



# Social Media in Ramadan

Exploring Arab User Habits on  
Facebook & Twitter

# Introduction

Ramadan has a significant impact on people's behaviors and daily routine in the Middle East. Generally speaking people tend to consume more media including TV, radio, and print during Ramadan in comparison to other parts of the year. This is the time of the year where brands dedicate 20% of their media spend to reach out to their customers. The biggest four telecom companies spend around 200 million marketing dollars during Ramadan<sup>1</sup>.

Through our daily interactions with the communities we manage and the campaigns we have executed here at The Online Project, we have observed certain patterns that appear as a trend between brands in different industries throughout the year. By analyzing these trends we discovered that social media consumption and user habits change significantly during the Holy Month of Ramadan. As a result, we set out to study these outlying trends by isolating additional variables that could affect this shift. By understanding why the behavior changes, we can help brands to learn when are the best times for them to post on social media platforms and then when to engage with their audiences.

One observation we made during Ramadan last year was the spike in user activity on Twitter. To understand this sudden leap in activity, we monitored thousands of tweets in four countries to understand when exactly users are engaging on social media the most.

<sup>1</sup> Advertising Spending Lower in Ramadan Due to Regional Unrest, Gulf News

This year, we decided to take things up a notch. We included Facebook in our analysis and branched out to include more countries in the region. Furthermore, in this report, we go beyond identifying the best times to engage on both platforms and now include analysis of the change in engagement levels across the region and sentiment analysis to determine if people are more positive or negative during the Holy Month.

We realized that not only do people engage with social media at different periods of time during Ramadan, but also their engagement is exponentially increased. Brands benefit from the increase in engagement, especially during peak hours, given that the content is entertaining and/or valuable.

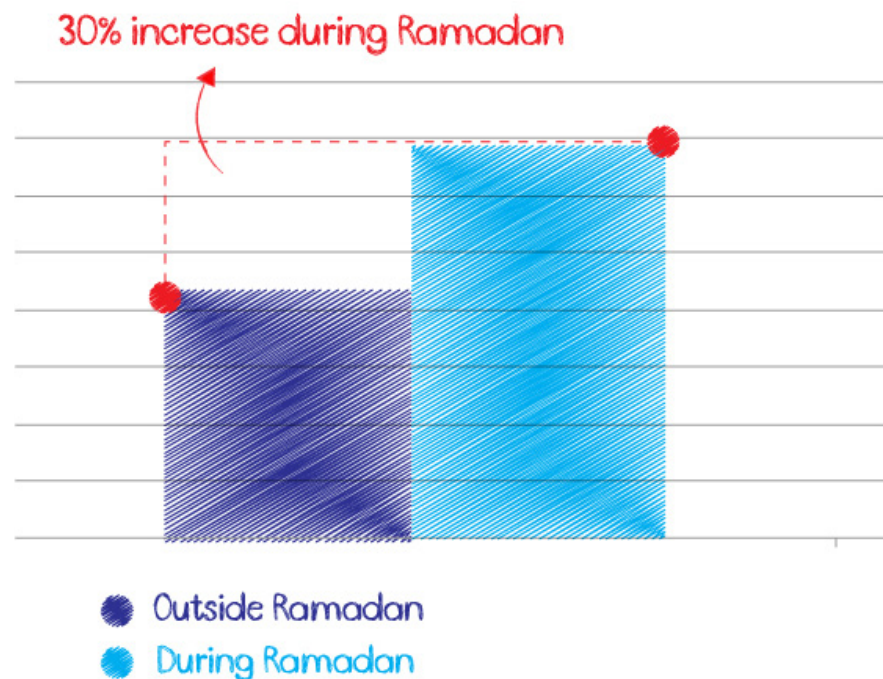
Our goal for this report is to determine the contributing factors leading to the change in consumers' online behavior. To do so, we observed Facebook and Twitter activity in nine different countries across the region including: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, KSA and the UAE.

The insights garnered from our research are meant to provide a broad and general overview of social media trends in the region. The data, however, do not reflect habits and trends within smaller communities in each of those countries so treat our observations as a starting point.

# Findings

## Do people engage more on Facebook during Ramadan?

We measured the level of activity on Facebook by delving into average engagement rates for regional brands during Ramadan compared to other times of the year.

