

## **Assumed Adverts leading to Presumed Consumers: Culture in Transition in Oman**

**Saba Mehmood**

Faculty, Department of Communication Studies  
Nizwa College of Applied Sciences, Ministry of Higher Education  
P.O.Box: 699 --Nizwa PC: 611  
Sultanate of Oman.

**Vartika Tandon**

Faculty, Department of Communication Studies  
Nizwa College of Applied Sciences  
Ministry of Higher Education  
P.O.Box: 699 --Nizwa PC: 611  
Sultanate of Oman.

### **Abstract**

*There has been a sea change in cultural as well as modernity practices in Oman. This change is bond up with the emergence of new wave of cognition. Space runs with time, beliefs runs parallel with practices. While simultaneously in the shifting dimensions of social life consumption, thoughts, people, media are no far to reach. The clamor of modernity over traditional thinking seems to decrease today even in cultural sensitive zones. Print media in Oman seemed to set fair role in defining the trajectory of social and cultural developments. By virtue of the way it defined standard of social status, their preferences, and awareness in different regions. Cultural is a concept of seeing beyond belief. It is something that you feel. It is a critical reflection of both society and entities. This research explains how print media in Oman has created an era of modern thinking and how localities have appreciated modernity in this Country.*

**Keywords:** Advertisements, Print Media, Culture, Traditional Oman, Consumption.

### **1. Introduction**

In climate controlled dwelling people live in their own sub cultural norms. There are hundreds of channel by which a media can penetrate in a home and the same has been applied in context to Sultanate of Oman. The understanding of cultural differences is often considered a prerequisite for successful international advertising (Keegan, 2008) because consumers grow up in a particular culture and become aligned with that culture's value system as well as beliefs and perception processes. Several studies have shown that consumers are more inclined to respond to advertisements that are congruent with their culture (Boddewyn, Soehl, and Picard, 1986; Buzzell, 1968; Harris, 1984). The value system includes sets of beliefs, attitudes, and activities to which a culture or subculture subscribes and is reinforced by rewards and punishments for those who follow or deviate from these guidelines (Rokeach, 1973).

As a consequence of the pervasiveness of consumer culture in many societies, there is a widespread belief that one's quality of life is a function of the quantity of things that one possesses (Roper Starch Worldwide 1994). This mentality is present in the widespread belief that happiness is based on one's income, or one's ability to acquire possessions and experiences without hindrance (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2002). The concept of consumer culture has become a lens through which the entities are able to see the past, present and the future. When individuals flip the history of mankind the culture of consumerism concept has become a fragile substance now which is easy to break or amend with the help of technology today. The audiences of advertisements, the potential consumers have been seen in many different ways in marketing studies and in social sciences. The views have oscillated between a passive recipient and active meaning creator (e.g. Carpentier 2004, Morley 1995, Slater 1997, Uusitalo 1998,).

According to Daniel Lerner, work on modernization in Middle East is like the Passing Traditional Society, claimed that modernization origination from West, along with the modern media, would bring about the development of "modern", Western societies in the Middle East. Later views, influenced by the dependency theory regarded the development of modernization and the media in Middle East is a new sort of western colonialism and imperialism. But in the context of multicultural approaches, although the media are doubtless pulling Arab world into the "global village", this is a village in which many rivals continue to exist, and they wrap their consumer products in different cultural packages.

In context to Oman the possible cultural disclosure can be observed via the uprising media adverts. The technique of advertising in Oman is one of the uprising concepts. As the economy grows, advertising expenditure is rising across many sectors. Financial service (which covers home loan) spent 32 % more on ads in the first six months of 2007". Looking at the current trends in Oman advertising market, the sector acts as an indicator of economy as a whole. As the sultanate powers its way through a massive phase of real state expansion, the advertising industry registered a 56 % increase in the real estate and the insurance related advertising in the first six months of 2007 ( Pan Arab Research Center) . Financial service experienced a 32 % increase while the traditional market share leader, government and organization, increased its ad spend by 30 %.( The Report: Oman 2008, Journal published by Oxford Business Group)

THG ( The Holding Company ) is one of many advertising and PR agency currently expanding operations in the Sultanate, including : Buzzword- Action, Trans Arabian Creative Communication, Advertising International Company, Muscat Promoseven , Asha Advertising and Marketing, Oman Advertising Agency and Paradigm Communications. Although the ad spends in the Middle East generally tends to be skewed in favor of print media, Oman's media split is disproportionately high. Oman Advertising made a splash on the scene by increasing newspaper advertising more than 300 % in 2007 knocking GSM competitor Nawras Telecom from the top spot in the process. The Muscat Festival ran a close second with one million in newspaper advertising followed by Bank Muscat, Toyota and National Bank of Oman.

