

Dissertation

Master's in international business

***The Dos and Don'ts of Doing Business in the
Middle East: GCC / United Arab Emirates***

Fátima Maria Neves Barbeiro de Abreu Neto

Dissertation under the supervision of Professor *Susana Rodrigues, Ph.D.*, professor at the
School of Technology and Management of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria.

Leiria, September 2021

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Acknowledgments

My master thesis is to be the culmination of my work experience in the international business area. However, it has taken me a few years to complete. It is, for me, a great accomplishment that would not have been achieved without those mentioned in the following lines.

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ABSTRACT

The Middle East, namely the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC), has been a key fast-moving economic region for the past decades.

The impact of the Covid pandemic is still being felt by many businesses all over the world, and the GCC is no exception. More particularly, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) plans to double its economy by the end of 2031, emphasizing the retail and tourism business and other major non-oil sectors. These economic recovery signs indicate that the UAE will continue to offer opportunities and be a key market for international business expansion in the retail area in a post-pandemic era.

Most literature about the Middle Eastern countries includes North African countries and sometimes Turkey that, although, in most cases, share the same language and Muslim teachings, have suffered different cultural influences. Literature is scant on the GCC culture, even less in GCC retail. Our research fills this gap through in-depth semi-structured interviews of European international business managers and European expat workers in the UAE.

Although most Arab businesses continue to be held by local Arabs or Arab groups, there is considerable assimilation of international staff (expats) that reflects population diversity. This cultural diversity naturally influences business dealings and negotiations; however, the business subculture continues to be heavily influenced by its Arab owners.

In the UAE, there is a younger, bolder generation of Emiratis that have been influenced by western education but continue to highly value their ancestral values of family, religion, respect, trust, cordiality, and relationships.

This fast-moving economy is not an “El Dorado,” To do business, you have to have the right partner, be financially sound, respect, and be respected personally and within the business relationship because the GCC business is personal. Understanding these cultural aspects can facilitate or hinder a business venture.

Keywords: Arab Middle East, UAE, Negotiation, Business Relationship, Culture, Retail

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

1- CAQDAS:	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
2- CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
3- CIA:	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
4- FDI:	Foreign Direct Investment
5- GCC:	Gulf Cooperation Council
6- GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
7- ICT:	Information Communication Technologies
8- INE:	National Statistics Institute (Portugal)
9- IPEP:	Individualized Perceived Export Performance
10- KSA:	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
11- MAXQDA:	Max Qualitative Data Analysis Software
12- MENA:	Middle East and North Africa Countries
13- OEC:	Observatory of Economic Complexity
14- PRO:	Public Relations Officer
15- PWC:	Price Waterhouse Coopers
16- RELQUAL:	Measure of Relationship Quality in Export Ventures
17- ROI:	Return on Investment
18- SME:	Small Medium Enterprises
19- STEP:	Short Term Assessment of Export Performance
20- UAE:	United Arab Emirates
21- USA:	United States of America
22- UK:	United Kingdom
23- WBG:	World Bank Group

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualization

International investment through franchises is today quite common in the retail area, and franchising in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) has become essential when companies want to internationalize. The Observatory of Economic Complexity World 2019 (OEC) refers that more than 20% of what the United Arab Emirates (UAE) imports from Portugal, international investment purchases included, is in the apparel business, including accessories and shoes. Portuguese apparel and textile industry is one of the most important in the Portuguese economy and makes up 15% of total export, including international business. Similarly, retail in most of the GCC is a significant business. In the UAE, non-oil business is forecasted to grow 3.6% in 2021, reaching approximately 58 billion USD, according to the UAE's Central Bank.

1.2. Motivation and Importance of the Investigation

After spending ten years as a retail manager in an Abu Dhabi (UAE) based Arab master franchise business, dealing with several European brands in the children's clothing and childcare areas, it became apparent that to avoid business failure, several dos, and don'ts needed to be disclosed to businesses wanting to invest in the GCC.

There is scant literature on retail franchise investments in the GCC to guide potential investors in the area. Additionally, when we look for literature about the Middle East and the Arab culture to try to grasp relevant ideas, it often includes North African Arabs. Although they share the same language and Muslim values, they do not share the same British Protectorate influence as the GCC.

After the COVID Pandemic, many Portuguese companies will look into investing in this area of the world for international business expansion. They must be aware of the dos and don'ts that will make or break their investments. A trial-and-error approach to this international market is complex, as investments of this magnitude are costly, and brand image can be affected if it does not work out.

1.3. Objectives of the Investigation

The main objective of this study is to share the findings, from actual European top managers of international investments, those aspects that can hinder or facilitate business in the Middle East, namely the GCC countries.

The Dos and Don'ts of Doing Business in the Middle East: GCC / United Arab Emirates

2. THE CONTEXT

The Arab Middle East – Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – The United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The Middle East has been coined as a “flexible “geographic term used by economic, academic, and other international organizations and often is inclusive of the countries that border the south Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, it often englobes the Arabian Peninsula (see Fig 1) as well as Turkey and Iran (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021; Scharnweber, 2015). In some cases, the definition of the Arab Middle East often encases not only Turkey and Iran but most of the Maghreb countries of North Africa. Presently, the Arabic-speaking North African countries that include Egypt, Marroco, Tunisia, among others, are considered part of a more encompassing region, called the MENA region (Acronym for the Middle East and North Africa) (Elsayed, 2021).

We have, therefore, opted to restrict ourselves to the countries of the Middle Eastern Arab Gulf States, more specifically the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (see Fig. 2). The GCC, established in 1981, is an intergovernmental organization alliance that shares common objectives and has similar political, economic, and cultural identities (Alkhatat, Naseeb, & Ramadhan, 2018; Sufian, 2020). The GCC consists of six fast developing countries in the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Alkhatat et al., 2018; Khakhar & Rammal, 2013; Sufian, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2015).



Fig 1- The Arab Middle East. Source: Google maps



Fig 2- The Gulf Cooperation Council. Source: Google maps

The GCC countries speak Arabic, are geographically close, and largely profess the same Muslim sect of Islam, consequently sharing the same values, cultural patterns, and traditions (ALPEN Capital Investment, 2019; Khan & Ebner, 2019). Moreover, as some would say, the GCC also shares the influences of being an old protectorate state under British rule (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Except for KSA which came in later than the others, the GCC countries formed part of the British Protectorate States (British Limited Jurisdiction Rule), which was present in the region from the late 1800s to 1971 (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Sufian, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2020).

The events that led to the Gulf crisis of June 2017, where Bahrain, Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) cut diplomatic ties with Qatar, fuelled by the US Trump administration, threatened that cohesiveness. These countries initiated a long air, sea, and road blockade to isolate Qatar (Ulrichsen, 2020). These events severely tested this alliance and the balance of power in the GCC, where both KSA and the UAE tried to “stamp their authority on regional affairs” (Ulrichsen, 2020, pg.2). Qatar has proven resilient, although its trade, currency, and economic indicators came under severe pressure (Baabood, 2019). Early 2021, through Kuwaiti mediation, the blockade was lifted; however, its members’ trust in the GCC alliance seems to have dissipated, and the organization’s credibility has been damaged. (Baabood, 2019; Ulrichsen, 2020).

Prior to this geo-political strife, nationals from the GCC countries could freely participate in business activities in the other’s Gulf State, either by themselves or through a partnership in areas such as retail, and wholesale trade and most cultural activities and even property possession (ALPEN Capital Investment, 2019; International Monetary Fund, 2018). Frequently, companies from one of the GCC countries had branches of businesses in the other GCC countries, and negotiations or any agreement reflected this extension. Tariff

barriers are almost non-existent between GCC countries, and despite this geo-political strife, the Gulf States have continued intra-regional trade as GCC (ALPEN Capital Investment, 2019; International Monetary Fund, 2018).

With the end of the blockade, these countries have agreed to further reduce tariffs and customs administrative procedures to facilitate the relationship and bring back intra-regional trade among all the GCC countries (Ramani, 2021). However, these actions do not solve pending political issues and rivalries that may further derail normalization in the GCC (Ramani, 2021). The focus of our study is not a political one; however, it is essential to understand the geo-economic and political context of the Gulf States that influences successful trade in the region.

The GCC countries continue to be in an accelerated economic expansion and have emerged as influential international players in geo-political and economic fields (Miniaoui & Schilirò, 2017). They are considered among the world's fastest-growing economies due to their rich oil reserves (Sufian, 2020). However, the recent oil crisis that lowered crude market value has challenged the GCC countries to diversify their economies and become less and less dependent on oil revenues. Diversification was incentivized by promoting private-sector SMEs, developing infrastructures, and more friendly business legislature to promote the ease of doing business (Almutairi, Heller, & Yen, 2020).

According to the CIA's World Fact Book, in 2020, more than fifty percent of the population of the GCC countries, except for KSA, Bahrain, and Oman, is composed of international migrants. In the case of the UAE, it borders eighty-eight percent of its resident population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). In the UAE, less than twenty percent of its population are citizens, and only around twelve percent are considered Emirati (Emirati descendants) (Marsh, 2020; Khan & Ebner, 2019). In Dubai, one of the UAE's most well-known major cities and one of the fastest-growing cities globally, more than eighty-seven percent of the residents are foreign nationals (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Sixty percent of these expatriates are from the Indian subcontinent or elsewhere from Asia, about thirty percent are from other Arab countries and Iran, and only five percent are western (Marsh, 2020; CIA, 2020). The Indian expatriates make up the largest of all the groups, with around thirty percent just in itself. Consequently, they also impact their host country's culture, traditions, and business patterns (Marsh, 2020).

2.1. The United Arab Emirates (UAE)

When the British gave up their Protectorate States in the Arab Gulf States, some of these rulers, Sheiks, Emirs, names given to their kings, formed alliances amid themselves as is the case of today the UAE. By 1972, seven Emirs had agreed to form a new nation, the UAE (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021; Miniaoui & Schilirò, 2017). Rich in oil, the UAE has an open economy that managed to transit from an oil-based economy to the most economically vibrant and diversified of all the GCC countries. Here there is, according to Khan and Ebner (2019), “a generational willingness to be bold, try new things, and be more tolerant of change” (Khan & Ebner, 2019, p.413).

Geographically, the UAE borders KSA, Oman, and the Arabian Gulf in a strategic location near the Strait of Hormuz (PWC, 2020) (see Fig 3).



Fig 3- The United Arab Emirates (UAE). Source: Google maps / Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.

The political system is based on a constitution with five federal authorities that rule over the political and constitutional organization of the country (ALPEN Capital Investment, 2019). Among the most important is the Federal Supreme Council, an indirectly elected body with the highest constitutional authority in the United Arab Emirates, followed by the President and Vice President, the ruler (Sheik) of Abu Dhabi, and the Sheik of Dubai accordingly. The Federal Supreme Council is also the highest legislative and executive authority that draws general policies and approves various federal legislation (PWC, 2020).

According to the World Economic Forum, the UAE is the most competitive economy in the Arab world, although it is the second-largest economy in the region only after KSA. In this Global Competitiveness Index measured among 141 global economies, the UAE ranks second in ICT (Information & Communication Technologies) only after

South Korea (Schwab, 2019). In Macro-Economic Stability, the UAE ranks first, along with 33 of the “best” countries that reached 100% in this index. Overall, the UAE ranks on the 25th position, better placed than the other Arab GCC countries, inclusively above several European countries, including Portugal (Schwab, 2019; Sufian, 2020)

This index ranks countries according to 12 preestablished “pillars” from Institutions, Infrastructure, ICT Adoption, Institutions, through Business Dynamism and Innovation capability (Fig. 4).

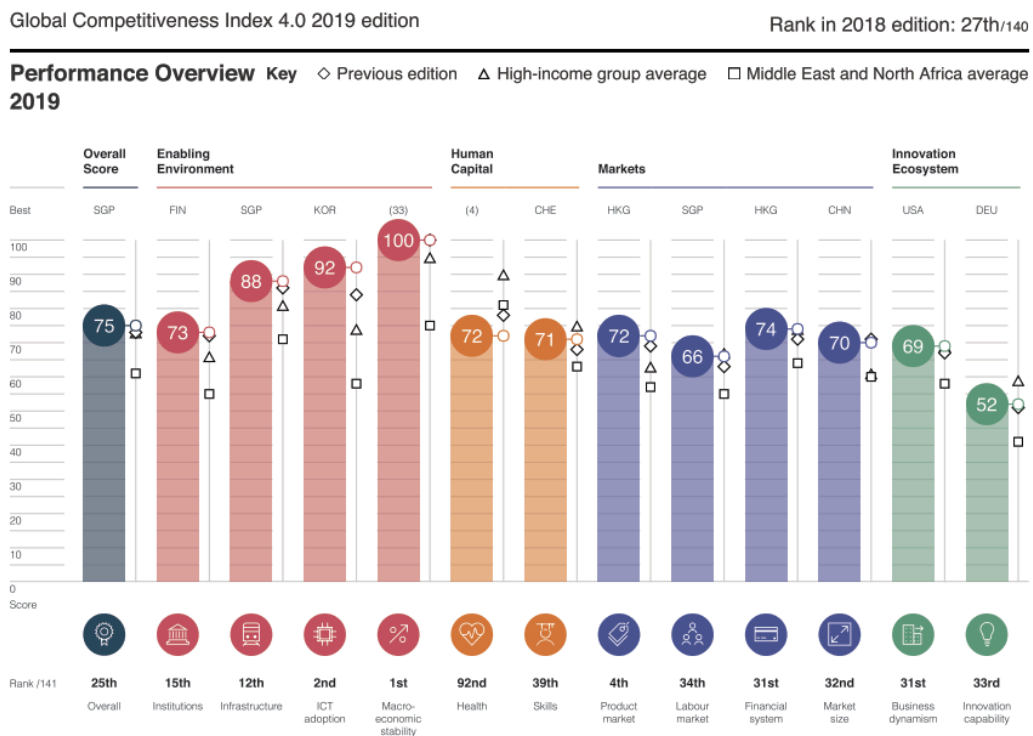


Fig 4- The United Arab Emirates (UAE). Source: World Economic Forum: The Global Competitiveness Index 2019

Due to its geographic location, growing business opportunities, friendly business legislation, and well-developed infrastructures in general and for business, the UAE has become an increasingly attractive business hub (PWC, 2020). In the Ease of Doing Business report that measures 190 countries from The World Bank (WBG), the UAE ranks 16th worldwide and first compared with the other GCC countries. The UAE is the largest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) recipient in the Middle East, which shows its economic potential (ALPEN Capital Investment, 2019). The UAE’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita is equivalent to the richer western European nations (World Bank Data 2019).

While it is a conservative Muslim country, where the Islamic Shariah Law and its principles are a legal guideline, residents are allowed religious freedom, public beaches are common, and buying and selling alcohol is permitted, with some restrictions (Almutairi et al., 2020). Today, the UAE seethes with excitement through culture and technological innovation. One such example is the recent opening of the only other Louvre outside of Paris in its capital, Abu Dhabi that exhibits artworks and artifacts on loan from France’s top museums (France Ministry of Culture, 2017). Culturally, it has become a hub for tourism.

The UAE has placed a strong emphasis on education with a literacy rate of 95% and has developed several global networks with well-known Universities that have implemented campuses in the UAE and are now actively recruiting students worldwide (WENR, 2019; UAEU, 2021). Local Universities are now focused on sectors of relevance for the UAE, such as economic growth and technological platforms. Technologically, local scientists partnered, with their International Universities and International Science Institutes, to launch a mission probe to Mars that arrived successfully, making it the fifth probe on Mars (Sarwat, 2021). Both culture and technology are part of a strategic broader ambition of the UAE to drive innovation and further diversify the economy (UAE, 2021).

According to the OEC World in 2019, Portugal exported to the UAE USD 309 Million, where apparel, its accessories, and shoes represented 21.57 % of total exports, while electrical machinery and related equipment came at 14.5%, and vehicles and their accessories came in a third place with 10.8% (see Fig 5).

