



## **Harmonizing Heritage: Reframing Nivea's Message for Middle Eastern Audiences**

Christina Carollo, Alexis Krouk, Heather Parrish and Kiley Vaughan

University of Florida

ADV 4400: International Advertising

Dr. Aqsa Bashir

November 22, 2024

## **Executive Summary**

### **Overview**

Nivea's 2017 advertisement, "White is Purity," aimed at the Middle Eastern market, inadvertently invoked connotations of racial purity rather than highlighting the deodorant's stain-preventing advantages. This misalignment sparked global backlash and significantly tarnished the brand's image. Nivea's failure to align its advertisement with the cultural values and demographics of the intended audience resulted in a disconnected campaign.

### **Strategic Response**

In response to the initial unsuccessful campaign attempt, we redesigned the advertisement to resonate with Middle Eastern cultural values of community and practicality. The revised tagline, "Stay stain-free, so you can focus on what matters most," emphasizes the product's functional benefits while supporting communal ties, shifting away from the controversial implications of the original campaign.

### **Campaign Implementation**

The revitalized campaign employs a diverse, strategic media approach, targeting popular platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and regional TV Networks. It seeks to partner with local outlets like *Lovin' Dubai* to boost engagement and credibility within the market. Furthermore, the revised campaign content is tailored to resonate with the everyday lives and cultural values of Middle Eastern women, with the goal of rebuilding trust and enhancing Nivea's brand perception.

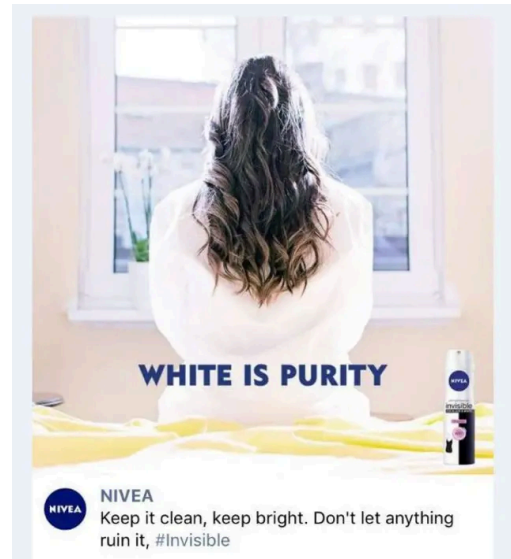
### **Anticipated Outcomes & Conclusion**

The revised campaign is projected to restore Nivea's reputation and reinforce consumer loyalty by demonstrating cultural sensitivity and the product's efficacy. Our goal is to establish a

marketing framework that respects and integrates regional cultural nuances to lay a strong foundation for future campaigns in the Middle Eastern market.

## Part 1

In 2017, the German skincare company Nivea published a deodorant advertisement for its *Invisible for Black & White Deodorant* in the Middle East with the slogan “White is Purity.” The brand captioned the ad, “Keep it clean, keep bright. Don’t let anything ruin it, #invisible.” The ad was intended to emphasize the product’s ability to prevent stains on clothing. However, the campaign faced immediate backlash on a global scale, as audiences condemned its wording for



perpetuating racist commentary and reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Although the ad was taken down after three days, the damage to Nivea’s reputation was significant, sparking conversations about cultural sensitivity, racial implications in marketing and the importance of understanding diverse audiences in an interconnected world.

This report will explore the target audience, culture and economy to understand the process that ultimately led to the controversy. As the global marketplace grows increasingly interconnected, understanding the broader impact of a campaign has never been more essential for companies seeking to foster inclusive and positive brand messaging.

