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Global Advertising and its Implications on the Concept of Spatial Identity:

*A Case Study of Urban Billboard Advertising in Tunis*

Tunisia is a country that has a very distinct and unique culture and collective identity that was shaped by their equally specific and unique history. With these facts in mind this, I was very shocked to see that the advertisements utilized in the city of Tunis to appeal to the Tunisian public, are very similar, if not that same to those of the United States and all around the world. At first, I was under the impression that manufacturers and advertising agencies played into spatial identities, such as those sovereign to demarcated nations or cultures, and that their advertisements would be reflective of particular cultural attributes found within a particular space. This did not seem to be the case here. Through this paper I plan to uncover how advertising uniformity works across the globe, why this is attractive to advertisers and what implications this has on the concept of spatial identity. My paper will be divided into three sections. The opening of my paper will consist of with a brief introduction to the advertising industry and the way in which it has morphed due to globalization. This will provide background information for my next section, a case study of urban billboard advertising in Tunis. Through this study I will interpret how advertisers are appealing to consumers and what types of values they are presenting to the public via these advertisements. This will be followed

by an examination of their methods in selecting specific values and in the end, I will conclude with thoughts on the impact this has on the concept of identity.

## The Changing Face of Advertising

Advertising is an industry that was created to serve the market. When the market was small and local, competition was little or non-existent and therefore there was no need for advertising. Competition increase is directly proportional to market range increase as similar products begin to occupy the same market place and consumers now must make a decision based on preference. In order for manufacturers to gain or maintain success, they must make their product the consumer's preference. As the market expands geographically, and continues to expand, competition does as well. Due to this increase in competition, perceived differences in products become more important; i.e. product design, packaging and advertising; almost equally important as product quality<sup>1</sup>.

The role of an advertising agency is to publicize a manufacturer's product in a way that it is appealing to consumers, or potential consumers. In order to make a product appealing to a consumer, the agency must have sufficient knowledge of the consumer; knowledge of their values, lifestyles, identities and identity aspirations. In this consumer-driven, capitalistic world, advertisers play into the identity aspirations and work to convince them that if they purchase this product, it will enhance their identities; resulting

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie, D A. "Global Scan: the Globalization of Advertising Agencies, Concepts, and Campaigns." *Economic Geography* 71 (1995): 402-426. [JStor](http://www.jstor.org/stable/144425). CEMAT. Tunis. 11 Apr. 2008  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/144425>. pg. 403

<sup>1</sup> Leslie, pg. 412

for them in the form of a better person, better citizen, better parent, etc<sup>2</sup>. Advertisers essentially dangle un-satiated desires in front of the consumer – desires created by the manufacturer no less – and wait for the consumer to succumb. In this way, advertising is not only an industry playing a role in economic structures, but is also deeply involved in the cultural processes of identity formation<sup>3</sup>.

In the past, knowledge of the consumer was easy to obtain. Previous conceptions of identity formation revolved around the assumption of the isomorphic qualities between space, place and time. This naturalistic way of thinking that tied the people of a particular area to the land and the history of that land, made defining a collective identity of a particular locale, region or nation less difficult as the connections between people and therefore their collective identities were already formed<sup>4</sup>.

As the market has changed and become so extensive and therefore a manufacturer's consumer pool has become much more diverse, the question arises as to what types of values advertisers see as appealing to the consumer. This determines the content to be presented in their advertisements. Through the following case study, these values will be extracted. Later in the paper, the methods advertisers use to determine these values, how they impose them on the consumers, and what implications this has on the concept of identity will be explored.

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<sup>3</sup> Leslie, pg.402

<sup>4</sup> Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. "Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992): 6-23. JStor. CEMAT. Tunis. 11 Apr. 2008  
<<http://www.jstor.org/sici?sici=0886-7356%28199202%297%3A1%3C6%3AB%22SIAT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6>, pg. 7

## Case Study: Urban Billboard Advertisements in Tunis

My case study will be broken up into four sections. First I will begin with a brief introduction to Tunisia, including information specific to their geography, history and identity. This will be followed by an explanation of my methods of sample collection. Next I have included a list of my sample and their corresponding interpretations. In the last part of this section, I will discuss my findings and conclusions based on my interpretations. Through this study I hope to uncover how and what values advertisers are presenting within specific locales that they see as cross-cultural as well.

### *I. Tunisian History and Current Identity*

In order to understand why I found it unusual that globally uniform advertisements are used in Tunisia, I believe it is important to understand, even slightly, their intricately spun identities, which stems from their specific geographic location and socio-political history.

Tunisia is a very small, fairly homogenous Arab-Islamic country located in northern Africa; the Maghrebi region. To its northern and eastern sea shores, it borders the stunning Mediterranean, and therefore is also within very close proximity to Europe and the Middle East. Its geographic location has left the area open to a long and diverse history of occupations, but since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the land has remained occupied mainly by Arabs<sup>5</sup>.

In tune with its history of occupations, from 1881-1956 the country was under French Protectorate. During this period, Tunisian culture fused with many aspects of the

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<sup>5</sup> Mezran, Karim. "Chapter 4: Tunisia." Negotiation and Construction of National Identities. Boston: Martinus Nijhoss, 2007. 107-144.

culture of its occupiers, including, but not limited to, western ideas of secularism, education, and urbanization. These and other aspects of western and French culture that were introduced during this time period are still prominent today, as these ideas were subscribed to by Tunisia's first president since their independence, Habib Bourguiba. Bourguiba maintained his presidency for a little more than thirty years, riding on popularity, although, all the while receiving opposition from those pushing for a more Arab-Islamic state. During his reign, Bourguiba even turned to socialism in an attempt to quiet his opposition, however the movement didn't stay popular for long and Bourguiba was back on the rocks. During the eighties, Bourguiba's popularity really spiraled downwards and in 1987, he was hushed out quietly and replaced by his Prime Minister, Ben Ali, who has been president ever since. One year after Ben Ali assumed the presidency, he instated National Pact in an effort to unify the country and satiate the needs of both those for secularism and a unique Tunisian identity, and those for more Arab-Islamic state recognition<sup>6</sup>.

