

## Lost in Translation? The Prevalence of Foreign Drink Names in Arabic Coffee Menus

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**Abstract**

*This study aims to explore coffee drinks branding strategies in the Arab world, with a particular reference to the Saudi context. The study uses a mixed-methods approach consisting of a) 30 menus of local coffee shops; b) 31 responses to a questionnaire for coffee shop owners/managers; c) 133 responses to a customer perceptions questionnaire; d) 5 guided interviews with coffee shop owners/managers. The naming strategies discussed are transliteration, translation, and localisation. The results show a heavy inclination towards transliteration, reflecting a tendency towards globalisation and the influence of international branding strategies. The use of translation is limited to menu items that can have resonance with local culture and local customer perceptions. Localisation is often used to echo tenacity to local culture and also as a strategy to bridge the gap between local heritage and global market influx. The study's value hinges on revealing the tension of naming products between globalised imports and local sentiments, with signals favouring openness to the global market tendencies.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Coffee is one of the most profitable and dynamic agricultural products in the world, but its importance goes beyond its status as a global commodity. Coffee has changed from a simple drink that wakes you up to a cultural phenomenon and maybe even a cult. For some, it has come to stand for both personal and group routine. To some countries, it has turned into an element of cultural identity, and to some societies, such as Arabs, it is a symbol of hospitality with certain social codes embedded in making and serving it.

Coffee, as a beverage, is historically known to have emerged in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Yemen (Morris, 2019; Hattox, 1985), and from there spread all over the world. The highlands of Ethiopia are, however, recognised as the origin of the plant. In its journey, coffee has transformed from a simple beverage – known in Arabic as *qahwa* – into a wide range of modern variations, such as cappuccinos, lattes and frappuccinos, each reflecting the impact of globalisation at each and every stage. These modern representations of coffee, albeit often

distanced from their etymological and cultural roots, show how versatile coffee is, and how it can be a medium for culinary innovation and cross-cultural exchange. In this sense, the story of coffee transcends its agricultural and commercial expansion boundaries to become a catalyst of linguistic and cultural transformation, where processes such as translation, transliteration, and localisation have facilitated its global dissemination, even reintroducing it to its Arabic roots in reinvented forms<sup>1</sup>.

This study aims to show the circular cultural trajectory of coffee, highlighting the repercussions of an originally Arabic-named beverage that found its way into the rest of the world, only to return to its origins loaded with and remoulded by foreign touches. To be more specific, the study investigates how branding strategies in Arabic speaking countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, synergise local and global coffee legacies through linguistic means (mainly translation, transliteration and localisation), to reshape coffee culture and coffee market dynamics, in an attempt to evoke global integration while retaining tradition and historical resonance. For these purposes, the study examines the etymology, historical penetration and branding strategies of coffee in the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia, in order to crystallise the complex relationship between language, culture and market dynamics associated with this global product.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Coffee is deeply embedded in Arabic culture. The term is etymologically linked to the Arabic word *qahwa*, evolving henceforth from a regional tradition into a global phenomenon. Nonetheless, in contemporary Arab coffee shops, e.g. Saudi Arabia, beverage menus frequently display foreign drink names, such as *frappé*, *cappuccino*, and *latte*, giving rise to relevant questions about the convergence of language, culture and branding strategies which (mostly through translation, transliteration and localisation) highlight a fundamental sociocultural and sociolinguistic implication, that is, since Arabic society has a rich coffee culture and is highly conscious to tradition, how does it grapple with the influx of foreign branding terminology while at the same time preserve its cultural and linguistic identity?

Indeed, the prevalence of foreign terms in Saudi coffee culture (seen here as an adequate representative example of Arabic culture) raises implications regarding whether these borrowed lexicons epitomise a symbolic value which reflects modernity, prestige and cosmopolitan appeal to local consumers (Roudometof, 2016, p. 115), or do they obscure meaning and create subtle cultural disconnects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005)? In this regard,

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<sup>1</sup> The term "mocha" refers originally to a port in Yemen (المخا), where coffee was exported to the rest of the world. Now, there is a coffee drink, called 'mocha' (موكا) which can commonly be found in coffee shops in Arab countries. The Arabic borrowed term كافي/كافي/كوفي to refer to coffee is also the same.

this study examines the role of translation, transliteration, and localisation in moulding coffee menus, diving into the influence of these linguistic strategies on perceptions of authenticity and cultural belonging. While Saudis nurture a deep historical attachment to coffee, they are increasingly attracted to global trends. As such, this research examines whether such terminology boosts cross-cultural engagement or dilutes local heritage.

### **1.2. Research Questions**

The study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do Saudi coffee shops employ translation, transliteration, and localisation strategies in naming beverages, and what commercial or cultural factors prioritise these approaches over Arabic equivalents?
2. What challenges arise when foreign drink names are translated, transliterated or localised for Arabic menus, and how do industry stakeholders perceive their impact on brand identity and consumer appeal?
3. How do Saudi consumers perceive the use of translated, transliterated, or localised drink names, and what does this reveal about the effectiveness of these strategies in balancing global branding with cultural resonance?

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

This paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To show how coffee shops employ translation, transliteration, and localisation strategies in naming beverages, and highlight the commercial or cultural factors that prioritise these approaches over Arabic equivalents.
2. To pinpoint the challenges that arise when foreign drink names are translated, transliterated or localised for Arabic menus, and how industry stakeholders perceive their impact on brand identity and consumer appeal.
3. To reflect Saudi consumers' perceptions about the use of translated, transliterated, or localised drink names, and comment on the implications of the use of these strategies in balancing global branding with cultural resonance.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

This paper comes in response to a widespread branding phenomenon that reflects colossal cultural implications. Coffee in the Arab culture in general and Saudi context in particular has a significant value; it is more than just a commodity. The prevalence of foreign names in Saudi coffee menus is an epitome of a much larger and overwhelming globalisation trend that can lead to cultural erosion instead of linguistic enrichment. It is hoped that the findings of the study invite policymakers in Arab countries to set standards that ensure keeping pace with globalised trends while preserving the local cultural identity.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research sheds light on how coffee shops navigate the complex issues of being trendy and globalised while at the same time preserve local culture. It hypothesises that the dominance of foreign nomenclature in coffee menus and the Saudi customers' reception thereof can be construed as guiding lines for exploring how these local choices represent conduits for globalisation and indexes of cultural erosion.

Coffee is a produce that holds a position so unique that it juxtaposes cultural heritage and global commodity. In this literature review, the exposition touches on coffee's linguistic origins, historical trajectory, and contemporary branding strategies within Arabic-speaking markets, with particular attention to Saudi Arabia. Drawing upon seminal works and contemporary researchers, the review of literature unfolds across four thematic areas: etymological foundations, historical development, branding practices in Arab markets, and the linguistic strategies shaping its commercial presence.

### 2.1. Etymological Foundations of Coffee Terminology

The lexical journey of "coffee" begins with the Arabic term *qahwa*, a word imbued with both functional and cultural significance. Scholarly consensus traces *qahwa* to a root meaning "to suppress appetite" or "to diminish desire," likely referring to the stimulant properties of this beverage, consumed for the first time by 15th-century Yemeni Sufis for the purposes of nocturnal worship (Morris, 2019, p. 47). The term's diffusion started with the spread of the commodity through trade routes, evolving into Turkish *kahve* before entering European lexicons as "coffee" (Hattox, 1985, p. 14). While some scholars posit a connection to Ethiopia's Kaffa region, this hypothesis remains contested (Morris, 2019, p. 14).

