



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMPUTER APPLICATION AND MANAGEMENT

CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	ROBOT MANIPULATOR CONTROL USING INTELLIGENT CONTROL SCHEME HIMANSHU CHAUDHARY, DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD & DR. N. SUKAVANUM	1
2.	SECURITIZATION AS A FACTOR OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION DIVVIO GALLEGOS PANIAGUA & JOSE G. VARGAS-HERNANDEZ	7
3.	E-GOVERNMENT - TRENDS AND CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEVELOPING NATIONS WITH FOCUS ON PAKISTAN SHAKEEL IQBAL & DR. IJAZ A. QURESHI	15
4.	INFLUENCE OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES ON POVERTY REDUCTION IN BANGLADESH MD. MORSHED HOSSAIN, MD. ZAHIR UDDIN ARIF & MD. NASIR UDDIN	21
5.	APPLICATION OF SYSTEMATIC INNOVATION IN TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT (RCA AND TOPSIS MODELS PRESENTATION TO DETERMINE PROBLEM SOLVING STRATEGIES) DR. YOUNOS VAKIL ALROAIA, JAVAD SOFIYABADI & ELAHEH BAKHSHIZADEH	27
6.	FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT MOZAFFAR A CHOWDHURY	35
7.	BOARD DEPENDENCE, INTERNAL AUDITORS AND EARNINGS MANAGEMENT: AN EMERICAL RESEARCH OF IRAN MOHAMMADREZA ABDOLI, MARYAM SHAHRI & MOHSEN RAHMANI	39
8.	CHILD LABOUR CONDITION IN RESTAURANT SECTOR OF BANGLADESH JASMINE JAIM	44
9.	FISCAL DEFICITS AND OUTPUT GROWTH IN NIGERIA DR. FREDRICK ONYEBUCHI ASOGWA & MUSA SHERIFF URAMA	47
10.	MEASURING THE QUALITY OF TEHRAN'S MUNICIPALITY SERVICES FROM THE VIEW POINT OF THE CLIENT DR. AMIR HOSSEIN AMIRKHANI, SAYD MEHDI VEISEH, MARYAM GHASEMI & HAMIDEH SHEKARI	52
11.	ATTITUDES OF INDIANS TOWARDS SERVICE QUALITY FOR LIFE INSURANCE IN INDIA ANAND PRAKASH, SANJAY KUMAR JHA & S. P. KALLURKAR	57
12.	PROFITABILITY PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF PANYAM CEMENTS AND MINERAL INDUSTRIES (AP), INDIA N. VENKATA RAMANA, S. MD. AZASH & K. RAMA KRISHNAIAH	64
13.	THE AUDIT EXPECTATION GAP: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN JORDAN SULTAN HASSAN MOHAMMED AHMED & DR. D. RAGHUNATHA REDDY	68
14.	DIFFUSION OF MOTOR VEHICLE SALES IN DELHI DR. DEBABRATA DAS	77
15.	AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION ON EFFECTIVE RISK HANDLING ATTITUDES OF TOP BUSINESS LEADERS IN RELATION TO THEIR APPROACHES TOWARDS INNOVATION DR. PUSHP LATA & ABHISHEK SYAL	84
16.	AUTOMATIC INFORMATION COLLECTION & TEXT CLASSIFICATION FOR TELUGU CORPUS USING K-NN ALGORITHM NADIMAPALLI V GANAPATHI RAJU, VIDYA RANI V, BHAVYA SUKAVASI & SAI RAMA KRISHNA CHAVA	88
17.	RE-ATTEMPT CONNECTIVITY TO INTERNET ANALYSIS OF USER BY MARKOV CHAIN MODEL DIWAKAR SHUKLA, KAPIL VERMA & SHARAD GANGELE	94
18.	FACTORIAL STUDY OF STUDENTS ATTITUDE TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY ENABLED ACADEMIC LEARNING SHARMILA.C & DR. R. RAJENDRAN	100
19.	ATTITUDE AND PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE TOWARDS WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES: A COMPARATIVE EMPLOYEE ANALYSIS OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS S.M. SHARIQ ABBAS & VANDANA PREMI	103
20.	AUDIENCE AWARENESS AND MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION DR. DIVYA WALIA	109
21.	FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF INDIAN AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY DR. NISHI SHARMA	112
22.	ANALYTICAL STUDY OF VARIOUS APPROACHES IN SERVICE QUALITY, DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENTS DR. RAJESH N. PAHURKAR	117
23.	WORK – FAMILY ROLE CONFLICT OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN ENGINEERING COLLEGES IN TIRUCHIRAPPALLI DISTRICT DR. M. YASMIN & FAYAZ AHAMED .M.A.	121
24.	INTERROGATION OF PACKAGING AND ADVERTISING A.NITHYA	125
25.	A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE DOT.COM CRISIS AND THE SUB-PRIME CRISIS DR. T.GEETHA	130
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	136

