

HOW FAR DOES THE APPLE FALL FROM THE TREE? ADVERTISING PREFERENCES IN SPAIN AND MEXICO

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This research examines which cultural values are important in Spain and Mexico and then relates those findings to the degree of customization required in those markets to yield positive attitudes toward the advertisement. Respondents (N=356) viewed print ads using an experimental design, with results showing total customization of the language and visual portion of the ad was preferred for all four products, but it was most important for ads with emotional appeals. The driver of significant differences in ads which were product-attribute driven was the language (dialect) used. Thus, standardization would not be feasible even in these similar markets.

INTRODUCTION

In the relative nascent paradigm of globalization, companies are moving into developing and diverse markets to improve growth and survival prospects in this competitive landscape (Townsend, Yenyurt and Talay 2009). Firms from industrialized nations are increasingly seeking opportunities in emerging markets, where they have never ventured before and where cultural differences tend to be significant. One thing that has become apparent is that in the international environment, it is a necessity that culture be well understood in order to achieve success in global marketing strategies (VanHeerden and Barter 2008). In fact, culture needs to be a major determinant in the establishment of global marketing promotions.

Although culture is widely recognized as the single most important constraint to standardization of marketing campaigns, the standardization/localization debate hasn't changed or been resolved in almost five decades; it has just changed names (Cateora and Graham 2007). Standardization vs. adaptation changed to globalization vs. localization, which evolved into global integration vs. local responsiveness, to name a few. Advocates of standardization contend that

due to the internet, increased travel and growing sophistication of consumers that global consumers are emerging and that marketing efforts should be standardized across markets. This was the position taken by Elinder (1961) in relation to the European market and later Levitt (1983) in relation to the world. Opponents such as Buzzell (1968) believe that language and cultural differences are of paramount importance, necessitating that firms tailor their marketing efforts to each and every market they enter. Over time firms have learned that it generally does not maximize profits to operate at either of these extremes on the standardization/customization continuum, so the question always becomes how many changes does a firm have to make to render its advertisements and marketing campaigns effective? Because the answer is always different according to the firm and its products/services, the home country and the intended export market and their consumers, the debate and the resulting scholarly articles continue with no end in sight. This debate maintains its significance because culture has been shown to influence all aspects of consumer behavior, including life insurance consumption (Chui and Kwok 2008), customer satisfaction (Ueltschy, et al. 2008), technology adoption (Calentone, Griffith and Yalcinkaya 2006) and lifestyles (Sun, Horn and Merritt 2004), so it is reasonable to believe culture will impact advertising preferences, which will be the focus of this study.

Thus, the objectives of this study are (1) to question whether countries which are perceived as being culturally similar still differ significantly on the cultural values they deem as important, and (2) if these differences influence the degree of customization necessary by a firm to render their advertisements effective. To achieve the objectives of this research, respondents from Spain and Mexico serve as comparative study groups, with the Spanish language and a common heritage serving as uniting influences. However, different paths taken by these two nations in recent history may potentially yield cultural differences.

SPAIN-MEXICO RELATIONSHIP

The blood of the Spanish conquistadors runs through the veins of the Mexican people, but it has been mixed with that of the indigenous Indians to give Mexico its own unique flavor. Since gaining its independence from Spain in 1813, Mexico has enjoyed a friendly relationship with Spain, which in recent times has grown into an important trade relationship.

The year 2010 has seen Mexico increasingly affected by the economic woes of its northern neighbor and NAFTA partner, the United States. The severe recession in the U. S. has led to a drop in external demand for Mexico, a decrease in revenues from exports, tourism and remittances from Mexican relatives living in the U. S. Additionally, Mexico sells practically all of its oil and natural gas to the U. S. (www.wharton.universa.net). The global economic downturn has resulted in a weaker peso, a tighter credit market, lower consumer demand and decreased private investment (*Country Commercial Guide: Mexico* 2009). To offset these woes, plus the problems brought on by the swine flu and the violence of the drug cartels, Mexico is increasingly looking to the European Union (EU), and Spain in particular, to lower its economic dependence on the U. S. Trade between Mexico and the EU totaled \$59 billion in 2008, some 18 percent higher than in 2007 and 222 percent higher than in 1999, the year before the Mexico-EU Free Trade

Agreement (MEUFTA) went into effect. Trade between the EU and Mexico is expected to reach \$80 billion by 2014 (Prim 2009). In 2009, the EU continued to be the second largest destination for Mexican exports and the EU was the second largest source of imports in Mexico, after the U. S. Mexico has also received \$84 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the EU from 1994-2008, with Spain being the largest investor from the EU, accounting for a whopping 47 percent of the total. MEUFTA has also promoted a dramatic increase in Mexico's FDI in the EU (*Trade Links* 2009).

