Saudi Arabia. This lack of information might have prevented information givers to make greater use of it than information seekers. In the West, for example, product information is available at a large scale and, therefore, information givers in this part of the World have a better chance to read and hear about any product than Saudi TV information givers. Further, this finding differs with what is reported in the literature, which suggested that the extent to which opinion leaders read in the media related to their topics/products, will be significantly greater than among non-leaders.

Social participation. Three statements (c, d, and e of table 3) were used to examine respondents' social participation. As Table 3 shows, the majority (74.1%, 74.7%, and 72%) of respondents agreed with the statements, with an overall mean value of 3.93 for the three statements. Reliability analysis for the three statements was conducted and this gave a Cronbach Alpha of 0.73 which suggested the use of the responses to the scales combined together. A T-test was carried out to examine if there is a significant difference exists between information givers and seekers regarding their social participation. The results, revealed in Table (5), indicate that no significant difference was found. The lack of significant difference between TV information givers and seekers could be related to the fact that, almost all Saudis tend to have high social participation. For example, regular visits to friends and relatives, and participation in weddings and birthdays are very common in Saudi Arabia. Probably, this is why this study could not detect any difference between the two groups. This finding seems to differ from the results of other studies which stressed that, in order for opinion leaders to spread messages about an innovation, they must have interpersonal networks with their followers. Opinion leaders must be accessible. One indication of such accessibility is social participation as face-to-face communication about new ideas occurs at meetings of formal organizations and through informal discussions.

Early Adopters or New Product Buying

Two statements (f and g of Table 3) were designed to examine if respondents are early adopters or tend to buy the product when it is new to the Saudi market. Table 3 shows that Saudis have agreed with the two statements with percentages of 73.5% and 71.9%, and overall mean value of 3.89 for the two statements. Reliability analysis was carried out and the results suggest the use of the response to the two scales combined together (Cronbach Alpha= 0.81). Table 5 shows that a T-test was used to examine if information givers have perceived themselves to have a significantly higher level of adopting or buying new TVs than information seekers at the 0.05 level. Therefore, information givers in Saudi Arabia tend to be early purchasers of TVs than information seekers. The early adoption of new TVs might be related to their willingness to enhance their self-image and reputation. For example, Saudis, usually, perceive those who buy new products as rich, confident and have high social class. These results are consistent with those in the literature. The literature suggested that innovativeness is related to the degree to which an individual is relatively earlier in adopting an innovation than other members of the system. It was also reported that the relatively earlier, means earlier in terms of actual time of adoption, rather than whether individuals perceived they have adopted the innovation relatively earlier than others in their system. Similar results were also found in the literature on the concept of the market "Maven" to describe the diffuser marketplace information. A market Maven was also seen as individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets; and then initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information. In addition, market Mavens can be opinion leaders or early purchasers of particular products. Market Mavens' general market place expertise should lead them to earlier awareness of new products (hence, an increased likelihood of early adoption).

Information Givers Influence on Others Purchase Decision of TVs

Two statements (h and i of Table 3) were used to investigate Saudis' influence on others purchase decision of TVs. The distribution of the five point scale used to test this characteristic is shown in Table 3 and it can be seen that Saudis have agreed with the two statements with averages of 70.3% and 71.9%, and an overall mean value of 3.84 for the two statements. Reliability analysis for the two scales was made and the results gave a Cronbach Alpha of 0.76. A t-test was used and as can be seen in Table 5, the results show a significant difference between information givers and information seekers regarding their level of influence on others' purchase decision of TVs at the 0.01 level. Hence, information givers in Saudi Arabia tend to have greater influence on others' purchase decision of TVs than information seekers. This influence might have come as a result of the experience that those information givers have. These results are in agreement with those reported in the literature. Hence, one can say early purchasers can exert either a passive or active influence on later purchasers. For visible products such as TVs, much information can be transmitted simply by product use. In summary, research suggests opinion leaders and early adopters influence other consumers because of their product-specific knowledge or expertise.

