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Information Economics Through the Example of Arab Countries

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Abstract

The article discusses information economics through the example of Arab countries, with particular emphasis on the conditions of communication in intercultural and business relations. The starting point is the understanding of information as a resource that influences economic decisions, reduces uncertainty, builds trust and shapes the functioning of the institutional order. The article draws on the perspective of the Poznan School of Information Economics, including the econocentric approach, according to which communication is not a neutral transmission of data, but an element of the economic order and a tool for legitimizing action. The article defines the conceptual scope of Arab countries and the MENA region, discusses the specificity of verbal and non-verbal communication in Arab cultures, and analyzes their characteristics through the models of R. Gesteland and G. Hofstede. It indicates that Arab countries generally belong to high-context, relationship-focused, polychronic, expressive and ceremonial cultures. The conclusion formulates practical recommendations for entrepreneurs and institutions cooperating with Arab partners, including the building of relationships, hierarchy, hospitality, negotiation practices, gestures and communication rituals.

Keywords: information economics; Arab countries; MENA; intercultural communication; verbal communication; non-verbal communication; Poznan School of Information Economics; high-context cultures; Gesteland; Hofstede

Introduction

Information economics is a "comprehensive analysis and study of the extent to which information affects the economy and the economic decisions of entities at all economic levels" (Deszczyński, 2017, p. 57; Deszczyński, 2020, p. 16). Within this framework, it can therefore be said that the focus is on managing information that may be used to obtain benefits. This is extremely important from a business perspective, because obtaining information faster and at a lower cost enables enterprises to derive profits from it.

In the approach represented by the Poznan School of Information Economics (PSEI), information performs not only a utilitarian function, but also a system-forming one: it constitutes the foundation of transformational processes, the shaping of institutional order and the building of trust in the market economy (Ławniczak, 2009; Rydzak, 1999; Deszczyński, 2020). In this context, communication, both at the level of individuals and institutions, ceases to be a neutral process of data transmission and becomes a strategic tool for managing change, legitimizing action and internalizing socio-economic norms (Deszczyński, 2022). This approach is described as econocentric because it treats communication as a key component of the economic order, and not merely as an operational tool for information exchange (Rydzak, 2023ab).

In the twenty-first century, many enterprises operate not only on local markets, but also introduce their products and services to foreign markets. Each market, however, has its own specificity, and success in such a market depends on a sound understanding of it. For this reason, when conducting business abroad, it is essential to understand how to communicate with the local community. Intercultural communication is becoming increasingly important today, particularly due to globalization and the internationalization of enterprises.

From the perspective of research conducted within PSEI, intercultural communication also has a normative dimension: it supports the shaping of shared values, norms and patterns of cooperation that enable organizations to operate in an environment characterized by diverse cultural capital (Rydzak, 2022; Deszczyński, 2018). Cultural differences thus cease to be merely an obstacle and become a challenge requiring deeper communicative competence, understood as the ability to translate meanings under conditions of cognitive and axiological asymmetry (Rydzak et al., 2023).

The aim of this text is to present the specificity of business communication in Arab countries. The Oriental culture of the Arab world and its distinct communication patterns mean that the intricacies of verbal and non-verbal communication are considerably more complex than those encountered in Europe. At the same time, however, many Arab countries are opening up to foreign investors, attracting them with higher rates of return on investment.

This text draws readers' attention to the specificity of communication in Arab countries, while also offering guidance on how to communicate effectively. The subjective scope of the article concerns Arab countries, although it must be noted that individual countries may differ slightly from one another. The Arabic language itself and its nuances often take the form of dialects in different countries, which means that literary Arabic is used by a relatively small group in comparison with the population of countries where Arabic is the official language. The objective scope of the article concerns aspects of communication, mainly verbal and non-verbal, as well as the positioning of Arab countries in the cultural classifications of Gesteland and Hofstede. The research methods used in the text include critical literature analysis, desk research and the use of secondary data.

