What do marketers post on brands’ Facebook pages in Islamic countries?

An exploratory study of local and global brands in Saudi Arabia

Mohammad Hatim Abuljadail
Department of Marketing Communication, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and
Louisa Ha
School of Media and Communication, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA

Abstract
Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the “posting” behavior of marketers on brands’ Facebook pages and whether these “posting” behaviors differ between local and global brands in Saudi Arabia.

Design/methodology/approach – The study randomly selected a total of 400 Facebook brand page posts from a matching sample of top 20 global and 20 local brands in Saudi Arabia using content analysis.

Findings – One of the notable findings show that global brands are more likely to post content that consists of prizes/giveaways, games/competitions and socializing than local brands, while local brands are more likely to post informative content than global brands. The findings also show that local brands are more likely to use content that includes Islamic messages, women in modest clothing, Arabic language and Saudi dialect than global brands.

Research limitations/implications – This study is limited to 20 global and 20 local brands. More product categories are needed.

Practical implications – The findings of this study have implications for marketers in regards to what types of communication content is more likely to be posted on brands’ Facebook fan pages in Saudi Arabia – especially for those global brands that are interested in having a localized brand Facebook fan page for Saudi Arabia.

Originality/value – The first study to compare Facebook strategies used by global brands and local brands in the same market.

Keywords Marketing, Facebook

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
With the increasing use of social media such as Facebook, which has a billion daily users, of which 85 per cent are outside the USA (Facebook, 2016), marketers set up official brands’ fan pages on Facebook to reach users, increase sales and cultivate consumer loyalty (Chen et al., 2014). In 2015, 93 per cent of the marketers reported that they are utilizing Facebook as a marketing tool (Social Media Examiner, 2015). Social media empowered consumers and reduced brands’ control over brands’ communication (Kuksov et al., 2013). Social media are more impactful compared to traditional media; it is ubiquitous and visible and spreads at a
fast rate through social networks (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Brands cannot ignore consumers’ feedback (e.g. complaints) anymore. Consumers have expectations; those pages that are not consistent with their postings or are not responsive to their consumers could end up hurting the brand. Marketers should know the most effective social media content that is representative of the brand, appealing to consumers and responsive to consumers’ feedback (Yan, 2011). Consumers play an important role in spreading electronic word-of-mouth in their social networks. Failure to manage brand’s social media pages could have negative consequences on brand–consumer relationships and on the overall brand.

Okazaki and Taylor’s (2013) review of social media and international advertising explained the importance of social media in the context of international advertising research and pointed to the lack of research, especially about the internationalization of social media across borders. Despite the importance of social media use to international marketers, their social media use in the Muslim world has not been explored as much as other areas in the world, such as Europe, America and Asia. The few studies that examined marketers’ use of media in the Muslim world were focused mainly on traditional media such as television (Kalliny et al., 2008; Al-Olayan and Karande, 2000; Luqmani et al., 1989). Because the Arab region has more restricted media than the western world, social media can provide freedom and direct access to consumers that marketers cannot enjoy through mainstream media. Global and local marketers may use different strategies because of different consumer expectations and brand images. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, there is no published study that examines how global marketers and local marketers in the Muslim world utilize social media and the effectiveness of their social media efforts. To address this gap in the literature, this study investigates the differences and similarities between local and global brands in the type of content (message appeals) they use to communicate to their consumers in Saudi Arabia on their Facebook pages.

This study focuses on Saudi Arabia, which is one of the major Muslim countries in the world. In fact, it is the birth place of Islam and the home of the two holy mosques, Makkah and Madinah. Saudi Arabia is going through rapid changes due to the new vision by Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister. He initiated “Saudi Arabia’s Vision for 2030”. This vision focuses on utilizing the country’s status as the center of the Islamic world and the land of the two holy mosques, investing the rich resources in the country globally and utilizing Saudi Arabia’s strategic geographic location that connects Asia, Africa and Europe (Vision 2030, 2016). Saudi Arabia is going through rapid changes toward modernization. This rapid change is being reflected in how Saudis interact with each other and with the rest of the world using information and communication technologies. GMI (2018) shows that, in 2018, 30 million people are using the internet in Saudi Arabia, which is 91 per cent of the Saudi population.

