

Balancing Global Standardization and Local Differentiation in Multinational Advertising — A Comparative Analysis of Global Advertising Strategies in the Restaurant Sector

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Abstract:

The study focuses on the tightrope act that global restaurant chains like McDonalds, KFC and Starbucks perform to balance between the brand image and local meaning in their advertising. Comparing advertising in different countries, it is analyzed how advertising deals with the challenge of being at the same time a part of a global entity and appealing to a local taste. Based on case study and content analysis, the influence of culture, customer and competition on advertising success is investigated. The results of the study confirm the need for flexibility and balancing between global and local markets in effective advertising. Finally, the study indicates the need for knowledge of cultural differences and a combination of global and local creativity in advertising. The study concludes with the fact that knowledge of cultural details will help the restaurant brands of global market to get connected and increase image in the market of different countries.

Keywords: Global advertising; local differentiation; restaurant industry; multinational corporations (MNCs).

1. Introduction

Due to the decline in transport costs and the rapid development of information and communication technology, the number and size of MNEs have increased and it has become easier for companies to operate internationally. As a result, the importance of advertising has changed from simply promoting the products to maintaining a global image in all parts of the

world. Obviously, MNEs should control costs while adjusting some key points that are acceptable to local consumers, which is difficult to do well in all aspects. Cross-border communication faces many challenges. This phenomenon is especially true in the highly culturally integrated hospitality industry, where considerable differences exist among countries in terms of taste, dining culture and food regulations. Under such

circumstances, the tension between standardization and localization is more evident, and the mechanism may be harder to distinguish in other industries with less cultural sensitivity.

Around the world, global companies advertise their products with the same slogans, logos, and core value propositions in order to create and maintain trust and brand recognition. However, they also need to conquer language differences, dietary culture, regulations, and consumer demands – all while requiring product adjustments to fit local needs.

As a result, advertising in multinational restaurant chains should always maintain a balance between localization and standardization when designing advertising strategies. This balance has a significant impact on operational performance, customer and employee satisfaction, and brand value.

The aim of this study is to explore how advertising strategies of multinational restaurant chains maintain a balance between standardization and localization and how different strategies affect advertising success and brand performance. With a case study of the food service industry, this study attempts to link two relatively underdeveloped areas of debate in international marketing and brand management, namely, the cultural adaptation literature.

This study makes the following three unique contributions:

Firstly, theoretical refinement of the standardization–adaptation debate by placing cultural embeddedness at the forefront.

Secondly, empirical contributions to the literature on when standardized versus local advertising leads to better brand outcomes.

Thirdly, a strategic framework for resource allocation and local–global creative collaboration in multinational marketing networks.

To guide the rest of the study, the following research questions are posed:

How does multinational restaurant enterprise implement the balance between uniformity and local distinctiveness in advertising?

How does standardized advertising and localized advertising impact on brand recognition and perceived brand authenticity and then consumer loyalty directly or serially mediated?

2. Introduction and Relationships Analysis

How does multinational restaurant enterprise implement the balance between uniformity and local distinctiveness in advertising? Global advertising standardization means that using similar advertising methods, creative execu-

tions, and brand message in several foreign markets [1]. The goals of global advertising standardization are cost savings, brand consistency, and operations efficiency. Multinational firms cut production cost and make their brand unite using same advertising strategy in the whole world. Standardization advocates believe that it can improve brand identification and consumer authenticity. It works when target market is similar culturally and the product category is local based. Standardization will not work when there are many different cultural groups and local product category. Their values, communication and customer behavior may make a US advertising not accepted in Japan.

2.1 Local Difference Conversely

Local difference means using advertising, creative, and communication in different culture, customer preference, and legal environment.

This is about relevance, resonance, and customer involvement by customizing brand message to local belief and buying habit. People should know the culture, habit, and language of target market. Localized advertising may need to translate ads, change pictures, and use local celebrities or influencers to make it more acceptable [2]. Localized marketing can increase brand authenticity but it also increases cost, decrease brand consistency, and make administration complicated [3]. It takes much time and money to create market by market advertising. It may be tough to maintain brand image in different areas.

