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Sania Khan (Saudi Arabia)

ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL VALUES OF YOUNG SAUDI CITIZENS TOWARDS SEGMENTATION OF COMMERCIAL ADVERTISEMENTS

Abstract

Advertisement, being one of the most effective marketing tools, induces customers to purchase their products and encourages them to behave in a certain way. This study focused on the relationship between demographic and cultural values of young Saudi Arabians. Primary data was collected from a total of 284 respondents from the Riyadh region using an online survey. The survey questionnaire was adopted from previous relevant studies and modified according to the objectives of the understudy by considering the cultural values apparent to Saudi citizens. The corresponding sub-items were also designed on a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the theoretical aspects presented in the literature, the hypotheses were formulated to find the substantial contributions of the sample data. The correlation using SPSS revealed that gender and marital status had no relation to the segmentation of advertisements, whereas other vital cultural factors such as religion, language, manners and customs, social institutions, aesthetics, and traditions demonstrated a strong linkage with segmenting firms' advertisements. The study revealed important implications for international product advertisers and market communicators. It also provided several directions for future researchers.

Keywords

Islamic marketing, Arab advertisements, product marketing, advertisement perceptions, cultural variables

JEL Classification

M31, M37, M39

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of business and online technology allowed customers to shop around the world without crossing national borders. According to Keegan and Schlegelmich (2001), most firms combat marketing-related challenges. Among them, understanding the cultural values of customers is vital, as they are constantly changing. Hofstede (1988) defined culture as complex but not chaotic, and it is a collective behavior of people's minds that differentiates one group from another. Hollensen (2011) exposed eight cultural components, including attitude, behavior, religion, manners and customs, technology and material culture, languages, values, and traditions, social institutions. According to Sinclair and Wilken (2009), to attain a competitive advantage in the global market, global firms need to understand these aspects of their customers to segment them accordingly. Further Usunier (1993) stated the cultural differences in every country arise from the spending pattern, values, attitudes, and tastes of different people. Many researchers demonstrated a strong impact of the consumer culture on their lifestyle, choice of product and services, motivation and intention to purchase, and ultimately, its consequences are evident on consumption behavior (Tse & Wong, 1988). Global firms persuade their audience in such a way to make them purchase their products. Some other companies may not even promote

their products, but present themselves just as uncommercial. Al-Mohammadi (2014), Limbu and Torres (2009) stated the main objective of such advertisers was to tempt customers to behave in a particular way that indirectly affected their purchasing behavior. In the context of Saudi culture, Kraidy (2009) stated the social lifestyle and culture in Saudi were established on Islamic values. Many other authors in the world also asserted that Saudi culture is developed from the fundamentals of Islamic religion and traditions (Al-Salomi, 2016; Bin Zaid, 2018; Ajina, 2019; Al-Saggaf & Simmons, 2015; Purnama & Safira, 2017). However, not all Saudis follow the same culture. From the Arabs point of view, Saudis focus on the social status and ethical issues in advertisements (ads) (Ali, 2019). Al-Habab et al. (2013) and Al-Salomi (2016) argued both liberal and Islamists of Saudis are not the same in perceiving different ads despite both groups applying true Islam. Therefore, it is not certain to state which group is right. Therefore, this study is proposed to explore the opportunities that firms may adopt to cultural ideas while advertising specifically in Saudi Arabia. It also examines how Saudi young consumers behave and adjust their buying patterns based on the advertisement messages, which they might find against their cultural values and beliefs. This study bridges the gap in understanding the attitude of various young consumers from cultural perspectives and differentiating Islamist and liberal customer groups. Moreover, the study helps advertising firms and marketing communicators to segment the youngsters while advertising.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW, AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

Ali (2019) stated that there is a lack of research on advertising with reference to the cultural context in the Arab world. In exploring the elements of cultural values on advertising, Mansour (2015) surveyed Saudi and Sudan customers and found that social norms and credibility affected Saudis, and entertainment, information and credibility affected the Sudanese. Sahin (2014) on Turkish students showed the local product ad was more effective than that of the international branded products. This demonstrates that cultural similarities increase the acceptance of an advertising message. Another study by Medabesh (2016), using desire, interest, attention, and actions as Saudi customers' variables, showed that online ads increased the customers' purchasing. However, it was assumed that this study might have persuaded people with the anti-culture ads. Therefore, another study was conducted by Badawi (2017) on Saudi families. The author considered the motivational factors, behavioral factors, and other demographic variables such as age, gender, education, family size, and economic status. It was found that the television ad had a low effect on families, and the consumer behavior was moderate. However, the emotions and motivational factors were higher. Hence, both Medabesh (2016) and Badawo (2017) demonstrated a significant ads effect on purchasing behavior. Al-Salomi (2016) and Al-Habab et al. (2013) affirmed that Saudi culture was resultant of Islamic religion and

strong trust in it. Rohrs (2013) explained that the short-term aims of ads convey temporary purposes such as seasonal offers and discounts, and long-term purposes are conveyed through effective ads in improving loyalty and trust.

