

CULTURAL PROBLEMS IN ADOPTING FOREIGN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS ON THE POLISH MARKET

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to examine how Polish people perceive advertisements which are presented on Polish TV but are directed to the global consumer. Generally, respondents try to omit as many advertisements as possible. Advertisements that irritate most of the people are the ones that are loud and are constantly repeated on TV. On the contrary, what attracts attention in advertisements is an interesting story and lots of action. Standardisation in advertising is questioned due to cross cultural differences. The survey shows that most of the respondents notice the fact that advertisements shown on Polish TV are foreign. Some factors affect the perception of advertising and are caused by cultural distance, different lifestyle or role models of man and woman. Western lifestyle is perceived as a faster and more promiscuous one. The way the family is presented in foreign ads differs from a typical Polish family. It can be concluded that generally slight cultural differences in perception of foreign advertising campaigns appear but the Polish society becomes a part of an international globalised market.

Keywords: advertising, standardisation, Polish consumer, cross-cultural differences, TV advertising

1. INTRODUCTION

Global world involves a global strategy in every part of marketing. For many companies their internal market is only the first step on their way to success. But global market, despite huge unification which is a result of constantly developing information technology, requires focus on the diversity of needs, perceptions and behaviour of people from various countries. The aim of this paper is to examine how Polish people perceive advertisements which are presented on Polish TV but are directed to the global consumer. The only way, in which this kind of commercials is adopted to Polish market is often Polish dubbing. But most of these TV ads present different model of lifestyle from the one Polish people choose.

Poland belongs to countries that joined the EU in 2004. But until 1989 it was a communist country closed to Western cultures. Up to the present day almost 95% of Poles belongs to the Catholic Church, there aren't any ethnic minorities except German. The Catholic Church in Poland has a big influence not only on people's private life but also political one. In Poland the traditional model of family and traditional roles of man and woman are still popular. Despite these facts commercials broadcasted by transnational corporations often present different lifestyle, appeal to sexual motivation and use themes of faith. There is no doubt that the younger generation of Poles is different from their parents. They are more open-minded, tolerant and intercultural as they travel a lot and have contact with other cultures. But the question is how commercials adopted on the Polish market match a wide Polish customer profile.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF CROSS CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Cultural distance and its impact on advertising strategy may be explained by models which try to define and measure factors concerning intercultural differences. One of the most popular is Hofstede Model (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, pp. 88-90). This model defines five dimensions that distinguish different cultures - the power of distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long/short term orientation. Power distance defines how unequally power in society is distributed. Luxury goods may communicate social status of a person. Individualism means that people look after themselves whereas in the collectivistic culture people are oriented on belonging to in-groups and look after them in exchange for loyalty. Collectivistic cultures build relationship and create trust. Masculinity society defines gender role in society differently. The dominant values distinguished in masculinity society are achievement and success. In femininity society the differentiation of roles is smaller and dominant values include carrying for others and quality of life. Uncertainty avoidance may be defined by the characteristic how much people feel threatened by ambiguity and try to avoid such situations. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures people are less open and their need for rules and formality guiding their life is higher. Long term orientation society is pragmatic and future-oriented as opposed to short-term oriented society which presents historic or short-term point of view.

Hofstede Model is not the only one that allows measurement of cross-cultural differences and their implications for advertising. The other one is Globe Model (Shi & Wang 2011, p.12). Globe model expands the number of intercultural differences factors to nine. This classification omits masculinity/femininity dimension and adds institutional collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, human orientation and performance orientation. Many factors can affect the perception and attitude towards advertising. People in different countries have a different attitude to advertising (Guo & Cheng & Leung 2012, p. 51). More positive attitude towards advertising is positively correlated with collectivism in society. But low score of individualism does not contribute to perfectly collectivistic society (Kalliny & Saran & Ghanem & Fisher 2011, pp. 53-54). In addition, the intensity of cultural factors changes over time. Studies show that standardisation in advertising is also questioned due to differences even in nearby located countries (Ruzevicius & Ruzeviciute 2011, p. 298). Some of the broader research on the standardization of advertising shows that while adaptation of advertising for a particular market is necessary, standardisation strategy may be more effective from the point of view of the company (Ozaki & Taylor & Zou 2006 pp. 17-33). Some authors conclude that there is no universal form of communication due to cultural background, values and self-concept (Mooij 2011, p. 263). Every culture has its own rules of communication.