1. Theoretical Framework

The Essence of Communicating and Communication

The Polish term *komunikowanie się* derives from the Latin *communicare*, meaning to notify or to be in relation, and *communio*, meaning community or a sense of connection (Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2012, p. 444). In Polish literature, Dobek-Ostrowska's definition is frequently cited. According to it, communication is a process of reaching understanding among individuals, groups or institutions, aimed at exchanging thoughts and sharing knowledge, information and ideas. This process takes place at different levels, uses various means and produces specific effects (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2002; 2006).

The characteristics of the communication process indicate its social and dynamic nature. Communication:

- is a social process because it takes place in society, among people;
- occurs in a specific context because it happens at a particular time and place, and often in the presence of a specific number of witnesses to the communicative act;
- is a creative process because it requires the participant to create messages and then express them: the sender must "dress" thoughts in words, which requires the involvement of cognitive and creative processes;
- is dynamic because, over time, the way people express and respond to the messages of others changes; for example, a five-year-old child and a seventy-year-old senior will react differently to the same message;
- is continuous: people communicate from birth to death, and in every second of life a person sends messages, verbal ones, but much more often non-verbal ones;
- is symbolic: people use symbols that have been previously agreed upon;
- is interactive: sending a signal initiates an action, and the response is a reaction;
- is purposeful: people communicate "for something" and for some reason;
- is inevitable: one cannot live without communicating;
- is irreversible: once messages have been sent, they cannot be withdrawn (Przybysz-Polakowska, 2019).

Communication as a social act is also a mechanism for expressing norms, exercising social control, assigning roles and coordinating actions (Rutka & Wróbel, 2012, p. 116). According to Frey, Botan and Kreps (2000), communication is the process of organizing messages in order to create meaning. Three aspects are essential here: messages, such as words, sounds and gestures; organization, meaning the creation and reception of messages; and meaning, understood as interpretation (Morrone, Spitzberg & Barge, 2007).

The non-verbal component plays a particularly important role in interpersonal communication. According to Mehrabian's research (1968), in situations involving the expression of emotions, verbal content accounts for only 7% of the message, voice tone for 38%, and non-verbal communication for as much as 55%. Under conditions of message inconsistency, recipients tend to trust non-verbal cues more often (Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968), which results from their cognitive automatism.

Communication in the Perspective of Information Economics and the Econocentric Approach

According to the achievements of PSEI, communication is of significant importance for the functioning of the institutional order. In Deszczyński's approach (2020), information is not merely a carrier of data, but performs a decision-making and regulatory function. Under conditions of risk, uncertainty and knowledge asymmetry, especially in intercultural environments, communication becomes an instrument for reducing transaction costs and shaping trust (Deszczyński, 2023).

In the econocentric concept developed within PSEI, communication is not neutral, but constitutes a tool for legitimizing institutions, economic orders and systems of values (Deszczyński, 2022; Ławniczak, 2009). Particular importance is attributed here to the transformational function of communication, which, as an element of change management, supports the internalization of new patterns of action and the consolidation of the market order in developing countries or countries undergoing systemic transformation (Kaczmarek, 2020).

Cultural Conditions of Communication

From the perspective of intercultural research, effective communication depends not only on linguistic correctness, but above all on the cultural competence of both the sender and the recipient. Communication under conditions of cognitive and axiological asymmetry requires the ability to translate meanings and sensitivity to the symbolic context (Rydzak et al., 2023).

In high-context cultures, such as Arab cultures, communication is more implicit, ritualized and connotative. Indirect forms dominate, deeply rooted in social norms and the rituals of everyday life. As a result, non-verbal communication, intonation, pauses and physical distance gain in importance (Leszczyński, 2020; Deszczyński, 2016). Communicative competence in this approach must also include knowledge of cultural codes, symbols and interpretive nuances.

In a broader sense, communication under conditions of cultural difference may be perceived as a component of the absorptive capacity of institutions, especially in developing countries, where the effectiveness of international cooperation and aid programs depends on competencies in knowledge exchange, education and technical cooperation. As shown by the research of Świerczyńska and Kliber (2019), these factors significantly influence productivity in Sub-Saharan African countries. It may therefore be assumed that effective intercultural communication is an important condition for the adaptation of institutional solutions and the long-term effectiveness of development processes.

