Critical Analysis: Cultural Views Of Advertising Theory

Cultural influences are part of every aspect of a consumer's life. Through the consumer's environment their behaviours, attitudes, social values, self and social identity and moral developments are all culturally influenced (Rodgers & Thorson, 2019). As more brands continue to enter the global market and target culturally unique markets, cultural knowledge is important for advertisers to understand in order to remain competitive (Rodgers & Thorson, 2019). With this being said, Rodgers & Thorson (2019) suggest cultural orientation influences the way advertisers execute their campaigns and how consumers respond to the advertisement.

In addition to culture, advertising expression can be affected by many socioeconomic factors such as political systems, the level of economic development and the literacy rate. According to Hong, Muderrisoglu & Zinkhan (1987) there are three factors which "influence international advertising: consumption patterns, psychological characteristics and general cultural factors" (p. 55). These influences coincide with culture and how advertising campaigns are strategically related to a particular society's cultural norm. In recent studies, international advertising is traditionally focused on consumers cultural influences based on their location and cultural characteristics (Rodgers & Thorson, 2019). With this being said, global brands need to look past the traditional forms of cultural influences a foreign market may have had but understand the younger generation of the digital world.

According to Kim & Heere (2012), "a global brand is defined as one that consumers can find under the same name in multiple countries with generally similar and centrally coordinated marketing strategies" (p. 19). Nike for example is a global consumer product who have recognised the importance of targeting the Asian market in the 1990s. During this time, Nike developed an extensive marketing strategy to make their Swoosh logo recognisable in the Asian market by appealing to the younger generation (Kim & Heere, 2012). For example, the total revenue for Nike Inc. 2019 for the recent quarter was US$9.6 billion, a 7% increase for the same period in 2018. Of this amount, US$1.6 billion was China's revenue compared to its strong traditional market of Latin America generating only US$1.3 billion (247WallSt, 2019). Therefore, cultural influences are critically important for advertisers when marketing to global consumers. In order to remain competitive, advertisers need to understand how consumers perceive these global brands and how consumer's cultural decisions influence them to purchase the goods.

Relevance of Cultural Influences

Global sporting brands are recognising the need to expand globally into foreign markets as Nike acknowledged in the 1990's. According to Seo (2010) the marketing strategies sporting brands use are to help maintain their consumer base, adopt new approaches to promote and communicate their brand and/or products to overseas markets.

Understanding the relevance of cultural influences can be determined using the Active Model of Persuasion (Elaboration Likelihood Model - ELM). This model aims to explain the different ways consumers process information and why advertisers use specific content messages to persuade the consumer (Rodgers & Thorson, 2019). Prior to the ELM model being developed, the impact

persuasion has on the formation of consumer attitudes was not comprehensively understood (Kitchen et al. 2014). The ELM model is often used by advertisers to understand consumer attitudes and the process of persuasion. There are two types of persuasion routes in the ELM model, these are central or peripheral.

Central route is a form of persuasion consumers receive through the content message. The second route, the peripheral route does not just rely on the content message but other associations such as the packaging, logo and/or symbols (Vanwesenbeeck, Walrave & Ponnet, 2016). Notably, the peripheral route influences consumers attitudes when they are not interested in the content but rather the image which stimulates their emotional feelings leading to a positive brand and advertising attitude (Seo, 2010).

Nike Inc recognises the use of visual communication to be a key component in advertising in order to attract the attention of overseas consumers (Seo, 2010). The Nike Swoosh logo is undoubtedly the most striking and recognisable symbol and/or brand in the global market today with a simple and clear message. Therefore, advertisers can effectively persuade and communicate to consumers by developing creative advertising “executions that inform, resonate, convince and even entertain” (Kates & Goh, 2003, p. 65). With this being said, global brands need to explore and recognise what are the cultural influences of each foreign market in order to determine the motivations of consumer consumptions.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Cultural Influences

As discussed previously, cultural influences are extremely relevant when targeting a foreign market through advertising. According to Rodger & Thorson (2019), acknowledging how advertising works in multicultural societies can help explain the way cultural forces influence individuals and how those individuals respond to persuasive messages. Through the communication process in creating an effective advertising campaign/message and the level of persuasion a consumer has towards global brands. Thus, culture has a significant role in the global market (Rodgers & Thorson, 2019).

