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**Demystifying Saudi Arabia: Is western fashion changing Middle East’s
most segregated country? How to approach it in business terms?**

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Master’s Dissertation

Master in Intercultural Studies for Business

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**INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE CONTABILIDADE E ADMINISTRAÇÃO DO PORTO
INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DO PORTO**



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Summary:

O objetivo desta dissertação é por um lado perceber se a moda do ocidente está a mudar o país mais segregado do Médio Oriente – Arábia Saudita, e por outro analisar as particularidades desta cultura em termos de *business approach*. Para se conseguir corroborar ou refutar a hipótese em causa foi feita toda uma investigação em termos de comunicação intercultural, comunicação não verbal, a moda e a sua origem bem como o mundo Árabe e o seu *background* cultural, considerando o caso específico da Arábia Saudita, para desta forma se poder inferir acerca da premissa. A dissertação culmina com um estudo empírico sob a forma de entrevistas que contribuem precisamente para testar a hipótese em causa.

Keywords: O país mais segregado do Médio Oriente; A Moda na Arábia Saudita; A Moda ocidental; Modest Fashion; A Moda Islâmica.

Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is on one hand to understand if western fashion is changing the most segregated country in the Middle East - Saudi Arabia, and on the other hand to analyze this culture's particularities considering a business approach. In order to corroborate or refute the hypothesis in question, a thorough investigation was made in terms of cross cultural communication, non-verbal communication, fashion and its origin as well as the Arab world and its cultural background, particularly considering the specific case of Saudi Arabia, in order to be able to infer about the premise. The dissertation culminates with an empirical study in the form of interviews that contribute precisely to test the hypothesis in question.

Keywords: Middle East's most segregated country; Fashion in Saudi Arabia; Western fashion; Modest and Islamic Fashion.

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Abbreviation List

WWI – World War I

WWII – World War II

DMIS – Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

AI – Artificial Intelligence

CE – Common Era

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Introduction

The Arab culture as many in the east are embodied with mysticism and exoticism, it is almost like they represent a utopia due to the fact that they are so different from western cultures (Said, 1979). These are important features that contributed to the elaboration of this dissertation. The other aspect that was decisive for this study's development was the fashion/clothing matter. This happens because fashion/clothing has long accompanied the human beings but as it is something taken for granted, people tend not to think about it deeply, paying attention to the latest trends only. The two concepts are different and throughout the dissertation they will be defined and developed. Fashion conveys crucial information not only about the human being that is fashion savvy and dresses up according to the industry's latest trends but also about the countries' cultures and subcultures. Fashion is all about identity, communication, context and culture. Just by observing what a person decided to dress up like, one can unveil what he/she is communicating. Combining the two main themes together: Arab culture plus fashion, plenty of research could be done already but the spectrum is still excessively wide. As a result, another element was added to the problematic – business. Societies have dealt with the business reality since their formation, which clearly demonstrates the importance it has for the community's survival. Narrowing down each matter, the result was choosing Saudi Arabia as the country whose Arab culture would be considered. This happened because it is one of the countries where it is difficult to get vehement information and studies about and also for being one of the most conservative countries in the world and the most gender segregated one in the Middle East. Being a considerably closed country made it the natural choice for the study, representing thus a challenge and also an opportunity to contribute with a different and unique perspective about the topics being analyzed. With the country selected, it was easy then to add the fashion subject to the study as Saudi Arabia has a particular dress code that one way or another affects its culture. If fashion impacts the country's culture, then it must impact business as well, not only as an economic market but also through the perspective of the cross cultural communication process by doing business with Saudis. The dissertation matter had been found.

Though, underlying the matter there's a parallel objective with this dissertation, which is to demystify the Saudi Arabian culture. Is it really like the representations portrayed by the press and social media? One will verify that throughout the study.

Getting hold of the fashion matter, with the dissertation it is intended to show the globalized western fashion importance and contribution to the changes brought to the Kingdom, if there are any.

Although there are books that approach the Saudi Arabian culture when referring to the Middle East e.g. the truth is that there is no in depth study about Saudi Arabia itself, at least one as it is intended with this dissertation. There are guides, hints and articles on how to address Saudis and how to behave according to the local culture's values, norms and rules, but this is meant either for expatriates or tourists. What is proposed here is something deeper. Naturally, there will be a mention to the characteristics that can be associated with Saudis, but the purpose is to deconstruct the image the world, especially the west, has towards Saudi Arabia, in particular in what concerns the behavior when it comes to dress code. It is aimed as well to get an understanding on how the west is influencing the country's culture and how does it reflect on business relationships.

The dissertation's first chapter focuses on the cross cultural communication phenomenon and its main constraints. The starting point is the *global village* concept in order to provide a context on the reality the world lives in today. From this point onwards the communication phenomenon is developed, taking the perspectives of several worldwide scholars as Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall. Having knowledge about the most important theories concerning this process, the main barriers that affect it are presented thereafter. Acknowledging these is extremely important, as they might affect the success or failure of a cross cultural interaction, especially if one is considering the business context. Still within the cross cultural communication process, one of the features it calls attention to is the non-verbal communication. If one thinks on a daily routine, even non-verbally, people communicate and sometimes more than by resorting to the verbal communication. In addition, the non-verbal communication can convey more truth than words do, as one cannot control facial expressions e.g. that easily. Taking into account an interaction with individuals from different cultures the non-verbal communication process is even more relevant as this message can convey what they are not being able to communicate verbally, regardless of the reason.

With a deep knowledge on how the ideal cross cultural communication process should be and being aware on the barriers that might occur, the study continues on with the second chapter which has to do with fashion as a mean of communication. This matter follows

on the non-verbal communication's approach. In order to understand how fashion itself communicates, one needs to get to know its origins. Though, and before reaching the fashion concept itself, a context is provided about clothing's origin and what were their main functions. Only with this knowledge one is able to clearly understand nowadays' fashion phenomenon. Clothing's main functions on their own are not able to provide understanding on how the concept has evolved to fashion, therefore this study is complemented by referring to the impact clothes have on the human body. This impact refers not exclusively to the physical repercussions but also in emotional terms. Under the same chapter the role of accessories and jewelry in the non-verbal message is also addressed. The chapter culminates with the contextualization of the fashion origin and development.

As mentioned before, Saudi Arabia was the selected country to be the object of study and therefore, the third chapter was dedicated to it. The chapter starts with three concepts that need to be distinguished from the beginning in order to have an accurate understanding of an Arab culture such as the Saudi one. Thus, a distinction is made between what are Arabs, what is Islam and what are Muslims. Before further analyzing the Saudi reality one needs to reflect still about west and east. This is relevant in order to retrieve the representations about Arabs and particularly about Saudis. One is then ready to get to know the Arab culture and that is in fact the next subject to be addressed, serving as the context to proceed to the Saudi culture, which is the focus immediately after. At this stage, one is already facing one of the dissertation's main problematics – fashion in Saudi Arabia. And then the distinction between the Saudi nationals' dress code and the non-nationals one are presented with all the connotations. This is a key topic supporting the dissertation as it demystifies Saudis.

After all the research done and consequent development, the dissertation proceeds with the empirical study. The study is intended to test the hypothesis: *Is Western Fashion changing Middle East's most segregated country? How to approach it in business terms?* Several methodologies could provide interesting results, though the one chosen was by doing interviews. Given the hypothesis being tested this is the methodology that seems the most adequate in order to retrieve the results that are expected. Ideally, the interviews would be done in person but due to geographical and agenda's constraints the interviews needed to be done via email and LinkedIn. The interviewees are three, two Arabs and one Portuguese with completely different backgrounds but that somehow could provide

valuable feedback to the study being developed. Given their different background it is natural the each had a different interview, even though some of the questions were common to the three of them. Provided with the feedbacks from the three interviewees, the following step is then to test the hypothesis and either they corroborate it or refute it. In order to so, the approach developed by Laurence Bardin, (2011) concerning content analysis was the one considered. After having analyzed all the techniques proposed by Bardin, the one that seemed the most adequate to treat the data in question was actually the traditional one – categorical and thematic. This technique implies a “vertical analysis” and also an “horizontal analysis”. Before this step though, a pre analysis is required, as well as an exploration of the material collected and only afterwards it is possible to treat the results, as per Bardin, (2011). Furthermore, there’s also the need to codify the information received in order to be able to treat the data in a coherent and efficient manner. Before the results’ treatment it is worth pointing out that even though the traditional content analysis is being used to explore the material retrieved, the analysis considered is hybrid. This means there is indeed a main hypothesis to be tested, referred already before, though additionally there are also particular hypothesis formulated for each of the interviews. This was intended due to the diversification of backgrounds one is dealing with, considering the three interviewees. There won’t be a single analysis in order to test the particular hypothesis, they will actually contribute to validate or not the main hypothesis. The following stage after the analysis is then understand if the hypothesis is corroborated or refuted. The reader may be questioning though why there is no mention to a quantitative analysis complementing the qualitative one. This happens due to the nature of the study and the sample used. If one was considering a bigger sample and using numerical scales in order to achieve additional data, then it would make sense. Nonetheless, in this case it wouldn’t make sense. The motto here was interpretation and context.

Chapter I – Cross Cultural Business Communication and its Constraints

1.1 The World people live in today – Global village

The world people live in today is a world where geographical boundaries have their importance questioned. That's because countries, cities and people are now closer than they have ever been before. This fast paced proximity is mainly due to the happenings on the post war of WWI and WWII. The political, economic, social, cultural and demographic consequences were tremendous. Today's reality is shaped by those aftermaths: world economies have a higher degree of interdependency; technology had a massive development; and the flow of people moving to other countries is quite expressive. More than half a century has passed since the last aftermath and nowadays the premise is that people live in a *global village*¹. This means that people are indeed closer now despite the fact that one can be located in one point of the globe and the other on the precise opposite point. The truth is that technology connects them and they don't need, or at least it is not mandatory, for them to be face to face to actually interact. If the message conveyed is expressed and understood as efficiently as if they were face to face is another matter that will be developed by the time the non-verbal communication matter is addressed. Technology was not the solo factor that put people together though. The way world economies work now has its own share of importance. What happens nowadays to a country is most likely to have effects also on the countries that are economically dependent on it. Currencies are linked, common markets exist and political and strategic agreements also need to be considered.

The concept of *global village* is not well perceived by everybody as it obviously comprises not only advantages but also disadvantages. Nevertheless, and considering governments' attitude towards it and the worldwide economic developments in the past decades, the advantages are far more than the constraints. However, the purpose here is not to discuss the pros and cons, but to understand the changes brought by this new reality.

This proximity now in place poses other challenges that were not addressed before, historically speaking, as there was no need for it. For instance, if countries are now more connected, how do they communicate? Before answering the question put it is necessary

¹ Term coined by the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, popularized in his books *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).

to clarify certain concepts in order to have a better understanding of what is being explored. Thus, it is important to clarify what nation and culture are.

Nation's concept is pointed out by several authors to having had its origin in different periods throughout human history. By March 1882, Ernest Renan when in a conference at Sorbonne mentioned that the concept had its roots at the end of the Roman Empire². When Renan mentioned the concept, he did it as having had first been referred to around the 5th century. When referring it he was considering the principles and traditions that were introduced in what could have been called a society at the time and that together would contribute to form the concept that is today known as nation. On his turn, Hofstede, (2010) mentioned the concept had its origin on the twentieth century, focusing his conceptualization based on the politics that led to the geographical changes around the 20th century. As a result, one can consider that Hofstede was not referring to the concept of nation but in reality to the nation-state one. Kohn, (1950) on his article about Romanticism³ and the Rise of German Nationalism seems to be the one referring to the actual origin of the nation concept as it known today. At that time Germany was in need of a national identity since it was divided into states and given the political scenario either Germany managed to unite itself or its territory would remain divided and thus an easy target to invasions. The figure behind this unification was Otto von Bismarck, Germany's first Chancellor. (Rasmussen, P. R., 2001) The arise of the German Empire and nationalism happened in the Romanticism period and this is no coincidence, in reality the first is the result of the latter. Despite the fact that at the beginning the Romanticism movement was not intended to have political reach, it was so disruptive towards the past traditions and standards that ended up influencing politics, the state and social life. It led to the awareness of the German individuality. (Kohn, 1950) Germans had a shared historical heritage, a common language and a unique culture – they had their own identity.

Defining culture is an extremely difficult task as it “is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture* (Rev. ed), 1983, p. 89) Thus, it is necessary to understand that it can be considered

² which occurred in the 5th century in the West and in the 7th century in the East. Ward-Perkins, B. (2006, March/April). An Interview with Bryan Ward-Perkins on the Fall of Rome. *Historically Speaking*. (D. A. Yerxa, Interviewer)

³ “(...) a rejection of the precepts of order, calm, harmony, balance, idealization, and rationality that typified Classicism in general and late 18th-century Neoclassicism in particular. It was also to some extent a reaction against the Enlightenment and against 18th-century rationalism and physical materialism in general.” (The Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2017)

according to three different domains: culture as being a process learned as Hall and Hofstede define it (social science definition), culture as defined by Clifford Geertz in which the focus are the patterns of meaning and its symbolism (interpretive definition) and also culture as a contested area, heterogeneous and dynamic (critical definition). (Nakayama, 2010)

The sense in which the concept of culture will be intended in this dissertation is culture as a social practice. Even within this specter there are innumerable approaches from many scholars, each of them defining it differently. Although they all touch important aspects, the following definition is the one that on a simple yet clear manner sums up the key aspects that the culture's concept comprises:

[...] a dynamic system of rules, explicit and implicit, established by groups in order to ensure their survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors, shared by a group but harbored differently by each specific unit within the group, communicated across generations, relatively stable but with the potential to change across time. (Matsumoto, 2004, p. 10)

Although straightforward and concise, Matsumoto's definition of culture follows a conceptualization that had been formulated decades before by Williams':

Culture is ordinary; that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment, under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. (Williams, Culture is ordinary, 1989, p. 4)

The fact that both definitions convey clearly that within a certain group there are differences when it comes to the individual, it's particularly important to note, as this does happen in reality.

Getting back to the question put above it is mandatory as well to clarify what *global village* is intended to mean. The concept had its origin in the work of Marshall McLuhan when writing the books: *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964).

“The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village”. (McLuhan, 1962, p. 31) By the time McLuhan made this statement the world wasn’t even closer to understand the repercussions of this phenomenon and he couldn’t imagine that he was already predicting something that would affect society until today, almost fifty years later. And the changes are not only in what concerns communication, but also in economic, social, political, cultural and even geographical terms. At that time the internet and personal computers hadn’t been introduced yet and still he was able to predict such a development. One can just imagine what he could anticipate now for the future considering today’s reality. What is important to retain though is the “proximity” and “connection” the world gained with the technological development.

After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man - the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society... (McLuhan, 1964, p. 3)

Just two years later with the new book’s launching he reinforced the *global village* concept referring to the inexistence of physical boundaries brought by technology and somehow he addressed what it seems now to be the AI – Artificial Intelligence. Explained in a simplistic way, *global village* means that everybody is now connected, at least more efficiently than before. It means communication does exist otherwise this relationship between nations couldn’t be established.

The concept of *global village* is naturally connected to globalization. And what is globalization exactly and when was it originated? The concept has been quite controversial in terms of origin as per O’Rourke (2000). In their paper they have presented the three main theories developed by other scholars regarding this matter. As per (Frank, 1998), conveyed by (O’Rourke, 2000) “there was a single global world economy with a worldwide division of labour and multilateral trade from 1500 onward”; even before that period and according to (Bentley, 1999, p. 7) “trade networks reached almost all regions of Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa and large volumes of commerce encouraged

specialization of agricultural and industrial production”; Still according to O’Rourke, (2000),:

“some attach globalization “big bang” significance to the dates 1492 (Christopher Columbus stumbles on the Americas in search of spices) and 1498 (Vasco da Gama makes an end run around Africa and snatches monopoly rents away from the Arab and Venetian spice traders)”

On his turn and also conveyed by O’Rourke, (2000), Immanuel Wallerstein had actually a different perspective. According to him: “(i)t was in the sixteenth century that there came to be a European world-economy based upon the capitalist mode of production” (Wallerstein 1974, p. 67). O’Rourke, (2000) also pointed out that some other regions and according to (Wallerstein 1989, Chapter 3) “only became incorporated into this world economy some time between 1750 and 1850”. One can conclude that globalization has had its origin around the sixteenth century and it has been a gradual phenomenon, not happening in every nation at the same time and still today there are nations (underdeveloped) that are not taking the most out of this phenomenon. Many reasons can explain this fact but that is outside the spectrum of this dissertation. Concerning the concept itself it implies an interdependency between nations and it comprises all society’s aspects from demography to economy.

The concepts of *global village* and globalization are indeed connected and they have a relationship of cause-effect. People live in a *global village* due to the process of globalization. However, globalization presupposes a sense of unity and uniformity that is not intended to be the motto in this dissertation. The objective is to understand how different nations communicate now. Nevertheless, there are opinions stating that a unique culture can emerge due to the globalization phenomenon. This dissertation goes on another direction though, based on the premise that it won’t happen any time soon. The concept that needs to be considered here is that of internationalization.

Globalization and internationalization do not mean the same despite the fact the both consider the global scenario. The first sees it generally while the latter one focus on the particularities. Internationalization as the word itself states focus on the international level, inter nations, across national boundaries in terms of trade, alliances and relations. (Daly, H. E., 1999)

Since countries are now more opened to the outside world and lesser barriers exist when it comes to trade between them, they feel compelled to do it. Naturally, business relations across nations will increase and the more it increases the higher will be the degree of dependency between them. Additionally, if regional differences can be found within a country many more need to be expected when going abroad, especially when doing business. And this is the aim of this chapter, to point out what needs to be addressed when doing business with other countries with such a different background. By background it is supposed to be understood each parties' culture.