With the acceptance of vast cultural diversity the continuing popularity of advertising will rest heavily on its juxtaposition of modern everyday consumer. Hence the main purpose of this paper is to explore the impact advertising is creating on the cultural transformation among the people of Oman.

## **2. Literature Review**

One way to understand the impact of the media on our lives is to explore the cultural context in which the media operate. Often, culture is narrowly associated with art, the unique forms of creative expression that give pleasure and set standards about what is true, good, and beautiful.

Culture, however, can be viewed more broadly as the ways in which people live and represent themselves at particular historical times. This idea of culture encompasses fashion, sports, architecture, education, religion, and science, as well as mass media. Although we can study discrete cultural products, such as novels or songs from various historical periods, culture itself is always changing. It includes a society's art, beliefs, customs, games, technologies, traditions, and institutions. It also encompasses a society's modes of communication: the creation and use of symbol systems that convey information and meaning (e.g., languages, Morse code, motion pictures, and one-zero binary computer codes).

Culture is made up of both the products that a society fashions and, perhaps more important, the processes that forge those products and reflect a culture's diverse values. Thus culture may be defined as the symbols of expression that individuals, groups, and societies use to make sense of daily life and to articulate their values. According to this definition, when we listen to music, read a book, watch television, or scan the Internet, we usually are not asking "Is this art?" but are instead trying to identify or connect with something or someone. In other words, we are assigning meaning to the song, book, TV program, or Web site. Culture, therefore, is a process that delivers the values of a society through products or other meaning-making forms.

Yet how much the media shape society—and how much they simply respond to existing cultural issues—is still unknown. Although some media depictions may worsen social problems, research has seldom demonstrated that the media directly cause our society's major afflictions.

There is no single way to influence people to form favorable attitudes toward brands or to act in ways marketing communicator's desire. Rather, the appropriate influence strategy depends both on consumer characteristics (their motivation, opportunity, and ability to process marcom messages) and on brand strengths. If consumers are interested in learning about a product, and a company's brand has clear advantages over competitive brands, then the appropriate persuasion tactic is obvious: design a message telling people explicitly why your brand is superior.

Because people read newspapers for news, they are in the right mental frame to process advertisements that present news of store openings, new products, sales, and so forth. Mass audience coverage, or broad reach, is a second strength of newspaper advertising. Coverage is not restricted to specific socioeconomic or demographic groups but rather extends across all strata. However, newspaper readers on average are more economically upscale than television viewers. College graduates are more likely to read a newspaper than the population at large. Because economically advantaged consumers are comparatively light TV viewers, newspaper advertising provides a relatively inexpensive medium for reaching these consumers.

A second facet of newspaper flexibility is that this medium enables advertisers to design ads of many different sizes (56 in total); few size or length options are possible in other mass media. The ability to use detailed copy is another of newspaper advertising's strengths. Detailed product information and extensive editorial passages are used in newspaper advertising to an extent unparalleled by any other medium. Timeliness is the final significant strength of newspaper advertising. Short lead times (the time between placing an ad and having it run) permit advertisers to tie in advertising copy with local market developments or newsworthy events. Advertisers can develop copy or make copy changes quickly and thereby take advantage of dynamic marketplace developments.

Magazines are also a particularly good source for providing detailed product information and for conveying this information with a sense of authority. That is, because the editorial content of magazines often includes articles that themselves represent a sense of insight, expertise, and credibility, the advertisements carried in these magazines convey a similar sense of authority, or correctness. A final and especially notable feature of magazine advertising is its creative ability to get consumers involved in ads or, in a sense, to attract readers' interest and to engage them to think about the advertised brands. This ability is due to the self-selection and reader-controlled nature of magazines compared with more intrusive media such as radio and television.

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The result should be equally clear: Consumers likely will be swayed by your arguments, which will lead to a relatively enduring attitude change and a strong chance they will select your brand over competitive offerings. The reality, however, is that brands in most product categories are similar, so consumers generally are not anxious to devote mental effort toward processing messages that provide little new information. Thus, the marketing communicator, faced with this double whammy (only slightly involved consumers and a me-too brand), has to find ways to enthrall consumers sufficiently such that they will listen to or read the communicator's message.

### **2.1 Advertising Appeals: Emotional vs. Rational Appeal**

An appeal, according to Manrai et al.(1992), is the basic idea behind an advertisement or the basic reason why an audience should act. As a rule of thumb, the appeal is categorized as emotional or rational, even though these two types are, in other contexts, used interchangeably as mood/logical and transformational/informational appeals. Copeland who set forth the basic distinctions between emotional and rational appeals proposed that "an individual must have a reason for buying a product; that reason is either emotional or rational" (Stafford, 1993).

