

## **Advertising Review: The Portrayal of Muslim Women Athletes in YouTube Ads**

Afnan Qutub \*

Wesam Basabain \*\*

### **ABSTRACT**

Promoting wearing of the hijab by active young consumers is one method of showing respect for the human rights of Muslim women. Some international sportswear corporations such as Nike, Adidas, Under Armour UA, and Haute Hijab HH have been targeting modest athletic wear as new clothing lines to empower veiled athletes and increase their consumer base. This study analyzed four international sports brands' advertisements on their official YouTube channels aimed at promoting modest sportswear for veiled women. The study investigated the discourse and semiotics used in the advertisements to persuade customers to make a purchase. Methodologically, the study conducted qualitative content analysis to review the ads and explore the extent of viewers' interactions. The findings determined that the Nike and HH ads were most reached ads, followed by the UA ad, while the Adidas ad was the least reached. Two strategies played a significant role in the success of hijab sportswear ads: cultural identification and transformational appeal. These factors were found to attract the target audience and result in their engagement more than a company's history and reputation.

**Keywords:** Women, Veiling, Hijab, Empowerment, Advertisement, Athletes, YouTube.

---

\* Faculty of Communication & Media, Department of Journalism and Digital Media, King Abdul-Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: Aqutub@kau.edu.sa

\*\* Faculty of Communication & Media, Department of Marketing Communication, King Abdul-Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: Wbasabain@kau.edu.sa

**Received on:** 2021/06/02

**Approved on:** 2021/11/09

Evaluated by a double blind review system

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Following their religious and cultural values, Muslim women are obliged to wear modest outfits and cover the attractiveness of their bodies' curves when they are in public and around men who are not members of their families, such as husbands, fathers, and brothers (Basabain et al., 2021a). Therefore, Muslim women athletes are demanding modest sportswear so they can participate in all types of sports in public while wearing comfortable and attractive clothing that supports their performance (Basabain et al., 2021b). Clothing companies have taken this opportunity to maximize sales by creating lines of modest sportswear.

This paper begins by describing the historical background of the sports companies: Nike, Adidas, Under Armour UA, and Haute Hijab HH. Afterward, the literature review section explores four essential areas: international advertising, the recent empowerment of athlete women in Saudi, the appearance of Saudi women in public places, and International Advertising for Modest Sportswear. Thirdly, the theoretical framework focuses on the Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP), Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP), and the Elaboration of Likelihood Model. Later, the method section clarifies the research questions, the content analysis procedure, and sampling. Finally, the results and discussion sections report the findings in relation to the two research questions and existing literature.

### **Background of the Four Companies**

International brands such as Nike, Adidas, UA, and HH are working hard to meet the requirements of Muslim female athletes and produce modest sportswear. Nike is an American company established in 1964 and located in Oregon. The company's products include footwear, sports clothing, and sports equipment. Nike was known as Blue Ribbon Sports from 1964 until 1971. In 1972, founders Bill Bowerman and Phil Knight achieved tremendous success when they stopped distributing an Asian company's running shoes and created their own product line and brand, Nike, which continues to innovate by developing athletic products and communicating with consumers via new strategies (Parker, 2015). In

2017, Nike announced its pro-hijab clothing line targeting Muslim women who practice any type of sports in public.

Adidas began operations in 1949 in the laundry room of Adolf and Rudolf Dassler's mother in Germany. Since then, Adidas has competed in the athletic market as one of the most famous sportswear brands worldwide. An Adidas sports-hijab advertisement was posted on YouTube on January 5, 2018. The ad was titled "Creativity by Ruqsana Begum—Adidas." In the first three years since the ad's posting, 540 users viewed it, and six users "liked" it. The ad received no comments or dislikes. The ad lasted for 33 s, and appeared on an Adidas channel that has 33 subscribers. The voice-over narration of the ad was:

Versatile colors let you mix up your look from day to day. Stay in the zone of your training with high coverage from our athletic hijab, offering breathability and comfort for whatever workout you have planned. Adidas Sport Hijab.

In 1996, the UA business was founded by Kevin Plank in his grandmother's basement in Washington, D.C. Patrik Frisk, the CEO, designed the first hijab sportswear line for the brand in 2018. It is intended for Muslim women who wish to exercise without jeopardizing their faith or success. UA posted an ad on their official YouTube channel on August 27, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their ad was titled "UA Sports Hijab" and lasted for 30 s. The ad recorded 206,489 views, 56 likes, seven "dislikes," and four comments.

The mission of Haute Hijab is described as follows:

From performance hijabs to sustainable innovations, we're obsessed with fusing design, style, and technology into the perfect hijabs for every occasion in a Muslim woman's life. It's not enough for us to make good hijabs; we're determined to make the hijabs you always wished you had—or the ones you never imagined were possible. (Haute Hijab)

Founded in 2010, Haute Hijab is the newest of the four companies. Surprisingly, considering its relatively short history, Haute Hijab's ad received 51,000 views, 468 likes, and 58 comments. The ad was posted on December 19, 2018. The ad was titled, "What Do You See When You See Me? Haute Hijab." The ad duration was 35 s.

International advertising research has two main purposes. First, it serves to guide multinational businesses to make profitable product/service decisions for their various offerings. Second, the research can create an interactive and informative contribution that is effective for marketing executives, scholars, educators, and those interested in learning about international advertising and marketing processes and practices. The majority of research conducted for the first purpose is confidential and not readily accessible to outsiders (Cheng, 2014). However, this study aims to contribute to the international advertising body of knowledge by investigating the success of ad content in relation to consumer behavior (number of views, likes, and comments), based on informed judgment and cumulative knowledge. Methodologically, the study analyzes the content of four international ads and looks deeply into the language employed in the advertisements' discourse for comparison. In addition, it analyzes verbal and non-verbal signs in the advertisements to identify the purpose, message, and implications of the communication.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Considering the recent changes in digital advertisements and Saudi women lifestyle, the following literature will shed lights on areas like: international advertising, the empowerment of Saudi female athletes, the appearance of Saudi women in public, and International Advertising for Modest Sportswear.