2. The Conceptual Scope of Arab Countries

When writing about Arab countries, special attention should be paid to their subjective scope. In the literature, they are often identified with MENA countries. This acronym comes from the English term Middle East and North Africa and denotes the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. This category was established on the basis of geographical location. The acronym MENA is most often used as a regional designation in scholarly, military and media discourse (World Bank, 2014).

What connects the countries of the region is, above all, a shared culture, similar environmental conditions and the economy. As reports indicate, the MENA region is among the most exposed to the effects of climate change, which occur there in similar ways, for example through the process of desertification (Namdar, Karami, Keshavarz,

2021). An additional element strengthening the coherence of the MENA region is its perception as relatively homogeneous on the financial market. Kronfol, Khatoun and Shamma (2020), in an analysis prepared for Franklin Templeton, indicate that countries of the MENA region export small amounts of goods, apart from crude oil, to markets such as the American and Chinese markets, which are the largest global trading partners. They also add that equities of companies from this region are strongly linked to the US dollar (USD), while debt instrument indices from Gulf Cooperation Council countries generate one third of the volatility of the J.P. Morgan Emerging Markets Bond Index.

The MENA region is defined by several characteristics, of which the most basic are geographical location and Arab culture. However, these two aspects do not determine either the scope or the potential of regional economic interactions, which also depend on economic and political factors. The more similar the economic and political systems of countries in the region and their strategic goals are, the easier it is to achieve effective regional integration. The benefits of this integration will also depend on resources, including human capital, in individual countries, though not necessarily in a direct way (El-Erian & Fisher, 2000, p. 71).

The Middle East and North Africa are among the most recognizable regions in contemporary international relations, mainly due to their high level of instability and their importance for international security. Countries in this area experience both internal conflicts and tensions of a regional nature. Examples include the dispute over Western Sahara, clashes between Egypt and Israel over the Sinai Peninsula, famine in Yemen, civil war in Syria and Iraq, and the current escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The complexity of these processes means that the MENA region remains a constant subject of public debate, especially in the context of international security. The scope of MENA countries, however, depends on the adopted paradigm. In geographical terms, it includes countries of the Mediterranean basin located in Africa and on the Arabian Peninsula. In geopolitical terms, it includes the entire belt of North Africa and the Middle East, while from a historical perspective it is sometimes identified with the territory of the former Ottoman Empire. In cultural terms, MENA may include an area extending from Sub-Saharan Africa to Iran.

MENA countries are often perceived through the lens of threats originating in the region. This category includes migration crises, trafficking in human beings, weapons and drugs, radicalization, extremism, technological and digital challenges, the rise of nationalisms, cultural decolonization, social tensions and hostility toward different values (El Ghamari, 2018, pp. 23-24). These are accompanied by structural problems such as lack of strategic planning, an incorrect hierarchy of priorities, ad hoc responses to crises, political implosion and a deficit of social solidarity (El Ghamari, 2018, p. 24).

There is growing interest among states and international organizations in national and cultural issues that significantly influence the directions and intensity of global economic interactions. This trend is reflected in the growing number of ethnic, religious and social conflicts, particularly in MENA countries. On the one hand, societies feel threatened by the influx of foreign cultural patterns, as in Jordan in connection with immigration from Syria; on the other hand, states have decreasing capacity to ensure cultural security. As a result, states themselves sometimes become sources of threats to the cultural identity of ethnic and religious groups, as a consequence of their foreign policy, especially in the area of migration strategies (Lizak, 1997, p. 71).

Systematizing and comparing the characteristics of individual cultures may be a useful tool in research on socio-cultural factors and in analyses within information economics. However, caution is necessary because such classifications may lead to excessive generalizations and reinforce stereotypes. In intercultural communication, it is therefore important to consider not only cultural differences, but also the behaviors of specific groups and even individuals (El Ghamari, 2018, p. 22).

As El-Erian and Fischer (2000, p. 70) point out, one of the broadest definitions of Arab countries includes 24 states: 21 members of the Arab League, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as well as Iran, Israel and Turkey. One of the more restrictive classifications, by contrast, is limited to Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza. For the purposes of their own analyses, these authors divide the region into four Maghreb countries, namely Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia; seven countries of the regional center, namely Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza; and six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

3. Verbal Communication in an Intercultural Perspective

Verbal communication is understood as the process of communicating through words, which must take place in a specific language. It should be noted that language is often an important attribute of national identity (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 99). An inherent feature of language is its lack of neutrality: it always functions in a specific cultural context. As Bartosik-Purgat observes, "the language of every national culture is clearly connected with the way in which a given nation perceives the world" (2010, p. 62).

