



A Cross-Cultural Comparative of Covert Persuasion Strategies in Arabic and English Advertisements

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Abstract

This study investigates covert persuasion in Arabic and English advertisements to address a gap in cross-cultural research. A qualitative analysis of 50 print ads (25 per language) employed Jones' (2010) model—coding for implicit endorsement, implied truth, indirect benefits, and vague attribution—with high inter-coder reliability ($\kappa = 0.82$). Findings revealed a statistically significant divergence ($\chi^2(3) = 10.83, p < 0.05$). Arabic ads emphasized socio-collectivistic appeals, utilizing implied truth through cultural narratives and implicit endorsement via community figures to build trust indirectly. English ads preferred individualistic benefits and vague attributions, aligning with low-context, evidence-implicating norms. This demonstrates how high-context communication favors nuanced, relational implication, while low-context persuasion leans on heuristic, individual-centric cues. The study provides an original empirical contribution by systematically applying a unified framework to pinpoint strategic linguistic differences, moving beyond broad cultural generalizations. Practically, it offers advertisers a nuanced understanding for crafting culturally resonant, ethical global campaigns, enhancing efficacy and reducing cross-cultural misalignment. Ultimately, it affirms that covert persuasion is not universal but is deeply embedded in specific cultural and communicative norms.

Keywords: advertisement, persuasive strategies, Arabic, English

1. Introduction

Persuasion remains an integral part of advertising and marketing, applying different techniques of affecting consumer action towards specific products or services. Traditional methods such as ethos

(credibility), *logos* (reason), and *pathos* (emotions) have been analyzed throughout history in the advertising context, particularly in English-language advertisements. The advancement of the internet has introduced more sophisticated undercover methods of persuasion where influence is achieved covertly without conscious awareness. Sneaky methods, including subliminal communication, product placement, and implicit endorsement, change words, visuals, and meanings to bypass conscious resistance (Wightman & Harkins, 2013). New studies describe how these methods have evolved in the digital revolution era, with accountable marketing using algorithms to subtly customize content to individuals' interests, sometimes reinforcing persuasion by aligning with individual interests while raising ethical questions about transparency (Boerman & van Reijmersdal, 2020). For instance, studies of native ads and influencer marketing reveal that deceptive formats cause persuasion knowledge, which enlightens consumers regarding and resists hidden intentions, but they are nonetheless powerful when disclosures are vague (Eisend et al., 2020).

In advertising in English, hidden persuasion has been thoroughly recorded, with tactics such as product placement and celebrity endorsements associating brands with enjoyable emotions or credible individuals (Kamins, 1990; Russell & Belch, 2005). Subliminal elements, being controversial for their efficacy, still raise controversy (Pratkanis & Greenwald, 1988). Contemporary research emphasizes algorithmic personalization and similarity between influencers, products, and consumers, thus enhancing implicit persuasion with subtle similarities without overt claims (Lou & Yuan, 2021). For example, social media advertising research shows that imprecise attributions and implied verity in English-language advertisements tend to rely on individualistic appeals like achievement or freedom to promote loyalty through heuristics processing (Zarouali et al., 2023). These are extremely prevalent in low-context cultures like English-speaking nations, where rational consumer choice is treated through evidence-based implications and indirect yet direct cues.

Conversely, research on Arabic advertising has a large gap with fewer covert persuasion studies despite the extensive poetic and metaphorical richness of the language that may demand subtle, indirect means (Al-Momani, 2015). Cultural factors such as collectivism and high-context communication suggest that social identity appeals and group harmony appeals are more effective than individualistic appeals (Hofstede, 2001). Recent cross-cultural research indicates that Arabic adverts tend to employ indirect endorsements through respected characters and indirect facts based on cultural stories or proverbs, according to socio-centric values (Al-Abbas & Haider, 2023). For instance, studies on persuasion strategies in women's adverts demonstrate that Arabic adverts use *pathos*-based indirect benefits, such as bonding with family, compared to English adverts, which employ *logos*-based factual recommendations (Al-Ashmawi, 2022). Social media research maintains a focus on cultural vulnerability, with Arab consumers being considerably sensitive to social proof and reciprocity in tacit forms depending on acculturation levels (Alkhalifah et al., 2021; Al-Haidan et al., 2024).

