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RESHAPING AMERICAN IDENTITY THROUGH ADVERTISING
STANDARDIZATION VS. LOCALIZATION

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Abstract: Our study focuses on the impact of American advertising on local consumers and industry and discusses the relationship between standardization and localization on the global market. Although America seems to be a hybridized, 'McDonald-ized' reality, it is in fact grounded on a multicultural and social mix that deems it highly recognizable. Consequently, we argue that reconstructing American identity means sharing similar values with other cultural spaces, whose history, religion, and social customs require a different approach to daily life and finding new means of expression.

Our main argument is that advertising disseminates its message in foreign markets and that American campaign models were implemented despite cultural differences. Therefore, we will study the way American heterogeneity becomes homogeneous in the advertising realm, and explain the relationship between standardization and localization in promoting brand values. Our analysis relies on examples of the post-1990 Romanian advertising revolution that showcase the global American influence on Romania's local industry as reflected by celebrations (Valentine's Day, Man's Day) and other American symbols (the cowboy image, the impact of the English language) present in locally broadcast advertisements.

Consequently, our paper asks a very controversial question: Does market globalization embed the American spirit in indigenous cultures through advertising, bypassing local culture, ideology and society?

Key Words: advertising, standardization, religion, society, globalization, hybridization, Americanization.

Introduction

Before investigating the Americanization of cultures and societies, we should explain the basis for this research, as “the land of promise” has always been open to challenges. Our area of interest is advertising, which encourages consumerism and hedonistic lifestyles. Obviously, the top world brands (*Levis, Coca Cola, Pepsi, McDonald’s, Ford, Procter & Gamble*) were born in the US, where the competition was very strong and the first professional advertising campaigns were created. These brands were at first local, but, when American soldiers crossed the Atlantic in World War I bringing *Coca-Cola* with them, everything changed.

Many factors justify the continuing influence of American industry on developing campaigns and accepting new values. Initially, consumers were mainly interested in products, and product features were associated with their country of origin. Later, consumers started choosing products according to brand names, which satisfy other types of personal needs. Today, products unite consumers in global categories who share the same lifestyles relying on the respective brand image. The local features of each market have been taken over by the trend of globally expressing brand values. Nevertheless, our discussion regards both local and global brands, because differences have softly dissolved. Returning to the Americanization phenomenon, we will answer the following questions:

- How are American culture, society, and religion involved in global campaigns?
- Why does the American world need re-construction?
- What are the tools of standardization in advertising campaigns?
- How can global brands better integrate into local markets?

To answer these questions, we must first briefly investigate the background of “cocalization” in American culture, society, and religion throughout history.

Researchers lend much significance to globalization, connecting it with other perspectives. George Ritzer associated the globalized world with the metaphor of liquidity, as compared to flexible solidity: “Globalization is a trans-planetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and the growing multidirectional flows of people, objects, places and information as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to or expedite those flows.”¹ “Solidity” refers to the age before globalization, when people did not enjoy travelling or leaving their homes, because they were conservative and not experiential. Over the ages, this lifestyle became cumbersome, isolating nations from each other and, hence, making them understand each other in an ecumenical manner.

Scientists were interested in various research areas such as politics, sociology, anthropology, communication sciences, semiotics, or even religion. Like Scholte, they questioned globalization by analyzing its five terms: *internationalization*, *liberalization*, *universalization*, *westernization* or *modernization* and *respatialization*.² The first concept refers to opening market borders and establishing international political and economic relationships. *Liberalizing* the market means removing the restrictions of political regimes like Communism in Eastern-European countries, while *universalization* is related to sharing similar principles and values throughout the world. The next concept closely resembles the McDonaldization or Americanization process, because it is based on consumerism and disseminating lifestyles on behalf of products. Finally, *respatialization* regards the opening of borders and disappearance of past restrictions.

Inspired by Scholte's view, this study aims to prove that globalization can be described as a multidimensional process of communication. Advertising research is "global communication and worldwide cultural standardization, as in Coca-Cola Colonization and McDonaldization, and on postcolonial culture."³ What else is advertising than the most efficient way to communicate a brand's message by adapting to different markets and consumers?

Historical Aspects and the Case of American Identity

Our goal is not to offer a history lesson regarding the New World and the role of Europe in discovering it, but to explain the aggressive evolution of the American land. Celebrating Columbus Day (not in every state), Americans still struggle with the problem of identity, deeming it necessary to accept a myth of their origin. Here there is a conflict between the indigenous nation (the anthropological roots of this country) and the myth of Columbus, who recorded the birth of America for the rest of the world, especially Europe. Our next question emphasizes this paradox: since life in the Americas began earlier than 1492, what is the identity of the American land? To this question there is no answer.

Scientists either completely deny this search for identity, or describe it as permanent reconstruction. Baudrillard rejects the preoccupation for identity, due to the absence of historical time and mythical perception. Actually, his view of time reveals the political and economic power of the United States nowadays and in the years to come: "America has no identity problem. In the future power will belong to those people with no origins and no authenticity, who know how to exploit that situation to the full."⁴ In other words, his perspective is radical and excludes any other ways of understanding Columbus' land. Baudrillard's attitude results from comparing America to Europe in European terms of identity such as history, religion, culture, and political systems.

