

## Investigation on transformation of advertising strategies and ads according to cultural values from a semiotic perspective: Coca-Cola case

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### Abstract

Although the word globalisation gives the impression as a unified whole, serious cultural differences from country to country could not be ignored. To point out, there is a homogeneous world culture in today's conditions that may not be very accurate. Cultural differences are especially more important for brands placing international ads. For example, white is known to be associated with death in Asia, whereas it is associated with health and cleanliness in Europe. Therefore, the success of the ad is dependent on the appropriate message according to the country where the ad is published. Global advertising concept, which gained importance with the globalisation, loses the distinction of being the current ad types for businesses operating in the international arena today. As a result, advertising has entered the glocal concept. Glocalisation is derived from a combination of words, global (global) and local (local). This paper examines globalisation, cultural concepts, global and local advertising by investigating the phenomenon with the Coca-Cola brand.

Keywords : Culture, advertising, strategy, global, local, glocal.

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## 1. Globalisation and Culture

Globalisation can be defined as a word used in the business, academia and politics, to define the rapid changes and technological developments in the global realm. Although the term 'globalisation' gives the impression that world is a single whole, it can be seen that world is still showing serious cultural differences from country to country. In fact, local and global may seem in a relation opposed to each other, the globalisation process appears to tight universal (global) and local values together. In other words, globalisation constitutes global and local values.

In the globalisation process, 'culture' has become more important than ever in marketing. In today's conditions to mention a world of homogenous culture may not be very accurate. For that that reason, it is necessary to emphasis that expectations of the target audience vary ignorable by country to country. Cultural characteristics of the audience also play a decisive role in the process of creating marketing communication strategy because successful strategies in one country may not be successful in another country (Yurdakul & Dincer, 2004).

With the expansion of consumer culture, it is seen that a brand to be successful in the new market conditions, it may dissolve local items in the same pot with cultural feature and in parallel should also adopt global market products to local market characteristics. In short, this situation can be called as adjustment of global marketing strategies to local market strategies.

Language, religion, beliefs, traditions and such matters involve the notion of culture. People with different cultures, talks in another languages, have different values, dissociate in law, vary in expectations, they live in different places, consequently it is necessary to call them differently.

Global brands do not content themselves with advertising ideas only describing the contents or ingredients of the products they sell. They appreciate the importance of promising consumer lifestyles and know this will lead to best sales. To do this, addressing the potential consumer goes through their language. Thus, 'culture', including the social value of the target market, is becoming increasingly important in international trade relations.

Compared to previous work in marketing communication strategies, brands understand the importance of preferring creative marketing strategies that forefront local market values in reaching target audience with right message and right channel (Yurdakul & Dincer, 2004). Adaptation strategies intended to gain profit with increasing the sales through addressing to differential consumers in a language as their own. In this way, the brand integrates with the country where the advertisement takes place and sense of commitment starts to form by consumers.

The model of global advertising gained importance with the globalisation loses the distinction of being the only type of advertising available today for businesses operating internationally. Because globalisation attempts to provide general messages and thoughts universal, a general message can vary from country to country and some differences in understanding might arise (Elden, 2005).

Consequently, glocal advertisement model has entered into advertising types. Glocalisation originates in a merge of words global (global) and local (local). It began to develop over the last decade as an alternation to standardisation and adaptation. Briefly, glocalisation is marketing a brand suitable to the characteristics of the local market without destroying its global image and properties. Generally, this conception is supported by the statement 'think globally, act locally' (Zeynalov, 2011).

Cultural differences are especially more important internationally advertising brands. However, cultural differences define and adjust conception of various cases, objects, and symbols. This can cause problems when making adaption on international advertisements and there may be need of reformatting those advertisements. For example, a good brand and its creative team should know that white colour is often associated with health and cleansing in Europe, whereas it is often related with

death in Asia. In this context, the success of ads are dependent on the creation of appropriate message according to the country it will run.

### **1.1. Global and glocal marketing**

Glocal advertising is a model used by global brands to position their product that is being advertised in local market through using country-specific motifs prepared for certain countries (Elden, 2005). Conversely, in global advertising model, the world is considered as a single market. Products, services or features of the brand are presented in a way that will appeal to this one world. However, sometimes this single message may not be sufficient and satisfactory, and brand should need to direct different messages to appeal to different cultures as mentioned before. To overcome these problems, glocal model needs to be introduced.

Generally, it is possible to mention two basic approaches in the glocal advertising effort.

In the first of these, a new version of a product or service was designed or produced specifically for that country it is advertised. For example, McDonald's 'KofteBurger' or Doritos's 'Alaturka' which were reproduced and advertised for Turkey can be given. These two ads only prepared specific to Turkey, a local study of a global brand was issued.