Another study by Ali (2019) in Egypt investigated the compatibility of Arab ads with local cultural values. The content analysis found that ads have shattered cultural values, societal norms, and ethics in Egypt. The author further added that firms flatter the customers' beliefs as some companies add sensational attributes to their products like energy to soft drinks, refreshment to tea, personality to shampoo products, etc. However, the influence of such messages needs more investigation to understand how subjective norms and individual attitudes replace the customers' beliefs. According to Keegan and Green (2011), the Middle East countries cover 16 nations, including Kuwait, Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Oman, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Afghanistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Although several countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, and Israel are not exactly in the Middle East, due to the majority of the Arab and Muslim population and the apparent homogeneity, there are many cultural similarities. These societal clusters can be segregated based on beliefs, traditions, behavioral aspects, religion, social class, income levels, and education. Researchers mentioned that due to globalization, the Arab nations

welcome foreign products and the market offers abundant prospective for imported products.

The cultural values in Saudi Arabia are given top-notch importance since the beginning. The same is true for organizations and advertising firms due to the prevailing cultural norms. According to Kalliny (2012), Arab countries maintain a conservative society, since women were given high value compared to western countries. For instance, Arab women dress modestly in ads in order to avoid the scenes of sexual attraction (Kalliny, 2010; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007). Even the international companies present modest ads in Saudi Arabia compared to anywhere they advertise in the rest of the world. Bin Said et al. (2017) and Sahin (2014) reported that advertising alcoholic products was challenging in Arab countries. Despite that fact that most of the Arabs are Muslims, there are different perspectives in terms of religious beliefs and their worship styles. Only Saudi Arabia believes in the Hanbali doctrine at the government level. Therefore, even political values are also based on Islamic trends for decades. Also, the national Saudi television channels present women in a modest way with full hijab and even edits the ads shown in the rest of the world before they telecast on Saudi television (Abdul Cader, 2015). These practices portray

a high level of harmony between Islamic teachings and the views of Saudis.

Purnama and Zafira (2017) scrutinized the apparent differences of ad in one religion separately for two Islamic countries, namely Indonesia and Malaysia. The results showed that the ad in one country could not be consistent with the other, especially if they are different cultures. So even if two neighboring Islamic countries have the same ad, it may fit one community alone and may not be suitable to the other due to sub-cultural differences. The buyers who are less familiar with foreign culture might not fit into the advertising of international products. So, it is the culture that shapes people's behavior in a particular society. Thus, in many nations when the firms want to grow internationally, they work closely with market research firms or marketing agencies to assist them in providing the insight to understand the similarities and differences of customers in those nations. Since most ads are verbal and screen played language, local culture and images will influence the socio-cultural behavior of customers in respective countries (Hollensen, 2011).

Research studies demonstrated how to convey the ad message to customers in order to segment the market. DeBono (2006) concentrated on understanding the magnitude of the message and found