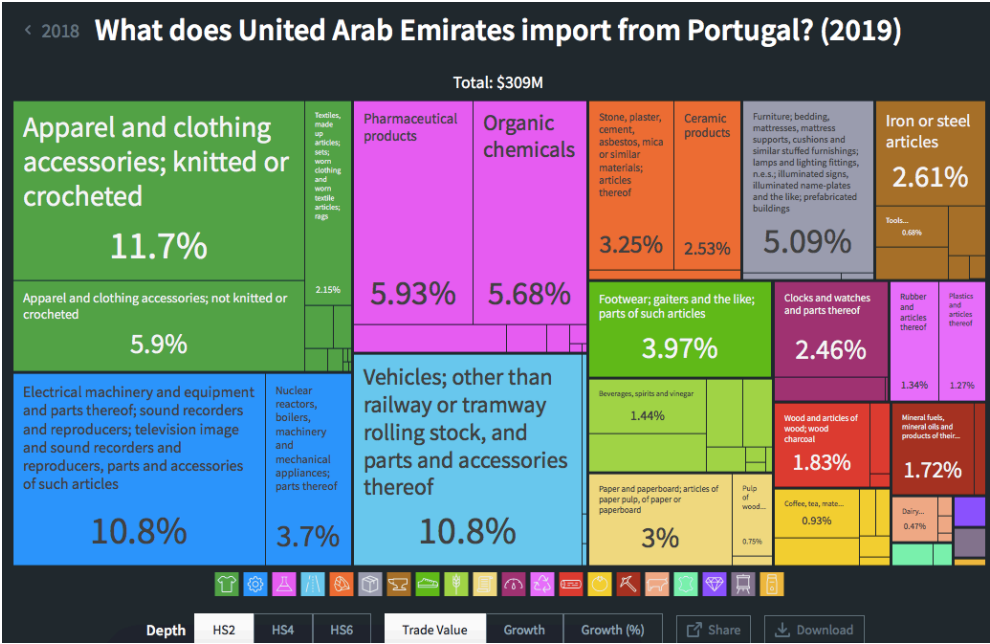


Fig 5- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) imports from Portugal. Source: OEC.World 2019

On the other hand, according to the Portuguese National Statistics Institute (INE), the most important exports to the UAE in 2020 were electrical machinery and related equipment, representing 16 % of total export, relegating apparel and other fashion items to a much lower percentage. This change mainly reflects Covid-19 pandemic measures and consequences and lower crude prices (World Bank, 2020; Arabian Business 2021).

Due to the Covid Pandemic, in 2020, the UAE economy contracted by 6.9%, with both oil and non-oil areas entering into a recession as per Gulf Business (Jan. 2021). However, some experts have indicated that the non-oil economy of the UAE will reach a 3.5% growth by the end of 2021 and 3.8% in 2022 as per Gulf Business (January 2021); Focus Economics (February 2021); Arabian Business (2021). PWC (January 2021) has recently forecasted a rebound of non-oil economy in the UAE to reach a 3.9% in 2021 above all the other GCC countries. Therefore, it is expected that the retail fashion business will rise in the UAE and the Portuguese exports will once again reach and expectantly exceed the Pre- Covid Pandemic numbers.

This study is, to some extent, focused on apparel, fashion accessories, including shoes, due to its weight on the overall Portuguese export to the UAE as per (Fig. 5) of the OEC World in 2019. It also reflects the author's long management experience in fashion retail in the UAE. However, this does not mean that the findings and considerations from our study do not apply to other areas of business. We will try to show that common business habits and cultural aspects influence business dealings throughout the Arab Middle East, be it retail or construction. Furthermore, the textile industry is one of the most critical sectors in the Portuguese economy and is recognized for its quality, know-how, and flexibility (ATP 2020). In a Gulf Business (August 2020) article, one of the major retail groups of the GCC, present in all GCC countries, although UAE based, the Chalhoub Group has forecasted a return to normalcy in 2021. This normalcy is expected through the complete opening of malls, "brick & mortar" commerce throughout the GCC, and a rapid, more robust rebound in 2022 (Gulf Business, 2020). Although "brick & mortar" commerce is crucial, it has been widely recognized that a stronger e-commerce based in Middle Eastern will considerably help to improve the overall retail performance (Arabian Business, 2021; Gulf Business, 2020).

Today, the UAE is considered a gateway to other Middle Eastern and Northern Africa countries (MENA Region), from where many multinationals run their business for those regions (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Due to the strong potential of Portuguese exports to

the UAE market and possible expansion to the other GCC and North Africa regions, as well as the continued UAE's expanding economic capacity, it is essential that exporters and international business managers know how to deal with GCC Arab managers and understand the cultural aspects through the dos and the don'ts of doing business in the Middle East.

12. Understanding the Arab Culture and how it reflects in the GCC

3.1. The Concept

The concept of culture has led to much research in various areas, including that of international business. Researchers have strived to cluster countries into groups in an attempt to study similarities and differences that help us understand and transcend them (Almutairi et al., 2020; Khan & Ebner, 2019). Hofstede (1980) is one of the most prominent and leading researchers with his investigation on national culture differences related to values, norms, and behaviors of various countries that he studied and grouped (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Masa'deh, & Al-Jarrah, 2012). These cultural differences were classified as dimensions of Power Distance, Masculinity versus Femininity, Individualism versus Collectivism, and Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede, 1984; Khan & Ebner, 2019).

The model of Power Distance reflects the fact that not all individuals in societies are equal, which in actuality measures the degree of acceptance of inequality in society (Almutairi et al., 2020; Hofstede, 1984). Masculinity reflects societies geared towards achievement, success, and material rewards obtained through success, while Femininity prefers cooperation, caring for others, and is geared towards the quality of life (Hofstede, 1984). Accordingly, a masculine society "lives to work," while a feminine society "works to live" (Obeidat et al., 2012, p. 515). In the case of Individualism, this reflects societies that are loosely-knit that prioritize their concerns and their immediate family over others (Obeidat et al., 2012). On the other hand, Collectivistic societies are tightly-knit with extended families or groups that support and are loyal to each other (Almutairi et al., 2020; Hofstede, 1984). When we look into the Uncertainty avoidance dimension, we find that it reflects the extent to which members of a society may feel anxious by unclear circumstances or positions and therefore try to avoid the anxiety of the "unknown" it may provoke as much as possible (Almutairi et al., 2020; Hofstede, 1984). Today, the cultural dimensions are seen as fundamental factors in economic expansion, human communication, and international business results (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012; Verluyten, S.P. 2018).

Hofstede (1980) presented his cultural findings of the “Arab countries,” which included three GCC countries, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. At that time, the “Arab countries” scored high on Power Distance and Collectivism dimensions (Almutairi et al., 2020). This indicates that Arab societies tend to accept people in authority where everybody has a place and for whom relationship building, trust, loyalty, and collectivism, the groups, are essential (Khakhar & Rammal, 2013; Obeidat et al., 2012). In Hofstede’s model, the “Arab countries” have a strong Uncertainty avoidance dimension (Hofstede, 1984). They focus on stability and rules and are mostly intolerant to new ideas and deviant behaviors. (At-Twajjri & Al-Muhaiza, 1996; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Obeidat et al., 2012).

The “Arab countries” scored at a midpoint in the Femininity versus Masculinity dimension (see graph below), which relates to Islamic teachings that adopt the concept of caring and assistance to others (At-Twajjri & Al-Muhaiza, 1996; Khan & Ebner, 2019). According to Hofstede, this is a feminine concept. Some researchers have implied that if a new study took place today in the Arab GCC countries, we would see a much lower dimension for Uncertainty Avoidance as a result of a much younger, western-educated generation that is more willing to “be bold, try new things, and be more tolerant of change” (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Overall, Hofstede believes that “culture is the software of the mind” and that the “hardware” is the culture we grew up in (Verluyten, S. P., 2018, p. 30).

In the graphs below, we can see small differences between the UAE (Fig.4), Qatar (Fig.5) as opposed to KSA (Fig.6), where the cultural values of Masculinity and Power distance are higher. Again, this reflects a more closed country where the influence of western expats and international migration is much lower. It is important to understand that the values presented are only estimations, and non-survey based.

United Arab Emirates culture through the lens of the 6-D Model of Hofstede (Estimated)

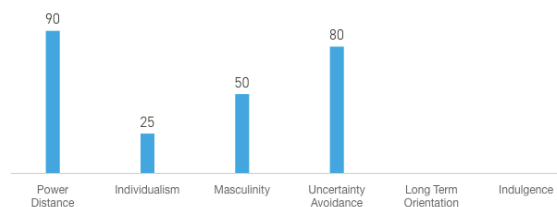


Fig.6 Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/the-united-arab-emirates/>

Qatar culture through the lens of the 6-D Model of Hofstede (Estimated)

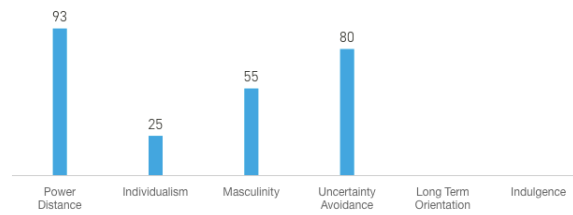


Fig. 7 Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/saudi-arabia/>

Saudi Arabia culture through the lens of the 6-D Model of Hofstede (Estimated)

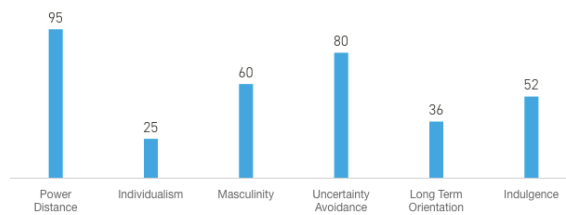


Fig.8 Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/qatar/>

Critical of Hofstede, Trompenaars & Hampden – Turner (2012) emphasized the need to think about the individual rather than generalizing for a whole country. They defend those cultures show specific tendencies which they classify through their seven dimensions. Trompenaars and Hampden – Turner based their research on how different managers in various organizations act in different countries (Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 2012). Their most significant criticism to Hofstede pointed out that his dimensions were based on the observations of one worldwide organization, which by itself already has an influence on cultural behavior and therefore biased his diagnosis (Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Trompenaars construes that international managers today have a difficult time when trying to analyze their foreign counterparts in various countries. The counterparts are influenced by a variety of factors such as their culture of origin, the culture they are working in, and the organizational culture (Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 2012). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner proposed seven dimensions of culture which they felt would facilitate reaching agreements and a successful continuum of international business dealings. They took into consideration other cultures’ habits, customs, traditional practices, and different organizational values (Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 1998). However, Trompenaars’ theory was criticized by Hofstede for not being supported by a database and so, accordingly, not valid (Hofstede, 1996).

According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, the seven dimensions of culture were described as Universalism / Particularism, Individualism / Collectivism, Neutral / Emotional, Specific / Diffuse, Ascription / Achievement, Sequential / Synchronic time, and Internal / External orientations. Universalism / Particularism mainly deals with how we evaluate other people's behavior, where the Universalist focuses more on rules and decisions instead of establishing relationships, while the Particularist sees the relationship as the focal point and deals or rules can be adapted to each side's reality (Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 2012).

As per E.C. Harrison and S. Michailova, 2012, both The UAE and the western English-speaking countries are Universalist "where there are moral absolutes and where decisions are based on a perceived shared set of commonly held values" (Harrison & Michailova, 2012, p. 627). However, according to Marsh, D. 2015, in the UAE, establishing relationships is key to negotiating and maintaining a good business relationship with room for flexibility and readjustment of rules. Although, commonly held values such as honor and integrity are upheld and thus show appreciation of the business relationship (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020).

Individualism / Collectivism deals with people who see themselves as part of a community and therefore support the community's views and try to attain the group goals or as an independent individual who has the autonomy to make decisions as he sees fit (Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 2012). In the Middle East, Collectivism is prevalent, loyalty to the family, the group, or community is paramount (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner described the value of Neutral versus Emotional concerning an individual's display of emotion. Neutral people can keep their emotions hidden, and it is not easy to know what they are thinking about the counterpart or the proposal since they do not show what they are thinking verbally or non-verbally. On the other hand, the Emotional person quickly shows how they think or feel, both verbally and through non-verbal expressions (Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 2012). The Arab culture, due to several centuries of negotiating, is masters in hiding their exact views; however, they are emotional and non-verbally expressive while negotiating and dealing with their business partner (Harrison & Michailova, 2012; Marsh, 2020).

Moreover, Trompenaars, F.; Hampden-Turner, 2012, p. 123 suggests that the Specific versus the Diffuse dimension shows that Specific oriented people "are more precise, blunt and even transparent while diffuse are evasive, tactful and ambiguous." Specific-oriented people do not want to waste time and are precise. On the other hand, the

Diffuse usually lets the conversation flow, are ambiguous, polite, but vague (Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, 2012). The Arab people, in general, are very diffuse, taking their time to let the counterpart know what is pretended and insuring tactfulness and respect with their approach (Marsh, 2020).

Ascription/ Achievement, Western societies highly value achievement, and stature within a company, for example, is mainly based on performance or expertise. To the Arabs as ascriptors, respecting hierarchy is of the utmost importance, where titles clarify a person's place, which is "seen as a commitment to the organization" (Harrison & Michailova, 2012; Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, 2012, p 144). During a negotiation, Westerners often find themselves going through several hierarchy levels before reaching the final decision maker, which may join the negotiation at the end and whose agreement is implicit. This, however, is simply a hierarchical question of respect (Marsh, 2020).

As to the value of sequential time and synchronic time, Trompenaars redefines it as the past, present, and future-oriented people and how they view time. The present and mainly the past-oriented people have a deep respect for ancestors and older people and their predecessors and frequently talk about their cultural heritage, their achievements as a country, and their company's achievements, demonstrating their potential (Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, 2012). For sequential people, time is measurable and is strict about timing. For synchronic-oriented people, time is endless and diluted, where schedules are approximate and often secondary to other relationships (Marsh, 2020; Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, 2012). The Arab culture and people tend to follow the past-oriented as their heritage and ancestors are held very highly and tend to follow cultural and traditional values, which most often stem from Islamic teachings (Khan & Ebner, 2019). However, unlike the typical past, present-oriented people, that traditionally only concentrate on one task at a time, the Arabs tend to multitask, and for them, like the synchronous oriented, time is endless and diluted, where extended family issues will likely take precedence to any appointment (Marsh, 2020; Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, 2012).

Are we subjugated to the environment and have to adapt to it, or are we in control of the environment? Trompenaars refers to this issue in his Internal /External orientations. People with Internal orientation are domineering and want to impose their views on others, sometimes aggressively. In contrast, in external behavior, people are worried about keeping the relationships and have no qualms about making concessions and being flexible to maintain consensus (Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, 2012). The Arabs view and take

great care in establishing relationships (Marsh, 2020). Therefore, according to Trompenaars value, tend to be more Externally oriented.

3.2. The Culture Concept Evolution in the GCC

Verluyten (2018) cautions that it is fundamental not to predict an individual's behavior because he belongs to a specific group or culture. When encountering an Arab in the GCC, it is automatically assumed that he speaks Arabic, is a Muslim, does not drink and does not eat pork, and prays five times a day (Marsh, 2020). However, as this is true for most of the Arabs in the GCC, these predictions may not be totally correct, as the Arab in question may be a Lebanese Christian and therefore drinks, eats pork, and does not share the influence of the Muslim teachings, although he is bound by the language and ancestral culture; it is, therefore, essential to understand the region's various cultures (Almutairi et al., 2020). Cultures only reveal influences and should not be generalized (Verluyten, 2018).

A person's values and conduct are linked to many other factors along with a cultural background, as Verluyten (2018) argues, which substantially influence their behavior and values, which Verluyten (2018) calls "dimensions." A person's social class and economic well-being, age, and gender also become strong determiners in a person's attitudes and general behavior (Verluyten, 2018). Often, the professional and corporate values and general practices, indeed the company's subculture, can curtail and even strengthen a person's demeanor no matter which culture has influenced the way of doing business (Silva, Santos, Reis, 2014; Verluyten, 2018). Due to different situational factors, a person's attitudes and behavior is likely to be adjusted (Verluyten, 2018).

Many of the new generation of GCC and especially the UAE citizens have been "accultured" through their western education while attending international schools at home and furthered their education in western universities (WENR, 2018; Kassem, Ajmal, & Khan, 2016). This growing, bolder generation has been influenced by western practices of doing business and combines both modern and traditional conduct in their business dealings and organizations (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020).

Through a cross-sectional empirical study using Hofstede's questionnaire and anchored to it, Almutairi et al. were able to show that the main characteristics of the dimensions that define the Arabic cluster, although not the same, maintain the overall tendencies (Almutairi et al., 2020). The one exception is power distance, that although still

high in the GCC countries, has decreased, which can perhaps be seen as the influence of acculturation as a result of expanding western education (see Fig.7).

New scores of selected Arabic Cluster *					
		Arabic cluster 1967	Scores: Almutairi et al. 2020		
			Kuwait	KSA	UAE
Power Distance	PDI	90	73	72	74
Individualism	IDV	38	39	48	36
Masculinity	MAS	52	45	43	52
Uncertainty Avoidance	UAI	68	70	64	66
Long Term Orientation	LTO	N/A	29	27	22

* Hofstede's Values Survey Module (VSM80) questionnaire employed in 2013. Study includes North Africa and Middle East, Arabic speaking countries

Tab. 1: Adapted from: Almutairi et al. 2020

The diverse groups of expats (international workers) in the GCC confer a particular influence in a business environment, be it business negotiations, work methods, or values and behaviors (Marsh, 2020; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). Due to their education, expat living, and prolonged exposure to Arab business norms, these expats have assimilated other styles of doing business than those of their national culture and, therefore, will manifest more unified business conduct (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Although there is extensive assimilation, these companies remain Arab, and, fundamentally, we do not fall into the trap of considering that if a company is in the GCC / UAE, the people we will be dealing with are always Arabs. These companies are multicultural, have a fast-paced environment, and are influenced by many subcultures (Marsh, 2020; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012; Petch, 2016).

