

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THAILAND AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA IN THE NEW ERA

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Abstract: This is a qualitative research on new international marketing communication strategies between Thailand and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2022, arising from diplomatic relations between the two countries, along with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Over 3 decades of bilateral collaborative limitations, diplomatic re-establishment has provided economic pathways, with Thai business opportunities, particularly among sectors and industries that meet Saudi Arabia's economic distribution policy, i.e., wellness, halal products, tourism, and healthcare. This research aimed to study the roles of diplomacy, cultural context, and national reform policies that drive marketing communication success in the Saudi market. Qualitative data was collected from 2021 to 2025, parallel to in-depth interviews with high-level informants. Thematic analysis was applied to government reports, trade fairs, media content, and communication media. The results demonstrated 3 major dynamics. First, diplomatic re-establishment has awakened bilateral trade and enhance government-driven initiatives, e.g. trade fairs and business conferences by integrating them in strategic marketing communication media which create trust within Saudi Arabia's cultural environment that mostly relies on its context. Next, Vision 2030 has brought new expectations among Saudi consumers, causing higher desires for brand communication with digital advancement, high value, and signified culture, particularly among young consumers under strong digital ties. Lastly, adherence to halal, serious concern about gender, translation into Arabic, and religious traditions as the primary elements in a cultural scope of this Islamic country are simultaneously advantage and disadvantage for Thai brands. To clarify, brands with adaptation to this scope can find their way for successful marketing whereas some others with institutional gaps, e.g., unawareness of Thai halal certification in Saudi Arabia have to face some difficulties. In conclusions, successful international marketing communication in context of this specific country requires cultural intellect, digital improvement, and diplomatic strategies. These pave a way to the strengthened relations between the two countries and the tendency of extended capabilities of Thai brands outside business centers located in the top cities.

Keywords: Thailand-Saudi Arabia Relations, international marketing communication, vision 2030, halal trade, cultural adaptation, diplomatic normalization

Introduction

After bilateral diplomacy had stagnated more than 3 decades, official re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia fully began in early 2022, indicating a historic milestone of the two countries. This can be compared to a new window for economic, political, and cultural collaborations in the new era, resulting in a huge change of trade and

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investment perspectives between both countries. It creates phenomenal opportunities for international business projects/ partnerships and marketing communications.

Initiated in 2016, an economic reform plan in Saudi Arabia “*Vision 2030*” is going to face a considerable improvement for more diversity of national economy apart from oil. To do so, there will be development of tourism, healthcare, logistics, technology, and consumer markets. These industries are also the strengths of Thailand. Thus, re-establishment of relations between Thailand and Saudi Arabia receives enthusiastic responses from both public and private sectors. Thai exports, halal products, tourism services, and wellness industries waiting for re-entry or expansion to the Saudi market.

This leads to new questions about appropriate adaptation of international marketing communication strategies to improvements of cultural, legal, and technological dimensions in Saudi Arabia. Based on these questions, the analysis must focus on the current context of re-established Thai–Saudi relations instead of previous diplomatic stagnation. Thai exporters and service providers must recreate understanding of the sociocultural and religious determinants of consumer behaviour in the subject country. According to recent modernisation and social restructuring in the reign of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, international businesses must be compliance with local traditions, values, and the overview of national goals.

Hence, the objective of this research was to explore the feasibility of successful development and conduct of international marketing communication between Thailand and Saudi Arabia in the post-relations establishment period. For more clarity, it was to study the determinants of trade, tourism, and marketing by public and private sectors; and how such approaches must adapt to new values, economic policies, and digital media use among Saudi consumers.

Research Questions

1. What are the influences of re-established diplomatic relations between Thailand and Saudi Arabia on international marketing communication and bilateral business collaborations?
2. How does Vision 2030 reform create opportunities and challenges for Thai businesses with regard to international marketing communication strategies?
3. Which cultural, religious, and regulatory determinants do Thai marketers require for successful international marketing communication in the Saudi market?

Literature Review

International Marketing Communication Theory and Planning

International marketing communication refers to a strategic process for promoting products and services in a country that publicises its business/marketing messages all over its domestic regions and overseas. According to previous research studies, successful international communication must combine local demography, economic situations, politics, geography, culture, and communication media as the key potential factors.

From the study by Worawan Ongkrutaraksa (2010), furthered by Alhuda Chanutphattana (2017), successful international marketing communication can be done through the following 6 key aspects:

