



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Campaigns Across Countries

Multinational companies are attempting to turn advertising expenses across countries into investments.

Just a channel may separate them - though connected below the sea – but the English and the French are as different as chalk and cheese. Centuries long history – and differences of race, law, habits, and structure of society – separates them. Not that England is a cohesive whole. The ‘United Kingdom’ contains four distinctive homelands: England, Wales, Scotland and Ulster. Move across countries, and then the differences multiply.

These differences of race, color, habits, religion, society, etc. pose problems for multinational companies that vie for the mind space of consumers spread across countries and continents. Are the differences insuperable? How do they manage to carry a common thread through all, or most of their advertising, and in their marketing communications?

Take, for example, the advertising for an international soap brand, Lux. The brand is associated internationally as the soap of the movie stars, and the campaigns are configured around the popular icons of beauty, in whichever country the product is advertised in. Then, how are the local adaptations different?

Deference to customs

In countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, the trappings of Hollywood are emphasized in the ads. In the Arab countries, the washing sequences are handled differently, as skin show is unacceptable in the local context.

Verbal claims also vary. In Japan, for example, commercials cannot claim that a movie star uses Lux; merely that she recommends it. The Japanese language does not easily handle shades of meaning between two extremes: it is possible to say ‘good’ or ‘bad’, but not ‘good enough’. Japanese advertising is more emotional compared to that in other countries. It eschews hard sell, which is one reason that multinationals take special care not to replicate their ‘international advertising’ in countries like Japan and Korea. They can do so in European countries and even in those like the Philippines.

In many countries there are trade union restrictions that say only local film technicians should shoot ads that are aired locally. While many attempts are made to ‘transliterate’ advertising messages and concepts, many of the advertising messages and themes that multinational companies come up with are conceived in the English language. And that poses problems.

Roping in local partners

Local branches of international advertising agencies or their local partners cope with these difficulties by employing local copywriters who are less concerned with generating big ideas than with understanding the nuances of the English language, and conveying the desired and socially acceptable messages to local audiences. Often, they convey the intent of the messages by using more idiomatic phrases in the local language.



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A positive advantage of a brand's internationality is that it generates its own appeal. Witness the appeal of Coca Cola, Pepsi, Nike, McDonald's, Marlboro, etc.; they all carry the unmistakable appeal that – over time – has come to be symbolically identified with the American good life.

Controversies regarding some products notwithstanding, these enduring symbols of American consumerism have over a period of time won over hundreds of millions of consumers across the globe. There are also brands that have come to be identified with their country of origin – like BMW with Germany, Chanel with France, Foster's with Australia, Toyota with Japan, and the like.

Getting the message across

Food and eating habits dramatically vary in different countries, and it is difficult to harmonize international branded food products to cater to audiences across countries. People prefer instant coffee in Britain and Spain; ground coffee in Germany and Scandinavia. Cold breakfasts that are popular in the US, Australia, Britain and Canada get a cold shoulder in many parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Viva la difference

The leading brand of beer is different in every country. Wine drinking and preferences vary enormously across countries; so does the eating of cheese. The British like lamb meat, the Germans do not. The leading brand of soup in the US is (Campbell's) condensed; in Britain and the Netherlands it is full strength (Heinz and Unox). A brand of cheese (Kraft P'tit Quebec) has its market only in French speaking Canada. There is an abundance of such examples.

In campaigns across countries, the underlying principle for marketing companies is that they be very cautious about extending their food brands, and be even more cautious about using international campaigns to advertise them. A large number of manufacturers are aware of these limitations, and they sometimes customize an international product to a local audience, or address taste preferences and sell it locally. For example, about half of Nestle brands sold in India are not sold anywhere else in the world.

To continue giving their brands wider exposure, international brands are coming up with products that cater to local demand and taste. Pepsico's entry into the snack food market in India with Kurkure is not aimed at just catering to the Indian taste, but at taking the brand to the Indian Diaspora as well, and to markets where it can ring in sales.

If international brands respect local customs, address local preferences and tastes, and convey their messages in an idiom that is appreciated, there is no reason for them not to succeed. Exclusive campaigns, keeping the local audience in mind, and empowering the local partner design the message or authenticate it will go a long way in ensuring its success.