

Brands: culture, leadership and differentiation: testing the effectiveness of highly performance-oriented appeal in four European countries.

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INTRODUCTION

This study examined the effectiveness of global consumer culture positioning strategy executed via highly performance-oriented appeal across four European countries. An advertising appeal that is favourably perceived in different markets should be a suitable candidate for use as part of a standardised strategy. The results indicate homogeneous acceptance of examined appeal.

BACKGROUND

Global brands which target consumers in multiple cultures may utilise several advertising strategies to become market leaders in the most cost-effective way possible. Can multi-country advertising campaigns be standardised in a way that ensures their effectiveness in the target countries? Empirical evidence indicates that indeed, some message strategies could be successfully standardised across different countries (Sirisagul, 2000). One of the ways that this global leadership may be achieved is by appealing to a universally favoured cultural dimension of performance orientation. Performance orientation is a cultural orientation which describes a community's preference for high

standards, performance, innovation, and improvement (House et al., 2004). Consequently, a performance-oriented advertising appeal is one which expresses the values of performance, innovation, high standards and improvement through copy, images, sound and motion.

This study reports research in which performance-oriented appeal was tested in four European countries. In line with Taylor's (2005) suggestion that researchers should focus on finding aspects of messages that could be standardised instead of focusing on whether standardisation is possible at all, this paper focuses on examining whether highly performance-oriented appeal could be effective in various countries as part of the Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP) strategy. GCCP originates from a new theory proposed to postulate the relations between globalization and marketing (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999). Global consumer culture theory (GCCT) posits that the ongoing globalization of markets has led to the emergence of global consumer culture (GCC) in which consumers are exposed to and influenced by de-territorialized cultural flows such as a variety of foreign and local brands, media, technology and international travel (Cleveland, Rojas-Mendez, Laroche, & Papadopoulos, 2016). The raise of GCC does not necessarily mean that consumers all over the world are the same, but it means that some symbols, brands and values are associated with GCC and could be favourably evaluated by consumers who idealise GCC regardless of their nationality or cultural background. For example, Holt, Quelch, and Taylor (2004) mentioned quality and performance as characteristics of global brands. Their study indicated that consumers all over the world associated global brands with high quality, global brands' drive to develop new products, excellence in quality and usage of breakthrough technologies faster than local competitors. These characteristics were in the past associated with country of origin (i.e.: the country the brand was originating from), but in the global consumer culture it has shifted to be associated with brands rather than origins. As Holt, Quelch and Taylor (2004) point out, global brands compete with other global brands and that is why "they must strive for superiority" (p. 5) on performance, available features, price and imagery. Indeed, some global brands compete on the basis of constantly offering better performance and features that are meant to make consumers' lives easier and help them

achieve better performance. For example, Apple has released the 7th edition of iPhone and markets it to users on its website with words such as “powerful”, “everything we make works together seamlessly”, “delivers the content you need when you need it most”, “intuitive and easy to use”, “powerful hardware, powerful results” to name a few (Apple, 2017a). Their iPad Pro is marketed with a slogan: “iPad Pro: Anything you can do, you can do better” suggesting that the product helps to achieve better results and hence improve performance. The slogan for the non-professional version of iPad also emphasises learning, creating, performance and ease of use: “Learn, play, surf, create. iPad gives you the incredible display, performance and apps to do what you love to do. Anywhere. Easily. Magically.” (Apple, 2017b).