The other method is designing a new them or image according to the country the product or service will be going to run, rather than preparing a new products for different countries. The product is the same product but the presentation is different from other countries, it is just altering according to the country-specific motifs and local features. The product is the same product but the presentation is different from other countries, it is just altering according to the country-specific motifs and local features. For such ads, 'Lays 'Chips' can be given as an example. Lays Chips ads use specific motifs and themes only for Turkey are good examples of glocal model (Elden, 2004).

By calling glocal ad, it is mentioned that without leaving the global concept and understanding, creating an ad containing local cultural features and perceptions in it. Within this context, glocal advertising model is not considered separately from the global model. They generally contain an adhesive structure. If it is necessary to use some themes in the local sense, the basic philosophy should be single-minded and single image should manifest itself, and the product must be submitted to a mutually complementary nature of the characteristics of the service or brand in one voice all over the world.

## **2. Coca-Cola Company**

As a USA origin, the Coca-Cola Company is sugar sweetened caramelised soft drinks brand. Coca-Cola, and other several soft drink brands located at the centre of the US state of Georgia, is a multinational company based in Atlanta. Founded in 1886, the company's shares are traded on the New York Stock Exchange acronym as KO. After World War II, it has gained a large market share with extensive advertising campaigns first in Europe as a symbol of the American way of life and after spread all over the world (Zeynalov, 2011).

Turkish businessman Muhtar Kent is Chairman of the Board (CEO). Apart from the well-known brands, such as The Coca-Cola Classic, Diet Cola, Fanta, Sprite, Turquoise, Bibo, Cappy, it holds hundreds of brands. Coca-Cola Company's some brands are available to consumers in many countries, while some of them are only available to consumers in certain countries (Elden, 2005).

While Coca-Cola publishes some of the commercials all over the world, its some periodical commercials are been published locally with local features. Examples include Polar Bears Coca-Cola advertisements' that carry a global and universal characteristic, and it is published in many countries, while specifies Ramadan advertisements' of intense local characteristics in Turkey and other Islamic countries.

Coca-Cola Company's transition to marketing approach is followed as until 2000s 'Think Global, Act Global', after 2000s 'Think Local, Act Locally' and recently 'Think Globally, Act Locally' (Zeynalov, 2011). If Coca-Cola's advertisement published in Turkey viewed as general, it can be seen that Coca-Cola in the past few years, especially during the month of Ramadan, uses local motifs and themes to affect the people and implicitly the market.

Coca-Cola Central Europe and Asia Department Head Cem Kozlu, in his statement he made in 2000, mentioned that the launch of a restructuring strategy process taken at the central office is called as a 'revolution': by his own words 'Maybe we have exaggerated the wave of globalisation. Globalisation ruptures us from the local realities and from our suppliers. We became more than an arrogant company, managed by a single strategy from headquarters in Atlanta'. Cem Kozlu describes the story of localisation decision of the company, which they call 'revolution' as indicated below: why are we late? Why we could not respond in time to the local sensibility? Perhaps, we exaggerate wave of globalisation a little more ... We sell 1 billion bottles of Coca-Cola a day, but still our business is not a global business, is a business based on relationships with people. We have also ruptured that relationship. Coca-Cola revolution started after these determinations. We have said that we are the sum of a local community. We have to be in constant relationship with the community. There shouldn't be merely a commercial connection among consumers and us; there must be a relationship. In summary, we have identified as Coca-Cola's new strategy to get closer to the consumer (Kozlu, 2000, quoted in Yurdakul & Dincer, 2004). As it can be understood from their strategy, Coca-Cola holds the first place in the world's most well-known brands list while carrying out a global brand marketing activities it also specifies strategic transition for local values according to the countries.

## **2.1. Coca-Cola's alternation of strategies according to the cultural values**

### **2.1.1. Examination of sample Coca-Cola ad**

Semiotics is a science that studies indicators and the relationship of indicators with other relevant indicators (Sayin, 2001). In this context, Coca-Cola ads can be analysed by observing at the use of semiotic cultural indicators and to the components used in its relationship with the brand strategy. In a semiotic examination of the indicators it refers to 'Semantic', 'syntactic' and 'pragmatic' meaning of the terms.

Examined commercial (East to West Ramadan) was directed by Can Ulkay and published by Can Ulkay specifically on Ramadan period. Screen shoots from the ad were shown in Figure 1. In terms of semantics, the meaning of the indicators can be clearly understood. Indeed, the indicators of Turkish culture and Ramadan have been used to purify the message. Coca-Cola ads published in the month of Ramadan opens with the sound of the reed flute can create a religious display. Scene continues with an aunt preparing a unique Turkish food called 'gozleme' (a kind of pastry). Scenes continue with local and cultural indicators of the various provinces. People preparing for the breaking of the Ramadan fast were always shown in unity. While people are breaking of the Ramadan fast, Coca-Cola is screened as the common denominator. In this ad, no one, even a person, wasn't fasting alone or drinking Coca-Cola alone because togetherness and sharing is the message to be taken to the forefront. Putting it differently, in period Ramadan, the holy month for Muslims, unity, integrity and sharing are the values is in the foreground and the advertisement was based on these values. That is why in this Coca-Cola ad, everyone was screened together (family, workers, both employees and passengers on the ferry) while they are breaking of the Ramadan fast. Although Coca-Cola is a global brand and has a global image at this ad, Coca-Cola gives a local message for Turks, which is 'you are not alone at Ramadan fast, your family, friends and Coca-Cola is with you'. This message was given by using Turkish culture specific symbols.



