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International and multimedia marketing communication strategies in Germany and Italy.  
Case analysis

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## 1 Introduction

Nowadays we often hear terms like “globalization” or “global village”, which refer to the theory that the world is becoming more and more globally, in other words that national borders are disappearing, changing the world into a global village where the people have the same needs and preferences. Companies tend to “go international” as tariff barriers are getting reduced and more free trade areas are getting established. In order to reduce costs and influenced by the “global village” theory, companies tend to apply global strategies throughout their business processes, without considering anymore national or cultural differences.

However, there are neither reasons nor proof for a worldwide convergence of the tastes and preferences of the consumers (Usunier and Walliser 1993). Nevertheless, there is no denying that an worldwide competition is increasing and consequently leads to a standardization of products and to a standardisation of the appearance in front of the consumer (Usunier and Walliser 1993). Nevertheless, by entering a foreign market, a company has to consider the cultural environment of this market, in order to address the consumer in an appropriate way, as the differences in consumer behaviour are the reason for every adaption in marketing (Usunier and Walliser 1993).

According to De Mooji and Hofstede (2006, p. 62): “International marketers would like us to believe that in the “new Europe” with a single currency, consumers will become more similar, will increasingly eat the same food, wear jeans and cross-trainers, and watch the same television programs. Reality is likely to be different”

“Marketing is an exchange process that is considerably influenced by communication” (Usunier and Walliser, 1993, p.3) and communication is in turn influenced by culture (Usunier and Walliser 1993). In addition, cultural differences not only influence the consumer but also the environment of the marketing strategies. Companies that have followed the philosophy of the global village have failed because they used to ignore the cultural differences (Usunier and Walliser 1993). Proof that cultural difference will not disappear in the near future can be seen in the existence of “different languages, political institutions, eating habits, cultural conflicts that take place between people in political homogenous countries etc.” (Usunier and Walliser 1993, p. 104).

It has to be mentioned, that consumer behaviour in international markets is not only influenced by cultural or sociocultural determinants, but also by economic, demographic and psychological factors (Glowik and Smyczek 2011). However, this thesis will focus on the influence of cultural determinants on marketing strategies, in other words, it will analyse which cultural characteristics are embodied in marketing strategies and how they are embodied. This is done

by doing a case analysis of the marketing communication strategies of Mercedes-Benz and Fiat Chrysler in Germany and Italy. Before starting with the case analysis, there will be the elaboration of the theoretical base of the thesis, starting with the concept of culture.

“Culture” is a very complex and versatile phenomenon, which is an object of investigation in many different scientific fields. In order to pay tribute to the complexity of culture and to outline the development of the concept of culture, we will start by looking at culture from the anthropological and sociological point of view, which leads us to the intracultural approach and finally to the models of Hofstede, Hall and the Globe study that are used mostly in business and marketing, in order to classify cultures and consequently to elaborate appropriate strategies. Consequently, the Italian and German culture will be analysed more in detail, thus, in the end in order to conclude the theoretical part about culture, two country profiles will be drawn up. It has to be mentioned, that these cultural profiles are based on general assumptions and cannot be applied to every individual of the culture, as there are also variations within one culture for instance to due regional differences.

Moreover, in the following chapters definitions and concepts of marketing and the particularities in international marketing will be elaborated and described. Special attention will be paid to the correlation between culture and marketing, for example by explaining the country-of-origin-effect, the concept of “culture-free” and “culture-bound” products.

The second part of the thesis will treat the case analysis of the international marketing communication strategies of the German automotive company Mercedes-Benz and the Italian automotive cooperation Fiat-Chrysler in Germany and Italy. As nowadays the social media channels are getting more and more important for the corporate communications, this chapter starts with the comparative analysis of the difference between the national homepages, the Facebook fanpages, the Twitter accounts, the YouTube Channels and the Pinterest boards. Even if there exist also other social media pages, where the companies are represented, only the four mentioned above have been analysed due to the fact that they are the most used social networks worldwide. (Statista 2015).

