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# *Cultural Values Reflected in Arab and American Television Advertising*

*Morris Kalliny and Lance Gentry*

*This study examines cultural values as reflected in U.S. and the Arab world television advertising. A total of 866 television commercials from Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and the United States were analyzed. Contrary to the common notion that the U.S. culture and the Arabic culture are vastly different, we found many similarities between the two cultures regarding TV advertising content and appeal. The findings contribute to the debate of standardization versus adaptation of international advertising.*

## **Introduction**

Globalization has brought us closer than ever to McLuhan's (1964) vision of a global village. As national boundaries continue to diminish, international trade is no longer defined by national borders leading to more businesses seeking opportunities abroad. The diminishing of national boundaries has increased more than ever the selection of products and brand names from which customers can choose. One of the most critical questions global marketers face is whether they can utilize global strategies in the foreign markets.

Previous literature (Zhang and Gelb 1996) noted that it is generally accepted that consumers react more positively to advertising messages that are congruent with their culture. In order for international businesses to achieve that, they first must understand the cultural similarities and differences between their own country and foreign countries. The extensive literature review indicates that there is an increasing need for cross-cultural advertising research to understand similarities and differences between nations. Scholars (Albernethy and Franke 1996; Al-Olayan and Karande 2000) identified the need for more studies comparing advertising content across countries, especially the neglected parts of the world such as the Arab countries. Abernethy and Franke (1996) pointed out that some parts of the world have been severely neglected in advertising research such as the Arab world. Re-

cently, Taylor (2005) examined international advertising papers published between 1994 and 2004 and found 44% of them were about Asia, 22% about Europe, 22% about developing countries and 12% about global in general/ multiple countries. Taylor's study revealed how the Arab region has been severely neglected in international advertising research.

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the similarities and differences of the manifestation of cultural values in contemporary United States and the Arab television advertisements. Specifically, this study investigates the types of cultural values conveyed in television commercials in a representative sample of the Arab world, including Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates and the United States. The second purpose of this study is to extend the international advertising literature to the Arab world.

## **Comparing the Arab and American Culture**

The understanding of cultural differences is often considered a prerequisite for successful international advertising (Keegan 1989) because consumers grow up in a particular culture and become aligned with that culture's value system, beliefs and perception processes. Several studies have shown that consumers are more inclined to respond to advertisements that are congruent with their culture (Boddewyn, Soehl and Picard 1986; Buzzell 1986; Harris 1984).

The value system includes the sets of beliefs, attitudes and activities to which a culture or subculture subscribes and is reinforced by rewards and punish-

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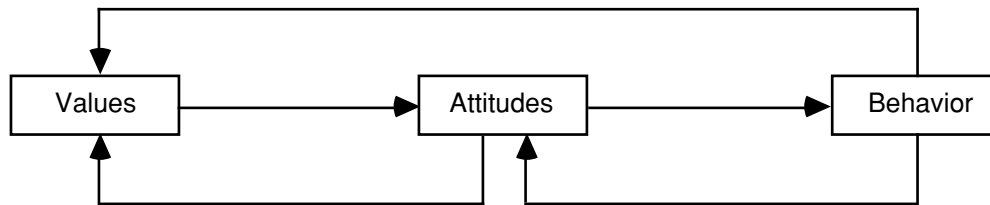
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Figure 1



ments for those who follow or deviate from these guidelines (Rokeach 1973). Durgee, O'Connor and Veryzer (1996) contended that one of the most powerful ways to understand consumers is to understand their values and value systems. At the personal level, values determine virtually all types of behaviors, from simple purchasing to religious ideologies (Pollay 1983). In the marketing and management literature, cultural values are recognized as having influence on consumer motivations and product choices (Tse, Wang and Tan 1988). Several researchers believe that values are predictors or antecedents of behavior (Conner and Becker 2003; England 1967; England and Lee 1974), and aid in the understanding of culture (Feather 1975; Rokeach 1968, 1973). Conner and Becker (2003) argued as shown in the next diagram that values influence attitudes which in turn influence behavior. Thus, behavior is determined by values (see Figure 1 above).

Although value systems exist in every society, significant differences exist between value systems. For example, the U.S is viewed as a society that values individualism while Egypt is viewed as a society that values collectivism. These priorities contributed to the creation of cultural differences among societies that set them apart from each other and make each society's culture unique. Thus, cultural differences can be understood by comparing the value systems of different cultures because each culture has its own unique set of priorities, rules and principles that facilitate group members and in their adaptation process to the environment (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961).

### Cultural Differences in Advertising Content

McCarty and Hattwick (1992) argued that culture impacts every aspect of a society, including the thinking and acting of every member of a group. No wonder culture has long been considered to have a significant influence on international advertising strategy (e.g., Albaum and Peterson 1984; Britt 1974; Donnelly 1970; Douglas and Dubois 1977; Harvey 1993; Kanso 1992; Mueller 1992; Onkvisit and Shaw 1987). Srikandath (1991) referred to cultural values as

the governing ideas and guiding principles for thought and action in a given society. Therefore, cultural values are important variables in advertising research. Advertisements are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any culture ever made of its entire range of activities (McLuhan 1964). Schudson (1984) viewed advertising as a window to a given culture and a mirror that reflects culture. Frith (1997) argued that consumers understand advertising messages by relating them to culture. Tse, Belk and Zhou (1989) argued that cultural values conveyed through advertising messages are considered powerful forces shaping consumers' motivations, lifestyles, and product choice. Marketers must understand cultural values of a given society to be able to select effective and appropriate advertising messages. Thus cross-cultural studies are crucial in understanding different cultural values.

Frith and Frith (1989) found significant differences in key cultural values between Western and Eastern cultures reflected in advertising such as direct and indirect discourse, individualism and collectivism, horizontal and vertical identification of personal relationships, determinism and fatalism, and logical and intuitive problem-solving. The most common cultural values manifested in advertising include individualism-collectivism (Cheng and Schweitzer 1996; Lin 1993), high and low context cultures and language (Muller 1987), power distance (Sriram and Gopalakrishna 1991; Zandpour et al. 1994), uncertainty avoidance (Sriram and Gopalakrishna 1991; Zandpour et al. 1994), and cultural preference for written versus oral communication (Unwin 1974).

Synodinos, Keown, and Jacobs (1989) studied advertising practices in 15 countries and found significant dissimilarities that were attributed to cultural differences. Kanso (1992) investigated the international advertising strategy of the largest fortune 500 corporations and suggested that advertising messages should fit the beliefs and traditions of the citizens in each country. Hornic (1980) found that, in most cases, an adaptive advertising strategy was followed when an American print advertisement for well-known American products was used in Israel. Graham,

Kamins and Oetomo (1993) found Japanese and German companies adapted their international advertisements to the foreign markets.