Forms of greeting provide a good example. In Poland, the customary greeting is "dzień dobry," used in both formal and informal situations. In Arab countries, the greeting "As-salamu alaikum" (Arabic: السلام عليكم) performs this function, literally meaning "peace be upon you" and having a religious character. In Poland, the equivalent would be "Szczęść Boże," which, however, is reserved mainly for clergy or deeply religious people. In Arab countries, the religious greeting is commonly used regardless of the sender's level of religiosity, as an element of culture rather than necessarily as an expression of faith.

The same applies to the expression "Inshallah" (Arabic: إن شاء الله), meaning "if God wills." In Polish, its religious equivalent would be "jak Bóg da," but in Poland this expression tends to be used by deeply religious people, whereas in Arab countries it is used commonly, regardless of religious affiliation. Interestingly, Arabic is spoken not only by Muslims, but also by Christians, which may lead to confusion when, for example, an Arab Christian uses the word "Allah" when speaking about God.

As already mentioned, verbal communication is expressed through language, which is a system of symbols organized according to specific rules that enable the reception of messages and the interpretation of their meaning (Morrone, Spitzberg & Barge, 2007). The key concept in this definition is interpretation: knowledge of words alone is insufficient if one does not understand the context of their use. For example, the English word "pension" may mean both a retirement pension and a disability pension, although the conditions for granting them differ.

In verbal communication, the lack of idiomatic and conceptual equivalence may cause difficulties. Literal translations of idioms may lead to misunderstandings and even

appear ridiculous. In turn, lack of awareness of the cultural context often makes it impossible to understand jokes or allusions (Bartosik-Purgat, 2010, p. 67; Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 99).

Grammatical differences, including word order, are also an important barrier to communication. There are six possible word-order combinations when taking into account subject (S), verb (V) and object (O): SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OSV and OVS (Bartosik-Purgat, 2010, p. 68). In Polish, the dominant structure is SVO, whereas in Classical Arabic the typical order is VSO. Word order often influences thought patterns and the way content is expressed.

At this point, it is also worth indicating the functions of language. Jakobson (1960) distinguishes six basic functions:

- cognitive: enabling the transmission of information and the description of facts and phenomena;
- expressive: enabling the expression of emotions through the choice of words, not only through intonation or gestures;
- conative: enabling influence on the recipient and their behavior, for example in advertising;
- phatic: serving to maintain contact, both momentary and long-term;
- poetic: building the aesthetics of the message, for example in poetry;
- metalingual: enabling communication about language itself, for example by naming its parts and structures.

In international verbal communication, interlocutors most often use the native language of one of the parties or a third language, most commonly English, French or Spanish. The key difficulty then lies in interpreting the cultural context, because different cultures use signs and symbols to different degrees.

The most frequently indicated division is that between low-context and high-context cultures. In low-context cultures, such as the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, literalness dominates: what is said is treated as the full content of the message. In high-context cultures, such as Japan, South Korea and Arab countries, greater importance is attached to non-verbal communication, including tone of voice, pace of speech, gestures and body posture, all of which co-create the meaning of an utterance. Only an analysis of both layers of the message, verbal and non-verbal, allows the message to be fully understood.

4. Non-Verbal Communication in the Arab World

The second type of communication is non-verbal communication. As Bartosik-Purgat (2010) and Szopski (2005) indicate, it primarily serves to transmit emotional states. In order to interpret non-verbal messages correctly, one must take into account such factors as context, the national culture of the interlocutor and their individual habits. For this reason, non-verbal communication in intercultural relations often creates more problems than verbal communication and leads to misunderstandings between business partners.

Leathers observes that "non-verbal communication consists in the use, by persons engaged in interaction, of mutually influencing visual, non-visual and vocal systems and subsystems of communication. By using these communication systems and subsystems, communicating persons simultaneously encode or decode non-verbal

symbols and signs for the purpose or purposes of exchanging meanings in specific communication contexts" (2009, p. 27).

