Cultural Interplay: Examining the Effect of Cultural Advertising on Audience Engagement in Lebanon in 2022 and 2023

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the cultural advertising strategies used by Almaza – Lebanon's leading beer company – to engage their Lebanese audience. To examine the effect of cultural advertisements on the Lebanese youth, this study will analyze the effectiveness of Almaza's cultural advertising practices on its Facebook and Instagram ads in 2022 and 2023. By collecting raw data from social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram), our study aims to analyze the effectiveness of cultural ads on the Lebanese youth. The findings of our study showed that the Lebanese youth who seem liberal and often reject culture in many of its forms, respond and engage with ads that reference the different aspects of their culture. Therefore, companies that implement cultural aspects in their ads such as Almaza, ensure the engagement of their audience.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication, Advertising, Social Media, Cultural Advertising, Lebanon, Audience Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

With the ongoing importance of establishing a strong online presence and keeping up with the growth of the digital age, all the sub-branches stemming from marketing communications need to appeal to the audience's scopes of interest. In terms of advertising, brands and companies should craft their advertisements miscellaneously, taking into account external forces that can be woven into these commercial means. Advertisements and their creation have widened their methods, style, and tactics, aiming to reach the targeted audience by touching on various paradigms.

The implementation of cultural references has been an additional strategy to effectively craft and link cultural motives and practices to successful Integrated Marketing Communication practices. Success in advertising campaigns can be achieved by relying on shared aspects of the culture such as common "attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and values" which can be capitalized on" yet avoid "aspects of culture which might lessen the impact of advertising investment" (Samiee and Jeong, 1994).

The discourse on cultural advertising can be intrinsically focal in the Middle Eastern region because of the core cultural essences that most of these countries' populations hold on to. In Lebanon specifically, it is essential to note that culture is a primary foundation of many fields such as culinary and fine arts, social customs, language usage, media and entertainment, and more.

Our study reduces the scope of advertising to Instagram and Facebook ads solely in terms of social networks, therefore, it is essential to understand the appropriate target audience of these applications to better evaluate the effectiveness of cultural advertising in terms of their demographics and psychographics. Generally, the main users of Facebook and Instagram in Lebanon are youth who are more likely to engage with content that either appeals to them or repels them. It is essential to note that engagement is not only based on whether the target audience seems positively interested in the content presented, but it also includes engaging to voice a dislike of what it exhibited.

The Lebanese subgroup that mainly uses these two platforms is approximately between 16 and 30 years old. They constitute the part of the Lebanese population who support fundamental freedoms and share the most liberal views. They promote themselves as individuals who believe in freedom of speech and voicing their opinions, especially when it comes to social issues that dominate Lebanon. They utilize their public space on digital platforms to voice their opinions deliberately. This category of Lebanese people is more open to sharing raw viewpoints, challenging the norms, and criticizing opinions, traditions, and culture if they deem them wrong. They tend to believe that many of their national problems stem from collectivism and that being individualistic is a form of rebellion against what they consider problematic in their culture.

Understanding the cultural sphere and the importance of culture for the participants of our study is essential for the accuracy of the results because "consumers who grow up in a particular culture become accustomed to that culture's value systems, beliefs, and perception processes", therefore, "they respond to advertising messages in a manner that is congruent to their cultural values and norms" (Zhang and Neelankavil, 1997).

