

# **STEERING CLEAR OF PITFALLS IN THE TRANSFER OF ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS – WITH A FOCUS ON FOOD/BEVERAGES COMMERCIALS**

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*Abstract: The process of transferring advertising campaigns from one country to another implies certain important requirements, such as avoiding translation issues or observing and learning about local culture aspects. This is particularly true in the case of advertisements promoting edible products, such as beverages or dishes, since this can become a sensitive topic across cultures, mostly due to the various religions, customs, norms, or beliefs the countries where a commercial is launched might be characterized by. Unfortunately, some advertising creators do not consider the necessary requirements, consequently launching advertisements that are offensive for certain markets. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to propose an awareness raising exercise, from the cultural, social and artistic points of view, useful for the preparation of advertising campaigns. The study explores the range of pitfalls that could occur due to lack of cultural sensitivity, thus warning about both cultural and translation blunders advertisers in the food industry might be prone to make. There is a special stress on the necessity to adapt advertising campaigns to local norms, in terms of copy, images or even targeted market sector profile, to avoid failure. A sampling of exemplifications illustrating popular brands is provided and discussed upon, to illustrate key aspects that must be considered.*

*Keywords: advertising campaigns transfer, cultural blunders, blunders in food/drinks advertisements, offensive advertisements, translation errors.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Globalization offers avenues to new markets and potential revenue growth, particularly pertinent in saturated domestic markets. However, international expansion of companies also poses intricate challenges. Many enterprises encounter setbacks due to common missteps in the process. Recognizing and adeptly addressing these pitfalls enhance the likelihood of successful global endeavors.<sup>1</sup> Cultural disparities significantly influence the reception of products or services around the world, profoundly influencing the performance of companies in foreign markets by impacting *consumer choices, operational norms, and communication approaches*. Hence, proficiently understanding and managing *cultural variances* is imperative for nurturing fruitful international expansion within an organization.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, *advertising for food and beverages* is a niche that poses an extra challenge, as it involves a creative process aimed at stimulating the consumers' senses. Also, with food being considered by experts “an expression of culture<sup>3</sup>, standardized advertising in this sector proves to be anything but the proper approach, as people from various geographical areas and cultures

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<sup>1</sup> Anuradha Gupta et al. 2024. “Examine the Possibilities and Obstacles of Global Business Expansion”. *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*, vol 4 (2024). 635. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380075712\\_Examine\\_the\\_Possibilities\\_and\\_Obstacles\\_of\\_Global\\_Business\\_Expansion](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380075712_Examine_the_Possibilities_and_Obstacles_of_Global_Business_Expansion). Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025

<sup>2</sup> Gao, Ya. 2023. “The influence of cultural differences on marketing strategies of MNEs”. *SHS Web of Conferences*. 163. Doi 10.1051/shsconf/202316302036. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370364574\\_The\\_influence\\_of\\_cultural\\_differences\\_on\\_marketing\\_strategies\\_of\\_MNEs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370364574_The_influence_of_cultural_differences_on_marketing_strategies_of_MNEs). Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025

<sup>3</sup> Appelbaum, U., & Halliburton, C. 1993. “How to Develop International Advertising Campaigns that Work: The Example of the European Food and Beverage Sector”. *International Journal of Advertising*, 12(3), 223–241. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02650487.1993.11104540>. Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025

display different eating and drinking customs. Tailoring promotional campaigns according to the food and beverage consumption norms of the target markets is imperative to avoid failure.

On the other hand, competition also contributes to the chances of success companies might have when advertising internationally. Although the quality level of the products promoted still plays an important role in consumer buying behavior, nowadays, due to globalization and digitalization, communication becomes more and more important in the international marketing sector.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, due to the harsh and challenging climate governing the food/beverages sector and the advertisers' disregard of the local values present in the target markets, some advertisements do not achieve the intended impact. Then, adverse outcomes occur, leading to potential setbacks. While some companies successfully recover, others fail to build a successful comeback.

## **2. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**

This study is focused on raising awareness on how pitfalls can destroy the reputation of a brand. It presents a mixture of theoretical views on the importance of two factors – culture and translation – in the process of promoting food and beverages overseas. After the theoretical section, the paper delves into a practical analysis of four advertisements (two of them falling under the “translation blunder” umbrella and the others – under the “cultural blunder” umbrella), followed by a list of strategies that can help in correcting and avoiding such errors.

## **3. TRANSFERRING FOOD ADVERTISING FROM ONE COUNTRY/CULTURE TO ANOTHER - THEORETICAL VIEWS**

As mentioned in the Introduction, food and beverages commercials maintain a higher degree of difficulty in the creation and especially in the transferring process and attaining success with them may prove to be a real challenge. The main requirements that an advertiser must consider when transferring this type of advertisements to a different market are listed and discussed in this chapter.