## Target Audience

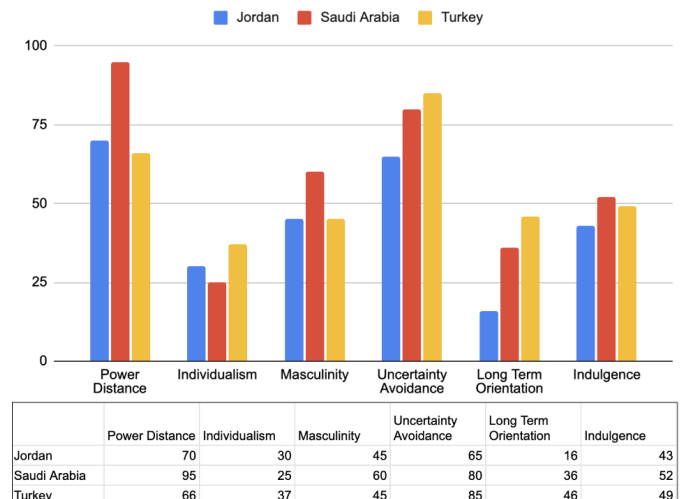
Nivea published this advertisement for its followers in the Middle East, but unfortunately, it appears that Nivea did not consider this audience when crafting the advertisement. Nivea's Middle Eastern consumers are primarily women aged 20-45, middle to upper-middle class and from diverse ethnic backgrounds. They reside in urban areas across the region and focus on personal care. These consumers value beauty and tradition and use products from trusted brands.

However, the demographics and psychographics of this ad's target audience appear to include white females of the same age who associate fair skin with higher social status or beauty.

## Cultural Comparison of the Middle East and Germany

This ad was intended to target consumers in Middle Eastern countries. Although the cultural values of Middle Eastern nations vary from country to country, they share general cultural traits.

This graph depicts Hofstede's dimensions of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan and shows similarities across each dimension.

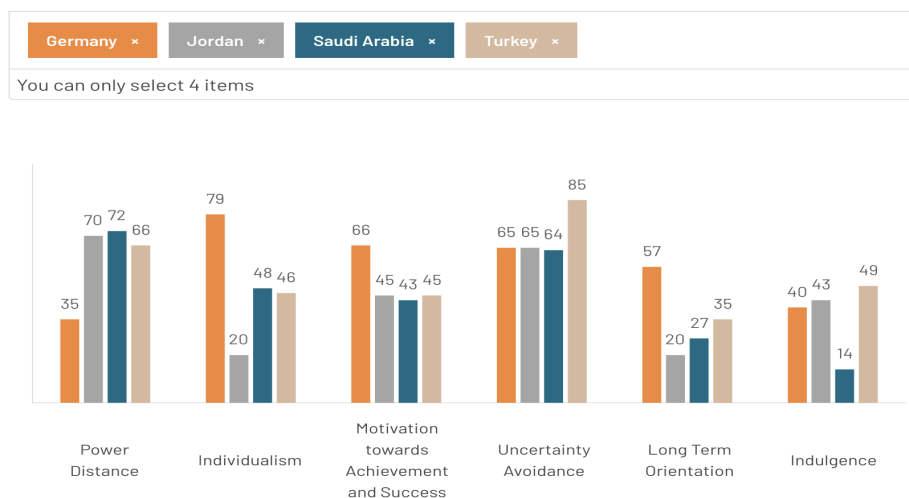


All three countries have a high power distance score, meaning they strongly value hierarchy and adhere to societal roles. Additionally, these countries scored quite high for uncertainty avoidance, which means they dislike ambiguity and impulsiveness. The countries had average scores for masculinity, suggesting that they value achievement and caring for others equally. Similarly, the countries had average scores for indulgence, which suggests that they

value some, but not an extreme amount, of leisure. In addition, these countries have a short-term orientation, meaning that they focus more on the present and living in the moment.

These countries scored quite low on individualism, meaning that they are a collectivistic culture. Collectivistic cultures view themselves as part of a group rather than as individuals and place more emphasis on familial and societal relationships.

Germany has a score of 35 on the power distance dimension, meaning Germans tend to have a more equal power distribution. While there are still hierarchies, the power is decentralized, and it would be common for employees to be included in decisions by their superiors. Germany is considered an individualistic society, meaning it values independence and individual achievements. Germany also scores high in masculinity, meaning their society is driven by competition and success. Germany scores high in uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation, meaning that their society feels uncomfortable with uncertainty, prefers long-term planning, and focuses on long-term gains. Finally, Germany scores low in indulgence, meaning they have a more restrained culture. Sticking with the three countries in the Middle East that share cultural similarities to represent the Middle East, this graph compares the cultural dimensions of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey with Germany.