### **2.1 International advertising**

International advertising is also called global advertising, multinational advertising, and cross-cultural advertising. International advertising is created and planned in one country and used to influence people in at least one other country (Cheng, 2014). To globalize an ad, international brands need to understand the foreign cultural positionings of the target audience to grab their attention and positively impact purchasing behaviors for their products (Keegan, 2009).

Along with the company's reputation and success, enhancing the influence and effectiveness of an international advertisement requires implementation of different marketing methods and creation of appropriate content for each ad placement. In terms of methods, successful advertising should include various marketing communications activities, for instance, direct selling, event sponsorships, mass-media marketing, and internet marketing. With the unprecedented growth of social media viewers, successful international brands should focus on social media marketing as a significant marketing channel (Rodriguez, 2017). At the

same time, an ad's content should be well-communicated, which could be difficult when aimed at consumers of various cultures (Baker, 2000).

Marketers encounter difficulties in content selection for global advertising when defining the specifications, criteria, requirements, behaviors, mindsets, customs, traditions, and perceptions of different groups of consumers (Baker, 2000). To overcome such challenges, it is crucial to examine and describe the nature, cultural practices, processes, and effects of successful international advertisements; by doing so a base of knowledge can be built and generalized for other corporations as a guideline to promote their products internationally (Cheng, 2014).

## **2.2 Empowerment of Saudi women athletes**

Saudi Arabia has been dramatically changing in the last few years, and Saudi women are becoming a vital part of society and the workforce. With increasing roles, they have more opportunity to enhance their education and qualifications. Saudi Arabia's acknowledgment of women's empowerment and leadership position in the economy signifies the country's reform and progress (Sabir & Zenaidi, 2019), especially after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's 2030 Vision which called for an increase in women's participation in all sectors of the workforce from 22% to 30% by 2030.

The women's fitness field in Saudi Arabia is still new. Studies investigating the empowerment of Saudi women athletes specifically are not yet in the literature. Islam urged all Muslims to participate in physical activities in the Hadeeth of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) that said: "Teach your children swimming, archery, and horse riding" (Samargandi, 2018). Despite that, women were not allowed to participate in sports publicly in the Kingdom for decades (Alenezi, 2014). The lack of women's physical activities and sports competitions has been evident since the council of senior scholars issued a fatwa preventing women from participating in sports in public to protect them from corruption, and any risk that sports may affect their reproductive systems (Abu Fawzan, 2016). This council works as a body that regulates the morality and applicability of religious values in the community.

To avoid criticism from the conservative community and honor the fatwa, no gym licenses were issued for women's gyms, and government schools prohibited physical activity classes for females. However, gyms such as Gold's Gym were attached to hospitals as physiotherapy centers staffed by foreign trainers and some Saudi trainers with minimum qualifications and education from a foreign institute or academy. Consequently, it was not an

environment conducive to producing physical knowledge, competition, and professional-level performance among women.

It was crucial to initiate physical awareness and remove regulations to empower women to participate in the fitness world. Thus, in February 2017, Princess Reema bint Bandar, the vice president of women's affairs at the General Authority of Sports, stated women's gyms were a vital issue and allowed licenses for women's fitness centers, a significant step for women's empowerment. She stated: "It is not my role to convince the society, but my role is limited to opening the doors for our girls to live a healthy lifestyle away from diseases that result from obesity and lack of movement" (*Arabnews*, 2017).

### **2.3 The appearance of Saudi women in public**

Saudi Arabia's culture is conservative and religiously ruled by Islamic sharia laws (Baker, 2016). Moreover, *custom* and *tradition* are two common words in most Saudi families when it comes to the raising of children. The family is very concerned about the reputation of women. According to Basabain (2021), the abaya is the official costume for Saudi women. It is described as a modest, black, long garment that covers the entire body and conceals the body's shape. In 2018, cleric al-Ghamdi, a member of the council of senior scholars, issued a fatwa stating that abayas were not mandatory for Muslim women. Clothes could be any color as long as they were modest and covered the body (Saudi cleric al-Ghamdi, 2018). Muslim scholars in fashion industries focused on designing sports abayas for their thermal comfort properties (Helmi, 2021; Tashkandi et al., 2014). Unfortunately, existing literature has not examined the relationship between sports abayas and attractiveness.

Saudi women's religious values are mostly in conflict with the perception of an attractive appearance used as a strategy to build a brand identity for an athletic woman (Arai et al., 2014; Basabain, 2021). However, according to Arai et al. (2014), one of the significant factors of athletic branding is showing attractiveness. Veiled women athletes likewise may wish to look attractive; therefore, many sportswear brands took advantage of the opportunity to grow their product line and meet Muslim women's needs by starting a modest clothing line of headcovers and sporty turban designs.

### **2.4 International advertising for modest sportswear**

Rochelle Terman revealed in her recent study of US news reporting that the coverage of Muslim women (whom she identifies as Muslim majority or Middle Eastern societies) is driven by a cognitive bias (2017). Advertising practitioners and marketing teams need to separate themselves from stereotypical portrayals of veiled Muslim women (El-Banna,

2020). For instance, as the world's largest athletic clothing company and a profit-making business, Nike corporation relied on this strategy and adopted the idea of commodifying the hijab (Bahrainwala & O'Connor, 2019). Many activewear companies also provided hijab sportswear earlier than Nike, such as ASIYA Sport in the US, Casters in the Netherlands, and general clothing companies like East Essence (Bahrainwala & O'Connor, 2019). The 2019 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue included a hijab-wearing model in a burkini, contributing to the growth of the market for Muslim women's athletic wear (Bahrainwala & O'Connor, 2019).

## 2.5 Theoretical framework

Nowadays, advertising via social media have become a necessity to reach, interact, and connect with audience. Yet, using the appropriate strategies, content, and messages might be challenging when targeting particular audience. With that in mind, the current theoretical framework explore three models: the global consumer culture positioning, the foreign consumer culture positioning, and the elaboration of likelihood model.