2. HYPOTHESIS

To check the validity of cultural advertising in Lebanon and whether it is a successful practice in the Lebanese context, this study will analyze the effectiveness of cultural advertising in the ads of Almaza, Lebanon's leading beer brewery since 1933, by comparing the audience engagement between their cultural ads versus their normal ads. Our model discusses individualistic and collectivist social dimensions and uses the Encoding/Decoding theory, Sociocultural theory, and Cultural Dimension theory to examine the importance and degree of effectiveness of cultural ads in Lebanon to enhance the interaction between Almaza's ads over two years, 2022 and 2023, on both Facebook and Instagram and their appropriate audience – the Lebanese youth. We will attest to how this category of the Lebanese population is more likely to interact with cultural ads because of their strong attachment to specific aspects of the Lebanese culture, and how even when they deem themselves liberals with deliberate thoughts and ideals, when it comes to the essence of their culture, they show collectivist motives. Furthermore, we will examine how Almaza's creative culture advertisements have received exponential engagement growth from its audience in comparison with their normal/other ads.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to a cross-cultural study conducted to examine the influence of culture on advertising effectiveness in China and the USA, Zhang and Neelankavil (1997) elucidate that the effectiveness of cultural advertising is not absolute, especially when taking into account different ethnicities and how they respond to cultural norms. Their findings were analyzed in light of the individualism-collectivism dimensions of culture by explaining that both theories view culture depending on one or the other. Their study experimented on 160 university students (80 USA students and 80 Chinese students) by taking into consideration variables such as the country (USA or China), advertising appeals (individualistic or collectivist), and product types (personal and non-personal). After careful examination, they were able to find that US citizens are more likely to engage with individualistic advertising appeals and Chinese citizens are more likely to engage with collectivist advertising appeals. Regardless of how each dimension relates to traditional definitions of culture, this study proves that people are a product of their culture, no matter what it dictates.

Additionally, Samiee and Jeong (1994) explore the similarity between European and North American cultures. They explain how people from these countries favor independent goals and relationships rather than group goals, whereas people living in the Asian-Pacific, Asia, Latin America, and Africa region are more apt to have interdependent goals and relationships. By exploring the ethnography of individuals, we are able to understand the cultural environment of people which will help us identify the nature of advertisements that resonate with them.

With individualistic groups, it is harder to design one advertisement that can touch on multiple independent values, because their individualities do not align with one specific norm that resonates with the group as a whole. The majority of people with individualistic views share the same understanding and concept of independence and individuality, yet the subcategories deriving from this individualism can vary from one person to another. In such cases, they are more likely to engage with ads that resonate with the general ideas of "independence, achievement, freedom, high levels of competition, and pleasure" (Zhang and Neelankavil, 1997).

Collectivist groups, however, are easier to reach when approached communally because of the linearity of their values and views. Therefore, using the shared culture when creating advertisements facilitates reaching the appropriate audience and ensuring engagement, because "advertising, as a form of communication, is particularly reflective, and indicative of culture and its norms" (Zhang and Neelankavil, 1997). By generating cultural ideas that can be implemented in advertising, brands and companies can "capitalize on" their target audience's "shared attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and values" in order to "achieve success in advertisement campaigns" (Zhang and Neelankavil, 1997).

While both individualists and collectivists share different values, the accentuation of values of freedom in the individualistic approach further enlarges the chances of commonality. Collectivist views, however, rarely change when addressing the targeted audience because of the shared values that unify their culture and facilitate communication and accessibility.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS
4.1 ENCODING/DECODING THEORY

In the process of creating advertisements that will ensure audience engagement, advertising specialists should address their ads efficiently to benefit the brand and reach the appropriate addressees. Hall's (1973) encoding and decoding theory can be applied in the cultural advertising realm, for advertising is an essential form of communication – a message – that works as a link between the sender and the receiver.

Encoding is the process by which the person disseminating the information changes the intention, message, meaning, or point of view that is expressed by spoken or nonverbal means into a symbolic code or information form that follows predetermined guidelines and is simple to comprehend and translate. Within the semantic chain of discourse, codes function to structure the encoding process, just like in any other language or communication medium (Hall, 1973).

Because marketing is a branch of mass communication and so is encoding, advertisements are core elements of Integrated Marketing Communication that expressly work as a form of communication between a brand or company and its target audience, to convey a message through symbolic representations. Hall (1973) asserts that the recipient of the information participates actively in cultural, and media means when decoding the message. Within the realm of media communication, the audience can be viewed as both the information source and the recipient of the message through other media means.

By analogy, as communication outlets broadcasted on media channels, advertisements can encode the meaning intended and are circulated to their target audience through multiple forms such as TV ads, social media ads, billboards, radio ads, guerillas, and more. Crafting and encoding advertisements can hence be considered "an area of practice in which science and art are forced together in the interests of commerce" (Hackley, 2011).

In the encoding part of mass communication, the audience's feedback can be considered as the process of reproducing the meaning (Dickinson & Linne, 1998). Hall's core essence of his theory is that "the receiver has an active role in media and cultural studies" (Alasuutari, 1999). Considering the importance of this claim in this theory, the encoder – and in the context of our study, the advertisement creator – should take into consideration the audience's cultural background and preferences when creating an advertisement.

