



Advertising in Saudi Arabia

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INTRODUCTION

International advertising entails dissemination of a commercial message to target audiences in more than one country. Target audiences differ from country to country in terms of how they perceive or interpret symbols or stimuli, respond to humor or emotional appeals, as well as in levels of literacy and languages spoken.

International advertising can, therefore, be viewed as a communication process that takes place in multiple cultures that differ in terms of values, communication styles, and consumption patterns.

International advertising is the art of our global multicultural world. It takes a product designed for culture A and puts it through a process of symbolic manipulation, thus transforming it into a product with a total different meaning that is suitable for culture B. Since suggesting a new way to read and use a product is always much cheaper than manufacturing a new one, this manipulation of mental images facilitates the process of international commerce.

The paradox of this process is that while different people around the world become accustomed to the same products, the ways in which they interpret and use them is completely different.

International advertising is a major force that both reflects social values, and propagates certain values worldwide.

The process of communication in international markets involves a number of steps. First, the advertiser determines the appropriate message for the target audience. Next, the message is encoded so that it will be clearly understood in different cultural contexts. The message is then sent through media channels to the audience who then decodes and reacts to the message. At each stage in the process, cultural barriers may hamper effective transmission of the message and result in miscommunication.

After all, advertising is an illusion of escape from the present, offering a vision of a sweeter life.

Let us imagine ourselves, as an advertiser who receives a contract to publicize a new and promising product that must be sold to the general public of a certain culture.

The first thing we would do is gather marketing data by analyzing the specific society, its people, their habits, their dreams and aspiration. Our goal, of course, is to sell as much as possible and our mission, consequently is to identify the « need » of the consumer (his cultural inclination and tendencies. And we must combine the product with existing cultural symbols to which the consumer can identify itself.

Many of the international advertising campaigns are kept the same in countries that have approximately the same culture, the same way of living and the same way of consumption (United States, Western Europe...). But in many countries over the planet, advertising campaigns have to be adapted to fit with the local culture, values and habits.

And one of the countries that come to mind while talking about adapted international campaign is Saudi Arabia.

All over this thesis, we will try to analyze how international brands adapt their advertising strategies and campaigns in the Middle East and especially in Saudi Arabia, in order to stick with the local and historical symbols of Arab / Muslim culture when it comes to women.

We will first, try to understand what is Saudi Arabia, in a cultural and societal way and we will then analyze the place of advertising in the Saudi Arabian society. The next step will be the examination of adapted international campaigns aimed to women in Saudi Arabia.

I. SAUDI ARABIA

The Middle East lies at the juncture of Eurasia and Africa and of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is the birthplace and spiritual center of the Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

Throughout its history the Middle East has been a major center of world affairs ; a strategically, economically, politically, culturally and religiously sensitive area.

A. General points

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, KSA (Arabic : Al-Mamlaka al-Arabiyya as-Su'udiyya), is an Arab country and the largest country of the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered by Jordan on the northwest, Iraq on the north and northeast, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates on the east, Oman on the southeast, and Yemen on the south. The Persian Gulf lies to the northeast and the Red Sea to its west. It has an estimated population of 27.6 million. The population density is 12 inhabitants per square kilometer (in France it is 94 inhabitants per square kilometer). In Saudi Arabia most of the population is shared out between the different cities, with almost no one in the desert.

The Kingdom is sometimes called « The Land of the Two Holy Mosques » in reference to Makkah and Medinah, the two holiest places in Islam. In English, it is most commonly referred to as Saudi Arabia. The current Kingdom was founded by Abdul-Aziz bin Saud, whose efforts began in 1902 when he captured the Al-Saud's ancestral home of Riyadh, and culminated in 1932 with the proclamation and recognition of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia covers an area of 2.2 million square kilometers (four times the size of France. 98% of the territory is desert or semi-desert. The capital and largest city is Riyadh (meaning «garden» in Arabic). In addition to Riyadh, major cities are Jeddah, a port city located on the Red Sea, Mecca the religious capital of Islam and largest center of pilgrimage, Medina («city» in Arabic), Holy City, and Damman, oil center of the Persian Gulf.

Saudi Arabia's economy is essentially based on petroleum; approximately 75% of budget revenues and 90% of export earnings come from the oil industry. Saudi Arabia officially has about 260 billion barrels of oil reserves, comprising about 24% of the world's proven total petroleum reserves.

Languages are really numerous in Saudi Arabia, as it is also important to distinguish the different varieties of Arabic: the Arabic najdi (46.5%), Arabic hijazi (35%) and the Gulf Arabic (1.6%). But the classical Arabic serves for written language and official language. Gulf Arabic is spoken in the emirates of the North and the South East, Arabic hijazi near the Red Sea coasts and adjacent areas, Arabic najdi, across the country. All Arabic languages over the country (with the exception of classical Arabic) know local dialectal variants.



B. Government

The central institution of the Saudi Arabian government is the Saudi monarchy. The Basic Law of Government adopted in 1992 declared that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by the sons and grandsons of the first king, Abd Al Aziz Al Saud. It also claims that the Qu'ran is the constitution of the country, which is governed on the basis of the Sharia (Islamic Law). Sharia is the body of Islamic religious law. The term means «way» or «path to the water source»; it is the legal framework within which the public and private aspects of life are regulated for Muslims. Sharia deals with many aspects of day-to-day life, including politics, economics, banking, business, contracts, family, sexuality, hygiene and social issues.

According to « The Economist's Democracy Index », the Saudi government is the ninth most authoritarian regime in the world.

C. Human rights

Several international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Committee have published critical reports of the Saudi legal system and its human rights record various political, legal, and social areas, especially its severe limitations on the rights of women. The Saudi government typically dismisses such reports as being outright lies or asserts that its actions are based on its adherence to Islamic law.

The Saudi legal system prescribes capital punishment (by decapitation) or corporal punishment, including amputations of hands and feet for certain crimes such as murder, robbery, rape, drug smuggling, homosexuality activities and adultery. The courts may impose less severe punishments, such as floggings, for less serious crimes against public morality such as drunkenness. Murder, accidental death and bodily harm are open to punishment from the victim's family.

D. Culture

Saudi Arabian culture mainly revolves around the religion of Islam. As said previously, Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, are located in the country. Five times every day, Muslims are called to prayer from minarets of mosques that are scattered around the country. The weekend begins on Thursday due to Friday being the holiest day for Muslims. The public practice of any religion other than Islam, including Christianity and Judaism, the presence of churches and possession of non-Islamic religious materials is not allowed in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabian dress follows strictly the principles of hijab (the Islamic principle of modesty, especially in dress). Traditionally, men usually wear an ankle-length shirt woven from wool or cotton (known as thawb), with a keffiyeh (a large checkered square of cotton held in place by a cord coil) worn on head. Women's clothes are decorated with tribal motifs, coins, sequins, metallic thread, and appliques. They are required to wear an abayyah and a veil (the yashmak) when in public.