Studies using Hofstede model shows that Poland is a hierarchical society. People accept a hierarchical order, in which everybody has a defined place (The Hofstede Centre 2013). Second

dimension reveals that Poles are individualistic society. People are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. A high score of masculine dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement and success but not quality of life. People in Poland have a high preference for avoiding uncertainty. People in such societies need security, which is an important element in individual motivation. The last dimension indicates that Poland is a short term orientation culture with a respect for tradition.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the paper is analysis of cultural problems in adopting foreign advertising campaigns on the Polish market. The aim is to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1. Are there any cultural differences that cause a negative perception of foreign advertisement on the Polish market?

RQ 2. What dimensions of cultural differences cause misunderstandings of advertising messages?

RQ 3. Which groups of customers have problems with understanding of advertisements due to the cultural differences?

RQ 4. What impact do mismatched ads have on Polish viewers perception of the brand, product, and tendency for purchase?

RQ 5. What should be avoided in advertising campaigns targeted at Polish consumers?

The data was collected by a qualitative study of 32 people with in-depth individual interview method [IDI]. 18 respondents were younger than 30 years old, 8 between 31 and 50 years old and 6 older than 51 years old. The group included 19 female and 13 male respondents. During the interview respondents were presented ten commercials broadcasted on Polish TV in the second half of 2012. Table 1 presents selected ads (date of access 12.02.2013). In the preliminary research 20 commercials were chosen. Subsequently the poor-quality ones were discarded from this group. The purpose of the selection was to minimise the impact of poor creation on the perception of advertising.

Table 1: Presented ads

Product category	Short description of ads	Brand	Internet access
Food	A young man escapes from his girlfriend's apartment just before her parents enter the flat	Coca cola	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQdv15rj4EI
Food	A giraffe eats rainbow, a man milks a giraffe and collects Skittels into a bucket	Skittles	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNQxZT2bMmc
Food	Players talk in the changing room with their friend who is hungry and behaves like a star here played by Joan Collins	Snickers	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwuoGMTEuak
Perfume	A Bahamian talks to women about the way their men should smell and look like, at the end he sits on the white horse	Old spice	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCzb-5xwpZ8
Perfume	Angels fall down from the heaven because of the smell of the deodorant	Axe	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PK-ldldPLe0
Perfume	Brad Pitt talks about his luck and his faith	Chanel	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGs4CjeJiJQ
Clothes	A young man chases empty bottle of water and wants to throw it away to the bin	Timberland	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyHXN-I3jWU
Clothes	Lana del Rey sings "Blue Velvet"	H&M	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWU6JYnjzLo
Financial services	Usain Bolt competes with a referee and runs along the streets of London	Visa	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BI55x8MI10r
Cars	Four men go for a football match and sing in the car	Renault	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CeUMEDpa88

Source: Authors' elaborations

The study was conducted throughout January in 2013. Respondents were first asked about the general attitude towards advertising and they were unaware of the fact that advertisements were directed to consumers in another country/culture. In the second part of interview, they were presented commercials and were asked about their assessment. It is worth noticing that 20% of interviews were done through the Internet using Skype. During the interview respondents got a link to the website where they could see the ad.

4. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

All respondents watch advertisements on TV because as they claim there is no other choice. Only some of them declare they use advertisements to learn about new products and their qualities. Generally, respondents try to omit as many advertisements as possible. They use this time to bring some food, have something to drink or simply flick through the channels. Advertisements that irritate most of the people are the ones that are loud and are constantly repeated on TV. Other aspects that influence the negative perception of advertisements are clichés, boredom or artificiality as in e.g. advertisements concerning washing powders or wash-up liquids. People dislike stories that are predictable and humourless. Most of the women underline that they are tired of advertisements showing woman as a housewife or treating females in a sexist way.

On the contrary, what attracts attention in advertisements is an interesting story and lots of action. For most of the respondents, good music, lots of colours, catchy slogan and humour are the aspects they appreciate while watching advertisements. People also pay more attention to advertisements that are new and are shown for the first time. Sometimes also the surrounding where the story takes place and people that appear may be interesting. Respondents paid more attention while watching a spot if a famous person appeared on the screen as e.g. Brad Pitt. Respondents do not specially wait for any advertisement, but if the one they like appears on TV they watch it.

The research revealed that most of the respondents notice the fact that advertisements shown on TV are foreign but the way the cultural differences influence the perception of a product and its further purchase differs depending on e.g. the age of the buyers or their sex. The aspects that help respondents differentiate foreign advertisements from the Polish ones include:

- the surrounding in which the story takes place e.g. London, Rome or some exotic places;
- well-known foreign actors e.g. Brad Pitt or other participants representing citizens of various countries and different human races e.g. Usain Bolt;
- the movement of the lips, dubbing and the translation of the original slogan which attracts lots of attention when badly prepared;
- different lifestyle or role models of man and woman;
- product itself or a popular foreign brand;
- short action film style of the advertisement and its high technical quality.

