

The Effectiveness and Effects of Intercultural Communication in Advertising

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What is Intercultural Communication

According to Franz-Josef Eilers, “intercultural communication means the sharing of information and knowledge, of sentiments and experiences by people from different cultures” (1992). In order to effectively communicate between cultures (to have intercultural communication), we must share a mutual understanding of different cultural backgrounds, preconditions, and conditions of people linked or to be linked together.

There are many different reasons why members of all societies should be well-equipped in their knowledge of intercultural traditions and forms of communication. The concept of intercultural communication can cover a multitude of different categories, from verbal to nonverbal communication, from business to personal.

In this research paper, we will be observing intercultural communication, but more specifically, the role that intercultural communication plays in the world of advertising and why in order for companies to market their product appropriately and successfully among cultures, they must be well-educated in the customs, traditions, languages, and values of each respect culture that they wish to appeal to. First, we will observe how culture affects advertising expression and communication style.

How Culture Affects Advertising Expression and Communication Style

Culture plays an integral role in communication and in order to have effective intercultural communication, we must have an educated understanding of different cultures. Because culture plays such an integral role in expression and communication, it is therefore an essential component in advertising.

In this section, we will look at the relationship between society and the communication media, how the media influences society, and how society influences the media. Over the years and the rise of modern advertising, there has been much debate circulating in regards to whether or not the influence of the media predominates, meaning that the media mold and control the patterns of society, or if the media simply reflect what is already happening in society (Unwin, 1974).

Advertising may not be the first form of communication or reflection of culture that one thinks of, however, in the words of McLuhan (1964), “the ads of our time are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities.” Advertisements can be seen as unique composites of words and pictures, sounds and movements, and symbols and slogans. Per discussion in Dr. Akbar Javidi’s Intercultural Communication class at UNK, symbols are a very important component in the composition of communication.

In his article “How Culture Affects Advertising Expression and Communication Style,” Unwin makes a comparison that reveals not only differences in social behavior and customs, such as dress, eating habits, and everyday situations, all of which can be clearly visible in different advertisements and all of which are essential components in culture, but also draws attention to differences in advertising expression. The point he makes is that we often take for granted our

own modes of expression until we see them compared with those of another culture communicating in the same medium. Believing that we can gather insights on American modes of advertising expression and the fundamental cultural values by which they are influenced, Unwin compares American advertising with that of British advertising (although this point can be observed by comparing American advertising with that of any other culture).

In his comparison, he observes that, intentionally or not, British advertising expression has the effect of leaving an audience with a rather general impressions of a product's values and benefits, while American advertisements are rarely deterred from focussing on a specific feature or attribute. Secondly, British advertisements sometimes seem to revel ambiguity; whereas, American advertisement take great pains to be exact and definite (1974). He goes on to suggest that "a British ad often appears to want each individual member of its audience to participate in the communication process and each make his own interpretation of its message. An American ad usually likes to leave no uncertainties in the minds of its audience and to get the message across as loud and clear."

The comparisons that are made truly reflect profound cultural influences on the modes of advertising expression in each respective country. These comparisons did not highlight creative content or even the basic idea of selling, but they focused on the differences in advertising expression.

Advertising: Student Perceptions and the Collegiate Recruitment of International Students

Working in recruitment at a college campus, this is a form of intercultural communication and advertising expression that I am faced with every day. The recruitment and retention of international students is an integral part of my job, as well as understanding the perceptions of students and their reactions to different forms of advertising.

In *Understanding Cross-Cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General: Implications for Advertising Educators and Practitioners* (Andrews, J. Craig et. al, 1991), a study is produced to present a cross-cultural comparison of student perceptions toward advertising in general. A primary advantage of examining the perceptions of advertising, as done in this article, is that this construct is an integral part of a theoretical network of relationships regarding advertising's impact on the individual (1991). There has been considerable interest and correlation between one's attitude towards a specific advertisement as an important antecedent to their attitude as the brand as a whole.

Migrating from individual students' perceptions to international perceptions of advertising, we can immediately see the practicality in having a construct understanding of this realm in order to most effectively utilize global marketing. It can be argued that we are all becoming "one large communication village."

Diving deeper into the insight of international students, Marta Dosa (1993) takes an individualistic look at recruitment and education goals for international students. The topics of students' perceptions of advertising and the recruitment and retention of international students at college campuses have a very clear correlation when considering the importance of advertising when recruiting these students. To

identify some solutions to the recruitment puzzle, we need to understand better the environment of populations that give us international students, that is, the interplay of trends in global economic, political, and cultural relations (p. 100).