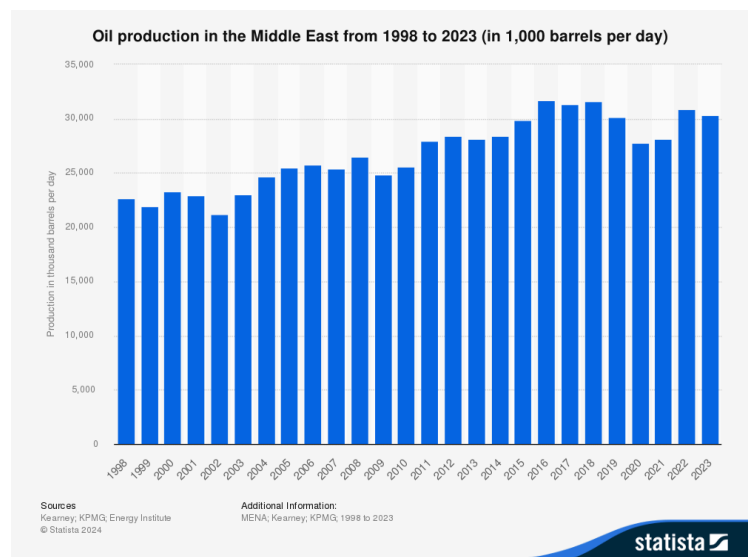


As shown in the graph, Germany has a more individualistic culture than the Middle East, meaning Middle Eastern countries put more emphasis on the needs of the group over the needs of the individual. Germany has a lower power distance score than the Middle Eastern countries, meaning there is less distance between those in power and those below them than in Middle Eastern countries. Germany's culture also places a higher emphasis on motivation toward success and achievement and long-term orientation. Germany has a similar score in uncertainty avoidance as the Middle Eastern countries and a similar score in indulgence, meaning people in both areas do not typically accept unknown ideas or freely gratify their desires.

Another difference between Germany and Middle Eastern countries is whether they are high- or low-context. Middle Eastern countries tend to be high context, meaning that the context of communication can drastically change its meaning, and non-verbal cues are very important (El-Ajlouni, 2023). Germany, by contrast, is a very low-context culture, so they interpret communication more literally.

## Trade Agreements and Economic Overview

The economy of the Middle East is primarily based on oil and natural gas production. These resources account for 51% of the exports for the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). According to the graph, in 2023, the Middle East produced 30.62 million barrels of oil per day (Energy Institute, 2024). Globally, 96.37 million barrels of oil



were produced in 2023 (Energy Institute, 2024), so the Middle East produced about a third of the world's production. The countries where these resources are more prevalent, like Qatar and Kuwait, have robust, wealthy economies. Saudi Arabia, especially, has a strong economy with a GDP of \$1,067.58 billion in 2022 (IMF, 2024). Tourism is also an important part of the Middle Eastern economy. The popular travel destination Dubai had 17.15 million international visitors in 2023 (Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, 2024). In comparison, Jordan had 6.3 million international visitors (Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2024), and Turkey had 49 million international visitors in 2023 (Road Genius, 2024).

Other countries, such as Jordan and Yemen, are limited in natural resources such as oil. For this reason, the Middle East has a strong divide between prospering and struggling economies. Additionally, wars in the region have caused economic hardship in some parts of the Middle East, furthering the divide of economic disparity (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

The European Union (EU), which Germany is a part of, currently has a trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC comprises Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain. The EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement was formed in 1988 to create a “framework for economic and political cooperation between the EU and the GCC” (European Commission, n.d.). In 2023, the EU was the GCC's second-largest import partner, its fourth-largest export partner, and its second-largest trade partner (European Commission, n.d.).

Germany is an important trading partner with the GCC. Germany is export-oriented and often exports goods to the GCC in the “manufacturing, infrastructure, [and] service sectors” (Ramezani Bonesh, 2023). However, Germany has recently made efforts to import sustainable

energy from the GCC, particularly from their growing hydrogen production industry (Ramezani Bonesh, 2023). Overall, the EU and the GCC are heavily involved in trade and are significant import and export partners for one another.

### **Unveiling The Controversy: Publishing Medium & Campaign Criticism**

The highly controversial Nivea "White is Purity" ad campaign, initially aimed at promoting the brand's "Invisible for Black and White" deodorant, was initially published on the Nivea Middle East Facebook page. This digital platform choice was meant to target the brand's followers in the Middle East. However, it quickly garnered much attention – and for all of the wrong reasons (Wang, 2017).