Although it is not most populated Muslim country, it is one of the fastest growing countries in regard to the use of the internet and social media. The population of Saudi Arabia is about 30 million people (Country Meters, 2016), and more than half of them are internet users (The Social Clinic, 2016; Internet World Stats, 2015). Facebook usage in Saudi Arabia is more dominant than other social networking sites such as Twitter (5.4 million users) and LinkedIn (1.4 million users) (The Social Clinic, 2016). As many as 8.4 million of the internet users in Saudi Arabia are Facebook users; 83 per cent of Facebook users are 18-35 years old and 90 per cent of them live in the largest three cities in Saudi Arabia: Jeddah, Riyadh and Dammam (The Social Clinic, 2016). Over 90 per cent of 8.4 million Saudi Arabia’s Facebook users use Facebook through mobile devices (The Social Clinic, 2016). This article first reviews the international marketing theories related to globalization and
local adaptation, and then the interplay of value congruity and paradox in messages to consumers.

**Literature review**

**Globalization**

The world has turned into a shared market that enables brands from all over the world to mobilize and spread in multiple markets as a result of globalization (De Mooij, 2013). The term globalization is defined as the complete structuring of the entire world as a whole (Robertson, 1990). Globalization is also used to refer to the flow of capital, media and technologies and the behavioral changes due to globalization, while global communication refers to the flow of communication, information, media and technologies around the world (De Mooij, 2013). Besides globalization, the term internationalization is also used to refer to the trade, exchange and communication among countries/nations, as well as the members of those nations. As brands became able to sell their products and services around the world, global media and advertising became important to carry the exchange and satisfy these new changes. Global media and advertising aim to diminish the differences among the world’s consumers’ cultures into one unified culture that can be understood universally (Cimendag and Yalcin, 2012). The success of such a strategy could enable global brand marketers to use a uniform strategy to market and sell their products efficiently at lower cost around the world (Ford et al., 2011). Although globalization aims to have a unified culture of consumers, it is mainly based on the western culture – primarily, the USA. Although globalization is melding the world into one marketplace, it is not changing people’s cultures or values. As De Mooij (2013) noted, global brands can have success around the world selling the same products, but the products could be used differently from one place to another; it can be used to reinforce the local values.

In addition, De Mooij (2013) refers to the phenomena of “cultural value paradox” which argues that, in a single culture, there can be strong yet opposing sets of values that coexist in an individual consumer. She argues that, within one culture, there can be two sets of values (desired and desirable). Desirable values refer to the standard norm in the society, what is right from wrong, what people think the world ought to be. The desired refers to what individuals really want and consider important. Value paradox can also be reflected in what people say they do versus what they truly do. The desired and the desirable do not always overlap and can lead to value paradox within one culture that can be confusing and misleading for advertisers and marketers.

**Standardization versus adaptation**

Standardization and adaptation are the two common marketing strategies used by international brands in international markets (Ha et al., 2014). Globalization and standardization are similar terminologies that refer to the use of the same marketing strategy for different countries. In contrast, localization and adaptation are interchangeable terminologies that refer to the strategy of customization to each individual local market. While standardization supporters argue that globalization leads to the convergence of consumers around the world and the same message is beneficial to create a consistent global brand image (Levitt, 1983; Yunker, 2010), adaptation supporters argue that globalization looks at markets at the macro level, neglecting the differences at the micro level (Giddens, 2005). Adaptation supporters base their argument on divergence theories that say groups and sub-groups strive to maintain their identities (Schlesinger, 1987; Arantes, 2007). The success of global brands around the world led some scholars to argue that the world is becoming a homogeneous market that enables multinational companies to use an identical
standardized marketing strategy to sell their standard identical brands (products and services) worldwide with more profitable results, higher margin and lower cost (Levitt, 1983; Subhash, 1989). Levitt’s (1983) notion of identical standardized advertising assumes powerful ads that apply to all races, nations, ages, religions, customs and values. Scholars have been concerned that the spread of American global brands around the world would lead to colonization of the world’s diverse cultures as their advertising is created by American advertising agencies using standardized creatives (Cimendag and Yalcin, 2012).

