

COMMUNICATING THE STEREOTYPE OF “OTHERNESS” IN EUROPEAN ADVERTISING: CULTURAL AND NATIONAL “FAKE MULTICULTURALISM”

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Abstract: *In its quest for the destination of an ‘all-encompassing’ communication, European advertising builds an image of complexity and oppositions. Constructed as a mingling of cultural values, intensive consumerism and creative touches, the story of advertising is a never-ending analysis of nowadays globalized societies. Moreover, its ramifying story of acceptance, assimilation, rejection and stereotyping brought advertising at a position in which the debate over intercultural representation and consumer behavior is crucial. Consequently, the main question that arises is: in the realm of the thirsty and goods-addict consumers, what type of discourse should advertising in Europe use, so as to emphasize pluralism and still maintain culturally personalized approaches. It is, therefore, the purpose of this paper to explore and analyze the congruencies and disparities between advertising and its social, cultural and economic repositories, on the background of Europe’s image. In this respect, some questions can be formulated: How does advertising pertain to organizing its communication with the overly globalized consumer markets? Is the stereotypical label hereby inserted in such a communicational direction with consumers, and if so, what are the features of an “addressing otherness” discourse with respect to ad typology? Another aim of the current paper is to evoke the level at which European advertising fails to stick to the intercultural framework of reference, through a presentation of the stereotypes of “otherness” and the implied “fake multiculturalism.” The idea behind this assumption is that, while representing ethnic groups differently or by use of a derogatory mechanism, the message cannot be that of Europeanness. Moreover, the focus on linguistic choice of advertising vocabulary is linked to the issue of “linguistic fetishism” and, more importantly, it shows that the variety of linguistic panel in Europe sometimes prevents consumers from decoding the message of advertising. The sphere of this domain allowed for a new analytical introspection in the appearance of this marketing mix, which led to further wanderings in the realm of an advertising that is both plural and rigid. Such an economic force, combined with intercultural representation, serves as an effective means of changing the fairytale of consumerism abuse into a fairly-oriented European happy-end story of multicultural consumers in the land of promising advertising.*

Keywords: communication in advertising; identity; linguistic fetishism; discourse; otherness.

1. European advertising in the context of identity

The label of Europeanism that advertising gains is a landmark of pluralism and multiculturalism that ads carry throughout their messages. In fact, the pattern of identifying Europe with various identities and cultures has even become a creed of the European Union, whose motto is "United in diversity." At the level of advertising, matters gain a new dimension, as markets that are fragmented in terms of linguistic, gender, ethnic or racial criteria require, from advertisers, call for a strenuous and multifaceted message. That is, advertising is faced with addressees that may easily not share common cultures, ideas and product preferences, but that, however, require equal attention. In a world where political correctness remains a major concern, the scope of advertising is to avoid discriminatory cues and, more importantly, to value multiculturalism above all, so that all national identities participate in this communication process.

2. Advertising and Cultural Identity Formation: Communication of Values in European Advertising Vocabulary

Designed as a means of trespassing stereotypical beliefs and getting the message to the customer base, advertising is often required to mirror cultural identities within its messages. The issue of *values* in the context of advertisements is crucial and has a double responsibility: as a basis for the conception of advertising and as a defining trait for the target audience. Values are prerequisites of any culture, determined as a consequence of trying to rank what is important, accepted and desirable. Consequently, when dealing with cultural values, advertising becomes a mirror of good/bad actions and desirable/undesirable behavior to the customer country and the representation of values is tightly related to brand recognition and its identification with a specific country.

Using value appeals in advertising is essential for a proper communication between the producer companies and the customer base. There are two essential reasons that support this theory. Firstly, 'it is possible to predict and explain cultural differences in the persuasiveness of different value appeals' (Hoeken et al., 2007: 20), precisely because value differentiation accounts for a cultural dissociation from other nations. This means that, in countries where values are highly personalized, advertising must be essentially adapted so as to fit the frame of reference. Secondly, value appeals can be considered a trustworthy variable in advertising communication, since such values are identified and recognized as cultural traits to which customers respond.

