Natural Resources for Human Health
eISSN: 2583-1194

Original Research

Received 20 April 2026
Revised 18 May 2026
Accepted 24 June 2026

Natural Resources for Human Health 2026, Vol. 6 (5s): 647–660

KEYWORDS:
translation quality; brand equity; consumer trust; Saudi Arabia; Arabic localization; brand credibility; e-commerce; consumer behaviour

The Impact of Translation Quality on Brand Equity and Consumer Trust in the Saudi Market

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ABSTRACT: Translation is often treated as a downstream production task: a campaign is written, approved, and only then sent for conversion into Arabic. That sequence overlooks the commercial work performed by translated language. In the Saudi market, a product page, mobile interface, warranty, advertisement, chatbot reply, or complaint response does more than transfer information. It tells consumers whether a brand is competent, attentive, culturally present, and likely to honour its promises. This article develops an integrative conceptual account of how translation quality shapes consumer trust and customer-based brand equity in Saudi Arabia. Drawing on translation studies, signalling theory, processing-fluency research, e-commerce trust literature, and brand-equity scholarship, it proposes a Translation Quality–Trust–Equity framework. Translation quality is defined through seven connected dimensions: semantic and factual accuracy; functional clarity and completeness; terminological and cross-touchpoint consistency; cultural-pragmatic congruence; brand-voice coherence; digital usability; and transparency, legal, and ethical adequacy. The framework argues that these dimensions influence trust indirectly through cognitive fluency, perceived product and service quality, brand credibility, cultural respect and authenticity, and lower perceived risk. Trust then strengthens awareness, favourable associations, loyalty, willingness to recommend, and resistance to competitors. The effects are expected to be particularly strong for high-risk or technically complex purchases and in digital settings where language substitutes for physical inspection and face-to-face reassurance. The analysis also rejects a simplistic Arabic-versus-English prescription: language choice creates value only when it fits the audience, category, touchpoint, and brand promise. The article concludes with eight research propositions, a practical governance model for Saudi-facing brands, and an empirical agenda for testing causal and longitudinal effects.

1. INTRODUCTION

A brand enters a market through language long before many consumers encounter its products in person. Names, slogans, packaging, search results, product descriptions, payment instructions, return policies, warranty clauses, automated replies, and complaint responses form a linguistic surface through which the organisation is judged. When that surface is translated, the resulting text is not a neutral copy of an original. It becomes part of the offering itself. A precise, fluent, and context-sensitive Arabic message can reduce uncertainty and make a brand feel dependable; an awkward or contradictory one can introduce doubt even when the underlying product is sound. Translation quality therefore belongs to the economics of brand value, not only to the craft of language transfer.

This issue is especially consequential in Saudi Arabia. The market combines Arabic linguistic centrality with extensive exposure to English in business, technology, education, tourism, and global media. Consumers move between physical retail, social commerce, brand applications, marketplaces, messaging platforms, and customer-service channels, often within a single purchase journey. The Communications, Space and Technology Commission reported internet penetration of 99 per cent in 2024, mobile phones accounting for 99.4 per cent of browsing, and local websites capturing 93.1 per cent of online shopping activity (CST, 2025). These figures do not mean that every consumer behaves alike, but they do show why translated microcopy and localized digital content now sit close to the centre of market experience. On a small screen, a mistranslated delivery condition or unclear payment label can become the decisive cue by which a consumer assesses the whole seller.

Brand-equity research has established that value arises from what consumers know, feel, and expect about a brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Trust research similarly shows that confidence in a seller's reliability and integrity supports loyalty, commitment, and market performance (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Yet translation has rarely been positioned explicitly as an antecedent of those assets. Marketing studies often reduce language to a choice between local and foreign codes, while translation studies may evaluate textual adequacy without tracing its consequences for perceived risk, credibility, or willingness to remain loyal. The two traditions examine adjacent parts of the same phenomenon but do not consistently explain the connecting mechanism.

The gap matters because poor translation can damage a brand without producing an immediately visible failure. A consumer may not complain about a clumsy sentence; the consumer may simply hesitate, abandon a cart, avoid sharing personal information, or choose a competitor whose offer feels easier to understand. Conversely, a well-localized message can create value without being consciously identified as translation. It lowers effort, removes interpretive friction, preserves tone, and allows the brand promise to appear coherent across touchpoints. Recent evidence that ambiguous translated descriptions depress perceived quality, particularly online, reinforces the commercial relevance of this hidden layer (Marinelli et al., 2025). Saudi-focused studies also indicate that Arabic e-commerce reliability depends on accessibility, readability, understandability, and localization quality rather than word substitution alone (Omar et al., 2022).

This article asks three questions. First, which dimensions of translation quality are most relevant to brand evaluation in the Saudi market? Second, through what cognitive, relational, and cultural mechanisms does translation quality influence consumer trust and customer-based brand equity? Third, under what market conditions are these effects likely to become stronger, weaker, or even reversed? To answer them, the article integrates work from translation studies, international marketing, information systems, consumer psychology, and Saudi e-commerce research. Its contribution is a Translation Quality–Trust–Equity (TQTE) framework that treats language as a sequence of market signals rather than an isolated text. The framework is conceptual, not a substitute for empirical testing. Its purpose is to specify testable relationships, expose assumptions that have remained implicit, and give researchers and practitioners a more disciplined account of why translation quality can accumulate—or erode—brand value over time.