1.2 The cross cultural communication phenomenon and its main theories

Long are the days in which a country could be considered as having a sole culture. In fact, for the majority of them, not to mention all, they had from the beginning several cultures and subcultures within. Having each country its own culture it means that it has a unique way of seeing the world and that can be difficult to deal with, when the world – others, are perceived as very different from oneself. That's why there's the need for adaptation in order to minimize the shock when two or more cultures have encounters regardless of the reason that led them to it. This adaptation needed has long been the object of study by many scholars that came up with theories that comprised the main differences between national cultures which naturally influence their way of doing business. The subject that resulted from their study is known as *Cross Cultural Communication* or *Intercultural Communication*.

Cross-cultural communication is about the way people from different cultures communicate when they deal with each other either at a distance or face to face. Communication can involve spoken and written language, body language and the language of etiquette and protocol. (Tomalin, 2013, p. 2)

Here it is considered the definition proposed by Hurn and Tomalin (2013) as it clearly conveys the interdisciplinary approach that is needed when taking in consideration this subject. They uphold it comprises disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, philosophy and linguistics. Although they highlight linguistics' importance, that is not the purpose in this dissertation.

The key aspect when two or more cultures interact with one another is then communication. And by referring to this concept, three types of communication are being

considered: verbal, non-verbal and written communication. This is what can lead to a successful relationship or a complete misunderstanding and, in some cases, being interpreted as an offense to one of the parties involved. The truth is that despite being a natural phenomenon communication is different across cultures and it has a deep background embodied that is accountable for the success or failure in conveying a message. For instance, sometimes even when one doesn't want to convey something it is already doing the precise opposite. That's why a deep dive into the analysis of this process is needed.

Again, Hurn and Tomalin, (2013) described the main features of some of the most recognized scholars in the study of culture and communication in the sense that is being approached in this dissertation. It is based on their report that this field of knowledge will be explored. At this stage it is important to point out that these scholars' work is being used in order to help understanding how people from different cultures communicate. And for that they resort to categorizations and structures that allow them to retrieve conclusions. This is not the ideal approach as categorizations and structures can be seen as a stereotyping phenomenon already. Though, if the context where these conclusions were drawn from is considered and they are seen as guiding lines only when studying the communication phenomenon across cultures there is no prejudice being made.

The authors considered the studies developed by Edward T. Hall, Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars, John Mole, Richard Lewis, and Milton Bennet. While Bennet focused its study on the constraints of cross cultural communication, the others emphasized on the aspects where cultures differ, affecting thus the communication process. For Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars and Lewis, despite having worked on specific features of the cross cultural phenomenon with the communication process as premise, it is possible to find some similarities on their work. All of them in a less or greater extent have given importance to the attitude of people towards time, the relationships' establishment between a certain culture's members and what they give importance to in terms of social organization (individualist or collectivist).

Edward T. Hall, (1976) has defined cultures in two types: *low context* and *high context*. The *low context* cultures are the ones in which nothing is assumed and importance will be given to what is stated verbally or written. The context in which the process occurs has a relative importance. Oppositely, are the *high context* cultures in which the context itself

plays the main role. It is assumed that the interveners have most of the information already and therefore what is expressed has less importance. Hall, (1990) has also defined cultures as *monochronic* or *polychronic* in relation to their attitude towards time. *Monochronic* are the ones where time is perceived as a preciousness. Therefore, everything is scheduled and happens at a certain premediated pace. The *polychronic* ones do not have such a strict positioning. In fact, they favor the relationships' establishment and the time that is dedicated to that effect over a fixed schedule.

Hofstede, (2010) on his turn, defined a model in which countries are ranked under certain criteria, allowing then a better understanding of their culture both national and corporate, as the first influences the second. Although, targeted at its launching by many scholars, the truth is that even if the study is now outdated as societies do change across time, it provided valuable information in managing cross cultural communication. And nowadays it is still used to compare the national cultures of the different countries. The model consisted at its origin of four dimensions: power distance index, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity and individualism oppositely collectivism. Afterwards, there was the need of adding two more: long term versus short term orientation and indulgence versus restraint.

Power distance index measures how authority is perceived within a culture; uncertainty avoidance has to do with how easy it is for members of a certain culture to be risk takers or rather to stay in their comfort zone; masculinity and femininity is not related with the genders directly but with the characteristics of a culture being under a male personality or a female one, e.g. competitiveness is a trace of masculine cultures and perfectionism is associated with the feminine ones; and individualism versus collectivism is concerned with what is considered as a priority, the interests of the individual or the group. About the two dimensions added later on: one is connected to the idea of how societies are oriented, if towards the short time period or instead a longer one. And indulgence versus restraint represents the degree to which a society is keen on rewarding or rather restraining the group, e.g. leisure time versus authoritarian social rules.

Trompenaars, (1997), on his turn, has a similar approach to Hall's in regards to the relationship towards time and similar as well with Hofstede's, concerning individualism and collectivism. He points out, nonetheless, important aspects that need as well to be addressed: universalism versus particularism, affection as opposed to neutrality, diffuse

versus specific, achievement in contrast with ascription and men's relationship with culture. By addressing universalism versus particularism he meant to refer to the degree to which people tend to follow the rules or instead, breaking them; affection and neutrality, as the words represent it's connected to the way people are encouraged or not to show their emotions; diffuse versus specific is related to work and personal life balance and consequent separation; achievement and ascription concerns the way people are recognized socially, if by their work or seniority; finally, the relationship of men with culture has to do with the extent to which men tends to consider he controls culture or rather as being part of it.

Lewis, (2006) study also addresses the matter of how time is perceived by members of a certain culture and as Hurn and Tomalin themselves he also addresses the importance of language concerning culture. He built up upon Hofstede's and Hall's work and defined three different types of culture especially considering Hall's perspective about *monochronic* and *polychronic* cultures, the so called: *linear active*, *multi active* and *reactive* cultures. The main difference is that he added the *reactive* cultures which aren't *monochronic* neither *polychronic*. The *reactive* cultures are those in which its members are first observant and then they react. They are especially skilled in the non-verbal communication.

In turn, John Mole (2003) has a slightly different approach towards cross cultural communication and focus mainly on the corporate culture in preference of the national one. He based its approach in two key aspects: organization and leadership. For Mole, the organization can be considered as systematic or organic. Systematic, are those in which the needs of the organization are more important than the individual ones. The opposite happens concerning the organic organizations. About the leadership, Mole refers to it as possibly being focused on the individual or in the group. If it's based on the individual than there's definitely a structured and strict hierarchy. If focused on the group, then democracy is the keyword.

1.3 The main barriers to an effective cross cultural communication process

After providing the main features concerning the work of the scholars selected by Hurn and Tomalin (2013) it is possible to determine that communication across cultures is definitely a complex phenomenon. There are too many differences across cultures to consider that addressing a different culture is an easy task, even between neighbour countries. The differences mustn't be underestimated as the price paid for that mistake can be too high. Relying on luck is also not a good option as one can succeed at an early stage of a negotiation e.g., but as it further develops the other part will notice. It is important to bear in mind that when communicating at an international level one needs to adapt. Actually, all the parties involved need to do it but the one who has the most to gain out of it is better to be prepared and do the homework. The level of preparation beforehand will depend on the reason for contacting a member from a different culture. If it's on a personal or academic level, a research on the main traits of the other part's culture should be enough. However, if at a business level (which is the focus of this dissertation) or another one that implies the long term period, for instance an expatriate, a significant and preferably extensive research should be considered. If there's no homework done before the interaction between cultures what will happen is that both parties will deal with one another based on the assumptions, values and beliefs of their own culture. This is a natural process but what usually tends to happen when one judges others based on his/her background is to think his/her culture is superior. One is then faced with the concept of ethnocentrism⁴. Without noticing stereotyping starts. It is in this field that Milton Bennet, (1998) made his major contribute, the conception of the DMIS - Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. The model was the result of the work around two major perspectives: ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. The concept of ethnocentrism, theoretically at least, is perfectly understood especially due to its connection with stereotypes. On the other hand, ethnorelativism is not as straightforward. As per Bennet, (1998), ethnorelativism would actually be the opposite of ethnocentrism, meaning people would not consider their own background when interacting with members from different cultures, but rather trying to understand the others in their own environment. This approach to the concept can then be understood as a "meet me halfway" as it is really difficult for a person to put his or her own entire background aside to understand others.

⁴ "Belief in the intrinsic superiority of the nation, culture, or group to which one belongs, often accompanied by feelings of dislike for other groups". (Collins Dictionary, n.d.)

Even if people are not able to undress completely of all their assumptions but they are willing to understand others based on what they represent and considering their background that is already a step ahead. And this is what is expected in a cross cultural environment. The model proposed by Bennet, (1998), resumes the journey of the participants starting as prejudiced and becoming culturally aware of the differences across cultures. As expected, ethnocentrism constitutes one of the main barriers to an effective cross cultural communication process although there are considerably more. The main constraints can also include: attitude, perception, interpretation and culture shock as per Robert Gibson, (2002). He also comprised stereotypes that were addressed as well by Bennet.

Considering humanity in general and in particular the human beings that are an integrant part of someone's daily life, although many similarities in terms of behavior and way of thinking can be found, the differences also have a significant impact, if not more expressive. The same happens within each culture, there are similarities and differences and these need to be acknowledged. It is normal then when there are cultural encounters that the different backgrounds may collide. Worse than the difficulty of interacting with someone with a totally different upbringing is when there's a cultural shock. As per Gibson, (2002) this happens whenever an individual suffers by feeling surrounded by novelty. In this sense novelty is not considered as something positive but rather negative that reaches the inner layers of the individual – the emotions. The individual will feel powerless because he/she will have the impression that he/she had lost all his/her references in terms of social behavior – the signs and symbols he/she is used to easily read and interpret. In addition and what does not help is the fact that most likely the language will also be different. Not being able to communicate at the same level, if that's the case, will stress him/her out as “language is power”.

Still about the constraints proposed by Gibson, (2002): attitude, perception and interpretation, each of the intermediates will perceive, interpret and react towards what is being conveyed in a different way. What is considered normal in one culture may not be in the other; even considering the same scenario, the parties may perceive it differently; and the attitudes taken towards something may result in stereotypes. One is then faced with a vicious circle in which if not cultural aware will keep facing each and every communication barrier.

1.4 The importance of non-verbal communication in intercultural contexts

The previous subchapter provided an insight on the actual reality people are currently living in, considering the communication phenomenon and the constraints that reality embodies. The current subchapter will focus on the particularities of the nonverbal communication process considering the *global village* people live in today, thus in intercultural and multicultural environments. The matter will be approached having in consideration Knapp, (2014) theory. According to the author, the nonverbal communication study, really considered as a scholar activity, started only on the post WWII.

Knapp, (2014) starts by emphasizing the three most important aspects surrounding the nonverbal communication process: sending messages, receiving them and the relation between the two. A person can intentionally or unintentionally send a nonverbal message. If intentionally it can be clearly perceived by gestures, facial expression or even clothing. This process is not always clear though as with any type of message it can be misunderstood, either due to the sender not conveying it clearly or due to the noise during the communication process or even considering the receptor's inability to decode it. (Knapp, 2014) It is a complex process because the nonverbal message can be conveyed by several means. The body language matters, e.g. the facial expression, the posture and the gestures; the emotional state; the clothing chosen; the proxemics⁵; the environment and the circumstances. The author accepts the general definition of nonverbal communication as referring "to communication effected by means other than words" (Knapp, 2014, p. 8) though he adds that one needs to consider that separating the verbal and nonverbal behavior into two different categories is impossible and that generally the nonverbal message is meant to be decoded by the receptor, thus he/she will be attributing meaning to it. He also mentions that considering the communication's environment, the physical characteristics and the body's movement and position is crucial when studying the nonverbal communication process. When referring the communication's environment he considers the physical space surrounding the sender and the spatial environment which has to do with the proxemics towards others. Lastly, the author refers as well to the body's movement and position, which comprises the gestures, the posture, the facial expression,

⁵ "Proxemics is the study of the use and perception of social and personal space." (Knapp, 2014, p. 11)

the touching, the eye movement and the vocals as well. By vocals he is not referring to the verbal message but rather to the way the verbal message is conveyed and what it carries. Can one sense nervousness, anxiety or sarcasm in the voice?

When we learn the rules and norms people expect our behavior to match, we are learning about culture. All of us exist within several cultures—our family, our religious group, our social class, our age group, our school, our workplace, our gender, and our society. So some cultural teaching is a part of all our communication behavior. (Knapp, 2014, p. 408)

As reported by Knapp, (2014) one's culture will affect the communication conduct and this was already demonstrated on the previous subchapter when the cultures were categorized according to several criteria presented on the research developed by Hurn and Tomalin, (2013). Thus, if there are more cultures than there are countries, considering the different ethnic groups, then the communication codes are necessarily different, both verbal and nonverbal. Focusing on the nonverbal communication process, although similarities and common meanings may exist throughout the message that is conveyed when considering worldwide cultures, each of these has particularities. Therefore, one cannot assume that the nonverbal message conveyed by someone from a different culture has the same meaning as in his/her own culture. That's why studying the "other" before any interaction is important, especially considering the business context. If there's no possibility of doing so, at least one needs to put aside all the assumptions and pre conceived ideas about the others.

And what influences the decoding of the nonverbal message? In line with Knapp, (2014) the main factors are: gender - "More often than not, girls and women score higher than boys and men on tests of judging the meanings of nonverbal cues" (Hall J. A., 1984); age - "People generally show a gradually increasing decoding skill from kindergarten until ages 20 to 30" (Dimitrovsky, 1964); cognitive ability - "(...) a person's skill at judging nonverbal behavior likely depends to some extent upon, but is not defined completely by, his or her general level of intelligence." (Knapp, 2014, p. 74); substance abuse - "Substance abuse can damage the brain, resulting in specific cognitive impairments, including nonverbal decoding skill and culture." (Knapp, 2014, p. 77); and culture - "(...) people have a slight advantage in accuracy when judging encoders who come from their same culture." (Elfenbein, 2002)

Summing up, the nonverbal communication needs to be a prioritized matter when in intercultural environments, it needs to be studied and planned, in a certain degree. If one considers all the aspects mentioned before it is no easy task as basically just by standing in a place one is already conveyed something, in this case most likely unintentionally. Imagining there's a business trip to a foreign country, regardless of what country is being considered, the sender will need to contemplate what is the message that he/she will be conveying and this comprises: thinking about what clothing is acceptable on the culture that will be receiving him/her; consider proxemics, if he/she should be close to the other party or keep a certain distance; the body posture, if it should be more relaxed or conservative; the voice tone, if more passive or assertive; and ultimately and perhaps the most difficult aspect to be controlled, the facial expression, what should it convey? The key note here is perhaps not what it should convey but rather, when the roles are inverted and as receptor what shouldn't it convey?

Chapter II – Fashion as Communication

2.1 The origin of clothing and its main functions

Throughout history, clothing has had nonverbal significance. Julius Caesar (before he became a politician) wore a purple tunic when he led his troops into battle—so that everyone from frontline soldiers to senior officers would know where their general was. A thousand years later, during the Middle Ages, people of wealth wore bright colors, better materials and longer length coats, so that they could recognize one another. A thousand years after that, fashion designers like Jean-Paul Gaultier and Versace make clothes so colorful and impractical that they imply wealth...if not taste. (Calero, 2005, p. 145)

As reported by Calero, (2005), since the human being has started to cover the body, without even noticing a nonverbal message started being conveyed. Within the nonverbal communication process, clothing⁶ is one of aspects that can be easily manipulated to communicate something completely different from the original content, considering the individual wearing it. The message portrayed by the clothing chosen is always connected to a sign of distinction, as the purpose is to “stand out from the crowd”. This doesn’t mean a sole individual is the only one that may want to be distinguished from the crowd. It can actually be a group that wants to be distinguished from other groups, regardless of the reasons. If one looks back in history there have been always specific clothing pieces associated with certain society’s groups. The Royalty and the Court had a certain clothing type associated, Clerics had another, Bourgeoisie had another and common people also had a different one. One can compare the clothing code with a language, each group spoke a different one. Looking even further in history clothing had already an important function, e.g. “The two main religious orders of the medieval Catholic Church were designated and identified by color. Benedictine monks wore black, while Cistercians wore white made from wool that was not dyed.” (Calero, 2005, p. 147)

When referring to a piece of clothing, it is being considered the piece as a whole and not exclusively its main function, whether it be to cover the body or not. The shape of it, the fitting, the cut, the colors, the materials and even the way it is worn matter and allow the ones who see it to decode the hidden message being sent.

⁶ The term clothing and dress will be used conversely throughout this dissertation, as: clothing is defined as: “things you wear to cover your body; clothes” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) and dress is defined as: “Wear clothes in a particular way or of a particular type.” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.)