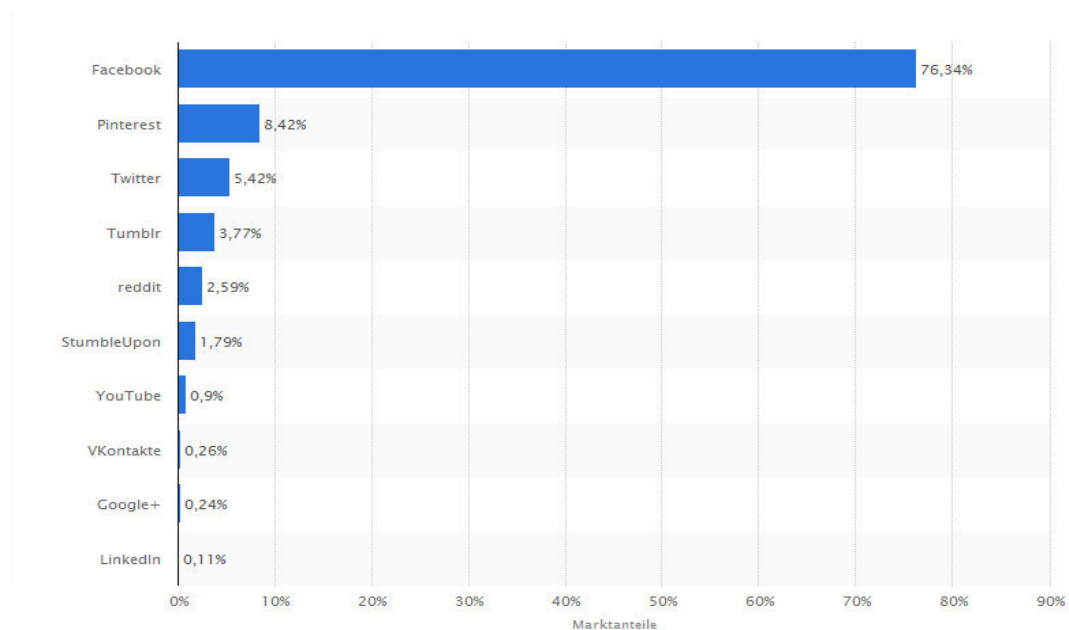


Fig. 1: Market share of social media portals 2015 (Statista, 2015)

Moreover, there will be also a comparative analysis of the TV advertisement spots of the Fiat 500 and the Mercedes-Benz A-class in Germany and Italy. These two cars have been chosen, due to their similar target audience, young people between 20 and 30 years. It has to be mentioned, that differences regarding the price of the cars have been ignored, as these differences are mostly explained by differences in the international product and price management, which will not be subject of investigation in this thesis, and by economic and political factors of the particular nation.

The final chapter will be about possible correlations between differences in the marketing communication strategies and characteristics of the German and Italian culture. It is aimed to draw the conclusion which cultural characteristics are embodied in the marketing measures and how are they embodied, and if they are embodied to a greater extend in the online marketing strategies or in the traditional TV advertisements.

## 4 Conclusions

This chapter is about elaborating correlations between the differences of the marketing communications campaigns of Fiat-Chrysler and Mercedes-Benz and certain characteristics of the Italian and German culture (see chapter 2.1.5). Thus, the objective of this chapter is to find evidence for the cultural characteristics in the marketing communication campaigns, in other words it will answer the question “which cultural characteristics are embodied in the marketing campaigns, how are they embodied or are there any contradictions between cultural values and elements of the marketing campaigns?”.

### Individualism and Collectivism

The German culture as well as the Italian culture are mostly seen as individualist cultures; however, the Italian culture is nevertheless characterized by a strong in-group collectivism. This fact is expressed in the TV spots for the Mercedes A-class “un nome da difendere”, the dialogue of the three young men reveals that normally buying a Mercedes is against the rules and the image of the group, which seems to be very important looking at the disgust of the two men. However, when they see the car, they change their opinion and are even willing to change the name of the group, in other words to leave the rules that were valid until now behind. Consequently, the message of the spot is that this car, the new A-class, is able to overcome barriers and become a “member” of the in-group.

In addition, also one of the Italian spots regarding the Fiat 500 show elements that are correlated with the in-group collectivism, in a way that everyone who is Italian is a member of the in-group by saying “a noi italiani piace...” (We Italians like...). The spot directs the Italian audience directly and by saying “noi” (we) a sense of belonging is transmitted and consequently this sense of belonging gets linked to car presented in the spot, the Fiat 500.

In the German campaigns is no such thing that refers to the audience as a member of any group, which embodies the focus on individualism, as the German culture is an individualist culture. In addition, the German online presentation of Mercedes-Benz often outlines the winning of awards, which is an expression of individualism as achievement and success are very important in individualist cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010).

