

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF THAI PRODUCTS AT THAI TRADE EXHIBITION IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

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Abstract: The Objectives of this research, International Marketing Communication of Thai Products in the Sultanate of Oman are 1) to study marketing communication in the Sultanate of Oman, 2) to study media exposure and social media application behaviours of the Omani, 3) to study the perception and expectation of Thai product and Thai Trade Exhibition of Omani consumers. The result of this study shows that People in Oman have a high trust of the quality of Thai products that reach international standards and the attractiveness of the packaging design. The overall satisfaction of “Thai Trade Exhibition 2019” is also at the high level, majority of the samplings collected in the fair opt to come back to the next season of Thai Trade Exhibition in Oman. Islamic culture has played an important role on international marketing communication. As word – of – mouth has been seen as one of the most powerful marketing tools in Oman, yet according to this research found that Arabic “Online Social Media Influencer” and “Key Opinion Leader” (KOL) are the most impactful marketing tools in Oman. Omani consumers tend to be more attracted to VDO content via Facebook & Instagram stories, Snapchat & Youtube VDO's more than picture contents. Moreover, Halal trust mark is seen as the key to create trust which is the key to success in doing business with Omani. Halal trust mark does not only certify that the products can be consumed for Muslims, but it certify the process in making of those products that it is able to be used by Muslims as well.

Keywords: Marketing, Communication, The Sultanate of Oman, Media Exposure

Introduction

Sultanate of Oman is one the member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which considered as wealthiest and well developed countries in the Middle East. As the GCC countries are known as the significant exporters of crude oil and natural gas of the World, the main national income of Oman also comes from those two resources. However, in 2017 Omani government announced an economic policy that will rely less of the income from exporting natural resources and to provide more supports for agricultural and fishery industries, this has made Oman the largest fishery exporter in this region. Moreover, Omani government will also encourage international investors to invest in Oman which can be the gateway to other Middle East and African countries (Thansetthakij, 2017).

In 2021, Ministry of Commerce in Thailand provided the data of the trade between Thailand and Sultanate of Oman. Accordingly to the data found that Oman ranked the fifth among the Middle

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Eastern countries trading products with Thailand. During 2021, the trade value between of Thailand to Oman was at 243 million USD. Most products exported to Oman were cars, and automobile components, chemical products, air – conditioning and components, refrigerators and components, polyethylene resin, washing machine and components, cloths, metal products, jewelry, other consumer products and etc. On the other hand, the products which had been imported to Thailand are crude oil, natural gas and minerals, fishery products and meat, chemical products, products made of plastic, shuttle buses and trucks, medical products and etc., Thailand has been facing trade deficit every year. According to the suggestions of the Ministry of Commerce report (2010), Thai government would like to encourage the private sectors from Thailand and Oman to have more cooperation and would like to increase the export rate of various kinds of products from Thailand to Oman. This can start by sharing the business information and import – export regulations, in order to facilitate an international trade between the two countries.

Recently, the World Bank forecasted the economic growth of the Sultanate at 3 percent by 2019. Also the Business Insider (2018) released the best ranking of the countries that investors opt to invest in 2019, Oman is ranked the tenth, this draws a massive attention from the investors all around the World to the Sultanate. Moreover, in Oman itself, there are several mega projects to develop the infrastructure of the city such as the expansion of the new port, expressway construction, national railway construction and etc., these create a lot of job vacancies, so there are a great population labour and workers from around the World moving to Oman. As Oman is well known for one of the most beautiful tourist destination of the Middle East, the Omani government has supported the tourism industries, especially the construction of the new international airport in Muscat which was opened in 2018 and expected to have 12 million passengers – up from the previous number of the passengers at 1.2 million in 2017.

Since 2016, Thai company called “VEGA Intertrade and Exhibitions LLC”, an event and exhibition organizer which was established in Dubai (UAE), has organized Thai products exhibition called “Thai Trade Exhibition Oman 2016”. There were around one hundred Thai companies participated in this event. Furthermore, there were around three thousand visitors visited the first Thai trade exhibition in Muscat.

From the success of the first event, “VEGA Intertrade and Exhibitions LLC” has been hosting “Thai Trade Exhibition Oman” annually. In 2018 and 2019, the visitors have also been significantly increasing from three thousand to five thousand and eight thousand accordingly. In 2019, “Thai Trade Exhibition Oman” which were hosted during the 1st – 5th October 2019, there were more than eight thousand visitors participated in the fair. The popularity of “Thai Trade Exhibition” in Oman has shown that Thai products and services are becoming more welcome and well known in this region.

Moreover, since 2018, Qatar was boycotted by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE, due to the political issues. This caused Qatari companies to move their import hub and investment to other countries, which are Iran and the Sultanate of Oman. The political issues between Qatar and other GCC countries turned to have positive effects and benefits on Oman economy as Muscat is the new hub for Qatar imported goods. Recently, luxury products are becoming more popular, as there are more investors from Qatar visiting the country.

Even though, Oman is our potential importer which we could expand Thai products in several categories, while Oman is rapidly growing, yet there are the lacks of information about doing business and marketing communication in this region. As the Sultanate is an Islamic country, it is very important for Thai entrepreneurs to understand beliefs, cultures, and lifestyle of Muslims. Furthermore, there are only a small number of the study on media exposure and social media application behaviors of the Omani which is the fundamental of the export business.

Thus, the significance of this study is to explore the Omani market for the benefits of the Thai export sector and also expand academic knowledge of international marketing communication of the upcoming emerging market.

Research Objectives

- 1) To explore marketing communication in the Sultanate of Oman towards Thai Products that exhibit at Thai Trade Exhibition
- 2) To study media exposure and social media application behaviours of the Omani consumers who visited Thai Trade Exhibition
- 3) To study the perception and expectation of Thai product and Thai Trade Exhibition of Omani consumers

Expected Benefits

- 1) Thai entrepreneurs/exporters can thoroughly study international marketing communication principles of Thai Products in Oman
- 2) Thai entrepreneurs/exporters will be able to plan their marketing strategies accordingly to the theory and Omani media exposure and social media application behaviors
- 3) This research will create opportunities for Thai entrepreneurs/exporters to extend the market and boost the export rate of Thai product to Omani market

Technical Terms

- 1) Beliefs - This refers to the religious beliefs and social norms that are held by a certain society and its members, as well as practices that have long been followed. In this study, "belief" refers to the Islamic belief that had an impact on respondents' intentions to buy Thai goods.
- 2) Cross-cultural psychology is the study of human behavior, including both its diversity and its invariance, in the context of various cultural or religious contexts.
- 3) Cultures - This concept refers to the thoughts, ideas, actions, and other human behaviors that are shared by all members of a certain civilization. They have been passed down through generations and have developed into the society's beliefs and customs. The culture of each community may, however, be influenced by religion, which results in behaviors that have long been passed down and have been associated with certain religious cultures, such as charitable giving or the zakat of Islam.

4) Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain are the members of this group of Middle Eastern nations.

5) Halal - In Arabic, this word means "Approve." When it refers to something in religion, it signifies that it is acceptable according to that faith (for example, it is acceptable to eat, drink, do, and use certain things.) In contrast to "Haram," which normally means "Prohibit," is "Halal." When used in relation to religion, it refers to what the faith forbids (The Halal Standard Institute of Thailand, 2010). Halal items are those that include high-quality ingredients that are correct in accordance with Islamic prescriptions; these include spa products. For instance, essential or therapeutic oils produced with alcohol are forbidden by religious doctrine. According to religious edicts, any cosmetics, particularly washing and lotion products made with components from non-Islamic slaughter animals or pigs, are likewise forbidden. Hence, the goods with Thus, there are no restrictions on products that contain vegetable oil or fats from ethically slaughtered animals in accordance with Islamic law. (Prince of Songkla University and the Halal Institute, 2011)

6) Media exposure behavior - This refers to how Omani people consume news through a variety of platforms, including printed publications, websites, television, radio, billboards, and word-of-mouth.

7) Social media application behavior - This relates to the Omani's Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Snapchat social media application style.

Literature Review

Introduction of the Sultanate of Oman

Understanding the demographics, economic situation, geography, politics, and cultural context of the country being marketed is crucial when studying international marketing. It is crucial to learn fundamentally useful facts in order to better grasp the business climate of the global market, as the Sultanate is known within the small group of Thai entrepreneurs.

General Information of the Sultanate of Oman

Table 1 : General Information of the Sultanate of Oman

Source: Department of South Asia, Middle East, and African Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013)

Information	Description
Capital City	Muscat
Area	309,500 Square Kilometers
Population	4.64 Million (World Bank, 2017)
Language	Arabic and English
Religion	Islam

Climate	Summer 30c – 40c (June – August), Autumn 22c - 34c (September – November), Winter 18c - 26c (December – February) and Spring 21c - 37c (March - May)
Currency	Rial (OMR) 1 OMR = 85.86 THB (November, 2018)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	72.64 Billion USD (World Bank, 2017)
GDP per Capita	15,668.37 USD (World Bank, 2017)
Political Administration	Unitary Parliamentary, Absolute Monarchy
Highest Ruler	Sultan
Sultan	Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said
Deputy Prime Minister	Fahd Bin Mamoud Al - Said

Thai – Omani Diplomatic Relation Foundation Day	July 30, 1980
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Economic Information of the Sultanate of Oman

Urbanization can be seen in the capital city in Muscat, Oman. There are several mega projects going on in order to develop the country, especially the improvement of public utility. The government has more flexible trade regulation and reform state enterprises to attract more investors to the country. While developing the infrastructure of the country, the government try to implement new technology and innovation in many business industries and also create new marketing strategy, for the reason that they would like to rely less on the income from natural resources (Department of International Trade Promotion office in Dubai, 2015).

As Oman’s oil reserves dwindle, the government is using enhanced oil recovery techniques to boost production, they spends more than 10,000 million USD to develop “Hydrocarbons Sector Project”, which is the cooperation between Oman Oil company and International Petroleum Investment company (which is the company from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates). The partners work on Oil refinery which they can produce the oil for 230,000 Barrel/day (ibid). Moreover, tourism industry and gas-based industries are seen as key components of the government’s diversification strategy as well.

According to the stats of the heritage foundation shows that Oman's economic freedom score is now at 61.0, which made Oman ranked the 93rd freest in 2018. It is the 8th in the Middle East and North African region, yet Oman is still below average of the overall score comparing to other countries in the region and World averages.

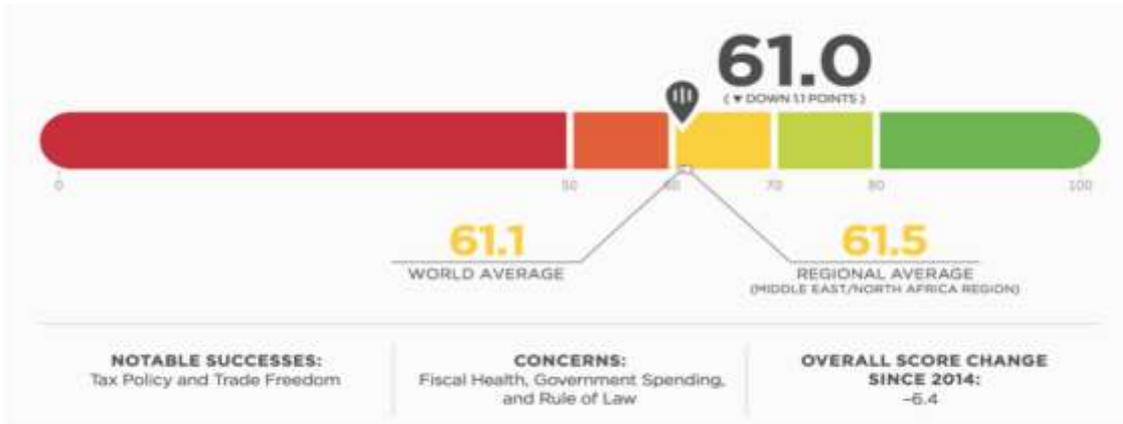


Figure 1 : Economic Freedom Score

Source: The Heritage Foundation (2018)

Even though Oman receives the lower economic freedom score, but the market seems to be more opened. Because trade is vital to Oman's economy. Exports and imports as a whole account for 109 percent of GDP. The average applicable tariff rate is 1.9 percent, however some trade is still hampered by non-tariff barriers. We can see from the graphic below that the government's level of openness to trade, investment, and financial freedom is higher than average. The banking industry is still developing, and commercial banks are doing well.

