

# NAVIGATING CULTURAL TRANSITIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATED ADVERTISEMENTS THROUGH LOCALIZATION

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## Abstract

The burgeoning growth of domestic advertisements and their international recognition through translation have led to a significant reception of translated advertisements. This reception can largely be attributed to the profound impact these translated advertisements have on individuals' cognitive processes, psychological responses, and purchasing behaviors. The aim of this paper is a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences in the translation of specific market products from English to Arabic while focusing on Eastern and Western markets. At the same time, this study looks at advertisements from a cultural perspective, emphasizing the differences among societies and consumers, especially in adapting digital content for foreign markets in terms of linguistic and cultural elements (Schäler, 2011). The findings obtained from this investigation, as well as the subsequent analysis, reveal an intriguing pattern. Namely, a considerable proportion of advertisements experience substantial modifications during their transition from their original community to

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the target communities. This transformation often results in a notable deviation from their intended sales objectives. These modifications may include alterations to the linguistic elements, cultural references, and other contextual aspects, all of which are undertaken in an attempt to optimize the effectiveness and impact of the advertisements in the new cultural and linguistic setting.

**Keywords:** Advertisement translation, Eastern culture, Product, Localization, Western culture

### Resumo

O aumento dos anúncios nacionais e o seu reconhecimento internacional através da tradução conduziram à aceitação de um número significativo de anúncios traduzidos. Essa aceitação pode ser atribuída, em grande parte, ao profundo impacto que estes anúncios traduzidos têm nos processos cognitivos, nas reações psicológicas e nos hábitos de compra dos indivíduos. O objetivo deste estudo é uma análise comparativa das semelhanças e diferenças na tradução de produtos específicos do mercado do inglês para o árabe, centrando-se nos mercados oriental e ocidental. Ao mesmo tempo, analisa-se a publicidade numa perspetiva cultural, enfatizando as diferenças entre sociedades e consumidores, especialmente na adaptação de conteúdos digitais para mercados estrangeiros em termos de elementos linguísticos e culturais (Schäler, 2011). Os resultados obtidos com esta investigação, bem como a análise subsequente, revelam um padrão intrigante – nomeadamente, uma proporção considerável de anúncios sofre modificações substanciais durante a sua transição da sua comunidade original para as comunidades-alvo. Essa transformação resulta frequentemente num desvio notável dos objetivos de venda pretendidos. As modificações podem incluir alterações ,os elementos linguísticos, nas referências culturais e noutros aspetos contextuais, todos eles realizados numa tentativa de otimizar a eficácia e o impacto dos anúncios no novo contexto cultural e linguístico.

**Palavras-chave:** Tradução de anúncios, Cultura oriental, Produto, Localização, Cultura ocidental

## 1. Introduction

The impact of advertising on individuals' attitudes and purchasing decisions is significant, as it can either compel them to buy a product or disregard it entirely. This influence is achieved through the utilization of various methods and techniques tailored to the specific product. Advertising serves as a means of communication between companies and consumers, involving multiple components such as the message, timing, delivery, and target audience (Fletcher, 2010).

Translation, despite its slightly elusive nature, can be understood as a range of strategies or the transfer of content from one language to another. Within the advertising domain, the process of translation encompasses the adjustment of both linguistic and presentational aspects of a product in order to effectively resonate with diverse linguistic and cultural environments. The translation of advertisements poses a formidable challenge, as it necessitates careful contemplation of the fundamental characteristics of the promoted goods, while concurrently endeavoring to customize them to suit the intended audience within the advertising campaign. Nevertheless, translators adhere to a prescribed framework of principles to safeguard the integrity and intent of their undertaking (Smith & Klein-Braley, 1997). Therefore, translation theory emphasizes the need to translate advertisements, particularly those in written form, in a manner that allows the target text (T<sub>T</sub>) to fulfill functions as closely as possible to those of the source text (S<sub>T</sub>) (Nord, 1991).

