

On Interpretation of Marketing Messages Across Realities

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Abstract

Sometimes a slogan misses its audience. Sometimes a slogan misses its audience. The reasons vary: for instance, the slogan may be unclear or too sophisticated. In this paper we wish to hypothesize another reason: that the reality in which the slogan has been created is different from that of the addressee; different to the extent that the original meaning is untransferable. The philosophical basis for this argument is that of Martin Heidegger, known as "being and time". Heidegger was concerned with the inability to understand texts across contexts being context time- or culture- related. The inability he points to is beyond mere translation; neither is it a conceptual gap. The essence is that the very usage of words reflects a reality within which one exists, and the emphasis is on "within": one is unable to think beyond this envelope. Projected on the realm of advertisement, we suggest that due to dissimilar realities a message can be literally "out of context". In such a case, mere translation or other oral adaptation will fall too short. We propose another perspective: that the advertiser has to encapsulate the appropriate reality in which the message does make sense together with the message. Stated differently, the message should incorporate the original reality wherein it "lives".

Consider the following example: up to the 1907's the typical Israeli kitchen was very modest, small and simply furnished. The social climate in the country was ascetic, and chasing after luxury seemed inappropriate. Under those circumstances some entrepreneurs in the building industry wished to differentiate themselves by offering more modern facilities, kitchen included. Rather than announcing the details, they invented the slogan "American kitchen", standing at once for size, equipment and functionality. Although few people knew at the time how a kitchen really looked in America, the message worked: the word "America" carried the imagined reality of well-being and prosperity. Another example sheds light on the elusiveness of such a cross-reality transfer. Consider the slogan "Coffee to-go": in a busy, hectic metropolitan environment, watching one who grabs a cup of coffee on the run from the metro to the office is commonplace. In contrast, in a milder setting (such as a rural area, small town or an otherwise tranquil society), sipping-while-walking may sound insane. Is a copywriter, who is most probably rooted in the former milieu, capable of noticing the dissimilarity? According to Heidegger, the answer is no. An attempt to see outside one's reality is like the Baron Münchhausen trying to escape from the quagmire by pulling his own hair. One is simply unaware of being confined in a reality; therefore one does not see other horizons. Awareness is the key.

The aim of this paper is to suggest "reality transfer" as a new conceptualization in the advertising context. It contributes another lens in order to discern, analyze and understand meaningless slogans, and above all to turn on the advertiser's awareness to the trap of "being confined inside a reality".