

Commercial Perception of Global and Local Brands on the Romanian Market

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Abstract: *The following research intends to analyse the perception of advertising campaigns broadcast on the Romanian market regardless of both local and global brands. The main interest is discovering how commercials point out Romanian's integration into the global consumer culture, by finding differences and similarities between the local perspective and the international background. This paper is not concerned with product or consumer perception, but with creating campaigns and understanding them based on the glocal culture. The main issues taken into consideration here are the following: the influence global on local brands, their originality and specificity, the predominant local topic developed in the ads and the best to appeal to local consumers. The study methodology relies on a survey applied on a specialized advertising target (students at Faculty of Communication and Sociology and industry professionals) and the findings were qualitatively debated to get to the conclusions.*

Keywords: *advertising, commercials, specificity, global, local.*

1. Global versus local in Romanian advertising

The distinction between consumption and commercial consumption reveals a way to better understand the world we live in. Understanding ads and making the appropriate connection to the target brands are dedicated to it involve very good knowledge of the market and its specificity. Watching commercials for a specific reason or for no purpose at all reminds us of McCracken's theory regarding two

advertising models that could provide us with the data we are intensively interested in, i.e. the meaning-based model of consumption and the information-based model (McCracken, 2005, 162-170). In both cases, commercials do not accomplish only the marketing goal (to sell), but deliver something more sophisticated to the watcher. According to the first model, promoting a product implies perceiving its qualities as a part of a consumer culture, as a construction and reconstruction of the context in which it may be consumed: "Cultural meanings, those in goods and those outside of them, make up the cultural context of consumption." (McCracken, 2005,164). Buying and consuming a product do not represent a way to understand its meaning, but understanding the consumption context is more important. The other model completely ignores the context, but pays attention to the individual effort of consuming and understanding a product insight. Consumption isolates the buyer from society, leaving him outside the collective meaning. Only his mind is responsible for the commercial message, there is no social influence, and no way to integrate him into a consumer category.

This classification may be undoubtedly extended to the commercial consumer, whose consumption is exclusively cultural, and their perspective more critical. They are more interested in context, trying to focus not so much on the product, but on brand strategy and target. This cultural frame is a meta-context, drawing attention to the market context, cultural influences and sociological factors.

Integrating these theories into the relationship between global and local features in advertising highlights the relevance of the meaning-based model of consumption, this is strongly connected with the context. Not only commercials broadcast on the Romanian market and created by local agencies do emphasize the product, but they also become cultural products. Advertising strives to appeal to consumers based on lifestyle and social environment, but also to externalize local brands while importing global behaviour models. According to Marieke de Mooij, this is a classic case of innovation and global paradox, from the cultural viewpoint: "Members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures like to be international, global, cosmopolitan, although in reality the local is more important." (2010, 220-221). This paradox is exploited in various way, and, most of the time, only ads reveal its complexity. Professionals are not so much aware of this theoretical situation, but commercials show this cosmopolite spirit based on mixing global with local features. The present research focuses on this issue and tries to establish a balance between global and local appeals. Geert Hofstede carried out a model based on five dimensions of national culture that considerably helps analyze differences and similarities between cultures and this consists of power distance, individualism/collectivism, gender of nations, uncertainty avoidance, long-short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede and Minkov 2010). Hofstede named these concepts "dimensions", because "they occur in nearly all possible combinations." (Hofstede, 1983, 78). Extremely important is

that Hofstede validated this model by analyzing television commercials and print advertisements as a first research method.

Power distance underlines the difference in consumers' communication behaviour and this aspect suggests that the main value promoted in advertising reflects both the authority and social status. This research aims to prove that local brands are less powerful than the global ones, which seem to be independent and influence the former and determine the social status in high power distance cultures. Power distance influences not only the image of consumer within a society, but also brand perception. This concept was interestingly related to other research terms such as cultural paradox, values, and authority by other researchers over the years. Authority and celebrity are keywords that define power distance as a degree of understanding life differences between the powerful and the less fortunate. (House et al., 2004)

The model of individualism versus collectivism debates the relationship between cultures individually focused on their values and cultures preoccupied by social integration and harmony. In the first case, people are concerned about being unique, and rely on themselves. Obviously, in terms of advertising, individual culture rejects global brands more than the collectivist one, because consumers are more connected to their local context. Thus, the other side of the coin means accepting and adapting to the universal image of the brand and understanding the common values.