In Europe, cultural differences and disparities at the level of value appeals represent a solid ground for the necessity to adapt advertising, but also show why Europe cannot be taken for granted as a single market. The leading premise for the analysis of values is Geert Hofstede's (Hofstede, 2001: 241) value orientations applied to intercultural communication: individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity and short-term orientation. Accordingly, in order to present the interdependence between advertising and cultural values, Hofstede's value orientations will be discussed in the context of European advertising.

At a first glance, the European cultural identities appear as nearly similar constructions, with few differences attached, due to their close interaction and geographical proximity. Indeed, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions'

representation, most European countries share common or close scores in three of the dimensions. Namely, 'most European countries are positioned at the individualism extreme of the individualism-collectivism dimension, at the short-term extreme of the long versus short-term orientation and at the medium and low-power distance extreme of the power distance dimension.'(Hofstede, 2001: 356) Consequently, the main disparities occur at the level of the two other dimensions: uncertainty avoidance and masculinity, which account for the influence of value appeals.

The distribution of uncertainty avoidance dimensions on the European scale shows Portugal and Belgium at the top extremes, with scores of 104 and 94 respectively, Sweden and Denmark are located at the bottom extremes, reaching scores of 29 and 23, while, at a middle position one can identify Austria and Germany, with 70 and 65. Likewise at the masculinity pole, Austria and Italy are on a high rank - 79 and 70, whereas Sweden and The Netherlands stand for the feminine pole - 5 and 14 and Belgium and France occupy a middle ground position - 43 and 54.

Referring to the *uncertainty avoidance dimension*, the attached advertising value appeals are the following: "safety, tamed and durable" at the positive pole and "adventure, untamed, magic, youth, casual" at the negative one, each appeal having a series of values that are accounted for in the advertising content. Due to the fact that uncertainty avoidance translates, at a socio-cultural level - in the need for laws, regulations, religion, and technology support and, on the other hand, it refers to the presence of anxiety and a manifestation of security needs, the aim of advertising becomes more clearly oriented. That is, a successful advertisement addressing countries with high uncertainty avoidance index should ensure that the ad content shows the competence of the manufacturer, guarantees for the powerful and advanced technology and facilitates stability and absence of hazards.

Moreover, since "tamed" advertising appeal is one that is characteristic for the positive correlation with high uncertainty avoidance countries (Portugal, Belgium, Greece, and Poland), ads addressed to such nations must contain images of civilized, obedient and responsible individuals. An example to support the above allegations is the German trend of using testing within their advertisements: "Testing and test reports are favored in all medium and strong uncertainty avoidance cultures. Favorite German expressions are "Die Besten im Testen" (The best in the tests) and "Testieger" (The test winner)" (Mooij, 2005: 180). The need to show that a product works and has been thoroughly tested is in accordance with the cultural value of recognized authority and acknowledged top position.

Countries that share a low uncertainty avoidance index (UK, Ireland, Denmark and Sweden) seem to praise distinct values appeals: youth, magic, wonders, courage, adventure, casual and untamed. In advertising vocabulary this means speaking a language that mentions the result and what the product can do rather than an appraisal of its qualities and performances as with the high uncertainty avoidance index. Also, there is no further need of introducing in advertisements the voice of an expert, as customers whose values are the above-mentioned prefer an authentic and spontaneous account instead of the rigid counterpart.

The other significant cultural dimension that fragments the European space is the *masculinity index*, which responds to the following advertising appeals:

“effective, convenient, productivity” on the top masculinity pole and “natural, frail and modest” at the feminine pole. Masculinity must be understood as the level at which male values (traditionalism) are stringent elements within society. Moreover, a country with a high masculine score (Austria, Italy, Hungary, Switzerland) commonly depends upon achievement ideals, assertiveness and materialism, which means that advertising addressed to such a country should be portrayals of the product’s performance capabilities, its effectiveness or accessibility. In addition to these advertising appeals, the cultural values that define high masculinity nations include ‘winning and the wish to dominate’ (Mooij, 2005: 186), represented in ads that proliferate the “simply the best” concept. Likewise, using the productivity appeal, advertising could also use the reference area of dreams and aspirations while conveying the message, since consumers from high masculinity countries are keen on the accomplishment, ambition and self-development ideal.