The ad campaign was significantly criticized almost immediately after its publication; the "White is Purity" slogan – positioned over an image of a woman in a white robe – received significant backlash for promoting racist rhetoric. The public's initial reactions to the social media ad were shocked and disbelieving. One Twitter user exclaimed, "What the HELL is this? White Purity?" and advised the brand to "fire your marketing person and anyone who approved this ad" (Wang, 2017). An Iranian woman took to Facebook where she commented, "It's cool for the 'Middle East' Facebook page? As if colorism isn't a problem in those cultures?" (Tsang, 2017). The audience's disappointment and overall sentiment were echoed across various platforms, emphasizing the profound disconnect between the advertisement's intended message of product efficacy and its perceived endorsement of racial purity.

However, criticism of the ad was not limited to individual users; the ad was quickly embraced and praised by white supremacist groups, adding fuel to the fire around the ad and compounding Nivea's brand crisis. As Amy B. Wang reported, "The Daily Mail captured an



image of a post by a white supremacist group on Nivea's Facebook page that read, 'We enthusiastically support this new direction your company is taking. I'm glad we can all agree that #WhiteIsPurity'" (Tsang, 2017). The extremist groups' endorsement of the ad led to an even more ardent public outcry, as the ad's message was seen as aligning with deeply divisive and racist ideologies.

Nivea and its parent company, Beiersdorf Global AG, moved quickly to mitigate the damage caused by the ad campaign. The first step consisted of issuing an apology, stating, "That image was inappropriate and not reflective of our values as a company. We deeply apologize for that and have removed the post," reiterating their commitment to diversity and inclusivity (Adams, 2017). The Nivea "White is Purity" debacle exemplifies the critical importance of cultural sensitivity and the potential ramifications of neglecting this aspect in global advertising campaigns. Social media is known for its ability to disseminate messages in record time. When used as an advertising medium to reach a specific audience, brands must carefully consider the broader implications of their marketing communications.

## **Part 2**

### **Explanation: Addressing the Problem**

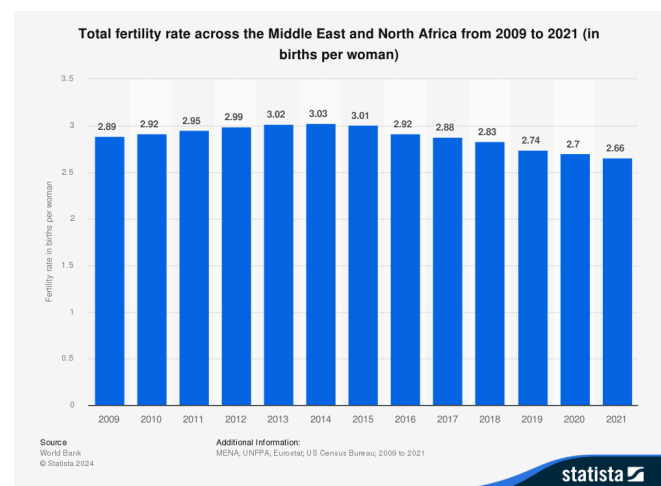
We are choosing to address the problem with the ad, which is the miscommunication that caused the ad to be offensive to the audience and the ad's failure to be culturally specific. The original ad was for Nivea's Invisible for Black and White deodorant. The main benefit of the product is that it does not leave white marks on black clothing, and it prevents yellow staining on white clothing (Nivea, n.d.). The original "White is Purity" ad was trying to communicate this message. However, the message was not clear, and it was very easily misinterpreted.

According to a representative from Beiersdorf, the German company that owns Nivea, they were trying to associate the color white with the quality of purity (Tsang, 2017) In the Middle East, the color white is associated with purity and cleanliness (“Colors of the Arab World: Meaning and Symbolism,” 2019); however, the ad's copy seemingly associated white with race rather than the color of an article of clothing, which resulted in the controversy.

Beyond the associations with color, the ad does not make other efforts to be more culturally specific. The ad features a woman with long dark hair in a robe, which is a fairly general image that does not specifically appeal to the target audience. We intend to address the issues within the ad by creating a culturally specific advertisement that will effectively communicate that the product does not stain black or white clothing.

### **Audience Analysis - Demographics**

Our new advertisement will target the same audience as the original, which is young to middle-aged women in the Middle East. Nivea’s Middle Eastern consumers are primarily women aged 20-45, middle to upper-middle class and from diverse ethnic backgrounds. They reside in urban areas across the region and typically are unemployed, with only 19% of women in the Middle East making up the labor force (Bouri, 2023). Additionally, much of the target audience will be married with children. According to the graph, women in the Middle East have an average of 2.66 children (World Bank, 2023).



