Factors Affecting Consumer Behavior in the Clothing Industry of the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

Clothing is an important business in the Middle East. The retail sales have been increased by 4.3% from 2017 to 2018. It is already known that prices and advertisements affect the consumer behavior in the Middle East. However, the impact of culture, religion, psychology, needs, motivation, inflation, interest rates, income, savings, family, references groups and social class is still unknown. For that reason, the researcher is highly interested and passionate to study the influence of these factors on consumer's impulsive behavior which is substantially important for the economic survival of the Middle East in the years to come. It is feasible to conduct this research because the available timeframe and financial budget are sufficient to examine this topic. The purpose of this paper is twofold: first is to critically investigate the factors which affect the consumer's behavior and second is to provide a forum for debate on the factors that are reshaping the everyday experience and behavior of consumers in the Middle East (it is new perspective). The data for this study is collected by applying primary research method. 3 similar countries including Oman, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were selected for the survey. In total 2500 upper, middle and lower class consumers of clothing companies were interviewed who provided their responses by filling questionnaires.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, clothing industry, marketing in the Middle East.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is located in the continent of Asia. It has covered a geographical area of approximately 2.82 million square miles. It consists of various countries such as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel,

Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and UAE. Islam is the official religion and Arabic is the official language. In this study, it is explored which factors affect the consumer behavior in the clothing industry which has a direct and indirect impact on the demand and supply of clothes. Supporting this point, this study has a significant importance of providing scientific evidence in the psychology and economics disciplines.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are factors which influence the buying behavior of consumers in the clothing industry of Middle East from the perspective of sociology, psychology and economics?

2. How do consumers make a choice of buying clothes when the economy slowdowns due to inflation and higher interest rates?

3. What does the exiting literature and theories say about the impact of social world on consumer's cloth buying behavior?

3. CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Culture Factors

A prior study that is related to the research problem being investigated is presented by Pantano, Eleonora (2011). They examined how the cultural factors influence the behavior of consumers when they buy clothes. Pantano, Eleonora (2011) conducted the research by using two distinct approaches, the first was quantitative approach and the second was a qualitative approach. The qualitative research method of this study was based on in-depth interviews with the marketing specialists that formulated the base for subsequent quantitative research which was focused on the survey with consumers using questionnaires. This study found that the most influential factor on the consumer's behavior and perception is the culture which is the combination of religion and nationality.

According to Pantano, Eleonora (2011), the clothing culture of Middle East is based on the dress code prescribed by Quran and Islam. Showing their adornment to na-mehram via bare clothing is a sin for women in Islam. The 80% of the respondent women of this study reported that when they buy clothes, they prefer hijab, khimar, abaya, chador, jilbab, burqa, shalwar kameez, thobe, egal and ghutra and Bisht over tank tops, skirts or jeans. Likewise, 76% of the respondent men reported that when they buy clothes, they prefer dishdashas, keffiyeh or shemagh, kufi caps and shalwar kameez over tee shirts, trousers and pants. Hence, this study concluded with the argument that culture (pilgrimage and five times prayers), nationality, religious values and beliefs largely influence the cloth buying decision of consumers in the Middle East countries (Pantano, 2011).

Psychological Factors

Contrary to the above study, another author namely Vainikka, Bianca (2015) presented conflicted and contradictory arguments. These antagonists contended that the psychological factors are the rationale behind the consumer's purchasing decision, not the cultural factors. They presented this argument by analyzing the way how buyers think and behave. Vainikka, Bianca (2015) conducted an online survey for a period of 3 to 4 weeks to collect the data about consumer's perception. The total study population was

771 and the responses were collected from 602 only in the form of completed questionnaires. Vainikka, Bianca (2015) developed the hypothesis and tested them later. The results of the study showed that there is a strong relationship between psychological factors and consumer buying behavior.

According to Vainikka, Bianca (2015), the psychological factors include human motivation (this means a need of protecting the body), six senses, emotions, feelings, perception and a drive for satisfaction. These psychological factors urge a person to perform an act in order to fulfil their wants. 67% of respondents of the study conducted by Vainikka, Bianca (2015) reported that the brand identity, color and quality of fabric stimulates their mind, feelings, perception and senses which ultimately motivates them to buy the product. Hence, it was explored that psychology is the significant factor that affects the consumer's buying decision. The results of this study are not consistent with the research mentioned previously in the cultural factor point (Vainikka, 2015).

