AGE AND ETHNOCULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ADVERTISING PERCEPTION

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Abstract. The study of ethnocultural and age characteristics of the advertising messages’ perception by potential consumers is extremely relevant and practically significant in the context of active international trading and industrial relations. While perception is a cycle guided and organized by a cognitive schema, the final image includes a person’s knowledge of the world. This determines the importance of studying the factors that determine the specifics of creating an image. The authors of this article consider the perception of advertising as a process of generating a meaning, which in the context of intercultural communication reveals cultural characteristics that are potentially important when choosing a strategy of behavior. The empirical study involved 100 people living in the United States and Russia. The research methods revealed differences in the assessment of values in both groups. Further research aimed at studying the specifics of advertising media texts showed that in the perception of advertising, not age differences, but the cultural aspect plays the leading role. The visual appeal of the commercial, the semantic and imaginative transparency, the positive attitude towards the main characters do not affect the desire of potential consumers of the American and Russian sample groups to purchase the advertised product. The research showed that studying the perception of advertising media texts allows you to obtain additional information about the representatives of different cultures. A cultural artifact actualizes specific features and allows you to model the idea of the overall integrity of the phenomenon under study.

Key words: media text, advertising perception, culture, consumer’s behavior, meaning, artifact.

Introduction

The modern development of post-industrial and new industrial national, religious, economic and other communities (from separate strata to new states) gives rise to new cultural practices that cannot be studied using traditional means. Their appearance is the result of emerging social formations and institutions that give rise to “hybrid cultural identities” [1]. New characteristics of the interaction of community members and new phenomena in society, the speed and depth of systemic changes in society drew attention to the language, texts and media texts used in advertising campaigns [2]. An increasing understanding that at present they are the central means that can be designated as cultural artifacts, on the one hand, acting as a product of new social relations and practices, on the other hand, representing a new kind of integrity, forms (as interaction of components), or in the modern thesaurus — “design”. The concept of exploring cultural artifacts as a design of overall integrity offers a means for analysis in project-oriented research [3].

It should be noted that it is the study of media texts from a socio-psychological perspective that opens up opportunities for the development of new methodological foundations that represent a broader and more modern cluster of interpretations of the media messages’ meaning. The goal of such studies is not a methodological freedom, but a tool for obtaining the largest amount of possible data, potentially aimed at covering the broadest possible social reality.

It is generally accepted that practice-oriented research mostly strives to find forms of explaining theories, tools or methods, and should provide a basis for the formation of new theories. For example, studying specifics of consumer’s perception of advertising allows you to reach a serious level of analysing the process of meaning formation in the context of interaction with the media [4].

In the modern context, the media text of advertising messages can be viewed as a curious artifact of social practice. From a socio-psychological point of view, the influence of media texts on society has long gone beyond the scope of only economic relationships, since their content not only captures the situation in a particular society, but also actively participates in its life. The success of the advertising media text is sufficiently provided by how psychologically correct the choice of a specific means of influencing a person is, which is most connected with the quality of considering the individual, personal,
cultural [5] and age characteristics of a potential consumer [6]. Regarding the buyer’s age characteristics in advertising, determining the needs and specifics of the perception of the advertising image, ethnocultural factors or acculturation [7], reflecting the entire spectrum of life and activities of its consumers and underlying their world outlook, act as important psychological determinants of effective advertising influence [8].

In this perspective, the process of perception is considered as a multilevel system of mental activity, determined by the mutual recognition of people in the process of joint activity and communication, and the perception of advertising is viewed as an integrative phenomenon of social perception [9].

It should also be specially noted that the term “media text” in the narrow sense means any message sent via the media tools or mass media. In the scientific semiotic tradition, the term media text means that “texts” are considered as complete communicative messages created using any conventional language (photography, paintings, drawings, conventional signs, color [10], etc.), built on images where the meaning of the transmitted allows multiple interpretation, leaving, on the one hand, a large field for an independent spiritual search for the “interlocutor”, on the other hand, opening up huge opportunities for enriching the dialogue [11].

Although media research and marketing research are focused on the study of the communication process [12], the approaches are very different, since in the first case the audience is considered as participants in the dialogue, an as potential consumers of other goods or services in the second one [13]. The specifics of cross-cultural research [14] is characterized by the fact that the object of the study allows, regarding the general laws of the psychological process, for example, perception [15], to focus attention on the research participants as citizens, representatives of a certain culture [16].