Nonetheless, De Mooij (2013) argues that the success of global brands around the world does not necessarily mean that local cultures are diminishing. Although markets and technologies are converging, people’s behaviors, attitudes, desires and values are not converging. Consumers around the world could use the same product or service but for different reasons. For example, Hello Kitty products are successful in both the USA and China; however, in the USA, it is a product that is desirable for children, while in China, it is desirable for both adults and children (De Mooij, 2013). Adaptation strategies for markets are designed based on local markets’ demographic, socioeconomic status, culture and other factors (Ford et al., 2011). Wind (1986) suggests a strategy called “think globally and act locally.” This strategy aims at designing a strategy that follows global perspective, but with paying attention to local details. Such a strategy satisfies the cost reduction aspect of globalized advertising, as well as the cultural differences aspect. Berthon et al. (2012) contend that international marketers must use a localized strategy in social media to adapt to the local culture because social media exchanges are strongly based on local culture. Okazaki and Taylor (2013) believe there is a strong need to empirically test the validity of such advocacy of localization effectiveness hypothesis.

Previous studies examined the effectiveness of both adaptation and standardization strategies around the world. Of these strategies, neither one is universally right or wrong. Both were explored in different countries and contexts, and they were effective in some cases, while ineffective in others. One of the standardization aspects that was explored and was effective is the use of the English language in international advertising, specifically in non-English-speaking countries. Spielmann and Delvert (2014) investigate the effectiveness of using English-language ads by local brands in non-English-speaking countries; their findings show that using English language in ads reflects positively on consumers’ attitudes toward the brand and the quality of the brand. There is a positive attitude associated with the English language in non-English-speaking countries. Advertisements written in English are assumed to represent better quality products as it reflects American superiority. In contrast, brands could use English standardized messages in different markets, but the message might not be understood by different cultures. For example, Levi’s used a slogan to advertise their products around the world. The slogan “Levi’s engineered jeans” was used internationally to promote Levi’s jeans. This slogan was not understood by consumers in continental European countries, and Levi’s ended up spending more money and time to explain that “engineered” means “made by” (Jain and Roy, 2012).

Islam and cultural values in advertising

Previous studies show that value congruence to the cultural context is essential to advertising success (Chang, 2006). The term congruency refers to harmony, compatibility and agreement. Congruency is used in multiple contexts, and it has been considered highly effective in persuading consumers (Ha et al., 2014). For example, content that portrays models of the same ethnicity as the majority of the viewers tends to be more persuasive, even though ads with models of another race might be more attention grabbing (Cui et al., 2012).
To understand the culture in the Muslim world, marketers should understand what Islam is and the culture in the Muslim world. Kabasakal and Bodur (2002) highlight the importance of Quran, which is the holy book in Islam, as a unifying factor that caused commonality of culture among people in the Muslim world. Islam is not only a religion; it is a complete system that guides individuals through life (Kavoossi, 2000; Lawrence, 2000). In the Muslim world, religion and culture go hand-in-hand most of the time. Shari'a (Islamic law) is a complete constitution directing Muslims in many areas such as how to behave and how to trade (Luqmani et al., 1989). The Shari'a guides everything Muslims should do; as a result, culture there is mainly derived from Islam (Anastos, Bedos, and Seaman, 1980).

Therefore, Islam in Saudi Arabia has a great impact on their market. For example, in 2005, the Scandinavian brand, Arla Foods, was very popular and dominant in the Muslim market for dairy products such as cheese and butter; its annual sales in the Arab region was US $550m. At the end of 2005, a Danish newspaper published a cartoon depicting Prophet Muhammad, the prophet of Islam (Mahajan, 2013). The cartoons were sarcastic and making a mockery of Prophet Muhammad and Islam in general. At the beginning of 2006, Saudi Arabia declared a boycott of Danish products. In just a few days, the majority of the retailers in the Muslim world boycotted Danish products, including Arla Foods products. Hoping to rejuvenate its sales, Arla Foods initiated a campaign to show its opposition to the cartoons that were published in the newspaper. Although Saudi Arabia lifted its boycott declaration, Arla Foods’ 2006 sales decreased significantly, as low as half its sales before the boycott period. In 2008, after Arla Foods’ recovery from the incident, several disrespectful cartoons were published in Danish newspapers. Arla Foods sales dropped again, costing the company around US$300m. Although the company tried to improve its image in the market and show its opposition to the cartoons, the company’s sales did not recover until 2010 (Mahajan, 2013). Kalliny, Dagher, Minor and do lo Santos (2008) suggest that the Arab/Muslim world could be ranked on a scale, with Lebanon as the most liberal and Saudi Arabia as the most conservative in respect to adhering to the Islamic requirements.