A new approach to interpret the prior research is to critically analyze it and compare it with the contradictory studies. Comparing and contrasting the empirical study conducted by Pantano, Eleonora (2011) with those performed by Vainikka, Bianca (2015) reveals that both authors do not agree on the same argument, though, they applied the same research methodologies in order to investigate the analogous research problem. The comparison further concludes that the results produced by the second study are more reliable, valid and appropriate because protagonists of the social world such as various neuroscientists and psychologists agree with this condemnation. This study carries more weight because the neuroscientists and psychologists also believe that psychological satisfaction plays a substantial mediating role in driving the consumer buying behavior. On the basis of this evidence, it is revealed that the arguments and study presented by Pantano, Eleonora (2011) are less persuasive, implausible and less reliable. Therefore, additional research work is needed to close the gap in the existing literature which is why this research project is undertaken.

Social Factors

In relation to the research problem being examined, another author namely Cotte, June, and Stacy L. Wood (2004) investigated how the behavior patterns of consumers such as likes and dislikes, lifestyles, tastes, preferences and rejections are influenced by the people around them to the greatest extent. The authors used triadic analysis (two siblings and parents) to investigate the inspiration of family on the consumer's buying pattern. They developed the hypothesis and tested them later by conducting a survey with 54 families out of which 38 families (70%) were sons and mothers while 16 (30%) were fathers. It was found that consumers always seek approval from the individuals around them and seldom buy clothes which are not socially acceptable.

According to Cotte, June, and Stacy L. Wood (2004), families are of two types in the life of a buyer, a joint family and a nuclear family. The nuclear family size is relatively small and consumers have the freedom to take their own decisions. On the flipside, in joint families, the number of family members is big and group decision making is more preferred than the individual. As cited in the study, the reason is that family members see each other on daily basis. Therefore, they act as advisors. Moreover, the furniture, televisions, food, washing machines, refrigerators and most importantly, clothes are shared and collectively purchased. Especially, the mothers who are working professionals have more influence on the buying decision of their family member.

Cotte, June, and Stacy L. Wood (2004) contended that wives in the Middle East normally take a joint buying decision by discussing it with their husbands when they purchase their dresses because husbands have higher power being head of the family according to Islam. Likewise, the buying habits of children are strongly affected by their parents. The authors presented an example to highlight this argument stating that an Indian vegetarian adult living in an Islamic country (expatriate) will not eat egg or meat though he may appreciate its nutritious values. Therefore, it is concluded from the study conducted by Cotte, June, and Stacy L. Wood (2004) that each family member exerts an influence on the buyer's behavior especially when it's about the clothing buying choice (Cotte, 2004).

Personal Income & Savings/Family Income & Savings

Contrary to the above study presented by Cotte, June, and Stacy L. Wood (2004), an antagonist namely G. Muruganantham & Ravi Shankar Bhakat (2013) presented opposing and contradictory views and opinions. These authors claimed that disposable and household income of consumers is the factor that significantly affects their impulsive buying behavior, not the people or family members. According to G. Muruganantham & Ravi Shankar Bhakat (2013), the important determinant of the consumers purchasing behavior is the personal income which consists of discretionary income and disposable income. The disposable income means the money balance left (savings) after the deduction of taxes and other essential deductibles from the gross income. As claimed by this study, the rise in the disposable income results in higher expense made on buying clothes whereas a fall in the disposable income results in a reduction in the expenditure on buying clothes.

According to G. Muruganantham & Ravi Shankar Bhakat (2013), the discretionary income means the amount left (savings) after spending on the basic necessities of life. This income is used to purchase formal and fashionable clothes to be worn on the wedding or special events. The author claimed that an increase in the discretionary income results in higher expenditure on shopping clothes which upgrades their living standards. G. Muruganantham & Ravi Shankar Bhakat (2013) collected the data through secondary research method and by analyzing the studies conducted by others. The secondary research found that aggregate income of all family members significantly influences the buying behavior of their individual family member. Therefore, it is concluded from this study that income, savings, bank balance, and cash in hand influence the buying behavior of consumers (Muruganantham, 2013).