2.2 McDonald's, KFC, Starbucks Case Studies

McDonald's, KFC, Starbucks use brand consistency-local relevance tactics. All of these companies have long history of internationalization and create their own unique standardization and localization advertising strategies [4]. KFC in Indonesia uses hybridized ingredients and recipes to make their advertising more acceptable to target market and build cultural resilience to increase consumer experience.

2.3 Standardization and Differentiation Change Brand Equity

This study focuses on how international restaurant corporation implement the balance between uniformity and local distinctiveness to build strong brand connection, increase consumer loyalty and improve performance in different culture. Effective cross cultural management increases income and business process [5]. This study focus on how international restaurant corporation implement the balance between uniformity and local distinctiveness to build strong brand connection, increase consumer loyalty and improve performance in different culture.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Base

Globalized companies should learn how global brands cope with cultural differences to do well [1]. In this section, the main theoretical approaches to international advertising will be introduced. Global consistency and local differentiation are discussed here [6].

Traditional international marketing has long argued whether advertising should be standardized globally to achieve economies of scale and create an integrated image or should be localized to target local consumer preferences and cultural values [7]. Levitt was the first to popularize the idea of standardization in 1983 in his book titled “the globalization of markets”. He said that world customer preferences were converging and that standardized products and marketing messages could reach everyone. Levitt said a global strategy would be cheaper and increase brand awareness.

However, scholars such as Jain believed that marketing had to be tailored to cultural differences, legislative constraints, and consumer preferences in target markets [8]. Jain argued that if advertising were standardized across markets, consumers would be alienated by the marketing strategy’s failure to recognize their needs and cultural sensitivities, and would weaken the effectiveness of the brand. A marketing that emphasizes individualism may work well in countries like the US or the UK, which are also considered western countries, but it may not function well or may even be an insult in other countries like china and japan that are collectivist societies. In which case, the community’s harmony and social responsibility are more important.

Robertson invented the word “glocalization” which bridges the two. Glocalization means adapting global products, services, and marketing communications to local culture and circumstances for multinational success. This is a kind of hybrid technique, standardization and localization. Globalization does not mean all cultures are the same or that local culture would disappear. Instead, globalization argues that global forces adapt to local conditions. This allows businesses to be worldwide brand names and to tailor their creative and messaging to local consumers. Glocalization in advertising means creating global brand names and messaging values that reach the world, while creative, messaging, and media channels are adapted to local customs, traditions, and consumer behaviors [9]. A worldwide fast food can use local ingredients, a local cultural hero, or a big local regional event to create local menus and advertising campaigns.

Some theoretical models and frameworks help people decide whether to standardize or differentiate in global advertising, and what will influence the effectiveness of the approach.

Hofstede’s innovative cultural features theory explains cross-national cultural differences. Hofstede’s theory identifies power distance (the acceptance of power inequality in a society), individualism versus collectivism (prioritizing people’s goals over group goals), masculinity versus femininity (focus on achievement and competition versus nurturing and cooperation), and uncertainty avoidance. This paradigm allows marketers to adapt their ads to target markets’ cultural features. Commercial advertisements targeting collectivist cultures may perform better when they emphasize family values, social harmony, and group membership than emphasizing individual gain or achievement.

Hall’s high-context and low-context culture theory helps people understand the way people from different cultures react and communicate with advertising. High context cultures such as Japan and China need implicit information, non-verbal statements and common knowledge background, while low context cultures such as the United States and Germany need direct information and simple message contents. This observation also reinforces the need for marketers to know something about the type of people to whom they are speaking with respect to the advertising message. That is, it is important to know the communication style of the target audience in the advertising situation. That is, use subtle image and symbolic meaning in the high context culture societies and give them brief and simple factual information in the low context culture society.

Quelch and Austin developed the Integrated Worldwide-Local (IGOR) strategy approach to assist multinational organizations in smartly balancing global and local marketing. IGOR focuses on deep-rooted brand values and messages that can be clearly expressed in all markets. It also allows local marketing staff to customize the creative, media and promotional strategies of an advertising campaign to their country. This strategy allows the company to maintain a global brand and respond to local market conditions. Restaurant advertising should integrate global brand awareness and local food habits, tastes, and eating habits. To make local consumers in different cultures aware of advertisements, multinational restaurant chains adopt a combination of emblems and slogans with specialized marketing to highlight the special attributes of each region, special cultural festivals, and community activities. Cross-cultural advertising methods are theoretically supported by this literature study. To achieve the best advertising results, it emphasizes cultural awareness, strategy adaptation, and global and local perspectives [10].