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) suggested that emotional appeals come from the emotional, experiential side of consumption. Kotler and Armstrong (1991, 426-427) define emotional appeal as an: "attempt to stir up either negative or positive emotions that can motivate purchase. These include fear, guilt, and shame appeals that get people to do things they should or stop doing things they shouldn't. Communicators also use positive emotional appeals such as love, humor, pride and joy." Emotional appeals are often strategically employed to influence consumers indirectly and make the consumer feel good about the product (Calder and Gruder 1989) and make a brand liked or friendly (Batra and Ray 1985), relying on feelings for effectiveness (Aaker et al 1992).

### **3. Methodology and Procedure**

The research conducted was Analytical Research and the data was collected with the help of a questionnaire in a cross sectional survey. After that a critical analysis was carried out of the collected facts and figures.

#### **3.1 Population**

The target population for the study was the educated Omani people from Muscat and Nizwa Area.

#### **3.2 Sample**

Sample of the study was composed of 100 participants which included people from different professions of life, i.e., students, teachers, bankers, salesmen, policemen etc. The sample was chosen using Purposive Sampling Technique.

#### **3.3 Variables**

In this Research, following variables were selected.

- Print Advertisements as Independent Variable.
- Consumers as Dependent Variable.

In this research, the Agenda Setting theory was utilized to check how the Print Advertisements have created a large influence on audiences, by their choices of content to consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space to give them.

Also Elaboration Likelihood Model was applied which is concerned not with the development of attitudes but with changing the direction of attitudes through persuasion (Shaughnessy, 2003).

#### **3.4 The Objectives of the Study are:**

- How much the Print Advertisements are influencing and changing the culture of Omani people.
- To discover how much the Omani people wish to adopt the behaviors presented in the Print Advertisements.
- To determine their understanding between the existing cultural values and those presented through Print Advertisements.

#### **3.5 Scope of the Study**

Omani people are exposed to various kinds of Print Advertisements almost every day and this study will help how the Print Advertisements can be improved to retain and transmit the cultural values among Omani people.

#### **3.6 The Hypotheses for the Research conducted are:**

*H1.* Print Advertisements are introducing subcultures among Omani people.

*H2.* Print Advertisements are changing the consumption patterns among Omani society.

### **4. Discussion**

Oman is a culture of rich values, traditions and heritage. After the leadership of his majesty, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said, Oman has flourished by leaps and bounds. In this development of the country, the role of the media also cannot be denied which is informing, educating and entertaining people in different walks of life.

Though media is playing a very vital role in every way, yet the fact cannot be denied that media influences a lot in changing people's opinions.

The purpose of this study is to find out the cultural transformation among the Omani people because of the Advertisements in the various print media; how the print Advertisements, whether they are in newspapers, brochures, flyers etc; are changing the way of the life of the people.

If we look at the ads in the different kinds of print media we can divide them in four categories, i.e., FMCG(Food or Daily Products), Classified Ads(Employment), Sales Promotion ads(Discounts/Offers/Coupons) and Business Ads(Finance/Real Estates).

The highest ratio of the Omani people read ads in both English and Arabic in the newspapers which is almost 45% and the rest prefer to see them in the magazines(32%), billboards(18%), posters(15%), brochures(12%) etc.

If one observes the content of the Print Ads, one would notice them to be very vibrant, using catchy headlines, body text etc. The impact of the Ad on most of the Omani people lasts more than one week(33%) which indicates how much they are getting influenced by the content shown in the print ads and according to them it is creating a positive effect on them.

The Omani culture is based on Islamic culture in which the mixing of girls and boys is not allowed and is considered inappropriate before marriage yet the ads covering Valentine's day could be seen in the print advertisements giving special offers to buy products for their loved ones; showing something out of the ordinary and creating a new culture in the society. due to which people especially youth have become fantasized.

The national dress of Oman is dishdashas but because of the ads a lot of people now prefer to wear other dresses like jeans, Capri, skirts, etc just to look modern, cool and stylish.

The Omani people prefer to eat their own national food but gradually they are accepting to dine in other restaurants like Continental, Chinese, Italian etc, only after looking at the content of print advertisements. Because of the content in the advertisements, the Omani people prefer to buy international brands more than the national or regional brands.

