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21

A TRANSFORMATIVE MARKETING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ARAB WORLD

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Introduction

Marketing, as an academic discipline, entered the business school only around the 1900s. Prior to that, marketing had been, if anything, a single subject, usually focused on sales and under the umbrella of (applied) economics (Ferrell et al., 2015). It was the impact of important thinkers in the field during the early decades of the 19th century, the founding of the *Journal of Marketing* in 1936, and the expansion of the subject into a full discipline supported by a key article by the "Father of Marketing," Philip Kotler, that resulted in the understanding that marketing could be/was more than just sales and price promotions (Kotler, 1972). In Kotler's conceptualization, marketing encompassed all of the business functions (Kotler & Witzel, 2003). This understanding of marketing as part and parcel of everything to do with consumption – and comprising the idea that consumption has everything to do with human experience – expanded the notion of marketing and its purview such that it is considered a very powerful and important subject today, and with an almost limitless scope of application (McKenna, 1991).

In the history of marketing, the discipline at first was focused on the "production concept," as Kotler phrases it: "consumers favored products that are highly available and highly affordable" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 31). This meant that factories produced goods and marketing had the job of finding buyers for these available and affordable products. The next step was that consumers would want more of these products (the "product concept"); they would "favor products that offer the most in quality, performance, and innovative features." This meant that companies should focus on continually improving their products. The third stage of the marketing evolution was the "selling concept"; this was where sales must be generated even on products unsought by consumers, and it applies best to products such as life insurance or blood donations. None of these "early" concepts focused on relationship building. The fourth stage is the "marketing concept," introduced around the late 1960s and early 1970s. This concept holds that "achieving organizational goals depends on knowing the wants and needs of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions better than the competition do" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 32).

Marketing has developed as a distinctly American subject, having evolved organically in the business schools of the United States and, from there, been exported to business schools around the world (Applegate, 2008). Being a relatively new subject in U.S. business schools, it has diffused

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across nations at varying rates; as one would expect, those countries most culturally similar to the United States accepted the modern format of the subject most quickly and most wholeheartedly – Canada, the UK, parts of Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. In many other places, marketing remained a subject or two in economics or management departments. In fact, conventional marketing is a very good fit for Western, individualistic cultures. With its focus on transactional relationships, marketing seeks to build proxy "friend" links between brands/products and the people who buy them (Berry, 1983). It seeks to extend the presentation of the individual self outwardly (Belk, 1988). It seeks to encourage the display of wealth and status through goods (conspicuous consumption). It seeks to reward hedonism through the consumption of luxury, comfort, and "self-care" (Veblen, 1899). Over time, marketing as a discipline spread to other environments, less culturally similar compared to the individualist West, such as Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In these contexts, cultural specificities exist that have been challenging for marketers in the region.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to date, marketing has not enjoyed the success or popularity as a subject of study that it has in Europe or the United States. Boulanouar et al. (2016) examine the lack of enthusiasm for marketing as a discipline by students in Oman. They find that concerned Gulf students do not perceive the full scope of marketing because they associate marketing with only sales and price promotions. They have some moral/ethical problems with marketing, which are related to Islam/religion in that they are concerned with the ethical aspects of both persuasion and potentially unnecessary/non-beneficial consumption. They also see marketing as a professional area of low status and, additionally, a sector that pays poorly. In other words, in the Arab/MENA region, marketing is perceived in an opposite light to the way many marketing academics see it and expect it to be seen. Consequently, universities in the region still struggle to recruit students for marketing majors (Boulanouar et al., 2016).

The Arab/MENA region covers 22 countries and includes parts of the African (North Africa, Maghreb states) and Asian continents. The region is hugely populous, with around 500 million people spread across the area. Two significant characteristics of this region are the average age of the residents (23–27 years old) and the transience of the populations occupying these land masses. Through all manner of movement and displacements, this region has seen dramatic sociocultural and demographic changes in populations for decades. Consequently, the region is very diverse ethnically and religiously. Even though it is dominated by the Arabic language and Islamic faith, substantial minorities also exist within this very large group of people. See the MENA region profile in Box 21.1.

Box 21.1 MENA region profile

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a diverse region with the potential for better growth while being shaped by economic and political transformations. The area boasts an abundance of natural and human resources, contributes significantly to global petroleum production and exports and has, overall, an acceptable standard of living. Within this broad definition, nations differ a lot in terms of their resources, economic and geographic size, population, and living conditions. A favorable geographic location with access to sizable markets, a young populace that is getting more education, and comparative advantages in many industries, including manufacturing, renewable energy, and tourism, are all advantages that the region enjoys. MENA economies are implementing reforms to create a robust and more inclusive economic model to enhance growth, governance frameworks, diversification,

integrity, private-sector development, and employment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023).