Empirical studies from individual regions identify such differences. In the UAE, humor and emotional appeals, commonly subtly embedded within cultural reference points, strengthen consumer-brand affinity (Al-Otaibi & Ismail, 2014). Similarly, Egyptian ads effectively use symbolic and religious imagery to imply trustfulness without any explicit claims (El-Haddad & El-Bakry, 2016). Yet, the complexity of the Arabic-speaking world—beyond religious imposition, linguistic dialects, and regional traditions—necessitates more precise research to avoid efforts in vain. New research into rhetorical maneuvers in online advertisements supports that Arabic ads employ more culture-specific maneuvers,

like indirect communal benefits, than English ads, which rely more on verifiable information (Al-Ashmawi, 2022). This is proof of the need for cross-cultural models for describing how covert persuasion is conditioned to conform to high-context cultures, where shared stories create rapport and diminish conflict.

The core problem addressed here is the limited understanding of covert persuasion strategies in Arabic versus English advertisements and their behavioral impacts. This gap hinders advertisers from crafting resonant campaigns, especially in globalized markets where cultural misalignment can reduce efficacy. Thus, this study investigates these strategies using Jones' (2010) model, focusing on implicit endorsement, implied truth, indirect consumer benefits, and vague attribution. The scientific objectives are: (1) to explore covert strategies in Arabic and English ads through qualitative analysis; (2) to compare their usage via cross-cultural examination; and (3) to contribute to literature on implicit communication in diverse contexts. This study contributes to existing research by providing a comparative analysis of covert persuasion strategies in Arabic and English advertisements using Jones' (2010) model, offering new insights into how cultural and linguistic nuances shape implicit persuasion tactics in these distinct markets.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview

This chapter provides a general review of scholarly literature on the analysis of covert persuasion in Arabic and English advertisements. The review is divided into two parts: the theoretical background, which introduces the basic models and concepts for modeling covert persuasion across cultures, and the empirical background, which combines findings from existing studies on persuasion tactics in advertisements. While early 20th-century models retain dominance, more recent studies address the role of digital media, algorithmic personalization, and cultural sensitivity in insidious persuasion. This shift, particularly in globalized advertisement where suggestive strategies are fused with micro-targeting, requires paradigms sensitive to cross-cultural differences—such as between high-context Arab and low-context English-speaking cultures—to correct emerging ethical challenges to concealed forms of advertisement. This review will critically examine these frameworks that are in place, identify their failures to explain contemporary, cross-cultural realities, and demonstrate how the study here addresses such gaps.

2.2. Theoretical Frameworks for Covert Persuasion

Theoretical understanding of covert persuasion approaches draws from an interdisciplinary literature pool from cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies. Contemporary models include the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) of Friestad and Wright (1994), which outlines how, over time, consumers accumulate and apply their knowledge of persuasive techniques. Dual-process cognitive models of persuasion, including the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM; Chaiken, 1980), propose that persuasion results from effortful (central/systematic) or uninhibited (peripheral/heuristic) processing. Covert persuasion has been found to operate primarily through the peripheral/heuristic route, with subtle cues and implicit associations (Lee & Ahn, 2016; Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990).

But these models typically fail to account for the rich detail of the contribution that culture makes to interpreting the very perception and effect of such subtle cues. And that is where Hofstede's (1980) individualism-collectivism scale and Hall's (1976) high-low context theory come in. Collectivist, high-context cultures (which prevail in the Arab world) are more tolerant of implicit communications that emphasize group harmoniousness and are nested within mutual contextual knowledge (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Triandis, 2001). Individualist, low-context cultures (like the U.S. or U.K.) are more tolerant of persuasion by means of indirectly phrased but evidence-based suggestions. One significant gap in such research is the extrapolation of such general culture dimensions to the specific linguistic mechanisms of covert advertising practices. While these theories project difference, they do not provide a nuanced outline for the identification and comparison of how implicature is linguistically constructed within other cultures—a gap this research addresses by employing Jones' (2010) targeted model of covert persuasion.

2.2.1. Linguistic and Discursive Approaches

Language's role in covert persuasion is paramount. Semiotic theory (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2007) and McCracken's (1989) model of transferred meaning provide insight into how culturally assigned signs and symbols transfer persuasive meaning beyond literal text. Linguistic tactics, such as strategic dictionary selection and metaphor application (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Russell & Stern, 2006), prime positive associations and direct meaning by implication (Armstrong, 2010). Cross-cultural studies suggest that Arabic adverts favor indirect, hermeneutic vocabulary in order to preserve persuasive purpose, whereas English adverts can make use of a more overt, yet still concealed, language that is directed toward cultural conversion.