The Editors, Johnson, Torntore and Eicher have gathered the first writings about clothing in a book called *Fashion Foundations: Early Writings on Fashion and Dress* and therefore, the main conclusions from each author will now be presented in order to understand the origin of clothing and its main function. Depicted by (Johnson, 2003):

Montaigne stated that “the naked state” (p.225) is the natural condition and undressed humans, like all living things, did not need artificial protection against effects of the physical environment. However, humans lost this protection when they started wearing clothes. (Johnson, 2003, p. 8)

Bliss (1916) introduces the idea of humans as incomplete and unfinished beings compared to the rest of the nature. She suggests that dress embodies and reflects unconscious or subconscious ideals and ideas. Rather than dress originating as custom (...) Bliss argues that the history of dress is a process of humans striving for the perfect “human costume” (p. 226). (Johnson, 2003, p. 9)

Crawley uses an evolutionary model in his discussion. Dress comes from people adapting to their environment; he believes dress should be treated in the same way as weapons, machines, and tools. He expands the biological view of evolution and uses the religious and social significance of dress as a guide to include the psychological evolution of dress. (Johnson, 2003, pp. 9-10)

Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1922) limits discussion of the origins and motives of dressing the body to a narrow view of dress as personal ornament. (...) He provides two motives for the use of personal ornament – the desire for protection and the desire for display. “All ornament marks the relation of the individual to the society, and to forces/power in society to which he owes his well-being and happiness (p. 319)”. (Johnson, 2003, p. 10)

Ruth Benedict (1931) (...) offers the view that we can know why people clothed themselves in the past by examining the present. She refers to this process of examining the present as conducting a comparative study of the “divergent behavior of now existing peoples” (p. 235). She outlines contemporary theories of origins and motives for dressing the body (...) as protection against the rigors of climate, or a means of sexual attraction. (Johnson, 2003, p. 10)

If one were to consider the theories proposed by Montaigne and Bliss only, the clothing phenomenon occurred when the first humans started to cover their body. Both authors have common ground in their theories, Montaigne sees clothing as an anti-nature phenomenon and Bliss points out the act of dressing up as being something that the human

being does due to the feeling of fulfillment. Without that action, the human being wouldn't feel complete. The truth is that one cannot go back in time and experiment how it would have been if the human being had never covered the body. Perhaps a certain degree of protection was lost when bodies were covered but in reality they were getting protection elsewhere. Thus, the primary function of the clothing act seems to have been for the body's protection. On his turn, Crawley adds another two elements to the equation. He points out the need of the human being to adapt to the surrounding environment and he puts clothing in the same category as weapons and machinery. On a certain degree he is right as weapons and machinery have as main functions attack and defense. Can clothing be interpreted as having the same utility? Indeed, it protects the body and facilitates the human being's integration in any environment. Additionally, it can be perceived as a mean to attack others. It may seem illogic that this may happen but if the clothing conveys a message, it can be intended to attack the receptor. Considering this perspective, one is actually agreeing with Crawler when he mentions the religious and social dimensions of the dress. Radcliffe-Brown's theory complements the approaches from the previous scholars as he identifies clothing main functions as related with protection and social behavior. Furthermore, he links clothing with the human being emotional dimension as a sign of happiness. Lastly, Benedict's theory is the one with the most contemporary approach. She points out that one can understand why people used clothes in the past if today's reality is observed. As almost all the previous scholars she also mentions the protection as one of clothing's main function and the other one as being a way of sexual attraction. What she mentions is not wrong, though if one considers today's society there are far more functions clothing has rather than the two she mentions. Still according to Benedict and portrayed by Johnson, (2003) the succession of styles that characterizes the fashion system would "maintain itself as a fixed characteristic of dress as a culture trait in our civilization" (Benedict, 1931, p. 237) This matter will be further analyzed when approaching the fashion concept origin.

All the scholars have pointed out something that can be perceived as true, except for Montaigne's view which seems to carry an almost utopic ideology. Protection, adaptation to the environment, social behavior and sexual attraction are all functions that can be recognized when clothing is worn. Though, there are many more and Barnard, (2001) through (Knapp, 2014, p. 188) proves it:

To understand the relationship between clothes and communication, we must be familiar with the various functions clothes can fulfill: decoration, physical and psychological protection, sexual attraction, self-assertion, self-denial, concealment, group identification, persuasion, attitude, ideology, mood reflection or creation, authority, and status or role display.

There are plenty of functions clothing can have, what needs to be considered is that these functions are dependent on the target of the message being conveyed by the clothes. The message can be intended to express something about the individual that is wearing the piece of clothing, disregarding what others might think or the other way around, meaning to wear a piece of clothing with the specific intention of inciting a reaction on the receptor.

2.2 Clothing's impact on the human body and mind

Having already an insight about clothing's origin and its main functions, this subchapter is having as object the clothing's impact on the human body. The starting point considers the studies of Dearborn, (1918), Lotze, (1887) and Hall, (1898) through Johnson, (2003).

Dearborn (1918) emphasizes that humans, in order to be "both more efficient and happy," need to be educated in to dress "properly" (p. 1). (...) properly relates to how dress impacts the functions of the physical body, such as breathing, sweating, heart rate, movement of limbs and even digestive action, as well to the psychological sense of comfort and well-being of the whole person. (Johnson, 2003, p. 12)

"(...) Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1887), in his seminal essay, credits clothing as giving human beings sensations and feelings of existence. Dress, in contact with the surface of the physical body, can increase or facilitate feelings of the continuation of the person." (Johnson, 2003, p. 12)

(...) Hall contends that dress and adornment are used to attract the attention of a child to its body. (...) clothes consciousness facilitates body consciousness. One of the primary purposes of clothing for Hall is to get children on the correct developmental path. Hall suggests that clothing has a moral impact on children in that a change of dress can change a child's attitude and behaviors. (Johnson, 2003, p. 12)

Clothing affects not only the physical body but also the psyche, thus emotions. This was addressed by Dearborn and Lotze respectively, considering the comfort and well-being humans can feel as a direct consequence of the sensations triggered by the clothing's usage. Hall's research focused on the body's consciousness through clothing especially concerning children. The author adds that children's behaviors can be influenced by clothing. When changing clothes, attitudes can also change. It is common sense that whenever a person changes wardrobe, personality is affected. It doesn't mean the effect will be permanent but even temporary, it does happen. Taking as an example the living cycle of a person from a developed western society nowadays, one can confirm the authors' theory. When a baby, and during the first years of life, children dress normally according to what their parents choose for them. The choice is related with their particular taste, what society and local culture expects from them and what they want to convey through the clothes. Soon after, when the child enters his/her teens it is up to him/her to make the wardrobe's choices, even if the parents try to put some barriers. At this stage

the factors that will influence the wardrobe are more than the ones parents had when it was up to them to choose the clothes. That's because the teenager is inserted in several groups (school friends and sport's team for instance) and not only the family circle. Clothing's impact is then decisive as the teenager, in order to feel accepted and integrated, will want to have the same dress code as his/her peers. Thus, it is normal to expect that the attitude will also change along with self-esteem, confidence and comfort with his/her own skin.

Another example that illustrates the change in terms of attitude just by putting a different outfit is for instance in religious, military, political or even education related ceremonies. Formality and conservatism are expected in these events, at least in many of the cultures, and if the clothes chosen when attending these are analyzed carefully, one can identify that they have these values embodied. Either the color, the fabric, the cut or the fitting of the clothes will definitely portray them.

2.3 Accessories and jewelry

During the previous subchapters clothing has been approached generally as an adornment to cover the body but it can be further explored if one considers the accessories and jewelry as being part of it.

People adorn themselves with badges, tattoos, masks, earrings, personal aids and devices (glasses, watches), accessories (hats), and jewelry, among other things. We must take these artifacts and decorations into consideration in any discussion of clothing because they are also potential communicative stimuli. A ring worn on a particular finger, a fraternity or sorority pin worn in a particular configuration, and a single earring worn in a particular ear all may communicate something about the nature of a person's relationships and self-image. (Knapp, 2014, p. 192)

As per Knapp, (2014) many are the accessories and jewelry that an individual can wear and these convey messages as well. The way the piece is worn can unveil many details about an individual's background. Not only how it is worn but also if further details are analyzed, as the material used to produce the piece, the shape of it and the color. One needs to consider also if there are symbols engraved, either in the item itself or on the body directly, through tattoos. These portray meaning as well and can be key factors to decode messages as they provide information about the individual's context. In reality, "(...) as soon as an item is actually manufactured, it inevitably becomes an element in semiology⁷." (Barthes, 2013, p. 38) This means it becomes a sign, a representation of something with sense, which is composed by a significant and a signified. Significant refers to the physical form to which the concept refers to, while signified is precisely that concept, the mental representation of the physical form. Considering Barthes' statement, the item is already embodied with connotations since the moment its production is finished and even before it gets to be worn. "Dress is a system and a history, an individual act and a collective institution." (Barthes, 2013, p. 8) Therefore, when decoding nonverbal messages through clothing, accessories and jewelry, the overall context needs to be considered. The message portrayed may consider the individual's choice only or may be affected by the individual's insertion in a certain group. Moreover, there's also the

⁷ "A science that studies the life of signs within society (...)" (Saussure, 1959, p. 16)

hypothesis of it being hybrid, a mix between the individual's and the group's clothing code.

2.4 The origin of the fashion concept

Until now the concept of clothing and dress have been approached interchangeably, though there's was no mention to the concept of fashion as this is considered to be something else rather than just clothing or dress. The concept itself and its origin will be the focus object of this subchapter.

Fashion is an institution and today nobody believes any more that it *distinguishes*; only *unfashionable* is a notion of distinction; in other words, in terms of the masses Fashion is only ever perceived via its opposite: Fashion is health, it is a moral code of which the unfashionable is nothing but illness or perversion. (Barthes, 2013, p. 63)

The exact date and place where fashion has had its origin seems to be a matter that hasn't reached a clear and final agreement on. According to (Heller, 2007, p. 46) and portrayed by (Godart, 2012, p. 15) fashion would have had its origin "in the West in the fourteenth - or fifteenth - century courts of Burgundy or Italy, or more generally with the era referred to as "Early Modernity."” This period matches with the European Renaissance⁸. Still, according to (Godart, 2012, p. 16):

There are, to be sure, scholars who claim to detect phenomena akin to fashion among other peoples and in past civilizations. None, however, carries the claim so far as to maintain that fashion – in the sense of a continual, largely uninterrupted, and ever more institutionalized succession of stylistic changes in dress, adornment, and decorative design generally – has existed anywhere other than in the postmedieval West. (Davis, 1992, p. 28)

In Davis approach there's already some new elements that help distinguishing fashion than clothing and dress when he mentions fashion as in: "(...) the sense of a continual, largely uninterrupted, and ever more institutionalized succession of stylistic changes in dress, adornment, and decorative design (...)." (Davis, 1992, p. 28). In terms of origin, he has the same line of thought as Heller. Nevertheless, Godart himself tests this idea by referring to the work of the main philosophers from ancient Greece and Rome: "they did

⁸ "the transitional movement in Europe between medieval and modern times beginning in the 14th century in Italy, lasting into the 17th century, and marked by a humanistic revival of classical influence expressed in a flowering of the arts and literature and by the beginnings of modern science." (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

not ignore fashion, though they did systematically subordinate this topic to what they saw as a more important subject – luxury” (Godart, 2012, p. 18). On his turn, Barthes, (2013) points out different periods for the fashion concept to have appeared and changed, respectively: the Romanticism period and the French revolution. After the latter happening, the importance was given to the details when dressing up and not to the main piece. Why? Because details were the sign that allowed the different classes to be distinguished. A new clothing style had started – Dandyism⁹ but soon after due to the emergence of the ready to wear it went into decline.

After having analyzed all the perspectives presented above about the fashion’s concept origin, one can conclude that if it can be tracked until ancient Greece and Rome, then named fashion or not, it has always existed. What is important to point out here is that the concept as it is perceived today (2018), has had its origin indeed in the Renaissance period.

⁹“(…) is more than simply vestimentary behaviour) is a man who has decided to radicalize the distinction in men’s clothing by subjecting it to an absolute logic. Furthermore, he takes distinction that bit further: its essence is no longer social for him, but metaphysical; the dandy stands in opposition not at all to the upper class and the lower class, but only in absolute terms to the individual and the banal;” (Barthes, 2013, pp. 61-62)

Chapter III – The Saudi reality

3.1 Distinction between Arabs, Islam and Muslims

The third chapter is supposed to narrow down the object of study of this dissertation. Until now, there were presented general perspectives about the cross-cultural communication process and the fashion concept. From now on, the study will become more specific until one reaches the hypothesis testing phase.

This particular chapter is about the Arab world, considering in particular the Saudi Arabian case, though before jumping to the particular case one needs to have a general understanding about the context surrounding Saudi Arabia's reality. The first issue that needs to be addressed if one is considering the Arab world is the relationship between the following concepts: Arabs, Muslims and Islam.

Starting with the Arab concept:

"An Arab is whoever speaks Arabic, wishes to be an Arab and calls himself an Arab." – Sati al-Husri (al-bab.com: An open door to the Arab world, n.d.)

"Those who belong to the Arab ethnic group, the Arab people or the Arab nation, speak a form of Arabic and consider it their "natural" language; regard the history and cultural characteristics of the Arabs as their inheritance; assert an Arab identity or consciousness." – Maxime Rodinson (al-bab.com: An open door to the Arab world, n.d.)

"By 'Arab' I mean whoever describes himself thus ... there, where he is – in his history, his memory, the place where he lives, dies and survives. There, where he is – that is to say, in the experience of a life which is both tolerable and intolerable for him." – Abdelkebir Khatibi (al-bab.com: An open door to the Arab world, n.d.)

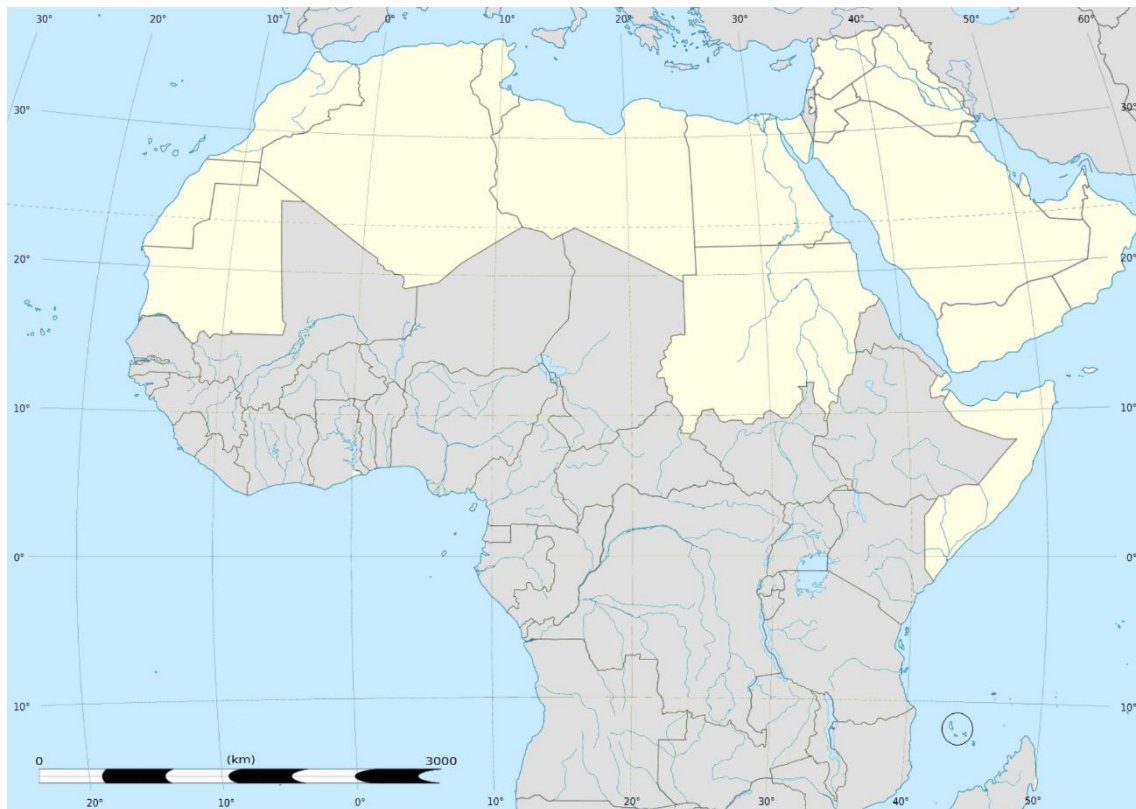
Being an Arab is not the same as being a Muslim or being connoted with the concept of Islam. Arab has to do mainly with the facts that a person speaks the Arabic language, is inserted in the Arab region and shares the same cultural and historical backgrounds. The list of Arab countries is composed by 22 members and these are also the same countries that comprise the Arab league¹⁰: "Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi

¹⁰ "(...) is a loose confederation of twenty-two Arab nations, including Palestine, whose broad mission is to improve coordination among its members on matters of common interest." (Elfenbein, 2002)

Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.” (al-bab.com: An open door to the Arab world, n.d.)

Despite the fact that the term Arab is related with the terms Muslim and Islam (religious terms), they refer to something else that will be explained afterwards. Therefore, it is important to point out that although when considering Muslims and Islam, people tend to associate these with the Arab concept, this mustn't happen. That's because there are many Arabs that do not share the same religious value. The majority of the Arab population is indeed Muslim but there are also Christians, Jews and Arabs from other religious minorities.

Image 1 The Arab World



Source: “Creative Commons Arab world location map” by Faycal.09 is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

When mentioning Islam one is referring to the religion that most Arabs practice. As per Armstrong, (2002), Islam had its origin in 610 CE with the new scripture - Quran¹¹ that was revealed to Muhammad on that year and that continued to be unveiled for over twenty years. Muhammad was not creating a religion as the Arabs already believed in one God

¹¹ “The Qur'an is the holy book for Muslims, revealed in stages to the Prophet Muhammad over 23 years. Qur'anic revelations are regarded by Muslims as the sacred word of God, intended to correct any errors in previous holy books such as the Old and New Testaments.” (BBC, 2011)

– Allah, he just returned the faith in God. The main principle of Islam at that time was “(...) to share wealth and create a society where the weak and vulnerable were treated with respect.” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 4) As time went by two branches of Islam started to be formed with the main difference being political. On one side are the Sunnis which compose the majority of Islam’s follower’s community today and on the other side the Shias. The Sunni community is composed by 90% of the population that have Islam as religion and the Shias by the remaining 10%. (BBC News, 2016) This rivalry that began centuries ago is still reflected these days and many of the extremist happenings in the Arab world are due to this form of sectarianism¹².

One knows already what is the religion that most Arabs follow but how are addressed its followers? “a muslim was a man or a woman who had made this submission of their entire being to Allah and his demand that human beings behave to one another with justice, equity and compassion.” (Armstrong, 2002, p. 5)

Therefore, one cannot generalize and assume that all Arabs are Muslims or the other way around as this is not true as per the reasoning provided before.

¹² “Sectarianism is strong support for the religious or political group you belong to, and often involves conflict with other groups.” (Collins Dictionary, n.d.)

3.2 West versus east

Having a basic understanding on the differences between what are Arabs, Islam and Muslims, one needs to consider that before studying specifically the Saudi Arabian case, there's the need to address the relationship established between the west and the east. This knowledge will portray a significant role in the cultural interpretation of the country within the Arab reality.