Academic researchers emphasise values of utilitarian convenience of globally available products, dreams of affluence and personal success communicated to consumers through advertising and American TV programmes and films as some of the values cherished by global consumers and encouraged and communicated by global brands (Holton, 2000). These values associated with GCC can be used to position a brand as global, employing symbols and values of global consumer culture as opposed to using local consumer culture positioning (LCCP: positioning a brand as local, and reflecting local cultural values) as a positioning strategy (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Okazaki, Mueller, & Taylor, 2010). Positioning a brand as a global brand may be beneficial to companies for a number of reasons (Nielsen, 2016). Some evidence exists to show that consumers in developing markets prefer global and foreign brands because they associate it with higher quality (Lee, Knight, & Kim, 2008). Brands can benefit from positioning themselves as associated with GCC via increased perceptions of quality, prestige, and credibility associated with the perception of a globalness of a brand (Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010). It also has financial implications for brands – it saves time and money to position a brand in a similar way in several markets. If that positioning can also be achieved with a standardised execution of appeals, this is even better.

This study builds on previous suggestions about some of the values that have been identified as representations of global consumer culture, and proposes that GCCP can be expressed through an appeal of performance-orientation (Czarnecka & Keles, 2014; Diehl, Terlutter, & Mueller, 2008). Performance-oriented appeal executed through the

use of images, sound and copy indicates or directly emphasises the performance-aspect of the product or service, or performance-aspect of the utility of the advertised product or service. For example, Diehl, Terlutter, and Mueller (2008) executed this appeal via the use of the following copy: “every performance counts”.

Extant research examined the effectiveness of various creative advertising strategies in various countries but as markets change and cultures interact, there is a need for more up-to-date research examining new propositions and incorporating often neglected markets. For example, emerging and transitioning economies have experienced significant economic and social transformations over the past decades and have become an integral part of global market but research about marketing communication activities in those markets is scarce (Dabic & Lamotte, 2017; Okazaki & Mueller, 2007; Seitz, 1998; Seitz & Johar, 1993).

This chapter rests on the premise that some advertising appeals, such as in this study highly performance-orientated appeals, are likely to be effective across many countries, and hence are good candidates for standardisation in international advertising campaigns. For example, Czarnecka, Brennan & Keles (2018) examined the content of advertisements from the UK, Ireland, Poland and Hungary and discovered that advertisers in those countries prefer certain appeals over others. Specifically, advertising appeals that were linked to the cultural dimension of performance orientation were found to be the most often featured appeals in advertising in the studied countries. This suggests that this appeal is favoured by advertisers and that examining its effectiveness may provide important findings for international advertisers interested in employing this type of appeal to achieve global brand leadership.

Performance-oriented appeals represent the values of GCCP and hence could be used by brands wishing to position themselves as representing GCC. The emerging GCC promotes and encourages values related to performance orientation such as effectiveness, convenience, achievement, and excellence (Holton, 2000). This study examined the effectiveness of an advertisement featuring highly performance-oriented message in four European countries – two (Ireland, and UK) represent Western Anglo-Saxon cultures that are the drivers of GCC, and two CEE cultures (Poland and Hungary)

represent less globalised, and less global cultures. Results demonstrate effectiveness of this approach in the studied countries. Brands may be confident that using such creative approach to appeal to this specific cultural dimension may be a source of their leadership and differentiation amongst other brands.

PERFORMANCE-ORIENTED APPEAL AND GLOBAL CONSUMER CULTURE POSITIONING

The preference for rewarding and focusing on performance has been conceptualized as *“the extent to which a human community encourages and rewards setting challenging goals, innovation, and performance improvement”* (House et al., 2004, p.276) or as ‘achievement’ culture orientation (Basáñez, 2016). Performance orientation is the *“most cherished”* (House et al., p.248) value across the world as people from across the globe *“are seeking a society that strongly encourages and rewards innovation, challenging goals, and improvement”* (p.248).

Researchers (House et al., 2004) argue that the human need to belong to a group that rewards high performance, excellence and success and high standards of performance is a universal one. Performance orientation is one of the values that is promoted by and encouraged by GCC hence can be seen as an appeal that could be used in GCCP strategies. Many cultures place a high value on achieving results, education and learning, setting high performance targets, and encouraging constant growth, but the origin of performance can be tracked down to mainly Western societies where people are rewarded based on merit and performance rather than on status, age or family background (Fischer & Smith, 2004; Kunovich & Slomczynski, 2007). The paper builds on the findings from previous studies (House et al., 2004) that certain values are cherished equally across the globe. If they are cherished as a cultural value, potentially they can be suitable for effective standardised campaign.