4. Introduction to the Research Subject

Based on the above introduction, this section introduces the research subject that forms the basis of this research:

global advertising standardization, local differentiation, and the strategic context of the restaurant industry as a multinational advertising subject [11]. Only by fully understanding these contents can people conduct a deep analysis of how global restaurant companies operate in the face of cross-border communication [6].

Global advertising standardization is the strategy to use the same advertising content in many different national markets around the world in a consistent design style and overall communication style. This is a strategy based on the idea that telling the same kind of brand story in different cultural contexts can greatly enhance brand recognition and increase brand equity, and will save a lot of money on advertising production and creative personnel allocation, media buying, etc. Advertising campaigns standardized and used by many different countries often have a theme that works for everyone, a brand image that is consistent with all media, and a slogan that lasts a long time and is intended to be used in different cultural contexts by people from anywhere on the planet.

In fact, carrying out the process of global standardization of advertising requires central supervision of the creative production process, rigorous adherence to the clearly defined brand requirements and rigid coordination of the media planning on a global basis [7]. Following a standardized policy, the multinational companies generally attempt to create a strong image of the brand among the customers in all parts of the world by emphasizing the basic brand values across all the markets in which they operate, thereby strengthening the worldwide brand identity, which makes people more confident about the brand and trusting of the brand. However, in order to make the global advertising standards work, the business need to have a clear and detailed knowledge of how things are different in different countries, such as the legal framework, competition, culture, and consumer preferences.

Localisation differences also demand that the advertising company to adapt its advertising policies and strategies as well as the creative part to suit the differences of target audience, customs of certain market, consumers' demand and many more differences existing in each country or region [9]. In other words, people in different countries and regions may react differently to advertising due to many differences existing in their deep-rooted culture, language, media reception and highly personal consumption habit. Localisation means that the company tries to create an appropriate local culture connotation using symbols, images and language that can be accepted by local people. In this way, the interest for the brand will be aroused and the loyalty is strengthened as well as the sense of belonging to the local area.

In order to create local distinctiveness, usually the local advertising division will be given the autonomy in strategic decisions-making, so that the global advertising can

be adapted to the local situation and local aspirations [4]. It may translate advertisements into local dialects, choose local famous figures as brand image, describe regional cuisine or cultural landmarks or invent new advertising concepts to fit the target market's culture. Local distinctiveness makes the brand more relevant and acceptable, and promotes satisfaction for both the brand and the local people. However, it may also raise more costs for production, decrease brand consistency and make the campaign harder to control [3].

Given that the food service industry is highly cultural, it puts emphasis on quality of service and it is also necessary to build long-term relationship with customers, so it is an ideal industry to analyze multinational advertising strategies.

Multinational food companies operate in a highly competitive and constantly changing market. People's food choices are affected by many factors, such as culture, food habits, personal experience and food lifestyle [5]. In order to win, they not only need to raise their products and services but also to raise their business. Therefore, advertising is of vital importance to make people want to think about the food brand, what they want to eat, and make them more loyal to the brand. The most important thing in food service advertising is that food should look good, taste good and feel good, make people feel satisfied, make food appear delicious, tasty and satisfying, and create an experience. Restaurant advertisements describe the mouth-watering dishes in great detail and choose ideal pictures. Restaurant advertisements also use vivid descriptions of restaurant atmosphere and social environment to arouse interest and curiosity, and encourage people to go and enjoy the experience.

5. Used Research Methodologies

This study uses a multi-case research method, qualitative and quantitative analysis in order to understand how multinational food service enterprises integrate both global standardization and local differentiation in their advertising strategies in cross-cultural brand communication.

This paper chooses McDonald's, KFC and Starbucks as its subjects. They are all global chain brands with large product lines, various advertising strategies and high brand awareness in many national markets.