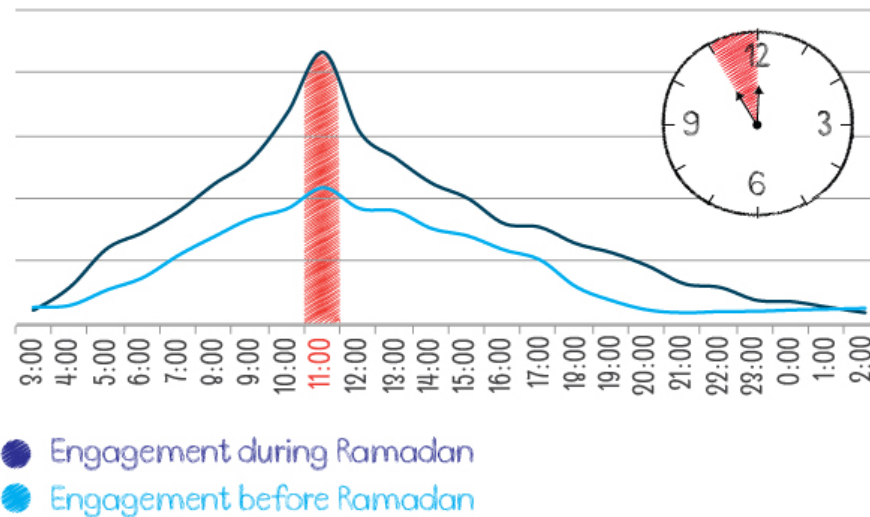


## What is the most popular time for people to engage on Facebook during Ramadan?

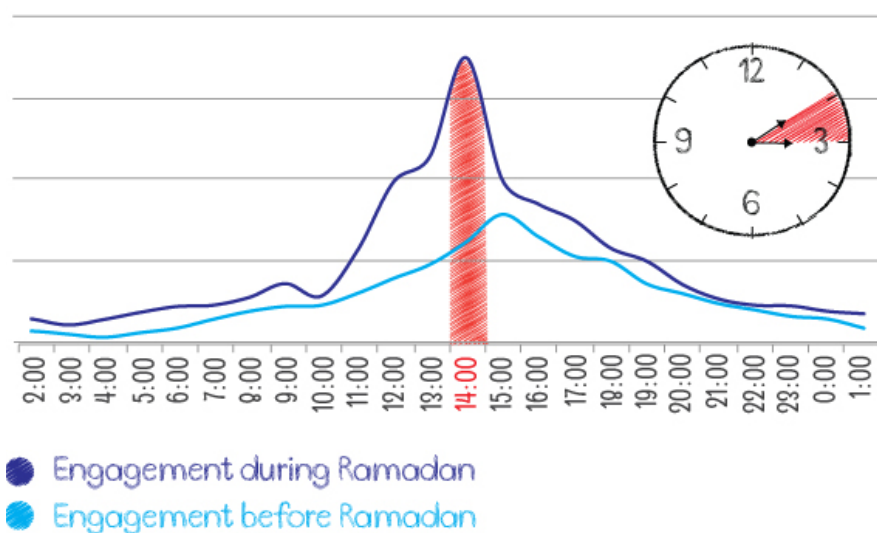
For this section, we monitored the level of activity on Facebook, on an hourly basis, during Ramadan 2012 and compared it to the same time interval outside Ramadan. The best time for

brands to engage with their audiences was selected as the time that showed the highest level of engagement in each of the following countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, KSA and the UAE. All times shown are in local time.

