IMPACT OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS SYMBOL IN PRODUCING FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD ADVERTISEMENT

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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature on religion and advertisement led to the identification of three lines of studies examining the influence of religion on advertising. These three lines of studies focused on attitude toward advertising of controversial products, presence of religious values in advertisements executions, and the consumers' reactions to advertisement containing religious cues or symbols. The latter line has been followed modestly in Christian context but not in Islamic context of advertising. Hijab as a significant religious cue might peripherally generates a favorable attitude toward advertisement among Muslims. It is suggested that information processing theories like Elaboration Likelihood Model provides a pertinent theoretical framework to examine this effect empirically.
Keywords: advertising, Islam, religious symbols, Hijab, Elaboration Likelihood Model

INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that attitudes and behaviors are greatly influenced by religion-rooted aspects of culture. A review of published literature on religion and advertising led to the identification of various studies on the influence of religion on advertising. The influence of religious mindset of audiences on information processing is one of the most significant dimensions of which have been modestly studied. The purpose of this review article is to illustrate the shortcomings or gap in past studies and, accordingly, propose a relatively new trajectory of studies in Islamic advertising.

INFORMATION PROCESSING IN ADVERTISING

It is widely acknowledged that attitude toward advertisement depends not only on the physical stimuli but also on the stimuli's relation to the surrounding field. This surrounding field which is shaped by the culture defines individual's perceptions of advertisement messages. A number of factors within the individual (such as the cultural background, experience, personality, values, expectations), and the context in which something is perceived (De Mooij, 2009; Usunier & Lee, 2005) intervene in shaping attitudes. Audiences react to an advertisement based on

the meaning assigned to the advertisement, which in turn depends on characteristics of both the advertisement and the audience (Veloutsou & Ahmed, 2006). This process takes place based on cognitive or affective interpretation of message content or cue. Accordingly, utilizing favorable or unfavorable cues might generate positive or negative perception while decoding advertisement.

Persuasion theories distinguish between two main cognitive (or systematic) and affective (or heuristic) information processing which affect attitudes shaping in different circumstances. Cognitive processing requires effortful decoding of messages while affective processing requires relatively little mental effort (Shavitt, Swan, Lowrey, & Wanke, 1994). Some theories like cognitive response theory focus only on those situations which people are active processors of the information rather than situations where people are not actively thinking about the message content (Bryant, 2008). This theoretical standpoint is challenged by other theories like Elaboration Likelihood Model which includes hypotheses about persuasion effects based on effortless processing. This dichotomous processing is known as systematic/heuristic model (Chaiken, 1980).

Systematic view of persuasion asserts that people put a cognitive effort into processing. Audiences elaborate on the message argument and evaluate it based on their previous attitudes. On the contrary, heuristic view of persuasion posits that audiences attach more weight on non content cues rather than arguments in processing information (Chaiken, 1980). Cues such as source characteristics, provides the non- cognitive routes to persuasion. "In essence, a systematic view of persuasion emphasizes detailed processing of message content and message -based cognitions in mediating opinion changes whereas a heuristic view de-emphasizes detailed information processing and focuses on the role of simple rules or cognitive heuristics in mediating persuasion" (Chaiken, 1980, p. 752).

This dichotomous perspective in information processing postulates that message and source variables have relative impact on information processing. Under systematic processing, message characteristics play the crucial role in accepting or rejecting a persuasion effort but heuristic processing employs source characteristics such as source's identity to accept or reject a message (Chaiken, 1980). This heuristic standpoint attaches a considerable weight on the source characteristics in information processing. It is believe that source factor variables may stimulate the audiences to accept a message or at least, feel at ease with it, regardless to the argumentation. According to Petty & Wegener (1998), source variables refer to aspects of the person(s) presenting the persuasive appeal. Early works in communication which has categorized source factor in three categories -- credibility, attractiveness, and power -- revealed that the more attractive source is more persuasive (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Source attractiveness among all source characteristics has received a greater amount of research focus. The literature suggests that audiences follow the rule that people generally agree with people they

like and consequently show agreement with liked spokesperson. Additionally, attractiveness generates or enhances the process of identification; identification is said to occur when an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or a group (O'Keefe, 2002).