Tunisia's distinctive history and particular geographical position have worked to define the culture that exists in this demarcated space. In general, Tunisians are very open-minded, curious people who wish to participate in the emerging global world and reap its benefits. However, they do take pride in their complex Tunisian identity and do not wish to assimilate their culture to that of the west. Due to my prior knowledge of this delicate collective identity created by the intricate history of these people and their land, I was very surprised when I realized Multinational Corporation's (MNC) and their advertisers did not seem to acknowledge it.

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<sup>6</sup> Mezran, pg. 107-144.

## *II. Method: Sample Collection*

To begin my study, I first needed to collect my sample. To do this, I chose a predetermined route that I felt was very heavily traveled. I began my journey at Place Pasteur, walked down Mohammed 5 to the intersection of Mohammed 5 and Avenue Habib Bourguiba. From there, I took a left onto Avenue Habib Bourguiba and continued en route to the TGM station. Along the way I stopped to take pictures of the billboards I passed, and also kept a tally of their prevalence. For the purposes of this study, I specifically defined billboards as the advertisement decorating the walls of the road or legitimate billboards, ignoring any and all small scale advertisements on the sidewalk or covering the bus stations.

## *III. Interpretation of Billboard Advertisements in Tunis*

After I had collected my sample, I proceeded to separate my sample into two groups, advertisements for Multinational Corporation (MNC) products and advertisements for Tunisian company products. This I accomplished by searching online for the company associated with the advertised product. From here, I began to decode the advertisements; first the advertisements for MNCs, and then the advertisements for Tunisian companies. I did this because I was interested to see if the underlining meanings MNCs were expressing through their advertisements differed from the meanings Tunisian companies expressed in theirs. I based my interpretations on a combination of three components: their illustrative content, their literary content and the colors used. Below is a list of my sample of billboard advertisements, each accompanied by a brief description and my interpretation of the advertisement. Each of them

corresponds the picture and company description with the same number in Appendix A and B respectively.

a. MNC Advertisements

i. Activa (Yogurt) n=1: This advertisement is focused on the torso a slender, fair skinned woman dressed in a green shirt that doesn't quite meet the top of her jeans where here hands are sitting comfortably. Laid atop her torso is an arrow defined by small yellow circles pointing in a downward fashion and above the arrow is a large display of the brand name in white, and this seems to be contouring to her torso, drawing more attention to the area. The very bottom of the add is divided into three sections: on the left there is a depiction of the product packaged mainly in green, with Arabic writing, centered is a slogan in Arabic, and to the right is the company logos, both in French.

Based on my observations of this advertisement, I see it exuding two messages. The first message is based on the prominence of the green in this photo and the focus on the woman's torso and the slenderness of it, which is accentuated by the yellow arrow. To me, this is indicative of concepts of health and well-being. Because the arrow is yellow, indicating happiness and joy, and the brand name is in white, indicating thoughts of purity, I would assume this is specifically focusing on digestive health; and this was confirmed when I visited the website. The literary content for this advertisement says that this product helps the consumer to be themselves, in an individual sense, which is an extremely western and capitalistic idea, but also leaves me to assume that individualism is the second message within this advertisement. This is further reinforced by the woman's position, in which she is standing confidently with her hands resting on her

hips. I would interpret this advertisement to specifically be directed at a female audience, aging from eighteen upward, but not specifically to the local female population.

**ii. Delisso (milk) n=1:** This advertisement is completed in a cartoon-like fashion is focused on the Arabic slogan which is centered in the middle in blue and reads, “ten vitamins and strong iron.” On the right there is a depiction of a young boy in a hot air balloon, where the balloon is actually a perfectly plump and juicily red colored strawberry. The boy is wearing a light blue t-shirt, with extended sleeves colored orange. He has red hair, brown eyebrows, blue eyes, fair skin, and a big smile. His left arm is extended upwards and capped off with a 'thumbs up' signal, while his right arm is extended outward into the viewer, with product in hand. He appears to be atop a cotton-candy pick cloud, and from there the background changes to white before extending into the blue sky, mixed with a few clouds. In the upper left corner of the advertisement is the brand name in red, which sits atop a milky (in color and perceived substance) white moon. Below that, in smaller font and the cotton-candy pink color is an Arabic word which means strawberry, indicating the flavor, and farther below that is a company logo.

Immediately you get the impression that this advertisement is directed towards children, with its cartoon fashion, use of imagination used in the depiction and actions of the boy, and the color usages of cotton candy pinks and blues. The boy's enthusiasm and simultaneous ascension into the sky leaves the viewer with an overall uplifting experience and impression of the product. The fact that the boy has a multitude of unrelated physical characteristics demonstrates that while he is not meant to be universal, he is also not meant to fit into a specific locale as the majority. When interpreting this advertisement past simply the illustration of the boy, but combine it with the slogan, one



can see that this is not just directed at the child, but also the parent. In addition, it is important to note that the strawberry, bearing health connotations, is hidden from the children by the fact that here it represents a hot air balloon, but can be read by a parent as allowing for the ascension into the sky. The fact that this advertisement is in Arabic says that it was tailored slightly to fit this specific locale, but this advertisement could be applicable to a number of locales if the language were to be changed.

**iii.** Peaudouce (Diapers) n=1 : In the center of this advertisement is a large display of the brand name in dark blue lettering, outlined in white. On the left side of the advertisement there is a depiction of an open diaper set in a sea foam green, circular background, with the words, “Extra Absorption, longue duree” in dark blue print set in a white background underneath it. On the right side there is a depiction of a healthy, happy, fair-skinned baby who appears East Asian in orientation wearing a blue hat. Below him/her to the left a little is a mother duck with a rabbit on its back leading its ducklings across a pond. At the very bottom of the right side there is a slogan written in Arabic, colored in white and set in a sea foam green background which reads, “The child will be healthy with Peaudouce.” The last word in the slogan, which is the brand name, appears at the larger brand name does, dark blue writing set in a white background. The upper half of the advertisement is in light blue.

