It must be said as regards advertising that, the Middle East went through a unique experience. The statement may look trivial but it is the exact truth, and nowhere else, probably, has change been so quick and total, in all aspects of business and everyday life.

From the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, every single country of the area was exposed to unpredictable market conditions which have emerged in a very short period of time.

Very rapidly indeed, the whole area shifted from tradition to modernity. It’s not that it hadn’t known any «revolutions» before. It is that it took all the previous revolutions, whether political, industrial, social or economic, decades if not centuries before they would introduce any noticeable change. In the Middle East, the fundamental marketing changes have erupted so quickly that they submerged the markets with their lava. And as is always the case on volcanic ground, advertising started to blossom on the fertile land left after the explosion.

If advertising is new, communication is a very old Middle Eastern tradition indeed.

In April 1928, a Syrian peasant, ploughing in his field, ran his sower into the remains of an ancient tomb, and so discovered Ugarit, one of the three archaeological key discoveries of all time, the other two being Mari and the Dead Sea Scrolls. At Mari, some natives were burying a dead man and near the Dead Sea, a Bedouin was looking for a stray sheep. The sites and scrolls were all discovered by chance, and yet they tell us so much about the Middle East, and probably just as much about Mankind.

Ugarit proved to be the site of an ancient city – 6,000 B.C. – which had flourished for four thousand years, and had been the centre of fertile cultural and commercial exchange between the Near East and the Mediterranean islands. Hundreds of texts, many of which Phoenician, new in language and in script, revealed the ways and trades of the ancestors of the peoples who live in the area today, as well as their ability to create language, and communicate their knowledge to the neighbouring world, and beyond.

* Ecole Supérieure de Publicité, Paris.
Mari disclosed another city from the antiquity – 4,000 B.C.; it was the centre of a state which, in its heyday, had a great influence over a great part of Mesopotamia. Its diplomatic archives, containing over 20,000 documents have led to a rewriting of the history of Western Asia in the first half of the second millennium B.C. As for the Dead Sea Scrolls, they threw a new, vivid light upon the beliefs and the ritual of pre-Christian Middle East.

These, of course, are not the only significant examples – Kirkuk, Alalakh, Nimrud, to name but a few, have also brought to light works so remarkable and significant that they changed all accepted opinions on much of Near Eastern culture and life. Thus, at the dawn of history, the ancient Orient already had a long life of experience behind it: from cavern to village and city, from rural to urban life, from hunting to pastoral and agricultural existence, its social, political, religious, cultural, artistic, and trade activities have undergone a vast process of evolution long before civilisation as we know it took the world. These activities tell us about the meeting – altogether through conflict, expansion, and trade –, of the peoples of the Fertile Crescent (Phoenicians, Syrians...), with the peoples of the Desert (all Semites), and the peoples of the mountains and beyond (Persians, Mesopotamians...), and from that point on, the peoples around the Mediterranean, as well as Asia, and the rest of the world. From Egypt to Mesopotamia, through the Arabian Desert and to Persia and Asia, the Middle East was to become and for a long time indeed remain the logical centre of the world. The Middle East must thus be regarded as a real synthesis; a literal centre i.e. the point from which life spreads to the rest of the world, but also the point towards which the rest of the world is inexorably attracted. It is by all means where East meets West, whichever way you look at it. It is a region of traders, merchants, communicators (didn’t they give the alphabet to the world?) and negotiators with a very strong inclination for open-mindedness and hospitality. And then, eventually, all things faded, and history went its way...

THE INTRUSION OF OIL

...Until the early years of 1960 when, all over the Arabian peninsula, extensive research was conducted to locate oil fields. The conclusion of the investigation soon became too clear: the area held the world’s largest resources of oil. And, of course, still does.

Drilling started on a large scale, generating huge profits. Money was available in massive quantities and started to circulate generously. The purchasing power of the local populations increased rapidly.

Thus the region’s landscape changed completely: derricks proliferated on a vast desert land and, with them, experts and workers of all sorts and nationalities. The Bedouins had to welcome those unexpected visitors, and many more since. Expatriates from all over the world were sent to the Middle East, along with their lifestyles and so far unknown consumption habits.