Evidence suggests that advertisements are processed subjectively by individuals on the basis of the group membership (Leach & Liu, 1998). If the spokesperson is a part of or similar to buyer reference group, the advertisement would be primarily processed through group affiliation process (Benoit & Benoit, 2009). However, cultural groups differ in their values, attitudes and prejudices they possess, and thus each group will read the advertisement distinctly and develop its own shared reactions, interpretations and meanings of the advertisement (Leach & Liu, 1998). In a cognitively diverse world, a message that is sent is not necessarily the message that is received. Advertising could be more effective when it provides information and uses 'language' that is consistent with the preferences of the audience; customized advertisements may be more successful than generic "one-size-fits-all" (LaBarbera *et al.*, 1998). In short, cultural values and norms assign the preferable form for advertisements targeted to specific group.

Cues and symbols are effective instruments to remind the consumers of their cultural values' affiliations. Therefore, advertising appeals that depict value orientations consistent with the intended audience is likely to be more persuasive than advertisements that depict inconsistent value (Leach & Liu, 1998), a fact that advertisers should take into account when creating their messages. As a result utilizing these symbols in advertisement might unconsciously enhance the process of information processing and consequently generate a favorable feeling. Elaboration Likelihood Model is one of the most widely used theory to clarify this unconscious influence of cultural symbols in persuasion.

ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is one of the most widely used psychological theories to account for how advertising information is processed. Since first formulated in 1979 in the field of psychology and applied to consumer behavior study in 1983, the ELM has been the subject of numerous studies, and it has been used in wide-ranging areas of persuasive communication from marketing to health communication (SanJose-Cabezudo *et al.*, 2009). The ELM developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), views persuasion primarily as a cognitive event, meaning that the targets of persuasive messages use mental processes of motivation and reasoning (or a lack there of) to accept or reject persuasive messages. The central processing route makes use of cognitive resources to understand and elaborate a message's argument (Tillard, 2000).

The ELM provides an integrative framework for understanding the antecedents and consequences of attitude change and specifies the various processes by which source, message, recipient, channel, and context variables have an impact on attitudes (Petty *et al.*, 2009). A key postulate in the ELM is that attitude change can result from relatively thoughtful (central route) or nonthoughtful (peripheral route) processes. ELM's explanation to this different effect relies on various elaborations of messages among respondents. ELM posits that the impact of messages cues like attractiveness or favorability of spokesperson changes according to receiver's elaboration. This ability to elucidate inconsistent findings from different studies put the ELM as a pioneer and most influential theory in persuasion research (O'Keefe, 2002).

ELM posits two possible routes or methods of influence: centrally routed messages and peripherally routed messages. Attitude changed via the central route tend to be based on active thought process resulting in a well-integrated cognitive structure, but attitudes changed via the peripheral route are based more on passive acceptance or rejection of simple cues and have a less well-articulated foundation (Petty *et al.*, 2009). The peripheral route uses fewer or no cognitive resources and allows a range of automatic mechanisms to be activated and to affect the hearer's attitudes (Tillard, 2000).

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), in contrast to all of the roles that variables can serve when the likelihood of thinking is high and when conditions do not foster thinking, variables influence attitudes by serving as simple cues. The rationale behind this attitude formation or change through a peripheral route is that the audience attributes the information to the positive cues in accepting or to the negative cues in rejecting the message (Petty & Brinol, 2008). Instead of doing extensive cognitive work and carefully evaluating the issue – relevant arguments, recipients rely on a variety of cues that allow them to accept the message.

An extant literature in communication studies and social psychology illustrates numerous cues peripherally regarded as attributers. When thinking is low, attitudes might be affected by a large number of different low-effort processes such as mere association (Cacioppo *et al.*, 1992) or reliance on simple heuristics (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). The number of arguments, characteristics of the source (e.g. attractiveness or expertness), the features of the presenter (e.g. race, gender, age), the situation and context (e.g. music and mood) are some of the peripheral elements which scholars tried to shed the light on their effect on message processing.