It was pointed out before that the whenever there's a multicultural interaction, the parties need to undress from all the preconceived ideas about the "other" and not judging him considering his/her own culture's values. This is a very complex process but if one wants the communication to be successful then this is the way to do it. Nonetheless, and particularly when studying the Arab countries' cultures, from Egypt until the Middle East, one needs to consider that besides the cultural particularities and stereotypes that are taken as accurate, there's another factor that influences the assumptions about the "other" – Orientalism. The concept was defined as:

(...) a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. (Said, 1979, p. 1)

With his definition of Orientalism, Said, (1979) meant that the European culture as it is known today was influenced by its colonies' cultures. The contrary is also true because the representations associated with the Orient are an European creation, especially considering both the British and the French empires. Thus, the gap between west and east is a creation from the west since the colonization period. "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony (...)" (Said, 1979, p. 5)

The bottom line is that one cannot generalize and assume others will behave on a certain way based on the representations created and conveyed by someone that on top of everything was in a dominating position when compared to the other party. East is not inferior to the west and if one goes back in history one can prove it as Arabs once dominated what is known today as the Arab world and also part of Europe and Asia.

Despite the dominant position of the Arabs in Europe, which is important to point out since they held it for seven centuries, they were able to live alongside Christians and Jews peacefully throughout almost this entire period. The end came in 1492 when Boabdil “handed” Granada, the last Muslim state in Europe, to the Catholic Monarchs. (Drayson, E., 2017) If there was a time where different cultures could live in a true intercultural environment why can't that be replicated today?

3.3 How Arabs do business

Before it was presented the concept of Orientalism and what it means and the conclusion was that one cannot generalize and assume everything that is portrayed about the east is true. This dissertation emphasis this part of the globe, being the focus the Saudi Arabian culture and from now on, within this chapter, this matter will be object of further exploration.

Nonetheless and before presenting the particular case, a general understanding will be provided on the communication process (business related) but concerning the Arab world as a whole. In this analysis the prejudices are being disregarded as the goal is to provide a general perspective on how Arabs do business so that later on one presents the Saudi Arabian case and point out this culture's unique traits. It is based on Dr. Jehad Al-Omari's research that this subject will be approached. Dr. Jehad Al-Omari, (2008) was the first to study the cross cultural perspective regarding the Arab culture, generally speaking. It is important to point out from the beginning that Islam, the religion of the majority of the Arab world, is embodied in every aspect of these nations' members' daily life: politics, economics, society, thus culture and ultimately the family and the individual. The degree of Islam's influence is different from country to country, at this stage it is being provided an overall perspective though.

The Arab people is considered the first "melting pot" in the world since there were "[...] many races and ethnic groups that have adopted the Arabic language as their medium of communication, and for the greatest majority Islam as the main source of religious values". (Al-Omari, 2008, pp. 74-75) Both Islam and the Arabic language are in fact considered the main sources for unity between Arabs. Islam works as a conducting wire in Arab societies.

Still according to Al-Omari, (2008), for Arabs business is personal as the importance given to it is greater than the one given by westerners. While westerners separate business from the personal life that doesn't happen with Arabs. They favor the long term relationships and friendship. Arabs as opposed to westerners are not obsessed with getting the business celebrated. It doesn't mean that they don't want it, but rather that they have their own pace to get things done. They tend to take pleasure of the initial small talk, if it's surrounding the personal life's it is even much appreciated; they do not like to lose

face, meaning to be disrespected or their authority to be questioned; and the network established is extremely important and there's even an Arabic word that describes it: Wasta¹³. Arabs tend to have a relaxed attitude towards business and they seek the consensus but one cannot be misled because they are quite competitive when it comes to business and everything can change at the last minute if a better opportunity appears. This idea that everything can change suddenly can seem quite strange to foreigners but for Arabs it is not, if it is a good deal then they must celebrate it. One is more likely to celebrate business with an Arab counterpart by becoming friends with them in preference of a signed contract. As a *polychronic* culture it is expected from Arabs to manage several aspects at the same time during a meeting, for the many participants to interact and give their opinion and for interruptions to happen quite frequently. While meetings are scheduled in advance in the West this is not mandatory for Arabs, of course it is expected that westerners indeed schedule them in advance, but Arabs have an *ad-hoc*¹⁴ approach towards this matter. It is expected when doing business with Arabs to approach the same topic more than once and this is not perceived as useless but on the contrary, as constructive since it allows space for more inputs and discussion. Ideas are reinforced and details are not missed. If someone shows up suddenly without further notice, Arabs will receive the person and cancel other commitments that may have been previously scheduled, such is their commitment towards hospitality. That happens as this is probably the value for what they are best known for. In addition, it should be expected that plans can change on spot as they are not attached to a fixed agenda. That happens because Arabs are “event driven”. (Al-Omari, 2008, p. 167)

In consonance with the author's research, what is also important to consider when doing business with Arabs is that they will always try to avoid direct confrontation and seek for consensus. If the deal is not going into this direction, then most likely they will resort to the use of intermediaries to deal with the other part in order not to lose face. Being disrespected or questioned is the worst that can be done to an Arab counterpart. Despite the fact that they seem relaxed towards business, one cannot forget that Arab is a traditional and conservative culture. As a result, hierarchy is highly respected and decisions are centralized in a few people only within the organizations. It is up to the interested part or the foreigner when doing business with Arabs to understand who the

¹³ “influential or powerful social connections that an individual has”. (Macmillan Dictionary, n.d.)

¹⁴ “made or happening only for a particular purpose or need, not planned before it happens.” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

decision maker within the organization is. And even after having uncovered who the person might be it won't be easy task to get the final outcome for the business proposal. Furthermore, Arabs will need time to discuss between one another the business proposal presented, regardless of the decisions being centered in a few people only. It is not a surprise then that during the first meeting most likely there won't be any contract signed. Also because contracts have a residual importance in this culture. The spoken word has more value.

Although categorizing people, in this case Arabs, is erroneous as one is occurring in prejudices and stereotypes, this structure helps to get basic knowledge about other cultures. Then it is up to the individual to refrain from over trusting this knowledge and observe others on their local culture, getting a more realist image.

3.4 Saudi Arabia's overview

Before advancing to Saudi Arabia's traits in terms of business, it is imperative to get to know them as a nation.

Saudi Arabia has the biggest territory in the Arabian Peninsula and it is a reference in the region due to Islam and the country's wealth. It was there that Islam was born and thus that explains being the region's most conservative country and the world's most segregated one as well. Traditionally their people was nomadic or semi nomadic until the oil discovery in the 30's. Afterwards, habits changed and people settled around what are today known as the major cities. This discovery contributed immensely to the country's economy, moving from an underdeveloped country to a developed one. Saudi Arabia's main natural resources are then oil and natural gas. The country is the biggest oil exporter in the world and their natural reserves represent 16% of the world's reserves. Hence it is natural that 90% of the country's exports are precisely from oil and its derivatives. The current population is about 28,571,770 million, however, more than 30% are immigrants. Despite this fact Non-Muslim religious manifestations are limited by the government. In addition, the Non-Muslim citizens cannot have Saudi nationality and worship locations that aren't Muslim related are not allowed. Almost 90% of the population are Sunni Muslims, the others are Shia Muslims and there are a few Protestant, Catholic, Jews, Hindu and some other minorities. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018)

Muslims from other countries need themselves to adapt to the strict social control present in Saudi Arabia. Saudi women, e.g. are the ones with more limitations in the Muslim world. (Al-Omari, 2018)

The country's government is an Absolutist Monarchy and its chief is King Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud since 2015. He is also the state's chief and the guardian of the holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina. The legal system as in all Muslim countries is based on the sharia – the Islam Law. There are no political parties in Saudi Arabia and only men are allowed to vote from the moment they turn 18 years old. Although women are not allowed to vote yet they have 30 places on the government's advisory board. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018)

Nowadays, Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud is the figure on the spotlight as he is the heir of the Saudi Crown since the line of succession was broken. He is an intriguing figure and the opinions diverge about his character.

Prince Muhammad wants the country not to depend exclusively on oil, more equality and freedom to women and more openness to the West. At a faster or slower pace the truth is that he his managing to make small changes in Saudi society, yet, it is still too early to understand the impact of these changes in the long term period as this is an ongoing process.

3.4.1 The Saudi Arabian case

Doing business in Saudi Arabia has its own specificities but the basis is the same for the entire Arab World. As a result, part of what was conveyed before in the subchapter about the Arab world according to Al-Omari, (2018) will now be revisited. In addition, as mentioned before when getting to know the Arab culture, one needs to consider that in order to truly get to know a culture one needs to experience it and be emerged in it for a period of time, otherwise the knowledge acquired beforehand will be based on categorizations. The amount of time that is needed for an individual to be intrinsically connected with a culture will not be object of study in this dissertation, but the idea that there's indeed this need is important to retain in order to understand deeply their people and consequently their background. As a result, before the Saudi Arabian particular case is presented please consider that the information being provided is the result of a conceptualization made about Saudis, meaning it has value, but cannot be the sole source being trusted as one might occur being base on prejudices and because cultures do change and there are always exceptions to the rule.

The particular case of Saudi Arabia in terms of business is being considered contemplating Warburton (2017) knowledge. First it is important to point out the intricate relationship between religion and every aspect of a Muslim nation's society and that includes business. If a business contract is celebrated it is thanks to God willingness and if it doesn't happen it was because it wasn't meant to be. All Muslims, including Saudis use frequently the expression "In Sha Allah" that means precisely if God wills. In addition, during a meeting with Saudis one should not find strange the resource to religious expressions.

Businesses in Saudi Arabia are usually held by families or at least at the core there is a family that is also at the top of the hierarchy. As a result, Nepotism¹⁵ is accepted in the country and promoted inclusively. This fact is also related with Islam since it conveys the importance of family and tradition.

Even though the decision maker can be at the top of the hierarchy it is wiser not to underestimate the people in other stages of the chain since they can have a strong

¹⁵ "the act of using your power or influence to get good jobs or unfair advantages for members of your own family". (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

relationship with the ones on the levels above. With such a strong hierarchy the management style in Saudi Arabia is from top to bottom. The decisions are made at the top and are then transmitted to the lower levels.

When in a meeting with Saudis, as with many countries from the Arab world, one cannot be strange if many people are participating in it and if a certain point starts feeling a bit lost and left aside as this is part of the process especially if one is a westerner. That happens because the Arab counterparts need to give attention to all the participants. Eventually, they will get back to the person that was supposed to meet them in the first place. It is expected from them to speak loudly during the meetings but this doesn't mean they are arguing with each other, but instead this shows they are interested in the matter and conveys honesty. Usually, they do not have more than one or two meetings per day as that would be too optimistic. Saudis do need time to get to know the person or team they are meeting with. In fact, several meetings can be held with only this specific goal before moving to business. Saudis value relationships and one needs to bear that in mind.

Small talk is much appreciated by Saudis in order to truly get to know the business partner they are meeting with and the subjects can be quite personal, so it's better to be prepared in advance especially if the matter is religion. Marital status and living standards can be subjects approached as well.

Strong eye contact is appreciated in Saudi Arabia and the proximity between intermediates can seem odd to foreigners, especially those from *monochronic* cultures, as they tend to stand pretty close.

In terms of gifting a Saudi counterpart, one can do it but it is not mandatory. It does help to establish a relationship though. Saudis won't open it immediately in front of the giver. If a gift is offered, it is important to bear in mind Islam, as there are certain goods that cannot be considered, at least if the goal is to be successful, e.g. mainly alcohol and pork and its derivatives.

In terms of dress code if a foreigner is meeting a Saudi partner and if a man the advice is to wear a suit and tie, conservative but fashionable. It can be perceived as offensive if foreign men wear the traditional Saudi clothing. As for women, they should wear suits as well, but with skirts and not pants. The skirts must have a length that covers the knee and ideally it should go up to the ankle. It would be well seen if women wear a headscarf as

well. The dress code is a very important matter in Saudi Arabia and this is monitored by the religious police – Matawain.

The women's role in Saudi Arabia is much reduced and in business it almost doesn't exist. As a result, if the team that is meeting a Saudi counterpart includes women, or if she is the decision maker it will be difficult to get the business settled. The first obstacle will be entering the country as a visa is needed. If it is granted, then they need to be conservative and play a more passive role.

Since Saudis need to establish a relationship before actually proceed to the business they enjoy spending quality time with their counterparts. Traditionally this would happen at the host's house, but nowadays it is common to happen in restaurants. Nevertheless, this quality time where entertainment is the motto can have two meanings, either that the relationship is on the good track to make business or the completely opposite. One needs be aware of the expectations created in order not to defraud them.

3.5 The fashion concept in Saudi Arabia

“I would want the fashion industry to know that it isn’t just burkas and black hijabs, which have been stereotypically linked to Muslim women. I would want them to look at the bigger picture and realise that, just like non-Muslim women, Islam encourages us to look good, to make an effort [...] and to look after our appearance.” (Janmohamed, 2016, pp. 145-146)

The general idea the world has about the Middle East in terms of fashion, including Saudi Arabia, is that all citizens wear the traditional clothing: men, women and children. It is perceived as a mandatory act due to the fact that they are Muslims (this matter will be further analyzed in the last chapter when taking conclusions from the empirical study). Focusing in Saudi Arabia, the traditional dress code is indeed worn by the majority of the population (the nationals). Nevertheless, they do not wear the traditional clothing exclusively, neither it is mandatory to wear it. The reasons that lead Saudis to wear it are other as it will be perceived in the next chapter.

The case of Saudi women is more flagrant as all over the media one is able to see women covered with black clothing, some of them with just the eyes uncovered. As for men, they also wear the traditional clothing but the attention is lesser when compared to women. With these features in consideration one can conclude that Saudi Arabia is characterized by the *Modest* and *Islamic fashion* styles. *Modest fashion* refers to: “(...) looking stylish while remaining relatively covered. For many, modest fashion is a personal choice that simply means wearing more traditional styles—longer hemlines or higher collars, for example.” (Weinswig, D., 2017) *Islamic fashion*, as the term itself conveys has to do with the traditional Muslim clothes that vary from country to country. This is a controversial theme though, as many point out that traditional clothing cannot follow fashion trends but the truth is if Islamic clothing maintains its true essence but still adds some fashionable details, then it gets influenced from the worldwide fashion industry.

Clothes are a blessings and a favor from Allah (may He be glorified and exalted). With them we cover what needs to be covered and it protects us from cold or hot weather. So it is a blessing of Allah (may He be glorified and exalted). Imagine our lives without clothes. And Islam does not reject people wearing beautiful clothes. It is a misconception. (Alhakeem, S. A., 2014)

And Islam does not condemn the beauty, what it does condemn and according to Sheikh Assim Alhakeem, (2014), is the blindly search for fashion trends, thus overshadowing their Muslim identity.

In reality, both *Modest* and *Islamic fashion* concepts are linked on a certain way as the main goal for both is modesty, thus having less body parts uncovered and also no revealing the overall body shape. There's no precise information on the *Modest fashion* origin but most likely it is the result of a new branch from the *Islamic fashion*. Reasonably, one would think the *Modest fashion* success would be expected to result from the markets where the majority of its people follows Islam. Though, surprisingly and taking the example of the Israeli brand ModLi “an online marketplace for modest, modern clothing for women”, in 2017, 90% of the brand's sales were actually from the US market only. (Weinswig, D., 2017) *Modest fashion* is thus another fashion style, as any other that one may be familiar with and not exclusively linked with religious values. It may derive from those values, especially the one concerning modesty, but the tendency, as per the results conveyed above, is for this fashion style to spread to other markets regardless of their religious background. Will east influence west changing its fashion habits?

3.5.1 The dress code for Saudi nationals

As a Muslim country, Saudi Arabia has a traditional dress code and even though it may seem similar to other Muslim countries, there are particularities. Generally, women tend to dress the black abaya on top of their normal clothes, which can follow the western fashion style, and the outfit is completed by the use of the hijab, leaving the face uncovered or with the niqab, showing only the eyes. The two pieces that compose the outer outfit of Saudi women are mandatory when they are in public. Although the Sharia Law does not specify the two pieces in question, it does mention that they should dress up modestly but so do men. Nevertheless, and most likely due to Wahhabism they have been enforced to do it. There are contradictory opinions in regards to the use of the abaya, some in favor and some against as per (BBC News, 2018). Though, and according to the same source, back in 2016 a woman was imprisoned for removing the abaya in public. One mustn't forget that Saudi Arabia is one of the fewest countries in the world that has a religious police - Matawain. There are opinions however, that point out today's reality will change soon, as per the words of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to CBS News, conveyed by the Telegraph, (2018):

The laws are very clear and stipulated in the laws of sharia: that women wear decent, respectful clothing, like men," the prince said. "This, however, does not particularly specify a black abaya or a black head cover. The decision is entirely left for women to decide what type of decent and respectful attire she chooses to wear. (Sanchez, R., 2018)

If the ruler himself portrays such a strong message it is most likely to produce effects in the country in the near future, as the same happened with the end of the ban that didn't allow women to drive or to attend sports' events in the stadiums. The following years will narrate the story.