At the same time, oil became a political issue. Two major oil crises shook up the world in 1973 and 1979, placing the Middle East in the spotlight. The long established harmony built throughout the centuries by the Bedouins and their tribal traditions were shaken and replaced by new living conditions which eventually were to move them to an altogether new society.
However, all the region’s countries were badly in need of infrastructures: and so many contracting companies rolled up from the five continents, and started to build harbours, airports, roads, water pipes etc... Energy was also needed of course, but it was made available rapidly because the resources were there.

As a result of building and construction, the urban population increased very quickly creating in turn a strong demand for housing, offices, schools, hospitals, hotels, warehouses, shopping centres, transportation, etc...

International trade was booming. The available harbour facilities could hardly meet the flow created by the increasing volume of imports. Cargo ships had to wait for weeks to unload their shipment. The local consumers gained access to an unprecedented volume of new products and equipment such as refrigerators, air conditioners, automobiles, electronics (radio, TV), furniture, powdered milk, instant coffee, tea bags, frozen food, luxury products, watches, perfumes, fashion designs etc...

By the same movement, Arabs turned into «new consumers» totally ‘crazy’ about all the previously unheard of and unseen products. The magic word was jadid (Arabic for ‘new’). And anything new would sell.

The market seemed to have no limits. All the available products, good or bad, were sold in no time. Each new consignment was swallowed in just a few days leaving distributors with one difficulty to solve, as indeed logistics were a major problem which surpassed by far all marketing considerations.

It was henceforth clear that the best part of the region was totally open to foreign products (with taxes and custom duties kept at minimal levels everywhere). The local populations were clearly opening to foreign influences: travelling to and from the West and the East amplified. New labour was badly needed and it came from Pakistan, India, the Philippines, and many other places. Within the Middle East, Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian and Jordanian nationals moved in numbers in the Gulf States, many of whom, talented businessmen and wise entrepreneurs, were to shape up the regional business world. They played a key role in the development of the regional media and advertising industry, both on pan-Arab and local bases.

The local population definitely chose a settled way of life, and, in no time at all, old and new cities boomed in the Gulf. On occasions however, the old Bedouins celebrated their past nomadic life by spending some time in the desert. Traditional values were well kept indeed, despite all the many changes.

On the other hand, competition was building up. Even more brands were offered to the consumers’ choice. Hence, marketing was to play a more important role. Consumers were developing strong brand awareness, as they were becoming more familiar with brands, trademarks and attributes. And so, naturally, advertising emerged, thanks to the initiative of the market leaders and the major international brands. The main actors were trying to secure the largest market share through strong presence in the distribution chain, as well as a larger visibility.

The audio-visual media were still scarce, though extremely efficient. In that context, advertising played a major role because of its very informative and demonstrative approach. It educated the consumers in a pleasant and attractive way. Consequently, successful as it was, advertising was there to stay, and to grow.
As could be inferred from the above summary of the situation in the Middle East, advertising as a trade was really introduced in the region in the early 1960’s. The first advertising agencies saw the light in Beirut (Lebanon) and Cairo (Egypt), though the paths of these two pioneering countries were never to meet, each following its own cultural ways and traditions. The Gulf region, at the time, was still in its pre-oil era, and thus did not attract too much attention, let alone interest.

In Beirut, agencies such as Pimo, Publirizk, Éclair Kazan, and, a little later, Intermarkets, BBDO, Horizon, and Publi- Graphics, (soon to be joined in the Gulf by also Lebanese owned Promoseven, Madco and Team), led the way. Strongly inspired by and trained in the West, their founders introduced concepts, tools and techniques which previously proved efficient in such countries as the US and the UK. In Cairo, Americana was on the other hand able to implement a very typically local advertising approach which was to be dubbed (and still is) the ‘Egyptian Touch’. The reason lies probably in the fact that Lebanon’s was an open economy which relied on imports, when Egypt’s economy was state-run and relied on locally produced/assembled goods. Thus, foreign made goods were brought to Lebanon along with their foreign imagery and values by which they had to be promoted, when the Egyptians had to make up their own. In a matter of ten years however, both countries were able to develop a strong advertising and marketing industry which included all above and below the line trades and techniques, together with creative and production services. Agencies, media and production companies were to flourish very rapidly, and all were to quickly meet international standards.

The mid-sixties in Beirut saw a very significant evolution: the major international clients – Procter & Gamble, General Motors, Unilever, Nestlé, Bristol-Myers, Reckitt & Coleman, General Food, Pepsi-Cola, l’Oréal, etc. – all entrusting famous and strongly established international advertising networks with their worldwide budgets, the stronger Lebanese agencies quickly understood that their expansion was closely linked with their ability to convince these networks – chiefly US owned – to cut partnership deals, in most cases based on split commissions.

