Comparative Analysis of Western Design Principles and Visual Structure in GCC Advertising Design

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ABSTRACT

The Research paper explores the influence of globalization on international visual communication practices in advertising design. It investigates the reciprocal interaction between design principles and structures in the field of advertising, focusing on the impact of Western visual communication practices on advertising in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. The study contributes to understanding of the effects of globalization on visual communication, specifically advertising design, and the role of culture in shaping advertising design. It examines the extent to which advertisers in the GCC countries adopt Western visual communication advertising design and how advertising is created or adapted to local cultural, social, and religious values.

Introduction

The objective of this study is to examine the design of visual advertising in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with a focus on the principles of Western design applied in these countries. The research encompasses various aspects, including the description of the socio-political and cultural context of graphic design and advertising design in the GCC countries, and an examination of the cultural context of the GCC region and its influence on the mutual interaction of advertising design principles.

Moreover, the study aims to investigate the commonalities and differences between Western culture and the GCC region's culture in the application of advertising design principles. Additionally, it seeks to describe the impact of the cultural context of the GCC region on the visual communication strategies of Western culture. To achieve these objectives, the research involves the analysis of advertising artifacts and the study of their effects on visual communication.

This paper investigates the structures within compositional systems and information flow of advertising design, specifically focusing on the visual hierarchy in advertisements of both Western and GCC countries. The aim is to explore and analyse the differences rooted in centuries-old visual culture. To accomplish this, a substantial number of advertising design artifacts were collected to facilitate the examination of the methods and principles.

Materials and Methods

Design in the 21st century is neither a subject nor an object; instead, it is a method for determining the necessary solution, identifying the beneficiaries, and reproducing the given task to achieve the most appropriate, socially responsible, and innovative outcome. Design manifests itself in products, services, processes, and systems, and it is an integral part of everyday life. As a human-centred activity, design focuses on creating positive results and impacts (Freimane, 2020).

Design research encompasses multiple disciplines and fields, aiming to provide universal models that offer rational responses to specific design-related situations (Baerhold, Bucher, Scheuer & Simonsen, 2010). It relies on practice-based design artifact research. This research paper represents an interdisciplinary design study that employs the method of structural analysis to explore the influence of different societal systems' paradigms at the macro level on the visual culture of the GCC countries.

Research paper outlines the methodological complexities of the qualitative approach used in the study, highlighting the integration of theoretical frameworks and the application of cultural categories in the analysis of advertising design artifacts. The research employed a qualitative method, with data collected in 2017 and 2018 from advertising design artifacts featured in lifestyle, fashion, well-being, and entertainment magazines. In developing the methodology for this study, a meticulous approach was taken to select print media that authentically reflect and represent the prevailing consumer culture in the GCC countries. The selection of magazines was based on identifying the dominant lifestyle publications and their availability. Magazines were sourced from Majid Al Futtaim Retail LLC group stores, specifically Carrefour, the largest retail chain in the United Arab Emirates, which holds approximately 38% of the market share. Majid Al Futtaim launched the Carrefour chain in 1995, and the company now operates stores in more than 30 countries across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (Statista, 2022).

The initial selection included a broad spectrum of magazines, covering topics such as sports, health maintenance, travel, and other activities. Subsequently, an in-depth analysis of the print media was conducted, involving a thorough examination of the content, themes, and dominant trends within each category. A refined selection process followed, ensuring that the chosen print media accurately represented the dominant consumer culture in the GCC countries and that their content could be generalized to the broader public. As a result, specific magazines, including "Men's Health" (a fitness and nutrition magazine), "Women's Health" (a fitness and health magazine), "Nomad" (a sustainability and quality of life magazine), and "National Geographic" (a magazine focused on geography, history, and world cultures), were excluded from the data collection.