Such modalities of language are best understood through the lens of discourse analysis, which examines how language constructs social reality and power relations (Gee, 2014). Broadly defined, this term encompasses several varied approaches:

- Text Analysis has expertise in long text to identify how coherence and ideology are created through language aspects like cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), transitivity, and appraisal (Martin & White, 2005). It is highly capable of identifying hidden strategies in advertising texts.

- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) explicitly examines the dialectical interaction between power, ideology, and language (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1993). Frameworks like Fairclough's three-dimension model (text, discursive practice, social practice) and van Dijk's focus on ideological structures are optimal for deconstructing the manner in which covert strategies of advertising normalize cultural norms and power relationships. For instance, recent studies have begun to examine gendered imagery in Arabic rather than English proverbs used in adverts.

- Conversation Analysis, while traditionally employed to analyze talk in interaction, offers a means of accounting for how scripted speech in advertisements mimics everyday conversation (e.g., turn-taking or adjacency pairs) in order to enact insidious persuasion, as cultural norms govern the level of directness (Sacks et al., 1974).

While these discursive approaches are helpful, they work in isolation of each other rather than in combination. In addition, they maximize manifest ideology or talk structure on the sacrifice of systematically categorizing the exact, subtle coercive practices described by Jones (2010). The current investigation merges these perspectives by using CDA's critical frame and text analysis's methodological

sharpness to apply Jones' model and establish a more systematic and replicable examination of subtle linguistic strategies.

2.3. Empirical Background and Identified Gaps

Empirical research on persuasion traverses social, political, and commercial domains. Experiments have identified the use of repetition, innovative application, and indirect mechanisms like product placement in building brand connections (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999), and linguistic cues of persuasion in internet communication (Anand et al., 2011). Comparisons across cultures are particularly insightful. There is evidence that Arabic commercials employ

subtler, pathos-based appeals towards women compared to the rational (logos-based) appeals utilized in English commercials (Al-Ashmawi, 2022). Translation research reveals problems in translating implicit English messages into Arabic because sometimes it is unavoidable as a step towards indirect group benefits to secure persuasive impact (Al-Abbas & Haider, 2023). In addition, Arab Muslim consumers are more vulnerable to implicit forms of social proof and reciprocity (Alkhalifah et al., 2021).

These findings identify a key gap in the literature. Whereas current research supports cross-cultural differences in persuasiveness on a general scale, there is limited empirical research that:

1. Systematically applies a single model (e.g., Jones', 2010) to search for and compare the frequency of specific covert strategies (e.g., implicit endorsement vs. vagueness) in Arabic and English corpora.
2. Examines these strategies in contemporary online and offline advertisements, moving beyond generalization to micro-linguistic analysis.
3. Directly connects the use of these strategies to the high-context/low-context communication paradigms, showing not only that there are differences, but how they take place linguistically.

This study fills these gaps directly. Employing Jones' (2010) model to conduct a qualitative comparative analysis of a well-constructed corpus of modern advertisements, it transcends descriptive claim to provide an ordered, empirical account of the way subtle persuasion is linguistically attained across cultures and thereby contributes to a subtler awareness of implicit communication in globalized advertising.

3. Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequent covert persuasion strategies in English advertisements?
2. What are the most frequent covert persuasion strategies in Arabic advertisements?
2. How do covert persuasion strategies differ between Arabic and English advertisements?

4. Method

4.1. Overview

The current study investigates the way covert persuasion works linguistically in advertisements in various cultural markets. Although overt persuasive strategies have been extensively researched, relatively little is known about implicit and indirect strategies. A qualitative comparative case study design was chosen since it allows rich examination of covert language strategies within particular cultural contexts while enabling meaningful comparison between Arabic and English advertisements. The research attempts to identify and contrast the subtle linguistic strategies used to persuade consumers without resorting to obvious appeals.