In Egypt, no major change, except for the fact that, in spite of the emergence of quite a few new agencies, Americana was turning into a form of a monopoly; by the early seventies, this agency’s share of voice was close to seventy percent of total advertising expenditures.

It was not, however, until the mid-seventies that things were really to evolve, and that the Beirut-born advertising industry would really expand to cover the Middle East. Ironically, the main reason was civil war in Lebanon! Indeed, civil war turned the small Lebanese agencies into large regional networks. In practical terms, it meant, for most, expatriation to the henceforth oil-rich emerging Gulf markets, starting with Saudi Arabia. For years, it also meant a sustained two-figure yearly growth for all Gulf markets. Those were the times of huge gains, and heavy investment. For it must be said that the major Lebanese networks did not – as many a malicious mind insinuated – ‘take the money and run’. Much rather, they invested in even more regional offices, human resources and state-of-the-art equipment.

By the same movement, partnership deals with international networks turned into full fledge alliances: McCann-Errickson, Young & Rubicam, Saatchi & Saatchi, Leo Burnett, BBDO, DDB, Lintas, J. Walter Thompson, Ogilvy & Mather, Ted Bates, TBWA, Grey etc. became the key players, alongside Denstu, Publicis or Euro-RSCG.
In the late eighties, a new phenomenon was to emerge: Media Buying Units (MBU). As indeed the Middle East was developing at a very fast pace, the markets were becoming more and more sophisticated and segmented. Media planning was henceforth too much of a headache to be handled by advertising agencies alone, however expert they may have become in the meantime. MBU’s hit the scene: Mindshare, Mediaedgecia, Carat, and others today take care of over 60 percent of the media buying activity.

THE MEDIA SCENE

Although the first Arab newspaper was founded in 1789, the birth of the media – as we would define the word today –, dates back to the early 1950s, with TV being introduced in the late fifties. Here again, the origin is two-headed: Lebanese and Egyptian. A quick presentation implies a movement from pan Arab to local, from local to regional, and then from regional to pan Arab again, and to local. This calls for an explanation, indeed.

The emergence of the Gulf markets is inseparable from the expansion of one particular title which, altogether on its own and alone, summarizes very well the history of print media, as well as its influence in the shaping of the advertising industry in the region: Al Oubu’ Al ‘Arabi (Arabic for ‘The Arab Week’) was a weekly newsmagazine which was founded in Beirut in 1957 by a businessman with no past or present linked to journalism, or any experience in the field. Nevertheless, Al Ousbou’ soon became the leading magazine both in journalistic and commercial terms since it was the only one to address all the 18 Arab countries of the time, with a distribution which encompassed them all – which meant a theoretical readership of several million. The magazine was so successful that, in the same decade, it gave birth to 4 other regional newsmagazines, three media shops and, at least one major regional advertising network (i.e. the founders of all were either journalists or executives with Al Ousbou’).

The era of pan Arab newsmagazines lasted until the mid-eighties when the Gulf countries were able to create their own media. Locally, each country now had its own media. This, added to political turmoil and civil war in Beirut, marked the end of the Lebanese-born pan Arab media. Advertisers were able to run their Kuwaiti campaigns in Kuwaiti media, UAE campaigns in UAE media, and Saudi campaigns in Saudi media. End of the second period.

The third period saw the birth of strong regional Gulf media – Kuwaiti, UAE, or Saudi born with strong regional distribution. It marked the birth of pan Gulf Media. The fourth period coincided with the emergence of satellite TV, and marked the revival of pan Arab satellite media, which, in turn, went along with the strengthening of the local Gulf media, as well as its diversification.

The Middle East media scene is indeed very strong and diverse. The newsmagazines have lost a major part of their audience, by they were effectively replaced by technically more professional trade & business media. By the same movement, thematic media was to get more powerful by the day, especially family, and women magazines.

TV, Outdoor, Cinema, Print, Radio and electronic media is all there. Total investments were multiplied by 5 over the past three years, to reach an unprecedented $2 US billion in 2003.
A VERY LIVELY SCENE WITH A BRIGHT FUTURE

No country or region, probably, could claim such dramatic change, economic development and growth in such little time. It must also be stressed that the Middle East was able to cross the bridge from ‘history’ to modernity without having to sacrifice its traditions of openness and sense of hospitality. Their respect of other peoples civilizations is just as strong as their strong attachment to their own. This most surely explains why the countries that form the Middle East today are able to maintain sustained growth at a level never seen before, anywhere. As far as the advertising industry is concerned, growth opportunities are yet greater. All experts predict that in the next ten years investment will be multiplied by fifteen. The Middle East is indeed a very old young market!