Macroeconomic Developments

According to economic experts at the World Bank (Gatti et al., 2024), post-pandemic growth in the MENA region were expected to slow down following the pandemic when the economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) profited from oil windfalls. The economies of the Gulf states were expected to show inconsistent growth between nation groups. Conflicts in the region were also expected to impact the region's economies. The past few years have also witnessed increases in their debt-to-GDP ratios.

With the present chapter, we try to contribute to a better understanding of marketing in the MENA region. In this context, we will determine certain attributes (demographic, cultural, theoretical normative) of the region and relate them to marketing. Based on these attributes, we will identify particular challenges and opportunities for marketing and what this also means for areas of future research evident in this region. Our work will describe and evaluate the pivotal roles of culture, as well as demographics, on marketing in the region. We will also discuss the importance of adapting research by contextualizing theories and concepts and by overcoming hegemonic Western approaches to better harness the power of marketing in the Arab/MENA.

Culture

Socialization

The "majority world," as Kağıtçıbaşı (2017) refers to the "collective" or "non-Western" world, operates on a group model and is socialized into this. Children are socialized into their societies from birth, by parents and families and also institutions and societal structures (Ekinci & Riley, 2003; McGuire, 1984). The individualism–collectivism divide is not fixed but rather a continuum, where the Western individualistic and autonomous "self" is toward one extreme. The "majority world" tends more to the other end of the continuum, which means that most cultures tend to be collectivist. This socialization (collectivist or individualist) forms the core and culture of a person and how they see themselves and their place in the world. The MENA region can be considered collective, and with shared sensibilities in terms of what is offensive, what is suitable to advertise and consume openly, and how marketing messages should be communicated (Turnbull et al., 2016). Across the MENA region, the societal structure has traditionally been tribal – people organized into affiliated groups bound by marriage and family.

Triandis et al. (1988) have referred to this understanding of relationships between groups as "in-group" and "out-group." Members of the in-group in question are much more likely to prefer, be loyal to, believe, and follow the rules/directives of their group and the leaders within it. This includes when the leader is in conflict with civil or (other) external laws or rules. Children socialized within a collective culture receive their strength and support from the group. They also receive the group's protection and permission (Ng et al., 2022). Collective structures privilege the group over the individual, asking first what is best for the group over the individual person

(Triandis, 1995). The development of the "self" of the individual is termed "interdependent" in this format – consensus is important, decisions are made in groups, and changes of the collective mind are won not through confrontation, but through rounds of discussion. Competition is acceptable between groups, but not within them (Gire & Carment, 1993; Wall et al., 2001). Children are raised to stay with the group, to maintain their support of the extended group, and not to break off and form independent units as is "normal" in a more individualistic context (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, 2012).

Previous research shows that consumer preferences and behavior depend on culture (De Mooij, 2019; Mortimer & Grierson, 2010). Seminal research in diverse environments, such as the United States and China (Zhang & Gelb, 1996), Korea (Han & Shavitt, 1994), and Mexico (Gregory & Munch, 1997), has analyzed advertising effectiveness in collectivist and individualist contexts and found that attitudes toward a product and brand were aligned with the cultural setting. In individualist cultures, advertising must emphasize individualist messages, and in collectivist settings, collectivist values must be communicated in the advertisement to be persuasive. Consumers in collectivist contexts respond best to ads emphasizing family orientation and in-group benefits (Han & Shavitt, 1994). Consumers in collectivist settings also tend to rely more on trust and feelings when it comes to buying decisions, which is especially visible with regard to their social media purchasing behavior (Goodrich and De Mooij, 2014). Research on the Middle East (Pashna et al., 2019) shows that consumers like to build personal trust relationships with companies and rely in their decision-making on those rather than on information provided about the products and the companies (which is the main element for decision-making in individualist contexts) (Goodrich and De Mooij, 2014; Pashna et al., 2019).

In marketing, however, the individualistic approach is still the norm, where marketing campaigns are addressed to the independent, autonomous, individuated self as prevalent in the West (U.S. or Europe) – a prototype viewed as the only "healthy" type of self (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017). By failing to acknowledge, let alone embrace, the "lived norm" of the collective culture of the Arabs (and Muslims) of the region, advertising communications still regularly "miss the mark." By understanding the power of collective values residing in the underlying cultural values that reflect collaboration, sharing, and mutuality, campaigns built around reflecting considerations of collective well-being (Sidani, 2018) must be more successful and generate more loyalty and sales (Kreisberg, 1992; Turnbull et al., 2016; Yee et al., 2021). A great example from Coca-Cola for Ramadan 2015 also offered an "ethical" message ("No Labels"); this campaign has been viewed on YouTube more than 8 million times to date.