### *Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP)*

Globalization allows corporations and marketing managers many new opportunities (Alden, Steenkamp & Batra, 1999). Market globalization and global brands are extremely important (Okazaki, Mueller & Taylor, 2010). According to Robertson, globalization is “the crystallisation of the world as a single place” (Robertson, 1987a, p. 38). Drawing on global consumer culture theory (GCCT), Alden et al. (1999) generated a GCCP model that “identifies the brand as a symbol of a given global culture—for example, the post-second world war, cosmopolitan segment” (Alden et al., 1999, p. 77).

Although there is a constant need for GCCP, there is a conflict in international corporations' advertising around the need for homogeneity across countries (Alden et al., 1999). Relatively, global brand advertising requires the interpretation of other cultures' touchstones, and building awareness of cultural differences that are often regarded as a requirement for successful global advertising (Okazaki, Mueller & Taylor, 2010).

### *Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP)*

Global companies marketing in foreign cultures should accommodate distinctive perspectives in order to be competitive in global markets. Therefore, targeting foreign consumption patterns in advertising should parallel global differences (Alden, Steenkamp & Batra, 1999). A global brand's influence and value become enhanced as it creates a global picture with foreign flavors (Alden, Steenkamp & Batra, 1999).

In deconstructing international advertising targeting Muslims and Middle Eastern veiled athletic women, our research studied foreign positioning strategies and evaluated those strategies by analyzing four international athletic brands' advertisements from the perspective of a Muslim consumer.

#### *Elaboration of Likelihood Model (ELM)*

The ELM has been used in previous studies to examine video marketing strategies (Broadus, 2011). The model describes two routes to two persuasions: central and peripheral routes, which could both be effective in changing attitudes when used in the right circumstances. Central route processing focuses on the information, evidence, content, and logic behind the message. On the other hand, the peripheral route addresses elements such as fame, attractiveness, and superficial characteristics. In other words, the central route relies on rational appeal whereas the peripheral route is based on emotional appeal.

### **3. METHOD**

The study used qualitative content analysis to deconstruct the four advertisements produced by Nike, Adidas, UA, and HH.

#### **3.1 Research questions**

RQ1: What are the strategies used in the ads?

RQ2: Which strategy would lead to affinity among Middle Eastern consumers? Why?

#### **3.2 Content analysis**

Content analysis was selected as it provides an opportunity to identify significant elements of the verbal and visual elements within the content (Krippendorff, 2004). Thus, our analysis focused on both the verbal and the semiotic approaches of the ads. According to Lazovic (2012), viewers are first attracted to pictures in advertisements; thus, it is important to focus on images and the messages provoked through the semiotic methods. The linguistic approach will focus on the verbal elements, including metaphors, text, rhymes, slogans, and brand name.

The current study applied inductive content analysis that relied on open coding and creating categories, while viewing the advertisements and related texts. Inductive content analysis is recommended when formal knowledge about the phenomena is limited (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Each researcher identified the codes and categories separately, and then similar codes were grouped. Afterward, we compared the four selected ads according to the coding sheet.

The data was coded and analyzed manually. In analyzing the data, we focused on elements



like potential audience, audience interactivity with the ad, storytelling, emotional appeal, cognitive appeal, phrases and text, transformational and informational appeal, messaging strategies, technological factors, places and situations, appearance, religious symbols, and veiling practices. With consideration to these aspects, we compared strategies used among the four ads, including both verbal and non-verbal strategies. This was also useful in understanding the rationale behind what is visible and what is invisible. We identified links between the images and text in the ads.

We limited our study to the YouTube platform as we wanted to focus on video ads and not static branding ads. YouTube is well known for video content. Additionally, marketing strategies differ from one platform to another, thus we decided to limit our focus to one platform. Lastly, YouTube was the only platform utilized by all four brands that were the focus of the study. For instance, Nike used a hashtag on Twitter along with YouTube, but other ads did not.

### **3.3 The sample**

The sample for this study consisted of four advertisements designed to promote hijab sports clothing. These ads were selected as the most prominent to appear on search engines when looking for hijab sports outfits. Additionally, researchers wished to explore ads that targeted international audiences, as in the case of the Nike, Adidas and UA ads. Haute Hijab is an emerging sports company that currently targets only Muslim women in the US; yet, consumer interactivity with the ad indicated that it is increasingly becoming a familiar brand. The advertisements were produced by Nike, Adidas, Under Armour, and Haute Hijab. All ads were posted on YouTube and ranged between 30 s and 81 s in length. The advertisements were published at different times. In February 2017, Nike became the first brand to introduce this type of sports clothing, followed by Adidas in January 2018. Both Under Armour and Haute Hijab introduced their lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Under Armour ad was released in August 2020, while Haute Hijab ad was posted in September 2020. The intent of including an older ad such as Nike was to understand the strategies that made the ad go viral, and analyze the adoption or exclusion of such strategies in other ads to determine how they might affect an ad's reach.

#### 4. RESULTS

In relation to RQ1, concerning the strategies used in the ads, the study analyzed the ads based on messaging and technical factors. As for the most successful strategy, which is the focus of RQ2, the study explored these strategies in relation to consumers' level and type of involvement with the ad. Accordingly, this section will explore the following codes to answer RQ1 and RQ2:

- Advertiser Characteristics and Level of Involvement;
- Type of Involvement (ELM);
- Messaging Strategy (Transformational Experience vs Informational);
- Technical Factors.

##### *Advertiser Characteristics and Level of Involvement*

As shown in Table 1, the analysis indicated that the four ads varied in terms of duration, targeted audience, logo and brand name appearance, contexts, and language, which influenced the level of involvement with the ads.

