



Exploring female siblings as social media influencers in the Arab World

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This paper aims to explore a new phenomenon sweeping across the Arab World of female sibling social media influencers. Social media influencers are well known for having started as informed bloggers and social networkers. They built for themselves an aura of authority in certain areas thus attracting people to follow them; some of their followers become fans. This paper will give an overview of the phenomenon of female sibling social media influencers, drawing upon the case study of a number of examples of female sibling social media influencers from the Arab World. It will look at why this is an important phenomenon, how female social media influencers behave online and the common characteristics they have. This paper is of exploratory nature and draws the attention to a growing phenomenon worth exploring and researching further. The paper identifies a number of potential areas and opportunities for future research.

Key words: *influencers, youth, Arab World, female sibling influencers*

Starting global and looking in regionally

It was estimated globally in 2022, in every 1 minute of the day: 5.9 million searches were conducted on Google, 2.1 million active users on Facebook users, 3.67 million videos were watched on YouTube and Instagram users shared 66K photos (Heitman, 2022). These numbers demonstrate how integral social media have become in daily lives. There are many different players on social media such as vloggers, celebrities, gamers, social media influencers and others. Usage of the internet and social media are mirrored across the world and indeed for the Arab World (also known as the Middle East and North Africa) the pattern of usage is similar as there has been a soaring rise in numbers of users across all platforms.

The soaring rise in user numbers is influenced by the fact that most Arab states are comprised of large young populations who are tech-savvy (Sabbagh, Mourad, Kabbara,



Shehadi, & Samman, 2012). The other recent factor which contributed to the soaring numbers was the COVID-19 pandemic during which many people turned to the internet to become more connected online and pass time indoors instead of outdoor activities which were limited in most countries. This numbers are expected to continue to rise post-COVID-19. The last factor which contributed to the soaring numbers is the increase in internet services and speed at relatively low costs across the Arab World (Kende, 2020). In his latest study about social media in the Middle East, Radcliffe states that the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of social media and that the numbers are soaring (Radcliffe, 2021).

A powerful force: Social media influencers

One of the most important players on the social media scene are social media influencers who are present on all platforms: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, which are the heaviest used social media in the Arab World (Radcliffe & Abuhmaid, 2021). Facebook and YouTube refer to social media influencers as ‘creators’ basically meaning those who produce content for them. On Instagram, social media influencers are referred to as ‘Instafamous’ or ‘Instagrammers’ (Marwick, 2015).

There are many ways to define a social media influencer: a basic way to define them is based on fan base or follower numbers using 1 Million as the divisive figure. So social media influencers who have 1 Million or more followers and subscribers are considered to be mega social media influencers, those with less than 1 Million but more than a 100K are considered macro social media influencers. Those with small numbers and a limited following are considered micro social media influencers (Ruiz-Gomez, 2019). Another way to look at social media influencers is through types of content such as bloggers, YouTubers, podcasters and social media posts or through their expertise, or what are they good at.

Regardless of the definitions, the premise of a social media influencer remains the same: it is an individual who produces content and has garnered an audience of followers and fans. Consequently, they are highly sought by companies to promote their products and services. At the surface, it seems to be a win-win situation to all those involved: influencers who have fans and followers help companies promote their products, services and brands. In a sense everyone wins; audiences get content which informs or entertains them, influencers get fame and money, and companies/brands get promoted and ultimately sell more of their services or products. The platforms are also guaranteed that they have a continuous flow of content to continue to exist and attract more advertisers.

During the Covid-19 pandemic many governments realized this power of social media influencers and used them to propagate their messages in relation to the behavioral changes needed to face the virus, to amplify key messages and also to counter the misinformation. For example, in Jordan, the Ministry of Culture partnered with a number of Jordanian social



media influencers to launch an awareness campaign to combat COVID-19. In the videos, the social media influencers showcased tips and ways to help children use their spare time at home efficiently under the indoor quarantine (UNICEF, 2020) (OECD, 2020). In Egypt, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) partnered with social media influencers, to amplify messages around the stigma associated with COVID-19 (UNFPA, 2020).