The main colors used in this advertisement, blue and green, along with the slogan’s mention of health and the depiction of a healthy baby on the right side of the advertisement implies associations of health, healing and safety. Also, in congruence with this feeling of safety, the depiction of the mother duck leading her ducklings safely across the pond demonstrates to the mother consumer that by purchasing this product, she

too will be able to lead her child to safety. There is also interplay between the left and right sides of the advertisement, with the left side demonstrating the products capabilities or absorption, and the right side displaying the results of the usage of this product, a happy baby. The way the label is situated in this advertisement, in dark blue lettering set in a white background has connotations of knowledge, seriousness, power, integrity and purity. The Arabic usage in this advertisement implies that it is not directed at a specific class of people, but the contents of the advertisement does indicate it is directed more at mothers or future mothers. Again this advertisement could be applicable to a number of locales with the alteration of the language.

**iv. Lilas 1 (Promotion) n=3 :** In the center of this advertisement there are five mainly white, gold trimmed sacks depicted as full of cash, with their amounts written on them in both Arabic and English in dark lettering. They are placed upon a pile of gold coins. On the right side there is very large, bright red Arabic script which says, “Play and win,” and on the left, there is a large number fifty with two other words, all written in white which says, “50 million dinar prize). The background colors being very dark green on the left side and gradually fades to white on the right side. On the bottom there is a bright red strip with white lettering spelling out Lilas, the brand name, and thank you written in Arabic script.

At first I thought the green background of this advertisement was fading from left to right. Now, as I realize it is a promotion, I see it as beginning on the right, extending through the money bags to the amount of the prize the left. Based on this, I have reassessed the color scheme to be excelling from pure and heavenly white, to ambitious and greedy dark green. This can also be interpreted as moving from nothing before you

play, into a lot of money after you play, hence the movement from white, nothing, to green, money. This is a promotion for this MNC, but because it is written all in Arabic, and the monetary symbols on the money bags are in dinars, it makes me think this is either a highly localized advertisement, or the promotion is only occurring within the immediate area.

v. Lilas 2 (Diapers) n=4 : This advertisement is not centered so beginning from the right side of the advertisement there is a head shot of a healthy, happy, brown haired baby, with a finger in his mouth and he almost seems to be giggling. Continuing from the center to the left begins the second half of the advertisement. On the upper left hand side, in large white font is the brand name, which exceeds the advertisement space, pushing into the space above the advertisement, and about each 'e' in 'bebe' site a yellow filled heart. In the bottom center to left hand space there is a slogan in Arabic in white lettering which reads, "The diaper can absorb and is always dry." In between these two items is a depiction of two products which are mainly green, but accented in white. Their packaging seems to be in French. The background color is dark green.

The fact that the brand name is so pronounced that it leaves the space and ascends upwards, is depicted in white and has yellow hearts on it implies an ascension towards the sun and heaven and product characteristics of joy, happiness and energy. The packaging being accented in white also indicates a heavenly and pure quality. The slogan displays the products capabilities, while the happy baby to the right of it displays the end result of the usage of this product. The prominence of green in this advertisement implies health, freshness and safety. The usage of Arabic implies this advertisement has been tailored to be able to reach maximum population in this locale. With the adjustment of

language, this advertisement contains the potential to be successful in a number of locales.

**vi. Nokia (Mobile) n=1:** In this advertisement, the main feature seems to be the large depiction the cellular phone, which is almost centered in the advertisement, and is presented in a very sheik manner and the majority colors are red and black. To the left of that is only a small logo guaranteeing quality (French). To the right of this phone and occupying the upper portion of the advertisement is a depiction of a music longevity counter in white and red and a slogan beneath in French which reads, “Press play.” In the lower right hand corner is a smaller version of the same product with its product number beneath it and positive product descriptions and capabilities listed farther right. They read, “With Music, we can bring people together, good audio quality, no stress and no worries.” In the center of the far right side of the screen is the brand name in white and their current slogan for this phone in hot pick. The background begins with a red and black circular design, of a strong, smooth surface, perhaps imitating metal, and it fades to black as the advertisement moves rightward.

This advertisement in whole implies high quality directed towards those coming from high socio-economic backgrounds. The sheik appeal of the phone and the advertisement in general and the lack of Arabic really imply that this product is not for all. These two factors prove that this advertisement is not meant to appeal to all Tunisians, or Tunisians in general at all, but actually meant to appeal to a globally stratified demographic group. The metal imitating substance in the background mixed with the red and black used indicate this product is strong, powerful and fortifiable, but also exudes a quality of elegance. The use of white to spell out the brand, slogans and list

of qualities and capabilities implies purity and heavenly eminence. The list of qualities, along with the phrase, 'music can bring people together,' also implies the power of this technology and the company's movement towards globality and world wide connection capabilities and values.

**vii.** Carrefour (Hypermarket) n=11: This advertisement does not really contain a center, but more is divided into two halves. The left side contains three filmstrips, consisting of three pictures in each strip. One contains a dark haired man, one a blond haired boy and the last one a red haired woman. All appear to have fair skin, and their expressions read happy, excited and surprised. To the left of the advertisement there are two sets of slogans in French. The higher one is half in purple writing and half in blue and reads, "This is Carrefour month." The centered one, of which contains the website of the store, is written in red and blocked in white reads, "we invite you to view our website as well." In the bottom right hand corner there is a depiction of the logo in blue and red, set in a white square and immediately to the left of that is a slogan, again in French, and written in white and reads, "the quality of all." The background of this advertisement is a blank red color.