**Table 1.** Advertiser Characteristics and Level of Involvement

CODE	NIKE	ADIDAS	UNDER ARMOUR	HAUTE HIJAB
<b>Duration</b>	82 s	33 s	30 s	71 s
<b>Targeted Audience</b>	Female Arab audience: kids, teenagers, and adults	Muslim women in the US and UK (practicing hijab)	Muslim women in the US (practicing hijab)	Muslim women in the US (practicing hijab)
<b>Logo Exposure</b>	10 times	12 times	15 times	11 times
<b>Brand Name Appearance</b>	None	6	Throughout	4
<b>Contexts</b>	Desert, outdoor spaces, streets, gym, Olympic pool, ice-skating area	Gym, wrestling arena, apartment in a city	Gym	Outdoor spaces, gym, streets
<b>Language</b>	Arabic – Hijazi accent, common phrases	English – UK accent	English – American accent	English – American accent
<b>Level of Involvement</b>	2,476,850 views 5,200 likes 376 comments 226,000 subscribers	516 views 6 likes 0 comments 33 subscribers	206,285 views 54 likes 3 comments 253,000 subscribers	51,000 views 468 likes 58 comments 39,900 subscribers

For Nike, the ad attracted 1,794,334 views during the four years it appeared on YouTube through the Nike women's channel. As shown in Table 1, this ad scored more than 5,000 likes. The ad targeted Arab women in general and athletic Arab women in particular. The ad

targeted adults and teenagers from the middle and upper classes who could afford branded products.

The Adidas ad was published in January 2018, yet only 530 YouTube viewers saw the ad by February 2018. The ad did not receive any comments and was liked by only six viewers. The ad was meant to target Muslim women in the West; however, only one Muslim woman appeared in the ad for 4 s. The ad was mostly focused on champion kickboxer Ruqsana Begum. Unfortunately, the hook of the ad did not attract the attention of the targeted audience. The ad did not include an emotional appeal, cultural aspects, or real-life challenges as did Nike's ad.

UA posted the ad to promote a new line of sports clothing customized for Muslim women. The ad message was "wearing hijab sports clothing allows you to perform better." The ad was seen by 206,000 viewers on YouTube; however, the ad received only three comments. This video ad lasted for 30 s. The setting and design of the ad suggested that the targeted audience was Muslim women in Western countries. Indicators include the accent of the main character, training by a male coach, and the language and slogan of the ad.

HH's ad was seen by 5,472 viewers on YouTube and was liked by 349 viewers. HH aimed to promote its products in the US for Muslim women who wear hijab. As highlighted in Table 1, Nike had the highest level of involvement followed by Under Armour. HH was third and Adidas scored the lowest level of involvement with only 516 viewers. It is essential to point out that although the UA ad had four times more viewers than the HH ad, HH viewers interacted with the ad far more. HH received 468 likes and 58 comments, while UA received 54 likes and 3 comments. This confirmed that the audience engaged more with HH's transformational message focused on the experience of using its products, compared to an informative type of ad.

Both the Adidas and UA ads had a higher level of logo exposure and brand name inclusion than Nike and Haute Hijab, yet that did not lead to more engagement with viewers; the two brands with lower logo exposure had higher levels of involvement. All ads were produced in the English language, except for Nike which used the Arabic language in the Hijazi dialect. Using the original language of the targeted audience had a great impact on audience perceptions of the ad. Using a native language allowed the audience to connect with the ad and easily recall the phrases and slogan of the ad.

As for contexts and settings, the Nike and Haute Hijab ads featured gyms and outdoor spaces; the Adidas and Under Armour ads featured gyms only. This might be influenced by the

duration of the ads as Nike and Haute Hijab were longer. Nike's ad spoke to those who had a modern lifestyle and believed in the importance of sports and talent. This intent was evident from the locations: wrestling arena, Olympic pool, ice-skating arena, and football stadium. The success of this ad is related to its ability to reach women from various sporting levels and religious groups. The ladies in Figure 1 and Figure 2 performed ordinary sports such as running and skateboarding that do not require a high level of training. The ad also included women performing sports such as boxing, fencing, and ice-skating that require professional training.

Similarly, the HH ad featured outdoor areas such as streets and basketball courts in addition to indoor spaces. These locations were filmed in the US whereas the Nike ad was shot in the Middle East. As illustrated in Image 1, the UA ad was photographed in a bright, professional gym. The space, sports equipment, and performance signaled professional training. In the Adidas ad, the gym and equipment appeared to be a personal space turned into a gym.

**Figure 1.** Under Armour Ad



The woman's participation in boxing, weight-lifting, running, and jumping signaled a high level of energy and enthusiasm. At the beginning of the ad, the woman was shown fixing her headscarf and shirt to allow viewers to focus on these particular products and the company logo. The pink color of her shoes and blouse gave a soft feminine impression.

#### *Type of Involvement (ELM)*

The previous code expanded on the level of involvement with the ad and general

characteristics of the ad. Here we outline the type of involvement based on emotional appeal, rational appeal, use of celebrity, use of religious symbols, and the phrases used in the ads.

**Table 2.** Type of Involvement (ELM)

CODE	NIKE	ADIDAS	UNDER ARMOUR	HAUTE HIJAB
<b>Using Celebrity</b>	Included a popular singer, Balqees Fathi	Ruqsana Begum, a champion kickboxer	None	None
<b>Use of Religious Symbols</b>	Veil practicing	Veil practicing	Veil practicing	Ablution, praying, <i>azan</i> prayer, <i>dua</i>
<b>Rational Appeal</b>	Strength, becoming a professional athlete	None	Perform better	Increase performance level

Adapting the ELM, the analysis revealed that all four ads relied heavily on central route tactics such as using a celebrity, religious symbols, or empowering and catchy phrases. The central route and rational appeal were somewhat included in three ads when stressing the claim that these products lead to better performance. Nike's ad in particular stressed the idea of becoming a professional athlete through the closing statement which is translated as “maybe they will say that you are going to become something big.”

According to the ELM, the peripheral route tactics use emotional appeal in persuasion (Griffin, 2010). The analysis identified the use of celebrities, religious symbols, empowering phrases, and animated text as peripheral route tactics.