Identity/Self

With the people of the MENA region sharing a culture of collectivism, emphasizing the interdependent self, and prioritizing the group over the individual, it is natural that they would prefer not to migrate. Staying with the family and community is where the strength and the support of the individual reside, and only extreme structural challenges would recalibrate that preference. As we have seen, these structural challenges exist, right across the region, from climate challenges to economic, educational, and employment aspects. Already, more than one in four young people are unemployed, despite over 30% having a tertiary qualification (OECD, 2022).

At the same time, young people in the region are inundated with marketing messages in the form of popular culture (music videos, advertising, social media influencers, movies), which support and promote individualistic and materialistic priorities in their messaging. With so many people in the region disconnected from their support systems and so many different groups being mixed together by work or displacement, the impact of global marketing messages will be

extra strong. In the GCC countries, where transient expat populations are prevalent (30% in Saudi Arabia and up to 88% in the United Arab Emirates [UAE]) due to permanent migration being prohibited and with these economies being product rather than production focused, the "third-culture kids" growing up here are often disconnected with their base culture and raised in a multicultural whirlwind of shopping and (luxury) consumption. With many children learning in English but being essentially Arab, without real fluency in either language, there are widespread issues of identity for even the most "privileged" in the region.

In less economically stable countries in the Arab/MENA region, mental health issues are rife, with many feeling hopeless due to informal housing, unemployment, a lack of education, and the inability of governments to provide the necessary social service support. Selby et al. (2015, p. 44) report feelings of hopelessness and frustration in this group, developing into "aspiration failure" and general pessimism. These young people tend to view themselves as less intelligent, and this causes a concomitant lack of commitment and investment in their own education. Culturally, young people report a lack of available support for mental health issues, and 48% also report that these issues are viewed negatively in their societies (OECD, 2022). As such, young people find themselves at a nexus of superficial materialistic marketing/media imagery and often drastically contrasted reality, further challenging their sense of self, connection to their group(s), and development of identity and stable "personhood."

Again, leveraging marketing for social benefit and socially based entrepreneurial ventures have a strong role to play here. Leveraging the inherent group well-being in the cultures of the region means seeing the benefits of helping others through information or service provision and the motivation to do so can be clearly and often freely communicated through marketing methods. Digitization can play an important part, and we turn to this opportunity later in the chapter.

Offensive products

A central issue with marketing in the region is about how marketing is enacted – how marketing is done. The MENA region is, as previously noted, religiously and linguistically diverse. However, it is dominated by both Islamic religion and Arabic language – despite many Arabs and Arabic speakers not being Muslim. In general, the region is "religious," or observant of religion of one kind or another, and there is much overlap in terms of what is considered offensive or suitable for public discussion – and, therefore, for marketing communications. Religion has been shown to substantially impact human behavior and attitudes (Armstrong, 2001); it influences people's life goals, motivations, and way of life, and consequently, religion has an impact on consumer behavior (Armstrong, 2001; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Rindfeisch & Burroughs, 2004) and attitudes regarding the advertising of offensive or controversial products (Fam et al., 2004) and on their purchases (Muhamad et al., 2018).

Products are considered "offensive" or "controversial" when they cause consumers uneasy feelings (Barnes & Dotson, 1990). "Offensive" products have been studied in a number of societies by Fam et al. (2004). In their studies, mostly with Western and Asian societies, a range of products were examined for their offensiveness. The products considered were as follows: alcohol, charities, cigarettes, condoms, female contraceptives, women's hygiene products, women's underwear, funeral services, gambling, guns and armaments, men's underwear, pharmaceuticals, political parties, racially extremist groups, religious denominations, sexual disease (AIDS, STD) prevention, and weight-loss programs. When discussing this list with students from different backgrounds, different products are seen to have a legitimate place (or not to have a place) on this list, depending on the students' culture and socialization model (Waller et al., 2005). Commonly,

alcohol and gambling – both unlawful in Islam – and products that may be considered related to personal or physical modesty (such as underwear, condoms, contraceptives, and sexual diseases) would not be advertised openly or discussed openly in many Muslim societies. Guns, extremist groups, and political parties may also cause issues – especially in the many monarchies of the regions. Indeed, Fam et al. (2004) found that "highly religious" Muslims were the most offended of the three religious groups examined.

Research on the Arab/MENA region regarding the subject of offensive products is scarce. A 2015 study from Lebanon analyzed the effect of Benetton's print campaigns on consumers (Naja, 2015). These campaigns were very provocative and aimed at creating awareness for anorexia and homosexual partnerships; one campaign showed a newborn child still attached to the umbilical cord of the mother. The author showed that controversial advertising messages, especially when they included the use of sex, led to great consumer irritation. The paper found that campaigns that were considered offensive to fundamental and religious morals eroded the company's strategy to create greater comprehension for certain subjects. They also damaged the brand image of the company, and consumers remained reluctant to buy from Benetton into the future (Naja, 2015).