Analyzing the Middle Eastern Arabic culture through Hofstede, Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner dimensions, or Verluyten's does not imply that a further study or specific theory is presented in the present research. It is, however, to capture and better understand how certain cultural aspects can influence attitudes and decisions that may impact the success or failure of doing business in the region.

3.2.1. Values: Religion and Family

One of the main aspects of doing business in the GCC and most of the Arab world is the fact that religion plays a pivotal point and is intertwined with culture and the way of life, where most of the time, it is difficult to disassociate one from the other (Almutairi et al., 2020). "Islam is more than a religion, and it is a way of life," as per Abbasi & Hollman, (1993). Followers of Islam have a profound reverence for the values taught by The Quran/Koran, the central religious text of Islam (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993). In many Islamic

countries, there is no distinction between secular or religious laws; the source of their law is the Koran called Sharia law, Islamic religious law (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993). Islamic Sharia law is very comprehensive as it encompasses both religious and secular guidance for people's everyday lives and punishment for criminal activity (Marsh, 2020). In short, Islam and, therefore, the Koran permeates the whole "fabric of society," from social aspects to business dealings (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993; Marsh, 2020).

A Muslim believes that Allah (God) controls everything and is pervasive over all aspects of life and that destiny is ultimately determined by Allah's will rather than what an individual may or may not do (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993). Therefore, nothing happens until Allah wills it so (Marsh, 2020). Islam not only is considered to have shaped the values, traditions, and culture within the Arab countries, but it is said to dominate people's behavior in their personal and professional life, such as keeping prayer times during the day at the office (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993; de Waal & Frijns, 2016).

Family is more important than work (Marsh, 2020). The family plays a significant role within Islam and the Arab culture. The concept of family is broad and, in this case, truly reflects the high score in Hofstede's dimension of collectivism as traditional Arabs favor extended families (Al Hashlamoun, 2020). Being family-oriented and fulfilling family obligations is of the utmost importance as it is also expected to be loyal to the family, the tribe, the organization, and the country (Katz, 2017). In businesses, it is natural to find managerial and other key positions held by the extended family members as many businesses; indeed, many conglomerates are family-owned (Almutairi et al., 2020). This perspective of family, loyalty, and implicit trust, reflects the importance of relationships in conducting business in the GCC Khan & Ebner, 2019).

Today, a GCC Muslim's behavior does not just reflect the Koran's teachings, but it also echoes the effects of globalization and their nowadays commonplace western education (WENR 2018, 2019). This has given them less inclination for the traditional values, where nuclear families and individualism are becoming the norm rather than the traditional collectivism of the extended family (Al Hashlamoun, 2020).

3.3. Doing business in the UAE – The Dos and the Don'ts

When firms internationalize into countries where ownership laws, cultural gaps, and language barriers are different from their own, it is advisable to enter either as a joint venture or as a franchise rather than implementing their stores (Forte & Carvalho, 2013).

Looking for the right partner in a specific market such as the UAE is essential. When companies search, they usually look for counterparts with a solid retail structure, business know-how, a grasp of local laws, and profound knowledge of the culture and cultural habits (Doherty, 2000, 2007; Forte & Carvalho, 2013). Fundamentally, after the initial meetings, it is essential to understand if there is a connection, a mutual appreciation between negotiating counterparts, that will automatically boost the initial contacts into a relationship (Forte & Carvalho, 2013; Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020).

Although throughout the GCC, several major retail players have dedicated teams and offices in each country, it is of the utmost importance to understand how strong they are in the UAE as being strong in KSA is not altogether the same when talking about brick & mortar stores and this misunderstanding will harm the development of business. In these cases, the major retailers will often apply a sub-franchising model to open stores in the other GCC countries (ALPEN Capital Investment, 2017).

The use of personal connections, as called by the Arabs as “Wasta,” used as social networking within the Ministries, will help to expedite issues. As an example, are the connections with the mall leasing teams to ensure the best locations are majorly intrinsic to each country and sometimes challenging to transpose between GCC countries (de Waal & Frijns, 2016). This is not seen as corruption but rather an accepted business practice in the Arab world, although slowly decreasing with the new western-educated Emirati leaders (de Waal & Frijns, 2016; Khakhar & Rammal, 2013; Marsh, 2020). Retail groups often themselves come together in joint ventures between GCC countries to minimize these issues.

Learning how to do business in the GCC is fundamental to business venture success. Reading the cultural clues, non-verbal communication, avoiding social mistakes, and essentially being patient and respectful is crucial to success (Marsh, 2020). It is said that a business meeting is cross-cultural if the people involved are from different cultural backgrounds or have different organizational values. Hence will not share the same ways of thinking, behaving, or negotiating, affecting the outcome of the business decisions (Silva, S.; Santos, J.; Reis, 2014; Simintiras & Thomas, 2007).

In the GCC, namely, the UAE, business meetings are undoubtedly cross-cultural as these companies are multicultural, frequently staffed by Indian, other Arab, and Western managers influenced by many subcultures (Marsh, 2020; Petch, 2016). However, it is important to understand that keeping business in the family is an Arab tradition. Although the companies are staffed by Indians, other Arab or Western managers, most companies still

belong to an Emirati or Emirati group. Therefore, the company subculture is heavily influenced by its owners (Marsh, 2020; Petch, 2016).

3.4. Business meetings –Etiquette

The knowledge of the most common business habits in the GCC can positively influence the capacity of non-Arab companies to successfully enter into the Middle Eastern market and, therefore, reduce the cost of doing business in this fast-growing economic hub (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993).

All over the Middle East, titles are highly valued; therefore, business cards must be exchanged and carefully read, always accepting it with the right hand as the left is considered unclean in many Asian societies (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020). As a sign of respect, politely ask how the counterpart would like to be called and keep the card in front on the table (Katz, 2017). The business card exchange helps to identify the other's professional title and seniority hence, the ability to make decisions (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020).

The first meetings are a sort of “get to know” the counterpart with many pleasantries and several personal questions about you and your family, which are often discussed at length. This can be somewhat frustrating as most westerners feel private matters are not to be discussed in a business forum and regard time as money. Therefore, they would like to start right away dealing with business issues (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019). It is, however, of the utmost importance to be patient and let the counterpart set the pace as there will not get a definite commitment or rejection in these first meetings (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020; Petch, 2016).

3.5. Establishing “The Business Relationship.”

According to both Hofstede and Trompenaars, individualism is a low characteristic of the Arabs where collectivism is central. The extended family, the community, group goals, and relationships, including the business ones, are defining characteristics of the GCC Arabs (Hofstede, 1984; Trompenaars, Fons; Hampden-Turner, 2012). Establishing a solid relationship in either export or a franchise venture leads to maximizing the market's potential of the products or brands, therefore gaining a competitive advantage and long-term profits (L. F. Lages, Silva, & Styles, 2009).

3.5.1. Trust and Respect

In business, as in their daily lives, trust and personal relationships are very important for the GCC Arabs (Katz, 2017). Business relationships are built through a solid relationship with a GCC partner (Katz, 2017). Without building a trusting and strong relationship, the success of any business deal is uncertain (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002).

For the Middle Easterner, establishing his counterpart's character, trustworthiness, and moral standards enables him to begin building a business relationship (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018). From a westerner's point of view, this somewhat time-consuming process can last for months before any "real" business begins to unfold (Khan & Ebner, 2019). It is, therefore, very complicated when a western company decides to change contacts because someone just left the company or because they feel negotiations are taking too long. They are not seeing results and feel a new contact may result better. The trust and mutual understanding that had already been established with the previous contact will be rendered useless, as the process of evaluating the new counterpart will undoubtedly restart (Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018).

In order to foster a relationship and build trust, the Arab from the GCC will evaluate you as a person, not just as a representative of your company, through small talk, general pleasantries as well as somewhat personal questions to assess your respectability (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020). This sometimes can take up the whole first meeting and subsequent ones to create the bond needed before the actual negotiation starts (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020). Patience is needed, as small talk is more than a courtesy; it is an evaluation of the other's suitability as a business partner. (Katz, 2017; Khakhar & Rammal, 2013; Petch, 2016; Simintiras & Thomas, 2007). Hence, the goal of this pre-stage is to determine if the other party can be trusted both as a person and as a representative of their organization (Khan & Ebner, 2019). This will always happen, independently of being the first contact from the organization or whether that contact is substituting another person (Marsh, 2020). Trust is personal!

Consequently, it is advisable to maintain the same person of contact upon whom trust has been bestowed; otherwise, it could hinder the relationship. This would be seen as a lack of knowledge on how business is done in the GCC, and the relationship would have to reinitiate with the new person (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002; Marsh, 2020).

To establish a trusting relationship, it is essential to be confident, humble, maintain strong eye contact, as this confirms trustworthiness (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Petch, 2016). It is crucial to convey a feeling of sincerity and honesty, show respect for the business partner,

Arab culture, and fundamentally for Islam (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Personal behavior is the crucial base for establishing trust and for the continuance of building a relationship (Marsh, D., 2015). Trust is built patiently over time, face to face, through continuous and consistent respectful behavior, for trust is bestowed only to a small group of people and cannot be rushed (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002; Petch, 2016; Katz, 2017 Khan & Ebner, 2019). Achieving a trusting relationship with a business partner can be difficult and will take time; however, once gained, it is “easier to attain the organization’s or family’s trust because the partner will champion and advocate for the relationship” (Khan & Ebner, 2019, p. 423). Once this trusting business relationship is established, the business will rapidly move along (Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018).

3.5.2. Communication – Verbal & Non-Verbal

Whether we shake hands or bow, whether we cross our legs or not, how we eat, or whether or not we make eye contact are only a few aspects of non-verbal communication. The way we conduct ourselves is permeated by national culture and the culture we grew up in (Khakhar & Rammal, 2013; Verluyten, 2018). However, these practices and attitudes continue to be influenced by various circumstances in a person’s life and the different situational factors and experiences encountered, whether personal or professional (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Verluyten, 2018). Nonetheless, Verluyten is adamant to caution that the person’s individual features, which have been permeated by their culture as well as many of the premises he presented, is still a person. Therefore, we cannot fall into the “trap of overgeneralization” as this is naïve and biasedly unreliable (Verluyten, 2018, p. 29).

Business communication in the GCC and the UAE is mainly done in English. As many of these countries have a high influx of migrants from many nationalities, English is the chosen business language (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). The English level is relatively high as many have studied in international schools and have gone on to western universities. Indian-controlled businesses or majorly run by Indians will also use English as their business language. The subcontinent has an ample array of languages, where English is the standard variant among educated Indians (Marsh, 2020). With the Indian nationals, although the level of English is relatively high, the accent, the syntax, and much of the terminology will invariably hinder the initial communications (Marsh, 2020).

Verbal communication in the Middle East, namely in the UAE, is amicable, pleasant, and usually spoken in mild tones but relatively diffuse and subtle (Marsh, 2020). You will rarely hear a direct “no,” as this may be more like “I will think about it” or “we will look into this,” which does not necessarily mean what it says (Katz, 2017). If, however,

there is a possibility for an agreement, there will still not be a definite “yes” but rather the ever-present “InshAllah” (God willing). On the other hand, the westerners tend to say what they mean, and there is little room for misunderstanding; however, in the Middle East and even in the Indian subcontinent, this may be seen as too direct and, therefore, impolite (Marsh, 2020). It is essential to carefully choose the words used and the tone of voice that will help shape the ambiance of the meeting, which is how the Arab GCC counterpart will also conduct his verbal communication (Marsh, 2020; Simintiras & Thomas, 2007).

Public verbal disagreement is rarely manifested, which can be translated into silence, or the counterpart may purposely ignore the issue and rapidly move to another subject (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020). As per Verluyten (2018), like the Chinese and Japanese, the Arabs also may use short periods of silence to assimilate information, which is just a way to assess if a proposal, for example, is advantageous to them. It is erroneous to fill this sometimes-uncomfortable space of time with another issue or when in a negotiation advance with further concessions (Verluyten, 2018). Trying to come back to the issue immediately may be considered rude and pushy, and it is best to follow the counterpart’s lead and be indirect (Katz, 2017).

Non-linguistic expressions, considered indirect communication, are quite significant in the Arab world and play an essential role in conducting business with Arabs in general (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993; Verluyten, 2018). Facial expressions, hand gestures, closeness to their counterpart, touching of the forearm, constant eye contact, or the lack of it, are many ways the Arabs communicate. The Arab culture often uses non-verbal gestures and signs that will help the westerner understand how the meeting is progressing (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Simintiras & Thomas, 2007). Arabs often use non-verbal communication to emphasize or substitute verbal messages, such as the way they like to stand close by, next to their counterpart, which shows interest. On the other hand, a westerner backing away due to their notion of personal space will invariably show a lack of interest (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993).

Between men, in a meeting, eye contact should be constant, as it, like in the West, conveys sincerity, having nothing to hide, and helps establish a trusting business relationship (Katz, 2017). On the other hand, if there is a woman involved, some non-verbal communication changes as a sign of respect (Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018). The most religious, traditional men will invariably not look directly into a woman’s eyes but to the side. The more western-oriented GCC Arabs will establish eye contact, although briefly.

Accordingly, most Arabs will also not stand close to a woman or touch her, as again, this would make them uncomfortable and feel disrespectful (Marsh, 2020). It is not a question of narrowness but a sign of respect that is deeply rooted in Muslim traditions and culture.

3.5.3. Time and Patience

The notion of time in the Middle East is somewhat diffuse, unprecise, as Middle Easterners believe that time is controlled by Allah (God). Therefore, if something else comes up, they must attend to it, as this is Allah's will (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). Hence, punctuality, including in the fast-paced UAE, is much less valued by Middle Easterners as opposed to Western cultures (Marsh, 2020). Flexibility is key to the understanding of time in the Middle East. Assume that deadlines are merely considered as indications, and a business trip to the Middle East may need to be extended to get down to business (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019). As much as possible, remaining flexible is the best strategy for western businessmen (Marsh, 2020). Patience is much valued in the Middle East, and it is imperative to possess while doing business in the region (Petch, 2016). "Western business professionals must show patience at all times, even if there are circumstances that from their point of view are patiently ridiculous" (Marsh, 2015, p. 237), as this must have been Allah's will.

Reacting with impatience or showing a lack of tolerance in the Middle East will inevitably lead to losing the trust already established, as well as your standing (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Contradicting the Arab counterpart assertively, namely in front of others, is considered aggressive and insulting that will cause embarrassment compromising his honor, which is called "losing face" (Khan & Ebner, 2019) (Elbanna, Abdelzaher, & Ramadan, 2020). It is vital to "go with the flow," be tactful and take heed of your reactions, as confrontational behavior is considered rude and fatal to any business dealing (Marsh, 2020; Petch, 2016).

Hence, being tactful and reserved is indispensable; not showing openly that you may be upset or causing embarrassment through actions or vivid disagreement with your counterpart, as this may lead to his "losing face," especially in public, is clearly to be avoided (Katz, 2017). Preserving the counterpart's honor is fundamental for the good continuation of the relationship (Katz, 2017). Respect and deference go a long way to show that you are serious and knowledgeable about doing business in the region (Marsh, 2020; Petch, 2016).

3.5.4. Contracts & Negotiations

Business in the Middle East is typically conducted face to face in the pre-negotiation phase, the getting “to know you” meetings, where trust and moral standards are evaluated. Similarly, contracts and agreement meetings are also negotiated face to face (Marsh, 2020).

To a westerner, a contract is a binding legal document until expiry and is typically enforced if conditions established are not met or are violated (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). On the other hand, Middle Easterners view contracts as a general form of agreement, a letter of intent, a guideline of general principles that usually are relatively flexible (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising if the counterpart wants to reopen negotiations when a condition may no longer suit him (Marsh, 2015). After the relationship has been established, the counterpart’s agreement and personal commitment are stronger and preferable to the Middle Easterner than a written document. After all, trust, mutual respect, and a sustainable relationship are crucial to maintaining a successful business venture in the Middle East (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019).

Negotiations can be slow and longer than expected, so it is essential to curb the emotions and not attempt to pressure or rush the procedure as being aggressive is insulting and counterproductive; thus, it must be avoided (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019). Furthermore, the counterpart may not be the final decision maker and could be waiting for directions from the “real” decision makers up top, the board members, or the owner of the business. Until they receive that direction, negotiations are not final (Marsh, 2020). It is, therefore, essential to be prepared to make more than one trip for the same negotiation (Khan & Ebner, 2019). The proposal may even need to be presented anew to the ‘real’ decision-makers, so be persistent and patient to reach the objectives.

During a negotiation in the GCC, it is fundamental to “leave some room” for further negotiations and bargaining otherwise; the westerner may be seen as inflexible and not appreciative of the business relationship (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020). It is imperative to also leave room for the “real” decision-makers, that may not be directly involved in the main negotiations and with whom you will have to concede conditions further so that they do not “lose face” as this would cause embarrassment (Katz, 2017). Indeed, face-saving, honor and dignity, personal and family reputation are of the utmost importance to a Middle Easterner (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020).