The separation between men and women in the society has an influence on everything.

Even in restaurants, men and women are not placed in the same parts and there are spaces dedicated to families. Each part and each table being separated from the others by a room divider screen.

An important part of the Saudi culture is based on ancient Bedouin traditions. The lifestyle of the Bedouin was, in the past, based on the movements of their herds through the desert, from well to well and from pasture to pasture. Today, most of them settled permanently. However, some aspects of their culture remain rooted and remind those ancient times : their sense of hospitality, family ties, belonging to the tribe and to the same people.

E. Social classes distinction

Most of the Saudi people belong to middle and upper classes. People who belong to high society assume more influential roles. The distinction between the different classes is quietly being felt.

Estimated at about seven thousand people, four thousand males, the royal family is very prolific and is now a real form of social class. Indeed, a privileged class whose financial strength is considerable and their lifestyle in general ostentatious. Princes established themselves in all sectors of national life and are now everywhere.

Immigration in Saudi Arabia is very important in terms of labour force. Despite the government's efforts to promote Saudization, the country takes a significant portion of its labour force from foreign countries, especially from South and Southeast Asia (notably India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka), East Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Egypt) and from other Middle Eastern countries (Syria, Jordania). There are also some expatriates from North America, South America, Europe and a lot of immigrated people from Lebanon. And even between all those immigrants, a distinction is made. In fact, occidental people and Lebanese are above Egyptians and Syrians, themselves above Pakistanis and Bengalis. This hierarchy between immigrants is mostly felt in terms of jobs and salaries, that generally correspond to the standard of living in their countries.

Immigrants approxiamtely represent 26% of the Saudi population.

F. Sexual equality

The society makes a clear distinction between the roles of men and women. Even if women take on more and more responsibilities, some jobs remain men's exclusive preserve, in particular politics, minister positions, diplomacy and executive positions and fieldwork that requires to be in contact with men in the service sector: the waitresses or air hostesses. In recent decades, women have benefited from the same work opportunities than men, particularly in the areas of education and health care.

Almost all schools are segregated from elementary to university. It is interesting to note that men and women in the same profession do so on an equal footing in terms of remuneration. According to Islamic law, the Sharia, women can automatically manage their wealth. Men are obliged to support their families regardless of the wife's financial status. This is why most companies reserve their home ownership only to male employees.

G. Religion

Islam is the state religion of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic law of Sharia governs all aspects of life, including civil legislation. Over the past three decades, the country has experienced a change in infrastructure and lifestyle. Modernization remains, however, in line with the precepts of Sharia, because it is said that it suits at all times and all places.

The Saudis practice their religious rituals on a daily basis. Almost all companies reserve a room in which employees can pray. Noon prayer « Dohr » and afternoon « Aasr » take place during working hours. The majority of employees can take 10 to 15 minutes to pray. It is common to see a supervisor and his employees go and pray in a public mosque close to their workplace. And during prayer time, all shops are closed.

A religious police (the Muttawah) even exists in Saudi Arabia and its presence over the country is very important. They are everywhere, being on patrol, and enforcing the laws.

H. Stereotypes

Stereotypes about Arabs are numerous and they are mostly related to religious extremism, sexual inequality, and the Saudi involvement in terrorism. Stereotypes are built on fragments of truth and what you observe could, no doubt, confirm, in many ways, some stereotypes. Sexual inequalities are most pronounced in Saudi Arabia, as said previously, but women are not submitted, nor necessarily abused or unhappy. Many of the Saudi women received an excellent cosmopolitan education.

You only feel the pressure of Islamic extremism when it comes to the way you have to dress up and the behavior in public and private area. It is important to know that the relationship between the government and the religious police is precarious, and in order not to exacerbate the latter, the government give the religious leaders carte blanche concerning public morality and social life.

I. Light breeze of globalization

Young people, in their traditional long white robe, installed, with their mobile phone in a cybercafe. Female students wrapped in black veils, but more numerous than their male classmates. Companies grown in the shade of the State, now in process of privatization. Exposed to globalization, Saudi Arabia is concerned about its future and its values. Crown Prince Abdullah says his desire for change in the economy, but conservatism's powerful vested interests are innumerable.

Each year, the capital Riyadh, expands more and more. Its wide avenues, highways, spread in all directions. In a state-of-the-art district, with its monumental shopping malls, luxury boutiques and its McDonald's, there was nothing there five years ago. In the city, only few buildings are very high: those who can afford, and they are numerous, prefer villas to apartments. Only the mosque minarets are high. No statue of any « immortal leader » or « supreme savior » stands in the city : here, they only worship God.

Morning after morning, avenues are full of powerful cars, driven without rules or laws. Riyadh despises pedestrians and crossing its large avenues is an achievement, public transportation is virtually non-existent, and the distances are never-ending.

J. The role of women in Saudi Arabian society

The position of women in Islamic society, in general, and in Saudi Arabian society in particular is a complex and frequently misunderstood issue. It is certainly true that Muslim and Western views of the role of women show sharp cultural differences.

The Quran gave women economic and social rights long before western women reached such rights. From the beginning of Islam, women could legally inherit and bequeath property. But in the actual Saudi society, women have almost no rights (they are not allowed to vote, to drive, to make decisions...)

Under Islam, a woman is commanded to behave modestly in public and, as in the West, until recently, is generally expected to give a full commitment to making a family home.

Women in Saudi Arabia have a pre-eminent role within the family, but it would be a mistake to think that the role of women in Saudi Arabian society is confined to home-working. The development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has brought opportunities for women in education and employment. In 1960, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia undertook the introduction of a national education program for girls. By the mid-1970s, about half of all Saudi Arabian girls were attending school. Five years later, education was available to all Saudi girls.

There are now important women physicians, professors, journalists, and business owners. In 2008, the Saudi government answered to pressure from Saudi businesswomen who always traveled by lifting the ban preventing single women from renting hotel rooms.

But, it is important to know that it is only a very small percentage of women who have access to this kind of jobs and who are allowed to choose themselves what they want to do. And when they express their desires of working, to be allowed to do so, their families have to give their agreement.

In Saudi Arabia, women are almost never allowed to express their desires when they have to select a husband. At home, women totally depend on their husbands and have almost no rights. They always need their agreement when they want to do something (going out with friends, shopping...).