Meanwhile, Campbell and Kean came to the very simple, broad conclusion that heterogeneity cannot be excluded from a world still looking for its paternity. They do not reject modern ways of expressing identity; consequently, they analyze identity in a dynamic manner, explaining that it is “constantly shifting in America, with renewal as a significant element in the recognition of difference and diversity, rather than fixity and stasis.”⁵ In this case, national identity cannot be judged according to its history as main argument, but according to its flexibility, ease of adapting to social reconstruction. This also applies to other nations that permanently interacted to similar or different societies. For instance, Romans did not destroy Greek mythology and traditions, but recognized and integrated them into their religion, fusing cultural and political issues. Therefore, we agree with Rutherford’s unconventional definition by using negation: cultural identity is “not once and for all...to which we can make some final, and absolute Return.”⁶

Additionally, the problem of deconstructing and re-constructing American origins faces another controversial aspect, plurality vs. singularity, or, clearer, identity vs. identities. Returning to the dawn of American identity, rejected by Baudrillard, the fusion of differences and multinational identities is certain, at least from the racial, linguistic, and tradition viewpoints. This cultural and religious mosaic started with colonization and increased during World Wars and Communist exodus. Instead of adapting immigrants to the American lifestyle, the US offered them the freedom to choose their property, find a workplace, and integrate. Obviously, this attitude is very different from the one in Europe and it is due to the industrialization and urbanization that connected the two civilizations. This phenomenon helped Americans develop a cohesive identity by striving for common economic goals in a very short time. Basically, this nation created the American spirit but couldn’t dissolve differences. Today, America still fuses individual identities without losing their uniqueness. Therefore, our discussion relies on two concepts: first, economic homogeneous identity, and, second, cultural and social heterogeneous identities. This draws attention to the paradox of Columbus’ world, made of “heterogeneous dialogues,” or parts of “the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference,” according to Smart.⁷ Most important here is the contradiction between dialogue and heterogeneity, only possible when searching for a common identity by mixing various others.

In sum, the American controversy has three important directions: the first denies any kind of identity because of the lack of history, the second accepts identity dynamics as constant evolution, and the latter addresses plurality. The evolution of American identity reveals that the role of this country progressively increases. From our viewpoint, plurality means diversity and flexibility towards innovation.

Religion – Another Form of Plurality

The terms “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” and “pluralism” rely on the American religious landscape and are a very important fundament of constitutional freedom. Returning to Baudrillard’s theory about no time and no past for the American land, we may say their perception of God proves a real accumulation of history.

Charles Lippy synthesized the evolution of pluralism and diversity in American society at the end of the 20th century, explaining that religious stability was politically justified in Europe, while, on the contrary, tolerance was the only way to bring people together in the land of promise: “That multiplicity of religious groups fed into the image of the United States as a nation founded on the principle of religious freedom; since so many diverse religious communities flourished, religious liberty must have been given.”⁸ In contrast to European kingdoms and states, where the head of the country accomplished God’s will and patriarchs and popes made political decisions, Americans do not officially involve the church in politics. This is why in 1798 the US Constitution stipulated the separation of church and state, as no religion practiced at that time could be declared official for the nation. In time, pluralism was understood not as religious freedom, but as freedom for any kind of practice or belief, given the number of denominations and sects that cannot be controlled or supervised.

Catholicism was the first religion officially brought by conquistadores, then Protestantism developed in many branches, and, finally, various sects were formed. Other religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, or Islam only deepened the puzzle. The last type of religion entered the country during the Asian immigrant exodus. This new face of pluralism also included Indian and Chinese religions. Metaphorically, America can be considered the Tower of Babel of religious modernity, because this diversity cannot be controlled and generates conflicts. Consequently, Schlesinger argued there is simply too much *pluribus* and not enough *unum*.

When conquering native lands, the Christian religion united people in communities and helped Americans integrate. Immigrants then created their own communities based on social and religious issues, which was in fact the real challenge: conservative, traditional Catholics were faced with the innovation of their beliefs. New denominations gradually drew the attention of communities by using more influent means to gain visibility, such as building schools and universities, organizing charities, or creating music styles. Actually, their presence in the public sphere developed the interest for ceremonies and celebrations regardless of religion, race, or ethnicity. Diana L. Eck states that “an incremental public recognition of holidays also takes place at the highest level”⁹ and United States presidents welcome any peaceful manifestation.

New York's Irish Saint Patrick's Day and Chinese New Year parades are main tourist attractions. According to Eck, visibility also entails exposure to danger, because, sometimes, too much freedom leads to confusion and oppression: "visibility makes a religious community more effective and also more vulnerable in the public square."¹⁰ Exotic buildings such as Hindu temples and Islamic mosques are required by the huge number of immigrants, especially after the US involvement in the Arab world.

From another perspective, American popular culture offers the best examples of integrating religious symbols and patterns in current events, sometimes with de-sacralized meaning, in the sense used by religious philosopher Mircea Eliade. A. Fătu-Tutoveanu and D. Pintilescu investigate the way Americans approach visual culture and believe that "these patterns ceased to be explicitly religious, being processed and therefore altered, converted, through recycling, into products ready to be consumed in deeply secularised environments."¹¹ The authors analyze the singer Madonna, one of the most significant pop culture images that combines religion and sexuality in a very challenging manner. Advertising conveys similar controversial examples that are only intended to sell, despite consumer prejudice or religious loyalty.