All these conditions are creating confusion among the Omani people; especially the youth as the youth gets most influenced from the media. They want to follow the values which they got from their family and parents but at the same time they want to adopt the values which are presented through print media which is creating cultural transformation among society and a sense of cultural conflict is rising among them.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article evaluates Omanis analysis of cultural phenomena in terms of its effectiveness for understanding contemporary print media production. The researchers begin by outlining the main features of Omani cultural trend and their norms competing with cognitive differences. Cross- cultural adaptation of immigrants had been an ancient story in Oman but the transformation of their attitudes and firm beliefs is a question of comprehensive understanding. This journal attempts to meet this need by presenting a multi-dimensional forum to understand the convergence of traditional media with modern thinking.

Earlier there were limited account of relationships between cultural consumption and cultural production. Today with the modernization era Oman is catering to both the extremes with diverse production and cross cultural consumption. We refer to examples from recent consume cognition to provide evidence for our arguments. The article argues that how media production via advertising is affecting cultural consumption in Oman. The clash of cognition vs. acceptance of diversity has been a question today. This research is an evidence to show the impact created by print ads over the consumers. The rise of more egalitarian attitude towards male and female can be depicted by the research. Their level of thinking and practices, transformation of life styles, families, public sphere has been experiences as a part of witness. Even in Oman there is an association of vast culturally diverse groups. These culturally diverse groups are more creative than homogenous single- culture group.

In research conducted over these distinct groups we found that within the Omani culture lies another group, who aspires to experiment with world today. Culturally homogenous group definitely have stiff base of cultural identity of sexual, gender, race. The later one , heterogeneous group is on a mission to synchronize itself with modernity and marches with the positive acceptance of this multi cultural environment. Authors believe that over a time there will be a breakdown of these assumptions that cross cultural relationship imposes stress and strains. On the whole, despite of strict gate keeping and ownership, print media is still managing to cater localities with a new taste of modernization and development. Thus be it small intellectual magazine to a entertainment book print media being the most economical source is solely responsible for steady cultural change in the vicinity of Sultanate.

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### 6. Appendix

#### 6.1 Questionnaire

(The survey is being conducted for the research regarding “Assumed Adverts leading to Presumed Consumers: Culture in Transition through Print Advertisement in Oman.” Your participation will greatly help to obtain the results...)

Name: -----

Gender:

Age:

Male	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Education:

Matric	Intermediate	Bachelors	Masters	Any Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Do you look at Print Advertisements?**

Yes  No

**2. Which Ad would you prefer to Read/See?**

Arabic  English  Both

**3. Which sources of print ads do you prefer to see?**

Newspapers  Magazines  Brochures   
 Flyers  Billboards  Posters  Other(specify)

**4. What category of advertisements interests you?**

FMCG(Food or Daily Products)                      Classified Ads(Employment)  
Sales Promotion ads(Discounts/Offers/Coupons)      Business Ads(Finance/Real Estates)

**5. How long does the impact of an Ad lasts on you?**

few hours    one day  
one week    more

**6. Name the Ad which you can recall instantly? Where did you see it?****7. What do you like about the ad which you have mentioned above?****8. Which element of the particular ad you focus on?**

Images    Caption    Slogan  
Layout    Color    Body text  
Concept    AnyOther(specify)

**9. How does an Ad affect you?**

Positive Affect    Develops Minor Interest    No Interest

**10. Do you to buy the product after looking at the ad?**

Yes    No

**11. Which brand would you prefer to buy after looking at the advertisement? Why?**

Local    National    International

**12. Do you attain any information regarding Omani cultural values through the Ad?****13. Do you think that message or images in the print ad is changing the culture of the society?**

Yes    No

**14. With regard to the above question, which dress would you prefer to buy?**

■ Jeans    ■ DishDashas    ■ Capris  
■ Skirts    ■ Any Other(specify)

**15. Do you think that the Ads motivates you to dine outside, in a restaurant, rather than cooking at home?**

• To some extent    ■ Completely    ■ Not at all

**16. With regard to the above question, which restaurant do you prefer to dine at? (You can tick multiple options for more than one choice):**

• Omani    ■ Chinese    ■ Continental  
• Italian    ■ Any Other

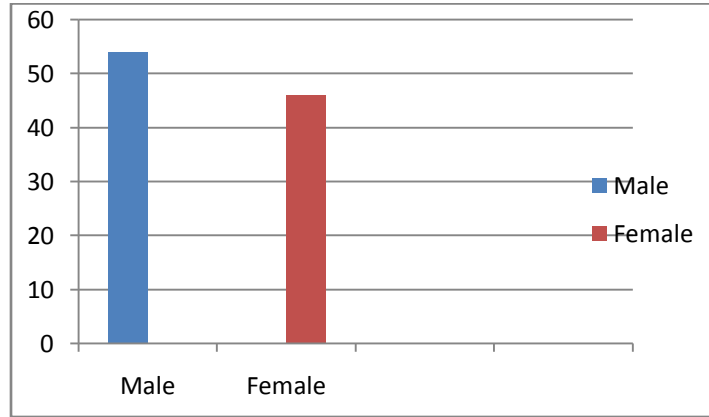
**17. Do you think that the Print Ads are:**