Although Spain has been one of the fastest growing countries in the EU for the last 15 years, the current global recession has hit them also, with GDP growth for 2009 recorded as a negative 1 percent. Spain is the second largest recipient of tourists in the world, but that figure was down for 2009 (*Country Commercial Guide: Spain* 2009).

So, for Spain, focusing on export growth to Latin America, specifically to Mexico, could help its economic woes also. Although industrial production continues to play an important role in the Spanish economy, the service sector continues to expand and currently accounts for 67 percent of economic activity. An indication of this is that Mexico's largest bank is a Spanish bank. Although in recent years Mexico has been an extremely important trade partner for Spain in Latin America, foreign direct investment has been acquiring growing prominence, giving a new dimension to the bilateral relationship. From 1993 to 2004, Latin America received 34.5 percent of Spanish FDI, making it the main area of interest after the EU. Mexico stands above the other Latin American countries, representing 34.6 percent of the regional total of Spanish exports (Santos and Pérez 2009).

Thus, Spain and Mexico hold much allure and potential for each other. With the same language and both classified as high-context cultures (Hall 1977), where relationships and trust come first and completing a conversation

is more important than rushing off to a class or business meeting, marketers from both countries must wonder how much customization is really necessary to make their advertising effective in the other’s market. This research will study that question.

CULTURE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Culture can be thought of as “those beliefs and values that are widely shared in a specific society at a particular point in time (Ralston et al. 2008). In recognition that culture is a multi-layered construct (Tung 2008), the level of analysis in this study will be national culture. At the aggregate or national level, it is “the collective programming of the mind” (Hofstede 2001) that distinguishes the members of one country from another. “More than any other factor, culture is the prime determinant of consumers’ attitudes, behaviors and lifestyles” (Cleveland and Laroche 2007, p. 251). Cultural values can be thought of as the basic motivators in life and the prescriptions for behavior (Rokeach 1973) with culture determining how people perceive and interpret phenomena (McCracken 1986). How an advertisement is perceived is critical in determining the consumer’s reaction to it and how effective the advertisement ultimately is. Because culture is the lens through which our perceptions are filtered, it can be viewed as extremely important in terms of advertising.

To answer the question of whether the ties between Spain and Mexico are strong enough to allow for standardization, one must examine both the countries’ common roots and unique characteristics. A powerful unifying factor would seem to be that Spain and Mexico share a common language, albeit different dialects. As Hall (1959, 217) puts it: “culture is communication and communication is culture.” Language does not merely relay our thoughts but rather influences and shapes them. The cultural paradigms most used to investigate consumer behavior are Hall (1977) and Hofstede (1980, 2001). Hall classifies Spain and Mexico as high-context cultures where relationships and trust come before business

and groups and group harmony come before welfare of the individual. Status is also important in high-context cultures. Thus, Hall would not expect to find cultural differences between Spain and Mexico. Hofstede (1980, 2001) rates countries on four cultural dimensions: power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and individualism (see Table 1). Although Spain and Mexico are very similar on the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, with both countries preferring the status quo, significant differences can be seen on the other three dimensions. It should be noted that Hofstede (2001) added a fifth dimension, long-term orientation, mainly in deference to the Asian countries, but neither Spain nor Mexico was rated on that dimension. Hence, according to the paradigm by Hofstede, Spain and Mexico would be expected to exhibit cultural differences.

TABLE 1
Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

	Spain	Mexico
Power Distance	57	81
Individualism	51	30
Masculinity	42	69
Uncertainty Avoidance	86	82

Rather than simply accept that Spain and Mexico are culturally similar in that they are both high-context countries (Hall 1977) or say that they are culturally different based on their differences on three out of four Hofstede (1980) cultural dimensions, this study will actually survey the respondents using the 36 values in the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) (Rokeach 1974) to examine which values are important in each country.