On the other hand, with countries that have low masculinity scores (Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark) new features of value appeals occur. Namely, feminine cultures thrive on images of caring, small, relationships, modesty, innocence, delicate and sensitive, and require advertisements that approach these country images in the proper vocabulary. There are two noteworthy and successful ads that have accomplished the proper representation of the feminine culture – Carlsberg and Sweden’s Volvo commercial.

In the first case, the logo of the commercial is “*Carlsberg. Probably the best beer in the world*”, which is in fact an understatement, therefore an indirect and delicate accomplishment, highly characteristic of low masculinity nations. The second, a product manufactured and advertised by Sweden, the country with the lowest masculinity index in the world, is a vivid image that focuses on “safety, protecting the family: in feminine cultures, showing-off is negative. The Volvo advertisement says: *True refinement comes from within*, meaning to say you don’t have to show off.” (Mooij, 2005: 175).

The starting premise in this debate was that, despite the geographical proximity and ideological similitudes that European countries share, there are still solid differences of cultural representation and perception. Such cultural disparities were considered in terms of *values*, which, in their own turn, were built upon the clusters of advertising appeals that Pollay (Pollay, 1983: 23) submitted. Eventually, it only took the exemplification of two of Hofstede’s (Hofstede, 2001: 142) dimensions to prove that European advertising can only represent cultural identity through adaptation and molding into cultural patterns.

If, on the one hand, the representation of cultural values and perceptions in advertising has distinct traits for the countries in the Western and Central Europe, the same premise does not apply in the case of Eastern European countries. Moreover, since only very few were granted attention in Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions scale, it is mandatory to draft a framework for the values that Eastern European consumers use when responding to advertising.

Literature review conducted in this area reflected a certain trend according to which ‘transition economies may be expected to have more information-rich advertising because their consumers consider it more important that the ads they face are clear, credible and simple to understand.’ (Herpen et al., 2000: 257) A hypothesis for this condition could be that, being under the communist regime for an extended portion of time, these countries had had little if no impact with commercial representation and variation in advertising campaigns. Accordingly, the

uncertainty that governed society immediately after the 1990s imposed somehow a medium in which advertising had to bring forth clear content, rich in information and especially trustworthy and competent.

However, apart from the typology of advertising that Eastern Europe requires, the problem of the value content of the ads is more important. Customers' need for advertising that is intensively spreading assurances is, in this respect, an essential valued parameter. Cultural values of unbiased authority, relationship safety, and freedom of expression or free choice are popular appeals in Eastern European countries, as they represent the rupture from the previous domination systems. The design of advertising content should, therefore, refer to availability information, "country of origin" cues, and special offers and benefit that come attached to the product.

Furthermore, the cultural identity of Eastern European countries is defined by a "think advertising", a term coined by Rossiter, Percy and Donovan (Rossiter et al., 2000: 171)–typology, which stands for 'advertisements in which a product solves or avoids a problem and advertisements in which a buying decision is made based on logical arguments or objective criteria.' (Herpen et al., 2000: 253) This means that clarity and uniform representation is a landmark of advertising to Eastern European countries, because among the top cultural values, logics, easy accessibility and simplicity occupy top positions. What is more, the role that advertising plays in this context is purely informative, as opposed to western cases in which advertising becomes a power in its own, affecting consumer preferences.

Eventually, to speak of successful advertising in Europe is tantamount to referring to the largest possible array of cultural values that customers share. These values that advertising is required to have in view are in fact, the specific values of each European subcultural audience, since, addressing to a European homogeneous market is an impossible aim. Consequently, in order for advertising to instill a sense of identity in the target audience, it is mandatory to establish a bridge between the advertised product and the highest level of social values.

3. Language, Culture and Identity: the Spinning Whirl of Decoding Advertising to its Cultural Meaning

Imagining the European space as a unified union that aims at constructing a unique market place in the spirit of the "united in diversity" motto is a difficult process. Advertising is perhaps the most important means of popularizing and acknowledging the idea of a joint sense of identity, and, through standardization and overall globalized trends, it nearly manages to accomplish its aim. The decoding methodology that advertising inserts within the proliferated messages is a combination of language, culture and identity, specific for each consumer market and country.