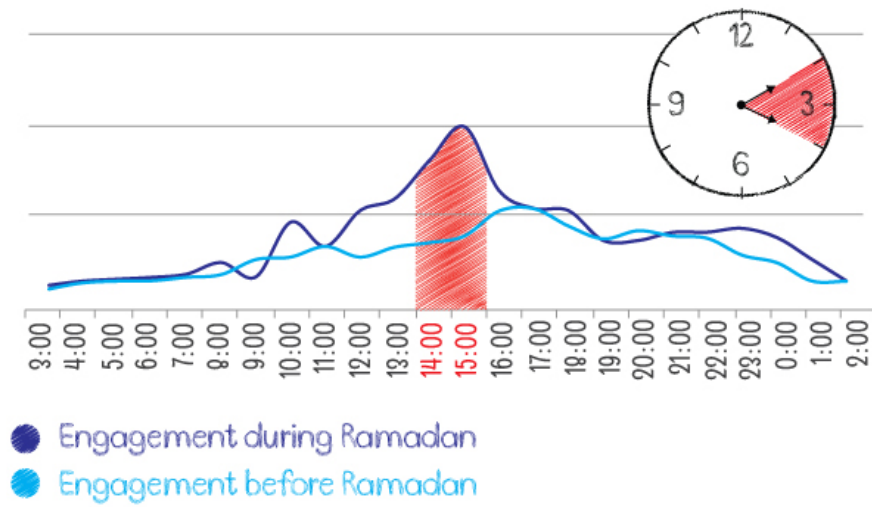
### Bahrain



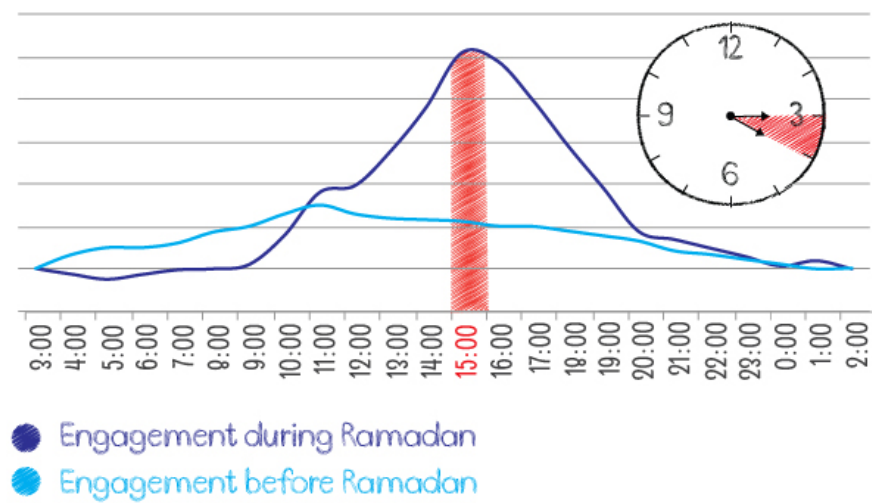
### Egypt



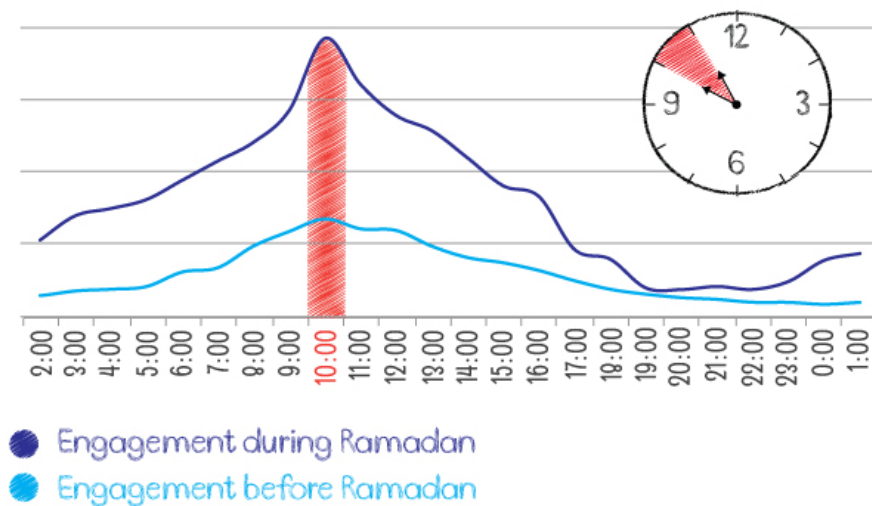
### Jordan



### Kuwait

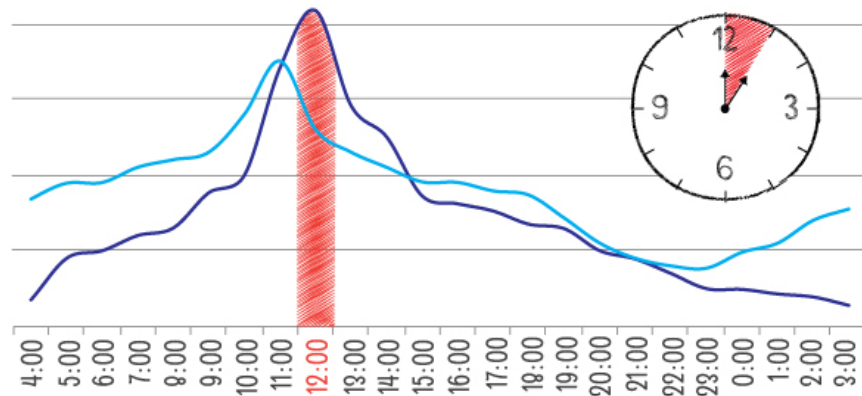


### Lebanon



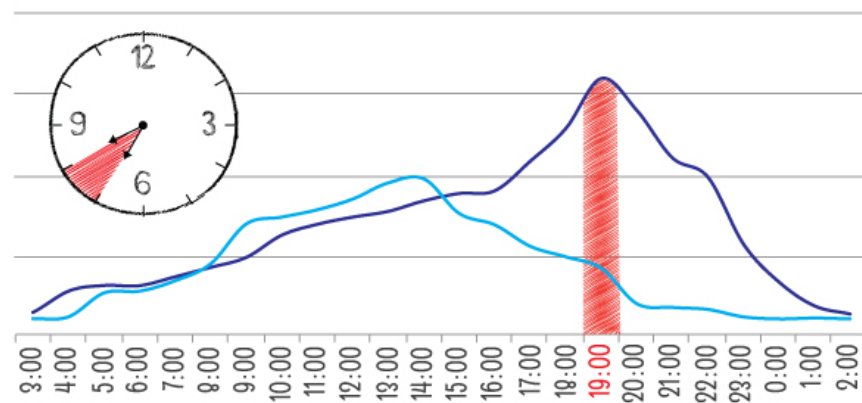


### Oman



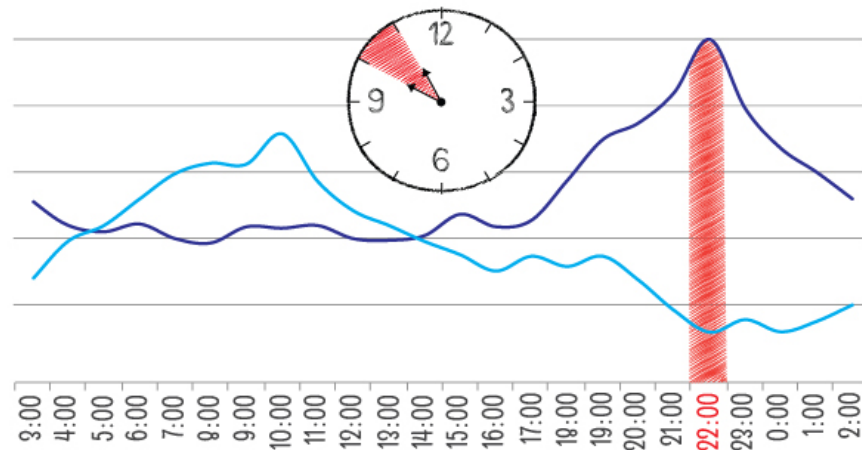
- Engagement during Ramadan
- Engagement before Ramadan