Research question
Based on the past research on globalization and localization, cultural value and branding, the following research question pertaining to the Facebook brand page content strategies is posed in the study:

RQ1. What are the differences and similarities between local and global brands in the type of content (message appeals) they use to communicate to their consumers in Saudi Arabia on their Facebook pages: information cues, association attributes, terminal values, post content categories and cultural cues?

Sampling and procedures
To identify social media content strategies used by local and global brands and the level of consumer engagement using the Facebook metrics, the researchers conducted a content analysis of brand pages on Facebook. The data for this study were obtained from purposely selected 40 brands’ Facebook fan pages in Saudi Arabia. And, 20 pages were selected from the top 100 Saudi brands in 2013 (top100Saudibrands, 2013) and another 20 were chosen from the worlds’ most valuable brands in 2014 (Brandirectory, 2014). These brands were chosen from different lists because the majority of the Saudi local brands did not exist in the world’s most valuable brands’ lists. In addition, the most current local list was issued in 2013, that is why, it is a year older than the global list. These 40 brands were selected based
on the following methods: the brand has to have an active official Facebook fan page that posts at least monthly and the global brand has to be in one of the six industry sectors included in this study and matched with a local brand (automotive, food and beverage, consumer goods, financial services, retail and technology). Other industry sectors, such as industrial and construction, were excluded due to their different nature of industry, which focuses more on business to business relations than business to consumer. The industry sectors were narrowed down to ensure that industries are comparable and messages are designed for similar audience and target markets. After the selection of 20 local and 20 global brands, the author randomly selected ten posts from every brand’s Facebook fan page posted in March 2015. A total of 400 posts were analyzed and the data collection took place during the first two weeks of April 2015. The screenshots of the selected posts were taken, and then the posts were coded.

**Measures**

The study used two message scales to code the Facebook posts. The researchers used the international advertising message scale developed by Ha (1998) consisting of information cues, association attributes and terminal values combining Resnik and Stern's (1977) scale that was designed to measure advertising content and the association attributes and terminal values scale that was developed by Rokeach (1973). Terminal values refers to the values advertisers promised the consumer can enjoy after purchase such as happiness, freedom and equality. Association attributes, also called instrumental values, are positive characteristics of the advertised products such as stylish and friendly (Ha, 1998).

The content scales used by Ha (1998) were originally developed to compare advertising between national markets only; the researchers of this study added two additional message scales to code social media postings specifically. Social media brands communicate a variety of content categories that are designed for different purposes, such as social engagement, entertainment and competitions, which may not relate to the product or brand directly, such as greeting fans on holidays and posting jokes. The researchers modified Parsons’s (2013) typologies of non-brand messages in social media to fit the purposes of this study. The modified scale consists of the following ten post content categories: prizes/giveaways, special price/voucher/rebate, celebrities, games/quizzes/polls/competitions, events/functions/occasions, social engagement/participation, corporate social responsibility, information/statements/instructions, entertainment/humor/TV/sports and greetings/religious messages. In addition, as the focus of this study is on brands in Saudi Arabia, the researchers developed a cultural cue scale specific to the Arab/Muslim culture based on past studies (Al-Olayan and Karande, 2000; Kalliny et al., 2008; Luqmani et al., 1989; Stone, 2002). The 11 items included are as follows: family, Islam, traditional clothing, desert, Saudi scenes, hospitality/Saudi food and beverages, nationalism/Saudi flags, representation of male and representation of female, depiction of female in traditional clothing, Arabic language only and the use of Saudi dialect. Hence, in total, the coding scheme of the study consists of eight information cues, 11 association attributes, and 14 terminal values, ten post content categories and 11 cultural cues.