Establishing a solid relationship in either an export or a franchise venture leads to maximizing the market's potential of the products or brands, therefore gaining a competitive advantage and long-term profits (L. F. Lages et al., 2009).

3.6. The Quality of the Entire Team

Although the Gulf countries have encouraged and set up programs to motivate their citizens to take up positions in the workforce, this has fallen short in some countries, namely in the private sector (Marsh, 2015). Therefore, each GCC country must rely on varying degrees of international migrants working in the private sector. As earlier established, countries like KSA, Oman, and Bahrain tend to have a much smaller number of migrant workers, where KSA has approximately 38% of the total population. In contrast, Bahrain, for example, has about a 48% ratio of migrant workers (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017, 2019). In the UAE, where the Emiratization program to promote a reduced dependency on international workers has fallen short in the private sector, Emirati prefers to work for the government or government-related companies (de Waal & Frijns, 2016). Therefore, the ratio of migrant international workers is now above 87% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019).

According to Khan & Ebner (2019), in the Middle East and therefore the UAE, due to its elevated high-power distance, according to Hofstede insights scales, as can be seen in Fig. 6, people are viewed and treated according to their social status, gender, race, age, and education. This hierarchization is generally applied in the business structure of the private sector teams, where some nationalities may be excluded from management positions and or maybe favored for certain positions in some lines of businesses (Bealer & Bhanugopan, 2014; Marsh, 2020). Unofficially, but, as a matter of fact, jobs are filled according to the most desirable nationalities, as seen below in decreasing order (Tab.2). Only after coming education and competence for the specific job (Marsh, 2020). Furthermore, salaries for the same position, but held by different nationalities, are also according to the below nationality hierarchies, which is perfectly within the law (Marsh, 2020).

Status	Nationality	Sub Group Sequence
High	Arab Nationalities (1)	1. Gulf Arabs 2. Levantine Arabs (Lebanese, Palestinian Jordanian, Syrian) and some Iraqi
	Westerners	1. British, Northern & Western European, North Americans, Australian, South African (usually) 2. Russian and other Eastern European
	"Honorary" Westerners	1. Turks and Iranians 2. Japanese and Korean 3. Some Chinese
	Arab Nationalities (2)	1. All other Arabs (Maghreb and Egyptian) and some Sudanese
	Indian subcontinent	1. Educated Indians and Pakistani (Muslims & Christians) 2. Other educated Indian
	"Service Economy"	1. Less educated Indian, Philippine 2. Afghans, Bangladeshi, other Asian
Low	African subcontinent	1. All other countries south of the Sahara desert (Sahel)

Tab.2: Adapted from Marsh, D., (2015) Doing Business in the Middle East and author's own experience

Therefore, the UAE is an agglomeration of many nationalities, where acculturation occurs almost naturally due to prolonged exposure to other cultures and the Emirate expat life (Khan & Ebner, 2019). The business teams are generally composed of various nationalities, more or less represented according to the type of business. Predominantly, the finance, IT, and accounting departments are usually run by Indian nationals. Ultimately, when dealing with international managers in any department, it is important to expect that their attitudes and values are presumably, more and more influenced by the new culture and much less by their own (Costa e Silva; Santos & Reis, 2014; de Waal & Frijns, 2016). A strong Emirati business culture influence is almost always present in all business meetings, even if no Emiratis' are present at any given time, although, business practices tend to be a selective fusion of those various cultures of the teams in the company (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). Thus, acculturation is subnational, a firm-level culture that flourishes and is present in business relationships (Costa e Silva; Santos & Reis, 2014).

Although acculturated, the partner needs to understand and know where the business will go and how it will be achieved in the case of a franchise or a joint venture (Forte & Carvalho, 2013). It is recommended to offer in-house training in the Western facilities, which will always be a motivational aspect for the UAE team. Suppose this is not possible, either due to budget constraints or because of the travel limitations of the team (non-western expats are not easily allowed into Schengen space or other western countries). In that case,

it is essential to send someone from the brand's head office frequently to train, involve and motivate the UAE team (Doherty, 2007).

Middle Eastern partners do not have just one type of business, but often several to dedicate their time and attention (Arden Advisory & Accounting, 2016; ALPEN Capital Investment, 2019; Forbes Middle East 2020). It will depend on a tactful, non-imposing but attentive approach to ensure success, especially in the retail field. Maintaining a constant cooperative feedback system with the franchise partner allows for efficient problem solving and reinforces the relationship, which is crucial to the success of the international venture (Doherty, 2007; L. F. Lages et al., 2009). Frequency and rapport in communication and being in the market quite often transform a simple franchise into a successful business (Doherty, 2007). In a very straightforward and informing way, Doherty (2007, pg.789) declares that "if you are not in touch with your market, you can forget about it."

The quality of the team in upmarket retail is primordial when we consider the above (Tab.2) nationalities subgroup sequence, as customers react differently and are more inclined to buy depending on the "status" of the salesman offering the high-end product. Most luxury brands employ Maghreb Arabs as well as Russians to "operate" their stores. On the other hand, most of the salespeople in the service economy of the Middle East are often of lower socio-economic class, which can influence the service quality delivered to customers unless significant training is provided (Raven & Welsh, 2004). Some companies have brought in their experienced nationals to actually work in the Middle East and train the partner's teams with the best practices the "brand" employs in their successful stores (Doherty, 2007). The reality of the Middle East, and in our case of the UAE, is very different from that of the Western countries, and it is easier to understand and adopt the best practices to suit the local environment (Marsh, 2020; Raven & Welsh, 2004).

One of the most successful cases that come to mind is that a Portuguese fashion brand, Saccor Brothers, had some difficulties implementing their high-end vision business dynamics in the UAE. Their business partner, an Indian-run company with a local partner, was quite successful in fashion and other international brands. However, the teams chosen to "operate" the stores did not embody the upmarket vision of the brand according to the hierarchy levels of nationalities in the UAE. The business was not as expected and among several solutions was a renegotiation where the strategic stores would be "operated" by Portuguese nationals recruited from their stores in Portugal. Success was imminent, and the upmarket stores were now not only looking upmarket but "manned" by westerners that were part of the second level of nationality sequence group status. As these Portuguese nationals

did not speak Arabic and most of the clientele were local Emirate, they brought in the next level on the nationality sequence group, the “Other Arabs,” and the success continued.

3.6.1. “The Movers & Shakers” (Middle Management)

As the UAE is an amalgam of cultures concerning both the managers and the managed, it is therefore essential for leaders, in our case the middle management, to have a doable knowledge of cross-cultural management with their teams to achieve targeted goals (Bealer & Bhanugopan, 2014b; Marques, Reis, & Gomes, 2018).

Hierarchies in the UAE continue to be very structured with clear lines of authority, power centralization; for this reason, procedures are generally rigid and sometimes slow trickling down to middle management (de Waal & Frijns, 2016; Katz, 2017). Relationships, nationality status, and positioning within the company are significant to speed “things” along. These managers here are called “Movers & Shakers” and play a vital role in integrating and motivating their store teams from different socio-economic backgrounds, mobilizing them to work together towards the success of their retail outlets under one specific brand (Maak & Pless, 2006).

After clear orientation from their lines of authority, these “Movers & Shakers” are the exporter’s continuous access to the UAE retail market. Their attention may be divided between several brands. It is fundamental to maintain a trusting, robust and productive relationship through systematic training and information sharing and become “top of mind” (Doherty, 2007). It is also decisive that they feel they have won the trust and respect, as this will place them in favor with their line authorities and therefore benefit the exporter (Katz, 2017).

3.6.2. The “Real” Decision Makers

The largest mall, the tallest building, the most sophisticated hotels, “the only...”, underneath all the superlatives of the modern UAE, basically remains an old political and social order that focuses on a central position of a ruler (Sheik) that centralizes the decision-making power. This centralization trickles down into organizations where the “real” decision-makers are the most senior-level executives (de Waal & Frijns, 2016). The “Sheikocracy” as presented by Ali, A. J. (2005) defines the Sheik, in our case the most senior administrator, as the ultimate authority in any subject, a sort of father figure that can “subordinate efficiency for personal relations and connections” (de Waal & Frijns, 2016, pg.240).

Arab managers do not excel in employee-manager communication, linked to Hofstede’s (1984) high-power distance. However, due to western education, which has

influenced business, more and more employee empowerment is gaining some ground in more progressive companies (de Waal & Frijns, 2016). In these more progressive organizations, the Arab owner or Arab sponsor is not present in negotiations or meetings and sometimes prefers to stay in the background and may or may not be the decision-maker, especially if they are only sponsors (Marsh, 2020). Hence, it is crucial to be aware of the “real” decision-maker. Contact or access to the “real” decision-maker, if the Arab company owner, usually is quite limited and may only be possible through a social gathering after a trusting, respectful relationship has been established (Marsh, 2020).

When the senior executive does get involved, if Arabic, and due to a question of status, will want to meet up with the corresponding person from the other side and thus leave the negotiations at an impasse until this happens (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). However, if the westerner has been empowered by his company to close the deal, it is essential to ensure that they understand this. An additional concession may be necessary to show deference, which should have been kept for this occasion for the senior executive and thus allowing him to “save face” and therefore enhancing his status (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). After all, a long-term relationship is being built rather than negotiating a “one-off” deal (Khan & Ebner, 2019).

4. What is success, and how do we measure it?

Success can be measured in many ways, as it all depends on the exporting companies’ goals (Carneiro, Farias, da Rocha, & Ferreira da Silva, 2016; Sadeghi, Rose, & Madsen, 2021). It can be measured through export intensity, export profitability, export market share, new store openings in a franchise, product awareness, payment regularity, order frequency, return on investment (ROI), and the not so less important relationship with clients (Acikdilli, Mintu-Wimsatt, Kara, & Spillan, 2020; Carneiro et al., 2016; Sadeghi et al., 2021).

Researchers have introduced various types of measures, both financial and non-financial, or a combination of both, in an attempt to standardize benchmarks for success, such as the STEP scale from Lages & Lages, (2004). This scale measures short term assessment of export performance or the RELQUAL Scale from Lages, Lages, & Lages, (2005) that measures the relationship quality between the exporting firm and the importer. Some researchers have also used resource-based approaches to measure export success (Acikdilli et al., 2020).

On the other hand, Carneiro et al., (2016) consider both financial and non-financial objectives, using in-depth interviews in a qualitative study, to get more detailed information of the performance indicators for exporting businesses. Concepts such as the relationship with clients already measured by C. Lages et al., (2005), brand image, product acceptance, client satisfaction were important non-financial metrics. Export volume, margin, profitability, and market share were referred to as the success or failure indicators most frequently reported by managers interviewed in research conducted by (Carneiro et al., 2016). More recently, another, more complex, in-depth, long-term measure, the IPEP framework of Sadeghi et al., (2021), also consider individualized perspectives of financial and non-financial benchmarks in a quantitative study of export performance.

This study attempts to understand through in-depth interviews those aspects of the dos and don'ts of international negotiations in the GCC.

5. The Conceptual Framework

To better understand the dos and don'ts of doing business in the GCC, the conceptual framework provides a clear view of the specific aspects that may lead to business failure and those that will trend into success. The research questions that are presented will relate to these aspects.

- The first meetings – Cultural Clues are influenced by business etiquettes such as card exchange and the deference shown to the counterpart. How it is done is an initial step that will lead to trust.
- Respectability & Establishing Trust are perhaps some of the most important aspects that can immediately lead to the failure of a deal if trust is not established between partners leading to “don'ts.” For the GCC Arabs, people, not companies, are trustworthy, and without establishing trust, there will not be a successful business venture. On the other hand, with some patience for sometimes lengthy small talk and with the correct verbal and non-verbal communication, respectability and trust can be established, which will lead to the path of the “dos” to the success of the business.
- Negotiating – Decision-making meetings where contract and other negotiations are presented can still be influenced by verbal and non-verbal communication, require patience, and may still lead to failure of the business, a

“do not.” When successful, these negotiations will lead to the running of the business.

- The success of Running the Business depends on the strength of the relationship established between partners. The quality of the team chosen dramatically influences the outcome of the business's success. As a negative factor, a “do not” may lead to failure of a business.
- The measure of success has been determined by a period of 3 years presence in the market. Less than three years is unsatisfactory and, therefore, a failure.

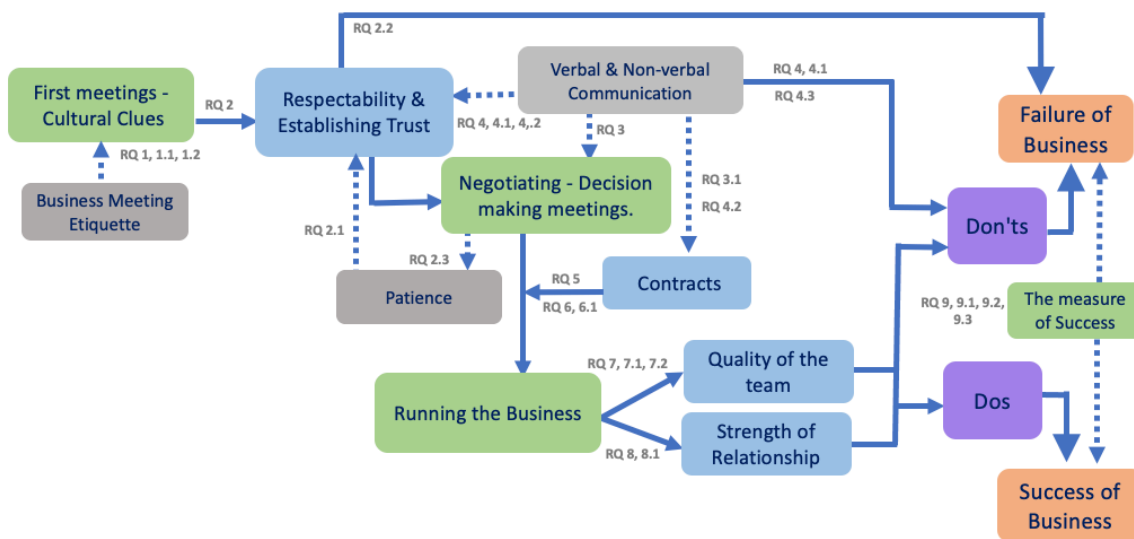


Fig: 9 Source: Own construct, based on interview questionnaire.

5.1. Research Questions

Our Research Questions have been elaborated to grasp those aspects, the don'ts, that may lead a negotiator not experienced with dealing with the Arabs from the GCC to be unsuccessful and on the other hand, understanding the “dos” that more easily will lead to business success.

- Research Questions 1 through 9.3 can be found in Appendix 1

6. Methodology

To respond to our research questions, in this study, we have resorted to semi-structured interviews within a qualitative method of data collection, where a series of predefined questions, and primarily open-ended questions, were posed to let the respondents describe their own experiences in their field (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Sekaran & Roger, 2016). This method allows our participants to give their observations and spontaneously provide insights and opinions rather than be mere respondents (Bryman, 2012). The main disadvantage of this method is the reduced scope of the sample, which limits the analysis.

This study integrates the findings of 13 semi-structured interviews, of which 11 have been video recorded and transcribed. According to the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection, there are no rules for how many interviews. The sample size is needed mainly because we have selected to focus on depth rather than breadth (Barbour et al., 2018).

In our questionnaire, two Research Questions were introduced. Respondents were asked to evaluate the essential features through a Likert scale, where five were extremely important and one not important. Additionally, the respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of the relationship established with their Arab counterparts through the same scale.

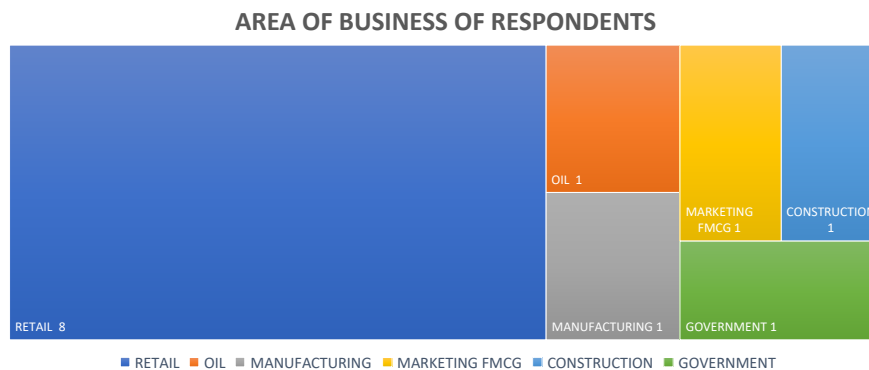
Due to geographical distances between the researcher and the respondents, the platform zoom.us was chosen as the vehicle for video interviews. Each interview was set up through an email previously obtained from personal contacts, through the professional platform LinkedIn or previous business connections. Each video interview was set up at a specific time and date and generally took from 40 to 90 minutes, depending on the depth of the insights and the time the respondents had available.