**CULTURE’S INFLUENCE
ON ADVERTISING**

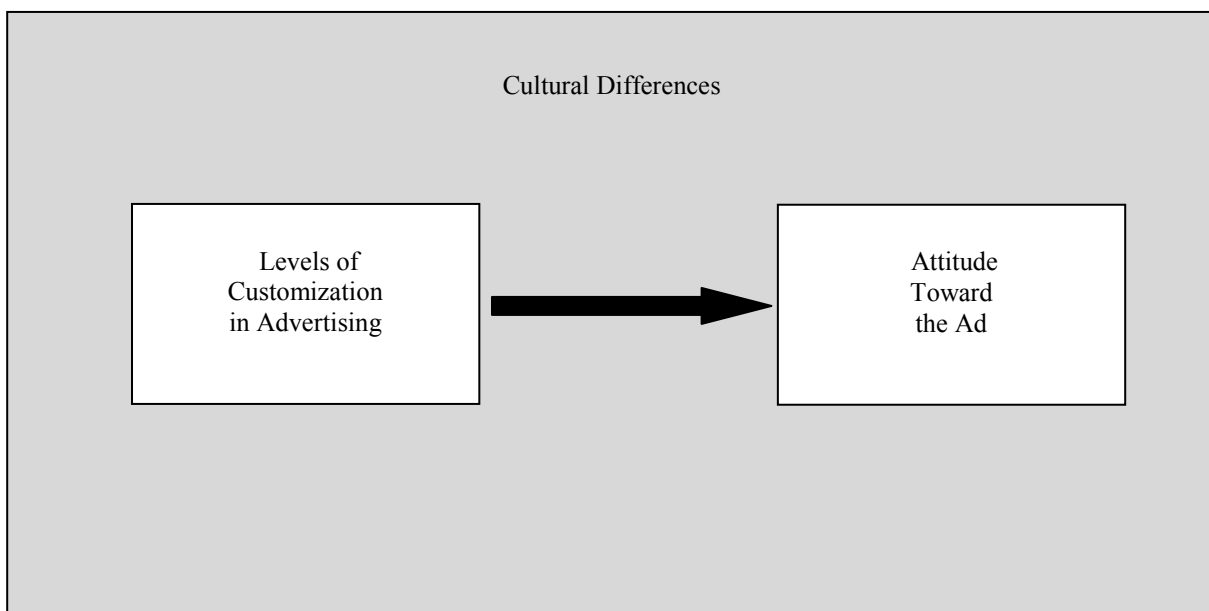
As discussed above, culture affects all aspects of consumer behavior. The influence of culture

is extremely important in transferring advertising strategy across borders, because communication patterns are very closely linked to culture norms in each market (Moon and Chan 2005). How phenomena are perceived is based on the background the viewer brings to the situation. Culture colors or shades the “reality” of a situation, along with the life experiences that a viewer brings. The content of advertisements can activate shared cultural values (Nelson, et al. 2006). For these reasons, the impact of culture has been found to be much stronger in the case of advertisements which have emotional appeals, where the viewer must identify with the people in the ad and the cultural values embedded in the ad for the advertising appeal to be effective.

Culture has been shown to influence advertising in countries where the cultures are very different, such as the United States and Israel (Hornik 1980), and also in countries where cultures are viewed as being very similar, such as China, Japan and Korea, which all have their roots in Confucianism (Ueltschy, et al. 2009). For example, Lass and Hart (2004) found

significant differences in acceptance of sexual imagery in advertising with the Italians, a high-context culture, being more accepting than those in the UK and Germany, low-context cultures. Choi and Miracle (2004) found that national culture has a significant main effect on how comparative advertising is accepted. Respondents in Korea, a high-context and highly collectivistic culture, did not accept comparative advertising as readily as those in the U. S., a low-context and individualistic country. Caillat and Mueller (1996) found differences in advertising preferences in two similar cultures, the U. K. and the United States. These are countries viewed as being so similar that Katz and Lee (1992) said “one might claim that if standardized advertising is to succeed anywhere, it must be in those two places.” Another study by Nelson et al. (2006) focused on four similar individualistic countries: U. S., Canada, Norway and Denmark and found significant differences in advertising based on differences in masculinity/femininity. Thus, the two countries chosen for this study, Spain and Mexico, can be expected to have significant differences in advertising preferences even though they share a language and are both high-context cultures.

FIGURE 1
Framework of Research



RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The research questions to be answered are: (1) Do Spain and Mexico differ significantly in the cultural values they deem important? and (2) How do these cultural similarities or differences affect the degree of customization necessary to make advertisements effective? Is changing the language (dialect) enough or does the visual portion and advertising appeal need to be tailored to the target market? (see Figure 1)

Thus, the first hypothesis to be tested is:

H₁: There will be significant cultural differences between Spain and Mexico.