In my opinion, and as echoed in the various articles that have been cited, the ability to have a positive ability to communicate with these prospective students is absolutely imperative in being able to not only recruit but to also retain these international students. Without the inability to effectively communicate with them, their interest in their respective institutions would not exist. Further, this communication is of course directly related to advertising because ultimately, in recruiting any new individuals, we are exercising advertising, marketing, and sales strategies in order to “sell” them on our university. Promotion and sales are two very important facets of advertising and it is integral to understand the culture that you are working to “win over” in this capacity.

Now tangent on the above, to bring back our article “Understanding Cross-Cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General: Implications for Advertising Educators and Practitioners” (1991) that was previously discussed, it is necessary for us to understand exactly what it is that makes these international students tick. In order to do so, we need to have a thorough understanding of a cross-cultural student’s perception of advertising in general.

Ethnic Consumers and Targeted Marketing

As a segway from our conversation discussing advertising and international students, we will now be discussing ethnic consumers and their reactions to

targeted marketing as we dive deeper into the roles and relationships that intercultural communication plays in the worlds of advertising and marketing.

Advertising is not a “one campaign fits all markets” type of game, and this is something that marketers are becoming increasingly more aware of. Today, we can observe marketers recognizing the growing power of ethnic groups, and such responding with more targeted marketing efforts. By adopting intercultural communication practices into our businesses and resonating that in our advertising and marketing efforts, we can enhance communication with and gain the approval of each of our intended audiences.

In the article “Ethnic consumer Reaction to Targeted Marketing: A Theory of Intercultural Accommodation” (Holland, Gentry, 1999), the authors present a model that views the consumer as having both affective and attributional responses to targeted communication. This means that while a consumer may have a very positive and well-received reaction to targeted forms of marketing, there can also be a negative and poorly-received reaction to this same form of marketing as well. For example, while one consumer may receive a report with a response such as, “This ad shows caring concern regarding all Americans,” another consumer may respond to the same advertisement with, “It seems that they will say whatever they can to appease the black community in order to sell their product.”

While some companies may create forms of targeted marketing in an effort to appease to certain demographics an addendum to their usual work, other companies have adopted it as an entire division of their business. For example, Kraft General Foods and Pepsi-Co have instituted special divisions within their marketing

departments to develop targeted strategies for communicating to ethnic groups through traditional advertising as well as through diverse channels such as ethnic event sponsorship (1999). One method that they utilize in order to create an effective form of targeted marketing is through the solicitation of their ethnic employees. Another method that they utilize is the commitment to the support and sponsorship of ethnic events (such as Calle Ocho, a Hispanic street festival in Miami, and the Hispanic World's Fair in New York). Further, Kraft also co-sponsors a cookbook with the National Council of Negro Women and, through Miler Brewing, a series of Kwanza greeting cards for the Thurgood Marshall Fund (1999).

The relationship between the aforementioned methods of ethnic engagement in corporate sponsorship and targeted marketing has a very clear and direct relationship to intercultural communication. Companies like Kraft are working to expand their relationships and their communication with ethnic groups in order to develop a better understanding for their cultures. Thus, the companies are supporting ethnic communities, and in so doing are building brand awareness. According to Holland and Gentry (1999) these companies' use of cultural symbols to reach ethnic consumers has been generally well received by those consumers. Of course the development of new market segments is not a rare thing or something that is owned predominantly by companies like Kraft; this is a method that many other lesser-known companies are practicing as well.

Applications to Ethnic Targeting. In the research presented by Holland and Gentry (1999), they discuss the use of promotional communications and their intention to communicate effectively and gain the approval of a targeted audience.

Organizations tend to accommodate their customer groups to win their business and build brand equity. Tangent, communication across ethnic groups often involves accommodation to the targeted group's culture. However, in that attempt, companies may go beyond merely matching their target's speech or language styles and use cultural symbols to become more similar to and gain the approval of their audience. According to research presented in the text (1999), researchers drew on speech accommodation research in their examination of Hispanic consumers' reactions to the use of Spanish language in advertisements; their hypothesis that "for accommodation to occur, Hispanics must perceive the choice and use of Spanish in the advertisement as an indicator of the advertiser's respect for the Hispanic culture and desire to break down cultural barriers through reduction of linguistic dissimilarities" (Holland and Gentry, p. 69). In this study, what they found was that the use of Spanish language in advertising increased perceptions of the advertiser's sensitivity to Hispanic culture, and those perceptions were associated positively with affect toward the advertisements.