The occurrence of foreign languages in advertising is more problematic when considering the European locus, as compared to the United States, where the advertising vocabulary belongs almost exclusively to English language. Here, advertising must not only address a varied audience, but also, it must ensure the applicability of cross-cultural messages outside of the producer's borders. Nevertheless, sometimes, communication symbols that belong to one country are not understood by the other European nations. Consequently, the responsibility of advertising is to adapt the message and convey a larger meaning.

That English represents the link language of the entire world is no longer a secret, nor is its status as international vocabulary. But the problem arises both at the level of language competence and at the country's number of people who are fluent in English. Needless to say, when advertising a product using English as information and content vocabulary, the addressee cannot be filtered enough so as to comprise only those who are competent in speaking and understanding the language. In reality, such ads are visualized by a large audience, among which the majority is monolingual. What happens in such cases with the message contained in the ad, since the decoding cannot take place?

There are at least three possibilities that European advertising has in range when directing the message towards the multicultural audience. The first is the *translation of foreign language advertisements*, in which the strategy is a typical procedure: standardized ads are translated into the local language spoken by the target consumers, while the content and visual representation remains unchanged. Even if this is an easy and cheap solution, there is still the problem of creating stereotypical otherness by not addressing the consumer in its private language and vocabulary. 'When products are foreign, the significance must be domestic but its reverberation will be intercultural: a translated ad can simultaneously create or revise a stereotype on a foreign culture, while appealing to a specific domestic constituency, a specific segment of the domestic market. (Venuti, 1994: 220)

In other words, when the translation method is used, there is often a disparity between the culture that the advertised product carries and the cultural context to which it is addressed. This disparity is a stereotype of exclusion because the clash derives from the direction of the "country of origin" effect. Namely, the advertised product, manufactured in another country, also carries the image of the respective culture and, by translation of the message; the consumer is under the impression of an invasion. Such an invasion is accomplished at a psychological level: consumers view the use of their language in advertisements as an authority that recognizes local production, whereas with translated advertising the authority is reciprocated to other cultures. Consequently, consumers become deprived of the sense of assurance for their local products advertised in their own language, because, as a result of this advertising strategy, authority can be transferred to other cultures as well.

Secondly, another direction of addressing multilingualism in Europe is the *code-switching* technique, which can be defined as "alternation among different speech varieties within the same event." (Gumperz, 1996: 365) The switching between languages can be considered an appropriate approach of the multicultural European construction, because it uses both the link language-English- and other languages, among which the one that is spoken in the target consumer country. Of course, the main determinant for this strategy is 'the desire to mark, assert or adopt an ethnic or regional identity' (Holmes, 2000:69), which enables the contextual reference through advertising. This way, consumers become acquainted with information about a foreign product, through a vocabulary that is mixed: it can contain the link language, the language of the producer and, essentially, the language of the addressee.

Within the same field of code-switching reference, there is yet another sensitive impact area: the way European cultures accept and adopt foreign words in their vocabularies (especially in the field of economics and IT). Therefore the use of code-switching and loanwords in advertisements addressed to this niche market

are sure to have an impact, because it is already part of the social lifestyle. The case of Romania is interesting in the perspective of advertising otherness essentially from the point of view of consumers using and responding to foreign words as a means of “crossing”/ “passing” for someone else. It applies especially to the youth, however, the phenomenon has reached such a level that most conversations and specific niche market broadcasting television channels resort to the “Englishness” of Romanian language.

The third level in which advertising aims at an actualization of multiculturalism is *language fetishism*. Commodities- products - reach a stage in which they are “social hieroglyphics” - signifiers of socially and culturally determined meanings, which are themselves the products of social relations. How fetishism applies to intercultural advertising in Europe is of particular interest, because there is an occurrence of an intensively used communicative function of language. To fetishize language in advertising means to use, within an ad, foreign linguistic cues, not the same way as code-switching uses other languages. These cues are in fact indicatives of landmarks in certain countries and show that, by using a certain product, the consumer receives a confirmation from an authority expert in the field (the authority being the country whose language is used in the ad).

