

SYMBOLIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONSUMER CULTURE

СИМБОЛИЧКИ ПРИСТУП РАЗУМЕВАЊУ ПОТРОШАЧА ИЗ РАЗЛИЧИТИХ КУЛТУРА

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Abstract: *The author offers the symbolic approach to understanding the nature of the cultural backgrounds of the consumers in the context of international marketing environment. The value of this approach is that it takes our attention to the necessity to conduct deep marketing research of the basic cultural meanings of the consumers in the various countries. We have to keep in mind that the interpretation of the symbols in marketing communication is depended from the measure of the cultural differences between consumers.*

Key words: *symbol, culture, cultural differences, marketing communication*

Садржај: *Аутор нуди симболички приступ разумевању природе потрошача из различитих културних средина у контексту међународног маркетинг окружења. Вредност овог приступа је да посебно нашу пажњу усмерава на неопходност спровођења темељног маркетинг истраживања основних културних значења за потрошаче у различитим земљама. Морамо имати на уму да је тумачење симбола у маркетинг комуникацији зависно од мера којим се мере културне разлике између потрошача.*

Кључне речи: *симбол, култура, културне разлике, маркетиншка комуникација*

INTRODUCTION

Nevertheless all human culture have universal meaning, each culture is unique and vary from state to state. In spite of the international norms of law, moral concepts and values, international ethics and etiquette, the cultural differences exist within each national state and even each of its regions, territories, cities. Culture plays a significant role in influencing consumer perception and evaluation, which in turn influences preference and purchase. International marketers need to recognize and appreciate varying cultures. A marketing mix can be effective only as long as it is relevant to the concrete society and culture.

International marketing communication is way by which the consumers with various social and cultural backgrounds interaction. Marketing communication helps the process of transmission and exchange of the special significant messages between the participants of communication. Any message is presented as a text, which can be read by the representative

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of any other culture only by means of understanding of this text. In communication process a main role belongs to the verbal means, but nevertheless it is not enough for the participants of the international communication to know grammatical and lexical structure of language. Marketers have to be careful even when the same French language is used in two or more markets, for example France and Belgium. Although these countries have some common features, there are many cultural differences which can be important for the marketer's strategy.

KEY QUESTIONS OF ANALYSIS

Each society and culture creates the particular system of non-verbal communication. Studying non-verbal behavior can lead to the discovery of a socio-culture's underlying attitudes and values. Symbol is the universal way in which the people of different societies and cultures relate to each other, and the means by which one generation relates to those that come before and after it. Symbols are means of non-verbal communication and they serve for expression of meaningful information. Information received from non-verbal resources, helps to interpret verbal messages more clearly and fully. Application of the non-verbal method is practiced only in those situations when the linguistic, cultural, social, religious differences between the participants of the marketing communication are too substantial to use the verbal method. The author put forward the thesis that symbols play a most important role in the whole system of the nonverbal means of intercultural communications in the field of international marketing.

In order to develop an appreciation for the role of the implications of culture in marketing communications, we have to explore the following. Firstly, what culture is? Secondly, what is a role of symbol as non-verbal means of intercultural communication? Thirdly, how culture affects consumer behavior?



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CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONSUMERS

Culture is a way of human being. Culture is that "second nature", created by humanity, in which each individual lives and develops. The human being is the only creature on the earth that is able to create and use symbols. E.Cassirer called a human as "animal symbolicum" [1]. The physical reality goes away as the human's symbolic activity increases. An individual is

so absorbed by linguistic forms and artistic images that people can see and do nothing without the interference of this symbolic mediator. Symbol can be seen as the instrument of the exploration and explanation of the whole world.

Thus, culture is understood as a symbolically significant construction of the world [2]. A symbol is a complex phenomenon, and it requires detailed scientific elaboration. Symbols are the basis for the description of the relations between the physical environment and spiritual world. Individual needs in the symbols to penetrate into the spiritual and semantic layers of the reality. With the help of symbols we store our knowledge, exchange experience and develop spiritual world of a society.

Its worth to note that a concept “culture” can be seen in two basic sides. One the one hand, culture is particular way of thinking and living in the society. On the other hand, culture can be presented as the universal phenomenon of human being. In last connection the scientists use the concept of the “universal values of culture”. G. Hofstede’s theory of culture reveals and describes the universal values of human culture. There are individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, power distance and uncertainty avoidance [3,4]. These twin-categories help explain and predict a host of market and marketing behaviors within and across countries, including consumer innovativeness, brand credibility, and global advertising effectiveness.