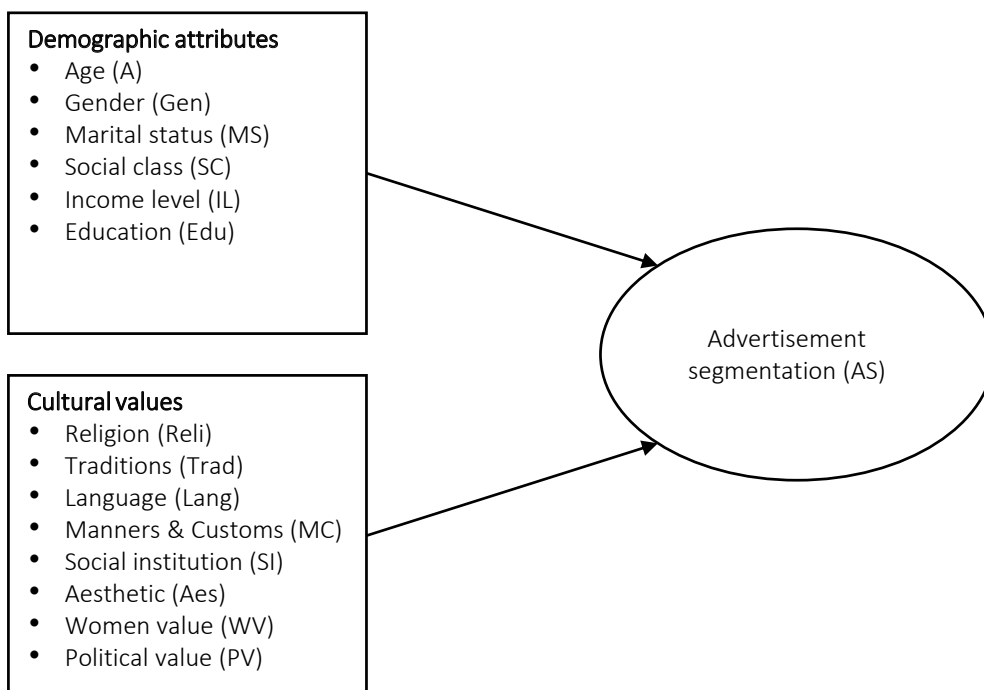


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of cultural values in advertisement segmentation

the recipient pays more attention and gets motivated if it matches them. According to Lammers (1991), various motives highlighted in ads, will attract them. Similarly, Rossiter et al. (2000) recommended the product ad must be appealing and supportive with many arguments and convey a low perceived risk by using only one or two claims to create curiosity about a product. Bajaber (2020) revealed that Saudi customers evaluate cultural aspects in ads. The same study stated that customers also take seriously the national ads compared to other nations. Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) stress people having collective cultures will have relatives and friends with common beliefs. Conversely, given people value cultural messages, an individual recipient may perceive them differently and develop other ideological references, and may not distract from cultural values. Therefore, sometimes advertisers may get misled by the public trend and would not guarantee individual purchasing behavior. From this point of view, it is essential to globally understand the customers' perception of ads based on their cultural values. Therefore, given the prevailing literature on ad segmentation, the study provides the following framework for understanding the relationship between the customer demographic variable, cultural values and ad segmentation (Figure 1).

1.1. The need for and objectives of the study

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) believed that people's values are basic and distinctive in every culture. Over time, there has been significant progress in terms of customers' whereabouts, lifestyle and thought process. Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010) stated that values are persistent, which force customers to behave in specific way. However, sometimes these inside cultural values are not apparent while watching different commercial ads and even customers behave differently during actual purchasing. Even though countries like Saudi Arabia are recently changing and moving towards adopting Western culture in many aspects, the inferences on cultural values and perceptions on advertisement are not comprehensive. Similarly, many studies attempted to understand the role of customers' cultural values and their attributes on firms' advertising. However, the perception of Islamic young consumers on global advertising

strategies and firms segmenting them accordingly were least emphasized. Therefore, this study aimed to fill the research gaps that exist in the literature. Therefore, the main objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To understand the role of customer demographic profile (gender, marital status, education, social status, income level on advertisement segmentation (AS)).
2. To understand the relationship between cultural values and advertisement segmentation (AS)).

1.2. Research hypotheses

Based on the literature review and above objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: There is a significant positive relationship between customer gender, marital status and advertisement segmentation (AS).*
- H2: There is a significant positive relationship between customer education, income level, social class and AS.*
- H3: There is a significant positive relationship between customer cultural values and AS.*

2. METHODOLOGY

This study proposed to determine the impact of demographics and cultural values of Saudi young customers on the ad. Based on these objectives, it was decided to collect the opinions of young Saudi customers. An online survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire to analyze their demographics, cultural values, and their attitudes and perceptions towards watching ads. The questionnaire was adopted from Bajaber (2020), with slight modifications, and circulated both in English and Arabic versions to obtain accurate opinions of customers and avoid any misunderstandings while filling the questionnaire. The variables and their items are explained below. The data was collected from a sample of 284 young Saudi respondents who are within the age group of eighteen to thirty-five. An online questionnaire was sent to their emails using

Google forms. Since this study adopted the questionnaire from Bajaber (2020), the exploratory factor analysis was not conducted as the underlying factor structure of the measure was previously identified and validated by the respective authors. Therefore, this study analyzed the collected data using Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented the demographic profile of the respondents (Table 1), mean and standard deviation of the constructs (Table 2), and correlation between cultural values and advertisement segmentation (Table 3).