## 2. Research aim

The influence of language and its ability to conform to distinct temporal, spatial, cultural, and communal settings is significant in the attainment of marketing goals. Moreover,

the effectiveness of a product may vary across different communities, depending on the translation and its influence on the foreign culture. This paper centers its attention on the translation of advertisements, with a specific focus on analyzing their visual representations. Although the objective is not restricted to translating advertisements *per se*, our main emphasis is on performing a comparative analysis of both the ST and TT. Our aim is therefore to examine the efficacy of advertising messages in retaining their impact and influence across different media platforms. Specifically, we seek to investigate whether these messages maintain their potency when translated from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). This comparative analysis sheds light on the influence of culture on the translation of advertisements, with a particular emphasis on the localization process and the cultural perspective of translation. At its essence, the aim of localization or the cultural approach is generally concerned with the translation and adaptation of not only words and phrases but with entire cultural settings, lifestyles, and conceptual frameworks. Furthermore, we will suggest translations for possibly equivocal counterparts in the TT, emphasizing the Arabic and English languages and examining them in a reciprocal manner. A proficient translation involves not solely attaining precision and efficacy in the intended text, but also preserving the innate attributes of both the ST and TT. Therefore, the importance of this study lies in illuminating the alterations in the messaging of advertisements during their transfer from one community to another, rather than exclusively concentrating on the process of translation.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. How does the translation of advertising messages impact their potency and influence on different communities?
2. What role does culture play in the localization process of translating advertisements, and how does it affect the transfer and adaptation of linguistic expressions and cultural contexts?

### 3. Literature review

#### 3.1 Advertisement Translation

The field of translation studies has explored the translation of advertisements, as demonstrated by Hurbin (1972) who focused on the notion of "equivalence" and drew inspiration indirectly from Nida and Catford. However, the focus of Hurbin's work is on text types and functions rather than equivalence. While there are various approaches to translation, the responsibility lies with the translator to select the most suitable method. In the context of advertisement translation, creating glossaries specific to this domain can assist translators in finding relevant equivalents easily. However, there may be drawbacks to offering glossaries for advertisement translation, as doing so may limit and stifle the translator's originality, which runs counter to Cook's focus on the poetic part of advertisements related to a literary form (Cook, 2001). Despite Hurbin's claim that rhetorical figures are where advertising really excels, this paper is primarily concerned with the translation of advertisements, how they are translated, and how they are portrayed in other languages (1972).

In subsequent years, scholars and researchers in the field of translation, including Vermeer, Reiss and Nord redirected their primary attention from the concept of equivalence. Reiss, for instance, advanced her "text type model" that accentuates the functional relationship between the ST and TT rather than striving for strict equivalence. This model was subsequently integrated into Vermeer's Skopos theory, which emphasizes that the TT is produced with a specific communicative purpose in mind, rather than solely aiming for formal equivalence.

In 1990, Tatilon addressed the topic of advertisement translation in an article titled "Le text publicitaire: traduction ou adaptation?". Tatilon makes use of Nida's idea of functional equivalence, dividing up the four primary functions of advertising text into several categories. There are two content-related functions: the identification and explanation of quality, while

the latter two functions concern the means of expression, particularly the manifestation of wordplay in advertising (Tatilon, 1990).

Previous studies on the translation of advertising can be broadly categorized as either pure, advocating a descriptive product-oriented approach, or hybrid, combining elements from different categories. Product-oriented studies examine the translation or adaptation of advertising concepts and issues in other languages or cultures. When translating advertising, Abdul-Ghani (2000) pays special attention to the visual illustrations, gender roles, and register that are culturally distinctive. Stereotypes in different cultures and their use in advertisement texts have also been explored in various articles. Valdés (2013), in turn, investigates the manner in which translated advertisements are received and assesses their degree of acceptability within the culture of the intended audience. This paper examines the effects of changes made to translated advertisements on the target audience and market. The analysis is based on the presentation of various examples. The changes are consistent with the Skopos, or intended aim, of the translation task.

