



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

15th Gulf Research Meeting

Cambridge, 22-24 July 2025

Workshop No. 8

Digital and Social Media Influencers Impact on Developing Country Image in Light of GCC National Visions

1. Directors

Louisa Ha

Professor of Research Excellence in the School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA, and Founding-Editor-in-Chief of the *Online Media and Global Communication* journal

Mohammad Abuljadail

Associate Professor of Marketing Communication and the Vice Dean for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at the Faculty of Communication and Media at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia

2. Abstract

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have the highest rate of internet and social media use per capita in the world. According to the latest UNESCO Crossings Institute report (2023), the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain are among the leading countries for social media usage. In this digital age, digital media and social media influencers have grown to be some of the most important opinion leaders with their high reach, perceived authenticity and credibility among their followers. Not only do many organizations achieve success through digital platforms, but influencers are making an increasingly profound impact on other subject matters which oftentimes turn into social advocacy and activism. Their influence is particularly high on the younger generation, who rely on social media for information and who make up the majority of the population in Gulf countries. Thus, GCC nations have, in their endeavour to achieve national transformation through their various National Agendas, utilized these tools to transform the global perception of their countries. This workshop will delve into how digital media and social media influencers have contributed to re-shaping the national image of the GCC countries.

3. Context

The sources of information and opinion leadership in today's digital era have shifted from traditional news media and other authoritative sources to digital and user-generated sources such as digital and social media. A new phenomenon has emerged referred to as "news-finds-me," where people obtain information and recommendations from the posts fed by the algorithm of social media platforms. Social media has created a new group of opinion leaders that users perceive as expert, impartial and authentic. Apart from the commercial success they achieved on their platforms through the high number of views and followers, their opinions are well-respected and have the power to encourage new practices, perceptions, and social innovations (Ha and Yang, 2023).

However, little research is done on their influence beyond their own area of expertise and especially in the Gulf region where their reach is high and they can be a positive force for reshaping national image. More research is needed to identify the potential for the larger societal good, and contribution they can make to altering the global perception about the Gulf countries. As each of the GCC countries pursues their own National Visions and transforms into modern, globally integrated power players, we must question how and to what extent digital media, social media and the influencers who run them, can contribute to this change.

4. Workshop Focus/Objectives

This workshop aims to understand how digital media and social media influencers from within and outside of the Gulf influence the global perceptions about the region. It aims to: 1. Identify and examine the different types of influencers in the Gulf states such as mega influencers with very high numbers of followers, niche influencers as well as celebrities who build presence online and journalists with social media accounts; 2. Compare and contrast GCC and non-GCC digital media use and social media influencers' level of influence in the Gulf states; 3. Perception by people of different generations in the Gulf states on the GCC and non-GCC influencers and how the reasons (popularity vs. congruence with users' views) for following these influencers affect the persuasiveness of these influencers on them. This will enhance the persuasion and opinion leadership theories and 4. Through understanding the mechanism of the success and limitations of non-GCC and GCC digital media and social media influencers in persuading the public, leaders in the Gulf states can cultivate a new breed of influencers who can act as "brand ambassadors" for the countries and facilitate their shifting country image, taking into account the various national agendas and visions for transformation being pursued in the region while developing policies that curb potential harm caused by influencers who have the power to conversely spread misinformation.

5. Papers Focus/Topics

1. Social Media Influencers from the GCC and non-GCC countries

- Compare the perceived similarities and differences of social media influencers from GCC and non-GCC countries
- Compare the level of trust in social media and digital media among global audiences
- Ethics of influencer marketing in the GCC region
- Platform comparison and how digital media and the various social media platform technologies build relationships
- Innovation category and user knowledge difference in persuasive effects of influencers
- Longevity of influence of social media influencers
- Scope of influence of the influencers
- How trust in social media influencers developed and eroded over time

2. Digital Media Role in shaping public opinion about GCC Countries
 - Analysis of innovation adoption/product endorsement content of social media influencers
 - Techniques used by influencers to persuade views
 - Incorporation of Islamic values in a wider global context (i.e. connecting with the non-Muslim world)
3. Social Media Influencers' role in social and political issue advocacy in support of the GCC countries' various national agendas
 - Identify topics and social issues in GCC commonly covered by influencers and follower perceptions in their comments and likes
 - Comments and opinion on Gulf states social issues and economic development by international social media influencers in and outside of GCC

6. Paper Structure, Referencing, and Format

Authors should refer to the [GRM Paper Guidelines](#).

