Website Globalization and E-Business United Arab Emirates

The Website Globalization and E-Business Series includes a series of brief reports on country-specific website globalization and e-business topics. The series includes:

- China
- Japan
- Germany
- US Hispanic Market
- Brazil
- India
- Russia
- Argentina
- France
- United Kingdom
- United Arab Emirates
- Qatar

This series of reports is meant to be a primer on e-Business as well as a collection of language, culture and website globalization facts by country. These reports are by no means a complete coverage of these topics. For more comprehensive or customized reports on country-specific Website Globalization and E-Business topics, please email mspethman@globalizationpartners.com.

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- Interpretation (Telephonic, Consecutive, Simultaneous)
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- SEO (Global Search Engine Marketing)

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I. Market Introduction and Stats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stats/Source</th>
<th>Online Activities</th>
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</table>
| Internet & social Media Usage (wearesocial, 2016)                                      | • Average daily use of Internet via PC or Tablet is 4 hours 25 minutes  
  • Average daily use of Internet via mobile phone is 3 hours 37 minutes  
  • Average daily use of social media over various devices is about 3 hours |
| UAE Mobile phone users online activities (wearesocial, 2016)                             | • Using the mobile messengers (71%)  
  • Watching videos (62%)  
  • Playing games (41%)  
  • Doing mobile banking (47%)  
  • Using map services  
  • Consumer product reviews |
| Some of the barriers for the growth of B2C commerce (export.gov, 2016) | • Low adoption of Online retail channels by local businesses  
  • Extensive prevalence of cash on delivery payments, and low consumer adoption of Online consumer adoption of retail shopping compared to international benchmarks |

The UAE Online Consumer

There are seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They are: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, and Fujairah. Each of the emirates is named after its principal city.

The state law of the UAE is Islamic Law, also known as Shari’a. (CultureGrams)

Islam is the official religion of the UAE, with the majority of the population being Sunni Muslim and approximately 20% of the population being Shi’a Muslim. (Euromonitor)

The social life in the UAE is greatly influenced by tribal values. This is due to the fact that the Emiratis often identify themselves by tribal origins, and in smaller states, primarily associate with those who share their tribal affiliation. (CultureGrams)

Internet usage penetration in UAE as of 2016 stands at 77.6% and is expected to grow to nearly 80% by 2019 (Statista.com, 2016)

As of 2016, UAE boast an e-commerce market valued at $2.5 billion, and is expected to reach $10 billion by 2018 (export.gov)

Top three popular payment methods for online shoppers in UAE and Saudi Arabia include: Cash on delivery (64%), Credit cards (46%), and Debit card (11%) (Statista.com, 2015)

Some reasons for low consumer adoption of online shopping in UAE include security concerns and lack of tangibility regarding touching and testing the products before purchase. Price, customer service and ease of use are important factors in determining UAE online shopper digital experience (export.gov, 2016)

Three most popular cross-border shopping categories for UAE online shoppers include: Apparel (40%), travel and transportation (43%), and luxury goods such as jewelry and watches (33%) (Pfsweb.com, 2016)

UAE online users when surveyed about their e-commerce activities and device use, during the past 30 days, the popular activities included: searched online to buy a product or service (80%), visited online retail store (65%), purchased a product or service online (62%), made online purchase via laptop or desktop (53%), and made online purchase via mobile device (40%) (Wearesocial.com, 2016)

EXPO 2020
DUBAI, UAE
II. UAE Culture and the Online Consumer

UAE Culture and Values

The United Arab Emirates is a traditional society full of symbols, rituals, traditional values and contextual elements. At a macro-level, UAE culture can be described using five cultural values based on the work of Hofstede (1980). Professor Geert Hofstede conducted perhaps the most comprehensive study of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture and is the author of several books including *Culture’s Consequences* (2nd fully revised edition), and *Cultures and Organizations*, *Software of the Mind*.