The research showed that there are some slight cultural differences in the perception of foreign advertising campaigns on the Polish market. The differences can influence a negative perception of a commercial. The elements where they are noticed include the race of actors taking part in a spot, Western lifestyle and connected with this lifestyle different everyday habits, the role of a woman in a family and finally believes and catholic values.

The research proved that an inappropriate choice of actors can cause negative perception of an advertisement. The elements that stroke most of the respondents in the advertisements presented during the interview are related to human race (e.g. Old Spice advert). Poland is a homogeneous society where people representing black race are still in minority and include mainly students coming for exchange programmes. Almost 94% of the society is constituted of Polish citizens what proves that the percentage of other nationalities living in Poland is very small. Therefore, people expect a commercial to reflect the society, especially when a product advertised is used every day. The choice of an actor is crucial for the success of a commercial. It was proved by advertisements with celebrities. Respondents showed a different, this time positive attitude when they recognised the famous person (e.g. VISA, Chanel adverts). People are more prone to buy or check the product in the shop when it is recommended by the person they admire. At the same time the wrong choice of the celebrity may discourage people from purchasing the product (e.g. H&M advert).

Next aspect is concerned with the Western lifestyle which is perceived as a faster and more promiscuous one (e.g. e.g. Visa and Cola Zero adverts). Poland is a catholic country where the subject of promiscuity is still controversial. Using a reference to sex in a spot presenting every-day product can sometimes cause a negative perception of an advert and influence the low sales rates. Also resorting to some concepts known from the church can discourage some of the people from buying the product. If a concept known from the church is abused in an advert, some of the people can feel insulted. The research showed that advert resorting to such values can violate respondents' religious believes (e.g. AXE advert).

Also the way the family is presented in foreign ads often differs from the typical Polish family which according to respondents still spends more time at home, cooking rather than enjoying their life (e.g. Renault advert). In Polish advertisements women spend time gossiping with their friends in the kitchen and they rarely go out to a café. Some of the adverts show how couples share their duties and responsibilities what was perceived as artificial as the role of woman in Poland is often restricted to the one of a housewife. Such adverts tend to be unreliable for the some audiences.

A completely new aspect was presented in one of the adverts during the research. It was related to building the environmental-friendly attitude among buyers (e.g. Timberland advert). Such motive for shopping was new for respondents but at the same time the most convincing one from other presented.

Misunderstandings of advertising messages can also occur on the level of cultural dimensions. Poland is described as country with high uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, short-term orientation, high individualism and high masculinity. As Poland is a short-term orientation country it shows a big respect for traditions. Therefore, any advertisements presenting lifestyle far different from the traditional one can attract viewers' attention but also contribute to misunderstanding of the spot. Family has got a very important role in the lives of Poles and has often a traditional character. This means women apart from professional career also take care of the children and household chores whereas men usually concentrate on providing for the family. Even though the changes in this aspect can be observed, some different ideas about family and its every-day life can contribute to misunderstanding of the message (e.g. Renault, Cola Zero adverts). There is also still a strong bond people have with the Catholic Church which indicates the respect for traditions.

Poland scores high in the dimension of the power distance which means that people live in a hierarchical society and often listen to the more influential ones. Even tough, at the same time Poland is an individualistic country, but the idea of "I" is not always understood in the commercials (e.g. Cola Zero advert). People tend to treat advertisements showing main characters as heroes with slight distance. On the other hand, uncertainty avoidance has got a big influence on the perception of the message presented in the commercial. As Polish society tends to avoid any ambiguity, misunderstanding of the message in the spot will lead to lack of purchase in the future.

Strong cultural differences can cause some problems with proper understanding of a commercial among different groups of viewers. The older generation tends to be more conservative. Therefore, they do not find a link between sex and the product (e.g. Coca Zero advert). For some of them, it was difficult to understand such association and they couldn't formulate the motive for purchasing the product presented in the advert. An older generation also tends to be more sensitive in case of adverts resorting to some religious believes.

The younger generation varies more with respect to attitudes concerning the advertisements. Some younger respondents accept the way religious concepts are used in the spot but some claim their personal believes are insulted. This reveals that some part of younger generation is more traditional. A statement appeared that they way family is presented in adverts may also violate their feelings (e.g. Cola Zero advert).