In spite of this rosy picture and worthy use, social media influencers may also have a negative influence on their fans and followers. A number of studies have already highlighted the adverse impact and influence of social media influencers on audiences, especially younger audiences. For example, a study found that social media influencers have an indirect influence in how youth construct their online identities. The study raised a number of alarm bells, it found that youth take social media influencers as role models and this is alarming given that most social media influencers were ordinary people that transformed into social media influencers, many did not have a clear purpose or messages in mind so are they best placed to become role models? The second alarm bell raised is the disconnect between parents and their youth children in terms of what they follow or who are they fans of. The third alarm bell raised is the development of parasocial relations between the youth and the social media influencers who eventually play an indirect role in shaping their attitudes and behaviours and may not be best placed to do so (Ezzat, 2020). Another study explored the associations among social media influencers and e-cigarette use behaviours, especially youth (Vassey et al., 2022). One of the main things they found was that Asian and US social media influencers had five to six times more teenage followers compared to the European social media influencers. One of the interesting findings of this study was that social media influencers often collaborate with multiple industries (e.g., fashion, beauty products, healthy lifestyle) in addition to e-cigarette brands, in which case these social media influencers could be considered an even higher risk for youth compared with those who post exclusively about e-cigarettes. Again, confirming negative and unfavorable influence and impact social media influencers have on young audiences. Another study looked at the impact of social media influencer marketing on the purchase intentions of youth in UAE. The key finding was that social media influencers had an influence on the youth to push them to search about more information about the product and assess it (Radwan, Mousa, Mohamed, & Youssef, 2021).

These studies and many more demonstrate how social media influencers play a role with their audiences in terms of influence and impact. Therefore, it is worth exploring the phenomenon of sibling social media influencers given the lack of studies around it and the potential influence of social media influencers on audiences especially youth.



From individual influencers to families of influencers

Given that presence on social media with a following achieves monetization, the numbers of social media influencers are growing exponentially daily, covering every topic under the sun on all the well-known and lesser-known platforms. A typical social media influencer is usually an individual presenting their content across all social media platforms. However, recently, social media influencers have started to appear online in families giving rise to a new phenomenon; a family social media influencers and in some cases siblings of social media influencers whether sisters or brothers.

In the traditional models of economy, family businesses accounted for a large percentage of the companies operating in the market providing and creating many jobs. Globally, we grew up hearing of the Rockefeller, Walton and Mars, families building empires. In a parallel world today, social media platforms are giving a space for families to have a voice and everyday new families of influencers are appearing. There are many forms of families of influencers: couples, couples with children, siblings and whole families small and extended such as the Kardashians, the Bucket List Family, Family LaBrant, Familia Diamond, Family Fizz, the Holderness Family, the LeRoys and We Are The Davises (FeedSpot, 2020). It is as if they look to replicate the successful model of family business but in an online environment. This paper will primarily focus on examples from the Arab World and Egypt specifically.

Literature review & importance of the topic

In terms of literature which covers sibling social media influencers in the Arab World, there is very little on this topic. There are a number of studies on the genre of ‘family influencers’ conducted in the West. As such the study on the new genre of microcelebrity formed from mommy bloggers, global micro-microcelebrities, and reality TV families, family influencers (Abidin, 2017). She focuses on two groups of family influencers on social media. Another study looks at mommy social media influencers and professional sharenting. The study focuses on Portuguese mummy and family social media influencers, analysing social media content observed throughout 2.5 years, as well as media discourses on them (Jorge, Marôpo, Coelho, & Novello, 2022). Their key findings include that women’s appearance and their (micro)celebrity as both mothers and entrepreneurs is co-opted for brand endorsement, alone or with their children. Also, that mummy social media influencers gain a cultural and social prominence sustained by their participation in mainstream – news and entertainment – media.

The topic of female sibling social media influencers is important to explore given its evolving nature. Although the numbers of female sibling social media influencers are growing, there is not enough literature about it, whether describing the phenomenon itself or looking at its consequences and impact especially in the Arab World. The topic is also



important because of the players involved: whether they are the social media influencers who are playing an increasingly influential role with their various audiences and groups of people or the youth who are the target of social media influencers and are the heaviest users of social media in the Arab World (Salem, 2017) (Radcliffe & Abuhmaid, 2021).

Naturally, social media have been the subject of numerous studies. However, looking at a niche segment of players such as female sibling social media influencers is less common and given the impact social media influencers have especially on young people it renders importance to the topic and creates a need to study this phenomenon and explore it further.

The female sibling social media influencers of the Arab World

A quick scan of YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok—the top social media in the Arab World—reveals a number of female sibling social media influencers who post content almost daily. Here are some examples from the Arab World:

Ayshah and Fatma Kamel

Dubbed as social media mommies, both Egyptian sisters who are twins are characterized by one being veiled and the other unveiled. They use Instagram as the platform to distribute their content which is sharing their lifestyle including fashion, beauty and modeling.