Featuring a celebrity from the Middle East was one of the most successful strategies to promote the Nike spring collection in that region. Balqees Fathi is a popular female singer who has 10.9 million followers on her Instagram account. She is well known in the Mena region and Arab countries (see Figure 2, third from right). The choice of this particular singer was appropriate as she is known to be a successful, independent woman. Many women look up to her. Thus, her inclusion worked well with the message stressed by the ad, which is “follow your goals and dreams and ignore social judgments”.

**Figure 2.** Nike Ad with Celebrity Balqees Fathi, Shown Third from Right



The Adidas ad's main character was Ruqsana Begum, who is the designer of their hijab sports clothing line (see Image 3). However, the majority of consumers may not have identified and connected with a kickboxer in the same way that they would with a popular singer. A champion kickboxer is most likely recognized by a limited number of people who are fond of this particular sport; whereas a famous singer is likely to be noticed by a large number of people who follow her daily posts on Snapchat and Instagram, attend her events, and know lyrics from her songs.

**Figure 3.** Adidas ad, Ruqsana Begum Kickboxing



Using religious symbols was another emotional tactic identified. All four ads used the basic idea of displaying veiled ladies wearing hijab to connect with the Muslim audience. However, the HH ad used a more engaging strategy by including religious practices such as praying, ablution, and *dua* as demonstrated in Figure 4. Haute Hijab was the only brand to include such religious actions in its ad.

**Figure 4.** Haute Hijab Ad, the Scene of Prayer



Nike's ad did not include religious practices, but it was distinctive because it spoke to women from varying religious levels. As illustrated in Figure 2 above, the ad included a veiled woman, unveiled women, women in modest clothing, a woman in a sleeveless shirt, and a woman wearing shorts. Adidas and Under Armour included veiled women wearing black headscarves as in Figures 1 and 7.

The analyzed ads' rational appeal was found in the claim that using the promoted products would lead to better and higher performance levels, or allow the wearer to compete as a professional. These central route tactics were mentioned in the Nike, Under Armour, and Haute Hijab ads. The Adidas ad did not include any central route tactic.

*Messaging Strategy (Transformational Experience vs. Informational)*

To address the second research question concerning the most effective strategy applied in the ads, the data focused on the following sub-codes: cultural positioning, type of message, phrases and text, routine, and social needs as shown in Table 3.

Nike, a US brand, released the pro-hijab line advertisement, “What will they say about you?” It appears in the Arabic language as the phrase in Figure 5, "اش حيقولوا عنك؟". The message of this ad is: buy our products to overcome social constraints about practicing sport in public places.

**Table 3.** Messaging Strategies

CODE	NIKE	ADIDAS	UNDER ARMOUR	HAUTE HIJAB
<b>Cultural Positioning</b>	Nike became familiar with Middle-Eastern culture and women’s challenges	Claim-base: Challenge gender norms	Claim-base: Challenge stereotypes about veiling constraints	Claim-base: Challenge gender norms; religious practices as motivator
<b>Transformational Message vs. Informational</b>	Transformational: Challenge social norms and gender norms	Informational	Informational	Transformational
<b>Phrases and Text</b>	Phrases: “What will they say about you,” “No one can stop you,” “You will find your way”	Text: “Creativity,” “Here to Create”	Text: “Through Uncompromising Performance”	Phrases: “You got them,” “Tougher,” “There is nothing you can’t do,” “I dare you”
<b>Routine / Social Needs</b>	The ad included an attractive hook. Spoke to ladies about their daily challenges	Did not appeal to routine. The ad focused on one type of sport, kickboxing	Addressed gym workout	Addressed daily routine: outdoor running, basketball, gym workout

Moreover, the Nike ad effectively recast the phrase “What will they say about you?” which is commonly used when someone avoids acting due to fears about social judgments. The ad twisted the phrase, posing the question “What will they say about you?” to a young female athlete at the beginning and then showing women (see Figure 5 and Figure 6) performing sports in the streets while others look at them. While the women were shown playing sports, the ad spoke in the voice of society, saying, “You shouldn’t be here. This is not your role. This isn’t your game.” Then the music and the voiceover change tone as a female athlete in a pool opens her eyes. The narrator says, “Or maybe...they will say...that you are strong, that no one can stop you, that you will find your path, that you are capable, that you have impressed them. Or maybe they will say that you will become something big.” (Nike Women, 2017).



**Figure 5.** Nike Ad and Tagline**Figure 6.** Nike Ad

Nike developed its message in consideration of social constraints in Middle-Eastern culture, specifically the social judgment linked to women who practice sports publicly. Then, Nike presented alternatives to these judgments. Among all ads reviewed, the Nike ad was the most successful as the advertiser understood the foreign culture and positioned the message of the ad effectively. This strategy confirmed Keegan's (2009) ideas about the importance of understanding the culture as it strongly influences consumer behavior. In this context, Nike used transformational messaging rather than informational messaging. Transformational advertising focuses on the experience of using the products (Puto, 1984). Nike's ad focused on what a woman could experience and achieve when using its products.

The use of empowering phrases was one of the common transformational tactics employed. The Nike ad used language emphasizing that Arab women will find alternative ways to perform sports. The ad presented realistic words and phrases that women regularly hear. Then, the ad conveyed a new vision that encouraged women to move forward and expect a new set of positive reactions. Presenting negative judgments followed by inspiring phrases allowed viewers to conduct comparisons for themselves. On YouTube, the published subtitle is "What will they say about you? Maybe they will say that you've exceeded all expectations." This phrase shows that the ad was continuously making associations between society's view and positive expectations.

Adidas stressed social judgments about sports types based on gender (see Table 3), instead of social judgments about playing sports publicly. Typically, rough sports such as kickboxing are considered appropriate for men, while less-aggressive sports such as ice-

skating or tennis are considered appropriate for women (Plaza, Boiché, Brunel & Ruchaud, 2017). Further, the Adidas ad assumes that women share a similar viewpoint in a world dominated by men. While Ruqsana feels lonely as she is the only woman performing this sport, she assumes that veiling is an obstacle for Muslim women interested in sports. As a result, she presents the solution for them by introducing this novel line of sports clothing. This is a commercial strategy to promote the new line by Adidas.