The third model approaches the so called "gender of nations," which is very well related to the successful society, the winner profile, and the respective mentality. This reveals that the specificity of any nation either oriented towards masculinity or femininity. Therefore, gender roles are clearly delineated and consumption depends on society dynamics. We believe that this model reflects the relevance of certain product categories connected to lifestyles and specific consumer behaviour. There are societies in which home is more important than professional performance and femininity plays a major role, considering family a priority, whereas male-oriented societies are meant to focus on success, lots of work, and less affectivity. Advertising analyzes this balance and appeals to consumers relying on this overview of gender nations, which is difficult to change over the years.

The next model developed by Hofstede is called "uncertainty avoidance" and refers to the way people agree and adopt innovation and whether they fear ambiguity and the unexpected situations. A society founded on strict law prefers stereotypes and likes to follow old customs; for this reason, either global brands adapt to its values, or local values become more important. On the contrary, a society, which is highly open to change and media innovation does not discriminate brands, and advertising uses synergetic strategies to promote them. Long- and short-term orientation explains differences in using some product categories and considering them goods culture from the consumer's viewpoint- or abstract oriented- society. Pragmatism and perseverance are vital to the long-term orientation culture and peo-

ple are mainly preoccupied by hard science. For the short-term orientation culture, tradition, popular culture, and folk wisdom are the top choices.

Hofstede's impactful theory was improved in 1996 by adding another 15 West European countries, which concluded that many research topics could be influenced and developed according to it. Based on this, we chose to apply these models on quantitative data to get a profile of the consumers of Romanian commercial in terms of studying specificity and the relationship between local and global features.

Another important aspect this research carries out, regards the way people watch commercials and perceive the influence of global aspects over local specificity. During the communist era, people were allowed to communicate and travel abroad only with special permission (even for tourist or private matters), and they could develop relationships with other "red" countries. Nowadays, heavily broadcast ads display global diversity, enabling consumers to compare global and local production. They aspire to consume global brands and, thus, seemingly participate in the globalization trend. Considering so many discussions on glocalization and hybridity, researchers (for instance Robertson, 2010; Pieterse, 2010; Ritzer, 2011) are more concerned about consumption and consumers, rather than the advertising industry. The best and most concise definition of hybridity reveals that "hybridization is the making global culture as global *mélange*." (Pieterse, 2009, 83). Understandably, cultural differences do not disappear, but only seem more relative and more easily included in other contexts. Their mixture joins local and global landmarks, establishing a kind of tolerance between them in terms of revealing some similarities. This is why the ad framework may be the same (a story, a mythical root, common TV format and so on), but the creative execution suggests multiculturalism. Pieterse looked for many other concepts that better describe this "global *mélange*" such as *syncretism*, *creolization*, *mestizaje*. The last one is the Latin American term for "boundary-crossing mixture." (Pieterse, 2010, p.327) According to him, hybridization makes cultures more compatible helping the transition between them. When Ritzer stated the McDonaldization society, he pointed out the consumption globalization supported by advertisements and media industry. McDonald would have never become such a recognizable brand without target's contribution: "These ever-present commercials, combined with the fact that people cannot drive very far without having a MacDonald's pop into view, have embedded MacDonald's deeply in popular consciousness." (Ritzer, 2011, 9). Eating a Big Mac is not always the best choice, but its symbol reaches a high level of cultural expectations, which is the experience of another world, and the taste of modernity in a conservative world. According to Lu, "The symbolic consumption of McDonald's and KFC enables local Chinese to know about advanced modernity, and get connected to the global modernization process." (Lu, 2010, 622). It is obvious that cultural syncretism helps brand globally develop.

