

Strategic Glocalization in Online Communication: The Value of Authenticity for the Romanian Audience

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Abstract. *This study analyses the impact of global communication strategies versus the impact of local communication strategies, both applied to the Romanian digital public. The purpose of the study is to underscore the tendency of global brands like Coca-Cola and Pepsi to adopt a glocal strategy and to integrate local cultural characteristics into their communication campaigns. In order to understand the value of authenticity in glocal communication strategies, we took a close look at the recent campaigns of the two brands. By applying qualitative research in order to analyze the impact of the marketing campaign of Coca-Cola and Pepsi, we suggest that a more local adapted message, created based on a local insight, is more powerful and has a bigger impact on the Romanian publics than a glocalized message. More generally, we underscore the need for developing local campaigns in order to regain the trust of the Romanian publics in the global brands.*

Keywords: *digital communication; globalization; glocalization; global brands; Romanian publics.*

Introduction

Globalization has become an expression of common usage and seems to be the hallmark of the 21st century, as Sriramesh (2007) summarized. The sudden increase in the exchange of knowledge, trade, and capital around the world, driven by technological innovation, the rise of the global internet and the new media thrust the term of globalization into the spotlight. The last two decades changed the way people and organizations communicate across national and cultural borders and the differences between countries are becoming harder and harder to recognize (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011).

In the context of globalization, the tendency of global brands is to strengthen their values in order to have a more unitary communication strategy worldwide. Big brands like Coca-Cola and Pepsi are now applying global communication strategy on local markets like Romania, with little differences applied on a more tactical level, like the language of the message or the creative execution or the media placement.

In the context of a localized communication, the tendency of big global brands is to cut the communication budget for countries with a smaller market like Romania and adapt the global strategy by changing as few elements as possible. In digital communication, the KPI's are directly proportional to the media budget invested and at the end of the campaign, the difference between the results of a local campaign and the results of a glocal campaign depends only on the media budget invested. But which is the impact of the two online transmitted messages? Was the global message representative for the local public? Therefore, this article takes a closer look at the impact of two different messages – one global and another one local, belonging to two big global brands, Coca-Cola and Pepsi. First, a literature review will underscore the tendency of global brands for a global communication strategy put in the mirror with the need for the locally adapted communication strategy. The literature review will be followed by the research questions and the methodology which formed the bases of this research. In the final section, we'll underscore the most relevant results of the quantitative research that was made.

Literature review

Due to the rising of the internet, many major companies have the possibility to conduct business in more than one country so they are called multinational corporations (MNC's) that may have in their portfolio more than one global brand. The country where an MNC has its headquarters is called its home country while the other countries it does business in are host countries. In this context of multinational corporations that have the possibility to engage in communication campaigns in less developed countries, a central part of many public relations and creative practitioners will be marked by the effort to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty in a more tightly networked world. Therefore, communicating with the global publics becomes a more complex task which implies understanding the complexities of intercultural core values.

Studies have been reporting that cultural differences have an impact on global communication practices (Kinzer and Bohn 1985; Kent and Taylor, 2011; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2013; Zerfass et al., 2008), but few studies examined the role of local cultural dimensions in the communication campaign of a global brand. In the context of social media, Falconi (2010) argues that all public relations are becoming global and that local public relations no longer exists (Falconi, 2010). This affirmation may be exaggerated, but we have to accept that standardization has its advocates and that public relations are still predominantly practiced in an old fashion way by multinational agencies replicating global strategies with only minimal, if any, variations that suit local socio-political conditions (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007). Apart from the fact that it facilitates a homogenous image and brand values, standardization is often preferred due to its economic advantages, like cost reductions through savings in advertising production, for example, sharing of experience and effective use of the creative idea budget (Tai, 1997). However, cultural adaptation has become a fundamental strategic principle for communication practitioners in the age of globalization (Sinclair & Wilken, 2009).

New generations communicate through new media technology and increasingly adopt global lifestyles and associate themselves with transnational brands (Falkheimer, 2008). More than that, different cultures interact now with each other in unprecedented ways, and technology has become one of the most important factors that facilitate the process of globalization. Hall affirms that we are facing one big global mass culture, that is centered in the West and it always speaks English (Hall, 1991).