A study from Egypt (Eyada, 2018), based on several focus groups, analyzed the acceptance or rejection of certain advertisement campaigns that has been previously banned by the Egyptian regulator. The results showed that a vast majority of adults (85%) agreed to ban certain content when it violated morals and religious sensitivities. Subjects of concern were "sexual gestures," "homosexuality," "obscene language," "revealing clothes," "obvious non-marital sexual relationships," and "unfamiliar family relationships contradicting religious values" (Eyada, 2018, p. 33). International studies from other regions confirm these MENA results. In contexts where religious groups are influential, well organized, and motivated, they tend to manifest their disapproval of such campaigns very openly and to specifically target companies that appear to disrespect religious morals and traditions (De Run et al., 2010).

A detailed discussion of the concept of *Haya'a* (modesty) can be found in Boulanouar (2006), which would further support the overtures of corporations in the region to communicate with (particularly Muslim) Arabs. In the Arab/MENA context, international companies have long realized this, as comparisons between advertising offerings will attest. For example, Garnier, while running a campaign in Western countries with pointedly sexual content, at the same time ran ads in the Arab/MENA area focusing on the natural ingredients in its Herbal Essences shampoo. Similarly, KFC regularly promotes its summer buckets of chicken with bikini-wearing consumers in the West, while in the Arab Gulf, the focus is often on having enough for the group.

Public and private

The public/private divide is an important issue for many in the MENA Gulf region. Just as the "in-group" is sacrosanct, so are the issues that protect the members from "out-groups." In combination with the common gender separation issues in the region, the discussion of what is public and what is private – in terms of topics and also of location – is important (Boulanouar, 2006).

In Islamic teaching, a public space is delineated by who is in it rather than where it is. Any outside or inside space can be public, depending on who is there at the time. For example, if a Muslim woman wears a hijab (head scarf) when in public (with people from outside her immediate family), then any space where people outside her immediate family are present becomes public. This may be the living room of her own house or the mall down the road. Similarly, private space is where this same woman will not wear her hijab when the space either is not filled or is filled with

people who are members of her immediate family. This is an important contrast to individualistic/Western delineations of public and private space, which are more often determined by the location of the space rather than the location of the people (Tavris, 1992, p. 17; El Guindi, 1999, p. 82).

Demographics

Young people

Among this huge number of people (around 500 million across the 22 countries of the Arab world), with 17% of this total in Egypt alone, there is an average age of 23–27 years old. Those 15 to 19 years old make up 25% of the population, and those under 30 years old make up 55% of the population across the region (OECD, 2022). Unlike the Western world, there are few "baby boomers" in this population – the trajectory of the population pyramid is characterized by high rates of childbirth, despite the many lives lost to wars, migration, natural disasters, and displacement (OECD, 2022).

Some areas of the MENA are both more stable and, consequently, richer than others. The Arab world obviously includes the Gulf region, where citizens have some of the highest GDP per capita in the world. Other countries in the MENA group have been afflicted with war and/or are very populous with far lower GDP per capita. As such, through reasons of work (expat/transnational workforces), war (migration and displacement), and document issues (no official documents, official residence but no chance for citizenship, illegal residence, refugee status, and the like), many people across the region have fragile existences. Across all of these situations, young people exist in very high numbers (OECD, 2022); see Table 21.1.

The OECD (2022) identifies several impactful considerations regarding the youth in the MENA region. Of key concern are their poverty and education levels, which vary considerably by country but are interrelated as statistics. For example, employment is precarious, with unemployment high and informal employment (without benefits) increasing. Over 15 million people (19% young people) are internally displaced and living in poverty, and the number of people living under US$5.50 per day increased by 30 million in just the five years from 2013 to 2018.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated all of the structural issues the countries of the region face, with water and food security also constant pressures on infrastructure. Ten out of 18 of the most water-stressed areas in the world are in the MENA area, meaning future pressure from the climate crisis will also impact migration aspirations and general (mental health) outlook. According to the OECD (2022), 44% of young people have considered (necessarily temporary), emigration with many targeting the cultural comfort and financial benefits of the GCC (the "aging world" is also increasingly looking for a workforce for the future). However, migration to this area follows international trends where low-skill/low-paying jobs that poorly educated people can expect are increasingly automated and the highly skilled workforce, which is still in demand, is highly educated. As "an estimated 15 million children in the region between the ages of 5–14 were out of school and nearly two-thirds of children in the region were unable to read with proficiency by the age of 10 before the onset of the Covid-19 crisis" (OECD, 2022, p. 18), employment prospects continue to be a concern.