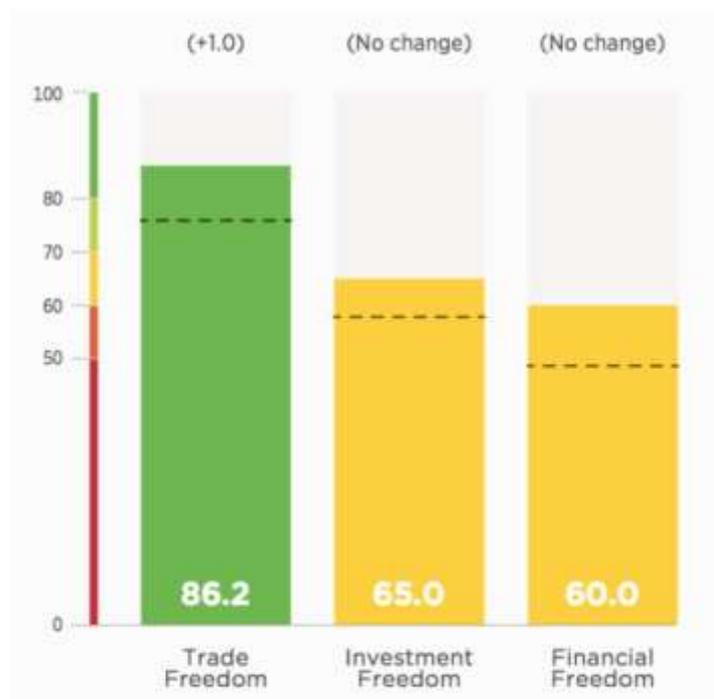


Figure 2 : Open Market Rate

Source: The Heritage Foundation (2018)

Trading Between Thailand and the Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate is now the number three trade partner in the Middle East who exports oil to Thailand. For trading status between Thailand and Oman in 2015, Thailand total export value to Oman was at 265.2 million USD.

The major products which were exported to Oman are consumers products, cars and auto parts, air – conditioning, chemical products, machinery and components, washing machine, latex products, cloths, canned seafood, jewelry and etc. However, as the import products from Oman to Thailand are mostly high value such as crude oil and natural gas, Thailand has got trade deficit at 49.3 million USD in 2015. According to the forecast of Department of International Trade Promotion office in Dubai (2015), the import rate of Thai products to Oman will decrease, as the oil price of Oman has been dropped down and the price of Thai products are not very competitive.

The Background of Thai Trade Exhibition Oman

Since 2016, Mr. Akavut Tangsilikusolwong a managing director of a Thai company called “VEGA Intertrade and Exhibitions LLC”, an event and exhibition organizer which was established in Dubai (UAE), has organized Thai products exhibition called “Thai Trade Exhibition” which is a series of Thai trade fairs taking place in various GCC countries such as UAE, Qatar and Oman; featuring quality Thai products and services aiming to find trade partners in the Middle East. There are two main activities of Thai Trade Exhibition ; First is the business matching event which is held on the first day of the fair, only B2B or Visitors who are looking for Thai business partners who got invited can join this session; Second is the retail event which is open for all visitors who would like to shop Thai products.

The first “Thai Trade Exhibition Oman 2016” was established with a cooperation with Thai government sector, The Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP), bringing over a hundred of Thai companies to Oman International Exhibition Center (OIEC). There were around three thousand visitors visited the first Thai trade exhibition. In 2018 and 2019, Thai Trade Exhibition has gained more reputation and visitors, the fair got supported by Oman Ministry of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). So, the business matching events on both year were held at OMCI separately from the fair venue which is moved from OIEC to Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC) .

In 2019, “Thai Trade Exhibition Oman” which were hosted during the 1st – 5th October 2019, there were more than eight thousand visitors participated in the fair. The popularity of “Thai Trade Exhibition” in Oman has shown that Thai products and services are becoming more welcome and well know in this region.

However, due to the COVID 19 situation, Thai Trade Exhibition which was expected to happen in October 2020 was postponed. Yet, the organizer sees this as an opportunity that Omani consumers may get more excitement of Thai Trade Exhibition after the COVID 19 in the following year.

Belief, Culture and Lifestyle of the Arabs

According to David A. Ricks' 2006 book *Blunders in International Business*, "Culture difference is the most critical component which might ignite issues. Managers may deal with foreign business

improperly if they don't fully comprehend those differences. Hence, it is crucial for business owners operating internationally in both the public and private sectors to carefully research the target group's religion, culture, beliefs, and way of life in addition to the country's marketing report. The understanding of product creation and services for Muslims is one of the major obstacles to Thai exports to the Sultanate of Oman, thus it was necessary to thoroughly investigate Arab beliefs, religion, culture, values, and lifestyle. Especially in the food industry, must be halal-certified. Research on the Economic Connections between Thailand and Middle Eastern Countries was undertaken by the Center of Development Policy at Chulalongkorn University (2011: 120–124), which looked at the Arab basic cultures as follows;

Basic value of Arabs

We must first realize that Arabs must make every effort to satisfy and uplift others before we can truly comprehend their core values. They understand the value of honor, prestige, and reputation. Arabs understand that loving one's family is more essential than having personal preferences because they typically live together. Although Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are viewed as contemporary, open nations, other Arab nations still exhibit conservative characteristics, particularly in Oman, where social customs and morality must be upheld. The status of an individual is mostly determined by their social standing, family history, personality, and life accomplishments.

Basic attitude of Islam

The first thing we need to grasp about the fundamental mindset in an Islamic country is that people there believe in the one and only God, or "Allah," and place a high value on religion. The Arabs all hold the view that humans cannot control all aspects of their life; rather, everything occurs according to god's will. Everyone must submit to god's authority and adopt the faith. Hence, there is no separation between the monarchy and the religious authorities. Every school is required by law to provide its students with a religious education. As a result, belief, faith, and religious practices are sensitive and cannot be violated or encroached upon in any Arab country. Liberalizing religion and imitating western epicureanism are thought to be the root causes of societal chaos, a moral decline, and fragile family relationships.