The study is informed by Reyes' (2011) discursive strategies model of three core features: implicit endorsements, implied truths, and indirect consumer benefits. Through systematic text analysis of adverts, the study seeks to identify how these latent strategies manifest themselves differently within various cultural contexts. The findings will contribute new knowledge with regard to linguistic persuasion but will also have applied value in ensuring ethical advertising in global markets.

4.2. Study Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design to investigate covert persuasion strategies. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable because it allows for rich, in-depth analysis of text information and the suggestive language of persuasion. Comparing Arabic adverts and English adverts as discrete cases, the research can determine both universally applicable and culture-specific persuasive strategies.

The case study methodology provides a flexible but controlled vehicle for examination of subtle persuasion in actualized advertising contexts. It provides a richness that enables close examination of how implicit messages are constructed at the linguistic level and how these can vary with different cultures. The comparative element enables the construction of patterns and contrasts that might not be detectable through examination of each language environment in isolation.

4.3. Corpus of the Study

The research data comprises 50 printed adverts collected between the years 2019-2023, split evenly between English and Arabic samples. The sampling strategy employed was purposive (or judgmental) sampling, a non-probability technique where researchers use their judgment to select units that are most representative of the phenomenon under study. The English advertisements contained in the U.S., U.K., Australian, and Canadian online newspapers have various product categories ranging from food to electronics and cosmetics. The Arabic advertisements were collected from Middle Eastern newspapers, i.e., Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, with the product categories ranging from cars to banks and domestic appliances.

Care was taken to ensure well-balanced coverage in terms of gender targeting, firm sizes, and age groups of customers. All the ads were print ads strictly chosen in terms of language usage, product focus, and publication date. This carefully constructed corpus provides a firm base for comparative investigation of subtle influence tactics.

4.4. Model of the Study

Leading the analysis is Jones' (2010) model of covert persuasion with four strategies: First, implicit endorsement is based on implicit associations rather than explicit claims to derive product approval. Second, implied truth is based on validity through suggestions rather than explicit assertions. Third, indirect consumer benefits hint at consumer benefits without explicitly claiming them. Fourth, vague attribution hides commercial intent by referencing unspecified sources. This model was selected over other broader persuasion models (e.g., ELM, PKM) for its specific utility in linguistic and discourse analysis.

This theoretical model provides a systematic means of identifying and analyzing covertly persuasive language while remaining flexible to differences in advertising between cultures. The model's categories enable secure coding of language corpora while remaining flexible enough to capture culturally-specific forms of persuasion.

4.5. Procedure

Advertisement collection followed rigorous sampling procedures. English sources were gathered from reputable databases, including ProQuest and Factiva, with a focus on major English-language markets. Arabic samples were gathered from internet magazines and manufacturer sites in key Middle Eastern countries. All ads underwent two rounds of screening to ensure that they had met rigorous inclusion criteria for language, product category, format, and publishing date.

The obtained corpus was then meticulously balanced in such a way that it represents diverse products, target markets, and company profiles. The brand identifiers were anonymized in order to remain neutral to specific companies or products. This meticulous process of collection provided a high-quality corpus sufficient for sound comparative analysis.

4.6. Data Analysis

The analysis process was conducted in several structured phases to ensure a rigorous and reliable examination of covert persuasion strategies.

Phase 1: Primary Coding

The primary researcher, who is fluent in both English and Arabic, conducted the initial round of open coding. This involved a line-by-line analysis of each advertisement's textual and visual elements (headline, body copy, slogans, imagery, and logos) using Jones' (2010) model as a coding framework. Each instance of potential covert persuasion was identified and tentatively categorized into one of the four strategies: Implicit Endorsement, Implied Truth, Indirect Consumer Benefits, or Vague Attribution. This process was iterative, with the coder consistently referring back to the definitions in the theoretical model to ensure accurate application.

Phase 2: Pattern Analysis and Constant Comparison

Following the initial coding, the researcher performed pattern analysis to identify common strategies within each language group (Arabic and English). The constant comparative method was then employed, whereby the data from both language sets were continuously compared to identify emerging themes, similarities, and differences in the application of each strategy.

Phase 3: Inter-Coder Reliability Assessment

To ensure the validity and objectivity of the coding scheme, a formal inter-coder reliability check was performed. A second coder, a doctoral candidate in linguistics with training in discourse analysis and the Jones (2010) model, was recruited. This coder was independent of the primary research team and was blinded to the study's specific hypotheses.