These many structural issues and their interplay invite marketing research and are ripe for Kotler's other evolution of marketing – the societal marketing concept. This concept "questions whether the pure marketing concept overlooks possible conflicts between consumer short-run wants and consumer long-run welfare and should deliver value to customers in a way that maintains or improves both the consumer's and society's well-being" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 33). In this context, marketing in the MENA region needs to also consider significant educational campaigns

Table 21.1 Arab world data

Country	*Population (millions), 2022*[a]	*Age breakdown (%), 2023, estimated*[b]			*Gross domestic product (US$)*	
		0–14 yrs.	*15–64 yrs.*	*>65 yrs.*	*Current (billions), 2022*[c]	*Per capita, current, 2022*[d]
Algeria	44.9	28.78	64.29	6.93	191.9	4,274.1
Bahrain	1.5	18.14	77.83	4.03	44.2	30,152.0
Comoros	0.8	33.45	62.00	4.55	1.2	1,484.9
Djibouti	1.0	28.65	67.21	4.15	3.5	3,470.0
Egypt	110.9	34.37	60.27	5.36	476.7	4,610.7
Iraq	44.5	35.24	61.17	3.59	264.2	5,937.2
Jordan	11.3	31.42	64.53	4.05	48.4	4,288.1
Kuwait	4.3	23.32	73.28	3.40	184.6	43,233.5
Lebanon	5.5	19.21	71.69	9.10	21.6	4,136.1
Libya	6.8	32.81	62.80	4.39	45.8	6,725.0
Mauritania	4.7	36.11	59.58	4.31	10.4	2,190.7
Morocco	37.5	26.01	65.92	8.06	135.8	3,626.0
Oman	4.6	29.88	66.17	3.95	114.6	25,056.8
Qatar	2.7	13.08	85.51	1.41	237.3	88,046.3
Saudi Arabia	36.4	23.45	72.36	4.19	1,108.1	30,436.3
Somalia	17.6	41.54	55.77	2.69	8.1	461.8
Sudan	46.9	40.47	56.35	3.19	51.7	1,102.1
Syria	22.1	33.27	62.58	4.15	12.4	560.5
Tunisia	12.3	24.77	65.26	9.98	46.7	3,782.6
UAE	9.4	16.23	81.77	2.00	507.5	53,757.9
WB & Gaza-Palestine	5.0	39.75	57.34	2.91	19.4	3,846.4
Yemen	33.7	35.14	61.52	3.34	22.7	674.4

[a] World Bank (n.d.c).
[b] Central Intelligence Agency (n.d.).
[c] World Bank (n.d.a).
[d] World Bank (n.d.b).

to inform, support, and reassure populations in the region regarding the future and its potential – especially for young people.

Digitization as opportunity

As we have seen, young people are in abundance in the MENA region. Despite many structural challenges, there are many well-educated albeit unemployed people, especially youths. In a collective, Muslim society, men are required to be able to provide for a wife and family before they can marry; unemployment frustrates this, causing ripple effects across the society and into the future. Being largely unmarried, young people who are settled/in a stable political environment often live at home with their families. As unemployment is widespread, they don't have work/life experience and so may remain quite inexperienced in comparison to people of similar ages in the West. In the richer GCC states, unemployed youth are supported both by the state and by their families, and research suggests that they feel no negative "life satisfaction" effects of unemployment (Lambert et al., 2022), as their trajectory is not sidelined.

Although access to technology infrastructure varies widely across the Arab/MENA region, the "normality" for Generation Z is still present (Székely & Nagy, 2011). In point of fact, what this means is that Generation Z is familiar with technology, they text with two thumbs, and they post pictures as a natural reaction to any event or celebration. They are not necessarily tech developers, but they are certainly the main body of content creators. Although technology may be used and diffused differently across the region depending on hardware access, infrastructure support, cultural fit, and perceived scope of usage, young people's interest in and engagement with technology is evident. The OECD (2022) points out that unequal access to digitization risks exacerbating inequalities, as it impacts education and relevance in the "new" job market: those without skills cannot gain secure employment, and the jobs that require fewer skills are increasingly going to be automated.

However, much marketing communication – and business in general – is carried via digital media, and more will follow. As such, the opportunity for Arab/MENA youth to leverage digital media (to transact and work) and the ability to support them through it (free online learning, information, and training) are pivotal. Good access to digitization, with marketing communications developed, directed, and controlled by people in the region, could transform many landscapes for both the people living in the Arab/MENA area and the landscape of marketing itself.