This strategic selection process ensures that the research utilizes the most influential and widely consumed print media, enabling a more focused analysis. Based on the criteria outlined above, 15 journals were selected: Harper's Bazaar Arabia, Cosmopolitan Middle East, Emirates Woman, Jamalouki, Time Out Dubai, Vogue Arabia, What's On

Dubai, Layalina, Masala, Good, Ahlan, Hello! Middle East, Sayidaty, Zahrat Al Khaleej, Aljamila.

Advertising design is an integral part of these magazines, serving as a medium for conveying information about prevailing consumer culture, lifestyle, and societal trends. Lifestyle, fashion, entertainment, and well-being magazines were chosen for this study due to their ability to provide comprehensive coverage of diverse interests and preferences across a broad demographic range. While the collected advertising design artifacts cater to a wide audience, the primary target demographic is women aged 18-40 who are residents of the GCC countries.

The journals selected for this study are concentrated in the United Arab Emirates but are distributed across all GCC countries. As a cultural and economic hub, the United Arab Emirates often influences and sets trends that resonate throughout the wider GCC region. This approach ensures a holistic representation of the cultural nuances and variations that exist in the region.

By collecting advertising design artifacts, the study aims to explore the dynamics of advertising design communication and the evolving paradigms within this field. The collected artifacts encompass a wide range of products and services. The largest category of advertisements is in the field of public catering, which accounts for 21% of all ads. Following this are advertisements from the fashion industry, comprising 17% of the total. Information about upcoming events, conferences, sports games, and concerts in GCC countries is represented by 14% of advertisements. Luxury goods are advertised in 9% and 7% of the ads, respectively, for jewellery and wristwatches. Hotel advertisements make up 6% of the total. Medical services are promoted in 3% of the ads, with another 3% dedicated to beauty products. Advertisements for interior items, beauty services/spas, perfumes, travel services, and food products each account for 2% of the total. Social ads, car ads, book ads, sports club (golf, polo, etc.) ads, movie theatre ads, advertisements for children's products, amusement park ads, and stationery ads each make up 1% of the total. The remaining advertisements, each representing less than 1%, include those for electronics, home appliances, museums, food brands, educational services, music discs, phone application services, magazines, and lottery tickets.

Research utilizes a dataset of advertising design artifacts, along with their equivalents or adaptations in Western visual communication design. To find equivalents of these global brand advertising campaigns targeted at Western cultural audiences, internet search tools were employed. The search process involved using brand names as keywords, such as Louvre Museum, Longines, Miss Dior, Guerlain, LG TWIN, Concord, Dermalogica, Hermessence, Pandora, etc.

In the context of advertising, adaptation refers to the process of tailoring an ad to different audiences, platforms, or markets to increase its effectiveness. This thesis analyzes the adaptation of language and advertising design culture through advertising design structures. When promoting products in different regions or countries, it is crucial to consider the nuances of language and visual culture. The selection criteria include the year the advertisement was created.

Thirty-eight percent of the advertising artifacts are trademarks from GCC countries or advertisements intended solely for the GCC region. The equivalent of 2% of these advertising artifacts could not be found in Western countries. Accordingly, 60% of the brands are advertised in both the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Western markets.

A/B Testing: Evaluating Advertising Design Structures and Effectiveness

These advertising artifacts are studied using the design research method "A/B testing," where two different versions of an ad (version A and version B) are compared, alongside the structural analysis method, which examines visual communication—advertising design artifacts—using design principles and components within a compositional hierarchy.

A/B testing is a valuable method for researching ad design, as it allows for the comparison of two different versions of an ad (version A and version B) to determine which one is more effective in achieving specific goals. In this research paper, the method is employed without the premise of determining "which advertisement is better." Instead, the principle of A versus B is used for analysis, focusing on the study of design structures—design principles and components. This approach is particularly useful for the author, to focuses on advertising design structures, without describing the preferences and attitudes of customers.