Self - Perceptions of Arab

Arabs are viewed as being exceedingly kind, loyal, humane, ethical, and polite. They also think that these qualities set them apart from other groups as their defining traits. The historical contributions show that the Arabs have a highly rich cultural heritage and have made significant contributions to the advancement of philosophy, literature, medicine, architecture, the arts, mathematics, science, and nature. Although, there are many countries in the Middle East and Africa, know as Arab countries, they believe in cultural oneness of all Arabs as the members of "The same Arab" (الأمة الإسلامية - al-umma al-arabiyya).

Communication with Arabs

We must make an effort to communicate with the Arab nations when we travel there. English is currently extensively spoken and used in the majority of Arab countries, and the younger generations

are all fluent speakers. Nonetheless, English communication skills are still poor in some isolated areas of some Arab countries. Use of brief and simple phrases or sentences is the most efficient technique to communicate in English. Politics and religion are two issues we should refrain from discussing. Sarcastically, mockingly, ironically, and rudely cracking jokes could also be viewed as inappropriate behavior.

Marketing Communication in Arab country

The Middle East market is one of the largest markets in the world and draws investors from all over. There were numerous organizations in the Middle East that carried out studies on marketing communications, but only to a small extent. As the major means through which business owners in the Middle East communicate, advertise, or publicize their goods or services, marketing communications are crucial.

The Fifth Ring (2012) study outlined the crucial elements of Middle Eastern company that needed to be "people centric." As a result, the development of relationships, trust, and familiarity are the fundamental pillars of company performance. These three elements have a significant impact on business in the Middle East. So, it may be claimed that developing relationships or connections is crucial for business in the Middle East.

Principles of International Marketing Communication Theory

The definition of International marketing communication is a type of communication in which senders convey marketing to recipients in different nations. The communication is what works toward the objective of global marketing communication (Worawan Ongkrutaraksa, 2010: 70). All objectives for business success in both the export of goods and services. Hence, it requires a number of crucial variables to plan international marketing communication in order to accomplish the goal of international marketing. The following are the five principles:

Demographic Characteristics

Advertisers must research the demographics of the populations in their target nations. This will make it easier for marketers to choose which goods or services to advertise in those nations. Marketing professionals should focus on four primary factors: 1) market size, 2) population growth, 3) population distribution, and 4) education.

Economic Factors

One of the most crucial ideas that marketers need to comprehend is economic factors. Marketers must research consumer spending patterns and track the economic growth of a target nation. Marketers need to be aware of four economic factors: GDP (Gross Domestic Product), per capita income, GNP (Gross National Product), and urbanization.

Political & Legal Environment

International marketing strategy is directly influenced by the political climate and legal system of the target nation. The political climate can have a significant impact on both international investment and

communication in some unstable nations. Marketers should research the legal systems and political climate of both the exporting and importing nations.

Geographic Characteristics

Geographical qualities are independent variables that are out of human control. Consumer behavior, product distribution, and logistics are all directly impacted by these. Understanding geographic features will also aid the packaging design process in nations with extreme summer or winter temperatures. Natural resources, the environment, and temperature are the three main aspects that marketers should research (ibid: 20).

Culture Environment

A group of people's inherited culture, in the words of Edward Burnett Taylor (1871), is the complexity of knowledge, norm, law, tradition, or habits. According to Edward T. Hall (1959), we cannot leave our own culture since it is ingrained in our subconscious. This indicates that even if a person moves to live in another society, they will still bring their original cultural identities with them. Verbal language, nonverbal language, needs, values, religion, morals, moral standards, customs, and consumption patterns are the main cultural variables that marketers should focus on.

In addition, it was suggested in the essay "International Marketing Communication: A Case Study of Thai Spa Goods and Services in the United Arab Emirates", written by Alhuda Chanitphattana (2017), that marketers should also consider "Communication Characteristics" as a key aspect. Marketers today need to be aware of how the target audience's behavior is impacted by technology because communication technology is evolving quickly in the digital age.

In this study, the author will also incorporate this idea as the cornerstone of the theory of international marketing communication in order to comprehend how the Omani people use social media and are exposed to the media.

Cross Cultural Psychology

There are certain features or characteristics that permeate people's subconscious minds and have an impact on their conduct. The findings of cross-cultural psychology are more subjective because they deal with subconscious mind actions, but the results of culture studies can be more objectively seen. Cross-cultural psychology is a subfield of psychology that tries to explain how people differ and are similar in ways that may affect how they perceive and respond to situations. It is thought to be distinct from the other area of psychology because it exclusively focuses on understanding human behavior while taking the influences of culture into account (Cherry, 2018).

For instance, the way that Asians and Westerners think differs. Whereas Westerners are thought to think analytically, Asians are thought to think holistically. People tend to focus on relationships between objects when they have a holistic way of thinking, which is typical of Eastern societies. Yet, analytical thinkers isolate the thing from its environment by focusing more on the qualities and categories to form a judgment (Monga and John, 2007). These analytical and comprehensive processes may have a distinct impact on consumer behavior and decision-making.

The International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) was founded in 1972, demonstrating the importance of this field of study and its potential to advance many areas of academic inquiry. More than 800 people from more than 60 different nations make up its membership. The organization's primary goal is to promote communication among those with an interest in a wide range of topics addressing the junction of culture and psychology. Hence, cross-cultural psychology is a well-known idea that is used to examine how customers decide what to buy and what kinds of marketing techniques can be most successful with individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

The Use of Social Media in the Sultanate of Oman

Internet communication and social media use have permeated Arab culture in the Middle East. According to the 2015 Arab Social Media Report, social media is equivalent to food, water, and an Arab's place of residence. Also, social media is like a "magic wand" for Arabs, giving them access to the entire globe at their fingertips.

Arabs social media users believe that social media is like “life enhancer” which revive liveliness and excitement to them. Their existences become real (ibid). Moreover, Arab Social Media Report (2015) also indicates that social media extremely influence as a marketing tool which drives business and are widely used via several channels.

Accordingly to the study of Stat Counter from October 2017 – October 2018, we can see that Facebook ranked the first place as the mostly used social media application in Oman. The rate of users who own Facebook accounts is at 41.79%, follows by Youtube 41.65%, Twitter 10.57%, Pinterest 4.25%, Instagram 1.17% and Tumblr 0.26%. However, this statistics of Stat Counter has not mention the rate of using WhatsApp and Snapchat Applications which are also widely used in Oman, especially for a business use. This research will also explore other new social media applications which are now the latest trend of the communication in Oman.