Contrasting and comparing the study presented by Cotte, June, and Stacy L. Wood (2004) with those presented by G. Muruganantham & Ravi Shankar Bhakat (2013) reveals that the former study is more valid, correct, credible, trustworthy and authentic. Both authors disagreed on the same idea and their research method was also opposite. In contrast, the study presented by G. Muruganantham & Ravi Shankar Bhakat (2013) is unconvincing, unbelievable, doubtful and incredible. The reason is that the results of this study were produced by conducting secondary research and the data presented by others is mostly unreliable and outdated whereas the clothing industry is highly dynamic and continuously changing. The first study about family influence on the consumer behavior is more valid because the latest results were produced by performing primary research and real experiment is considered the realistic and truthful approach. However, to close the gap (conflicts) in the existing literature, this additional research work is undertaken.

References Groups

Another previous study that contributes to the research problem under examination is presented by Escalas, Jennifer Edson, and James R. Bettman (2003). These authors investigated the interdependent relationship of the reference group and buying behavior of individual member-consumers by conducting two different experimental surveys. The participants of the first experimental survey were 45 undergraduate students of marketing course. In the second experiment, 171 undergraduates took participation. A Visual Basic Program was installed on the computers of University to collect the participant's responses. Questionnaires were distributed to them via this software and they were asked to demonstrate up to which extent they agree or disagree from scale range of 1 to 5 (1 disagree, 2 strongly disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree). Each experimental survey took 30 minutes to get completed.

The results of the study provide empirical support to the notion that the consumers everyday interaction with the certain groups such as co-workers and neighbors lead to the generation of similar beliefs within them. Therefore, these groups have a direct influence on their member's buying behavior and the brands used by one group member get connected with the mental state of other group members. Escalas, Jennifer Edson, and James R. Bettman (2003) further claimed that religious groups in the Middle East are most influential and powerful because wearing clothes based on Islamic dress code moves the consumer a bit closer to being a member of the spiritual Islamic group. Likewise, the advertisements of various smartphone brands instigate the consumers by showing that an office worker can get into the company's boardroom (top position) by using a superior and expensive phone model (Escalas, 2003). This is the point in the previous literature which is connected to the researcher's own area of research and investigation about factors affecting the consumer behavior in the Middle East.

Interest Rates

Opposing the above study on reference group influence, the opponents namely Gross, David B., and Nicholas S. Souleles (2002) presented disagreed and contrary arguments and perspectives. They debated that it is the fluctuations in the interest rate that affects the consumer's spending behavior, not the reference groups. To collect the answers to this research problem, the authors performed a telephonic survey and interviewed 2513 adults. The random sampling technique was used to select the study population. The response rate was 56.2%. The respondents comprised a higher percentage of women and people aged 55 and older as well. The incomes of the respondents were under $50,000. The respondents exhibited that they are less motivated to borrow money from the conventional banks to purchase trendy and fashionable clothing for weddings of their daughters when the interest is high because it is unaffordable for them. Based on these responses, the Gross, David B., and Nicholas S. Souleles (2002) concluded that interest rate level determines the consumer's spending behavior (Gross, 2002). However, the researcher's own new research about factors affecting the consumer behavior in the Middle East departs from this opinion.

The comparison and contrast of the above study presented by Escalas, Jennifer Edson, and James R. Bettman (2003) with the controversial study presented by Gross, David B., and Nicholas S. Souleles (2002) reveals that both authors are in disagreement but the findings expressed in the former study on reference groups are more valid, right and reliable because these authors conducted two experiments on the same research problem to produce accurate, genuine and authentic results. The methodological approach of Escalas, Jennifer Edson, and James R. Bettman (2003) is more reliable as compared to that adopted by

Gross, David B., and Nicholas S. Souleles (2002). The reason is that the later authors conducted telephonic interviews and the answers of the telephonic respondents are subject to biases. Therefore, to resolve the conflicts among previous contradictory studies, this additional own research work is undertaken which fits within a larger field of study.

