Measuring message framing effects across Europe

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Abstract This study examines consumer response to positively versus negatively framed advertising messages across seven Central and Western European countries. The frames elicited significantly different emotional, cognitive and attitudinal reactions. Groups of nations where consumers responded more homogeneously to the frames were different from the groups plotted according to cultural context. In addition, the results present a new perspective for international marketing. While advertising content and imagery has often been designed to account for known or assumed differences across nations, the findings of this study show that neglecting even subtle national differences can be misleading and can result in adverse consequences. The study has shown that consumers in similar countries, such as Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary, respond quite differently to positively or negatively framed advertisements. This suggests that even advertising campaigns that are designed for relatively narrow international audiences may not be effective when featuring an inappropriate message frame.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding crossnational differences is often considered a key prerequisite for successful international advertising. Over decades, the issue of standardised (universal) versus adapted (specialised) advertising has elicited controversial debates among scholars and practitioners alike. While the pros and cons of both approaches to international advertising continue to be debated, evidence suggests that the feasibility of

standardisation varies with the level of cultural similarity between markets. When communicating with potential buyers in foreign markets, messages encoded in one culture must be decoded in another. Chances of success for international advertisers can thus be increased if similarities/differences are taken into consideration.

An ample body of content analyses substantiates the practice of different advertising appeals in different nations, eg

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the USA and Western European countries or even between English and French-speaking consumer groups within a nation, eg Canada. Differences or similarities have been shown to exist in message appeal elements such as copy and layout, message, appeal or cultural values. Nevertheless, little attention has been given to consumer research and no study could be found examining how the content in general, or the message frame in particular, affects consumers on a crossnational basis. The study reported in this paper tries to partially rectify this situation since advertisers should not only be aware of common practice, but should also be aware of the nations in which consumers are most likely to respond favourably to a particular message frame. It hereby builds on an integrative attitude formation model¹ that includes cognitive as well as affective responses. Of particular interest are emotional, cognitive and attitudinal consumer responses as a function of an advertisement's message frame. Additional attention is given to cultural context as a measure of the degree of similarity between nations. Thus, by comparing how consumers in different nations respond to message frames, a new perspective with respect to standardised/adapted advertisements for offers that appeal to buyers across national boundaries is presented.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Message framing

The theoretical starting point for the current work is derived from prospect theory² which considers the effect of framing a decision problem in terms of gain versus loss. Empirical research has shown that individual judgments and choices can be influenced not only by the content of communicated

information but also by the way the information is presented. Effects of positive versus negative advertising appeals has received attention in advertising and marketing communication research under the issue of 'message framing' whereas 'framing' refers to the way objectively equivalent information is presented. Message framing has been operationalised either by focusing on positive product attributes (or benefits gained through product use) or by focusing on negative product attributes (or benefits lost by not using the product). The underlying contention is that the message frame leads to changes in consumer perception of the situation which in turn affects choice.

Past studies in marketing and advertising research have focused on particular framing effects³ and examined determinants of frame effectiveness such as involvement,⁴ personal experience,⁵ attribute salience,⁶ age,⁷ processing detail,⁸ numerical versus verbal frames,⁹ type of behaviour advocated,¹⁰ education¹¹ or perceived efficacy.¹² Although empirical research suggests that positively framed messages result in more desirable responses than negatively framed ones, evidence also indicates that the effects of message framing may vary under different conditions. In particular, contextual effects such as social or cultural dimensions have been suggested to affect consumer response to a particular frame.

Cultural context and advertising

Among the various factors that have been investigated in the context of explaining advertising effects, nationality and cultural background have consistently produced significant results.

Understanding cultural differences is therefore considered a key prerequisite for successful international advertising.

Advertisers are required to tailor advertisements to reflect the cultural context of their target group since individuals respond better to advertising messages that are congruent with their culture. On the other hand, economies of scale strongly suggest that advertisements use groups that are as large as possible, thus counterbalancing the argument supporting the development of highly specific advertisements for smaller target groups. Starting with Elinder's¹³ provocative article, this issue of standardised (globalised, universal) versus adapted (localised, specialised, customised) advertising has elicited over decades a highly controversial debate among scholars and practitioners alike.