As for the men, despite the fact that they need to dress modestly as well, it is not mandatory for them to wear the thobe or at least it wasn't. Male students from four Saudi universities are now required to wear the Saudi traditional dress code. Surprisingly, there were no negative reactions on the students' side, in reality they were happy and proud to wear the thobe and the ghutra. (Saudi Gazette, 2018)

Image 2 Saudi women



Source: “Creative Commons Saudi women walk inside the Faysalia shopping centre in Riyadh” by Fayez Nureldine is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Image 3 Saudi women fully veiled



Source: “Creative Commons Gold and Silver Jewelry in Downtown Jeddah” by Nouf Kinani is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Image 4 Saudi man wearing the traditional clothing



Source: Arabian man with arms crossed by michaeljung on Adobe Stock

Image 5 Saudi couple wearing the traditional clothing



Source: Arabian couple posing by Ramzi on Adobe Stock

Image 6 Child in Dammam, Saudi Arabia



Source: Photo by Mohammed Hassan on Unsplash

Considering the fact that both women and men in Saudi Arabia wear or might wear the traditional dress code, respectively, one can question oneself what they wear underneath it. Concerning women and according to Laura, (2010), what they wear underneath the abaya will depend on several factors, though the most important should be the cultural background. If the woman is more conservative and religious oriented, even having the abaya on top of her clothes she will choose clothes with full length, covering the full body, for instance, dresses. In addition, she can even cover the hands with gloves and wear the niqab, leaving only the eyes uncovered. Considering a more liberal woman, she will choose fashion items, most likely following the same trends as western cultures do. They may wear jeans, tops and high heels underneath the abaya. On top of it, accessories will catch the attention: jewelry, sunglasses and bags. If one is considering Saudi women from high society and the Royal family, then one should consider that the clothes underneath the abaya will be from famous international designers, the same ones admired in the west. The same happens with accessories, jewelry and shoes. One should not be misled and think they do not have the chance to display their outfit, they actually do in women only events. In addition, the accessories play an important role as depending on how trendy they are it can help unveiling the social status of the woman wearing it.

As for the men, and since the thobe, despite being full length as well, fits completely different from the abaya, it narrows down the options when it comes to choose what to wear underneath it. Therefore, and according to Life in Saudi Arabia, (2014), men wear three main pieces, the underwear, a shirt and pants. The color choice must be white as throughout the year thobe is also white, except in winter where darker colors might be worn. If men were to choose different colors, other than white, for the pieces underneath the thobe, since its fabric is thin, they would be visible through the thobe.

Saudi men contrary to women are not obligated to wear the thobe, only in some contexts as per the news portrayed before, thus they can wear western clothing, shoes and accessories. As in the women's case the type of fabric and brands chosen can convey what's their social status. Contrary to women they can display their clothing almost freely.

3.5.2 The dress code for non-Saudis

According to Foster, (2002), whenever westerns are in Saudi Arabia regardless of the reason that led them there or even the expatriates that live there already, they shouldn't by any means wear the traditional Saudi clothing. Doing it would be occurring into a severe offense. Thus, westerners are required to dress up conservatively, both men and women. Slim fit clothes are not appropriate, not only, because they reveal the bodies' shape, but also due to weather conditions it will be more comfortable if looser pieces are selected. The entire body needs to be covered and this is not only applicable to women but to men as well. It is important then to make sure clothes go up to the neck and the wrists and until the ankles. In addition, wearing T-shirts and sneakers is only appropriate to play sports or at home. If these rules are not followed, then westerners will probably hear how to dress appropriately from the Matawain. In terms of colors, it is better to go with the neutrals since traditional Saudi clothing is black and white. Women should consider that makeup is permitted but it shouldn't be too strong. Accessories can also be worn, but in men's case gold usage is not well seen as it is reserved for women. What westerners can put more effort in is when choosing the perfume, as Saudis do like good aromas.

Chapter IV – Empirical Study

4.1 Interview Analysis

This chapter is being dedicated to the empirical study itself, meaning according to the knowledge and experience acquired and the research done a practical approach was taken in place in order to answer the thesis' main question – *Demystifying Saudi Arabia: Is Western Fashion changing Middle East's most segregated country? How to approach it in business terms?*

Before proceeding to the analysis of the interviews itself it is mandatory to mention the approach being used as reference. There are many types of interview analysis as there are authors, each one having a specific or derivative approach. For this particular study the method proposed by Laurence Bardin was the chosen one.

Bardin mentions the non-directive interviews and the semi directive as the traditional styles to elaborate an interview. The directness and depth of the message being conveyed is what dictates if the interview follows one style or the other. The author points out that the content analysis of an interview is a delicate process that relies heavily on the subjectivity. (Bardin, 2011, p. 93) And this happens because the interviewee will answer all the questions based on his/her reasoning and one's reasoning is nothing less than the sum of the assumptions, representations, values, beliefs and attitudes one has towards something. The interviewee can try and undress of all the pre-owned knowledge and representations and try to be the most genuine possible but it is part of the human nature not being able to do it with 100% accuracy. The goal can be indeed to be able to do it without prejudice but even if it is something that is within the inner layers of the human being as emotions are, it will restrain the feedback provided. The interviewer needs to be aware of this when analyzing the content otherwise he/she might occur into error.

The major difficulty according to Bardin when analyzing the interviews' content is precisely connected with the singularity of the human being. On one hand the interviewer knows that he/she is requesting feedback to an individual but that feedback is supposed to be representative of the society. There's a paradox here – singularity versus the group. The author's solution to overcome this obstacle is by having two levels of analysis: "horizontal" and "vertical". (Bardin, 2011, p. 95) When Bardin refers to the "horizontal analysis" it is supposed to be understood the traditional method in which the content analysis is based in finding the common elements in the several interviews and aggregate

them into typologies, categories and main themes. This analysis is still a descriptive one and cannot be considered interpretative as the task here is treating the data in order to facilitate further study. If the study would end when finishing the “horizontal analysis” then it would be incomplete. The work continues with the “vertical analysis” which is the interpretative one. Part of the richness when analyzing an interview’s content is precisely the context surrounding the message being conveyed and the signification produced by the interviewee.

The “horizontal analysis” starts by each interview being scrutinized separately without pre conceived ideas and representations. Even though it is useful to bear in mind what the interviewer learns from each interview’s feedback but without letting it influence the following analysis. This first stage was named by Bardin as the “structural deciphering”. The second stage of the content analysis is called “thematic transversality” and it presupposes that each interview has a coherent reasoning behind it even though the interview supposedly reflects a spontaneous message. There’s a structure and the interviewer needs to be sensitive enough to recognize it. Related to the “thematic transversality” is the “transversal syntactic analysis” by which the interviewer needs to deconstruct the reasoning behind the discourse, meaning to be able to point out the main themes and identify its usage throughout the interview even if they are not clearly expressed but rather implied. (Bardin, 2011, pp. 95-97)

The “vertical analysis” will complement the horizontal one as each interview will be thoroughly examined in separate and interpreted. At this stage the interviewer needs to put him/herself into the interviewee’s “shoes”. (Bardin, 2011, p. 96) The interviewer will deduct what the interviewee intended to express with his/her answers, considering both the theme and the context.

4.2 Method, codification and inference

Until now it was described the traditional content analysis technique – categorical and thematic. From this point onwards the content analysis' method and codification developed by Bardin will be presented in order to understand how the analysis will actually be held.

The author defines that the content analysis' method is based in three main tasks: the pre analysis, the material's exploration and the results' treatment, inference and interpretation. The pre analysis comprises: the choice of documents to be analyzed, the formulation of hypothesis and objectives and the indicators that will ground the final interpretation. (Bardin, 2011, p. 124) This stage is supposed to structure the work being initiated, choosing the documents being analyzed, understanding what is the appropriate technique to be used considering the data available and formulate the first hypothesis that will guide the analysis itself.

The pre analysis starts with an initial reading of the documents being object of study with no pre conceived ideas or hypothesis established. Afterwards the documents being examined are selected and depending on the study a *corpus* may be needed to be defined. "The *corpus* is the set of documents taken into account to be submitted to the analytical procedures." (Bardin, 2011, p. 126) And there are some rules that the corpus needs to comply with: the *exhaustion rule*, the *representativeness rule*, the *homogeneity rule* and the *relevance rule*. The first has to do with the amount of materials that can be part of the *corpus*, as there is no reason that can justify some element being left aside – *non selectiveness rule*. The second is related with the sampling and in order for a sampling to be used it needs to represent the whole. Concerning the *homogeneity rule* it implies that the documents gathered don't present singularities. They must obey to the same criteria otherwise it will be difficult to proceed with the analysis if the goal is to have standardized answers. Finally, the *relevance rule* establishes that the documents selected are the most relevant ones considering the analysis being held. After the initial reading and the *corpus*' selection it is time to formulate the hypothesis and the objectives. Formulating the hypothesis is expressing the main question it is expected the analysis results' to answer to. It is a question that can only be answered once the content analysis is finished. Nevertheless, and according to P. Henry and S. Moscovici through Bardin, formulating the hypothesis doesn't necessarily needs to happen at the pre analysis stage. In fact they

point out two types of procedures in regards to this: *exploratory* and *closed*. The *closed* ones allow the hypothesis testing, while the *exploratory* ones presuppose a deductive process and the construction of new hypothesis as the analysis takes place. Subsequently there's the need to set up the *indexes* and *indicators*. The *indexes* will be the elements allowing the categorization in the content analysis. Considering the hypothesis formulated, if that's the case, the indexes will actually be the indicators. The indexes can be words, themes, interjections... The final stage under the pre analysis phase is the *material's preparation*. This stage is dependent on the type of analysis being made. For instance, when considering interviews in a different form other than written text they will need to be transcribed and then printed. Before printing them it is better to take in consideration that the sheets need to have accentuated margins in order to write down the code. (Bardin, 2011, pp. 126-131)

The content analysis method's second task is the material's exploration. This phase, probably the longest one is basically the application of the decisions made on the pre analysis stage. If nothing changed then it will be a straightforward yet lengthy process. (Bardin, 2011, p. 131)

The last stage has to do with the results' treatment, inference and interpretation. The analyzed data is then organized to produce meaning. If the results are strong enough then inferences and interpretations can be raised considering the hypothesis established in the first place. In this stage tables, diagrams and graphs can be designed in order to organize the results so they can be interpreted on a clearer manner. If possible and to increase their accuracy the results can even be tested statistically. (Bardin, 2011, p. 131)

Before initiating a content analysis there's the need of coding the information. What does this mean? It means that in order to be able to take precise interpretations and conclusions out of the analysis it is not possible to do it if the spectrum of objects being analyzed is heterogeneous. A comparison between data when analyzing interviews e.g. would not be viable. In order to tackle this difficulty Bardin approached the codification stage. The codification implies the transformation of the information collected (text). The text can be divided into units – “cut out”; consider the amount of times a certain word or expression is mentioned – “enumeration”; and the categories' definition – “aggregation”. These three stages' fulfillment is indicated for quantitative analysis mainly as in the case of a qualitative analysis not all of them might be needed. (Bardin, 2011, p. 133)

Holsti defines clearly the codification process:

“Coding is the process by which raw data is systematically transformed and aggregated into units, which allow an accurate description of the relevant characteristics of the content.” (Holsti, 1969)

In order to define which units will be used to analyze the content, according to Bardin one must consider the ultimate goal of the study and the particular characteristics of the material. This unit is called register unit and it will be the one that will allow the categorization. It can be a word, a theme, a referent, a character, a happening or a document. (Bardin, 2011, p. 134 and 135) Since the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the approach on how the analysis this study implies is going to be developed and not an extensive explanation about the content analysis method developed by Bardin, these register units won't be further developed. Only the register unit suitable for this study will be object of further explanation – the theme.

According to d'Unrug through Bardin, the theme is:

(...) a unit of complex meaning, of variable length; its validity is not of linguistic order, but rather of psychological order: both an affirmation and an allusion may constitute a theme; conversely, a theme can be developed in several statements (or propositions). In short, any fragment can refer (and usually refers) to various themes... (d'Unrug, 1974)

Unveiling the theme in a content analysis is a challenging task as depending on the *corpus* one may be facing one theme or many. Identifying them though is the basis for the analysis to be started. As per Bardin, the theme is usually the basis of the study whenever the *corpus* is an interview, a survey, group meetings, mass communications, etc. In these cases the study focuses on open answers, motivations, attitudes, values, opinions, trends, among others. (Bardin, 2011, p. 135)

In the codification stage besides the register unit, the context unit needs to be considered. This unit facilitates the understanding of the register unit and usually its dimension is actually bigger. Basically, the context unit provides the background surrounding the register unit and should be defined considering its cost and relevance. (Bardin, 2011, p. 137)

Still within the codification stage Bardin points out the difference between register unit and enumeration. The first one refers to what is counted while the latter one has to do with the way the counting is done. The enumeration will depend on the presence, frequency, intensity, direction, order and co-occurrence of the register units. (Bardin, 2011, pp. 138-142) The enumeration won't be further developed as the current study will be object of a qualitative analysis rather than a quantitative one where the method would be more appropriate.

Another aspect that Bardin mentions as being part of the codification stage, although it is not mandatory, has to do with the categorization of the register units into different classes according to certain criteria. (Bardin, 2011, p. 147) In this study the categories will be precisely the register units due to the *corpus*, thus this stage will be skipped even though it is important to note that depending on the study it may be necessary to categorize the register units.

In terms of inference the content analysis should be focused on the message being conveyed as this is the basis of the analysis and when doing so one must consider the signifier and the signified¹⁶. Nevertheless, both the sender and the receptor can also be object of analysis as the message can convey complementary and essential details about these two. The channel used to convey the message needs to be object of study as well. There are then four inference centers: message, channel, sender and receptor and since the inferences can be as diverse as the centers are one needs to analyze them case by case. (Bardin, 2011, pp. 165-168)

¹⁶ The concepts of signified and signifier were proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure when explaining the "linguistic sign" which is precisely defined by being the result of the connection between a concept (signified) and its corresponding sound-image (signifier). "The sound-image is par excellence the natural representation of the word as a fact of potential language, outside any actual use of it in speaking." (Saussure, 1959, p. 66)

4.3 Practical study

This subchapter will present the practical study that was held and to which Bardin's approach was applied since the very first stage – pre analysis, until the results' treatment and interpretation.

Considering the study's object – to verify if western fashion is changing Middle East's most segregated country and how to approach this market in business terms, a thematic and categorical content analysis is being made. At this point an important note needs to be added which is: this analysis is going to be hybrid. What does it mean? It means that it will follow the content analysis' rules considering the technique chosen but due to its particular nature some deviations are expected to happen.

4.3.1 Pre-analysis and material's exploration

4.3.1.1 Corpus

The method chosen to support the study was by interviewing selected personalities that could contribute with a realistic and close view of the matter in question. Thus, three people were selected, not randomly but considering their knowledge, experience and professional background.

The first interviewee, from now on referred to as interviewee X due to the fact that he decided not to have his identity revealed was selected especially concerning his professional background and his upbringing abroad. He's an Arab man, an Emirati national that went abroad to pursue his university level studies and that returned later on to the country where he applied the knowledge acquired.

When studying, he focused in the exact sciences such as mathematics and economics and also in business management. Having started to work mainly for international companies that had business activities in the Middle East, the companies' activity spectrum is quite different in the first years when analyzing his profile but then there's a pattern as he started to focus on luxury retail. Today he is the Managing Director for an international fashion related company for the Middle Eastern Market.

He was chosen to be interviewed as he was not only an Emirati, thus having knowledge on the Middle Eastern culture but also because he contacted with the international reality and worked for international companies. In addition, he has deep knowledge about the

fashion industry in this region of the globe. And despite not having been born in Saudi Arabia, he was raised and lives nowadays in a neighbour country. Therefore, he is aware of the Saudi reality as one does about one's neighbour, regardless of the country being considered.

The second interviewee is also a male and in this case his identity can be disclosed. In fact his name was pointed out in a previous chapter already. He is Dr. Jehad Al-Omari: Cross-Cultural Management Consultant.

Dr. Jehad Al-Omari is an Arab born in the Middle East, but as the case of the interviewee X he was not born in Saudi Arabia either. Besides being a writer whose work was considered as an important contribute to this study, he is currently a trainer for Westerners doing business with Arabs and also in cross cultural encounters. In addition, he is a lecturer and consultant in these subjects and has been doing that for the past 30 years. (Al-Omari, *Understanding the Arab Culture: A practical cross-cultural guide to working in the Arab world*, 2008, p. xiii)

He was selected to be interviewed especially due to his technical knowledge about Arabs and how to approach them. His contribute gives another perspective about the Saudis and can also complement what has been researched about the country's culture. His feedback can corroborate the findings or refute them.

The third interviewee is also a male but oppositely to the previous two he is a westerner born in Portugal. Although, a woman's feedback would enrich the study as most likely the feedback would be somehow different, due to agenda's reasons it was not possible to include it.

Rui Amaral is the name of the interviewee and currently he is the Sales Director and Marketing Manager of a luxury furniture company. The path that led him to the position where he stands today started with his academic background. Rui has a Bachelor degree in Management and a Postgraduate Degree in Marketing and Strategic Management. His professional background has started in the banking industry but soon after he went on to a new challenge as Client and Press Relations of a furniture group, the adventure in the luxury segment had its start. After a few years in the company he went on and moved to another company within the luxury segment and this is the company where he currently works. (Amaral)

The reason that explains Rui's being proposed to be part of the study is because of his professional background. When he started working in the luxury furniture industry he had the chance to travel to other countries in order to find local partners and establish business with them. He actually had the chance to visit several countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia. It is then reasonable to assume that his feedback can greatly contribute to answer the study main question and to provide further details that as a westerner the other two interviews wouldn't be able to provide. And although the industry he is working on is not fashion related his contribute is a plus to this dissertation especially considering the approach to the Saudi market. Being the only interviewee non Middle Eastern national also adds value to his feedback. A Westerner's view about "the other".

At a first glance the three backgrounds of the interviewees can be perceived as so different that would make the comparison between feedbacks almost impossible but in reality it's not and this will be perceivable later on.

The main goal of the interviews which is to answer the thesis' question was common to the three of the interviewees but there was also a specific and different goal with each interview. This was a premeditated decision and explains why it was mentioned previously the hybrid nature of the analysis. This decision was made because it would be improbable not to say almost impossible to find three people with the exact same background (social, economic and cultural) and also due to the particular contribute that each interviewee could provide, enriching the study on different aspects.

The particular objective of interviewing interviewee X was to get access to the representations of a Middle Eastern national about Saudi Arabia on one side and on the other, to understand the fashion industry development in the Middle East with a particular focus in Saudi Arabia and its consequences in today's reality and in the next few years. For Dr. Al-Omari the particular goal was completely different - to gather more data in regards to the Saudi Arabian culture from a Middle Eastern national that studies the cross cultural phenomenon and to get the country's "real picture". Lastly, Rui's interview goal was to have a foreigner's perspective on the region's cultural traits and barriers when interacting with its people on a business perspective and also to unveil the "picture" he retained about Saudi's social and economic reality.