Because many advertisements are culturally specific, the TTs of many of them fail to accurately reflect the originals. This is exacerbated by the fact that cultural differences occur between countries. Cultural translation must be given the same weight as linguistic translation. This would establish translatology as specific to a culture constituent of textology, which is concerned with the principles of text production, but it is crucial to acknowledge that such considerations may not inherently bring forth novel insights but could potentially increase the likelihood of misinterpretations (Munday et al., 2022).

International companies use enticing advertisements written in a variety of languages to promote their products around the world, but the cultural aspect must be taken into account. Usually, advertisements are translated from their native languages and then adapted to fit the target culture (TC). Translation of advertisements involves not just a linguistic transformation, but also a cultural one, in which foreign values and viewpoints are introduced

to the receiving culture (Au, 1999). The word "cultranslation," which was first used by Talat S. Halman (Deeney, 1995), describes this occurrence well.

### **3.2 Localization as a cultural process**

Cultural translation is a well-known process that facilitates communication between cultural communities by means of translation, as it encompasses various complex issues related to migration, hybridity, postcolonialism, and more. Moreover, the power of translation is immense, "both in shaping how other cultures are perceived and in directly influencing the target culture" (Bassnett, 2006, p. 313), and it is the means through which nations gain access to information from other languages and cultures. Cultural translation is notoriously difficult due to the interconnected nature of various social and cultural settings. There are many factors that must be taken into consideration when attempting to translate cultural elements, including "the status of the source text, its adjustment to ideological and/or didactic purposes, its degree of complexity, the needs of the target audience, and the prevailing translational norms in the target culture" (González-Cascallana, 2006, pp. 97-98). Cultural translation produces new cultural meanings for words and phrases by taking into account both their linguistic and cultural settings. And when a translator creates a new version of a text, they stamp it with their own meaning by employing a category that connects the two disparate linguistic and cultural worlds (Venuti, 2011). Given our paper's specific focus on the translation of products and advertisements across languages and cultures, it becomes crucial to explore the localization process from a cultural perspective.

Translating materials like user manuals, websites, and video games, as well as performing various supplementary activities to ensure content suitability and functionality for the target audience, is just one part of the larger process of localizing digital content to meet the linguistic, cultural, and functional needs of a foreign market (Schäler, 2010). Localization holds a distinctive position within the field of translation, posing challenges due to its multifaceted definitions and incorporation of innovative computational methods and

capabilities. Whether a product is being localized for a foreign market or a domestic one, its major goal is to make the target audience feel as though the product was designed specifically for them. Skopos theory (coined by Vermeer) and this strategy are highly congruent since they both highlight the essential role that the origin product plays in the TC. Maroto (2005) posits that the process of localization is a unique expansion of the Skopos theory, delineating between culturally unbounded products and those inherently tied to a specific culture, whereby adapting advertisements to local attitudes and cultures can lead to varied consumer perceptions across diverse markets. That is why, company managers, according to Cleveland and Laroche (2007), should be aware of cultural influences on markets because of the increasing speed with which cultures and markets interact in the modern global economy.

Furthermore, localization is intricately linked to internationalization, globalization, and translation. While these concepts may be part of the localization process, our prime aim here is not to clarify each term aside, but to explain the relationship between localization in its general definition and translation in order to provide a clearer understanding of their respective roles.