Connecting this information about hybridized American religions, diversity obviously leads to pluralism, which causes further multiculturalism. Being different has always been the slogan for the highest possible freedom in the US. American society discourages gender and race discrimination and tolerates homosexuality. Americans only fight for morality, which seems to be the secret of surviving in pluralism without becoming confused. Actually, because they are so flexible and open to influence, American people are taught morality in daily life regardless of denomination. In his research on the effect of religion on American teenagers, Christian Smith concludes it is positive and constructive in teenagers' education, affording them moral directives, spiritual experience, and behaviour models: "American religions can provide youth with adult and peer-group role models, providing examples of life practices shaped by religious moral orders that constructively influence the lives of youth, and offering positive relationships that youth may be invested in preserving through their own normatively approved living."¹²

Analyzing the previous quote, we noticed the noun "religion" is in the plural form, proving the acceptance of any kind of relationship with God under moral circumstances. This positive attitude towards the role of religion in education cannot explain the very intolerant justice system, with practices such as capital punishment. Despite its massive European abolishment, the United States established strong limitations for capital punishment and did not completely reject it. Is the church involved in understanding the legal system so radically? According to Bedau, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), representing more than 10

million conservative Christians and 47 denominations, was among the Christian groups supporting the death penalty in 1970. Today, Fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches support the death penalty, typically on biblical grounds, specifically The Old Testament. The Roman Catholic Church, especially under Pope John Paul II, repeatedly appealed to end this cruel form of justice. Most Protestant denominations, including Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and the United Church of Christ, oppose the death penalty. The European Convention on Human Rights took many decisions in this direction, but abolishment hasn't completely crossed the ocean. This growing and dynamic involvement of religious communities in American society is highly debated by Liliana Mihuț, who states: "beyond the controversial aspects, the religious groups and their activities have contributed to a better representation of various categories of faith and to an intensified participation of people in the policy-making process"¹³ The author reveals, in our opinion, the importance of American religious groups for building a multicultural society based on difference and negotiation that are diplomatically turned into economic advantage.

Controversial Cultural Aspects of the American Land

First, we aim to analyze the most important features of genuine culture in the United States. Everything depends on the way culture is understood, in local or global manner. Some believe Native Americans developed their still surviving popular culture in a very spectacular manner, but with rather an anthropological meaning. Baudrillard is one of the scientists who deny the existence of any kind of culture or religion, considering America an authentic desert. His perspective doubtlessly focuses on the comparison between the old and new continents. He argues the non-existence of culture, relying on the absence of its accumulation: "There is no culture here, no cultural discourse (...) Not only does centralization not exist, but idea of a cultivated culture does not exist either, no more than that of a theological sacred religion. No culture of culture, no religion of religion."¹⁴ Although America does not seem to express classical forms of culture through history, arts, mythology, or religion, it developed something else: a consumer culture relying on industrialization and the accumulation of goods. At this point, there is no similarity between Europe and "the land of promise." This culture is inextricably linked with consumers, as Schlessinger points out: "In this regard, Europeans differ from Americans in their strongly held world view that cultural products are not simply commercial products but bear a special relationship to collective identity."¹⁵ Actually, it is very simple to support this idea, because cultural products are not perceived as commercial products due to the European mentality, and Americans usually convert them to marketing value. Developing their needs as much

as possible, regardless of physiological or primary necessities, and relying on cultural ones, both societies achieved complementary levels of evolution.

Therefore, America is the best example of consumption society considered by Baudrillard.¹⁶ His theory explains the growth of industrialization, the development of advertising, and the necessity to expand the market. This society focuses on concrete accumulation, facts and direct profit, because its spiritual background has been denied and personalized. Therefore, according to Baudrillard, this type of society consumes everything, not only objects or services that cost more or less. Obviously, this consumes the US itself, transforming everything into meta-consumption: "As much as it consumes anything, it consumes itself as consumer society, as idea. Advertising is the triumphal paean to that idea."¹⁷ To have and to consume more, with no reason, generated many discussions in United States, because people are so interested in accumulation and egotistic behaviour. Using the pronouns "you" and "yours" in commercials, advertising encourages unreasonable consumption just because the target can do anything he or she wants. The consequences of this same freedom can be unpleasant, such as health issues (obesity, bulimia, anorexia) and psychological problems (the suicide of race-conscious teenagers).

The next sensible question is the movement of cultural influences between the continents: are we faced with a double reaction and adaptation to both value categories, or with reciprocal rejection? There is no doubt regarding the American power to adapt itself to European identities, which always varies for political/historical reasons (Western vs. Eastern-European countries, democracy vs. communism). Therefore, the US social construct can best be described by flexibility. According to Epitropoulos and Roudometof, cultural transfer is ambivalent, explaining the relationship between both continents as a reconstruction of their identities: "Not only is European culture being reinterpreted by Americans and used as raw material for the construction of American culture, but also American culture is being transmitted into Europe and undergoing similar processes of readaptation and selective appropriation."¹⁸

Actually, this situation is no more than an amalgam of local cultures and global influences demanded by the circulation of goods and the universalization of brands. More important here is the local reconstruction of American society and culture due to its worldwide mobility and wide consumer experience. This view of controversial cultural aspects could be better explained by accepting that American life is a challenging puzzle of opportunities, as stated by Irina Frasin: "Life in multicultural societies may seem complicated and puzzling for many of our contemporaries due to the multitude of possible options and choices."¹⁹ Just like a puzzle that first seems to offer many possibilities

although only one fits a certain place, the American influence found its specific role in different societies relying on a very simple principle: uniqueness in diversity.

Glocalizing the World through Americanization

“Americanization” is merely associated with political events, given their specific impact and features, as Claudiu Coman reveals in his study: “On a micro-theoretical level is a proper description of the innovation during the election campaigns which continuously emerged in many democracies all over the world.”²⁰ Further, “Americanization” is strongly connected to globalization, glocalization and capitalism, all of which are derived from each other. According to Robertson, the most simple definition of globalization helps people understand the world’s homogeneity and work more on integration: “Globalization is a compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as whole.”²¹ Being so open to diverse influences, America illustrates the tendency of increasing interconnectedness, by analyzing the context of the ongoing process of globalization. The best way to understand this is to combine American values with local ones, conveying comfort and not disruption. Basically, this strategy generated the meaning of “glocalization,” a term derived from the Japanese “dochakuka,” the agricultural principle of adapting farming techniques to local conditions. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*, “glocalization” is “formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend.”²²

Simultaneously expressing the local and global features of a living space, we are faced with the double process of *macro-localization* and *micro-globalization*. Macro-localization involves expanding local boundaries, on the one hand, and adopting some local ideas, practices, and customs, on the other. Micro-globalization means integrating global processes into a local frame, so people living there can identify consumers from any other countries by applying the same rules. From this perspective, globalization is glocalization. According to Giddens, globalization “is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world.”²³ This reaction stems from the defence of the particular identity of each national space against the tide of universal values that depersonalizes it. Sometimes, glocalization or hybridization occurs with cultural diffusion and the necessity to search national traditions to make a campaign, for example in advertising.