Fatma started in 2014 and has amassed a following of over 497K followers (on date of writing this paper). Her bio includes wife, mommy, fashion, beauty, model and lifestyle (F. Kamel, 2022). Ayshah also started on Instagram in 2014 and has amassed a following of over 655K followers (as of the date of writing this paper). Her bio includes wife, mama, inner peace is my priority . Ayshah was chosen as one of the top 20 bloggers in Egypt in 2022.

Both sisters operate separately presenting their content on the various platforms, however, in many cases they collaborate and feature other family members in their videos, posts and photographs such as their husbands, mother and other relatives.

Hadia and Layla Ghaleb

Both Egyptian sisters use Instagram as the platform to distribute their content which is sharing their lifestyle including make-up tips, fashion inspiration, and traveling hacks.

Hadia Ghaleb started on Instagram in 2012 and has amassed 2.2 Million followers on Instagram (as of the date of writing this paper. Her bio includes Founder and CEO (H. Ghaleb, 2022). Layla Ghaleb started on Instagram also in 2012 and has amassed 274K followers. Her bio includes artist, dance choreographer and teacher (L. Ghaleb, 2022) .



Both sisters operate separately presenting their content on Instagram, however, in many cases they collaborate and feature each other.

Marwa and Mayada Hassan

Both Egyptian sisters use Instagram as the platform to distribute their content which is sharing their lifestyle including make-up tips and fashion inspiration. Marwa Hassan started in September 2014 and has amassed a following of over 2.5 Million followers on Instagram (as of date of writing this paper). Her bio includes: Fashion, Beauty and Travel (Marwa Hassan, 2022).

Mayada Hassan started in July 2014 on Instagram and has amassed a following of over 401K followers on Instagram (on date of writing this paper). Her bio includes: Lifestyle blogger (Mayada Hassan, 2022).

Both sisters operate separately presenting their content on Instagram, however, in many cases they collaborate and feature each other.

Noor and Banen Stars

Both Iraqi sisters use YouTube and Instagram as the platforms to distribute their content which is sharing their lifestyle including fashion, beauty. Noor, the elder sister, started in 2014 and has amassed 19.2 Million subscribers on YouTube, 12.7 Million followers on Instagram, 3.5 Million followers on Facebook and 148K followers on Twitter (as of the date of writing this paper). She describes herself on Instagram as Arab Woman of the Year 2022, content creation, makeup and business (N. Stars, 2022).

Banen Stars started in 2016 and has amassed 6.5 Million subscribers on YouTube and 3.5 Million followers on Facebook and 3.6 Million followers on Instagram (as of the date of writing this paper). She introduces herself on YouTube as by writing: Hello everyone :) My name is Baneen, I am 18 years old, and here you will see various videos such as pranks, challenges, cooking, makeup and many other things! On my channel I share with you a lot of time from my life and days, also things that I love such as food, fashion, Japanimation and more (B. Stars, 2022).

Both sisters operate separately presenting their content on the various platforms. However, in many cases they collaborate and feature other family members in their videos, posts and photographs such as their mother and brother.

Zeina and Menna El Fakahany

Both Egyptian sisters use Instagram as the platform to distribute their content which is sharing their lifestyle including make-up tips, fashion inspiration, new mothers' advice and traveling hacks.



Zeina El Fakahany started on Instagram in 2013 and has amassed a following of over 600K followers (as of the date of writing this paper). Her bio includes Egyptian, wife, mother, an introvert with a blog, everyday style + sales (Zeina ElFakahany, 2022).

Menna El Fakahany started in 2018 and has amassed a following of over 450K followers (as of the date of writing this paper.) Her bio includes: wife, mama, believer in balance and positivity advocate (ElFakahany, 2022).

Both sisters operate separately presenting their content on the various platforms, however, in many cases they collaborate together and feature other family members in their videos, posts and photographs such as their husbands, mother, father and brother.

Common threads

Looking across the cases examined in this paper, there are general observations which can be considered as common threads:

Usually, one sibling takes the lead, and the other sibling follows

In the cases included in this paper, all the social media influencers examined—with the exception of the Kamel sisters—one sibling started first then the other followed. It can be assumed, that one starts and shares with the other that it's doable and rewarding and encourages her to go on the same journey. The first one proves that it is viable, lucrative and financially rewarding that it can become a living. In potential future research, this can be explored further through an interview with these social media influencers.