The ad included the following language:

I trained in secret, the only woman in a man's gym. I wanted to be part of the sport, so I got creative and built a new world where I got to be myself. Then I created a way for Muslim women to join me in the spotlight...I want you to see us and what we can do. I am Ruqsana Begum, and my creativity makes the world see us differently. "HERE TO CREATE."

The ad was created from the concept of sisterhood and feminism, as indicated at the beginning when Ruqsana was the only woman in an arena of men. Later, she created a space for practicing and invited Muslim women to share the space and sport as Figure 7 shows. Also, the two opposing statements, "I trained in secret," and "...to join me in the spotlight," indicated that previously women had to practice sports in secret. Now, Adidas products allow Muslim women to practice more openly.

**Figure 7.** Muslim Woman in Adidas Ad



The UA ad started with the phrase, "As a Muslim woman," and then the character started introducing UA products (see Image 1). This strategy was successful as it allowed the targeted audience to identify with the main character. The ad tried to build a sense of commonality by saying, "The best thing about the Under Armor hijab is that it allows millions of women to feel confident enough to participate in sports." Here, the ad was highlighting the influence of these products on a large number of women worldwide. In particular, the ad used the common stereotype about the constraints of hijab as a cultural positioning tactic. The Under Armour ad promoted the idea that practicing hijab should not be an issue anymore because of the newly designed sports clothing for Muslim women; however, practicing with a male trainer raised an ethical and religious matter. In Islam, the practice known as *Kolwah* means it is not permissible for a Muslim woman to be around a non-related man privately.

The UA ad intentionally used words like "empowered" and "confident enough" to challenge stereotypical ideas about Muslim women who wear hijab in the West because they are usually portrayed as an oppressed minority (Qutub, 2013). As a result, the ad focused on the common issue using the statement "Your hijab does not prevent you from doing anything" and then presented the solution "Be bold and be proud of your identity," which is achieved by buying sports clothing products. At the end of the ad, this line appeared: "THROUGH UNCOMPROMISING PERFORMANCE." It reminded the viewer of the association between the products and the exceptional level of practicing sports.

HH focused on the religious aspect of veiling and Islamic practices as a form of cultural positioning, as exemplified in Image 4. Although the ad received only 29 comments, all comments were positive and encouraging, especially about the prayer scene. The comments also revealed that viewers were waiting for similar products, and that they were motivated to buy them. The ad signals the following message: "Hijab shouldn't be a barrier to performing sports."

HH used a transformational messaging strategy to challenge the common stereotypes about veiling and practicing hijab publicly. In particular, the ad first presented stereotypes about women using phrases like "Can't do more than you did yesterday? ... You can't be stronger? You can't be tougher? You can't do stretchy backward stuff? You can't miss? You can't beat your personal best? You can't do the coolest things in this video?" After that, the scene of the prayer appears, and the ad says "You come back even stronger," an indication that

Islamic practices boost the performance of women practicing sports.

Further, HH used simple language and addressed daily routines to grasp the attention of consumers. The casual language used in the ad appeared in words like “hey you,” “got’em,” and “stuff” to give a sense of identification with dialects used by young adults. As for daily routine, the ad showed young ladies in various daily sports like walking, running, playing basketball, doing stretching exercises, karate, and weight-lifting.

#### *Technical Factors*

In this code, we explored the technical factors included in the ads to assess how they might have influenced interactivity with advertisement. As demonstrated in Table 4, the analysis focused on the use of computer graphics, music and sound effects, presenter tone, inclusion of other media channels, and other visual appeal.

Nike's ad did not include any computer graphics, yet it was rich in terms of sound effects and other visual elements. For instance, the atmosphere of Nike's ad focused on objects from Middle Eastern culture such as deserts, palm trees, Arabian horses, buildings, veiling, and the abaya. The ad used a variety of colors to signal different messages. There were scenes in which white and blue colors were used to emphasize being fresh and cool. A boxer wore a pink T-shirt that signaled a feminine sense. Most Nike products were shown in cheerful colors, such as light green, bright yellow, pink, white, and blue. These colors are trendy among young women. The use of dust colors related to the desert and old buildings gives an impression of the location and culture of the Middle East. Other visuals, like patterned cloth, gold accessories, and horse accessories, all signaled a taste of the culture.

Similar to Nike, Adidas did not incorporate computer graphics in the ad. The Adidas ad was filmed in a bright studio which included a wrestling ring and kickboxing equipment. White and bright colors were selected. There were no symbols that related to Islamic culture other than the veiling of the second woman. The boxing gloves worn by the Muslim woman were the only product that showed the Adidas logo. It was not clear if her blouse, pants, or veil were produced by Adidas. In the Adidas ad, the narrator was the same character featured in the ad who appeared confident and expert in kickboxing.

Unfortunately, the Under Armour ad did not include either computer graphics or other media channels. The selected music was energetic with a fast rhythm, which suited the short ad filmed in a gym which focused on the presenter's performance. Her character was confident and she used hand gestures while giving information about high performance and her identity, which was effective.

**Table 4.** Technical Factors Codes

CODE	NIKE	ADIDAS	UNDER ARMOUR	HAUTE HIJAB
Use of Computer Graphics	None	None	None	Used digital graphics
Music / Sound Effects	Music changed according to context / Low, high, violin, horse sound, wind	High beat energetic / Kickboxing sound	Energetic	Energetic music / Sound of <i>azan</i>
Presenter	Confident tone, presented the stereotypical idea and its counterpart effectively	Confident – high charisma	Confident, use of hand gestures for illustration	Friendly and confident
Other Media Channels	Used hashtag “Just do it” in the ad description	None	None	Used hashtags “CantBanUs,” “HHSport,” “ChangeTheGame”
Other Visual Appeal	Bright colors, desert	Natural sunlight	Feminine color, bright gym	Use of modern digital watch

HH was the only ad that used computer graphics as illustrated in Figure 8. As for visual cues, the ad highlighted daily situations like playing basketball in a park, girls playing football on the streets, female athletes at karate class, and a woman weight-lifting and running in an open area.