Non-verbal communication includes, among other elements, kinesics, facial expression, proxemics and haptics (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 103). In a broader view, it also includes physical appearance, chronemics and the symbolism of colors, numbers and other elements. An alternative classification is presented by Bartosik-Purgat, who divides the elements of non-verbal communication according to a functional criterion into:

- illustrators, which support or supplement speech;
- regulators, which regulate the course of conversation and involve the whole body;
- emblems, which have a specific meaning and denotative value;
- adaptors, which are gestures emphasizing a particular meaning;
- affect displays, which transmit emotions, mainly through facial expression (2010, pp. 86-87).

It should be understood that while non-verbal communication does not play a major role in low-context cultures, in high-context cultures it may carry more content than the verbal utterance itself. Arab countries, as representatives of high-context cultures, willingly use elaborate non-verbal messages, which makes the expression of an average Arab more vivid than that of an average Pole.

It is worth remembering that non-verbal communication is strongly linked to the cultural context. Gestures, facial expressions or behavior may have a positive or neutral meaning in one culture, while being considered offensive in another. A classic example is the use of the left hand. In low-context countries, this does not raise major objections: even in business situations, documents or business cards may be handed over with the left hand. In Arab countries, however, the left hand is regarded, from the religious point of view, as "unclean." It should not be used for eating, and according to many Arabs, it should also not be used in any other everyday situations. For example, if during a business meeting a document is handed over with the left hand, an Arab partner may ask for it to be placed on the desk and only then pick it up after a moment.

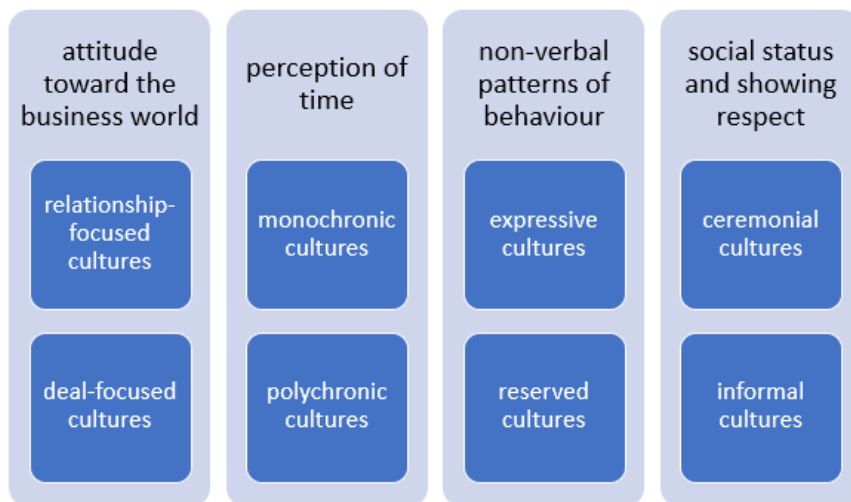
Non-verbal communication performs a number of functions (Leathers, 2009, pp. 33-37):

- transmitting information, similar to the cognitive function of language, involving the transfer of content from sender to recipient;
- regulating interaction, for example by indicating a seat at a table or signaling the end of a conversation with a gesture;
- expressing emotions, both positive ones, such as joy, and negative ones, such as anger;
- creating metacommunication, that is, defining, supplementing, contradicting or expanding verbal utterances by non-verbal means;
- controlling social situations, meaning attempts to regulate the behavior of others without using words;
- managing impressions, usually connected with the process of persuasion (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 104).

5. The Cultural Dimension of Communication According to R. Gesteland and G. Hofstede

In the literature, the four pairs of cultural models proposed by Gesteland and the six-dimensional cultural model developed by Hofstede are among the most frequently cited typologies of cultures. Both approaches analyze natural cultural differences that are important in the context of negotiation and concluding business agreements. In Gesteland's model, eight categories of cultures are distinguished, assigned to four axes of division.