Therefore, glocalization helps the American world to be accepted by everyone in a friendly way, not as oppressive market dominance. Advertising campaigns coin brand messages by borrowing the local mentality and American way of living, using products, or just speaking the same language. The final product, the commercial, is good enough to make the buyer join a very large family of consumers, regardless of

mother-tongue. Consumer insight is the content of this melting pot, because its recipe consists of understanding the local way of thinking, consuming a specific product, and adding brand values in a convenient shell.

Relying on the explosion of the American market and several globally launched concepts describing consumption culture such as McDonaldisation or Cocalization, researchers such as John Tomlinson approached the new term “Americanization.” Tomlinson argues that Americanization could be understood as another form of spreading capitalism, because people living in Communist cultures associate the United States with the highest form of freedom, no buying or consumption restrictions. Meanwhile, in Europe there were two types of Communist countries: those with less interdictions, familiar with occidental products (Poland, Czechoslovakia-actually Czech Republic and Slovakia-, Hungary, East Germany- unified with West Germany), and the isolated – the Socialist Romanian Republic (presently Romania). The perception of America was different here, and political heterogeneity transcended cultural homogeneity. After escaping Communist prohibition, these societies were rebuilt and viewed the American dream as people’s struggle for social models and the consumption of universal brands.

Romania quickly imported not only brands, which were completely unknown to inhabitants, but also life-styles, at least in the first 10 years after the December 1989 Revolution. At that time, local products seemed to have been completely rejected. Driving a *Dacia* or washing one’s hair with *Farmec* became a utopia. Consequently, many local communist brands could not survive or be rebranded, because consumers had to accomplish their dream of living in a democracy. Actually, advertising was not the only industry responsible for this, as film also made people imagine the American dream. Analyzing Southern-European countries, Roudometof and Robertson noticed the impact of modernity on the young generation, which enjoys expressing itself by echoing the American lifestyle. Social change was generated by the local consumption of American culture. According to a former researcher, “Local agents appropriate and recontextualize consumer items according to their own frame of reference. In this process, cultural heterogeneity is reconstructed via a cultural syncretism of imported commercial items and local practices.”²⁴ Obviously, this syncretism causes a re-creation of American identity by using media and advertising, so its features are gradually and persuasively implemented in local cultures by choosing relevant events with broad circulation. What are such events? Celebrations, when people share feelings in local or global contexts and do not reject other forms of expression.

Standardization vs. Localization in the Advertising Field

American companies and brands convey messages through advertising to make European targets trust them by presenting not only product features, but also their country of origin. By buying a product and watching a TV commercial you get a piece of the American lifestyle. After World War II and the 70s TV explosion, American media controlled the European market except for Communist countries, which gained media freedom after the 90s. The real struggle for market identity and creativity started by intensifying the feeling of belonging to the European Union, market fragmentation, and the competition of local brands.

According to Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells, three approaches focus on the balance between standardization, localization, and combination. *Standardization* focuses on worldwide consumer similarities. This model supports globalization, helping express American values everywhere. *Localization*, sometimes termed “adaptation,” consists of considering the important coordinates of each market, such as lifestyles, cultural, economic, or political particularities. *Combination* means finding a middle-ground, mixing both directions to produce more effective advertising by preserving and translating general brand strategy for local customers. In this case, glocalization is the most effective way to create a new identity that results from interweaving two kinds of societies – global, the way American society wants to be viewed, and local, as each country should be considered.

Advertising standardization supported the reconstruction of American society through different strategies. Researchers agree that cultural impact is extremely important for communication strategies. This debate started when Douglas and Dubois identified the cultural factors that advertising used to disseminate its message. These are the advertising topic, word connotations and symbols, the way pictorial conventions are interpreted, and media selection. In a scientific research of standardization literature, Krolikowska and Kuenzel compared the six most important models of advertising strategies.²⁵ Authors concluded that none of the models were practically applied, so everything has moved in circles rather than forward. At the end of the article, writers recommended paying more attention to customer perspective.

In our opinion, every model of standardization was based on a portrayal of specific markets and consumers. This issue was not paid too much attention, which could be explained by research focusing on the market. Despite this critical conclusion, which actually proves how complicated the debate is, we think Papavassiliou and Stathakopoulos provided a more organized model. Analyzing their paper, we noticed it relies on many practical arguments in comparison to other theoretical frameworks. According to Papavassiliou and Stathakopoulos, three sets of determinants may influence the standardization process or the degree of adaptation of advertising strategies.²⁶ The first set describes local environmental determinants and consists of the cultural environment,

economic and legal conditions, competition, advertising infrastructure, consumer profile, and the image of the country of origin. The second set regards firm environmental determinants and includes managerial and financial characteristics (corporate strategies, internal culture, decision-making authority, financial status), as well as the nature of the product. Finally, the last category refers to intrinsic determinants, which are international advertising objectives, and the relationship between multinational agencies, creative strategies, media strategies, the communication mix, support activities, and barriers. The first rule of standardization involves market similarities. They became a principle of the relationship between America and the old continent, which has remained quiet after its growth with the integration of young democratic states into the European Union. Researchers such as Boddewyn and Grosse (1995) argue market standardization dissolves differences between countries and cultures for the sake of profits and successful business.