The red background in combination with the expressions depicted in the filmstrips implies feelings of joy and love of the company to the viewers. The diversity of models used in the filmstrips and the logo slogan of 'the quality of all' imply a diverse audience, however this is contradictory of the display of the website and the lack of Arabic in the advertising, which imply a specific audience of higher socio-economic background. In congruence with this, the usage of purple in part of the slogan indicates luxury and

extravagance, a quality not privileged to all. Like the Nokia advertisement, these factors imply a specific demographic group, not a specific locale.

**viii.** JCI (Membership and Education) n=1: This advertisement was extremely small and most of the writing did not come out in the picture, but of what can't be translated, it is obvious that it is in Arabic in blue, some in red and some in black. What can be readily deciphered from this is the head of a man peaking in from the left side of the advertisement, his name, written in red and in Arabic, and the organization name, which is in blue. The backdrop of the advertisement is in white.

The man represented in the advertisement is a well-known Tunisian singer, Cherif Alaoui. His picture, which takes up almost half of the advertisement, and his name written red indicates that he is meant to draw viewers in. The organization is inscribed in blue, which implies stability, trust, loyalty, wisdom, intelligence and truth, all very strong qualities this company would like to exude. The plain white background does not imply blankness, but the purity of the organization. The fact that this advertisement is mostly in Arabic and depicting a person who would only really be readily known by Tunisians implies this advertisement is made for Tunisians, and has very little, if any global uniformity. This said, the writing and headshot could be easily altered to fit into another locale as the message it implies is of global value.

**ix.** Palette (Hair Coloration) n=1: In the center of this advertisement is a description of the product written in English in gold lettering that says, "Gold gloss browns." Above this is the company name written in black, in a white block and underlined by three color strips of golden yellow, red and purple. To the left advertisement is a model with an intense yet composed expression, whose entire complexion - hair, skin, and eyes - is

silky. To the right side of the advertisement is three depictions of the product with their packaging all in French. There is a slogan strewn across the bottom of the screen in French, in gold lettering and reads, “She will be gluttonous until the color of her hair is right.” The background is brown and appears to be imitating a metallic look.

This advertisement is very elegant in design from the metallic imitation background to the gold lettering, and also the model. The elegance and sophistication this advertisement exudes in combination with the lack of Arabic, seems to be aimed at a specific audience of higher socio-economic background. The model by herself is representative of the effects this product will have on the consumer and indicates to the consumer that this product can not only make her beautiful, but also elegant and sophisticated. The brown backdrop implies the simplicity, durability and stability of this product and its company. My interpretation of this advertisement leads me to the conclusion that this advertisement was not at all modified for this specific locale.

#### b. Tunisian Company Advertisements

i. ANME (Education) n=4: This advertisement is divided completely into two halves. On the left side of the advertisement is a depiction of an oil can with a 100\$ inset in a white square covering part of the can and a question underneath the can which reads, “Where is the solution?” The can is half engulfed by a red can and it is set against a black background. On the opposite side there are two halves again. The top half had three pictures depicting automobile maintenance with the statement above it reading, “control payments on automobile” and to the left of that a red/orange box with the fact, “40% savings in auto energy yields 500dt./year saving.” On the bottom half it is the same sort of thing, except this time for household appliances and the fact reads, “30% savings in

household electricity yields 200dt./year savings.” At the very bottom there is another Arabic slogan that reads, “be economical in energy is the solution,” and to the far left of that is the organization logo. On the left side the background colors are green, blue and gray.

After reading the advertisement, the most striking aspect I noticed was the color difference. The black background behind the oil can is indicative of death, danger, and void, while the green, blue and gray behind the solutions are healthy earthy tones. This is the movement of the entire advertisement with the question on the right and the answers and solutions on the left. This is an educational advertisement, meant to influence the behavior of the public. It is interesting to note that the advertisement uses the motivation of saving money to appeal to viewers implying the material culture that has spread through the city. This advertisement is presenting global awareness and global solutions that are not specific to Tunisian identity, but to a global consciousness.

**ii. Calinou (Diapers) n=3:** Starting from the right side of this advertisement, there is a depiction of what looks like a happy, dark-haired mom holding her happy, healthy baby. As you move across to the left, pausing in the upper center there is an Arabic slogan in blue lettering which reads, “Your child must wear Calinou's diapers because we love Calinou.” At the bottom center is the company name in dark blue lettering. Moving to the left side of the advertisement, there is a brand display in the upper left hand corner in blue writing but set in a yellow box. In the bottom left corner there is product depiction whose packaging seems to be in French. The background is light blue with a drawn in butterfly about the baby’s head.



The main colors used here transmitted a lot of the messages. The blue indicates stability, trust, and confidence, while the yellow implies joy, happiness, and energy. The butterfly in the background emphasizes freedom and ascension towards heaven one will feel when using this product. The expression of the mom and the baby in her arms is meant to demonstrate to the viewer how happy they will be with the product. Interesting to note, the packaging on the product is in French, implying its readiness to be exported globally. The advertisement itself doesn't seem to be specifically directed towards the Tunisian public, and could be seen as effective and appealing towards mothers in other locales.

**iii. Jadida (Butter) n=2:** This advertisement seems to be split into two unequal halves. The larger half, the right side, is dedicated to product display and above it a slogan in Arabic script and red letter describing the product as very delicious, and even above that to the brand name, also in red and with a semi-circle underling. On the left side of the advertisement there is a dark haired woman with bright red lipstick dressed in a white shirt. The backdrop is yellow, darker at the bottom and becoming lighter as the advertisement ascends upwards.

When the viewer first looks at this advertisement, its gaze is immediately drawn to the brand name, as it is depicted in red. From here they may notice that the semi-circle underlining the brand name which if connected with the two a's, forms a smiley face, inferring brand happiness. The model here appears to maintain a fuller figure, dark hair and dark eyes, implying to me that she represents a more traditional view of Tunisian beauty. Her red lips indicate pleasure, her fuller figure indicate indulgence while her white shirt is indicative of purity. The yellow background radiates joy, happiness, and

energy. These factors tell me that this ad has been directed towards a specifically Tunisian mindset and that it wouldn't be applicable to other locales.