### **3.3 Localization and translation**

Generally speaking, when companies localize their products, they tailor them to the specific requirements of individual markets in order to better serve customers (Chen et al., 2013). Defining localization in relation to translation proves to be a complex task. While there are similarities between the two concepts, it is essential to recognize their fundamental differences. Translation involves the conversion of words from one language to another, whereas localization goes beyond linguistic transformation by adjusting or even completely transforming the overall concept of a product to cater to a target audience in a different geographical location. Regrettably, many marketing companies have often overlooked the intricacies of the localization process, opting for a mere translation that often results in awkward grammatical and spelling errors. To ensure accuracy and cultural relevance,



translators and writers require guidance from the original advertisers regarding visual content, advertising scenes, and short phrases or quotes. Localization then becomes paramount in reconfiguring and rewriting product descriptions and advertisements to resonate naturally with the target language while preserving the essence and central idea of the SL. Nonetheless, certain products exhibit inherent cultural norms and distinctions, resulting in significant divergence among their components across different regions, thereby making adaptation suitable in one context but inappropriate in another.

Localization encompasses multiple stages, with translation being just one of them. In a broad sense, localization encompasses the process of culturally and linguistically shaping a product to correspond with the target community. Scholars and professionals in the field emphasize that translation inherently carries cultural and linguistic limitations. However, it is possible that catering only to the translation needs of your target audience and consumers will not be enough. LISA (Localization Industry Standards Association) recognizes the difficulty of defining localization in relation to translation because of the many tasks and roles involved in localization, particularly in the fields of marketing and information technology; and all of these require a wide range of linguistic competence (2005). Furthermore, localization extends beyond mere textual adaptation, as it encompasses the overall preparation, planning, and adjustment of the product to suit specific conditions.

Localization extends beyond the boundaries of translation, encompassing not only the linguistic adaptation of a product to the target market's language but also effective communication that aligns with the cultural norms and worldview of the target audience (LISA, 2005). Therefore, within the context of localization, translation serves as a vital element renowned for its practicality.

Practically, localization operates as an official framework process commencing with a translator who works on the text using dictionaries, terminology lists, word processors, and translation tools that expedite the task. During the phase of translation, the translator tries

to work on texts and shapes that are subsequently reviewed and reengineered at the software and computer level. Cultural differences play a significant role, with the translator considering appropriate computer experience that resonate with the TC.

#### 4. Methodology

To answer the questions raised in this paper, we depended on qualitative approaches to data analysis in our research. Our data was predominantly collected from social media, television advertisements, and official websites of the respective products. And to ensure that our study is well-grounded, we have included five figures that include both a ST product and a TT product. In order to dissect the parallels and differences between the ST and TT, we relied heavily on the cultural methods to translation. These methods helped shed light on what happened when advertisements were translated into other languages. Our primary objective was to examine the differences and similarities between the ST and TT of available market products. The investigation relied profoundly on a cultural perspective on translation, with a focus on *localization* in particular. We also explained the processes, approaches, and strategies used by translators. Arabic and English were the languages we focused on for this analysis.

A sizable industry has developed around advertisement translation. Different methods and strategies are used to deliver information in a way that matches with the expectations of the target audience when translating advertisements across different cultures. As more and more businesses look to capitalize on the global market, it is essential that they tailor their advertising to the local culture in terms of not just words, but also images, themes, colors, and cultural references. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that the product's efficacy is enhanced by considering the TL alongside a thorough awareness of each culture. Adapting the TL without taking into account cultural differences between societies is impossible for translators.

## 5. Results and discussion

Localization acknowledges the intrinsic diversity that exists in worldwide markets and regards customers as cultural entities whose values and actions are influenced by their distinct cultural surroundings (Munday et al., 2022). The objective here is to gain an understanding of the preferences and requirements of consumers, with the aim of customizing market offerings to effectively meet their needs and demands. Localization is a process and methodology aimed at enhancing the accessibility of a product to different audiences with varying backgrounds, cultures, religions, among other factors. Many localization strategies are available, tailored to the distinctive methodologies of individual companies (Fry et al., 2003). These methodologies consider the conduct, routines, and cultural diversity of particular societies' consumers.