Surely, many global companies and brands play their respective parts in this evolution. None however can serve as a better example than l’Oréal, Nestlé (with Nescafé), or Unilever (with Lipton).

THE L’ORÉAL EXAMPLE

Advertising, of course, is directly related to socio-economic factors and to marketing options. The history of L’Oréal in the Middle East is a good example.

The premises: From end World War II until 1975

L’Oréal forged its reputation in France on the quality of its capillary products for hairdressers, more precisely hair dyes. Many more health and beauty products followed, which made L’Oréal a famous household brand. Many distributors operating outside of France started to show interest for these products. Quickly, they imported goods and started to distribute them in their domestic markets. At the same time, these distributors imported competitive products coming from the USA, the UK, Germany and many more suppliers.

In fact, the marketing strategy consisted basically in seizing business opportunities. The agents based their decisions on instinct and gut feeling. Their marketing approach was very much based on emotion and their very deeply rooted understanding of the market. They knew the consumers very well because the markets were small in size. On top of that, a mistake in the marketing approach had no consequence because supply would not match demand anyway.

In the Middle East, the «Made in France» label was extremely appreciated. Obviously, L’Oréal took advantage of this reputation to expand its presence in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen and Jordan. Lebanon played a privileged part because Lebanese businessmen were the most active players all over the area. At the very beginning, L’Oréal exported finished products all manufactured in France. Increasing volumes of sales and heavy custom duties combined generated interest for local manufacturing. Thus, some products started to be produced locally under license, with technical support provided by L’Oréal technicians. L’Oréal export division was based in Paris. The staff was extremely limited and importers had to visit Paris to negotiate sales deals (distribution contracts, price structure, volumes of products, new products opportunities...).

L’Oréal’s presence on the various markets was not homogeneous. It varied in terms
of products and market share. Its most successful products/brands were ELNETT hair spray, IMEDIA colouring cream, ELSEVE shampoo, AMBRE SOLAIRE sun tan lotion and cream, as well as VICHY, GARNIER, «Salon» hair care products, BIEN r the creation and concepts of the campaigns. Advertising was extremely limited in the early stages because consumers were not offered a large choice of products. Advertising was not a priority. It consisted mainly in in-store promotional materials and very limited media coverage (press and outdoor). Each importer created in-house (so-called) advertising agencies while cutting deals with one of the few organized local full-service advertising agencies.

By the mid Seventies, each market had its own different story. And, accordingly, L’Oréal had a different brand image in each country. There was no clear brand identity. Thus, the need for coordination started to emerge and soon became a priority. A special division was created for mass market products to build a coordinated marketing strategy and control local importers. A staff of 4 area managers was responsible to implement the new strategic plans. The export teams started visiting all markets, supervising marketing strategies, sales plans and communication programmes. All perfumes and cosmetic brands were placed under the responsibility of a separate luxury products division. It handled such brands as LANCÔME, BIOTHERM, or GUY LAROCHE. A new age had come.

Civil war in Lebanon in 1975 put and end to this initial phase. Businessmen started to reconsider their strategy. They moved away from Lebanon and settled throughout the Middle East. As did advertising agencies. A new history was in sight.

A new vision: 1975-1990

It took some time for the main economic actors of the region to understand that they should react to a fast changing situation. Each country was investing heavily in infrastructure facilities in order to acquire independence. The “oil dollars” would do miracles in no time. The boom opened wide perspectives. Mentalities were changing, and so did business.

Evolution occurred for L’Oréal in 1977, during the launch of a new product: «ELSEVE Balsam». «ELSEVE shampoo» was already present in the market and had established a good reputation for the brand. For the first time in the history of the company, its Middle East area manager decided to organise a frontal launch by which all Middle East countries would introduce the new product at the same time. Coordination was the key to success because the supply of goods needed to be planned carefully. For the first time as well, advertising had to play a very important part. A budget was especially devoted to the promotion of the new product. Each territory had to contribute to a regional campaign.