**iv. Selja (Yogurt) n=6:** This advertisement seems to be broken into three sections stacked on top of each other although I think the top one and bottom one are connected, with the middle one dividing the other two. The top and bottom joint sections are a slogan in Arabic with the top, in white reading, “when you collect four covers,” and the bottom section in Arabic in red reading, “you get one free.” (Indicating this is a promotion.) In the middle strip there is a display of three different products all the by the same company. The company logo is depicted in the upper left hand corner in red writing, set in a circle that is divided in half between blue and white. The advertisement in general is divided in background color with the top 1/3 in red, and the bottom 2/3 in blue.

This advertisement is pretty simple and straightforward. The red background in the upper portion of the advertisement is attempting grab viewers attention and carry it to the slogan, across the diverse product display and into the end of the slogan set blue background, which ensure stability and confidence. This is a promotion so it must first grab the viewers' attention and then convince them that this is a good deal. This advertisement attempts to do this through its color choice. This advertisement doesn't seem to be catering specifically to the Tunisian identity.

**v. Tunisie Telecom 1 (Promotion) n=5:** This advertisement is centered around the depiction of an American cowboy who is clutching a cellular phone in one hand and a house phone in the other. His head is tilted down so his face is not visible. Streaming across the bottom of the page is a promotion written in Arabic in white, boxed in dark blue that reads, “recharge your phone or cell without taxes.” To the far left of this

promotion is the company logo which is a combination of white writing with a dark and light blue circle above it with a white design on it set in a light blue box. In the upper left hand corner is the words, “TT Cash” in English in which, and below it in Arabic, also in white, is written “I will call you, I have to call you.” The background is blue and looks like the sky.

It is very interesting that the center focal point of this advertisement is an American cowboy. To me this says this advertisement is attempting to appeal to viewers by implying its similarities to America. This may imply that they are trying to move into the international market where advertisers sometimes do sell a product by commodifying and tying American values to it, however this advertisement is for a local promotion therefore it seems odd this would be used internationally. The excessive use of blue in the scene is attempting to ensure stability, trust and confidence in the viewer.

**vi. Tunisie Telecom 2 (Promotion) n=1:** This advertisement is centered around the letter ADS attached to a laptop. They are depicted in silver and appear to be illuminating a metal-like quality. On the right side of the advertisement there is a man in a brown traditional robe, eyes closed, right arm extended towards the laptop, capped off with an extended pointer finger as though he will push a key. Occupying the left side of the advertisement there are two depictions of logos. In the upper left corner, there is the word “Fixi” in purple, and under it there is a slogan in Arabic in white which reads, “Fix and Serve,” and is set in a yellow/green box. In the bottom left corner is the Tunisie Telecom symbol as in the previous advertisement, only this time it is set in the same yellow/green box as the one above it. Across the bottom there is a blue box with a slogan

in white in it (except for the word 'Fixi' which again is in purple) and it reads, "with Fixi, it is cheaper." The setting is a darkly lit house with the laptop sitting atop a red table.

In the scene in this advertisement the man in his brown robe, represents tradition and stability while the laptop he is extending his arm towards, with its metal like qualities, indicates strength and powerfulness and represents global processes and international communication. This demonstrates the physical merging of Tunisia and their traditions, with that of the global world, while holding steadfastly to their traditions, avoiding westernization. The slogan indicates that this is a promotion, but the way it is inset in blue says the company is attempting to ensure confidence and trust of the viewer.

**vii.** Tunisie Telecom 3 (Promotion) n=3: This advertisement is centered around a skyscraper which seems to be stemming into outer space from a distant earth. To the left of this picture, in the upper corner there is an orange box filled with white French writing, which is the name of the program being promoted, "Excessive Corporate," and black French writing below this which is the program's slogan and reads, "communication without counting." In the lower left corner is the Tunisie Telecom logo; it is the same as was on the two previous Tunisie Telecom advertisements with the only difference being the block background which is orange. From here, across the screen to the right are two slogans. The first is in white writing set in a 'barely there' black box and reads, "100 hours of communication gratuities, movable offer for the enterprise, for more information call 1277." Farther right and just above this slogan is another slogan written in white, but set in an orange box and it reads, "liberate the capacities of your business." In the lower right hand corner is a very small disclaimer in white which reads, "Tunisie Telecom is a service for the enterprise."

The prominent use of orange throughout the scene is indicating where the advertiser wants to draw the viewers' attention first. The areas are the slogans that are explaining about the program in a promotional way. In the scene in the background, the extension of the sky scrapper into outer space makes the world look small and manageable, implying that this company has the capabilities to operate internationally with ease. The fact that the advertisement is completely in French, but this is a Tunisian company says to me that either this company has plans for movement to the international market or they are attempting to appeal to a specific audience within the locale; perhaps those of higher socio-economic backgrounds.

**viii.** Goldina (Butter) n=2: This advertisement is broken up into three sections.

Beginning on the left, there is a depiction of a woman hugging a little girl, appears to be mother with daughter. Both models are fair in skin color and are smiling. They are set in a white background, encapsulated by a thickly outlined, golden yellow semi-circle protruding from the left side of the advertisement. Moving along towards the center of the screen, there is a depiction of the brand name in the upper middle written in white, underlined in a golden yellow curve, set in pea green box outlined in lighter green to differentiate it from the background. In the bottom center is a slogan written in white, in Arabic, outlined in green and reads, "You are very good." On the right side of the screen there is a depiction of the product and above a slogan that I can not make out.