When it comes to the decoding part of Hall's theory, he explains that the receivers can dissect the transmitted message in different ways. This is mainly because of "the difference in the audience's cultural background, knowledge structure, social status, ideological understanding, economic status, values, and decoding context" (Xie *et al.*, 2022).

By correlating the former analogy to the concept of cultural advertising, we can understand that the message circulating between the encoder and decoder is not linear, but rather goes through different interpretations because of the pragmatic nature of the message in media and communication models. Therefore, the target audience's culture and all its subdivisions should be taken into account by the encoder when working on advertisements to have them decoded by the receivers (and decoders) without changing the ad's meaning, hence achieving its purpose. As the message is decoded initially by the decoders, they recode it again and send it to other receivers,

adding newer meanings to the first encoded message. By following a cycle of encoding and decoding a message that is not absolute, the schema of the message becomes circular instead of linear, widening the multiplicity of interpretations and meanings of the message.

To better understand the concept of encoding and decoding in its cultural sphere, Katz and Liebes (1990) add a referential frame that aligns with Hall's theory. Referential decoding statements connect the message with the real world "which involves more emotion" (Xie *et al.*, 2022). The increase in emotion ensures an increase in engagement when the audience resonates with an advertisement. Katz and Liebes's (1990) referential framework has "proved the correctness of the Hall model" by providing an "operational standard for observing and studying audience decoding" and relying on "a series of previous experiences in real world and critical thinking" to allow ads to reverberate with the target audience further leading to their engagement (Xie *et al.*, 2022).

This theory is a core element of our study because it helps us analyze how the message is encoded by Almaza, how it is decoded by the appropriate target audience, and how it is circulated and encoded again by decoders. In terms of our study's method, the decoders can reencode the message by sharing the ad again. Therefore, this study deals with this theory in terms of the circular cycle that the message goes through when delivered from its sender to its appropriate target audience. The main question that adjoins this theory and our study is: how is Almaza's target audience decoding the cultural ads they are exposed to on Facebook and Instagram, and how are they encoding them again?

4.2 CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY

To directly establish a link between encoding/decoding theory, consumer culture theory (CCT), and cultural advertising, and show the relevance of this theoretical framework to the study's purpose, it is essential to note that Arnould and Thompson (2018), along with many consumer culture theorists, argue that "consumers creatively and constructively rework mass media and advertising messages in ways that often run against the grain of their corporate encoded meanings". This consumer culture claim further reinforces the importance of culture in media means, specifically advertisements, and aligns with the previously cited theorists examining the encoding/decoding theory who prominently stress the idea that the message sent by the encoder can be decoded differently than how they were initially sent and can never be absolute. Thus, consumer culture theory similarly emphasizes the role of culture in reshaping the meaning of a specific message by analyzing it with respect to pragmatic and cultural examinations.

In cultural advertising, the fundamental role of the ad is to take into account the audience's cultural background and work appropriately. According to the establishers of this theory, Arnould and Thompson (2005), CCT refers to the process wherein market research and consumer behavior can be approached from a range of socio-cultural perspectives (Arnould *et al.*, 2019). Similar to the encoding and decoding theory, CCT also takes into consideration "the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological level of consumption" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In advertising, the 'consumer' is in contact with the advertisement rather than a tangible product.

In the context of this study which takes into consideration cultural advertising, the consumption of media through the consumer culture theory refers to the audience's engagement with an ad in

light of its cultural reflection. By that, we mean the degree to which the audience is likely to 'consume' and engage with the ad because the latter exhibits an explicit replica of the audience's cultural surroundings. In that sense, culture plays a pivotal role in how the audience consumes the ad and interacts with it to determine the degree of its success.

Through CCT, companies can "unravel the complexities of consumer culture" to center their ads around cultural components that guarantee engagement (Arnould *et al.*, 2019). This theoretical framework of mass communication and marketing emphasizes similar notions explored in the encoding/decoding theory, where culture (and in the encoding/decoding theory, the message) is not a "a fairly homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life, and unifying values shared by a member of society" but rather insinuates that it is a "heterogeneous distribution of meanings" that takes into consideration "what consumers do and believe" (Arnould *et al.*, 2019).