Experience. The statements (j and k of Table 3) were designed to examine Saudis' experience of selling, buying, and repairing TVs. Table 3 indicates that Saudis have agreed with the statements of j and k with a majority of 72.3% and 68.7%, with an overall mean value of 3.86 for the two statements. Reliability analysis for the two statements resulted in a Cronbach Alpha of 0.79, which suggests the use of the response to the two scales combined together. As Table 5 indicates, a T-test was carried out and the results showed that information givers have had a significantly higher level of experience with TVs than information seekers at the 0.01 level. Thus, information givers in Saudi Arabia are more likely to have higher level of experience in selling, buying and repairing TVs than information seekers. Therefore, it can be said that, in the case of the opinion leaders, knowledge or expertise has been viewed as arising from involvement with a product or product class. In the case of the early adopter, this expertise arises from product usage or purchase experience. Hence, in explaining the informational superiority of opinion leaders and early adopters, researchers have emphasized their involvement and experiences with specific products.

Self confidence. Two statements (l and m of Table 3), were designed to examine respondents' confidence when buying TVs. The results revealed in Table 3 showed that the majority (71.7 and 73.1%) of Saudis agreed with statements (l and m), with an overall mean value of 3.84 for the two statements. When reliability analysis was conducted, the results gave a Cronbach Alpha of 0.77. Again, a t-test was used and the results showed that information givers have had a significantly higher level of self confidence when buying TVs than information seekers at the 0.05 level, see Table (5). Hence, the results suggested that information givers in Saudi Arabia tend to have a greater self confidence than information seekers. This high self-confidence among TV information givers might have come as a result of the high level of the experience they had and their regular adoption of new TVs. These findings are consistent with existing literature and, therefore, it can be concluded that, as opinion leaders have a greater interest in the product class, they should also have higher knowledge and possibly experience, and this should result in opinion leaders having higher specific self confidence also.

Level of Interest in the Product Area

The statements (n and o of Table 3) were used to examine respondents' interest in TVs. Table 3 shows that the majority (71.9 and 70.3%) of Saudis agreed with the statements (n and o), with an overall mean value of 3.88 for the two statements. Reliability analysis was carried out and the results gave a Cronbach Alpha of 0.78, which suggested the use of the response to the two sales combined. As can be seen in Table 5, a t-test was used to examine if a significant difference exists between information givers and seekers regarding their level of interest in TVs. The results showed no significant difference was found.

These findings seem to differ from the results reported in the literature which indicated that, opinion leaders are more exposed to mass media, tend to be more socially active, fashion conscious, independent and are more interested in the topic under discussion than others are. The results, also, showed that information givers were more innovative or early adopters (or buyers of new TVs), more influential, more experienced with TVs, and have higher level of self confidence when buying TVs than information seekers. However, no significant difference was found between information givers and seekers in terms of their level of exposure to mass media, level of social participation, and their level of interest in the product area (TVs). Therefore, one could conclude that information givers in Saudi Arabia tend to have some characteristics of opinion leaders such as innovativeness, influence on others' purchase decision, experience in the product area, and higher levels of self confidence when buying such a product.

Opinion leadership. Having discussed the characteristics of information givers and seekers, it was necessary to investigate if opinion leadership regarding TVs exists in the Saudi context. Before doing so, it should be noted that the following new variables were computed after the reliability analysis was carried out (Table 6 below shows the new variables and their definitions):

Variable 1 = a + b /2 ; Variable 2 = c + d + e /3 ; Variable 3 = f + g /2
Variable 4 = h + i /2; Variable 5 = j + k /2 ; Variable 6 = l + m /2
Variable 7 = n + o /2.

Table 6: Opinion Leadership Variable Definition

Variable	Variable Definition
Variable 1	Respondents' exposure to mass media.
Variable 2	Respondents' social participation.
Variable 3	Respondents' purchase of a new TV when it is new to the Saudi market (innovativeness).
Variable 4	Respondents' influence on others purchase decision of TVs.
Variable 5	Respondents' experience on TVs.
Variable 6	Respondents' confidence when buying TVs.
Variable 7	Respondents' interest TVs.

This table provides definitions for the seven variables used in the study after the reliability analysis was carried out.

As was indicated earlier, the existing literature on opinion leadership indicates that opinion leaders tend to have greater exposure in media, greater participation tends to be early adopters or purchases of new products (more innovative), more influential, more experienced in the product area, have higher level of self confidence when buying such a product, and have greater interest in the product area than non-leaders (followers). Therefore, it could be argued that respondents who scored very highly on these social characteristics (Variable 1…, Variable 7) are more likely to be opinion leaders than followers and vice-versa.