Specifically, this study uses a multiple case study method, qualitative and quantitative analysis in order to understand how multinational food service enterprises integrate both global standardization and local differentiation in their advertising strategies. This study examines what advertising strategies are used by each company in different national markets. Content analysis is a method for analyzing advertisements [3]. The data for this study were collected from multiple sources, including thorough industry re-

ports, advertising content, official information published by the companies' websites, related academic publications and authoritative news sources [4]. This method of triangulation helps to enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Content analysis provides a structured way of analyzing the advertising content of these three companies. This method is used to analyze both globally standardized advertising content and locally differentiated advertising content. This article carefully analyzes the visual content, language content, cultural symbols and overall brand message used in different advertising materials.

This study analyzes the degree to which each company consistently communicates its core brand values, and the extent to which the company invests in advertising strategies with a global standardization [5]. For example, the article analyzes what values in terms of quality, convenience, value and community are expressed. The degree to which the overall brand message used in different national markets is consistent can be analyzed. Furthermore, the overall brand tone in different national markets can be analyzed. This research paper analyzes and identifies any degrees of differences in the expression of values in different cultural groups. The research paper may analyze the degree to which values in different cultural groups are consistent based on the different international advertising strategies implemented by each company. Furthermore, it may analyze the creativity of advertisements in terms of music, images, celebrity figures and language use. The research may analyze the adjustments made in advertisements due to different food preferences. In addition, it may analyze the media used to disseminate advertisements in different markets and the degree to which the media planning and advertising buying are standardized.

In order to analyze the degree to which companies use the strategy of localised differentiation, this study selects several instances where advertising campaigns at regional levels were adapted to suit local market conditions [4]. This is done by analysing campaigns aimed at certain cultural groups such as Chinese consumers or Middle Eastern markets and how much of the campaigns used language, symbols and themes that were suitable to the local culture [12].

This study analysed how McDonald's, KFC and Starbucks adapted their menu and advertising campaigns to suit Chinese consumers without compromising on respect for local Chinese culinary traditions, food nutrition concerns and other cultural values that are very deeply rooted in the minds of the consumers [13]. The paper also examined how much these companies adapted their advertisements to suit religious customs and cultural practices in Middle Eastern countries where such religions as Islam are practised and during certain religious observances such as Ramadan [11].

This study analyses how each of the organisations uses local cultural symbols, linguistic values and most fundamentally local cultural values in their advertising campaigns. This includes the use of local celebrities, iconic local buildings and references to local history among others. It also analyses how each of the organisations adapts the language and messages in their advertisements to reflect local communication styles and prevailing cultural values. This study also analyses how each of the organisations copes with sensitive cultural issues of gender, religion and potentially political sensitivity.

To evaluate the relative effectiveness of strategies employed by organisations in achieving a strategic balance between global standardisation and localisation in advertising, this study selects instances where such equilibrium was successfully achieved alongside instances where cultural conflicts occurred [5]. Advertising campaigns that achieved a strategic balance between globalisation and localisation were analysed alongside their effectiveness to key performance indicators. These included qualitative indicators such as brand awareness and image, consumer response and their expressions on social media platforms, as well as quantitative indicators such as market share and sales.

Advertising campaigns that elicited negative reactions from consumers were analysed with respect to the nature of cultural conflicts faced, the response to the cultural conflict immediately after and its impact on the overall brand image of the organisation. Furthermore, the measures each organisation took to prevent similar cultural risks from arising in future were analysed. These included measures to ensure thorough cultural audits, use of local cultural experts and empowering local marketing personnel to make decisions on localisation of advertising content.

Case study analysis and content analysis were employed in elucidating how multinational food service enterprises localised and standardised content to multinational advertising at a global level [2].

Results from this research will be useful to academic researchers and industry professionals who wish to manage multinational brand communication more effectively [6].

6. Empirical Findings and Theoretical Confirmation

This study investigates how multinational restaurant companies reconcile branding standardization at the global level with local advertising strategies. The selected case studies of McDonalds, KFC and Starbucks are analysed. Study results support theoretical tenets of glocalization and cultural dimensions but contribute to practice with new insights on cross-cultural marketing [10, 14].