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AUDIENCE AWARENESS AND MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural communication is gaining importance with the increasing globalization. Since borders are disappearing as companies merge with overseas companies, need for translating various marketing slogans into different languages is being felt. If this will not happen, it may result in miscommunication and misinterpretation. For instance, when Chevrolet tried to sell Nova to Spanish-speaking countries, it didn't work because in Spanish No-va means, "it does not go". Also when Pepsi used the slogan, "Pepsi Brings You Back to Life", it was translated quite literally in China which meant "Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back from the Grave". Such instances draw our attention towards the need to better assess how our audiences are going to interpret our messages. Audience awareness is always placed at a height when it comes to communicating effectively. This paper will take up the analysis of certain Indian advertisements where the stakeholders and the promoters of a particular product could not achieve the expected targets due to the misinterpretation of the advertisements by the audience leading to a negative response.

KEYWORDS

Audience awareness, Indian Advertisements, Multicultural communication, Stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

With the expansion of global markets along national and cultural lines, it has become essential for the organizations aiming at growth to add some degree of multicultural marketing to their advertising strategies if they wish to convey their messages effectively to the target audience. Without making an effective appeal to the diverse cultures, an organization could end up facing missed opportunities, damaged brands, and poor relationships with existing customers, severe threats from competitors or even compliance issues. For instance, when Chevrolet tried to sell Nova to Spanish-speaking countries, it didn't work because in Spanish No-va means, "it does not go". (<http://www.grammarlady.com>). Also when Pepsi used the slogan, "Pepsi Brings You Back to Life", it was translated quite literally in China which meant "Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back from the Grave". (<http://www.grammarlady.com>). Such instances draw our attention towards the need to better assess how our audiences are going to interpret our messages. Audience awareness should always be taken into consideration when it comes to communicating effectively. The paper is an attempt to emphasize upon this aspect of marketing for effective understanding of the advertisements by the audience and consequent better and improved response from them.

METHODOLOGY

Being the qualitative type of research, the study relies more on the secondary sources of data mainly articles from newspapers, magazines, websites etc. The paper also reviews certain advertisements in order to bring out communication related challenges and issues, the audience's perspective and understanding of the ads; for this information and analysis the sources of data are television, online reviews and blogs.

CRITERIA OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In the economy of the new century, communication means communicating cross-culturally and it should stress on the three criteria:

- **CONTENT CRITERIA** - In today's world of greater interdependency and interconnectedness, the need for effective communication in conjunction with cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding is intensified. For any message to be successful across cultures, it is important that it must embrace the social nuances of separate markets and take a serious note of culturally sensitive imagery, appropriate inter- personal communication dynamics and the right jargon or slang.
- **DELIVERY CRITERIA** - The medium of delivery should be selected keeping in mind the largest likelihood of audience comprehension.
- **CULTURAL CRITERIA** - Constructing the right message in a non native culture is even more complicated. For winning the credibility of the audience, content should be assessed for the following areas:
 - Culturally inappropriate or confusing analogies, metaphors, puns, idioms and slang;
 - Cultural references that are inappropriate or could lose meaning (e.g. gender-specific roles, humor, ethnic, geographical or historic references);
 - Names and slogans that are culturally inappropriate;
 - Confusing graphics or icons;
 - Grammar issues (e.g., ambiguous use of direct and indirect objects, gerunds, nouns, adjectives, relative pronouns, questions in negative form etc.).