**Figure 8.** Example of Declamatory Visual Effects in Haute Hijab Ad



The HH ad spoke the language of the young generation by using several trendy visual cues: taking a selfie while playing sports, wearing a sports watch, and the declamatory visual effects as exemplified in Image 8. Unlike the Adidas ad, the Haute Hijab ad included different sports such as running, weight-lifting, football, and basketball. One of the powerful elements in the ad showed Muslim women performing sports collectively, such as the scene of the two girls playing football.

Interestingly, including visual symbols of Islam such as performing ablution and praying was one of the most successful elements; many viewers commented on it positively. The ad suggested that these Islamic practices motivated women to perform better when practicing sports. In addition to computer graphics and everyday language, HH used a digital watch which signaled the modern lifestyle preferred by young adults, and also highlighted the idea of prayer times throughout the day of a Muslim woman.

In terms of incorporating other media channels for marketing purposes, Nike and HH provided hashtags to involve the audience on Twitter. Nike included the hashtag *just do it* so people would interact with the ad and give their opinion on the ad and the products. HH included three relevant hashtags: *CantBanUs*, *HHSport*, *ChangeTheGame*. On the other hand, Adidas and UA did not include any hashtags in their ads, resulting in a limited number of interactive responses. This points to the importance of including multiple media channels in advertising to enhance viewers' engagement (Danaher, 2017).

The HH hashtags signaled an empowering message for young Muslim women. Historically, it is men who perform sports in public places. However, the ad challenges this idea, stressing that women can do sport publicly if they wear suitable hijab sports clothing. The ending seconds included a powerful message when the statement "So tell me I can't, I dare you" summarized the stereotype that Muslim women usually face about the hijab being an obstacle to performing sports. Hence, Haute Hijab products now challenge such misconceptions and provide the solution to such a dilemma.

Also, the ad used the casual language of young women, which appeared in words like "hey you," "got'em," and "stuff" to give a sense of identification with the dialects used by young adults.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of this study revealed that Nike's advertisement was the most reached ad compared to the other three produced by Adidas, HH Sports, and UA. According to the FCCP model, successful advertising depends on adhering to the culture of the targeted audience. Nike's advertisement was able to attract such attention because of its cultural aspects. The ad addressed an important issue and challenge for Muslim women interested in daily sports or being professional athletes. As these women could face social judgments about their appearance in public places or media, and be told to perform typical gender roles, Nike signaled a message of "Just do it" and "Take the first step. Later, they will say positive things about you." Goddard (1998) defined the process of "adapting the text to fit a culture of its targeted groups" as copy adaptation. Nike designed their ad content and topic based on the culture of its targeted groups. In alliance with the GCCP model, Nike's ad success builds on its understanding of cultural cues and social expectations (Alden et al., 1999).

In contrast, the three ads produced by Adidas, HH, and UA focused on the religious practices of the targeted audience, such as veiling and prayer. Although this factor is important to identify with the targeted audience, appealing to specific cultural matters like the social stereotypes highlighted in the Nike ad was more successful and resulted in more engagement and more views on YouTube.

The hook and story of the Haute Hijab ad were other key factors in audience engagement. Haute Hijab is a relatively new brand compared to Adidas and UA. However, Haute Hijab reported 5,472 viewers of the ad, and only 530 viewers saw the Adidas ad. Both Adidas and UA ads were informative and focused on promoting the products as a way to solve hijab constraints in practicing sports. The HH ad relied on daily situations in which women might wish to participate in sports. Additionally, HH used verbal and non-verbal cues that identified with young adult lifestyles, such as casual language, the sports watch, and the digital effects included in the ad.

In terms of differences, Nike was the only ad that sought to promote products in the Middle East, so it used Arabic language and included a Twitter *just do it* hashtag in English. The other three ads were targeted at Muslim women in western countries, so they used English dialogue and text. Nike focused on challenging social expectations as a motivation to practice sports. The other ads presented religious practices as a motivator to perform better and succeed in sports. Adidas was the only ad that featured a non-Muslim woman to speak

on behalf of Muslim women, which was problematic as Muslim women need to address their appearance issues (Qutub, 2013). In the other three ads, the speaker or the narrator of the ad was a Muslim woman.

As for celebrity inclusion, Nike was the only ad that used a popular singer, Balqees Fathi, which was a successful strategy, while the other ads did not use celebrities. Including celebrity is one of the tactics used in the peripheral route of persuasion according to the elaboration of the likelihood model (Broadus, 2011). Only Nike and HH included Twitter hashtags on the ad posted on YouTube to encourage further engagement with the product and the company accounts on social media. The Adidas ad was the only ad that did not receive any comments. Nike and HH used the question-and-answer form of presentation style, while Adidas presented a case and UA focused on defining their products.

As for similarities, all ads focused on empowering women by motivating them to practice sports. All ads included Muslim women with veiling performing sports, and Haute Hijab included two veiled women practicing sports together. All ads included music and were posted on YouTube. Most ads received comments and likes from YouTube viewers except for the Adidas ad.

In conclusion, this study found that when advertising for hijab sports clothing, focusing on the cultural appeal and including a story with a hook are more powerful than a company's history and reputation. In particular, using the peripheral route tactics like emotional appeal and transformational messaging engaged the audience in the case of the Nike and Haute Hijab ads. The influence of cultural positioning was also confirmed in former literature (Okazaki, Mueller & Taylor, 2010). From all ads, the data revealed that the Nike and Haute Hijab ads were the most reached ads, followed by Under Armour, while the Adidas ad was the least reached.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to understand the most effective strategies to use when an International corporation advertise for Muslim women's sports clothing. The findings revealed that understanding cultural cues is one of the significant keys to the success of international advertising. The Nike ad was the most reached ad compared to others as it was in the language of the audience, and used contexts and visuals existing in the environment of the targeted audience. Second, addressing daily routines and practices was another essential factor as in the case of the HH ad. HH succeeded in applying elements like computer



graphics, daily sports practices, and daily religious practices. Finally, using transformational appeal, which focuses on the experience of using the products, was a key factor of the Nike and HH ads. Future studies could compare advertisers' visions and audience perceptions of hijab sportswear to understand the effectiveness of strategies embodied in advertisements.