### **Psychographic Profiles**

A deeper analysis of our target audience reveals unique insights concerning personality, lifestyle, social class, values, interests, attitudes, and habits. Integrating these factors into our new campaign will allow us to strategically align our marketing efforts with the desires and needs of our consumers, fostering stronger brand trust and loyalty.

### **Personality Traits in the Middle East:**

- A blend of modern aspirations and traditional values
- Resilient and nurturing
- Act as a linchpin in family and community relations

### **Balancing Act:**

- The desire for personal care and self-improvement
- Roles within the family and society

### **Lifestyle Characteristics:**

- Emphasis on family and community involvement
- Actively engage in social and familial activities
- High value placed on personal and communal well-being

### **Employment Context:**

- Lower employment rates, with only 19% participating in the labor force (Bouri, 2023)

### **Social Class Characteristics:**

- Predominantly middle to upper-middle class
- Access to discretionary spending
- Discerning in product choices
- Preference for products that offer added value (e.g. quality, ethical production) (Statista Market Insights, 2024)

**Core Values:**

- Cultural respect and ethical consumerism are paramount
- Preference for brands that embody community-specific cultural and ethical standards
- Favor product ads in alignment with cultural norms and religious beliefs

**Interests Characteristics:**

- Focus on fashion, beauty, and wellness
- Preference for products that enhance personal appearance while respecting traditional values
- Active engagement on visual and media-rich platforms like Instagram and YouTube (VeraContent, 2024).

**Attitudinal Characteristics:**

- Cautious optimism towards international brands
- Expectation for brands, such as Nivea, to understand and respect their culture
- Positive response to marketing that emphasizes inclusivity and cultural sensitivity

**Habitual Characteristics:**

- Prevalent use of online shopping and social media
- Utilize the internet for product research and informed decision-making
- Frequent engagement with online reviews
- Reliance on word-of-mouth recommendations within social networks

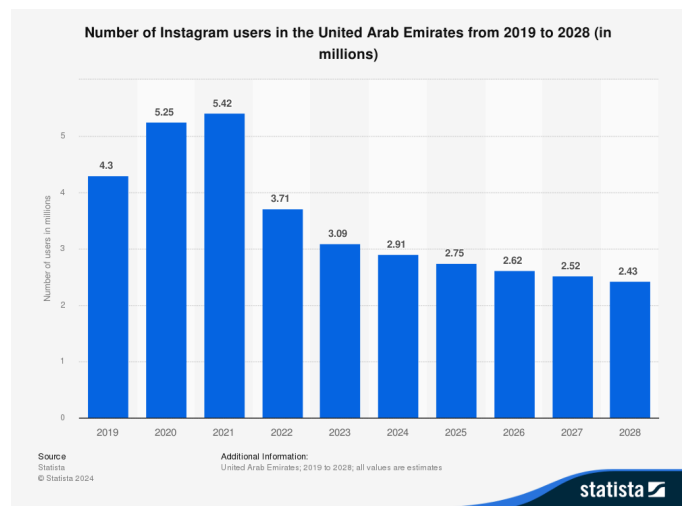
Incorporating these psychographic insights into the new campaign will highlight Nivea's commitment to empowerment, cultural diversity, and product integrity.

## Media Analysis

We plan to integrate a strategic mix of media channels, including social media, regional television and local digital outlets to reach our target audience of young women. For social media, we will mainly focus on YouTube and Instagram. YouTube is the most popular social media platform in the Middle East, and 75% of women with access to the internet use it (VeraContent, 2024). Nivea can take advantage of the popular platform to tell a story about Nivea's brand values, making viewers more

comfortable with the foreign brands and reaching most Middle Eastern women. We will also use Instagram because it is a highly creative and interactive platform, allowing Nivea to showcase its brand values and products in an engaging way.

The graph shows the reach of Instagram in



the United Arab Emirates, with a reach of 3.09 million people in 2023 (Statista, 2023). With 64% of Middle Eastern women with internet access using Instagram, both platforms together allow Nivea to reach a large demographic to build brand trust and increase visibility among the desired target audience across the Middle East (VeraContent, 2024).

