

**Verena Wiedmaier / Britt Söder**

# Intercultural Issues in Online Communication: A German-Egyptian Comparison

**Diploma Thesis**

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Diplomarbeit  
Fachhochschule Heilbronn  
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## PRELIMINARY NOTE

This thesis includes all relevant information. However, for any further references, please refer to the appendices, the quoted sources as well as the researchers. It should be noted that all sources were selected properly and were double-checked for reasons of reliability. All references are published by official institutions, governments, as well as in accessible literature and publications. Additionally, it was referred to the knowledge of the tutoring professors, Prof. Dr. Margarete Seidenspinner and Prof. Dr. Gabriele Theuner.

A separate CD is provided including the completed questionnaires of the Egyptian and German sample. For a uniform layout and easier reading, the Egyptian questionnaires were retyped. It should be emphasised that the content was not changed whereas spelling mistakes were partly corrected.

The graphical illustrations of the online-behaviourist research results were kindly provided by Prof. Dr. Gabriele Theuner who evaluated these questionnaires by means of SPSS.

Finally, it has to be stated that the recommendations are only applicable to the respective target groups and can therefore not be generalised thus cannot be used for other cultural groupings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## SYNOPSIS

In these times of rapid increase of internet usage, the question arises for multinational companies (MNCs) whether to standardise or adapt their internet presence to different cultural groupings or even subcultures.

The overall target of this research is therefore to assist MNCs by producing recommendations concerning the promotion of products and services for a particular transnational consumer group. Therefore, country-specific websites of companies rooted in different cultural origins are selected for this research, namely EgyptAir, Mercedes-Benz and SonyEricsson.

This analysis follows the inductive research approach embedding elements of an ethnographic and exploratory research method. The main part of the empirical study is conducted by means of an online-behaviourist questionnaire following the quantitative research approach and complementary a culture-related questionnaire following the qualitative research approach.

The sample size is composed of Egyptian students from the Misr International University in Cairo (online-behaviourist questionnaire: N=18; culture-related questionnaire: N=18) and German students from Heilbronn University (N=34; N=22) forming the selected samples. Even though Egypt is a developing country and Germany an industrialised one, the samples are comparable due to the similar social and educational backgrounds.

The research results are applied to the lifestyle typology segmentation method, namely the Euro-Social-Styles of the GfK thus creating a new model of six lifestyle typologies in which the two samples are categorised.

It is revealed by the main findings that the respective companies deal despite the different nationalities of the samples, with a transnational consumer group which is characterised by a relative homogeneity. Nevertheless, not all values and traits are

similar within this consumer group and it therefore requires a certain degree of adaptation of marketing activities.

It was possible to identify within the scope of this research that, in general, companies enjoying a high brand awareness and reputation are not exposed to the urge of adaptation, especially when selling culture-free products and services.

Finally, one should continuously bear in mind that generalisations must not be made at any stage. Moreover, due to the small sample size, this research only represents a starting point for further research.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AIO	Activities, interests, opinion (Burnett)
A4 (DIN A4)	Format for paper, 210mm x 297mm
BMW	Bayerische Motorenwerke AG
B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to customer
CAA	Centre de Communication Avancé, France
Deutsche BA	Deutsche British Airways
E-book	Electronic book
et seq.	Latin “ <i>et sequentia</i> ” meaning "and the following one or ones"
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GB	Great Britain
GDP PPP	Gross domestic product purchasing power parity
GfK	Gesellschaft für Konsum-, Markt- und Absatzforschung e.V.
HLX	Hapag Lloyd Express
HTML	HyperText Markup Language
IBIS	Internationale Betriebswirtschaft – Interkulturelle Studien International Business – Intercultural Studies
M	Million
MIU	Misr International University, Cairo
MNC	Multinational company
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
PC	Personal computer
RISC	RISC Institute S.A., Nyon, Switzerland
SIM	Subscriber Identity Module
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TB	Tourismusbetriebswirtschaft Tourism Management

WWW

World Wide Web

W2

Wirtschaft Zwei

Faculty of business at Heilbronn University

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE THESIS

The information and communication technology sector is a fast growing driver in the world economy and therefore affects most countries led by the industrialised ones. Nevertheless, emerging markets and developing countries are catching up which also includes **Egypt** in terms of the PC segment in general and **internet usage** in particular. As far as the latter is concerned, the Egyptian government has supported this specific industry from the earliest days resulting in the establishment of an internet network at a comparable early stage in governmental institutions, NGO's and private companies and later for individual users as well.

In 2005, the amount of the **internet hosts** in Egypt reached 1,702 (rank 124 in worldwide comparison) whereas approximately 5M Egyptians (total population in 2006: 78.9M) **use** the **internet** which ranks the country at 35 worldwide. In comparison to these figures, Germany has 7,657,162 internet hosts (rank 4 worldwide) as well as 48,722,055 internet users (total population in 2006: 82.4M) which results in rank 7 worldwide (www.cia.gov).

Nevertheless, a huge **imbalance** between **urban** and **rural** areas in Egypt in regard to internet users and hosts can be noticed. Its capital **Cairo** is by far the city with the most internet service providers in comparison to other Egyptian cities and regions. Consequently, this relatively high competitiveness has entailed a slump in price thus resulting in affordability of internet for the majority of the urban citizens which makes internet nowadays an **important** and **powerful tool** for **marketing activities** in Egypt.

**Global players** have already realised their opportunities to add value to their company by setting up a high quality internet performance and a properly designed website. This raises the question whether these companies could use their basic **home country website** for all cultures or if any **adaptation** should be conducted. If so, it has to be determined on the one hand to what degree an adaptation still aligns with the corporate identity or on the other hand if the companies should rather respect the culture of the respective market they are operating in.

This approach allegorises the basis for the **previous research** conducted by Prof. Dr. Gabriele Theuner who specialises in the field of eye-tracking. Regarding earlier researches, Latin and North America as well as China were covered by Prof. Dr. Theuner leaving space for further studies within other cultural areas. The regional focus for this thesis was initiated by Prof. Dr. Margarete Seidenspinner who has established intensive links with the **Misr International University in Cairo (MIU)**. In this context, Egypt seemed to be a predestined country for analysis because of the existing relationship between the MIU and the University of Heilbronn and the fact that a number of Egyptian students participated in the Summer School project providing the opportunity for interrogation. Moreover, the researchers' study course has a strong emphasis on the Egyptian language, modern culture and economic development which made the topic of this thesis a **well-fitting addendum** to their studies.

Moreover, the specific scope of this paper was developed in order to combine the previous findings of Prof. Dr. Theuner and the results of this research for the **“Business Management Conference 2006”** in Latvia in which both professors participated actively.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVES AND ROADMAP OF THE THESIS

The **main objective** of this paper is to formulate the **needs** for **standardisation** or/and **adaptation** of a company's website design to an **Egyptian** and **German** subcultural group. The investigated company homepages were **Mercedes-Benz**, **EgyptAir**, and **SonyEricsson** from the respective countries. In this context it should be stated that the transferability is limited to the subjects of investigation which are in this thesis the Egyptian and German samples. Theoretical as well as empirical aspects were embedded by means of a sound literature review and a survey.

The **theoretical foundations** consist of a brief and general description of the Egyptian culture as well as the socio-cultural factors of international marketing focusing on the development of lifestyle typologies. These fundamentals provide only a general application of regional areas such as e.g. the Middle East, Europe, or America. However, this research approaches the **Egyptian and German culture**, represented by the **upper middle class** as a subculture.