The majority of cross-cultural advertising studies explicitly assumes that culture is an antecedent to different advertising content and expressions (Al-Olayan and Karande 2000; Gilly 1988; Hong et al. 1987; Mueller 1992; Tansey et al. 1990), and tremendous support has been reported for the culture-specific content of advertising. Pollay and Gallagher (1990) argued that cultural values are the core of advertising messages and typical advertisements reinforce cultural values. Finally, several empirical studies found that advertisements reflecting local cultural values are more persuasive than those that ignore them (Gregory and Munch 1997; Han and Shavitt 1994; Hong, Muderrisoghi and Zinkhan 1987; Madden, Cabellero and Matsukubu 1986).

This preceding literature shows that there is a strong relationship between cultural values and advertising content. Cultural values play a central role in the advertising content and advertising content plays an integral role in transmitting and shaping cultural values. Therefore, the study of advertising content makes it possible for academic researchers to gain insight about the cultural values of a particular society.

## The Arab Culture

### *Common Characteristics of the Arab Culture*

Although it is impossible to generalize about all or most cultural values across the Arab world (Lamb 1987; Nydell 1987), there are beliefs and attitudes that are shared by many Arabs and seem to cross national and social class boundaries (Wilson 1996). Wilson (1996, p. 69) provides the following summary in regard to the Arab culture:

Everyone loves children; that age automatically confers wisdom; that men and women have vastly different personalities and characteristics; that a person's dignity, honor, and reputation are of primary importance and must be protected at all costs; that one must always behave in a way that will create a good impression on others; that loyalty to one's family takes precedence over personal needs; that piety is one of the most admirable traits in a person; and that there should be no separation between "church and state"—religion should pervade all aspects of life.

One of the most important facts about the Arab culture is the role of Islam in shaping it. The language, social structure, and economic philosophy are

fully grounded in Islam and Islam is considered a complete way of life (Kavoossi 2000; Lawrence 1998). There is a fine line between what is religious and what is cultural in the Arab world. Shari'a (Islamic Law) is viewed as a comprehensive code governing all areas of a Muslim's life such as duties, morals and behavior, individually, and collectively including commerce (Luqmani, Yavas and Quraeshi 1987). The Shari'a describes the values Muslims should hold, such as truth, justice, individual freedom, honesty, social obligations, collective responsibility, the roles of men and women and the role of buying and selling. Thus, the Shari'a prescribes all that one should do (Coulson 1964), and, therefore, the cultural value system of the Arabs is strongly derived from and guided by the Islamic religious beliefs (Anastos, Bedos and Seaman 1980).

Most Arabs are Muslim (Hofstede 1994; Kabasakal and Bodur 2002) who are influenced by the Koran in conducting their daily activities (Ali 1996), and religious beliefs are a constant reminder of what is considered culturally acceptable. Thus, one of the characteristics that distinguish between the followers of Islam from followers of some other faiths is that religion influences every aspect of a Muslim's life. This is not to say that some followers of other faith may not have the same thing but to say that is probably more prevalent in Islam. A survey in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, revealed that most respondents were united in their belief that Islam structures the daily life of people and that Gulf society and identity are woven with Islam (Rice and Al-Mossawi 2002). Egyptians considered religion to be the most important value after health (Rice and Al-Mossawi 2000).

## The American Culture

The America culture is different from the Arab culture in many ways. Just as the underlying Islamic beliefs of the majority of Arabs has shaped Arabic culture, the underlying Christian beliefs of majority of U.S. citizens has helped shape American culture and the American value system. Specifically, Americans can be described as informal, direct, competitive, high achievers, independent and individualistic, questioners, and punctual (Bakhtari 1995). Americans are a heterogeneous group who live at a fast pace, believe in direct methods of communication, are practical and egalitarian, live as a nuclear family, reject fatalism, and like to achieve through their own efforts (Wilson 1996; Lee 1980). The American culture is argued to be a low context culture (Hall and Hall 1987), where most in-

formation is vested within explicit codes, such that things are spelled out as concisely and thoroughly as possible.

For example, messages are explicit, and there is considerable dependence on what is actually said or written.

According to Hofstede (1981), American culture is one of the most individualistic cultures and, as such, strongly values uniqueness and self-determination. In U.S. culture, there is a widespread belief that each person is an entity separate from others and the group (Spence 1985); therefore, the focus is more on the individual well being rather than on the group.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research effort focuses on two main research questions. What are the types of products that are commonly advertised on U.S. and Arab TV? What are the main cultural differences and similarities between the United States and the Arab World? We selected a group of cultural values (Tradition, Feminine Appearance and Beauty Enhancement, Respect for the Elderly, Harmony with Others, Interdependence, Thriftiness, Competitiveness, Attitude toward Nature, and Attitude toward Enjoyment) for investigation to answer the latter question. These cultural values were chosen based on the preceding discussion of the cultural values and similarities between the Arab world and the U.S. These cultural values relate, some more than others, to tradition and that is the cultural value we start with. This group of cultural values should not be viewed as conclusive for there are many other cultural values that could be investigated. Since both Arabian and American cultures draw heavily upon the local predominant religion, it is important to understand what the predominant local religion teaches about the subject to better understand how it may have influenced the local culture.

#### Tradition

According to Cheng and Schweitzer (1996), traditional society is static with little specialization, a low level of urbanization, and low literacy. Traditional society is depicted as having an authoritarian political system, whereas modern society is characterized by wide participation on the part of citizens. Moreover, traditional society is bound by the cultural values established by old customs and conventions, while modern society is culturally dynamic and oriented to change and innovate.

By this definition, Arab society is very traditional in many respects. For centuries, Bedouin tribes have been known for their gracious hospitality to lost desert trav-

elers. Even today, Arabs maintain this tradition by displaying generosity and offering hospitality (Lee 1980). Arabs value honor and honesty and are willing to go to great lengths to avoid losing face (Ali 1996). As stated by Prophet Mohammad, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be hospitable with his or her guests" (ipaki.com). The Institute for the Secularization of Islamic Society reported that a number of Arab young women have been killed by their families in Denmark to protect the honor of the family. This illustrates how tradition in the Arab society may take precedent over secular law and family ties.