In order to isolate from the sample those who scored highly on these seven social characteristics and those who did not, the aggregate score was taken by a simple mathematical process (Variable 1 + Variable 2 + …., + Variable 7). If the distribution of the sample on the aggregate score is normally distributed, then opinion leaders could be classified as respondents scoring ≥ the mean value + standard deviation, and followers as respondents scoring≤ the mean value – standard deviation. The following results describe the distribution of the sample on the aggregation of (Variable 1 + Variable 2 + …… + Variable 7):

Mean = 16.76 *Standard deviation = 4.11*
Kurtosis = -.68 *Valid observations = 495*
Skewness = -.066

As can be seen from the above results, the sample skewness and the kurtosis are small (-.066) and -.68, consequently), which means that the sample approximates well to a normal distribution. Thus, opinion leaders and followers were classified on the basis of two logical conditions. These conditions are:

a. if the score for some respondents on the aggregate of (Variable 1 + Variable 2 + … + Variable 7) ≥ m + σ, then those respondents could be classified as opinion leaders.
b. if the score for other respondents on the aggregate of (Variable 1 + Variable 2 + … + Variable 7) ≤ m - σ, then those respondents could be classified as non-leaders (followers).

Based on the analysis, Table 7 shows the number of respondents who were classified as opinion leaders and those who were classified as non-leaders (followers).

Table 7: Number of Respondents Who Classified as Opinion Leaders and Non-Leaders (Followers)

	Response	
Cases	**n**	**%**
Saudis' Who Classified as Opinion Leaders	81	17.8
Saudi's Who Classified as Followers	88	16.4
Neither Leaders nor Followers	326	65.9
Total	495	100.0

n = numbers of valid observations 495 cases This table breaks down the respondents into leaders and followers.

These transformations have created a new variable which distinguished between those who are and are not likely to be opinion leaders. It should be noted that this variable is based upon the assumptions that TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia tend to have greater exposure to mass media, greater social participation, are adopters or buyers of new TVs, more influential, more experienced with TVs, have higher self confidence, and take more interest or tend to know more TVs than non-leaders (followers).

Opinion Leaders and the Two-Step Flow Model

The concept of opinion leadership is based on the idea that a group of individuals referred to as "opinion leaders" or "influentials" in a community create an additional stage in the communication process, whereby information flows from the formal media through those opinion leaders to the general public. This concept is part of a model known as the Two-Step Flow of Communication was originally identified by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). This model hypothesized that mass media does not influence an audience directly, but works through a network of interpersonal communication. The aim in this section is to investigate, after all those years, the accuracy of the Two-Step Flow model of communication within the Saudi context, and for the fact that this model was never investigated in Saudi Arabia. This will be done by examining whether opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia only give TV information to others or whether they give and seek information from others and not from impersonal sources. In order to conduct the investigation, opinion leaders and followers were cross-tabulated with respondents' categories (seekers-givers, givers, seekers, and those who neither give nor seek information from others) as shown in Table (4). Many important conclusions were reached and highlighted in Table 8.

Seekers-givers. The first category (seekers-givers) shows that the expected cases for opinion leaders are 33 and the observed cases are 52. This means that there are more opinion leaders classified as information seekers and givers than expected. The expected cases for followers are 33 and the observed cases are 24, which mean there are fewer followers who classified as information seekers and givers than expected. Since the Z value for opinion leaders = 1.9 and p = 0.037, it could be said that opinion leaders are more likely to be information seekers and givers than followers at the 95% level of confidence. Thus, the null hypothesis, which says that the chances for opinion leaders or followers being a seeker-giver are the same, is rejected.

Table 8: Opinion Leaders and Followers by Respondents' Categories

Category	Opinion Leaders			Followers			Level of Significance
	Observed Cases	Expected Cases	Z Value	Observed Cases	Expected Cases	Z Value	
a. Givers-Seekers	52	33	1.9	24	33	-1.9	*
b. Seekers only	2	10	-2.5	23	17	2.5	**
c. Givers only	13	21	-.9	18	16	.9	NS
d. Neither Givers nor Seekers	3	6	-.9	7	6	.9	NS
Total	70	70		72	72		

NS indicates no significant difference was found. 495 Cases included in the sample. 0 Missing value.
** Significant Difference at the 0.05 level (P = 0.037)*
*** Significant difference at the 0.01 level (P = 0.011).*
The Z value is an expression of the magnitude of the difference between the observed and expected values. The larger the absolute z value, the greater the difference. For a Z value ≥ + 1.7, we can be 90% confidentthat a genuine difference occurs.
This table shows the results of investigating whether opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia only give TV information to others or give and seek information from others.