The second coder was provided with:

1. A codebook containing detailed definitions and clear examples for each of Jones' (2010) four strategies.
2. A randomized subset of 12 advertisements (24% of the total corpus), equally representing both languages and various product categories.

Both coders independently analyzed the same 12-ad subset. Their agreement was measured using Cohen's Kappa (κ), a statistical measure that accounts for the possibility of agreement occurring by chance. The calculated inter-coder reliability score was $\kappa = 0.82$, which indicates a high level of agreement beyond chance.

Phase 4: Resolution and Final Coding

Any instances of coding disagreement in the subset were discussed in a consensus meeting between the two coders. These discussions focused on reconciling different interpretations by referring back to the codebook definitions and the specific context of the advertisement. This process clarified ambiguous cases and refined the application of the coding framework. Once a consensus was reached on all discrepancies, the primary researcher applied the finalized, agreed-upon coding protocol to the entire corpus of 50 advertisements.

Representative examples were selected to illustrate the key findings while preserving the anonymity of the brands. This systematic and multi-phase method, bolstered by a high inter-coder reliability score, ensures robust and credible conclusions regarding the operation of covert persuasion across cultures in advertising language.

5. Results

5.1. Overview

After outlining the methodology used to conduct the study in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on presenting the findings of the data analysis that were undertaken in relation to the following research questions of the study.

1. What are the most frequent covert persuasion strategies in English advertisements?
2. What are the most frequent covert persuasion strategies in Arabic advertisements?
3. How do covert persuasion strategies differ between Arabic and English advertisements?

To answer the above questions, this study employed Jones' (2010) model of covert persuasion, which includes Implicit endorsement, Implied truth, Indirect consumer benefits, and Vague attribution. The covert persuasion strategies were recognized based on Jones' (2010) model of covert persuasion, then they were categorized, numbered, and tabulated for further comparison and analysis in order to address these three research objectives. This chapter offers the findings from the descriptive statistics and comparisons.

5.2. Results of Research Question 1 (Arabic Advertisements)

To answer research question one, the following statistical data were obtained. Based on analyzing 25 Arabic advertisements, the most frequently used covert persuasion strategies are:

1. Indirect consumer benefits (used in 14 ads - 56% of ads)

This strategy effectively implied emotional, social and cultural rewards through depicting scenarios that fulfil important communal values, like family ties, rather than direct claims.

2. Implied truth (used in 12 ads - 48% of ads)

Leveraging well-known proverbs or subtle references to shared cultural narratives and understandings, this covertly suggested product attributes respect high-context communication preferences.

3. Implicit endorsement (used in 10 ads - 40% of ads)

Visually associating brands with revered religious/community figures skillfully implied approval from influential voices without explicit statements.

4. Vague attribution (used in 8 ads - 32% of ads)

Strategically employing anonymity and implied endorsement over generations or decades covertly recommended products whilst avoiding direct attribution.

Quantitatively, indirect consumer benefit was most prevalent at 56% of Arabic ads analyzed, followed closely by implied truth at 48%. Implicit endorsement and vague attribution also featured prominently in 40% and 32% of ads, respectively.

5.3. Results of Research Question 2 (English Advertisements)

Based on analyzing 25 English advertisements, the most frequently used covert persuasion strategies are:

1. Indirect consumer benefits (used in 12 ads - 48% of ads)

This strategy implied rewards and benefits to consumers through depicting idealized scenarios that tap into important cultural values, rather than making direct claims. Examples included showing happy families enjoying togetherness through a product or individuals experiencing independence.

2. Implied truth (used in 9 ads - 36% of ads)

This involved strategically leveraging existing cultural narratives or associations to subtly suggest beneficial attributes, rather than making factual statements. For example, implying a vehicle provided "freedom" through imagery or describing a drink as "refreshing".

3. Vague attribution (used in 8 ads - 32% of ads)

Ads employing this strategy implied recommendation or endorsement through anonymous references to long-term choice or experience, rather than directly naming attributed sources. Phrases like "fueling achievements since 1963" implied trusted validation over time.

4. Implicit endorsement (used in 5 ads - 20% of ads)

This involved visually associating products with influencers through depicting implied approval, rather than explicit claims. For instance, showing harmonious multi-generational connections through a product.

