Is NEOME a Saudi City?

A Multimodal analysis of the language and cultural aspects in NEOM Advertising Language

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**Abstract**

The research will investigate if the language of the advertisements of the future city NEOM and its urban area project The Line in both languages Arabic and English if they differ from the unique cultural heritage of the Saudi people; or are there any similarities? Therefore, in this research I will analyses the language used in NEOM digital advertisements from a pragmatic and cultural perspective, through classifying and describing the language styles from one side and the selected words in a context and connection to the images in relation to the values and culture aspects of the Saudi people from other side. Therefore, I would be able to know if NEOM advertisement reflects the Arab and the Saudi cultural values or not.

In this research I will be using three analysis approaches. In the first approach, three local respondents will interpret the advertisements. Accordingly, it is expected to decode the meaning and it would enhance the reliability of the findings. The second approach will be used to analyse each digital video using the multimodal analysis to break down the elements in each video. The third approach to be used is the qualitative approach, it is the descriptive method to describe each advertisement and its language within the context; the culture aspects; and the results of the multimodal analyse along with Hofstede cultural dimension score results for Saudi Arabia. For this research, 12 video advertisements to be collected from NEOM media campaigns from its YouTube Chanel. The study will elucidates if there is still any reflection of Arab cultural values in digital advertisements provided by Saudi Arabia for its new designed city NEOME.

# Introduction

* 1. Background

The language used in advertising not only contains information, but also reaches the emotions and thoughts of the recipients (cf. Janisch 2012: 29). The language chosen depends on the target group, as the main goal is to influence this group through advertising. This can be achieved through selected language elements and a style that creates a connection to the target group (cf. Goddard 2002: 47). But "This connection doesn't have to be real [...] it is enough that readers think that there is some connection" (ibid.).

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

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

THE LINE is a proposed major urban development in NEOM city in Saudi Arabia has been designed as a smart city where it has zero roads and zero cars, it is supposed to be design in a way that people can reach all essential daily services, such as schools, medical clinics, leisure facilities, as well as 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: 2021cit. in neom: online

Diagram, map

Description automatically generated

A map shows the location of the future city NEOM source is (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: online)

* 1. Why Neom city?

My interest in this topic and this city comes out from different factors, I personally find the proposed idea from such a city fascinated specially the location at the beautiful area and at my favorite sea the Red Sea near two of my favorite cities Aqaba and Eilat.

However, it is assumed that the culture of this city is more West and less Saudi.

Saudi Arabia which is in the Middle East normally is known for preserving the heritage culture and the traditional aspects of Arabs and of the Islam. Neom is not only a change in the future, but also a change in the tradition of Saudi Arabia. Looking at the ideas proposed in Neom we might see a main influence from the West but no influence from the Saudi tradition. It is assumed that Neom is a new concept for the change in the future but also it might be a new change in the cultural aspects in Middle East.

In this research I would like to examine the videos used in NEOM media campaigns from pragmatics and cultural perspectives this involves the description and closer examination of the language in the advertisements and the question of how the elements of a text interact with each other in the advertisement on one hand, on the other hand, the relationship of the cultural aspects of the local social community.

* 1. Current Research

Neom is relatively a new designed city, and therefor there is still not any available linguistic or language studies for this city. There are some recent studies which have examine the comparison of advertising language and cultural aspects, such as "*English in print advertising in Germany, Spain and the Netherlands: frequency of occurrence, comprehensibility and the effect on corporate* " by Nickerson (2007). In this work, the occurrence of Anglicisms in advertising language is analyzed. It showed that the use of English in a product advertisement does not seem to have any effect on the image and price of the product, but it does affect the comprehension of the text: the meaning of almost 40% of the English sentences was not understood (Cf. Nickerson et al. 2007: Online).

Another available study is: "*The Analysis of some Stylistic Features of English Advertising Slogans* "by Woodward-Smith Eynullaeva (2009). Here, an attempt was made to determine whether the text or the image plays the primary role in shaping the advertising message. It also examines the universal and culturally specific elements of verbal and visual means of influencing the viewer of an advertisement and considers whether the elements have an impact on the message of the advertisement. The study argues that the interplay of verbal and visual imagery can create a powerfully structured whole that delights, informs, and entertains potential consumers (see Woodward-Smith/Eynullaeva 2009: Online)

The study of advertising language in German and Egyptian Arabic (Abdallah 2007) examines advertising in Germany and Egypt. It deals with the problem of translation. Here, the problems of translation between Arabic and German are highlighted and it is recommended to take into account the different cultural aspects (Abdallah 2007: Online).