The A/B testing method is detailed in the book "The Pocket Universal Methods of Design: 125 Ways to Research Complex Problems, Develop Innovative Ideas, and Design Effective Solutions". The book describes universal design research and synthesis/analysis methods:

"Testing can assess design aspects such as different uses of text (tone, length, and font size); elements (number of elements and their arrangement); and various design actions or calls to action (page layout, size, color, and markup). A/B testing will not help you understand which design is desirable. It can, however, be combined with other research methods to gain a deeper understanding of customer trust, preferences, attitudes, and needs." (Hannington, Martin, & Safari and O'Reilly Media Company, 2021, p. 1).

Thus, the A/B testing method contributes significantly to the study of advertising design communication practices and serves as a valuable resource for gathering information in the field of design communication.

Principles of Advertising Design in the Perspective of GCC Countries and Western Culture

In the following analysis, attention is focused on the structural analysis of the two-dimensional advertising image. Graphic design is created within two dimensions (height and width). A white sheet of paper remains a flat surface until a design element is rendered on it; then, it transforms into a design composition that becomes increasingly complex as the number of elements increases (Swann, 2004, p. 10; Wallschlaeger, 1998, p. 81).

The author will not study the message of the advertisement and its imagery but will instead focus on the artifacts of advertising design—specifically, the structure and compositional solutions—using design principles and components within the compositional hierarchy. Graphic designers employ visual hierarchy to organize visual elements according to their importance in the design. Every design element contributes to the delivery of information—words convey a message, and pictures explain or add meaning. Without a clear hierarchy, the visual information becomes relative, creating ambiguity in the message and rendering it potentially incomprehensible or unreadable (Resnick, 2003, p. 121; Evans & Thomas, 2013, p. 5). Visual hierarchy is established by emphasizing the size, visual meaning, or color of an object (Resnick, 2003, p. 159). An

integral part of compositional hierarchy is visual emphasis and dominance. The terms "emphasis" and "dominance" refer to the hierarchy of elements within a compositional structure; primary and secondary compositional elements determine visual meaning (Wallschlaeger, 1998, p. 409). Emphasis is achieved by using a focal point to highlight certain elements and draw attention to them. Without emphasis, the viewer's eyes may wander aimlessly through the design composition. Emphasis can be accomplished in various ways—by altering size, color, visual weight, density, shape, or placement (Evans & Thomas, 2013, p. 11).

In the 21st century, understanding how perception mechanisms work is crucial for successful message transmission in visual communication. Effective visual communication focuses on the viewer and their comprehension of what they see. Knowing how the viewer perceives visual information helps create a meaningful message that resonates both cognitively and emotionally.

The image plays a significant role in the architecture of human perception and cognition; the viewer is unconsciously drawn to the image. In book "Visual Language for Designers: Principles for Creating Graphics That People Understand", Malamed posits that designers create graphic design with the assumption that, when viewing the visualization of lines, colors, and shapes, the message will be communicated. It is presumed that the viewer will follow the graphic design composition in a specific sequence, guided by the visual hierarchy created by the designer (Malamed, 2009). Therefore, designers use visual hierarchy to arrange visual elements according to their importance in the design.

When viewing a work of art, the artist engages several regions of the brain, creating a coherent and unified visual perception. These cultivated visual skills can be attributed to education in the arts, a well-developed visual imagination, and a natural inclination toward the visual. When observing a painting, a viewer with an art education spends more time analyzing the relationships between background features, elements, shapes, and colors. In contrast, viewers with no background in design or art tend to focus more on central and foreground figures, concentrating on objects and pictorial elements (Nodine, Locher & Krupinski, 1993). François Molnar, in his books "Towards Science in Art" and "On the Role of Visual Exploration in Aesthetics", wrote: "To quantify the

role of eye fixation patterns in the evaluation of visual compositions, it must be assumed that eye fixations are driven either by the pursuit of knowledge or the pursuit of pleasure. Research driven by the pursuit of knowledge is slower and more conscious than the pursuit of visual pleasure. This has important implications for the spatial parameters of eye fixation" (Molnar, 1981).