Exploring the advertising field, we realized that Romanian commercials use syncretism as a creative strategy for two reasons: firstly, the European influence on an ex-communist country with a very diverse target and, the model of global brands imported or adopted by local campaigns. Briefly, there is a mixed advertising industry which has been trying to find the suitable track, its own identity given its re-birth, on the one side, which is very interested in global evolution, while keeping the pace on the other side. This is certainly a common occurrence for many former communist countries, whose freedom became an explosion and advertising a kind of magma that is still flowing. What makes things more exciting here is the evolution of hybridity in Romania after the 90s. In the beginning, consumers and professionals were very interested in globalization, offering the image of international brands as creatively as they could, almost completely ignoring local brands. Nowadays, the industry is paying more attention to the latter, awarding local campaigns and being judged internationally. For example, the campaign "The American Rom" (Rom is a very old Romanian chocolate brand) was awarded with a Grand Prix and Gold Lion at Cannes 2011, within the Promo and Activation section. A local campaign for a local brand was rewarded for its originality at an international level by a global judgement. This reminds us of the question Roland Robertson asked in several of his articles: "The local in the global? The global in the local?" (2010, 337). His opinion highlights the necessity of striving for a global model of consumer behaviour, on the one side, but also preserving specificity, by accepting that homogeneity and heterogeneity go hand in hand, on the other side.

2. Research method and respondents' profile

This paper aims to reveal the relationship between global and local brands, regarding advertising products. We intend to extend our research by focusing on advertising from the perspective of people watching commercials that involve the relationship between the global and local. For this reason, our research method is the opinion survey applied to 700 people. First, the main detail we need to emphasize is that we do not intend to make a research whose results describe the entire population of country, because we focus on the opinion of the selected respondents who are really interested in commercials.

The information we need and the quantitative research imply the use of a structured questionnaire based on its features, which Joel J. Davis broadly described in his book: "versatility, ease of administration, reduction in interviewer bias and influence and ease in data entry and analysis." (Davis, 1997, 298). Our respondents answered 16 close-ended survey questions, structured as multiple-choice, using between 4 and 8 categories. The topic of the questions follows a couple of issues: the comparison between international and Romanian advertising campaigns, global models in advertising, global versus local features, the specificity of Romanian

commercials, originality, and market identity. The questions were coded and analysed according to their answers, in order to obtain an efficient output that allows drawing some conclusions.

The non-probability sample was the most suitable method of selecting respondents, considering they were not chosen based on population rate, because our intention is not to generalize the answers, but to use them for scientific goals. In addition, our research uses quantitative methods to collect data, but the final approach is qualitative. In this case, we consider this type of sample a convenience one, according to Davis' approach (Davis, 1997, 186), while the specialized topic of the questionnaire involves establishing some selective criteria, given the exploratory and scientific purpose. By writing "convenience sampling is just what the name implies: study participants are selected because they are convenient and accessible" (Davis, 1997, 186), does not mean respondents were accidentally selected. The term "accessibility" refers here, in our opinion, to the most efficient sampling method.

Therefore, we are concerned with the viewer profile: students at the Faculty of Communication, majoring (in advertising), the Faculty of Sociology, (studying Advertising Sociology) between 20 and 25 years old, and young professionals working in advertising agencies, aged 23- 27. All live in Bucharest, watch and analyze commercials for professional reasons. Questionnaires were applied in-person between January and March 2011.

3. Findings

The quantitative results of the survey synthesized only the highest frequency for each question in the table below, to point out the general overview on the most important issues:

No.	Questions:	Answers	Respondents' number	Percentage
1.	Do you think Romanian advertising uses international models?	c. sometimes	364	52,00%
2.	What is the difference between commercials for Romanian brands and for the international ones?	c. reflecting the consumers' lifestyles.	404	57.72%
3.	What are the aspects that prove the similarity between international and national advertising?	b. using several symbols	322	46,00%
4	Do you think international brands should:	b. have specific ads for each market	404	57.71%
5	Have you identified original aspects in Romanian video advertisements?	a. yes	352	50.29%
6.	Do you think Romanian specificity:	a. outlines better the target	300	42.86%
7.	What does the Romanian specificity consist of?	a. traditions and folk culture	302	43.14%
8.	Which category of Romanian stars/personalities does more often show up in commercials?	b. actors (singers)	378	54,00%