This strategy could not exist if advertising was not coordinated. The moment was favourable thanks to the few Lebanese advertising agencies that started to settle in the whole region, creating the first pan-Arab networks. One of them was selected to run the «ELSEVE Balsam» campaign. The creative material was provided by L’Oréal and was adapted whenever needed. The visuals and films had to stay as much as possible by the international communication concept. However, the local censorship requirements created many problems. All press ads, TV commercials, radio spots, POS materials had to get local censorship clearance (particularly, TV commercials had to be pre-approved by the TV channels. Before making a decision for the launch, clearance had to be given by
the advertising agency. It was a huge responsibility because «censorship» is a very unpredictable authority. Many problems occurred during the campaign because of that. Some adjustments were made in order to run the same campaign in all markets. The media strategy was based on TV (English and Arabic channels), Magazines (pan-Arab and local female magazines) and radio.

A regional campaign offered L’Oréal the opportunity to use the available regional media, and more precisely the pan-Arab magazines, press and radio, in addition to the local media. An umbrella campaign was thus made possible. All media plans were approved by the local importers, which was no easy task because such a regional campaign was bound to upset the local interests and responsibilities of the importers. It was vital to prove that such a coordinated campaign would benefit all parties. That was a real challenge. And it worked!

Never before was a single product launched with a unique campaign supported by a consistent and clear message. The volume of investment was much higher than ever before, and it was concentrated on a short period of time. The mass effect was there. On top of that, samples were distributed in large quantities. They were inserted in the magazines. It was the first time indeed that trial doses were given to consumers via a media vehicle. The technique was new in these markets, and it produced a very strong impact. Very soon after ELSEVE Balsam, l’Oréal used the same approach to launch their hair colouring shampoo RECITAL. The campaign was originally created in the USA with a testimonial featuring women who felt happy with their beautiful hair and used the most expensive hair colouring shampoo «because they were worth it». The campaign worked so well that it paved the (worldwide) way to a now very famous brand signature.

It was also the first time that an advertising concept was pre-tested in the various Middle East countries. It was indeed a new thing to conduct a research before taking a major marketing decision there. The advertising agency in charge of the campaign decided to organise an in-house test which involved agency personnel in each country, along with a sample of resident women. Today this type of pre-test is so widespread that it may seem ridiculous to mention that first experience. But this was the Middle East. Having Arab women who should not show their hair in public talk about themselves was no easy task in a Muslim country. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by women who had to carefully select the persons they wanted to research. Even if the method was not totally scientific, the indications it gave about the product and the advertising campaign were clear enough to be taken into account and processed. On top of that, it helped the other advertisers understand the need for a well-organised research industry. And very soon after indeed, specialized research companies hit the market and started to run more structured studies and surveys.

The conclusions of the pre-test were very encouraging for L’Oréal, and the advertising campaign was thought to be extremely well adapted by Arab women. But new difficulties emerged that had to be overcome. They had to do with language. Modern Arabic is not a unified language. Each country has its own dialect. An advertising campaign could not ignore this aspect. Fortunately, the advertising message was universal: beauty and self-achievement are universal values. A unique campaign was finally adopted for the whole region. And, in spite of some difficulties with the local censorship authorities, the campaign ran as per schedule, with a very strong impact.

Many product launches followed suit: «FREESTYLE», «ULTRA RICH», «MIXA», «ANAIIS ANAIIS» (and other CACHAREL fragrances), STUDIO LINE and many more, and, as a consequence, the locally manufactured products were loosing
importance in the overall turnover. Finished products imported from France forced everyone involved into taking quick steps to answer the new marketing challenges. The capacity to react to competitive initiatives or to business opportunities proved indeed much faster with imported finished goods, supplied with strong industrial backing. L’Oréal was able to provide a fantastic support: volume of production, quality of production and reactivity.

Conversely, local manufacturing was slow, as it needed technical expertise that very often lacked in such emerging markets. All filling machines and production equipment had to be imported from Europe. Even with assistance from L’Oréal technicians, production was always a problem. Delays in production schedules generated stock failures. Retailers lost sales, and complaints were growing.

Coordination brought coherence, rationalisation and efficiency and, as a result, L’Oréal’s presence in the markets became stronger and stronger. But, another revolution was already in sight.

Integration and globalization: 1990 onwards

A new vision was emerging. Among the existing brands and products, only a number of them had a real potential to take world wide or regional challenge of which, L’Oréal made a clear assessment. The idea was to capitalise on the strongest and most universal product lines. Strategic brands emerged. The main marketing efforts were channelled for support.