Americanizing Local Advertising

Cultural environment, consumer image and the image of the country of origin (terms from Papavassiliou's and Stathakopoulos's standardization model discussed earlier) represent the main factors in charge with the balance between global and local. In an article about the American image in Israeli advertising, Avraham and First pointed out that a new word would better describe the situation: "In our opinion, this is a reconstruction process that may be termed Amerisraelization, where local is Israeli while global is American. In other words, we make a case of a specific type of glocalization."²⁷ American findings in Israeli ads consist of using the flags of countries, the English language, as well as visual landmarks such as the Empire State Building or the Statue of Liberty.

Other examples of Americanization happen in China and Japan, where lifestyles and views on market strategy seem very far from McDonaldization or Cocalization. Eating a Big Mac is not always the healthiest choice, but it symbolizes high cultural expectations – namely, the experience of another world and the taste of modernity in a conservative society. According to Lu, "The symbolic consumption of McDonald's and KFC enables local Chinese to know about advanced modernity, and get connected to the global modernization process."²⁸ Opening the Asian fast-food market has been the great success of America during the past few years. In China, a Big Mac does not mean eating in a hurry without culinary satisfaction, as some European consumers believe, but it shows everyone your social status and wealth. In other important Eastern-Asian cities, the young generation is very interested in McDonald's modern restaurants. This phenomenon allows us to raise an important question: why is there a reasonable connection (cultural, social, religious) between Israel, China, and the United States?

Answering this question implies returning to the previous theoretical framework regarding the cultural, religious and social aspects of the American world. Its values can be synthesized in the keywords “religious freedom” and “cultural syncretism,” which is actually multiculturalism -- no gender or racial barriers in expressing American identity. Given this flexible mentality, Americanization was disseminated by interweaving local cultures and welcoming specific landmarks within the commercials launched on the local market. As Krolikowska and Kuenzel stated in their article, the advertising perspective moves from a standardized view to a glocalized one, which is more dynamic and affords a better appeal to local customers.

Americanization Strategies in Romanian Advertising - a Case still in Progress

Romanian advertising has already recovered from Communist prohibition because it develops bold creative strategies that emphasize the country's cultural and historical heritage. Before 1990, there were no American brands on the local market except for black trade or the privileges of certain Communist dignitaries. Actually, the only brand that could be bought, expensively and for special occasions, was *Pepsi-Cola*, produced for Eastern-European countries in 33 ml glass bottles with a different package. After the 1989 Revolution, American brands were welcomed, and standardized ads taught consumers to behave like their international counterparts. Taking advantage of the situation, international agencies came on the market during the first 5 years. The first one was Graffiti BBDO, part of BBDO Worldwide, which offered full campaign services for local (*Dacia, Romtelecom*) and international brands (*Pepsi, Lay's, Tuborg, M&M, Holstein*). The local market started to be organized in a global manner and consumers enjoyed buying without a limit, even if they didn't have any previous experience with those products. They even rejected genuine items for new imported ones, as Arno Loessner and Călin Hințea argue: “Markets, using rules set elsewhere, replaced traditional patterns of doing things.”²⁹

Also important was using the US Dollar as trading currency. This happened before Romania started to ally with the European Union, and before the Euro was accepted throughout the continent. Additionally, advertising hybridization was shown by using foreign languages for ad copy, such as American English, French, and Italian. Sometimes foreign influences reflected intertextuality, by weaving foreign languages with the Romanian and inserting words in the dialogue of ad characters. Several commercials are characterized by bilingualism, either as a double message or the partial translation of foreign words (for example, *weekend, business, cool, sir, OK*). Given the impact of the media, the movie industry, and Facebook, consumers are highly attracted by English slogans.

Moreover, they integrate them into their lives, so English becomes part of the popular culture. Even if the advertised brands are not American, Romanian campaigns successfully appeal to young consumers by using English or characters bearing English names (one of the large *Vodafone* campaigns uses a singer named “Smiley”).

In the following paragraph, we will try to summarize the American influence on local mentality as reflected in Romanian ads, offering examples for each case. Our main hypotheses are:

- Romanian advertising adopted the Hollywood atmosphere and its optimistic outlook;
- Some American legends were warmly received on the Romanian market;
- Local advertising draws a comparison between Romania and the features of American products;
- Some brands followed the same creative strategy as American ones, considering their campaigns similar;
- Some celebrations were just imported and adapted to the local mentality;
- After 20 years, Romanian advertising tends to be more local and express its genuine creativity, increasingly rejecting Americanization.

We will now illustrate these hypotheses with evidence, revealing the relationship between standardization and localization on the Romanian market.

The Image of the American Hero

The optimistic American attitude is reflected by legendary characters featured in Hollywood movies, who actually manifest the American identity, despite Baudrillard's negativity. The cowboy hero created a dynamic and romantic image of the land conqueror in advertising and movies. Who could imagine *Marlboro* changing its logo and male image? Consequently, the brand supports motor racing, Formula one, *Alfa Romeo* and *Ferrari* campaigns, all of which signal masculinity.

Judith and Andrew Kleinfeld deny the bad connotation of “cowboy country,” because the image does not disadvantage the American nation, revealing its genuine features: “The cowboy legend, properly understood, represents what is best about us--spiritedness, energy, courage, competence, a passion for freedom, and an idealistic drive to pursue justice. What makes US American is also a distinctive psychology and spirit.”³⁰ This superhero image was developed by advertising campaigns that preserved the features of other Hollywood characters, such as Superman, Spiderman, or Wonderwoman. Mr. Muscle and Mr. Proper are just as proud and justice-seeking as cowboys. Obviously, hero features

imply advertising standardization and his copies are unsuccessful clones without copyright. Between 1970 and 1980, Romanian directors created movies on the emigration into the US and the seduction of America, starring well-known Romanian actor Amza Pellea.³¹

Romanian ads maintain the idea of the rescuer in campaigns in which the hero depicts a local image, such as the Male-Fairy Transilvania Bank spots. He is the opposite of a cowboy because he is not masculine, but his values are just as relevant: helpful, powerful, and imaginative. Additionally, his spirit of optimism, independence, and courage are the big idea behind many ads, apparently disconnected from the less fortunate Romanian reality.