In this way, the future of marketing (and the internet/digitization itself), truly belongs to them. We would argue that marketing is mainly about ideas – it's about positioning and the communication of that positioning, whether your product is physical, digital, ideological, abstract, or ethereal. Up until this point, marketing has mainly involved physical products and their physical pathways to markets and then on to the consumers. At the nexus of youth and digitization, that changes. And with digitization in material terms "free," barriers which have been in place for young people from across the less financially well-supported parts of the MENA have an opportunity to use marketing, and marketing media, to redefine and reclaim the hegemonies of the market (Wood et al., 2021). Beyond the finances, the way the opportunities of digitization appear to young people makes marketing the natural pathway for the communication of new goals, new words, and the new thinking that the new generations can offer.

Gulf region: Expat identity

There is a large expatriate population in the Arab Gulf states, notably, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain. Expatriates, or expats, are defined as individuals who live temporarily or permanently in countries other than their citizenship mainly for work reasons (Andresen et al., 2012). The percentage of these workers in the host countries and the length of their average term of residence varies with their country of origin and their skill level, but they are all transient as there is no opportunity for permanent migration or citizenship in the Gulf countries. Across the Gulf, expats account for between 30% (Saudi Arabia) and 88% (UAE) of the population (2015 figures; Gulf Labour Markets and Migration [GLMM], 2018). Gulf countries started attracting expat workers in the early 1960s and 1970s with the oil boom, when mainly manual laborers and other low-skilled workers were recruited into labor-intensive industries. Later, with economic diversification, the expat population became more wide-ranging and also included highly trained professionals in finance, healthcare, education, and engineering. Since then, all of the Gulf states have developed economic agendas that foresee a transition from economies dependent on oil and gas to "knowledge-based" economies that rely on knowledge, information, and highly skilled labor (Malecki, 2007). This has led to more expat immigration and an even more diverse expat population, including entrepreneurs, investors, and highly skilled workers (Statista, 2023).

The composition of expat workers in the Arab Gulf varies between the countries in the region. The majority of non-nationals stem from South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan) and the Philippines. However, there is also a substantial number of people from other Arab/MENA countries and other global regions. The number of expats in the Gulf economies is substantial; for example, in Saudi Arabia, 76% of the workforce are non-nationals (GLMM, 2018), and in Qatar, the proportion is 95% (Statista, 2023). The expat population is overwhelmingly male, with about five men per woman (GCC-STAT, 2020). Experience of expat life and expat expectations differ with different kinds of workers. There is an increasing number of expats who come to the Gulf in search of professional opportunities ("self-initiated expats") and who typically work in management, entrepreneurship, and related fields. Obviously, these expat workers differ substantially from those who came by necessity and due to lack of employment opportunities in their home countries.

To effectively market products to such a diversified expat society is a challenge in terms of segmentation and targeting, considering these diverse demographics and cultural backgrounds (Jaklič & Karageorgu, 2015). Equally, inclusive representation becomes increasingly important (Elsharnouby & Maher, 2023). Notably, marketing campaigns need to become inclusive of all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics, and to pay rapt attention to diversity and intersectionality (Shortland & Perkins, 2022).

Challenges for marketing theory

Another "founding father" in the development of marketing thought was Theodore Levitt (1984, 1986). Levitt's work on globalization is key to this discussion. He believed that as markets became more global, consumers would converge to become more alike in their values and viewpoints. Actually, this is not what happened: after consumers around the world met and exceeded basic levels of income (enough to feed, educate, and house their families), they began to diverge in their consumption – emphasizing their nationality and traditional cultural values (De Mooij, 2019). As countries got richer, they consumed more strongly in alignment with their civilizational identity. For example, once Japan succeeded in meeting the universal needs of its people, many citizens reignited their study and interest in the many Japanese traditional activities such as tea ceremony (*sado*), Japanese chess (*shoji*) and calligraphy (*shodo*), Japanese flower arranging (*ikebana*), and abacus (*soroban*).

Similarly, the consumption of global products has varied by culture. For example, in Saudi Arabia, many young women had BlackBerry phones, while in Western nations, BlackBerry phones had been positioned for businesspeople based on the phones' various business-related capabilities. However, BlackBerry had a signature app called BBM (introduced in 2005). When Saudi women were still not able to drive, BBM allowed them to message brothers, fathers, or drivers to collect them or drop them off via Wi-Fi – a service not provided by other cellphones at the time (WhatsApp was introduced in 2009). Another example is the use of Instagram. When Instagram came out, it was positioned as competition for Picasa and Flickr – to share your holiday snaps with your family and friends without having to use up email space by sending them one by one. In Saudi Arabia, where sharing photos in this way is not common due to cultural traditions, Instagram was almost immediately operationalized for selling (Bashraheel, 2013). Women especially used the new app to showcase the Qur'an covers, phone covers, and *abayas* that they were offering for sale. They quickly used the new media options to arrange delivery, central point drop-offs, and other methods of transfer to buyers in a culture where coming to a stranger's door is unusual.