Apart from the first author, a graduate student from Saudi Arabia was recruited to compute intercoder reliability and was trained for 3 h. During the training, the coder was given a codebook that has operational definitions of all the measures. The first author coded all 400 posts of the local brands and global brands. After the completion of the data, intercoder reliability test was assessed through another coder who double-coded a 10 per cent subsample of the local and global brands Facebook fan pages. An intercoder reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic to determine consistency among coders was done. The reliability coefficients were satisfactory for all the scales, as Kappa values from 0.60 to 0.79.
are considered substantial and 0.80 and above are considered outstanding (Landis and Koch, 1977). The overall intercoder reliability for all the scales was found to be Kappa = 0.81. Kappa for information cues was 0.74; Kappa for association attributes was 0.70; Kappa for terminal values was = 0.69; Kappa for social media post content categories was 0.72; and Kappa for the cultural cues was 0.93.

Results
A total of the 400 posts of the 40 brands (see Table I) were analyzed to explore the differences between local and global brands in Saudi Arabia in regards to what they post to their fans through their Facebook fan pages (see Table II). Figure 1 shows the use of information cues of local and global brands in the brands Facebook postings. Local brands were more likely to communicate posts containing availability ($\chi^2 = 4.88, p < 0.05$) and components ($\chi^2 = 7.24, p < 0.01$) information cues than global brands. The rest of the information cues (quality, performance, packaging/shape, warranties, price/value and special offer) had no significant difference between the local and global brands. Figure 2 shows the differences in association attributes between the local and global brands. Local brands were more likely to have posts that contain heroic ($\chi^2 = 6.56, p < 0.05$) and familial/friendly ($\chi^2 = 5.06, p < 0.05$) association attributes than global brands. In contrast, global brands were more likely to have posts that contain individualistic association attributes ($\chi^2 = 18.51, p < 0.001$) than local brands. Other than these, there was no significant difference in the rest of the association attributes (stylish, traditional, intelligent, sexy, sensory, easy, funny, natural and fresh) between the local and global brands. Figure 3 shows the terminal values displayed in the posts of local and global brands. Local brands were more likely to have posts that contain love ($\chi^2 = 4.74, p < 0.05$) and convenience ($\chi^2 = 10.75, p < 0.01$) as terminal values than global brands. In contrast, global brands were more likely
### Table II. Chi-square analysis of comparing the use of content and message appeals in local and global brands Facebook pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information cues</th>
<th>Local (%)</th>
<th>Global (%)</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price/value</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components/contents</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>4.89*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special offers</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Package/shape</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guarantees/warranties</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association attributes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stylish/trendy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>18.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligente</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroic/successful/brave</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>6.56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial/friendly</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine/feminine/chaotic</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory/satisfying</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy/relaxed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny/cheerful</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural/fresh/organic</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminal values</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health/life/fitness</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection/beauty</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4.74*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success/self-esteem</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social approval</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>10.75**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post content categories</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prizes/giveaways</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>5.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special price/voucher/rebate</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games/quizzes/polls/competitions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.96**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events/functions/occasions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/engagement/participation</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>3.93*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate social responsibility</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/statements/instructions</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment/humor/TV/sports</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greetings/holidays/religious messages</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
to communicate posts that contain freedom terminal values ($\chi^2 = 9.37, p < 0.01$) than local brands. A majority of the terminal values examined (health, safety, comfort, excitement, perfection, happiness, success, social approval, harmony, economy and equality) had no significant difference between the local and global brands.

Figure 4 compared the content categories between posts of the local and global brands. The posts of local brands were more likely to contain general information ($\chi^2 = 4.44, p < 0.05$) than global brands. In contrast, global brands were more likely to contain prizes/giveaways ($\chi^2 = 5.06, p < 0.05$), games/quizzes ($\chi^2 = 7.96, p < 0.01$) and social engagement/participation ($\chi^2 = 3.93, p < 0.05$) than local brands. There were no significant differences in other content categories such as special price, celebrity, events, corporate social responsibility, entertainment and greetings between posts of the local and global brands.
regards to cultural values, Figure 5 shows few areas that showed large differences between the local and global brands. Local brands were more likely to have posts that contained cues about Islam ($\chi^2 = 7.58, p < 0.01$), females depicted in traditional clothing ($\chi^2 = 5.09, p < 0.05$), Arabic language only ($\chi^2 = 34.37, p < 0.001$) and Saudi dialect ($\chi^2 = 3.83, p < 0.05$) than global brands. But there was no significant difference between local and global brands in many cultural cues such as family, traditional clothing, nationalism and representation of gender.