This section will center on the cultural approach, which holds significant importance in societies where accurate localization is imperative to prevent product ambiguity or misapprehension. For instance, the process of localizing food ingredient information on product labels extends beyond mere language translation and involves adherence to the legal regulations of the destination nation. This implies that specific ingredients could be inaccessible or prohibited within the jurisdiction in the target country. In addition, localization process also encompasses the visual representation of the label, encompassing aspects such as color schemes, icons, font styles, and other design elements. Without a doubt, a deep familiarity with Arab cultures is essential for any marketing efforts aimed at the Arab world. Thus it is important for companies to learn the language well enough to translate their brands' logos and products into it at the right time and with the right approach. The essence, color scheme, and typographic characteristics associated with a brand or product in its original language must also be preserved when translating the logo and name into another language.

**Figure 1.** Illustration of a front façade of KFC restaurant



Source: KFC Website

KFC (Figure 1), an internationally renowned American fast-food chain specializing in fried chicken, holds a prominent position within the restaurant industry (Sheila, 2014). The foremost aspect that captures attention is the logo, prominently displaying the name of the brand in both the SL and TL. Regarding the process of translation, there are two primary strategies employed for the localization of the KFC logo. Firstly, the acronym 'KFC' is rendered as 'دجاج كنتاكي' (Dajaj Kentucky) in Arabic, as a straightforward transliteration would result in 'كفس', which requires further explanation to be comprehensible. It has already been established that the quality of the localized TT is crucial to the effective distribution of a product or brand logo. Therefore, the translator has used both explanation and omission strategies. Firstly, rather than transliterating the acronym, the translator has provided an explanation of what the individual letters (KFC) represent. Secondly, while 'KFC' signifies 'Kentucky Fried Chicken', the translator has opted to literally translate all the words except for 'Fried', leaving new customers unaware of the specific method of chicken preparation. Last but not least, the localization process looks successful as it maintains a sense of balance between the SC and TC, primarily because of the similarity in color and general theme, linking the assumed gap between the two languages in terms of fonts and cultural aspects.

**Figure 2** Illustration of Pizza Hut featuring pizzas and other types of Iftar food



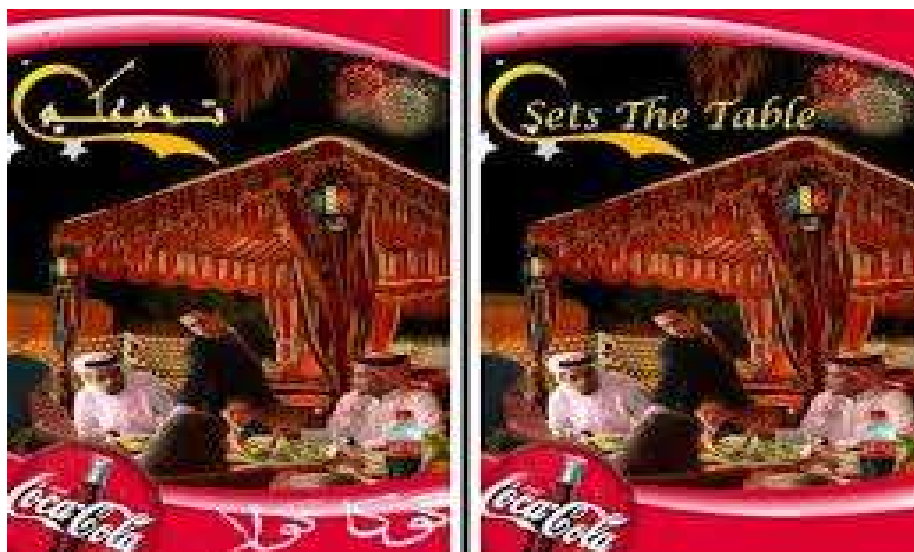
Source: Pizza Hut Website

Figure 2 displaying the Pizza Hut chain shows an interesting contradiction. In this case, the Arabic version of the ST serves as the basis for the TT. In countries where Islam is the main religion, the holy month of Ramadan is observed in a very unusual way. Customers or readers from the English-speaking Muslim community are not the focus of this message, but Muslims from Arabic-speaking countries are.