The excessive use of a light green and yellow present both a calming effect, and thoughts of joy, happiness and energy, creating an equilibrium with the emotional connotations of the product. The slogan implies that the products main appeal is based on its flavor and quality, which is of importance to Tunisian culture, but also is applicable

cross culturally. The yellow semi-circle surrounding the models implies their happiness and joy in selecting this product, and is meant to provide an example for the viewer. The fact that while this advertisement is for a Tunisian company and their products, non-Arab looking models were used in its production. This suggests that this company has aspirations of entering the international market and therefore would like keep its advertisement applicable.

**ix. L'Epi D'or (Couscous) n=1:** This advertisement is centered around the dark colored hand, gold bangle coverer wrists and red, baggy robe colored fore arms of a woman sifting through grains with her hands. The scene appears to be in a kitchen and the scent is enclosed from the rest of the advertisement by the depiction of a traditional Arabic architecture arch. Below the scene is the name of the brand, which means, “the golden wheat,” and to the right of this is a depiction of the product whose packaging is in Arabic and French. In the upper right corner is the brand logo, written in both Arabic and French in gold, with a picture of a wheat grain above it, also in gold. There is not slogan presented in the advertisement.

The dress of the model and the product, couscous, implies tradition, traditions of Tunisians. The red on the model is meant to attract the viewers' eyes here first. The lack of a slogan suggests that the product is well known and speaks for itself, and the language duplicity of the advertisement suggests either aspirations of moving into the global market, and/or an attempt to reach the largest audience.

\*\*There are two more advertisements I accepted into my sample, one for Farat Water, and the other for Souplesse Shampoo, however when I was researching them online, I was unsuccessful in locating any information on their company associations. While I did include the pictures in Appendix A as they were part of my sample, for the purposes of this paper, I do not see a point in

thoroughly analyzing and interpreting them, as they can not fit into a category of my sample without their company information.

#### *IV. Results and Conclusions*

I completed the interpretations above to see what values advertisers were expressing in an effort to understand how such similar advertisements could exist in such seemingly different locales such as between the United States and Tunisia. Through my interpretations I found that neither MNCs or Tunisian companies pay very much attention to spatial identity characteristics. The values that were expressed ranged from health and wellness, to global consciousness, to world wide telecommunications and beauty. All of these values are values that would appeal to a global consumer; a consumer with aspirations and conceptions of cosmopolitanism and/or universalism. They are indifferent to national and cultural demarcations and identities as they are not isomorphic with time and place.

I also think it is important to comment on the methods advertisers used within their advertisements express these values to the public/consumer. By 'methods' I am talking about the models, the language, the colors, and other components of the advertisement that compose the message and allow it to transcend down to the consumer. These methods did vary slightly between Tunisian companies and MNCs. Almost all of the Tunisian companies, except one, were completely in Arabic. The one advertisement that was in French, I believe was aimed not at the general public, but at a specific type of socio-economic background. Also, not in all, but in some of the Tunisian advertisements, Arabic models were used, as compared to the MNC advertisements in which none included Arabic models. It is worthy to note that many of the nine of the seventeen

advertisements chose not to include models at all, perhaps for the sake of uniformity and standardization.

Lastly, I have included brief overviews of the manufacturers responsible for the advertisements in my sample in Appendix B. I believe it is significant that each of these companies is expressing global values to their consumers; global values that they also maintain as their companies values. Each of these companies, both MNC or Tunisian, understand the importance of membership and prominence in the global market. Due to this realization, companies are not only marketing their products as global, but their companies and their companies' values as well. A companies' desire to demonstrate a global persona both through its products and projected personal values differs between MNC's and Tunisian companies only slightly. For MNC's this has to do with securing their international membership, and to allow for further expansion. For Tunisian companies, this is in relation to their aspirations of joining the global market, realizing that in order to attain true success, this is necessary. This demonstrates that not only are both types of companies conveying the same values and messages through their products, but also are subscribing to the same desires and personal values. The birth of the global market has not only created product similarities and advertisement similarities, but also cross-cultural company structure similarities.

The conclusions I have drawn from my study are all either part of or have induced a new method of advertising now utilized by global advertisers and MNCs called standardization. This method will be further explained in the next section.



## Global Advertising Methods and Implementation Tactics

Through this section of my paper, I plan to approach this method of standardization from a theoretical position. I will examine the reasoning behind the creation of this method, advertisers' methods of determining what values to express and their implementation tactics.

With consumer populations as wide and far-reaching as they are now, one would imagine it would be very difficult for advertisers to concentrate on each and every subunit of that population. To address this issue, global advertisers now use a method called standardization. Standardization is a method that deploys the same advertisement conveying the same message across the immense span of consumers, although, as you will learn below, standardization is carried out in varying degrees depending on specific measurements of the MNC to subsidiary relationship. Since standardization redefines advertising geographies, it was also necessary for advertisers to update their methods of population categorization, in an effort to make sure their messages are received correctly. Standardization is an economical, efficient and effective way for global advertisers to be successful in addressing such a large audience, when carried out with care.

Before a standardized message can be formulated and dispersed, it is imperative that the advertising agency first be knowledgeable of their consumers. This is important to be sure that they are conveying a message that will appeal to consumers across the globe, and that it will work to either shape them into global consumers or make them want to maintain their global consumer citizenship. In order to appeal to consumers across the globe and manifest within them global consumerism, advertising agencies have had to overlook nationally and culturally constructed borders, and analyze consumers

from a cross-cultural standpoint. By drawing similarities from this point of view, agencies have been able to uncover universal values, lifestyles and identities that apply to the majority of consumers across the globe. Research methods that accomplish this, such as geodemographics (the mapping and visualizing of consumers based on cross-cultural similarities of lifestyle and socioeconomic background) and psychographics (“the development of personality or lifestyle typologies of consumer behavior<sup>7</sup>”), allow agencies “detailed marketing profiles which identify the customer’s aspirations as well as her stated needs<sup>8</sup>.”