Prior to the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the research and its focus (Given, 2012). Additionally, each respondent gave their informed consent to recording the zoom.us session and to participate in the research (Given, 2012). Each respondent was assured anonymity in their responses as names and brands were omitted.

Two questionnaires were received in written format according to the respondents' requests due to frequent business travels and time constraints. These questionnaires sent to the respondents were precisely in the same format as those used for the zoom.us interviews (see Appendix 2).

6.1. Respondent's Profile

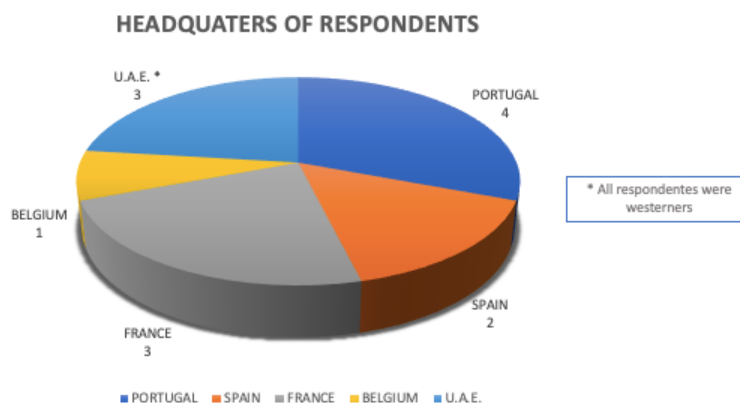
The respondents were chosen to represent several business areas in the UAE; however, they mainly focused on fashion retail. Retail is one of the fastest-growing areas of business in the GCC. In the UAE, by the end of 2021, the retail industry is expected to grow 13% to reach US\$58 billion (Arabian Business, 2021). Portuguese fashion exports, either through franchise or other forms of international investment, represent more or less 20% of the total business imported by the UAE (OEC. WORLD 2019).



Graph 1: Source: Own construct, based on respondents' information.

The respondents are all European, of which six are Portuguese; however, 2 of these live and work in the Emirates. Their experience and know-how, the dos and don'ts, about the GCC can benefit Portuguese companies wanting to invest internationally and be successful in these markets.

The retail respondents provided information about other GCC countries as most of the brands were at least in one other country, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Our approach was to understand if some of our premises were common to the culture and if the area of business in some way reshaped those cultural premises accordingly.



Graph 2: Source: Own construct, based on respondents' information.

In the fashion retail industry, our respondents are primarily responsible for the international business of their companies, either as area managers or directors. The respondents of the non-retail areas are diverse and represent significant business areas in the UAE, such as the oil, national wealth investment management, or the construction business. The respondents from the UAE were chosen due to the researcher’s facility of contacts.

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Business Area</i>
<i>M</i>	International Business Director	Retail Fashion
<i>R</i>	Export & Franchise Manager	Retail Fashion
<i>C</i>	Director of International Department	Retail Fashion
<i>S</i>	CEO / Owner	Manufacturing / Exporting
<i>MA</i>	International Market Manager	Retail Fashion
<i>P</i>	International Director	Retail Fashion
<i>V</i>	International Director	Retail Fashion
<i>JD</i>	International Area Manager	Retail Fashion
<i>O</i>	International Area Manager	Retail Fashion
<i>JP</i>	Head of Marketing	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
<i>L</i>	Head of Procurement	Investment Management - UAE
<i>LA</i>	GCC Technical Manager	International Joint Venture in Oil
<i>RC</i>	GCC Regional Director	Construction Consultancy

Tab.3: Source: MAXQDA Based on Respondents Interviews

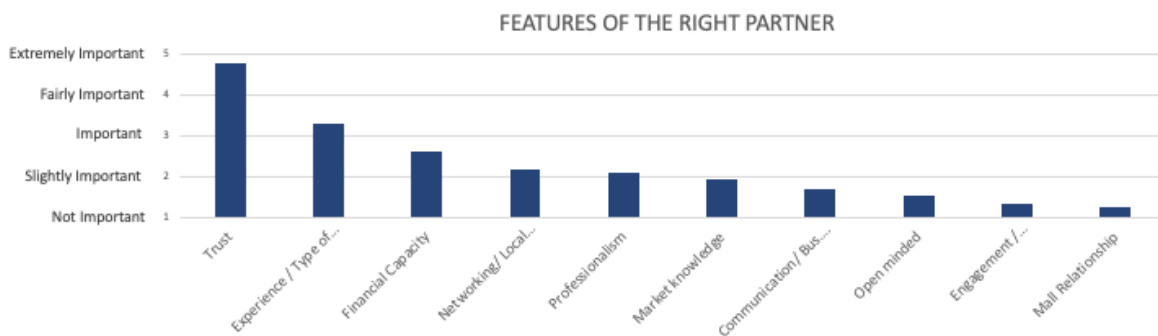
7. Content Analysis

Computer-assisted qualitative content analysis has grown substantially in qualitative research. These programs allow the researcher to code words and sequences of texts in a program to later retrieve those codes for interpretation and correlate this coded information to their research questions (Bryman, 2012). Using software such as MAXQDA 2020 ensures the accurate transcription of video interviews and safeguards accuracy and credibility (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020).

The recorded video interviews were later imported into MAXQDA 2020 to be coded and analyzed. The written questionnaires were also imported into MAXQDA 2020 and treated the same way. According to Costa & Amado (2018), the use of this type of software assists the researcher in making better-informed usage and, therefore, better content analysis while safeguarding the accurate, unbiased representation of data (Barbour et al., 2018).

7.1. Analysis and Results

When looking for the right partner in the UAE / GCC, it is essential to look for specific features that will become relevant in setting up the business and business success in the long run. While answering RQ.1, several features were brought up by our respondents such as trust, experience in the same type of business, the ability to network or have connections as well as financial capacity in accordance with the literature (Forte & Carvalho, 2013; Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). After itemizing these features, the respondents were asked to place them on a Likert scale which revealed several features that our respondents found most important when looking for a partner, as seen in the below graph.



Graph 3: Source: Own construct, based on respondents' information transcribed into MAXQDA

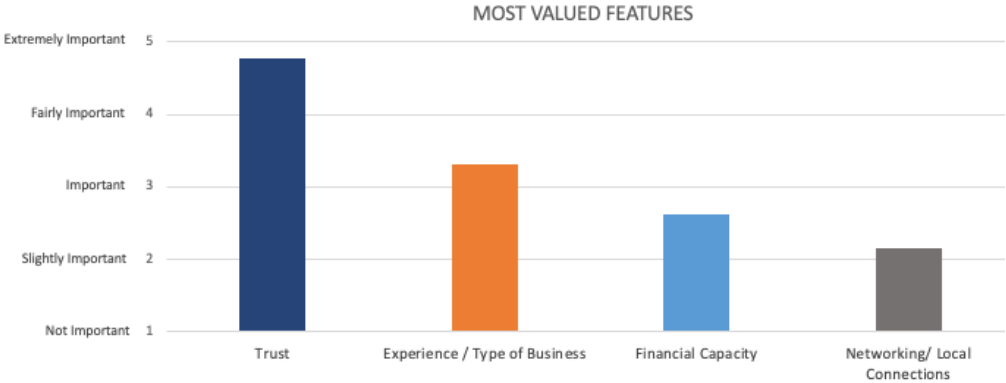
When analyzing these responses, the top valued features identified were Trust, Experience / Business type, Financial Capacity, Networking / Connections, Professionalism, and Market knowledge. Having experience in the same type of business ensures some degree of experience. For example, if the company wanting to do business in the UAE were a children's fashion brand, they would choose a partner with a retail background in fashion. Companies that have been dealing with other international brands

for some time usually have a well set up middle and upper management, are entirely professional, and have acquired market knowledge while doing business. Knowing someone, having the right connections with the right malls can ensure the best locations and better negotiations, as one of the respondents' states, as the most suitable malls have incredibly high rental prices and very sought-after locations, as exemplified by the respondents' answers below.

<i>R.Q.1</i>	<i>MA</i>	<p>I will add a new one which is networking, they know who is behind the shopping malls and the ability to negotiate with them as this kind of networking is extremely important . To get the best places inside the shopping malls , to negotiate lower rents, as key money and rents play such an important role in the GCC.</p> <p>FEATURES R1 > NETWORKING (0)</p>
	<i>P</i>	<p>Yes the trust is most important but in fact the most important is to check the connection the relation of the partner, normally you have to find a business man having both money and connections.</p> <p>IMPORTANT IN A PARTNER R1 > FEATURES R1 (0)</p>

Tab. 4: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents'

Connections are not only to get the best deals with malls but also to speed up legal issues that may take longer if the chosen partner does not have the right PRO (Public Relations Officer). This PRO acts as a liaison between the company and the government (de Waal & Frijns, 2016). The financial capacity of the partner is third overall in the most valued features of a partner as there is a heavy investment necessary to introduce into the market a new brand, a new product, and the continued purchase of stock. Financial capacity is also needed for companies to secure a letter of credit from banks as payment assurance. As one of the respondents discloses, “you are not sending things before receiving something; you work with a “letter of credit” (Respondent: S, Pos. 24).



Graph 4: Source: Own construct, based on respondents' information transcribed into MAXQDA.

Trust seems to be the most critical feature for most respondents. For the GCC Arabs, it is essential to understand if there is a connection, a mutual appreciation, shared values, as this will naturally lead to trust. Hence, for Westerners, establishing a trusting relationship will facilitate business, according to the literature (Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018). Accordingly, our respondents mention trust as a vital feature.

<i>R.Q.1</i>	<i>MA</i>	<p>What I feel from Arabs in general, they were really friendly and trustful. They wanted to trust us. It's kind of the opposite culture we have in the western countries which we are much more into the bureaucracy and the paper and the signature and they are more into the trust. They look at your eyes and shake hands and for them it's the most important sign of trust for an Arab. I value that a lot.</p> <p>FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 (0)</p>
	<i>JD</i>	<p>They want to know who you are if you fit with their values, and if it fits they can work with you in a partnership. Its personality and attitude.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 (0)</p>

Tab. 5: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Our RQ. 1.1. relates to the nationality inclusiveness of these first meetings in the GCC. In accordance with the literature, and although keeping business in the family is an Arab tradition, many companies are staffed by Indians, other Arab and Western managers, as can be seen in the respondents' answers below. However, the GCC Arab subculture heavily influences business. Most top managers are still locals (nationals of that specific country), as supported by (de Waal & Frijns, 2016; Marsh, 2020; Petch, 2016).

<i>R.Q. 1.1</i>	<i>C</i>	<p>C: In the first meeting, there was the Arab, the CEO and then Indians basicly, there were local Arabs , the chairman for example. No, not with me but with our GM. In general we met with all the different departments, we met with the team that was going to do the follow of our account. They tried to let us to understand on how the company worked. Different nationalities Mainly Indians.</p> <p>FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > OTHER NATIONALITIES R1.1 (0)</p>
	<i>P</i>	<p>For example in the UAE you had a big company, so you had the GM, the executive manager, you have the brand manager, you have assistants, people can join for meeting for certain topic and then they can leave the meeting. It's also a question of nationality , westerners in a meeting a Lebanese, Phillipino, British and American people.</p> <p>FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > OTHER NATIONALITIES R1.1 (0)</p>
	<i>L</i>	<p>L: A bit of everything happens.</p> <p>FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > OTHER NATIONALITIES R1.1 (0)</p>

Tab. 6: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information

In RQ.1.2. we try to identify if business card etiquette positively influences business meetings. Following the literature, we found that the correct etiquette establishes deference, as titles and seniority are highly valued aspects for GCC businessmen (Marsh, 2020). Business cards should be exchanged with the right hand and carefully read. As a

sign of respect, and to identify the counterpart, as well as his title and seniority, it is recommended to keep the card on top of the desk in front of you (Katz, 2017). It is a sign of disrespect to place the card in the business bag or wallet, which shows that the counterpart is not valued (Katz, 2017; Marsh, 2020). Most of our respondents understood this etiquette by following their Arab counterpart. One respondent uses this method also to help him identify the various identities when a meeting has a variety of Arab and Indian nationalities. Another respondent places the card in his wallet, which means keeping it safe, however unbeknown to him, he is showing disrespect (Katz, 2017).

<i>R.Q. 1.2</i>	<i>P</i>	<p>it always in front of me, b/c if you put it in our pocket the card disappears, secondly it helps me to have the right name and so most of the time I ask them how they pronounce their name as it's a kind of respect for the people so normally when I see several people in a meeting I display their cards in the same position of the people I have in front of me.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > EXCHANGE CARDS R1.2 (0)</p>
	<i>RC</i>	<p>R: You have to put it in front of you. Because it makes a sort of connection. it's something I have only seen there. You have to put it in front of you and that it is important somehow, and who gives the card first, I don't remember but if you are going to meet a local and whoever is presenting himself first should also give the card first.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > EXCHANGE CARDS R1.2 (0)</p>
	<i>JP</i>	<p>given with the hands but not 2 hands , given with the right hand.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > EXCHANGE CARDS R1.2 (0)</p> <hr/> <p>Normally placed in front of them</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > EXCHANGE CARDS R1.2 (0)</p>
	<i>L</i>	<p>I normally place the business cards on the table. I might hand them directly to them but no different if they were westerners or Asians on the other side of the table. I find that they adapt.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > EXCHANGE CARDS R1.2 (0)</p>
	<i>V</i>	<p>V: In my wallet.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > EXCHANGE CARDS R1.2 (0)</p>

Tab. 7: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Trust is personal. To evaluate the character of the western counterpart, the Arab businessman will engage in pleasantries and personal questions for the first meetings. According to a Middle Easterner, character, trustworthiness, and moral standards are the basis for a business relationship (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018). From a westerner's point of view, this can be a time-consuming process and can take several meetings before any real business gets underway (Khan & Ebner, 2019). In RQ.2. we evaluate if our respondents' experience supports the above literature.

In the interviews, it was perceived that, on average, this type of "getting to know you" establishing trust through small talk is more recurring to the retail field than the other business areas. This can be explained by the fact that these other areas are more technical, like the oil business or the construction business, and by the fact that there are more

westerners or western educated Arabs in these meetings. As for the wealth investment area, although there is some personal "salt & pepper" described by the respondent, this "getting to know you" helps build relationships. This "getting to know you" is not ordinarily lengthy; "it is just a nice way to make them feel comfortable themselves (Respondent: L, Pos. 43)".

Code System																SUM
ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABILITY R2	4	5	6	3	1	6	5	8	6	3	4	1	1			53
SMALL TALK /WASTE OF TIME R2	3	1	3	4	2	2	4	2	3	2	3	1	1			31
FAMILY / MARRIED & CHILDREN R2 (+)	3	1	3	2		1	2	2	1	2			1			18
SUM	10	7	12	9	3	9	11	12	10	7	7	2	3			102

Tab. 8: Source: MAXQDA Code Matrix based on respondents' information.

In table 8 above, we can identify that our respondents often mention small talk as a way of establishing trust and respectability. Below, we can relate the respondents of the retail business to the answers to R.Q. 2., which reinforce the literature. They understand that small talk is a form of evaluation of the other side.

R.Q. 2.	<i>S</i>	<p>he first talks is to evaluate you. If you say yes they have good roads , the city is very clean , the airport is very organized, you like the clothing of the locals, and the staff in hotel is very cordial and kind. You are telling him about good things of his country. So he feels that if you like it you will come again.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABILITY R2 > SMALL TALK /WASTE OF TIME R2 (0)</p> <p>After that then questions of family, I think it is to see if we are reliable or trustworthy. If it's a person with responsibilities b/c if he is married and has kids he has responsibilities.</p> <p>SMALL TALK /WASTE OF TIME R2 > FAMILY / MARRIED & CHILDREN R2 (+) (0)</p> <p>it shows that we are a stable person. I think the feeling we have when we are there it is that for them it's very important that the person they are speaking to has values and can be trusted.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABILITY R2 (0)</p>
	<i>O</i>	<p>O: To see who they have in front of them before they do business to establish some kind of trust I believe and then we talk about business. Unlike the English people that when they stop talking about business, then with a drink you talk about something else.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABILITY R2 (0)</p>
	<i>JD</i>	<p>J:For this culture it is not correct to enter directly into the subject. When you sign something you have to understand who is your partner and for them too the feeling has to be there. they have to trust you.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABILITY R2 (0)</p>

Tab. 9: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

In RQ.2.1. the westerner, in these meetings, needs to be obliging and go along with the Arab counterpart as for him, trust is personal, and a way to measure the counterpart's respectability and evaluate whether or not he can be trusted is by asking personal questions. In this pre-stage, the Arab counterpart will try to determine if the westerner is trustworthy both as a person and representative of the company (Khan & Ebner, 2019). Not answering or trying to deviate from the conversation can be seen as dubious and, therefore, not someone in whom to deposit trust (Petch, 2016). In the table below, we can see that one of

the respondents does not understand the function of small talk and would only willingly talk about their personal life after “some good experiences” (Respondent: R. Pos. 84). This misunderstanding can lead to a “do not” and, therefore, failure of the business.