Seekers. The second category (seekers) shows that the expected cases for opinion leaders as information seekers are 10 while the observed cases are only 2. Thus, there are less opinion leaders classified as information seekers than expected. The expected cases for followers are 17 and the observed cases are 23. Therefore, there are more followers classified as seekers than expected. Since the Z value for followers is 2.5 and p = 0.011, it can be said that followers are more likely to be information seekers than opinion leaders at the 99% level of confidence. The null hypothesis which says that the chances for opinion leaders or followers being information seekers are the same is rejected. Based on the cross-tabulation analysis, it could be concluded that TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia tend to be information givers as well as information seekers, while followers tend to be information seekers. This is interesting because it shows opinion leaders value the acquisition of information from personal sources, just as much as they like to give information. The research finding which suggested that TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia tend to be information seekers as well as information givers was strengthened. A Mann-Whitney rank sum test was carried out between opinion leaders and followers to examine the amount of information sought by them from others, and the amount of information given by them to others. Table 9 shows the results.

Table 9: Opinion Leaders and Two Way of Communication (Receiving and Giving Information to Others)

Cases	Level of Giving & Receiving	n	N	P-Value	Level of Significance
- Amount of Information Sought by Opinion Leaders From Friends, Relatives, Colleagues, Neighbors, etc.	H	81	169	0.021	**
- Amount of Information Given by opinion Leaders to Friends, Relatives, Colleagues, Neighbors, etc.	H	81	169	0.019	**

*n = number of valid observations , N = number of cases included in the test, H = High ** Significant difference at the 0.01 level. This table shows that Saudi opinion leaders value the acquisition of information from personal sources, and opinion leaders tend to be information-seekers.*

Table 9 indicates that there was a significant difference between opinion leaders and non-leaders (followers), regarding the amount of information sought by them from friends, relatives, colleagues or neighbors at the 0.01 level (p= 0.021). Opinion leaders, as the same Table shows, have searched for a significantly larger amount of information, from others, than non-leaders (followers). Also, Table 8 shows that a significant difference exists between opinion leaders and non-leaders (followers) regarding the amount of information given by them to friends, relatives, colleagues or neighbors at the 0.01 level (p= 0.019). As shown, opinion leaders were found to have given a significantly larger amount of information to others than non-leaders (followers) at the 99% level of significance. The research results suggest that

TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia will not only seek and give information to others, but will also search for a larger amount of information than non-leaders (followers). These results also show the inaccuracy of the Two-Step Flow model, which suggests that information flows in two steps from mass media to opinion leaders and from them to the general public.

The simplicity of the Two-Step Flow model is inappropriate for consumers in Saudi Arabia. People with the social characteristics of opinion leaders do not receive information from the media and then pass on this information to others. In the Saudi context, the concept of opinion leadership applies to people who are engaged in the process of seeking and giving information from and to personal sources to a greater degree than others who do not have the same social characteristics. The Saudi TV opinion leader is, therefore, someone who communicates to a greater degree with other members of society. The opinion leader is not just a provider of respected information as the Two-Step model suggests. Although the Two-Step Flow was a historic breakthrough in understanding communications, the re-examination of this model in the Saudi context shows that it is no longer an accurate and complete model of the process. For one thing, it views the audience as passive receivers of information.

Opinion Leaders and Demographic Characteristics: Authors and researchers could not agree on the demographic characteristics of opinion leaders. Some views described opinion leaders as being younger, better educated, have higher incomes and better occupations. Others reported that there is no significant difference between opinion leaders and non-leaders regarding demographic characteristics except for higher incomes and occupational levels. Therefore, the aim here is to find out if significant differences regarding demographic characteristics exist between those with the social characteristics of opinion leaders and those without the social characteristics of opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia.

Education and Opinion Leadership: In order to investigate whether opinion leadership in Saudi Arabia is related to education, a cross-tabulation analysis was carried out between opinion leaders and non-leaders (followers), and the level of education of respondents. Table 10 shows the results.