While the pros and cons of both approaches to international advertising continue to be debated, a number of studies suggest that the feasibility of standardisation varies with the level of cultural similarity between markets. When communicating with potential buyers in different markets, messages encoded in one culture must be decoded in another. With cultural values, norms and characteristics embedded in advertising appeals, chances of success for international advertisers thus can be increased if the cultural context is taken into consideration. Researchers generally agree that cultural context is the core of advertising messages, and that typical advertisements endorse, glamorise, and inevitably reinforce cultural values. Nevertheless, culture is a complex, multifaceted construct that has been defined in many ways by researchers. A definition of culture commonly used in a marketing context is 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another'.¹⁴

Employing cultural context as a universal measure for cultural

similarities/differences also enables national positions to be plotted in two or higher dimensional space so that consumer advertising responses can subsequently be compared against the cultural context positions which then act as points of reference. To the extent that advertising does reflect cultural context one would predict greatest success in each cultural context for congruent advertising appeals, that is, appeals that conform to prevailing cultural values and norms. Similarly, the effectiveness of a particular appeal should differ between cultures that do not share the same context.

Framing effects on cognition and affect

Advertising effects can be classified as cognitive or affective responses. Cognitive responses are defined as thoughts (including inferences) during advert exposure. Such thoughts can be evaluative or non-evaluative (though thoughts and evaluations are theoretically distinct constructs, they are combined here for simplification). Cognitive effects of message framing have been demonstrated by the existence of a 'negativity effect': negative information receives greater weight than positive information, hence affecting consumer responses more strongly. Looking beyond cognition, Homer and Yoon¹⁵ further demonstrated that advert attitudes, brand attribute evaluations and brand attitudes were influenced indirectly through judgments of advert characteristics as well as directly by advert-induced feelings. In the context of message framing effects, Levin and Gaeth¹⁶ demonstrated that positive frames invoke positive associations whereas negative framing causes disagreeable associations. The authors suggest that the frame of an advertising message therefore might also have an effect on feelings. Previous

studies^{17,18} have confirmed the frame's impact on feelings based on a Dual Mediation Hypothesis (DMH) framework.

Researchers have argued that failing to understand the role of emotions by focusing on cognitive processes impedes the ability for understanding various consumer behaviours. Generally, the role of emotions as an affective response to advertisements as well as their impact on attitudes is well established. Emotions have been found to influence the evaluation of both attitude towards an advert and towards the advertised brand. Considering that emotions are evoked by the framing of advertising messages, it is surprising that no study could be found examining consumer emotional response to message frames in an international context.

Affective responses to advertising can be complex and multidimensional in their scope, and emotional typologies have been developed for the purpose of capturing consumers' emotional response to advert content and imagery. Although no generally accepted emotional profile has yet emerged, a variety of empirical studies indicate that those emotions or feelings batteries are captured in two or three most core emotional dimensions, such as upbeat, warm, negative¹⁹ or downbeat, pleasure, attentive.²⁰

In this study the focus is on feelings generated by an individual in response to an advert. The primary goal is to examine the role of message frames in generating cognitive and emotional reactions and subsequent downstream effects on the respondents' attitude towards the advert, respondents' attitude toward the brand and purchase intention.

Given the findings of previous research on the role of emotions in shaping attitudes and taking into account earlier studies on framing effects, it is hypothesised that consumers in different

nations will vary considerably in their emotional, cognitive and attitudinal response to a particular message frame. Drawing specifically upon the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are advanced:

- H1: Consumers in nations with different cultural context will respond significantly different to the framing of an advertisement's message. In particular, they will exhibit different
  - H1a: cognitive
  - H1b: emotional, and
  - H1c: attitudinal responses.
- H2: Across nations, negative (positive) frames will elicit less (more) favourable responses.
- H3: Consumers in nations with a more similar cultural context will react more similarly to the framing of messages.

METHOD

Subjects

A sample of 1,082 students was recruited initially from universities in 14 countries with a focus on Western and Central Europe. Nations in Europe are often combined under the headings 'Western' and 'Central' Europe. There is, however, evidence suggesting heterogeneity in cultural context within both regions. Advertising researchers and business consultants advise marketers to recognise the considerable diversity in the Central European countries. Based on past studies it seems reasonable to expect that consumers in eg Poland may react differently from consumers in Hungary as may consumers in the Western European nations such as Spain or Ireland. Accordingly, examining message framing effects across nations is a topic of particular concern to advertising