## REFERENCES

- Adi das. Creativity by Ruqsana Begum – adidas. (2018) <https://youtu.be/tHkBsTrGEU0>.
- Alden, D. L., Steenkamp, J. B. E., & Batra, R. (1999). Brand positioning through advertising in Asia, North America, and Europe: The role of global consumer culture. *Journal of marketing*, 63(1), 75-87.
- Alenezi, L. (2014). Women's Practice of Sports in Islamic Jurisprudence [Taibah University]. <http://0o106yui1.y.http.search.mandumah.com.kau.proxy.deepknowledge.io/Record/620902>
- Anonymous. (2017) Saudi Arabia to start granting female gym licenses this month. Arab news <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1052881/saudi-arabia>
- Arai, A., Ko, Y. J., & Ross, S. (2014). Branding athletes: Exploration and conceptualization of athlete brand image. *Sport Management Review*, 17(2), 97-106.
- Bahrainwala, L., & O'Connor, E. (2019). Nike unveils Muslim women athletes. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-16.
- Jones, J. P. (Ed.). (2000). International advertising: Realities and myths. Sage. Baker, R. "Online Social Networks and Saudi Youth Participation in Physical Activity." Ph.D. diss., Brunel University London, 2016.
- Basabain, W., Macleod, K., Westbury, T., & Qutub, A. (2021). Challenges of Self-Presentation and Athlete Branding among Saudi Female Exercisers: An Auto-ethnography of a Muslim Saudi Personal Trainer Instagram User. *Asian Social Science*, 17(3).
- Basabain, W., Macleod, K., Westbury, T., & Qutub, A. (2021b). Personal Branding on Instagram: The Challenges Encountered by Saudi Women Exercisers. Official Conference Proceedings of the European Conference of Arts and Humanities.
- Baxter, E. (2010). Saudi cleric says the sport is corrupting women. [arabianbusiness.com. https://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-cleric-says-sport-corrupting-women-270714.html](https://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-cleric-says-sport-corrupting-women-270714.html)
- Broadus II, T. G. (2011). The Viral Fingerprint: A Content Analysis of Popular Viral Advertisements.
- Cheng, H. (Ed.). (2014). *The handbook of international advertising research*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Davis, C. S., Powell, H., & Lachlan, K. (2012). *Straight talk about communication research methods*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall.
- Danaher, P. J. (2017). Advertising effectiveness and media exposure. In *Handbook of marketing decision models* (pp. 463-481). Springer, Cham.
- El-Banna, D. (2020). The representation of veiled versus non-veiled women in advertising: a comparative analysis of local and western brands' Instagram posts.
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 62(1), 107-115.
- Faisal Al-zawy Abu Fawzan. (2016). Ruling on establishing women's sports clubs? Allama Al-Fawzan. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9na8MDxFFA>
- Goddard, A. (2002). *The language of advertising: written texts*. Psychology Press.

- Haute Hijab. (2020). Introducing Haute Hijab Sport. <https://youtu.be/BeD0h5Zj0dQ>.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage publications.
- Helmi, M., Tashkandi, S. & Wang, L. (2021). Design of sports-abaya and its thermal comfort evakuation. *Textiles Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00405175211028802>
- Lazović, V. (2012). Content analysis of advertisements in different cultures. *ELOPE: English Language overseas perspectives and enquiries*, 9(2), 39-51.
- NikeWomen. (2017). Nike: What will they say about you?. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-UO9vMS7AI>
- Okazaki, S., Mueller, B., & Taylor, C. R. (2010). Global consumer culture positioning: testing perceptions of soft-sell and hard-sell advertising appeals between US and Japanese consumers. *Journal of International Marketing*, 18(2), 20-34.
- Parker, M. "Nike." *Fortune Magazine*. 2015.
- Plaza, M., Boiché, J., Brunel, L., & Ruchaud, F. (2017). Sport= male... But not all sports: Investigating the gender stereotypes of sport activities at the explicit and implicit levels. *Sex roles*, 76(3-4), 202-217.
- Puto, C. (1984). Informational and transformational advertising: The differential effects of time. *Advanced in Consumer Research*, 11. <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/display.asp?id=6323>
- Robertson, R. (1987). Globalization and societal modernization: a note on Japan and Japanese religion. *Sociological Analysis*, 47, 35-42.
- Rodriguez, P. R. (2017). *Effectiveness of YouTube advertising: A study of audience analysis*. Rochester Institute of Technology.
- Samargandi, T. H. (2018). *The Attitudes of Saudi Teachers Toward Teaching Physical Education for Girls at Public Schools in Jeddah*. University of Arkansas.
- Al-Ghamdi. (2018). Abaya is not mandatory as per Islam's teachings,. Al Arabiya English. <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2018/03/28/Saudi-cleric-Al-Ghamdi-Abaya-is-not-mandatory-as-per-the-teachings-Islam>
- Tashkandi, S., Wang, L., & Kanesalingam, S. (2013). An investigation of thermal comfort properties of Abaya woven fabrics. *Journal of the Textile Institute*, 104(8), 830-837.
- Terman, R. (2017). Islamophobia and media portrayals of Muslim women: A computational text analysis of US news coverage. *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(3), 489-502.
- Under Armour. (2020). UA Sport Hijab. <https://youtu.be/FnEVUcwOg9E>

### How to cite this article:

Qutub, A. & Basabain, W. (2021). Advertising Review: The Portrayal of Muslim Women Athletes in YouTube Ads. *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, Vol. 9, N° 17, 72-97.