Hofstede demonstrated that there are national and regional cultural groupings that affect the behavior of societies and organizations that are very persistent across time. Hofstede’s research showed that cultural values like **Individualism-Collectivism**, **Power Distance**, **Masculinity-Femininity**, **High-Low Context** and **Uncertainty Avoidance** can be used to categorize various national cultures. (see sidebar for definitions of these terms).

A country’s culture is made unique by which of these five values are incorporated into daily life and they emphasis it puts on each. For example, the UAE rates significantly on Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity, Power Distance, and High Context.

Insights into UAE Consumer Values:

1. **Tribal Values**: Tribal values are derived primarily from Islam and the family’s heritage. They influence political, social and financial endeavors. (Culture Grams)

2. **Prestige**: It is considered important to carry items that give a person prestige and these items can be designated by the consumer segments. These include western items and technology gadgets. (AME Info)

3. **Family**: Family ties, both nuclear and extended, are extremely important to UAE consumers. It is expected that people will share resources with their family. Although women play a central role in the family, it is considered unacceptable for them to live alone. (Culture Grams)

UAE Consumer Decision Making:

1. **Product Type**: The husband is the key decision maker in the purchase of luxury items. On the other hand, the wife plays a decisive role when it comes to household items. (Euromonitor)


II. UAE Culture and the Online Consumer

### Demographics Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Socio-demographics:</strong></th>
<th>The analysis of different social groups. The criteria used to segment consumers based on age, economics, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geographics:</strong></td>
<td>The geographical distribution of the market being analyzed. The criteria used to segment these consumers can be country, region, town, etc. For example, consumers can be segmented by residence or work place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychographics:</strong></td>
<td>The criteria used to segment consumers based on lifestyle, attitudes, personality, buying motives, and/or extent of product usage.</td>
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### UAE Market Consumer Segments:

Market segmentation identifies profitable consumer segments based on themes such as socio-demographics, geographics and psychographics. The UAE’s demographic make up can be generalized into the following categories:

- **Tweenagers:** This is the consumer segment with the fastest growing spending power. They are aged between 10 - 13 and very aware of brands. They are interested in fashion, video games, cartoon films and books. Moreover, they are highly influenced by their peers.

- **Teenagers:** This consumer segment is aged between 14 - 19 and is greatly influenced by advertisements. Their interests are broad and include clothes, games, movies, eating out, junk food and sports. Sports and clothing stand out as their top focus.

- **Studying Age:** This consumer segment is focused on individuals in either college or university, although there has been a rapid decrease in the number of people falling into this consumer segment. They are highly focused on future choices, including selecting the right school and career path. They are greatly influenced by the latest fashion and trends. They also enjoy spending time with peers, such as in a coffee shop.

- **Young Adults:** Consumers in this segment have their first job. They prefer to have the best and latest gadgets, such as the newest mobile phone. They also spend a great deal of their money on formal business clothes and fashion accessories.

- **Middle-Aged Adults:** This consumer segment is one of the biggest contributors to the overall population of the UAE. The majority of the individuals in this category are expatriates. They are concerned about saving and want to purchase items that are considered a good value. Many of their spending choices are frugal and family-oriented. Saving money is the primary goal for middle-aged adults.

- **Baby Boomers:** This consumer segment ranges in age from 42 – 60. They are settled in life, occupy key jobs and receive a good salary. Their free time is primarily focused on leisure activities. They are interested in utilizing their money in purchasing durables and items that put them in tune with current times. In addition, they often indulge themselves in buying electronic products.