Table 1: Sample profile

	N	Female–Male ratio	Mean age (standard deviation)
Croatia	123	1.5	20.8 (2.2)
Czech Republic	175	1.2	22.6 (2.1)
Hungary	137	1.5	21.8 (2.5)
Ireland	117	1.7	20.8 (2.6)
Poland	125	1.6	20.3 (1.9)
Portugal	131	1.2	22.6 (2.5)
Spain	142	1.2	22.9 (2.0)
Total	950	1.4	21.8 (2.6)

practitioners across Europe, many of whom have come to rely on messages and appeals that are standardised for ‘Western’ and ‘Central’ Europe.²¹ The selection of specific countries and universities within both regions was primarily motivated by the authors’ academic affiliation and professional contacts. To control for potential confounds, evident from past research, respondents were recruited within a narrow age bracket (18 to 26-years-old) from marketing classes taught in English. Subsamples from six countries were later discarded due to insufficient responses from those countries. The final sample used for subsequent analysis consisted of 950 respondents with demographic characteristics as shown in Table 1.

Product category

Of major concern was the selection of products to be advertised. Several authors recommend studying the promotion of a single product category when examining consumer responses to allow for a direct and relative comparison particularly useful when studying cultural differences. In this study, the food and beverage product category was selected because it provided the opportunity to relate advertising appeals to nutrition and health, and the basic personal values that were assumed to be important across national boundaries.

Apples and bottled water were selected

as products. Each was given a fictional brand name to remove possible distortions due to prior brand evaluation and knowledge. This selection also took into account potential disparities in consumer preferences for processed food. Apples were used because this fruit is common in all countries while bottled water was chosen on the basis of being a beverage that is universally consumed so that respondents in all countries would be equally familiar with it.

Stimuli

Building upon a systematic typology of different framing manipulations, simplified advertisements were created for stimuli consisting only of a picture, a headline and an appeal but without price information. Advert copy, size and layout for both products were identical to control for potential confounds. Only the fictional brand names were varied to correspond to the product. The message frame was manipulated by varying the headline copy and the background pictures of the adverts. Following suggestions by Phillips,²² pictures used for framing the message were only loosely related to the products.

The four adverts used in this study were selected from an original total of 12 that were pre-tested. The pre-test adverts, selected for manipulating the message frame, were shown to a panel of 20 judges (advertising practitioners,

Table 2: Item battery measuring cultural context²⁷

In my culture, ...
... the language is very explicit and direct.
... when meeting, people use informal gestures rather than formal bows and handshakes.
... dress clearly indicates an individual's position in the society.
... people's body language tells more than their words.
... eating is a social event rather than a pure necessity.
... it is very important to be strictly on time for all appointments.
... time is money.
... family is more important than all friends or acquaintances.
... an individual is nothing, the society is everything.
... having fun and enjoying life is most important.
... old people deserve utmost respect.
... personal independence is more important than conformity with any group.
... people want to live in harmony with their social environment rather than in confrontation.
... authorities have to be continuously challenged.
... gender roles are clearly established.
... everybody determines his/her own fate.
... money is more important than friends.
... to do business, first you make a friend then you make a deal.
... work is a necessity.
... we live to work.

Scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree

marketing faculty and target group members), who rated them on a seven-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 = very negative to 7 = very positive. The advertisements that scored either quite high or quite low on the assessment scale were selected for use in the further study. The positively framed adverts featured the slogan ‘Just imagine ... Enjoy Life’ before a background picture of laughing children. The negatively framed adverts featured the slogan ‘Why not feel better? ... Change the way you feel!’ before a background picture showing an open grave with a casket.

Procedure

Data were collected via a web-based questionnaire. During class hours, students were instructed to log on to the survey website where the advertisements were shown and data were collected. To prevent multiple responses from the same respondent resulting in potentially distorted results, each respondent received a unique login-password combination from her/his teacher that

allowed access to the survey. With the successful submission of the completed questionnaire the password expired and further access was denied. A random ordering of experimental stimuli assigned subjects to each advertisement in a 2 × 2 factorial design (product × message frame). After reading an introductory note, subjects completed questions that assessed their advert evaluations (cognitions), their emotions, their attitudes (attitude toward the advertisement and the brand, purchase intention), and various demographic variables including nationality and cultural context. Additional precautions were taken to ensure that each individual performed the task alone and that stimuli and questionnaire were presented uniformly in the specific computer setups.

