

PhD defense Mahdi Rajabi - Faculty of Applied Economics

“Cross-cultural experiments on the effectiveness of advertising adaptation”

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Abstract: This dissertation explores the reasons why societies or individuals may behave differently to adaptation vs. standardization of advertising. The subject is one of the primary international advertising topics over the past five decades, which is whether, and to what degree, advertising can and should be standardized or adapted to be effective in different countries and cultures. The models proposed in this dissertation are based on data collected in a cross-national experiment that measured Belgian, Indian, Iranian consumers' attitudes and purchasing intention for brands advertised with different levels of advertising adaptation. The design of this cross-national experiment was similar in the three countries allowing us to analyze the behavior of consumers either within the nations or across the nations. The stimuli (ads) used in the experiment are developed by the interaction of both verbal (brand name, language, name of the cities and web domain origin) and visual (celebrity origin) cues for two product categories (home cinema system and fashion). As a result, in this dissertation, we not only discuss the effects of verbal and visual appeals adaptation, but also the effects of the continuum of advertising adaptation levels (i.e., standardization, semi-adaptation, adaptation) as the outcome of the interaction of verbal and visual appeals origin. This dissertation contributes to the ongoing debate on the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication strategies, self-brand congruity, perception of brand globalness, ethnocentrism, consumer culture and cultural values. This cross-cultural experiment is one of the first to explicitly test consumer responses to semi-adapted or glocalized advertising appeals. Glocalization is a hybrid approach with a mixture of adapted and standardized appeals, that has not been given enough attention in the previous studies. The manipulations of advertising strategies in the present dissertation also allows us to explicitly compare two different types of semi-adaptation: either through the celebrity endorser, or the verbal cues. Moreover, this is one of the first studies that more clearly define consumer segments with a local versus global consumer culture. As mentioned, consumer culture theory has long been recognized as a solution to the trade-off between the economic advantages of advertising standardization and attitudinal benefits of advertising adaptation. However, their characteristics are not yet explained by cultural dimensions. Marketers targeting societies with lower levels of openness to foreign markets or individuals with high power distance, masculinity, ethnocentrism and low uncertainty avoidance, individualism are suggested to adapt their advertising appeals to the consumers' environment. Marketers targeting societies with higher openness to foreign markets and individuals with low ethnocentrism, power distance, masculinity and high uncertainty avoidance and individualism are suggested to standardize their appeals to gain economies of scale and take the advantage of a global brand identity by a unique advertising strategy.