This was an interesting finding as one could see a Hispanic consumer's reaction to this study go either way. While some Hispanic consumers may be sensitized to the advertisement and respond positively to it, other consumers may feel a sense of mockery or that these companies are trying to play them in order to acquire their business. In my opinion, however, this study is flawed. While this study provides valuable contributions to the marketing literature, they were solely and entirely within the linguistic domain of speech research. The only aspect of accommodation under investigation was language use (English only, Spanish only,

or a combination of Spanish and English). Thus, all they were able to gather or learn from this study is a consumer's reaction to speech. While speech and language are very important components of culture, they are only one aspect of what makes up a culture.

The model presented in this research and the findings presented regarding ethnic consumers' reactions to targeted marketing is both very interesting and very helpful in the world of ethnic targeted marketing. It of course is very beneficial for advertisers to be able to have the insight and the awareness as to how ethnic consumers will react to targeted marketing and how they will feel receiving specific accommodation to their culture.

Of course, every person is different. As previously mentioned, while one demographic of consumers may feel sensitized and accommodated in receiving a specific form of targeted marketing, another demographic of consumers out of the same culture may feel like they are being taken advantage of and perhaps even offended that these advertisers think that this is the primary way to appeal to them. Fortunately, with this research, we are presented with critical information that pertains to how ethnic consumers will emotionally respond to cultural accommodation. Unfortunately, we are unable to determine what their behavioral reaction will be to this accommodation. This, of course, is the most critical part in advertising: the action.

Most importantly and in regards to this specific research paper of mine, the research presented by Holland and Gentry indicates the value and the importance in cultural accommodation and the effects of ethnic targeted marketing within

advertising. This is extremely relevant in regards to intercultural communication as in order to successfully and effectively carry out a targeted marketing strategy, there must be a reasonable understanding of the culture in which you are working to identify with's customs, traditions, language, symbols, etc.

The Influence of Family Communication Patterns on Parental Reactions toward Advertising

In the previous section, we examined targeted marketing towards specific demographics and cultures and what their reactions were to these advertisements. Similarly, in this section we will continue to observe reactions toward advertising but will focus our observation to examine these reactions at a more familial level, analyzing the influence of family communication patterns on parental reactions toward advertising.

In 1998, the authors Rose, Bush, and Kahle examined this subject and provided critical feedback to the Journal of Advertising. Their study was cross-national, examining the family communication patterns and general attitudes toward television advertising among mothers of children three to eight years of age in the United States and Japan. In order to categorize their observations, they used a four-category typology based on concept and socio-orientation in order to classify mothers of both nationalities. Predictably, *laissez-faire* (lower socioeconomic) mothers tended to have the most positive attitudes toward and the lowest mediation of their children's exposure to television advertising. Higher

socioeconomic mothers, conversely, had the highest mediation and the least positive attitudes and reactions toward the same type of advertising.

Children. Children have always been a very important, yet controversial, target for advertising. According to Competitive Media Reporting (Rose *et. al*, p. 71), “U.S. advertisers spent \$894 million on children’s television in 1996, an increase of 11% over the 1885 expenditure.” Because this presented research is a bit outdated, it would most likely be fair to assume that these numbers have continued their steady climb over these past couple of decades. It is an interesting concept to focus advertising efforts so heavily on children. Overall, the global children’s market holds tremendous potential, but little research has addressed international attitudes toward advertising and family communication patterns.

Attitude toward advertising is something that has been studied more in the United States than most other countries. Over time, concerns have grown about the possible influence that advertising may have on the American society (1998). Some of the typical criticisms that are presented are that advertising makes false and misleading claims, promotes undesirable values, including materialism, and exploits vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. All of those claims are particularly relevant to advertising directed toward small children. Of course, in advertising, we are all affected and we can all be taken advantage of in terms of what we are told and how we are affected, but children quite obviously are the most vulnerable of any demographic and are the most likely to have their perspectives and their minds twisted to believe or be controlled by what they see in advertising or on television in general.

Past research has indicated that family communication is related to parental restriction and monitoring of children's consumption and media behaviors (as originally insinuated in the opening of this section). However, much of this past research has examined parental responses to children's purchase requests, and control and mediation of children's media exposure. However, there has not been much research conducted that has related family communication patterns to attitudes toward advertising in general or examined family communication patterns and advertising-related parental practices in a cross-cultural context.