Measures

To assess a respondent’s cultural context, the multi-item scale, detailed by Usunier²³ was employed. The 20-item battery (Table 2) is based on the general concept of high and low contexts as a

way of understanding different cultural orientation and measures general comparative characteristics of cultures. Utilising short concise statements with simple language this scale is less likely to be misinterpreted by respondents from different nations and, if need be, can easily be translated into other languages.

The judgment scale (advert evaluation/cognitions) included four dimensions commonly used in advertising research,²⁴ namely, believable, convincing, unique and memorable. The degree of a respondent's evaluation that an advert had each of those attributes was measured on a seven-point Likert type scale.

The scale for measuring emotions was based on the standard emotional profile introduced by Holbrook and Batra.²⁵ To ensure construct equivalence in the selected crossnational context, the validity of the measurement model was examined through confirmatory factor analysis. The fit statistics for the postulated three factor model were considered satisfactory: chi-square (156) = 127, $p = 0.063$, goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.91, adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI) = 0.90. Accordingly, the model was accepted for use of the constructs downbeat, pleased and curious in the subsequent analysis. The results further indicate that the following items load onto the constructs downbeat (afraid, distrustful, fearful, sad, sceptical, sorrowful, suspicious), pleased (active, aroused, entertained, excited, lighthearted, playful) and curious (curious, interested). Ratings on the items were averaged to generate mean scores for the three dimensions downbeat, pleased and curious.

Attitudinal variables incorporated within the study were 'attitude toward the ad' (AAD) and 'attitude toward the brand' (AB). These measures were derived from two three-item, seven-point semantic differential scales

(very unfavourable/very favourable, very bad/very good, disliked very much/liked very much) that had been adapted from previous operationalisations. To avoid response set problems, several items were reversed in the questionnaire. Again, items were assigned to common factors by a confirmatory factor analysis. Factor loadings and t -values for 'attitude towards the ad' were both significant and positive (bad/good = 0.751, $t = 12.37$, (un)favourable = 0.657, $t = 9.19$, (dis)liked = 0.655, $t = 10.18$) as were the parameters for 'attitude towards the brand' (bad/good = 0.702, $t = 12.17$, (un)favourable = 0.637, $t = 10.44$, (dis)liked = 0.660, $t = 11.57$). Both constructs were highly correlated ($b = 0.57$, $t = 18.6$), indicating an AAd effect consistent with prior research. With fit statistics indicating an acceptable fit of the model to the data (chi-square (7) = 21.26, $p = 0.094$, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96), the mean scores of the ratings were used as aggregated measures for AAD and AB in the further analysis.

To measure purchase intention (PI), a response to three statements²⁶ was solicited: 1) 'I believe this product is definitely right for me', 2) 'I will definitely choose this product' and 3) 'I will definitely buy another product'.

An exploratory factor analysis confirmed one common underlying dimension (KMO = 0.753). With a value of 0.778, Cronbach's alpha was considered sufficient for the purpose of this study. The Eigenvalue was 2.55 and the percentage of explained variance 0.86. An average of the multiple ratings served as the purchase intention measure in the further study. Correlations between attitudes and purchase intention were high and significant ($p < 0.001$, two-way correlation coefficients: AAD $\rightarrow$ PI = 0.50, AB $\rightarrow$ PI = 0.46).

Figure 1: Nations discriminated by cultural context in a reduced two-dimensional space
Wilk's $\lambda = 0.162$, $p < 0.001$, chi-square (120) = 1,615, explained variance = 80.4 per cent

RESULTS

Framing manipulation

To check the message frame manipulation, respondents were asked to evaluate the appeal of an advertisement on a scale from 1 = very negative to 7 = very positive, a procedure identical to the one employed with judges during the stimuli development. Crosstabulation of responses and the intended framing condition confirmed that the majority of respondents perceived the picture as either negatively or positively (chi-square (18) = 447, $p < 0.001$). The significant chi-square supports the contention that observed frequencies in responses were not simply due to chance.