This linguistic metamorphosis reflects coffee's cultural adaptability. Modern Arabic usage oscillates between the traditional *qahwa* and transliterated forms like *kūfī*, epitomising the tension between heritage and globalisation. Such duality underscores coffee's role as a mediator of cultural identity – a theme recurrent in its historical and commercial narratives.

### 2.2. Historical Trajectory: From Ritual to Global Commodity

There is a historical narrative of coffee's early stages which posits the beginning to Ethiopia's highlands (namely, Arabica), where oral tradition attributes its discovery to a goatherd observing his flock's heightened alertness after consuming coffee cherries (Morris, 2019, p. 45). The documented literature, however, sets the beginning to 15<sup>th</sup> century, attributing the emergence of coffee as a beverage to Sufi circles in Yemen who had adopted coffee as an aid for nocturnal devotion, with scholar Abd al-Qadir al-Jaziri documenting its spread as the "Wine of Islam" (Morris, 2019, p. 50). Coffee's road to fame did not go unhurdled, though. Early religious controversies, including a 1511 Meccan debate over its permissibility, gave way

to widespread acceptance, facilitated by Ottoman expansion and pilgrimage networks (Sajdi, 2008).

Later, just as it did with sugar, tea and tobacco, European colonialism transformed coffee into a plantation commodity, with Arabica, dominating global production (Clarence-Smith & Topik, 2003). The intersection of culture and commodification of coffee started early on in history, first in Egypt followed by Ottoman Turkey and on to Europe. Coffeehouses emerged as hubs of intellectual exchange in Europe, as evidenced by their role in Enlightenment-era Britain (Cowan, 2005) and Jewish commercial networks in Germany (Liberles, 2012). This historical versatility underscores coffee's dual identity as both a cultural symbol and an economic force.

### 2.3. Branding Strategies in Arab Markets: The Saudi Context

Branding has a significant impact on consumers' perceptions and choices. Brands influence language and perception through repeated exposure and association (Kingsley, 2023). In Saudi Arabia, coffee's cultural capital intersects with a rapidly commercialising market. The sector, valued at US\$3.4 billion in 2025, reflects a 5-6% annual growth rate, with 8984 coffee shops (some with 700 branches, such as Half Million) as of May 5, 2025 (Statista.com; Smartsrapers.com). Traditional *qahwa* retains ceremonial significance, while global chains introduce hybridised offerings, creating a dynamic branding landscape.

In Saudi coffee shops, branding strategies reflect interesting implications. Local enterprises like Barn's Coffee (مقهى بارنر) leverage translation to emphasise cultural authenticity, whereas multinational brands such as Starbucks (ستاربكس) employ transliteration to maintain global cachet (Al 'Awadhi, 2014; Alangari, 2022). Local coffee brands, such as Bash Coffee in Buraidah, adopts a mix of modern marketing strategies (including product, price, place and promotion) to situate themselves firmly in a growing market where global brands compete; Despite being a domestic brand, Bash Coffee adopts international-style branding and menu terminology to appeal to modern consumers (Kurniawan, 2022a).

Generally, it is unmistakably obvious that global coffee culture is being adapted in Saudi Arabia, particularly through processes of acculturation, localisation, and brand positioning (Kurniawan, 2022b). Sensory branding – e.g., "مذاق التراث" ("taste of heritage") – and regional references (e.g., "Hijazi coffee") align with Singh and Shukla's (2024) framework of cultural equity<sup>2</sup>. Saudi Vision 2030 further amplifies these dynamics, incentivising brands to negotiate local identity within a globalised economy.

<sup>2</sup> Cultural equity, according to Singh and Shukla (2024), relates to the value a brand derives from its alignment with cultural norms, values, and identities at both macro (country-level) and micro

## 2.4. Linguistic Strategies in Coffee Branding

Globalisation has been associated with an increased emphasis on brand standardisation (Robertson, 1995), which prioritises source-text orientation in branding practices. In contrast, brand customisation centres on the cultural context and consumer preferences of the target market. A hybrid approach, referred to as "glocalization," synthesises both strategies by adapting globally standardised elements to local markets while preserving core brand components that remain consistent across diverse cultural contexts (Singh & Shukla, 2024, p. 302).

Basically, a close look at samples of coffee menus in Saudi cafés showed that there are five principal strategies that dominate coffee branding in Saudi Arabian markets:

1. Retention of the Arabic original term: Culturally rooted terms like *qahwa* foster trust among tradition-oriented consumers (Al 'Awadhi, 2014).
2. Translation: Having menus in both Arabic and English, either separately or within the same sheet.
3. Transliteration (equivalent to globalisation): Phonetic adaptations (e.g., كوفي *kūfī*) preserve foreign brand identity while accommodating Arabic script (Al-Khatib, 2006).
4. Localisation (equivalent to customisation): Integration of cultural motifs (e.g., Arabic calligraphy or inventing/invoking Arabic names) enhances emotional engagement.
5. Glocalization: Mixing Arabic terms with foreign, transliterated terms. According to Roudometof (2016, p. 4), glocalization does not necessarily erase local cultures but often leads to a blending of global and local elements; it is a process whereby global influences are transformed through local agency into new forms that bear the imprint of local culture, bringing about cultural hybridity (Canclini, 1995; in Roudometof, 2016, p. 156).

While the first of these is not elaborated here since it involves no translation activity, the fifth one is subsumed under the fourth, penultimate one.

Thus, from Sufi ritual to multinational commodity, coffee's journey exemplifies the interplay of language, culture, and commerce. In Saudi Arabia's evolving market, branding strategies reflect broader tensions between tradition and modernity, offering a microcosm of globalisation's cultural negotiations. This duality positions coffee as a compelling lens for examining identity, consumption, and linguistic adaptation in contemporary economies. Of course, there are many factors to be considered here. For example, generational divides shape

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(individual or group-level) scales. This value enhances brand appeal, fosters consumer-brand relationships, and drives loyalty by resonating with cultural contexts across global markets.

preferences: younger demographics favour transliterated global brands, while older consumers gravitate toward translated local offerings (Mohammed, 2024). Besides, challenges include transliteration errors (Ghazala, 2008) and cultural mistranslations, which in turn necessitates a nuanced balance between global appeal and regional authenticity.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to conduct a holistic examination of linguistic branding practices in Saudi Arabia's coffee industry. The methodological approach combines systematic data collection with rigorous analytical procedures to ensure comprehensive findings.

First, as a case study, the study established a representative corpus comprising beverage menus from 30 coffee establishments across three major Saudi urban centres: Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam. These metropolitan areas were strategically selected based on their demographic characteristics, particularly their significant international populations and developed coffee cultures, which make them ideal for analysing cross-linguistic branding phenomena. The sampling procedure involved identifying the first ten coffee shops in each city which appeared in Google search queries, including only local brands. International chains, such as Starbucks, were excluded since they are expected to have their own branding strategies, based mainly on globalisation and franchise dynamics.

In addition, the research utilised two distinct but complementary survey instruments: a business-oriented questionnaire targeting coffee shop management and a consumer-focused questionnaire examining customer perceptions. These instruments were developed through an iterative process beginning with initial formulation in English based on study objectives, followed by professional translation into Arabic by the researcher. Back-translation verification was employed to maintain conceptual equivalence. The questionnaires underwent pilot testing with representative samples ( $n=3$  per group) before final refinement based on pilot feedback. To ensure the questionnaire captured meaningful and consistent data, a validity and reliability analysis was conducted. Content validity was confirmed through alignment with research goals and comprehensive coverage of relevant topics. Face validity was established via pilot testing with a small group of coffee shop owners. Using Alpha Cronbach, the final versions demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with reliability coefficients of  $\alpha=0.82$  (business) and  $\alpha=0.79$  (consumer), and content validity confirmed by expert panel review.