**Methods and Materials**

An empirical study conducted in the context of a cross-cultural experiment [17] involved 100 people (50 citizens of the Russian Federation and 50 US citizens, divided into four age groups, respectively: R18–24, R25–35, A18–24 years and A25–35 years). The researchers were interested in these age groups since they are the most active consumers of goods and services. Numerous studies carried out in the United States show that these groups form the mainstream of consumers and, under the immense impact of the media, can be susceptible to advertising strategies used by the media [18]. The respondents were recruited from members of various groups (Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Facebook).

At the first stage, we studied Russian and American cultural values using the methodology of G. Hofstede “Values Research Module 1994” [19; 20], successfully applied in marketing practice [21]. This showed that Russians and Americans have opposite cultural values: in the first module of the values “Individualism vs. Collectivism” USA is a country which highly values individualism (82 points), Russia values collectivism (21 points). In the “Power distance” module, America is a country with less distant power (91), Russia — with more (34). In the module “Uncertainty avoidance” America is a country that accepts uncertainty (84), Russia avoids it (31). In the module “Masculinity vs. Femininity” both America and Russia are countries with data indicating the femininity of cultures, but in America the femininity of culture is manifested more vividly than in Russia (America has 15 points, Russia — 22). And in the last module “Long-term vs. short-term orientation”, Americans have a long-term orientation (88), Russians — a short-term orientation (27).

Therefore, we can see that Americans prioritize careers, freedom, and family, Americans are easier to tolerate changes, are not tied to a place and are much less anxious than Russians, and tend to count on success. Russians, in turn, have more distant relationships with children (less control), Russians experience more emotional resistance to change, strong work-related stress and increased anxiety, fear of defeat, and therefore are much less tend to risk and change (Fig. 1).
At the second stage of the study, the respondents were asked to watch four advertising videos and answer the questions of the offered questionnaire [22].

In the research, we used the following groups of advertising videos:

1. Advertising of the unlimited mobile Internet provided by a Russian brand “Megafon” with the singer IOWA;
2. A commercial for the American brand “AT&T” with actor Mark Wahlberg;
3. Advertising video for cookies of the Russian trade mark “Yubileinoye”;
4. A commercial for the American brand “Misano”.

The first and second videos advertising the unlimited mobile Internet Megafon and AT&T were shown without translation to study what the respondents pay attention to when there is no content component due to the language barrier. The third and the fourth videos with advertisements for “Yubileinoye” and “Misano” cookies were shown without words to exclude the translation problem from the list of possible reasons for not understanding the content of the advertising message.

To obtain data, we developed an author’s questionnaire, based on the AIDMA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Motive, Activity) [23], which is applicable both for cross-cultural analysis of advertising, and adopted in the psychology of the "CAC" triangle, which implies considering the attitude to advertising in three aspects: cognitive – rational, affective – emotional, conative – behavioral components of advertising influence. The answers to the questions assumed a verbal answer, as well as a ranking of the answer on a scale, which made it possible to carry out a statistical analysis of the received answers using the Cronbach’s α test (Cronbach’s alpha), which showed an internal consistency of answers at the level of 0.7.

For statistical verification of the data obtained in the analysis of responses, we used the Pearson test, the $\chi^2$ goodness test.

The following questions were analyzed:

1. Question: “What product is advertised on this video?”

   • Without understanding the language, promotional videos remain insufficiently understandable for consumers of a great linguistic group. The Americans could not understand the product advertised by Russian advertising, and the Russians — the American one.

   • There were no age differences within the American or Russian sample.

The $\chi^2$ values, where the critical $\chi^2$ is 5.99, and the significance level is 0.05, are presented in Table 1.
Correlation data from a comparative analysis of Russian and American respondents’ answers in the age groups of 18–24 and 25–35 to the question “What product is advertised in this video?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian advertisement</th>
<th>American advertisement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R18-24</td>
<td>26.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R25-35</td>
<td>13.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: “Would you like to buy this product?”

Statistically significant cultural differences and similarities:
- The advertising product of American commercials aroused the greatest consumer interest in both the Russian and American sample than the product of Russian commercials.

Statistically significant age differences and similarities:
- Russians aged 25–35 have the most ambiguous attitude towards advertised goods in Russian commercials: in 44% of cases the respondents expressed a desire to purchase the goods, and in 40% they did not;
  - Americans aged 25–35 have shown the least desire to purchase products of their country’s brands;
  - Russians aged 18–24 would like to purchase goods advertised by American and Russian commercials, as well as Russians aged 25–35;
  - Americans aged 18–24 and 25–35 years old evaluated the attractiveness of both Russian and American goods differently.

The $\chi^2$ values, where the critical $\chi^2$ is 5.99, and the significance level is 0.05, are presented in the Table 2.

Table 2.