1. **Local demography** – Insights into target groups in terms of their characteristics, age ranges, education levels, and growth directions facilitate appropriate product development and communication styles. A World Bank (2024) reported that young and well-educated population (Over 99.89% of those between 15–24 years of age were literate) are exposed to modern and digital marketing patterns/platforms.
2. **Economic situations** – It is indispensable to evaluate purchase power, income distribution, and urbanisation levels. Based on GDP growth and driven diversified economy in Saudi Arabia, it is a great opportunity for Thai exporters to try wealthy consumer segmentation in Riyadh and Jeddah, and also seize middle-class consumers with halal products.
3. **Politics and laws**– This aspect refers to the stable government, import-export laws, and business rules that affect communication channels as well as message control. Saudi Arabia’s reform facilitates easier business license issuance for foreign companies. However, the country is still strict to enforcement of content and advertising rules as well as regulations in compliance with Islamic teachings.
4. **Geography** – Product distribution and marketing campaigns partly depend on logistics, seasons, and infrastructures. For example, during Hajj and Umrah can attract maximum tourists to Thai wellness products efficiently. Still, product shipment or transportation from Thailand to Saudi Arabia may take longer time and higher delivery costs than similar product import from South India, which is closer to the Saudi market. This geographical distance naturally generates advantage for Indian suppliers in terms of cost and time. In contrast, this is serious disadvantage for some specific Thai products, particularly the common ones in South India because it may be difficult for Thai exporters/supplier to compete on pricing and delivery speed.
5. **Culture** – Islamic principles and cultural practices have been instilled very deeply in Saudi ways of life. Likewise, religion, customs, and overall values have huge influences on interactions and communication among Saudi citizens. Islam is the national religion. Approx. 93 % of the population are Muslim. Undoubtedly, Islamic principles/teachings are the strong bond in their everyday life, law, and consumer behaviour (Global Media Insight, 2025). This deep-rooted cultural basis truly influenced marketing communication, with messages showing respect to their religious holidays (e.g., Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha), politeness in visualised content, family-focused essences, and ethics in all products as well as services. Polite clothing, gender-based roles, and habits in accordance with cultural expectations determine advertising campaign directions of international brands that must respect Saudi culture and must be acceptable in the society
6. **Communication media** – Digital platforms, influencers, and smartphones as the top medium in Saudi Arabia create a lively communication environment and a very dynamic atmosphere. Digital connectivity and nationwide social media are the key drives, with approx. 99% internet use and 34.1 million social media users in early 2025; or 99.6% of the entire population (DataReportal, 2025). These comprehensive digital interactions mirror the position of Saudi Arabia as a top ranked country of internet connectivity in the world. The widely used platforms/social media are Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, particularly among powerful marketing, brands, and online commerce.

What's more, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) (Kotler, 2003) describes that conformity of advertising, public relations, direct marketing, and social media is necessary for brand trust. This concept also appears in Gulf market contexts (Chanitphattana et al., 2022). To exemplify, Thai spas in Saudi Arabia may use local advertising, cultural and respectful images, and government partnerships (through Thai commerce or embassies) all together for higher efficiency to enter the Saudi market.

Cross-Cultural Communication Theory

This theory is a foundation to understand perception, interpretation, and responses to marketing messages among people from different cultures. For business relations between Thailand and Saudi Arabia with totally different religious principles, traditions, and communication styles, cross-cultural frameworks are highly required to prevent miscommunication and to create long-term trust.

According to Edward T. Hall (1959) and Geert Hofstede (1980), there are some tools to examine cultural differences between a high-context society and a low-context one. For Saudi Arabia, it is regarded as a high-context culture with non-verbal communication that concentrates mainly on hidden meanings, the unity of its society, and common values rather than verbal communication. Although Thailand is also a high-context society, cultural sensitivity expression is different from Saudi Arabia, particularly in the dimensions of religious actions and gender interactions.

The theory by Hall describes a high-context culture as follows, like Saudi Arabia, for instance:

- Relations and trust must be established before business communication is successful.
- Visual imagery and symbolism carry deeper meanings and must be carefully chosen.
- Marketing content that is overly direct, humorous, or emotionally expressive may be misinterpreted or deemed inappropriate.

In this context, Thai businesses must *avoid imposing Westernized marketing styles* and instead adapt their messages to resonate with Islamic values, social etiquette, and national identity. For example, spa and wellness advertising in Saudi Arabia should present images of politeness, appropriateness of gender, and benefits of families as these are much more preferable to physical contacts or visual beauty that can be seen in Western spa brands.

Cultural Dimensions by Hofstede is another key concept of cross-cultural marketing. It suggests 6 aspects of national culture, which can be adopted to the Thai–Saudi context as below:

Power Distance: Both countries score high, indicating acceptance of hierarchy, which impacts how authority is communicated in branding.

Uncertainty Avoidance: The world's ranking of Saudi Arabia is higher than Thailand, which implies more solid structure, religious practices, and disciplines. These are all essential when new or foreign products are launched.

Masculinity vs. Femininity: Masculinity is more prominent in Saudi Arabia, highlighting success, strength, and traditions. On the contrary, Thailand focuses mainly on value system balance, with expressed empathy and quality of life.

In addition, the value of “*face*” (reputation and dignity) in Thai culture is similar to Saudi key concepts of honor and reputation. Respect, generosity, and family honor are the core values within Arab culture as well as the Saudi society. These values should be reflected in the tone and imagery of Thai marketing messages, emphasizing authenticity, trustworthiness, and respect for tradition. Lastly, cross-cultural psychology strengthens the mindset “*communication over language*.” It reflects that way people create values, beliefs, and behaviours through religion, families, and the society. Marketing communication that goes well with these concepts, e.g., *halal compliance*, *family safety*, and *ethical benefits*, tends to be more successful over competitors.

To sum up, cross-cultural communication underlines that successful marketing in Saudi Arabia needs something more than just translation, i.e., culture-based content creation. Thai brands can present its own national values and communication styles to be in line with Saudi religious practices, traditions/customs, and communication.

Diplomatic Renewal and Bilateral Trade Relations

The re-establishment of diplomatic relations in early 2022 as aforementioned has been a crucial new beginning for economic collaborations and marketing exchange. The relations between the two countries have been suspended for over 3 decades, followed by limited trade, investment, labor exchange, and diplomatic missions. Later, the meeting between Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman brought the return of bilateral trust and economic power.



Figure 1: The First Thai – Saudi Business Forum at ICON SIAM (Photograph by Author, 2022)

Figure 1 displays the business forum between Thailand and Saudi Arabia, with Riyadh Chamber's delegation, consisting of more than 90 Saudi business leaders from different sectors, i.e., industry, technology, tourism, jewelry, and healthcare. The visit between 4–8 July 2022 was for business partnerships and investment in Thailand. It was the first official visit by the business delegates from Saudi Arabia to Thailand after 32 years, leading to the re-established relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand 2022).