Cultural context of national subsamples

To establish points of reference for examining how consumers in different nations respond to the framing of messages, the degree of similarity in cultural context between the national subsamples was assessed. Discriminant analysis was performed with respondent

nationality as the group variable and the cultural context scale items as independent variables. Figure 1 shows the results with national group centroids mapped in a reduced two-dimensional discriminant space. The canonical correlations were highly significant (Wilk's ($\lambda = 0.162$, chi-square (120) = 1,615, $p < 0.0001$, 80.4 per cent explained variance) indicating that the cultural context items successfully discriminated between nations. The positions of national group centroids relative to each other provide insight into respective similarities and differences with similar nations grouped in close proximity to each other. For example, the four Central European nations are plotted in a relatively tight formation with Poland and Hungary positioned in immediate proximity. The three Western European nations are distinctively set apart from the Central European group. Considering the significant results, the relative positions of national group centroids provide the desired benchmarks for the following assessment of differences/similarities in message framing effects.

Table 3: Effects of positive and negative frames across nations

Nationality	Frame	N	Downbeat	Pleased	Curious	Believa.	Memor.	Unique	AAD	AB	PI
Czech Rep.	pos.	85	3.03 ^{abc}	3.83 ^{abc}	4.14 ^a	4.07 ^{abc}	3.93 ^a	3.45 ^a	4.39	4.47 ^a	3.63 ^a
	neg.	90	3.94 ^{abcd}	3.76 ^{abcde}	3.48 ^{abcd}	3.31 ^{ab}	4.21 ^{ab}	4.53 ^{abc}	3.99 ^{abc}	3.72 ^a	3.37 ^{ab}
Croatia	pos.	57	2.72 ^{de}	3.11 ^{ad}	3.93 ^b	3.54 ^a	3.66 ^b	3.66 ^b	4.40	4.58 ^b	3.49 ^b
	neg.	66	3.83 ^{efgh}	2.44 ^{afg}	4.32 ^{aef}	2.58 ^{ade}	4.03 ^{cd}	5.00 ^{de}	3.14 ^{adef}	3.68 ^b	2.96 ^c
Spain	pos.	79	2.95 ^f	3.58 ^e	4.08 ^c	3.39 ^{bd}	3.32 ^{acd}	2.78 ^{abcdef}	4.14	4.62 ^c	3.89 ^c
	neg.	63	4.37 ^{aei}	3.15 ^{bghi}	4.16 ^{bgh}	2.35 ^{bfg}	3.90 ^{efg}	4.63 ^{fgh}	2.77 ^{bdghi}	3.40 ^{cd}	3.19 ^d
Hungary	pos.	57	2.25 ^{bdfgh}	3.43 ^f	4.05 ^d	3.77	3.91	3.67 ^c	4.49	4.38 ^d	3.54 ^d
	neg.	80	4.20 ^{bfi}	2.88 ^{cj}	4.69 ^{cij}	2.63	4.25 ^h	5.38 ^{afi}	3.53 ^{gi}	3.64 ^e	2.60 ^{aef}
Ireland	pos.	60	2.85 ^g	2.65 ^{bdefgh}	4.25 ^e	3.20 ^{ce}	3.40 ^{ef}	4.05 ^d	4.25	4.58 ^e	3.82 ^e
	neg.	57	4.64 ^{cgk}	2.67 ^{dhk}	3.40 ^{egik}	2.40 ^{chi}	4.56 ^e	5.94 ^{bdgj}	2.33 ^{ceijkl}	3.36 ^{fg}	2.76 ^{bg}
Poland	pos.	62	2.56 ^{ci}	3.69 ^g	3.16 ^{abcdef}	3.73	4.11 ^{ce}	4.00 ^e	4.69	4.89 ^f	3.70 ^f
	neg.	63	4.20 ^{dhi}	3.89 ^{gijkl}	2.92 ^{fhjl}	3.06 ^{dth}	5.10 ^{acfh}	5.83 ^{cehk}	3.75 ^{hk}	4.00 ^{efh}	3.29 ^e
Portugal	pos.	66	3.06 ^{ehi}	3.22 ^{ch}	4.02	4.17 ^{de}	4.20 ^{bdf}	3.92 ^f	4.00	5.64 ^{abcdef}	4.71 ^{abcdef}
	neg.	65	3.67 ^{ijkl}	2.89 ^{el}	4.31 ^{dkl}	3.12 ^{egi}	4.83 ^{bdg}	4.31 ^{ijk}	4.08 ^{fil}	5.14 ^{abdegh}	4.01 ^{cdfg}
ANOVA	pos.	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.004	0.002	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000
	neg.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
MANOVA											0.000

Message frame effects across nations

To test Hypothesis 1, that consumers in different nations will exhibit different cognitive, emotional and attitudinal responses to the framing of advertising messages. Data were analysed by means of standard analysis of variance (ANOVA) and MANOVA techniques. Results including details of how consumers in the selected nations responded to both the positive and the negative framing conditions are shown in Table 3. According to the MANOVA *p* value (bottom row, Table 3), effects of respondents' nationality were significant on all cognitive, emotional and attitudinal measures. Hypothesis 1 was accepted accordingly.