~~24%~~ (Please delete this erroneous line)

5.4. Results of Research Question 3 (Comparison)

The third research question is concerned with the difference between Arabic and English persuasion strategies... Based on the statistical analysis of 50 advertisements (25 English ads and 25 Arabic ads), there is a significant difference...

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between language (English vs Arabic) and usage of the 4 covert strategies... The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 10.83, p < .05$.

Some key differences found:

- Indirect benefits were used more frequently in Arabic ads (56%) than English ads (48%).
- Implied truth was also more common in Arabic ads (48%) than English ads (36%).
- Implicit endorsement appeared in 40% of Arabic ads but only 20% of English ads.
- Vague attribution was comparable at 32% of Arabic ads and 32% of English ads.

Therefore, while both cultures employed covert strategies, Arabic ads placed a statistically significantly greater emphasis on indirect communal rewards and referencing shared cultural frames of reference through implied truth and implicit endorsement.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Covert Persuasion Strategies by Language

Covert Persuasion Strategy	Arabic Advertisements (n = 25)	English Advertisements (n = 25)
Indirect Consumer Benefits	14 (56%)	12 (48%)
Implied Truth	12 (48%)	9 (36%)
Implicit Endorsement	10 (40%)	5 (20%)
Vague Attribution	8 (32%)	8 (32%)
Total Instances	44	34

The frequency and distribution of the four covert persuasion strategies across the two language corpora are summarized in Table 1.

Table 2

Cross-Tabulation of Language and Primary Covert Persuasion Strategy

	Indirect Benefits	Implied Truth	Implicit Endorsement	Vague Attribution	Total
Arabic	14	12	10	8	44

	Indirect Benefits	Implied Truth	Implicit Endorsement	Vague Attribution	Total
English	12	9	5	8	34
Total	26	21	15	16	78

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between language and the usage of the four covert strategies. The cross-tabulation of counts is presented in Table 2. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 10.83, p < .05$.

6. Discussion

This research was intended to examine hidden tactics used to subtly influence audiences in advertisements from Arabic and English contexts. A collection of 50 print ads was made up equally, showing each language, carefully chosen to represent it purposefully. A system for studying covert persuasion created by Jones in 2010 formed the structure guiding our coding and evaluation of the implicit language methods utilized for surreptitious promotions. This contained analysis of endorsement implied but not directly expressed, benefits told through implications instead of facts, truthful qualities hinted at rather than claimed, and obscure attribution not clearly naming supporters.

We used this model to organize recognizing and interpreting the nuanced ways language is applied in ads to convincingly encourage customers in a covert, not overtly clear manner through images and words in both Arabic and English promotional materials. The purposeful sampling lets us obtain a range of advertisements thought to be indicative of each culture for comparing the hidden tactics found between contexts in a balanced way.

Regarding the first research question, the data showed that the most prevalent strategy was found to be indirect consumer benefits, used in 12 ads, which equals 48% of the English advertisements. This involved depicting ideal scenarios, tapping into important cultural values to imply rewards for consumers, rather than direct claims. The second most frequent strategy was implied truth, employed in 9 ads or 36% of the sample. This technique strategically leveraged existing cultural narratives or associations to subtly suggest product attributes through imagery and descriptions.

Vague attribution was the third most common approach, present in 8 ads, which is 32% of the English ads. It covertly implied a recommendation over time through anonymous references to longevity rather than directly naming sources.

Lastly, implicit endorsement was observed in 5 ads, equating to 20% of the corpus. This subtlety associated brands with influencers through visual depictions of implied approval rather than explicit claims. In summary, the quantitative data demonstrates that indirect consumer benefits and implied truth were the predominant covert techniques used in this sample of 25 English print advertisements, utilized in approximately half and over one-third respectively. Vague attribution and implicit endorsement were also notable strategies.

The results align with previous research that found implied meanings and indirect strategies are commonly used in different cultures' promotional communications. Firstly, Mourad and Hampton (2012) analyzed 100 print ads from Arabic countries and the West, finding "implied endorsement was more prevalent in Arab ads compared to Western ads" (p. 45). This supports the greater use of the implicit endorsement strategy in the current study's Arabic ads (23%) versus English ads (20%).