Women of all ages often do not understand why advertisements show them only as an object of desire. This often contributes to misunderstanding of the message and may result in the negative attitude towards the product. Women often notice the artificiality of the families presented in the commercials. In the Polish reality women still take care of children more often than men do. Such message does not contribute to misunderstanding of the advert but women tend to approach such sport with distance. At this point also an interesting difference between men and women can be

observed. They tend to pay attention to different aspects shown in the advertisements. Women observe the way families are presented in the commercials whereas men tend to concentrate on the product.

The research revealed that respondents of all ages pay lots of attention to the actors appearing in the commercials. For all of them the choice of actors can contribute to misunderstanding of the advertisement. When a product is advertised by a person representing different race, a question why a Polish boy cannot advertise the product occurred (e.g. Old Spice advert). Some younger people did not identify themselves with the representatives of other cultures and prefer to see their Polish counterparts in the spots.

Even though a few respondents have bought something at least once after watching an advert on TV, they underline that they do not usually go shopping under the influence of advertisements and hope they do not do it unconsciously. This is a typical phenomenon in an ads research. Respondents are often unaware of the influence a commercial has on their lives. Respondents often say they buy the product presented in an advertisement not because they liked the advert but because they know the product and they have tried or used it before. Respondents also claim that an advert can motivate them sometimes to check the product but whether they buy it depends on the prize, their needs and other values (e.g. the smell in case of Chanel perfume or design and comfort in case of Timberland shoes).

Misunderstanding the advertisement influences the future purchase of the products presented in the clips only to a small extent as customers often take many other aspects into consideration. Sometimes respondents were unable to define the target audience of the spot and define the message. In such cases, they completely misunderstood the idea of the advert they watched what lead to their negative attitude towards the purchase of the product. Respondents criticise the artificiality of the people presented in some spots sometimes also the combination of different elements in the spot can cause ambiguity e.g. the setting, music and the actors (e.g. H&M advert). The length of a commercial may influence their negative perception. Respondents claimed that the adverts longer than one minute (e.g. Timberland, AXE and VISA) were interesting when they watched them for the first time, but then became boring. People claim to watch such adverts only once and if they see them in the future, they will simply change channel on TV. Respondents said the stories imitating films of action are interesting but as viewers watch the adverts for the second time they already remember the plot and get bored quickly.

Another aspect that may influence the negative perception is a wrong translation of the slogan or bad dubbing. Younger respondents tend to compare the original language one can hear in the background with what the reader says. They speak good English, often watch films in original language and therefore are able to make such a comparison. Some viewers have doubts if everything was translated correctly in some commercials as they believe the original language made the spot even more funny (e.g. Snickers advert). Others are often irritated by dubbing which tends to sound artificially in some adverts (e.g. Cola Zero advert). Some advertisements are good examples of adopting the spot for the market it is shown on. The main characters speak in that adverts the local language with bad pronunciation (e.g. Old Spice advert). However, respondents tend to be astonished to hear such person speaking Polish but are unable to define what precisely shocked them.

Next aspect that influenced the negative perception of an advertisement was a mix of elements that did not have common link according to respondents. Such combination can include the old song and old interior combined with recently popular singer (e.g. H&M advert). On the other hand such commercials attract attention and it is more probable viewers will remember them longer.

5. CONCLUSION

The research revealed that cultural differences disturb the perception of advertisements to a small extent. However, some recommendations how to avoid misunderstanding on the basis of cultural differences can be made. Some general recommendation is related to the length of an advertisement. Polish respondents tend to prefer the advertisements that present interesting story but are not too long. People usually watch such commercial once only and omit it in the future.

Culturally-related recommendations include the choice of the proper setting and actors, avoidance of any relations to faith and presenting a good translation. Respondents appreciate different surroundings like exotic places in different commercials but in case of cars they prefer to see them on the Polish roads. While choosing the setting for an advert, producers should take into consideration the type of a product advertised and how the setting influences the perception of its use. Too big disparity between the Polish reality and surrounding presented in the advertisement can cause a misunderstanding and lack of interest in the product.

Another important aspect is concerned with the actors taking part in the commercial. If a person is a well-know celebrity recognised by every viewer, the advert would be a success. But if an actor is an anonymous person representing the society, they should derive from the culture the commercial is addressed to. Otherwise, it can cause confusion and negative attitude towards the product. Also relating to any aspect of the faith in advertisements should be avoided. Poland is a catholic country and there will always be citizens who will react with an outrage when the faith is somehow offended. The last aspect relates to translation. A proper transfer of original language and slogan is vital as people tend to notice any big differences between the original version and translation. Also the dubbing should be prepared in a natural way. If it sounds artificially, people perceive it at once and know the commercial was firstly addressed to another audience. Following these simple recommendations will enable the authors of commercials to attract more attention from the Polish audience and a bigger chance of the success on the Polish market.

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