The premise that language heavily differentiates and divides cultures is mandatory for the description of linguistic fetishism as both ‘product and producer of another allied development in the Europe of the closing years of the 20th century: namely, the extent to which racist and nationalistic discourses are widespread across the continent.’ (Holmes, 2000: 69) The fetish of languages in advertising is responsible for replacing the multicultural ideal with a stereotypical identity creation, because it builds hierarchies among the countries’ images. Hierarchies here identified refer to the way in which, by the use of advertising linguistic fetish, specific competencies are assigned to certain countries, making the other producer countries unequal on the advertising background.

An accurate example of language fetishism and hierarchy building is the label “vin de pays” that France uses: all European countries are aware that France is the recognized authority in wine and cuisine, and, therefore, a product that originates in France benefits from the approval of its national experts. The language fetishism, therefore, applies when other European countries resort to borrowing the French authority in wine/cuisine, by the insertion of French words or even French expression “vin de pays” in advertisements that use another language and are addressed to a different language-speaking customers. Likewise, cosmetics also carry the Paris label, regardless of the country in which they are advertised.

Eventually, the framework of language in European advertising can be considered, on the basis of the cases presented above, a case of “fake multiculturalism”. The “fake” label best reflects the current situation in Europe, because even though there is an intensive use of foreign words in ads throughout the continent, the dominant language remains a monolingual one, just like the addressee’s typology. Namely, diversity cannot be approached entirely due to the fact of distinct levels of development that advertising has in countries.

4. Ethnic Advertising and the Story of Ethnocentrism: how Commercials Build Stereotypical Imagery

Ethnic advertising can function as the framework in which the consumers' stories of identity are told, often in subliminal cues and images. Rendering the profile of ethnic groups as a variable of marketing goods, advertising enables the making and deciphering of a jig-saw puzzle, whose pieces consist of ethnic consumer behaviour, dress codes, musical and culinary preferences etc. Even though the aspect of ethnic advertising is highly discussed with reference to the American markets, due to the large numbers of immigrants that cross the boundaries annually, Europe is not at all foreign of similar experiences. It is only the fact that "multiculturalism" has been adopted as European framework by the EU that the illusion of a fair and diversified advertising still exists. However, the disclosure of a varied and fragmented side of Europe is imminent, as more and more ethnic groups are claiming the recognition of their identity and their presence.

The most stringent need, in this respect, is to ensure a proportional representation of minorities within advertising, whether that implies the actual use of ethnic groups' representatives in ads or the addressing of media messages towards specific such groups. Needless to say, the problem of ethnic advertising also draws attention to the religious aspect, since certain ethnic consumers live exclusively in accordance to their religious code of conduct. However, one must take into account the fact that even though there are numerous ethnic groups in Europe, not all of them claim voicing. Also, "Europeans still have trouble identifying even second-generation immigrants as citizens. We tend to define them by ethnic origin, color or religion. The expression "a Turk with a German passport" is a telling example of this mentality." (Özdemir, 2008) Consequently, a brief reference imposes on each of the visible ethnic groups that Europe hosts: the French Muslims, the Turkish Germans, the British Hindi, and respectively the Roma population.

Firstly, the French Muslims' ethnic representation in France amounts to about 6 millions (Ketani, 2010: 2), which clearly states that a distinct advertising approach is required. Naturally, to address ethnic groups it is first necessary to have products and services that are especially directed towards such markets - in this case food and clothing articles being the most need-oriented products. The main failure of communication in advertising for ethnic groups occurs at the level of clashes between different ethnic groups and the mainstream society. For instance, in the case of French Muslims the veil affair (l'affair du voile), in which the wearing of full-face covering with burqas or niqabs led to endless debates, somehow affects the representation of Muslim women in commercials, which commonly portray stereotypical depictions of women as symbols of motherhood, sex-appeal or business. Consequently, how could advertising to this type of ethnic minority not come into conflict with the mainstream customer base? The most viable solution would be to advertise in such a way as to divert attention from clothing trends (which are considered to be a proof of religious radicalism) and focus mainly on textual cues and written support. (Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the commercial created by German lingerie retailer Liaison Dangereuse, where the stereotype of women as sex symbol crosses the boundaries of the veil issue and represents attraction regardless of the ethnic belonging.)