When creating advertising materials for broad segments of society, the principle of eye fixation patterns or focal point perception is considered. Most often, the focal point in the visual hierarchy is placed on foreground objects (such as goods) and elements of images (such as representations of people). However, there is a different approach to visual structures and compositional hierarchy in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council compared to the visual culture of Western design.

In the Western world, viewers typically perceive and read text as well as visual images from left to right. In the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, textual and visual information is read and perceived from right to left: "Arabic writing runs horizontally, starting from the right side, which is the field of action, and moving to the left side, which is the area of the heart; symbolically, it represents the development from the outer world to the inner being" (Burckhardt, Nasr & Michon, 2009, p. 52).

Therefore, the compositional solutions for the flow of visual and textual information in Western and Eastern cultural environments will be fundamentally opposed (refer to Figure 1).
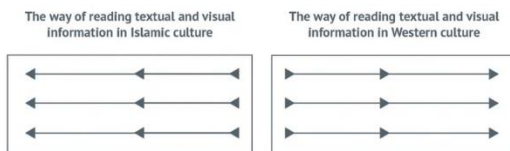

Figure 1 Compositional Solution of the Flow of Information in Western and Islamic Cultures (Eklsa, 2021)

The compositional solution of information flow in Islamic and Western design cultural advertising artifacts is illustrated by posters from the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi and the Louvre Museum in Paris. These examples clearly demonstrate the textual compositional solutions, considering the information perception mechanisms: from right to left in the

United Arab Emirates and from left to right in France (refer to Table 1).

Features of advertising characteristics in Islamic culture	Features of advertising characteristics in Western culture
Luvre Abu Dhabi advert (What's On Dubai, 2018)	Luvre Paris advert (Luvre museum, 2015)

Table 1 : Ways of reading textual and visual information in Islamic and Western cultures

An advertisement from "Mediclinic" in the United Arab Emirates highlights the division of the target audience between Western and Eastern cultures. The compositional solution of the same ad varies significantly depending on whether the intended target audience reads the text from right to left (Arab culture) or from left to right (Western design culture) (refer to Table 2).

Features of advertising characteristics in Islamic culture	Features of advertising characteristics in Western culture
Mediclinic advert (Layalina, 2018)	Mediclinic advert (Emirates Woman, 2018)

Table 2: The way of reading textual and visual

information in Islamic and Western cultures in "Mediclinic" advertisements

Differences in the flow of visual and textual information are not the only factors to consider when designing advertising for the GCC countries. A culturally sensitive approach in advertising design communication involves adapting Western advertising design artifacts to those intended for the GCC countries. Advertising design adaptation refers to the process of modifying or tailoring an advertising campaign or content to suit the cultural, linguistic, social, or regional differences of a particular target audience or market. The goal is to ensure that the advertising message effectively resonates with the local audience and aligns with their preferences, values, and cultural context.

Customization can involve various elements of advertising, including:

Language: Adjusting the language to be culturally and contextually appropriate for the target audience.

Visual Elements: Modifying visuals, graphics, and images to reflect local customs, traditions, and preferences. This can include changing models, clothing, settings, or even the overall tone of the visual.

Cultural Nuances: Ensuring that the advertisement is culturally sensitive and avoids content that could be considered offensive or inappropriate in the local context.

Compliance with Laws and Regulations: Adhering to local laws and regulations related to advertising to avoid any legal issues.

Advertising customization is crucial for global brands or companies operating in diverse markets. It helps ensure that the marketing message is not only understood but also positively perceived by the target audience, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the advertising campaign. Achieving this requires a deep understanding of the local culture, market dynamics, and consumer behaviour in each target region.

Table 3 shows advertising examples from lifestyle magazines: "Emirates Woman" (Longines Rivoli), "Aljamila" (Miss Dior) (refer to Table 3).

Features of advertising characteristics in Islamic culture	Features of advertising characteristics in Western culture
Longines advert (Layalina, 2018)	Longines advert "Harper's Bazaar UK" (images5.fanpop.com, 2011)
Miss Dior parfume advertisement (Aljamila, 2018)	Miss Dior parfume advertisement (fr.shopping.rakuten.com, n.d.)