Marketing Campaigns

Douwe van den Brink, Gaby Odekerken-Schröder, Pieter Pauwels, (2006) explored the effects of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) campaigns on the behavior of consumers and their brand loyalty. The authors developed 6 hypotheses and used an experimental design approach to test these hypotheses. The study population was comprised of 240 participants who filled a questionnaire to provide their responses to the research questions. It was discovered from the measurement of the responses that ads play a significant role in inducing the purchasing decisions of consumers. This study concluded that the advertisements even bring a paradigm shift in the market share of competitive apparel companies by influencing the consumer's purchasing decisions (Douwe van den Brink, 2006).

Inflation

In contrast to the above study, another author namely Lyziak, Tomasz (2003) presented contradictory and conflicted opinions by investigating the impact of monetary and fiscal policy such as inflation on the consumers' buying behavior. The authors collected the qualitative data for this study through surveys. The responses obtained through surveys were analyzed by using regression method. The results of data analysis process indicate that inflation exerts a significant influence on the behavior of consumers in terms of savings, consumption and investment decisions. Finally, the study concluded that increase in the inflation leads to increase in apparel price while a decrease in the value of the dollar and a decrease in consumer's purchasing power. The makes the basic necessities such as clothing unaffordable for the consumers especially when their income is not increased in these circumstances.

The comparison and contrast of the study about marketing campaign influence presented by Douwe van den Brink, Gaby Odekerken-Schröder, Pieter Pauwels, (2006) with that presented by Lyziak, Tomasz (2003) about inflation influence reveals that second study is more valid, reliable and appropriate because the macroeconomic theory corroborates this evidence. According to principles of macroeconomic theory, the consumer spending behavior is adversely affected due to inflation as they become unable to fulfil or maximize their utilities. In contrast, the arguments presented by Douwe van den Brink, Gaby Odekerken-Schröder, Pieter Pauwels, (2006) are less persuasive and unreliable because consumers are unable to afford the pricy apparel brands when there is inflation in the economy. Hence, it the inflation that affects the consumers' purchase decisions not the CRM campaigns. However, to close the gap (contradiction) in the previous literature, this own research work has been undertaken.

4. METHODOLOGY

Methodological approach refers to a process to conduct the research by following particular rules and regulations. This section shows how the answers to research questions were found by the researcher. Research about the factors affecting the consumer behavior has not been previously conducted in the clothing industry of Middle East. Therefore, this research project adds value by increasing the knowledge of readers about

the social, economic, cultural and psychological factors influencing the consumer's behavior. The chosen research philosophy for this research project is positivism because the research starts from collecting and analyzing the empirical data and ends with the creation of a new general theory. At the completion, a new knowledge will be created about the Middle East's social world that will explain the real collected facts and figures (statistical analysis) regarding factors affecting consumer behavior. However, hermeneutics research philosophy is also used up to a certain extent to understand the social phenomenon. This is also an "abduction research" because it is the iteration between inductive and deductive research approaches. In inductive stance, the theory is the outcome (findings) of the research while in deductive stance; research is the outcome (findings) of the theory. The use of a combination of induction and deduction approaches explores the two types of outcomes in this research project. Then, the conclusions are drawn from these empirical outcomes. The selected research paradigm for this research project is the combination of both "qualitative and quantitative" because the data emerged from the research is explained both in descriptive words and numerical figures.

Research Design

This refers to the approach to collect, analyze and report writing the data. Normally, there are multiple types of research design including experimental, comparative, longitudinal, cross-sectional and case study. The experimental research design is chosen to conduct this research study. The research was conducted in three countries of the Middle East, namely "Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia". The clothing industry of each country is a market leader worldwide. The GDP of Oman is 66.29 USD billion in 2018 and the contribution of Omani clothing industry is 4%. The GDP of Qatar is 152 USD billion in 2018 and clothing industry makes a 6% contribution to it. The GDP of Saudi Arabia is 646 USD billion in 2018 and the contribution of clothing industry is 5%.