Both theories, therefore, accentuate the importance of individual experiences in the translation – or decoding – of an ad through the process of correlating it to culture, because culture shapes the individual experience of a consumer through the set of values, ideologies, and beliefs that it imposes. Through consumer culture theory, Slater (1997) explores how companies and markets mediate the relationships between "meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend" (Arnould *et al.*, 2019). Here again, the consumer culture theory and the encoding/decoding theory highlight the importance of deciphering symbols and meanings in the determination of pragmatic meaning – a contextual final connotation that the audience receives and reformulates by reference to culture.

Consumer culture theory is relevant to the concept of cultural advertising because it is not a unified theory but rather an ever-evolving viewpoint of markets and consumer society that are shaped by cultural life; CCT is far from being a linear approach but rather provides a method for evaluating consumption within certain socio-cultural systems and by taking into consideration the audience's series of previous experiences (Joy and Li, 2012). The main question that relates CCT to the scope of our study is: how is Almaza using its consumers' culture to craft ads for its Facebook and Instagram ads, aiming for the engagement of this target audience?

4.3 RECEPTION THEORY

Another theoretical framework that converges with cultural advertising is the reception theory which also, along with the two former theories previously discussed, "must be understood as a more cohesive, conscious, and collective undertaking" (Holub, 2013). The reception theory can be defined as "a reaction to social, intellectual, and literary developments" (Holub, 2013). Audience reception has been a key element for many media outlets and productions because it takes into account the multitude of meanings that can be derived both internally, through the creation of a specific message, and externally, through the audience's understanding and contextual meaning. It is essential to understand audience reception and how individuals "find meaning in their encounters with media" because audience reception and the formation of meaning is "a process that wrestles with concepts of identity and shifting alignments to social signifiers" (Crosby, 2020). Culture, therefore, a leading factor that affects one's identity and social interplay, is a fundamental component in the process of audience reception.

When discussing advertising through the scope of the reception theory, the "cultural audience research", which views the audience as a synergistic entity with its cultural surroundings, can be divided into three sub-categories: "reception studies, media ethnography, and constructionism" (Puustinen, 2005). These categories are analogous to the three units of the encoding/decoding cycle where the encoder sends a message to the decoder. Through the reception theory, we are able to closely examine the effectiveness of a cultural advertisement by analyzing how the audience receives the ad, investigates it ethnographically, and irrevocably constructs a final outlook toward it which will then determine the degree of engagement.

Reception theory expands on the idea of contextual meaning being constituted "by the interaction between [the ad] and [the audience]" (Holub, 2013). Therefore, in cultural advertising and specifically through the lens of the reception theory, the interaction based on cultural linkage pledges a degree of interaction and engagement from the audience that will determine the ad's success level.

We have seen the process of constructing a final understanding of an ad in the consumer culture theory where "multiple concepts and research domains" are used to better understand audience conception (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). By creating culturally oriented advertisements, companies are delivering their ideas and ensuring a higher percentage of positive reception because of the essential role of culture in affecting and understanding the meaning, which will enhance the probability of audience engagement.

By intertwining cultural aspects in advertisements, we are constituting the "units of reception theory" which not only relies on the importance of the receiver (and in the spec of our study, the audience watching the ad) decoding (as per the encoding/ decoding the theory) and contextualizing (as per the consumer culture theory) the message but rather focus on the advertisement itself being "framed by a certain theoretical model of communication" – culture (Skrendo and Warso, 2016).

The study of Skrendo and Warso (2016) quotes many other contributors to the reception theory who view it from "the outside" rather than "the inside". This is to say that not only is the audience internalizing this form of communication as the context dictates, but the advertisement itself and how it is designed is considered as the core focus. Ryszard Handke, as quoted by Skrendo and Warso (2016), suggests putting the work "within the realia of a communicative situation" where "it reveals the multitude of codes used to formulate it" yet still attributes a role to the receiver, "constituting a part in the act of its reception."