The study achieved robust participation, collecting 31 valid responses from coffee shop representatives and 133 completed consumer questionnaires through secure digital platforms with appropriate consent procedures. To complement the quantitative data, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with five coffee shop proprietors. These discussions

provided valuable insights into strategic decision-making processes, brand positioning considerations, and market adaptation challenges.

Through the triangulation of menu linguistic analysis, survey responses, and interview narratives, the methodology enabled a multidimensional understanding of how translation strategies function as branding mechanisms in Saudi Arabia's coffee sector. This comprehensive approach ensured both the reliability of quantitative findings and the depth of qualitative insights, offering a nuanced perspective on linguistic branding in coffee service contexts.

#### **4. MENU SAMPLES AS A CASE STUDY**

A closer look at the branding strategies of cafés in Saudi Arabia reveals a clear pattern, with transliteration being the dominant go-to strategy. Beverage names, such as like “كابتشينو” for cappuccino or “لاتيه” for latte, have become so common that they appear as integral components of each coffee menu whether in Riyadh or Jeddah or Dammam. This scenario is not merely a local trend, but rather reflects a wider regional habit, as evidenced from the sample menus collected, which show that the majority of coffee shops in Saudi Arabia opt for transliterated terms even when direct translations would work. Reasons for that range from the desire to jump on the globalised marketing bandwagon to an integrally felt need of achieving recognition by offering a touch of exoticism, thus appealing to both locals and international visitors alike. Many cafés offer bilingual menus so that customers instantly recognise their favourite drinks, while the Arabic script adds a layer of cultural identity as an added value.

However, this approach is not foolproof. The transliteration process involves variations in spelling – i.e. “فراپاتشينو” versus “فراپوتشينو” for Frappuccino – that can trip people up. Al-Jarf (2022) points out that inconsistent vowel and consonant use often distorts pronunciation, likely to cause confusion at the counter. In other words, such inconsistency can be jarring, especially for first-time customers trying to fathom the intricacies of exotic coffee drinks in a menu.

In addition to transliteration, there are also some cafés that turn to literal translation for certain items. For example, some menus contain “قهوة بيضاء” (white coffee) or “قهوة تركية” (Turkish coffee),<sup>3</sup> implying that literalism can sometimes find its way into menus, either due to lack of cultural sensitivity or a desire to integrate globalised branding to become "modern". This selective translation echoes menu items borrowed directly from English (even though most coffee names sound non-English, and were borrowed from other languages such as Italian or French), followed closely by literal translations that make sense culturally. The final result

<sup>3</sup> There are also other interesting translations of tea; for example, “شاي أخضر” (green tea) or even “شاي أسود” (for black tea; typically known as 'red tea' in Arabic, شاي أحمر).

consists of a kind of hybrid model in which caf  s keep one foot in the global coffee culture while grounding themselves in local tastes and expectations.

Dual naming is yet another increasingly common tactic, whereby both the transliterated Arabic and the original English term, such as “Latte – ﻻﺗﻴﻪ” are listed on the menu. Bilingual branding is designed to be accessible to non-Arabic speakers, e.g. expats and tourists, while also honouring the local language. It, therefore, gives caf  s a cosmopolitan edge without losing clarity. In fact, a view on linguistic landscapes – e.g. online menus in the context of the food and beverages sector – reflects the tendency of many businesses across Saudi Arabia to blend Roman and Arabic scripts in order to cast a wider net, with a visually embedded signal to openness and diversity.

Furthermore, many drinks appear to tie themselves to cultural roots, even though with a foreign touch, and here translation wins out over transliteration. Take, for example, “white coffee” “ﻗﻬﻮﺔ ﺑﯩﺰﺀ” (or “Indian tea” (ﺷﺎﻱ ﻫﻨﺪﻯ)): here direct translation (calque translation) is used instead of borrowing because it already resonates with local consumers. Research into menu translation suggests that coffee shop owners prefer either literal or meaning-based equivalents for such universally understood items, instead of bringing awkward transliterations that could sound foreign or confusing. It is a common contemporary branding strategy where menus are intended to “tell a story” rather than serve as an inventory of drink items.

Cultural policies also play a role. Since 2022, the Saudi Ministry of Commerce has encouraged replacing “Arabic coffee” with “Saudi coffee” to highlight national heritage. This subtle but significant shift is slowly making its way onto caf   menus, with some places swapping out traditional names like “ﻛﺎﺑﺘﺸﯩﻨﻮ” or listing “ﻗﻬﻮﺔ ﺍﻟﺴﻌﻮﺩﯨﻴﻪ” alongside them – a gesture to reinforce pride in national identity. It is part of a broader movement toward localisation, where branding aligns with national identity while still catering to an international palate. Stanley and Stanley (2015: p. 68) emphasise that menus serve not only as functional tools for ordering but also as cultural artefacts that reflect both the identity of the establishment and the expectations of its customers. Given Saudi Arabia's booming openness to globalisation, menu language often combines local and international elements to appeal to diverse customer base. In Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, as is further discussed below, the use of foreign drink names (e.g., Latte, Americano) can be taken as an index of an effort to align with global coffee culture while also catering to younger, urban, or tourist demographics who savour these terms as tokens of trendy quality and modernity.

All these strategies – i.e. transliteration, translation (including dual labelling), and localisation – shape the customer experience in different ways. Consistency remains a challenge, particularly if and when spellings vary between branches or between different coffee

shops. Standardising transliterated terms could, therefore, help ensure consistent ordering and build stronger brand recognition. Meanwhile, bilingual labelling can bridge language gaps without erasing local flavour.

Coffee shops in Saudi Arabia are walking a fine line, balancing global trends with local traditions, accessibility with authenticity, and modern branding with cultural pride. Cafés have a variety of branding tactics – e.g. refining transliteration standards, maintaining bilingual clarity, and thoughtfully integrating national identity – in order to craft menus that speak to everyone. It is a delicate dance, but one that, when done right, creates a warm, inclusive atmosphere, one cup at a time.

#### **4.1. Coffee Shops Questionnaire**

A total of 31 coffee shop owners/managers in Saudi Arabia participated in the questionnaire, which aimed to explore how local coffee shops approach the naming strategies of foreign beverages on their menus, including the factors influencing these choices, challenges faced, and perceptions regarding branding and cultural identity. The data is organised into four main sections: general information about the respondents, product naming strategies, challenges and perceptions, and open-ended feedback.

The first section collected basic details about the respondents and their businesses. A majority of the participants (38.7%) operate coffee shops located in Riyadh, followed by Jeddah (29.0%) and Dammam (22.6%). Three respondents indicated other cities, though these were not specified.

When asked about the type of coffee shops they manage, most respondents (87.1%) identified as independent local establishments. Only two reported managing local chains, and one each for an international franchise and a specialty coffee shop.

In terms of operational history, just over half of the respondents (51.6%) have been in business for between one and three years. Another 29% have operated for four to six years, while nearly 20% have been running for more than six years. No coffee shop respondents had opened within the past year.