The nexus of culture and youth encourages the use of and sheds light on opportunities to that leverage new technologies whose potential is otherwise lost on the Western culture and older generations. Marketing could be applied to a range of activities, especially via digital networks, to support, encourage, revitalize, and train young people. It can also be used to reignite their community and identity ties which may have been fractured by migration and displacement.

Research paradigms: Values measures

During the mid-20th century, scholars from various social science backgrounds tried to develop "universal" human value measures and to attribute human motivations to universal patterns. Maslow's (1943) pyramid of needs is one of the most famous representations of motivation in the world – even though Maslow himself did not present his ideas as a pyramid and completely revised his work later in his career (Maslow, 1971). In this work, people move from the lower levels of the pyramid to the upper (from satisfying physiological needs for safety to the more psychologically focused belonging, esteem, and self-actualization). Maslow maintained that it is not possible to "jump" levels; people must work their way up through the levels, eventually reaching their most evolved selves (later, he revised this entirely, but his later work has had much less attention). For Muslims, this model has proven controversial (Sulaiman & Willett, 2003). As has been pointed out in previous research, the Islamic concept of humankind means they would necessarily start with "self-actualization" as this would be the motivation for anything else to occur: without an understanding of the purpose of your creation (to worship Allah), there would be no motivation to eat, sleep, or find shelter. In an Islamic formulation of humans as creation, the metaphysical considerations are primary and outweigh any considerations of materiality (Bouzenita & Boulanouar, 2016).

Similarly, the celebrated work of both Hofstede (originally based on workers at IBM) and Schwartz (based on teachers and their students) has failed to be convincingly "universal" for Muslim respondents. The profiles of the researchers developing these paradigms are very similar: they are of a similar age, have a similar educational background, were educated in similar cultural circumstances, and all developed their work in the English language. Schwartz, in particular, has been very clear in relegating Muslim cultures to positions of lesser "moral universality" and greater "embeddedness" and "conformity" (all negatively positioned in his work). In both Schwartz's and Hofstede's cases (Schwartz, 2006, 2007), the definitions of the dimensions are developed in an individualistic/western way (e.g., risk aversion), making a less favorable outcome inevitable when the data are interpreted.

These examples also show how important it is to contextualize theories and concepts and to question underlying Western, Eurocentric, or white academic assumptions (Bannerjee et al., 2020), as well as acknowledging multiple approaches to marketing understanding (Eckhardt et al., 2022). Overcoming the canon is not a new issue for people outside the "hegemonic world" of the English language and cultural understanding, framing, and publishing (Wood et al., 2021). However, there are benefits to understanding how the individuated self is understood and how it is operationalized in marketing media to communicate with audiences worldwide. From the position of knowledge, citizens of the Arab world can harness the power of marketing to meet their needs and accomplish marketing in service of what they want or need.

An opportunity exists for those working on, and in, the MENA to contribute to the decolonization of the literature and the canon – within marketing, business, and more widely. In recent times, decolonization of the business school has been an area of increasing scholarly interest, and many issues could be addressed from the perspective of this region (Wood, 2022). Fundamental issues

of understanding obscure comprehension and applicability on an "everyday" basis; for example, a foundational concept in finance is the growth of money – how does money grow? – by leveraging interest. However, interest is an unlawful (haram) concept in Islamic teaching; the leveraging of interest from someone who has money requires the exploitation of someone who does not have money. Given that the Islamic understanding of *rizq* (sustenance) is that money comes from Allah, the person with the money is simply a caretaker of the money, responsible for its lawful (*halal*) use and distribution. So, from the outset, within an individualist, neoliberal capitalist paradigm structure (the modern business school), students are disadvantaged (Boulanouar & Boulanouar, 2013; Bouzenita & Wood, 2018). There has been extensive discussion of this issue in terms of teaching and learning and also research in Indigenous and other contexts (Bargh, 2007; Cusicanqui, 2012; Escobar, 2011; Freire, 1996; Mukherji & Sengupta, 2004; Smith, 1999).

Opportunities for marketing practice

From a practical perspective, that of implementing marketing "best practice" across the Arab world for the benefit of Arab consumers, the "education" multinationals and internationalized operations have received from their experiences so far could be leveraged to better, and more ethically, communicate and transact with them.

Sander (1997) conducted a study on Sweden's Muslims. He classified Muslims into four different definitional groups on a continuum from broad to narrow as ethnic, cultural, religious, or political Muslims. His broadest definition, that of ethnic Muslim, is "anyone born into an environment dominated by a Muslim tradition, belonging to a Muslim people, of Muslim origin, with a name that belongs in Muslim traditions and/or who identifies her/himself with, or considers her/himself to belong to this environment and tradition" (Sander, 1997, p. 184). The definition is noteworthy in that it recognizes a continuum of individual commitment. Sander found around 60% of his sample of 385 could be classified as "religious," defined as someone who followed the five pillars, who accepted the articles of faith, who tried to live according to the Qur'an and Sunnah, and believed this to be a "right, good, correct or valuable [way of] life" (Sander, 1997, p. 189). With 40% remaining in his other three categories, the impact of the culture of Islam is illustrated: even those in the broadest group reflect a significant relationship to Islam and Islamic teaching.