The study population is comprised of total 2500 participants mainly Upper Class, Middle Class, and Lower Class consumers in each of these three Middle East countries. These consumers are known for having greater knowledge of fashion trends because they early adopted technology such as the internet for shopping purpose. Therefore, the impact of price on the consumer's perception and behavior is not studied in this research. Despite the small numerical size, the population of this study is fairly a large sample of clothing industry of Middle East. Together, the 2500 participants represent more than 10% of the customers of clothing companies in Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

During 2003, the clothing industry in the Middle East was deregulated and market share was relatively low. At the time of this research work, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arab were perceived to be the countries where consumer behavior was largely influenced by the cultural, religious, economic, social and psychological factors. Since 2008, the global market share of clothing industry of Middle East has remained approximately 40%. The upper class, middle class, and lower class consumers were interviewed, despite the fact that the interview access to the upper-class customers was difficult. Only one interview was conducted with each of the study participants for 1 to 2 hours and their responses were recorded on tapes.

All the interviews were within the age group of 18 to 55 years. The primary focus of the interview was concentrated on identifying factors that influence consumer's behavior. Most respondents acknowledged that they were knowledgeable of the area of the study under investigation. In total 2500 consumers were interviewed. The middle-class consumers were the first choice as interviewee because they mostly spend their money on fulfilling their clothing needs and wants.

Research Instrument and Data Collection Process

In the first step, the consent form and questionnaire were prepared and translated into the Arabic language. In the second step, the name of the Middle East countries was selected to conduct the survey. Various characteristics were considered at the time of selecting countries such as language, population size, GDP level, economic growth, revenue of clothing industry, income per capita and consumer spending level. This selection procedure went through a staged process. After selection of countries, the attention was paid to interview the consumers by visiting hypermarkets and mega shopping malls in Saudi Arab. Preference was given to maintain the equality of gender in selecting study population. First, their written consent was obtained that they were asked to fill the questionnaires.

At the same stage, the consumers in Qatar and Oman were reached via online (Facebook and Twitter) and their email addresses were obtained where questionnaires were sent and their written consent was obtained. They were also interviewed on Skype. The fourth step focused on collecting the completed questionnaires and on classifying the accessed consumers into upper, middle and lower class according to their personal or family income. Efforts were made to get back more than 2400 completed questionnaires. The survey was conducted from 22nd Dec 2017 to 25th Jan 2018.

Therefore, the research was more exploratory rather than to be explanatory. An interview guide textbook was followed during entire data collection process. A research helper participated in the interview process by preparing notes and transcripts. Shortly after the interviews, in the last step, all the collected data was transcribed to the excel worksheets. Then, this information was transferred to the SPSS software to understand the relationship between dependent and independent variables. A report of 300 pages was produced by summarizing the answers of the respondents.

Findings and Discussion

In total 2500 participants took part in the survey as mentioned in Table 1. Approximately 23% (one quarter) of the participants were from Oman, 50% from Saudi Arabia and 27% from Qatar. Almost half percent of the participants was cyber shoppers (online buyers of clothes).

Table 1
Participants by settlement areas

Settlement area	Offline clothes buying consumers	Online clothes buying consumers	Total
Oman	287	288	575
Saudi Arab	625	625	1250
Qatar	337	338	675
Total	1249	1251	2500

Table 2 indicates the number of upper, middle and lower class participant consumers who completed the questionnaire. In the settlement area of Oman, a noticeably bigger percentage (80%) of upper-class consumers completed the questionnaires as compared to the middle and lower class consumers. The dominance of the upper-class respondents was less in the Saudi Arabia where 66% of the middle-class consumers filled the questionnaires. On the opposite side, the consumer type balance was equal in the settlement area of Qatar (Kim, 2012).

Table 2
Classification of participants by settlement area

Settlement area	Offline clothes buying consumers	Online clothes buying consumers	Total
Oman			
Upper Class	229	230	
Middle Class	17	41	575
Lower Class	41	17	
Saudi Arab			
Upper Class	37	176	
Middle Class	412	412	1250
Lower Class	176	37	
Qatar			
Upper Class	112	113	
Middle Class	112	113	675
Lower Class	113	112	
Total	1249	1251	2500

As can be seen from Figure 3, in case of Oman, half (50%) of the upper class, 67% of the middle class and 43% of the lower class consumers that buying online clothes agree with the statement that psychological factors are the rationale behind the consumer's buying behavior. As far as offline consumers are concerned, a larger percentage 75% of the upper class, 33% of middle class and 54% of the lower class also agree with the same statement. The remaining number of participants is disagreed (Sinha, 2004).

