

Rules and Hofstede's UAI, a study on the Arabic Muslim and European Christian cultures

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Abstract

The present paper is aimed at bringing to light some very important aspects of intercultural communication relating to Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance Index. The focus will be on the European and Arab cultures, consistent with correlative aspects of social life, pointed out by Hofstede and other authors. The result is a study on the UAI concerning the Arab Countries and a brief look into the correlation of the UAI with the way society works, with the image of the self and with linguistic complexity in pronoun use.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Middle East, Europe.

Introduction and acknowledgements

THE PRESENT STUDY aims at analysing some of the correlative factors that G. Hofstede points out to, using the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) and his correlation of the UAI values with the degree of complexity of a culture's rules. The UAI score is calculated starting from value 100, designating cultures which are more preoccupied with avoiding uncertainty, down to value 0, assigned to cultures which are less preoccupied with avoiding uncertainty.

G. Hofstede (2001, 2010) includes the Arab Countries in his scales of the four cultural dimensions that he identified. In his study (2001, 2010), "The Arab Countries" are composed of Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya and Saudi Arabia. Values for these countries have been calculated as an average, which was then entered in the scale. Since the 3rd edition of Hofstede's study (2010), additional data has been displayed in The Hofstede Centre database (www.geert-hofstede.com) for The Arab Emirates (score 80). We will discuss this aspect later on, in a dedicated chapter of this paper.

We acknowledge that both the "European culture" and the "Arab culture" cannot be treated as monoliths. We are fully aware of the fact that these are just artifices grouping the multiple cultures that make up each of the above mentioned clusters. Our intended

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use of these clusters is to compare some of their general characteristics, ones that are shared by all the separate cultures that make up the European culture and all the individual cultures that make up the Arab culture. This artifice is far from being a perfect one but it will be of some help in analysing some of the traits shared by these clusters of cultures, as well as provide a good contrast between the two main clusters analysed.

Within this paper we will probably make fewer references to the European cultures, as portrayed in the following chapters. This approach will allow us to focus on “the other one”, in order to better portray the cultural particularities and correlations analysed.

Table 1 – Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Romania and Arab Countries

RANK	America C/S	Europe S/E	Europe N/NW/Anglo World	Europe C/E Ex-Soviet	Muslim World M.E. & Africa	Asia E/SE	INDEX
1		Greece					112
2		Portugal					104
3	Guatemala						101
4	Uruguay						100
5			Belgium NI				97
6		Malta					96
7				Russia			95
8	El Salvador						94
9-10			Belgium Fr				93
9-10				Poland			93
11-13						Japan	92
11-13				Serbia			92
11-13	Suriname						92
14				Romania			90
15				Slovenia			88
16	Peru						87
17-22	Argentina						86
17-22	Chile						86
17-22	Costa Rica						86
17-22		France					86
17-22	Panama						86
17-22		Spain					86
23-25				Bulgaria			85
23-25						S. Korea	85
23-25		Turkey					85
26-27				Hungary			82
26-27	Mexico						82
28					Israel		81

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29–30	Colombia					80
29–30				Croatia		80
31–32	Brazil					76
31–32	Venezuela					76
33				Italy		75
34				Czech Rep.		74
35–38			Austria			70
35–38			Luxembourg			70
35–38					Pakistan	70
35–38			Switzerland Fr			70
39					Taiwan	69
40–41					Arab ctrs	68
40–41					Morocco	68
42	Ecuador					67
43–44				Germany		65

Source: Hofstede et al., 2010: 192).

Further Acknowledgements Regarding “The Arab Countries”

We believe that the Uncertainty Avoidance Index score of the Arab culture, as portrayed in Hofstede’s study would require further attention because of the grouping of the six countries (Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya and Saudi Arabia) in one conglomerate meant to represent the Arab Muslim world.

We have identified two main issues with this grouping. The first one would be the absence from the group of a great part of the Arab world, countries like Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria and Yemen being left out of the group. The second issue is Lebanon’s presence within the group which is a country with a very heterogeneous population especially as religion is concerned.

Looking further into the first issue identified above, the Arab Countries value stated in the last edition of the study (2010) and by the Hofstede Centre database is 68. However, the combined values of Egypt (80), Iraq (85), Kuwait (80), Lebanon (50), Libya (80) and Saudi Arabia (80) have an average of 75. Furthermore, if we add the new United Arab Emirates UAI value (80) which is published on the Hofstede Centre internet site, the average for the group would be 85. More so, if values from the other Arab countries are made available and added (Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria and Yemen), then the score would surely vary.