2. THE SAUDI MARKET AS A LINGUISTIC AND DIGITAL BRAND ENVIRONMENT

Saudi Arabia should not be approached as a market in which one standardized Arabic version will automatically satisfy every consumer and every purpose. Modern Standard Arabic provides broad intelligibility and institutional legitimacy, while regional and colloquial choices may create immediacy in social media, entertainment, and conversational service encounters. English can carry associations of international reach, technical expertise, luxury, or innovation, but it can also exclude consumers or weaken comprehension when used for essential information. Expatriate communities add further linguistic diversity. The practical question is therefore not whether Arabic or English is inherently superior. It is whether the chosen language, register, and degree of localization fit the audience's task and the brand's intended position.

Digital commerce intensifies that question because consumers must infer unseen qualities from limited cues. Product descriptions stand in for physical inspection; delivery and return language stand in for a salesperson's reassurance; interface labels stand in for procedural guidance. Information quality is consequently bound to trust formation (DeLone & McLean, 2003; Kim et al., 2008; Wang & Strong, 1996). Saudi research has long identified trust as a central condition for online retailing (AlGhamdi et al., 2012), and more recent work describes social commerce as an expanding but trust-sensitive environment in which platform practices, content credibility, privacy, and consumer protection remain important (Alotaibi & Aljaafari, 2024). The E-Commerce Law also gives formal significance to accurate commercial information, advertising, and disclosure (Ministry of Commerce, 2019). Translation errors in such material are not merely stylistic blemishes; they may alter what consumers believe they are buying or what remedies they understand themselves to possess.

Localization practices already vary sharply across brands. A comparative analysis of Saudi-facing Apple and Huawei websites found substantial differences in the depth and coherence of linguistic and cultural adaptation (Alharbi et al., 2023). A broader review of language and digital content in Saudi e-commerce likewise highlights the strategic importance of accessible Arabic content and the continuing unevenness of localization practice (Abdulaal & Aldawoody, 2026). Such variation is commercially meaningful because consumers rarely separate the translator from the brand. They attribute the final wording to the organisation whose logo appears beside it. The Arabic interface is therefore interpreted as evidence of the brand's own care, resources, and respect for the market.

The Saudi setting also exposes a useful paradox. Global brands may benefit from a degree of foreignness, especially where globalness itself conveys prestige (Steenkamp et al., 2003). Excessive domestication can flatten a distinctive identity or make an international brand sound artificially local. At the same time, leaving important content untranslated can signal distance and shift interpretive work onto the consumer. The strongest strategy is selective and functional: retain foreign elements that contribute legitimate brand meaning, but localize information whose comprehension, emotional resonance, or legal consequence affects the consumer's decision. Quality lies in managing that boundary deliberately.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The proposed framework rests on four complementary foundations: functional translation theory, customer-based brand equity, signalling theory, and consumer trust and processing fluency. Each explains a different part of the translation–market relationship. Taken alone, none is sufficient. Together, they show how a textual decision can become a commercial judgement.

Functional approaches to translation reject the idea that quality is exhausted by sentence-level equivalence. A translation should be evaluated in relation to its purpose, users, medium, and communicative situation (Nord, 2018; Reiss & Vermeer, 2014). House (2015) similarly distinguishes linguistic accuracy from broader pragmatic and register-related adequacy, while localization scholarship extends the unit of analysis to websites, software, interfaces, and culturally situated user journeys (Esselink, 2000; Jiménez-Crespo, 2013). For promotional material, the translation must also reproduce persuasive force and an appropriate relationship with the audience rather than simply mirror lexical choices (Torresi, 2010). These perspectives justify treating brand translation as a designed experience distributed across text, image, interface, and service encounter.

Customer-based brand equity refers to the added value generated by consumers' knowledge and responses to a brand. Aaker (1991) conceptualizes this value through awareness, associations, perceived quality, loyalty, and proprietary assets; Keller (1993) emphasizes differential response rooted in brand knowledge. Later measurement research connects equity to perceived quality, uniqueness, value, willingness to pay a premium, and behavioural loyalty (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Yoo et al., 2000). Translation can influence each element. Consistent naming supports recognition; culturally intelligible narratives shape associations; clear technical and service information affects perceived quality; dependable bilingual interactions reinforce loyalty; and a coherent voice protects distinctiveness.

Signalling theory explains why language affects judgements about qualities that consumers cannot directly observe. Brands know more than consumers about product performance, organisational competence, return handling, and future service. Consumers therefore use visible, costly, or consistent cues to infer hidden characteristics. Brand credibility functions as a signal of whether claims are truthful and likely to be delivered (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004). Translation quality can operate as such a cue. A company that invests in accurate terminology, coherent interfaces, and responsive Arabic service appears more capable and committed than one that publishes obvious errors or conflicting versions. The inference may not always be logically warranted—a flawed sentence does not prove a flawed product—but it is psychologically plausible under uncertainty. The effect becomes stronger when the consumer has few alternative diagnostic cues.