As Table 10 shows, no significant difference exists between opinion leaders and followers regarding their level of education. The results did not show if opinion leaders would have higher levels of education than followers. This could be because Saudis regard this type of appliances as an essential part of their furniture and, hence, Saudis would usually have, at least, two or more TVs at their homes. This habit of owning more than two TV could have provided Saudis with lots of TV information, and this could explain the lack of significant difference between the two groups. These results tend to support the earlier findings in this article, which suggested that information givers in Saudi Arabia are more likely to have higher level of experience with TVs than information seekers.

Age Groups And Opinion Leadership: In order to examine if significant differences exist between TV opinion leaders and non-leaders with regard to age groups, a cross tabulation analysis was carried out between them and age groups. The analysis showed no significant differences exist between TV opinion leaders and non-leaders with regard to age groups. Therefore, the researcher was unable to conclude whether TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia would be younger or older than non-leaders. Table 11 shows the results.

Levels of Monthly Income and Opinion Leadership: When opinion leaders and followers were cross-tabulated with Saudi levels of monthly income, the results showed that insignificant difference exist between them. The results are provided in Table 12. The lack of significant difference between the two groups could be related to the fact that, Saudis, regardless of their levels of income, are more likely to have many TVs and, therefore, have similar experience with this type of product.

Gender and Opinion Leadership: When opinion leaders and non-leaders (followers) were cross-tabulated with respondents' gender, the results showed that no significant differences exist (see Table 13). Therefore, it could be concluded that TV opinion leadership in Saudi Arabia does not relate to gender.

Table 10: Opinion Leaders and Followers by the Levels of Education

Job Category	Opinion Leaders Observed Cases	Opinion Leaders Expected Cases	Z Value	Followers Observed Cases	Followers Expected Cases	Z Value	Level of Significance
a. Read and Write	19	18	0.3	17	20	-0.3	NS
b. Primary/Intermediate	21	26	-1.3	24	21	-1.3	NS
c. Secondary/Pre-University Diploma	11	15	-1.1	17	15	-1.1	NS
d. University/ High Diploma.	16	15	0.3	13	16	-0.3	NS
e. Master/PhD	14	13	0.2	12	15	0.2	NS
Total	81	87		83	87		

NS indicates no significant difference was found. 169 valid observations. 495 Cases included in the sample.0 Missing value. The z value is an expression of the magnitude of the difference between the observed and expected values. The larger the absolute z value, the greater the difference. For a Z value ≥ + 1.7, we can be 90% confident a genuine difference occurs. This table shows that impact of level of education on opinion leaders and followers.

Table 11: Opinion Leaders and Non-Leaders by Age Groups

Age Groups	Opinion Leaders Observed Cases	Opinion Leaders Expected Cases	Z Value	Followers Observed Cases	Followers Expected Cases	Z Value	Level of Significance
a. < 19 years	8	6	1.0	11	12	-.1	NS
b. 20-29	10	11	.1	13	12	.1	NS
c. 30-39	19	21	-.1	21	20	.2	NS
d. 40-49	26	27	-.2	27	26	.2	NS
e. 50-59	13	12	-.1	12	13	-.1	NS
f. ≥60 years	5	4	.1	4	5	-.1	NS
Total	81	81		88	88		NS

NS indicates no significant difference was found. 169 valid observations. 495 Cases included in the sample. 0 Missing Value. The z value is an expression of the magnitude of the difference between the observed and expected values. The larger the absolute z value, the greater the difference. For a Z value ≥ + 1.7, we can be 90% confident a genuine difference occurs. This table shows the impact of age on opinion leaders and followers is not statistically significant.

Table 12: Opinion Leaders and Non-Leaders (Followers) by Levels of Monthly Income

Levels of Monthly Income	Opinion Leaders Observed Cases	Opinion Leaders Expected Cases	Z Value	Followers Observed Cases	Followers Expected Cases	Z Value	Level of Significance
a. < SR 5000	2	3	-.1	5	4	.1	NS
b. SR 5001-10000	8	9	-.2	15	12	.2	NS
c. SR 10001- 15000	20	18	.8	18	20	-.8	NS
d. SR 15001-20000	15	16	-.2	17	16	.2	NS
e. SR 20001- 25000	27	20	1.7	15	22	-1.7	NS
f. SR 25001- 30000	4	6	-.9	7	6	.9	NS
g. SR30001- 35000	2	4	-.8	3	2	.8	NS
h. SR35001- 40000	2	3	-.7	4	3	.8	NS
i. ≥SR40001	1	2	-.7	4	3	.7	NS
Total	81	81		88	88		NS

NS indicates no significant difference was found. 169 valid observations. 495 Cases included in the sample. 0 Missing Value. The z value is an expression of the magnitude of the difference between the observed and expected values. The larger the absolute z value, the greater the difference. For a Z value ≥ + 1.7, we can be 90% confident a genuine difference occurs. This table shows that monthly income has no significant impact on leaders and followers.