Discussion

The results have a number of important theoretical and practical implications for social media marketing. The research question seeks to answer whether appeals, content categories and cultural cues used by brands to communicate to their fans through their official Facebook fan pages differ between local and global brands. In general, we found that the local and global brands' social media communication through Facebook fan pages in

![Diagram showing comparison between local and global brands on Facebook pages]
Saudi Arabia is more similar than different. In most of the appeals and post content categories and cultural cues, there were no significant differences. Yet, in a few aspects, the local and global brands communicate differently on Facebook fan pages. We found more cultural paradox appeals used by global brands by their emphasis of individualism and freedom. But local brands used more cultural congruent appeals with higher presence of cultural cues than their global brand counterparts. Specifically, local brands were more likely to post availability and components information of their brands than global brands. This could be due to global brands having one pan-Arab or Middle East Facebook page that is standardized for multiple countries; therefore, it is difficult for them to indicate the availability of products in particular locations, while other locations might not have it. In addition, the components information cues could be explained by the same reason; different countries have different styles, components and recipes. The components of a product sold in Saudi Arabia, for example, might be different from the components of the product sold in Lebanon.

![Figure 4. Comparing the use of content categories in local and global brands Facebook pages](image)

![Figure 5. Comparing the use of cultural cues in local and global brands Facebook pages](image)
Similarly, most of the association attributes were more alike than different between the local and global brands’ communication through Facebook fan pages in Saudi Arabia, except for the following attributes. Global brands are more likely to use association messages that communicate individualism than local brands. This is not surprising due to having mostly western brands included in the global brands. This is consistent with previous studies that claim that western brands are less likely to adapt to other cultures in advertising compared to the eastern brands (Ha, 1998). Another explanation that is mentioned in the literature is that western brands believe that they are superior to brands in different parts of the world, and they believe that emphasizing their culture in their communication reflects superiority and quality, appealing to the cultural paradox. On the other hand, local brands are more likely to post messages that communicate heroic/bravery and familial association attributes than global brands. This also could be explained by the nature of Islam and Saudi culture, as it emphasizes these two aspects. Bravery is a characteristic that is valued in the Saudi culture as many of the historical stories emphasize bravery, and this is reflected in the Saudi culture until today. Familial association attributes are also part of the Saudi culture that emphasizes the importance of family and collectivism. These show local brands’ appeal to cultural congruency.

Terminal values also have few differences between the local and global brands. Similar patterns appeared here, as global brands continue to include some western characteristics; global brands are more likely to use freedom as terminal values than local brands. In contrast, local brands are more likely to post terminal values that reflect love and convenience. Love can also be explained by the nature of the collectivistic culture and the emphasis on the collectivistic love for the family and community. Convenience is a terminal value that was used more by local brands than global. This could be explained by the competition between the local and global brands that are under the same category. A global brand could be more exciting, but local brands could offer convenience because they are local.