Since then, bilateral trade has progressed efficiently, with the volume up to USD 7.56 billion in 2024. The primary Thai exports include automotive business, wood products, and canned seafood (Bangkok Post, 2025; Thailand BOI, 2024). Support the Thai government, e.g., the founded Thailand Board of Investment office in Riyadh in 2024 and attendance in bilateral forums have reinforced expanded the national economic involvement and obvious business position (Thailand BOI, 2024). At the same time, there have been a larger number of Saudi tourists in Thailand, confirming satisfactory bilateral exchange after the diplomatic re-establishment.

Impact of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 on Market Communication

Vision 2030 starting from 2016 is a master plan for the national economic diversity, social reform, and modernisation. The implementation of this vision helps minimize reliance on oil, pay more attention to woman empowerment, tourism improvement, and motivating foreign direct investment (FDI). A major project under Vision 2030 “the National Improvement Program (NTP)” enthusiastically encourages involved industries to operate according to Thailand's export advantage at the international level. Those industries included healthcare, hospitality, logistics, retail, recreation, etc. The Saudi government is going to host numerous global trade events, to promote premium-super premium tourism destinations (such as AMAALA and NEOM), and to strengthen private enterprises. These will be very beneficial to Thai businesses which also cover wellness and spa services, halal products, and organic products. According to previous studies on Thai businesses in Gulf markets (Chanitphattana et al., 2022) with adaptation to the national development strategy of the host country, there are key factors to become successful in overseas marketing. The Global Wellness Institute (2023)'s studies also present Saudi Arabia as one of markets with the quickest growth for wellness tourism in the Middle East. Thailand can take part in this industry, with services provided under cultural adaptation. The government's focus on sustainable digital development also prioritises strategies for modern marketing channels/platforms, influencer-oriented marketing, smartphone applications, and digital content.

Thus, marketing strategies must not only be congruent with business purposes but also with national reform and adaptation directions, which requires modifiable and goal-oriented communication planning that must still be strictly hold to independent economy and conservative traditions.

Cultural, Religious, and Regulatory Considerations in Marketing Communication

Regardless of modernisation trend, Saudi Arabia's ways of life has mainly relied on Islamic traditions all the way through and in all dimensions of their living. This pattern of their life shapes gender-related traditions and religious/ethical code of conduct, which generate rules and criteria for successful

international marketing that must comply with cultural competence. It is necessary for Thai marketers to understand these sensitive issues so as to prevent wrong communication or non-compliance with culture. Several studies highlight the significance of halal certification and sharia in consumer products, particularly cosmetics, healthcare, and food (Halal Standard Institute of Thailand, 2019; Cateora & Graham, 2014). According to the Halal Standard Institute of Thailand (2019), there is a requirement for being strict to Islamic principles in product ingredients, packaging, and advertising. This point conforms to available research on Thai marketing communication in Gulf markets (Chanitphattana et al., 2022), which clarify how halal label is significant for consumer trust in markets with Muslims as the major population.

Pertaining to gender segmentation in services, e.g. spas, salons, fitness centers, or medical treatments, business models are needed for helping separate specific places/sites to suit users of different genders. Communication strategies, i.e., visual advertisements, social media content, and events, must present cultural politeness and avoid any regular Western implications that are inappropriate for Saudi contexts. The use of language and symbols must also be seriously considered. Despite English as the official language in cities and businesses, the main language used in mass communication is still Arabic.



Figure 2: HTMi Saudi Arabia (Higher Institute for Tourism & Hospitality)'s students listening to a guest speaker about the primary differences between Thai and Saudi cultures at the Thailand Mega Fair (Photograph by Author, 2023)

Successful Thai brands usually provide Arabic version for their packaging, slogans, and service channels for higher accessibility and trust. This approach is consistent with Hall's (1959) theory of a high cultural context, with communication that mainly relies on implications and cultural motivation, and with serious supervision of legal and regulatory issues. Saudi Arabia has recently offered convenient foreign businesses through better improved licensing, taxation, and labor systems. However, all business operations must still

comply with local laws associated with censorship, politeness, and religious principles. The Fifth Ring (2012), a literature about business culture in the Middle East shows the disagreement that business success in this specific-context region actually requires embedding trust, two-sided respect, and acquaintance. These are the fundamental qualities that all marketing communication should have.

To summarize, the literatures reviewed in this research make us realise Thai–Saudi relations in the new era tend to have considerable potential to economic collaborations, but need prudent international marketing communication. The 3 key factors include diplomatic re-establishment, strategies that meet Vision 2030, and cultural-oriented brand communication. Under and attempt of Thailand to reposition itself among the countries in the Gulf, particularly while Saudi Arabia is making its nonstop national progress, Thailand's success must rely on strategic communication with awareness of politics, Saudi culture, and adaptation to Saudi economic situations.

Case Studies of Thai Brands in the Saudi Market

After the re-established relations between Thailand and Saudi Arabia, Thailand has developed economic collaborations with this country through several trade fairs in Riyadh, starting from the Thai Trade Exhibition Saudi Arabia at the Riyadh International Convention and Exhibition Center between 27–30 August 2023, representing the first official Thai trade fair after the suspended diplomatic relations. A few months later, Thailand Mega Fair 2023 was held between 13–16 December 2023, extending involvement and emphasising capabilities of Thai industries. The next one was Thailand International Mega Fair 2024 between 15–17 November 2024, implying the larger scale, Thai industrial sectors, and bilateral business collaborations. Then, Thailand International Mega Fair 2025 (3rd edition) between for 7–9 December 2025 presented Thailand's persistent strategic obligations for deeper commercial as well as business relations, for promoting investment, and for strengthening sustainable economic collaborations with Saudi Arabia in accordance with Saudi Vision 2030 and Thailand's goals for international business development.