By applying the perspective of the reception theory to cultural advertising, companies are able to design advertisements that can reach the appropriate audience and ensure that the decoded message aligns with the audience's influential context; on the one hand, by working on the ad internally and adding cultural references affiliated with the appropriate audience, and on the other hand by delivering the ad in a way that can be externally decoded by the audience yet still achieve the designated purpose. Therefore, the purpose of this theory in regard to our study is to help us understand, as much as possible, how the audience receives and internalizes the cultural ads made by Almaza.

5. METHOD

In order to examine the above-mentioned hypothesis, this research will make use of raw social media data collections taken from various social media networks wherein Almaza posts its advertisements. Social media data refers to information such as the number of likes, comments, and shares that a post receives on a network that shows how users viewing your content engage with it. It is essential to note that this method of data collection is described as raw social media data collection because the numbers that will be analyzed are available to all users and are not taken from Almaza's personal data analytics, but rather a public analysis of accessible statistics. For more accurate results, the social media networks that are taken into consideration for this study are two of the most used platforms for the studied target audience in Lebanon where Almaza showcases its ads: Instagram and Facebook during 2022 and 2023. The study will compare the data between advertisements incorporating Lebanese cultural references and other non-cultural advertisements. To further ensure the accuracy of our results, the data collected will be divided based on platform and years.

6. RESULTS

The findings of our study turned up several interesting trends and patterns regarding the efficiency of Almaza's cultural advertisements. A thorough analysis of these results is provided in the following parts, providing insights into audience engagement and the influence of cultural factors on social media interactions.

Our results are divided into 8 figures: 4 figures that show the audience's engagement in cultural ads (CA), and 4 other figures that show the audience's engagement in noncultural ads (NA). Additionally, we subdivided each of these categories in terms of year and social media application. Therefore, we laid out our results in terms of CA – NA ads on Instagram in 2022, CA – NA ads on Facebook in 2022, CA – NA ads on Instagram in 2023, and CA – NA ads on Facebook in 2023. The reason for doing so is to take into account the difference between applications because the number of Lebanese youths who are active on Instagram and Facebook might differ, and because the degree of engagement from one year to another might also fluctuate.

TABLE I. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON CULTURAL ADVERTISEMENTS IN 2022 – INSTAGRAM

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
CA1	4,308	220	3,444
CA2	7,400	59	480
CA3	4,242	35	769

CA1: Almaza's public acknowledgment of the Lebanese alternative precision dance crew, Mayyas, who qualified for the finals in America's Got Talent (AGT) season 17. As the Lebanese population shared their pride and contentment for Mayyas, Almaza decided to do the same, emulating the precision dance poses of the dancers with the beer bottles. They wrote "Proudly Lebanese! Congratulations Mayyas Dance Crew", associating the pride of the Lebanese dancers with the original Lebanese beer.

CA2: another ad honoring Mayyas after they won AGT season 17. The Instagram post incorporated the same pose matching the dancers with the beer bottle caps opened and the words "Hats Off Mayyas".

CA3: an ad posted during the period of the 2022 parliamentary elections when many political parties launched their election campaigns. Because Lebanese politicians are known for bribing their voters, Almaza posted an ad with the forefinger and electoral ink replaced with a diamond. Their caption translates to "Your vote is yours, even if they give you a diamond". Almaza translates to diamond in Arabic; therefore, this ad shows the importance of social values for Almaza and proves that they are more than a mere company that only cares about selling products.

TABLE II. Audience Engagement on non-Cultural Advertisements in 2022 – Instagram

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
NA1	2,080	7	62
NA2	1,719	8	23
NA3	2,582	13	158

NA1: an ad about the launch of a new size for Almaza's canned beer. It includes one large can and a smaller one, with the quote "It's going to be a long meeting, make it short".

NA2: an ad encouraging UGC, where people who take a picture of their Almaza beer and post it on their Instagram accounts can get the chance to fly with Almaza.

NA3: an ad about the launch of new limited-edition bottles of Almaza that include letters on their packaging. People can buy bottles that have their name initials on them or formulate words using Almaza bottles. The Instagram ad shows the new Almaza bottles with the letters of the expression "limited edition".

TABLE III. Audience Engagement on Cultural Advertisements in 2023 – Instagram

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
CA4	2,980	20	6
CA5	3,403	42	33
CA6	2,366	5	44

CA4: this ad shows the new color of Almaza bottles going from green to dark brown as winter comes. Lebanese people are known for their major seasonal transitions in terms of clothes, colors, and more. Almaza quotes the Lebanese famous saying "We're putting the winter appeal" with two brown Almaza bottles facing a chimney.