### Qatar



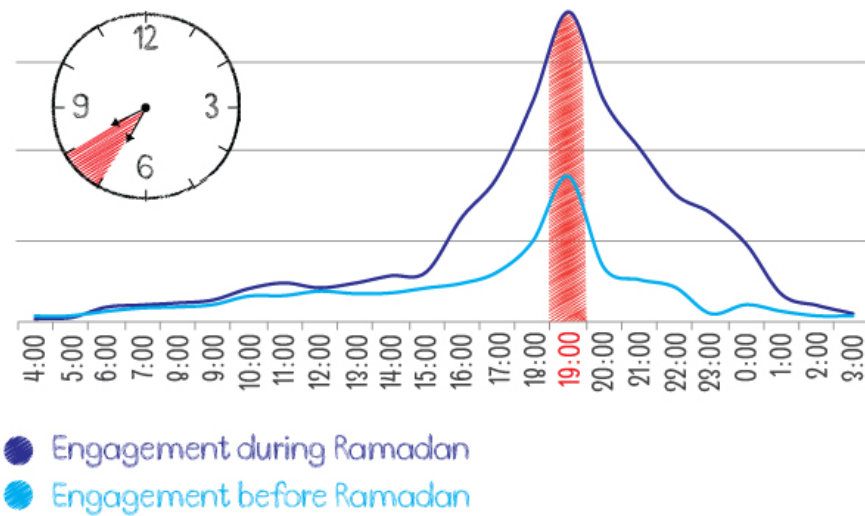
- Engagement during Ramadan
- Engagement before Ramadan

### KSA



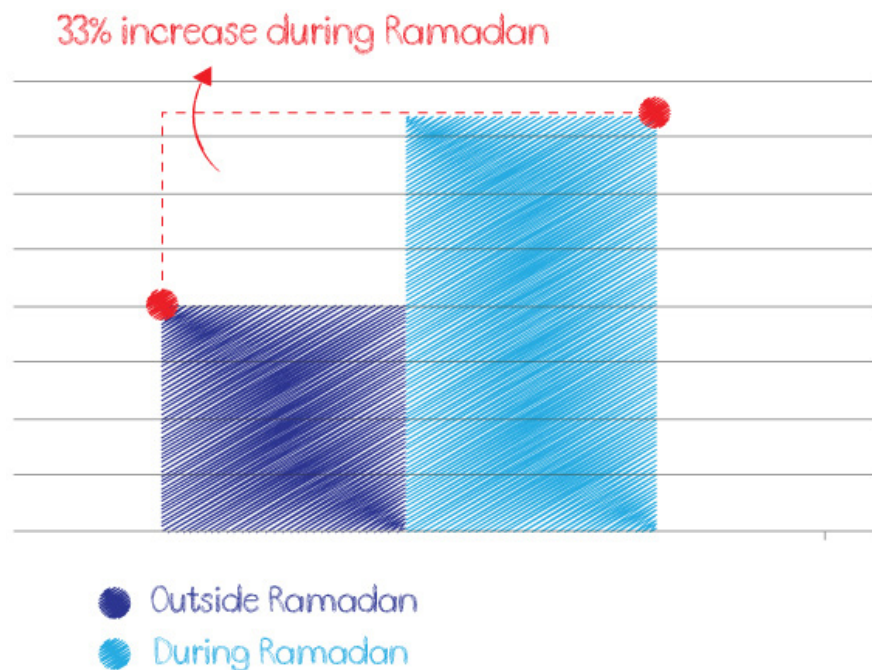
- Engagement during Ramadan
- Engagement before Ramadan

## UAE



## Do people engage more on Twitter during Ramadan?

We tracked the number of tweets and retweets generated in the region during Ramadan 2012 and compared to the same time interval outside Ramadan.



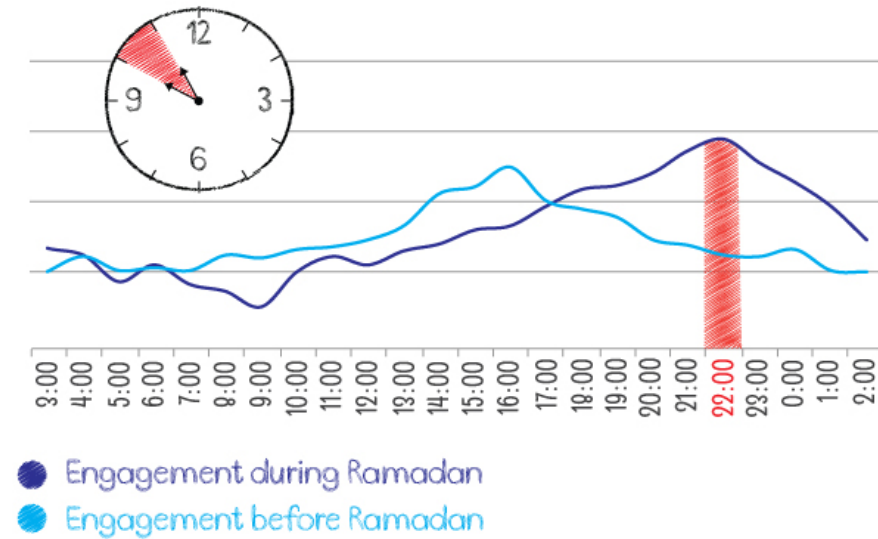
## What times do people engage most on Twitter?

We monitored Twitter activity on an hourly basis during Ramadan 2012, and compared it to the activity generated during the same time interval outside Ramadan. Similar to Facebook, the