Trust provides the relational bridge between credibility and enduring brand value. In e-commerce, trust includes beliefs about competence, benevolence, integrity, and predictability (Gefen et al., 2003; McKnight et al., 2002). It lowers the perceived risk of paying, disclosing data, relying on delivery claims, or expecting a remedy after purchase (Pavlou, 2003). Brand trust similarly reflects confidence that the brand will perform and act responsibly when problems arise (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Language affects that confidence because promises, instructions, and remedies are encountered linguistically. When the wording is complete and internally consistent, the consumer can form expectations. When it is vague, contradictory, or culturally tone-deaf, the relationship begins with ambiguity.

Processing-fluency research adds a cognitive mechanism. Information that is easier to read and interpret is often experienced more positively and judged with greater confidence (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Reber et al., 2004). Fluency should not be confused with oversimplification. A medical device warning may need technical precision; a luxury slogan may rely on suggestive language. The point is that avoidable difficulty—unnatural syntax, unexplained transliteration, inconsistent terms, or broken right-to-left layout—consumes attention without adding meaning. Consumers may then misattribute that difficulty to the offer or the brand. Translation quality therefore influences not only what a message states but how confidently the message can be processed.

4. METHOD: AN INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The article uses an integrative conceptual review because the focal question crosses disciplinary boundaries and the relevant evidence is heterogeneous. Integrative reviews are appropriate when a study seeks to combine theoretical traditions, empirical findings, and practice-based evidence in order to generate a new framework rather than estimate a single pooled effect (Snyder, 2019; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The method also avoids presenting an invented Saudi consumer dataset. The resulting propositions are grounded in existing evidence but remain claims for subsequent testing.

A structured search-and-synthesis process was completed and updated through August 2026. Search combinations linked translation, localization, language quality, Arabic content, and bilingual advertising with brand equity, credibility, trust, perceived risk, e-commerce, Saudi Arabia, and consumer response. Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, publisher records, and official Saudi sources were prioritized. Backward and forward citation tracing was used to locate foundational studies and work connecting information quality with consumer judgement. Sources were included when they offered: a defensible concept of translation or localization quality; evidence about language effects on persuasion, product evaluation, service experience, or trust; a recognized model of brand equity or online trust; or contextual evidence about Saudi digital commerce and Arabic localization. Work was excluded when it treated translation only as a metaphor, discussed language technology without consumer or quality implications, or offered unsupported commercial claims.

The selected literature was read comparatively and organized through three analytic passes. The first identified recurring quality criteria. The second traced mediating mechanisms and outcomes, distinguishing textual properties from consumers' inferences about the brand. The third examined boundary conditions, contradictions, and Saudi-specific implications. This procedure produced seven quality dimensions, five principal mediating routes, and a set of moderators. The synthesis is deliberately explanatory rather than exhaustive. It does not claim the coverage of a preregistered systematic review, and it treats the TQTE framework as a reasoned model open to falsification.

5. TRANSLATION QUALITY AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCT

Calling a translation 'good' is too imprecise for research or management. A grammatically polished slogan can still misrepresent the brand, while a semantically faithful policy can remain unusable if its syntax is opaque or its interface is broken. The TQTE framework therefore defines translation quality as the degree to which localized content conveys the intended meaning and commercial promise accurately, usefully, consistently, appropriately, and accessibly for its Saudi audience across the relevant touchpoints. Seven dimensions operationalize this definition.

Semantic and factual accuracy is the first and non-negotiable dimension. Product specifications, prices, quantities, eligibility conditions, safety statements, delivery dates, guarantees, and exclusions must preserve the substance of the source and the reality of the offer. Errors here can create direct loss. A mistranslated unit, negation, or warranty condition may change the consumer's decision. Accuracy also includes avoiding unjustified additions: promotional Arabic that intensifies a claim beyond what the product can deliver may sound fluent yet weaken credibility once experience exposes the exaggeration. Because negative information often carries disproportionate weight, a single consequential error may outweigh many elegant passages.

Functional clarity and completeness concern whether consumers can use the translated content to complete their task. Literal accuracy is insufficient when a return procedure remains difficult to follow, a form label is ambiguous, or critical conditions disappear from the Arabic version. The order and visibility of information matter alongside wording. Online consumers scan, compare, and decide under time pressure; translation should therefore support the sequence of action. Evidence from Arabic e-commerce localization shows that reliability is closely related to readability, understandability, accessibility, and translatability (Omar et al., 2022). Completeness also communicates parity. When English pages contain fuller specifications or faster updates than Arabic pages, the Arabic-speaking consumer may reasonably infer secondary status.