Figure 3: The Entrepreneur presenting Thai Skincare and Cosmetic Products to Saudi consumers at Thailand Mega Fair (Photograph by Author, 2023)

Latest trade fairs and diplomatic conferences have introduced the return of Thai brands in Saudi Arabia, particularly among industries conforming to Vision 2030, e.g., as wellness, healthcare, and tourism. For example, Thai Airways has restarted its operations in Saudi Arabia by founding its sales office in Jeddah, signifying re-motivated attraction to tourism and travel business between both countries. In December 2025 Thai Air Asia X has offered the first direct flight from Bangkok to Riyadh. This collaboration efficiently reinforces bilateral tourism, with greater transportation for Saudi tourists to Thailand.



Figure 4: Thai AirAsia X advertisement of the direct flight from Bangkok to Riyadh, showing higher popularity of both tourism destinations (Thai air Asia X, 2025)

Another notable example is Café Amazon, a Thai coffee chain operated by PTT Oil and Retail Business (PPTOR), which has expanded into the Saudi Arabian market with the opening of its first branch in Riyadh at InterHealth Hospital. Marking a wider regional growth strategy, the company plans to open up to 150 Café Amazon stores all over Saudi Arabia within the upcoming 10 years. This will enhance coffee businesses in Saudi Arabia to their fast growth with premium position. To respond to tastes and cultural

preferences among Saudi consumers, the brand's "Taste of Nature" maintain the same position. In the meantime, it has launched niche drinks, e.g., signatures mixed with coconut like Iced Coconut Americano and Iced Coconut Caramel Latte. There personalised menus and active business expansion imply the integration of international brand identity with local product attributes (Caterer Middle East, 2022).



Figure 5: The debut of Café Amazon in Riyadh as a Thai drinking brand (Caterer Middle East, 2022)

Bangkok Dusit Medical Services (BDMS) is another good example. It is the largest private hospital network from Thailand. It collaborates with Saudi Arabia through wellness and healthcare diplomatic approaches, not apparently appears in the market. BDMS has taken part in premium projects in Riyadh to promote and to do advertising campaigns on science-based wellness and preventive healthcare under Saudi Vision 2030. This reflects strategic, international acceptance through knowledge sharing. BDMS also get involved in Arabic language and cultural-based trainings. In fact, Thai private hospitals usually offer services with cultural emphasis indeed, e.g., female physicians, prayer venues, and halal food, for the best convenience of Muslim tourists coming for medical care. These facilitation approaches represent service adaptation to Islamic culture that supports Thailand's positioning as a regional medical and wellness tourism hub for Gulf patients (BDMS, 2025).

On to Thai SMEs, "Cheraim" is the brand of a Thai herbal product company. It also enters the Saudi market through trade fairs and Thailand Mega Fair, demonstrating its organic products and compliance with halal. Cheraim was one of over 100 Thai companies in the Thai Trade Exhibition Saudi Arabia 2023 and also Thailand MEGA Fair 2023 as well as 2025. These events were the stages to present Thai innovative food, fashion, health, and aesthetics; proving that brands from Thailand can build credibility and trust in the subject country by integrating cultural adaptation, halal, and participation in public trade fairs.



Figure 6: “Cheraim” booth in Thailand MEGA Fair 2023 & 2025 (Cheraim, 2025)

Consumer Behaviour Insights in Saudi Arabia

It is vital to dig into Saudi consumer behaviour unless Thai brands do not expect successful international marketing communication. McKinsey’s Middle East Consumer Sentiment Survey found a new type of Saudi consumers with digital expertise, concern about price value, and high social conscience. This phenomenon arises from uncertainty of national economy, higher access to technologies, and changing social norms with time.

The discovery from the survey reveals 4 explicit trends among Saudi consumers:

- Digital Interactions: More than 70% Saudi consumers are active on social media, e.g., Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok, the popular platforms among youths.
- Price Sensitivity: Consumers show more concerns about spending money, worthy buying, and marketing promotion.
- Cultural and Religious compliance: Cultural reflection, halal compliance, and family-oriented messages are the primary and potential influences on brand loyalty.
- Personalisation: Today’s consumers have shown more demands for personalised experiences, products, and services; particularly in e-commerce and wellness.

According to Statista 2024 on consumer trends, Saudi consumers pay much higher attention to eco-friendly and health-concerned brands. This is advantage for Thailand's prominence in natural/chemical-free wellness and sustainable tourism.