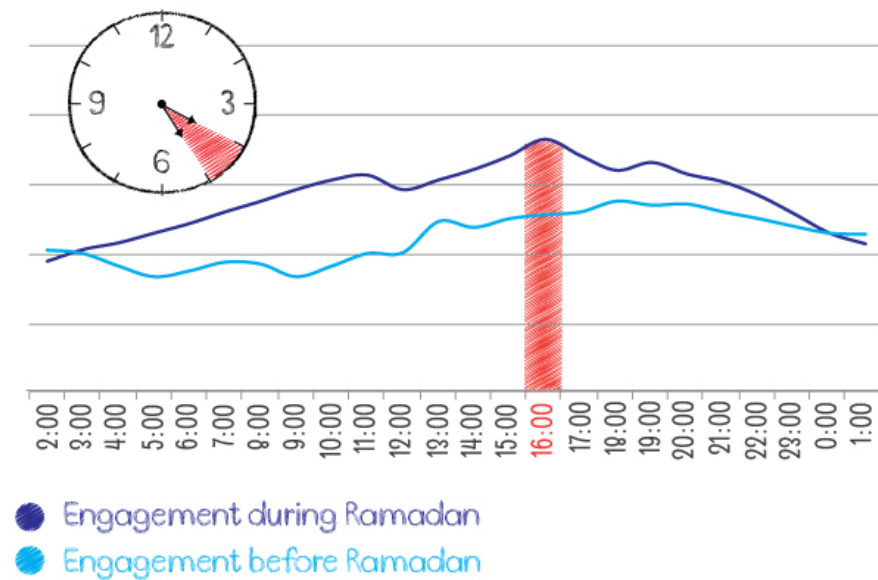


best time to engage was chosen on the basis of the highest engagement created. As shown in the following graphs, each country displayed a unique level of engagement. All times are shown in local time.

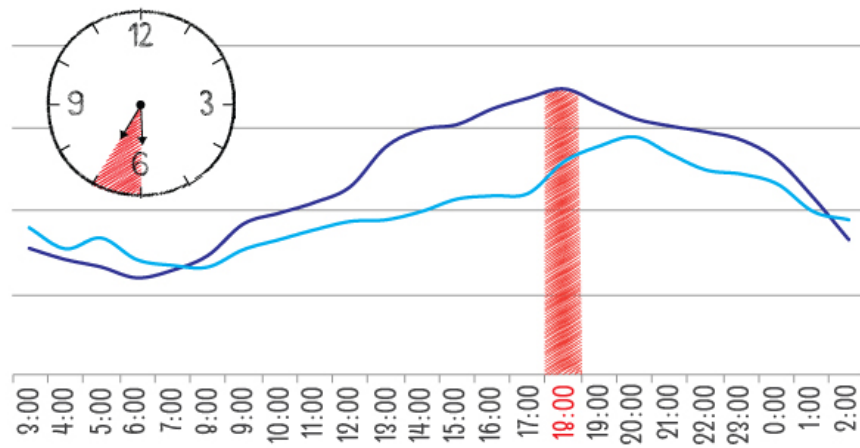
### Bahrain



### Egypt

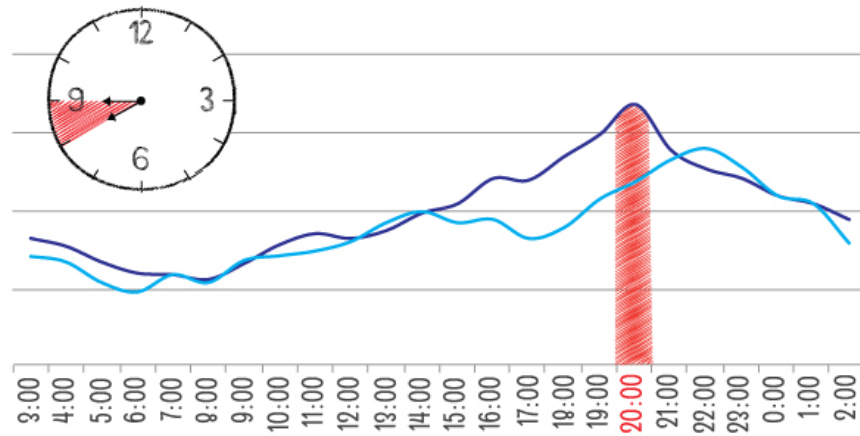


### Jordan



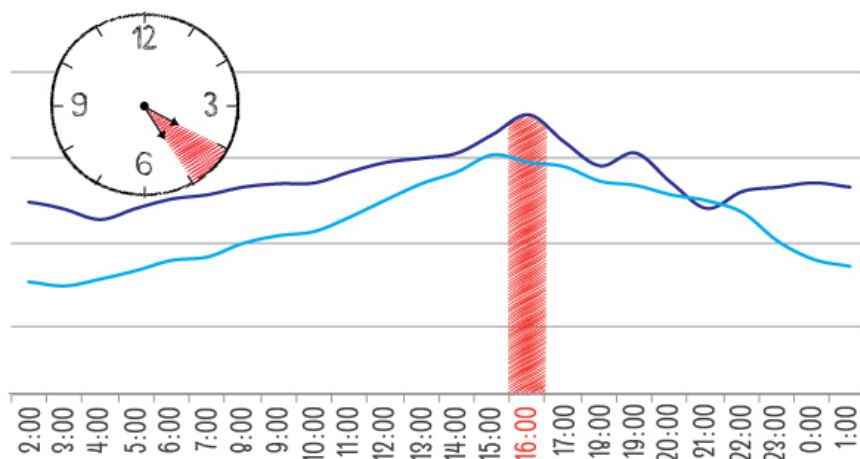
- Engagement during Ramadan
- Engagement before Ramadan