Consumer Segments of the United Arab Emirates [Euromonitor]
III. The Arabic Language

The Modern Arabic dialects are considered to be a part of the Araco-Canaanite sub-branch of West Semantic languages. They have over 200 million native speakers. There are six major dialect groups of Arabic: Egyptian Arabic, Maghrebi Arabic, Levantine Arabic, Iraqi Arabic, East Arabian Arabic and Gulf Arabic, which is the primary language spoken in the United Arab Emirates. (Wikipedia.org)

The Arabic alphabet derives from the Aramaic script. It bears a resemblance to Coptic, Cyrillic, and Greek Script. The Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters. Moreover, letters change form depending on where they appear: beginning, middle, end of a sentence, or on their own. (Omniglot.com)

Language Facts/Tips

- **Diacritics**: These marks, placed above or below letters usually represent vowel sounds or other modifiers.

- **Numbers**: Arabic numbers can be represented by either Hindi or Arabic numeric digits depending on the dialect of the target region.

- **Text expansion**: When some languages such as English, are translated into Arabic, the text can expand up to 25-35%. This means the text takes up more physical space on the page and the words inside the graphics, tool bars, tables, etc. can all expand.

- **Bi-Directional**: Languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Farsi are written primarily right-to-left (for strings) but often referred to as bi-directional text. Because simply that numbers are typically written from the left-to-right style. So, the resulting text, while primarily right-to-left oriented, contains some left-to-right elements necessitating a bi-directional reading style.

- **Tables**: Avoid using too many nested fields and indents as these can reduce available space for text expansion after the translation. In addition, because Arabic is read right-to-left, the tables will need to be reversed.

- **Letters**: Arabic letters change shape depending on context. Moreover, each letter has up to four shapes: Initial form, final form, medial form and isolated form. Letters that can be joined are always joined. (omniglot.com)
IV. Website Globalization

Whether you are trying to launch a multilingual website in order to expand the markets for your products and services, or you are trying to increase your company's global operational efficiencies by developing multilingual extranets and intranets, Website Globalization is a requirement to make either a reality. In order to enable your web presence to communicate, conduct and complete international e-Business, you need to translate (globalize) your website.

Website translation is also known as “Website Globalization”. In order to truly “translate” a website into other languages you may need both Internationalization (I18n) and Localization (L10n) services.

Internationalization (I18n) involves enabling the backend of a website to handle different languages, character sets, currencies, submit form data, site search capabilities, etc… and involves understanding what database and content management systems you are using to author, store and publish your site’s content.

Localization (L10n) involves translating and localizing the front end of your website into different languages ensuring all content (text and graphics) is translated in an accurate and culturally correct manner.
Cultural Customization: Key Issues

The basis for cultural customization of websites is a theoretically sound, empirically validated framework built on five unique cultural values that account for similarities and differences across global cultures. Research indicates that attitude towards websites, the sites’ interactivity and usability, as well as purchase intentions of users are enhanced when sites are congruent with the target customers’ cultural predispositions.

The cultural customization framework is drawn from established research and is based on five unique values: Individualism-Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity-Femininity, and Low-High Context. (See page 3 of this report.)

The five predominant cultural values can be represented in a country-to-country comparison using the maps below:
Once we have identified the country’s predominant cultural values using the cultural maps, the next step in customizing a website is to evaluate it on the relevant cultural values. We do this in the form of the Cultural Customization Scorecard. The score card is produced by analyzing the features on the site that conform to the cultural values of that market.

The cultural values of interest for the UAE are Collectivism, Masculinity, High Context, Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance. These are carefully derived based on the cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society. (For a detailed cultural analysis of your website please contact mspethman@globalizationpartners.com)

The Cultural Customization Scorecard™ - United Arab Emirates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Collectivism</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Power Distance</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Low Context</th>
<th>High Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Scores</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Grading Scale:

- > 90% Excellent Customization on Cultural Value
- 70-89% Good Customization on Cultural Value
- < 70% Poor Customization on Cultural Value

**Cultural Customization (Examples)**

**Collectivism**: The UAE is a collectivist culture. The targeted websites may be culturally customized by emphasizing values important in collectivist cultures. Research suggests there are several web-specific features that can be included in a site to make it more appealing. For example, a theme that emphasizes family.