Preserving the Same Commercial Format – Case-Study of Procter & Gamble

Developing and encouraging Americanization in advertising is also achieved by maintaining the same format for different product categories, almost impossible to be changed, such as those for Procter & Gamble campaigns. P&G have always used the “problem-solution” strategy that relies on a very simple narrative: someone has a problem, the product solves it, and the consumer is completely satisfied at the end. This strategy was mostly noticed in detergent (*Ariel, Tide, Lenor*) and cosmetics campaigns (*Head & Shoulders*), with the product as advertising hero. This strategic idea has not changed for years, sprouting similar concepts. P&G extended the approach to other categories, appealing to the consumer for objective reasons. The efficient and clear storytelling reminds us of Ryan’s classification of simple narrativity, complex narrativity, figura narrativity, instrumental narrativity, and proliferating narrativity. Narration is simple and commercials do not require adaptation, because the target cannot deny product features. When the formerly Romanian-owned detergent *Dero*³² launched its campaign *The scent of the most beautiful years* as song and dance, the target perceived a huge difference between the objectivity of P&G brands and 80s national music nostalgia. Characters sing and dance to old-fashioned music to remind the target about the origin of this product. This ad format generalized brand positioning that relies on product features. Actually, the problem-solution format proves that Americans trust facts and not dreams; as Baudrillard wrote, the main feature of this nation's identity is they “believe in facts, but not facticity.”³³

Importing Celebration Days

Every culture encourages celebrations as a permanent renewal and confirmation of its identity and values. Leaving theoretical classifications aside, we should at least say celebrations may be historical (e.g. Independence Day), socially construed (Woman’s Day, Mother’s Day Children’s Day), or religiously determined. The most important celebrations are grounded in traditions and dogmatic knowledge. In

advertising, the most treasured events are those that imply sharing gifts for different reasons.

Historically, Pope Gelasius declared February 14th St. Valentine's Day at the end of the 5th century, but in 1969 the Catholic Church no longer recognized the saint. Today it is not clear whom the celebration is dedicated to, although legends reference three saints born in the Roman Empire. At the time it was not considered a day for expressing love, and during the Middle Ages it was associated with the beginning of bird mating season, which may explain why Valentine greeting-cards became popular as early as 1400. The oldest known Valentine still in existence is a 1415 poem by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife while imprisoned in the Tower of London following his capture at the Battle of Agincourt.³⁴ Valentine's Day has promoted the American spirit and not the European, even if it is diversely celebrated in many countries. This may sound contradictory, since Europeans brought the celebration to North America, but in the United States Valentine became popular along with Hallmark cards after 1910. Valentine's Day is also celebrated in Canada, South America, the United Kingdom, France, and Australia. In Great Britain, Valentine's Day began to be openly celebrated around the 17th century. In the United States, Esther A. Howland began selling the first mass-produced Valentines in 1840.

This is a very brief history of how the celebration spread from Europe to other continents, preserving the common theme of love. What empowered this celebration to extend to countries with no connection to the Catholic Church during the past 50 years? Mass media and advertising that initially develops local campaigns and then globalizes them.

A very interesting example is Ghana, where the holiday was activated by American-produced, expensive Hallmark cards. Jo Ellen Fair analyzed the evolution of this holiday by using interviews and noticed that "Valentine's Day offers upwardly mobile, urban Ghanaians a sense of connection to global modernity. It helps Ghana's newly privatized media, as well as its merchants, create the commercial culture necessary for their advancement."³⁵ In this case, Americanization is welcomed, and the reaction toward such a new and global celebration is unanimously positive.

Another persuasive example is the Japanese market, where hybridized Valentine's Day was originally introduced in 1936 by Morozoff Ltd., which changed gift-giving rules a bit: women offer men chocolate and other products, not vice versa. Like Christmas, this holiday doesn't belong to Japanese religious traditions, but represents a ritual of expressing love by using other means. Americanization strongly influenced the image of women in advertisements, liberating femininity from gender prejudice and social restrictions. According to Minowa, Khomenko and Belk, who synthesized the evolution of this celebration in five stages,³⁶ "Valentine's Day has become a rite to reconfirm gender

identity.”³⁷ Striving for gender equality, Japanese consumers invented another holiday entitled White Day, celebrated a month later, which requires men to offer women gifts. American mentality hybridizes local representations, changing the perspective on gender identity in a very conservative society. The victory is total and print ads prove the merger of both cultures.

Valentine's Day vs. Romanian Dragobete – The Rom Chocolate Case Study

Let's now consider Romania, a small country very open to change in the beginning of democracy. Except for Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, Women's Day, Children's Day, and Saint Mary's Day, Romanian consumers did not develop other celebrations, but imported Valentine's Day and created *Bergenbier* – Man's Day. Romania is almost wholly Orthodox; hence, it's very focused on major religious celebrations such as Easter and Christmas. Orthodox people do not seem to have a spiritual connection to Valentine's Day, because the saint is celebrated on July 3rd in the Orthodox calendar. Another argument is the traditional Romanian equivalent of Dragobete, an old Dacian feast day for love on February 24th. Dragobete was the son of Old Woman Dochia and is connected to the myth of the arrival of spring and the end of a harsh winter. Those who take part in Dragobete customs are supposed to be protected from illness, especially fever, for the remainder of the year. If the weather allows, girls and boys pick early spring flowers for the person they are courting. The young generation is interested in Valentine's Day because of romantic gifts and the advertising show, while the old generation still holds on to tradition. Advertising is faced here with two important perspectives: the global aspect of the celebration and the local one. The global one is very powerful worldwide and basically follows Hollywood romance, while the local one is in the process of advertising renewal.