Creating Awareness    Changing Lifestyle/Trends  
Introducing New Culture    Promoting Local Culture

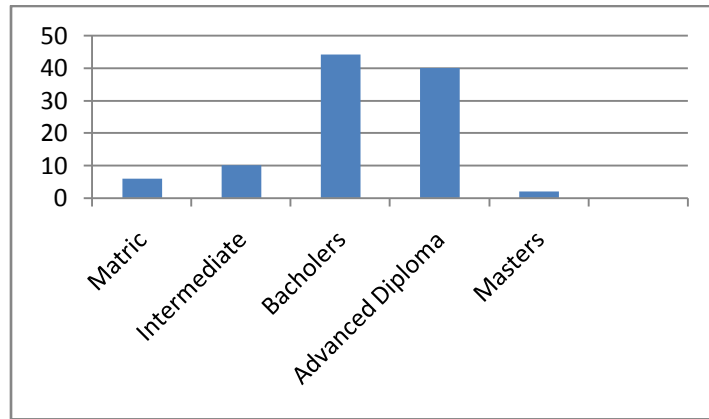
**18. Do you think that the Advertisements can be improved in any way? Any section would you like to add or edit?**

Thank you for your cooperation...

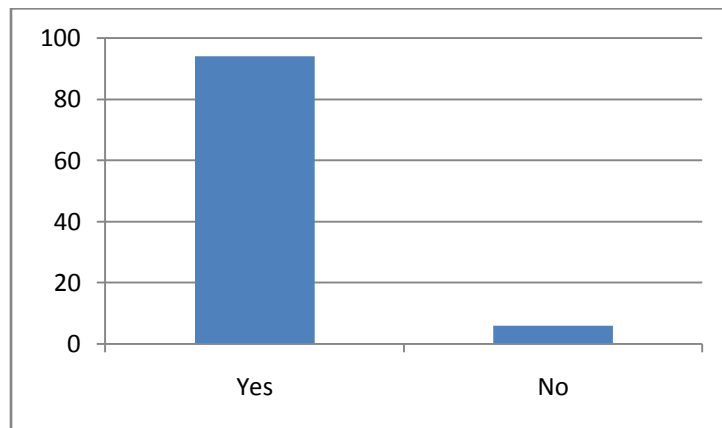
### 6.2 Graphs



**Figure 1: Percentage of Male and Female Participants of the Research.**

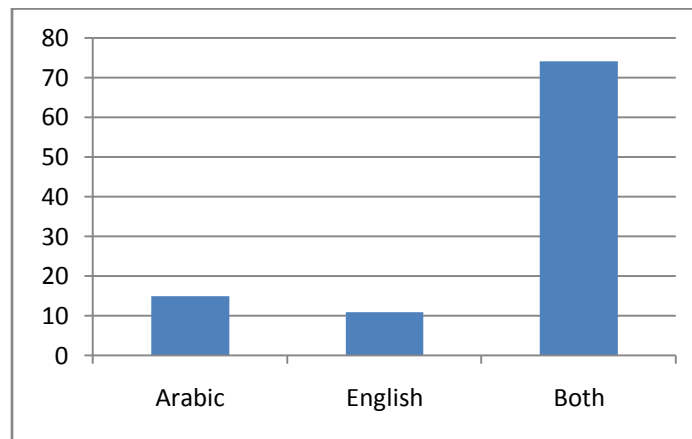


**Figure 2: Percentage of Educational Level of Respondents.**

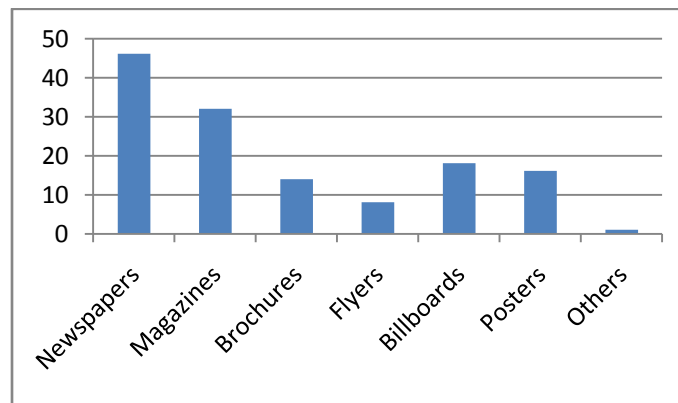