R.Q. 2.1	O	<p>O: We started with small talk,</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 > SMALL TALK /WASTE OF TIME R2 (0)</p> <p>O: I thought It was just a custom. I think its important.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 > SMALL TALK /WASTE OF TIME R2 (0)</p>
	JD	<p>They want to know who you are if you fit with their values, and if it fits they can work with you in a partnership. Its personality and attitude.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 (0)</p>
	R	<p>Only After getting some good experiences</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 > SMALL TALK /WASTE OF TIME R2 (0)</p>

Tab. 10: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

“Time is money!” As much as it is understood that a business meeting is to establish a business relationship rather than a personal one and this “chit chat” is time-consuming and frustrating, it is necessary to be obliging (Marsh, 2020). Patience is the keyword; let the counterpart set the pace (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). Through R.Q. 2.2. most respondents understand that this small talk is fundamental to establishing relationships, as seen below in Tab. 11. However, it was found that in non-retail areas such as the oil business and due to highly technical personnel of primarily western origin or western educated, these conversations are abbreviated to a western usual polite “few minutes” (Respondent: L, Pos. 23).

R.Q. 2.2	P	<p>You have to take time, most Westerners do business with the Arabs as they do with Western people so you have an 1 hour meeting, then you leave. In KSA for example I made a very good deal because I spent 5 days and a 2 hour meeting. During all the time were together, we took time to discuss about several topics, when we arrived at the meeting we knew what to expect from the other.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 (0)</p>
	M	<p>a. How comfortable are you talking about your personal life in business meetings? It depends on the topic, but I do not mind to share general personal information in backgrounds where it is necessary.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 (0)</p>
	L	<p>L: No it's quite short normally. Our time is very expensive and if meeting was supposed to be for half an hour or one hour we try to control our time so it doesn't go beyond that. Usually there is a few minutes before the meeting starts where people introduce themselves and where we have a little time for socializing but we are speaking of 5 minutes no longer than that. Again it's not specific for these kind of countries in general.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 > TIME IS MONEY R2.2 & 2.3 PATIENCE</p>
	JD	<p>J: Well for sure it's not as direct as we could be with an European person. This talking about all different kinds of things you have to create a personal area to take time, as compared to Iran we have to create a personal environment before talking about business.</p> <p>ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABIITY R2 > SMALL TALK /WASTE OF TIME R2 (0)</p>

Tab. 11: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

In R.Q. 2.3 we have found that according to the literature, several meetings may be necessary and a lot of patience before being able to present a proposal in traditional areas such as retail (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Petch, 2016). In one case, negotiations took up to 6 months. Another respondent tells us that it is crucial to be very patient in the GCC as it also shows them that the business and people there “are important by giving your time” making them “more open to deal with you.” (Respondent: P, Pos. 23). As soon as trust is established, business tends to move along rapidly (Marsh, 2020; Verluyten, 2018).

R.Q. 2.3	P	<p>P: What I told you is that you have to be very patient when you go to those countries, if you go there and have a meeting at 12 and you arrive by plane at 10 and you leave by plane at 5 that means that you went there only for the meeting, for them it's not good at all. You have to take your time, this does not mean that you have meetings for 5 days, but you ensure to the people that they are very important for you and by giving your time it's also for them very important, as they seem important for you they are more open to deal with you.</p> <p>⌚ TIME FRAME TO NEGOTIATE 2.3 (0)</p>
	M	<p>i. All morning – The proposal was presented in the first meeting, later it was discussed in detail.</p> <p>⌚ ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABILITY R2 > TIME IS MONEY R2.2 & 2.3 PATIENCE (0)</p> <p>i. Was there another day set up for another meeting? Yes, the meetings took several days.</p> <p>⌚ ESTABLISHING TRUST & RESPECTABILITY R2 > TIME IS MONEY R2.2 & 2.3 PATIENCE (0)</p>
	JD	<p>J: it was very long for KSA for Emirates it was long in the beginning and then it speed up. There were a lot of negotiations in all aspects and the group we talked about were big and had it's own legal department but longer for KSA.</p> <p>⌚ TIME FRAME TO NEGOTIATE 2.3 (0)</p> <p>J: 6 months.</p> <p>⌚ TIME FRAME TO NEGOTIATE 2.3 (0)</p>

Tab. 12: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Arabs from the GCC are pleasant and amicable and will rarely give a direct “yes” or “no” after a proposal (Katz, 2017). This could be because they would like to think about the presented proposal or are not the final decision-makers (Marsh, 2020).

On the other hand, if the possibility for an agreement exists, instead of a “yes,” there will often be an “Inch Allah” (Marsh, 2020). In R.Q.3. We try to understand how the expression “Inch Allah,” often used in the Arab world, is perceived and corroborates literature. Our respondents perceive that “Inch Allah” is not necessarily positive or negative. We have found that “Inch Allah” is “very content-specific” and is often used as a “verbal crutch” (Respondent: L, Pos.69). Another respondent tells us that the use of “Inch Allah” is widespread through the various areas of business; however, in more technical areas, it has a more negative perception, a sort of maybe. When they are interested, they will say straight away “yes” (Respondent: L, Pos.37). Therefore, the analysis of the table below suggests that the expression “Inch Allah” is quite ambiguous and is often used indirectly, which corroborates the literature.

R.Q. 3.	<i>M</i>	a. If the response was "Insh Allah" what do you think he/she meant? Hopefully, if all goes well. Wish that happen. Sometimes it meant – I don't believe it is like this or will work, but let's see. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > INSH ALLAH / YES or NO R3 (0)
	<i>S</i>	S: No, It's more or less like we will see , I need to check if this fits with something else. They don't like to close doors VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > INSH ALLAH / YES or NO R3 (0)
	<i>JP</i>	If they want to say to you " sure I'll do that" they replace that with " Inch Allah", or I don't think it's working" it will also be "inch Allah". Incha Allah is not necessarily positive or necessarily negative. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > INSH ALLAH / YES or NO R3 (0)
	<i>L</i>	L: Not happening! It depends on how they say it. It is also used as a verbal crutch. " yes we are going to have this project Inch allah" This is just a verbal interjection and things will be happening. Inch Allah is very content specific. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > INSH ALLAH / YES or NO R3 (0)
	<i>LA</i>	It's more than a maybe. When they say "Inch Allah" that means they are not very interested. b/c otherwise they will say yes. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > INSH ALLAH / YES or NO R3 (0)
	<i>RC</i>	: I think it's cultural the way they are, There are cultures that are more direct and some less direct and even when they say yes it's also, more subdued let's say. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > INSH ALLAH / YES or NO R3 (0)

Tab. 13: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

During a meeting, the Arab counterpart's silence makes it difficult to understand if he agreed or disagreed with the proposal presented. Like other easterners, the Arabs also may use short periods of silence to assimilate information (Verluyten, 2018). Trying to interrupt this silence may be seen as pressuring, which is not well received. It is best to follow the counterpart's lead (Katz, 2017). The R.Q.3.1. tries to establish what the western counterpart understands by a period of silence during a meeting. For a westerner, it can be an uncomfortable time, and it is best to fill this gap with other things, like one of our respondents suggested "drinking a glass of water slowly" and wait. (Respondent: P, Pos. 49). Our respondents also state that they feel the counterpart is measuring what to say or assimilating information that corroborates the literature presented.

R.Q. 3.1	<i>P</i>	P: You know in our company we had several trainings given by professionals about that and so as they say at the moment you have a period of silent the first that will start to speak will lose the discussion. So in fact, when you are silenced for 30 seconds, 40 seconds or even one minute it's very long during a meeting. You have to wait, you can drink some water slowly, you can clean your nose in fact if you at a certain moment perceive the silent is for the counterpart to get something else you just have not to say anything. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > SILENCE R3.1 (0)
	<i>JD</i>	J: Depends sometimes it's like I'm thinking about it other times is to put pressure. " I don't answer I want you to think that I'm thinking and it could be a no" so it's a pressure, they maybe do it more and they want you to feel they have the power. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > SILENCE R3.1 (0)
	<i>L</i>	Yes it does. I means they are thinking their words. They are very polite people and measure their words carefully. Of course it varies with their personality but they are not impetuous. They are measured. I interpret it positively as they want to measure their words thinking a bout the solution. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > SILENCE R3.1 (0)

Tab. 14: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Lack of eye contact or avoidance can hinder the business. Between men, frequent eye contact conveys sincerity and should not be avoided, as this may implicate that there is

something to hide (Katz, 2017). As a sign of respect towards western women, the more western-oriented GCC Arabs will maintain eye contact, if only briefly (Verluyten, 2018). R.Q.4. refers to non-verbal communication expressed through constant eye contact with men, which assures the counterpart that nothing is hidden, as the literature suggests. Corroborating literature, it was found that eye contact with women usually is less frequent, and, in many cases, the Arabs follow the woman’s lead. It was also mentioned that the GCC Arabs tend to act differently when they are in western countries and will more easily maintain eye contact with women outside of their local environment. Overall, and in the case of men, some respondents feel that there is not much difference compared to Portugal, where eye contact is also a constant and where lack of eye contact will also mean that something is being hidden.

R.Q. 4.	LA	Usually yes. Not the ladies and I don't try to do that never, but with men there is no restrictions. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > EYE CONTACT R 4 (0) This is where eye contact is very important and you can see the reaction from the other side. I do this always and not specifcly with Arabs. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > EYE CONTACT R 4 (0)
	RC	: I never felt any difference from what we have here, so no cultural Gap there. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > EYE CONTACT R 4 (0)
	M	16. RQ4 Did your Arab counterpart keep constant eye contact with you at all times? Not usually. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > EYE CONTACT R 4 (0)
	JD	J: When the partner was in France I had a good contact with him it was not a formal one. In France it was different b/c maybe they are out of their cultural aspect. Easily you can see there is a difference between UAE and KSA it is not the same. In KSA they are not looking at you directly. The eye contact is actually not there. They talk to you but they don't look at you. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > EYE CONTACT R 4 (0)
	L	think they take que's from the woman . I have no issues with them keeping eye contact with me I do it. It is my personality. I'm an extravert. I like to make people confortable so they become confortable with me. FIRST MEETINGS R 1.1 & 1.2 > FEMALE (0)

Tab. 15: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents’ information

R.Q. 4.1 and R.Q. 4.2 continues to infer if non-verbal communication, such as being close to someone or touching them in the arm or back, is a sign of trust and establishing a relationship. According to literature, a sign of trust and interest can be shown through non-verbal communication such as standing quite close to the counterpart or specifically touching the arm or placing a hand in the westerner’s back, as this can demonstrate rapport between men (Khan & Ebner, 2019; Simintiras & Thomas, 2007). Backing away due to a sense of personal space may hinder the relationship, transmitting a lack of interest relationship (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993). Women respondents corroborate literature maintaining that this practice happens between men, but due to a sense of respect and deference, it is different with a woman. In addition, some Portuguese respondents refer

that this habit of touch and closeness is quite similar to that of the Portuguese and would not react any differently than they would in Portugal. However, they would never initiate touch with an Arab counterpart.

<i>R.Q.4.1</i> & <i>R.Q. 4.2</i>	<i>O</i>	<p>O: That is more like in Algeria where they are very close but you get used to it so I wasn't uncomfortable.</p> <p>VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMUNICATION R3 > DISTANCE R 4.1 (0)</p>
	<i>C</i>	<p>: with me no, he was very respectful, but with our CEO yes. He put his hand on his shoulder like a friend or colleague.</p> <p>VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMUNICATION R3 > TOUCH R4.2 (0)</p>
	<i>JD</i>	<p>J:For me it was more distance . For my male colleague maybe less but still distant..</p> <p>VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMUNICATION R3 > DISTANCE R 4.1 (0)</p>
	<i>LA</i>	<p>L: In Portugal we touch a lot as well and here I don't do different. It's a way for them to feel closer to us and leave things in a less formal way to comunicate. Break ice by doing that.</p> <p>VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMUNICATION R3 > TOUCH R4.2 (0)</p> <p>if you were talking with an Arab contact , they didn't touch you but would you touch them?</p> <p>L: No I will not!</p> <p>VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMUNICATION R3 (0)</p>

Ta.16: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

In business negotiations, there are several moments of discord which is to be expected, but where and how it is done can lead to the success or failure of a negotiation. R.Q.4.3. tries to understand how voicing disagreement with an Arab counterpart can lead to failure. Literature refers that contradicting the Arab counterpart loudly or assertively in front of others will lead to his “losing face,” which can be fatal to the business (Elbanna et al., 2020). It also refers that impatience and confrontational behavior are seen as aggressive and rude and may compromise the Arab counterpart’s honor, making him “lose face” (Elbanna et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to be respectful and tactful to maintain the established relationship (Katz, 2017). In non-retail fields where the relation of buyer and seller is not present, there is more room for polite disagreement. One respondent states that voicing disagreement loudly is a setback, but the Arab counterpart will not voice his opinion in the same form and pretend it is ok even if it is not. According to literature, this type of action will lead to a do not and, therefore, business failure. In the retail business, there is some polite disagreement, however, and as one respondent affirms, “you take what you got and what you cannot get, as in the end, it has to be a win-win situation” (Respondent P, Pos.61). Literature is corroborated through the responses given.

R.Q. 4.3	L	Yes I have. They have reacted professionally, sometimes they will listen or not agree but its just business. It happens with other nationalities. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > DISAGREEMENT 4.3 (0)
	LA	I don't do different than I would do anywhere else. We need to be always polite, and we need to make things clear that our disagreement is not personal. Nothing personal it's a recommendation to improve the quality of the work. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > DISAGREEMENT 4.3 (0)
	RC	: It's always a set back of course, they tend to be quiet , they will not voice their disagreement but they can take it very wrongly. They will not shout at you. They will pretend it's ok, even if it's not. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > DISAGREEMENT 4.3 (0)
	P	P: When you come to a business meeting you try to convince the other and we defend our companies so of course we can not agree with everything. So at this time we take what we got and what we cannot get, then infact it has to be a win win deal not a one way deal. VERBAL - NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION R3 > DISAGREEMENT 4.3 (0)
	S	Their image and trust that is something that for them is very important. DISAGREEMENT 4.3 > LOOSING FACE R 4.3 (0)

Tab. 17: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

To a westerner, a contract precedes the establishment of a franchise or other forms of business, and as one respondent said, “it is a legal way to avoiding confusions” (Respondent: O, Pos.140). As international businesses evolve in the GCC, more Arabs accept the idea of a contract, although some still view it as a letter of intent or a guideline of general principles (Katz, 2017; Khan & Ebner, 2019; Marsh, 2020). R.Q. 5. Tries to understand if the meaning of a contract to an Arab is the same as to a westerner. The respondents corroborate that the Arabs have a much less “strict relationship with contracts,” as per one respondent. However, this point does not corroborate the literature as the constant introduction of international brands has changed their views on contracts. Western practices have been introduced either by western managers or by young western-educated Arabs, and the acceptance of a contract is becoming the norm.

R.Q.5.	JD	J: No it's more. It could have changed, 10 years ago the contract, a fysical contract was less important then than the discussion, but now it more important as they work with a lot of international brands they understand the way it works with international brands. Before the contract was just something like formal administrative, but the discussion was more important. It will be more and more important b/c of the international brands in terms of legal and financial impacts. TEAM R7 > REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 (0)
	O	O: That's a good question. I would say not, they consider this more like a shaking of hand unlike us. If they want to break the contract they will break it anyway They don't care about the consequences. While we consider a contract in a more legal way to avoid confusions. We the French will be more precise in the wording... while they will try to renegotiate on a weekly or yearly basis. TEAM R7 > REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 (0)
	RC	: yes they have a much less strick relationship with the contracts than you would find in Northern Europe or in Central European countries. Again we (as Portuguese) are much more like them and that is one of them. TEAM R7 > REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 (0) : It's not something so simple as we agreed let's sign a contract. We have to introduced it in a smooth manner, such as we have to put something in writing so we have to move forward, you have to lead the conversation to this. TEAM R7 > REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 (0)
	P	f I travel to the Gulf countries for me that means we had already a few contacts to establish the most important points. If I go there or they come to Brussels they know , we know eachother and we have to sign an agreement. A verbal agreement especially in a franchise does not exist, so we have to sign an agreement. I send them the draft of the agreement after our first discussions so, my contract was always the same and I changed only an appendix. TEAM R7 > REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 (0)







Tab. 18: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

R.Q.6. refers to the time necessary to get approval on a contract. Literature refers that it may take several meetings and several months before a contract or business plan is accepted and signed (Katz, 2017). It is important to be prepared to make more than one trip for the same negotiation (Khan & Ebner, 2019). The literature recommends being persistent but patient and not pressured as the Arab counterpart may not be the final decision maker, and more time may be needed to reach the objectives. Our respondents corroborate literature as contracts take a long time to be signed, which could be influenced by the time it takes to get the final decision maker to sign.