Figure 1. East to West Ramadan. Coca-Cola commercial ad.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPLLMljnGel> )

This ad can be only effective in Turkey from the countries where Coca-Cola is consumed, values such as family, sharing, friendship, unity, etc., are presented to the audience through the emotional indicators. Coca-Cola, while not staying contrary to global objectives, advertised on local arena.

Judging from the Syntactic point, a day experienced in various regions of Turkey was shown in a creative consistency and flow, by screening the patience and sharing of the joy while meal preparing and hurrying for the Iftar (breaking of the Ramadan fast) time. These scenes are accompanied with a well-known hymn of Turkish Sufi culture: 'Sordum Sari Cicege'. By this way, cultural values and local motifs have met with consumers by local and cultural rhythms. An original and creative presentation was carried out. This ad addressed to the emotional inner world of audience.

If it is evaluated from the Pragmatic point of view, the message and the benefits of buying Coca-Cola was clearly stated in a creative manner. Advertisement designed in a visual pleasure, letting consumers to fell at home.

Coca-Cola Turkey marketing Director Beyza Ergen explains the formula of the success of Coca-Cola's global marketing field as 'Physical, Emotional and Cultural Happiness', continues explaining that as Coca-Cola they are distributing happiness. For this reason, their slogan is 'open a Coke, open happiness'. She mentioned, as Coca-Cola they are celebrating their 125th anniversary, and the fact is that they distribute 125 years of happiness. Their slogan has changed over time but their discourse had always been on having a good time together and happiness. They consider happiness in three categories including physical sense of happiness, emotional sense of happiness and cultural meaning of happiness. They give physical happiness by cooling off people on hot days. With music and football events they are trying to please them emotionally. Their ads during Ramadan can especially show Coca-Cola's outstanding work for happiness in cultural terms. They are making a special communication plan during Ramadan for 14 years.

## 2.2. Coca-Cola's other strategies

If we briefly mention other local communication strategies of Coca-Cola, we may think Rock'n Coke festival in this context. Since 2003, a huge music event for young people in Turkey is performed under the sponsorship of Coca-Cola. Additionally, with the slogan 'Kimizi-Beyaz En Buyuk Turkiye (Red-White the Biggest Turkey)', Coca-Cola supports Turkish National Football Team competing in the World Cup. Coca-Cola's stand up for the Turkish National Football Team was a study that emotionally attached consumer to the brand. Another sponsorship of Coca-Cola in Turkey is 'Popstar' contest. Coca-Cola by knowing that one of the easiest ways to communicate with young people is music, by sponsoring the contest 'Turkey Pop Star' had remain on the agenda and particularly provide the switching to a close contact with the young people (Yurdakul & Dincer, 2004).

## 3. Conclusion

Usually, advertiser suggests dreams envisioned by consumers will come true when they purchase the product or products. That way, smoking becomes an adventure, an automobile grows a freedom and love is a drink or chocolate. The aim is to create a change in consumer behaviour and creating long-term commitment. From advertisers, perspective people named as consumer is precisely the individual.

When this is taken into account, advertisers, whom their interest is individual and the individual's behaviour, in order to achieve their objectives must specify, recognize and understand every aspect of the individual behaviour. Individuals as an entity living in the society are highly possible to be affected by the culture and social life in which they live in. In this context, it is necessary to address the individual as both psychological and a social presence. Certainly, the necessity to considering the impact of psychological (needs and motivation, learning, perception, personality, attitudes and beliefs) and socio-cultural factors (culture, subculture, families, advocacy groups and social classes) affecting human behaviour arises. Local changes are a way of addressing culture and encounter as one of the most important factors in successfully achieving the goal planned by the campaign. It can be possible to mention that closely observing cultural factors affecting the buying behaviour of consumers and changes in them must be referred for a campaign success.

The reflection of today's contemporary world nested inversion of globalisation and local values to advertising strategies can be summarized with Can Dundar's following words: what happened to the Coca-Cola commercials, that uses celebrities like Michael Jackson, Ricky Martin and Madonna, shoot in Atlanta or London and distributed all over the world a while ago? Why our villagers namely 'Ayse Teyze (Aunt Sally)' who says 'Cekinmen, yeyin gari (don't hesitate, go ahead eat)' took the place of world stars? What happened to Coca-Cola get out from disco, sat on the table of Ramadan? These are the products of the new marketing strategies introduced by the global brands in last years. Now, they are thinking locally, acting locally. Yes, the fight is heating up (Yurdakul & Dincer, 2004).

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