To make the interviews in person would result in a more interesting work, meaning the analysis of the context in which the interview would be done would allow to retrieve more

truth from the message being conveyed. One would be able to cross the verbal communication with the non-verbal and draw conclusions. In addition, the message conveyed by the interviewees would be more genuine as they wouldn't be able to second guess what they were about to say. It would be something immediate and enriched with connotations. The conclusions could be actually ambiguous if the verbal and non-verbal communication conveyed different messages. A similar scenario would happen if the interviews were to be made by phone call. The non-verbal language couldn't be considered but the fluidity of the interview and thus the discourse would bring more content to be analyzed, certainly adding value to message's interpretation.

Although, it would have been interesting to do the interviews live or by phone call, especially considering the theme of this study and the connection to the non-verbal communication there were many constraints that didn't allow that option to be considered. Instead, an alternative way needed to be found and the fastest and most efficient channel considering both the interviewer and the interviewee was the email. This happens not only due to the geographical distance between all the parties but also considering their timetables. The email was then the channel chosen for two of the interviews while LinkedIn was the channel used for the other one just as a matter of convenience and straightforwardness and not due to any particularity of the network itself.

Through the email and LinkedIn it was expected that only written communication would be conveyed. Thus, the same standard was maintained for the three interviews. First and due to the reasons presented above for the choice of the interviewees, their background was considered and the interviews were then formulated. Each interview approaches different matters despite containing some common questions that were thought as mandatory in order to draw conclusions considering the study's main question. The structure of the interviews itself follows the interviewer's logic and start with a general feedback, narrowing it afterwards and broadening it once again towards the end. This happens as at the beginning of the interview the goal is to introduce the theme and get a general feedback. As the questions follow one after the other they become more direct and demanding a narrower answer. This is the stage where the questions differ the most among the interviews because they consider the backgrounds' particularities of each of the interviewees. Towards the end of the interviews the scope of the questions broadens again in order to have a general perspective about what the future holds – this aspect will be further developed when interpreting the results.

The interviews were thought to be under the semi directive typology and that happens because the three of them have a structure that cannot be altered; the structure was not randomly selected, there's a reasoning behind it that was explained before; and when facing each question put the interviewees have total freedom to answer it as the answers are not restricted to "yes" or "no".

In terms of timing for the interviews to be finished, there was no particular event they were depending on to be answered. As a result, the only considerations taken were the deadline for the study to be finished and the interviewees' availability.

Interview A Script

Interview with Interviewee X - Managing Director for the Middle East

1. The dress code is a very important feature both as an identity element and as a cultural one worldwide. The Middle East is no exception, nevertheless and according to your personal and professional background do you think it has the same importance in all the region's countries or it varies?
2. Do you think nationals wear the thobe and the abaya e.g. out of respect for the religion's principles or because it is something intrinsically embodied in the culture?
3. Would you point out Saudi Arabia as the region's most conservative country in terms of dress code? If so, why do you think that happens?
4. For a foreigner doing business with a Middle Eastern country do you think the dress code is something to which a certain degree of importance should be given or do you feel it is something overrated?
5. When a Middle Eastern national goes abroad for business related purposes, the dress code is considered and adapted to the culture receiving him/her or will he/she bears in mind their country's dress code only?
6. Considering your upbringing abroad, when coming back to the Middle East do you realize it is now becoming closer to the west in what fashion is concerned?
7. Would you say that globalization changed how fashion is perceived in the Middle East? If so, in what sense?

8. What about the internet, in your perspective did it bring significant changes in the fashion industry particularly in this part of the globe? Has it changed consumer habits? Are people feeling reluctant or embracing this change?
9. If you do agree that globalization and the internet brought changes to the industry, do you consider these changes will impact society's behavior in the long term period? Will this contribute to reduce the clash between west and east, culturally speaking?
10. Do you acknowledge the "Modest Fashion" concept? How is it being perceived by Middle East's nationals?
11. The fact that international well-known brands are now creating specific clothing lines considering the specific needs of the Middle Eastern market, will it bring awareness worldwide for the particularities of the dress code in this region, thus creating eventually a global trend and putting west and east closer or is it highlighting even more the differences between both sides?
12. How do you foresee the fashion industry development in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia in the next five years?

Interview B Script

Interview with Dr. Jehad Al-Omari - Cross-Cultural Management Consultant

1. Do you consider Saudi Arabia as the most segregated country in the Arab world? If so, why?
2. Would you point out Islam as the main factor contributing to the conservatism that Saudi Arabia is known for? Would that be related to the fact that Islam was born there?
3. As a Middle Eastern national, what are the main representations you think the region's countries/cultures have towards Saudi Arabia?
4. What are the main cultural differences that you can point out when considering the Arab world in general and comparing with the particular case of Saudi Arabia?
5. As a Cross Cultural Management Consultant would you consider that it is easy to do Business with a Saudi counterpart? Is it the same for Arabs and non-Arabs?
6. In terms of dress code and both for men and women do you think Saudi Arabia has stricter rules when compared to other Muslim countries?

7. For a foreigner doing business with Saudi Arabia do you think the dress code is something to which a certain degree of importance should be given or do you feel it is something overrated?
8. When a Saudi goes abroad for business related purposes, the dress code is considered and adapted to the culture receiving him/her or will he/she bears in mind their country's dress code only?
9. Would you say the proximity to the Western world is changing the Middle Eastern countries? What about Saudi Arabia in particular?
10. Would you say that globalization and the internet changed how fashion is perceived in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia? If so, do you foresee the local dress code to suffer some changes?
11. Is there a huge gap between the social classes in Saudi Arabia? Are there regional differences also?
12. Considering the dress code itself, one can reckon a person's background just by the way he/she dresses up like? What are the social implications?

Interview C Script

Interview with Rui Amaral - Sales Director and Marketing Manager

1. Do you consider Saudi Arabia as the most segregated country you have visited in the Middle East? Regardless, if yes or no, can you please further explain?
2. Did you prepare yourself in advance before going on a business trip to Saudi Arabia? What cultural aspect surprised you the most and why?
3. How would you describe the way of doing business with Saudis? Do you consider it is something relatively easy for a westerner to do or there are many constraints in fact?
4. How was the dress code used by the Saudi counterparts? Were they using the traditional dress code or a western one? Regardless if the traditional or a western one what message do you think they were trying to convey?
5. Can you describe the business environment? Did you meet with the decision makers or there was many people in the room and you needed to interact with all of them? Was there any woman attending the meetings?
6. Overall, did you feel the society's conservatism? Mainly where?
7. Did you experience a cultural shock or was it a smooth experience?

8. Would you say that Islam is present in every aspect of the Saudi society at least according to what you have experienced?
9. Since you have visited two cities, Riyadh and Jeddah, did you find regional differences? What about people's dress code, was it similar?
10. Did you experience the globalization's effect in the country? Is Saudi Arabia becoming closer to the west or there's still a long way to go through?
11. If you were asked to describe the Saudis what would you point out as being the main representations?
12. How do you forecast the country's developments in the next 5 years considering all the changes already implemented since Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman is ruling?

4.3.1.2 Main Hypothesis

The study's main hypothesis and thus reflected on the interviews is answering the following question: *Demystifying Saudi Arabia: Is Western Fashion changing Middle East's most segregated country? How to approach it in business terms?* Even though it is the main hypothesis, this question was not put in the interviews directly but rather it is expected that the answers provided help replying to it. In addition, this hypothesis can be defined as a closed one as per Holsti, (1969) since with the analysis running it is not expected to change but rather to be tested.

4.3.1.3 Particular hypothesis

As mentioned before it is expected that each interviewee provides feedback on specific matters and these are considered the particular hypothesis.

For interviewee X the particular hypothesis were: *what are the main representations of a Middle Eastern national about Saudi Arabia and how he perceived the fashion industry development particularly in Saudi Arabia in the next few years.* For Dr. Al-Omari the particular hypothesis were on one side *to describe Saudi Arabia's culture* considering his personal and professional background and on the other side *to provide information on the country's "real picture"*. To conclude, for Rui the particular hypothesis were: *to identify the main cultural traits and barriers when interacting with Saudis on a business perspective and also to provide information on the country's "picture" both socially and*

economically. The latter one must not be comprehended as being the same particular hypothesis as one of Dr. Al-Omari's. Even though they might look the same they are not, in terms of dimensions Dr. Al-Omari's has a wider scope while Rui has just two. Naturally the feedback provided will be different as one is Arab and the other is a Westerner.

4.3.2 Objective

Since there are two types of hypothesis it would be natural to think that there would be different objectives as well. That's not true though. Although, there's a main hypothesis and some particular ones the only goal is to test the main hypothesis, corroborating or refuting it. Please note that the particular hypothesis will help validating or not the main one. Without the main hypothesis the particular ones wouldn't exist. In reality they are extensions of the main question.

4.3.3 Indexes and indicators

The correspondents to the indexes and indicators in the current study are the common themes to all the three interviews. These are the only text elements that allow categorization.

4.3.4 Coding

Since the *corpus* of the analysis is composed by three interviews substantially different from one another, answering on one side to the main hypothesis and on the other side to particular hypothesis, one needs to find common ground in order to draw conclusions. Again, this was something premeditated which means even though the interviews are different, they touch common matters and some of the questions are actually the same to the three of them. The "register unit" as per Bardin will be the theme. In this particular case several themes are being contemplated. In the "horizontal analysis" only the common themes to the three interviews are being considered while the others will be object of exploration on the "vertical analysis".

4.4 Results' Treatment
4.4.1 Horizontal Analysis

After having analyzed the three interviews the interviewer found that there were seven common themes: dress code, conservatism, west versus east, fashion, internet and globalization, religion and country's representations.

In order to better understand the position of each interviewee on each theme and to be able to compare them easily, after having identified the main themes the interviewer scrutinized each interview further and highlighted all the mentions to the themes, either direct mentions or embodied. The data gathered is being presented in the tables below, comprising each theme and the three feedbacks.

Please note that Interviewee I is in reality Interviewee X, Interviewee II is Dr. Al-Omari and Interviewee III is Rui Amaral.

Table 1 Main Themes: Dress Code

Dress Code

<i>Interviewee I</i>	The GCC countries have their traditional dress code but tend to wear western clothing as well; The abaya and the thobe are worn especially as a cultural trait, there's no linkage to religion in general, although women's coverage might be related with a religious movement – Wahhabism. Foreigners are free to wear what they desire as long as respecting the country's values; "When travelling GCC nationals will adapt to western clothing".
<i>Interviewee II</i>	Points out Saudi Arabia as being the most conservative country in the Middle East in terms of dress code, even considering children and teenagers; Nevertheless, in private spaces they can wear western clothing; The rules are stricter for women; When going abroad the choice of dress code is ultimately a personal one, they might choose western clothing or the traditional one; There are no rules; A person's background can be unfolded by the way a person dresses up like.

<i>Interviewee III</i>	When in Saudi Arabia the nationals encountered were wearing the traditional dress code, both men and women; The expatriates were wearing western clothing; It was uncomfortable seeing only black and white clothing on the streets, without seeing as well any women's face in public; No significant differences in terms of dress code were found when comparing cities such as Riyadh and Jeddah.
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Table 2 Main Themes: Conservatism

<i>Conservatism</i>	
<i>Interviewee I</i>	Considering the Middle East in general, without specifying any country the interviewee mentions that the majority of the population lives the same lifestyle as westerners do; Though, he points out Saudi Arabia as being the region's most conservative country but with the new Crown Prince ruling society is changing.
<i>Interviewee II</i>	Mentions the conservative nature of Saudi Arabia to be connected with three main factors: Islam, Tribalism and Politics put into practice by the Royal Family.
<i>Interviewee III</i>	The conservatism was felt especially in what has to do with women's role in society and religion itself. All the activities even the commercial ones stop on praying times; In addition, in public spaces where men and women hang out together in western societies, in Saudi Arabia there are designated areas for men and women, e.g. "(...) "women stores" which are closed from outside (no windows) and only women allowed entering".

Table 3 Main Themes: West versus East

<i>West versus East</i>	
<i>Interviewee I</i>	There's no cultural clash between west and east, the latter one is just more conservative.

<i>Interviewee II</i>	The Arab world has becoming nearer the west over the past hundred years; Though this is happening at different paces for the different countries; For Saudi Arabia it has been a slow process but the changes are significant.
<i>Interviewee III</i>	“Saudi Arabia in terms of economy, technology, architecture and many other things is close to western countries”. Nevertheless, at first there was a cultural shock.

Table 4 Main Themes: Fashion

Fashion

<i>Interviewee I</i>	“Fashion is universal and very much globalized in the Middle East. The UAE and Saudi rank in top 5 worldwide in numbers of brands concentrations so there is nothing different in the Fashion scene than the West”; The most wanted items in the Middle East are the same ones as in the west, except for winter items. The fashion trends and developments that are happening in the west are having the same reflect in the Middle East; Demystifies the relation between the concept of “Modest Fashion” and religion as for him it is nonexistent.
<i>Interviewee II</i>	Mentions the fashion concept but generally. Relates it with the internet’s development and acknowledges Saudis are being able to take the most out of it, being trend setters.
<i>Interviewee III</i>	The interviewee contacted with nationals that were wearing the traditional thobe and abaya and also with expatriates that were wearing western clothing; Moreover, there was a mention of Saudis enjoying to show the wealthy lifestyle which can be represented by the way they dress up like.

Table 5 Main Themes: Internet and Globalization

Internet and Globalization

<i>Interviewee I</i>	Acknowledges that the Middle East follows the same fashion trends as westerners do, the natural effect of globalization; Points out as well that since the majority of the population in the region are young the internet's penetration has been significant;
<i>Interviewee II</i>	Reckons both the internet and globalization impacted positively the Arab World, Saudi Arabia included, though the internet's development has had a higher contribution.
<i>Interviewee III</i>	Saudi Arabia is benefiting from the globalization indeed but this is not happening in behavioral terms, as the society remains firmly conservative.

Table 6 Main Themes: Religion

Religion

<i>Interviewee I</i>	The dress code is partially related with the region's main religion – Islam; Points out a particular conservative movement: Wahhabism; Advocates that the globalization phenomenon's impact depends on several factors one of which is precisely religion.
<i>Interviewee II</i>	Religion is one of the factors that contributes for Saudi Arabia to be the most segregated country in the Arab world and for the society's conservatism; Makes citizens living a "schizophrenic existence" in which public and private lives are almost antagonist worlds.
<i>Interviewee III</i>	Suggests that religion is present in every aspect of Saudi's society and gives the example that even the nationals that studied abroad and then return maintain the same principles and traditions; Mentions the existence of a religious police.

Table 7 Main Themes: Country's Representations

<i>Country's representations</i>	
<i>Interviewee I</i>	The conservatism that Saudi Arabia is known for and the restrictions applied to women.
<i>Interviewee II</i>	Saudi Arabia is perceived by its "Strict Conservatism" and "Islamic Orthodoxy". It is also described as being "far behind the times". Saudis also carry the prejudice of being the "least sophisticated and educated" among the GCC countries.
<i>Interviewee III</i>	Saudis are friendly and educated people and a big percentage is wealthy and enjoys demonstrating it; They are committed to the family, traditions and religion; Conservatism is also clearly pointed out as one of the main representations.

4.4.2 Vertical Analysis

Since the "horizontal analysis" itself is not enough to draw conclusions from the interviews and to verify if the hypothesis can be corroborated or refuted a "vertical analysis" will now be held. Nonetheless, this "vertical analysis" will not only focus on the results gathered from the "horizontal analysis" but also will consider the additional feedback provided on the interviews but that wasn't object of further development at the "horizontal analysis" stage. That happens precisely due to the uniqueness feature of each interview. As previously mentioned, each one was intended to be different considering the interviewee himself. The additional feedback deserves to be analyzed though as it can help corroborating or refuting the hypothesis.

Before proceeding with the "vertical analysis" the interviewer needed to consider that the feedbacks about each theme where being provided by three people with completely different backgrounds. Even though the goal was for them to be the more objective as possible due to way the questions were formulated it is only natural that they would reply considering their professional and personal background and thus the answers can be interpreted on a certain way as "manipulated". Not in the sense that they were conveying part of the information intentionally and not disclosing other details but in the sense that

without even noticing, especially if there's no sensitivity to the concepts of stereotyping, prejudice and cultural awareness their reasoning might have been conditioned or not. That is going to be assessed during the analysis itself.

Another important detail that needs to be mentioned before the analysis is that Interviewee I was providing feedback about the Middle East in general and the other two about Saudi Arabia in particular. This was intended from the beginning to figure Saudi Arabia's image and position particularly and when put alongside Middle East's neighboring countries.

4.4.3 Vertical Analysis Findings

The first stage of the "vertical analysis" has to do with the themes presented on the "horizontal analysis".

In terms of Saudis' dress code the interviewer verified that the traditional dress code is indeed worn by the majority of the population, even teenagers and children. Though, it is not mandatory and there's no expressed connection with religion but it is rather a cultural trait. Stricter rules are pointed out to be applied to women and in this case it may be indeed related with religion, specifically with the wahhabism movement mentioned previously. On their end, the expatriates in Saudi Arabia wear western clothing. Saudis also wear the western dress code but apparently they do it in private spaces. In terms of regional differences considering the dress code, as per the feedback provided there aren't. Though, the interviewer needed to consider that the feedback provided was regarding Riyadh and Jeddah. These cities shouldn't present that many differences if one considers that the first is the kingdom's capital and the second is one of the country's most developed cities. If smaller cities especially in rural areas were to be considered most likely the feedback would be different, however this is just an assumption and one needs to focus on the data retrieved. In addition, when going abroad Saudis can dress up the way they feel like it, they may adopt the traditional dress code or the westerner one.