CA5: this ad is a product launch of a new "unfiltered" beer. Almaza describes it as "A beer as brave as you". This reflects the culturally known title of Lebanese people being brave and resilient after all the hardships that they've faced. Almaza is making a product that is similar to its audience.

CA6: word playing on the famous Arabic saying, "Go and don't come back", Almaza created this ad at the end of summer 2023 when the diaspora left Lebanon, quoting "Go and come back" next to

an Almaza bottle and a flying airplane. This ad is culturally significant to Lebanese people because of their well-known reliance on and anticipation of their diaspora every summer season.

TABLE IV. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON NON-CULTURAL ADVERTISEMENTS IN 2023 – INSTAGRAM

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
NA4	1,665	2	2
NA5	1,291	1	20
NA6	1,533	4	6

NA4: an ad about the launch of the new mini size of the Light Almaza beer, mentioning the number of calories next to a picture of the bottle.

NA5: an ad about a brand collaboration between Almaza and Rifai (the largest nut-retailing company in the Middle East) for a famous local festival. With every Almaza purchase, buyers will get a small Rifai pack.

NA6: an ad about a collaboration between Almaza and Virgin Radio Lebanon, announcing a happy hour brought to the listeners of the radio station by Almaza's Unfiltered beer.

TABLE V. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON CULTURAL ADVERTISEMENTS IN 2022 – FACEBOOK

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
CA7	1,200	42	8
CA8	1,300	22	7
CA9	1,300	18	20

CA7: when the Lebanese people had to suffer from severe electricity and generator outages in 2022, Almaza dedicated a Facebook ad with the darker edition of the bottle quoting "Will keep you company in the dark!"

CA8: following the multiple crises of 2022, many Lebanese could not afford to go to the beaches because of the fuel crisis and the increased entrance prices following the fluctuating LBP rate. Since beer is a traditional summer drink for Lebanese, Almaza, through this Facebook ad, showed a woman tanning on her balcony with an Almaza bottle next to her. The picture quoted the Arabic translation of "A homemade beach".

CA9: after the Lebanese basketball team qualified for the Asian World Cup final, Almaza dedicated a Facebook ad to show their pride. They chose an extreme close-up shot of a basketball showing the texture of the ball made of small circles, with "Goosebumps, we did it" written over it. The two O's are replaced by Almaza's bottle caps.

TABLE VI. Audience Engagement on Non-Cultural Advertisements in 2022 – Facebook

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
NA7	356	145	7
NA8	636	23	4
NA9	377	13	8

NA7: this ad shows a giveaway made by Almaza on 2/2/2022 where people can tag and get the chance to win two packs of Almaza bottles 33cl.

NA8: on Father's Day, Almaza asked its audience to share a picture of their father with an Almaza bottle. This ad falls in the non-cultural category because this holiday is not for Lebanese people solely nor did Almaza make use of cultural references to interact with its audience.

NA9: Almaza dedicated a Facebook ad to wish a happy Valentine's Day to its audience. Similarly to NA8, this ad falls in the non-cultural category because this holiday is not for Lebanese people solely nor did Almaza establish cultural references to send its wishes.

TABLE VII. Audience Engagement on Cultural Advertisements in 2023 – Facebook

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
CA10	1,500	45	20
CA11	1,400	18	7
CA12	1,300	50	17

CA10: at the start of the winter season, Almaza quoted the famous Lebanese singer, Fairuz, making use of her song 'Habaytak Bil Sayf' (which translates to "I loved you in summer"). The picture cited the part of the song that translates to "I loved you in the summer, I will love you in the winter". This shows that although Lebanese people mainly associate beer with summer, Almaza is also a winter drink.

CA11: Lebanese people are known for calling the snow season "saison", which translates to 'season' in French. As done in CA10, Almaza is further reinforcing the idea that their beer is also an essential part of the Lebanese people's winter season.

CA12: an ad for the product launch of Almaza's canned beer making use of the famous Lebanese saying, "If your head is a can", which is often used by Lebanese people to humiliate and insult someone whom they think has stubborn views or takes time to understand.

