Is NEOM a Saudi City?

A Multimodal Analysis of the Language and Cultural Aspects in NEOM Advertising Language

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**Abstract**

The proposed study will analyse the language used in advertisements for the future city of NEOM and its urban area project, The Line, in both Arabic and English. The data set for the study will be twelve video advertisements from NEOM media campaigns on its YouTube Channel. The goal of the study is to ascertain whether they represent a departure from the traditional Saudi cultural values in favour of more Western-oriented linguistic and cultural norms. I will analyse the language used in NEOM digital advertisements from a pragmatic and cultural perspective, classifying and describing the language styles used. I will be using three analytical approaches. In the first approach, three local respondents will interpret the advertisements. This is intended to decode the meaning from the perspective of the audience and enhance the reliability of the findings. The second approach uses multimodal analysis of each advertisement to break down the elements in each video. The third approach to be used is the qualitative approach. This will rely on the descriptive method to describe each advertisement and its language in its cultural context. Hofstede’s cultural dimension scores for Saudi Arabia will be used as a framework for this analysis.

# Introduction

* 1. Background

The language used in advertising contains information and works on the level of emotion (Janisch 2012: 29). The language chosen for advertising depends on the target group, as the main goal is to influence their dispositions and behaviour. This can be achieved by selecting language elements and a style that creates a connection with the target group (Goddard 2002). However, “This connection doesn’t have to be real [...] it is enough that readers think that there is some connection” (Goddard 2002: 47).

The interpretation of an advertisement depends on the connection that the audience makes. Themessage of an advertisement achieves its purpose when the audience connects it to other relevant information based on their knowledge (Williamson 2002: 19). “Advertisements clearly produce knowledge [...], but this knowledge is always produced from something already known” (Williamson 2002: 99).

* 1. What are Neom city and The Line about?

THE LINE is a proposed major urban development in NEOM city in Saudi Arabia. It is designed to be a smart city with no roads or cars. It is conceived such that people can reach all essential daily services, such as schools, medical clinics, leisure facilities, and green spaces, within a five-minute walk.The city was presented by Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Chairman of the NEOM Company Board of Directors, on 10 January 2021 and is currently under construction.

*I present to you THE LINE, a city of a million residents with a length of 170 km that preserves 95% of nature within NEOM, with zero cars, zero streets and zero carbon emissions.*

Mohammed bin Salman (Neom, 2022).

Diagram, map

Description automatically generated

The location of the future city NEOM (The Guardian: 4 May 2020).

*NEOM is not about building a smart city; it is about building the first cognitive city, where world-class technology is fueled with data and intelligence to interact seamlessly with its population.*

Joseph Bradley, NEOM Technology & Digital CEO (Neom, 2022).

* 1. Why Neom city?

It is fair to assume that the culture of this city will be more Western than traditionally Saudi. Saudi Arabia is generally known as a Middle Eastern country that puts a great deal of emphasis on preserving traditional Arab and Islamic values. Neom represents a break from tradition and a new vision of the future for Saudi Arabia.

This study examines videos used to promote NEOM in its media campaigns. I adopt perspectives from pragmatics and cultural linguistics to produce an analysis of the language used in this promotional material. My goals are to ascertain how the elements of a text interact within the advertisements and analyse the relationship between the advertisements and the cultural aspects of the local social community.

* 1. Existing Research

Neom is relatively a newly planned city. For this reason, linguistic or language-related studies have not yet been conducted concerning this city. However, some studies have examined the comparison of advertising language and cultural aspects in other contexts that are instructive for our purposes (Gerritson et al., 2007; Woodward-Smith and Eynullaeva, 2009; Abdallah, 2007).

Gerritson et al. (2007) analysed the occurrence of anglicisms in advertising language in Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. They demonstrated that the use of English in a product advertisement does not seem to affect the image among consumers and the price of the product. The use of English does, however, affect the comprehension of the text, with almost 40% of the sample English sentences not being understood by respondents (Gerritson et al. 2007).

Woodward-Smith and Eynullaeva (2009) attempted to determine whether text or image primarily shapes advertising messages. They also examined the universal and culturally specific elements of verbal and visual means of influencing the viewer of an advertisement. They interrogate whether these elements affect the message of the advertisement. They argue that the interplay of verbal and visual imagery can create a powerfully structured whole that delights, informs, and entertains potential consumers (Woodward-Smith and Eynullaeva 2009)

Abdallah (2007) performed a study of advertising language in German and Egyptian Arabic. The problems of translation between Arabic and German are discussed, and he recommends taking into account cultural differences when producing translations of advertisements (Abdallah 2007).

# Data Analysis Methods

* 1. “Think into it” Approach

In the first step of the analysis, we use the “thinking into it” approach adopted by Phillips Barbara and Edward McQuarrie in their landmark 1997 study on consumer interpretations of advertisements. Other scholars have adopted this qualitative methodology and successfully applied it to other studies since its inception (see Lerman and Callow, 1999). This approach allows for cultural interpretation of the material before the content can be analysed. This interpretation involves decoding the advertisements (Lerman and Callow 2004: 512).

In the proposed study, each advertisement will be interpreted by members of the respective culture. Subjects will be asked questions used by Lerman and Callow (2004: 513) in their study.The following are sample questions:

* Describe the advertisement in your own words.
* What do you think about it? How do you understand the sentences/words?
* What do you think the advertiser wants to communicate?
* What cultural elements do you see?
  1. Multimodal Transcription Analysis

Multimodal Transcription Analysis (MTA) is a methodological tool for analysing audio-visual text. It is an approach to multimodal texts developed by Thibault (2000) and further developed by Baldry and Thibault (2006).