Regarding the conservatism's theme Saudi Arabia was pointed out as Middle East's most conservative country. The kingdom's conservatism is linked with Islam, Tribalism and Politics. Most likely because interviewee III is the only Non-Arab he mentioned that the conservatism felt was especially towards the women's role which is quite conditioned and the religion's reach within Saudi Society e.g. all Muslims stop what they are doing

and practice the religious' rituals whenever it's time to do it. There's a trigger though that might bring some changes - the new ruler, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. In reality, by the time this study is being developed some unexpected events occurred in the country e.g. Saudi Arabia has held the first Fashion Week in its territory this year (2018); Women are now allowed to have a driver's license, they can watch sports' events and apply for military positions. (BBC, 2018)

About the third theme: West versus East it was mentioned that there's no clash between the two sides, East is just more conservative. It was referred that Saudi Arabia is actually close to the west especially when considering the country's economy, technology and architecture. This closeness happens to occur at a slow pace when compared to other countries in the region. As per the feedback, apparently there isn't a major gap between west and east, nevertheless, interviewee III did mention a cultural shock when arriving in Saudi Arabia. Considering that he is the only Non-Arab interviewed and also the fact he was in Dubai before visiting Saudi Arabia the interviewer is assuming there are indeed differences between both sides and there's still this division with all the significations attributed to each one. In addition, interviewee II also mentioned a closeness that is happening, one can thus assume if there's the need to become closer to the west is because currently there is still a gap.

In terms of fashion the interviewees mentioned the fact that Saudi Arabia is being able to follow what happens outside its borders. The Kingdom is stage for both the traditional dress code and the western clothing style. Since Saudis also take pleasure by showing their wealthy lifestyle one can assume that the clothing reflects that as well. Moreover, it was pointed out that in the Middle East fashion is as globalized as in the western world, thus there are no differences. The most wanted items in the Middle East are the same ones as in the west, except for the wintery ones. If this is indeed what is happening in the Middle East, again, one can assume that the same is happening in Saudi Arabia. In addition, since Interviewee I professional's background is related with fashion the interviewer needs to acknowledge his feedback since there isn't anything even when considering the other two opinions that leads to a different outcome.

It is acknowledged that both the internet and the globalization impacted the Arab world which includes Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the internet's development has been more expressive most likely because the majority of the population is young. In addition and

according to Interviewee III not all the society's aspects have been impacted and that happens because society still remains conservative. Concerning this particular feedback, although Saudi Arabia is following the internet's evolution and the globalization phenomenon there's no guarantee there will be a direct reflection into significant changes in the most intricate of society's layers. Culture is one of those layers and a difficult one to be changed, thus if the society is conservative and even with the happenings described it doesn't mean there will be immediate changes in the short time period in this sense.

In what concerns religion, it was mentioned as being one of Saudi Arabia's main pillars. Its influence is impressive and even a phenomenon as globalization is dependent on Islam. Religion also greatly contributes for the conservatism the country is known for and for turning it into the most segregated country in the Middle East. Given the circumstances it is not to strange the existence of a religious police in Saudi Arabia – Matawain. This was the theme which feedback has been the most unanimous among the interviewees.

The last theme concerns with the country's representations. The conservatism and the restrictions towards women were clearly identified. It was mentioned that they do like to show their wealthy lifestyle and this is actually common from the GCC countries and it can pointed out as a cultural trait. Saudis were referred to as well as being outdated. Surprisingly, in this theme and for the first time there were substantial contradictions in terms of feedback. Interviewee II stated that Saudis are less educated when compared to other GCC countries. Though, interviewee III referred to Saudis as being educated. It needs to be considered here that both interviewees either had knowledge or were in contact with one or more cultures in the Middle East which allowed them to have a term of comparison. What can assist unveiling which one is actually accurate is the fact that one is Arab and the other is Westerner. Although, this can't be affirmed breezily as the context needs to be regarded as well. Therefore, since Interviewee II is Arab one may assume he would know better about his neighbour country? What if Interviewee III has had contact with the exception to the rule? When analyzing a culture a sample is studied but there are always exceptions. It may be the case here. Alternatively, one may think about Saudis being educated when putting the country in the worldwide scenario and not being that educated when compared with the GCC countries. One can reckon as well in Saudis their commitment towards family, traditions and certainly religion.

Demystifying Saudi Arabia: Is western fashion changing Middle East's most segregated country? How to approach it in business terms? This is the study's purpose and thus, the "vertical analysis" main hypothesis. After having analyzed the themes under the "horizontal analysis" the interviewer is now testing the hypothesis, verifying if it is being corroborated or refuted. Considering that it was asserted that Saudis are traditional and outdated, the interviewer is assuming that on one hand they value and respect their heritage and on the other that the progressiveness in the country's society is happening at a slow pace and this is verified by the conservatism that characterizes Saudi Arabia and that the interviewees reinforced. This is not strange though as the three concepts have a relationship of cause-effect: it is only natural that if a country has a traditionalist image it will be considered conservative and hence outdated, at least in certain subjects. Furthermore, as religion is embodied in every and single aspect of Saudi's society it adds even more truth to the premise. Despite this premise, Saudi Arabia is coming closer to the west, therefore it allows the interviewer to infer that something is changing in the country. Is it western fashion nonetheless that is contributing to this change? As per the previous analysis, the fashion concept in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia included, is the same these days as in the west. The same brands are penetrating the market, the most wanted items are the same and Saudis are aware of the international trends. However, this leads the interviewer to bring in to the discussion the other two themes considered in the analysis: the internet and globalization and the dress code. If the former is happening and at a slow pace, the interviewer is presupposing there are some obstacles for this not to happen quicker as it is happening in the west. And this can actually be explained by Religion, Tribalism, and Politics as per Interviewee II. This leads the interviewer to the beginning of this hypothesis testing as adding up religion, tribalism, politics, traditionalism and conservatism the result can only be barriers that are blocking progress and shift. In addition, in terms of dress code Saudis dress up with the traditional clothing, even children and teenagers. However, if they follow the international trends, why would they do it if they are not allowed to wear them? In reality they are allowed to wear western clothing, women especially do that under the abaya in public spaces and in private, in women's presence only, they can show the clothing underneath the abaya. As for men they can either wear the traditional thobe or the western clothing regardless if in public or private spaces. There's no law that forces the use of the traditional clothing but there's a cultural and social obligation in order to do it. It is part of the culture's code and it is intricately connected with everyone's morals. The interviewer concludes then, that

western fashion is indeed changing Middle East's most segregated country, not exclusively but as part of a changing wave that is hitting the country and which effects are and will be in place over the next years. This change is not structural by itself as fashion alone wouldn't be capable of such transformation. Though, it is contributing to open the country to the west and in this sense yes it is making a difference.

After having tested the study's main hypothesis the interviewer is now focusing the attention on the additional feedback provided by the interviews. This feedback is useful to verify if the hypothesis can be validated or not.

Starting with Interviewee X (Appendix 1, Interview A), he mentions at some point that the *Modest Fashion* concept is not religiously linked but *Islamic fashion* is. Both fashion styles can be found in the Middle East and as a consequence in Saudi Arabia as well. However, the fashion market gross revenue doesn't come from *Islamic fashion* designers or brands yet but from western designers and brands. And the items that Arabs from the Gulf countries are buying are indeed from the west, once again as mentioned by the interviewee. If that's the case, then western fashion is indeed penetrating the Middle East market and contributing to change it. In addition, in this part of the globe the fashion industry is a powerful one that despite the fact that they have a conservative background affecting the way they dress up like doesn't put barriers when it comes to business. Interviewee X also points out that the traditional dress code of the Gulf's countries cannot be considered as fashion and he expects that the same brands that have already a strong presence in the market to continue that implementation and to follow the ecommerce global trend. However, he contradicts himself because there are western brands that in the past already presented Islamic clothing in their collections, thus labelling those items as fashionable. As per Segran, 2018 it is the case of DKNY, Nike, Dolce & Gabbana and more. Also, there's an Islamic brand that is approaching the western market by using the traditional dress code of the Gulf countries and fusing it with some of the international fashion trends' elements proving once again that the traditional dress code can be considered fashionable. The brand is called Toby by Hatem Alakeel and it was actually mentioned by the interviewee himself.

According to Dr. Al-Omari's feedback (Appendix 1, Interview B) it is not easy to celebrate business with Saudis especially for westerners. He gives the example of Kuwait and UAE as countries where it is easier to celebrate business as they are more open to the

West. Once again Saudi Arabia's conservatism contributes to this closeness and acts as a barrier. In addition, he mentions that Saudi Arabia is a society where the class system is intricately embodied and the dress code can actually unfold to which social class a person belongs to. Therefore one needs to pay attention to it as well as when considering the business dress code.

Regarding Rui's feedback (Appendix 1, Interview C) it is easy to do business with a Saudi counterpart as they are used to deal with foreigners/westerners. This statement goes against the feedback provided by Dr. Al-Omari and once again there needs to be a closer look to the context. Dr. Al-Omari addressed the issue in general while Rui mentioned a particular case and specific activity sector. Thus, depending on the context the outcome might actually be different. In addition, unless the business is done with expatriates Rui pointed that Saudis wear the traditional clothing both men and women.

After having analyzed the additional feedback provided by the interviewees the interviewer concludes then that the hypothesis is corroborated as western fashion is contributing to change Middle East's most segregated country. In addition, and in terms of business when approaching the Saudi culture, it is natural to find it different from one's own culture but that doesn't make it impossible to penetrate. It is undoubtedly easier for an Arab culture to approach Saudis rather than a western culture and that has to do with the shared traditions, religion and language. Westerners need to do an extra effort in order to adapt themselves to the Saudi reality and this is just a matter of putting assumptions and prejudices aside trying to see reality through the counterpart's culture. Due to their economic power and their openness to the west becoming a reality, it is expected that more business bridges are created with other cultures. Thus, as one needs to respect all cultures one is dealing with and undress of all the pre conceived ideas and assumptions one might have, with Saudi Arabia the same happens. The factors here that perhaps make the difference when comparing it to other cultures, especially the western ones are the importance given to religion, the specific dress code worn and the conservatism the country is known for. Nonetheless, if one is aware at least of the main differences when comparing to the "mother" culture that is already a step ahead to overcome some difficulties and avoid a cultural shock.

Conclusion

Although being a natural phenomenon, communication is different across cultures and there is a complex context surrounding it, therefore, the differences mustn't be underestimated as this may determine the success or failure in conveying a message.

The nonverbal communication needs to have a significant consideration within the cross cultural communication process as individuals can intentionally or unintentionally send a nonverbal message. If intentionally it can be clearly perceived by gestures, facial expression or even clothing. This process is not always clear though as with any type of message it can be misunderstood, either due to the sender not conveying it clearly or due to the noise during the communication process or even considering the receptor's inability to decode it. Furthermore, although similarities and common meanings may exist throughout the message that is conveyed when considering worldwide cultures, each of these has particularities. Therefore, one cannot assume that the nonverbal message portrayed by someone from a different culture has the same meaning as in his/her own culture. That's why studying the "other" before any interaction is imperative, especially considering the business context.

Clothing plays an important role when it comes to nonverbal communication and one can even compare the clothing code with a language, each culture speaks a different one. There are plenty of functions clothing can have, what needs to be considered is that these functions are dependent on the target of the message being conveyed by the clothes. The message can be intended to express something about the individual that is wearing the piece of clothing, disregarding what others might think or the other way around, meaning to wear a piece of clothing with the specific intention of inciting a reaction on the receptor. When changing clothes, attitudes can also change. It is common sense that whenever a person changes wardrobe, personality is affected. Therefore, when decoding nonverbal messages through clothing, accessories and jewelry, the overall context needs to be considered. The message transmitted may consider the individual's choice only or may be affected by the individual's insertion in a certain group.

Considering the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, the country that was object of study, there is a misconception in regards to their dress code - that all citizens wear the traditional clothing. It is perceived as a mandatory act due to the fact that they are Muslims. In Saudi Arabia, the traditional dress code is indeed worn by the majority of the population. Nevertheless, they do not wear the traditional clothing exclusively, neither it

is mandatory to wear it. Islam only requires its followers to dress modestly, but there is no mention to the particular dress code worn by both men and women. The case of Saudi women is more flagrant though as all over the media one is able to see women covered with black clothing, some of them with just the eyes uncovered. As for men, they also wear the traditional clothing but the attention is lesser when compared to women. With these features in consideration one can conclude that Saudi Arabia is characterized by the *Modest and Islamic fashion* styles.

Bearing in mind what was asserted by the interviews, that Saudis are traditional and outdated, one can assume that on one hand they value and respect their heritage and on the other that the progressiveness in the country's society is happening at a slow pace and this is verified by the conservatism that characterizes Saudi Arabia. This is not to strange though as the three concepts have a relationship of cause-effect: it is only natural that if a country has a traditionalist image it will be considered conservative and hence outdated, at least in certain subjects. Additionally, as religion is embodied in every and single aspect of Saudi's society it adds even more truth to the premise. Despite this premise, Saudi Arabia is coming closer to the west as something is indeed changing in the country. Is it western fashion nonetheless that is contributing to this change? The truth is that these days the most wanted brands in the west are the same brands penetrating the Saudi market. In reality Saudis are allowed to wear western clothing, women especially do that under the abaya in public spaces and in private, in women's presence only, they can show the clothing underneath the abaya. As for men they can either wear the traditional thobe or the western clothing regardless if in public or private spaces. There's no law that forces the use of the traditional clothing but there's a cultural and social obligation in order to do it. It is part of the culture's code and it is intricately connected with everyone's morals. Thus, western fashion is indeed changing Middle East's most segregated country, not exclusively but as part of a changing wave that is hitting the country and which effects are and will be in place over the next years.

Concerning Middle East's fashion market gross revenue doesn't come from *Islamic fashion* designers or brands yet but from western designers and brands. And the items that Arabs from the Gulf countries are buying are indeed from the west. Therefore the fashion business in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia included, is a powerful one that despite the fact that they have a conservative background affecting the way they dress up like doesn't put barriers when it comes to business.

In addition, and in terms of business related to the fashion industry, Saudi Arabia is not hindered by any chance due to the fact that there's a moral dress code that needs to be followed. Saudis are buying the exact same brands that westerns are. Moreover, and still according to business but under the cross cultural communication perspective, even though Saudis wear the western clothing as well, it is better to expect them to be wearing the traditional dress code. It is important to retain this in order to be an efficient communicator with parties from this country. Assumptions and prejudices need to be put aside, it is just a matter of oneself trying to see reality through the counterpart's culture.

What will this proximity to the west represent for Saudi culture's future? Will the country become more opened to the outside world?

Will east influence west changing its fashion habits and invert the current reality?

These are interesting matters that can be object of further study, thus giving continuity to this dissertation.

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Glossary¹⁷

Abaya: The abaya is a black long piece of clothing, normally made out of synthetic fiber, which covers entirely women's body except the wrists. It is the piece of clothing that Saudi women wear in public on top of the normal clothes (that can be western). The abaya can have details engraved and can be used together with a hijab or a niqab.

Bisht: The bisht is a cloak worn by men, normally on top of the thobe. It is usually worn by high ranked men.

Egal: The egal is the black rope that is worn on top of the ghutra to maintain in the same position.

Ghutra: The ghutra refers to the headscarf worn by men. Normally it's white, but it can also be a combination of black and white or red and white. The latter is the one used by the majority of Saudi men. It can also be called shemagh or kuffiyeh.

Hijab: The hijab is probably the most well-known piece of clothing worn by Muslim women and it refers to the headscarf they wear on top of the abaya, for instance. It can also be addressed as a shaylah or tarhah depending on its style and on the country being considered.

Niqab: The Niqab is similar to the hijab but covers women's face entirely, leaving only the eyes uncovered. In Saudi Arabia it is common for women to wear it combined with the abaya.

Thobe: The thobe is a robe, normally white, worn by Muslim men, including Saudis. It is a long piece, fitted at the top and loose at the bottom.

¹⁷ The unique source used on the glossary's elaboration was (Huda, 2018).

Appendices

APPENDIX I

Interview A

Interview with Interviewee X - Managing Director for the Middle East

1. The dress code is a very important feature both as an identity element and as a cultural one worldwide. The Middle East is no exception, nevertheless and according to your personal and professional background do you think it has the same importance in all the region's countries or it varies?
2. Do you think nationals wear the thobe and the abaya e.g. out of respect for the religion's principles or because it is something intrinsically embodied in the culture?
3. Would you point out Saudi Arabia as the region's most conservative country in terms of dress code? If so, why do you think that happens?
4. For a foreigner doing business with a Middle Eastern country do you think the dress code is something to which a certain degree of importance should be given or do you feel it is something overrated?
5. When a Middle Eastern national goes abroad for business related purposes, the dress code is considered and adapted to the culture receiving him/her or will he/she bear in mind their country's dress code only?
6. Considering your upbringing abroad, when coming back to the Middle East do you realize it is now becoming closer to the west in what fashion is concerned?
7. Would you say that globalization changed how fashion is perceived in the Middle East? If so, in what sense?
8. What about the internet, in your perspective did it bring significant changes in the fashion industry particularly in this part of the globe? Has it changed consumer habits? Are people feeling reluctant or embracing this change?
9. If you do agree that globalization and the internet brought changes to the industry, do you consider these changes will impact society's behavior in the long term period? Will this contribute to reduce the clash between west and east, culturally speaking?
10. Do you acknowledge the "Modest Fashion" concept? How is it being perceived by Middle East's nationals?

11. The fact that international well-known brands are now creating specific clothing lines considering the specific needs of the Middle Eastern market, will it bring awareness worldwide for the particularities of the dress code in this region, thus creating eventually a global trend and putting west and east closer or is it highlighting even more the differences between both sides?
12. How do you foresee the fashion industry development in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia in the next five years?