No.	Questions:	Answers	Respondents' number	Percentage
9.	Which advertising spokespersons express Romanian advertising specificity best?	b. actors (singers)	222	31.71%
10	What kind of issues do you think are less valuable and original in Romanian advertising?	d. geographical details	238	34,00%
11	Which product category does better suggest Romanian specificity best?	a. bakery and dairy	346	49.43%
12	Which topic is dominant in Romanian advertising?	c. Entertainment	292	41.71%
13	Do you think gender stereotypes are better differentiated in local commercials?	a. Sometimes	342	48.86%
14.	What product categories emphasise the advantages of the Romanian market best?	food products	278	39.72%
15	Which space represents the Romanian specificity in commercials best?	a. the Romanian village	372	53.15%
16	Do you think religious aspects are welcome in Romanian commercials broadcast at Christmas/ Easter?	a. Sometimes	268	38.29%

In the next paragraphs, we will organize these questions around four important research directions which will better justify the involvement of the commercial watcher in decoding brand values and adapting to the Romanian market. These directions are: the relationship between Romanian advertising and the international one; the originality of Romanian advertising; the main topic of Romanian advertising; the appealing to the Romanian target in advertising.

3.1. The relationship between Romanian and international advertising

The first part of this survey, particularly the first four questions, focuses on the relationship between global and local advertising. Respondents considering that Romanian commercials are sometimes created after international models are at the top of the hierarchy with 52%. People who are not interested or, better said, unable to find a specific answer, represent the minority in this situation. The difference between local and global commercials consists in consumer lifestyle, in a major percentage, 57.72%. This answer suggests how important popular culture and consumer insight are on a market. Only a few people believe that a topic may bring to light essential differences between consumer cultures. There are similarities between advertising fields regardless of the type of brands and relying on universal symbols like the mythical and historical (46%). We think this percentage is the expected proof of sharing the same values all over the world, based on history, tradition, anthropology and mythology. Respondents who did not clearly chose concrete answer, by answering "I don't know" are insignificant with 4%. Having specific ads for each market is the predominant answer (with 57.71%) of the question regarding the way global brands should take care of their consumers, no matter where they come from. Actually, these results confirm the theories regarding global

consumer culture, which are either related to the socio-historic frame of globalization, market capitalism and cross-cultural consumption (Arnould & Thomson, 2005) or symbolic dynamics based on meaning transfer (McCracken, 1986). By analysing a simple ad, without necessarily being its product consumer, people easily perceive the cultural flow between the global and the local. One of the researchers believes advertising makes global and local brands cohabit by sometimes sharing similar values, considering it “has the ability to move fluently between the local and the global, as well as between the concrete and the abstract.” (Mazarella, 1986, 74). According to Miracle (1968) market standardization depends on many factors such as type of product, media availability, homogeneity of the market, government restrictions, and advertising agencies. The people questioned might identify global cultural patterns, homogeneously distributed in commercials created for local and international brands, and consider them the signature of powerful and qualitative advertising. They are aware of using the local cultural flow to appeal to consumer identity, on the one hand, and enrich the meaning-based model of consumption, on the other. Their answers empirically confirmed researchers’ opinion on cultural adaptation to each market in terms of better appealing to consumers. According to Sinclair and Wilken “marketing has had to learn how to come to terms with the realities of cultural and other differences as it has become ever more globalized.” (Sinclair and Wilken, 2009, 147).

3.2. The originality of Romanian advertising

For our next issue, we tried to find out respondents’ opinion about the level of originality in local advertising, making a connection with the previous question categories. Most respondents (50% of them) believe that local commercials personalize their message in a very creative way. The percentage of undecided people questioned is minor, and therefore negligible for the conclusions of this research. Next, our research focuses on Romanian specificity and our interviewees consider that this aspect points out local audience in predominant percentage of 43.14% of respondents. Looking for specificity in Romanian advertising, tradition and folk culture were the main attractions tightly followed by a different kind of personalities acting in commercials. In terms of celebrity, Romanian commercials often use actors or singers (54%) as spokespersons according to target preferences. Another very important question for the consumers’ opinion was the one dedicated to the less valuable and original aspects that commercials sometimes promoted. According to the people questioned, geographical details are not highly relevant for local specificity and tradition remains the most treasured element. Therefore, baked goods and dairy are the categories that suggest what Romanian specificity consists of given consumer preferences. With 49.43%, they are at the top of other categories such as cars and appliances, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, mobile phones and com-