Terminological and cross-touchpoint consistency ensure that the brand names the same object, benefit, fee, or policy in the same way. Inconsistency increases cognitive load and can resemble deception. A financing term translated differently in an advertisement, checkout screen, contract, and service reply may cause consumers to wonder whether the conditions have changed. The problem is organizational as much as linguistic: different agencies, vendors, departments, or automated systems may produce technically acceptable fragments that fail as a single brand experience. Consistency requires controlled terminology, shared memory resources, version ownership, and synchronized updates. It should not become mechanical repetition, however. The same concept may require a shorter mobile label and a fuller legal definition; the relationship between the forms must remain transparent.

Cultural-pragmatic congruence concerns how the message acts in its context. Forms of address, humour, gender reference, religious and social sensitivities, politeness, visual-verbal relations, and the implied distance between brand and consumer can change persuasive effect. Bilingual advertising research demonstrates that language choice and code-switching can shape evaluation, but the effect depends on brand origin, expectations, and the placement of the switch (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008; Luna & Peracchio, 2005). Emotional intensity may also differ across a bilingual consumer's languages (Puntoni et al., 2009). Congruence therefore does not require erasing foreign identity or inserting local symbols indiscriminately. Token adaptation can feel opportunistic. The better test is whether the message respects how meaning, humour, intimacy, authority, and evidence are conventionally negotiated in the relevant Saudi setting.

Brand-voice coherence addresses whether the translation sounds like the same brand. Voice is a pattern of lexical choice, rhythm, formality, confidence, warmth, and restraint. A premium brand may lose distinction if rendered in generic promotional clichés; a friendly service brand may appear bureaucratic if its Arabic relies on stiff nominal constructions. Coherence also applies to transliteration, product naming, and the handling of global slogans. Some expressions should be transcreated because their persuasive logic cannot survive literal transfer; others should remain stable because repetition has built recognition. The central requirement is governed variation: translators need access to the brand's strategic meaning, not only the source text.

Digital usability extends quality beyond words. Arabic localization requires correct right-to-left behaviour, readable typography, sensible line breaks, mirrored navigation where appropriate, robust search, localized numerals or date formats when needed, and forms that accept local names and addresses. Truncation, disconnected letters, left-to-right punctuation, or an untranslated error message can interrupt the purchase path. Website design research shows that usability and culturally responsive design contribute to satisfaction, trust, and e-loyalty (Cyr, 2008; Flavián et al., 2006). On mobile devices, where the Saudi browsing environment is overwhelmingly concentrated, small defects become more visible because the user has less screen space and fewer contextual clues.

Transparency, legal, and ethical adequacy form the final dimension. Translations must make material terms, sponsorship, recurring charges, data practices, limitations, and complaint routes understandable rather than merely present. Legal equivalence should be reviewed by qualified specialists when consumer rights or safety are involved. The goal is not to turn all marketing into legal prose, but to prevent persuasion from depending on obscurity. This dimension also covers automated language. Machine-assisted translation and generative systems can accelerate production, yet the brand remains responsible for the final message. High-risk content requires human review, documented approval, and rapid correction procedures. A company cannot outsource accountability to a tool that consumers never chose.

These dimensions interact. Elegant style cannot compensate for a false specification; semantic accuracy may still fail when the interface hides the text; cultural adaptation may become misleading if it changes a material claim. Translation quality should therefore be assessed as a profile rather than a single score. Different touchpoints can carry different thresholds. A social-media caption may tolerate creative variation, whereas dosage guidance, financial conditions, and return rights demand near-zero tolerance for substantive ambiguity. Table 1 converts the seven dimensions into practical diagnostic questions.

Table 1. Translation-quality dimensions and diagnostic questions

Quality dimension	Diagnostic question	Trust and brand relevance
Semantic and factual accuracy	Does the Arabic preserve specifications, quantities, conditions, limitations, and claim strength without distortion?	Prevents consequential misunderstanding and signals honesty.

Quality dimension	Diagnostic question	Trust and brand relevance
Functional clarity and completeness	Can the consumer understand the offer and complete the intended task without consulting another language version?	Lowers effort, abandonment, and uncertainty; communicates information parity.
Terminological and cross-touchpoint consistency	Are key concepts named coherently across advertisements, product pages, checkout, contracts, and service?	Signals organisational control and prevents apparently conflicting promises.
Cultural-pragmatic congruence	Do register, address, humour, politeness, examples, and symbolic choices fit the audience and purpose?	Builds relevance and respect while avoiding stereotype or artificial localness.
Brand-voice coherence	Does the Arabic reproduce the brand's intended personality, distinction, and persuasive force?	Protects associations, memorability, and perceived authenticity.
Digital usability	Does the localized interface work naturally in right-to-left use on mobile, search, forms, and error states?	Supports task success and transfers interface quality to brand competence.
Transparency, legal, and ethical adequacy	Are material terms, rights, risks, data practices, and automated outputs clear and responsibly reviewed?	Reduces transaction risk and supports integrity and accountability.

Note. Quality should be assessed as a profile across relevant touchpoints; thresholds vary with communicative risk.