### **3.1.MAIN REQUIREMENTS**

In the process of internationalizing a promotional product, there are many requirements that must be considered to avoid offence and create successful campaigns that appeal to the international public. This sub-chapter presents some of the main requests advertisers should not ignore when promoting products in various countries and cultures.

#### **(i) Respect the local *laws* and *regulations***

Adhering to local laws and regulations is paramount when engaging in international marketing endeavors. This ensures that businesses operate ethically within the legal framework of each jurisdiction, upholding positive reputations. Therefore, prior to entering a new market, comprehensive research into the local legal landscape is imperative. Understanding laws governing marketing activities, such as *consumer protection*, *data privacy*, *intellectual property*, and *competition* is essential.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, different countries possess varying *advertising standards* and guidelines, so a strict adherence is necessary to prevent deceptive or misleading practices. Certain jurisdictions may enforce stringent regulations concerning advertising claims, endorsements, or visual elements.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Faster Capital. “Respecting Local Laws And Regulations In International Business”. *Faster Capital*, 2024. <https://fastercapital.com/topics/respecting-local-laws-and-regulations-in-international-business.html>. Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025

A good advertiser should know that nowadays, prioritizing consumer rights is fundamental in international marketing endeavors and that marketing communication should be characterized by transparency, honesty, and fairness. Concepts such as accurate product information, warranty adherence, and efficient handling of customer grievances are ought to be studied by people working in the advertising domain<sup>6</sup>.

Another sensitive advertising-related topic nowadays is data privacy and security. Many countries enforce laws governing the collection, storage, and utilization of personal data, mandating compliance to safeguard consumer privacy. Hence, implementing robust data protection measures, obtaining consent, and securely managing customer data are imperative.

Cultural sensitivity is also a delicate matter when marketing internationally. Alignment with local customs and values by tailoring marketing messages to resonate with cultural norms and avoiding offensive content is crucial to maintain brand reputation.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, it is imperative to consult legal experts or local authorities to ensure full compliance with specific laws and regulations in each country. Upholding local laws not only mitigates legal risks but also enhances trust and credibility among consumers and stakeholders.

(ii) Consider the consumers' feedback

Another important requirement a brand must consider, for a successful experience on international markets, is to tailor its advertisements based on *feedback*. Advertisers should keep in mind that reaction from consumers, local collaborators, and international staff is extremely valuable and neglecting it can lead to overlooked chances for advancement and expansion. Thus, the literature advises people who work in the advertising domain to embrace feedback as a pathway to growth, as cultivating a positive outlook and as an essential commitment to ongoing learning.

Customer response has always been considered to provide insight into consumption patterns and areas ripe for improvement. Furthermore, it fosters trust and strengthens commitment by involving stakeholders in the development strategy.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4. PITFALLS IN TRANSFERRING FOOD ADVERTISING - HOW TO CORRECT AND AVOID THEM**

Reviewing past failures in food industry advertising serves as a strategic method to circumvent similar mishaps. Although advertising strategies may seem experimental, gleaning insights from mistakes made by brands proves to be a valuable strategy that acts as a helping hand in conserving time, effort, and precious marketing resources.

Hence, this chapter delves into the errors and educational opportunities presented by ineffective food advertising, examining the potential repercussions it may entail.

##### **4.1. TRANSLATION PITFALLS**

As literature<sup>9</sup> states, there are three challenges that one can encounter when translating for international advertising campaigns: different cultural norms and values, different languages and environments. Consequently, companies that try to promote their products abroad have three variants: either to translate their promotional messages (a cheap, but quite dangerous option), to create tailored commercials where certain areas/cultures are specifically targeted (a more expensive option) or to launch international campaigns in English (which might work only when promoting a global culture).

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Arens, William. 2002. "Contemporary Advertising", *New York: McGraw Hill*.

Most of the times, the most accessible option for advertisers is to hire someone to translate the text of a commercial. As Arens<sup>10</sup> suggests, a good advertising translator should regard both the original and the target language in a balanced way and have good copywriting skills and knowledge of the product, playing a very important role in an international campaign. Also, any transnational promotional product that aims to success needs to check a native-speaker verification box.

Given the harsh requirements that need to be met when translating for an international advertisement and to the high probability of mishaps, the leading category of pitfalls exemplified in this study is the one represented by *translation blunders*, which might be the most prevalent ones in the advertising industry.