TABLE VIII. Audience Engagement on Non-Cultural Advertisements in 2023 – Facebook

Ad	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
NA10	783	14	1
NA11	896	16	2
NA12	942	12	5

NA10: an ad with the bottle caps forming a thought bubble quoting "always a good idea".

NA11: an ad showing different Almaza bottles held by people next to the beach in preparation for the coming of spring.

NA12: another introductory ad for the launch of the new light Almaza mini with a small nutritional informational panel of its size and calories written next to the picture of the bottle.

7. DISCUSSION

As the results show, the ads that include cultural references witness more interaction from their audience in terms of likes, comments, and shares on both Instagram and Facebook during 2022 and 2023. These results prove that the encoding of the cultural message and its decoding are done by using the same symbols and codes. This shows that the cultural ads of Almaza follow a simple pattern of encoding and decoding that aligns with their audience's interests. Because of this common structure that Almaza builds with its audience, they are able to deliver ads that resonate with their audience and encode messages that can be decoded unproblematically, guaranteeing engagement and interaction.

Almaza's rationale behind the creation of successful cultural ads is because of their understanding of their consumers' culture and their awareness of aspects of CCT. They know that their audience is shaped by the cultural surroundings, therefore their approaches are crafted to help the audience dissect the messages following their consumer's culture and its significance in the advertisement. However, because of the sensitive viewpoints that the Lebanese youth show toward their culture, Almaza uses aspects of culture that their target audience in these two applications seems to partake in.

By taking into consideration the concept of audience reception, Almaza undergoes cultural audience research and chooses categories that are of personal preference to viewers such as social, artistic, and humorous takes. Through our results, we were able to find recurring patterns between ads delivered in the same way which we will compare in the following parts of our discussion. These significant patterns follow the sub-divisions of the reception theory that focus on reception studies, media ethnography, and constructivism. The Lebanese youth seem to favor the part of culture that does not centralize politics and conflicts, but rather aspects that align with their liberal views.

It is essential to note that even in their non-cultural ads, Almaza still uses implicit aspects of Lebanese culture such as switching between Arabic, English, and French in their advertising languages. Lebanese people are known for their trilingualism and fluency in all three languages, which is an encoded aspect of culture even when shown indirectly. This is to prove that some aspects of the Lebanese culture are deeply embedded in Almaza's advertising strategies.

However, when looking at explicit expressions and displays of culture ranging from social issues in ads (CA2 and CA8) to famous Lebanese sayings (CA6, CA11, and CA12), or Lebanese music and singers (CA10), the Lebanese audience showed significant engagement. Especially when it comes to ads sharing collective pride in Lebanese talents such as CA1, CA2, and CA9, the Lebanese audience showed even greater engagement. This shows the collectivist nature of the Lebanese population, which shares similar values in terms of interest and the "subordination of

personal interests to the goals of the group" (Zhang and Neelankavil, 1997). These results prove both parts of the hypothesis which state that the Lebanese people have collectivist aspects in their cultural environment even if they promote themselves as the opposite, and they interact more proficiently with cultural ads that reflect their Lebanese identity following the ideas of encoding/decoding, CCT, and reception theory specifically.

Nevertheless, on ads such as NA7, we notice a higher number of comments than any other non-cultural ad. This is mainly because this advertisement is a giveaway that requires the audience to comment for a chance to win. However, when looking at other engagement signifiers on such posts (such as likes and shares), we do not notice a similar level of engagement. This shows that the interaction on these posts is merely for winning and not to show appreciation or interest beyond the purpose of obtaining a price.

Generally speaking, as noticed in all 8 figures in both 2022 and 2023 on both Instagram and Facebook, CA ads showed more audience engagement because they utilize cultural references to market their beer. Additionally, if we compare advertisements that have the same purpose such as NA12 and CA12, we can see a difference in audience engagement on Facebook during 2023. The purpose of both ads was to market the launch of new types of Almaza beers. However, in CA12, Almaza used Lebanese cultural references when delivering their message, whereas, in NA12, they introduced their product using nutritional references.