Local advertising exploited this connection to the traditional celebration by coining messages that oppose the globalization of love in commercials. One of the oldest chocolate brands in Romania, *Rom*, created a campaign especially for February 24th in 2010. The message was very clear and the brand's slogan reveals local customs: “On Dragobete, love in an authentic Romanian way.”

McCann Ericson “American ROM” campaign received 9 trophies at Cannes 2011,³⁸ drawing the attention of the industry. The ad shocked the local target, because it completely hybridized the genuine roots of the brand. An American man, sitting at his New York desk and contemplating the new product wrapper says “Hi. What's this in my hand? It's the new Rom. It's not the same. It's better. The Romanian flag has been replaced with the American one. Why? For you! You can eat it anywhere in the world and be proud. Try the new Rom—with the American flag, with the taste of coolness.” In less than two weeks another ad calmed the target, saying, “It was a joke. *Rom* is *Rom*,”³⁹ and outdoor prints directly reacted

against Americanization: “*The American Dream in the Romanian chocolate*” and “Let’s build America here.” The brand had a very interesting strategic evolution, and never gave up its local image. It went through several stages: first, the nostalgic image of communism led by Ceausescu’s interdictions; second, the transitory phase based on the cultural confusion of new consumers; third, patriotism and a traditional phase comparing it to the American mentality. In this case, the Romanian approach revealed a sort of independence toward Americanization advertising strategies. Maybe this explains why only three online ads for local brands ran in Romania on Valentine’s Day 2012: *Boromir* (bakery), *Mobexpert* (furniture), and *Bitdefender* (software); in the United States there were 24, and in the UK 10. Additionally, no local commercials used the name of Saint Valentine in their messages but referenced the day of lovers or love, revealing that these people have another religious background and are still reticent about such trends.

Comparing these examples, Americanization influences cultures on Valentine’s Day holidays in different ways and emphasizes its values according to their social and religious backgrounds. Some cultures, like Ghana, are more open to any kind of change because people associate them with modernity. Others, like Japan, quickly adopted the celebration but expanded its significance. Romanian advertising does not ignore the opportunity to share gifts, but differentiates this celebration according to global and local brands. In terms of Americanization, the Romanian market has global campaigns that do not hybridize local ones, such as Dragobete on Valentine’s Day,

Creating Bergenbier “Man’s Day” on the Romanian Market – Case Study

In 1908, Americans decided to celebrate fathers as well as non-discrimination between parents. The first Father’s Day was dedicated to 210 fathers lost in a Monongah, West Virginia disaster several months earlier, on December 6th, 1907. In fact, the first Mother’s Day had happened a year before, so people were influenced by both events. In 1972, President Richard Nixon declared it a permanent national holiday. An International Man’s Day for young boys and young fathers also is celebrated on November 19th.⁴⁰ Since 2010, Father’s Day has been celebrated on the second Sunday of May in Romania and was officially recognized by the state. Of the 27 European Union member states, Romania was the only one without an official Father’s Day. Even so, people do not consider it as important as Woman’s Day (March 1st) and Mother’s Day (March 8th); also, it is almost completely unknown. Actually, Romania welcomed a simple ad idea: beer is basically a men’s drink – hence, it should be dedicated exclusively to them, at least once a year. Leo Burnett created Man’s Day in 2007, celebrating it each May 5th with special campaigns that go beyond brand promotion. Moreover, The National Men’s Organization then tried to convince the Parliament to

adopt this celebration as legal and include it in the Romanian calendar as a day off, even if women's days are not. A print ad states, "It's your right to be free! Vote for Man's Day as a free day." Despite media and market impact, the celebration was not approved as a free day and, each year, the brand organized huge PR campaigns, very creative and unconventional (football matches, concerts, marathons). These campaigns were inspired by the American male image as coined by Old Spice or Gillette ads. Bogdan Naumovici, the main copywriter for *Bergenbier* Man's Day, stated the campaign started from the idea of matriarchy, because Romanians are very conservative: "I thought of a fight platform against matriarchy expressed for *Bergenbier* through Man's Day."⁴¹ These campaigns then developed along with gender discrimination and men's passion for sport.

Conclusions

American identity could be broadly developed due to global advertising and hybridization strategies. Given America's amazing religious plurality and cultural diversity, global campaigns can easily become glocalized without changing the image of brands. Therefore, Americanization relates to several dimensions of strategic advertising such as standardization, hybridization, and identity development. As this paper stated, standardization relies on ignoring local features to universally disseminate a homogeneous message created for one commercial (maybe only adapted by translation). In such cases, American identity maintains its shape, weaving with the local one. In terms of creativity, the final result is a successful puzzle in which the target recognizes itself and its self-projection (dreams, aspirations). This process could be very dangerous for a brand unless its management is under control.

As for the Americanization process, hybridization (or glocalization) is the future, because people can enjoy the American lifestyle, language, and cultural perspective without becoming alienated from their own culture. Advertising expresses power, while social, new media and English are global communication channels. The development of identity is related to new forms of Americanization, new fields for the "cowboy spirit" discovered due to globalization. In advertising, this process may be associated with wide market communication (local brands supporting global ones and vice-versa) and the concept of Americanization itself may scientifically be considered a meta-brand like Cocalization and McDonaldization. In our opinion, the meta-branding process could be further discussed as another way to understand the necessity of reconstructing the American image in the communication field, either in a standardized or in a local manner.