As can be seen from Figure 3, in case of Saudi Arabia, only 22% of the upper class, 7% of the middle class and 15% of the lower class consumers that buy online clothes disagree with the statement that cultural and religious factors affect their buying pattern. As far as offline consumers are concerned, 13% of the upper class, 21% of middle class and 30% of the lower class disagree with the same statement. The remaining number of participants is agreed on this notion (Birtwistle, 2007).

As can be seen from Figure 3, in case of Qatar, a bigger percentage 71% of the upper class, 69% of the middle class and 62% of the lower class consumers who buy clothes on the internet are agreed with the statement that inflation affects their buying and consumption behavior. As far as offline consumers are concerned, 53% of the upper class, 82% of middle class and 73% of the lower class are agreed with the same statement. The remaining number of participants disagrees on this notion (Lee, 2008).

Hence, the survey and analysis of collected data via SPSS software concludes that there is a strong correlation between the following dependent and independent variables

- Cultural, religious factors (independent) and consumer behavior (dependent)

- Psychological factors (independent) and consumer behavior (dependent)

- Social factors (independent) and consumer behavior (dependent)

- Reference groups (independent) and consumer behavior (dependent)

- Marketing campaign (independent) and consumer behavior (dependent)

Table 3
Responses of participants by settlement area

Settlement area	Offline clothes buying consumers	Offline clothes buying consumers	Online clothes buying consumers	Online clothes buying consumers	Total
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	
Oman					
Psychological factors such as perception and six senses urge a consumer to purchase clothes to fulfil their needs and wants?					
Responses from:					
Upper Class	172	57	115	115	
Middle Class	6	11	27	14	575
Lower Class	22	19	7	10	
Saudi Arab					
Culture, religion and nationality induce the Saudi Arabian Muslims to purchase burqa, abaya, hijab, and thobe not jeans, skirts, tank tops or pants?					
Responses From:					
Upper class	32	5	137	39	
Middle Class	325	87	383	29	1250
Lower Class	123	53	31	6	
Qatar					
Inflation affects the buying pattern of consumers, when the local currency devalues, prices go up and wages remain same, consumers don't buy fashionable clothes to maintain their social status?					
Responses from:					
Upper Class	59	53	80	33	
Middle Class	92	20	78	35	675
Lower Class	83	31	69	44	
Total	914	335	929	322	2500

- Inflation (independent) and consumer behavior (dependent)

- Interest rates (independent) and consumer behavior (dependent)

It is explored from this research work that psychological factors such as perception and six senses urge a consumer to purchase clothes in order to fulfil their needs. These needs are categorized into five types according to the theory of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. They include psychological needs, safety needs, needs of love/affection and belongingness, needs for esteem/social status and needs for self-actualization (born to do). The consumers buy clothes to meet each of types of needs because their brain orders them to do so. Hence, the findings show that marketing efforts can be fruitful if the marketers target their advertisements to each of the consumer needs discovered by Abraham Maslow (Tsang, 2004).

The findings of this study also corroborate with another psychoanalysis theory namely "Freduan theory". This psychiatry theory asserts that human behavior is largely governed by the conscious and

unconscious mentality as well as their motivation. One motivation of consumers is to improve their social status. Therefore, their behavior is naturally directed to buy such clothes that show their role in the society or workplace. For example, a professional working woman prefers to buy a formal dress rather than a party dress because she is unconsciously motivated by her social role. Other motivations include inflation, interest rates, reference groups, personal income and marketing campaigns that influence the consumer's behavior (Young, 2010).

5. CONCLUSION

It is concluded from the primary and secondary research work that culture, tradition, religion, nationality, family, reference groups, needs, motivation, perception, inflation, income, savings, marketing campaigns, interest rates, purchasing power and social status are the factors which significantly drives the consumer's buying behavior (Park, 2003). Based on these factors, companies can improve their marketing strategy. This research project provided a valuable experience to the researcher to benefit from own strengths and to show the creativity and originality.

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