Although the American culture has an element similar to the Arab culture where people are proud of the founding fathers and what they have done to build their country, Americans tend to focus more on the future than on the past. With lessons such as the parables of the talents, Christians are taught to have a strong work ethic—in fact, previous generations remarked upon the "Protestant work ethic"—and to look forward to the future. Modernity and progress is highly valued in US culture and clenching to certain traditions merely for the sake of tradition strikes many Americans as backward and restrictive. Therefore:

H-Trad: Arab television commercials will manifest more traditions compared to their U.S. counterparts.

#### Feminine Appearance and Beauty Enhancement

One of the main cultural differences between the United States and the Arab world is how woman should appear in society. Support for our thesis that this cultural difference rests upon the local predominant religion may be found in Arabia itself. For example, dress in the Arab countries ranges from wearing a bikini to being completely covered. This contrast can be found between Lebanon where about 50% of the population is Christian and affiliate themselves with the West in several respects and Saudi Arabia where Islamic values are held to the most stringent interpretation. In Saudi Arabia, women are required by the law to cover up, while in Lebanon, Egypt, Syria and others such a requirement does not exist. This is not to say that veiled women are not found in those countries because this is dependent on each family and person's way of life, commitment to Islam and interpretation of the teaching of Islam.

The cultural differences in modesty in dress reflect both the local predominate religion as well as the percentage of people in the country that follow it. This Koran passage provides some guidance as to how Islamic women should appear in the public:

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appear thereof that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers... (Koran 24:31).

Arab society is expected to adhere to the teachings of Islam (Al-Olayan and Karande 2000) and follow its guidelines. Various scholars interpreted the preceding Koran passage differently: most scholars interpret this message to mean that women may show only their hands and face to men outside of their immediate family. Stricter scholars interpret the message to mean women should be completely veiled. For example, Saudi women are not allowed to walk in the streets with their faces uncovered.

Contrast the Koran's commands to all Islamic women with the Bible's words on the subject. The New Testament has no specific instructions on how unmarried Christian women should dress outside of the church. The Apostle Paul provided guidance for how women should dress while attending church and the Apostle Peter provided some general guidelines for married women:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God ... (NKJV, 1 Peter 3:3-4).

Since Muslim women have a much stronger religious command toward specific types of modesty in dress than Christian women, one would expect this to be reflected in advertising. Indeed, this is the case. Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) found in 83% of Arabic magazine advertisements showing women, women were wearing long clothing, compared to 29% in U.S. advertisements. It is clear that this Islamic restriction may pose an advertising dilemma for advertisers who would like use female sex appeal to sell to men (e.g., automotive ads using nubile women to sell sports cars). It is also apparent that advertisers will have to be more cautious in showing women using women's products (e.g., American razor ads showing women how nice their legs will look if they use the specified product would not be culturally appropriate in Saudi Arabia).

What is not clear is if women who have to show more modesty in dress in public are still as interested in beauty enhancement as women who expect to be seen by men in addition to their fathers and husbands. Likewise, even if these Islamic women are as interested in beauty enhancement, can advertisers ef-

fectively use television to market their goods without the ability to show women actually using the product? While the first question is outside the scope of this research project, we can more feasibly measure the relative importance of marketing beauty enhancement goods to women under various cultural conditions by measuring the percentage of television ads that attempt to sell these goods. Given the additional complexities of advertising these goods in an Islamic society, it is expected that:

H-BE1: The focus on women's beauty enhancement will be less in Arab advertising compared to their U.S. counterparts.

H-BE2: There will be differences among the Arab countries regarding the cultural value beauty enhancement due to cultural variations among Arab countries with those with larger and stricter Islamic populations having a smaller percentage of television ads aimed at marketing goods for enhancing feminine beauty.

### *Respect for the Elderly*

Arabs have much respect for parents and elders (Nydell 1987; Kabasakal and Bodur 2002). For example, an Arab would never make derogatory statements about deceased relatives or show any disrespect to his parents because of their immense loyalty and respect for parents and elders. The following Koran verses makes it clear that respect for parents and the elderly is strongly desired by God.

And We have enjoined man in respect of his parents— his mother bears him with faintings upon faintings and his weaning takes two years— saying: Be grateful to Me and to both your parents; to Me is the eventual coming (Koran 31:14).

And We have enjoined on man doing of good to his parents; with trouble did his mother bear him and with trouble did she bring him forth; and the bearing of him and the weaning of him was thirty months; until when he attains his maturity and reaches forty years, he says: My Lord! grant me that I may give thanks for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good which pleases Thee and do good to me in respect of my offspring; surely I turn to Thee, and surely I am of those who submit (Koran 46:15).

While a review of American popular television may give the appearance of a significant difference between American and Arabian views on this issue,<sup>1</sup> the histori-

cal and Christian cultural norm is for Americans to respect their parents and the elderly. The fifth commandment states:

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. (NKJV, Deuteronomy 5:25).

Both Arabian and American historical and religious cultures advocate a respect for parents and the elderly. Therefore:

H-Eld: Arab television commercials will manifest respect for elders in the same proportions as their U.S. counterparts.

### *Harmony with Others*

Another characteristic of collectivistic societies is that they value harmony with others. Thus, Arabs are encouraged at an early age to learn to live in harmony with one another. Islam stresses that people within the Muslim faith should learn to get a long and strive for unity and harmony. One of the many Koranic verses stresses that people should speak well to others, "... and speak good to people..." (Koran 2:83).

While the American culture is individualistic and the focus is on the individual rather than on the group, Jesus provided numerous examples how have Christians need to look out for others and be peacemakers. For example, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God* (Matthew 5:9). Likewise, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is so integrated into American culture that most states have "Good Samaritan" laws that protect individuals with good intentions from legal liability. The only time Christians are expected to be "disharmonious" is when local governments place their laws over what Christians understand to be God's laws (for examples, if the government forbade people to be Christians on penalty of being thrown to the lions, Christians would elect to be thrown to the lions vs. repudiate their beliefs.) While the Arabic countries see harmony with others as a group imperative and Christians generally see harmony as an individual responsibility, the overall result is similar. Thus:

H-Hmy: The cultural value "harmony with others" will be manifested the same in the Arab television commercials as it is manifested within U.S. commercials.

### *Interdependence*

Hofstede (1991) reported that the United States was the most individualistic country among the 53 coun-

tries analyzed, with a score of 91 on a 100-point scale. The Arab world, however, scored 38 on this individualistic dimension. Members of Arab culture have a high need for affiliation and value mutual dependence (Yousef 1974). Success is measured by what one does for his family rather than individual earnings or achievement. Consequentially, loyalty to one's primary group is an integral part of Arab culture. This sense of loyalty is exemplified by this Arab proverb, "I against my brother; my brother and I against my cousins; I, my brother, and my cousins against the outsider" (Bates and Fratkin 2003, p.272). This group loyalty can be seen in societies such as the Egyptian society where family members are strongly encouraged to marry their own relatives to keep the wellbeing of the family intact. Hofstede (2001) argued that the Arab culture is a collectivistic culture where members of the Arab society tend to depend on each other. Thus,

H-Int1: Arab television commercials will manifest the cultural value "interdependence" more than their U.S. counterparts.