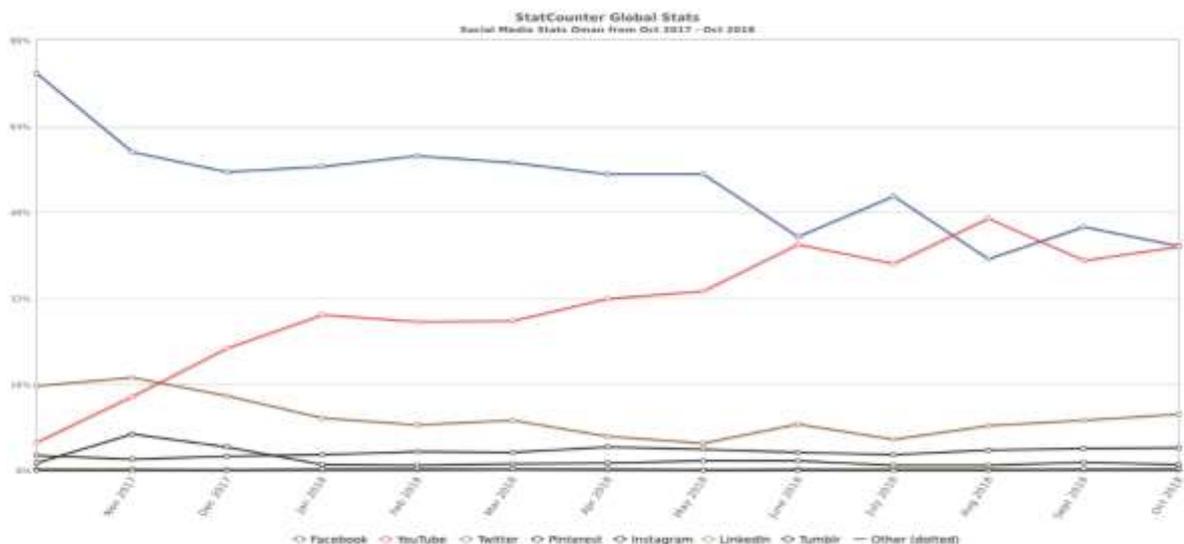


Figure 3 : Social Media Stats in Oman

Source: Stat Counter (2018)

Research Method

“International Marketing Communication of Thai Products in the Sultanate of Oman” research is a mixed methods research. It aims to 1) to study marketing communication between of Thai products in the Sultanate of Oman, 2) to study media exposure and social media application behaviors of the Omani and 3) to study the perception and expectation of Thai products and Thai Trade Exhibition of Omani consumers. Data collection method could be divided into three parts;

1) Review Literature Data Collection

General data collection about the factors which affected international communication of Thai products in the Sultanate of Oman would be the collection of primary data from the related document and research under the concept of international marketing communication. It could be divided into five principles as the followings;

- a. Demographic characteristics in the Sultanate of Oman
- b. Economic factors in the Sultanate of Oman
- c. Political and legal environment in the Sultanate of Oman
- d. Geographic characteristics in the Sultanate of Oman
- e. Culture environment in the Sultanate of Oman

2) Qualitative Data Collection

Data collection part 1: The researcher will collect all data in Thailand by studying relevant document and research. In addition, primary data collection would use; In-depth interview with a representative of Thai government sector and Thai entrepreneurs who used to export their products to the Sultanate of Oman.

Data Collection Part 2: The research will be conducted in the Sultanate of Oman by in-depth interview with both representatives from private sector which is an Omani business owner who used to import Thai products to Oman.

The in - depth interview with sample group in part one and two of data collection required certified letter from Faculty of Communication Arts, Kasem Bundit University, in order to get permission from the participants of both public and private organizations. After being approved by that institute, the researcher would schedule an interview appointment. The interview would take about an hour per session. The data from the interview would be collected by note - taking, voice and visual recording if agreed by the interviewees.

3) Quantitative Data Collection

In quantitative study, the data was collected by accidental sampling in order to get the required numbers of samples without criteria. The questionnaire was designed in Thai language and translated into Arab language which will be certified by Sheikhul Islam Office.

The site to distribute the questionnaire will be at the “Thai Trade Exhibition 2019” which is the only Thai fair in Oman and is organized annually in Muscat, Oman. There will be more than 3,000 visitors visit this event each year. The researcher intends to collect a hundred samplings from this event.

Data Analysis

- 1) Using frequency and percentage, general information, media exposure, and social media usage patterns of Omani customers will be examined.
- 2) The data of cross-cultural psychology that affected worldwide marketing communication of Thai products in the Sultanate of Oman will be analyzed using the mean and standard deviation.
- 3) The variation of media exposure and social media usage behaviors among Omani customers was analyzed using ANOVA (F-test).
- 4) Quantitative data from questionnaires, the outcomes of in-depth interviews conducted in Thailand and Oman, and findings from documentary research will all be linked with a discussion segment.

Research Result

The results of this study on "International Marketing Communication of Thai Goods in the Sultanate of Oman" may be split into three categories based on the data gathering techniques. The document study comes first, and the results will be given in a descriptive manner by the variables that influence Thai products' international marketing communication in Oman. Second, it is the outcomes of in-depth interviews with academics and specialists conducted as part of qualitative research. Lastly, it is the results of the quantitative data obtained from the responses of at least 100 Omani consumers of Thai goods.

- 1) The elements of international marketing communication theory

The research found that Oman population and population density have been constantly increasing over the years. The majority of the populations in Oman aged between 25 – 54 years old and the average literacy rate of the population in Oman is at 83.73. Regarding the economy, Oman is one of the top oil-producing nations in the world, and oil and natural gas extraction make up 51% of the country's GDP. 37 percent of the wealth is in the services sector. The current GDP of Oman accordingly to the study of World Bank was at 76.33 Billion USD. Moreover, Oman invested heavily in Mega-projects to promote a rapid economic growth. The data of the political situation in Oman shows that, Oman has a likely high political stability. Oman is said as a “Switzerland” of the Middle East, who neutralizes the argument between other countries in the GCC, especially Qatar and UAE. In geographical aspect, the most important resources of Oman are petroleum (crude oil) and natural gas. The reserve rate for oil is 5.4 million barrels and is able to produce more than 970,682 barrels per day. It is ranked the 21st country in the World with highest oil reserve and the 28th for natural gas. The culture factor of Oman is also interesting, unlike other GCC members, Oman is seen as more conservative and show its strengths in traditional culture, hospitality, nature and political neutrality as well as pursuing economic and infrastructure development at the same time.