### Kuwait



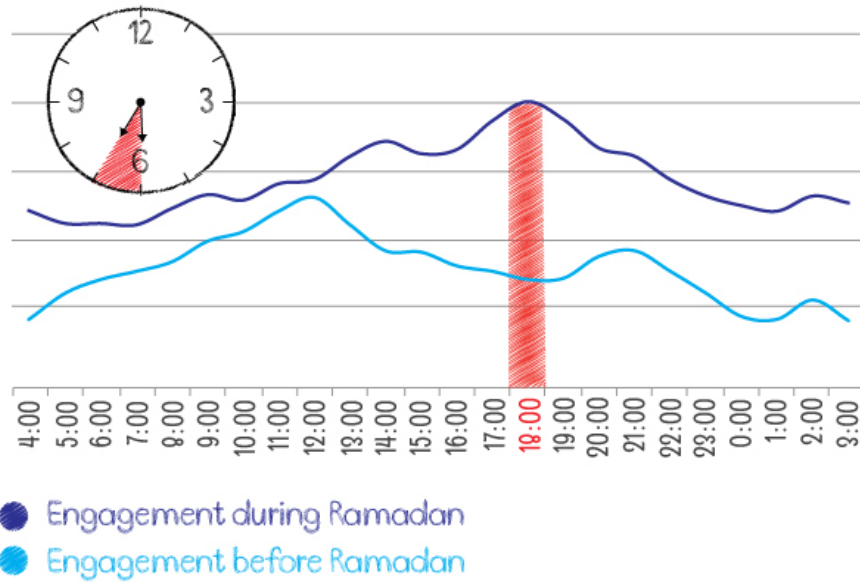
- Engagement during Ramadan
- Engagement before Ramadan