**Table1: Percentage of Respondents who look at the Print Advertisements?**

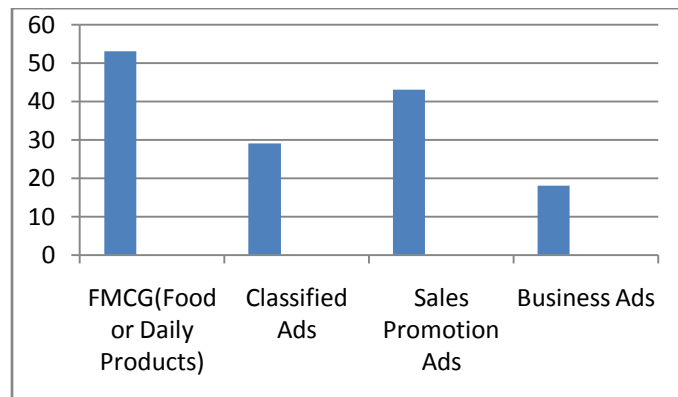




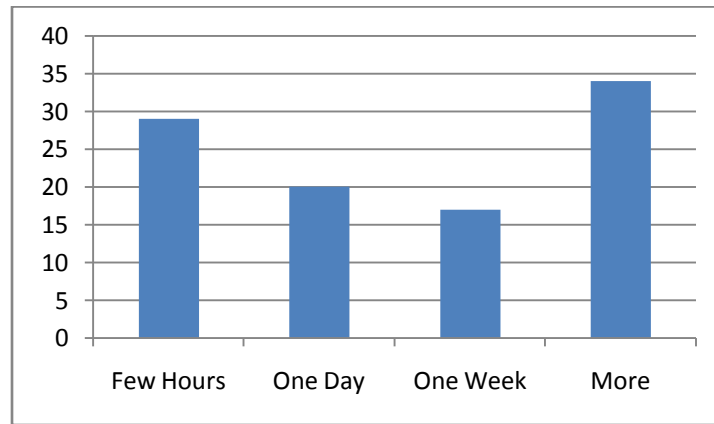
**Table 2: Percentage of Ads, Respondents like to Read/See.**



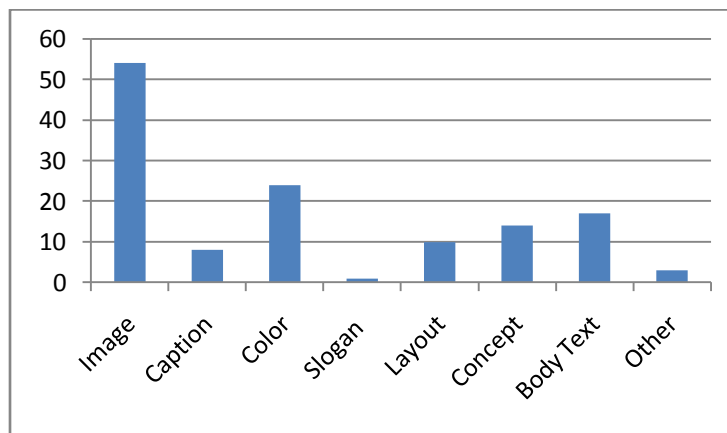
**Table 3: Percentage of the Sources of the Print Ads Respondents prefers to see. (Participants were given the option to choose more than one option.)**



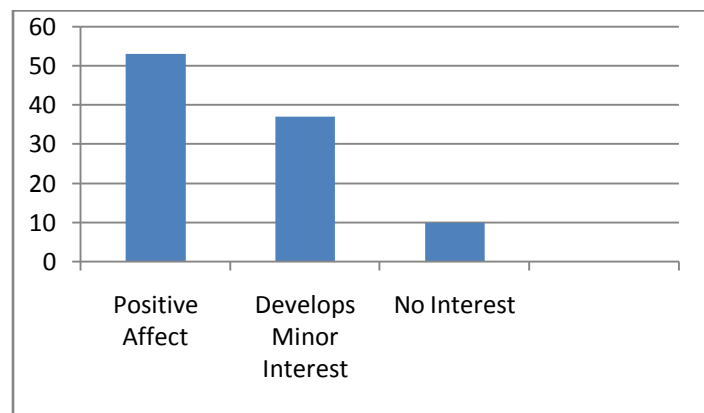
**Table 4: Percentage of the category of Ads Respondents was interested in. (Participants were given the option to choose more than one option.)**