PERIPHERAL CUE

The study of peripheral cues in persuasive communication as Petty *et al.* (1983) reiterated is important because "there is some suggestion that they affect attitude in ways other than those predicted by the more attribute-oriented

expectancy value and cognitive response models" (p 136). When the receiver has no motivation or ability, the peripheral route of persuasion appears. The peripheral route offers a mental shortcut path to accepting or rejecting a message without any active thinking about the attributes of the issue or the object of consideration. Instead of doing extensive cognitive work, recipients rely on a variety of cues that allow them to make quick decisions without argument scrutiny (Whittler & Spira, 2002).

A peripheral cue is any advertising element that is not central to the product's merits but can affect attitudes toward it such as source characteristics (i.e. attractive endorsers, gender or race of spokesperson), music, the background of the advertisement, and a religious symbol. As a result, different peripheral cues have been examined by researchers to enlighten its contribution to the information processing (e.g., Dotson & Hyatt, 2000; John *et al.*, 1998; Lumpkins, 2010; Miniard *et al.*, 1991; Park & Young, 1986; SanJoze-Cabezudo *et al.*, 2009; Whittler & Spira, 2002). ELM allows a single source characteristic to serve as a persuasion variable that may influence attitudes in different ways.

Characteristics of the source (i.e. the presenter in advertising) besides the merits of a product, is one of the most widely noticed elements of an advertisement. Previous studies have suggested that same messages propagated by different presenters are welcomed differently by viewers (e.g., Baker & Churchill, 1977; Kahle & Homer, 1985; DeShields *et al.*, 1996; Bower & Landreth, 2001; Whittler & Spira, 2002; Rouner *et al.*, 2003; Edwards & La Ferle, 2009). Attractive communicators are more persuasive than their counterparts in delivering virtually the same message (Chaiken, 1979). This rule has been widely used by advertisers utilizing celebrities in their advertisement.

Source attractiveness is derived from likability, similarity, or familiarity. If the audiences find some sort of similarity with the source they should tend to be more influenced by the source (Petty & Wegener, 1998). If the source and the receiver have similar backgrounds, attitudes, lifestyles, or interests, the position advocated by the source is better understood and received. These common orientations are the products of cultural or group membership. Cultures provide the context in which this similarity act and enhance the receiver's mental process of identification with the liked source.

Different cultural cues , such as culturally similar actors, shared cultural symbols and preferred language to produce the intended meaning, has been widely used by advertisers in the hope that the cues will be "decoded" by the audience (Veloutsou & Ahmed, 2006). Religion as one of the most significant component of culture utilizes symbols to transfer religious values among its followers. To elucidate the role of religious symbols in advertising, the subsequent sections review and synthesizes the literatures on the role of religion and religious cues as a both the advertisement execution and generating attitude toward advertisement.

RELIGION AND ADVERTISING

Religion as an institution significantly influence on people's attitudes, values and behaviors (De Run *et al.*, 2010) at both the individual and societal levels. Scholars would agree that religion represents unified systems of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred things, and religiosity is viewed as the degree to which beliefs in specific religious values and ideal are held and practiced by an individual (Delener, 1993). Weaver and Agle (2002) reported that religiosity is known to have an influence both on human behavior and on attitudes. They argue that behavior is influenced by religious self-identity which is formed by the internalization of role expectations offered by religion (Weaver & Agle, 2002).

In other words, religious beliefs are presented in daily life. Clothing behavior of both sexes, rituals of rid de passages including birth, marriage and death, and expected role of men and women in different aspect of life from home to work and from economic to politics are representations of religion in everyday life (Droogsma, 2007). Religions around the globe are believed to have sets of laws and rules that affect ritualistically and symbolically consumer behavior: from eating and sleeping to working and playing, by passing by everyday purchases and habits (Assadi, 2003). Here, religion dominates and influences cultures via providing a set of norms that affect the life style and opinions of the members of any given society. This role is activated and executed through rituals and symbols. Rituals and symbols are focal elements in transferring religious courses and meanings to people which consequently shapes their values, beliefs, and behaviors.