In recent studies, researchers have found that global consumers have similar tastes and/or preferences when it comes to global brands and so through cultural, social and economic influences understanding the differences is important (Mikhailitchenko, Javalgi, Mikhailitchenko & Laroche, 2009). Rodgers & Thorson (2019) point out that “cultural distinctions have demonstrated important implications for advertising content, persuasiveness of appeals, consumer motivation, consumer judgement process, and consumer response style” (p. 462). From this perspective, culture is likely to influence how consumers perceive a global brand and the advertising message directed at them through the way they think, feel and respond.

With this being said, cultural influences are significant for markets and/or advertisers as consumers influenced by the ELM peripheral route may “be influenced more strongly by ingrained disposition than by cognitive processes” (Sportswood & Tapp, 2013, p.278). Since culture has a significant role in advertising in the global markets, there are however strengths and weaknesses of cultural influences that global brands and/or advertisers need to address when creating their marketing strategy.

Strengths of Cultural Influences

Through the use of visual imagery in global markets, the consumers perception and the peripheral route of ELM are caused by the fact that cultural environments are a combination of beliefs, values, norms and attitudes obtained by consumers as it's part of their heritage (Mikhailitchenko, Javalgi, Mikhailitchenko & Laroche, 2009). Recent studies have found consumers in emerging markets (i.e. developing nations such as Asian markets) like to emulate the behaviours of consumers within developed markets (Western nations), particularly for their consumption behaviours and lifestyles (Kim & Heere, 2010). With this being said, consumers who own a global product feel like they are somewhat part of a community that connects them with other consumers who also own the same global product, regardless of their geographical location.

Global sporting brands who collaborate with international sport athletes or sponsor foreign athletes are more likely to relate and influence consumers of that particular foreign market they are targeting. Nike Inc have used sports sponsorship in Asian markets in recent years as a promotional tool to appeal to the younger generation. According to Kim & Heere, Nike Inc "outfitted top Chinese athletes and sponsored all of the teams in China's new pro basketball league in 1995 (2012, p. 20) which influenced the younger Asian generation to purchase Nike products making Asian markets the major consumers of Nike products.

According to Ko, Taylor, Sung, Lee, Wagner, Navarro & Wang (2012) it's important for advertisers to know who they are targeting, for example Nike who target the younger generation in Asian markets are less price-sensitive and more responsive to the ambassadors of the brand. From this perspective, targeting the younger generation particularly in the sports industry have similar values, lifestyles, mass media and a popular culture (Ko et al., 2012). As previously discussed, global consumers especially the younger generation want to feel connected and a part of a global community with the same experiences and/or desires as they do.

With the sports culture continuing to grow globally, Nike's cultural influence on foreign markets are determined on how their brand advertisements appeal to those consumers while contributing to the globalisation of commodity culture (Goldman, Papson, 1998). Therefore, understanding cultural influences of a foreign market is crucial for global brands if these brands want to remain competitive in one of the fastest growing markets in the world (Kim & Heere, 2012).

Nike a globalised brand has created a culture where consumers consider the brand to be reliable, high quality and prestigious in the sporting world. Thus, consumer attitudes towards a brand are formed through advertising campaigns as "the meanings associated with those advertisements (which may culturally bound) and other aspects of the brand e.g. experience with the brand, status, personality that is deemed that advertising context, culture plays a role in inducing attitude towards the brand" (Seo, 2010, p 65). According to Seo (2010) "communication and culture are not separate entities or areas, and each is produced through a dynamic relationship with the other" (p. 21). In summary, when advertisers communicate their brand and/or product to foreign markets they need to ensure both their advertisement and the message communicated has a clear culture influence when persuading global consumer.