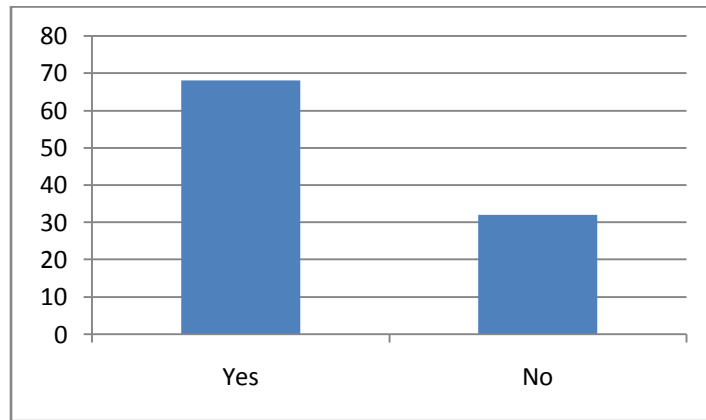
**Table 5: Percentage of the Impact of an Ad lasting on the Respondents.**



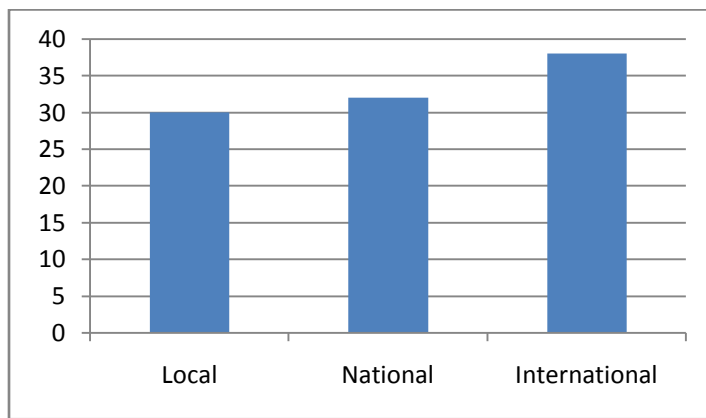
**Table 6: Percentage of Elements of an Ad Respondents focus on. (Participants were given the option to choose more than one option.)**



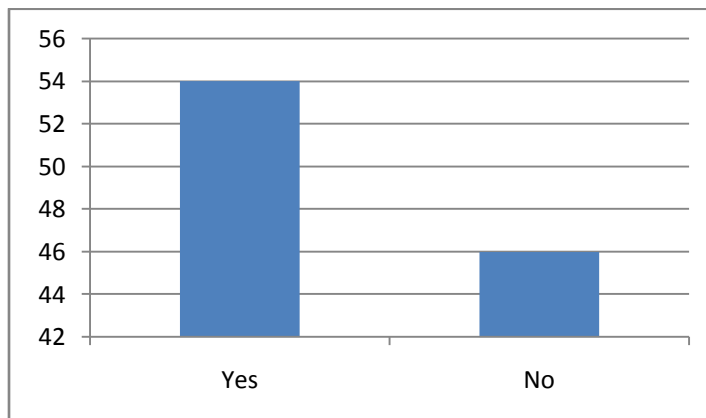
**Table 7: Percentage of Respondents affected by an Ad**



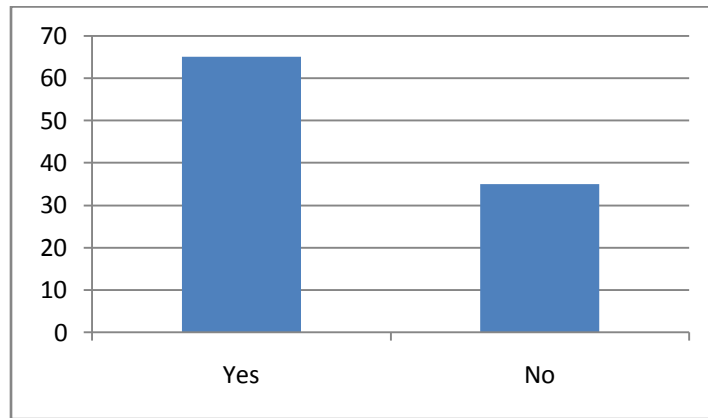
**Table 8: Percentage of Respondents who buy the product after looking at the Ad**