On the other hand, the new technologies, in general, and the Internet in particular, can be tools that facilitate the interactions between local cultures and global cultures (Wasserman, 2002). Besides, the sociologist Anthony Giddens affirms too that globalization is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world (Giddens, 2002, p.13). So it's possible that, from a cultural perspective, the globalization is probably better interpreted as processes of glocalization – local identities are not at all replaced by one global identity, on the contrary, globalization seems to multiply micro-publics with different identities at all levels (Falkheimer, 2008, p.294).

Therefore, a glocal strategy can be applied in the communication of global brands in order to improve their worldwide performance based on local differences (Jessop, 2000), like linguistic or cultural differences, including religious rigidity and variations in tastes (Sinclair & Wilken, 2009). In search of the right communication mix, Banerjee (1994) suggests that the physical or the functional proprieties of a product may be kept the same from one country to another, while the brand values can be varied according to the local public: "it is possible to use a common advertising strategy and positioning of the product, but vary the execution" (p.102). Tai (1997) made another distinction in her study of regional communication by emphasizing the strategic level (the concept of the campaign, the target, and the product positioning) and the tactical level (the creative execution and the media placement) which she names the adaptation strategy (p.58). Basically, this adaptation consists of keeping some elements unchanged while varying others based on local differences in order to keep a balance between the organizational and economic advantages of standardization, and the necessity of responding to cultural differences between publics (Sinclair & Wilken, 2009).

The "think global, act local" communication strategy is based on the assumption that local practitioners know the local target better than the people from the MNC's headquarters and so local communication agencies (creative, digital or public relations agencies) have the opportunity to adapt the campaign in order to suit each national market. As Sinclair and Wilken declare, it is more an amalgamation of global, regional

and local strategies (2009), that can be seen as a kind of standardization based on the idea that practitioners “should view standardization not as the transferability of an entire campaign across countries, but as a strategy that makes unified themes, images and even brand names, possible across countries, even if issues of campaign execution still need to be decided at the local subsidiary level” (Sriram & Gopalakrishna, 1991, p.146).

The concept of authenticity

In the context of the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world, the concept of authenticity is becoming increasingly important in strategic communication. Authenticity is the hottest buzzword of the 21st century (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, being authentic is being original, actual, and real, true to one’s own personality, spirit, and character (2019). These synonyms could be used to describe individuals, objects, products or even online communication campaigns for all types of MNCs.

As Cook says, people want authentic stories about authentic people and the communication practitioners have now the important task to find the authenticity of every global brand and to tell those stories that will be truly heard (Cook, 2007, p.33). Gilmore and Pine (2007) introduce five types of authenticity, corresponding to five economic offerings: commodities (natural authenticity), goods (original authenticity), services (exceptional authenticity), experiences (referential authenticity), and transformations (influential authenticity).

Natural authenticity: *People tend to perceive as authentic that which exists in its natural state in or of the earth, remaining untouched by human hands; not artificial or synthetic.*

Original authenticity: *People tend to perceive as authentic that which possesses originality in design, being the first of its kind, never before seen by human eyes; not a copy or imitation.*

Exceptional authenticity: *People tend to perceive as authentic that which is done exceptionally well, executed individually and extraordinarily by someone demonstrating human care; not unfeelingly or disingenuously performed.*

Referential authenticity: *People tend to perceive as authentic that which refers to some other context, drawing inspiration from human history, and tapping into our shared memories and longings; not derivative or trivial.*

Influential authenticity: *People tend to perceive as authentic that which exerts influence on other entities, calling human beings to a higher goal and providing a foretaste of a better way; not inconsequential or without meaning. (Italics in original, pp. 49-50)*

Gilmore and Pine (2007) recommend that in any market or corporate offer appealing to authenticity, one or more of these five genres, and usually all five, are encountered. They also discuss what they refer to as “the authenticity paradox”. Gilmore and Pine state that businesses long to fulfill the need of being authentic by selling authenticity, but cannot really provide it. “Consumers do perceive many inherently inauthentic offerings – as they do countries, cities, places, and nature – as undeniably authentic, so enterprises must learn the discipline of rendering their offerings as real” (2007, p.89). This paradox allows the authors to formulate the following set of five axioms:

Axiom 1: If you *are* authentic, then you don’t have to say you’re authentic.

Axiom 2: If you say you’re authentic, then you’d better *be* authentic.