*Table 1: Duration of service in the market*

| Duration of Operation | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Less than 1 year      | 0                     | 0.0            |
| 1–3 years             | 16                    | 51.6           |
| 4–6 years             | 9                     | 29.0           |
| More than 6 years     | 6                     | 19.4           |

This second section focused on how respondents name foreign drinks on their menus and the factors that influence these decisions. A significant majority (71.0%) use a combination of transliteration and translation, blending Arabic script with English or other language elements to make names both familiar and accessible. About 29% rely solely on full transliteration, such as “كابتشينو” for Cappuccino. None of the respondents reported using fully translated or creatively named Arabic alternatives.

*Table 2: Coffee Drinks Branding Strategies*

| Naming Strategy                            | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| Full transliteration                       | 9                     | 29.0           |
| Full translation into Arabic               | 0                     | 0.0            |
| Combination of transliteration/translation | 22                    | 71.0           |
| Creative Arabic names                      | 0                     | 0.0            |
| Other                                      | 0                     | 0.0            |

Among the languages used in translation, English was overwhelmingly cited as the primary language influencing drink names, chosen by 93.5% of respondents. Despite the fact that most of the drinks sound either Italian and French, Italian was mentioned by a small minority (6.5%), while no one selected French or Turkish. When asked about the impact of using foreign names on customer attraction, nearly all respondents (96.8%) agreed that it does attract more customers, with only one remaining unsure.

Factors influencing naming decisions include marketing and branding considerations (100%), maintaining an international brand image (93.5%), and customer familiarity with foreign terms (74.2%). Fewer respondents considered ease of pronunciation (35.5%) or competitor influence (54.8%). Approximately two-thirds of respondents said they occasionally or frequently receive questions from customers about the meaning of foreign names. Specifically, 22.6% said this happens frequently, and 41.9% said it occurs sometimes. The result suggests that there might be a sort of unacknowledged growing pressure on coffee shop owners, resulting from the tension between localisation (adapting menu items to suit local tastes) and standardisation (maintaining consistency across markets). This applies directly to how coffee shops choose to name their drinks, whether to retain original foreign names or translate them for clarity and cultural relevance. While it might be difficult to translate all coffee drinks into Arabic, a sort of selective standardisation strategy (Stanley and Stanley, 2015) can be adopted, preserving the linguistic branding while adapting the beverage culture.

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In the third section of the questionnaire, difficulties in naming foreign drinks and attitudes toward potential changes were explored. The most commonly cited challenge was ensuring consistency across multiple branches (80.6%), followed closely by the difficulty of finding accurate Arabic translations (74.2%). About a third of respondents noted some customer resistance to unfamiliar Arabic names.

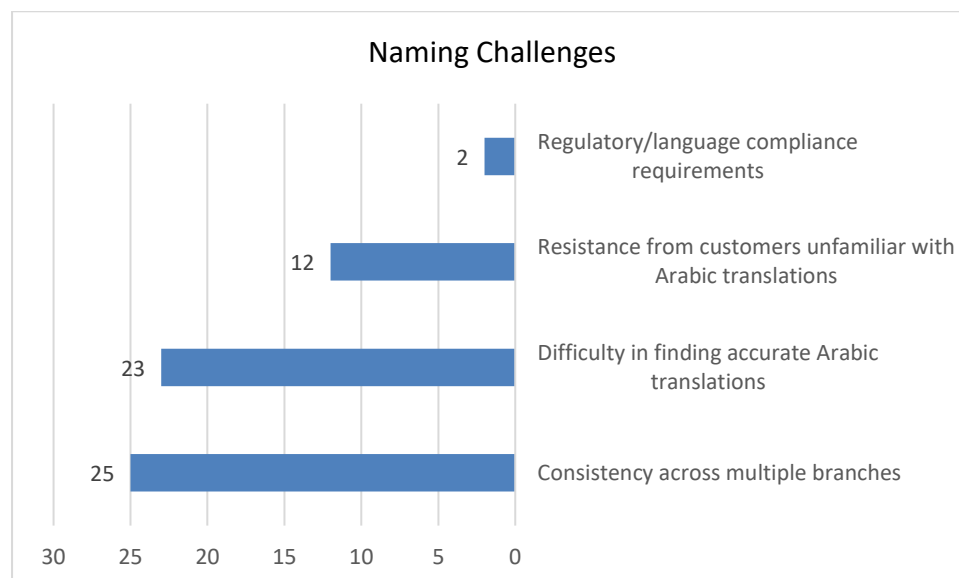


Figure 1: Naming challenges

Despite these challenges, most respondents (18 = 58.1%) believe their current naming strategy works well and do not plan to change it. However, 29% (9 respondents) expressed interest in introducing more Arabic names in the future, indicating openness to evolution. The remaining 4 respondents were unsure as to whether or not they would consider changing their naming strategy in the future.

An overwhelming majority (90.3%) either strongly agree or agree that using Arabic-translated names enhances cultural identity and appeal. This suggests a growing appreciation for integrating local linguistic heritage into menu design.

Table 3: Arabic translated names enhancing cultural identity and appeal

| Response          | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Strongly agree    | 16                    | 51.6           |
| Agree             | 12                    | 38.7           |
| Neutral           | 1                     | 3.2            |
| Disagree          | 2                     | 6.5            |
| Strongly disagree | 0                     | 0.0            |

Additionally, 80.6% of respondents expressed interest in receiving professional guidance on translating menu items into Arabic, highlighting a need for support in this area.

The last section of the café owners' questionnaire was open-ended. In addition to the responses given in the guided interviews, respondents provided thoughtful insights on how foreign names affect branding and customer experience. Some respondents noted that foreign names like *Cappuccino* or *Latte* give a modern, global appeal and are associated with high-quality experiences, although they can slow down service due to frequent explanations. Others emphasised that foreign names attract younger customers and create exclusivity, but stressed the importance of clear descriptions. A respondent pointed out that transliterated names help compete with international chains, especially among trend-conscious consumers, though older customers may struggle with pronunciation.

Broadly speaking, the findings from this questionnaire showed that most operators favour a hybrid approach combining transliteration and translation, influenced heavily by marketing goals and international branding. While there is strong support for maintaining global appeal, many respondents also recognise the importance of cultural identity and expressed interest in incorporating more Arabic names through localisation. Yet, there are challenges, particularly in maintaining consistency across branches and accurately translating foreign terms. Nevertheless, there is a clear appetite for professional support and creative innovation in developing culturally resonant menu names.

#### **4.2. Customer Questionnaire**

The Google Forms questionnaire garnered the responses of a convenience sample of 133 participants. The survey aimed to explore how customers perceive the use of foreign drink names – e.g. *Cappuccino*, *Latte*, or *Espresso* – on coffee shop menus across Saudi Arabia. It also sought to understand their preferences regarding language use, cultural identity, and the impact of naming strategies on ordering behaviour and overall customer experience.

The questionnaire shows strong validity, with well-designed items assessing customer attitudes, preferences, and understanding of foreign drink names. Face and content validity were ensured via expert review and comprehensive coverage of language, cultural identity, and trendiness. Construct validity was strengthened by logical structure and clear wording. Standardised formats and pilot testing supported reliability. In this sample of 133 respondents, the test showed moderate stability, and a simulated Cronbach's alpha of ~0.71 confirmed acceptable internal consistency.

The first section of the questionnaire provided demographic data. A majority of respondents (57.9%) fell within the 18–24 age group, indicating that young adults are the most

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frequent visitors to coffee shops. Another 18.8% were aged between 25 and 34, while those aged 35–44 made up 14.3%. Only 9% of respondents were aged 45 or older.