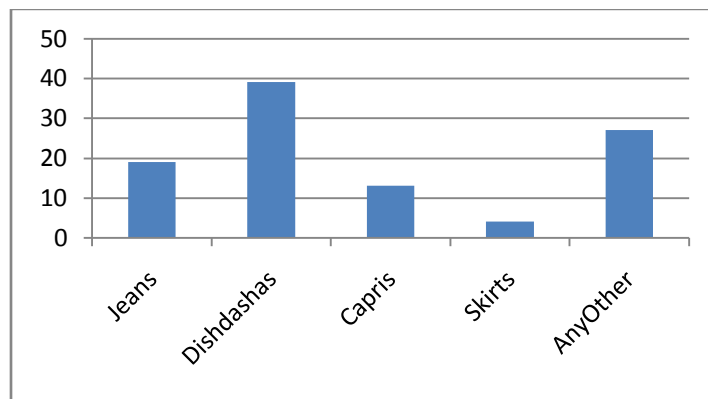
**Table 9: Percentage of Brands Respondents prefer to buy after looking at the Ad**



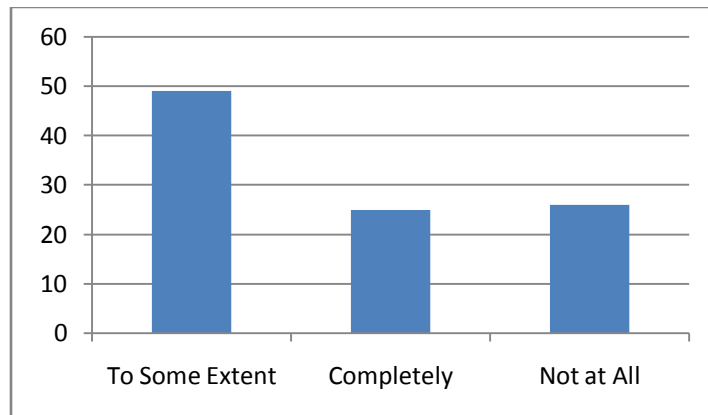
**Table 10: Percentage of Respondents who think that they attain any information regarding Omani cultural values through the Ad**



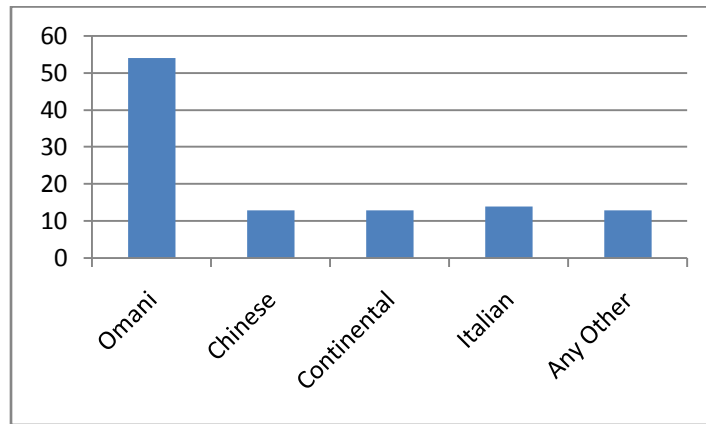
**Table 11: Percentage of Respondents who think that messages or images in the Print Ad is changing the culture of Society.**



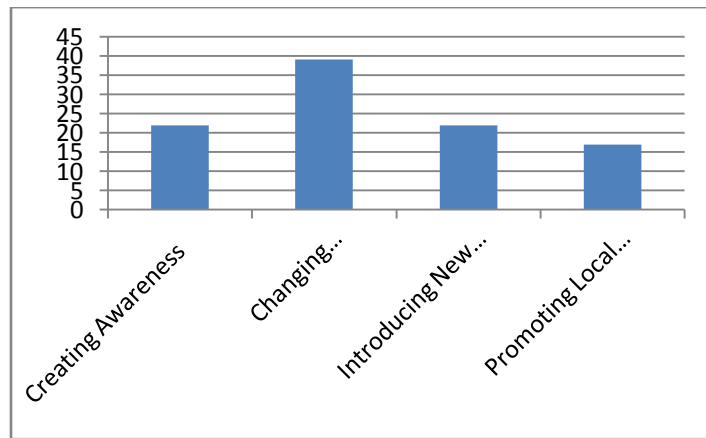
**Table 12: Percentage of Respondents who prefer to buy the dress after looking at the Print Ads**



**Table 13: Percentage of Respondents who gets motivated to dine outside after looking at the Print Ads**



**Table 14: Percentage of Restaurants, Respondents prefer to dine at. (Participants were given the option to choose more than one option.)**



**Table 15: Percentage of Respondents who think that Print Ads**