Axiom 3: It’s easier to *be* authentic if you don’t say you’re authentic.

Axiom 4: It’s easier to *render* offerings authentic if you acknowledge they’re inauthentic. (Italics in original, p.90)

However, according to Holt, to be authentic, global brands must be perceived as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value (Holt, 2002, p.83). It is important to highlight the fact that, in the context of online communication, consumers tend to perceive branded messages as being inauthentic and have no real insight at the basis of their campaigns. The digital exposure in general and the social media context in particular facilitates the negative feedback coming from the consumers. Otherwise, Holt concludes that global consumers have raised the bar on what they consider an authentic brand to be (Holt, 2002).

For most global brands, Romania is the host country where the “think global, act local” strategy is applied in order to optimize the campaign’s budget. In online, where the attention of the consumer is even lower, we have asked ourselves if a global message, adapted only linguistically at the local public, has a desirable impact on the audience. Based on the above-mentioned literature review and on the direct professional experiences of the researchers, the idea of the impact of global brand campaigns on the Romanian public will be debated in the following research sections.

Research questions

Based on the literature review, we have launched quantitative research by focusing on the following research questions:

- Q1. Which is the difference between the impact of a global campaign, adapted locally, and the impact of a local campaign, based on local insight?
- Q2. Which is the perception of the consumer about the authenticity of a global campaign, adapted linguistically only to the Romanian audience and which is the perception of the authenticity of a local campaign?
- Q3. Are the Romanian public’s core values represented by the insight of a global campaign?

Methodology

In order to answer the main research questions, quantitative research was conducted. We have started by choosing two global brands, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, often mentioned as global companies that possess a network of global products and global business activities, and took a closer look at their communication campaign for the past two years on the Romanian market (2017-2019). According to their YouTube social media channels, both brands have adopted the same communication strategy mix, including global campaigns that were local adapted and local campaigns created on the basis of local insight. Therefore, in order to collect relevant data for our research, we have selected two campaigns for each brand. Pepsi’s 2017 campaign with Pishotrop, a local online influencer, was selected as being the representative local campaign of the brand and Pepsi’s 2019 campaign for launching a new product, with ginger flavor, was selected to represent the global communication strategy applied on a local market. The same research approach was applied for Coca-Cola: we have selected the brand’s 2018 summer campaign to represent the global approach, and the Coca-Cola Zero campaign of 2018, featuring Inna, a local musician, to represent the brand’s local campaign.

Accordingly, to our research purpose to analyze the impact of each video of the campaigns mentioned above, we have applied the same set of questions for each video separately. In our research, the representation stands for the level of resemblance between the respondent and the story of the video while authenticity refers to the level of originality perceived by each respondent. Ultimately, each respondent was asked about the preferred video by choosing one of the four video campaigns presented in the questionnaire.

Therefore, based on the campaigns of the two global brands, we have conducted quantitative research by utilizing the questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire was applied to convenience sampling through social media channels Facebook and LinkedIn. Considering the fact that the subjects were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity, and that the total number of respondents is below the necessary limit, we may suggest that this is a pilot research, started with the purpose to be part of a biggest doctoral study about the factors that influence the online communication strategy in a globalized world.

Findings and discussion

As we previously mentioned, the questionnaire was applied online on a convenience sampling. The audience has received the task to answer the same five questions about four different videos – two belonging to Coca-Cola and the other two belonging to Pepsi. In the following section, we suggest taking a closer look at the results by keeping in mind the research questions above-mentioned.

Video 1: Coca-Cola's 2018 Romanian summer campaign (V1)

In brief, this video, posted on Coca-Cola's YouTube channel, was chosen based on the following characteristics: it was a global video, adapted locally by adding the voice of a Romanian musician, Inna, and it was communicated in the last 2 years – more exactly, in the summer of 2018. The campaign's video is presenting a couple who run out of Coca-Cola on their road trip; she decides to stop spontaneously and go to a secret beach in order to satisfy their thirst with a fresh bottle of Coca-Cola. The video has a very *cool* vibe, based on global footage, and is presenting the ideal way of spending the summer holiday. The local element added to the video was the music played by Inna, a Romanian musician, combining Romanian lyrics with English lyrics. The Coca-Cola summer campaign was communicated under the global umbrella known by the headline "Taste the feeling". On YouTube, the video reached 898,300 video views.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Video 1

		V1_Representa tion	V1_PREFERRED video element	V1_Authenticit y
N	Valid	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.70	3.80	3.90
Std. Error of Mean		.505	.139	.552
Mode		0	4	0 ^a
Std. Deviation		2.769	.761	3.021
Minimum		0	1	0
Maximum		9	5	9

In the first place, we'll underscore the main results for each video, followed by a discussion in which we'll focus on the differences between global and local communication strategies.