COMPONENTS OF MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Multicultural Communication should include the following components in its construction:

- **MARKET RESEARCH:** Audience analysis is very important before one starts planning a strategy for marketing. Who is being targeted? What are the relevant demographic issues? What are the sensitive ethnic oriented issues?
- **CULTURAL ADAPTATION:** Cultural adaptation will help in avoiding certain potential obstacles that could lead to interference with the building up of rapport with the audience. A culture's communication dynamics can be listed as grammar, humor, analogies, ethnic or historic references and symbolism.
- **LOCALIZATION:** Texts which are borrowed and adopted must be translated with efficacy so as to make them culturally acceptable with the use of unique locale-specific references and examples.
- **INTERNATIONALIZATION:** There are few elements that can be internationalized and made global. Such elements appeal to masses globally and should be incorporated in the communication.
- **GLOBALIZATION:** It is communication skills, both in sending and receiving, that determines how well an individual, an organization, an industry, or a nation does and broadens its chances of success. Certainly, the ability to effectively negotiate the inherent cultural issues in communication becomes more of a competitive edge in a global world. Therefore 'Localization' of marketing, sales and customer support should be integrated with the 'Internationalized' management processes and procedures. (*World Trade 100 Magazine*, 2006)

CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

When we come to talk about communicating with the multicultural audience, the first thing that one has to keep in mind is the best way to communicate with the audience in order to build trust and loyalty because even within single language groups there are significant differences in vocabulary, usage and vernacular. Consider, for example, a word as simple as "insect". It can have different meanings, depending on the audience. Sometimes it is just one word of a slogan that

changes the whole meaning. When Parker Pen marketed a ballpoint pen in Mexico, its ads were supposed to say "It won't leak in your pocket and embarrass you." (Source: <http://www.takingontobacco.org/intro/funny.html>). However, the company mistakenly thought the Spanish word "embarazar" meant embarrass. Instead the ad said "It won't leak in your pocket and make you pregnant!!"

Besides these, marketers have to also consider certain differences between generations within a culture. One may also find variations in the use of language and the imageries in the successive generations. While constructing a message, such factors must be taken into account.

MULTICULTURALISM AND INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

Talking about the Indian scenario, we can say that since globalization is a growing trend, and India is playing a major role in this, it is important for advertisers to know the trends within the country and outside so as to be able to integrate the local culture with the global culture. One has to keep in mind the difference in cultural nuances while constructing a message. We may consider for example the difference in men –women equation in different cultures. Caste hierarchy and caste consideration is also different in different societies. Westerners do not have caste as a consideration as the Indians have.

In *Fair & Lovely* fairness cream ad – Beta Ek Coffee Milega (*Can I have some more coffee*), the commercial shows a girl is earning for her family meanwhile her dad asks for coffee. The mom says don't waste your daughter's money by drinking coffee which doesn't go well with the dad as he says "Kaash hamara beta hota" (*I wish we had a son!*). Suddenly after the use of *Fair & Lovely*, the daughter becomes beautiful and gets an Air Hostess's job and is able to afford more than the desired cup of coffee. This Ad shows nothing but negativity and gender bias which is not acceptable in all cultural contexts.

Similarly an ad showing a Bollywood star will have a greater effect on the Indian audience than on the western audience as they do not have that sort of craze or stardom fever that Indians have.

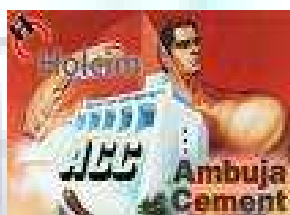


Besides this we may notice that often the symbols, ideals and mores that Indian advertisers portray and promote are those of Western society and culture. It is through the projection of advertisements that brands such as Levi's, Nike, Marlboro and McDonalds are disseminated in and become objects of desire for teens and young adults throughout India and the world. Similarly, images and scenes depicted are either Western in origin or reflect Western consumption behavior and values. Even where adapted to local scenarios and role models, those shown often come from the elite sections of society, such as the upwardly mobile urban middle class, which embrace or are receptive to Western values and mores.

If the product is to be marketed globally, it must be advertised globally but then care must be taken to adapt it culturally to make it acceptable across the cultures. When Western advertising depicts sexually explicit situations or shows women in situations considered as inappropriate or immoral, it is likely to be considered a subversive force undermining established cultural mores and values in India. For example, an ad for *Axe*, a men's deodorant shows a number of females with pseudo-coy expressions on their faces coming out of a room where a handsome male model is lying prostrate with telltale lipstick marks across his body. The product advertised does not really bear a direct relationship with the message or script since Indian males would be caught dead before females catch them like this. A single public kiss can become a case of condemnation and raise a furor, then how can nudity plus scores of lip imprints be accepted. These are western concepts imposed on Indian ad scripts and misrepresent the social norms of the society.