2) Media exposure and social media application behaviors of the Omani

The research found that social Media has been playing a big role in Oman such as Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. Social media or online platforms that the entrepreneurs should have are websites, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp at the start of your business. As well as Arabic influencers has been gaining popularity over the past few years. For print media, it might be difficult for Thai entrepreneurs to advertise their products, especially on newspaper because this needs to ask the permission from Oman Ministry of Information which may take sometimes. So, Thai entrepreneurs can shift from advertising on print media to Online newspapers which will be more impactful. Moreover, online shopping also play a big role and gaining more popularity during the covid pandemic, Thai entrepreneurs can sell their products via online websites. Ones of the most well known platforms among Omanis are; LetsTango.com. From the opinion of Thai sampling, “Halal trust mark” is important, but it is not as strict as other Arab countries for negotiation. In case, the products are already “Halal” accordingly to the religion, but they do not have Halal trust mark from Thailand, “Personal contact” may help those products get through and sold in Oman. On the other hand, the Omani sampling suggested that “Halal” certification is really important when exporting to Oman, because it shows that the ingredients are “Halal” and the process of making this products are “Halal” as well.

3) The perception and expectation of Thai products at Thai Trade Exhibition of Omani consumers

The demographic of visitors of Thai Trade Exhibition 2019 are likely to have more female visitors than male visitors. Majority of the population who visited Thai Trade Exhibition 2019 aged between 31 – 40 years old. Social Media platforms which are mostly used by the samplings are Instagram at 58.00, Youtube at 47.00 and Facebook at 36.00. Top three period that the sampling used on social media are during 9 – 12 am at 21.00, 6 – 9 pm at 18.00 and 9 – 12 pm at 15.00. The result also illustrated that the samplings mostly spent on social media are 1 – 2 hours/day at 42.00, more than 4 hours/day at 26.00 and during 3 – 4 hours/day at 20.00. The average rate of the perception and satisfaction of Thai products consumers from Thai Trade Exhibition 2019 is at the high level. The satisfaction rate is at 4.16.

Discussion

In the discussion part, the findings obtained from document research, in depth interview, and questionnaire, the research presents all the findings based on the following aspects.

1) Marketing communication factors of Thai products in the Sultanate of Oman

The marketer or businessperson must research the crucial details of product and service usage in order to build the global marketing communications. The following variables should be included while studying international marketing communication, according to Worawan Ongkrutaraksa (2010, p. 15):

1) Demographic characteristics, 2) Economic factor, 3) Political environment & law, 4) Geography features, and 5) Culture component. The main components of international marketing communication are all five of these components. The next section discusses the results of the documentary study that was done in relation to the five variables indicated above for the worldwide marketing strategy development of Thai products in Oman.

Regarding to the demographic characteristic in Oman, population rate increases constantly. The recent survey in 2020 showed that there were 5.25 million people in Oman, which was massively increased compared to 1960 when the population of Oman was only 551,740. The main reason is the migration of expats who came to work and settled down in Oman. The majority aged group of the population is between 25 – 54 years old which was 44.81% of the total population. In Oman, women are also allowed to work outside their home, unlike some Arab countries. The demographics analysis indicated that the continual increase of the population, the age range of population and the increasing of female workers were the main drivers of the use of products for health and beauty products. Moreover, accordingly to the demographic factor result, it shows that the majority of Omani population has somewhat high average literacy rate 83.73%, when looking at the ability of communication in English, it is widely used in Oman, this reduce the language barrier between Thai and Omani entrepreneurs by communication in English.

From the analysis on economic factors in Oman by analyzing the research findings of GDP, GNP per capita, and GNP, it was found that the number of the current GDP in 2019 was at 76.33 Billion, it dropped from the peak of the GDP in 2012 significantly. However, when looking at the GDP per capita which shows the high purchasing power of the Omani in 2019 is at 15,343 USD. In comparison to Thai GDP per capita in the same year it was at 7,806 USD which is a half of the GDP per capita of the Omani population. Moreover, in the recent years Oman ruler has been trying to seek a new income to the country apart from the main resources such as crude oil and natural gas, thus Omani government has been using its strength to create several integrated tourism complex which will create a great amount of the GDP to Oman in the future. If all the mega projects are finished in Oman, it will create more job opportunities, the need to import more products from abroad and also accelerate the economic in several sectors.

The analysis in the political situation in Oman, it shows that Oman has a very high political stability inside the country and Omani government has a somewhat high trust and acceptance from its population. For an outside argument between other GCC countries Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain who had been boycott Qatar, this situation seems to benefit Oman, as Oman did not take side of any countries and remain a good neighbors for every GCC nations. The benefit of Oman on its economy can be seen from the Qatari importing hub had been removed from the UAE and was settled in Oman instead. Also several mega projects which is occurring and will bringing a lot of income in the near future are invested by companies from both UAE and Qatar. Thai luxury products such as jewelry is gaining a great feedback from Qatari customers who residing in or traveling to Oman.

In correlation with the benefit of political situation in Oman, the boycott of the Qatari of other GCC nations brought Oman to great use of its geographic benefits. As Oman can be connected to Asia, Africa and Europe, Oman port is gaining popularity for international trading as a products logistic or a transit hub to distribute the products to other continent.

1.5 For the cultural factor, Oman is seen to be more conservative comparing to other GCC nations apart from Saudi Arabia. However, Oman keeps their tradition and religion and blend it seamlessly with the modern way of living. The cultural factors do not have a much effect for the foreigners that would like to do a business in Oman and all religions are welcomed. Moreover, the study of the Fifth Ring (2012) shows that the important characteristics of Arab culture emphasized on “People centric”

Business is based on trust, familiarity, and relationship building. Therefore, operating business in Oman must be based on these three elements.