<i>R.Q.6.</i>	<i>C</i>	The negotiation of the contract it took us a long time. One was yes you will be my partner. The other was now that you will be my partner now we will sign contrat. The time to sign a contract took a very long time. I remember because we were like " what's happening now? why is it taking so long"?
	<i>RC</i>	: I have dealt with contracts of varying sizes, smaller contracts 1 to 2 months. A big contract namelly for the government it can take you a long, long time. They read they repeat and repeat again. Then the have the best and final offer and then the 2nd best and final offer and they will even send you an email to see if they can get a better price. To sign a contract there it can take several months.
	<i>O</i>	O: yes 6 months.
	<i>M</i>	i. 6 months approximately

Tab. 19: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Literature refers that o the Middle Easterner, the counterpart's agreement and personal commitment is stronger than a written document (Marsh, 2020). R.Q.6.1. tries to establish if, after signing a contract, the Arab counterpart will try to readapt conditions. As one of the respondents relates, "if the business relationship is good, you may never open the contract again, it is just kept away" (Respondent: P, Pos. 64& 65). Today, the contract is acceptable with international business, and in the non-retail business, these changes do not happen, and a contract only changes if the scope of work changes (Respondent: L, Pos. 114). The Arab counterpart, in more traditional areas such as retail or even construction, as can be seen below, will try to renegotiate conditions even after the deal has been closed for some time. Literature continues to be corroborated in this point, however, basically in traditional areas of business.

R.Q.6.1	RC	: This is all over the world but there they really try to twist the contract. we had some complicated situations especially when we had the crisis in Dubai there was really some twisting the arms about the contracts that were signed that they wanted to change.  REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 > CHANGE CONTRACT R6.1 (0)
	LA	L:No, they try always to go beyond what is written on the contract. Nowadays, when we negotiate the contracts they are already clever enough to push us to the limits and we cannot go back. If we step back we may fall down. We are at the limits already, and if they put more and more things on the table we just remind them what is in the contract and there is already an appreciation on this.  REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 > CHANGE CONTRACT R6.1 (0)
	L	No it does not happen . Maybe changes to the scope but that's business. You know sometimes plans change and you may add or cancel something but its actually related to the project. Not a cultural thing.  REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 > CHANGE CONTRACT R6.1 (0)
	O	O: Everytime in seminars where they made the buys when they came to France they tried to renegotiate their conditions. Everytime!  REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 > CHANGE CONTRACT R6.1 (0)
	P	P:No in fact a contract if the business relation is good you will never open the contract anymore. The contract remains in the safe of your company and will stay there. If you start to discuss about the terms of the contract then that the end of the business relationship.  TEAM R7 > REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 (0)
	M	RQ6.1 Did your counterpart ever want to change or readapt any of the conditions already signed (contract)? <i>Yes, several times.</i>  REACTION TO CONTRACT R5 > CHANGE CONTRACT R6.1 (0)

Tab. 20: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Nationality, social status, race, and education are critical aspects in the GCC, and this hierarchization is unofficially practiced in business and society in general (Marsh, 2020). Certain nationalities are more desirable than others, and this will undoubtedly reflect on their salaries, their position, and their “clout” within the company (Bealer & Bhanugopan, 2014). The R.Q. 7. and R.Q. 7.1. try to infer if stratified hierarchy according to nationalities is perceived by westerners and if it plays an essential part in the teams chosen. According to all the respondents, this hierarchization is still very much evident in the GCC. This nationality stratification is common in all areas of business. As one respondent states, “in a meeting, the same comment made by a European or an Indian will have different reactions” (Respondent: LA, Pos.68). However, some of our respondents have made us aware that although this is a situation that is still very common in GCC society, it is decreasing. This is the case in the fast-moving UAE, where businesses run by western-educated Emiratis “are changing the balance and setting an example to society” (Respondent: L, Pos. 130).

R.Q. 7.	<i>LA</i>	<p>In AD they are the richer people they believe they are on the top of the pyramid. The certification of pyramid the locals are on the top, then probably the western people and I sepak of the Europeans and Americans. Then the rest of the Arabs in the reagion, then Arabs out of GCC.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p> <p>We see this clearly in meetings. The same comment made by myself, or by and Indian guy the reaction is not the same, even if the Indian has a position even higher than mine, but he creates a natural reaction from them straight away. unfortunately it's like that. After all these years I would be surprised if i didn't see that.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>
	<i>O</i>	<p>O: It could b/c, I'm not racist but if we are working with an European or someone from UAE they have more power than if we work with Indian or Filipinos, there is a scale of power in this country, there is a difference.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>
	<i>C</i>	<p>: I think in these countries they have very established "rancos sociales" (social stratification)</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>
	<i>RC</i>	<p>:It's clear, the first ones are the locals, then the second other GCC people, 3rd westerners, 4th the other Arabs and 5th the people Asians non subcontinent and the last ones the subcontinent Indians. Indians, Pakistani, Afagani and Bangladeshi.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>
	<i>JD</i>	<p>J: For sure, if we take the example of KSA Filipinos were the last of the scale, the Arabic or French were a higher scale. In UAE less but the same. The Arabs , the British were very important in UAE and then the other nationalities for the stores. There is a difference.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>
	<i>P</i>	<p>P: Yes I felt that more at the beginning in 97 but later on no as there were a lot of Pakistani and Indian educated in America or in their countries they had university degrees and reach a high position level. This depends on the country, in KSA you deal with locals b/c its by law. The Saudi have all the management positions even if you officially are the manager but you end up dealing with other people that have more experience.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>
	<i>L</i>	<p>t used to be more. The locals are always above everyone else. Especially in terms of compensation. Certain nationalities have advantages in certain organizations.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p> <p>o you can see stratification of nationalities is actually going down and this is the 3rd biggest company in the UAE and it's an example for the rest. Her it's very fast moving</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>

Tab. 21: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Some respondents view the choice of the “Movers & Shakers” team as crucial to the business. Respondents refer that nationality is significant when choosing these teams due to their level of influence within the company, which corroborates the literature. Some respondents like to validate this middle management team with their Arab counterparts to ensure that the right person from the best nationality is chosen.

<i>R.Q.7.1</i>	<i>M</i>	<p>a. How important is the choice of this team? It is decisive.</p> <p>TEAM R7 (0)</p>
	<i>O</i>	<p>It is really important I will work with them and it is them that will deliver what we expect in terms of brand standards, so very important.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > STAFFING NATIONALITY R7 (0)</p> <p>O: It could b/c, I'm not racist but if we are working with an European or someone from UAE they have more power than if we work with Indian or Filipinos, there is a scale of power in this country, there is a difference.</p> <p>TEAM R7 > NATIONALITY HQ R7.1 (0)</p>
	<i>V</i>	<p>In the other part of the world they are running your business so it is very important to have the right people.</p> <p>TEAM R7 (0)</p> <p>V: They were key people in the organization b/c in fact with the day to day business you are not dealing with the big bosses but with his team and they have to be super reactive and smart to be successful in the business.</p> <p>TEAM R7 (0)</p>
	<i>C</i>	<p>For me it's crucial. At the end we are in Spain and for us you are our brand in this country so, for us you are our eyes. So for us it's crucial.</p> <p>TEAM R7 (0)</p>
	<i>P</i>	<p>P: it is very important really it's very important, that's why most of the time we validate the team together. Especially the middle management of the team. In fact in a franchise you transfer know how and it's an image so it's really important. For the operators (store staff) themselves, no it's not the same.</p> <p>TEAM R7 (0)</p>

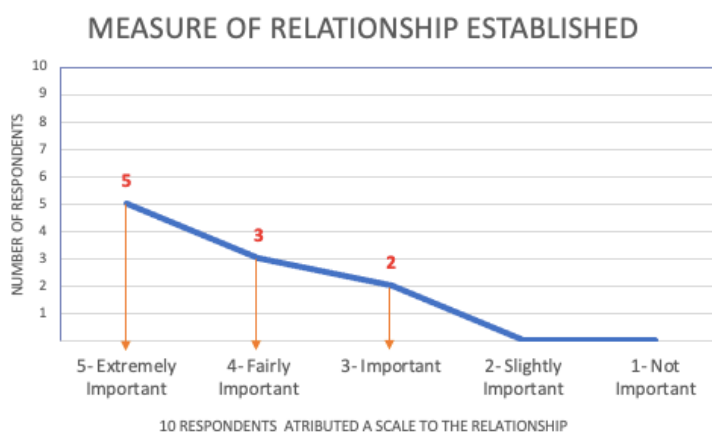
Tab. 22: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

In the GCC, trust is earned over a period of time (Marsh, 2020). Business information is closely guarded and rarely shared, as the GCC Arabs believe that privileged information creates negotiation advantages (Katz, 2017). However, one of the most vital indicators of a good trusting relationship is when the Arab counterpart is willing to share some information. This shows a mutual appreciation between partners. In R.Q.8. our respondents define the GCC Arabs as “quite secretive” and “not transparent” (Respondent: R, Pos. 150) and (Respondent: V, Pos. 134). Unofficially and only verbally, there may be some sharing of financial information with an Arab counterpart when a trusting business relationship has been established as Respondent: P, Pos.86, puts it “It happens.” On the other hand, when the counterpart in the Arab company is western, there is more propensity to share financial information, as can be seen in the comments of both Respondent O and M.

<i>R.Q.8.</i>	<i>V</i>	V: no they are not transparent about that. STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP > EXCHANGE INFORMATION R8.0 (0)
	<i>RC</i>	: They were quite secretive. STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP > EXCHANGE INFORMATION R8.0 (0)
	<i>P</i>	P: Yes it happens. During unofficial discussions, the talks , about your family and after 2 hours of these discussions you can make a question about a special topic. That's a red light flashing that means this point is important but it's touchy. STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP > EXCHANGE INFORMATION R8.0 (0)
	<i>O</i>	O: Yes, regarding financial, not in KSA. Actually not that much and only later in the UAE with the English guy. More verbally. STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP > EXCHANGE INFORMATION R8.0 (0)
	<i>M</i>	Yes they have always been very transparent, with the company in the UAE, because they treated us as if we were the same team. They shared PL/ Profit and Loss with us so it was very transparent. On the other hand with KSA they never show their books. STRENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP > VISITS R8 (0)

Tab. 23: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

The R.Q.8.1. tries to rate through a Likert Scale the relationship established with the Arab counterpart. Literature tells us that not showing enough recognition of the importance of the relationship that is being established with the Arab counterpart shows a lack of understanding of how business is done in the Middle East / GCC (Marsh, 2020). This recognition of importance passes through continuously nurturing the relationship through phone calls and face-to-face meetings, as this is the way Arabs prefer to do business (Marsh, 2020). Our respondents in the retail area, for the most part, understand this premise, as can be seen by the graph below, where respondents attributed the maximum to the relationship.



Graph 5: Source: Own construct, based on respondents' information transcribed into MAXQDA

Understanding if a business has been successful in international business is a manifold endeavor, as Carneiro et al. (2016) reveal. In international business, the franchise or export companies' goals are at the center and can be measured through profitability, purchasing intensity, new store openings, and product awareness. Sedeghi et al. (2021), in addition to those measures' point to the relationship with clients as an additional point, to measure success. In R.Q.9. our respondents have indicated sales performance, purchase intensity, the number of stores opened, and brand awareness in the international business market as measures of success, therefore corroborating the literature.

<i>R.Q.9.</i>	<i>M</i>	<p>RQ9 How did you measure success in that country? <i>Sales volume, brand awareness mainly.</i></p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 (0)</p>
	<i>C</i>	<p>: yes we checked the evolution of the stores and also season per season. The stores that had bad locations we needed to check the evolution.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 (0)</p>
	<i>V</i>	<p>V: LFL for sure, Exports. At the end what we are looking at in all this area was our sales. And plus store openings.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 (0)</p>
	<i>P</i>	<p>P: In our company for example we measure that by season as we compare season by season and we check the number of pieces bought, the average price per unit and also the profit. For the franchisee it can be different although they compare the same but they have other costs.. so everybody is responsible in his own company.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 > YEARS 9,1 (0)</p>

Tab. 24: Source: MAXQDA Code Matrix based on respondents' information.

In R.Q.9.1, the researcher tries to identify how long their brand has remained in the market. Capturing success indicators from our respondents, namely in the retail area, was diverse as some of our respondents considered achieving their financial goals as primordial. In contrast, others considered the financial success of their counterpart, which can be difficult to measure when information is rarely if at all, shared. For a more uniform analysis, this research has considered the number of years the brand or the business has remained in the market. Our respondents have varied experiences with their brand in the market, from “1 year or less” to an average “2 to 3 years” to a more significant “more than ten years.” For this research, it has been assumed that more than three years can be considered a success. On the graph below, we can see that 3 of our respondents in the retail area were present in the UAE market for two years or less, which implies business failure as these brands have closed in the UAE. Other brands have continued and range from 3 years to more than ten years, making them, according to our scale, successful in the UAE market.



NOTE: Each company only had one brand at a time in the market. Success was defined at a minimum of 3 years

Graph 6: Source: Own construct, based on respondents' information transcribed into MAXQDA

Occasionally due to management changes, in either the westerner's company or in the Arab company, the strategy and company vision changes. R.Q. 9.2. infers if the “real decision-makers” play a part in the success or failure of a business. Our respondents confer that the “real” decision-makers influence the success or failure of a brand or company, which was the case with certain respondents. In one case, the western company was sold, another began having structural issues due to lack of funding which made stock deliveries a dilemma and, therefore, business unsuccessful. On the Arab side, upper management changed, and their position concerning the brand also changed, as can be understood in the table below.

<i>R.Q.9.2</i>	<i>M</i>	<p>RQ9.2 Did the “real” decision makers the top / CEO / General Manager or Board Director play a part in your success? Or failure? Yes</p> <p>a. How? The management changed, and with this the priorities and way of doing business.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 > REAL DECISION MAKERS R9.2 (0)</p>
	<i>P</i>	<p>P: Of course, in our case the company was sold.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 > REAL DECISION MAKERS R9.2 (0)</p>
	<i>S</i>	<p>If the boss says it's to work with these people then they do. No discussion. In Europe it's not like that.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 > REAL DECISION MAKERS R9.2 (0)</p>
	<i>O</i>	<p>O: In the failure. The fact they know a lot of the issues we were facing and we didn't have what was necessary to improve the IT as well as stock issues which were basic things that should run smoothly to be successful in retail. As the basis was not working ...</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 > REAL DECISION MAKERS R9.2 (0)</p>
	<i>JD</i>	<p>J:From both parts. From their part they did not give enough time for the product to be successful</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 (0)</p>
	<i>V</i>	<p>I think it took a couple of years to become successful at least 2 to 3 years.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 > YEARS 9.1 (0)</p>
	<i>RC</i>	<p>Yes sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't, but they always try to pass as if they are the real decision makers.</p> <p>MEASURE SUCCESS R9 > REAL DECISION MAKERS R9.2 (0)</p>

Tab. 25: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

Shopping centers in the GCC, namely in the UAE, offer the most popular brands from various continents. It is possible to find brands and products from the USA, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Britain, and western Europe. Competition is tough, and if a brand or product is not differentiated enough, has enough demand, and is placed at the right price, it may not inspire loyalty. Therefore, businesses will fail in a demanding and growing customer base (Petch, 2016). This is true almost everywhere; however, competition is fierce in the UAE, and customers are very selective.

R.Q.9.3. tries to infer if the respondents feel that their business has been successful during their period in the UAE. Some of the retail respondents refer that at first, they were very pleased. However, in the long run, the business became disappointing, which is understandable when the “real” decision makers impact the outcome through strategy changes. However, one respondent states that he was very pleased with business in the UAE, which lasted for more than ten years. Another continues to be very pleased with the business and has been there for more than five years. These statements confirm literature that implies that the brand will not be successful when there is not enough differentiation in the product offered, or it is not placed at the right price, or has low demand. As one of the respondents from a non-retail area has stated, “You cannot go convinced that it is the El Dorado, it is not, perhaps it was some time ago” (Respondent: R, Pos. 173).

R.Q.9.3	M	<p>RQ 9.3 Overall, how did you perceive the success of the business? a. Disappointing <i>In the long run.</i> b. Very Pleased <i>In the beginning</i></p> <p>OVERALL PERCEPTION 9.3 (0)</p>
	C	<p>: I think it was satisfactory.</p> <p>OVERALL PERCEPTION 9.3 (0)</p>
	R	<p>RQ 9.3 Overall, how did you perceive the success of the business? a. Disappointing <i>in the UAE</i></p> <p>OVERALL PERCEPTION 9.3 (0)</p>
	V	<p>V: I would say satisfying to disappointing. Because we closed the stores, it's always a failure, when you go for a new partnership and after a couple of years you get out of the country then it's a big failure for both partners in fact. as if your franchisee decide to stop it would be very tough to come back with another franchisee.</p> <p>OVERALL PERCEPTION 9.3 (0)</p>
	P	<p>P: In the UAE I was very pleased. It was very good. We did not come to a good end unfortunately, (<i>European company was bought by another and the relationship was not the same</i>) in but the evolution of the business was good and if I think if I have to do it again I would do the same.</p> <p>OVERALL PERCEPTION 9.3 (0)</p>
	RC	<p>You can not go convinced that it is the ElDorado. it is not maybe it was sometime ago. It's going to be very difficult.</p> <p>OVERALL PERCEPTION 9.3 (0)</p>

Tab. 26: Source: MAXQDA Retrieved segments, based on respondents' information.