Correlation data from a comparative analysis of Russian and American respondents’ answers in the age groups 18–24 and 25–35 to the question “Would you like to buy this product?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian advertisement</th>
<th>American advertisement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R18-24</td>
<td>12.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R25-35</td>
<td>6.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A18-24</td>
<td>11.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>A25-35</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: “Did you like this promotional video?”

Statistically significant cultural differences and similarities:
- Americans generally rated both Russian and American videos more positively than Russians;
- Russian video advertisement was more attractive to American respondents than American;
- Russians considered American advertisement more attractive than Russian.

Statistically significant age differences and similarities:
- Russians aged 18–24 and 25–35 equally assessed the attractiveness of both Russian and American commercials;
  - Americans between the ages of 18–24 and 25–35 equally assessed the attractiveness of Russian advertising videos (positively);
  - Americans aged 18–24 and 25–35 years old rated the attractiveness of American advertising videos differently (Americans aged 25–35 years old rated more positively than Americans aged 18–24).

The $\chi^2$ values, where the critical $\chi^2$ is 5.99, and the significance level is 0.05, are presented in the Table 3.
Correlation data from a comparative analysis of Russian and American respondents’ answers in the age groups 18–24 and 25–35 to the question “Did you like this commercial?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Russian advertisement</th>
<th>American advertisement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American advertisement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R18-24</td>
<td>2.025</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>R25-35</td>
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<td>0.738</td>
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<tr>
<td>A25-35</td>
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</table>

4 Question: “What do you think about the characters of this promotional video?”

Statistically significant cultural differences and similarities:
- Russians liked the American characters of advertising videos more;
- Americans between the ages of 18–24 liked the characters of Russian advertising videos more;
- The highest number of negative answers evaluating the characters of Russian advertising videos was shown by Russian respondents aged 18–24;
- The highest number of negative answers about the characters of American advertising videos was shown by Americans aged 18–24.

Statistically significant age differences and similarities:
- Russians aged 18–24 rated the characters of Russian and American advertising in the same way as Russians aged 25–35;
- Americans aged 18–24 rated the characters of Russian and American advertising in the same way as Americans aged 25–35.

The $\chi^2$ values, where the critical $\chi^2$ is 5.99, and the significance level is 0.05, are presented in the Table 4.

Correlation data from a comparative analysis of Russian and American respondents’ answers in the age groups 18–24 and 25–35 to the question “What do you think of the characters in this commercial?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Russian advertisement</th>
<th>American advertisement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American advertisement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R25-35</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A18-24</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.105</td>
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<tr>
<td>A25-35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarize we can say that statistical analysis of the data obtained, showed statistically significant differences among the responses of the Russian and American sample to the questions about whether they like the video advertisement, whether they would like to purchase the advertised product and what was their attitude to the main characters of the advertising videos.

It should be noted, however, that no statistically significant age differences were found for the same questions either within the American or within the Russian sample (Table 5).
Qualitative analysis of the results was carried out using content analysis of answers to three questions:

1. “What do you think about the characters of these videos?”
2. “What did you like the most about this video?”
3. “What did you dislike the most about this video?”

1. “What do you think about the heroes of these videos?”

An analysis of the answers to the first question showed a tendency that Russians, regardless of the age and country where the video was shot (American or Russian), mainly assessed the personality of the actor, not his role. Americans did the opposite. It is also worth noting that Russians have a very negative attitude to the advertising products of their country, although they may note the attractiveness of the video itself (“good advertising, but the product is not very good”), and the American advertising products are rated positively. The Americans did not observe such in-group discrimination: they assessed the advertising videos of their own country and that of a foreign one equally.

Assessing the heroes of the advertising video for the Yubileinoe brand cookies, Russians aged 18–25 and 25–35 found the characters cute and funny, while Americans, regardless of age, considered the characters and their actions weird, but appreciated the animation and remained generally neutral to the video.

When evaluating the heroes of the commercial for the Milano brand cookies, we found ambiguous attitude of Russian viewers towards the appearance of the fourth video’s main character (a black woman). Russians and Americans aged 18–24 found the woman visually attractive, while Russians aged 25–35, found her appearance repulsive. It is worth noting that Americans paid attention to the fact that the main female character looks tired of the family, and the image of the child is broadcast as a “burden”. Russians practically did not have such observations.

2. “What did you like the most about this video?”

Both Russian and American participants of the study aged 18–24 liked the graphics the most watching the Megafon advertising video, while Russians and Americans aged 25–35 liked the soundtrack of the video.