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The frequency and percentages of demographics were illustrated in Table 1. The majority of young citizens were between 18 and 25 years old

(42.253%). Among them, 168 (59.154) are male and 116 (40.845) are female. Most of them, 101 (35.563%), have a bachelor's degree. Only 108 (38.028%) are married and 120 (42.253%) are single. The monthly income level of most of the respondents, 109 (38.380%), is in the range of Saudi Riyals 3,000 to 5,000, where only a few, 38 (13.380%), earn more than Saudi Riyals 15,000 per month. A huge number of respondents are from the lower middle class 87 (30.633%) and the working-class 82 (28.873%). The mean for the Islamic religion and the Arabic language was higher than for other cultural variables with 3.66 (SD = 1.16) and 3.64 (SD = 1.06), respectively. The next highest mean is for Islamic traditions with a mean value of 3.58 (SD = 1.03). It is evident that young customers give a preference to ads that are acceptable with Islamic religion, their traditions and local language.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Source: Primary data analysis.

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (A)		
18 to 25	120	42.253
26 to 30 years	72	25.352
31 to 35 years	56	19.718
36 to 40 years	36	12.676
Gender (Gen)		
Male	168	59.154
Female	116	40.845
Education (Edu)		
Schooling	58	20.422
Vocational	62	21.830
Bachelors	101	35.563
Masters	47	16.549
Ph.D.	16	5.633
Marital status (MS)		
Married	108	38.028
Single	120	42.253
Divorced	38	13.380
Widow	18	6.338
Income level (IL)		
3,000-5,000	109	38.380
5,000-10,000	95	33.450
10,000-15,000	42	14.788
Above 15,000	38	13.380
Social class (SC)		
Upper class	34	11.971
Upper middle class	53	18.661
Lower middle class	87	30.633
Working class	82	28.873
Poor	28	9.859

Table 2. Cultural values of customers towards ads

Source: Survey questionnaire adopted from Bajaber (2020).

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Religion (Reli)	284	3.66	1.16
1. I am a Muslim.			
2. I am interested to watch the ads that are Islamically acceptable.			
3. I pay more attention to company ads whose products interests me.			
4. I will not entertain the company ads that detract my religion in their ads.			
Tradition (Trad)	284	3.58	1.03
1. I am interested in the cultural information provided in Saudi ads as a reflection of the reality of Saudi people.			
2. Normally, I evaluate cultural messages in ads when they occur.			
3. I deal with advertising messages contrary to my culture by Saudi advertisers more seriously than non-Saudi advertisers.			
4. My interest in the advertiser is more likely to increase when we share the same cultural beliefs.			
5. Being a company's customer, I may stop dealing with it if their ad carries a messages that affects badly my cultural values			
Language (Lang)	284	3.64	1.06
1. Ads that are in my language appeal me more than that are in other languages.			
2. I will no longer watch the ads that try to change the social role of women through their ads.			
3. I shall not trust the companies whose ads are against the Islamic principles.			
4. I will not entertain the company ads who exposes the women in undesirable images.			
5. I will not entertain the company ads, which detracts the Islamic manners.			
Social institution (SI)	284	2.98	1.14
1. The advertising messages shape the direction of my relationship with the advertiser.			
2. I like the ads, which my family likes.			
3. I like the ads, which normally Saudi citizens like.			
4. I do not like company ads that mock some segments of my society.			
Aesthetic (Aes)	284	2.93	1.18
1. I no longer watch the ads that attack or disregard my country.			
2. I no longer watch the ads that disregard my country's governors.			
3. I no longer entertain the ads that support the rivals of my country.			
4. I do not encourage the product ads, which are prohibited Islamically (e.g., drugs, alcohol, etc.)			

The correlation matrix (Table 3) shows that gender (0.054) and marital status (0.186) do not have any positive relationship with AS due to the insignificant value. Therefore, hypotheses H1 was rejected and not supported by the data. Similarly, income level (0.386, $p < 0.05$), education (0.567, $p < 0.001$), and social class (0.406, $p < 0.001$) obtained a moderately significant positive relationship with AS, which shows that hypothesis H2 was supported by the data and accepted. The other variables,

Table 3. Correlation matrix of demographics, cultural values and advertisement segmentation

Source: Primary data analysis.