**Masculinity – Femininity**: Although the UAE is a culture that shows a slight preference for masculinity, the blending of certain feminine values into a website is considered appropriate. There are numerous ways masculinity can be depicted, including achievement orientation, success, product durability, and a sense of adventure and fun. Femininity can be expressed by creating a website focused on softer themes with a softer-sell approach.
High-Low Context: The UAE is a high context culture. Incorporating elements such as harmony and aesthetics can help to customize your site for the UAE market.

Power Distance: Since the UAE scores high on the power distance value, cultural customization may be achieved by adding elements that emphasize honor and recognition, like displaying awards that a company or brand has received.

Uncertainty Avoidance: The UAE is a very risk-averse society. Therefore, it is important to reduce the consumer’s perceived risk of shopping online. Using graphics or images of products and support personnel may help to reduce uncertainty and increase online shopping confidence.
Web Site Customization Considerations

Symbols and Icons

An ancient culture like the United Arab Emirates, utilizes a long list of symbols and icons that carry special cultural meaning. It is important to be aware of them to avoid any cultural blunders and inadvertent use of offensive symbols.

Some examples:

- **Hands:** The entire hand should be used when pointing, as pointing with just one finger is considered rude. The use of left hand is considered rude. Shaking hands, eating and gesturing should be done with the right hand, though passing items with both is acceptable. (CultureGrams)

- It is considered bad luck to step across a doorway with the left foot first. (World Trade Press)

- It is considered bad luck to go back to a building (usually home) to retrieve a forgotten item. (World Trade Press)

- **Bismillah:** In Arabic, it literally means “In the Name of Allah”. This is spoken as a gesture of respect and acknowledgement before undertaking a number of activities including prayer, eating and as a general expression of sincerity. (about.com)

- Either spitting or pretending to spit three times will keep away the Evil Eye. (World Trade Press)

- **Allah - Muhammad** (Sala Allah Aleyh Wa Salam): Images of people and animals are forbidden by Islamic law; therefore, calligraphic art is used as an alternative form of creative expression. High offense is taken in the pictorial rending of any religious figure, such as Allah or Mohammed. Therefore, calligraphic art is used as an alternative form of creative expression. (about.com)

Spatial Orientation:

Spatial orientation refers to how web content is structured. According to Wendy Barber and Albert Badre, authors of “Culturability: The Merging of Culture and Usability” (1998), spatial orientation has a direct effect on website usability, because it affects visual perception. Manipulating the orientation can change the user’s comfort level. What is user-friendly for one country may be vastly different for another.

The Arabic Language is read right to left. In addition, the usage of pictures and graphics should be carefully considered in placement, in order to ensure the layout be culturally sensitive and aesthetically pleasing.
Colors

For the United Arab Emirates certain colors carry specific meaning and symbolize aspects of their culture.

- **Green:** Holiness or luck
- **Blue:** Immortality, a protective color
- **Yellow:** Strength, reliability, happiness and prosperity
- **Red:** Danger or evil
- **White:** Purity or mourning

Text Length:

When translating a document or website, it is important to take into account how the length of the text will change after translation. There are a variety of reasons why text expansion occurs. Equivalent phrases in a target language may have more characters or words than in English, and some cultures prefer using a more formal style than other cultures, avoiding abbreviations, for example. Additionally, for both documents and websites both line and page breaks may be different in the localized version than in the English version. Finally, the layout of the document or website itself may change depending on the direction of the text. For example, Arabic is a bi-directional language and is read right-to-left, which will not only switch the layout of the text, but also the graphics, the tool bars, the navigation bars, and the binding of the book, etc. Similarly, some languages like Chinese and Japanese can be displayed either in left-to-right character rows or vertical character columns, and the choice influences how document elements such as graphics, figures, tables, call outs, etc. are arranged in the final document or webpage.