To identify significant differences between nations and between frames in more detail, two additional tests were performed. First, ANOVA determined that, across countries, positive frames elicited more positive emotions, more favourable cognitive evaluations and more favourable attitudes (all *p* values < 0.004). The negative frames elicited significantly more downbeat feelings, lower pleasure, less favourable attitude toward the advert, brand attitude and purchase intention than the positive

frames across nations. This finding that positively framed messages result in more desirable responses than negatively framed ones provides major support for Hypothesis 2.

In addition, statistically significant multiple differences between consumer reactions to positive versus negative message frames were examined within each country. The pattern emerging from a closer examination of the results (see 'Significance' rows for each nation) provides additional evidence that, in the selected countries, positively framed messages elicited more favourable responses. Specifically, scores on the less desirable downbeat dimension were lower (all countries) while scores on the more desirable attitudinal measures AAD, AB and PI were higher (all except Portugal where the difference on AAD was not significant). Hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Significant statistical differences between countries (see ANOVA significances, bottom row) in response to a particular frame were then subjected to a conservative multiple comparison test to identify pairwise differences between the nations. Superscripts (eg^a) indicate significant differences between pairs of

Figure 2: Nations and stretched effects vectors (positive frame)

Wilk's $\lambda = 0.639$, $p < 0.001$, chi-square (42) = 186, explained variance = 79.3 per cent

countries separately for each dimension. For example, the downbeat score exhibited by Czech participants in response to the negative frame ($M = 3.94^{abcd}$) is significantly lower than the corresponding scores obtained from Spanish ($M = 4.37^a$), Hungarian ($M = 4.20^b$), Irish ($M = 4.64^c$), and Polish respondents ($M = 4.20^d$). Furthermore, participants in Ireland were significantly least pleased by the positive frame ($M = 2.65$), participants in Spain considered the positively framed advertisement the least unique ($M = 2.78$), the positively framed advertisement made the Polish sample least curious ($M = 3.16$), and Portuguese participants showed the significantly highest brand attitude ($M = 5.64$) and purchase intention ($M = 4.71$) in response to the positive frame among all nations. Overall, the results provide additional and complementary evidence that respondents in the selected nations exhibited significantly different emotional, cognitive and attitudinal responses.

Finally, to test Hypothesis 3 and to

examine relationships that may exist between the advertising frame and various cognitive and emotional responses on a crossnational basis, discriminant analysis was employed. Two discriminant analyses were performed separately, one for the positively and negatively framed advertisements each with respondent nationality as the group variable and the measures of advertising effects as independent variables. Figure 2 shows the results for the positive frame and Figure 3 for the negative frame. Although the discriminatory power is smaller than the one of the cultural context items, the canonical correlations were significant for both the positive (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.571$, chi-Square (42) = 285, $p < 0.001$) and the negative frames (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.618$, chi-Square (42) = 218, $p < 0.001$). Accordingly, the variables measuring framing effects successfully discriminated between nations and hypothesis 3 was accepted.

For each frame, the distances between national centroids in a plot reflect the relationships between the independent variables with similar nations plotted

Figure 3: Nations and stretched effects vectors (negative frame)
 Wilk's $\lambda = 0.596$, $p < 0.001$, chi-square (42) = 264, explained variance = 74.8 per cent

close to each other. Close proximity of countries thus indicate similar framing effects with their respondents. The expectation that respondents in countries with a similar cultural context (eg the Central European countries as shown in Figure 1), would react similarly to the framing of an advertising message was only partially confirmed. For both the positive and the negative frame, Czech Republic, Croatia and Hungary were not grouped as closely together as in the cultural context analysis.