Attaining this kind of knowledge about the consumer provides the agency with power over the consumer. It allows the agency to decipher the consumer and more importantly their wants, needs and desires. On the basis of this knowledge that the agency produces the standardized advertisement with the intentions of cross-cultural, global appeal<sup>9</sup>. It is through the standardized advertisement that the agency interacts with its consumers and where it actively interferes with and shapes their identities.

As seen in the case study, standardization can result in a variety of degrees. The standardization of an advertisement is dependent on the locality into which the advertisement is placed. The degree to which an ad is standardized depends on the relationship between the MNC and the local subsidiary, and is directly proportional to the amount of control the MNC has over the local subsidiary. The balance of control depends on the international prominence of the MNC and the degree of independence of the local subsidiary<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Leslie, pg.417

<sup>8</sup> Leslie, pg. 416-418

<sup>9</sup> Leslie, pg.415

<sup>10</sup> Laroche, Michel, V H. Kirpalani, Frank Pons, and Lianxi Zhou. "A Model of Advertising

This degree of control is mounted atop four pillars. The first pillar is their similarity in market positions. This refers to their global perception, market development and intensity of competition. If their market position is more similar, then the MNC has a higher degree of control over its subsidiary. The next indicator of control is similarity in country environmental conditions. If the cultural variables, cultural and language issues, advertising infrastructure, legal, political or economic contexts, of both the MNC and the subsidiary are similar, then a higher degree of control is granted to the MNC. The third factor in MNC-subsidiary relations is the decision power of the subsidiary. If the subsidiary maintains the skills and abilities to implement effective advertising strategies, then they would be granted more decision power, and the MNC would have less control over the subsidiary. The last dynamic in this power relationship is the familiarity of the foreign context by the MNC. The more familiar the MNC is with the culture and business organization of the subsidiary, the more control over them they will have. It is these factors that account for varying degrees of standardization, as they are indicative of the amount of control an MNC has over its subsidiary, and therefore, indicative of the degree of standardization<sup>11</sup>.

When global agencies first began using standardized advertisements they received a lot of criticism because these advertisements were ignorant to the cultural and historical differences of their host populations, and sometimes advertisements inadvertently offended a specific population. This caused the advertisement to backfire to the extent where consumers actually rejected certain products because of the advertisement.

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Standardization in Multinational Corporations." *Journal of International Business Studies* 32 (2001): 249-266. [JStor](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3069559). CEMAT. Tunis. 11 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3069559>>. pg. 250-251

<sup>11</sup> Laroche, pg. 251-254

<sup>12</sup> Leslie, pg.415

Because of this, a branch of standardized advertising, GLocal advertising, was born and is now the main method for global advertising<sup>12</sup>.

GLocal is a compromise between total standardization and cultural carelessness, and economically expensive local advertising. The GLocal approach is one that utilizes a standardized shell, but is made to be flexible during the implementation process, deviating from the standardized shell to fit into a specific locale. This allows the advertisement to be sensitive to particular behaviors and beliefs of a particular community<sup>13</sup>. (GLocal advertising is evident in some of the advertisements in my sample and is mainly expressed through the adaptation of language.)

As stated earlier, the standardized advertisement is the agencies active communication to the consumer population. It is through these advertisements that agencies deploy uniform, universal values and lifestyles across space. This is where the reconstruction of space and identity by the agency occurs. Through standardized advertising they are attempting to eradicate cultural and national lifestyle and value differences, in an effort to market their products to such an expansive and diverse consumer population<sup>14</sup>. By doing this, global advertising is dispersing uniform identity features, irrespective of borders and boundaries and it is at this moment one must question the fate of the relationship between space and identity.

### Implications on the Concept of Spatial Identity

Spatial identity is a socially constructed concept, created by people to organize other people. It is the coordination of specificities where a specific piece of land, which

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<sup>13</sup> Leslie, pg.416

<sup>14</sup> Leslie, pg.413

was arbitrarily demarcated by borders and boundaries, contained a specific group of people and this specific group of people shared an essential, common, natural identity<sup>15</sup>. This naturalistic idea of spatial identity is further solidified by the collective identification with a specific, yet constructed, historical consciousness<sup>16</sup>. The combination of these factors has in the past solidified concepts of spatial identities such as national identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity and so on. It was this kind of identity and characteristics associated with this identity that manufacturers and advertisers have played into in the past. They used this knowledge to decipher their consumers and their desires and therefore market their products effectively.

Now it seems the processes of globalization are attempting to disrupt this once solidified notion. The intensification of globalization has expanded the global market creating new market geographies that nearly span the entire globe. This has complicated and diversified the consumer pool, forcing advertisers to delineate new consumer categories based not on landscape and geography, but on demographic factors. Globalization has forced global advertisers and manufacturers to eradicate identity differences between defined spaces in an effort to remain successful. This has led to the dissemination of global values through standardized global advertisements. These values are then accepted by consumers and incorporated into their identity. Their acceptance of particular values is synonymous with their product choice as the particular values embedded in particular products is one of the differential factors between products for consumers.

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<sup>15</sup> Foster, Robert J. "Making National Cultures in the Global Ecumene." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20 (1991): 235-260. JStor. CEMAT. Tunis. 11 Apr. 2008 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2155801>>. pg. 236-237

<sup>16</sup> Foster, pg.241

It is at this point of acceptance that the identity renegotiation is confirmed. Through their purchase of a particular product, the consumer confirms their identification with the imagined landscape that is occupied by other global consumers. This unrecognizable landscape to which the consumer has now ascribed their citizenship and their identity now rooted, is known as the global village<sup>17</sup>. This landscape, this global village is not of physical substance, but is actually a mentally shared space; a collectively created landscape.

The renegotiation of identity has induced a reorganization, but not eradication, of space. The spaces are most likely more homogenous in the type of people who occupy it because it is a specific mentally demarcated space that was already mapped by advertisers before it was formed (as opposed to arbitrarily demarcated physical spaces such as nations). It is this way that advertisers have played a significant role in the renegotiation of space and identity.