II. ADVERTISING IN SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia is the largest advertising market in the region, accounting for 40 % of all advertising expenditures in the Gulf alone. The Saudis, with their relatively high per-capita income and market-oriented economy, have become the prime target of producers of consumer goods and thus, the prime targets of the best international advertising firms.

Print media assumes the most important part of advertising expenditures in the Kingdom, of Saudi Arabia with newspapers accounting for 61% of the spendings, magazines 23% and television just 16%.

A. A little bit of history

Advertising is over 3000 years old. A placard, dating from circa 1000b.c promises the reward of one gold coin for the capture of a runaway slave. Similar advertisements have been found all over the ancient world. But the birth of modern advertising, or « print advertising » can be dated to the fifteenth century, with the invention of modern printing by Johann Gutenberg.

The idea of advertising and marketing were not foreign to Arab culture, nor were they familiar to the Muslim culture. The Koran sets itself the task among others, of propagating the Islamic faith. As well as the announcement of the muezzin, cried five times a day from the minaret, are meant to inform Muslim people of prayer time and urge them to perform their religious duty. These are only two examples of advertising, marketing, propaganda and public relations in the Middle East.

The spread of printing to the Middle East was delayed, for various reasons, until the nineteenth century. It's interesting to know that when the print finally began to accelerate, it was due to the authorities' desire to publish and advertise laws, rules and ordinances. Soon after the first newspaper in the Middle East began to appear, it was full of advertising commercials.

B. The situation

Until the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia advertising spend was mostly limited to local media. Since the media were local, companies saw little need for ad agencies: they knew the market, and therefore, created their own in-house creative departments to sell their products and services to local customers in local media. Cheap and seemingly efficient, this was the status quo for decades.

Regional advertising expenditure stood at \$ 2.8 billion in 2008. With a population of 27 million, the average age of which is 18, the biggest spender, Saudi Arabia, is now clearly a highly attractive market for the multinational advertising agencies. And despite the blip caused by the war outbreak and the conflict in Iraq, its growth shows no sign of slackening.

Nevertheless, while advertising spend in other Middle East markets tends to be driven by foreign clients, Saudi Arabia has its own high-spending local brands - Saudi Airlines, for example. However, the country presents agencies with its own particular set of challenges.

In the past, when creative work was totally dominated by foreigners, cultural differences created barriers between advertisers and consumers. Today, most of the agencies are trying to use more local expertise. The best way to deliver an effective campaign is to understand the target audience. The continued dominance of foreigners detracts from the efficiency of advertising. Foreigners, especially newcomers, are loaded with assumptions about what Saudis like and don't like, what is permissible and what is not - and many of these are false. There are certain cultural restrictions, but depending on the message and the way it is framed.

It is true that this market is very different from Lebanon, for example, where the outlook is quite European. This is an Islamic culture, and it is important to keep that in mind. Even though people from many countries live here, the target market is predominantly Arab and certain traditions have to be respected.

The rise of satellite television has made advertising more liberal, and yet at the same time more fragmented. The strongest channel remains Saudi-owned MBC, but stations like Orbit and Showtime from Lebanon are also popular, and they show unrestricted, uncensored, Western-style programs. In fact, the average viewer has access to between 30-50 channels from all over the world. This has made it harder to target the Saudi viewer efficiently.

C. The rules

Companies are trying to appeal to the new generation of Arabs, who are desperately looking for patterns in mass media. At the same time cultural taboos are imposing strict rules on what can and what can not be shown in public. This war sometimes leads to creative and sometimes disturbing results.

Eyes

Face and eyes are not allowed to be shown outdoors in more conservative areas. Companies try to come up with the most interesting solutions. It's common to pixelate the eyes, but more creative solutions are to let the talents wear sunglasses or come up with a concept where the models would have to close their eyes.



Sex

Nudity is not allowed in any form. The Islamic culture is very conservative and showing any skin other than the face, hands or feet can be considered sexually arousing, therefore inappropriate for public display. Different countries vary, Riyadh in Saudi being the most conservative and Dubai in UAE the most liberal. In Saudi Arabia you can't show any skin (other than the mentioned body parts) outdoors, while in Dubai the same beauty product ads are running as in Europe. Magazines are edited by hand and alternative covers need to be developed for the more conservative audience.

Movie ads need to be retouched to comply with the strict cultural expectations. Legs, cleavage and even shoulders need to be covered. This not only applies to women, but to men as well. Even cartoon characters need to be dressed up.



Homosexuality

No references to homosexuality can be made in ads. However shows like Will and Grace can be seen on TV.

Witches, Magicians, Vampires or aliens

Any connotation to supernatural can be considered as another God like force.

Drugs

Drugs, alcohol or even a champagne glass can not be shown in advertising. Unless it's an anti campaign.

Food

Advertisements for breakfast or other meal never show eggs. Ads for fish, or recipes for other products that are eaten with fish, are also close to non-existent. In the Arabian peninsula, fishing is traditionally considered an inferior profession, and selling eggs and chickens is likewise not a respectable trade. Alcohol beverages and pork cannot be advertised in Saudi Arabia.

Animals

Although many Arab Muslims keep and love dogs, generally dogs are considered dirty, therefore there are no puppies or golden retrievers in the ads. There can be many other borderline issues with other animals as well, such as fish means christianity, crow means death or chameleon means hypocrisy.

Symbols

The crusades have left a deep wound in the Arab psyche. Any form of crosses can be considered offending. There is no Red Cross in the Middle East (it's Red Crescent). Even a snowflake can be considered bad intention, because you can find multiple crosses in it. Several other symbols are not to be used as a visual device, such are the David's star, US flag or five pointed red star. Directional symbols pointing from left to right signify backwards direction, since Arab script is to be read from right to left.

Words

Enjoy or exciting are words that can be interpreted as sexual descriptors therefore to be avoided. Words like create and greatest should be used with caution, since they are associated with God.

Arabic calligraphy is a very creative art, where words can be written down by an endless number of forms. One has to be careful how an innocent logo would be interpreted.

Flowers

The use of flowers, and especially roses is well appreciated in Saudi advertisements. In fact, the use of the rose contains a religious allusion : the rose is known as the favourite flower of the prophet Muhammad.

It may seem as these rules limit creativity, but in reality they just push creativity to its limits.

D. The medias in Saudi Arabia

It is very important to know that in Saudi Arabia, movie theaters are forbidden. Therefore, there are only 5 medias : press, radio, television, outdoor display and Internet.