Variables	Gen	Edu	MS	IL	SC	Reli	Trad	Lang	MC	SI	Aes	AS
Gen	1	.139	.130	.095	.668	.062	.164	.183	.116	.204	.134	.054
Edu		1	.439*	.594**	.559**	.452**	.392**	.439*	.408**	.299**	.338**	.567**
MS			1	.138	.219*	.254*	.432**	.214	.346*	.627**	.437*	.186
IL				1	.581**	.302*	.234	.334**	.134	.109	.214*	.386*
SC					1	.503**	.472**	.438**	.513**	.637**	.661**	.406**
Reli						1	.728**	.563**	.812**	.636**	.707**	.801**
Trad							1	.336*	.801**	.627**	.650**	.768**
Lang								1	.305*	.734**	.594**	.729**
MC									1	.581**	.554**	.664**
SI										1	.483*	.564**
Aes											1	.438**
AS												1

Note: N = 284. ** Correlation is highly significant at the 0.01 level. * Correlation is moderately significant at the 0.01 level.

namely religion (0.801, $p < 0.001$), tradition (0.768, $p < 0.001$), language (0.729, $p < 0.001$), manner and customs (0.664, $p < 0.001$), social institute (0.564, $p < 0.001$), and aesthetics (0.438, $p < 0.001$), are found to have a strong positive relationship with AS. Hence, it is evident that hypothesis H3 was accepted and supported by the data.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the relationship between customers' demographic and cultural values and advertisement segmentation. All the respondents involved in the study were Muslims, and it turned out that young customers possess high cultural values and do not tolerate any information against their customs and traditions. It is understood in the modernized world, although perceptions and consumer patterns are dynamically changing globally, Saudi citizens continue to value their cultural perspectives. While gender and marital status had no association with AS, other factors gained moderate to high significant association with AS. With regard to cultural values, most respondents gave priority to religion and Islamic traditions. Language, Islamic manners and customs, affiliations of social institutions and aesthetic values developed subsequent strong connections with AS. The majority of respondents said that gender and marital status would not affect segmentation, but education, in-

come level, and social class would influence advertisement. These findings are highly relevant to many similar Saudi cultural studies, which talk about the existence of high religious values among Saudi citizens and their importance to their women, manner and customs, as well as belonging to social institutions (Bin Said et al., 2017; Sahin, 2014). This study states that women in Saudi Arabia are treated with utmost respect in society, and respondents believe they should not be shown openly or misused in ads. According to respondents, women are given high role in society, and they would not entertain such ads that show women in undesirable images. This finding is in line with Kalliny (2010), Abdul Cader (2015), and Kalliny and Gentry (2007) who consider the use of women as a weapon in promoting the firms' products and a negative impact of customers' loyalty on firms. Also, the ad that conveys an appealing and modest message to family, friends and relatives will be valued more in the view of customers and may foster a decent relationship with the firm. The respondents expressed they did not encourage the ads that promoted a rivalry message or products that are Islamically prohibited. Obviously, advertisers should segment their customers based on the aforementioned cultural variables. Failure to consider them can also lead to the failure of their advertisement efforts and new product launches. Thus, it is believed that the majority of Saudi young customers are Islamists and may not change soon in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the conceptual content of ad segmentation as applied to young Saudi citizens in Saudi Arabia. The study demonstrates the high cultural values of the citizens and illustrated that the perception of Islamists differs significantly from the perception of liberals. With regard to cultural values, the study paid attention to religious, social, manners and customs, language, tradition, and aesthetic aspects of Saudis along with some other demographic aspects. The study was limited to local citizens who reside in Saudi Arabia and did not include other social groups like families, teenagers, and old customers. Further research could explore the advertisement perception by these groups, as well as Saudi nationals in foreign countries, to provide a broader view of whether they are open to different cultures in other foreign countries. The study contributes to providing international firm advertisers with some useful insights into Saudi culture. Therefore, firms must focus on segmenting Saudi customers while advertising and cannot broadcast the same advertisements they present to other citizens in another country.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Sania Khan.

Data curation: Sania Khan.

Formal analysis: Sania Khan.

Investigation: Sania Khan.

Methodology: Sania Khan.

Software: Sania Khan.

Supervision: Sania Khan.

Writing – original draft: Sania Khan.

Writing – review & editing: Sania Khan.

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