6. HOW TRANSLATION QUALITY BECOMES CONSUMER TRUST AND BRAND EQUITY

Translation quality does not enter brand equity by a direct mechanical route. Consumers rarely assign a numerical quality score and then revise their loyalty. Instead, textual features influence intermediate perceptions—often rapidly and below full awareness. Five mechanisms are central: processing fluency, perceived product and service quality, credibility, cultural respect and authenticity, and perceived risk. Their cumulative effect shapes trust, which then feeds the dimensions of brand equity.

The first route is cognitive fluency. Clear, idiomatic, well-structured Arabic reduces the effort required to identify an offer, compare attributes, and predict the next step. That ease can produce a general sense that the interaction is under control. Poor translation creates friction: the reader reprocesses a sentence, checks the English version, searches for an explanation, or abandons the task. Fluency research suggests that people use the subjective ease of processing as information when forming judgements (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Reber et al., 2004). In a commercial setting, the consumer may attribute ease to a well-organized brand and difficulty to a confusing offer. The attribution is not guaranteed, but it is more likely when the brand provides no competing explanation for the problem.

The second route is perceived product and service quality. Consumers often treat communication quality as a sample of future performance. A carefully translated manual implies attention to design and after-sales support; a careless one suggests that other hidden details may also have been neglected. Website quality can signal product quality and purchase worthiness (Wells et al., 2011), and user-manual quality can affect satisfaction through perceived product quality (Gök et al., 2019). Marinelli et al. (2025) provide particularly relevant evidence: ambiguous translations in product information lower consumers' quality perceptions, with stronger consequences in online contexts. The translation becomes a proxy because the product cannot yet answer for itself.

The third route is brand credibility. Credibility reflects whether consumers believe a brand's claims and expect it to deliver what it promises (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Translation quality contributes through consistency and apparent investment. Precise, synchronized content indicates that the company has control over its operations and regards the Saudi market as worth serving properly. Contradictory terms, missing updates, or repeated machine-like errors send the opposite signal. They create a mismatch between the brand's explicit claim—often excellence, innovation, or customer centricity—and the evidence present in the interaction. That mismatch is especially damaging for brands whose positioning depends on meticulousness. A luxury watchmaker, bank, hospital, airline, or technology provider cannot easily ask consumers to interpret linguistic carelessness as unrelated to operational care.

The fourth route is cultural respect and authenticity. Consumers may read localized language as evidence of whether a brand recognizes them as full participants rather than peripheral recipients of globally recycled content. Respect is conveyed through correct names, appropriate address, locally intelligible examples, balanced bilingual information, and sensitivity without caricature. Authenticity matters because brands are judged not only on factual truth but also on whether their expressions appear sincere and consistent with their identity (Morhart et al., 2015). An international brand does not become authentic by pretending to be Saudi. It becomes authentic by being honest about what it is while demonstrating that it has listened, learned, and designed the encounter for people in the market.

The fifth route is perceived risk. Online purchasing exposes consumers to uncertainty about payment, privacy, delivery, performance, and recourse. Trust reduces that uncertainty and supports transaction intention (Gefen et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2008; Pavlou, 2003). Translation quality lowers risk when it makes obligations and remedies predictable. A consumer who understands whether a subscription renews, how a refund is calculated, or where warranty service is available can evaluate the exchange. Ambiguous translated information increases uncertainty even if no deception was intended. Perceived risk can then spread from the sentence to the seller: 'If this condition is unclear now, what will happen when I need help?' The resulting hesitation is rational because communication is part of the service infrastructure.

Trust emerges when these mechanisms converge. Fluency alone may create a pleasant impression but cannot support trust if the facts are wrong. Accuracy alone may not be enough if the language is unreadable or dismissive. Credibility, competence, integrity, and benevolence are inferred from the whole pattern. This is why one excellent campaign cannot compensate indefinitely for poor service translation. Trust is reinforced when promises and post-purchase behaviour align; it deteriorates when the brand's Arabic voice becomes less careful after payment. The chain is relational and temporal.

Once established, trust contributes to brand equity in several ways. It makes brand associations more favourable because communication is interpreted through a presumption of reliability. It supports perceived quality by reducing suspicion about claims. It encourages loyalty, repeat purchase, and willingness to recommend, which are central outcomes of trusted brand relationships (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). It can also create tolerance for ordinary service failures, although not immunity. A trusted brand is given an opportunity to explain and repair; an untrusted brand may be abandoned at the first problem. Translation quality is therefore both an acquisition asset and a retention asset.

The relationship is cumulative but asymmetric. Positive linguistic experiences often work quietly, whereas a single high-consequence error can become highly salient. This asymmetry means that translation investment should not be justified only by immediate conversion uplift. Some of its value lies in preventing trust shocks, regulatory disputes, reputational spread on social media, and costly service recovery. In brand-equity terms, quality protects an intangible asset whose erosion may appear later than the error that caused it.

Language choice itself remains contingent. English can enhance perceived globalness or expertise in certain technology, fashion, education, and premium contexts. Arabic can increase comprehension, emotional accessibility, and local relevance. Strategic code-switching can attract attention or combine those associations. Yet the effect depends on proficiency, category expectations, and execution. An English technical term may be useful when the Arabic equivalent is unfamiliar; unexplained English in a payment warning is less defensible. The correct principle is consumer-centred fit: preserve the symbolic value of a foreign expression only when it does not obstruct informed choice or contradict the brand's relationship promise.