(i) The first example on the list belongs to Coors, an American beer manufacturer, that encountered a linguistic adaptation related challenge in its process of market expansion. Upon launching its "Turn It Loose" campaign in Spain, it became apparent that the executives had overlooked the importance of ensuring the resonance of the translation with customers. The Spanish version of the tagline utilized an expression commonly interpreted as "suffer from diarrhea.", thus while the campaign did leave an impression on Spanish beer enthusiasts, it was not the result Coors was aiming to.<sup>11</sup>

(ii) Another instance mentioned in the study is centered on Hunt-Wesson, the American-based company that fell into the bad translation trap when introducing its baked beans in the French speaking part of Canada. Marketed as "Gros Jos", a jargon term used for referring to "big breasts", the product can be added to the list of translation blunders in advertisements.<sup>12</sup>

While both examples of translation blunders mentioned in this list can be deemed as amusing, having the potential of generating smiles, there are instances when this type of errors can be offensive and do real damage to a brand. Therefore, both advertisers and translators should pay attention to what message the advertising texts actually conveys.

#### 4.2.CULTURAL PITFALLS

Besides the translation process of advertisements, cultural factors and the use of language also represent a chapter that needs to be properly studied by advertisers when promoting overseas. For a good understanding of cultural differences, a step that helps people to avoid making cultural blunders, one should do a deep research on intercultural communication and conduct an analysis on the buying behavior and cultural variables of their target audience, as suggested by the literature.<sup>13</sup>

Because of the utmost importance of cultural sensitivity in publicity, this paper showcases two examples of *cultural blunders* in commercials.

(i) The list begins with a very popular (at worldwide level) fast-food chain, a fact that show how even brands with a reputable reputation are prone to mistakes. In 2006 Burger King failed in its attempt to enter the European market with a promotional campaign for the Texican Whopper burger. The initial idea, as the name suggests (Texican – Texan and Mexican), was

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Skye Schooley. "Lost in Translation: 13 International Marketing Fails". Business News Daily. 2023. <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/5241-international-marketing-fails.html>. Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025

<sup>12</sup> Judith N. Martin, Thomas K. Nakayama. 2001. "Experiencing Intercultural Communication: An Introduction", 7<sup>th</sup> edition. 158

<sup>13</sup> Pinfan Zhu. 2010. "Cross-Cultural Blunders in Professional Communication From a Semantic Perspective". *J. TECHNICAL WRITING AND COMMUNICATION*, Vol. 40(2) (2010). 179-196

to bring two different cultures and flavors together. Unfortunately, due to lack of cultural awareness, the advertisement received backlash.<sup>14</sup>

As shown in Fig. 1 below, the commercial features a short wrestler adorned in attire resembling the Mexican flag, who collaborates with a tall American cowboy, depicting a fusion of flavors transcending national borders. The advertisement, accompanied by a narrator's voice proclaiming "The taste of Texas with a little spicy Mexican," showcases the cowboy aiding the wrestler in accessing elevated shelves and cleaning tall windows, while the Mexican character assists the cowboy in opening a jar.<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 1 – *Texican Whooper burger ad*<sup>16</sup>

In response to the advertisement, Mexico's ambassador in Spain, Jorge Zermeno, declared that he dispatched a formal communication to Burger King's offices in Spain, expressing objections to the advertisement and requesting its removal. Moreover, Zermeno highlighted that the advertisement inappropriately perpetuates stereotypical portrayals of Mexicans.<sup>17</sup>

Also, of particular concern to Mexican authorities was a print version of the advertisement featuring the wrestler draped in what appears to be the Mexican flag. Zermeno emphasized the importance of conveying to the advertisers the deep reverence Mexicans hold for their national flag, maintaining stringent regulations regarding the respectful use of it.<sup>18</sup>

Because Burger King disregarded the cultural variables of the Mexican culture, their values (such as the great respect they hold for their flag) and the regulations regarding the use of their flag, the campaign they tried to launch in Mexico did not reach success and, even more, it had to be taken down.

(ii) Another popular brand that was no stranger to cultural blunders is Nestlé. A few years ago, Nestlé decided to withdraw a specialized series of KitKat chocolates in India due to allegations of causing offense to religious sentiments, allegations generated by the inclusion of depictions of revered Hindu deities on the packaging.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Associated Press. "Whopper of an insult? Mexico slams burger ad". NBC News. 2009. <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna30202483>. Accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Hannah Ellis-Petersen. "Nestlé withdraws Hindu KitKat range in India over accusations of disrespect". The Guardian. 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/nestle-withdraws-hindu-kitkat-range-in-india-over-accusations-of-disrespect>. Accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2025.