This assumption is based on evidence from previous studies which focused on this specific appeal. For example, the usage of this appeal is consistent across several

countries: it was the most frequently used appeal in Poland, Ireland, Hungary and the UK (Czarnecka & Keles, 2014). Diehl et al. (2008) investigated how consumers from the USA, Germany, France, Spain, and Thailand responded to a highly performance-orientated appeal and found it to be highly effective. Nijssen and Douglas (2011) examined consumer attitudes towards advertisements featuring Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP), Local Consumer Culture Positioning (LCCP), and Foreign Consumer Culture Positioning (FCCP). They found that GCCP appealed to consumers who were more world-minded. However, this study was based on a single country, the Netherlands and does not provide evidence to answer the question about cross-national effectiveness of the GCCP strategy that would benefit global brands interested in pursuing a strategy that would appeal to consumers in different countries and allow them to achieve leadership using a standardised strategy.

It is proposed here that the need to achieve and excel is a universal one, is present in many societies across the world and may apply to people regardless of gender and age. The following hypotheses summarise the arguments:

H1: Highly performance-orientated appeal will achieve positive evaluations in all four countries and there will be no difference in the perceived effectiveness.

H2: Age will have no effect on the effectiveness of highly performance-orientated appeal and there will be no significant interaction between the country and the age group on the effectiveness of this appeal.

H3: Gender will have no effect on the effectiveness of highly performance-orientated appeal, and there will be no interaction between the country and gender.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample Countries

Most advertising studies which compared advertising effectiveness between various countries focused on Western and Far Eastern countries. Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have been largely under-researched. For example, Okazaki and Mueller (2007) reviewed the major marketing journals in search of international advertising studies for period 1995-2006. The 106 articles reported research conducted mainly in North America (26.7%), Western Europe (21.8%) and Asia (12%). CEE countries featured in only 1.9% of the studies. Ireland has also been neglected, usually being regarded as very similar to the British culture (Keating and Martin, 2008), and hence not worth-studying. Few studies focused on examining advertising from understudied countries such as Ireland, Poland or Hungary (Czarnecka et al., 2013).

In order to meet the objectives of this study, the empirical research was conducted in the UK, Ireland, Hungary and Poland. Consequently, the study includes two countries from the under-researched region of Central and Eastern Europe, and two countries from well-researched Western Europe. The UK and Ireland represent the Anglo-Saxon, Western economies, have similar per capita gross national income (GNI), and have been European Union (EU) members since 1973. Poland and Hungary represent the Central and Eastern European economies, have similar per capita GNI, have been the EU members since 2004, and are past communist states.

Creation of Stimuli Advertisements and Choice of Advertised Product

Several product categories were considered for the development of the test advertisements. The lists of the most popular global brands and products were studied in order to make a decision as to what product could be seen as 'global' and also which product categories are more susceptible and appropriate for standardization. The lists

have been usually dominated by technology giants, including mobile phone producers (e.g., Interbrand's list of global brands). Following this, a mobile phone was selected to be included in the stimuli advertisements. The choice was driven by the need to have a product that was globally available, relatively easy accessible to consumers, and easily recognizable.