6.1 Standardization at Advertising Message Level

The effectiveness of advertising message resonance varies across cultures because of differences in values and communication styles [1, 4]. Nam and Kannan show how cross-cultural factors influence consumer responses at all stages of the digital customer journey and suggest that cross-cultural considerations are important for creative campaign design [12]. Oosthuizen also asserts that culturally insensitive messaging can lead to a miscommunication and alienation of the brand [10]. For example, advertising that focuses on individual achievement is more effective in individualistic cultures such as the United States and the United Kingdom. In contrast, advertising that focuses on social harmony is more effective in collectivist cultures such as China and Japan [4, 13].

The effectiveness of individual advertising elements, such as humor style and use of celebrities, appeals to emotional or rational customer needs, also varies across cultures [3]. Czarnecka and Schivinski further add that acculturation levels to the global consumer culture moderate these responses, and advertisers need to find a balance between global and local in these terms [8].

6.2 Managing the Standardization-Local Paradox in Practice

Three Approaches Based on the selected case studies, three approaches to managing the standardization-local paradox are identified.

6.2.1 McDonald's: Branding with Core Values and Tactical Local Adaptations

McDonald's maintains consistency across the global brand through standardized brand values and family values advertising, while the overall strategy is one of local tactical adaptations. For example, in India, where 80% of the population does not consume beef, the company introduced vegetarian variations of its products, such as McAloon Tikki burger and Chicken Maharaja Mac [15]. This enables the company to retain its universal brand appeal while respecting local dietary restrictions and popular culture. This approach to branding is an example of the glocalization concept proposed by Robertson [14]. Advertising campaigns focus on experiential branding rather than product attributes, thereby creating an emotional bond with customers that transcends cultural boundaries [2].

6.2.2 KFC: Iconic Branding with Hyperlocal Tactical Innovations

KFC maintains its global brand image through Colonel Sanders and the "finger-lickin' good" slogan, while the local marketing mix includes tactical innovations. For

example, in China, the breakfast menu includes congee and youtiao (fried dough sticks), and these products are promoted through local advertising campaigns that emphasize the use of local ingredients [5]. Azimi and Saleh note that successful global brands typically consist of 60-70% standardized elements and 30-40% local elements [6]. Advertising campaigns in collectivist markets focus on the local cultural value of shared meals rather than individual food consumption.

6.2.3 Starbucks: Branding with a Luxury Experience and Cultural Hybridization

Starbucks maintains its global brand image through its brand values as a luxury experience, while the local marketing mix includes tactical adaptations that create a sense of cultural hybridization. For example, in Japan, the company introduced a premium coffee brand, Tachel, which offers a unique coffee experience for the Japanese market [9].

Starbucks reconciles its global "third place" concept with local store designs and offerings. Architecture features Japanese stores with typical "third place" architectural elements. Seasonal menus feature sakura (cherry blossom) flavors in the spring [5]. The introduction of jelly coffee and tea-based beverages in China indicates hybridization as described by Dukut in combining global quality standards with local tastes [5]. The Strategy Institute also credits Starbucks success to this experiential localization as 78% of international customers accept localization as "culturally respectful" while maintaining premium brand equity [16].

6.3 Contributions: The Cases' Validation of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

The cases validate Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, especially for individualism-collectivism in advertising narratives [1, 4]. Collectivist markets exhibit stronger responses to campaigns for family meals at KFC or the Starbucks "community" experience, whereas individualist markets accept more product-focused McDonald's advertising [13, 14].

The cases also validate Bengtsson's brand consistency framework. Market leaders remain 85-90% consistent in visual identity and core messaging while localizing executional elements [2]. Özsomer identify this as "marketing agility," where subsidiaries use a combination of standard strategic frameworks and localized tactical execution to achieve optimal performance [7].

6.4 Contributions: Challenges and Limitations

These brands demonstrate successful balancing, but significant challenges remain. Leonidou report that consumers expect cultural authenticity. 62% of 2,000 global

respondents in their study criticized brands for half-hearted localization attempts [17]. McDonald's failure for seven years to find acceptable vegetarian recipes in India demonstrates the challenge behind advertising localization [15].