Fig. 2 – “KitKat travel breaks” in India<sup>20</sup>

This limited edition of the chocolate bar was introduced as part of the global “KitKat travel breaks” collection, which showcases artwork by local artisans on the wrappers. However, the Indian variant of this series, designed to highlight the craftsmanship of Odisha, faced criticism online for featuring images of Hindu deities Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Mata Subhadra. Many voiced concerns that such wrappers, when being disposed of, might end up in dustbins or drains, which would be deemed offensive to the gods and the Hindu faith.<sup>21</sup>

Nestlé clarified that the objective was to celebrate the cultural heritage of Odisha by incorporating designs inspired by Pattachitra, an art form known for its vibrant imagery. Still, as a proactive measure, Nestlé recalled the KitKat range from the market.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, in this case, taking a wrong step in approaching Indian religious values and showcasing Indian religious symbols in India forced the multinational company to completely take down a whole range of products from the market

However, Nestlé, Burger King, or KFC are not the only companies that fell into the trap of cultural and translation blunders. Every brand, whether reputable or not, can be prone to translation and/or cultural mistakes, as long as its advertisers do not do proper research before launching advertising campaigns abroad.

#### 4.3.HOW TO CORRECT INTERNATIONAL MARKETING MISTAKES

In the event of inadvertently creating a commercial that receives negative feedback or a slogan that fails to resonate with your international audience, it is crucial to address the marketing mistake directly. For example, if the campaign is deemed offensive, taking accountability, and issuing a *sincere apology* is paramount. However, given that the effectiveness of apologies varies across different cultures, it is imperative to tailor the public statement according to the cultural sensitivities of the target audience.

As suggested in the literature<sup>23</sup>, it is advisable to engage a *local agency* or *consultant* to devise strategies for managing the adverse publicity and develop new campaigns. For example,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Skye Schooley. “Lost in Translation: 13 International Marketing Fails”. Business News Daily. 2023. <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/5241-international-marketing-fails.html>. Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 2025

as the publication<sup>24</sup> notes, instances of misinterpreted Western campaigns are common in China, often resulting in amusement due to the anticipation of foreigners making such errors.

Once the initial embarrassment subsides, leveraging the expertise of local agencies or consultants to craft campaigns that genuinely resonate with the audience is advisable.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.4.HOW TO AVOID PITFALLS IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

The examples listed above are proof that even some of the most popular brands can be prone to mistakes. This chapter offers an insight, through theoretical views, on how to steer clear of pitfalls when marketing abroad.

When expanding your brand globally, it is essential to take proactive measures to prevent international marketing mishaps such as those outlined above. Literature advises to begin by identifying the *target audience* and then *adapt the advertising strategies* accordingly.<sup>26</sup>

According to Vera Mirzoyan, an expert in search engine optimization (SEO) at Digilite, the process of *customization*, particularly concerning language, culture, visuals, gestures, and trends, is very important when transferring an advertisement - “Everything should be customized to the market your brand is introduced in,” she states. “Learn as much about the destination of your brand as possible to ensure the success of your business”.<sup>27</sup>

A fundamental and critical marketing strategy is represented by the *localization* of content. When transferring an advertising campaign from one country/area to another, mere translation is not enough.<sup>28</sup>

Scott Kellner, who is the Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing at the global marketing agency George P. Johnson stresses the necessity of product localization to convey nuances, which is often crucial for positioning and taglines: “It is imperative to study the culture and the way people communicate on a daily basis, and to also ensure you have people on the team who know the culture you’re marketing to inside and out, to ensure your message will be interpreted in a way that resonates rather than upsets”.<sup>29</sup>

Also, consideration of *communication* mediums is equally vital in crafting a global marketing strategy, as noted by Amekodomo: “Just because a Facebook campaign might have great results in the United States doesn’t mean the same campaign will have similar results on WeChat”, she cautioned. Amekodomo and Kellner both advocate for consulting local experts before launching campaigns to gain valuable insights and feedback: “Do not publish, share or promote anything on an international scale without cross-referencing the content with individuals from the respective area who are fluent in the language and culture” and “Ensure you avoid idioms, jargon or regional diction that could otherwise be misinterpreted.”<sup>30</sup>

As the aforementioned experts state, it is advisable for advertisers to tailor their communication style to the local market; oftentimes, the same words or expressions do not convey the same meaning to everyone. Also, the visuals used might deliver different messages across the world; the sentiments and impressions customers are left with after acknowledging a certain message or seeing particular images can vary from one culture and geographic region to another. Therefore, crafting campaigns with regard to local customs and vision is imperative in the process of creating high quality commercials.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

## 5. OPEN CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, there are a few steps that any advertiser should follow on the process of transferring campaigns, to have a successful experience on the international market.

Firstly, doing research on the habits and behavior of the customers is essential when launching commercials overseas and this step will most probably ruin all the possibilities of gaining new customers on the new international markets.

Secondly, learning about the laws and regulations that foreign markets impose is another key aspect in transferring commercials to another country/culture. Needless to say, neglecting the legal matters can get advertisers in trouble.

Thirdly, doing research about the language spoken by the target audience should be considered as an important rule that can guarantee success abroad.

By following the above-mentioned steps, people who work in the advertising domain can ensure and enable a profitable experience in foreign countries, fostering fruitful relationships with consumers from different cultures.

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