In regard to the translation process, the popular phrase " رمضان كريم " (Ramadan Kareem) is transliterated as "Ramadan Kareem" in English. It is possible that the word "كريم" has a TL counterpart, although a direct translation would be strange. The ST is translated loosely, therefore the phrase " إفطار حتى الإشباع " (Iftaar Hatta al-Ishbaa) can be translated into any language. The TT still serves the same function as the ST, which is to stress the importance of eating until one is satiated. *From Maghrib Azan to Isha Prayer* is the English translation of the Arabic phrase "من أذان المغرب - صلاة العشاء". Several interesting points can be made here. The translator may have been Egyptian, given the letter "ذ" /ð/ is pronounced similarly to the letter "ز" /z/ in that language. The term "call to prayer" may be a better fit. Transliteration is required for correct portrayal of the Maghrib and Isha prayer times, which are distinct periods within the Islamic religion.

This advertisement poster is connected to religious and partially cultural dimensions. The cultural and religious aspects in this advertisement are closely intertwined with the concept of localization, which, in our example here, is intricately linked to a religious perspective, with every aspect carefully considered on the visual level, including colors, themes, fonts, and design. The use of "Ramadan Kareem" fonts are similarly employed in the ST, evoking connotations of religion. Furthermore, the inclusion of the crescent moon and surrounding mosques functions as symbolic representations of the sacred period. In addition, the azure sky serves as a representation of the Iftar occasion, during which Muslims congregate around a communal table, eagerly anticipating the call to prayer for Maghrib.

**Figure 3.** Illustrations of Coca-Cola advertisement depicting a group of people sharing a meal together



Source: Coca-Cola posters

Figure 3 is a poster produced by the Coca-Cola company. It combines two posters that share a common theme, color scheme, location, and logo. But there is a key difference that changes how we interpret both posters. This very analysis focuses on the cultural implications of translating advertisements, and it is evident that this poster transmits significant cultural loads. The translation of the word 'تجمعكم' to 'Sets The Table' demonstrates the transformation

of a regular expression into an idiom. 'Sets The Table' signifies the act of arranging utensils, such as plates, glasses, forks, spoons, and napkins, in preparation for a meal. The literal meaning of 'تجمعكم', in turn, denotes the concept of gathering around a table while conversation and having a meal. Culturally, this idiom may appear daunting due to the frequency of invitations to gatherings and parties, indicating a strong inclination towards socializing with neighbors and close friends. Consequently, declining many invitations or failing to attend such events could easily offend someone (Nydell, 2018). We can infer from Figure 3 that the Arab world places a higher priority on group dynamics and cooperation than do Western cultures. Therefore, the importance of personal growth and family ties is highly valued in the East (Li, 2016).

**Figure 4** Illustration of Coca-Cola bottles with proper names on the front label



Source: Coca-Cola Ads

Figure 4 represents 'Coca-Cola' which is transcribed as 'كوكا كولا' using transliteration. However, what is intriguing is the translation of proper names within the context of localization and cultural approach. The translation process involves transliterating the brand name into an equivalent word. Another major difference is the translation of "Find even more names with." This approach emphasizes loose translation, creating a new version of the ST that goes beyond the linguistic and contextual levels, which the inferences can be

drawn from. The translator has used their own interpretation to translate "Find even more names with" into TT, as none of the words from the original are included. As for the third and last issue, it has to do with cultural adaptation and localization and involves changing English names to Arabic ones. Baker (1992) argues that professional translators employ eight strategies to overcome translation challenges. Cultural substitution is one of these strategies, and it entails replacing a TL element or term that is culturally specific to the target reader while yet retaining the TL's naturalness, comprehension, and familiarity. The decision to use this strategy depends on the translator's level of autonomy and the purpose of the translation, as well as the prevailing norms in the translation community. Strategies that significantly depart from a text's propositional meaning, Baker adds, are accepted in different degrees by various linguistic communities (1992).