Moreover, the number of male opinion leaders was larger than female opinion leaders because male respondents have dominated the sample (438 male respondents out of 495). This could be the reason for the lack of a significant difference between both sexes regarding this matter.

Occupation Categories and Opinion Leadership: The respondents' occupations were classified into nine categories, and when a cross-tabulation was carried out between opinion leaders and non-leaders, and the nine categories, the analysis produced the results shown in Table 14.

Table 13: Opinion Leaders and Non-Leaders (Followers) by Gender

Gender	Opinion Leaders			Followers			Level of Significance
	Observed Cases	Expected Cases	Z Value	Observed Cases	Expected Cases	Z Value	
a. Males	52	48	0.5	45	50	-0.5	NS
b. Female.	29	33	-1.0	43	38	1.0	NS
Total	81	81		88	88		

NS indicates no significant difference was found. 495 Cases included in the sample. 169 valid observations. 0 Missing value. The z value is an expression of the magnitude of the difference between the observed and expected values. The larger the absolute z value, the greater the difference. For a Z value ≥ + 1.7, we can be 90% confident a genuine difference occurs.This table shows that the gender factor does not have significant impact on opinion leaders and followers.

Trading, Business and Related Jobs: By looking at the third category (trading, business and related jobs), it can be seen that the expected cases for opinion leaders are 7 and the observed cases are 14.This means that there are more opinion leaders who had trading, business and related jobs than expected. The expected cases for followers are 17 and the observed cases are 9, which means that there are fewer followers who had this type of jobs than expected. The Z value for opinion leaders = 1.9 and p= 0.048, therefore, it could be concluded that opinion leaders are more likely to have Trading, Business and Related Jobs than followers at the 95% level.

Teaching And Related Jobs: The fourth category (teaching and related jobs) shows that the expected cases for opinion leaders are 12 and the observed cases are 5. This means that there are less opinion leaders who had teaching and related jobs than expected. The same category shows that the expected cases for followers are 7 and the observed cases are 13. This means that there were more followers who had teaching and related jobs than expected. Since the z value for followers = 1.9 and p= 0.032, it could be said that followers are more likely to have teaching and related jobs than opinion leaders at the 95% level. These findings show that followers have had teaching and related jobs and TV opinion leaders have had trading, business and related jobs.

Therefore, TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia tend to have different jobs from non-leaders (followers). Moreover, it could be suggested that, those trading, business and related jobs which have been performed by information givers were related to buying and selling TVs or other durables/appliances. The analysis of TV opinion leadership showed that, when the aggregate score for the seven social characteristics (exposure to mass media, social participation, innovativeness, influence on others purchase decision, experience with TVs, self confidence when making the purchase decision, and level of interest in TVs) was taken, opinion leaders were found more likely to have these characteristics than non-leaders (followers). TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia were also found to have given and sought information from others. Therefore, the research results, on the re-examination of the two-step flow model in the Saudi context, support the existing literature on the inaccuracy of this model of communication and suggest a more active role for the opinion leader than suggested in that model.

Table 14: Opinion Leaders and Non-Leaders (Followers) by Job Categories

Job Category	Opinion Leader			Follower			
	Observed Cases	Expected Cases	Z Value	Observed Cases	Expected Cases	Z Value	Level of Significance
a. Oil Producing, Petrochemicals, energy & Related Jobs.	12	9	0.2	9	11	-0.2	NS
b. Administrative, managerial and related jobs	11	8	1.1	7	10	-1.1	NS
c. Trading, Business and Related Jobs.	14	7	1.9	9	17	-2.0	*1
d. Teaching and Related Jobs.	5	12	-1.9	13	7	1.9	*2
e. Transport, driving, Labor and Related Jobs	6	7	-.2	7	6	.2	NS
f. Services (Financial, banking, insurance, investment and related jobs).	9	12	-.9	11	9	.9	NS
g. Medical and related jobs.	3	4	-1.0	9	7	1.0	NS
h. Professional (e.g., pilot), technical and related jobs (e.g., computer).	5	6	-.9	7	5	.9	NS
i. Government (e.g., Military and Government Officials services) and all other related jobs	16	16	0.0	16	16	0.0	NS
j. Others (please specify)	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	
Total	81	81		88	88		