7. THE TRANSLATION QUALITY–TRUST–EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 summarizes the TQTE framework. The seven dimensions of translation quality form the observable input. Consumers do not necessarily inspect each dimension separately; they experience a pattern that shapes fluency, perceived quality, credibility, cultural congruence, and risk. These perceptions influence consumer trust, which in turn affects brand-equity outcomes such as favourable associations, perceived quality, loyalty, advocacy, willingness to pay, and resistance to competing offers. The model is recursive in practice. Strong equity may buffer a brand against an isolated minor error, while repeated translation failures can eventually weaken that buffer.

Proposition 1: Translation quality is positively associated with brand credibility in the Saudi market. Accuracy and consistency indicate that the brand is capable of controlling its information and willing to invest in the market. The effect should be strongest when the translated message contains verifiable claims or when consumers compare Arabic and English versions.

Proposition 2: Translation quality is positively associated with perceived product and service quality. Consumers use communication as an extrinsic cue when direct evaluation is difficult. The wording, completeness, and usability of localized information provide a preview of the organisation's standards. A polished translation will not rescue a poor product indefinitely, but it can strengthen initial quality expectations; poor translation can depress them before trial.

Proposition 3: Cultural-pragmatic congruence and brand-voice coherence are positively associated with perceived brand authenticity and cultural respect. The proposition does not predict that maximal localization is always best. Rather, consumers should respond favourably when the brand's degree of local adaptation appears knowledgeable, sincere, and consistent with its identity. Forced dialect, token cultural imagery, or opportunistic religious reference may reduce authenticity.

Proposition 4: Translation quality reduces perceived transaction and performance risk through greater information completeness and processing fluency. Clear Arabic conditions enable consumers to estimate costs, obligations, and remedies. This effect should be distinguishable from general website quality: even an attractive interface can remain risky when its translated terms are uncertain.

Proposition 5: Brand credibility, perceived product and service quality, cultural respect and authenticity, and lower perceived risk mediate the relationship between translation quality and consumer trust. The proposition captures the central theoretical claim: consumers trust not because translation is an abstract virtue, but because quality changes what the translation implies about the organisation and the exchange.

Proposition 6: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between translation quality and customer-based brand equity. Translation quality should influence loyalty, advocacy, premium acceptance, and resistance to competitors mainly by strengthening confidence that the brand will act consistently and fulfil its promise. Some direct paths may remain—for example, memorable transcreation can strengthen associations without a trust mechanism—but trust is expected to explain a substantial share of the relationship.

Proposition 7: The effects of translation quality on trust are stronger for high-involvement, high-risk, or technically complex offerings and for digital touchpoints. Financial services, healthcare, travel, electronics, subscriptions, and products with important safety or warranty conditions create greater dependence on language. Digital settings amplify the effect because consumers cannot rely as readily on physical inspection or face-to-face clarification. The proposition is consistent with findings that translated ambiguity has a stronger quality penalty online (Marinelli et al., 2025).

Proposition 8: Cross-touchpoint consistency strengthens, whereas language-version asymmetry weakens, the translation quality–trust relationship. Consumers build a brand judgement across advertisements, product pages, checkout, delivery messages, service encounters, and policies. Consistent language allows positive signals to accumulate. When Arabic and English versions conflict, or when a fluent campaign leads to an incomprehensible contract or chatbot, the inconsistency becomes diagnostic and may be interpreted as strategic rather than accidental.

Several moderators qualify the model. Consumer proficiency shapes sensitivity: highly bilingual consumers may detect semantic discrepancies, while less bilingual consumers depend more heavily on the Arabic version and may be harmed by missing content. Brand origin matters because global brands and local brands carry different language expectations (Krishna & Ahluwalia, 2008). Familiarity may buffer minor errors but also increase disappointment when the error violates a strong promise. Product category determines the acceptable balance between creative transcreation and terminological precision. Finally, the visible use of automated translation may affect trust differently depending on risk, disclosure, and evidence of human accountability. These moderators make a universal translation recipe both unrealistic and theoretically weak.