H-Int2: U.S. television commercials will manifest the cultural value "independence" more than their Arab counterparts.

### *Thriftiness*

One of the teachings that Islam stresses is for people to be thrifty and not waste what they have. It is stated in the Koran that *God loves not the wasters* (Koran 7:31). Likewise, a common theme throughout the Bible is one of good stewardship. Part of being a good steward is being economical and the Bible is full of examples about the foolishness of living beyond one's means (e.g., the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32). Thus:

H-Thrift: The cultural value "thriftiness" will be manifested in the same proportions in the Arab and the U.S. Television commercials.

### *Competitiveness*

According to Hofstede (1984), the Arab world is a highly collectivist society. Ibn Khaldun (1967) addressed the concept of *asabiyya* in the Arab countries as a type of solidarity among the group that is based on blood or a strong bond of mutual affections among the members of the group, which make them willing to fight and die for one another. Moaddel (2002) argues that this solidarity was the key factor in the Bedouins' military prowess and driving force that enabled them to overcome city-dwellers and establish

royal authority. This illustrates how collectivism existed in the Arab world many years ago. One can argue that the collectivist concept in the Arab world has been strongly impacted by the teachings of Islam.

Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) argue that behavior in the Arab world toward others is influenced by messages in the Shari'a, which encourage people not to compete at the cost of harming others. Prophet Muhammad stressed this issue by stating, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" and that "A Muslim is the one who avoids harming Muslims with his tongue and hands" (quoted in Al-Olayan and Karande 2001, p.72). Thus, it is expected that competing advertising will be less prevalent in the Arab world because doing so may cause harm to a Muslim.

Similar charitable concepts are found in Christian culture. For example, Jesus told people, *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you* (NKJV, Mathew 5:44). However, where the Arabs interpreted their religious charge as support for collectivism, Americans tend to treat this religious imperative as an individual instruction. This is evident in Hofstede's scores that showed the United States to have the highest score for Individualism. The US Federal Trade Commission even encourages the use of competing advertising (Cutler and Javalgi 1992). Thus, while Arabs are culturally conditioned to find internal competition negative, Americans may see internal competition as a positive. This leads to:

H-Comp: Compared to U.S. television ads, Arab television ads will use fewer (competitive) comparative ads.

### **Attitude toward Nature**

Researchers have found that certain cultures tend to value oneness with nature while others value mastery over nature and that this cultural difference is reflected in advertising. For example, Japanese (Mueller 1987) and Chinese (Chen and Schweitzer 1996) ads have a greater tendency to illustrate the importance of oneness with nature when compared to U.S. ads. Both constructs may include a respect for nature, but oneness with nature indicates more of an appreciation for nature as it is while mastery over nature indicates a belief that nature needs to be managed.

The Koran teaches that Allah's (God) creation is not to be altered, which implies that man is to respect and accept nature as it is. *"Then set your face upright for religion in the right state— the nature made by Allah in which He has made men; there is no altering of Allah's*

*creation; that is the right religion, but most people do not know"* (Koran 30:30).

The Islamic belief on this issue is much different than the Christian worldview. In the very first chapter of the Bible, Christians are told to manage the earth.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (NKJV, Genesis 1:27-28).

The Christian theme of good stewardship strongly influences how Christians perceive nature. Christians believe that management of the earth is not just a good idea, but that they are commanded to be good stewards of the earth and to master it. Thus:

H-Nat1: Arab television commercials will manifest the cultural value "oneness with nature" more than their U.S. counterparts.

H-Nat2: U.S. television commercial will manifest the cultural value "mastery over nature" more than their Arab counterparts.

### **Attitude toward Enjoyment**

Both religions warn people not to indulge themselves in the enjoyment of this life at the expense of their afterlife. For example, the Koran states, *O my people! this life of the world is only a (passing) enjoyment, and surely the hereafter is the abode to settle* (Koran 40:39). Likewise, Jesus taught, *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?* (NKJV, Mark 8:36). However, both religions encourage men to take joy in life. *This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it* (Psalm 118:24). Lin (2003) argued that some values tend to be more universal than specific. For example, all human beings strive for the feeling of enjoyment. So long as a culture has progressed beyond a substance economy, economic differences should not have an impact on the desire for enjoyment. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H-Enj: U.S. television commercials will manifest the cultural value "enjoyment" in similar amounts as their Arab counterparts.

### **Methodology**

Several approaches and methodologies such as content analysis, ethnography, survey, interview, and



experiment have been used in international advertising to investigate culture and its impact on advertising. Content analysis approach focuses on advertising content to identify cultural similarities and differences manifested in advertising content across different countries and/or media (Al-Olayan and Karande 2000). To fulfill the purpose of this study, we employ the content analysis to identify cultural similarities and differences manifested in advertising content.

### **Conceptualization of Coding Categories**

Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) argued that conceptualization of coding categories is the most important step in content analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2002) pointed out that a group of vague or ambiguously defined categories makes reliability extremely difficult to achieve. Riffe et al. (1998) recommended that coding categories should be determined only after the researcher has become thoroughly familiar with research materials. This recommendation is provided to avoid building a weak research design that can lead to inaccurate data analysis. Moreover, the authors recommend that coding categories should be established in accord with the research purpose, questions and hypotheses. The more precise and complete the coding categories and definitions, the easier the job of coding the data will be.

Following the above recommendations, we relied on previous research in defining cultural values. Our cultural values were adopted from the literature: Pollay's (1983) typology of cultural values manifest, Mueller (1987, 1992), Cheng and Schweitzer (1996), and Yau (1988) as reported in Table 1.

### **Sampling Method**

A sample of 12 hours of programming was videotaped in each of the countries (USA, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and U.A.E.). The local times chosen for taping were 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday. These times were chosen because they are considered the prime evening hours for TV watching in all six countries. Samples were collected during February 2005. Two guidelines were followed in selecting television channels to be taped: 1) the channel had to be broadcast nationwide, and 2) the network is accessed for free and no subscription of any kind is required. Based on these conditions we chose (CBS in U.S., Channel 2 in Egypt, LBC in Lebanon, Kuwait TV in Kuwait, Saudi TV in Saudi Arabia and Dubai Channel in U.A.E.). These Arab TV channels are directed towards the general public and include programming

that can appeal to most people in the country. One hundred fifty television advertisements were used from the U.S. Lebanon and Egypt, 145 from Kuwait, 144 from Saudi, and 127 from U.A.E.