Television remains a powerful channel in the Middle East, and significant regional TV networks have a large viewership among women. The most popular network among women in the Middle East is MBC, known for its lifestyle and family programs that appeal to women (MBC Data, 2024). The content on this network makes MBC the ideal environment for ads promoting products like deodorant and Nivea's company value of self-care and empowerment.

MBC, Al Arabia and Kuwait TV are three examples of networks that produce women-centered content and would be an effective space to air our new ad. On MBC, we would target popular programs such as *Sabah Al Khair Ya Arab* (Good Morning Arabs), which offers a mix of lifestyle tips, beauty advice, and current affairs, ensuring relevance to Nivea's audience. For Al Arabia, we could leverage talk shows and news segments that emphasize modern living and women's perspectives, creating a thoughtful association with empowerment. On Kuwait TV, family dramas and health-focused programming would provide the perfect backdrop for showcasing Nivea's commitment to holistic self-care.

Finally, collaborating with local digital outlets that attract young women who engage in lifestyle content could increase engagement in our ad. For example, Lovin Dubai is known for partnering with brands and displaying their ads along with analysis pieces on the brands they partner with (Allison, 2017). If we partnered with them, we could reach not only our original demographic but also the demographic of women who are not active on social media. By pairing with a local outlet to show our ad and promote our company value, we will reach more women and increase the brand's credibility and messages behind the ad.

## Advertisements

### Ad #1: Storyboard for a Commercial for YouTube and TV

FRAME 1



The first shot is of a young fashionable woman wearing a hijab walking through a city.

Voiceover: "If you've picked out your best outfit today..."

FRAME 2



Next shot is of a woman walking in a black dress.

Voiceover: "Whether it's a dark dress..."

FRAME 3



Next shot is of a woman in a white blouse.

Voiceover: "Or a white blouse..."

FRAME 4



Next shot is of another young woman wearing light colors.

Voiceover: "You won't have to worry about sweat stains with Nivea's Black and White Invisible Deodorant, which applies completely clear."

FRAME 5



Next shot is of a woman holding a baby.

Voiceover: "Instead, you can pay attention the important things."

FRAME 6



Next is a close-up shot of a mother holding a baby's hand.

FRAME 7



Next is a shot of two women having coffee and smiling.

FRAME 8



Next is an aerial shot of a group of women smiling.

FRAME 9



Last shot is a close-up of the product.

Voiceover: "Black and White Invisible Deodorant: Stay stain-free, so you can focus on what matters most."

## Ad #2: Still Ad for Instagram and Digital Media Outlets



## Instagram Mockup of Still Ad:





## Mockup of Still Ad within Lovin' Dubai:

Community 8 hours ago

### Top 10 Dubai Christmas Brunches You Can't Miss Out On This Festive Season

Alexa, play All I Want For Christmas Is You – Mariah Carey. Christmas is almost here, and no one does ...



Latest 10 hours ago

Get Your Mat Ready Because A FREE Guided Yoga Session Is Happening This Weekend

Latest 1 day ago

Why NOW Is The Perfect Time To Upgrade To A Large Screen

Sponsored 1 day ago

NIVEA: Stay Stain-Free, So You Can Focus On What Matters Most.

**Rationale:** We created the new tagline “Stay stain-free, so you can focus on what matters most” to relate to the collectivistic aspect of Middle Eastern culture. Through these ads, we want to communicate that the audience will not have to worry about staining any of their clothing with this deodorant, and they can focus on friends and family instead.

## References

Adams, Cydney. (2017, April 2017). *Nivea Pulls "White Purity" Ad After Backlash and Racism Claims*. CBS News.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nivea-pulls-white-purity-ad-after-backlash-and-racism-claims/>

Allison, A. (2017, February 6). *Lovin Dubai Buys 7Days' Social Media Handles*. Campaign Middle East. <https://campaignme.com/lovin-dubai-buys-7days-social-media-handles/>.