### Lebanon

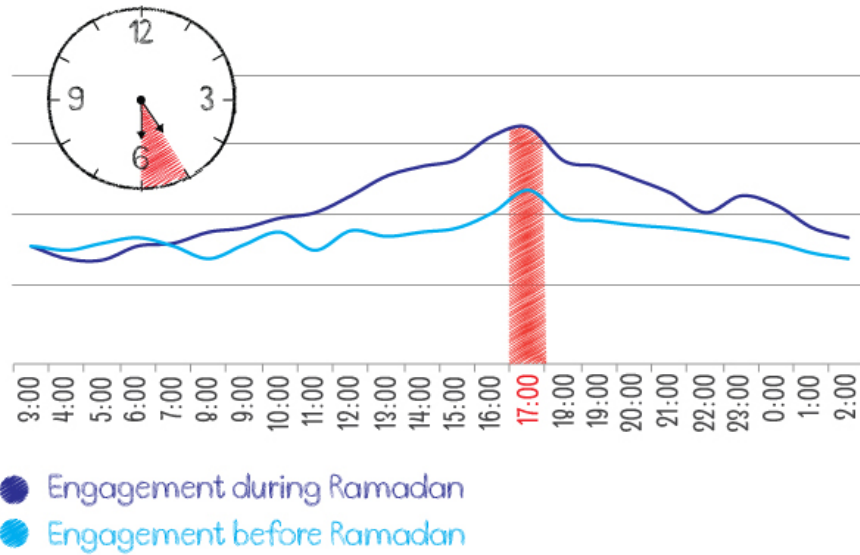


- Engagement during Ramadan
- Engagement before Ramadan

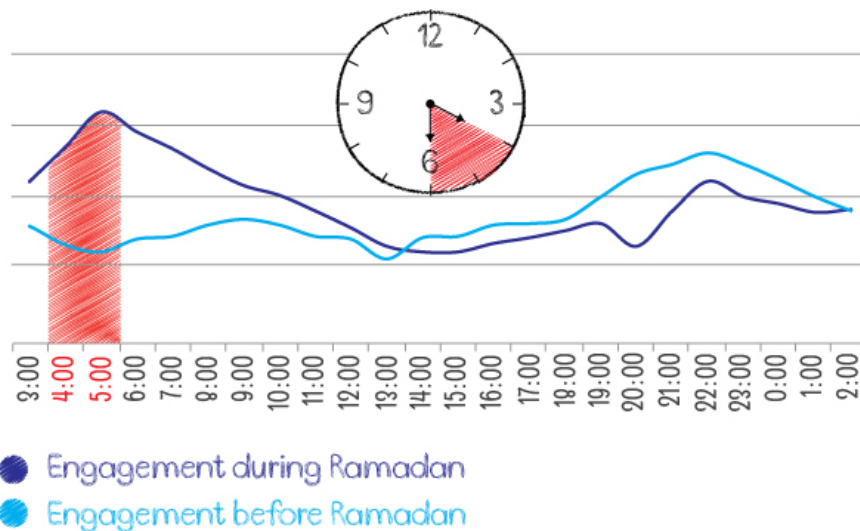
### Oman



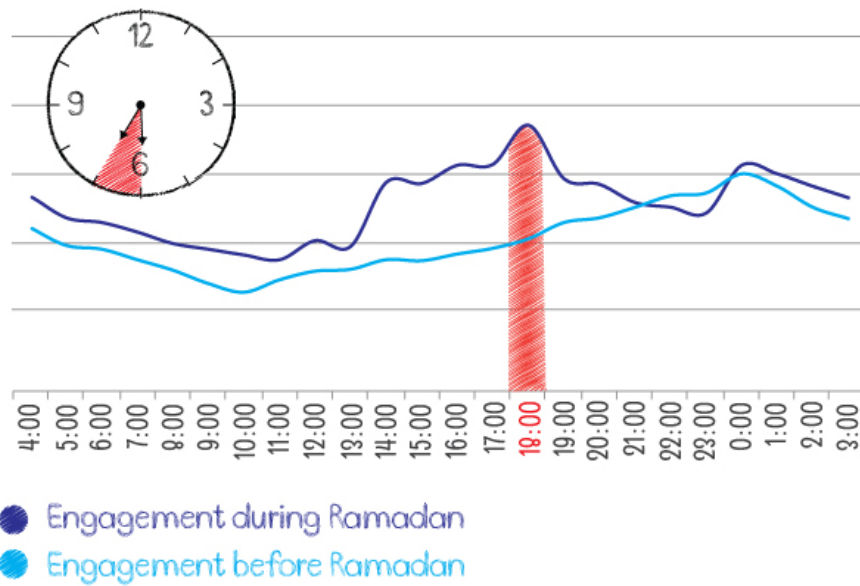
### Qatar



### KSA



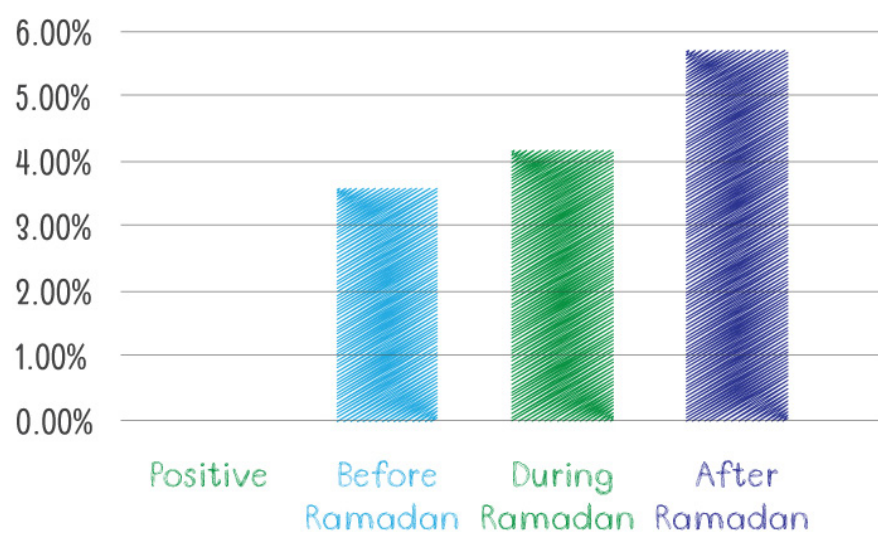
## UAE

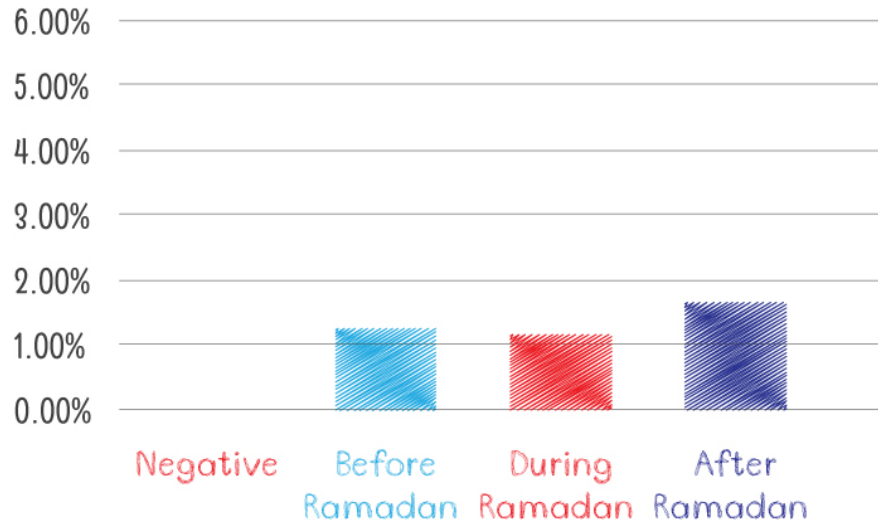


## Are people more positive or negative on social media in Ramadan?

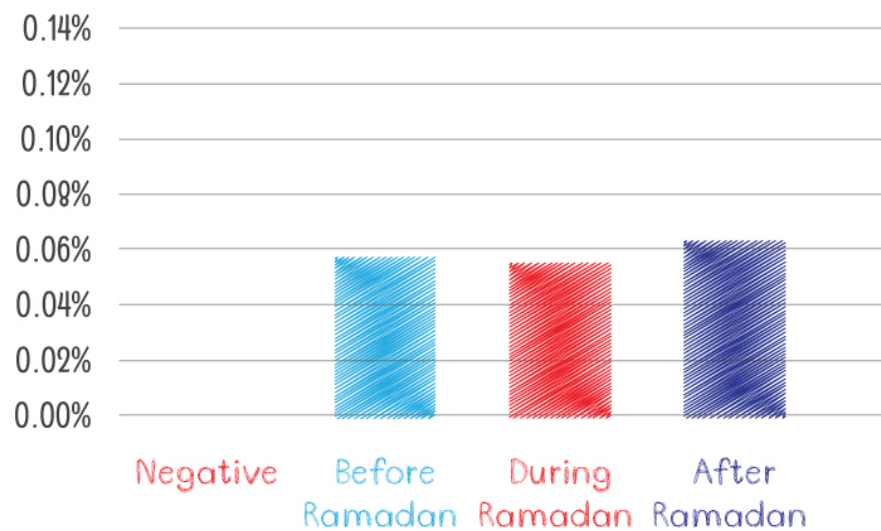
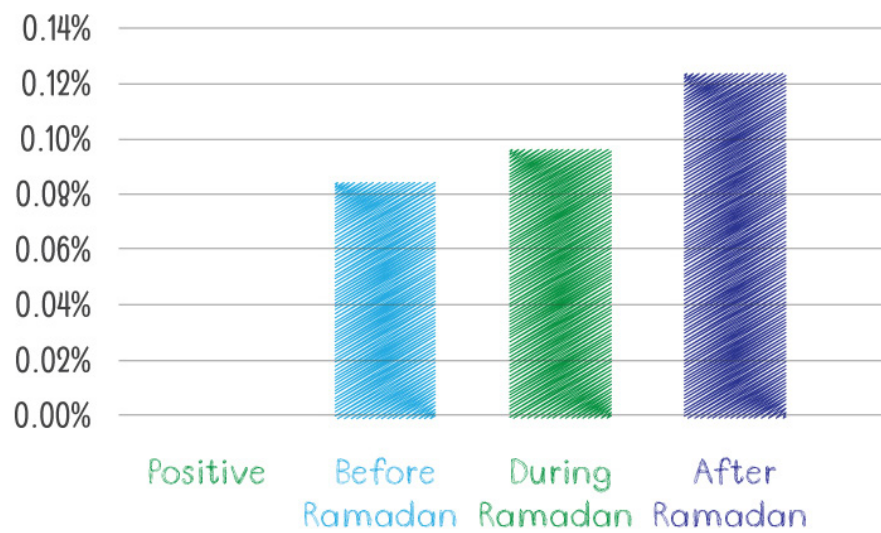
We manually analyzed engagement activity on Facebook and Twitter to track and categorize posts and tweets as either positive or negative to determine the sentiment of Facebook and Twitter in the region this time of the year.