### **Coding Procedure**

Three U.S. undergraduate students coded the U.S. ads. Three bilingual Middle Eastern students, two graduates and one undergraduate, coded the Arab sample. All coders were trained prior to coding. To reduce the effects of fatigue, coding was restricted to two hours a day with a break after each hour. The coders were provided with a detailed guidance as to how the coding categories should be done. Coders were instructed to use a dummy variable ranging from 1-3 to code the data. The scale ranged from one where it indicated an absence of the cultural value to three indicating a strong presence of the cultural value. The number of times coders were in agreement was divided by the total number of ads coded to calculate reliability. Consistent with the procedures of Gilly (1988) and Schneider and Schneider (1979), disagreements among the coders were settled via discussion and consensus. The inter-rater reliability was calculated using the percentage of similar classifications for all ads. Intercoder reliabilities are reported in Table 2. Duplicate ads were eliminated to allow for the inclusion of more ads dealing with different product categories.

### **Results**

To answer question 1, Table 3 presents a detailed description of the distribution of sample advertisements according to product category. The most frequently advertised product in the Egyptian, U.S., and Saudi television sample is food with 58%, 28.6 and 20%, respectively. As Table 3 indicates, 9.9% of the Lebanese sample was for alcoholic products, while none of the other countries samples included advertisements for alcoholic products. The Lebanese sample also included 4% of its advertisements for tobacco products while none of the other countries sampled had advertisements for tobacco. Hair care (16%) and laundry/soap (14%) also appeared more frequently in the Lebanese sample than in any other. A big portion (11%) of the U.A.E. sample was for insurance and health, while a big portion of the U.S. sample (15.3%) was for automobile. TV-VCR products (6.6%) and cellular phone (2.6%) appeared more frequently in the Egyptian sample than in any other, while toothpaste (2.4%) appeared more frequently in the Kuwaiti sample than in any other. Besides automobile, the

**Table 1**  
**Operational Definitions of Cultural Values**

<i>Cultural Value</i>	<i>Operational Definition</i>
Beauty Enhancement[a]	The advertising highly suggests that the use of a product will enhance the loveliness, attractiveness, elegance, or handsomeness of an individual.
Competition [b]	This value encourages individuals to compete with others or the self. In advertising, the emphasis is on distinguishing a product from its counterparts by aggressive comparisons. While explicit comparisons may mention the competitor's name, implicit comparisons may use such words as "number one, leader."
Thriftiness [c]	The inexpensive, affordable, and cost-saving nature of a product is emphasized in the advertising content.
Attitude toward Enjoyment [c]	This value encourages the individual to pursue temporary happiness and to enjoy life. The advertising suggests that a product will make its user wild with joy. Typical examples include the capital fun that beer or soda drinkers demonstrate in some advertising.
Harmony with Others [d]	This value emphasizes the importance of having good interpersonal relationships. It also suggests that people should be in harmony with others and avoid anything that might damage the relationship.
Independence [b]	The emphasis here is on the self-sufficiency and self-reliance of an individual. This value also addresses the self-improvement, self-freedom, or individual accomplishment.
Interdependence [d]	The emphasis of this value is on the individual in relation to others typically in the reference group. Individuals are depicted as integral parts of the group.
Attitude toward Nature[a]	This attitude reflects two distinct ways of viewing nature. Both constructs may include a respect for nature, but <i>oneness with nature</i> indicates more of an appreciation for nature as it is while <i>mastery over nature</i> indicates a belief that nature needs to be managed.
Tradition [b]	The experience of the past, customs, and conventions are respected. In advertising, the qualities of being historical, time-honored and legendary are venerated, e.g., "With eighty years of manufacturing experience"; "It is adapted from ancient Chinese prescriptions."
Respect for the Elderly [b]	The advertising displays a respect for older people by using a model of old age or asking for the opinions, recommendations, and advice of the elders.

[a] Adopted from Cheng and Schweitzer (1996)

[b] Adopted from Mueller (1987, 1992)

[c] Adapted from Pollay (1983)

[d] Adapted from Yau (1988)

U.S. sample included 12% of the advertisements for medicines and 3.3% for credit cards and banking which is higher than any of the other samples. For a detailed description of the product categories, please see Table 3.

To test the hypotheses, we used descriptive statistics and MANOVA to examine the differences between the United States and the Arab World television advertisements. Table 4 provides a description of the mean averages of each cultural value. Values of 1.00 (in italics) indicate the absence of the cultural value in the sample.

As Table 4 indicates, the cultural values that had the highest manifestation in the U.S. sample are enjoyment (mean=1.42) and thriftiness (mean=1.36). The cultural values that were least manifested in the U.S. sample are interdependence (mean=1.01), and tradition (mean=1.01).

The cultural values that appeared most often in the Egyptian sample are enjoyment (mean=1.46), nature (mean=1.42), thriftiness (mean=1.31), and beauty enhancement (mean=1.18). Respect for the elderly (mean=1.00), and interdependence (mean=1.00) had the least appearance.

**Table 2**  
**Cultural Values Intercoder Reliability**

<i>Cultural Value</i>				
Beauty Enhancement	Egypt:	.85	Lebanon:	.76
	Kuwait:	.74	Saudi:	.74
Competition	Egypt:	.93	Lebanon:	.90
	Kuwait:	.96	Saudi:	.92
Thriftiness	Egypt:	.77	Lebanon:	.79
	Kuwait:	.81	Saudi:	.78
Attitude toward Enjoyment	Egypt:	.77	Lebanon:	.74
	Kuwait:	.80	Saudi:	.83
Harmony with Others	Egypt:	.94	Lebanon:	.96
	Kuwait:	.99	Saudi:	.95
Independence	Egypt:	.94	Lebanon:	.98
	Kuwait:	.98	Saudi:	.94
Interdependence	Egypt:	.99	Lebanon:	.92
	Kuwait:	.98	Saudi:	.98
Attitude toward Nature	Egypt:	.81	Lebanon:	.79
	Kuwait:	.80	Saudi:	.88
Tradition	Egypt:	.92	Lebanon:	.96
	Kuwait:	.93	Saudi:	.92
Respect for the Elderly	Egypt:	.98	Lebanon:	.96
	Kuwait:	.97	Saudi:	.98

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of Advertisements on Product Category**