## Concluding thoughts

When I first began this paper I was under the impression that spatial conceptions of identity stood in the way of globalization and the global market and that global advertising was purposefully trying to deconstruct these notions within their consumers. This, I found, was not the case. Global marketers and advertisers were simply compelled by the magnetic powers of globalization, and now that the processes are already in motion, the inertia of the situation is too great to turn back now. This has created a necessity for advertisers to adjust their methods in an effort to survive. In order for the

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<sup>17</sup> Leslie, pg.413

market to survive, they must be able to appeal to the masses of the global community.

The only way to do this is to form a global community in which all its members subscribe to similar values, lifestyles, and essentially maintain a common sense of identity.

Through advertisers' efforts to accomplish this, they have had a hand in reconfiguring ideas of identity and space.

## Appendix A: Pictures of Billboard Sample

### A. MNC Descriptions

See attached files Photos 1-9

### B. Tunisian Companies

See attached files Photos 10-18

## Appendix B: Company Descriptions

### A. MNC Descriptions

i. and ii. The brand names, Activa and Delice are associated with the leading global distributor of Dairy products, Danone, a French MNC. This firm is established in 40 countries world-wide with hopes of continuing its expansion, acquiring 3-5 new countries per year. Within their products they have infused values of health and wellness.

iii. Peadouce is a brand name of a United States MNC, Kimberly Clark World Wide Inc. With products being sold in over 150 countries world wide, this MNC is a world distributor in health and hygiene products. The Peadouce branch is based in France and it provides family friendly education and support online as well as product information.

iv. and v. Lilas is a brand name associated with the Chinese MNC, Zhejiang Yiwu Huamei Sanitary Suppliers. This company exports a wide range of sanitary products to markets in North America, Eastern Europe, South-East Asia, Africa and Oceania.

vi. Nokia is an MNC with its head office located in Finland. The distribute globally to Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and North America. “Nokia is the world leader in mobility, driving the transformation and growth of the converging internet and communications industries<sup>18</sup>.”

vii. Carrefour is a French international hypermarket, 2<sup>nd</sup> in retail only to Wal-Mart, which operates mainly in Europe, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, but also limitedly in North Africa and Asia. In the past, this company has been involved in some controversial issues surround sweat shop working conditions and now work hard to express an image of ecological, economic and social responsibility.

viii. JCI, the Junior Chamber International is a worldwide organization that bring together young leaders and entrepreneurs in an effort to create a global community through which discussions of global issues can be pursued. Through this they hope to create individual, community, international and business growth. Their slogan is, “developing Tomorrow’s leaders...today<sup>19</sup>.”

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<sup>18</sup> [www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com)

<sup>19</sup> [www.jci.cc/members/dbnoms.php?lang\\_id=2&n=139](http://www.jci.cc/members/dbnoms.php?lang_id=2&n=139)



ix. Palette Schwarzkopf is an international brand spanning across 45 countries. They are associated with the German Fortune Global 500 company, Henkel. Henkel not only operates in almost 125 countries world wide, but is sells a vast array of products; so vast it has divided its company up into three sections, Laundry and Home Care, Beauty and Personal Care, and Adhesives, Sealants and Surface Treatments. Palette is associated with the Beauty and Personal Care section. Henkel's slogan joining these three very different partitions within their company is, “as much as the products differ from one another, they have one thing in common: They make people’s lives easier, better and more beautiful<sup>20</sup>.”

## B. Tunisian Companies

i. ANME is an organization that is associated the company CIEDE, an educational company focused on sharing knowledge pertaining to sustainable energy and the environment. This in turn is associated with the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Small and Medium Enterprises, the National Agency for Energy Conservation, the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Republic of Tunisia.

ii. Calinou is a brand name of a prominent Tunisian industrial corporation called CIPAP, Industrial Complex Products of Welcome and Paper. They disperse sanitary products for babies, hygiene products, and also paper products for hotels. Currently they export North African, West Africa, and France.

iii. The brand name Jadida is associated with ALMES, the vegetable division of a larger MNC, POULINA\*. ALMES is the leader in margarine and hydrogenated vegetable fat corporations in the Tunisian market and exports regionally to West Africa, North Africa and the Middle East. They project health consciousness with even some educational information on their website.

iv. Selja, is a sub-company of GIPA, a company that holds a major position among food processing in Tunisia. They have a wide range of products ranging from frozen cream to cones, yogurts, juices and pastries. “The name of GIPA symbolized the innovative spirit, audacity and the imagination<sup>21</sup>.” GIPA is also associated with POULINA\*.

\*POULINA was the first Tunisian group to own more than thirty subsidiaries in the industrial, commerce and service sectors. “The vocation of POULINA is to bring, by its innovations in all the domains of the economical social activity, products and services intended for the improvement of the well-being of all men<sup>22</sup>.” Poulina seems to dabble in

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.henkel.com/cps/rde/xchg/henkel\\_com/hs.xsl/index.htm](http://www.henkel.com/cps/rde/xchg/henkel_com/hs.xsl/index.htm)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.gipa-web.com/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.poulina.com.tn/default.asp>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.goldina.com.tn/>

everything as an actor in farming, industry, food processing, service and real estate.

v., vi. And vii. Tunisie Telecom is a telecommunication company that focuses on both public and private services of telecommunications and is involved in various social and economic needs.

viii. Goldina is the brand name of a larger corporation called the General Food Industrial Slama (GIAS). GIAS is a major actor in the Tunisian economy, marketing their products to ten different countries. They mainly focus on the production of butter, margarine and other varied ingredients. “GIAS has a passion for rich flavors and tradition<sup>23</sup>.”

ix. L’Epi D’or is associated with the Tunisian company, Usine NLLe de Pates Alimentaires Habib Mellouli et Cie (UNPA). It is a private limited liability company that specializes in pasta products, semolina, durum wheat, flour, soft wheat and couscous.

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