8. Conclusions

Literature is scant on international business and retail for the GCC. Having updated information on the dos and don'ts of doing business in this rapidly changing region is fundamental for the success of any international business venture.

8.1. Theoretical Implications

In our search to better understand the culture of the GCC Arabs, we support Verluyten (2018) and Marsh (2020) when they refer that you cannot assume an individual's behavior because he belongs to a specific culture. Cultures can only reveal influences and should not be generalized, according to Verluyten (2018).

In the ancestral Arabic culture, the Muslim teachings influence local Arabs but do not determine their behavior. As Almutairi et al. (2020) refer, it is essential to understand the various specific cultures of the region as these not only influence the local Arabs but "trickle-down" to others of different cultures working in the GCC.

According to most researchers, when establishing a business relationship, the Arabs tend to take a long time with small talk in a "getting to know you" phase. Business does not start until they feel that the westerner is trustworthy. Although this "get to know you" stage continues to be necessary, our research indicates it is no longer as long as previously indicated due to the new young, western-educated Arab generation.

Contracts are viewed as a general form of agreement, a letter of intentions, and therefore flexible, according to Katz (2017) and Khan and Ebner (2019). In the most traditional retail business, this is still the case, and they will continuously try to renegotiate conditions that corroborate literature. Our results show that contrary to literature companies that frequently deal with international businesses run by westerners or western educated Arabs; a contract as defined in the west, is acceptable and changes to the contract are not discussed unless the scope of work changes.

As per Verluyten (2018), Arabs will tend to maintain eye contact only briefly with women due to a sense of respect. This continues to be corroborated by our respondents; however, our respondents also refer that the UAE Arabs tend to take clues from the women in the case of shaking hands or maintaining eye contact.

8.2. Concluding Remarks and Managerial Implications

The experience of living and working in the GCC, mainly the UAE, during ten years in the retail area with western brands delineated many of the premises introduced in this research. A time lap of 5 years occurred when the researcher lived and worked in the UAE. As a region where rapid change develops by “leaps and bounds,” as described by one of the respondents, some of those premises discussed in this study have evolved, as shown in our results. In the UAE, the young local Arab generations are mostly Western-educated today, either through local western universities or universities outside and mainly in the USA or the UK.

Although the traditional values of family, religion, politeness, and relationships continue to be very present, their business mindset has embraced some western practices. This is reflected by what some respondents have referred to concerning the speed of decision-making and the less evident social class hierarchization.

A venture into a culturally different market such as the UAE has several risks best supported with the right partner. He will have the contacts necessary to expand the business and mitigate issues. In the non-retail areas, the risks maybe even more significant, and a thorough evaluation of the business concerning competitors is a must as competition is fierce. It is crucial to be prepared to invest and be financially sound as initially there may be losses, which in the non-retail area often will not be supported by the partners. For most of the Arab Middle East and in the UAE, debts are treated as a criminal offense rather than a civil one in western countries; therefore, being financially sound is of the utmost importance.

Tactfully avoid talking about religion or politics as this can lead to uncomfortable and confrontational situations which are not appreciated in the GCC. In the UAE, locals are incredibly polite and appreciate politeness.

In general, to the business venture, it is crucial to be present as often as possible and take heed of the famous Arabic saying that says, “if you are far from the eyes, you are far from the heart.”

8.3. Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation to this research is linked to the scope of the sample, which limits the analysis. The sample is concentrated in the fashion retail area of franchisors and hence has a minimal approach in other areas, which could influence the results. Having a more comprehensive sample size with broader business areas would enrich the scope and depth of understanding.

The second most significant limitation is linked to the fact that the respondents were mainly related to businesses in the UAE and very little with other GCC countries. Although culture and business habits are pretty similar, specificities for each country influence business relationships and negotiations.

Further to the research presented that delves into the relationships between GCC Arabs and westerners, it is essential to understand the relationships where middle and sometimes upper management are non-GCC Arabs. Their cultural background will influence relationships and negotiations, even though the GCC Arabic business culture is always present.

Future studies could further explore the relationship between the Arab companies and the western exporters, focusing on the cases where Arab companies are managed by other nationals. These non-locals have become more and more common in these GCC business areas.

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11.APPENDIX

11.1THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ. 1. When looking for the right partner in the GCC / UAE which are the features you feel are most important? For example, Trust. From what you stated can you rate them in a scale of 1(not important) to 5 (extremely important)?

RQ. 1.1 Was your meeting just with Arabs or were there other nationalities involved? Which ones?

RQ. 1.2 Did you exchange cards? Where did you place the card that was given to you? Where did he place the card, you gave him? With which hand did you give or accept his card?

RQ. 2.Were you able to talk right away about business? Did you start with small talk? How long did it take? Did you feel he/she was trying to establish a personal relationship rather than a business one?

RQ. 2.1 Did you oblige him /her going along with the questions or did you feel that it was a “waste of time”? Do you feel he now knows you better and trust has been established?

RQ. 2.2 “Time is money” while he/ she asked personal questions did you try to get back to the business aspect of the meeting? How often? How comfortable were you talking about your personal life? Was there another meeting set up in another day to deal with business?

RQ. 2.3 How long and how many meetings did it take before you were able to make your proposal? Did you have to reschedule your agenda?

RQ. 3.When you made your bid / spoke about your proposal did you get a “yes” or “no” response? If the response was “Inch Allah” what did you think he /she meant?

RQ. 3.1 Did your counterpart go silent at any one time during the meeting? If so for how long? Did you try to give him further concessions?

RQ. 4. Did your Arab counterpart keep constant eye contact with you at all times? Did you try to avoid it? If you are a woman did, he behaves differently?

RQ.4.1Did your Arab counterpart stand very close to you? How close? How did you react?

RQ.4.2 Did your Arab counterpart at any time touch you in the arm? How did you react?

RQ. 4.3 During the course of your meeting did you voice your disagreement with your counterpart? Did you explain why? What was his reaction? Were there other members of his team?

RQ.5 When your business conditions were more or less settled did you propose a contract? How was the reaction?

RQ. 6. How long did it take you; how many meetings to establish and sign a definite business contract?

RQ. 6.1 Did your counterpart ever want to change or readapt any of the conditions already signed?

RQ. 7. Were you able to perceive that there is a stratified hierarchy according to nationalities? Do you think that nationality plays an important part in the choice of the team to represent your brand? Were you able to give your opinion on staffing chosen for the stores?

RQ.7.1 After the business plan was established your counterpart set up a team to work exclusively. How important was the choice of this team? Was nationality important? Did he or she have clout in the company?

R.Q.8. Now that business has been established, do you feel that there is a mutual appreciation between yourself and your Arab counterpart? Did your counterpart share financial information or other business details with you?

R.Q.8.1 Can you rate the relationship you have established with your counterpart? Please give your opinion by using the scale from 1- not important to 5 - extremely important.

R.Q.9. How did you measure success in that country? What performance indicators did you use?

R.Q.9.1 How long did your brand / business remain in the market?

R.Q. 9.2 Did the “real” decision makers the top / CEO/ General Manager or Board director play a part in your success? Or failure? How?

R.Q.9.3 Overall, how did you perceive the success of the business?

11.2 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Semi-structured Interviews: The dos and the don'ts of doing business in the Middle East.

My name is Fatima Barbeiro Neto and I'm a student of an International Business Master's Degree at the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, School of Business and Technology (ESTG). At the moment, I'm collecting data to ascertain knowledge of common business habits and cultural aspects that can facilitate business meetings, negotiations and business relationships and therefore reduce the cost of doing business in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE). We can only corroborate our theories based on your valued experiences in these markets/countries. Let us reassure you, that your responses to this semi-structured interview will be anonymous and confidential and will take approximately 40 to 50 minutes.

Company profile:

1. Where are /were your headquarters located?
2. What is / was your business sector?
 - a. Is it a specific brand? Which one?
3. Is it a multinational brand such as?
 - a. Franchise
 - b. Licensee
 - c. Intermediary
 - d. Export
 - e. Joint venture
 - f. Other, Which one? _____
4. Particularly in the GCC, do you export or franchise or have a joint venture?
 - a. To which GCC countries?
5. What is / was your job position in the company?
CEO
Export Manager
Middle manager
Other, which one? _____
6. Are you male or female?
RQ.1. Which are the features of a partner in the UAE / GCC you feel are important?
 - a. Please can you list them:
Example: Trust
.....
.....
 - b. From the above which do you think is the most important?
Please state your opinion by using the scale from 1 - not important, to 5 - extremely important.

- a. Which ones?
 - b. How many?
 - c. Mostly who spoke?
 - d. Did you talk in turns or was there a lively conversation?
- RQ1.2** Tell me about your first meeting with an Arab counterpart in the UAE?
- a. How did you present yourself regarding the position you hold in your company?
 - b. Did you exchange cards?
 - i. Where did you place the card, he /she gave you?
 - ii. Where did he / she place your card?
 - iii. Do you remember with what hand you accepted your card?
 - 1. The left or the right?

Respectability and establishing trust

- RQ2** Were you able to talk right away about business?
- a. Did you start with small talk and how long did it take? (5 minutes to 30 minutes or more)
- If yes, did you talk about:*
- i. The trip
 - ii. Sightseeing the city?
 - iii. Hotel conditions where you were staying?
 - iv. Football
 - v. World events
- If not:*
- b. Did you feel it was straightforward and to the point?
 - c. Did he/she ask you personal questions?
 - i. About your family?
 - ii. About your status (married / single/ living together)
 - iii. If you had children?
 - iv. If you were religious. What religion?
 - v. What was the most personal thing he/ she asked?
 - vi. About politics?
 - i. Other, which one?
 - d. Why do you think he /she asked all these questions?
 - e. Did you ask him /her any personal questions as well?
 - i. How did he/she respond?
 - f. Did you feel he /she was trying to establish a personal relationship, rather than a business one?
- RQ2.1** Being obliging, going along with it.
- a. Did you feel that all these questions were a waste of time?
 - b. What makes you think so?
 - c. After answering your counterparts' questions did you feel, he /she knows you better?

- RQ2.2** “Time is money!” While he/she asked all the personal questions did you:
- a. Answer the questions truthfully?
 - b. Did you try to get back to the business aspect of the meeting so as not to waste time?
 - i. Once and gave up.
 - ii. More than once.
 - iii. All the time.
 - iv. How did your counterpart react?
 - c. Do you think that him / her knowing if you are married or have children affects the business?
 - d. How comfortable are you talking about your personal life in business meetings?
 - e. Did you try to make him /her understand that “time is money”.
 - i. Did he / she finally get back to business?
 - f. Was there another day set up for another meeting?

Negotiation – Decision Making meetings

- RQ2.3** How long and how many meetings did it take before you were able to make your proposal?
- a. Temporal length?
 - i. All morning
 - ii. The whole day
 - iii. More than one meeting
 - iv. Other_____
 - b. Did you have time to talk about your proposals?
 - c. Did you have to reschedule your agenda?
 - d. If you met with other companies in the UAE did the same happen?
 - i. If no, why not?

Verbal & Non-Verbal Communication

- RQ3** When you made your bid / spoke about your proposal, did you get a “yes” or “no” response?
- a. If the response was “Insh Allah” what do you think he/she meant?
 - b. If he/she said “we will look into this” or “we will think about it” what do you think he / she meant?

- RQ3.1** Did your counterpart go silent at any one time during the meeting?
- a. If so,
 - i. For how long did you think it was?
 1. 30 seconds
 2. 1 minute
 3. 2 minutes or more
 - ii. What did you do or say?
 - b. Did it seem to you that he /she agreed or disagreed with your proposal?

- RQ4** Did your Arab counterpart keep constant eye contact with you at all times?
- a. How did that feel? Was it too personal?
 - b. Did you try to avoid it?
 - c. Do you think you he or she behaved differently because you are a woman?
 - i. Did he/she look sideways most often?
 - ii. Did you feel it was a sign of respect or that he /she did not like you

RQ4.1 Did your Arab counterpart stand very close to you?

- a. At what distance did he stand?
 - i. Very close, less than 25cm
 - ii. Close enough about 35 to 40 cm
 - iii. Less than 50cm
 - iv. 50 cm or more
- b. How did you react?

RQ4.2 Did your Arab counterpart at any time touch you in your arm or back?

- a. If so, where?
 - i. How did you react?

RQ4.3 During the course of your meeting did you voice your disagreement with your counterpart and explained why?

- a. If so, how was the reaction?
 - i. Did you try to get one of his /her team present to agree with you?
 - ii. Did he /she change the subject?
 - iii. Did he /she stay throughout the meeting?
- b. No and why?

Contract & Negotiations

RQ5 When your business conditions were more or less settled, did you propose a contract?

- a. yes
 - i. How was the reaction?
- b. No
 - i. Why not?

RQ6 How long did it take you; how many meetings, to establish and sign a definite business plan / contract?

- a. It took,
 - i. Less than 1 month
 - ii. 1 month
 - iii. 2 to 3 months,
 - iv. 6 months
 - v. 1, to 2 years
 - vi. More than 2 years
- b. Was he/she the “real” decision maker? Did he /she have bargaining power?
- c. Did you have to meet with higher up people such as the CEO, General Manager, Board Director, the “real” decision makers?
 - i. Did you have to make further concessions you were not planning on?

RQ6.1 Did your counterpart ever want to change or readapt any of the conditions already signed (contract)?

- i. How did you react?
- ii. Did you confront him /her, as you have a signed contract with specific conditions?
 1. What was his /her reaction?
 2. Do you feel that this confrontation changes things between you?
- b. Do you think a contract for him /her means the same as it means to you?

Running the Business

RQ7 Where you able to perceive that there is a stratified hierarchy according to nationalities? Do you think that nationality plays an important part in the choice of the team to represent your brand?

If you set up stores in the UAE / GCC for your brand, did you feel the need to intervene in the choice of staffing, at any time?

Why or Why not?

- a. For you, does nationality play a part in the quality of the team?
- b. Were you able to give your opinion on staffing chosen for the stores?
- c. Was training a big part of your investment in the GCC?
 - i. Why or Why not?

RQ7.1 After the business plan was established, your counterpart set up a team (1 or 2 people), I call them “The Movers & the Shakers” to work exclusively with you.

- a. How important is the choice of this team?
 - i. Were you able to give your opinion on the person / people chosen, even if later on?
 - ii. Were you able to depend on your contacts (The Movers & Shakers) to assure that what was needed actually got done?
 1. Did he / she have enough clout with the local company?
 2. How far up in the hierarchy of the company was he / she?

RQ7.2 Did your contact, the “Movers & the Shakers” have other brands /products to handle?

- a. If so, how did you try to be top of his / her concerns among the other brands?
- b. Did at any time, from your side, the contact person change?
 - i. Why?
 - ii. What happened?
 - iii. Was he / she able to right away take charge?
 - iv. How was the reaction from your Arab counterpart?

RQ 8 Now that business has been established, do you feel that there is a mutual appreciation between yourself and your Arab counterpart?

- a. Did your counterpart share financial information or other business details with you?
- b. How often did you go/ visit or any of your managers to the country / market?
 - i. Once a season

- i. Twice a season
 - ii. Yearly
 - iii. Rarely
 - b. If you visited the country or any of your managers, did you feel that the business improved after you visited, or not really?
 - i. Did you feel there was a need to do this?
 - 1. Why? Or why not?
- RQ8.1.** Can you rate the relationship you have established with your counterpart?
- a. Please give your opinion by using the scale from 1 - not important, to 5 - extremely important.

Success / failure? How did you measure it?

- RQ9** How did you measure success in that country?
- a. What performance indicators did you use?
 - i. Continued increase in exports? LFL (Like for Like, same stores)
 - A. Less than 1 year.
 - B. 2 years
 - C. 3 years
 - D. 5 years or more
 - ii. Continued increase in sales from stores? LFL (Like for Like, same stores)
 - A. Less than 1 year
 - B. 2 years
 - C. 3 years
 - D. 5 years or more
 - iii. Opening of new stores?
 - A. Same as expansion plan
 - B. Increased number to the expansion plan
 - C. Less than expansion plan
- RQ9.1** How long did your brand / business remain in the market?
- A. 1 year or less
 - B. 2 years
 - C. 3 years
 - D. 5 years or more
- RQ9.2** Did the “real” decision makers the top / CEO / General Manager or Board Director play a part in your success? Or failure?
- a. How?
- RQ 9.3** Overall, how did you perceive the success of the business?
- a. Disappointing
 - b. Satisfactory
 - c. Very Pleased

Thank you for your participation.