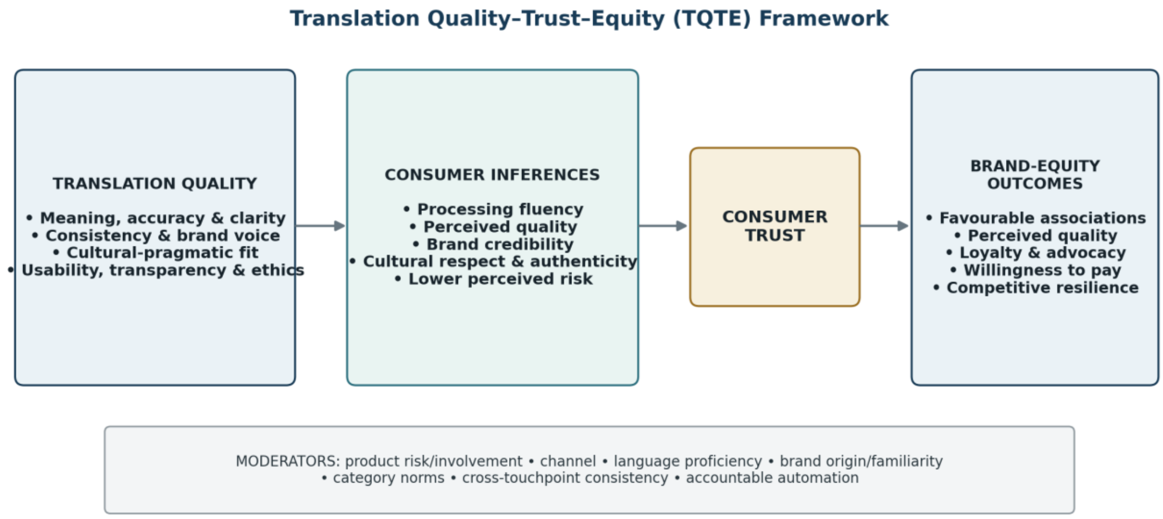

Figure 1. Translation Quality–Trust–Equity (TQTE) framework. Source: Author's synthesis.

Table 2. Summary of research propositions

ID	Proposition	Primary mechanism
P1	Translation quality is positively associated with brand credibility.	Consistency and competence signal
P2	Translation quality is positively associated with perceived product and service quality.	Extrinsic quality cue
P3	Cultural-pragmatic congruence and voice coherence strengthen authenticity and perceived cultural respect.	Identity fit and relational recognition
P4	Translation quality lowers perceived transaction and performance risk through clarity, completeness, and fluency.	Uncertainty reduction
P5	Credibility, perceived quality, authenticity/respect, and lower risk mediate the effect of translation quality on trust.	Multiple perceptual pathways
P6	Consumer trust mediates the relationship between translation quality and customer-based brand equity.	Relational value accumulation
P7	Effects are stronger for high-risk, high-involvement, technically complex offerings and digital touchpoints.	Dependence on linguistic information
P8	Cross-touchpoint consistency strengthens, while language-version asymmetry weakens, the translation quality–trust relationship.	Signal accumulation or contradiction

8. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS OPERATING IN SAUDI ARABIA

The managerial implication is straightforward but demanding: translation governance should be treated as brand governance. Purchasing isolated words at the lowest rate while measuring only turnaround time is inconsistent with the value at risk. Brands need a system that links linguistic decisions to consumer tasks, regulatory exposure, brand position, and post-purchase experience.

First, organisations should tier content by consequence. High-risk material—prices, financial terms, safety information, medical or technical instructions, privacy notices, warranties, returns, eligibility, and complaints—requires subject expertise, bilingual legal or technical review where relevant, and documented approval. Medium-risk content such as product descriptions and onboarding flows needs terminology control, user testing, and conversion analysis. Creative campaigns need transcreation, brand-voice review, and cultural evaluation. This risk-based approach directs the strongest controls to the places where ambiguity can most seriously affect trust.

Second, the translation brief should begin with the consumer rather than the source file. It should specify audience, objective, channel, desired action, brand personality, prohibited claims, terminology, reading constraints, and the intended relationship between Arabic and English. Translators cannot preserve a brand promise they have never been shown. Giving them context, product access, screenshots, and decision authority over awkward source formulations usually improves both quality and efficiency.

Third, brands should create one governed language system across agencies and departments. A Saudi Arabic style guide, approved termbase, product-name policy, transliteration rules, voice examples, and version-control process reduce accidental variation. Governance must still allow purposeful adaptation across channels. The objective is not identical sentences but coherent meaning. A short button label, a conversational chatbot response, and a formal contract can differ in register while preserving the same concept and obligation.

Fourth, quality assurance should combine expert review with consumer evidence. Linguistic review can detect semantic error, register problems, and inconsistency; usability testing reveals whether people can actually navigate, compare, and act. Brands should test mobile screens, right-to-left layouts, search terms, forms, payment flows, and recovery messages with Saudi users from relevant segments. A translation that reads well in a spreadsheet may fail when truncated on a device. Comparative testing can also examine when an Arabic term, an English term, or a controlled bilingual form produces better comprehension and confidence.

Fifth, automation should be deployed with differentiated accountability. Translation memories, terminology tools, and machine-assisted drafting can improve speed and consistency. They should not erase human responsibility. Low-risk repetitive content may be suitable for automated first-pass production with sampling and monitoring; high-risk or identity-defining content needs expert review. Brands should log source versions, system outputs, reviewer decisions, and corrections so that a discovered error can be traced and repaired across every channel. The relevant performance question is not whether a tool produced fluent text, but whether the published message is accurate, fit for purpose, and defensible.