According to Pan Arab Research Centre (PARC)'s 2007 figures, TV advertising accounted for 56% of the total expenditure, followed by print at 51% (newspaper 37%, magazine 14%), outdoor at 10% and radio at 3%.

Except for a few websites, all the Saudian medias, press, radio and television are under political or financial control of the royal family. Censorship is very powerful and is exerted under two distinct forms : in the case of medias whose capital belong to the royal family, self-censorship and editor in chief's intern authority are supposed to be sufficient to ensure the political correctness of the journalistic production and distribution of audiovisual programs. The « independent » medias, that is to say whose capital is not owned by the royal family, are, on the other hand, subject to severe and punctilious censorship. There are even people who are specifically paid by the government to blacken advertisements and pictures in occidental magazines and tear up pages on which articles do not comply with Islamic laws.

1. Print

Because of this extremely rigid organization, the content of the Saudi press is very stereotyped, humbly patriotic and always religiously correct.

Reporters Without Borders ranked Saudi Arabia 159th out of 167 on a worldwide scale for press freedom. The Saudian press is subject to a very strong censorship. In fact, journalists often censor themselves. Within the country, the policy of censorship is to prohibit any reconsideration of the royal and religious power ; whereas outside, officials seek to give a progressive image to Saudi Arabia that should be shown as fighting terrorism.

Newspapers are privately owned, but their directors are paid by the authorities. Many websites are still blocked but with the rise of satellite dishes and antennas, the government has surrendered some ground on the press freedom.

The Saudi press was created in 1920 with the newspaper « Al-Falah », which were then distributed from Mecca. The official newspaper of Saudi Arabia is Al-Riyadh.

In magazines, when single pages of advertising appear, they are mostly printed on the left-hand page (in opposition to Western countries where most of the advertisements are printed on the right-hand page), which is the first page you encounter when reading Arabic magazines, from left to right.

Most of advertisings are usually produced at local advertising agencies, or directly in the own graphic studios of the magazines.

2. Radio and Television

In 1932, King Abdul Aziz set up his own private radio network in the Kingdom, mainly to enable him and his officials to keep themselves informed of what was happening in the world. Public broadcasting, transmissions began in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1948 from a small station in Jeddah.

In 1964, the late King Faisal commissioned the American National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to construct a national television network. The first test television transmissions in the Kingdom took place in 1965 from stations in Riyadh and Jeddah.

Television is the main field of political and ideological battle in the Middle East. Since the 1990's, satellite channels have opposed a fierce competition to traditional national channels, and very diverse contents, often subversive, set up into Saudian homes. Saudi Arabia is at the center of the reaction against satellite channels and their content deemed dangerous for the strategic balance of the region: after having banned - without effect - the sale and possession of satellite receivers, Saudi Arabia and the royal family have heavily invested in the sector, in order to capture the market for Arab viewers and to broadcast contents deemed more in line with the Saudi and American domination in the Middle East.

The last decade of the century is, without a doubt, a red-letter period in the history of radio and television in the Arab world. During the 90's, the audiovisual industry in this part of the world has supposed to undergo a lot of accelerated changes. A dramatic event was the trigger to this great metamorphosis : the Gulf War.

If the Arab world could enter fully into the twenty-first century with a modern technical infrastructure, its weakness is the sector of production. How to use the technological tool to promote Arab audiovisual production that would be able to meet the real expectations of the public by providing programs of quality that can convey their concerns and hopes? How can production contribute to safeguarding the Arab cultural identity in a globalization, in which many people fear the risk of deculturation, increase the opening degree of the Arab citizen on modernity and promote, at the same time, better knowledge of Arab culture on a global scale?

3. Outdoor media

Outdoor has so far been treated irreverently by the advertising industry. Today, outdoor is to be counted among the big medias – print and television – not so much for size or rate of growth, but for mass impact and innovation. This global trend is evident even in Arabian Gulf countries, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia. “Outdoor is often described as the last broadcast medium, in the sense that it reaches the masses when other media see their audiences fragmenting more every day,” explains Nadim Samara, a planner at OMD Arabia in Jeddah. The growing levels of creativity also make the medium increasingly appealing to advertisers.

One of the main reasons for the relatively stronger growth in outdoor, according to Peter Smith, managing director, Optimedia, Riyadh, is the fact that media has become more fragmented, making it increasingly difficult for advertisers who wish to reach mass audiences being able to achieve the coverage levels that they experienced in the past. Outdoor provides the classic opportunity to build rapid coverage and very good frequency.

Intense activity is evident if you go around the Gulf cities. “There has been an explosion in the number and types of circuits available in the region lately, from toilet advertising in the United Arab Emirates to gigantic footbridges in Saudi Arabia. There is a great creativity coming through, bringing this region in line with the rest of the world,” explains Peter Smith. “Backlit sites are getting bigger all the time, lamppost advertising is very popular today, at least in Jeddah, and building wraps are starting to appear there. Today, everything can be branded, from taxis to buses to and even airport buildings.”

All this activity on the outdoor front is happening as a result of the positive mood in the advertising industry this year. This is partly due to the explosive growth of the retail sector. The Middle East’s retail sector is developing rapidly, with industry analysts forecasting the regional market will be worth in excess of \$500 billion by 2010.

4. Internet

Research showed that the number of Internet users reached 19 382 400 in the Middle East. This region has experienced a growth rate of 490.1% between 2000 and 2007. Integration of the Internet in the Middle East has averaged 17% while it reaches only 21% in the rest of the world.

These figures indicate that knowledge of the Internet in the Middle East has evolved very quickly in the past eight years, a fact that has given impetus to the sector of online business. The result of this change is apparent in the emergence of new websites and online services in the region. It also provided an opportunity for marketing responsible to offer advertising solutions in the region.

Online promotion promises to know a rise and to have a value that exceeds \$140 million in 2011. The average growth in this area has been over 50% in the last six years.

Saudi Arabia is worldwide, the 41st country with the largest number of Internet users, with nearly 4.7 million users. The Kingdom is thus ahead all Arab countries, except for Egypt (35th place, with 5 million users) and Morocco (33rd place, 6.1 million).

Today, it is Saudi state's turn to face the «Internet wave» : the number of Internet users increased by 50% since 2006, and one out of three Saudi is now connected to the Web.

Even if the Saudi authorities have authorized access to the Web in the Kingdom that late, they have nevertheless demonstrated a relative flexibility in the management of this difficult tool to control, and that naturally represents a potential threat for a authoritarian state.