Concerning the second issue, regarding Lebanon’s presence within the group, we strongly believe that Lebanon’s case is a special one as far as the Arab culture is concerned.

In a country where the population is highly heterogeneous (59.7 Muslim, 39% Christian, 1.3% other religions), religion is one major factor, the country's political system itself being confessional. According to Moaddel (2008), inter-religious relations exhibit a high degree of insecurity and distrust in the situation in which most of the Lebanese identify with their religion rather than ethnicity (Moaddel, 2008). Furthermore, the study registered significant differences in values, depending on ethnic group. For example, there are significant differences regarding gender equality between Druze and Sunni groups (around 19%) but perhaps the greatest difference recorded is regarding political attitudes, where the difference between the Sunni and Christian groups relating to whether religion and politics should be separated was 27%.

Because of this heterogeneous trait of the Lebanese environment, we strongly believe that if states of the Arab culture would be grouped together, Lebanon should be treated as a special case because the internal value system varies from group to group and the groups also affect one another, resulting in an intricately and heterogeneously woven system of coexisting values and beliefs. Then again, the overwhelming majority of the Lebanese are of Arab ethnicity and Lebanon is not the only Arab state with such a heterogeneous population, so we would have to argue that for the most faithful analysis, the information would have to be interpreted either on a country-by-country basis or within a determined, complete group.

Language complexity and the UAI

Language was one of the important correlative factors that Hofstede (2010:197) pointed to when detailing his findings on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index. Following his study, he has concluded that cultures situated at the high end of the scale are less rigorous about formulas of addressing to one another. Using Kashima & Kashima's 1998 study on the personal pronoun use in cultural contexts, Hofstede points out to a direct proportionality between the uncertainty avoidance score of a culture and its inclination towards more complex formulas of communication. So, the higher the score on the scale the more complex the formulas of addressing get (i.e. tu, vous etc.). We have to point out that in Kashima and Kashima's original 1998 work, the main focus was on the use of the singular form of the 1st and 2nd person. Their conclusion was that if the subject of the sentence was a pronoun, a language's inclination to drop the pronoun would point out to an inclination towards being less individualistic and thus more community-oriented.

In this correlation between the UAI score and this particular linguistic trait we recog-

nise the need to underline some facts ascertaining to the European and Arabic cultures (referring to Standard Arabic as the language of reference).

The European cultures are situated at different positions with scores ranging from 112 to 65. From the linguistic perspective, within Indo-European languages there is no gender assignment in the singular form of the 1st and 2nd persons. More so, verbal forms of the Indo-European languages are not in accord with the pronouns regarding sex assignment. Sexual identification is entirely made by using pronouns (he, her) together with a verb (he walks, she walks) or contextually.

By contrast, the Arabic countries are situated at position No. 40-41, with a score of 68. From the linguistic perspective, the Standard Arabic Semitic formulas of addressing to one another are much more complex by comparison to the European ones, harmonizing the form of the verbs with the pronouns. Furthermore, besides the additional verbal conjugation forms (1st, 2nd and 3rd persons masculine and feminine, in both singular and plural) the Arabic language also features a „dual” form in both the 2nd and 3rd persons.

Comparing these two different linguistic particularities, one belonging to the European cultures which scored from 112 to 65 on the UAI and the other to the Arabic culture, which scored 68 on the UAI, we come to the conclusion that the Arabic language is much more complex than the European languages (except for German, according to the correlation which has a 0.43 variation according to Kashima and Kashima) as far as formulas of addressing to one another are concerned, as detailed in the 1st and 2nd persons, singular comparative verb conjugation chart below. However, most languages have strong inclinations to drop the personal pronoun. The difference in this case would be that in the Arabic language the form of the verb takes on the information on the sex of the person that was contained in the pronoun that was dropped.

Table 2 – Arabic conjugation in 1st and 2nd person, singular form

Verb-to write	1 st person	1 st plural	2 nd m. sg.	2 nd f. sg.	2 nd d. sg.
KATABA ((Ana aktubu	Nahnu	Anta	Anti	Antum
كتلر		naktubu	taktubu	taktubina	taktubaani

In conclusion, Hofstede's observation based on the 1998 study of Kashima & Kashima establishes a link between discarding the personal pronoun as the subject of the sentence and the UAI score. Basically, the higher the UAI score, the higher the need for more rules and thus a more complex linguistic system, therefore the more use of the pronoun. In the above mentioned analysis, we have pointed out that in the case of comparing the main European languages and Standard Arabic, the latter has a much more complex structure

than the European languages. Concerning the UAI score, modern studies place some of the countries studied by Hofstede in the original study at a higher score (Oshlyansky, Cairns, Thimbleby, 2006; The Hofstede Centre).