Initially, two test advertisements were developed based on previous research on the effectiveness of performance-oriented appeals and the usage of such appeals in advertising (Czarnecka & Keles, 2014; Okazaki et al., 2010). The mock advertisements featured a photo of a product and copy. The two adverts had the same image but the copy was designed to reflect highly performance-oriented message. Previous advertising research examining GCCP in advertising was reviewed together with research related to performance orientation as cultural orientation (Diehl et al., 2008; House et al., 2004; Okazaki et al., 2010). A list of statements was developed, and this list was discussed with a group of undergraduate students who then chose the statements that represented highly performance-oriented appeal most accurately. The chosen mock advertisements were back translated and then pre-tested with 10 respondents in each country. Respondents were given a definition of performance orientation and were asked to rate the two advertisements on the following question: 'This advert promotes high performance orientation' on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely). The mock advertisement that was rated as reflecting performance orientation the most was selected to be included in the final questionnaire. Consequently, the test advertisement featured a picture of a mobile phone, and the following copy: "Effective and convenient way of communicating with the world. Constructed to be easy to use and suitable for your needs." The advertisement featured only three colours: black, white and grey.

The questionnaire instrument was first prepared in English, and then translated into Hungarian and Polish, and back-translated into English (Brislin, 1970). Both translators were native language speakers of Hungarian or Polish, familiar with native and English culture, and who had lived in the UK for a period of 3-5 years. Both were university graduates and were familiar with the challenges of translations and cultural variations. After translation of the instrument into these two languages, they were pilot-tested by a

Polish group and a Hungarian group of university students, who further commented on mistakes in the translations, if any.

To test the stated hypotheses, a non-student survey experiment was conducted in four countries. An online questionnaire was employed to collect data from respondents through purposive sampling with the following results: Poland (N=108), Hungary (N=110), the UK (N=67) and Ireland (N=83). Respondents took part in the survey voluntarily and no incentive was offered to those who participated. The invitation to the survey was distributed via e-mail and social networking websites. This method was appropriate given the ease of use of online tools as a method to reach consumers across the four countries. In total 368 responses to the survey were received. Table 1 gives an overview of the sample characteristics by country.

(“Insert Table 1 about here”)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Characteristic		Overall N = 368	England N = 67	Ireland N = 83	Poland N = 108	Hungary N = 110
Age	Mean	37.5	43.4	38.9	38.0	32.3
	SD ¹	13.62	16.68	11.98	13.53	10.88
Gender %	Male	56.5	55.2	45.8	53.7	69.1
	Female	43.5	44.8	54.2	46.3	30.9
Professional status %	Unemployed	6.3	14.9	1.2	4.6	6.4
	Working	80.7	71.7	78.3	81.4	77.3
	Studying	13	13.4	20.5	13.9	6.4

The attitude towards the advertisements was used to measure the effectiveness of appeals. The ‘attitude towards the ad’ (AtAd) scale consisted of four 7-point semantic differential questions: pleasant-unpleasant; likable-unlikable; not irritating-irritating;

¹ Standard deviation scores have been rounded up to two decimal places.

interesting-not interesting (Zhang and Gelb, 1996). This scale has previously been used in other studies and its reliability was established in a number of countries and therefore yielding the higher probability of the measures working in the subject countries. It was relatively simple to translate which was important as the present study involved collecting data in 3 different languages. In order to measure the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha was used; the values were above .80 which is considered high (Field, 2009).

RESULTS

Overall, the advertisement featuring highly performance- orientated appeal was effective in all four countries (Table 2).

("Insert Table 2 about here")

Table 2: Effectiveness scores by country

Appeal	England N = 67	SD	Ireland N = 83	SD	Poland N = 108	SD	Hungary N = 110	SD
Highly Performance- Orientated	4.35	1.29	4.48	1.37	4.71	1.23	4.50	1.35

Both older and younger respondents, and both men and women evaluated highly performance-orientated appeal positively (Table 3) with the highest score in Hungary (M = 5.33), (Table 4). When the results are split by country the effectiveness of this appeal is maintained across all age groups and both genders (Table 4). Three-way Analysis of Variance was used to test the hypotheses. Table 5 presents the results of the test.