Next, the independent variables were added to the plots to determine their relative impact. The independent variables were mapped into the two-dimensional space using the pooled within-groups correlations between the discriminating variables and the first two discriminant functions, as the coordinates of the head of the vector. Relating the length of a particular vector and its direction to the various countries provides information on its importance to those countries it passes. For example, positively framed messages yielded higher pleasure with respondents in Spain while

making respondents in Poland more curious. Similarly, negative frames generated more downbeat feelings with consumers in Poland while having a more pleasing effect with consumers in Czech Republic.

CONCLUSIONS

Contributions to advertising theory

The objective of this research was to examine how consumers in different nations, with different cultural contexts, respond to message framing in advertisements. Evidence has been found that a particular message frame elicits emotional, cognitive and attitudinal responses. In particular, negative frames elicited less favourable responses across nations. This is theoretically important because it adds an international perspective to previous findings on message framing effects under different conditions. Past research on the mediating role of emotional responses is extended in determining that the message frame in a particular advertisement

influences respondents' emotions across nations. The emotional responses downbeat, pleased and curious were generated and appeared to mediate attitudinal responses. Hence, the employment of an inappropriate frame may lead to negative effects on the brand. This finding is remarkable considering that the experimental adverts used for stimuli were for a fictitious brand, a fact that should have precluded strong effects on brand attitude and purchase intention.

The most remarkable implication of this study's findings is that consumers in seemingly similar countries did not respond homogeneously to a particular message frame. The identification of differences in how consumers with similar cultural context respond to positively or negatively framed advertising messages could be interpreted as suggesting that the 20-item cultural context scale is not a powerful explanation for similar or differing reactions. This finding, however, raises further questions about the effectiveness of standardised advertisements designed for groups of seemingly similar nations.

Implications for advertising practitioners

Advertisers and their clientele need to recognise that a given advert that has been designed for an international audience featuring a specific frame may elicit a variety of cognitive, emotional and attitudinal responses due to differences between consumer groups. Generally, advertising content and imagery can be designed to account for known or assumed differences, but neglecting even subtle national differences can be misleading and can result in serious damage. As the current study demonstrates, consumers in presumably similar countries, such as Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary,

respond quite differently to positively or negatively framed advertisements. This suggests that even advertising campaigns that are designed for relatively narrow international audiences may not be effective when featuring an inappropriate message frame.

Limitations of the study

Several limitations associated with this study need to be mentioned. First, the nature of the sample (students of marketing classes taught in English) limits the generalisability of findings. While focusing on this group provides homogeneity in terms of age and education, thus reducing the impact of these distorting variables, it cannot be assumed that the descriptive results are representative for each nation's population. Yet, the results of this exploratory study seem to warrant further investment in more extensive future studies to assess consumer response on a larger scale. Another limitation lies in the use of pictures and slogans to positively or negatively frame a message. While the imagery was carefully selected for manipulating the frame across nations, it was not overly suggestive of common health threats such as allergies, cancer, heart diseases or obesity. Studies using more extreme images may elicit different responses.

Like other studies examining advertising effects, findings are based on a single-exposure manipulation. Respondents were questioned about one advertisement rather than being exposed to an advertising campaign over time. Considering this limited exposure, however, the strength of emotional responses to the advertising was considerable. The fact that selected advertisements were not presented in the usual framing media context (eg a magazine) may impose an additional

limitation to the current study. This undoubtedly directed subjects' attention to the advert. In the context of an actual media environment, more distractions might occur and emotional responses could be more muted. More importantly, specific media may moderate the effect of message framing, especially the downbeat and pleased dimension. For example, the effects of a negative frame may be heightened in a lifestyle magazine or attenuated in a health journal. Finally, biases introduced by the use of a web-based surveying methodology, due to non-response, refusals, measurement errors or respondent errors (intentional as well as unintentional) cannot be overlooked. There was no evidence, however, that respondents in the countries studied used scales differently thus affecting results. The use of everyday products, fictional brands and English as common non-native language in the questionnaire may have prevented such a caveat as suggested in past research.

Areas for future research

In addition to future extensions stemming from the limitations outlined above, several more research directions appear to be rewarding. First, an investigation of the mechanisms that lead to differing responses, ie how variables such as national culture affect consumer response would contribute to a better understanding of the message frame–respondent interaction effect. Secondly, a further area for future research would involve the examination of differences in perceived risk in conjunction with the type of behaviour advocated. Perceived risk could be used to test for national differences, for example, by pronouncing risks related to health, social recognition or self-esteem. Reactions to corresponding appeals could

be more diverse and elicit stronger emotions.

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