Religion's importance to the present study

In both Persian and Arabic cultures, Islam (which has appeared within the Arabic cultural environment) has greatly influenced social life through its normative structure, regulating aspects from commerce to family law. Given the fact that Islam is a religion with a very powerful community focus and the Arab States are rated at position No. 42 out of 76 on Hofstede's Individualism Index (Hofstede 2010:96), well within the collectivist half of the scale, and that Islam is the most widely spread religion within the Arab geopolitical area, we have decided to include cultural traits that are not only affiliated to the Arab culture but also to the Islamic one, being however fully aware that these two terms are not interchangeable, although the first is widely engulfed by the second.

One of the pillars of Islam, the Qur'An, is also referred to as The Constitution of Medina, because of its high normativity trait. Every day aspects of social life, from food to dress code, personal hygiene to family and commercial law are provisioned in norms that are either in the Hadith, Sunna, and the traditions of the Prophet or the Qur'An. In Islam, prayers are performed 5 times per day, occupying a central place in the life of a Muslim. Each prayer has a name and specific conditions that it must be performed in. For instance, the Fajr is performed at least 10-15 minutes before sunrise, Zuhr must be performed after true noon, Asr in the afternoon, when the shadow of an object is twice its size, Maghrib is performed after sunset, until dusk and Isha from dusk until dawn. Also, there is Jumuaa, the day when all the Muslims within an area gather at the local mosque to pray but this does not mean that they cannot do so in the other days of the week, the prayers being one of the 5 pillars of Islam.

By contrast, in the European cultures, like in most Christian countries, secular norms and religious ones are well separated within society. The prayer remains a community event but is only performed on Sundays. By contrast, there is no daily obligation to prayer for the faithful and there are no prerequisites that one must fulfil other than confession before sacrament.

Purity and the UAI

In a 1965 study (Mary Douglas: 174) cited by Hofstede (2010), the author portrays dirt or impurity as rejected elements. This would also, in turn, imply that the acceptance of dirt or impurity would equal the acceptance of a lower hierarchic position than the

orderly system that rejected it. Dirt which pollutes can thus also be associated with personal hygiene and its symbolic meaning in religious rituals. We understand that there are a lot of variables concerning the multiple aspects of such a subject and we do not claim to adopt an exhaustive approach in this regard. However, we will base our arguments on the assertion that one's surrounding reality which leads to the constitution of one's subjective reality plays a key role in the formation of one's self, shaping one's cultural identity (Kitayama, 2000). We will further base our present analysis on a very specific trait of the Muslim culture, the institution of the prayer, which takes place 5 times per day. A study of The PEW Research Forum which involved face-to-face interviews with more than 38.000 people has recorded that in Middle Eastern countries with Arab-Muslim majority, Muslims have reported that religion is very important in their lives: Morocco (89%), Jordan (85%), Palestinian territories (85%), Iraq (82%), Tunis (78%), Egypt (75%), and Lebanon (59%).

Older Generation More Religious Committed in Middle East-No

% who say religion is very important in
Ages 18-34 **Ages**

Lebanon	42	7
Palestinian territories	80	9
Tunisia	73	8
Iraq	79	8
Jordan	82	8
Morocco	88	9
Egypt	74	7

% who pray several times a day
18-34 **35**

Lebanon	47	7
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Source: The PEW Research Center, The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity, August 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>

More so, there is also data regarding the percentage of Muslims that pray multiple times per day, indicating a strong system of belief and thus a very high compliance with general religious prescriptions.

Concerning personal purity, the ablution ritual of "Wudhu" must be performed under strict rules (i.e. for each paired part of the body start with the right one) in order for the body of the Muslim to be fit for prayer. A ritual that consumes from 5-10 minutes to half an hour or more, wudhu is also a state of purity that can be broken in certain conditions

that may vary from scholar to scholar and from sect to sect: passing gas, faeces or urinating, sexual discharge (both male and female), deep sleep that makes a person unaware of his or her surroundings, loss of consciousness, touching the sexual organ with the bare hand. In the situation that the above situations occur, the ritual of wudhu must be performed again in order to obtain the purity needed in order to pray properly (Al-Imām Ibn Qudāmah).