Similarly on Instagram in 2022, audience engagement on ads shows analogous patterns. In NA4, which also relied on mentioning nutritional value to market the launch of the new mini light beer, the engagement statistics are much lower than CA5, which described the Unfiltered Beer as brave as the Lebanese people. Not only did Almaza associate the characteristics of this beer with the characteristics of Lebanese people, but they also chose appropriate wording to create a connection between one of their products and their target audience known for bravery and resilience.

8. CONCLUSION

Almaza's target audience on Facebook and Instagram – the Lebanese youth, has shown greater engagement in cultural ads than noncultural ads in both 2022 and 2023 on both social platforms. This leads us to the interpretation that although this category of Lebanese people usually supports liberal viewpoints that differ from the traditional norms of its surroundings, the Lebanese youth has shown greater interest in cultural ads, and collectivist viewpoints toward the essential aspects of their culture, especially when these ads reverberate with the Lebanese culture that shifts from extremism and goes far beyond politics, sectarianism, socio-economic problems, inequality, and war and conflict, and dives into the artistic, social, and humorous aspect of the Lebanese culture. We can interpret that although the Lebanese youth usually promote themselves as liberal individuals with views that drift away from some aspects of their culture, they share different standpoints toward their culture. When approached with a different cultural tone that showcases the collectivist aspects of the Lebanese culture rather than the political and sectarian beliefs, the Lebanese youth showed greater engagement. Therefore, we can conclude that the Lebanese youth are unlike what they might be promoting themselves as because of the problematic aspect of their culture; their reception of cultural ads differs from their stereotypical views of Lebanese culture.

9. LIMITATIONS

As we have previously mentioned, our study does not indulge in content analyses of the comments on any of the Facebook and Instagram ads that we've used. Engagement does not ensure satisfaction, and comments can either include positive or negative feedback toward the content. However, the scope of our study only focuses on whether the target audience engaged in the ads, irrespective of additional content analyses which can be the topic of another study. Additionally, the data collected using the likes, comments, and shares are not absolute values and they are prone to fluctuate because they are available online to anyone who wishes to access them. However, our samples are taken from previous years and are not new, and we know that content usually scores its highest levels of reach during the initial parts of its life duration, therefore, the numbers can still be reliable.

10. APPENDIX

Advertisements	URL
CA1	https://www.instagram.com/p/CfHnWzzssMh/?igsh=YnkweWw2YWNqc2s1
CA2	https://www.instagram.com/p/CigvEuKKuyu/
CA3	https://www.instagram.com/p/Ccm4yb3M9s_/?igsh=aGthbDd4Z2ExeDJp
CA4	https://www.instagram.com/p/CnUcK4ss43x/
CA5	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cs6CFLUNzki/
CA6	https://www.instagram.com/p/CwzwAVvMsjR/
CA7	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/iMnB9gjA6j5MCy25/?mibextid=WC7FNe
CA8	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/wo3Fw6WdmQjmW5K2/?mibextid=WC7FNe
CA9	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/gyC16N1rBFSyZ4po/?mibextid=WC7FNe
CA10	https://www.facebook.com/share/WinVjpEZoGdUhcfV/?mibextid=WC7FNe
CA11	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/cXf8LDV8JzG2zbRx/?mibextid=WC7FNe
CA12	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/6HTfTbanzcc3JpEg/?mibextid=WC7FNe
NA1	https://www.instagram.com/p/CeTjJQUs2hi/
NA2	https://www.instagram.com/p/CfZDTS3sCf6/
NA3	https://www.instagram.com/p/ChmsVbVqArm/
NA4	https://www.instagram.com/p/Csi3aglM4IU/
NA5	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cvwh6ufM4hD/
NA6	https://www.instagram.com/p/CwM6cJ6sp77/
NA7	https://www.facebook.com/share/k7M5UKDye8NdB6Qh/?mibextid=WC7FNe
NA8	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1YfuXCAey12zTUEs/?mibextid=WC7FNe
NA9	https://www.facebook.com/share/9GFWYCuhh4qRPjHP/?mibextid=WC7FNe
NA10	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/K7PD4YAQG2gvB9tP/?mibextid=WC7FNe
NA11	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/nrtMi3R4u39Hq4aZ/?mibextid=WC7FNe
NA12	https://www.facebook.com/share/p/u4DTGjb81n4nnxj3/?mibextid=WC7FNe

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