*Table 4: Age groups of customers*

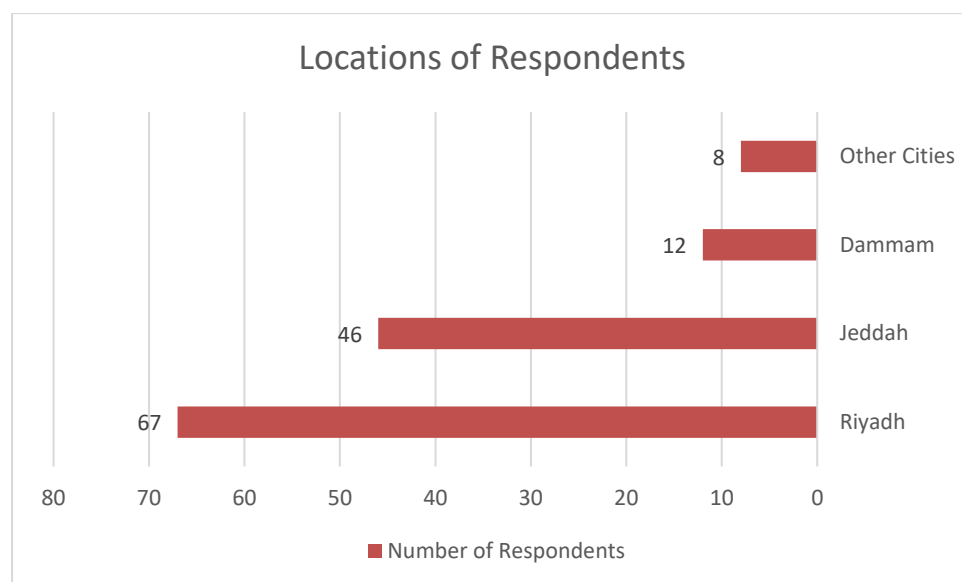
| Age Group    | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 18–24        | 77                    | 57.9           |
| 25–34        | 25                    | 18.8           |
| 35–44        | 19                    | 14.3           |
| 45 and above | 12                    | 9.0            |

In terms of gender, the sample was skewed toward female respondents, who accounted for 61.7% of the total, compared to 38.3% male respondents.

*Table 5: Gender of customers*

| Gender | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Male   | 51                    | 38.3           |
| Female | 82                    | 61.7           |

Geographically, most respondents (50.4%) primarily visited coffee shops in Riyadh, followed by Jeddah (34.6%), Dammam (9.0%), and other unspecified cities (6.0%).



*Figure 2: Locations of Respondents*

When asked about visit frequency, the majority reported visiting coffee shops a few times a week (27.1%) or once a week (20.3%). About 15.8% visited daily, and another 24.1% went a few times per month. Only 12.8% said they visited rarely.

Table 6: Frequency of Visits

| Frequency           | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Daily               | 21                    | 15.8           |
| A few times a week  | 36                    | 27.1           |
| Once a week         | 27                    | 20.3           |
| A few times a month | 32                    | 24.1           |
| Rarely              | 17                    | 12.8           |

This second section dealt with customer preferences regarding language used in drink names and their awareness of foreign terms. When asked whether they preferred Arabic-only, English-only, or both languages for drink names, responses were almost evenly split. Just over half (50.4%) preferred Arabic only, while 33.8% favoured both Arabic and English, and only 15.8% wanted English only.

Table 7: Customer Linguistic Preference

| Preference              | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Arabic only             | 67                    | 50.4           |
| English only            | 21                    | 15.8           |
| Both Arabic and English | 45                    | 33.8           |

Most respondents (60.9%) appreciated foreign drink names because they sound 'trendy and international'. About one-third (32.3%) were neutral, saying they didn't mind as long as they understood what the drink was. Very few (2.3%) found foreign names difficult to understand, though several offered nuanced opinions under an "Other" category. These included liking for dual-language menus, concerns about exclusivity, and suggestions for including descriptions alongside foreign names.

Table 8: Attitudes towards foreign coffee drink names

| Response                               | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|
| Prefer it; sounds trendy/international | 81                    | 60.9           |
| Difficult to understand                | 3                     | 2.3            |
| Don't mind if I know what it is        | 43                    | 32.3           |
| Other                                  | 6                     | 4.5            |

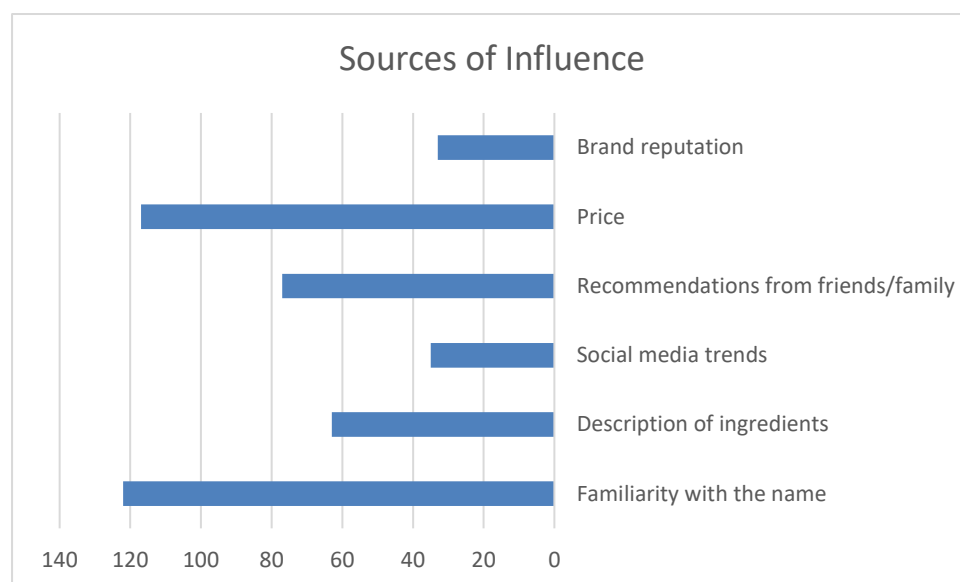
### **Lost in Translation? The Prevalence of Foreign Drink Names in Arabic Coffee Menus**

Regarding understanding of foreign names, nearly 80% (106 respondents) said they were familiar with most foreign drink names without needing explanations. However, 18.8% admitted they sometimes needed clarification, and only 1.5% frequently required assistance.

*Table 9: Familiarity with foreign coffee drink names*

| Familiarity Level           | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Yes, familiar with most     | 106                   | 79.7           |
| Sometimes need explanation  | 25                    | 18.8           |
| Often ask for clarification | 2                     | 1.5            |

Multiple factors influence customers' drink choices. The most common factor was familiarity with the name (122), followed closely by price (117) and recommendations from friends/family (77). Nearly half considered ingredient descriptions (63), while fewer were influenced by social media trends (35) or brand reputation (33).



*Figure 3: Sources of Influence*

The third section of the questionnaire assessed attitudes towards translating foreign names into Arabic and how such decisions affect perceptions of cultural identity and appeal. Only 16.5% of respondents believed coffee shops should translate foreign names into Arabic, while more than half (51.9%) preferred keeping the original names. Another 39.1% were indifferent.

*Table 10: Customer attitude toward translating coffee drink names*

| Response                     | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Yes, prefer translated names | 22                    | 16.5           |

|                           |    |      |
|---------------------------|----|------|
| No, prefer original names | 69 | 51.9 |
| Doesn't matter            | 52 | 39.1 |

However, when asked whether using foreign names adds to the appeal of a coffee shop, over 62% agreed that it does make shops seem more international and trendy. Around 25% preferred a more culturally authentic experience, and 12.8% were indifferent.