Same vs. different content

There is a tendency for siblings to develop and produce more or less the same content. In the case of the examples in this paper, the sibling social media influencers all showcase their lifestyle, which includes, their makeup, clothes, fashion style and daily activities. The content is almost the same with slight variations. They even run parallel advertising and sponsored reels or stories for the same products/services and this usually takes place around the same time on their separate accounts. In potential future research, this can be explored further through content analysis of their posts, videos and photographs to confirm or negate this. Looking at Zeina and Menna El Fakahany's posts there is a pattern of both of them promoting exactly the same brand, product or service at approximately the same time. For example, they both ran stories for P&G's diaper brand Pampers, Tefal irons and Hero Jam.

Collaboration vs. standalone

A common feature is that although the siblings have separate channels, pages and accounts in all cases they collaborate together in videos, appearing to do things together, which in a sense strengthens their online presence. Zeina and Menna El Fakahany are an example of this. Although each sister has a separate Instagram account they occasionally appear together and publicize the fact that they are sisters. Typically, Noor and Baneen Stars



collaborate frequently as well. In potential future research, this can be explored further to see whether this has specific impact on their fans and followers. Also how does this work with sponsorship and paid promotion?

One sibling social media influencer garners a bigger audience or fanbase than the other

Judging by the numbers of fans for the different sisters in this paper, it does seem that one sibling social media influencer garners a bigger audience than the other. Either simply because she started in terms of the timeline earlier than her sibling or because the audience prefers one over the other or simply due to social media algorithms and organic growth rules. In some cases, the social media influencers run competitions and giveaways which contributes to growth of their audiences. For example, Marwa Hassan has millions of followers, while her sister Mayada has thousands only. The same is the case of Hadia Ghaleb and her sister Layla Ghaleb. Hadia has recently launched her own line of modest swimsuits and branched out further to other areas. This can be explored in future.

Rivalry vs. competition

With sibling social media influencers coming from one family, does this create competition between them or is it more like rivalry? The answer to this question isn't necessarily clear, it will need the social media influencers to be interviewed or a content analysis of their posts to be conducted.

Potential areas and opportunities for future research

This area of study has a huge potential for further research in future and presents a number of opportunities for both qualitative and quantitative research. Different techniques can be employed to seek answers to research questions.

One area is to examine the content created by each sibling social media influencer for example, analyzing the content the sister influencers produce: looking for similarities and differences and how that links in with the audience. Another area is to compare the online behavior of sibling social media influencers, for example the looking at how frequently they post, patterns in posting etc. Comparing and contrasting social media influencers from a collaboration standpoint and rivalry behaviors. Comparisons can take place between the female sibling social media influencers and also comparing those siblings with other male sibling social media influencers or others from another part of the world.

An important concept to look into is sisterhood on social media and how these female sibling influencers create their own community. The last potential area for research is to look from a fan and follower perspective. For example, influencers' relationships with their fans and followers and the influence they exert on them.



Conclusion

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a huge online movement within the Arab world that ended up drastically increasing the number of Arab social media influencers and their fans on social media. Social media influencers have – as the name suggests – a colossal influence on their followers, especially youth. This influence can be positive or negative as proved by numerous studies.

One aspect of the social media scene remains obscure, especially in the Arab world: sibling social media influencers. Many siblings have amassed great amounts of followers on social media, either by appearing on a single account or by operating separately or together. This tactic has allowed them to support each other and build a sense of community for countless youth across social media.

The most famous Arab female sibling social media influencers discussed in this paper – and, indeed, some of the most famous across the Arab world – are Noor and Banen Stars, two sisters who have successfully started their social media presence in 2014 and 2016, and have grown it to massive numbers.

This paper also featured four other pairs of influencers, namely Ayshah and Fatma Kamel, Hadia and Layla Ghaleb, Marwa and Mayada Hassan and Zeina and Menna El Fakahany. It included when each sibling created their social media accounts, and their followers/subscribers on the platforms they are present on. After collecting such information, however, some common patterns are noticeable. For instance, that more often than not, one sibling social media influencer takes the lead by starting their social media accounts and the other follows. Also, one sibling social media influencer gains more traction than the other. There are multiple other common threads, and many can open opportunities for further research.

This paper is just the tip of the iceberg, and it leaves many unanswered questions that can grow into other studies about the phenomenon of sibling social media influencers. For instance, one opportunity for future research on the topic would be the differences and similarities between each sibling's content, posting cadence, etc. Another idea is to observe the sibling social media influencer situation through the perspective of a fan/follower. Sisters as social media influencers is definitely a rich area to be explored and researched further.

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