Table 3 Examples of advertisements representing GCC countries and Western culture

The images show advertisements for international brands aimed at Western consumers and advertisements for the same products aimed at GCC countries. Culturally based visual differences can be observed in the ad designs depicted in the table 3. These include the adaptation of the ad design to incorporate visual elements based on local traditions, as well as changes in the models' clothing. The compositional structures of the advertisements are similar across both regions, with shared principles of balance and emphasis in design, as well as the use of space, typeface, and form in the design components. In all the advertising designs, the human image is given the greatest visual importance within the compositional hierarchy, while less importance is placed on the advertised product itself. This reflects a common principle in Western visual culture, where products are marketed through visually appealing

individuals, placing emphasis on the model in the composition. The appearance of this principle in the advertising artifacts of the GCC countries can be attributed to shifts in advertising design communication paradigms.

The following analysis of advertising design structures is based on the LG Electronics TWINWash advertisement. Schematics with hierarchical compositional layout analysis are created to compare the visual structures of Western advertisements with those targeted at GCC countries.

The schematic analysis in the table 4 highlights differences in the hierarchical structures of advertisements. In the GCC countries, the main visual focus in the advertisement design is on the product itself, whereas in advertisements aimed at Western audiences, the person depicted takes the primary role in the compositional hierarchy. While the product shown in Western ads, it is given secondary importance. The same characteristics can be seen in other advertisements, such as those for Concord watches (refer to Table 4).

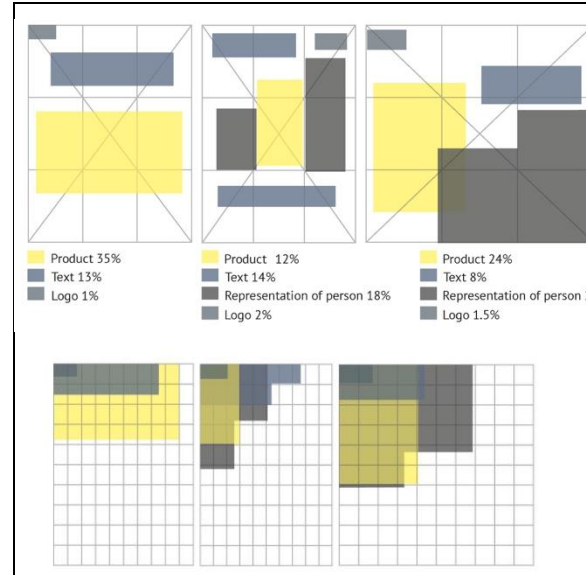| Features of advertising characteristics in Islamic culture	Features of advertising characteristics in Western culture	Features of advertising characteristics in Western culture
LG TWIN washing machine advertisement (Layalina, 2018)	LG TWIN washing machine advertisement (slvrdlphn.com, 2018)	LG TWIN washing machine advertisement (www.gadgetsnow.com, 2020)

Table 4 Table caption LG Electronics - Analysis of TWIN Wash Washing Machine Advertisements

In the promotional designs for Concord watches, the previously mentioned features become even more evident in the hierarchical analysis. In advertisements targeting GCC countries, the product takes a dominant role, whereas in advertisements aimed at Western audiences, the product is depicted but occupies a relatively smaller area in the compositional hierarchy. However, both types of ads share the characteristic that the product is clearly visible and remains the focal point (refer to Table 5).