This is just one example out of many concerning personal and collective purity, like eating only with the right hand, always entering the prayer room right foot first and much more. These traits are consistent with Hofstede's correlation between the UAI and the degree of provisioning or social rules within a society and point out to yet another set of cultural elements that would situate the Arabic culture further up on the UAI scale.

Rules and leadership legitimacy

When it comes to norms, the European Christian and Arab Muslim cultures share some values that are, however, interpreted differently in each case. This became even clearer in the case of the recognition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although most Arab Muslim countries signed the document and apparently supported it diplomatically, many did not ratify it internally. One of the most important reasons for the rejection of the internal ratification of this set of norms was that it was culturally biased, being the projection of Judeo-Christian values. This is not to say that the Arab countries that were not keen on integrating these norms into their internal legal frameworks did not share the values defended by it but some of these values were culturally interpreted in a different way. This apparent cultural clash gave birth to a mirrored initiative to defend human rights which benefitted from the approval and acceptance of its signing entities, The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam. The emergence of a parallel document that is practically a source of international law, which contains references to religion, may be puzzling to a European Christian. What do legal norms and rules have to do with religion, which is mostly associated with morality? This is one of the most clashing aspects when it comes to European Christian – Middle Eastern Islam interactions.

Following the 1996 Arbitration Act in Britain, Muslim Shari'a Courts have emerged and quickly started to function, imparting justice within Britain's Muslim communities. Seeing that the phenomenon grew wider, some non-Muslims began to fear what would happen to them if they were to come under the Shari'a jurisdiction. The fact was that the Muslim Shari'a Tribunals were arbitration courts that required the express request of a person in order to be able to pass judgement on any aspect concerning that person, so al-

though its decisions were enforceable by law, one would choose whether or not he or she would be tried by such a tribunal, which was in fact functioning exactly like a Commercial Arbitration Tribunal (Georgia, Jucan 2011). The British Muslim Shari'a (Arbitration) Tribunals developed and spread so fast because Muslim communities really needed this institution to set their differences and the vast majority preferred it to the secular, more powerful legal system, and even the women, who basically had a more favourable status within the national legal system, were inclined to use the Shari'a.

As we have argued before, Islam, compared to Christianity, is a system of beliefs with a very pronounced normative character that was preserved over time. Furthermore, in the European Christian states, religion and secular matters are notoriously separated, while in the Arab Muslim states religion and politics are intertwined, sometimes inextricably dependent on one another. As a consequence of this fact, all the Middle Eastern states with Arab Muslim majority have internal legal frameworks that are tributary to Islam and to Shari'a norms. In one way or another, they are imbued within the constitutions of the states and/or function alongside general legal norms. Thus, Islamic Shari'a provisions regulate diverse aspects of social life, ranging from commercial matters to family ones.

In the previous chapter, we have underlined the importance of certain practices related to purity and prayer. While practices are a very important aspect of religion and, in fact, of any system of beliefs, we intend to go beyond this and stress that a system of beliefs moulds one's personality, playing a crucial part in the development of the ego, super-ego and the way that one perceives and interprets the surrounding reality (Nakata, 2009; Hofstede, 2010). Rules are the expression of encouraged behaviour within a society and whether or not they are followed and respected to the letter by each and every individual matters less than the overall impression of their enforcement. As long as there is a critical mass within a society that upholds and enforces a set of rules, they will produce their effects, even if social conditions impose adaptation or deviation from their original form.

This is where one of the most visible contrast areas between the Arab Islamic civilization and the European Christian occur. In all of the European Christian Cultures, due to the fact that religion and state are profoundly separated, being two entities that exert their power in parallel systems that do not overlap, the rules that directly affect society are the ones derived from state authority, namely the states' legislative systems. More precisely, parliaments are the main source of law, followed by the judicial systems that generate case law. The interpretation of the law falls within the exclusive competence of the judicial systems of the states. All the rules that can be enforced by the state and thus guaranteed by the state's monopoly over coercive power are the product of the above mentioned man-made systems. Religion, in this case, is the realm of morality, which is the source of social norms that are optional within a society, open to interpretation and subjectivity. More

so, in most of the European countries, multiculturalism opened the environment up to all religions and thus to all systems of values, some of them conflicting, so that morality would be dependent on the point of view of the observer.