munication tools, insurance companies, banks, and meat products. The second place is dedicated to drinks, (29.15%), which is completely justified by the local production of wine, beer, and schnapps. It is very important to emphasize that specificity not only refers to local brands, but also to commercials broadcast on the Romanian market. Therefore, global brands create local campaigns, sometimes local brands as well (for example *Ciuc*, *Bergenbier* beers belonging to Heineken, but they are only sold for Romanian markets), by adapting to the target's cultural background. Kates and Goh explained the paradoxical understanding of local values very well in terms of global branding: "This meaning provides a basis for creating local relevance and the ways brands might morph into the new locale." (Kates & Goh, 2003, 62).

3.3. The main topic of Romanian advertising

We strongly believe that the overall theme of a cultural product clearly describes lifestyles, consumer habits, and, sometimes, personality. In the present questionnaire, entertainment covers most of the respondents' answers, with family coming second. The respondents age is the main reason for this, given they reach their interests during work and spare time. Besides, advertisements often develop various lines of entertainment regardless of product specificity, so our respondents easily noticed this topic. As for the family, Romanian society is a conservative one and this explains why young people still appreciate the topic, or at least are aware of its importance in advertising. With regards to gender stereotypes, our information does not prove a special focus on this issue, since respondents choose to answer "sometimes" with 48.86%. This kind of uncertainty over gender proves that this aspect did not catch enough of our respondents' attention.

3.4. Appealing to the Romanian target in advertising.

The last three questions refer to product categories, which are well represented in local commercials, particular aspects of the local market, and religious references that may better describe consumer insight. According to respondents' opinion, food commercials are the best way to emphasize the advantage of the local market, which is quite understandable, considering eco-agriculture a support of local economy. Doubtlessly, the result of this question is tightly connected with the issue relating to the representative space for Romanian specificity in commercials broadcast on our market. Obviously, the Romanian village draws consumers' attention, because it indicates the origin of natural products by association with the local landscape. Regarding the opinion on the last item that our questionnaire focused on, were divided almost equally between respondents who believe that religious issues are always welcome in commercials at Christmas/Easter time (34.28%) and those who considered that these elements are only sometimes important (38.29%). Obviously, these answers focus more on Romanian consumer insight and are almost not at all influenced by their perception of globality. They are very well individualised accord-

ing to the cultural values and lifestyles. Food, tradition, and religion persuasively define the perspective on local culture and the suitable way to appeal to consumers both through Romanian and international brands.

4. Discussions

Before we start debating these findings, we think it is very good to put all this information together to preserve the main goal of our research, which focuses on the creative pattern of commercials, originality, commercial topic and consumer appeal.

Regarding creative patterns, the interviewed audience believes that local specialists sometimes use external promotional models. Linguistic aspects and cultural products provide both global and local features in our corpus. According to our respondents, symbols prove similarities between international and national advertising, and global brands should find a way to adapt to each market.

In terms of originality, questionnaires reveal that half of our respondents considered this issue often present in local spots, while, on the contrary, the other half had serious doubts about this aspect.

As for the predominant topic of the investigated commercials, the answers underlined the role of entertainment and family in coining the best message. In our research, bakery and dairy products definitely justify the authority of local brands such as culinary aspects, traditions, and natural landscape. In addition, specific food has always been related to religious celebrations, even if other dogmatic aspects were not taken into consideration.

With regards to the representative space of Romanian image in local commercials, most believe that the village and countryside landscape are very significant. These two perspectives are complementary and illustrate the connection with other aspects just revealed in this research, like tradition, product categories, local features, and ad originality.

Finally, returning to the theoretical background discussed in the beginning of this paper, it would be very useful to check how McCracken's and Hofstede's model could be recognized in the former respondents' answers. Romania is not only a young democratic country, but it is still in a transitory economical and political situation, and, therefore, difficult to be completely integrate into a category or pattern. From an advertising viewpoint, researching a problem means paying attention both to advertising products (commercials) and their consumers (viewers, creative). This paper also aims to check the models of previous researchers, because Romanian advertising was not included into the research sample, so it may offer new and contextual information.