	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>	<i>Kuwait</i>	<i>Saudi</i>	<i>U.A.E</i>	<i>U.S.A.</i>
Alcohol	0.00	14 (9.9%)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Automobile	0.00	0.00	15(10.3%)	2 (1.3%)	3 (2.2%)	23 (15.3%)
Cellular phone	4 (2.6%)	3 (2.0%)	2 (1.3%)	3 (2.0%)	1 (.6%)	3 (2.0%)
Coffee/Tea	5 (3.3%)	1 (.6%)	4 (3.0%)	8 (5.5%)	1 (.6%)	0.00
Credit Card/Banking	0.00	3 (2.0%)	1 (.6%)	3 (2.0%)	1 (.6%)	5 (3.2%)
Cosmetic	1 (.6%)	11 (7.3%)	12 (8.2%)	4 (2.7%)	9 (7.0%)	4 (2.6%)
Computer/software	0.00	0.00	0.00	4 (2.7%)	0.00	3 (2.0%)
Hair Care	1 (.6%)	16 (10%)	14 (9.6%)	9 (6.0%)	7 (5.5%)	3 (2.0%)
Health/ Insurance	0.00	0.00	5 (3.4%)	5 (3.4%)	14 (11%)	11 (7.3%)
Laundry/ Soap	8 (5.3%)	21 (14%)	17(11.8%)	8 (5.5%)	9 (7.0%)	1 (.6%)
Medicines	0.00	0.00	1 (.6%)	2 (1.3%)	1 (.6%)	18 (12%)
TV/VCR	10 (6.6%)	0.00	0.00	1 (1.3%)	0.00	2 (1.3%)
Tobacco	0.00	6 (4.0%)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Toothpaste	4 (2.6%)	2 (1.3%)	4 (2.7%)	1 (.6%)	3 (2.3%)	1 (.6%)
Watches	0.00	0.00	1 (.6%)	7 (4.8%)	0.00	1 (.6%)
Contraceptive	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Food	87 (58%)	22(14.6%)	16 (11%)	29 (20%)	10 (7.8%)	43 (28.6%)
Other	30 (20%)	53 (35%)	54(36.8%)	57(39.5%)	68 (53%)	33 (22%)
Total	150.00	150.00	145.00	144.00	127.00	150.00

**Table 4**  
**Means of Cultural Values**

<i>Cultural Values</i>	<i>USA</i> <i>N=150</i>	<i>Egypt</i> <i>N=150</i>	<i>Lebanon</i> <i>N= 150</i>	<i>Kuwait</i> <i>N=145</i>	<i>Saudi</i> <i>N= 144</i>	<i>U.A.E.</i> <i>N=127</i>
Beauty Enhancement	1.15	1.18	1.43**	1.51**	1.50**	1.50**
Competition	1.30	1.13**	1.16**	1.02**	1.11**	1.03**
Thriftiness	1.36	1.31	1.23	1.17	1.22	1.42
Attitude t. Enjoyment	1.42	1.46	1.64**	1.77**	1.54	1.46
Harmony with Others	1.10	1.02	1.06	1.00*	1.07	1.07
Independence	1.05	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.07	1.00
Interdependence	1.01	1.00	1.00	1.01	1.09	1.14**
Attitude t. Nature	1.05	1.42**	1.56**	1.55**	1.18	1.40**
Tradition	1.01	1.06	1.00	1.03	1.04	1.03
Respect for Elderly	1.04	1.00*	1.00**	1.02	1.02	1.00
Mastery over Nature	1.06	1.00	1.00	1.17**	1.00	1.01
Oneness with Nature	1.05	1.00**	1.00**	1.02	1.02	1.00**

\* significant at the 0.05 level ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* significant at the 0.01 level ( $p < .01$ )

In the Kuwaiti sample, enjoyment (mean=1.77), nature (mean=1.55), beauty enhancement (mean=1.50), and thriftiness (mean=1.17) were the most manifested cultural values, while respect for the elderly (mean=1.02) was the least manifested cultural value. In addition, the sample from Lebanon contained more of enjoyment (mean=1.64), nature (mean=1.56), beauty enhancement (mean=1.43), and thriftiness (mean=1.23), and less of independence (mean=1.00), and interdependence (mean=1.00).

Moreover, the Saudi sample included more of enjoyment (mean=1.54), beauty enhancement (mean=1.50), and thriftiness (mean=1.22), and less of respect for the elderly (mean=1.02). Finally, the United Arab Emirates sample included more of beauty enhancement (mean=1.50), enjoyment (mean=1.46), thriftiness (mean=1.42), nature (mean=1.40), and interdependence (mean=1.14) and less of respect for the elderly (mean=1.00) and independence (mean=1.00).

This study also utilized the Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to examine the differences of cultural values manifested in the U.S. and the Arab countries. MANOVA is deemed appropriate because it allows for multiple comparisons and allows for post hoc tests to be conducted avoiding the problem of inflated alphas (Field 2000).

Hypothesis Trad postulated that Arab television commercials will manifest more traditions compared to their U.S. counterparts. Although the majority of the Arab countries scored slightly higher than the

U.S., none of the differences were significant; therefore, hypothesis Trad was partially supported.

Hypothesis BE1 stated that the focus on women's beauty enhancement will be less in Arab advertising compared to their U.S. counterparts. Table 4 shows the comparison results between the United States and each of the Arab countries. In this study, the U.S. is compared to each one of the Arab countries included in the sample. As indicated in Table 4, there was a significant difference between the U.S. and Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi and the United Arab Emirates regarding the cultural value beauty enhancement. Each of these Arab countries had a higher score on this cultural value than the United States. Although Egypt had a higher score, the difference was not significant. Therefore, hypothesis BE1 was not supported.

Hypothesis BE2 stated that there will be differences among the Arab countries regarding the cultural value beauty enhancement due to cultural variations among Arab countries with those with larger and stricter Islamic populations having a smaller percentage of television ads aimed at marketing goods for enhancing feminine beauty. Although there was a significant difference between Egypt and each of the other Arab countries, Egypt scored lower than the rest of the Arab countries, which is opposite of what we expected to find. Therefore, hypothesis BE2 was not supported.

Hypothesis Eld indicated that Arab television commercials will manifest respect for elders in the same proportions as their U.S. counterparts. This cultural

value was hardly manifested in the Arab television commercials and there was no significant difference between the U.S. and the Arab world. Therefore, hypothesis Eld was supported.

Hypothesis Hmy stated that the cultural value "harmony with others" will be manifested the same in the Arab television commercials as it is manifested within U.S. commercials. The United States scored higher than each one of the Arab countries included in the sample. The difference, however, was significant only in the case of Kuwait. Therefore, hypothesis Hmy was partially supported.