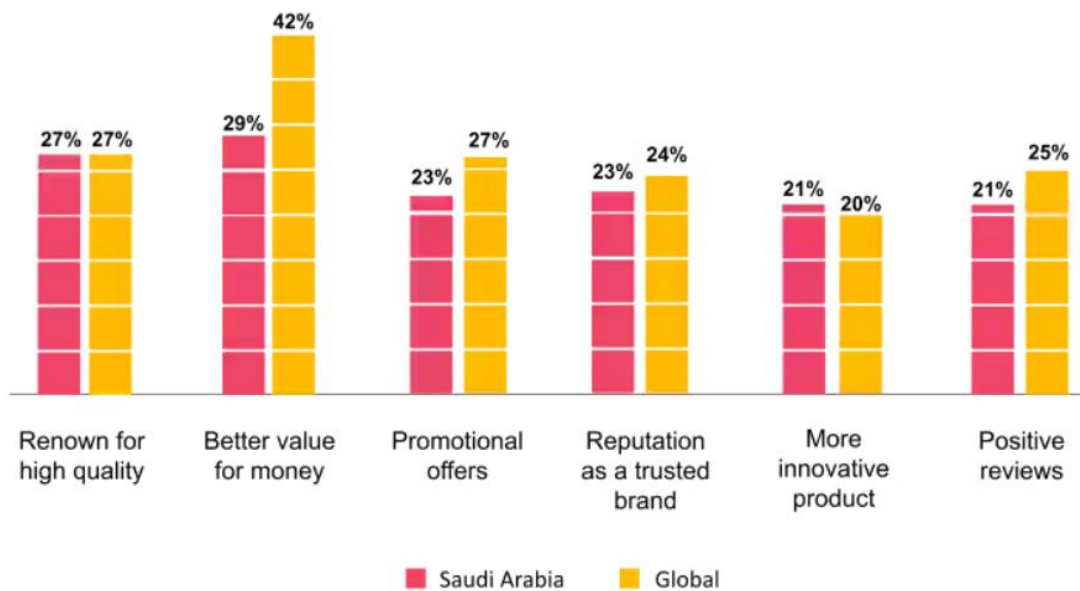


Figure 7: that the key factors that would motivate Saudi consumers to switch from a brand they are loyal to and try a competing brand offering similar products (PwC, 2024)

Furthermore, PwC's Voice of the Consumer 2024 in Saudi Arabia reported the key factors which can convince Saudi consumers to ignore their brand loyalty and turn to some other brands instead. According to the results of the report, price value is the very first factor of brand switching. 29% of Saudi consumers rated it as the top 3 reasons, parallel to the higher focus from regional and global comparison (42%). This finding underscores deeper price sensitivity, possibly affected by pressure from inflation and higher cost for living. The other great influences on decision making are product quality and brand. About 27% of Saudi consumers may choose some other brands if they perceive high quality of those alternatives. while 23% are motivated by a trusted brand reputation. This suggests that while consumers are cost-conscious, perceived quality and trust remain essential components of brand loyalty. Additionally, promotional offers (23%), positive customer reviews (21%), and product innovation (21%) contribute moderately to purchase decisions. These factors indicate that Saudi consumers respond positively to incentives and social proof, but they are secondary to core considerations such as value, quality, and brand credibility.

Taken together, these data indicate that Saudi consumer behaviour is simultaneously value-driven and quality-conscious. Brands seeking to enter or expand in the Saudi market must therefore balance competitive pricing with a credible reputation for quality and consistent customer interactions.

For Thai businesses, these behavioural patterns underscore the necessity of culturally tailored, digitally optimised, and value-driven communication strategies.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was applied to analyse the secondary data in order to examine the development of international marketing communication between Thailand and Saudi Arabia in terms of the re-established diplomatic relations; along with and the improved socio-economic environment in Saudi Arabia based on Vision 2030. Sources of primary data included online secondary sources, followed in-depth interviews with high-level informants. The secondary sources are as follows:

- Public websites and those of relevant institutions (Thai Ministry of Commerce, Saudi Chamber of Commerce, Saudi Vision 2030 portal, Invest Saudi, etc.)
- Well-known news agencies (Arab News, Bangkok Post, Saudi Gazette etc.)
- Trade/commercial agencies (e.g., Thai Trade Center, Thai Trade Exhibition, Thailand Mega Fair)
- International agencies and think tanks (e.g., World Bank, Global Media insight, PwC)
- Company websites and digital promotional materials related to Thai products and services in Saudi Arabia

Data Collection Tools

- Document Analysis: Policy briefs, bilateral trade reports, press releases, and marketing campaign overviews
- Media Content Analysis: Online news articles and digital features
- Website Explore: Analysing visual and language used in business websites and social media accounts among Thai exporters and trade fairs in Saudi Arabia.
- In-Depth Interviews: (1) Mr. Thanis Na Songkhla, Former Thai Ambassador in Bahrain and also Former Thai Consul-General in Saudi Arabia; 2) Mr. Akkharaphat Tangtrongchitr, Managing Director of Cheraim, a Thai herbal brand.

Thematic content analysis was part of methodology. To elucidate, there was coding for secondary as well as interview data into 3 thematic categories, congruent with the research questions, i.e., (1) the influences of re-established diplomatic relations between Thailand and Saudi Arabia on international marketing communication and bilateral business collaborations; (2) the influences of Vision 2030 on marketing strategies that also include opportunities and challenges; and (3) cultural, religious, and regulatory determinants for successful communication of Thai marketers in the Saudi market.

Findings

Reinstated Diplomatic Ties Have Revitalized Trade and Marketing Opportunities

Following the official re-establishment of diplomatic relations in January 2022, bilateral trade between Thailand and Saudi Arabia has surged. According to Thailand's Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP), exports to Saudi Arabia reached USD 2.55 billion in 2023, a 46% increase from 2021.

This includes automobiles, processed food, beauty products, and health supplements. Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia has expressed interest in Thai medical services, hospitality, and halal wellness products.

Thai government-led promotional events such as the “Thai Trade Exhibition” and “Thailand Mega Fair” in Riyadh and Thai–Saudi Business Forums held in 2022 and 2023 served as platforms for marketing communication. These events demonstrated the application of state-driven diplomacy as a strategic marketing mechanism, a pattern consistent with findings from earlier studies of Thai trade promotion in the Gulf region (Chanitphattana et al., 2022).

According to in-depth interview data provided by Mr. Thanis Na Songkhla, the strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signing ceremony between the Saudi–Thai Business Council and the Thai SME Confederation, held on 9 January 2026 at Gaysorn Tower in Bangkok, clearly demonstrated the evolving direction of Thai–Saudi economic collaborations. The key goal of this MOU is to enhance bilateral trade and business collaborations. “*Real People, Real Products, Real Markets*” is the MOU’s slogan with a true intention on market access expansion for Thai SMEs and Saudi small entrepreneurs. This initiation moves forward to further development of investment, trade networking, and product categorization/segments on the basis of Social Integrated Enterprise (SIE) model for lower logistics/transportation costs of businesses. This agreement complies with Saudi Vision 2030, which strengthens international business allies and also supports Thailand 4.0 for economic development through innovation.