Even though attitudes and behaviors are directly influenced by religion-rooted aspects of culture, religion's impact on advertising have been only very modestly studied in advertising literature (Mokhlis, 2009). Reviewing published writings on religion and advertising led to the categorization of these lines of studies under three categories. These categories are attitude toward advertising of controversial products (e.g. De Run, *et al.*, 2010; Fam & Grohs, 2007; Fam *et al.*, 2004), presence of religious values in advertisements (e.g. Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000; Kalliny & Gentry, 2007; Michell & Al-Mossawi, 1995), and the consumers' reactions to advertisements containing religious cues or symbols (e.g., Henley *et al.*, 2009; Lumpkins, 2010; Taylor *et al.*, 2010).

Existing studies on advertising and religion mainly examined the influence of religion on attitude toward advertising of controversial products. Examining whether religion and intensity of religious belief has an effect on the attitudes towards the advertising of controversial products, Fam *et al.* (2004) studied the attitudes of the followers of four religious groups (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and non-religious believers) toward four different types of controversial products (gender/sex related products, social/political groups, health and care products, and addictive products). Their findings revealed a significant effect of religiosity on attitudes toward products. According to Fam *et al.* (2004) Muslims found the

advertising of gender/sex related products, social/political groups, and health and care products most offensive relative to the other three religions. In addition, the religiously devout respondents were more likely to find advertising of gender/sex related products, health and care products, and addictive products more offensive than the less devout followers (Fam *et al.*, 2004).

Second area of research in the field of advertising and religion has primarily focused on the presence of religious values in advertisements. For example, in a cross cultural content analysis of magazine advertisements in the U.S. and Arab countries, Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) found significant differences between Arab and US advertisement in portraying women. When utilizing women in ads, more Arabic ads show only the women's faces or portray them in long clothing than U.S. ads. Advertisement in Arabic countries utilized women as spokesperson only when the products were related to women but this relevancy has not been taken into consideration in U.S. ads (Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000). In another research to investigate the impact of religious differences on advertising execution in Arab world, Kalliny and Gentry (2007) found that there were major differences among the Arab countries where Egypt and Lebanon were found to depict women who are dressed less modestly than Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. This seems in compliance with Muslim's belief that women may show only their hands and face to men outside of their immediate family.

Keenan and Yeni (2003)'s work shows how advertisers try to respect this perception in executing their advertisements. In an investigation to compare ads run during Ramadan and those run during a non-Ramadan period in Egypt they observed fewer ads, more emphasis on charity messages, and more conservatively dressed characters in ads during Ramadan. According to Keenan and Yeni (2003) advertisers intentionally tone down the way they present women in their commercials. This might be interpreted as a form of respect for the Islamic principles and values of Ramadan (Keenan & Yeni, 2003).

RELIGIOUS CUES AND ADVERTISING FAVORABILITY

Developing alongside the literature focusing on the two above-mentioned of the research area is another cluster of studies that explores the consumers reactions to ads containing religious cues or symbols (e.g. Dotson & Hyatt, 2000; Henley, *et al.*, 2009; Lumpkins, 2010; Taylor, *et al.*, 2010). This line of study, on the contrary to those two other line of studies, attempts to shed the light on the audiences' attitudes towards ads utilizing Christian symbol.

A study on consumers' responses to ads with religious cues, Henley *et al.*, (2009) examined the effects of Christian cues or symbols on relevant and irrelevant symbol product ad evaluations. Religiosity is found to have a significant moderating impact on the evaluation of an ad (attitude toward ad, attitude toward brand, and purchase intention) that has a relevant Christian symbol, suggesting that

relevant Christian Cross-product linkages generate positive attitude towards advertisement while irrelevant Christian Cross-product linkages cause a negative perception of the advertisement. In another study, Taylor and his colleagues (2010) examined consumer reactions to the use of a Christian religious symbol (the Christian fish symbol: Ichthus) in advertisement by running two experiments. In the first experiment, the findings showed that consumers have varied reactions to Christian messages in the secular marketplace and that responses depend on their religiosity levels. Christian symbol enhanced consumer evaluations of the advertisement which increased their purchase intention and this effect increased among highly religious evangelists. However, these relationships were not supported in the second experiment where they found an unusual backlash effect of the Christian symbol on purchase intentions for some consumers. The finding of the second experiment on a non-significant impact of level of evangelical religiosity on respondents' purchase intention corroborates Dotson and Hyatt's (2000) findings.