### Facebook



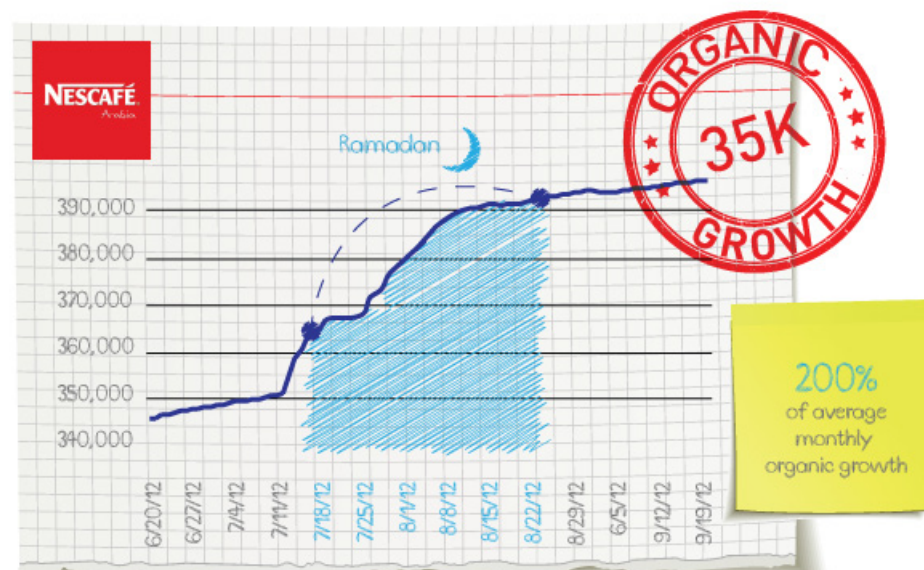


### Twitter



# Case Studies

Identifying the best times to engage with your audiences may amplify your reach but to also increase engagement, it's important to use relevant content. A great example of how entertaining and valuable content can help boost engagement levels on your Facebook page is Nescafe Arabia during 2012.





Another example is Zain's integrated campaign in Ramadan 2012 that resulted in gaining 100,000 Twitter followers organically. This was achieved by integrating a TV show that Zain sponsored and featured the Arab star, Shooji, with Zain's channels on Twitter mainly, Facebook and Instagram as well.



# Recommendations

- Ramadan is a unique time in the Arab world both online and offline. Consequently, what brands know about their community's behavior during much of the year may not apply during the Holy Month as peak activity times are likely to move and engagement to increase. Therefore, observe and take note of trends happening within your communities this Ramadan in order to align your publishing times with your audience and maximize engagement next year.
- Optimize your content mix: MENA user interests shift during the Holy Month. Adapt your content accordingly to stay relevant and build stronger relationships.
- Increase post/tweet advertising support budgets in Ramadan: as organic engagement rates increase, your advertising dollars will push content even further to reach out to more people.
- Launch integrated marketing campaigns: social media usage increase in-line with TV, radio, and print consumption. Integrated campaigns deliver higher multiplier effects in Ramadan.

# Methodology

The data related to Facebook and Twitter consumption was retrieved by analyzing a period of three weeks before, during and after Ramadan in 2012. The logic behind excluding Eid as well as weekends in each country is to avoid skewing the results. For Facebook, engagement was calculated as the number of likes, comments, shares that regional brands received divided by the average number of fans these brands had during that time interval. As for Twitter, engagement was calculated as the number of mentions and retweets these brands received.

Regarding the best times to engage, we monitored the top ten pages in terms of local fan base in each of the studied countries, on an hourly basis. These pages were retrieved from Socialbakers.com as of June 2013. For Twitter, we tracked a total of 8,879 users across the region. We filtered them by only including users who have created their Twitter accounts before June 2012 and have 3000 tweets/year or less. This is less than ten tweets per day for every user; more would indicate a heavy user and would skew the results. Best times to engage in each of the studied countries was selected as the hour with the highest level of engagement in local time.

Sentiment analysis was done manually by our team of social media analysts at The Online Project for accuracy and to ensure the human element is present in determining what is positive, negative, and neutral. We analyzed all the engagement we tracked, which totaled to 106,753 comments, timeline posts and tweets, to ensure emotions, such as sarcasm and frustration, were taken into consideration that automated tools fail to detect.

# About TOP

As the Middle East's leading social media agency, The Online Project develops and executes social media strategies for Fortune 500 companies and high profile organizations operating in the region.



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