The method involves breaking down a video into single frames, shots and phases and analysing all the semiotic modalities operating in each frame or shot, such as gesture, gaze, dress, visual and aural art, image-text relation, cinematographic and sound design and production resources, etc. (Taylor 2003:192).

* 1. Criteria for Data Analysis

The advertisement will be analysed and simplified using multimodal transcription, and the text analysis method produced by Anthony Baldry & Paul Thibault (2006) will be utilized for the analysis. The observation domains are as follows:

**Language:**spoken, written, and non-verbal elements.

**Action:** camera position**,** the characters, roles, humour/emotion in gestures, situations, or words.

**Visual elements of advertisement**: reflections of sight, image, and movement.

**Music and soundtrack**



Hofstede’s (DATE) model for classifying and comparing cultural norms will be used to identify and analyse cultural elements in the advertisements. The system categorization is based on four cultural dimensions: Power Distance (PD), Individualism (IDV), Uncertainty avoidance (UVA) and masculinity/femininity (MAS).

The cultural values and characteristics from the Hofstede Model and their application to global branding and advertising strategy will be used as criteria for analysis to identify the cultural values of NEOM advertisements. They are detailed in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Values | | |  | | --- | | General meanings | |
| Collectivism | | |  | | --- | | Trust-building style of advertisement by focusing on feeling | | Extended family | | Eating/drinking together | | Dependency  Encouragement of needs in complex familial hierarchical relationships and care for family  Enhanced body movement and facial expressions | |
| Individualism | | |  | | --- | | Persuasion style of advertisement focusing on providing information | | Eating drinking alone/with friends | | Enhancing/building endorses personality to function independently | | Limited body movement and facial expressions | |
| Low Power Distance | | |  | | --- | | Humourous appeal | |  | |
| High Power Distance | | |  | | --- | | Acceptance that power is distributed unequally and reflects social status | | Appeal of luxury | | Showing respect for people with a higher social status | | Emotional appeal | |
| Masculinity | | |  | | --- | | Status brands to demonstrate success | | Distinct gender roles | |
| Femininity | | |  | | --- | | Modesty and relationships are important | | Mixed gender roles, e.g. men do more household shopping | | Reflection of safety and protection | |
| High Uncertainty avoiding |  | |  | | --- | | Formal dressing | | More visual content than verbal | | Past/history-oriented | |
| Low Uncertainty avoiding | | |  | | --- | | Informal dressing | | More verbal content  Innovations and wish to change future oriented | | Reflection of sports and health activities | |

Table 2: Cultural dimensions for analysis. The Hofstede Model (2011: 88-103) as applied to global branding and advertising strategy

The scores for Saudi Arabia by Hofstede are summarized below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| County | Individualism | Power distance | Masculinity | Uncertainty avoidance |
| Saudi Arabia | 25 | 90 | 50 | 80 |

Table 1: Hofstede score for Saudi Arabia. Source: (www.hofstede-insights.com)

# Research Question and Hypotheses

From a linguistic and cultural perspective, this study will pose the following questions:

* What language styles, linguistic features, word choices, etc., are used in NEOM media campaigns?
* Does advertising language reflect the traditional cultural values of Saudi society, or is it more Western in orientation?

# Expected Results

It is expected that linguistic features, such as stylistic and pragmatic features, used in the advertisements will not reflect the traditional social and cultural values of Saudi Arabia.

In addition, it is expected that the language of advertising in both English and Arabic versions communicate the same cultural values and use the same language style and pragmatic features.

# Time Schedule

12 Weeks (Deadline 30. Nov)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Task | Time | Date |
| Literature reading and research | 2 weeks | 01. Sep – 15. Sep |
| Viewing and selecting the materials | 1 week | 01. Sep – 08. Sep |
| Subjects interpret the videos | 1 week | 15. Sep – 22. Sep |
| Analysis of the videos using the MTA method | 3 Week | 22. Sep – 13. Oct |
| Find and write the Results | 3 weeks | 13. Oct – 03. Nov |
| Arabic/English comparison | 1 week | 03. Nov – 10. Nov |
| Writing and proofreading | ca. 2 weeks | 10. Nov – 24. Nov |

# Preliminary Structure of the Content

1. **Introduction**

1.1 Background

1.2 Purpose of Study

1.3 Research Question

1.4 Limitations

2. **Literature Review**

2.1 Defining Advertisement

2.2 Defining Culture

**3. Hofstede Cultural Dimensions and Advertising**

3.1 Power Distance (PDI)

3.2 Individualism vs Collectivism (IDV)

3.3 Masculinity vs Femineity (MAS)

3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)

**4. Methodology**

4.1 Data Collection

4.2 Steps of Data Analysis

4.3 The Multimodal Transcription Analysis

4.4 Criteria for Data Analysis

**5. Analysis Results**

**6. Findings and Conclusions**

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# Declaration

I certify that I have written this seminar paper without the help of third parties and without the use of sources and aids other than those indicated. In addition, I assure that I have marked the parts of the thesis that I have taken over verbatim or in content from the sources used as such at the appropriate places within the thesis. To the best of my knowledge, this paper or parts of it have never been submitted as proof of performance. I agree that my work may be sent and stored in electronic form for the purpose of a plagiarism check. I understand that correction of the work may be waived if the declaration is not given.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| 30.05.2022 | Fürth-Hessen |  |
| Date | Place | Signature |