Moreover, it is notable that the Valentines’ Day seems to be more important in Italy as the Italian campaigns publish more posts regarding Valentines’ Day and these posts are also more personal as the ones on the German pages. This could be explained by the in-group orientation

in the Italian culture. Due to this orientation the members of one's group are important and thus also a public holiday that has the aim to cherish the persons dear to us.

### Femininity/Masculinity and Gender Egalitarianism

Both cultures are masculine cultures, in other words gender equality is still rather low in these cultures. This can also be seen in the marketing campaigns where in both cultures the spot "Parking", regarding the A-class, refers to the stereotype of women that have an issue with parking a car and are considered to be worse drivers than men. Furthermore, the majority of spots of the Mercedes A-class show men as drivers and also the voice-over in the background of the spots are male. Only the spot iLike includes a female driver and her female friend, but also this can be seen as a cause of cultural values, as women in masculine cultures are considered to take more care of relationships (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010, p. 155), thus they are more likely to use the advertised iLike technology in the car to stay in contact with their friends. However, the marketing campaign for the Fiat 500 spots try to avoid showing a driver of the car or in one spot there is a man as well as a woman shown as drivers. Nevertheless, if there is a couple, always the man drives the car, in the German spots, as well as in the Italian spots. A particularity of the Italian spots of the Fiat 500 is that, if there is information about the price or the financing of the car, at the end of the spot, a female voice gives this information. This stands in contradiction to the assumption of masculine cultures, that the purchase of a car is a task accomplished by men (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). However, it could be that the marketers use this strategy in order to combine financial facts with something feminine and femininity is considered as being modest and tender in masculine cultures.

Regarding the online marketing messages, it has to be noted that there is no difference in addressing men or women. The posts on the social media are designed in a way that they address both genders without making differences to a female or male audience.

In masculine cultures an explicit discussion of sex is almost prohibited in public, but, implicit erotic symbolism is accepted (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). This explains why it is possible to use the erotic hints in the TV advertisement of the Fiat 500X in Germany and Italy. Nevertheless, this type of implicit erotic symbolism is more often used in the Italian marketing campaigns regarding the 500 (the campaign for Valentines' Day with the TV spot and the slogan for the online campaign "Viva l'amore, abasso i sedili") and just once in the campaign for Germany.

In masculine cultures material rewards for success are considered important (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). The German TV spot for the Fiat 500 Cult refers to this material prosperity, normally appreciated in a masculine culture like Germany, in an ironic way, in order to present a small car like the Fiat 500 as desirable as any other big car.

### Uncertainty Avoidance

The German culture is considered to have a high uncertainty avoidance. This high index manifest itself for example in the way how Mercedes-Benz addresses its fans on Facebook. As cultures with a high score in uncertainty avoidance tend to be more formal in interactions with others, the German Facebook page of Mercedes-Benz addresses the fans with “Sie”, which is the German formal form of “you”. The Italian culture has a lower score in uncertainty avoidance and tends to address its fans or followers always with the informal form of “you” (German “du”, Italian “tu”). The fact that also the German Facebook page of Fiat addresses its fans with the informal form may derive from the fact the Fiat as an Italian company characterised by low uncertainty avoidance, implement the informal way to address others in interactions throughout the whole company, even in the national branches. This can be seen in combination with the “country of origin effect” that is used intensively by the Fiat campaigns in order to stress their Italian origin, but this will be discussed more in detail later on.

Another characteristic of cultures with a high score in uncertainty avoidance is a need for detailed information (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). Consequently, this leads to the expectation that there would be detailed information in the German campaigns. However, Mercedes-Benz include detailed information about fuel consumption and emissions not in their German spots but in the Italian spots. In addition, in the Italian spots that have the same scenes as the German spots a voice-over in the background offers more information to the car, in the German spots there is no such voice-over at all. Moreover, even in the social networks the Italian posts of Mercedes-Benz contain more often the information regarding fuel consumption and emissions. Regarding the Fiat campaigns, it is exactly the opposite. In the German Fiat campaigns there are more often information about fuel consumption and emission than in the Italian campaign. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact, that the Mercedes-Benz cars already are very well known in Germany and have a strong position in the market, thus, detailed information about the fuel consumption, emissions etc. of the cars may not be necessary, as these facts are well known in Germany. However, in the foreign market, it is still important to provide this information in order to strengthen and stabilise the position in the foreign market and to avoid the risk of failure. On the contrary, for Fiat it is important to provide detailed information in the German campaign as for the German audience it is important to have many information in order to avoid for example the risk to be unsatisfied after buying a



car referring to the high score in uncertainty avoidance. With this line of argument it can also be explained why Mercedes-Benz includes many information even in their online presentations in the social media.