Figure 1. Pairs of cultural models according to R. Gesteland



Source: Own elaboration based on: Zenderowski, R., Koziański, B. (2012). *Różnice kulturowe w biznesie*, Warsaw, pp. 63-80.

When describing the attitude of cultures toward the world of business, Gesteland distinguishes two main categories: relationship-focused cultures and deal-focused cultures, as well as an intermediate category, moderately deal-focused cultures. In this division, key importance is attached to the approach of representatives of a given culture to building relationships with negotiation partners and to their attitude toward the transaction itself (Gesteland, 2000, p. 8). Relationship-focused cultures concentrate on creating and maintaining interpersonal bonds; many business matters are handled through personal networks of contacts. There is a preference for doing business with someone who is "known" and can be trusted. In these cultures, before a business relationship is established, an interpersonal bond must first be built. Practically all Arab countries are classified as relationship-focused cultures (Zenderowski, Koziański, 2012, pp. 63-64).

In deal-focused cultures, by contrast, concluding a business agreement does not require the prior building of personal relationships. Cooperation with foreigners is not problematic in these cultures because of a relatively high level of openness to "outsiders." It is often wrongly assumed that interpersonal relations do not matter there. In reality, although relationships exist, they remain secondary to the result of the transaction. As Gesteland observes, "business partners focused on the business relationship spend a great deal of time together at cocktail parties, meals and on golf courses. They establish relations with one another, however, primarily right away at the bargaining table, in the process of forging an agreement" (2000, p. 29). Deal-focused

cultures include, among others, Norway, Germany, the United States and Australia (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 65).

Another aspect of cultural differences is the understanding of time. Although the statement that different cultures perceive time differently may seem like a truism, it has considerable significance in business practice. In this context, attitudes toward schedules, daily plans and agendas are also important (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, pp. 75-76). In monochronic cultures, time is understood linearly: there is always too little of it, and it cannot be reversed. Great importance is attached to punctuality, and lateness may be perceived as a lack of respect. Schedules are treated as tools that reduce uncertainty and support planning. Monochronic cultures evolved from earlier polychronic cultures (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 77). As Giddens notes, monochronic time is an "invention of the West" (2007, p. 121), where thinking in terms of "time is money" or "strike while the iron is hot" dominates (Reynolds, Valentine, 2009, p. 55). Examples of monochronic cultures include Japan, the United States, and the Nordic and Germanic countries.

In polychronic cultures, time is perceived flexibly, and even cyclically. Failure to follow a schedule or being late is not treated as a problem, but as an understandable situation. Time is perceived as an inexhaustible resource, not correlated with monetary value. Typical sayings include "make haste slowly" or "if Allah wills" (Reynolds, Valentine, 2009, p. 57). All Arab countries are classified as polychronic cultures, which affects the need for greater patience in business contacts, especially in relation to punctuality and deadlines.

Another area of difference is the expressiveness of non-verbal communication. The elements analyzed include facial expression, gestures or kinesics, physical distance or proxemics, and touch or haptics. There are no cultures that are 100% expressive or restrained, but one can speak of varying degrees of intensity. Representatives of expressive cultures gesture, speak loudly and communicate vividly; their facial expressions reflect emotions (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 79). Proxemics assumes a small physical distance: tactile forms of contact, such as patting someone on the shoulder, are permissible. These cultures occur, among others, in Romance, Mediterranean and Latin American countries. In the case of Arab countries, the situation is complex: although they are characterized by expressiveness, religion limits physical contact, especially in male-female relations. The higher the level of religiosity, the more restrictive the norms.

In restrained cultures, static behavior dominates: people speak more quietly, physical contact is less frequent, greater distance is maintained and facial expressions are subdued. This way of communicating expresses respect and restraint. This group includes the countries of Southeast Asia (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 80).

Another aspect is ceremoniality, understood as an attitude toward social status and the expression of respect. Ceremonial cultures are characterized by hierarchy, emphasis on titles, forms of politeness and status differences. Gesteland observes that "businesspeople from ceremonial, hierarchical structures may feel offended by the jovial familiarity of contractors from informal, relatively egalitarian societies" (2000, p. 46). Examples of such cultures include Germanic, Mediterranean and Latin American countries and, importantly, Arab countries. In Arab countries, particular attention is paid to the choice of vocabulary and titles appropriate to social position: one form will be used toward a member of a royal family, another toward a worker.

