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Culture and metaphors in advertisements: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United States

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Culture in Advertisements: France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, United States

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Loyola University Chicago
Abstract

Using a content analysis of 87 French, German, Italian, Dutch, and American magazine ads, variations in metaphors and cultural attributes were examined from culture-bound groups: food/beverages, automobiles, insurance/finance, and personal care.

Findings provide examples for how culture is reflected in language and symbols. The study shows metaphors are exploited in headlines to capture attention throughout all countries. However, metaphors and cultural attributes are used strategically within nations to deliver persuasive messages.
Metaphors

• Understanding one concept in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Nelson & Hitchen, 1999; Sapir 1977)

• Part of the human conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

• Pervasive, can’t do without (Berlin, 1981; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Leary 1995)
Metaphors

• Important in public communications:
  – Speeches (Bowers & Osborn, 1966; Fearing 1963; Reinsch, 1971; Siltanen, 1981)
• Main types (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Reddy 1979)
  – Orientation
  – Ontological
  – Structural
  – Conduit/Container
Culture Dimensions

Hofstede (1980, 1991)
• Individualism/Collectivism
• Masculine/Feminine
• Power Distance
• Uncertainty Avoidance
• Long/Short-term Orientation

Hall & Hall (1990)
• Low/High Context
• Information Flow
• Time-orientation
• Space-orientation
Culture Dimensions

Masculine/Feminine
1. Italy
2. United States (UK scores used)
3. Germany
4. France
5. Netherlands

Uncertainty Avoidance
1. France
2. Italy
3. Germany
4. Netherlands
5. United States (UK scores used)
Culture Dimensions

**Individualism/Collectivism (Italy not included)**
1. United States (UK scores used)
2. Netherlands
3. France
4. Germany

**Power Distance**
1. France
2. Italy
3. Netherlands
4. Germany
5. United States (UK scores used)
Culture and Advertising

- Ads use symbols, common practices to get messages across (Jhally, 1995; Lester, 1997)
- Ads reflect/construct culture (Dyer, 1982; Lester, 1997; Valdivia, 1997)
- Product categories can be placed on continuum (de Mooij, 1998, 2000)
  - Culture-free (cigarettes, hard liquor, perfume)
  - Culture-bound (food/beverages, autos, insurance/finance, personal care)
Research Questions

• What metaphors are used and why?
• How do metaphors differ across nations?
• What cultural attributes are used in conjunction with metaphors to create ad messages?
Method

• **Content analysis of magazine ads**
  – Purposive/Convenient, Popular, General Interest, Read by Men & Women

• **Ads chosen from 4 culture-bound categories**
  – Food/Beverages, Autos, Finance/Insurance, Personal Care

• **Ads reviewed for 4 metaphor types**
  – Orientation, Ontological, Structural, Conduit/Container
  – Translation/Interpretation with native speakers
Publications

- **France** – *Le Point*, December 10, 2009; *L’Express*, May 28, June 4, August 6, 20, October 8, 2009
- **Germany** – *Der Spiegel*, October 10, 2009; *Stern*, June 10, 2009
- **Italy** – *L’espresso*, June 11, 2009; *Oggi*, June 10, 2009;
- **Netherlands** – *Elsevier*, May 16, June 27, July 4, 2009; *Vrij Nederland (VN)*, April 18, June 6, July 18, 2009;
- **United States** – *Newsweek*, October 12, 2009; *Time*, June 15, 2009
# Results

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<td>4</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
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## Results

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<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
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</table>
Beverages
Coffee
Autos
Autos

HYUNDAI i20
L’auto con grandi idee.

CLEANER, FASTER, SMARTER.

LINCOLN
REACH HIGHER

IN ITS CLASS:
Compared with what's out there, the Lincoln MKS is head and shoulders above the rest.

LINCOLN
REACH HIGHER

IN ITS CLASS:
Compared with what's out there, the Lincoln MKS is head and shoulders above the rest.
Finance/Insurance
Finance/Insurance
Personal Care
Discussion

- Metaphors used in headlines
- Metaphors capture attention, aid understanding, create bond between product and audience - branding
- Metaphors play a key role based on culture
- Effectiveness enhance through strategic use of metaphors
Discussion

• Language used for branding, English found throughout

• In times of globalization, cultures still differ

• Culture is an important consideration in advertising and communication development