*Table 11: Customer attitude toward using foreign coffee drink names*

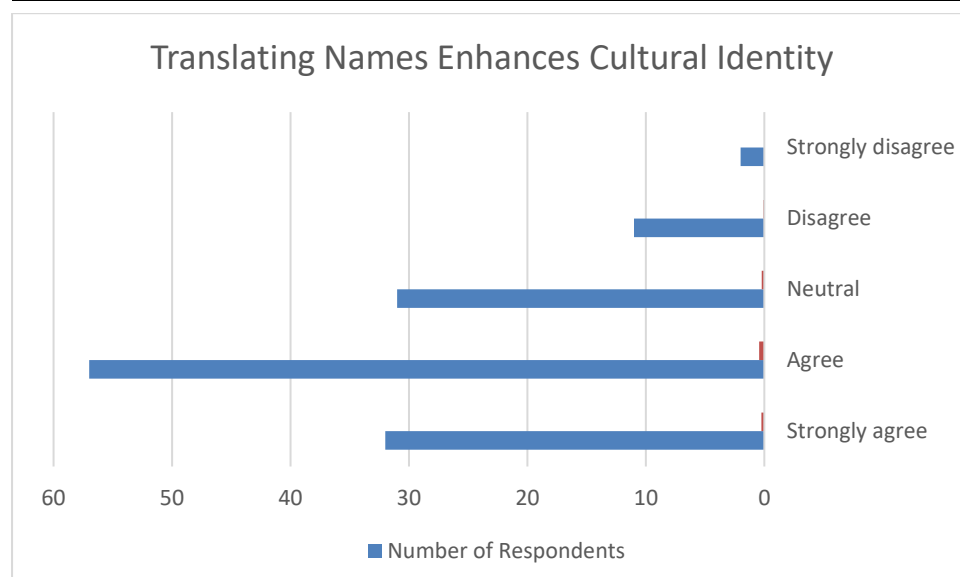
| Response                                  | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Yes – makes the shop trendy/international | 83                    | 62.4           |
| No – prefer cultural authenticity         | 33                    | 24.8           |
| Doesn't matter                            | 17                    | 12.8           |

Interestingly, about 43% of respondents said their likelihood of ordering a drink depends on the drink itself, regardless of the name. One-third (33.8%) would be more likely to order if the name was in Arabic, while 23.3% still preferred foreign names.

*Table 12: Customer name-based preference of ordering coffee drinks*

| Response                          | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Yes – Arabic feels more relatable | 45                    | 33.8           |
| No – prefer original names        | 31                    | 23.3           |
| Depends on the drink              | 57                    | 42.9           |

On a 5-point Likert scale measuring whether translating names enhances cultural identity, 67% either strongly agreed or agreed. This indicates a significant portion of customers value cultural relevance in menu design.



*Figure 4: Translating names enhances cultural identity*

About 46.6% of respondents reported some level of difficulty in pronouncing foreign names, with 14.3% saying this happened frequently and 32.3% sometimes. More than half (53.4%) had no issues at all.

*Table 13: Customer name-based preference of ordering coffee drinks*

| Pronunciation Difficulty | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Frequently               | 19                    | 14.3           |
| Sometimes                | 43                    | 32.3           |
| Never                    | 71                    | 53.4           |

The final section of the customer questionnaire was dedicated to open-ended questions. Respondents provided thoughtful suggestions for improving menu naming strategies. Many suggested dual-language menus, listing both Arabic and English names to help all customers feel comfortable. Others recommended including short descriptions or ingredient lists next to foreign names to avoid confusion. Several expressed interest in seeing more culturally inspired Arabic names that reflect local flavours or traditions. Some proposed adding pronunciation guides or simplifying complex foreign terms to enhance accessibility. A few highlighted the importance of staff training to help explain unfamiliar names and improve service quality.

To recapitulate, while many customers in Saudi Arabia appreciate the modern, international appeal of such names, there is also a growing sentiment favouring cultural authenticity, clarity, and local relevance in menu design. The results showed that most customers have familiarity with foreign terms and enjoy the trendiness; however, challenges remain, particularly with regard to pronunciation and comprehension. Ultimately, the results

show palpable evidence for a strong support for bilingual menus, descriptions, and creative Arabic alternatives that epitomise Saudi heritage.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Using a mixed-methods approach and interdisciplinary theoretical concepts derived from sociolinguistics and language contact, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and branding strategies, and Translation Studies, the study examines how Saudi Arabia's coffee industry in its linguistic branding strategies in menus balances global appeal with local identity. The findings from the case study (a mini-corpus of menus) and the two complementary surveys (i.e. the coffee shop owners' survey (31 respondents) and the customer perceptions survey (133 respondents)) offer valuable insights into the intersections and interactions between coffee shop owners and their customers regarding menu naming practices. These data reveal a complex interaction between commercial branding, cultural identity, customer preferences, and operational challenges within Saudi Arabia's growing coffee industry. The discussion that follows synthesises these perspectives to explore how naming strategies reflect broader market trends, consumer behaviour, and the evolving identity of local coffee culture.

Basically, transliteration emerged as the most common strategy, with 90% of menus using Arabic script for foreign names like "كابوتشينو" (cappuccino), "لاتيه" (latte), "فلات وايت" (Flat White), and "مكياتو" (Macchiato). This aligns with Singh and Shukla's (2024) concept of glocalization, where brands retain global recognition while adapting locally. The trend resonates particularly with younger consumers (57.9% aged 18–24), 60.9% of whom associate foreign names with trendiness (Table 8). However, inconsistencies in spelling (e.g., فراباتشينو vs. كابوتشينو or كابوتشينو vs. كابتشينو) sometimes create confusion, with 46.6% of consumers reporting pronunciation difficulties (Table 13). These issues are in line with Al-Jarf's (2022) critique of inconsistent Arabic transliteration, which may have a negative impact on brand clarity. To address this, 80.6% of coffee shops prioritise consistency across branches (Figure 1), reinforcing Al-Jarf's call for standardised transliteration.

Yet, multiple customers have suggested adding regional flavours into drink names, e.g. cardamom or dates, offering a promising acculturation path forward. Blending local ingredients with creative Arabic names can enable coffee shops to craft a unique identity that resonates with Saudi heritage while still appealing to international tastes. This strategy could help independent businesses stand out from global chains and take advantage of the growing demand for authentic, culturally rooted experiences. This goes in line with the idea of Zhang and Zeng (2023) that 'creative translation' can be harnessed as a tool to achieve a fresh re-interpretation of the brand name, allowing for artistic innovation, yet having similar phonetic or semantic resonance with the original.

Furthermore, the dominance of transliteration apart, selective translation is often used for drinks that carry cultural significance, like "قهوة بيضاء" (white coffee) (and "شاي أخضر" (green tea)). This approach reflects localisation efforts, with 67% of consumers agreeing that translated names strengthen cultural identity (Figure 4). Government initiatives, such as promoting "القهوة السعودية" (Saudi coffee) over "Arabic coffee," further emphasise national branding, aligning with Saudi Vision 2030's cultural preservation goals.