Because of the localization process, which keeps colors, logos, themes, and typefaces intact, advertisements for both ST and TT look nearly identical in every way. First of all, both depictions use red and white, the company's signature colors. Secondly, the target and source logos are so similar that the clients of both countries may find it difficult to tell them apart, despite the fact that they use completely different languages. Thirdly, both the ST and the TT have the same line under the names, demonstrating that the theme is the same. The last similarity between the fonts used for the names 'ياسين' and 'Zack' is in the letters themselves. The majority of translational features are shared by the ST and TT.

The translator's intentional decision to replace English names with Arabic names achieves the preplanned effect because the target audience, especially Arab people, form stronger associations with proper names that are germane to their cultural and personal identities. They are more interested in Arabic proper names because of the worth and relation to their own cultural history than they are in foreign proper names that do not have any meaning to them.



**Figure 5.** Illustration of Oral-B advertisement depicting a veiled woman wearing a smile



Source: Oral-B website

This advertisement (Figure 5) centers on the analysis of Oral-B, an American brand of oral hygiene products and other related items. Although the advertisement's visual presentation may seem straightforward, it contains numerous implicit messages that have important implications for cultural interpretations. Prior to delving into the analysis of cultural perspectives, it is essential to present an outline of the linguistic level translation alterations that occur from the ST to the TT.

Initially, it is noteworthy that the trade name "Oral-B" is preserved without modification in this specific promotional material, as well as in all other marketing campaigns. The brand name is preserved in its original form from the ST without any attempt at translation. The second point pertains to the translation of the expression "Brush like a dentist" into the target language, which involves the use of a feminine imperative form, specifically "فرشي أسنانك كالأطباء." An aspect of significance pertains to the translation of the term "dentist." Essentially, the use of the term "الأطباء" is not limited to dentists, but rather encompasses medical doctors in a more comprehensive manner. The poster effectively assists the intended audience in understanding that the advertisement specifically refers to "أطباء الأسنان" (dentists). One possible alternative translation that may be taken into account for the aforementioned phrase is "فرشي أسنانك كأطباء الأسنان" (Brush your teeth like dentists).

## 6. Conclusion

Advertising exerts significant influence over people's everyday choices, making it one of the most powerful tools available. The efficacy of this influence, however, is contingent upon specific prerequisites, including the utilization of language that is imperative for effectively conveying the promotional message. As previously mentioned, language plays a crucial role in translating marketing products. Translation of advertisements requires translators to possess the necessary tools, strategies, theories, approaches, and knowledge to accomplish the task professionally. Additionally, translators need skills to present information convincingly, as customers may be swayed by how the translator conveys the message rather than solely relying on the product's label. This paper aimed to analyze advertisement translation within the cultural approach, specifically focusing on localization. The study involved analyzing a range of translated product labels and posters from both Arab and foreign contexts to identify linguistic, stylistic, and cultural differences and similarities. Through examining the effects of the cultural approach, particularly the localization process, insights could be gained.

The analysis revealed challenges in localizing acronyms, such as "KFC," in Arabic due to the language's lack of acronyms or abbreviations, impacting the completeness of the translation. Examples from Pizza Hut and Coca-Cola demonstrate how religious and cultural elements were incorporated in advertisements, with translators inadvertently revealing their identity or nationality in some instances. Moreover, the paper addressed gender stereotypes by translating an advertisement featuring a Muslim woman as a dentist, challenging societal norms.

Overall, the analysis underscored that advertisements underwent substantial changes when adapted to target communities, with cultural factors playing a significant role in their success. However, we acknowledge that interpretations of advertisements can vary, and this study provided some effort to comprehend their cultural perspectives.

## Declarations

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