Discussions during MOU signing focused mainly on a number of high-potential product categories in the Saudi market, particularly processed and canned food products. Thai ready-to-eat products were also included, e.g., green curry, a very popular dish for Saudi consumers. Similarly, the MOU regards spa-related products, tourism, and the hospitality industry as with quick growth for tourist preferences. Even so, strict compliance with the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA)’s regulations is indispensable for successful market entry, particularly in terms of ingredients and standards. Some specific products may be presented or sold in short promotion campaigns, but may not be permitted for full export unless they meet disciplinary requirements. In the near future, Saudi Arabia as the host of World Expo 2030 indicates bright future opportunities ahead, including the powerful construction of Thai Pavilion, extended from the concept of “Thai Village.” This venue shall definitely generate huge benefits for Thai entrepreneurs and SMEs on international stages if it receives support from Thai and Saudi authorized parties.



Figure 8: MOU signing ceremony between the Saudi–Thai Business Council and Thai SME Confederation (Photograph by Author, 2026)

In spite of more availability and widespread recognition of Thai products in the past few years in Saudi Arabia's large cities, Global City Dammam has brought a perfect opportunity and a critical challenge for Thai exporters. Global City is a massive-dollar, multi-phase cultural, tourism, and entertainment hub covering more than 650,000 square meters and featuring international pavilions designed to showcase products, cuisine, and cultural experiences from around the world — is intended to enhance Dammam's appeal as a regional destination for local and international visitors and investors (Arab News, 2025).

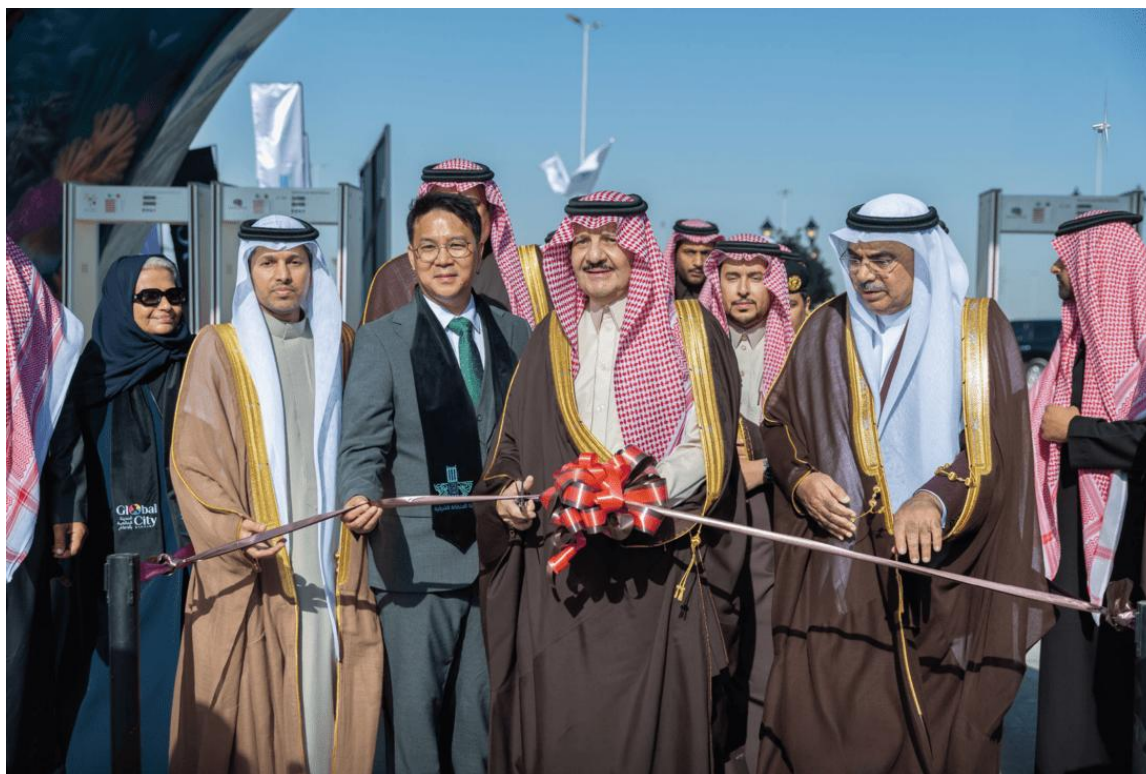


Figure 9: Global City Dammam Opening Ceremony by His Royal Highness Prince Saud bin Nayaf bin Abdulaziz and Mr. Akavut Tangsilikusolwong, Managing Director of VEGA International Co. (KSA) on the 29th December 2025 (Global City, 2025)

Nonetheless, due to the theme-based display space to present finely selected and arranged cultural identity more than as a traditional trade platform, participation in the pavilion can bring benefits for a country with strong strategic support and higher promotion budget. This may limit full capabilities of Thai SMEs with neither financial nor diplomatic backup for their larger potential among target consumers. This means whereas the Global City project may brought recognition of secondary cities' Thai products and services, competitions and intensive investment for national zones can increase hindrances for some Thai exporters.

Vision 2030 Creates Strategic Demand for Thai Wellness, Tourism, and Consumer Brands

Advanced economy in Saudi Arabia has led to the new emphasis of foreign investment to other industries instead of oil, e.g., tourism, healthcare, retail, logistics, entertainment, and other industries that contain significance of hidden cultural diplomacy. The key goal of large-scale projects like Riyadh Boulevard, NEOM, AMAALA, and Red Sea Global is to draw huge attention from international businesses that must meet wellness, sustainability, and lifestyle branding.