Hypothesis Int1 stated that Arab television commercials will manifest the "interdependence" cultural value more than their U.S. counterparts. Data analysis revealed that only Saudi Arab and U.A.E. had a score higher than the United States. Similar to the United States, Egypt, Lebanon and Kuwait scored low on this cultural value; therefore, there is only a partial support for hypothesis Int1.

Based on the individualistic nature of the American culture, hypothesis Int2 speculated that U.S. television commercials will manifest the "independence" cultural value more than their Arab counterparts. As Table 4 indicated, the United States scored slightly higher than all the Arab countries, except for Saudi. The difference was not significant; therefore, hypothesis Int2 was partially supported.

Hypothesis Thrift posits that the cultural value "thriftiness" will be manifested in the same proportions in the Arab and the U.S. Television commercials. As Table 4 indicates the U.S. score and the Arab scores came to be fairly close on this cultural value and none of the differences were significant. Therefore, hypothesis Thrift was supported. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) found the U.S. to score much higher than China on this cultural value.

Hypothesis Comp stated that compared to U.S. television ads, Arab television ads will use fewer (competing) comparative ads. Coders were instructed to look for any type of comparison (direct and indirect) because previous research showed that the Arab countries tend to use indirect comparisons. This study reveals that the use of comparative advertisements is seldom used in the Arab countries. The United States scored significantly higher than each of the Arab countries sampled; therefore, hypothesis Comp was strongly supported.

Hypothesis Nat1 stated that Arab television commercials will manifest the cultural value "oneness with nature" more than their U.S. counterparts. Contrary to what was expected, the U.S. scored slightly higher than all of the Arab countries. This cultural value was

seldom observed in the Arab sample; therefore, hypothesis Nat1 was not supported. Hypothesis Nat2 indicated that U.S. television commercial will manifest the cultural value "mastery over nature" more than their Arab counterparts. Table 4 indicated that the United States scored higher than each one of the Arab countries, except for Kuwait. Therefore, hypothesis Nat2 was supported.

Hypothesis Enj postulated that U.S. television commercials will manifest the cultural value "enjoyment" in similar amounts as their Arab counterparts. As indicated in Table 4, Lebanon and Kuwait scored significantly higher than the United States, and while Egypt, U.A.E. and Saudi each scored higher than the U.S., the difference was not significant. Therefore, hypothesis Enj was partially supported.

To make sure that the cultural differences found were not due to differences in product category, cultural values distribution by product category is reported in Table 5. A MANOVA with product categories as covariates was run to test for the product category confounding effect. None of the results were significant except for beauty enhancement and thriftiness. In the Egyptian sample, the bulk of the ads that included beauty were in the food product category, in Lebanon it was for cosmetics, Saudi Arabia for cosmetics and other, Kuwait for cosmetics, U.A.E. for other and cosmetics and the U.S. is for cosmetics. For being thrifty or economical, the bulk of the Egyptian sample was for food, the Lebanese sample was for other and laundry/soap, for the Kuwaiti sample was for food, Saudi sample was for other and food, U.A.E. was for other and cosmetics and U.S.A. was for laundry/soap.

## **Discussion and Implications**

This study presents some interesting findings about the similarities and differences between the United States and the Arab world. Although in some Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, women are required by law to cover their faces in public, the cultural value "beauty enhancement" appears to be an important one in the Arab culture. This supports our supposition that Arabs differentiate between the desire for women to look beautiful (for those permitted to see them) and the need to dress modestly.

We were not surprised to see that there was no significant difference between the Arab countries and the U.S. regarding thriftiness because both Islam and Christianity advocate wisdom in spending given the congruence of the Koran and the Bible on this value. This stands in marked contrast to China where Is-

**Table 5**  
**Cultural Values by Product Category**

VALUE	<i>Egypt</i>											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Beauty												
Enhancement	0	0	1	13	2	0	0	0	3	0	3	22
Competition	0	0	4	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	7	19
Thriftness	0	0	2	31	0	0	0	0	4	0	8	45
Attitude toward												
Enjoyment	0	0	13	43	2	0	0	0	0	0	7	65
Harmony with												
Others	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	6
Independence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interdependence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attitude toward												
Nature	0	0	8	19	1	0	0	0	9	0	9	26
Traditional	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	10
Respect for												
the Elderly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	0	0	28	124	5	0	0	2	18	0	37	

1: Alcohol/Tobacco  
5: Credit Card  
9: Soap/Toothpaste

2: Automobiles  
6: Cosmetics/Hair Care  
10: Watches

3: Cellular Phones/Computer  
7: Contraceptive  
11: Other

4: Food/Coffee  
8: Health/ Insurance  
12: Medicine

VALUE	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Beauty												
Enhancement	0	0	2	10	0	13	0	0	5	6	14	50
Competition	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	1	3	0	3	13
Thriftness	0	0	3	6	2	0	0	2	3	1	9	26
Attitude toward												
Enjoyment	0	0	0	7	0	5	0	0	0	0	4	16
Harmony with												
Others	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	6	11
Independence	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	8
Interdependence	0	0	0	3	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	9
Attitude toward												
Nature	0	0	2	7	0	0	0	0	3	0	5	17
Traditional				5								5
Respect for												
the Elderly												0
TOTAL	0	0	10	46	5	27	0	5	14	7	41	

*(continued)*

**Table 5 (continued)**  
**Cultural Values by Product Category**

VALUE	<i>Lebanon</i>											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Beauty												
Enhancement	1		1	2		27			5		14	50
Competition			2	2		3			14		5	26
Thriftiness				2	2	1			11		14	30
Attitude toward												
Enjoyment	15		1	9		25			6		25	81
Harmony with												
Others							3					3
Independence												0
Interdependence												0
Attitude toward												
Nature	8		1	8	2	9			17		23	60
Traditional											1	1
Respect for the												
Elderly											1	1
TOTAL	24	0	5	23	4	65	3	0	53	0	83	

VALUE	<i>Kuwait</i>											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Beauty												
Enhancement		2		3		6		2	1		3	17
Competition		4	3	11	2	1		6	1		6	34
Thriftiness		9	4	11	2	1		2			8	37
Attitude toward												
Enjoyment		9	4	13		2		7	1		12	48
Harmony with												
Others		2	2					6			3	13
Independence		1							1		4	7
Interdependence		1			1							1
Attitude toward												
Nature		1		3				3			2	9
Traditional				1				1				2
Respect												0
TOTAL	0	29	13	42	5	10	0	27	4	0	38	