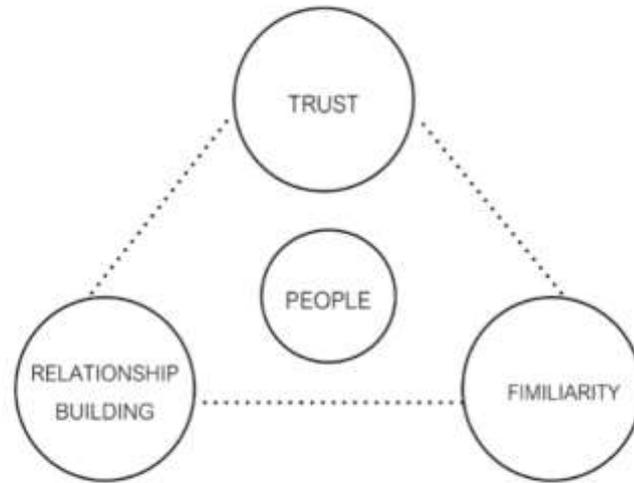


Figure 4 : Three Main Factors of Business Elements in doing Oman

Source: Fifth Ring, 2012

The analysis of those five factors affected the international marketing and facilitate the situation of exporting Thai products to the Sultanate of Oman. Apart from the five factors, it is undeniable that the extensive use of Online media and social media is another important factor affecting international marketing communication. Therefore Alhuda Chanitphattana (2017), had added Communication characteristics, in order to understand media exposure and behavior of marketer's target audience.

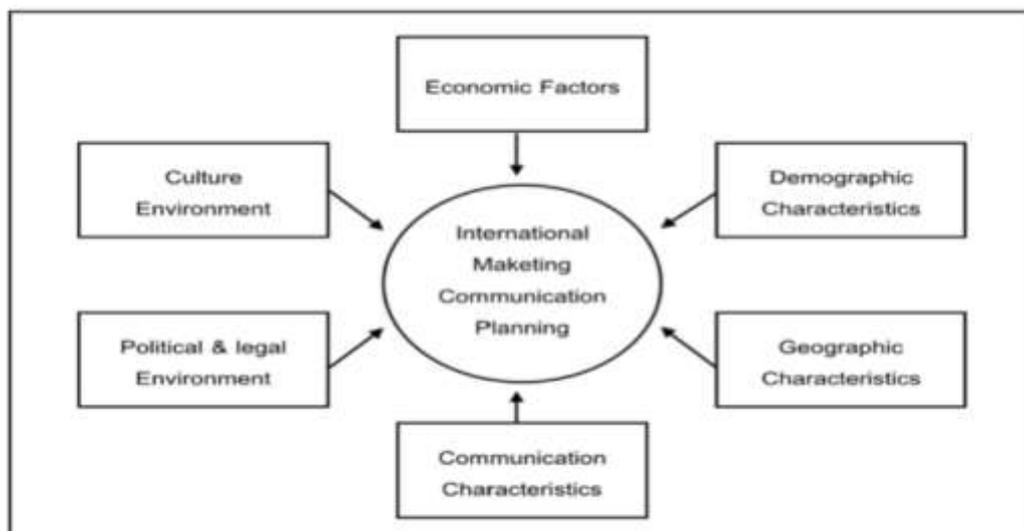


Figure 5 : Model of Factors Affecting the International Marketing Communication Planning

Source : Chanitphattana, 2017, p.237

The analysis of the findings from qualitative research obtained from the in – depth interview with Thai and Omani entrepreneurs in Oman, it was found that online media channels are impactful to marketize Thai products, especially VDO content reviewing the use of products or services will lead to more attention to the customers. Accordingly to the study in the literature review presents that word of mouth is one of the most influential channel of how Arab choosing to but ones' products. Nowadays, the rise of the social media influencers play an important role as the Arabs, especially the Omanis believe and trust the word of mouth of those influencers through social media. Social Media LIVE on Facebook and Instagram can work effectively among Omani. Moreover, online shopping website also play an important role, LetsTango.com is one of the most popular website where Thai products will be advertised on the its homepage, this selling channel is gaining more popularity since covid pandemic.

Even though social media platforms are working effectively, yet Thai entrepreneur who has been working with the Omanis suggest that Offline media such as newspaper advertisement can also work well with the older generation of the Omanis. However, publishing an print media advertisement needs the permission from Ministry of Information. Thus, Thai entrepreneurs can opt to advertise on an Online newspaper via several Omani media agency in Oma.

The analysis in the factors for international marketing communication planning for Thai products in Oman provides guideline for Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). From both qualitative and quantitative study with the consumers of Thai products in Oman , the findings were correlated. Anyhow, to plan the marketing communication to approach the target group effectively, the entrepreneurs should analyze other factors purposed earlier in order to make the communication successful and effective to the target group.

2) Religious and cultural context and marketing communication of Thai products in the Sultanate of Oman

The discussion in religious and cultural context and marketing communication of Thai products in Oman is based on the results of study on literature review, in – depth interview and quantitative research . The findings can be classifies into two aspects ; 1) The overall of religious and cultural influences in Oman affecting marketing communication of Thai products and 2) The expectation of the importance of Halal certification of Thai products in Oman.

The overall of religious and cultural influences in Oman affecting marketing communication of Thai products

As we can see that, more than eighty percent of the population in Oman are Muslims and Oman is seen as one of the most conservative country in the GCC, but not as intense as in Saudi Arabia where there are more than 90 percent of the population are Muslims. Islamic traditions and Islamic laws are used as part of the daily life of the population in Oman. However, as the result of the study in chapter four Omanis are seen to be very welcoming of visitors from other countries even from the perspective of other Arab countries, a fact that is reflected in the generous hospitality extended to guests. All religions are respected and can be practiced in Oman. This shows that Oman is open for everyone.

\However, visitors to Oman should learn about Muslim traditions such as the behavior to greet male and female, creating trust and loyalty when doing a business, the importance of daily prays and

Ramadan month, dress code when visiting different places and etc., this can help facilitate the entrepreneurs to understand the culture and succeed in their business.

In different business sectors may also have different cultural factors that Thai entrepreneurs should focus on. From an in – depth interview result, some products which are related to Islamic culture can easily succeed in Omani market such as oud oil, sandalwood or specific perfumes, as they are the tools which are use by Omanis in daily life. For medical industry, the availability of female doctors are increased because female muslims (Muslimah), may not reveal their body parts to other men accordingly to Islam. Thus, providing only female staffs to facilitate female Muslims might benefit in some business services.