*NS indicates no significant difference was found. 495 Cases included in the sample. 169 valid observations. 0 Missing value. *1 Significant difference at the 0.05 level (P=0.48). *2 Significant difference at the 0.05 level (P=0.032). The z value is an expression of the magnitude of the difference between the observed and expected values. The larger the absolute z value, the greater the difference. For a Z value ≥ + 1.7, we can be 90% confident a genuine difference occurs. This table shows that generally, job factor does not have a significant impact on opinion leaders and follower. However, trading and teaching jobs do have some significance.*

CONCLUSION

This article was intended to find out if Saudis give information to other TV buyers and whether information givers differ from information seekers in certain characteristics (exposure to mass media, social participation, innovativeness or adoption or buying new TVs, influence on others purchase decision, experience on TVs, self-confidence when buying TVs, and level of interest in TVs). Also, an attempt was made to find out if opinion leaders differ from non-leaders (followers) regarding the above mentioned characteristics and their demographic factors. The results showed that Saudis give information to other TV buyers, and those information givers were found to be more innovative or early adopters or buyers of new TVs, more influential, had greater experience with TVs, and had higher self confidence when buying TVs than information seekers. Therefore, it could be concluded that information givers tend to have some of the characteristics of opinion leaders. The results, also, showed that there was no significant difference between information givers and seekers regarding the level of exposure to mass media, level of social participation, and level of interest in TVs. Moreover, the findings indicated that TV opinion leadership exists in Saudi Arabia. When the aggregate score of the seven social characteristics (mentioned earlier) was taken, the results showed that opinion leaders were more likely to have these characteristics than non-leaders (followers). The results also indicated that TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia were both information givers and seekers, which, in turn, suggest the inaccuracy of the Two-Step Flow model of communication for the Saudi context. Thus, a multi-step model of communication would be more accurate and suitable in describing the flow of information amongst TV buyers.

Also, the results of this study showed that significant differences existed between opinion leaders and non-leaders with regard to one demographic factor (occupation categories), while no significant differences were found between them regarding all other demographic factors. This supports the existing literature regarding the inclusiveness on opinion leadership and demographics. The existence of TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia could be taken a step further to suggest, what was reported in the literature, the important role opinion leaders may play in creating awareness about new products, and the impact they may play at all stages of the purchase decision processes as personal sources of information. Thus, using opinion leaders by marketers, producers or manufactures in their promotional strategies may create, for example, more convincing promotional campaigns for Saudis and therefore, better sales volume. Further, creating a positive product phobia would make Saudis more willing to buy a particular product. This is important when marketers take into account the fact that "advertising cannot persuade people unless they are willing to be persuaded".

However, the study has some limitations. Although the study established the main characteristics of TV opinion leaders in Saudi Arabia, it failed to establish whether there was any relationship between Saudis' marital status and TV opinion leadership. The researcher had to exclude this "demographic variable" as 96% of the respondents have not answered this question. This issue is always considered personal and sensitive for Saudis and therefore, could be the reason for not answering the question. Furthermore, the following studies could be carried out to build onto this study for further improvement and understanding of the concepts of interpersonal information and opinion leadership in Saudi Arabia: First, the impact of electronic means of communications on the use of interpersonal sources of information and opinion leadership in the Saudi context, and would it be more influential than the "face-to-face" form of communication. Second, understanding whether Saudis' formal and informal means of communication are based, mainly, on "electronic" or "face-to-face" interaction when buying their TVs, and for what reasons. The suggested studies could provide more valuable data which could help in the improvement of understanding the importance of such concepts for Saudis, particularly, when making their purchase decision on durables/appliances. Those studies and maybe other related ones could help marketing managers in developing more effective marketing strategies. Third, though every care was taken to validate the findings of this study, other studies using different methods of data collection are recommended. The recommendation is important in order to validate the finding of this study. Forth, the findings of this study may not be generalized to other countries of the Gulf Region. Further studies, covering other countries of the Arabian Gulf, are needed before any generalizations are made.

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BIOGRAPHY

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