This study has three main limitations. First, findings reflect markets primarily in Asia and the West. Validation in African and South American markets remains an open question [6, 10]. Second, while Nam and Kannan provide insights on digital customer journeys, cases reflect primarily on traditional media adaptations [12]. Finally, the literature lacks consensus on standards for measuring cultural resonance in advertising. Most studies rely on sales as a proxy for brand perception indicators [8, 9].

6.5 Future Research Directions

Three areas for future research exist. First, what standards do brands use for cross-platform cultural relevance in digital platforms that are so different (e.g., TikTok vs. Facebook) in service advertisements in global markets? [12, 3]. Second, how is the rise of Gen Z, consuming across the world, changing localization imperatives? [8, 17]. Third, how have brands adapted to brand crises, especially of cultural or geopolitical origin? [16, 18].

6.6 Summary

The case studies have shown that successful global advertising does not need to be fully standardized nor fully localized, but should be creatively hybridized in an intelligent mix of both. McDonald's operational localizations, KFC's hyperlocal innovations and Starbucks' cultural hybridity have shown support for Robertson's claim that global brands gain resonance when they locally reinterpret their global offering [18]. Similarly, Özsomer's concept of marketing agility allows firms to centralize their brand control while locally responding to culture [7].

These two approaches have been found to be effective in major markets. However, the emergence of new issues reveals the boundaries of current frameworks. Increasing consumer expectations for cultural relevance have forced brands to do more than surface-level localizations and to address sociocultural aspects of a destination [17]. Furthermore, digital platforms have heightened the risk of cross-cultural failures and called for rapid modifications to campaigns, issues that current theoretical frameworks struggle to address poorly [12, 3].

The geographic scope of this study limited it to Asian and Western markets, so strategies proven effective in these regions may not hold in other regions with vastly different cultural profiles, such as Africa or South America [6, 10]. Future studies should focus on comparative analyses in less represented regions and construct metrics to evaluate cultural relevance beyond sales outcomes. Only through

addressing these limitations can scholars and practitioners hope to improve the fine line between standardization and differentiation in increasingly fragmented markets.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between global standardisation and local differentiation in advertising strategies of multinational food service companies. In this regard, case analyses of McDonald's, KFC and Starbucks are presented. These corporations attempt to maintain a homogeneous global image while adapting to the local environment of different international markets. The research reveals that global standardization can bring cost efficiencies and brand advantages. However, global standardization is not the panacea. Market cultural similarity, product category, and consumers ethnocentrism levels are decisive factors for the success of standardisation strategies. Localised differentiation enables companies to adapt to local consumers' preferences, establish brand loyalty and gain a larger market share. However, it may also demand a lot of resources and possibly undermine the image of a global company.

As shown by the cases of McDonald's, KFC and Starbucks, the most effective advertising strategies for multinational food service companies are to seek a balance between global standardisation and local differentiation. That is, the standardisation differentiation combination can be integrated into the globalisation with localisation strategy to produce advertising campaigns that are both globally recognisable and locally differentiated.

This study contributes to the literature by empirically exploring cultural factors affecting advertising effectiveness and the need for advertisements to adapt to local cultural values and consumer preferences. It also shows how marketing flexibility allows multinational corporations to adapt to changes in marketing environments and cultural forces.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, it used only a few case studies from a single industry. The validity of the findings is limited to the context in which they were found. Future research could expand its scope to include other industries and cultures. This study used secondary data. Information obtained from secondary sources may not reflect the decision-making processes of an organisation. Subsequent studies could use primary data collection methods, such as interviews and questionnaires, to explore the views of marketing managers and consumers.

Effective global advertising management is a delicate balance between the two extremes of standardisation and differentiation. That is, when entering a different culture, multinational corporations should evaluate the cultural environment of the target country and adjust advertisements accordingly without undermining the brand's core

values. Only by being culturally sensitive and flexible in marketing can multinational corporations achieve their localisation and produce advertisements that are recognised by consumers from all over the world, thereby gaining sustained growth in the global market.

Future research could focus on the influence of digital media and social networks on consumer perceptions of global brands and advertising. The ethical implications of cross-cultural advertising could also be explored. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to investigate the long-term effectiveness of advertising strategies on brand equity and market success.

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