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## A comparison of print advertisements from Australia and Croatia

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## ABSTRACT

This study extends the research on cross-cultural advertising by comparing print advertisements from Australia and Croatia in terms of emotional appeals and information content. A content analysis of advertisements from magazines similar in readership profile from Australia and Croatia revealed that Croatian advertisements make greater use of emotional appeals and informational cues. Cross-cultural understanding is imperative in order to be able to reflect the cultural values and norms of the intended audience. These findings are timely given that Western and European countries are coming into far greater contact due to increasing globalisation.

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## 1. Introduction

For an advertising message to resonate with a target audience, it must reflect the social norms and cultural values of a given society (Hirschman, 1981). Ideally, advertisements would be created within a particular community and consumed by members of the same community. This is in itself an issue when developing international campaigns for similarly constituted markets, but is exacerbated when creating messages for simultaneous use in both developed markets such as USA, UK, Australia, and emerging markets such as Croatia, Czech Republic, Russia, and Turkey. The phrase 'lost in translation' comes to mind when one considers the appropriateness of messages developed in perhaps the USA and then employed in countries such as Turkey or Croatia where the social fabric is in many ways quite divergent to the USA, and many firms operating in these emerging markets are relatively young and managerially inexperienced (Hitt et al., 2000; Uhlenbruck and De Castro, 2000). The motivation for this study is drawn from the need to understand cultural diversity – hence the call to investigate marketing activity in developed and emerging markets (Hitt et al., 2000), particularly with respect to Eastern Europe (Arnold and Quelch, 1998; Jancic and Zabkar, 1998), by contrasting the approach to women's magazine advertising in a developed and an emerging market (Australia and Croatia).

At the heart of the issue is the much deliberated question of whether advertising can and should be standardised, however the argument becomes more complex when developed and emerging markets are involved. The theoretical foundations of the standardisation/localisation debate centre on the perception of consumer homogeneity and/or the movement toward homogeneity

(Levitt, 1983; Wind, 1986; Shoham, 1995; Griffith et al., 2000; Samiee and Roth, 1992; Zou and Cavusgil, 2002). Those who view markets, or consumer wants and needs, as being homogenous, argue that the standardisation of advertising is more effective as it allows for the lowering of costs, via economies of scale, and thus increasing margins for a firm (Levitt, 1983; Jain, 1989). The alternative view is of markets being heterogeneous, representing consumers with differing wants and needs, and therefore there is greater value delivered via localisation (Ryans and Donnelly, 1969; Wind, 1986; Harvey, 1993). After almost four decades, there continues to be much debate and divided views (Ryans et al., 2003).

Over the past three decades, a number of studies have made valuable contributions to the understanding of the differences among cultures in terms of informational and emotional contents in advertisements (Belk and Bryce, 1986; Bjerke and Polegato, 2001; Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver, 2006; Gilly, 1988; Hong et al., 1987; Mueller, 1991). In an endeavour to better understand some of the differences between advertising in culturally and developmentally distinct markets, this study investigates the differences found in advertising expressions in print advertisements from Australia and Croatia, a developed and an emerging market. To the authors' knowledge, no previous study has compared differences in advertising in Australia and Croatia. In this study, we specifically investigated the differences between Australian and Croatian advertisements in terms of the degree of emotional appeal in general and in terms of informativeness of the advertisements. A comparative study in the form of a multi-dimensional content analysis (Mueller, 1992; So, 2004) was undertaken between two corresponding women's magazines in Australia and Croatia resulting in a number of findings that can inform communication strategy particularly where emerging markets are involved.

Emotional appeals are widely used in advertising because of the positive effect they have on consumers' reactions to advertisements (Shimp, 1981). The most common typology that has

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received wide usage in studying emotion in consumer research is the categorical approach according to which, all emotions stem from a relatively small number of basic categories that are qualitatively distinct (e.g., Plutchik, 1980). For this study, we defined emotional appeal as the extent to which advertising tries to build “affective or subjective impressions of intangible aspects of a product” (Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1984), and we measured emotional response by using the scale developed by Plutchik (1980).

An advertisement’s informativeness is a reflection of the extent to which advertisements focus on the consumers’ practical, functional, or utilitarian need for the product (Mueller, 1991) so that they might make a sound choice between products or brands. A number of studies claim that the study of informational content of advertisements has become an issue of considerable concern throughout the world because of the increase in international trade and promotion across diverse cultures (Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver, 2006; Byfield and Callier, 1997; Cervellon and Dube, 2000).