It was in 1994 when the first connection was established in Saudi Arabia, but it took another three years before the Saudi population was actually permitted to join the global network. This delay is largely due to the establishment of a legislative and technical framework (including a firewall on a large scale) allowing the authorities to exercise a relatively efficient control over the use of the Internet.

Saudi Arabia is among countries which assume, to some extent, the censorship on the web. The Saudi filters clearly point out to Internet users which pages are prohibited by the authorities and even invite people to report any suspicious page to the body of censorship.

Prohibited websites are, first, those that offer pornography. But the prohibitions also concern websites of political opposition, Israeli publications, or those dealing with homosexuality. In addition, the filtering system often gives rise to an approximate censorship and websites without «dangerous» are left blocked. Sometimes, the blocking of sites - especially political - is disguised as a technical problem.

E. Language in advertising

It seems clear that the conception of an advertisement place the product closely with the public, using all the tools available to achieve their advertising goals. One of these fundamental tools is the language. The questions that arise are: What is the language used in Arabic advertising, for what purpose, and what dictates the choice of a particular language for an ad? If the answer to this question seems very simple, it presents a number of nuances that can not be ruled out.

We must distinguish the use of modern Arabic and dialectical Arabic, considering that there may be a mixture, or interaction of these different registers of language.

The linguistic aspect in advertising is an aspect of the most important because it reflects the link of advertising with the audience you want to reach and the product.

The languages chosen match, most of the time, to the population range to whom the advertisements are sent.

For example, an advertisement for a washing powder, wouldn't be done in classical Arabic, « fusha », because they are sent to housewives or to people who don't use, or not much classical Arabic. In the same way, a bank or an insurance company, which cater mostly to a range of the urban and literate people, will not advertise in dialectical Arabic, a language that is often regarded as «not serious» or «popular».

For the use of Fusha, one notices that most of the time, advertising are of a technical or industrial nature. These are serious ads that are based on the inherent qualities of the product.

Advertisements that use dialectical Arabic are usually ads that can be described as «family.» They target a wide audience and are often linked to food or household products. Some banks or official organisations can sometimes use dialectical Arabic in order to target a wider audience.

F. WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

1. General representation of women in advertising

Women in advertising is a vast and broad topic. Men and women, young and old agree however on the evolution of themes approached in advertisements. A large majority of people, in many countries around the world, say today that there are more sexual evocations in advertising nowadays than two or three years ago.

There are many different stereotypes of women in advertising. Throughout history there have been many studies that proved women were mainly portrayed on television advertisements as housewives or occupations that are subservient to men.

Advertising has many effects on society. As a result of not being in as many commercials as men, at very young ages boys and girls conclude that girls are valued less than boys. Magazines, television, and the Internet display this quite well by constantly portraying thin models with, tight waists, perfect long legs, enhanced breasts and red puffing lips. These women are then illustrated in sexually provocative poses for the purpose of selling something as ordinary as shoes. They are also shown barely dressed and sprawled in positions of bondage just to sell a product such as lipstick. Such ads give women unrealistic notions of what they should look like. This is how advertisers have become the single largest contributor to the continuation of female degradation. The negative effects of advertising on women fall into a huge range of problems. The most common effect would be the constant increase of women struggling with dieting and eating disorders.

2. Representation of women in Saudi advertising

In front of different types of media, people adopt behaviors and attitudes, and have stereotypical images that affect their vision in real life. The issue of the showing of women in the Arab media has been under examination for many years because of its negativity and the way that it affects the image of Arab women in the society.

People are not conscious of how much they are manipulated by the messages broadcasted through a lot of media. Television, magazines, newspapers, and radio advertisements are trying to sell people various products, and people also buy into beliefs and attitudes that will play a very important role in their lives, and on their way of thinking. Newspapers, television, and radio carry a variety of messages on issues that affect women and their portrayal.

There are many things that affect Arab women's status in society, such as the high percentage of illiteracy, lower socioeconomic standing, and the long existence of customs and traditions which cause financial pressure on women. Unfortunately, Arab media have had the tendency to portray women in a manner that has done more to make these problems worse.

It is important to bear in mind that the representation of women in Saudi advertising is less existent than men's, as women are often left aside within the society. Moreover, in opposition to Western countries, you will never find sexual references in Saudi advertisements as it is completely forbidden by the Sharia. Also, women are usually portrayed wearing their veil or traditional clothes from Saudi Arabia. Naked parts of their body are strictly forbidden in TV commercials and outdoor advertisements and some of the magazines even don't tolerate naked arms, legs and scoop necks. Therefore, it is very frequent to see that creative designers cover up those women's naked parts of their bodies in certain magazines.

Stereotypes of women portrayed as weak, docile, and inferior last through the Arab world. The Arab media have a tendency to give support to this reality distortion in various ways, and therefore have helped to spread and perpetuate them. Magazines generally focused on the traditional preoccupations of women, such as fashion, cooking, cosmetics, and home affairs.

G. Saudi Advertisements

Time and Saudi Arabian History are subjects that often appears through Saudi advertisements. The constant connexion between past, present, and future.

Advertisers take their readers on a journey through time, dealing with some historical events. Time, in Saudi advertisements, does not grow due to causality, it consists of a collection of events from different periods.

Thus, modern Saudi advertisers construct the advertisements of various periods or various histories of Saudi Arabia so that Saudi people can identify themselves to those ads.

Music and culture (such as desert, camels, traditional dance...) in Saudi advertisements are also very important subject.

The Music is an essential part of the Culture of Saudi Arabia. It is as ancient and rich as the History of Saudi Arabia. Like most of Saudi Arabian culture, music derived mostly from the Bedouin culture.

Music in Saudi Arabia comprises an innumerable variety of classical music. One of the traditional music is the « al-mizar » that is usually performed in Mecca, Medina and Jeddah.

Cultural elements of Saudi Arabia are usually used in advertisements.