Notes:

¹ George Ritzer, *Globalization: A Basic Text*, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 2.

² Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, 2nd edition, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 16.

³ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, 2nd edition, (Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2009), 66.

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, translated by Chris Turner, (London: Verso, 1989), 76.

⁵ Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies. An Introduction to American Culture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 33.

⁶ Jonathan Rutherford (ed), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 226.

⁷ Barry Smart, *Postmodernity*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 149.

⁸ Charles H. Lippy, "Pluralism and American Religion U.S. Life in the Later Twentieth Century" in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture*, ed. Peter W. Williams (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1999), 48.

⁹ Diana L. Eck, "The MultireligioU.S. Public Square", in *One Nation under God? Religion and American Culture*, ed. Marjorie Garber and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 16.

¹⁰ Idel, 7.

¹¹ Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, Corneliu Pintilescu, "Religious 'Avatars' and Implicit Religion: Recycling Myths and Religious Patterns within Contemporary U.S. Popular Culture", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 11, issue 33 (Winter 2012): 186.

¹² Christian Smith, "ReligioU.S. Effects among American Adolescents", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42 (March, 2003): 22.

¹³ Liliana Mihuț, "Two Faces of American Pluralism: Political and Religious", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 11, issue 33 (Winter 2012): 51.

¹⁴ Baudrillard, *America*, 100.

¹⁵ Phillip Schlessinger, "From Cultural Defence to Political Culture: Media, Politics, and Collective Identity in the European Union ", *Media, Culture, and Society*, 19 (July 1997): 375-376.

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society, Myths & Structures*, translated by Chris Turner, (London: Sage Publications), 1998.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society, Myths & Structures*, 193.

¹⁸ Mike- Frank G. Epitropoulos and Victor Roudometof, "America and Europe, Fragile Objects of Discourse", Introduction to *American Culture in Europe Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mike- Frank G. Epitropoulos and Victor Roudometof, (London: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 4-5.

¹⁹ Irina Frasin, "Identity and Cultural Diversity Challenges arising from Globalization", *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 8, 3 (Sept. 2012): 39.

²⁰ Claudiu Coman, "Modern Media Innovation in Electoral Campaigns", *Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială*, 31 (2010): 48.

²¹ Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, (London: Sage, 1992), 8.

²² *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 134.

²³ Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 31.

²⁴ Victor Roudometof and Roland Robertson, "The Space between the Boundaries Globalization and Americanization", in *American Culture in Europe Interdisciplinary Perspective*, (London: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 189.

²⁵ Ewa Krolukowska and Sven Kuenzel, "Models of Advertising Standardisation and Adaptation: it's Time to Move the Debate Forward", *The Marketing Review*, 8, 4 (Winter 2008): 385-386.

²⁶ Nikolaos Papavassiliou and Vlas Stathakopoulos, "Standardization versus U.S. Adaptation of International Advertising Strategies: Towards a Framework", *European Journal of Marketing*, 31, 7 (1997): 506.

²⁷ Eli Avraham and Anat First, "'I Buy American': The American Image as Reflected in Israeli Advertising", *Journal of Communication*, 53,2 (June 2003):296.

²⁸ Jia Lu, "Multiple modernities and Multiple Proximities: McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken in Chinese Television Commercials", *International Communication Gazette*, 72, 7 (November 2010): 622.

²⁹ Arno Loessner and Călin Hînțea, "Impact of Globalization in Central and Eastern Europe and the Role of Higher Education. Experience of Babes-Bolyai University, Romania", *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 15E (2005): 57.

³⁰ Judith Kleinfeld and Andrew Kleinfeld, "Cowboy Nation and American Character", *Society*, March/April 2004: 43.

³¹ Amza Pellea acted in many Romanian films, some of which connected to American culture and society, like *Uncle Marin*, *Billionaire*. These were broadcast during the Communist era and ironically showed its most oppressive side.

³² Initially, Dero was a Romanian brand that came on the market in 1966; in 1996, it was acquired by Unilever.

³³ Baudrillard, *America*, 83.

³⁴ The greeting is now part of the manuscript collection of the British Library in London, England.

³⁵ Jo Ellen Fair, "'Me, Do, Wu,' My Val: The creation of Valentine's Day in Accra, Ghana", *African Studies Review*, 47, 3 (December 2004): 44.

³⁶ These phases are: chaos and polyvalence (1958-1969), formation and ambivalence (1970-1979), growth and outgrowth (1980-1991), contraction and compunction (1992-2002), recovery and diversification (2003-2007).

³⁷ Yuko Minowa, Olga Khomenko and Russel W. Belk, "Social Change and Gendered Gift-Giving Rituals: A Historical Analysis of Valentine's Day in Japan", *Journal of Macromarketing*, 31, 1 (September 2010):53.

³⁸ IQads, "Noul Rom-Case Study", http://www.iqads.ro/podcast_184/noul_rom_case_study.html. (Accessed February 22nd).

³⁹ IQads, "Noul Rom-A fost o gluma"- http://www.iqads.ro/ad_5639/rom_a_fost_o_gluma.html. (Accessed February 22nd).

⁴⁰ Men's Day logo -<http://www.mensday.ws/en/index.php>. (Accessed February 23rd).

⁴¹ Sonia Ardelean, [AdBreak #43] Bergenbier si Ziua Barbatului in Romania - povestiri din culise de la Bogdan Naumovici si Mihai Ghyka, 26.10.2011, http://www.iqads.ro/a_16593/adbreak_43_bergenbier_si_ziua_barbatului_in_ro

mania_povestiri_din_culise_de_la_bogdan_naumovici_si_mihai_ghyka.html
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