C. Nakata and E. Izberk-Bilgin write: “The majority of studies uses country as a surrogate for culture and do not apply an explicit measure of culture. Furthermore, nation and a single country or multiple countries specifically serve as the predominant geographic focus, ignoring the possibility that culture might be interpreted as occurring at levels above or below that of the nation state, as has been widely acknowledged among culture theorists. All these approaches to culture necessarily limit learning about culture and how it matters to global marketing” [5]. It is increasingly important to use the concepts, methods, approaches of the cultural theories in the development of the theory and practice of the international marketing.

SYMBOLS AS NON-VERBAL MEANS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION: ISSUE OF THE INTERPRITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Human interpretation of symbolic meaning differs from various factors (level of education, religious beliefs, political positions, moral values, so on) [4]. Factors that can contribute to the incorrect of interpretation of the message are differences in language and culture between in transmitter and the receiver. Communication between subjects of the cultures with similar basis has wider perspectives for mutual understanding. The degree of similarity of opposed cultures can differ greatly. Very close cultures (maximum similarities and minimum differences) and very remote cultures (maximum differences and minimum similarities) will be polar opposites. The differences can be interpreted as the differences of verbal and non-verbal codes in the context of communication.

In order to avoid “the conflict in the interpretation” [5] of the symbol in the marketing communication in the different countries and regions the market’s specialists need to study and understand the whole system of the potential meanings of that symbol in the history of the culture of those countries. The process of understanding the other culture can be presented as the process of cognition and decipherment of symbols, transforming them into one is own. In the area of marketing communication, symbolic dimension is one of the most valuable. That

is, products and their advertising communicate through the symbolism of color, shape, label, brand, name, and so on. But the interpretation of the symbols is strongly culture bound.

Culture may be examined at each step of the research process of marketing research: questions, survey methods, interviews and questionnaires, informants. As rule consumers buy meanings and marketers communicate meanings through products and advertisements. The consumer goods are vehicles of cultural meanings and consumers choose and then make use of these cultural meanings. In order to understand this, we have to look areas: consumption patterns, norms, values, technologies with people originating from the host culture.

The meanings in marketing exchanges are culture based: they are inter-subjectively shared by a social particular group. Consumption patterns, lifestyles, and the priority of needs are all dictated by culture. For example, eating habits of many people seem exotic to Westerners. The Chinese eat such things as fish stomachs, the Japanese eat uncooked seafood, French eat frogs and snails, Russian eat salt vegetables and fishes, so on. Although such eating habits may seem repulsive to Westerners, consumption habits of the West are just as strange to foreigners. In this context it is interesting to turn to the results of an author's survey which was conducted in 2015 among the students of Rostov branch of the Russian Customs Academy. The total number of respondents was 136 people. The average age was 20 years. The survey focused on the symbolic image of France in the eyes of the Russian youth. When they were asked about the symbol which most clearly reflects the image of France, 85% of respondents answered "Eiffel Tower", "Louvre" (8%), "Notre Dame de Paris" (6%). Only 20% named Paris as the capital of the leading modern fashion, because the majority of respondents (66% of respondents) see the true fashion capital in the face of Milan. Answers to the question "Do you think modern French people consume frogs?" point to the destruction of the historic stereotype about the French people. For example, 53% answered "probably yes", "this tradition in the past" (47%). To the question ("Which products may be considered as an invention of French cuisine?") offered several options. 20% of respondents chose the "mayonnaise", "croissant" (60%), "julienne" (15%), the cake "Napoleon" (5%). On the question "What kind of food you strongly associate with France" respondents answered: "cheese" (44%), "wine" (36%), "champagne" (7%), "cognac" (10%), "chocolate" (3%) [6].

Inter-subjective sharing of meanings signifies that each person in the group knows that everyone else knows the cognitive schema. Therefore in the process of exchange through buyer-seller relations, marketing communications or product consumption, interpretations are made spontaneously, as if they were obvious realities, and a great deal of information in the process of marketing as exchange and communication need not be made explicit [7].

CONCLUSION

Marketing communication takes place within a given culture; a firm's marketing plan assumes meaning or is appropriate only when it is relevant to that culture. The contemporary companies have to understand and except that foreign consumers are not obligated to take on values of particular national country (for example, USA), nor may those consumers desire to do so. The managers should think in international terms and not in terms of his or her native culture.

Because of the great differences in language and culture around the world, companies need to adjust their approach to solving marketing problems in the various countries. In the cultural environment, the marketing plan that has worked well at home may no longer be effective. As

a result, the firm's marketing mix may have to undergo significant adaptation and adjustment. Effective marketing in this environment will be responsible that the company be culturally responsive. The awareness of the influence of culture on the perception and understanding the symbols in marketing communication by the consumer from different countries is relevant because such awareness can help the managers to prevent a transfer of personal cultural norms on a wholesale basis to an overseas market. This awareness should make the managers more customer oriented, and the marketing strategy developed will better reflect hidden market needs.

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