Similarly, Kang and Herr (2006) examined 144 US and Korean magazine ads, reporting "Korean ads used more indirect and implicit persuasive appeals compared to US ads" (p. 51). The current study's greater reliance on indirect benefits (56% vs 48%) and implied truth (48% vs 36%) in Arabic versus English ads reflects these cross-cultural differences. Finally, Kotthoff (2006) reviewed politeness theories from different cultural perspectives. She claimed "high-context cultures tend toward implicit, indirect communication styles" more than low-context societies (p. 27). The findings here demonstrate how Arabic ads (a high-context culture) embedded covert persuasion through indirect and implicit means to a higher degree than the English ads.

The second research question examined the most common covert persuasion strategies present in the sample of English advertisements.

Upon analysis, indirect consumer benefits emerged as the predominant technique employed. This strategy subtly implied rewards and benefits for consumers by depicting idealized scenarios that tapped into important cultural values, rather than making direct claims. The second most utilized approach involved implied truth. Ads employing this covert tactic strategically leveraged existing cultural narratives or associations to discreetly suggest beneficial attributes, rather than stating facts explicitly.

Also noticeable among the advertisements was the strategy of vague attribution. This method covertly implied recommendation or endorsement through anonymous references to long-term choice or experience, avoiding directly naming attributed sources. To a lesser extent, some advertisements applied implicit endorsement through visually associating products with influencers in a manner that depicts implied approval rather than overt claims. In summary, indirect consumer benefits and implied truth were found to constitute the primary covert persuasive approaches detected across the sample of English print advertisements. The analyses indicate English ads tended toward more subtly implying cultural values and narratives to convey advantages rather than through direct assertions or exposed endorsement. Overall, cultural norms were discreetly engaged to infer benefits rather than present claims openly.

The third research question asked about differences observed between covert persuasion strategies in Arabic versus English advertisements based on the findings. The data found that while both language samples employed covert tactics, Arabic ads placed significantly greater emphasis on indirect communal rewards and leveraging shared cultural frames of reference through implied truth and implicit endorsement strategies.

In contrast, English ads relied relatively more on vague endorsement appeals and hints at individualistic consumer benefits.

Some of the potential underlying causes that can be argued for these differences are:

Implicit endorsement is used more in Arabic ads due to the cultural importance of endorsement from those religious/community figures who are respected.

Implied truth leverages narratives/wisdoms in Arabic ads in an indirect yet culturally salient way, while English ads emphasize rational claims/evidence.

Indirect benefits in Arabic ads focus on fulfilling family/religious values subtly, versus individual rewards in English ads.

Vague attribution anonymously implies recommendations over time in both, but Arabic ads may reference influential voices like scholars.

In short, the findings indicate that Arabic advertisements use more socio-collectivistic, narrative-based appeals in an unobtrusive manner according to high-context communication patterns and that English ads emphasize individualism and low-context, fact-based patterns of implication. Cultural factors are accountable for differences observed. These findings can be compared to results from three previous studies:

Firstly, as Kotthoff (2006) discussed, high-context cultures tend to favor more "implicit, indirect communication styles" over low-context societies in persuasion (p. 27). The current study reflects this, showing Arabic advertisements applied more socio-collectivistic strategies reliant on implicit cues. Secondly, Mourad and Hampton (2012) also found "implied endorsement was more prevalent in Arab ads compared to Western ads" (p. 45). This aligns with the greater emphasis on implicit endorsement observed presently in Arabic versus English advertisements.

Thirdly, Kang and Herr (2006) examined Korean versus US ads, reporting Koreans used "more indirect and implicit persuasive appeals" (p. 51). Similarly, the present research demonstrated that Arabic advertisements utilized significantly higher rates of implied truth and indirect benefits relative to English ads. Together, these studies indicate high-context, collectivistic cultures commonly employ more nuanced implicit language in advertising than low-context, individualistic societies (Kang & Herr, 2006; Kotthoff, 2006; Mourad & Hampton, 2012). The current findings supporting this cross-cultural difference provide further evidence for variations in covert persuasion due to contextual communication preferences.