The opposite consists of informal cultures: egalitarian, without clear status differences. In interpersonal relations, directness dominates, for example the use of first names and

the absence of elaborate rituals, such as those accompanying the exchange of business cards. Examples include the United States, Canada, Australia and Denmark (Zenderowski, Koziński, 2012, p. 73).

In 1984, Hofstede published *Culture's Consequences*, in which he presented the results of research on national cultures based on more than 100,000 surveys conducted among IBM employees in 80 countries. The aim of the research was to determine whether people's behavior is shaped more strongly by national culture or organizational culture (Hofstede, 2007). Hofstede's model does not analyze individual characteristics, but rather dominant values at the national level (Bond, 2002; Oyserman et al., 2002; Sharma, 2010). As a result of the research, four original dimensions of culture were identified, and then two additional dimensions were added.

Figure 2. Cultural dimensions according to G. Hofstede



Source: Own elaboration based on: Subocz, D. (2012). Geert Hofstede - praktyczne zastosowanie wymiarów kultur narodowych, Annales UMCS, Lublin, p. 42.

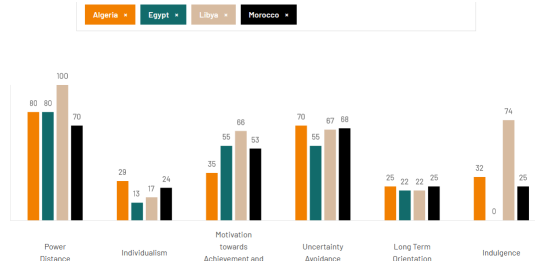
The additional dimensions are long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint. High power distance means acceptance of social inequalities. Uncertainty avoidance indicates the need for clear rules and order (Subocz, 2012, p. 44). Masculinity of culture refers to a focus on success and material goods, with a clear division of social roles (Hofstede, 2007, p. 68). Individualism means the priority of the individual over the community and concentration on one's own goals (Subocz, 2012, p. 43). Long-term-oriented culture is characterized by the adaptation of tradition and the saving of resources (Hofstede, 2007, p. 72). The indulgence dimension indicates a society's tendency to satisfy needs and seek pleasure.

The "Country Comparison Tool" (Hofstede Insights) was used to compare Arab countries by analyzing three groups of countries:

- a) North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Egypt;
- b) wealthy Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait;
- c) less wealthy Levant countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq.

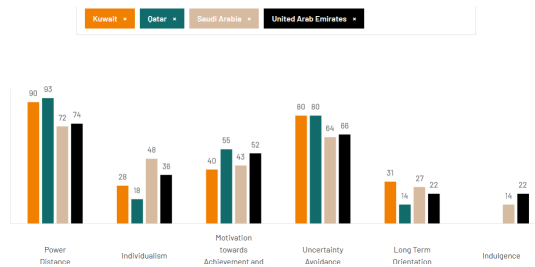
Charts 1-3 illustrate the differences between these groups.

Chart 1. Hofstede's cultural dimensions model for Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Egypt.



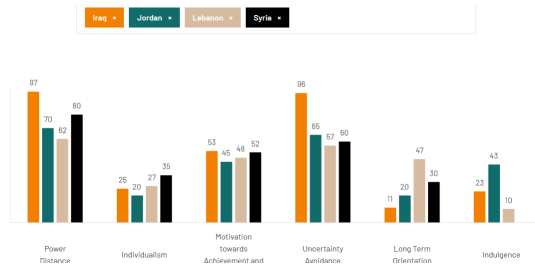
Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=algeria%2Cegypt%2Clibya%2Cmorocco>

Chart 2. Hofstede's cultural dimensions model for Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait.



Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=kuwait%2Cqatar%2Csaudi+arabia%2Cunited+arab+emirates>

Chart 3. Hofstede's cultural dimensions model for Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.



Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=iraq%2Cjordan%2Clebanon%2Csyria>

As the charts show, Arab states are characterized by high power distance. Individualism is low, with the exception of Saudi Arabia. Ball (2001) explains this relationship by pointing to the correlation between wealth and individualism. In the dimension of motivation toward success, the countries achieve moderate results. Significant differences occur in the area of uncertainty avoidance, with the lowest result in Egypt and the highest in Iraq. Hassan (2015) criticizes the current relevance of Hofstede's model and presents alternative research findings among Kurds. Long-term orientation is generally low, with the exception of Lebanon, which may result from its socio-religious specificity. In terms of indulgence, the results are varied and the data incomplete: Libya obtains a high result, while Saudi Arabia and Lebanon obtain low results. Armstrong (2014) explains this by the practical approach of Libyans to resources and available options.

Summary and Conclusions

Information economics focuses on the analysis of human behavior in the context of the economy, taking into account the role of information and its influence on decision-making and the allocation of resources. Effective intercultural communication, in turn, is the ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, requiring an understanding of differences in values, norms and modes of communication in order to achieve a common goal and avoid conflicts. Both fields are of key importance for the effective functioning of societies and organizations in the global world. This text has attempted to present the specificity of business communication in Arab countries and to formulate recommendations on how to conduct it effectively.

The geographical term "Arab countries" refers to a very extensive area located at the intersection of Europe, Asia and Africa. This region is extremely diverse in ethnic, religious, political, economic and social terms. What connects these countries, however, is Arab culture and the use of the Arabic language. Therefore, the intricacies of verbal and non-verbal communication can be described through features common to the entire region. The key element of effective communication is communicative competence, understood as the ability to formulate messages that are effective, clear and appropriate to the situation and context. This requires at least basic cultural awareness concerning Arab countries.

The basic theoretical reference may be Hall's classification, which distinguishes low-context and high-context cultures. Arab countries belong to the latter. Arabs are expressive and make extensive use of non-verbal communication. According to Gesteland's classification, Arab cultures may be described as relationship-focused, polychronic, expressive and ceremonial. This means that when cooperating with representatives of these cultures, it is worth focusing on building a personal relationship and gaining trust before moving on to business matters. It is also necessary to show flexibility with regard to deadlines, schedules and previous arrangements. Knowledge of basic customs and rituals of a given country may also be helpful; such small gestures build goodwill and facilitate business relations.

For Polish entrepreneurs interested in cooperation with partners from Arab countries, the following recommendations may be formulated:

- Titles and forms of address: it is worth remembering to use the first of the three parts of a name, the remaining ones usually being the names of the father and grandfather and indicating origin, together with the surname, preceded by "Mr." or a title such as "sheikh." Before a meeting, it is advisable to check which title should be used.
- Handing over documents and business cards: only the right hand should be used.
- Gifts: although they are not required, small gifts are welcome. Alcohol, cigars or other items prohibited in Islam, that is, haram (Arabic: حرام), should absolutely not be given.
- Shared meals: these are an important element of relationship-building. In a restaurant, it is advisable to check the menu in advance for pork, gelatin or alcohol. In private homes, it is polite to eat a larger portion, as this expresses appreciation for the host's hospitality. A practical tip is that refusing a second helping should be done three times in order to be considered sincere.
- Greetings: Arabs use a gentle handshake and intense eye contact. Caution should be exercised in physical contact with representatives of the opposite sex. In

closer relationships, warmer forms of greeting may appear.

- Culture of hospitality: it is common to offer guests coffee or tea served in special vessels as part of a ritual. Refusing a drink may be perceived as tactless.
- Hierarchy: in Arab countries, social hierarchy is as important as business hierarchy, so respect should be shown, for example by observing the proper order of greetings.
- Expressiveness: Arabs are expressive and emotional. They often use gestures and facial expressions, sometimes in an exaggerated manner, to strengthen the message.
- Avoiding a direct "no": in Arab culture, direct refusal is rare. To understand the interlocutor's true intentions, it is worth comparing the verbal message with the non-verbal one; only their combination provides a complete picture.
- Negotiations: one should be patient and prepared for bargaining. Arabs expect mutual concessions. After negotiations are concluded, it is necessary to ensure that all arrangements are written down. Although oral agreements are treated seriously, it is worth ensuring their written confirmation.

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