Theoretically, it makes sense and seems fair to assume that parental attitudes toward advertising should relate to family communication patterns and societal attitudes toward advertising. Practically, family communication patterns are a potentially valuable tool for segmenting families across international borders and assessing the degree of parental concern about and mediation of children's advertising exposure.

According to the research presented (1998), parental reactions to targeted children's advertising is being reviewed as it is the most controversial form of advertising. While it is the most controversial, unfortunately, it is also the most prevalent. Their cross-national study focused on the United States and Japan as the two countries traditionally have led the world in television viewing and advertising expenditures (which is a little embarrassing but no surprise). While the Japanese spend more time watching TV than any other Asian people, approximately 2.5 hours a day (1998, p. 72), in the United States, however, children two to 11 years of age watch an average of 2.7 hours of television a day.

While the government does have some restrictions on advertising toward children and the amount of exposure that they receive, these restrictions are of course limited, and this type of regulation comes back on parental control more than anything else.

Family Communication Patterns. So what does advertising toward children have to do with intercultural communication? According to the study presented, family communication is a fundamental aspect of consumer socialization. We also know that family communication and family communication patterns are a fundamental component of intercultural communication, with families playing a pivotal role in the development of culture, traditions, and language among their generation and future ones as well.

Current conceptualizations have their roots in general models of communication and socialization. There are a couple of different spectrums of parents that are reviewed: the parents that restrict their children's purchasing and the parents that encourage children to develop independent preferences and evaluations. The below model presents the four-category typology that the researchers Rose *et. al* presented in their research on the study of the influence of family communication patterns on parental reactions toward advertising.

| | | <i>Socio-Orientation</i> | |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | <i>Low</i> | <i>High</i> |
| <i>Concept-Orientation</i> | <i>Low</i> | <i>Laissez-Faire</i> •Little communication with children •Little parental impact on consumption | <i>Protective</i> •Stress vertical relationships •Obedience and social harmony •Children's exposure to outside information is limited |
| | <i>High</i> | <i>Pluralistic</i> •Stress horizontal relationships •Issue-oriented communication •Children are encouraged to explore ideas and express opinions | <i>Consensual</i> •Maintain control over children's behavior •Stress both issue-oriented communication and the consideration of others |

The presented model above gives us a good understanding and insight into determining family communication patterns and how they respond to advertising when it affects their children. While of course one parent might not necessarily fall perfectly into one of these specific contexts, it provides positive insight for us and gives us a solid grasp on what different categories of parents will feel and how they will react to their children's exposure to advertising.

The research presented here and the model given allows us to have the tools that we need in order to assess and analyze the potential reactions to advertising toward any family of any culture. This model is not focused on just one specific demographic, but is constructed in a way that it can be applied to any person of any country.

Conclusion

Throughout the entirety of this research paper, there has been a lot of information presented in regards to intercultural communication and how we can apply it and see it throughout the world over advertising.

Though each category discussed was unique and very different, all were extremely relevant. With the conclusion of this paper, the hope for the reader is to be able to see the importance of intercultural communication and expression in being able to be an effective advertiser.

So throughout the course of this paper, we reviewed what intercultural communication is. We gave a definition of intercultural communication and a brief understanding of its relevance in society. We then reviewed how culture affects advertising expression. This piece was very important to the discourse of this assignment as it demonstrated, not necessarily advertising's effect on culture, but how culture itself plays a very pivotal role in the nature of advertising. Following our look on how culture affects advertising expression, we segway'ed into student perceptions on advertising and the recruitment and retention of international students at a college or university. While this section was not as blatantly related to advertising as our pieces regarding TV ads, this section was most relevant to how I use advertising in my job every day. It is my hope that this section can open the eyes of readers to understand the perplexity of advertising and how it is relevant in nearly every field. Next, we looked at ethnic consumers and targeted marketing. This section tied in nicely to our final piece that took a look at the influence of family communication patterns on parental reactions to advertising. Unlike any other section, this section focused almost entirely on advertising toward children.

Though advertising can be lucrative with an overarching purpose to win over people and make money, it is also a form of artistic expression and perhaps the most commonly viewed form of cultural art that we see on a daily basis. The most beautiful part of advertising is that we often times don't even notice that we are experience cultural expression.

Advertising plays a very pivotal role in the development and maintenance of culture today. If you would like to get a better understanding of a different culture, an excellent place to start is in the review of various forms of advertising popular in their demographic in their country. If you can understand what it is that motivates them and drives them to business, you can easily have a better understanding of their culture, their customs, their language, and their symbols as well.

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