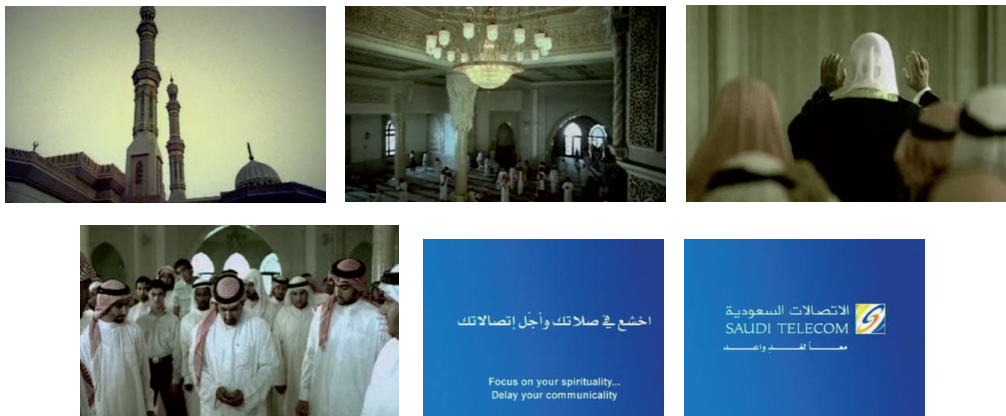


Saudi family having dinner



Cultural references to traditions and dance

In opposition to Western countries, where religion is completely forbidden in advertising, Islam is an integral part of advertising in Saudi Arabia. In fact, it is not rare to see TV commercials in which a lot of muslim men (and only men) are praying in a Mosque. Religion is, in that case, used to promote a local product, brand or company.



Advertisement for Saudi Telecom

Advertisements in Saudi Arabia are also usually use as a pretext to show things and attitude that wouldn't be allowed in real life. Adevrtisements exploit the desires that are set into the collective subconscious (passion, love, conspiracy...) Moreover, advertisements make them possible, whereas in real life, their relaization is severely punished. Advertising liberates.

The natural hair color of Arab women is black. Therefore, in Saudi advertisements, the ideal hair color for a woman is black, and may be smooth or wavy but not curled. Most of the advertisements for Shampoo and hair products show that kind of hair. However, where dyeing and fantasies are concerned, all women want to be blond. For them, blond represents the exotic, the other, the unfamiliar, the exciting.

It should be remembered that women's hair in Saudi Arabia is not exposed but covered with their abayyah's veil or other traditional items.

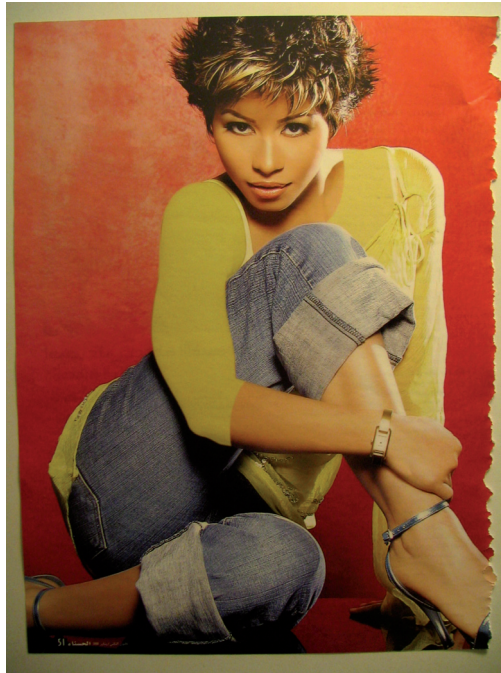


Advertisement for a shampoo.

The slogan : "A tribute to Arabian beauty"

The use of sex, as said previously, is forbidden in advertisements in Saudi Arabia. However, the use of sex as a fantasy of « free time » and « pleasure » has been encountered in perfume advertisement. For Saudi men, sex is a leisure activity, but for women (whom lives depend on their availability for sex and their reproductive capabilities), sex is a work.

Nudity in Saudi advertisements is also forbidden. In some Saudi magazines, even naked arms and scoop necks are not tolerated. We can easily identify that women's arms have been covered in a not particular well-done way.



We can easily identify that her right arm has been covered with green color as well as her scoop neck.

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III. ADAPTED ADVERTISEMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

There are, in Saudi Arabia, many ways for international brands to adapt their communication and advertising campaigns in order to respect the country laws and culture.

Many of the major international brands have to edit or even completely change their communication or their campaigns in Saudi Arabia, when they communicate to women. Others use their creativity to overcome the barriers of censorship and restrictions ...

A. The unchanged advertisements.

It is the rarest example that exists in Saudi Arabia.

Some advertisers have the ability to communicate in Saudi Arabia the same way as in the rest of the world.

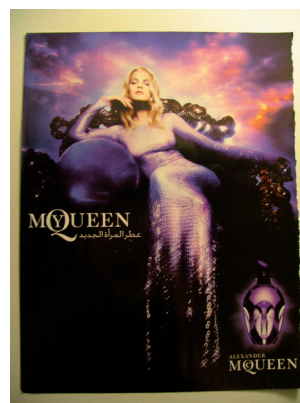
Indeed, if their advertisements do not transgress the rules and laws of the Saudi government, then, no modification or adaptation of their campaign is necessary.

This applies to the advertising campaign of the British fashion designer Alexander McQueen for one of its perfumes «My Queen», which has been used in Saudi Arabia without any creative changes.

It is important to know that it is very rare that an advertisement can be used in Saudi Arabia without any changes given to it.



International campaign



Saudi campaign

B. Tolerated naked parts of the body.

We saw earlier that women's naked arms and legs are, most of the time, forbidden in magazines. However, some magazines tolerate bare arms and legs, both in internal articles and in advertisements.

It is therefore easier for brands to adapt their campaigns, since in these cases, the adaptation is done very simply and they almost do not need to retouch their ads.

Here for example, in the advertisement for the perfume «Touch of Pink», from Lacoste, the advertisement has almost not been retouched. There is a young blond woman who, as explained previously, represents the exotic, the unfamiliar, the desire.

She wears a pink dress which was slightly lengthened compared to the original one, and her arms are bare and not covered, compared to other advertisements that we will see below.

We also note that naked parts of the body are allowed for little girls, as proven by this advertisement for Pampers where you can see a 3 year-old-girl who wears a diaper. She therefore has naked legs and seems to be in the process of dressing so we can see her belly and one of her arms is bare. If advertisers want to show the product placed in real situation, they have no choice but to show a denuded little girl.

Lacoste - Touch of Pink



International campaign



Saudi campaign

Pampers



C. Not tolerated naked parts of the body.

As we have explained many times, naked parts of the body in advertisements are mostly banned in Saudi Arabia.

In order to succeed in adapting their advertisements, some of the international brands use creative self-censorship. They therefore keep the same advertisements but amend certain elements. Indeed, they «dress up» their models or their muses to be able to communicate internationally with similar campaigns.

This is the case of the Dior Christal campaign. In fact, Dior communicates with an international muse, Sharon Stone, internationally known actress. Dior did not want to change its communication campaign (which would cost time and money) and therefore prefer to dress up a little bit more its muse.