Spain and Mexico are hypothesized to differ significantly for the following reasons. The Spanish conquistadors and the Spanish Catholic church have played an important role in the cultural evolution of Mexico, but the significant influence of the indigenous Indian cultures can be seen in every aspect of Mexican culture, including certain words used in the Mexican dialect of “el castellano,” the Spanish language. Spain, on the other hand, has received cultural influences from the Arabs, the Romans, the Greeks and the Mediterranean cultures. Additionally, as was discussed previously, Spain and Mexico differ significantly on three of the four dimensions of the Hofstede cultural paradigm.

Given an understanding of these cultural differences or similarities, it will then be feasible to assess the impact of various levels of customization in advertising in these two markets. Culture has consistently been mentioned as one of the key constraints to standardizing marketing efforts globally (Terpstra, Sarathy and Russow 2006), which leads to the second hypothesis:

H₂: If significant cultural differences exist between Spain and Mexico, there will be significant differences in attitude toward the ad based on the level of customization utilized.

The conceptual framework is best described by the model presented in Figure 1. As firms venture abroad, it is this situation, where cultural distance exists between the home and target market, that is of primary interest and concern. Hutzchenreuter and Voll (2008) found that added cultural distance taken on by international expansion negatively impacts a firm’s profitability unless the necessary time and care is taken initially to ensure success in the new market.

METHODOLOGY

Experimental Design

To address the research objectives, respondents were asked to view four print advertisements exhibiting different degrees of customization (see Table 2). The experimental design included two experimental variables, the language used in the ad copy and the visual portion of the ad with its appeal. The country in which the experiment was administered and the product category were the blocking variables. The dependent, or criterion variable, was attitude toward the ad.

The products selected were based on potential interest to students, as indicated by a pretest of graduate students from both countries, and a desire to have each of four categories of consumer products suggested by Whitelock (1987) represented. The four resulting products were Whirlpool washing machines, Ford automobiles, Kodak cameras and Avon cosmetics. The original advertisements were deemed suitable in both markets and were modified as needed to fulfill the research objectives

Sample

MBA students (N = 356) from Spain and Mexico were selected as participants for this study since they were well matched on key demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education and international experience, as advocated by Calder, Phillips and Tybout (1981) since such samples allow a stronger test

TABLE 2
Degree of Customization

T ₁	Total Customization	Language (Dialect)	Home Country
		Visual & Appeal	Home Country
T ₂	Less Customization	Language	Home Country
		Visual & Appeal	Other Country
T ₃	More Standardization	Language	Other Country
		Visual & Appeal	Home Country
T ₄	Total Standardization	Language	Other Country
		Visual & Appeal	Other Country

of theory (see Table 3). The universities selected were two private schools in each capital city. In both samples, over 80 percent of the respondents were young adults 24-35 years of age. In both Spain and Mexico, over 50 percent of the subjects had visited four or more countries outside their own. Significant gender differences in the sample were not noted; 65 percent of the sample in Spain were male and 69 percent of the sample in Mexico were male. The one difference between the two samples is that fewer students in Mexico have the luxury of being full-time students; most MBA students work full-time jobs and go to classes at night and on the weekend. Even though a large percentage in Spain were full-time students, the samples were still well-matched in that 92.8 percent of those respondents in Spain were working part-time in professional jobs and many were sponsored by their firms and given release time to pursue their studies. Additionally, graduate students in foreign countries represent the young upwardly mobile, which is a target market selected by many firms trying to expand internationally.

Measurement

In order to maintain consistency and content, the questionnaire was written in Spanish by the researcher and backtranslated by graduate students from Spain and Mexico, residing in the U. S., who were familiar with the topic of the

study. After demographic questions, the next six questions pertaining to each ad were manipulation checks of the language in the ad and the visual portion of the ad to ensure that respondents perceived the language to be theirs and that the visual portion looked like it was designed for their countries. In relation to the manipulation checks, subjects agreed or disagreed with the statements on a nine-point Likert like scale (1 = strongly disagree and 9 = strongly agree).

To compare cultural values of the participants from Spain and Mexico, Form G (Feather 1988) of the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) was used. Originally designed to have subjects rank order in importance 18 terminal values and 18 instrumental values, more recent researchers (Munson and McIntyre 1979) have modified the RVS, resulting in an interval measure of value importance. Respondents rated each value on a nine-point Likert like scale (1 = not at all important and 9 = extremely important). Lastly, respondents listed the most and least important values from both the instrumental and terminal value lists.