Dotson and Hyatt (2000) examined the use of religious symbols as peripheral cues in advertising. In ads for pet health insurance, the authors manipulated the presence or absence of the Christian cross as a peripheral cue. Product category involvement and level of religious dogmatism were found to be related to attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention, however, not in the expected directions. While the study hypothesized that low involvement subjects who were high in religious dogmatism should show more favorable attitude toward advertisement and brand and a greater purchase intention, the findings were in the opposite direction. Low involvement subjects who were high in religious dogmatism showed a less favorable attitude toward the brand and lower purchase intention when exposed to ads containing the cross. Furthermore, high involvement subjects who were also highly dogmatic had more favorable feelings toward the product when the cross was present in the ads. In another, Lumpkin (2010) examined information processing of religious symbols in breast cancer advertisements among African American women. It hypothesized that a religious symbol, the cross, would have an impact on the way African American women processed health advertisements. Although this impact was not fully confirmed, there was a main effect of the cross among African American women highly and lowly involved with health messages. In particular, there was a main effect of the exposure to a cross on attitude toward the ad and behavior intention toward the sponsor.

Notwithstanding the contradictory findings of the above mentioned studies which have been carried out in the context of Christianity, this effect has not been examined meticulously among Muslims, the second largest population in the world. Differences in religious affiliations tend to influence the way people live, the choices they make, what they eat and whom they associate with. As a result

Muslims perceptions of advertisement messages should be different from other religious followers to some extent. This implies to seek clarification of the essence of the relationship between Islam and advertising.

ISLAMIC VALUES AND ADVERTISING

Muslims consider Islam to be a complete way of life. Indeed, one of the characteristics that distinguish Muslims from followers of some other faiths is that the influence of religion is very clear in every aspect of the Muslim's life (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002). Shari'a, the Islamic comprehensive code of conducts, governs the duties, morals and behavior of all Muslims, individually, and collectively in all areas of life, including marketing and commerce (Luqmani *et al.*, 1989). It completely describes the values that Muslims should hold, such as truth, justice, honesty, social obligations, collective responsibility and the roles of men and women (Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the whole characteristics of Islamic values. But we refer to some of which needs more attention in advertising industry. According to Islamic social philosophy all spiritual, social, political, and economic spheres of life form an indivisible unity that must be thoroughly influenced by Islamic values. This principle informs such concepts as "Islamic law" and the "Islamic state" and accounts for Islam's strong emphasis on social life and social duties (Fam *et al.*, 2004).

The Islamic law, Shari'a, which sets all that one should do, derives from four main resources of Islamic teaching. These resources are Qur'an (Muslims' holy book which is God's wording), Sunnah (the divinely inspired conduct of the Prophet Mohammad), Aghl (reasoning), and Ijma (consensus of opinion) (Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000). These four main sources might have not addressed many of modern phenomena such as marketing and advertising explicitly, but its comprehensive value system explicates should and shouldn't which consequently influences advertising content, execution and evaluation.

In an attempt to relate basic Islamic values to advertising implications Rice and Al-Mousavi (2002) elucidated some Islamic values and their advertising implication. Some of these values which Muslims should follow are truth, honesty, politeness and social and collective obligations and responsibilities. Muslims should keep away from falsehood and deception everywhere in general and in trade and financial dealings with others in specific. They should not tell a lie and should avoid exaggeration. Therefore Muslims may process exaggerated messages in advertising as lie which intends to mislead (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002).

Islam has a set of orders which is defined as lawful (halal) and prohibited (haram) behaviors. This religious code of conduct not only designates the allowed range of behavior but also provides a system of values to evaluate behaviors of other members of the group. Eating pork, carrion, and carnivorous animals,

gambling, drinking alcohol, nudity and idol worship (statutes inclusive) are prohibited (Chachua *et al.*, 2010). As a result, advertisements which portray some of these prohibited elements would be perceived offensive among Muslims (Michell & Al-Mossawi, 1995). Global advertising which intentionally or unintentionally overlooked these implications caused a great deal of controversies.