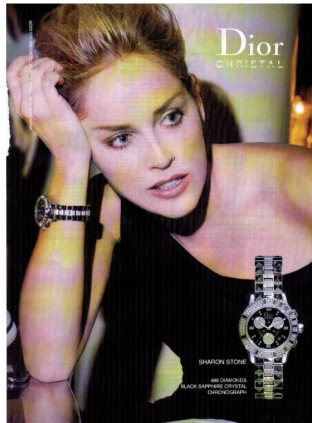
We can thus observe on this advertisement that the cleavage of Sharon Stone and her arms have been covered in an unobtrusive way.

The same is true for the communication campaign of the brand Louis Vuitton, which communicates with its muse Uma Thurman, a very well-known American actress.

The advertisement that appeared in Saudi Arabia is a little bit different from the original one. Indeed, for Saudi Arabia, only the upper part of Uma Thurman's body has been kept and her neckline was closed. We cannot see her legs anymore and her attitude is no more sexy and provocative.

Most major brands often content themselves with «dressing up» their models to keep the international communication coherence and thus save time and money. It is always simple changes but absolutely well done, and that you cannot generally see.

Dior Christal



International campaign



Saudi campaign

Louis Vuitton

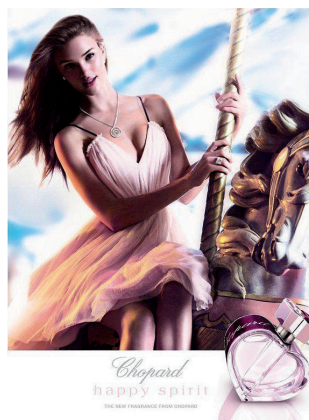


International campaign



Saudi campaign

Chopard - Happy Spirit



International campaign



Saudi campaign

D. Advertisements readjustments.

In some cases, and for some brands, it would be too complicated, too expensive and too long to make creative changes to their advertisements.

Therefore, some international brands decide to adjust their campaigns in Saudi Arabia by creating specific ads for that country.

However, brands generally keep the same atmosphere and the same spirit as in their original advertisements.

In fact, with the advertisement for Marc Jacobs' perfume Daisy, advertisement aimed at Saudi Arabia has been modified and is different from the original one.

As we can see, the naked woman was removed and only the fragrance is highlighted. The advertisement loses its sexual side to keep only the product. However, the spirit of the campaign is still the same, since the page setting does not change and the background is still a natural setting.

The advertisement for Christian Lacroix's perfume was also amended from its origin.

Indeed, we find the same background and the same atmosphere, but only the product is highlighted. The use of the woman is not anymore, the emphasis is on the product itself.

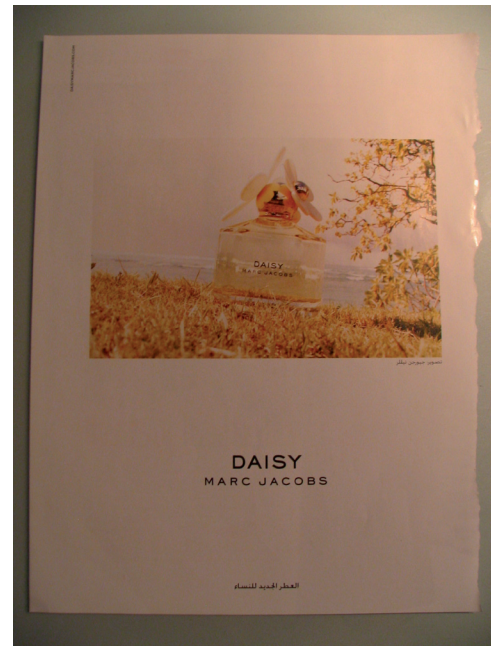
Changes to these advertisements are not excessive in nature but the adjustment is much more noticeable than for the previous examples.

In addition, we feel from the Saudis, but also from the advertisers, a search for aesthetic «censorship». Indeed, a few years ago, the Saudi authorities and the Council of censorship would have content themselves with simply censoring with an indelible black marker pen. Advertisers are therefore sure to adjust to the rules and laws of the Saudi government and prefer to «self-censorship» themselves in a more aesthetic way and also ensure the possibility to be able to communicate again in Saudi Arabia.

Marc Jacobs - Daisy



International campaign



Saudi campaign

Christian Lacroix - Tumulte



International campaign



Saudi campaign

E. The new advertisements.

1. The use of cultural references.

Some international advertisers see in Saudi Arabia, the opportunity to directly speak to their consumers.

Indeed, that is why they choose to communicate completely differently and to create for Saudi Arabia a totally new advertisement. This is no more an adaptation but a creation.

In those advertisements, there are usually references to the culture and the values of the country.

For example, HP communicates on the HP Photosmart 475 featuring 2 Saudi women, wearing abayyah and veils, which are directly related to the values and rules of Saudi Arabia. We are not able to see any naked parts of their bodies, except hands and faces.

With this advertisement, HP aims directly at Saudis consumers, who can clearly identify themselves with these two young women. The background is typically oriental.

The same is true for Samsung advertisement which communicates on washing machines.

This advertisement was created especially for Saudi Arabia and highlights the qualities of the product. Only traditional clothes (the men thawb in the center) are used to illustrate and provide proof of product's qualities.

In both ads, we note the strong presence of text, a major feature of Saudi advertisements. In fact, advertisements in Saudi Arabia are generally based on a vast majority of texts and images illustrate the essays.

HP

[illegible]

Samsung

[illegible]

2. Highlighted products.

Some advertisers also choose to create new advertisements for Saudi Arabia but this time without relying on cultural references or the values of the country.

Indeed, some ads do not do more than present the product, with nothing around.

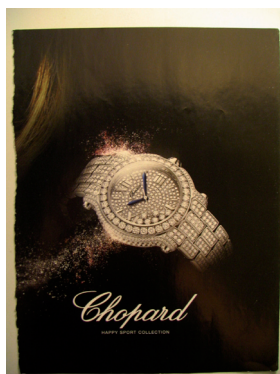
It can therefore be noted that for these two advertisements, only the product is in the middle of the advertisement.

They are very different from the original advertisements in which appear women who are promoting the product and attract the eye of the consumer.

Chopard

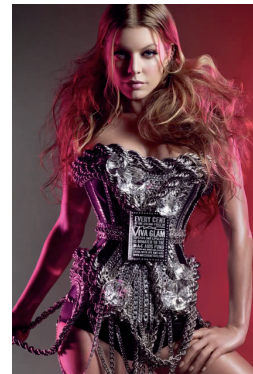


International campaign



Saudi campaign

M.A.C - Viva Glam



International campaign



Saudi campaign

F. Adaptation of products

It is not uncommon in Saudi Arabia that products for Saudi consumers have to be adapted to their culture and their values.