Bouri, C. (2023, Sept. 19). *Women's Labor-Force Participation in the Middle East*. Think Global Health. <https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/womens-labor-force-participation-middle-east>

CFR Education. (2024, February 8). *Economics: Middle East and North Africa*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://education.cfr.org/learn/learning-journey/middle-east-north-africa-essentials/economics-middle-east-and-north-africa>

*Colors of the Arab World: Meaning and Symbolism*. (2019, December 11). Arab America. <https://www.arabamerica.com/colors-of-the-arab-world-meaning-and-symbolism/>

Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism. (2024, May 24). *Annual Visitor Report 2023*. Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism. <https://www.dubaidet.gov.ae/en/research-and-insights/annual-visitor-report-2023#:~:text=Dubai%20showcased%20its%20tourism%20strength,16.73%20million%20set%20in%202019>

El-Ajlouni, E. (2023, September 20). *Arab Culture Being a High Context Culture*. Arab America. <https://www.arabamerica.com/arab-culture-being-a-high-context-culture/>

Energy Institute. (2024, June 20). *Oil production in the Middle East from 1998 to 2023 (in 1,000 barrels per day)* [Graph]. Statista.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/265200/middle-eastern-oil-production-in-barrels-per-day/>

Energy Institute. (2024, June 20). *Oil production worldwide from 1998 to 2023 (in 1,000 barrels per day)* [Graph]. Statista.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/265203/global-oil-production-in-barrels-per-day/>

European Commission. (n.d.). *Gulf Region*. European Commission.

[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/gulf-region\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/gulf-region_en)

IMF. (2024, April 22). *MENA region: Gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022, by country (in billion U.S. dollars)* [Graph]. Statista.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/804761/gdp-of-the-mena-countries/>

Issa, T., Alqahtani, S., et. al. (2020). *Middle East - Cultural Orientation according to Hofstede's cultural framework based on Hofstede Insights*. ResearchGate.

[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Middle-East-Cultural-Orientation-according-to-Hofstedes-cultural-framework-based-on\\_fig1\\_350745943](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Middle-East-Cultural-Orientation-according-to-Hofstedes-cultural-framework-based-on_fig1_350745943)

MBC Data Group. *Channels*. MBC, (2024, Oct. 31). [www.mbc.net/channels](http://www.mbc.net/channels).

*Nivea removes 'white is purity' deodorant advert branded 'racist'*. (2017, April 4). BBC.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39489967>

Nivea. (N.d.). *Black & White Invisible Original Anti-Perspirant*. Nivea.

<https://www.nivea-me.com/en-me/products/nivea-men-black-and-white-roll-on-40059000361620214.html?>

Tsand, Amie. (2017, April 4). *Nivea Pulls 'White Is Purity' Ad After Online Uproar*. New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/business/media/nivea-ad-online-uproar-racism.html>

Ramezani Bonesh, F. (2023, November 26). *Germany's trade with the GCC, 2023/24 Status and Prospects*. Middle East Briefing. Middle East Briefing.

<https://www.middleeastbriefing.com/news/germanys-trade-with-the-gcc-2023-24-status-and-prospects/>

Road Genius. (2024, July 22). *Turkey Tourism Statistics*. Road Genius.

<https://roadgenius.com/statistics/tourism/turkey/>

Statista. (2023, July 25). *Number of Instagram users in the United Arab Emirates from 2019 to 2028 (in millions)* [Graph]. Statista.

<https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1138746/instagram-users-in-the-united-arab-emirates>

The Culture Factor. (n.d.). *Country Comparison Tool*. Retrieved from

<https://www.theculturefactor.com/>

*Tourism Quarterly Review Q1* (2024). Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

[https://mota.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/en/eb\\_list\\_page/quarterly\\_review\\_-\\_q1\\_2024\\_en.pdf](https://mota.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/quarterly_review_-_q1_2024_en.pdf)

Tsang, Amie. (2017, April 4). *Nivea Pulls 'White Is Purity' Ad After Online Uproar*. *New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/business/media/nivea-ad-online-uproar-racism.html#:~:text=The%20advertisement%2C%20which%20was%20on,mascot%20for%20the%20alt%20Dright.>

VeraContent. (2024, Sept. 19). *Social Media in the Middle East: Tips for Global Marketers*.

VeraContent.

<https://veracontent.com/mix/social-media-middle-east/#:~:text=While%20some%20may%20not%20consider,million%20users%20in%20the%20region.>

Wang, Amy. (2017, April 5). *Nivea's 'White Is Purity' Ad Campaign Didn't End Well*. *The Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2017/04/05/niveas-white-is-purity-ad-campaign-didnt-end-well/>

World Bank. (2023, August 2). *Total fertility rate across the Middle East and North Africa from 2009 to 2021 (in births per woman)* [Graph]. Statista.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1135753/mena-rate-of-female-fertility/>