The expectation of the importance of Halal certification of Thai products in Oman

Accordingly to the result from the quantitative research shows the high expectation of Omani consumers towards Halal trust mark on Thai products. From the in – depth interview result, three aspects ; 1) Religion aspect, we need to see what should we ask for the Halal trust brand accordingly to Islamic religion, 2) Import – Export aspect, some Arab countries need Halal trust mark to be appear on every food products, in this case it is important to ask for Halal mark in order to cope with the import – export regulations of that countries, and 3) Marketing aspect, some Arab customers are comfortable when they see Halal trust mark on the products, even it is food or cosmetics, it increases their trust to the products.

Moreover, accordingly to DITP Omani citizens have a high trust on their government, they believe that all consumer products which are available in the supermarket are certified “Halal” as there is a separated zone for non – halal products. Omanis also have a high trust of the importing process and laws which can confirm that all products which had passed through those process are “Halal”.

However, Omani entrepreneur suggested that “Halal” also represents the process of the production of the product, not only to confirm that the ingredients are allowed for Muslims to use, but it confirms that the process of making this product is approved by Islam as well, this can create a great trust to Omani consumers.

Conclusion

Oman has been seen as a high potential trading partners of Thailand for several decades. There is a significant increasing needs of Thai products in Oman, Thai trade exhibition is the first Thai trade show organized by a Thai company has been bringing more than hundreds of Thai companies to showcase their products to serve consumers' needs. The popularity of the exhibition which shown in the increasing numbers of visitors each year confirmed new opportunity of Thai entrepreneurs to enter Oman's market. However, there is the lack of the study of an international marketing communication in Oman for Thai entrepreneurs which could affect Thai entrepreneurs businesses in several categories.

The recent argument of the GCC countries that Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain boycott Qatar, has been accelerating international trade of Oman. As Oman promises to be a neutral nation among the GCC countries. Qatar has moved their import hub from UAE to Oman, and several mega projects are

invested by big companies from UAE and Qatar as well. There are the rise of the consumption of luxury products in Oman by Qatari consumers who are traveling or residing in Oman for businesses.

The research results illustrated that one of the most important factor of International marketing communication is “Communication Characteristics” of the consumers in foreign countries. Accordingly to the study of Omani consumers, we found that Arabic social media influencers or key opinion leaders (KOL) have been playing an important role influencing people to buy ones products. The reason of the impact of those influencers is because the long tradition of the word of mouth culture that has been rooted among the Omani.

Even though Oman has been coping up with the modern economic investment and urban development, traditional culture and religions still play a great role of marketing communication. While English is widely used, Arabic language is still very important especially for the explanation of product usage or ingredients on the products labels. Moreover, Halal trust mark is seen as the key to create trust which is the key to success in doing business with Omani. Halal trust mark does not only certify that the products can be consumed for Muslims, but it certify the process in making of those products that it is able to be used by Muslims as well.

People in Oman have a high trust of the quality of Thai products that reach international standard and the attractiveness of the packaging design. However, the materials that are used to contain the products which came from a mass production have been seen to have as low quality standard by Omani. Thai entrepreneurs should create a unique identity of the brands not only the image, the ingredients of the products, but how the packaging of the products look like as well.

To summarise the significance of this study, after the covid – 19 pandemic there will be more needs of Thai products as Omani consumers did not have a chance in traveling to Thailand and the pause of organizing Thai trade exhibition in Oman in 2020 and 2021. This probably create an opportunity for Thai entrepreneurs to be prepared for their international marketing tools, especially social media contents and websites, in order to penetrate the Omani market through Thai trade exhibition or through a trust worthy distributors in an upcoming seasons.

Recommendations

1. Thai entrepreneurs should create more VDO content because it can draw more attention to the audience
2. Thai entrepreneurs should endorse their brands by hiring Arabic social media influencers or KOLs
3. In hiring KOLs, Thai entrepreneurs should select ones who has their own target audience, not just by the number of their followers
4. Thai entrepreneurs should not use a mass production of packaging as the quality does not meet the standard of customers expectation, and the designs does not show the uniqueness of the brands
5. Thai entrepreneurs should prepared more variety of products and services to enter Omani market, as there would be the rise of Thai products need after post covid pandemic

6. Thai entrepreneurs should build an official social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat and also a website before entering Omani market
7. Thai brands should ask for Halal trust mark to certify the ingredients and/or the process in making of the products or services
8. Thai government agency should be appointed to be responsible for testability system of the products to help Thai entrepreneurs to enter Omani market
9. The products that are required by Omani consumers in the next season of Thai Trade exhibition are ; 1) Fashion (Clothing, Bags, and Shoes), 2) Thai Street Food, 3) Premium Organic products, 4) Electrical Devices, 5) Spices and Essential Oils, 6) Personal Care and Hair Products, 7) Cosmetics and Perfumes and lastly 8) Toys for young children

Recommendation for Future Research

1. In – depth study of behavior of social media use of the population in Oman affecting the marketing communication specify by business categories such as food, cosmetics and health and wellness products
2. How does word – of – mouth culture turning into KOLs, and how effective of this marketing tools?
3. The researcher should conduct a focus group interview of Omani consumers at Thai trade exhibition
4. The researcher should aim for more samplings for public sector interview
5. The researcher should collect a greater samplings for quantitative research
6. According to the recommendation of a future research from DITP, there should be more research conducted in the area of Thai business which can be invested or established in the Sultanate of Oman such as; Energy Industry, Aqua Culture Industry, Mining Industry, Logistic Sector, and Tourism & Related Services (Thai Spa, Thai Restaurants, Thai Massage and etc.).

Research Limitations

1. Due to COVID 19 situation started from March 2020, all in depth interview data will be collected via online channels such as ZOOM or Google Meet applications
2. As the interviews were conducted via online platforms, some samplings cancelled the appointment as there was a lack of knowledge in using online meeting platforms
3. As the Arabs are likely to prefer face – to face communication, conducting online interview and collecting research ethical forms from the samplings caused several obstacles in research working process
4. There were the lack of the latest data about international marketing communication of Oman, especially in Thailand. There were no academic research on marketing or international marketing communication in Oman

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