Another instance being noticed in the Indian context is that the ads which appeal to the local market fail to reach to the global audience. In an ad of *Ambuja Cement* we have a family reluctant to let a girl uproot their *tulsi* plant for her parking space. Now this *tulsi* plant has a religious value for the Indian audience but it will not have a similar significance for the audience across the cultures.



Besides the above we also have some ads which fail at communicating the message in the right perspective or are so confusing that the audience is left with a sense of discontentment at the end of the commercial. In an advertisement for *Iodex*, a pain reliever cream, we are shown a 500 rupee note lying on the street. An old person notices it and wants to pick it up but he can not do so due to back ache. Now this ad implies that if that person would have used *Iodex* he would have surrendered to his instinct of turning dishonest. The message conveyed is in no way related to the promotion of the product. It, infact, leaves a negative impact in the minds of the audience.



Chevrolet Forester started its promotion with campaign "*I am your light ...sunshine ...prayer and all*". It went on for over 3 months before the Chevrolet was actually shown. This ad was very misleading and confusing because many people thought it is Engineering Co. and some thought it is a Mutual Funds Co... BUT it turned out to be an out of reach Rs.16 lakhs SUV.

But then, there are certain ads which have appealed to the audience across various cultures because their promoters have realized the importance of communicating the product information while blending it with the cultures of the countries they serve.

In this we can quote the ad of *McDonald's* featuring *Dilip Kumar/ Dev Anand*, the bollywood heroes of the 60's and 70's. The commercial, shot at one of the *McDonald's* outlets, shows a 'black and white' Dev Anand / Dilip Kumar entering the outlet and enquiring about McDonald's burgers, which were available at a price from their hey days. This bears reference to the Happy Price Menu which is available at Rs 20. Wittily done, the ad drives home the point that McDonald's is a reasonably priced food joint and is being loved since the bygone ages.



We can also consider the ad of Asian paints which has taken up a global setting for conveying the message. The advertisement does complete justice to the brand Asian Paints "Exterior Emulsion". The exterior paints are exposed to harsh weather conditions of our country where there are extreme conditions across length and breath of the country. The advertisement is trying to put forth the basic proposition of "Time Proof Beauty" through portraying various changes happening in the life of one Sunil Babu. The story starts from the younger days of Sunil Babu when he purchases a new house, new car and gets himself a new wife. Now the story develops wherein everything changes from receding hairline of Sunil Babu to the expanding contours of his wife and the deteriorating car, but there is only one constant, the exteriors of his house which withstands the onslaught of time and extreme conditions and still looks brand new. The subtle use of humor actually reinforces the benefits of the brand. Now this ad will be comprehended in a universal context as the message conveyed is universal showing the different stages of a man's life from his youth to old age.

CONCLUSION

We can conclude that there are a few factors which should be kept in mind while communicating with the multicultural audience. First, simply translating a message from English can undercut the intended message completely, or worse yet, result in an entirely different meaning. There are too many linguistic and cultural nuances which are to be considered while attempting a translation. For example, one multinational financial institution's new marketing campaign revolved around their 'revolutionary' approach to banking. But in the multicultural community, the financial services industry is seen as being very reliable and trusted, so the 'revolutionary' approach did not resonate with them. The financial institution failed to understand the difference between the English-speaking market and other cultural segments. It is to be kept in mind that the multicultural consumer is different from its mainstream counterpart. Their culture, their language and their values are all different.

Secondly, many ad agencies have translation done by the particular multicultural media source they purchase space from, whether it be newspapers, radio, or TV. In marketing to the mainstream, a local TV station is not very likely to produce television commercial targeting high net worth consumers. This might be one of the biggest reasons why companies have not been successful in reaching the multicultural markets.

Moving forward, companies should use multicultural people who work for them as resources for these markets. They will be able to provide them with the information regarding communication to the multicultural markets for a particular product or service.

Therefore, companies looking for achieving success in a multicultural market need to address the changing demographics of their consumer base. There will be an increase in affluence in multicultural communities and therefore companies cannot ignore local multicultural markets. And in order to successfully reach to the multicultural audience, companies should take care to avoid cultural errors. They should realize the importance of not only communicating key product information in the native language of the countries they serve but also applying the appropriate cultural context so as to make their products universally acceptable.

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