Sixth, performance metrics should connect language to business outcomes. Useful indicators include comprehension success, task completion, search refinement, checkout abandonment at language-sensitive stages, customer-service recontact, complaints caused by unclear wording, time to correct an error, cross-version consistency, trust ratings, and changes in perceived quality. Conversion is important but incomplete. A wording change that increases short-term clicks by obscuring a condition may destroy long-term trust. Metrics should therefore include post-purchase satisfaction, return reasons, advocacy, and repeat behaviour.

Finally, brands need a language-incident protocol. When a consequential translation error appears, delay and defensiveness can deepen the harm. The response should identify affected channels, stop further exposure, publish a clear correction in the consumer's language, honour reasonable reliance on the faulty wording, brief service staff, and explain what has changed. Effective repair demonstrates integrity. In some cases, the correction process can restore trust more strongly than a silent edit because it shows that the brand accepts accountability.

9. RESEARCH AGENDA

The framework invites empirical work that goes beyond asking consumers whether they generally prefer Arabic. Preference is not the same as causal impact, and language choice is not the same as translation quality. Researchers should manipulate specific dimensions—such as terminology consistency, pragmatic naturalness, completeness, or right-to-left usability—while holding product, price, design, and brand constant. Randomized experiments could compare high-quality, literal-but-awkward, ambiguous, and partially untranslated conditions and measure comprehension, processing time, credibility, risk, trust, and purchase intention.

Field studies could test real behaviour. Brands or marketplaces could conduct ethically designed A/B tests on product pages, checkout explanations, or chatbot responses, with safeguards against exposing consumers to misleading high-risk information. Recent randomized field evidence that translated chatbot interactions can change mobile-commerce outcomes demonstrates the feasibility of connecting language to behaviour rather than self-report alone (Nayak & Nair, 2025). Longitudinal designs are also necessary because brand equity accumulates. Researchers could examine whether repeated quality across touchpoints predicts retention, complaint resolution, advocacy, and price tolerance over months rather than minutes.

Measurement needs similar care. A Saudi-market translation-quality scale should be developed and validated with Arabic-dominant, balanced bilingual, and expatriate segments. It should distinguish perceived quality from expert-assessed quality: consumers may not detect every semantic error, and experts may not predict every usability problem. Multi-method designs can combine professional error analysis, eye-tracking or reading-time measures, comprehension tests, interviews, behavioural logs, and structural-equation models. Measurement invariance across age, region, proficiency, category, and brand origin should be tested before group comparisons are interpreted.

Further research should investigate strategic code-switching and the boundaries of localization. English may enhance globalness in one category and create exclusion in another. Dialect may increase warmth in social media but reduce authority in a financial disclosure. The same translation may help a new entrant by signalling commitment yet have little effect for a familiar brand until an error occurs. Automated translation also creates new questions: whether disclosure affects trust, whether consumers value human review, and whether fast correction offsets initial failure. These questions require designs that acknowledge heterogeneous Saudi consumers rather than treating the market as linguistically uniform.

10. LIMITATIONS

This article is conceptual and therefore cannot estimate the size of the proposed effects or establish that they occur uniformly across Saudi consumers and categories. The integrative method draws together relevant traditions but is not a preregistered systematic review, and the evidence base remains richer for online trust and general bilingual advertising than for direct Saudi tests of translation-to-equity pathways. Some mechanisms may also operate bidirectionally: existing brand equity can influence how consumers interpret a translation error. The propositions should accordingly be tested against competing explanations, including general website quality, prior familiarity, price, service history, and country-of-origin perceptions.

11. CONCLUSION

Translation quality is a market signal embedded in the consumer experience. In Saudi Arabia's mobile, bilingual, and rapidly developing commerce environment, consumers meet brands through language at nearly every stage of the relationship. Accuracy protects the offer; clarity supports action; consistency signals control; cultural and pragmatic fit communicates respect; coherent voice preserves identity; usability makes the promise accessible; and transparent legal and ethical language reduces risk. These qualities work together rather than independently.

The TQTE framework explains how they can become brand value. Translation quality shapes fluency, perceived product and service quality, credibility, authenticity, and risk; those perceptions influence consumer trust; trust then supports favourable associations, loyalty, advocacy, and resilience against competitors. The framework also sets limits on easy prescriptions. Arabic is not automatically persuasive, English is not automatically prestigious, and localization is not automatically respectful. Value arises when language choice and translation quality fit the consumer's task, the category's risk, the channel's constraints, and the brand's genuine promise.

For researchers, the next step is causal, longitudinal, and segment-sensitive testing. For managers, the immediate step is to stop treating translation as the final cosmetic stage of a campaign. The translated interface, policy, package, and reply are places where the brand either fulfils or contradicts its own claims. In that sense, translation quality does not merely describe the brand. It performs the brand in public.

Declarations

Funding: The authors extend their appreciation to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for funding this research work through the project number (PSAU 2025/02/38246)

Ethics statement: Not applicable. The article is a conceptual review and reports no research involving human participants or identifiable data.

Data availability: No new dataset was generated or analysed for this conceptual article.

Conflict of interest: The author should confirm or amend this statement before submission: no conflict of interest is declared.

Funding: Funding information should be inserted or confirmed by the author before submission.

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