7. Publication Plans

The workshop directors are planning to bring together a themed journal issue out of the best 7-10 papers from the workshop in the Online Media and Global Communication journal, a quarterly open access refereed journal themed issue with eight-language abstracts including Arabic on the topic. Louisa Ha, the workshop director, is the founding editor-in-Chief of the journal and has secured the commitment of the journal to dedicate a themed issue on the proposed workshop topic. The journal web site is: <https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/omgc/html>. Dr. Mohammad is a member of the editorial board.

Papers that cannot fit in with the joint publication will be considered for publication individually in a journal or as a GRC paper, under the guidance of the workshop directors.

8. References

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9. Directors' Bio Notes

Louisa Ha is Professor of Research Excellence (2021-24) in the School of Media and Communication at [Bowling Green State University](#), Ohio, U.S.A. She is the Founding-Editor-in-Chief of [Online Media and Global Communication](#), and also the former editor-in-chief of [Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly](#), the flagship journal of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. She is a recipient of the prestigious Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's (AEJMC) Elenor Blum Award for Distinguished Research Service. As the founder and leader of the [Global Social Media Influencers Research Lab](#) in the [School of Media and Communication](#), she is currently working on a global study of the information literacy and ethical practices of Content Creators sponsored by the UNESCO. She has over 5,900 citations according to Google Scholar. Her research interests are misinformation, social media influencers, online videos, new media business models, social and mobile media use, international conflicts and comparative communication, and audience research. She has published 80 refereed research journal articles and edited five books such as [U.S.-China Trade War: Global News Framing and Public Opinion in the Digital Age](#). Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press and [The Audience and Business of YouTube and Online Videos](#). Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books She serves on the editorial boards of *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, and *Communication and Society* (an ICA affiliate journal in Chinese). She published a BGSU [SSCI Communication Journal Publishing Guide](#) comparing 94 communication and 72 information studies and interdisciplinary journals with 40 attributes for communication scholars.

Email: louisah@bgsu.edu, X/Twitter: @LouisaHaBGSU, Google Scholar Profile: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=9zeJXnEAAA&hl=en>, ScholarWorks: https://works.bepress.com/louisa_ha/

Dr. Mohammad Hatim Abuljadail is an Associate Professor of Marketing Communication and the Vice Dean for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at the Faculty of Communication and Media at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Saudi Arabia. His research focuses on social media marketing, particularly engagement and brand loyalty. This area of interest has led him to examine

consumer-brand engagement and audience interaction in digital spaces, contributing to marketing communication research. He is a member of the Global Social Media Influencers Research Lab where he collaborates on research projects, including a UNESCO-sponsored study examining the information literacy and ethical practices of content creators worldwide. His broader research spans digital marketing, advertising strategies, consumer behavior, and international advertising, with publications that contribute to understanding social media's role in shaping consumer attitudes, particularly in the Arab world.

Dr. Abuljadail has held leadership roles at KAU, including his position as Marketing Director for the Patent Unit within the Knowledge Economy and Technology Transfer Center. Dr. Abuljadail has received multiple awards for his research, including top paper awards at the Broadcast Education Association and AEJMC conferences. He is also an editorial board member for the Online Media and Global Communication journal.

Email: mabuljadail@kau.edu.sa, X: @abuljadailm, Google scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=dFp6JBEAAAAJ&hl=ar&oi=ao>, Scopus Author ID: 56682105200, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6168-6259>, Web of Science ResearcherID: AAS-4417-2021