In order for the consumers to identify themselves to the product and find an interest, advertisers are often brought to modify their products but also the names of these products.

It is the case for Givenchy, who communicates in Saudi Arabia for its perfume “Ange ou Démon”. However, the latter name has been changed to respect the rules and laws of Saudi Arabia, namely, one never speaks of a supernatural force other than God. Here in this case, the devil is mentioned, which can not be tolerated. The fragrance in Saudi Arabia bears the name of “Ange ou Étrange”. We note at the same time that the advertisement has also been adapted for the country.

The young woman no longer has her back naked and her arms were covered.

Patek and Philippe, a Geneva-based company also adapted its products to Saudi Arabia.

In fact, the company advertises a watch suited for sale in Islamic countries : studded with 114 diamonds, corresponding to the number of « surat », or chapters, in the Koran.

Givenchy - Ange ou Étrange



International campaign



Saudi campaign

G. Creativity.

Some advertisers are very creative when it comes to communicating in Saudi Arabia.

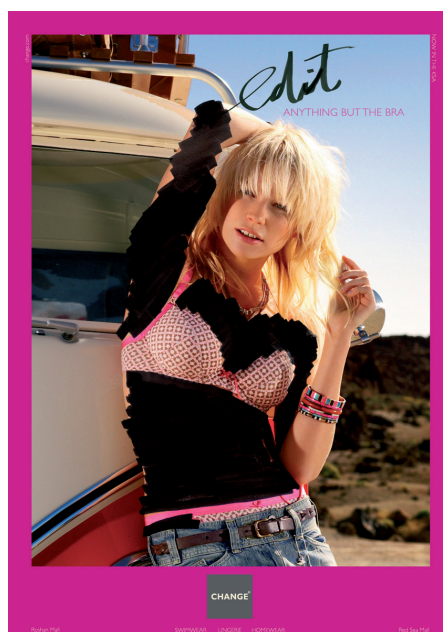
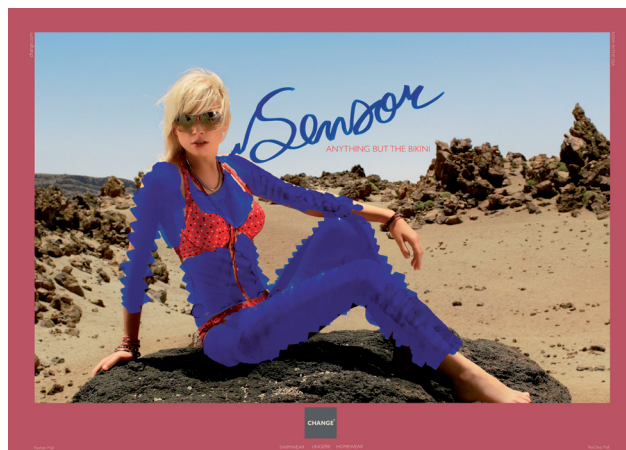
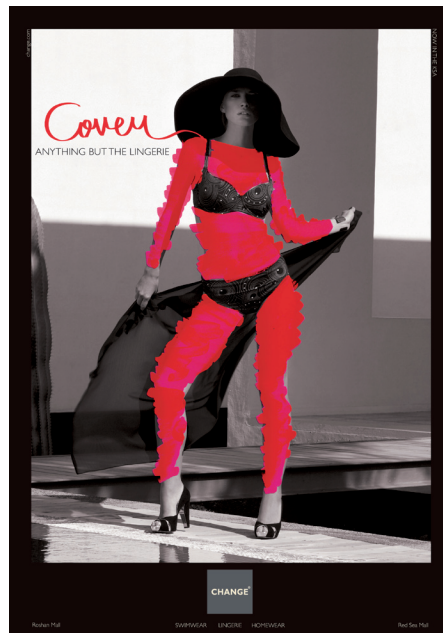
In order to go round the restrictions and laws of the Islamic government that bans nudity in advertisements, some brands of lingerie must use out of the ordinary creativity.

Indeed, the British lingerie brand CHANGE practices self-censorship in its advertisements. The objective of the advertisement was to announce the launch of CHANGE in Saudi Arabia. The brand uses censorship as a creative and visual element of its Saudi advertising campaign and transforms this censorship in art! The lingerie brand, denounces through this campaign, censorship it has shown. It can be seen that designers play with this censorship and transform it as the main element of the campaign.

The eye is attracted by this disturbing «censorship» that directly highlighted the product. The ads are all in English, as they target an upscale bilingual audience.

Slogans used also refer to censorship:

- « Cover anything but the lingerie »
- « Sensor anything but the bikini »
- « Edit anything but the bra »



H. The contrast

There are, in Saudi Arabia, as in any country in the world, a strong contrast between the ads produced and edited.

In some cases, advertisers (local or international) have shown great creativity to attract the attention of consumers and the public while respecting the rules and laws of Sharia, issued by the Saudi government.

However, in other cases, advertisers are not at all being creative and often produce advertisements with no interest and that do not attract the attention of the consumer.

Not creative



Creative



Creative



CONCLUSION

As we have seen all over the analysis, advertising in Saudi Arabia is a very complex subject.

Advertising, the visual art of capitalism, is a vehicle for cultural production, a machine that creates culture. Advertisers take products and services, strip them of any cultural overlay, and they re-attach them to well-known historical symbols of a new culture.

One of the function of advertising is precisely this : to start with a product created for certain tastes, for a certain social reality, and stress the elements in it that may be appropriate for a different culture

There is a very important contrast in the Saudi society. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is a wealthy nation where advertising could be really exploited and developped and they don't use all their potential. They have at their disposal really developped means and advertising systems but actually very archaic in terms of contents because of all these Islamic law and restrictions.

Even if a sensible evolution can be noticed, Saudi Arabia is still far from occidental practicals, this development being hampered by the Islamic laws but also by the status of the Holy Land that Saudi Arabia has for Muslims.

We also analyze along this thesis, the place of women in Saudi advertising.

The image conveyed (housewife, mother, usually subject to family male authority) is in opposition or even contradiction with the one conveyed by Western advertisers (free women, independent, smart, sexy ...). But, is it not a way (certainly excessive), from Saudi Arabia to protect women's image?

We must therefore ask ourselves if all those new means of communication and especially Internet will someday and somehow succeed in contributing to improve advertising contents ?

And moreover, does the fact that the Saudis discover « occidental » advertising on Internet will one day contribute to advertising evolution, in general, in Saudi Arabia ?

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