This would suggest Muslims want to consume as Muslims. Marketing in the region, therefore, has the opportunity to make that easy, and also to show how that can be done – be that how to conduct *halal* business; to reinforce and enact the *halal* value chain of people, products, and process (Wood & Al-Azri, 2019); to use local knowledge and personnel as specialists on campaigns and launches; or to consider the societal marketing concept to support people and communities

Muslims typically learn that business has benefits other than simply profit (Beekun, 1997; Sadeq, 1987; Saeed et al., 2001). Just as Indigenous groups prioritize community harmony, synergy and well-being, the environment (Mika & Scheyvens, 2022), and descendants, Muslims too often value these things in addition to reputation and family, tribal, and national pride (Bastian et al., 2023). As referenced earlier, many of these considerations are central to Arab culture in general, and groups in this area are socialized into collective, relational interactions from childhood. As a worldview, Islam prioritizes societal and collaboration goals (Elmessiri, 2006; Saeed et al., 2001) in the place of self-oriented and competitive ones (Gibbs & Ilkan, 2008).

Tying these opportunities to theory, one notes that criticisms often center on ethics: where authors "have had relatively little concern for the epistemological position of the ideology and have

chosen and shown how pragmatic methods can be used to "colour" an existing neoliberal capitalist approach with a gloss of Islam. This approach is transparent to the faithful because it concentrates on the surface value and leads to misleading ways of seeing the world. To offer an alternative requires an understanding of the phenomenological ontology of being a Muslim and how that constructs the nature of being" (Gibbs & Ilkan, 2008, p. 166).

Given these myriad considerations, the rise of the region's youth with their skills and perspectives is integral to marketing transforming itself within (as well as outside of) the region.

Conclusion

With respect to using the core teachings and understandings of marketing in the Arab/MENA, there are naturally a number of adjustments that have to be made to the current dominant model. In general, marketing is viewed negatively across the Arab world, as it is seen to encourage people to buy things they do not need, to consume excessively, and to require an element of "selling yourself" (Boulanouar et al., 2016).

The recent focus on digital marketing presents it as if marketing has had a revolution – but it has not. Marketing deals with people, and people are notoriously "wrapped" in their socialized culture. They are socialized into a cultural norm and seldom stray far from it unless they consciously choose to, sometimes as the result of a trauma (such as a serious accident/illness), exposure to different cultures while living abroad for extended periods, or a fixed decision ("I will not be like my father"). The thing that differs in terms of what is offered, to whom, and how is the socialization of the actors – marketers and audience members.

Islam, which allows no exploitation in the value chain – people, products, or process (Wood & Al-Azri, 2019) – and which has a collective vision of business and its outcomes, means the "perceptual fit" of marketing can be problematic. In fact, there is nothing inherent in marketing that should make it so, especially if Muslims filter their use of marketing through Islamic teaching.

Business is both *halal* and appreciated in Islamic teaching and does not have any of the connotations it may have in the West, such as the class biases around dealing with money/goods and trade in general. In fact, business – where the community is provided with products, services, and experiences that are beneficial for them – is very highly regarded, particularly if it is entrepreneurship, which gives the added benefit of creating *halal* work (Sadeq, 1987).

With the combination of structural challenges the Arab/MENA region's youth face, using marketing techniques to "reclaim" the narrative, both in the literature and in popular culture, offers many impactful possibilities. As Belk (2020) has noted, the "ownership" of the narrative in marketing communications has moved from the corporations to the consumers: with such a large body of consumers, content creators, and followers on social media applications, young people can now fully leverage their dual roles as those marketed to and those doing the marketing. Between social entrepreneurship ventures and governmental programs aimed at supporting the poor and undereducated, using culturally appropriate and acceptable messaging, structural inequalities can be challenged and innovation can be inflamed.

Marketing is not inherently "good" or "bad." It represents a set of skills that can be used in the service of those leveraging it. However, communications are the key: if marketers filter communications through the culture of the region, successful connections can be made. Members of collective cultures have received socialization that makes relationships with brands, brand loyalty, and therefore customer lifetime value quite natural. Once brands enter the trust circle for quality and reputation, they will become a committed preference. With a very large pool of "natural marketers," the Arab/MENA region has the opportunity to use marketing to change the global narrative

on them, their generation, and their future. Marketing researchers can use the digitization application to collect data at a never-before-possible rate and volume and support these young people in reshaping the world of tomorrow.

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