Such a strategy required a more centralised organization in terms of decision and implementation of plans. The industry was also to provide reliable supply and independence. Clearly, the traditional commercial structures needed to be replaced by integrated operational entities.

For this purpose, the base for the Middle East was set in Dubai in the UAE. The country had always been considered as a paradise for merchants and traders. Free zones were created to attract investors. They offered the opportunity to create production units and permanent management units. Just like in Europe two decades before, branches were created. The mother company was in command. After a long process of evolution, the Middle East was now part of a ‘global’ strategy, with advertising campaigns benefiting from the expertise and funding of a central marketing division.

But, the peculiarities of each market are still there. Globalisation does not exclude ‘localisation’. The spirit of the age of the pioneers is still there. Wherever they are, consumers express their own identity. Advertising cannot ignore this fact. But that’s another story.

THE NESCAFÉ VS LIPTON TEA BAGS EXAMPLE

Another good example of how closely advertising is related to socio-economic factors and to marketing options belies in the Nescafé v/s Lipton Tea Bags case.

The Nestlé saga in the Middle East began in Lebanon in the early 1950s with two early childhood aimed products/brands: Nido and Cerelac, respectively powdered milk and cereal based canned meals. In a country where breast feeding was the rule, Nestlé managed to turn Nido into a just as natural way to provide your child with quality milk for a healthy growth («Growing Up» has been Nido’s line for over 40 years now!).
Firstly positioned as a good breast feed supplement, it was eventually looked at as a good substitute milk, for convenience and all practical purposes, especially in places where women were taking on a real active role in society. Nestlé owed their success both to an astute marketing strategy, and a very shrewd and aggressive distributor. Two ingredients which became the company’s trademark in the whole region. Within a couple of decades, Nestlé would be just as successful with such famous products/brands as Nesquik, Crunch, Carnation, Libby’s... and Nescafé.

Perhaps, much sooner and better than anyone, Nestlé could read the signs of the new times. The company’s marketing brain could foresee that lifestyles were changing, and that in this ever-faster world, people would look for healthy tasty ‘home-made’ food that did not need much time to cook. Just like the rest of the world, the Middle East took the same fast lane to change. In a matter of two decades, the Gulf States moved from desert tents to post-modern architecture sky-scrappers, and from nomadic austere existence to state-of-the-art hi-fi electronic equipment driven standard of living. This, Nestlé’s regional distributor could sense the ‘modern times’ syndrome long before it happened. As did the company’s regional advertising agency. And their communication strategy was a perfect reflection of their insight. The best example of their perspicacity came with Nescafé.

RIDE AGAINST THE WIND

By and large, the people of the Middle East were divided into two irreconcilable groups: coffee drinkers and tea drinkers. Either way, there was no room for Nescafé. Why? For one, tea drinkers would never switch to coffee; for two, coffee drinkers had their very own kind of coffee: it was ‘Turkish’ coffee for Levantines, and the green very strong Arabic coffee for the Gulf people. Knowing that, Nescafé opted for a ‘step-by-step’ strategy. During the first ten years (1960-1970), the brand was positioned as «The Modern Man’s Coffee» in the Levant, and as «The Drink for hasty Expats» in the Gulf. Driven by a booming Lebanon, the Levant countries understood the message and were taken in. On the other hand, for their economic development, the Gulf States relied on a very large expats community who did not share the natives’ standards of living: no servants, no nurses, and no cooks. DIY was the rule, and Nescafé was a perfect match.

By definition, however, the expats community was transient, and Nestlé’s people knew their strategy would not live long if they would not extend its positioning and message to the natives. But the natives were, for one, mostly tea drinkers, and for two, not really open to Western style when it came to food because food was The sign of hospitality, and hospitality Must be oriental. Thus, for another 10 years (1970-1980), Nestlé opted for an intermediary phase in the Gulf: from ‘drink of hasty expat’ they moved to expat opening up to his/her environment; this was the «Open Up» era. TV commercials were built around the theme of expats opening up to natives, organizing mixed cocktail parties, dinners, desert outings, etc. Mostly, outdoor gatherings. Expats were learning about oriental hospitality. Individually, at first. Thus the final move for Nescafé: «The cosmopolitan household hospitality» coffee. And it worked. It did pay to ride against the wind.