### Performance Orientation

Germany has a rather high score in performance orientation, which explains the focus on performance and technology issues of the new A-class in the TV spots. Just one spot regards only design, and all the other spots regard technology issues that characterize the car. On the contrary, the Fiat 500 campaign in Germany, as well as in Italy, focus not on technology but on design. Design is extremely important in Italian marketing as mentioned above (see chapter 2.3.4.), which will reappear later in the discussion about the usage of the country of origin effect in the campaigns.

Cultures with a low score in Performance Orientation emphasize tradition (House et al. 2004), thus, this can be the reason for the usage of the picture of the traditional family, consistent of father, mother, a boy and a girl, in the Italian Facebook post regarding the Mercedes Vito. In addition, the Italian culture is still strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, which also promotes the picture of the traditional family instead of more modern ones, like a family with homosexual parents. Another allusion to this influence of the Catholic Church is used in the Italian TV spot “Pinolla blu” of the Fiat 500X, it is an humoristic allusion when the blue pill, actually passes by of all things a catholic priest.

### High-context/ Low-context

Even if the Italian culture has a rather low score in Human Orientation, the Italian homepages and the Italian social media pages contain many links that could be of service to the costumer, or direct links to customer services. Even if the Human Orientation score is low, the Italian culture is nevertheless a high-context culture that appreciates relationships (Treichel 2011), so the links at service to the customer are an instrument to stabilize and improve the relation to the customers, fans, followers etc. The German pages contain more often links regarding the cars or information regarding the cars, a possible explanation could be the Performance Orientation, as the German strategy is focused on promote the cars of the companies, which represent the actual performance of automotive industries.

As a high-context culture the Italian culture tends to use a more indirect communication style, in contrast to the German culture that uses a more direct communication style as a low-context

culture (Usunier and Lee 2013). This could be an explanation for the fact that emoticons are used regularly in the Italian campaigns, but not at all in the German campaigns.

#### Usage of the country of origin effect by Fiat

Fiat uses the country of origin effect in the marketing communication strategies for both countries. In the campaign for Germany it stresses the concept of “la dolce vita” that is coming to Germany in terms of driving a Fiat 500. As mentioned above in chapter 2.3.4. design is very important in the Italian marketing, but it is not only an important element of marketing itself, but Fiat also stresses the design of the cars, especially the Fiat 500, in order to convey the fashionable, stylish Italian way of life to the German audience. The Italian way of life can be found throughout the TV spots of the Fiat 500, every scene of the “Hallo Deutschland” spot represents an element of the Italian way of life, which is recognized by the German audience as Italian and to which a German audience is attracted, for example sitting in the piazza drinking coffee, or a Italian wedding, etc. Most of all, the typical “piazza” atmosphere (sitting together with friends in the piazza, drinking for example coffee) is transmitted in the TV spots, in the German spots, as well as in the Italian spots. Moreover, also the Italian Fiat campaigns underline these facts. The German audience is attracted to the foreign life style of the “dolce vita”, however, the Italian audience is not attracted in that way, but the campaigns try to address the ethnocentrism of the Italian audience. In other words, the Fiat campaigns for Italy try to convey a sense of togetherness to the Italian people, try to persuade them to buy Fiat as an expression of togetherness and commitment to one’s home country.

To conclude, it can be said that most of all individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity are embodied in the marketing communication strategies of Fiat-Chrysler and Mercedes-Benz. Moreover, cultural differences seem to be more significant for the TV advertisement, as there the underlying cultural characteristics have been more evident than in the corporate social media representations, which could stem from the fact that the TV spots are directed versus a local audience. It seems that in the Internet, as a global medium directed versus a rather global audience, addresses people in a more global way, for example by having the official corporate page or account in English like Mercedes-Benz does in Twitter, or both companies in Pinterest or by including materials in other languages than their “mother” language in their social media pages. Some differences of the communications on the social media could not be attributed to a specific cultural aspect, it could be that these differences derive simply from the fact that there are different individuals who publish the post on the social

media, deciding from their individual perspective and situation what picture to choose and which words to use.

In conclusion, it could be stated that the global village with global consumers exists. It is the internet and the social media where companies are able to address consumers from different nations in the same way without being constrained to pay much attention to cultural differences. However, further research and analysis are necessary to proof this statement in the future.

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