A three-item scale capturing global attitude toward the ad (Zinkhan, Locander and Leigh 1986) was used to measure respondents' attitudes toward the ad, using a nine-point Likert like scale to respond to the three items (1 = strongly disagree and 9 = strongly agree).

TABLE 3
Respondent Profiles

	Spain (N=184)		Mexico (N=172)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
GENDER				
Male	120	65.2	120	69.8
Female	64	34.8	52	30.2
Total	184	100	172	100
AGE				
18-23	25	13.6	8	4.7
24-29	134	72.8	86	50.0
30-35	21	11.4	52	30.2
Over 35	4	2.2	26	15.1
Total	184	100	172	100
OCCUPATION				
Full-time students	103	56.0	31	18.0
Professionals	73	39.7	121	70.4
Technicians, office workers	8	4.3	11	6.4
Factory workers	0	0	9	5.2
Total	184	100	172	100
INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE (countries visited other than their own)				
0 – 3	39	21.2	86	50.0
4 – 6	55	29.9	37	21.5
7 – 8	31	16.8	10	5.8
9 or more	59	32.1	39	22.7
Total	184	100	172	100

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

To ascertain that the desired effects were achieved, manipulation checks were performed pertaining to the language used in the ad copy and the pictures and people used in the visual portion of the ad. T-tests were performed between the respondents from Spain and those from Mexico and the results showed that the desired effects had been obtained with significant mean differences noted at $p < .001$.

Ordering Effects

To control for ordering effects in the experimental design, the four ads were

alternated in four different orders in the booklets given to respondents. To test for ordering effects, ANOVA was done by selecting random variables in the ad section of the questionnaire. No significant differences resulted based on the four different orders in which the advertisements were presented, meaning no ordering effects existed.

Hypotheses Testing

To test for cultural differences between Spain and Mexico, factor analysis was used to extrapolate the value dimensions represented by the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS). With the minimum Eigen value set at one, five factors appeared using principal components analysis with all 36 of the Rokeach values. These five

factors can be thought of as the global value dimensions present in Spain and Mexico (see Table 4) and together they account for 93.1 percent of the total variance. To assess the reliability of the RVS, Cronbach alphas were performed with all 36 values yielding a Cronbach alpha of .913. The Cronbach alphas

of the five factors uncovered ranged from .76 to .82; thus, the RVS is a reliable measurement instrument, having been well validated in the field.

To test whether Spain and Mexico did differ significantly on the value dimensions uncovered, a mean score for all Spaniards was

TABLE 4
Cultural Value Dimensions

	Country Comparison	Difference Between Means
Factor 1 – Rewards in Life		
health		
pleasure		
comfortable life	Mexico – Spain	.4553*
mature love		
sense of accomplishment	Spain – Mexico	-.4553*
family security		
exciting life		
true friendship		
Factor 2 – Peace & Beauty		
inner harmony		
world at peace	Mexico – Spain	-.1218
equality		
world of beauty	Spain – Mexico	.1218
freedom		
national security		
Factor 3 – Mental Attributes		
independent		
capable	Mexico – Spain	.4823*
intellectual		
imaginative	Spain – Mexico	-.4823*
broad-minded		
ambitious		
courageous		
Factor 4 – Personal Responsibility		
self-controlled		
responsible	Mexico – Spain	.5879*
loyal		
clean	Spain – Mexico	-.5879*
polite		
Factor 5 – Religious Values		
forgiving		
loving	Mexico – Spain	.1044
helpful		
obedient	Spain – Mexico	-.1044
salvation		
honest		

* Indicates significant difference at the .05 level

calculated on factor 1 and the same done for all Mexicans with the same procedure followed for all five-factors. Then a Tukey’s Studentized Range test was performed on each factor yielded from the RVS. The first hypothesis was largely supported in that significant differences were noted at the .05 level for three of the five factors, as one can see in Table 4.

Next, to test whether the levels of customization influenced attitude toward the ad, ANOVA was performed with the four levels of customization as the independent variables and attitude toward the ad as the dependent variable. The second hypothesis was supported at the .05 level for all four advertisements, as can be seen in Table 5.

TABLE 5
ANOVA
Attitude Toward Ad Levels of Customization

	F Values	Pr > F
Ford	3.03	.03*
Kodak	6.96	.0001*
Whirlpool	3.33	.02*
Avon	5.67	.0008*

* significant at .05 level

The question of interest, though, to marketers and firms is what factors are the drivers for the significant differences noted in attitude toward the ad? How many changes need to be made to make the ads effective? When looking at the details of the experiment, it becomes apparent that total customization is preferred for all ads – the language (dialect) of the market and the visual portion looking like it was designed for that market. This was particularly true for Kodak and Avon which were based on emotional appeals. In the case of the Ford and Whirlpool print ads, fewer significant differences were seen since they were very cognitively based and product-attribute driven. In the case of the Ford ad, the only significant difference was in relation to the language (dialect) used in the ad. This would make sense

since only the car was pictured; no people were present. In the Whirlpool ad, people were pictured and total customization was preferred, but only the language of the ad was significant at the .05 level.