Answers:

1. The dress code is very different depending on which country/region within the region in the middle east you are talking about. Each country has its specificities but to generalize, we can classify the middle east in 2 parts: The GCC (UAE, Saudi arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman) and the Levant + Others. The Levant have no particular dress code (except traditional families but a very small % of population) and can be described as similar to the west. The GCC have their traditional dress code (ie: the Thob/Kandoura for Men and the Abaya for women) but they do also tend to wear Western clothing from time to time.
2. Again, we are talking about GCC here. It's a bit hard to say: there is definitely some religious aspect to it (But it can't be generalized to Islam in general as there is nothing in the Qoran that obliges people to wear this) but some religious movements throughout history, mainly the Wahhabism, has enforced the abaya and head cover on women. For Men, there is nothing religious about it. All in all, I would say it's mainly cultural as even in countries such as UAE, Kuwait, Oman etc.. where there was never any extreme religious movements, women still tend to wear the abaya when going out.
3. Saudi Arabia is definitely the most conservative country in the region but that can't be 100% correlated to the dress code. Historically, and again it depends on which part of Saudi Arabia, the Abaya has been enforced on women country-wide and depending on the region, the head cover as well. This said, with the new crown prince in place, there is a lot of change happening. Women can now drive and although I am not 100% sure, but I think they don't have to wear an abaya

anymore. This said, I don't think this will cancel the dress code all together as it is a cultural choice as well.

4. Foreigners NEVER have to wear the traditional dress code. Actually, it is almost a bad thing and a sign of disrespect in many people's eyes. Foreigners can wear what they want as long as they respect the cultural values of the countries (ie: not wearing any provocative clothing). In private environments and in compounds, foreigners are free to wear what they want. Again this depends on country to country. In UAE and other GCC countries, Foreigners dress as they do back home while in Saudi, until today, women wear an abaya. For men, there is nothing in particular.
5. Again speaking about GCC as other Middle Eastern countries dress codes are very similar to Western. Usually, GCC nationals will adapt to western clothing when they travel (wearing suits at meetings, or casual clothing in general). Sometimes, and that usually is for very conservative families, they will dress as they do back home but this is very rare in general.
6. Fashion is universal and very much globalized in the Middle East. The UAE and Saudi rank in top 5 worldwide in numbers of brands concentrations so there is nothing different in the Fashion scene than the West. The same big brands worldwide (LV, Chanel, Hermes etc...) are as big in the Middle East.
7. Of course. Middle Eastern are aware of the same Fashion trends globally. It's a big market for luxury and although the locals might not pick any provocative pieces (short mini skirts etc...) they still buy from the same big brands as the West.
8. The Middle East is huge when it comes to Social Media. 10% of Global Instagram users are from the Middle East and 8% for Facebook (vs. 5% of world population). This is mainly due to the very young population amongst other reasons. Whatever happens globally, because of social media, will be heard in the Middle East. Middle Eastern fashion shoppers love Newness and are very aware of what's hot and what's new globally. They will catch trends as soon as they come out and will know about all up and coming brands due to social media.

9. Honestly, it's very hard to answer this question. Globalization has lots of impacts but when it comes to impacting society's behavior, that will depend on many things (Politics, Economic incentives, Corruption, Capitalism, Religion, etc...) I don't believe there is any clash, culturally speaking between the East and West. The Middle East is definitely more conservative for many reasons, but culturally, it is not a clash in any way. There is a lot of bad press about the Middle East in Western news mainly due to some political rifts, but these people cannot be generalized in any way to represent the Middle Eastern population. The vast majority live exactly the same lifestyle as a Western does, with a bit of conservatism.

10. Modest fashion is a big niche in Fashion industry. This said, Modest Fashion is not Islamic Fashion and that is a big misconception. Unfortunately I cannot disclose some confidential information but from the discussions I had with CEOs of some of the biggest Modest Fashion e-comm websites globally, their biggest markets are actually the US and the UK. Modest Fashion is a choice and is not religion linked. Islamic Fashion is very different. (ie: a plain look, unexposed from Gucci could be considered a Modest Fashion look).

11. Some brands like Burberry and LV have made some special "shmaghs" capsules for the Middle East (the thing that Men put on their head). I would say this is more of a marketing activity and do not see this becoming a permanent category in any brand's portfolio. When you look at Middle Eastern sales, the top performing items are the same as Global ones (except for Heavy winter items as there is no cold in the middle East). The opposite is actually also happening. Check Toby, a Thod brand with a western twist to it, as it has gotten some global PR about it. I don't expect Abaya's to become a global product but then again Kimono's are hot right now 😊

12. As I mentioned, the Fashion industry is fully globalized and the Middle East is no exception. From this point, I expect the same usual suspects to act in the ME as they do globally. And the same fashion trends, such as E-commerce, to happen in the Me as they do globally. The traditional dress code is a cultural choice and is

not considered fashion. It's like the Lederhosen in Germany, the Highland dress in Scotland etc...

Interview B

Interview with Dr. Jihad Al-Omari - Cross-Cultural Management Consultant

1. Do you consider Saudi Arabia as the most segregated country in the Arab world?
If so, why?
2. Would you point out Islam as the main factor contributing to the conservatism that Saudi Arabia is known for? Would that be related to the fact that Islam was born there?
3. As a Middle Eastern national, what are the main representations you think the region's countries/cultures have towards Saudi Arabia?
4. What are the main cultural differences that you can point out when considering the Arab world in general and comparing with the particular case of Saudi Arabia?
5. As a Cross Cultural Management Consultant would you consider that it is easy to do Business with a Saudi counterpart? Is it the same for Arabs and non-Arabs?
6. In terms of dress code and both for men and women do you think Saudi Arabia has stricter rules when compared to other Muslim countries?
7. For a foreigner doing business with Saudi Arabia do you think the dress code is something to which a certain degree of importance should be given or do you feel it is something overrated?
8. When a Saudi goes abroad for business related purposes, the dress code is considered and adapted to the culture receiving him/her or will he/she bears in mind their country's dress code only?
9. Would you say the proximity to the Western world is changing the Middle Eastern countries? What about Saudi Arabia in particular?
10. Would you say that globalization and the internet changed how fashion is perceived in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia? If so, do you foresee the local dress code to suffer some changes?
11. Is there a huge gap between the social classes in Saudi Arabia? Are there regional differences also?
12. Considering the dress code itself, one can reckon a person's background just by the way he/she dresses up like? What are the social implications?

Answers:

1. Certainty, Saudi Arabia can be considered as the most segregated society in the Arab world. This is largely due to the application of “Shari’ah Laws” that officially espouse segregation and regulate it through legal codes. However, this is reinforced by Tribalism, which is another prominent feature of the Saudi Society. Tribalism is itself a social order in the way that Islam is considered a Way of life where the former is largely tending towards patriarchy and male domination.
2. The conservative nature of Saudi Arabia is largely attributed to 2 factors; Islam and Tribalism. Both possess strict codes of conduct that are highly conservative. However, conservatism and isolation has also been a Political Choice by the Ruling Royal Family therefore perceived as providing more political stability and security.
3. Besides the predominance of Islam and as the home of the 2 of the 3 holiest places of Islam, the overall all impression of Saudi Arabia and Saudis is the “Strict Conservatism” or “Islamic Orthodoxy” by which the country and the people are “forced’ to live. This brings about another dimension of “Dualism” whereby many people are forced to leave “schizophrenic existence” living by “public norms” on the outside whereas adopting “western values” in private or whenever the opportunity arises to travel outside Arabia.

Saudi Arabia and Saudis do also come across as being “insular” or “far behind the times” or “backward” or “lazy” and many of these stereotypes. As Gulf Arabs they are perhaps the least sophisticated and educated and therefore giving rise to these stereotypes. This begs the question of the impact that the oil wealth had on the Saudi Society in both negative and positive terms.

4. Saudis do come across as being both more religious and tribal or Bedouin society. A society that does not appear to have been affected by the advent of the 20 th and 21 st century in the same way as other neighboring Arab countries. For example, taking the Bedouin heritage, they come across as broth brave and generous people

yet most naïve and savage simultaneously. They are religious people in their countries and quite the opposite outside their countries.

5. As a general rule, it is not easy to do business with the Saudis especially if you compare that to the Kuwaitis and the Emiratis. Whilst they are all Arabs and a certain level of knowledge in Arab Culture is required to deal with all three, the Kuwaitis and the Emiratis are more sophisticated and more exposed to the outside world, therefore more likely to be more understanding and more forgiving. Without a doubt, it is easier for an Arab to deal with a Saudi than a non-Arab and it is easier for a Gulf Arab to deal with a Saudi than a non-Gulf Arab. It is all very relative. It is all about knowing how to gain trust and gaining it in the end.
6. Definitely a very severe dress code for both men and women and Ironically it also extends to the young ones and Teens. It really can't be fun growing up as a Teen in Saudi Arabia and partly because "fashion" in its widest meaning is almost totally missing in Saudi Arabia. However, this is mainly true in public whereas in private the situation is less oppressive or bleak and especially for women. It is normal for people to dress in strict accordance to Arab/Islamic dress code in public and revert to Western and even the most liberal Western dress code in private.
7. Without a doubt it is not overrated. However, it is far stricter for women than men and particularly in public as opposed to in private in some cases.
8. It is not guessing as to the dress code a Saudi Travelling abroad will adopt. It is a matter of personal preference. They may adopt Western dress code and this is true for the majority especially males, or maintain their traditional dress code and this is also true for a good number of females and the older generation. There are absolutely no rules here and anything can be expected. It is perfectly normal for Saudi Women to change from Traditional Clothing to Western Clothing as soon as the Airplane takes-off from the Airport.
9. Without a doubt that the Arab world has been changing for well over a hundred years ever since the Arab revolution through to colonization to the wars of

independence to the discovery of Oil and so on. Each stage changed the Arab world and brought it nearer to the Western world be it in varying degrees. In some cases, change has been fast and Vast such as Say Lebanon and other cases, it has been Slow and Limited such as Saud Arabia and Yemen.

Today and initially with the advent of the Satellite TV and later the Internet and more pressingly Mobile Phone Technology and Social Media, the rate of change is moving a faster pace and the gaps between the generations are getting wider. The younger generations appear to have grasped the Information technology revolution and is running with it.

Events of the last 5 to 10 years have provided that Saudi Arabia is not immune from the changing scenery across the region. As mentioned earlier, it may be slower but it is significant. Today and for the first time in decades, Saudi Arabia has a very young Crown Prince who is trying to talk a new talk and walk a new walk and for the first time, Saudi Arabian Women are able to drive. This is a significant victory for the feminist and modernists and a Giant step for Saudi women. Only time will tell what is next.

10. Indeed both the internet and globalization have made a strong impact of the order of change in the Arab world with the former having a more profound impact and Saudi Arabia is no exception be it a slower and more limited impact. It is a fact that with the Internet being both a “equalizer and enabler” it means it is within the grasp of every Saudi to make the best out of the internet for themselves initially and for the society as a whole. Time will only tell how many talented Saudi Arabians will be inspired and empowered by the Internet but we are beginning to see them as trend leaders and you tubers and more will come across in years to come.
11. Certainly and it is now emerging or at least beginning to have noticeable impact as opposed to, say, 20 years ago. Saudi Society is intrinsically a Tribal Society and whilst tribalism is not set to disappear in the next 50 years or so, we can say that the “class system” is beginning to emerge to the point that there are very noticeable differences in attitudes and behaviors.

There are definitely regional differences as the existence or imminence of the class system in the region. Each country has its own dynamism and it is very difficult to address such issue in this short questionnaire.

12. To a very large extent yes. In the conservative Arab society dressing well and formally and according to one's status, relationship, context, education and many other factors is important. One important issue that is true for most Arab societies is that they are collective societies. This mean that they are affected by face. If we imagine a continuum extending from Shame on the one extreme to guilt on another extreme, the Arab society is very much a Shame Culture. The impact of this on Dress code is obvious. What one does in Public is not necessary compatible with what one does in private and vice versa. It depends and the Arab is a Contextual being who will change their behaviors according to context or situation.

Interview with Rui Amaral - Sales Director and Marketing Manager

1. Do you consider Saudi Arabia as the most segregated country you have visited in the Middle East? Regardless, if yes or no, can you please further explain?
2. Did you prepare yourself in advance before going on a business trip to Saudi Arabia? What cultural aspect surprised you the most and why?
3. How would you describe the way of doing business with Saudis? Do you consider it is something relatively easy for a westerner to do or there are many constraints in fact?
4. How was the dress code used by the Saudi counterparts? Were they using the traditional dress code or a western one? Regardless if the traditional or a western one what message do you think they were trying to convey?
5. Can you describe the business environment? Did you meet with the decision makers or there was many people in the room and you needed to interact with all of them? Was there any woman attending the meetings?
6. Overall, did you feel the society's conservatism? Mainly where?
7. Did you experience a cultural shock or was it a smooth experience?
8. Would you say that Islam is present in every aspect of the Saudi society at least according to what you have experienced?
9. Since you have visited two cities, Riyadh and Jeddah, did you find regional differences? What about people's dress code, was it similar?
10. Did you experience the globalization's effect in the country? Is Saudi Arabia becoming closer to the west or there's still a long way to go through?
11. If you were asked to describe the Saudis what would you point out as being the main representations?
12. How do you forecast the country's developments in the next 5 years considering all the changes already implemented since Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman is ruling?

Answers:

1. Yes. Indeed from all the countries I've visited in the Middle East (UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Lebanon) Saudi Arabia is undoubtedly the most segregated country. Before the business trip I had a lot of diplomatic issues regarding visa, and only for this I started to realize that there is indeed something different about Saudi Arabia. As they are a big country and a huge economy they protect themselves a lot, and along with Iran (an official rival) both very segregated compared with other countries in the same region. Also, all aspects regarding the Islamic religion affect you and the way you feel comfortable or not in Saudi Arabia, at least in the 1st visit.
2. Basically, I tried to read everything I could about Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately I didn't know anyone that had been there before that could share some advices. But I only found information through internet which isn't the best source. Anyway, I already had a good feedback regarding the business meetings before traveling so I was more concerned not to make any "etiquette" mistake when in meetings. So in this case before traveling the most surprising aspect was related with the way we should greet (or not) women, because it is our first impression/action when you meet someone.
3. Indeed it was very easy at least to have a chance of meeting them. I was expecting it to be more difficult but in general all companies and people accepted the meeting proposal and they were very open to the idea of us travelling to Saudi Arabia to meet them. So I believe that they are very used to meet and deal with foreigners or westerners. Also a lot of people we met during this business trip, they studied in western countries, some in London, Paris and New York, so for the majority they are very familiar with meeting with someone from abroad. And we also had a chance to meet with expats who are partners with Saudis, for example, an interior designer from London working in a Saudi Interior Design Company owned by a local.
Even regarding sales conditions and all business issues it's not difficult in special compared with other countries.

4. All Saudi counterparts were dressing local/traditional clothes, both men and women. Saudi men dressing white thobes and women wearing black abayas with the hair covered. But we met also with expats wearing western clothes.
I think there is no special message they were trying to convey actually. It is only the way they dress everyday so I didn't feel any special message was intended because we were westerners.
5. Almost all the meetings were in a meeting room, like a regular office. We met with decision makers, who sometimes were also the owners. There were at least two people mainly and 40% percent of all meetings with one or more women.
6. Yes, I felt the society's conservatism, regarding all issues with women and religion. You can see and feel when on praying times, with all public services and stores getting closed. And mainly in restaurants and shopping malls where there are men areas and family areas (when women go with men relatives) and also all "women stores" which are closed from outside (no windows) and only women allowed entering.
7. I did experience a cultural shock at least in the first two days, because we came from Dubai and it's not even close. I felt uncomfortable in the first moments because I only saw Arabic clothes (black and white) without seeing any women face in public. A lot of military presence on the roads. A lot of safety procedures in each hotel. And also the religious calls you would hear on praying times. It's completely different from all other countries. Anyway after some days I got used to all the differences and instead of being shocked I started to see everything as a normal situation.
8. Indeed, I think Islam is still very present in every aspect in Saudi Arabia. And even with people who studied abroad in western countries could have a different vision and opinion but when they are coming back to their homeland they keep all the traditions. You can see this by the presence of Mutaween (Islamic religious police) controlling locals to respect praying hours, and for example in each hotel room you can find a Quran, a prayer rug and the direction to Mecca.

9. There is a big difference between Riyadh and Jeddah, at least I found this difference in the way they live in both cities. Riyadh is very central, the capital of the Kingdom with a very dry weather and very conservative because all Ministers and Saudi VIP are living there. In Jeddah as it is a city just near the Red Sea you feel the influence of this, with more expats and even Saudis enjoying more restaurants and cafes by the sea. From what I know a lot of Saudis have a house in Jeddah to spend weekends and holidays. In terms of business and dress code in specific I didn't find any big difference between the two cities.

10. Saudi Arabia in terms of economy, technology, architecture and many other aspects is close to western countries so it is receiving all the globalization's benefits. Still keeps much closed in terms of behavior, especially when compared with western countries where some subjects are not an issue anymore. I believe that nowadays is the most interesting era of all history to start to change some mentalities and being more open and acceptable about some issues. Including the pressure from outside to be more tolerant and to provide a peaceful contribute in all conflicts in the region, demystifying Islam as a violent religion.

11. I have a good opinion about Saudis in general. They are very friendly and help you to feel comfortable. At least it was what I experienced from the contact in the meetings. Even in common situations like in the hotel or restaurant I didn't feel any issue, maybe because I'm a man and a foreigner. I believe that a woman from abroad could face more difficulties to interact or use some services.

They are cult as well, as most of them lived and studied in the biggest cities in the world. Most of the Saudis, especially those that are connected with the Royal Family, have a wealthy way of living and they love to show some luxury. They seem to be strongly connected with family and also following all Islamic traditions carefully.

12. I think there are great news, not only for Saudi Arabia, but for all the neighboring countries. As one the stronger economies of the Islamic world and especially those that are Sunni it could be a beginning of moderated way of living, and for sure it will have a huge impact in all the Saudis. Anyway, it will be a long walk until achieving to be a truly open country, and the Crown Prince will face for sure

resistance from all the conservatives, including family. So the upcoming 5 years period will be very turbulent until these first decisions get approval from society. It can be perceived as an opportunity for new businesses or a threat as some investors may wait for more developments (at least on the traditional industries).