Analyzing the data connected to the relationship between Romanian and international advertising, we recognized what Hofstede calls "power distance," with the relation to the relevance of global brands and their creative pattern in local ads. Respondents believe that if ads use similar symbols, the distance between global

and the local brand is less significant. This is why they consider it is suitable to create specific ads for each market, because international brands influence so much the perception of local ones.

Furthermore, the originality of Romanian advertising is strongly related to “the short-term orientation culture” and the relationship between individualism and collectivism. Highlighting tradition and folk culture as main national landmarks means describing very well the interest in the spiritual aspect, regardless of brand identity. At first sight, if commercials focus on tradition, Romanian personalities, and cultural issues, they tend to be perceived as more individualistic. Going deeper into this problem, it is actually difficult to decide this, given the global brands that adopt the same topic to better address to consumers. This indecision gives significance to the “value paradox” very well brought to light by de Mooij, which makes the difference between what people think ought to be desired and what people actually desire, or how people think the world ought to be versus what people want for themselves (de Mooij, 2010, 47). Some researchers took de Mooij’s theory even further (Moon and Chan, 2005) and discovered other conditions that emphasize the distance between desired and desirable, such as economic and political changes, as well as new lifestyles. Romania has been changing considerably for the last 20 years and faced many unexpected situations. Respondents of the present survey grew up in this transition and their answers sometimes demonstrated the confusion surrounding them.

Therefore, we can definitely state that local brands often develop individualistic strategies to promote their own values, while global brands balance between the individualistic and collectivistic approach. Global brands use diverse creative models, either standardization, localization, or combination (Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells, 2009, 548-568), depending on campaign type. The easiest model to identify is standardization, that focuses on consumers’ similarities from everywhere in the world, without any specific issue. Localization, sometimes termed “adaptation”, consists of many other important coordinates of each market, such as lifestyles, cultural, economic, and political particularities. Combination is nothing else than finding a middle way to combine both directions to produce more effective advertising while preserving general brand strategy and translating it for local customers. Sometimes this is called hybridization. Localization points out the individualistic view of consumer needs, while combination strives more for the collectivistic meaning of values shared by the Romanian target.

Regarding the main topic of Romanian advertising, both family and entertainment seem to represent attractions to respondents, which, actually, is not so different in comparison with other countries. Obviously, this is connected with the age of respondents and the balance between individualistic and collectivistic behaviour. Hofstede’s term “uncertainty avoidance” may be easily explained by accepting stereotypes as a way to better emphasize local commercials. Almost everyone in-

volved in this research (except 39 of 700 respondents) place their trust in the power of gender stereotypes.

The last category of target appeal outlines individualistic mentality and the preoccupation for spiritual issues, i.e. short-term orientation culture. More than 500 respondents consider that religious aspects might be successfully employed to reveal Romanian specificity.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the present research reaches some conclusions regarding the attitude of Romanian commercial consumers. First, the quantitative data confirms the existence of one of McCracken's models, the meaning-based model of consumption. Watching and analyzing Romanian commercials, our respondents offered interesting answers, whose connection with the context is obvious. They integrated ads into the local cultural background, on the one hand, and, the global pattern of the advertising industry, on the other hand. Their perception was certainly influenced by their studies in the field of communication, and, in our opinion, mostly because the survey did not focus on consumer behaviour of specific product categories.

Second, according to study results the relationship between local and global brands seems to be very balanced, due to the importance given to Romanian specificity. The people questioned did not deny local values and campaigns, but highlighted the "mimesis" style of creating campaigns, appreciating the global ones.

Third, the difficulty to decide between individualism and collectivism in promoting brand values shows how hybridization works on the local market. Positively appreciating rural communities and religious customs, commercials point out the individualistic image reflected by Romanian campaigns, while entertainment, symbols and gender stereotypes involves accepting global values.

In conclusion, Romanian target perception of local campaigns cannot be entirely integrated into a global consumer culture due to respondents' opinion regarding commercial originality and individual vs. collectivistic representations. The best explanation for this perception is based on the campaigns developed during the last two years that have very much emphasized national identity and the power of local brands (the so-called "eco-campaigns").

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