Regarding the Coca-Cola's video summer campaign, the highlights are: with a mean of 3.70, the research audience declared that they're feeling slightly unrepresented by the Coca-Cola's summer campaign; they also declared that the campaign video is slightly fake because it presents a nonrealistic story that will never happen in a day by day life. Regarding the preferred video element, the atmosphere transmitted was by far the most appreciated part of the video.

Video 2: Coca-Cola Zero local campaign featuring Inna (V2)

In order to have the possibility to put in the mirror the perception on the global message versus the perception on the local message, we chose another video from the Coca-Cola Romania portfolio, which represents the local campaign, created on the basis of a local insight and is picturing one of the most influential Romanian musicians, Inna.

The Coca-Cola Zero's video campaign is presenting Inna, the big start, which is entering the elevator of the hotel together with one of the hotel's staff; from uncertain reasons, the elevator stops and they have to wait for help in order to get out. Meanwhile, they are having a very good time together, dancing and drinking Coca-Cola Zero, and they end up by immortalizing this moment through a selfie. In order to maximize the impact of the campaign, the video was posted on Inna's YouTube channel and it reached 707,567 video views.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Video 2

	V2_Representat ion	V2_Authenticity	V2_PREFERRED video element
N Valid	30	30	30
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	2.37	3.97	2.57
Std. Error of Mean	.454	.485	.257
Mode	0	7	1
Std. Deviation	2.484	2.659	1.406
Minimum	0	0	1
Maximum	8	9	5

Regarding the highlight results of the research, the local video belonging to Coca-Cola Romania had a 2.37 mean score of representation, meaning that it was unrepresentative for the research group. On the other hand, compared to the global footage video, the local reached a 7 score for mode, meaning that video was appreciated as being sufficiently authentic. The message was the preferred element of the video, while the music and the influencer chosen were the elements that weren't liked by the research group.

Video 3: Pepsi's 2017 Romanian campaign featuring Psihotrop (V3)

In order to keep the same product category and not add another layer of discussion, we have chosen Pepsi, the main competitor of Coca-Cola in Romania (and not only) to continue our research. The first video that the group had to watch was a local video belonging to Pepsi's 2017 campaign with the Romanian influencer, Psihotrop.

The video is, in fact, a manifesto for all the new generations that wish for a free spirit. The lyrics were inspired by the youth segment of the population and it comes as an inspiration to follow their dreams. "I come from a new world, with good vibes," says Psihotrop, the Romanian influencer known for his passion to make rhymes. And he continues: "In our world even the commercials are different and you can win a worldwide journey or cool sneakers for going out and even a cooler Pepsi jacket". In the end, he concludes: "Your road is a moment, find it". The manifesto video was posted on Pepsi's YouTube channel and reached 897,305 video views.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for Video 3

	V3_Representat ion	V3_Authenticity	V3_PREFERRED video element
N Valid	30	30	30
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	4.27	5.97	2.40
Std. Error of Mean	.542	.454	.290
Mode	0*	8	1
Std. Deviation	2.970	2.484	1.589
Minimum	0	0	1
Maximum	9	9	5

One of the most relevant results was that Pepsi's campaign featuring Psihotrop registered an 8 points mode representing the level of authenticity. Also, it is worth mentioning that the message was the most appreciated element of the video, while the fact that this manifesto made reference to the promotional campaign was the most unappreciated part of the overall video campaign. The mean score for representation is at 4.27, meaning that the research group was slightly close to being represented by Pepsi's video campaign.

Video 4: Pepsi Ginger launch campaign (V4)

The last video is representing the global strategic communication of Pepsi. We have chosen a video that was released in 2019, presenting the new Pepsi ginger flavor.