Weaknesses of Cultural Influences

Cultural influences have many strengths when targeting the global market through the

peripheral route of the ELM model, however, there are some weaknesses that may be difficult in representing consumers “schematic processing of visual images embedded in real-world contexts” (Seo, 2010, p. 13). Further to this, consumers from different cultural backgrounds express their emotions, perceptions of self and others could also differ which can raise problems of miscommunications (Craig & Douglas, 2005). As a result, “intercultural communication between consumers from different national cultures raises numerous issues of which difference in language constitute” (Craig & Douglas, 2005, p. 329).

As previously discussed, consumers regard global brands as high quality and a sense of prestige in the global market however, this could offset consumers ethnocentric tendencies meaning one’s culture belief their culture is different and in some way superior to other cultures (Seo, 2010). With this being said, consumers from a foreign market “believe their own nation produces superior products; hence they develop a preference of ‘homegrown’ products (Seo, 2010, p. 20). Global brands face these cultural challenges when entering a foreign market and so the psychological processes behind consumer attitudes towards a global brand are quite complex due to ethics, social responsibility and consumer behaviour.

According to Mooji (2003) consumers with different perceptions, behaviours and cultural influences in one culture are not necessarily relevant for other cultures meaning universal advertisement does not make an effective advertising. For example, in Asian markets advertisers frequently use more implicit messages of the product in a visual context so the advertisement relates to a society in order to create a sense of cultural stimulus (Seo, 2010).

Over the years there has been significant doubt and further recognition that the ELM model has some weaknesses. Kitchen et al. (2014) discuss how advertisers have found the ELM model to be questionable about its predictive abilities and its implementation in the advertisement. Furthermore, the ELM model was developed during the 1980’s a time when there was a mass-media marketing communication, thus advertisers might use the ELM model without reacting to the new global market of digital landscape (Kitchen et al. 2014).

Cultural influences is quite complex due to the number of definitions of culture and so many focusing on the “social and group processes, particularly the extent to which these are converging or diverging across countries rather than on the individual” (Craig & Douglas, 2005, p.323). Therefore, advertisers should understand how significant the role of culture is in advertising; however, much work is needed to fill the gap of knowledge in how advertising works across nations and ethnic cultural groups (Rodgers & Thorson, 2019).

Recommendations on Cultural Influences

Given the findings and discussions of cultural influences, it is clear that cultural understanding is critical for success when advertising to a global market. The ELM model using the peripheral route is a theory in which marketers should refer to when targeting global consumers. According to Rodgers & Thorson (2019) advertisers known as the source in terms of encoding associate the product, targeted consumers and their society through their advertisement. Further to this, culture influences the consumer in terms of how they decode the advertising message (Rodgers & Thornson, 2019).

A key finding for global brands should be aware of and avoid when communicating to foreign

markets, particularly “Asian markets is the extent to which an advertising campaign can be standardised across cultures” (Seo, 2010, p.1). With this being said, global consumers rely heavily on their cultural beliefs and/or customers when it comes to evaluating the advertisement and forming their opinion. As a result of this, consumer behaviour has changed over the years due to cultures not depending on local resources to formulate their characteristic, preferences or behaviours but rather linking to different geographical locations (Craig & Douglas, 2005).

Consequently, marketing managers should direct their attention and focus on strategies that connect their consumers around the world. Hence, marketing managers should take advantage of this and “develop a global brand image that is competitive with traditional brands such as Nike and Adidas (Kim & Heere, 2010, p.29). With this being said, it’s perfectly that consumers response is heavily influenced by culture and markets such as Asian or Western markets vary when it comes to advertising persuasion (Seo, 2010). Therefore, cultural influences vary from one country to another and so an advertising campaign needs to adapt to the individual market they are targeting.