**DISCUSSION AND
MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Many researchers have conducted cross-cultural research on how culture impacts various types of consumer behavior and most have chosen to use countries thought to be very dissimilar from which to draw their samples, such as Laroche et al. (2004) which investigated customer satisfaction and service quality perceptions among subjects from the U. S., Canada and Japan., contrasting high- and low-context cultures (Hall 1977) and Eastern and Western cultures. Perhaps more challenging and interesting are those studies which choose countries which are thought to be similar to see if cultural differences still do exist and what their impact would be on consumer behavior. An example of this would be a study by Deshpandé et al. (2004) which sampled respondents from China, Hong Kong, Viet Nam, Japan and Thailand and found significant differences in innovativeness, marketing orientation and culture. This present study belongs to the latter category. Spain and Mexico are thought to be very similar culturally. They share a common language, a common heritage and both are classified as high-context cultures (Hall 1977) where relationships and trust are paramount. This study actually surveyed the respondents as to their cultural values and their importance using the RVS, rather than assuming they were similar or different based on the popular cultural paradigms of Hall (1977) and Hofstede (1980). On three of the five cultural value dimensions uncovered using the RVS, there were significant differences between the Spanish and Mexican samples. This probably comes as a surprise to academics and practitioners alike and is a clear warning to firms to not assume that countries are alike culturally just because they speak the same language or are classified similarly according to

popular paradigms. This is particularly true if the advertisement uses an emotional appeal, like Kodak and Avon did, because then the viewers must bring similar perspectives and frames of reference for the ads to be effective, which is where the importance of similarities between cultures enters in. For product categories which typically use product attribute-driven ads, not emotional advertisements, such as industrial products, simply changing the language in the ad prototype advertising (Peebles, Ryans and Vernon 1978), might be very appropriate. However, it should be emphasized that differences in idioms, slang and vocabulary used in the dialect were found to be important in this study, so all the nuances of a particular dialect must be adhered to in order to maximize positive feelings toward an advertisement. Thus, the findings of this study concur with the contention of Alimiéne and Kuvykaite (2008, 37) that “standardization is often of no use to companies because of differences in language, culture, and consumer preferences . . . whereas, adaptation helps companies to evaluate and effectively use cultural differences to their competitive advantage.” So, in relation to the question in the title: How far does the apple fall from the tree? It does not fall directly below the tree, but rolls a short distance as if to establish its own self-identity.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Using subjects from Spain and Mexico, this study found that significant cultural differences may be found, even in nations linked by a common language and heritage. Although respondents from both countries indicated that salvation was the least important cultural value from the RVS and health the most important, they did vary significantly on the importance they placed on three of the five cultural value dimensions uncovered, with these cultural differences translating into significant differences in advertising preferences as measured by attitude toward the ad. Respondents from both countries wanted the visual portion of the ad to look like it was

created for them and the language in the ad to be their dialect of Spanish. This concurs with the work of Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2006) that found that pictures are not universal and visual interpretations vary as viewers use cultural cues and visual signs to interpret commercials. Advertising messages are processed differently by receivers raised in different cultures. Interpretations of a single advertisement may vary considerably. Thus, advertisers should be aware of ascribed meanings of their advertisement internationally, as subtleties in campaign interpretation may lead to difficulties in various markets. Another important implication for managers is that sending a print ad to a translation service and telling them to translate it into Spanish is not sufficient; the dialect of Spanish has to be correctly matched to the target market. The viewer needs to perceive the language (dialect) as being their own; understanding the message is not enough.

While the findings from this research are potentially very useful for managers and marketers operating in global firms, the limitations must also be acknowledged, and then considered as opportunities for future research. This study focused solely on print ads; future research should investigate other types of media, such as television commercials and see if similar findings result. Lastly, this research surveyed graduate business students, the young, upwardly mobile segment in just two countries, so the results may be applicable solely to the results of the investigation. Subsequent research could employ samples from other countries culturally similar to each other who share the same language, such as Canada and the U.K. or Germany and Austria, etc. to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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