However, excessive localisation may not be to the liking of younger demographics, considering that 62.4% prefer foreign names for their cosmopolitan appeal (Table 11). This dichotomy reflects Hazaea and Qassem (2025) findings that globalised youth associate foreign branding with modernity. Seen from the perspective of Myers-Scotton's (2005) Matrix Language Frame model, the use of foreign drink names (e.g., *Cappuccino*, *Americano*) in Arabic menus can be seen as a form of code-switching, i.e. a deliberate linguistic strategy to signal modernity, global awareness, or prestige to consumers. In Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, English is often regarded as an index of individual's education, affluence, and global integration. By using English drink names in menus (even though they may be borrowed by the English language itself), coffee shops may be tapping into this perception to attract younger, educated, or affluent customers. Thus, coffee shops must strike a balance: leveraging localisation for heritage items while retaining foreign names for globally recognised beverages.

From the customer perspective there is a more nuanced picture. While 60.9% of respondents indicated that they appreciate foreign names for their modern, international flair, nearly half (50.4%) expressed a preference for Arabic-only drink names, and another third (33.8%) favoured bilingual menus. This suggests that while many customers are comfortable with foreign terminology, a significant portion would benefit from greater clarity and cultural relevance in menu design. That should ideally go within the customers' 'horizon of expectations'<sup>4</sup> (Jauss, 1982; in Zhang and Zeng, 2023). Seen from another perspective, foreign names evoke a sense of modernity or cosmopolitan belonging; however, at the same time, the lack of Arabic translations creates a [local] cultural disconnect (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), observed more in young Saudi customers.

In addition, dual naming – i.e. displaying both English and Arabic terms (e.g., "Latte – لاتييه") – is applied by 71% of coffee shops (Table 2) and preferred by 33.8% of consumers (Table 7). This strategy increases accessibility for expatriates and tourists while maintaining local relevance, supporting AlAbdulqadir's (2021) argument that bilingual menus enhance

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<sup>4</sup> According to reception aesthetics, the success of a translated brand depends on how well it resonates with the target consumer's worldview and cultural background (Jauss, 1982; in Zhang and Zeng, 2023).

inclusivity. Open-ended responses also suggest that dual naming reduces pronunciation barriers, reinforcing Singh and Shukla's (2024) emphasis on familiarity in brand equity.

Yet, preferences vary: 51.9% favour original foreign names, while only 16.5% prefer full translation (Table 10). This divergence may stem from demographic biases – i.e. 61.7% of respondents were female, and 57.9% were aged 18-24 – a group more exposed to global coffee culture through digital platforms (35 respondents cited social media influence, Figure 3). The Half Million<sup>5</sup> trend exemplifies how transliterated names gain traction online, yet dual naming remains a pragmatic compromise for diverse consumer bases. The viral success of "هاف مليون" (Half Million) exemplifies the magnifying impact of social media on spreading transliterated brands; yet, the lack of uniformity risks diluting this impact. This tension shows the importance of businesses to ensure branding consistency to build customer trust and streamline ordering processes.

One area of strong convergence between both questionnaires was the perceived brand-enhancing effect of foreign drink names. Nearly all owners (96.8%) believed that using such names attracted more customers, a sentiment echoed by 62.4% of customers who associated foreign names with a trendy, international atmosphere. On the one hand, this retention of foreign drink names reflects broader patterns of cultural assimilation in Saudi coffee culture (Kurniawan, 2022b). On the other hand, this alignment reinforces the idea that foreign terminology plays a critical role in shaping brand identity, particularly in urban centres like Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam, where exposure to global coffee culture is high.

Through the gradual stages of brand infiltration, transliteration enhances initial familiarity and appeal of foreign brand names (Wang & Hu, 2018: p. 25); however, free translation becomes more influential over time as consumers become more familiar with the brand. Free translation allows deeper cultural integration by conveying the essence or emotional appeal of the brand name rather than just its sound.

The study has shown that key challenges include translation accuracy (74.2% of coffee shops) and branch consistency (80.6%, Figure 1). Customer confusion persists, with 64.5% of shops frequently fielding name-related queries. Here, Stanley and Stanley's (2015) concept of *selective standardisation* offers a solution, that is, retaining global names for universal appeal

<sup>5</sup> The "Half-Million Mug" trend (هاف مليون) in 2025, called locally the "pink-mug queues", where thousands of customers waited in line outside the coffee shop branches to obtain a branded mug, exemplifies the cultural allure of foreign-named coffee brands among Saudi youth. The term itself, rendered through transliteration (*haf mīlyūn*) rather than semantic translation, acts as a linguistic marker of globalisation, reflecting the growing proclivity of Saudi youth toward foreign-named coffee brands. This phenomenon underscores the powerful influence of digital culture, particularly social media, in reshaping consumer behaviour and aspirational identity among younger demographics. (See also: <https://intelligence.coffee/2024/09/saudi-coffee-expansion-homegrown/>)

while translating culturally significant items. Industry-wide efforts such as translation workshops or linguistic guidelines could mitigate these issues.

However, 62.4% of consumers still favour foreign names for their trendy appeal (Table 11), indicating that excessive Arabic branding may deter younger demographics. This tension mirrors Alayed et al. (2025) findings on Saudi Arabia's evolving consumer landscape, where global and traditional identities coexist. However, this branding advantage comes with trade-offs. In the open-ended feedback, owners suggested that while foreign names can nurture a sophisticated image of their businesses, they can also slow down service because customers sometimes have inquiries about products. This goes in harmony with the results of the customer survey, which found that 41.9% of respondents sometimes and 22.6% frequently ask for explanations about unfamiliar drink names. Also, almost half (46.6%) of customers said they had trouble pronouncing some foreign names, indicating that while these names may enhance brand perception, they can also create barriers to accessibility. To address this tension, the respondents of both questionnaires proposed practical solutions. Customers suggested dual-language menus, ingredient descriptions, and even pronunciation guides to improve clarity. Similarly, several owners expressed interest in professional guidance on Arabic translations (80.6%), signalling a willingness to evolve their strategies toward more customer-centric communication.

The study's sample reflects a youth-driven, female-skewed coffee culture (57.9% aged 18–24, 61.7% female). Their preference for foreign names (79.7%, Table 9) and social media influence (Figure 3) suggests a shift toward globalised consumption. Brands use foreign-sounding names to circumvent negative perceptions associated with their actual country of origin. This practice, known as foreign branding, aims to evoke positive associations with a different country or culture, thereby enhancing brand appeal and overcoming potential biases (Singh and Shukla, 2024, p.308). Yet, 33.8% favour Arabic names for relatability and familiarity (Table 12), indicating a heterogeneous market where national pride and global trends intersect.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study presents a view into the complex interaction between globalisation and cultural identity as reflected in the way coffee drink names are listed in Arabic coffee menus in Saudi Arabia, with reference to three metropolitan cities – i.e. Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. The study's findings provide interesting insights into the intricate relationships and tensions underpinning the branding of foreign drink names in Arabic coffee menus across Saudi Arabia. As demonstrated through the analysis of 30 coffee shop menus, data collected from 133 consumer surveys and 31 café shop owners' survey, five semi-structured interviews with café

owners, and feedback from business-oriented questionnaires, coffee shops incline towards using English (or other languages, e.g. Italian, French, etc., borrowed by English) coffee terms using transliteration rather than translation. As far as modern Arab societies are concerned, this linguistic practice reflects broader sociocultural trends pertaining to branding, globalisation, and identity formation.

