CROSS-CULTURAL ADVERTISING

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The essence of successful advertising is to convince people that a product is meant for them. By purchasing it, they will receive some benefit (lifestyle, status, convenience, etc.). However, when an advertising campaign is taken abroad different values as to what enhances status or gives convenience exist. These differences make the original advertising campaign defunct. It is therefore critical to any cross cultural advertising campaign that an understanding of a particular culture is acquired.

Cultural differences can create problems when potential customers translate the message into their own cognition. A cosmetics firm attempted to sell its lipstick in Japan using a television ad that depicted Nero coming to life just as a pretty woman wearing the lipstick strolled by. Since Japanese women had no idea who Nero was, the commercial confused rather than amused or informed.

As always, when dealing with different cultures, translation problems can be embarrassing. General Motors had a perplexing problem when they introduced the Chevy Nova in South America. Despite their best efforts, they weren't selling many cars. They finally realized that in Spanish, "nova" means "it won't go". Sales improved dramatically after the car was renamed the "Caribe."
Poor marketing research is a major source of cross-cultural advertising blunders. A toothpaste’s product’s advertising in parts of Southeast Asia stressed that the toothpaste helped enhance white teeth: since the local people deliberately chewed betel nut to achieve the social prestige of darkly stained teeth, the ad was ineffective.

Misunderstanding or lack of understanding of differences between cultures also have led to a number of advertising mistakes. When a baby care company advertised soap to Hungarian consumers showing a young woman holding her baby, Hungarians saw an unwed mother; the model was wearing a ring on her left hand; Hungarians wear wedding bands on the right.

Culturally sensitive companies understand differences exist and make accommodations for them. Volvo emphasizes economy, durability, and safety in America; status and leisure in France; performance in Germany; safety in Switzerland; price in Mexico; and quality in Venezuela.

Cultures in general do show distinct differences regarding tastes for their advertisements. French advertisements use more emotional appeals than American advertisements, but American advertisements contain more information cues. The French use humor more frequently in advertising than Americans. American commercials often feature a celebrity to provide testimonials or arguments in favor of the product.

Advertising regulations range across the entire spectrum. Malaysia is determined to protect the Islamic population from the excesses of Western advertising and marketing. Some of the bans include no pork, alcohol, or cigarette advertising; women in advertisements should be decently dressed. All the commercials must be filmed in Malaysia and use only Malaysian models.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions can be very useful for cross-cultural advertising.

Power Distance: Status symbols are less frequently used in small power distance cultures then in large power distance cultures where prestige is an important appeal. Power distance can be shown in the way people interrelate or by the type of people shown (older vs. younger). In large power distance cultures, the elder (grandmother, mother, or aunt) advises the younger (daughter or niece).

Individualism / Collectivism: In individualistic cultures, the public tends to be addressed in a direct and personalized way. Words like you, we, and I are frequently used.

Masculine / Feminine cultures: In masculine cultures if men do something with babies, it likely serves their own purposes. In the masculine cultures of Latin America, men must be real men. In a Latin America survey across 7 countries, the percentage of answers agreeing with the statement “Real men
don’t cry” correlated with masculinity. Appeals of masculine cultures are more task or success oriented whereas appeals of feminine cultures will be more relationship oriented.

Strong / Weak Uncertainty Avoidance: Testing and test reports are favored in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures. Technical explanations about the product can be very detailed for all sorts of products, be they cars, toothpaste, or shampoo. In strong uncertainty avoidance cultures, people tend to be better groomed than in weak uncertainty avoidance cultures. In advertisements from the southern European and Germanic countries, people are significantly better dressed than in advertising from the northern European cultures. Being well groomed means matching the right colors and picking the right accessories.

**Literature**