There is a similar situation with the British Hindi ethnic groups, whose population is 13% (about 700 000) of the total English population, according to the

British Census in 2011. A particularity presented by this group is the importance of word-of-mouth advertising, which functions due to the fact that 'the newly arrived trust peers and friends to inform them on the important aspects until they can find the information themselves.' (Neff, 2009) Advertising can therefore count on those customers who reacted to a specific ad and who are sure to use the word-of-mouth form of advertising the message. Moreover, such cultures are collectivistic nations and, therefore rely on the word-of-mouth communication, which, in turn, allows for a proper management of ethnic advertising. Consequently, to address the ethnic group of Hindis is hardly a challenge, especially since the linguistic aspect is not a problem for this type of advertising.

The German Turks, another numerically relevant ethnic group of Europe, pose yet another personalized problem to advertising. In fact, according to the 2003 Eurobarometer, the position of Euro-Turks in the context of Europeanness is not one of disparity, but instead, it appears as an ethnic group willing to blend in. 'Euro-Turks do not pose a threat to the political and social system of the countries of settlement, but rather have the willingness to incorporate themselves into the system.'(Kaya, Kentel, 2005: 154) This requires for a type of advertising that is bilingual; that is, one that addresses the needs of the ethnic groups but also that doesn't disentangle them from the mainstream German consumers.

Eventually, the Roma ethnic groups, predominant in Romania and Italy are, perhaps, the most interesting case, due to their derogatory position in the European perception. The powerful stereotypy to which the Roma are associated (criminals, thieves, uneducated people, etc.) prevents them from recognition of identity and from having a voiced identity. In terms of advertising, however, there is a specific tendency related to their representation, which could lead to an improvement both in terms of ethnic perception and in terms of advertising consumer diversity. This tendency refers to the fact that all ads related to the Roma ethnic groups are public awareness campaigns (be those education equal rights, violence against Roma women, anti-discrimination ads), conceived so as to address the mainstream population. Therefore, advertising only represents the Roma- in order to modify the general perception- but does not refer to their specific needs, nor does it orient any ads towards this ethnicity. Accordingly, the display of ethnic advertising is never entirely attained, instead, it is an unfinished project meant to cover the basics of ethnic voices.

To speak of a fair ethnic representation in advertising is tantamount to changing biased public attitudes in the European space. If the scope is to create through the media, a Europe in which immigrants and mainstream groups can relate efficiently and can forge solid grounds of communication, the rule is to facilitate a special advertising discourse in which ethnic groups can identify with their adopted countries and can also maintain their private cultural values.

5. Conclusion

In trying to regard advertising as a hybrid between culture and economy, there cannot be any pre-established direction: advertising is in as much a direct product of economy activity as it is a consequence of the cultural forces. In the eyes of consumers this reads as follows: individuals, who aim at displaying their social status, can only resort to the advertising consumerism frenzy so that they can locate themselves in a global society. Such a global village is extremely biased

however, because it imposes a specific role on advertising. Namely, the scope is a dual opposition: it aims at a global economic accomplishment of consumption patterns and it addresses the messages in a polyglot discourse.

The charges that economy and culture apply to advertising are, therefore, both favorable and biased. European advertising is in search of epitomes of cultural and national identities in the context of the growing globalised village, while, at the opposite pole, it is also in the impossibility of finding the solution to erase marring discrepancies. Its discourse must not be an overly stretched language of marketing, as consumers are no longer fooled by the glamorous images that appeal to extensive consumerism. The only level at which such a discourse can become a functional mechanism is at the crossroads of economy and culture. This way, should a pattern of mature and European engaged interest representation emerge from narrative of advertising, the story of great accomplishments could become embedded in the intercultural discourse and, therefore, change the current axis.

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