Thai business companies have started to adjust their communication strategies in response to this perspective, as per some outstanding examples below:

- Thai herbal cosmetics brands highlight halal compliance and natural origins, appealing to religious and health-conscious Saudi consumers.

- Thai spas, long established in global luxury markets, are targeting wellness tourism zones in the Red Sea area, using branding tied to “authentic Thai healing traditions.”
- DITP campaigns on social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube) now include Arabic-speaking influencers and subtitled promotional videos, aligning with Saudi Arabia’s high digital interactions rate.

These trends illustrate how Vision 2030 is reshaping Saudi Arabia’s economic landscape while simultaneously redefining the communication expectations placed on international marketers, including those from Thailand. However, Vision 2030 also presents challenges for Thai businesses. The rapid pace of regulatory change including evolving standards set by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA), tightening licensing requirements for foreign firms, and shifting content regulations governing advertising demands continuous monitoring and adaptation that Thai SMEs, in particular, may struggle to sustain. Moreover, as Saudi Arabia draws growing international competition from South Korea, Japan, and European nations that are actively targeting the same Vision 2030–aligned sectors, Thai businesses face an increasingly crowded field in which cultural fit and halal compliance alone may no longer constitute sufficient competitive differentiation.

Cultural, Religious, and Regulatory Factors Shape Thai Marketing in Saudi Arabia

Although there have been huge social and economic shifts according to Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia still strictly holds to Islamic values and religious principles, which primarily influence marketing communication as follows:

- Halal Certification: All food, cosmetics, and spa products must comply with sharia standards. The Central Islamic Council of Thailand is partnership of Saudi authorities for halal certification of Thai products.
- Gender Sensitivity: Advertising materials must respect politeness and often require separate marketing channels or visuals for men and women.
- Translation: Successful Thai brands in Saudi Arabia translate their websites and packaging into Arabic, with avoidance of idioms or funny texts that may sound inappropriate for Islamic culture.
- Attention to Religious Calendars: Advertising/campaigns from Thai marketers must be aligned with Ramadan, Hajj, and Eid for appropriate and appeal cultural promotions. This conduct is similar to the findings from associated studies on Gulf market (Chanitphattana et al., 2022).

An essential role of halal certification is to build trust between brands and consumers because it symbolises product credibility, compliance, and respect to Islamic values. It also indicates a good will among Thai sellers to adapt and truly try to understand and comply with the local culture despite the different nationality and religion. This cultural conformity resides in marketing communication strategies of many Thai brands as well as industries, e.g., Thai Airways, Thai AirAsia X, Café Amazon, BDMS private hospitals, and Cheraim. Their messages do not only focus on product functions and benefits but also intangible values, e.g., family bond, psychological well-being, and being humble to Islamic culture. These are regarded as the core values in the Saudi society. Still, the results of in-depth interviews pointed an unsolved limitation from the Thai side, that is, so far the Saudi halal certification authority has not yet granted full accreditation for

halal product certification. As a result, some product categories may not be acknowledged as halal in Saudi Arabia although they demonstrate halal logo from Thailand on product packages. This discordance implies a risk of market entry, and thus Thai entrepreneurs must be concerned about this in case of exports to the Saudi market.

Discussion

According to the results of this research, international marketing communication between Thailand and Saudi Arabia has been basically improved, grounded on 3 key driving forces, i.e., re-established diplomatic relations, latest Vision 2030, and Saudi cultural–religious framework. The combination of international marketing communication, cross-cultural communication, and empirical cases resulted in the findings that went beyond descriptive commercial analysis of communication strategies that finally turned into strategic tools of bilateral collaborations.

The re-established relations between both countries in 2022 has been a political breakthrough and a motive for marketing communication under government support. Public pilot projects, e.g., Thai Trade Exhibition Saudi Arabia and Thailand Mega Fair reveals the function of diplomacy as a tool for credibility, acceptance, and trust toward brands. The results of the research prove the validity of international marketing communication theory by showing that government support and diplomatic roles in Saudi Arabia, a high-context market, are significant in narrowing perceived risk and business partners. Thai brands gain benefits from being part in the renewed bilateral collaborations, followed by higher credibility and speeded market acceptance. This is different from traditional models of market entry.

In this regard, Vision 2030 has restructured Saudi economy and consumer expectations consumers simultaneously, leading to interactions with brands. Modern Saudi consumers with digital engagement, concern about values, and holding to Islamic culture expect Thai brands and marketers to apply adjusted and cultural-oriented communication strategies. Café Amazon and Cheraim are the example of successful brands which show compliance with the key requirements bring success in communication with Saudi consumers, i.e., halal compliance, sending messages in Arabic, and appropriate content. In The research also supports Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory by visualising that smooth communication and strategies must be in line with national advancement discourses, e.g., sustainability, wellness, and modern lifestyle based on Vision 2030.

Cross-cultural communication facilitated the analysis in terms of understanding the reasons for attraction to Thai brands whereas others confront resistance. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic environment with an ultimate faiths and value for the religion, and thus it must also be reflected through communication with indirect, respectful, and value-based messages. In the research, Hall's high-context communication concept is also proved true. To clarify, meanings are transferred through language and symbols, religious compliance, and trust in institutions. But under new adaptation of the theory, it depicts that influencers, public fairs, and cultural spaces presented by brands currently act as cultural mediators that transform values foreign brands into local messages with consumer acceptance. This situation represents adaptive high-context communication in a society with high digitalization.

These case studies also present structural challenges that make market entry more complicated, particularly for Thai SMEs. At the time that diplomatic collaborations and communication channels enlarge visibility outside urban areas, e.g., the project “Global City Damma,” new pressures from competitions associated with scope, financial potentiality, and recognised certification have emerged. Specifically, no recognition of halal certification between Thailand and Saudi Arabia is a serious regulatory obstacle, which stresses that only cultural adaptation is inadequate unless there is no institutional consistency. This part of findings reveals an unsolved pressure between cultural compliance and regulatory acceptance in such communication environment.