In the post content category section, global brands are more likely to post content that consists of social/engaging, games/competitions and prizes/giveaways. These three categories are related somehow because games and competitions are a way of encouraging people to participate and engage. Also, prizes and giveaways are sometimes given based on fans’ participation in games or quizzes. The difference in using these categories between the local and global brands can be explained by the higher budgets global brands have which allows them to afford to give away prizes and products. Another explanation could be that global brands are already well known – advertisers do not have to talk about their products because consumers already know who they are. Maybe it is a way to reinvent themselves or keep incentive going because they are offering something that everyone already knows exists. On the other hand, both local and global brands posted informative content, but local brands were more likely to post informative content than global brands. Previous studies have shown that there are two types of content that motivates fans to like or join brands’ Facebook fan pages: hedonic and utilitarian. Hedonic motives are affective, while utilitarian are cognitive (Abuljadail et al, 2015). In this study, it is apparent that global brands are more likely to attract hedonic motives because they are posting more content that consists of games and socializing. In contrast, local brands are more likely to attract utilitarian motives than global brands because they are posting more informative content. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found that Muslim consumers are practical consumers and interested more in utilitarian values such as deals, promotion and store credits (Cherrier et al., 2009). Because local brands here are Saudi brands and their consumers are mainly
Saudis, this could mean that local brands have more Muslim customers than global brands, which could explain the utilitarian motives. For cultural cues, local brands were more likely to post content that reflects Islam, depict females in traditional clothing and use Arabic language and Saudi dialect than global brands. Previous studies have shown that Islam is the dominant religion in Saudi Arabia, as well as it is a way of life and constitution for everyday matters (Luqmani et al., 1989; Stone, 2002). Prior studies have also shown that ads in the Muslim world are more likely to depict women in traditional clothing, such as Hijab and modest dresses, than non-traditional clothing (Al-Olayan and Karande, 2000). Arabic is also the mother tongue of not only the people in Saudi Arabia, but in 21 surrounding countries. The reason behind not using other Islamic cultural cues as much by global brands could be explained by the standardization strategies that some of the global brands have because some of the pages are targeting the Middle East, which consists of some non-Arab countries. In addition, the use of Islamic cues is less by global brands because some Arab countries have non-Muslim citizens, such as Lebanon and Egypt (Kalliny et al., 2008). Therefore, it is safer for global brands that have a pan-Arab page to avoid religious posts. Lastly, the use of Saudi dialect was used more by local bands than global brands because Saudi local brands are communicating to their own country’s target audience, Saudis, and they know the dialect that is used among them. In contrast, there are many other dialects used in the Muslim world, and some of them are difficult to understand from one Muslim country to another (Al-Olayan and Karande, 2000); as some global brands have Pan-Arab or Middle East Facebook fan pages, it is safer to use the formal version of Arabic that is understood by all Arabs rather than focusing on dialects that can only be understood by a few. In addition, posts that incorporated both Arabic and English tended to receive more “likes” for both local and global brands than posts that used strictly English or Arabic.

Marketers are still discovering the best way to communicate with the public through social media. Social media is still unclear and risky for marketers, and they should be very careful as the public can turn social media against the brand. Social media is different from traditional media, in that it is about building a relationship with the public (Kim, 2016). Most previous studies have been stuck between strategies and desired outcome. Before thinking about brand–consumer engagement and brand loyalty, marketers should understand their consumers better and design the best social media campaigns based on understanding their culture. They cannot just adopt a strategy because it was successful in a certain market – it should consider the characteristics of their audience and their cultural values.

Conclusion
This study explores the differences between what local and global brands communicate through Facebook fan pages in Saudi Arabia. The author followed the theoretical framework of globalization versus localization, as well as previous literature that discusses the cultural aspects of the Muslim world. Previous scales such as Ha’s (1998) and Parsons’s (2013) were utilized in this study. A quantitative content analysis was used to analyze 400 posts from 20 local and 20 global brands in Saudi Arabia. The findings show that local brands are more likely to post content that consists of components and availability information cues than global brands. The findings also show association attributes are communicated differently between the local and global brands; global brands are more likely to post individualistic association attributes than local brands, while local are more likely to post heroic and familial association attributes than global brands. In regards to terminal values, local brands are more likely to post content that communicates love and
convenience terminal values while global brands are more likely to post content that communicates freedom terminal values. The author also examined post content categories to include posts that were unrelated to products and brands because 32.5 per cent of the posts were not about the product/brand. The author used some items that were used by Parsons (2013) to measure different social media post content categories. The findings show that global brands are more likely to post content that consists of prizes/giveaways, games/competitions and socializing than local brands, while local brands are more likely to post informative content than global brands. Lastly, the study explored if the Saudi culture is portrayed by the local and global brands in their Facebook fan pages in Saudi Arabia. The findings show that local brands are more likely to use content that includes Islamic messages, women in traditional clothing, Arabic language and Saudi dialect than global brands. The findings of this study have implications for marketers in regards to what types of communication content is more likely to be posted on brands’ Facebook fan pages in Saudi Arabia – especially, for those global brands that are interested in having a localized brand Facebook fan page for Saudi Arabia. Future studies could examine the association between the different strategies used by the local and global brands in Facebook fan pages in Saudi Arabia and investigate if there is a relationship between the posting strategy used and its impact on the number of likes, shares and comments. Such a study will have additional important implications for marketers in regards to what appeals and posting strategy are more effective and attractive for fans.

References


**Further reading**


**Corresponding author**

Mohammad Hatim Abuljadail can be contacted at: mabuljadail@kau.edu.sa

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