Watching a video advertising the cookies of the brand Yubileinoe, basically all viewers appreciated cute graphics and characters, but it is worth noting that only Americans aged 25–35 highlighted the presence of a “family relations demonstration”.

Analyzing the responses to the advertising video for the Milano brand cookies, we found that most of all in this video, both Russians and Americans liked humor, but Russians aged 25–35 also liked the relaxing mood, and Americans aged 25–25 years old appreciated the plot.

3. “What did you dislike most about this video?”

Russians found it difficult to single out negative qualities in American advertising videos. Even a lack of language skills sufficient for understanding the content of the video could not stop Russian viewers from finding its negative characteristics. However, an exception for the Russian sample between the ages of 25–35 was an advertising video for the American brand “Milano” cookies with a black woman as the main character. The Russian sample, regardless of age, had a huge number of complaints about Russian advertising videos. Basically, it was dissatisfaction with the plot, graphics, “too bright colors” or “too dim”, too much theatrics in the actors’ actions, poor cast of actors, the discrepancy between the advertising product and the selected video sequence, etc. The Americans, on the other hand, generally assessed Russian advertising videos positively. It is also worth noting that even without understanding the language, the Americans pointed out a possible discrepancy between the advertising product and the selected video sequence. In the advertising videos of their country, American viewers did not like the overload of information and the discrepancy between the video sequence with the advertised product (advertising video of the unlimited mobile Internet of the AT&T brand). Besides, Americans aged 18–24 noticed that in the video for Milano cookies, the child is shown as an annoying factor and this is not a good message to the audience. Americans aged 25–35 found it difficult to answer this
question, because they considered the video satisfactory.

As we can see, the Russian sample has in-group discrimination and auto-group favoritism regardless of age. Americans remain objective in this matter and are more positive towards both their own country’s and foreign advertising videos. It is interesting to note the qualitative difference in the responses of the American and Russian samples: the Americans were very careful in expressing negative comments, always explaining the reason for their opinion, while the Russians generally answered briefly and concisely, without adding arguments and explanations.

Formulating answers to questions, Americans often turned to the concepts of goodness and family values, which confirms the important place they occupy in American culture [24]. Analyzing the answers to the question, which video did the respondents like the most, we got completely different results: there was no video that would be liked simultaneously by two samples out of four.

- Russians between the ages of 18–24 liked the advertisement of cookies of the American trade mark “Milano” most of all, explaining that “this video is really funny, and humor is important in advertisement”;
- Russians aged 25–36 chose the Russian commercial of Megafon, explaining their choice by the fact that the video is bright and the song is well remembered;
- Americans aged 18–24 chose the Russian video for the Yubileinoye cookies, explaining that this video has pretty cute graphics, cute characters and, in general, the video after watching it leaves a “pleasant feeling”;
- Americans aged 25–36 chose the American AT&T commercial, explaining that the video had a good and memorable idea.

Results

At the third stage, using the Pearson criterion, we calculated the correlation between the desire of consumers to purchase the advertised product and the assessment of the attractiveness of the advertising video, its accessibility and clarity for respondents, as well as their positive attitude to the main character. The obtained correlation values are presented in the Table 6.

Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№ Question number</th>
<th>Russian advertisement</th>
<th>American advertisement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R18-24 2</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R25-35 2</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A18-24 2</td>
<td>0.694</td>
<td>0.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A25-35 2</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see from the data shown in the Table 6, both Americans and Russians highlight the visual attractiveness of an advertising video and its semantic accessibility as the main factor influencing the desire to purchase a particular product. Americans, just like Russians, regarding a language barrier with respect to commercials of another country, found it difficult to determine for themselves whether they want to purchase the advertised product or not, while when deciding to buy the advertised product of their country, where there are no restrictions in understanding the content of the advertising there is no video, this item did not have a significant correlation. Accordingly, it can be assumed that Russian commercials are potentially interesting and attractive to representatives of American culture, as well as American commercials for Russians, but they do not affect the desire to purchase the advertised product of another country.

The data obtained allow us to assert that the specifics of consumer behavior of the American and Russian audiences is not uniform [25], which underlines the need for such psychological and marketing research.

Conclusion

Therefore, our study of the influence of culture and age on the perception of advertising showed that there are no significant generational differences in the perception of advertising by representatives of Russian and American early and middle adulthood, but the cultural aspect plays a leading role.

However, some of our assumptions were disposed: the visual attractiveness of the commercial, its accessibility and clarity, a positive attitude to the main characters does not affect the desire of potential consumers of the American and Russian sample to purchase the advertised product. As a result of the experiment, it was found that the desire of Americans and Russians to purchase one or another product is influenced only by the visual attractiveness of the advertising video.

References