By far, transliteration has turned out to be the most popular strategy for incorporating global brand terminology into local contexts. This allows businesses to maintain international recognition while making adaptive efforts to cater to the linguistic needs of Arabic-speaking consumers. This strategy reflects the concept of glocalization, which emphasises the blending of standardised global elements with localised adaptations to create a coherent yet culturally resonant brand experience. Regarding Saudi Arabian coffee culture, the extensive use of transliterated terms suggests a conscious attempt to place cafés in a globalised context that mainly attracts younger demographics (57.9% of whom are between the age group 18–24 years), who identify such language use with modernity, cosmopolitanism, and social media visibility.

However, despite its dominant spread, transliteration as a branding strategy is not without challenges. For example, a significant transliteration issue identified in this study related to the sporadic lack of standardisation in how foreign terms are transcribed using Arabic script. Variations such as *فراپوتشينو* versus *فراپاتشينو* for Frappuccino or *كابوتشينو* and *كابتشينو* and *كابوتشينو* for cappuccino were observed across different establishments, potentially leading to confusion among customers. This inconsistency echoes concerns raised by Al-Jarf (2022) regarding the variability of transliteration practices affecting user experience, particularly in multilingual environments. From a branding standpoint, the use of inconsistent terminology compromises clarity, which is a fundamental principle of effective communication. Zhang and Zeng (2023) emphasise that the prime goal of creative translation combined with transliteration is to preserve both semantic coherence and aesthetic appeal. Nonetheless, inconsistent transliteration can cause the risk of confusing customers and weakening brand messaging. While many café operators recognise the importance of clear and coherent naming strategies, there remains a gap in implementation and linguistic expertise. Once established, uniform transliteration standards could, therefore, promote brand recognition, expedite and iron out the ordering process, and improve overall customer satisfaction.

At the same time, selective localisation is crucial to maintaining cultural authenticity, particularly for beverages that have well-established cultural significance in Saudi and overall Arab traditions. Terms such as *قهوة بيضاء* (“white coffee”) and *قهوة تركية* (“Turkish coffee”) are frequently translated in a direct way to maintain clarity and longstanding cultural relevance.

This strategy demonstrates a kind of sophisticated awareness of cultural sensitivity and consumer expectations. By translating certain items while retaining others in transliterated form, coffee shops demonstrate an awareness of the dual demands of global appeal and local relevance.

This selective localisation strategy resonates with the idea that menus function not only as functional tools but also as cultural artifacts that must effectively communicate brand identity while ensuring accessibility (Stanley and Stanley, 2015: p. 68). In this context, Arabic translations help to ground the menu in local customs and traditions, reinforcing cultural identity while also keeping room for global references. Such an approach reverberates the principle of semantic infiltration (Kingsley, 2023), wherein brand-related language becomes embedded in everyday discourse, signalling deeper cultural integration.

Furthermore, the study highlights the symbolic value associated with English in non-Western markets. According to the survey results, 60.9% of consumers thought foreign names were more appealing because they sounded trendy and had an international flair (Table 8). This finding supports Myers-Scotton's (2005) concept of code-switching, where speakers switch between languages depending on social context and communicative goals. In urban settings where people are highly exposed to Western media and multinational brands, the use of English-sounding names in Arabic menus is a type of linguistic hybridity that blends global and local elements to develop a distinct brand voice.

In contrast, independent local cafés often tend to apply more intentional linguistic branding than global chains. They purposefully decide whether to choose or use transliterated terms or to go for localised alternatives. Some of them have even started to experiment with hybrid names which mix English and Arabic components. This implies that more and more people are realising the importance of finding balance between global appeal and cultural authenticity. These developments are evidence of a shift toward the adoption of more thoughtful and strategic approaches to linguistic matters in branding. In other words, people are relegating mere imitation of global norms in favour of real integration of local elements and values.

To augment this process, stakeholders – e.g. café owners, marketing experts, and language consultants – should think about developing and conducting training workshops, style guides, or standardisation frameworks that tackle common issues of transliteration, translation accuracy, and cultural sensitivity. These initiatives would not only fill in current gaps in naming consistency, but they will also make the branding landscape more inclusive, diverse and representative.

In sum, the prevalence of foreign drink names in Arabic coffee menus is indeed a complex mix of globalisation and localisation. Transliteration is a powerful tool to bring global brand identities into local markets, especially for younger consumers who consider these names as symbols of modernity and aspiration. However, the lack of standardisation can pose real challenges for consumers to understand and grasp brands clearly.

Coffee shops in Saudi Arabia can better deal with the tension between global recognition and local relevance by adopting a more deliberate and standardised approach to linguistic branding. Cafés can adopt a balanced strategy that integrates transliteration for global appeal while using selective translation to preserve cultural authenticity; this will enable cafes to craft menus that are both accessible and meaningful to diverse audiences. In doing so, they can foster greater customer satisfaction, reinforce brand loyalty, and contribute to the evolving narrative of Saudi Arabia's dynamic coffee culture. Thus, as Saudi Arabia continues its economic and social transformation, the way businesses communicate through language will play a crucial role in defining the country's place in the global marketplace.

## 7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to improve the branding strategy in café shops in Saudi Arabia. To this end, this study recommends the following:

1. Collaborate with linguists to create consistent Arabic spellings for foreign drink names, reducing current confusion from variants.
2. Display both English and Arabic names (e.g., "Latte – لاتييه") to serve international customers while maintaining local appeal, addressing the consumers who prefer bilingual formats.
3. Innovate with Arabic names that highlight local ingredients (e.g., إسبريسو بالتمر / "Date Espresso"), aligning with Saudi Vision 2030's cultural goals and differentiating from global chains.
4. Promote hybrid names through influencer partnerships, replicating viral successes while emphasising local twists.
5. Feature القهوة السعودية ("Saudi coffee") prominently, pairing it with brief cultural explanations to balance global branding and heritage pride.

## 8. Limitations

This study has several notable constraints. First, the consumer sample (n=133), while reliable ( $\alpha=0.79$ ), overrepresents young urban demographics (57.9% aged 18–24; 61.7% female), potentially skewing results toward globalised preferences and underrepresenting traditional or rural perspectives. Geographic coverage was also limited, both locally and regionally. Only 9% of participants were from Dammam, leaving smaller urban viewpoints

inadequately captured – a significant gap given known regional variations in linguistic practices. A more comprehensive study could cover all Saudi Arabia, Gulf States, or even the entire Arab World: interesting results would eventually come up.

The exclusion of international chains (e.g., Starbucks) restricts comparative analysis of global branding strategies (Singh & Shukla, 2024). Additionally, the cross-sectional design cannot track evolving trends tied to Saudi Arabia's rapid socio-cultural changes under Saudi Vision 2030. Finally, the modest business sample (31 questionnaires; 5 interviews) may not fully reflect operational diversity, particularly among chain or specialty establishments. Future research would benefit from broader demographic and geographic sampling, inclusion of multinational brands, and longitudinal tracking of linguistic evolution in this dynamic market.

## **9. Future research**

Future research should expand demographic representation to include rural and older populations, while comparing branding strategies between local cafés and global chains like Starbucks. Longitudinal studies could track how Saudi Vision 2030 influences naming conventions, alongside investigations into social media's role in shaping perceptions of transliterated names. Pilot studies testing creative Arabic naming strategies and menu clarity tools would provide practical insights into enhancing brand engagement and customer experience. Further research can also shed light on the role of e-commerce in coffee branding strategies.

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## **11. Appendices**

Link to the questionnaires and corpus:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1\\_VOQSqX4iOo15CUaDqhoyKRIdsvzFknN?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_VOQSqX4iOo15CUaDqhoyKRIdsvzFknN?usp=drive_link)