("Insert Table 3 about here")

Table 3: Effectiveness Scores by Age and Gender

Appeal	Age	Mean	SD	Gender	Mean	SD
	Older	4.89	1.26	Men	4.36	1.28

Highly Performance-Orientated	Younger	4.41	1.31	Women	4.75	1.31
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(“Insert Table 4 about here”)

Table 4: Effectiveness Scores According to Age, Gender and Country

Appeal	UK		Ireland		Poland		Hungary	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Highly Performance-Orientated	4.08	4.68	4.20	4.80	4.61	4.81	4.42	4.68
	Older	Younger	Older	Younger	Older	Younger	Older	Younger
	4.65	4.13	5.16	4.28	4.77	4.70	5.33	4.39

Note: Older consumers (50+); Younger consumers (18 -49).

(“Insert Table 5 about here”)

Table 5. Anova Results

Appeal	Age	Gender	Country	Age/Country	Gender/Country
Highly Performance-Orientated	10.135**	3.060	1.553	.630	.367

*p≤.05; **p≤.01; ***p≤.001

As expected, the advertisement featuring highly performance-orientated appeal received positive evaluations in all four countries indicating that it may be standardised to those countries. In addition, there was no significant difference between the effectiveness of this appeal in the different countries, $F(3, 360) = 1.504$, ns. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Contrary to H2, age had a significant effect on the effectiveness of highly performance-orientated appeal. Older consumers rated this appeal higher ($M=4.89$) than younger consumers ($M=4.41$) and the difference was significant, $F(1,352) = 10.135$, $p \leq .01$). This pattern was visible in every country as there was no interaction between country and age; $F(1,352) = .630$, ns. Hypothesis 2 is therefore not supported.

As expected, the effect of gender on the effectiveness of highly performance-orientated appeal was not significant; $F(3, 352) = 3.060$, ns. There was no significant interaction between gender and country on the effectiveness of this appeal, $F(3, 352) = .367$, ns. Hypothesis 3 is supported.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study should be useful to both practitioners and researchers in the area of international advertising, and global consumer culture.

Highly performance-orientated appeal was found to be effective across all four countries, age groups and genders. This appeal would be found attractive by both younger and older consumers as both groups rated this appeal favourably, but older consumers rated this appeal more favourably than younger consumers. Both men and women found this appeal effective. By incorporating this appeal in commercial messages, advertisers can positively influence the evaluation of those messages. Because performance orientation is a positively held value in many countries it can be seen as an appeal suitable for cross-national standardized advertising campaigns.

The results of this study are consistent with findings of Diehl, Terlutter, and Mueller (2008) who demonstrated that the performance-oriented appeal was effective across several countries, providing further evidence that highly performance-oriented appeals are the conclusions from the GLOBE study regarding the dimension of Performance Orientation which show that this value is held important in most societies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study should be viewed within its own limitations. The sample sizes varied across countries. In addition, the online survey which was used attracted a more educated audience. The sampling technique, purposive sampling used in this study may have influenced the data collated. Moreover, because the survey respondents were not selected through simple random sampling technique the results of statistical analysis need to be interpreted with caution.

Future research in this area should be encouraged. In addition to appeal type, other factors such as message execution style should be investigated. Moreover, digital media messages (for example, advertisements on Social Networking Sites) should be also examined in a greater number of countries. The effectiveness of these appeals should also be investigated in the context of advertisements for additional product categories as well as for services. A natural next step may be to examine consumers' responses to advertising stimuli when the origin of the brand is manipulated. Future research should apply different data collection tools (for example, pen and paper surveys or focus groups) to gain access to people without internet access.

CONCLUSION

This research examined the effectiveness of a highly performance-oriented appeal in four European countries: Hungary, Ireland, Poland and the UK. The findings reveal that global brands may successfully use this appeal in standardised advertising campaigns as this appeal was evaluated favourably by consumers in all studied countries. The findings are limited to one product category, that is mobile phones, and future academic research and commercial testing of advertising appeals should extend this examination to other product categories.

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