There can either be text expansion or contraction when a document or website is translated from English into a target language. For example, Arabic can expand up to 25% when translated from English. With document localization, there are several steps that can be taken to help preserve the integrity of the look and feel “layout” of the document. These include:

1. **Using a larger font in the original language, if it is expected the language will expand during translation.** This will help to develop a better feel for the final size of the document and how the document elements will be laid out relative to the text. If the text is expected to shrink, use a slightly smaller font for the same reasons.
2. **Tables and graphics may need to be resized or changed.** Some, like the Persian or Urdu layout, will require more finessing than others.
The key to promoting a website internationally is to create localized content and keywords, register local domain names and then promote it through local search engines, affiliate marketing, online and offline branding and promotions.

A search engine marketing campaign for the United Arab Emirates should be multi-dimensional for both short-term and long-term success. Using Pay-Per-Click campaigns on targeted UAE websites and search engines is one way to produce immediate results and become familiar to the UAE consumer segment being targeted.

Long term search engine marketing plans should include the use of keywords in both Arabic and English, as these are the primary business languages in the UAE. In addition, it is important to remember that there are many different expatriate sub-groups in the United Arab Emirates that prefer to speak their national language. Therefore if attempting to target one of these groups, research should be done on their preferred language in order to properly target the correct search engines and keywords.

The top level domain in the United Arab Emirates is .ae.

**Top Search Engines in the UAE**
- Google (97.54%)
- Bing (1.33%)
- Yahoo (0.8%)
- Ask Jeeves (0.08%)
- Other (0.25%)

For more information about Arabic Search Engine Optimization, see Arabic SEO and Localization.
With the growth of global communications and marketing you need to adapt your social media communication to different cultural audiences and locales.

Since social media is influencing all online communications, it is no longer enough just to localize your content. In today's dynamic, social networking charged environment, you need to adapt your communication to match your target audience in UAE to make sure that your message and intent is successfully communicated.

Key Insights from the Digital Landscape for the UAE:

1. Based on Arab Social Media report (2015) Arab online users see social media as a people connection facilitator and it has changed the world as we know it. (TNS, 2015).

2. Based on Arab Social Media report (2015) popular social media activities for Arab online users include: chatting Online, reading posts/blogs by other people, search and connecting with family/friends, posting pictures, blogging/discussing current event and others. (TNS, 2015)

3. As of 2016, there were 6.30 million active Social media users in UAE (Wearesocial.com, 2016)

Top Social Media Networks in The UAE

- Facebook (94.67%)
- Twitter (2.55%)
- Pinterest (1.23%)
- Tumblr (0.76%)
- Other (0.79%)

Source: StatCounter.com.
### Search Engines

- Search Engine Colossus  
  www.searchenginecolossus.com/UAE.html
- Arabbay - UAE  
  www.arabbay.com/Arab_Countries/UAE/
- United Arab Emirates Internet Pages  
  www.uae-pages.com
- Eiktub  
  eiktub.com
- Yamli  
  www.yamli.com/ar/

### Useful Links

- Official Portal of Dubai Government  
  www.dubai.ae
- Tejari  
  www.tejari.com
- Dubai Financial Market  
  www.dfm.ae
- UAE Pages  
  www.uae-pages.com
- Arabo  
  www.arabo.com
- Dubai Directory  
  www.dubaicityguide.com
- Eyoon  
  www.eyoon.com
- Google: Arabic  
  www.google.ae/
- ODP: UAE  
  www.dmoz.org/Regional/Middle_East/United_Arab_Emirates
- The Emirates Network  
  www.theemiratesnetwork.com/dir
- Fares.net  
  www.fares.net
- Al-Bab  
  www.al-bab.com
- About Dubai  
  www.aboutdubai.org
- UmmahNet  
  www.ummahnet.com
- Dubai Media City  
  http://www.dubaimediacity.com
- Go Dubai  
  http://www.godubai.com
- Dubai Virtual Guide  
  http://www.dubaivirtualguide.com

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