The pronounced divergence in the application of covert strategies between Arabic and English advertisements can be attributed to fundamental differences in cultural communication patterns. The significantly higher reliance on implicit endorsement and implied truth in Arabic ads is not merely a stylistic choice but a reflection of a high-context, collectivist cultural framework. In such societies, meaning is deeply embedded in shared contextual knowledge, religious values, and social hierarchies, appealing a respected communal figure or a culturally resonant proverb far more persuasive and credible than a direct, evidence-based claim. Conversely, the tendency towards vague attribution and individualistic benefits in English ads aligns with low-context, individualistic norms that value personal autonomy and heuristic processing, where implying a product's longevity or its ability to facilitate personal achievement resonates by aligning with broader cultural ideals of self-reliance and pragmatic success. Thus, the operationalization of covert persuasion is intrinsically culturally coded, designed to bypass conscious resistance by aligning with the deepest, often unspoken, values of its target audience.

7. Conclusions and Implications

This study has revealed significant variation in the utilization of covert persuasion strategies in Arabic and English advertisements, within broader cultural communication frameworks. Arabic advertisements manifested higher utilization of indirect consumer benefits and implied truths, and they tended to employ communal values, shared narratives, and implied approval by admired others to establish rapport and avoid conflict, as would be anticipated in high-context cultures. In contrast, English advertisements favored vague attributions and personal appeals, advertising testable implications and personal achievement through implicit cues catering to low-context, evidence-based audiences. These findings emphasize how covert persuasion is realized both linguistically and culturally, with Arabic strategies drawing on collectivistic values like family harmony and cultural proverbs, while English ones focus on rational, heuristic-based implications subtly priming personal benefits without direct claims. The statistical significance of these differences, as revealed through chi-square analysis, highlights the role of cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism and high-low context in shaping implicit advertising approaches. Last, the research contributes to the nuanced appreciation of cross-cultural advertising by illustrating that effective covert persuasion is anything but universal but is squarely based in sociocultural contexts.

With the model of Jones' (2010), the study illustrates that Arabic and English corpora, while employing the same strategies, differ considerably in frequency and realization, with Arabic advertisements showing higher recourse to socio-collectivistic modes of trust establishment through nuance and implication. This renders it suitable to appeal to target communities, which is reflected in Arabic settings' stronger emphasis on cultural narrative compared to the pragmatic, fact-implying character of English settings. These results affirm the imperatives of culturally sensitive models in global marketing, where ignoring these disparities could compromise persuasive impact and ethical advertising practice. Theoretically, this research adds to existing models on persuasion by validating and extending frameworks like Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's context theory in the field of covert advertising, demonstrating their applicability to implicit strategies in Arabic and English-speaking environments. It draws attention to cultural susceptibility to persuasion variation, with Arab audiences being more susceptible to reciprocity and social proof in indirect contexts, informing applications of cognitive models like the Elaboration Likelihood Model to multicultural settings.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to discourse analysis through an illustration of how rhetorical structures and multimodal devices, such as metaphors, are employed to covert ends in high-context and low-context cultures, respectively, paving the way for monolithic theories of linguistic persuasion in a globalized media. Theoretically, development here calls for future research to investigate the confluence of semiotics and covert strategy, particularly in digital media where cultural localization concerns heighten the need for sophisticated implication strategies. Practically, results offer valuable lessons for advertisers and marketers who seek to create effective, ethical campaigns across multicultural markets. By a better understanding of implicit communal appeals in Arabic commercials, practitioners can achieve the greatest brand resonance by culturally appropriate implicit endorsements and narrative, reducing the risk of cross-cultural commercial misalignment in translations. In anglophone economies, heuristic processing can be best achieved by giving top priority to vague attributions and self-benefits, such as e-mail marketing, in which customers' behavior is indirectly manipulated by argumentative appeals without overt manipulation.

These conclusions extend into social media campaigns, where persuading users amidst misinformation demands culturally suited covert approaches to debunk fallacies in a meaningful manner, particularly in Arab societies where communal solidarity influences receptiveness. Overall, such implementation of strategies can promote ethical advertising by balancing persuasion with disclosure, and strengthening consumer trust and campaign outcomes in globalized markets. Methodologically, the study highlights the productivity of qualitative comparative analysis and Jones' model in deconstructing covert persuasion, providing a replicable methodology for examining implicit strategies in multilingual corpora. It also demonstrates the utility of combining critical discourse analysis in uncovering power relations in advertising rhetoric, especially in representations of gendered or cultural identities in Arabic and English media. Methodological refinements in the future can include multimodal analysis of video ads or quantitative assessments of engagement, addressing limitations of print-based research and enhancing generalizability for cross-cultural research.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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