By contrast, in the Arab Muslim world, religion and state are interwoven, even in the states with the most secular tendencies. Even in the dictatorships from before the Arab Spring, although the main spectre of Civil Law was regulated by legal norms of English or French origin, some adapted to the specifics of the area or others taken as they were, there were some aspects of social life which were regulated by Shari'a inspired provisions. Family life was one such matter, with different implications regarding inheritance, marriage, the decomposition of marriage, adoption and so on.

Taking these two separate approaches concerning rules, one might ask oneself what would be the importance of how rules are made and implemented in an environment, why does it matter as long as there are rules and people abide by them? Well, this would be, as we have argued in an argument from one of the previous chapters, one of the greatest contrasts between these two cultures.

Social norms and the power of the mundane

Answering the question which ended the previous chapter, the way rules are applied within a social environment is very important in the way rules are made and implemented and especially in what concerns their overall effects within the social environment.

In the European states, the main actors that play key roles as far as rules are concerned are the parliament, the government and the judicial system. These three institutions come together and uphold the State's monopoly on coercive force. The rules take the form of juridical norms, which are then digested by the population and are most widely perceived as social norms. For instance, theft is usually regulated by the Penal Code but it is common knowledge that theft will be punished by the authorities. Juridical norms are in fact social norms that are guaranteed by the state and the community within which they operate is moulded by them and the prescribed behaviours are assimilated by the individuals over time. However, as society changes, so do the juridical norms. This also triggers a change in the social norms and in what is perceived as morality. For example, before 1989, adultery was a punishable crime in Romania. After 1989 it was de-incriminated and nowadays, while adultery is morally undesirable, the social reaction to it is not as powerful as it was back when it was incriminated and correlatively, Romania's divorce rate has been experiencing a rise in the last 20 years. Although, as we have argued, juridical norms are social norms that become part of an individual's preferable behaviour and

of the way she or he relates to the surrounding reality, rules are complicated. Rules need a main body, a methodology of implementation and other details that make these matters more suited for specialized organisms and occupations rather than the general public.

In the Arab states of the Middle East, due to their former colonial status, most of their internal state composition mimics the one of the European states, mainly the existence of a government, a judicial power and a legislative body. Although there are substantial similarities, the core of the Arab Muslim society is very different from the European one. In most of the Arab states, there is a framework of juridical norms similar to in the European one, with one big difference, namely that Shari'a norms are incorporated into the legal framework. However, implementing the rules is different from making them and in this regard, within some matters, conflicts occur between the social norms which are already accepted by the individuals as part of their positively prescribed behaviour and the juridical norms enforced by the state.

In a previous chapter we have argued that Islam is a very normative system of beliefs. Its normative sources regulate a very wide part of the spectrum of social life, from norms regarding personal hygiene to prayer, cooking, dress code, commercial interactions and even proof in litigations. This time, Islam's normative framework, although it may slightly differ in interpretation from one region to the other and greatly differ in the case of confessional differences (i.e. Sunni-Shia), retains a common frame and a far greater stability over time than the judicial norms which animate the European societies. In this regard, in Islam the only source of law is considered to be God and man-made norms are devoid of authority because man cannot rule man, only God having this attribute. Thus, Islamic norms benefit from both the legitimacy of religion and the stability it offers. Taking the subject of adultery into question once more, even if not all the Arab countries incriminate it, the consequences are far more complex than in the European environment. Even where judicial norms do not stipulate punishments, social norms give birth to phenomena like honour killings or others which are based on morality and the social practices within a given community.

Conclusion

Cultural identity is a very complex aspect of human life. One that is shaped by numerous factors and prone to changes and shifts that mimic the complex world we are living in. Hofstede's dimensions of culture, including the one that we have analysed in this paper, the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, shed some light into the inner workings of the cultural avatars that we are. However, further studies (Oshlyansky, Cairns, Thim-

bleby, 2006; Nakata 2009) have shown that this paradigm is neither a complete nor an extremely accurate one. Some would argue that due to the complexity of human life, such a paradigm may not be found at all.

We believe that Hofstede's UAI dimension is a very sturdy base that allows further development to be made on the matter and we find the correlation of the UAI with general norms like purity or rules and with the linguistic complexity of a culture to be very compatible. The way a society works, the image of the self and the complexity of the code used for communication within a culture are aspects of human life that contribute to shaping our realities. We believe that the integration of more variables measuring these human aspects would greatly contribute to a more accurate cultural representation of uncertainty avoidance.

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