According to another implication obtained from the research, the data of consumer behaviour promotes and highlights the findings in all 3 dimensions. To elucidate, stronger price sensitivity as well as demands for quality and reputation of brands emphasise how value-oriented communication is strategically significant. Thus, Thai brands must consider balance between pricing with fine quality amidst competitors. Halal certification, government support, and conformity of messages perform as mechanisms of trust that minimize uncertainty of consumer behavior, particularly in a market with all-time social change and diverse economy.

The overview of this research helps extend knowledge of international marketing communication through presented successful business communication in Saudi Arabia. To reach this success, there must be complex strategies with integration of diplomacy, cultural compliance, respect to rules and regulations, and digital literacy. This research on the return of Thai-Saudi relations suggests that international marketing communication in the specific context does not refers to transactions anymore but bilateral relations under broader frameworks of national improvement, cultural legitimacy, and long-term partnership building.

Research Limitation

There are some limitations to be acknowledged.

1. The Dynamic Policy: Regulations and economy in Saudi Arabia always change with time. The research focuses mainly between 2021–2025 situations, which possibly cannot be inferred to future reform or improvement.
2. There were no interviews with Saudi consumers. Thus, future studies should do accordingly to fulfill the gap of this research, and to gain benefits from their viewpoints toward Thai products in Saudi Arabia.

These limitations can be a guideline on future research for better effectiveness. This one was implemented specifically on international marketing communication strategies in today’s Thai–Saudi context.

Future Recommendations

To enhance international marketing communication between Thailand and Saudi Arabia, it can be done as follows:

1. Increase Halal Certification Recognition: Halal compliance in marketing must not be only a legal requirement but also a tool for value-added products and services.
2. Use More Saudi Influencers and Content Creators: Business allies of native KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) can narrow down cultural gaps and maximize reach/engagement throughout online platforms which are mostly used by Saudi youths (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok).
3. Conformity of Halal Certification: To increase recognition of Thailand's halal certification among Saudi authorities, both Thai government and the Central Islamic Council of Thailand should prioritise this as one of the top policies for sooner implementation. Thai exporters should examine acceptance and accreditation in product categories on their own first prior to export. Also, they should not only wait for taking part in trade fairs as the market readiness indicator.
4. Develop Diplomacy-Based Support for SMEs: In fact, leading Thai companies can enhance independent diplomatic business platforms. Still, SMEs need concrete government support for competition in an environment with intensive investment like Global City Dammam and World Expo 2030 Riyadh. Such support includes financial support for trade fairs, regulatory and legal guidelines, and rules/requirements to be followed prior to export.
5. Motivate Academic and Industrial Research Partners: Collaborations between Thai universities and Saudi research institutions shall surely create fundamental communication models that suit the bilateral relations. Future research should give precedence to Saudi consumer attitudes toward Thai products, effectiveness of digital influencers in Gulf markets, regulations for halal exports from Thailand and also how Thai businesses can adapt to the new market conditions objectively.

Conclusions

The re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and Saudi Arabia has been regarded as a historic event for modern international marketing communication between both countries. Based on this research, regenerated political trust and Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 introduce readjusted terms and conditions that facilitate Thai businesses to communicate, set positions, and validate their brands in the Saudi market.

Three research questions were raised in the research. Q1: the re-established relations enables marketing communication by making Thai brands legally and socially accepted in the Saudi society, which is closely bonded with culture and religion. Q2: Vision 2030 increases business opportunities and healthcare whereas also stressing disciplinary expectations and pressure of trade competitions. Q3: Saudi Arabia's cultural, religious, and regulatory dimensions still determine marketing communication indicators, with more understanding among Thai marketers regarding this matter despite halal certification gap as a barrier waiting to be solved at the government level. The results of these 3 research questions brought about a simple but practical perspective, i.e., successful international marketing communication Saudi Arabia is

relational, not transactional; based on cultural respect, trust, and strategic conformity to national development goals. Trade fairs supported by the government, bilateral business conferences, and diplomatic projects do not only act as business platforms but also communication tools that bring lower uncertainty and higher brand credibility in this Islamic society.

According to the academic view, this research strengthens and elevate international marketing communication along with cross-cultural communication theories through clarified interactions between the high-context culture and digital advancement. This Middle East country has long been very strict to Islamic ways of life, but the emergence of digital engagement and value-concerned consumers have provided an integrated communication atmosphere under co-existence between traditional culture and modern media activities. Halal certification, Arabic translation, and cultural sensitivity are the signs of considerable trust. At the same time, digital influencers and public projects are cultural mediators in the contemporary era.

As for the practical view, the research concentrates on both opportunities and challenges for Thai brands. Top businesses/industries with institutional support are at higher ranks to strengthen bilateral diplomatic relations, and to take part in large projects, e.g., Global City projects. In contrast, SMEs have to deal with structural difficulties of Thai halal recognition, financial support, and complicated regulations/conditions. These suggest the requirement of institutional coordination at a deeper level, particularly in halal accreditation and harmonious regulations, to facilitate full and long-lasting market entry.

Above all, international marketing communication between Thailand-Saudi Arabia should be perceived as a transaction as a long-term cultural negotiation and partnership process. Under ongoing strengthened bilateral relations, Thai brands with cultural intellect, regulatory/disciplinary compliance, and digital adaptability will be placed at the best rank to turn the re-establish diplomatic relations into durable, commercial, and interactive success. This Thai–Saudi case study provide a precious hint of effective cultural-oriented practices, diplomatic approaches, and marketing communication ahead can promote international collaborations in markets with rapid change.

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