According to Fam *et al.* (2004), Muslims found the advertising of gender/sex related products, social/political groups, and health and care products most offensive relative to the other two religions of Buddhism, and Christianity. Moreover, the religiously devout respondents were more likely to find advertising of gender/sex related products, health and care products, and addictive products more offensive than the less devout follower (Fam *et al.*, 2004).

In addition to further consideration of Islamic values, some advertisers utilized Islamic elements to produce a favorable feeling among Muslims. For example some advertisement utilized Qur'anic words to enhance the influence of the ad and make it more appealing to Muslim consumers. Examples are the words "Bismillah" (in the name of God; a phrase used by Muslims before beginning any action) or "Allahu akbar" (literally, God is greater) (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002). Luqmani *et al.*, (1989) provide an example of a manufacturer of water pumps that uses a verse from the Qur'an in advertising: "We made every living thing from water." In another example a distributor of Royal Regina honey capsules in Saudi Arabia successfully ran a contest that included a question on how many times bees are mentioned in the Qur'an, along with questions and information about the product (Luqmani *et al.*, 1989).

All these studies enlightened the importance of utilizing Islamic elements and symbols properly not only to decrease the negative perception of Muslims to advertisement but also to generate positive attitude toward advertisement. Embedding Islamic symbols such as hijab for spokesperson in advertisements might enhance the information processing due to the familiarity it produces with its target audiences. This probable effect of Islamic symbol of hijab is what Elaboration Likelihood Model coined as positive effect of peripheral cues.

ISLAMIC SYMBOL OF HIJAB AND ADVERTISEMENT

Symbols play an important role in the mental life of people individually as well as social activities. The question of the function of symbols in a group or society is more important than the meaning of the symbols. Every symbol consists of both "face" and "hidden" value. Scholars attach more weight on studying the function of this hidden value in social life. This hidden value carries a great deal of undifferentiated feelings and impulses (Gibson, 1998) which might affect our behavior unconsciously. Facilitating the preservation of groups is another function of symbols (Gibson, 1998). This preserving function would also provide a harmony and loyalty among group members. This social function can widely be recognized

in religious symbols. As a result, individuals are expected to be more concerned to respect the symbol as a means of identification and faith.

Religious symbols take on a sacredness that gives them a very strong presence and power in many people's daily lives (Zwick & Chelariu, 2006). The wearing of religious dress and symbols is an important expression of an individual's religious identity (Kulenovi, 2006). It may reflect the wearer's understanding of the requirements prescribed in their tradition or their belief that wearing this form of dress or these symbols as a mark of their religious commitment helps to enhance their spiritual life. It may also reflect a desire publicly to affirm the identity to which these are linked. This interpretation and affiliation might emerge in information processing among Muslims when they encounter a message carrying this religious symbol.

Hijab, further to religious identification, functions to "perform a behavior check, resist sexual objectification, afford more respect, preserve intimate relationships, and provide freedom" (Byng, 2010, p. 111). According to Bullock (2000) Muslim women in west who cover their head, see hijab as a way of projecting a Muslim identity and refuting an imitation of the West. France's controversial new law banning the overt display of religious symbols in school, directed at the wearing of the hijab, brings to the forefront the enormous contemporary significance of the veil as a historically and culturally constructed symbol of female Islamic identity (Zwick & Chelariu, 2006). Westerners often regard the hijab as a symbol of backward cultural and gender politics and even fundamentalist extremism (Droogsma, 2007), but the practice of hijab among Muslim women is based on religious doctrine.

Islam stresses that women should dress modestly and encourages women not to show too much of their bodies in public. Surat Al-Noor-Aih-31 in The Qur'an, the Muslims' holy book addressed the issue of women's modesty by stating: "And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appear thereof that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers" (Kalliny & Gentry, 2007). Scholars have interpreted this Qur'an passage differently, but most scholars take this message to mean that women may show only their hands and face to men outside of their immediate family (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002).