# Data Analysis Methods

* 1. Think into it Approach

In the first step of the analysis, think into it approach from Phillips Barbara and Edward McQuarrie (1997) will be used. This is a qualitative analysis already used by Phillips Barbara and Edward McQuarrie (1997) and Lerman and Callow (1999). This approach is recommended to allow for a cultural interpretation of the material before the content can be analyzed. This interpretation involves decoding the advertisements (cf. Lerman/Callow 2004: 512).

Each advertisement will be interpreted by members of the respective culture.

For the interpretation, the subjects will be asked various questions. The following are sample questions:

* Describe the advertismnet 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?
* Which culture elements do you see?

(ibid.: 513)

* 1. The Multimodal Transcription Analysis

The Multimodal Transcription Analysis (MT) is a methodological tool in the analysis of audio-visual text. It is approaching multimodal texts and it was devised by Thibault in 2000 and further developed by Baldry and Thibault in 2006 (Taylor 2013:100).

The method involves breaking down a film into single frames, shots and phases and analyzing 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 “a film can be analyzed as a series of phases, sub-phases, etc” (Taylor 2003:192) .

The MT consists of a breakdown of a multimodal text into individual frames displayed in a table (of rows and columns) containing a minute description of the contents in terms of the visual image, the kinetic movement, and the soundtrack “the multimodal transcription could be a use­ful tool in establishing where meaning was being created in a multimodal text and whether resources other than the spoken word could relay that meaning” (Taylor 2013:102).

* 1. Criteria for Data Analysis

The advertisiment will be analysed and simplified using the multimodal transcription and text analysis method presented by Anthony Baldry & Paul Thibault, 2006 (Taylor 2003: 191) the domains for observations are:

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

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

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

**Music and soundtracks**

The language meaning would be created by identifying culture elements in the advertisements on basis of four cultural dimensions Power Distant (PD), Individualism (IDV), Uncertainty avoidance (UVA) and masculinity/femininity (MAS). The score for Saudi Arabia by Hofstede is summarized below.

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

Table 1: Score by Hofstede for Saudi Arabia. The source (www.hofstede-insights.com)

The cultural values and characteristics from the Hofstede Model: application to global branding and advertising strategy are used as criteria for analysis to identify the cultural values NEOM advisements.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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 endorsers personality to function Independently | | Limited body movement and facial expressions | |
| Low Power Distance | | |  | | --- | | Humorous appeal | |  | |
| High Power Distance | | |  | | --- | | Acceptance that power is distributed  Unequally and reflection of social status | | Luxurious appeal | | Showing respect for ones in a higher social status | | Emotional appeal | |
| Masculinity | | |  | | --- | | Status brands to demonstrate success | | Distinct gender roles | |
| Femininity | | |  | | --- | | Modesty and relations are important | | Mixed gender roles, men do more household shopping | | Reflecting safety and protection | |
| High Uncertainty avoiding |  | |  | | --- | | Formal dressing | | More visual contents than verbal | | Past/history oriented | |
| Low Uncertainty avoiding | | |  | | --- | | Informal dressing | | More verbal contents  Innovations & wish to change future oriented | | Reflection of sports and health activities | |

Table 2: Cultural dimensions for analysis. The source: The Hofstede Model: application to global branding and advertising strategy (2011, p88-103)

# Research Question and Hypotheses

From a linguistic and cultural perspective, this paper asks the following questions:

* What language styles, linguistic features, word choices, etc. are used in NEOM media campaigns?
* Does advertising language reflect the values of Saudi or Arab society? What are the cultural elements? Are they more West and less Saudi?

# Expected Results

It is expected that the linguistic features, such as stylistic and pragmatic features, which are common in advertising language will have not many similarities to the social and culture values of Saudi Arabia.

In addition, it is expected that the language of advertising in both English and Arabic versions are communicating the same cultural values and using the same language style and meanings.

# Time Schedule

Total time is around: 12 Weeks (Deadline 30. Nov)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Task | Time Period | 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 MT 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 About the study-Purpose

1.3 Research Question

1.4 Limitation

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 Analyzing

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.

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