**Table 5 (continued)**  
**Cultural Values by Product Category**

<i>VALUE</i>	<i>U.A.E.</i>											<i>Total</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	
Beauty												
Enhancement		1				13		1	7		24	45
Competition				1					3		1	5
Thriftiness		1	1	2		5			4		20	33
Attitude toward												
Enjoyment		1		10		10		2	5		20	47
Harmony with												
Others						1		2			4	7
Independence												0
Interdependence								2			10	12
Attitude toward												
Nature			2	10	1	10			9		12	44
Traditional											2	2
Respect for the												
Elderly												0
TOTAL	0	5	1	23	1	39	0	7	28	0	93	

<i>VALUE</i>	<i>U.S.A.</i>											<i>Total</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	
Beauty												
Enhancement		3				25		2		1	7	38
Competition		1				1			1			3
Thriftiness		5		3		2			7		5	22
Attitude toward												
Enjoyment		7		15		19		1	13		30	85
Harmony with												
Others												0
Independence												0
Interdependence												0
Attitude toward												
Nature			6	12		11		1	14		19	63
Traditional				2					1		1	4
Respect for the												
Elderly												0
TOTAL	0	22	0	32	0	58	0	4	36	1	62	



lamic and Christian values are not currently part of the majority culture. In comparing the U.S. and China, Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) found the U.S. to score significantly much higher than China on this cultural value.

Although veneration for the elderly and tradition play an important role in the Arab culture, these cultural values were not highly manifested in the Arab television commercials. Although this is not what we expected to find due to the nature of the Arab culture, Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) found a similar result between the U.S. and China (a country that is argued to be very traditional), where there was no significant difference between the 2 countries regarding respect for the elderly. One explanation for the result of this study could be that since the Arab culture values beauty, the focus in advertising is on the young generation. Another explanation could be that the Arab culture is slowly changing due to the western influence. This change may be apparent in the report of BBC News (2005) of a young man who was arrested in Saudi Arabia due to his interaction with females in public. According to the report, the young man, who has recently won a reality TV show award, "was mobbed by male and female fans wanting to kiss him and shake his hand in the Kingdom Tower Mall." This is very much against the traditional way of the Arabs who are raised not to show or express affection in public even to closest family members. In addition, Aljazeera net (2005) reported that a sociology professor in Egypt concluded that the breaking down of family ties in the Arab world was due to the increased number of satellite channels and video clips, which is promoting a different life style and culture.

This study reveals that some aspects of the Arab culture are still in existence such as not to directly compete with others. Hill and Shao (1994, p. 352) stated, "Historically, anthropologists note that traditional societies (notably in developing countries but also in rural parts of advanced markets) are controlled through religious and social conventions." They also noted, "In many religions (e.g., Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism), religious and social duties are indistinguishable." A company that engages in comparative advertising in the Arab world may be taking a risk because the Arabic consumer is not accustomed to it. The advertisement as a result may lead to confusion between the advertised brands. This is not to say that the Arabic consumer is not sophisticated but to say that the Arabic consumer has not been used to seeing comparative advertising. Although legislation is one of the factors that can potentially influence ad content, Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) argue that legislation pertaining to the regulation and censure of ads

is scarce in the Arab countries. Therefore, guidelines for advertising have to be drawn from cultural orientation. The lack of legislation was found in an earlier study by Lugmani, Yavas and Quraeshi (1987) that found little regulation of advertising in Saudi Arabia. Based on our study and previous studies, international advertisers are advised to give consideration to both regulation and cultural influences, such as those discussed in this study, when determining ad content. It is possible that comparative advertising might be perceived as unethical or immoral in the Arab world. Therefore, it is advised that the differences in ad content should be considered in light of possible differences in regulation and attitudes toward comparative ads between the United States and the Arab world, as well as intra-Arab country differences in regulation.

This study reveals that there are some similarities and differences between the U.S. and the Arab World. These similarities could be due to similarities in religion. So often only the differences between Islam and Christianity are emphasized but this study indicate that there are many common values between the two religions. These similarities could also be attributed to the recent expansion of the Arabic media that now includes pan Arab TV stations such as Aljazeera which are watched by millions of Arabs across the Arab world. According to Kraidy (2002), this has caused the Arabic media to be caught between regionalization and globalization. He also argued that the Western influence is a far reaching force whose potential for cultural change will be growing to the extent that most Arab states are aiming for integration into the global economy.

In spite of these similarities, we still recommend that advertising agencies pay attention to the differences. Because the differences are integrated in deeply held religious beliefs, we suggest that ads produced in one country should not simply be standardized or directly translated for use in another, particularly if they are different culturally. For example, a cultural value that may be desirable in the U.S. may be viewed negatively in the Arab world. An advertisement that may depict parents in a humiliating funny manner in the U.S. may create an adverse reaction with the Arabic consumers due to the strong emphases placed on respect for parents. Advertisers are encouraged not only to familiarize themselves with the fundamental cultural values in the Arab World, but also to familiarize themselves with cultural values' religious significance. Advertisers are advised to pay special attention to cultural values that have significant religious values because going against those cultural values will be viewed as a great offense.

## Conclusion

In this study, the authors tested differences and similarities between the U.S. and a group of Arab countries' TV advertising. Although the common notion is that the U.S. and the Arab countries are very different in cultural values, the data analysis revealed that there were more similarities than differences between the U.S. and the Arab world regarding ad content and execution. Although these findings maybe puzzling, there are several possible explanations. As shown in the arguments leading to the development of the hypotheses, there are many teachings that are shared between Islam and Christianity. These common teachings could be playing a major role in ad content and execution. It is also possible that the influence of the west is so great in the advertising industry that Arab advertisers are imitating the west in ad execution and content. It is also possible that because the Arab advertising industry is still young, it is still climbing the learning curve and it is still following the methods of the west since it does not have its own well established methods. In addition, because many advertised products on the Arabic TV are foreign products, advertising agencies are tempted to use the same advertising message and appeal.

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## Endnote

- <sup>i</sup> If our study compared Arabian and American television shows, as opposed to commercials, we would expect to find significant differences between what the two cultures allow to be presented over the public airwaves. The change in how American parents and the elderly have been portrayed on American television over recent generations would make a fascinating study in itself. From an initially positive point of view (e.g., *Father Knows Best*, *The Brady Bunch*), the portrayal of parents was shown in a less positive light with characters such as Archie Bunker, and then in more bumbling roles in shows such as *The Simpsons*. In 2006, Fox may have set a new low with *House* – in one episode a father admits to sleeping with his daughter and this is neither portrayed as unusual nor unethical.