The guidelines provided in the Qur'an might not be strictly followed in the contemporary Muslim countries. A range of practices exists among Muslims regarding the times and places -ranging from prayer only to all the time - which women are expected to wear the hijab. This different perception influenced advertising industry among Muslims' world. While in Saudi Arabia and Iran it is forbidden to show other than the above-mentioned body parts, in Dubai in United

Arab Emirates, Turkey, Malaysia and Egypt, the most liberal outdoor advertising is presented in the European version (Al-Olayan & Karande, 2000).

In most Muslim countries, Islam also exerts great influence on advertising regulation. In Malaysia, for instance, the advertising code is heavily influenced by Islamic values (De run, *et al.*, 2010). The Islamic principle of covering the aurat (i.e., private body parts) for women and the prohibition of using women as sex symbols in advertising are mentioned but not strictly enforced (Wah, 2006). The Malaysian advertising code stipulates that female models portrayed in advertising must be fully clothed up to the neckline. The length of the skirt should be below the knees. The arms may be exposed up to the edge of the shoulder without exposing the underarms (Advertising Code for Television and Radio, 1990). These regulations are rarely followed by advertisers.

This clothing code of conduct which is a bit broader than the prevalent interpretation of Islamic rule for covering – women may show only their hands and face to men outside of their immediate family – allows for creating of a variety of advertisement which might be offensive to Muslims. This probable offensiveness needs to be examined. Muslim women in Malaysia many choose to cover their hair with a headscarf, also known as Tudor and this symbolic behavior is expected to affect their mindset while decoding advertisement messages. This effect might be generated through an unconscious liking of the similar spoke person.

Some scholars theorized that affective symbols influence motivational states both consciously and unconsciously (Weisbuch-Remington *et al.*, 2005). Exposure to Muslim religious symbol of hijab outside of conscious awareness may influence Muslims interpretation of advertising and fortify their positive feeling towards that advertisement. This unconscious effect of hijab can be identified as the peripheral cue of ELM. ELM allows a single source characteristic to serve as a peripheral persuasion variable that may influence attitudes in different ways.

The spokesperson's hijab via likability, familiarity, or similarity might enhance the persuasion through the process of identification. Muslim consumers may seek some association or relationship with the spokesperson who is wearing hijab in propagating a product. Hijab symbolically represents and reminds Muslims of their religion and its implications and orders. As a result, this significant indicator of religious affiliation can play a significant role in shaping Muslims' attitudes towards advertisements. But religious symbols differ in their importance to people of a particular religious affiliation, depending upon members' degree of identification with the faith. This degree and its mediating role in shaping Muslims attitudes towards advertisement have not been studied yet.

In symbolizing religion, hijab for Muslims is as the Christian cross, the ichthus or Christian fish, the Jewish Star of David, and the Hindu bindu (Zwick & Chelariu, 2006). To clarify the possible link between religious symbol and consumption behavior, several studies have utilized ELM to examine the effect of

Christian Cross as a peripheral cue in information processing. To date, no studies have investigated the effect of Islamic symbols like hijab as a predictor of advertisement processing among Malaysian Muslims. Hijab, an exclusively outstanding Islamic symbol, has not been examined as peripheral cue in information processing. This line of study is very pertinent given the globalization of advertisement and the theoretical and practical significance offered by the studies.

CONCLUSION

Although the peripheral role of Christian symbols of Cross and Ichthus in advertising advertisement among Christians have been examined in some studies, the influence of Islamic symbols such as hijab on Muslims advertising information processing is yet to be studied. Among different verbal and visual Islamic symbols, hijab seems the most prevalent one. Hijab is a significant expression of Muslims' identity and affiliation which might emerge in information processing when they encounter a message carrying this religious symbol.

With the surge in creative hijab designs in different Muslim countries over the past years, and given that hijab is one of the strongest Islamic religious symbols, information processing theories such as ELM provides a pertinent theoretical framework to examine the peripheral impact of this symbol in decoding advertisement messages. To question whether Muslims' consumers feel more favorable with advertisement portraying a spokesperson with headscarf and consequently give positive responses to those advertisements which carry this religious symbol as a peripheral cue certainly worth studying.

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