## 2. Literature review

The content of print advertising comprises visual and textual elements, both of which contribute to how well a target audience will associate with the communication. Indeed, ethnic identification is acknowledged as an important cultural variable that contributes to consumers’ purchase behaviour (Hirschman, 1981; Liu et al., 2007), their media use (Deshpande et al., 1986; Donthu and Cherian, 1992), and evaluation of advertisements (Paek and Nelson, 2007). Pictures of people – models, celebrity endorsers, spokespersons, ‘average’ consumers, managers and employees – make up a large part of marketing imagery (Donthu and Cherian, 1992), serving as stimuli, signs, or representations that drive cognition, interpretation and preferences (Hirschman, 1981). It has been reported that 70% of the women who regularly read fashion magazines consider them to be an important source of beauty and fitness information (Sarwer et al., 2004), and that a quarter of these women are reported to have a strong interest in imitating fashion models (Sarwer et al., 2004). Fashion magazines essentially provide prescriptions for becoming more beautiful – through artful use of make-up, exercise, clothing selection, and so on. They target distinct cultural dispositions and are a potent means of socialising young consumers about beauty and fashion, and for advertising beauty and fashion related products.

Previous research has by and large neglected and oversimplified the role of the visual image in global print advertisements. Consumers’ contextual background plays an important role in the effectiveness of visual elements of an advertising campaign just as do textual elements (Donthu and Cherian, 1992).

The continued globalisation of markets throughout the developed world, not surprisingly, sees the role of culture and cultural sensitivity becoming of increasing importance within this changing environment (Taylor, 2005). It is also evident that the powerhouse western economies have become the dominant embodiment of stereotypes portrayed to the rest of the world through advertising, highlighting what has been described as ‘cultural imperialism’ (Anholt, 2005). This is particularly pertinent to the ‘nouveaux’ markets emerging in Eastern Europe that have strong cultural heritages, as they struggle to meld tradition with progress. Indeed, whilst described as ‘emerging’, perhaps a more appropriate descriptor from an advertising perspective is ‘merging’ as they take on the cultural influences of others in their approach to communication.

Cross-cultural advertising research is a well established field however the predominant focus has been on Western or developed economies (Cervellon and Dube, 2000; Mueller, 1992). It is critical to now extend this focus to emerging economies (Taylor, 2005) such as those of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This is an

interesting part of the world from a marketing perspective, given that similar developments that unfolded in Western Europe over a period of 30–40 years have occurred in CEE in just a few years (Arnold and Quelch, 1998). The liberalisation of the political and economic systems in CEE opened a huge new opportunity for foreign firms, and its significance is evident when one considers that the market size represents some 325 million people, not far off the 370 million in the EU (Schuh, 2000). This study adds to the understanding of emerging markets by contrasting the approach to women’s magazine advertising in two markets; one a developed market and one an emerging market (Australia and Croatia), that exhibit a number of similarities but that are culturally quite different.

This is the first study to compare the markets of Australia and Croatia. However, parallels can be drawn to other market contexts where there are cultural diversities (i.e. between other developed and emerging markets). These countries were selected because:

1. Whilst exhibiting a number of differences, both markets are quite multicultural in make up, they also exhibit similar leisure pursuits and interests, have a comparable social structure and utilise humour as part of daily life and language. This suggests that at least within certain common product categories, a parallel approach to advertising execution may be possible.
2. The cultural and economic differences between Australia and Croatia were expected to affect the transferability of advertising, thereby making it a good test case to examine the plausibility of standardisation (Hite and Fraser, 1988). See Table 1.
3. Finally, there has been a call to investigate marketing activity in Eastern Europe and to contrast this to Western markets (Arnold and Quelch, 1998; Hassan et al., 2007; Jancic and Zabkar, 1998; Kornai, 2006; Meyer, 2000).

In sum, Australians and Croatians differ in terms of purpose of communication and the context to which their culture belongs; and these differences are likely to be reflected in the nature or type of appeals used in advertising in the two countries. On the strength of the authors’ depth of knowledge of the two cultures, it was expected that more emotion would be evident in Croatian advertisements, and more information being presented in Australian advertisements (see Section 4.3 for further discussion). Consequently, we offer the following hypotheses.

H1: Croatian advertisements use more emotional appeals than Australian advertisements.

H2: Australian advertisements contain more information cues than Croatian advertisements.

## 3. Research methodology

This is the first study to compare the markets of Australia and Croatia. The study compared Australian and Croatian advertisements in terms of content and expression by using content analysis (Kassarjian, 1977). Content analysis is a commonly adopted methodology (Mueller, 1992; Taylor, 2005). Many previous cross-cultural advertising studies have adopted a quantitative approach to content analysis, examining only verbal content. However, given that advertising communicates through both verbal and visual cues, a multi-dimensional qualitative approach was implemented to capture cultural significance (Mueller, 1992; So, 2004). An alternative methodological approach that could have been adopted for this study was semiotic analysis. The authors determined however, that semiotics was less suitable to their research purpose than content analysis and more breadth of analysis was preferred. Both emotion and informativeness were examined via two complimentary approaches. The Mood Rating Scale developed by Plutchik

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