The video was created based on a general insight – the day by day routine, and is presenting the characters going through the same activities every day: “Wake up, make it on time, learn this, go out, repeat”. Pepsi is the element that saves the day by offering a new flavor in order to break the routine – the new Pepsi ginger flavor. The initial voice-over of the video is related in English, but the final message is in Romanian, making it easier to be recognized as being based on global footage. The Pepsi Ginger video campaign was posted on YouTube and reached 1,842 video views.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for Video 4

	V4_Representat ion	V4_Authenticity	V4_PREFERRED video element
N Valid	30	30	30
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	5.77	6.20	1.87
Std. Error of Mean	.386	.438	.248
Mode	6	9	1
Std. Deviation	2.112	2.398	1.358
Minimum	0	0	1
Maximum	9	9	5

Regarding the most important results, it's interesting to point out that the research audience finds the video as being moderately representative and authentic (mean 5.77 for representation and 6.20 for authenticity) while the message was the element preferred. On the other hand, the fact that the voice-over was partially in Romanian, partially in English wasn't appreciated by the research audience, neither the new ginger flavor itself.

Global vs. Local (V1 and V4 vs. V2 and V3)

In the final part of the findings section, we will take a closer look at the difference between the results reached by global campaigns, adapted locally (video 1 and video 4) and the local campaigns (video 2 and video 3).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for representation

	V1_Representation	V4_Representation	V2_Representation	V3_Representation
N Valid	30	30	30	30
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.70	5.77	2.37	4.27
Std. Error of Mean	.505	.386	.454	.542
Mode	0	6	0	0 ^a
Std. Deviation	2.769	2.112	2.484	2.970

In terms of representation, campaigns based on a global insight are perceived as being more powerful and having a bigger impact on the audience. Punctually, 3 out of 4 campaigns analyzed had a 0 score for mode, the only one reaching the 6 scores being the Pepsi Ginger campaign, which, based on the statistics, had a more relevant insight for the audience – the routine is characteristically for the research audience. Therefore, a more generalist insight, even it comes from the global agency, could be the solution for a more unitary image worldwide.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for authenticity

	V1_Authenticity	V4_Authenticity	V2_Authenticity	V3_Authenticity
N Valid	30	30	30	30
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.90	6.20	3.97	5.97
Std. Error of Mean	.552	.438	.485	.454
Mode	0 ^a	9	7	8
Std. Deviation	3.021	2.398	2.659	2.484

On the other hand, the group research evaluates the local videos (V2 and V3) as being more authentic – the videos reached a 7, respectively 8 scores for the mode, while the global adapted videos reached a 0, respectively a 9 score for the mode, suggesting that the concept of authenticity should become a more important pylon in the local strategic communication of global brands.

Conclusions

Before jumping into conclusions, it is important to underline the fact that the quantitative study was applied to a group of 30 people, who spend an average of 7 hours online daily. We think that it's important information that characterizes the social behavior of the research audience: a group of people, who have a wide opening to worldwide social, economic and cultural diversity, for which the authenticity represents an important value in their relationship with global brands.

The results of this pilot study offer us the possibility to test our hypothesis according to which local campaigns, created based on a local insight, are perceived as being more authentic compared to global campaigns, adapted locally. Therefore, we have chosen two of the most recognizable global brands, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, in order to answer our research questions. Throughout this study we were able to identify that local-based campaigns are considered as having a more authentic and powerful message, while global-based campaigns are more relevant for their expensive video footage utilized in order to represent an idealized story, therefore are being considerate slightly fake. On the other hand, global campaigns are based on a more representative and mild insight, while local campaigns are addressing a specific age category, like Pepsi featuring Psihotrop in a manifesto video for generation Z.

However, in order to achieve a strong glocal strategic communication, based on the study results we can now admit that communication practitioners must address simultaneously the global and the local: the global has the resources for a better understanding of the brand's core values, while the local has the potential to elaborate a more authentic message. Moreover, we consider that for future campaigns it is important to insert a testing phase before releasing the message in order to measure and determine the level of authenticity and create more compelling and sustainable stories and brand identities.

Therefore, in this context, the final purpose of the research is to bring a new perspective upon the value of authenticity upon the communication of global brands to the Romanian audience, by emphasizing the most relevant elements of a video message for the research group and also the level of representation. Also, it is important to highlight once again the fact that the pilot study has the potential to be the very first step towards new future research determining new possible communication models for global brands worldwide, with a focus on the communication channel and the characteristics of the targeted public.

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