Nescafé was so successful that it almost killed completely both Turkish and Arabic coffee... as it nearly did tea, if it weren’t for Lipton deciding to fight back.
The taste of hospitality

Lipton was losing ground to a coffee maker in a tea drinking region! Unilever would not tolerate that any longer. They decided to fight back with Lipton’s Yellow Tea bags. Ironically, they used the same advertising agency as Nescafé. And, here again, it worked. Because Lipton blew back the winds of tradition into the Gulf homes. Lipton put desert life back at the centre of the Gulf ‘modern’ households, because, in the minds of the Gulf natives, the desert meant two distinctive things: it meant tradition, and it meant hospitality. Besides, in the desert you would only drink tea, and any other drink wouldn’t do. That’s the way it is. And that’s the way Lipton played it. And the message went through. The same agency who promoted modernity for Nescafé campaigned for tradition for Lipton!

The story of Nescafé and Lipton tea bags in the Middle East is a story about understanding a market. A market is not only a collection of laws, rules and regulations. Not even a matter of cultures and traditions. It is about integrating all that, and knowing what to do about them. In other words, a market is a marketeer’s land of opportunities. Understanding a market implies, of course, that you know about its rules, regulation, cultures and traditions. But, more important, it entails that you know what to do about all these things. That you are able to change all that into a real long term business opportunity. And that, both Nestlé and Lipton knew. As did their agency.

Tradition and modernity are no enemies. This is what the advertising company was able to prove. It took Lipton five years to adopt the ‘tradition’ strategy because the mother company, Unilever, wanted to implement the global Lipton concept which revolved around the «The World Famous English Tea» concept; and while it did that, Lipton was no match to Nescafé. This is a case of when a global brand has to go local, if it wishes to be and remain global. Nescafé, on the other hand, did go global, but only after a transition that lasted well over twenty five years! The fact that the same advertising agency was able to help both companies to achieve such striking results is also further proof that a global approach can rely on regional expertise. Communication is not science. It is sharing experience. It is getting to know people the way they are, as well as the way they are willing to be. If only you were willing to take them.

RIASSUNTO

È probabile che nessun Paese o territorio possa rivendicare una trasformazione, uno sviluppo economico e una crescita di tale portata nel volgere di così poco tempo. Occorre anche evidenziare come il Medio Oriente sia riuscito a oltrepassare il ponte che separa la ‘storia’ dalla modernità senza dover sacrificare le sue tradizioni di apertura e il senso di ospitalità che lo contraddistinguono.

D’altro canto, nella seconda metà degli anni Settanta, la concorrenza si stava rafforzando, mettendo il consumatore nella condizione di scegliere fra un numero maggiore di marche. Il marketing era dunque chiamato a ricoprire un ruolo più importante. Il consumatore d’altronde sviluppava una forte notorietà di marca, in virtù della sua crescente familiarità con marche, marchi di fabbrica e simboli. E così, in modo del tutto naturale, si affermava la pubblicità per iniziativa dei leader di mercato e delle più importanti marche internazionali.

I protagonisti principali cercavano di garantirsi le maggiori quote di mercato attraverso una massiccia presenza nella catena di distribuzione nonché attraverso una maggiore visibilità.
RÉSUMÉ

Il est probable qu’aucun Pays ou territoire ne puisse revendiquer une transformation, un développement écono-
mique et une croissance d’une telle envergure au bout de si peu de temps. Il faut aussi souligner que le
Moyen-Orient est arrivé à franchir le pont séparant l’’histoire’ de la modernité sans se voir contraint de sacrifi-
cier ses traditions d’ouverture et le sens de l’hospitalité qui le caractérisent.

Dans la deuxième moitié des années soixante-dix, la concurrence était d’ailleurs en train de se renfor-
cer, ce qui avait mis le consommateur dans les conditions de choisir parmi un nombre de plus en plus grand
de marques. D’où la nécessité que le marketing joue un rôle plus important. Le consommateur développait
donc une conscience remarquable en matière de marques, due à sa familiarité croissante avec marques,
marques de fabrication et attributs. C’est ainsi que la publicité avait réussi à émerger, d’une façon naturelle,
sur l’initiative des leaders du marché et des marques internationales les plus importantes.

Les protagonistes principaux cherchaient à s’assurer les plus grandes parts de marché moyennant une
présence massive dans la chaîne de distribution ainsi que moyennant une visibilité plus répandue.