| Features of advertising characteristics in Islamic culture	Features of advertising characteristics in Western culture	Features of advertising characteristics in Western culture
Concord wristwatch advertisement (Layalina, 2018)	Concord wristwatch advertisement (www.coloribus.com, 2001)	Concord wristwatch advertisement (assets.website-files.com, 2001)
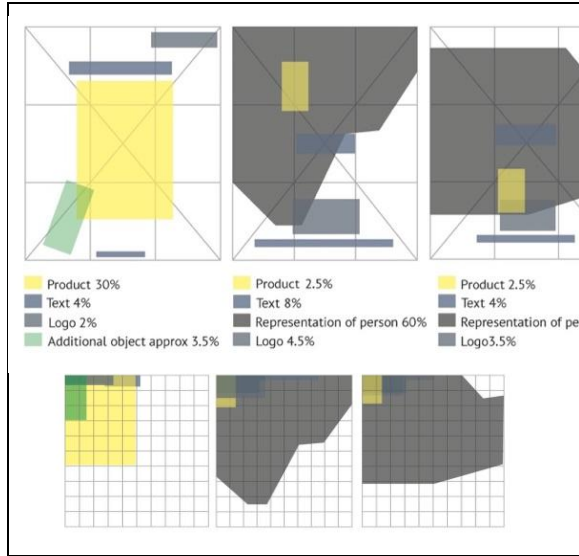
Table 5 An analysis of "Concord" watch advertisements

The study highlights the disparities in visual communication observed in the adaptations of advertising design artifacts for the target audience of the GCC region and the Western consumer. By comparing the examination of visual structures within the framework of compositional systems, the author concludes that in the advertising design of the GCC region, the brand product assumes the primary role in the visual hierarchy. This approach to advertising design research was selected to analyse the adaptation strategies employed by international brands for Islamic and Western target audiences through qualitative research and the analysis of the structure of the compositional hierarchy in advertising.

Conclusion

The research paper employs the design research method known as "A/B testing" to compare two distinct versions of advertising design artifacts. This methodological approach is particularly valuable in elucidating the differences in visual communication strategies between advertisements targeting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and those aimed at Western audiences. The analysis yields several critical insights:

• In Western cultures, viewers typically process both text and visual elements from left to right, following the standard reading direction. Conversely, in GCC countries, textual and visual information is perceived from right to left, consistent with Arabic script. This

fundamental difference in reading direction profoundly influences the compositional flow of advertisements, resulting in diametrically opposed layouts in the two regions. The visual hierarchy in each case reflects these divergent cultural practices.

• Advertisements targeting GCC audiences prioritize the product image within the compositional hierarchy, allotting it a substantially larger share of the visual space. This stands in contrast to Western advertisements, where the product often occupies a secondary position within the composition, with greater emphasis placed on other elements.

• In Western advertising design, the human figure assumes a central role, often dominating the visual hierarchy. The person featured in the advertisement is typically larger and more prominent than the product itself, reflecting a design strategy in which the product is marketed through association with an aspirational or visually appealing individual. In contrast, advertisements tailored for the GCC region frequently assign a more modest role to human imagery, focusing instead on the product itself as the primary visual element.

• Despite these differences in visual emphasis, both GCC and Western advertisements allocate comparable percentages of space to textual content within the overall composition. This suggests a shared recognition of the importance of text in the visual hierarchy, regardless of cultural context.

• Further analysis reveals that the design principles governing advertising artifacts in the GCC region are shaped by distinct cultural and aesthetic norms. Advertisements from the GCC exhibit a restrained, modest aesthetic, in line with regional values that prioritize subtlety and respect for tradition. These principles manifest in designs that are less visually assertive than their Western counterparts, which often employ bold, attention-grabbing techniques to capture viewer interest. The restrained approach in GCC advertisements aligns with broader societal norms, emphasizing functionality and clarity over dynamic or provocative visuals.

This divergence in design strategies is indicative of the broader cultural influences that shape advertising practices in different regions. Western advertising tends to rely on visual dynamism and emotional appeal, often using human figures to evoke personal connections with consumers. By contrast, GCC advertisements reflect a more product-centric

approach, adhering to aesthetic values rooted in cultural tradition and regional sensibilities. As such, this study underscores the importance of culturally contextualized design strategies in advertising, particularly when engaging with global markets where visual communication norms vary significantly.

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