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UDK 659.1.01:339.133.2 (497.5)
JEL Classification M 370, P 360
Izvorni znanstveni rad

ADVERTISERS AND CONSUMERS IN TRANSITION¹

Globalization of consumption and advertising is a dominant aspect of the post-socialist economic and social transition in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet we are only beginning to understand how consumers and local advertisers make sense of this, the role of historical influences, and the meaning of current outcomes. Croatia is an excellent site for researching this. How local advertisers and consumers adjust to globalization, and adjust its forces to their culture, will in no small way determine Croatia's future, socially, economically, and politically. Through a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Croatia, the authors hope to unlock the local meaning and process of market globalization.

Key words: globalization of consumption, advertising, transition, Croatia, ethnographic fieldwork

Overview of Research Concept

Globalization of consumption and advertising is in fact a dominant aspect of the post-socialist economic and social transition in Central and Eastern Europe (Berdhal 1999, Ger and Belk 1996; Ger, Belk & Lascu 1993; James 1995; Sklair

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¹ Research for this article was supported in part by a grant from the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the United States Department of State, which administers the Title VIII Program, and the IREX Scholar support Fund. None of these organizations are responsible for the views expressed.

1995). The consumer experience during the socialist era was characterized by strongly felt consumer aspiration for western style consumption (Berdhal). Many scholars argue that the fall of the Berlin Wall is one of the single most significant historic moments in our history. Many people in the United States and Western Europe, and of course in Central and Eastern Europe, saw the fall of the wall and the democratic movements as symbols of the triumph of the human spirit and the ideology of Western capitalism over totalitarianism and planned economies. The pace of change has been “so fast and unexpected that some analysts described the results as the “end of history”, the new “spring of nations”, and the new “European concert”. For US brands, that was also the opening of new markets (Blackett 1992; Dibb, Simkin & Yuen 1994; Kelly-Holmes 1998). Yet the local social values, for example “ironic freedom”, continues to inform the socioeconomic and political climate as well as consumption (James; Lofman).

Since 1989, Central and East European consumers have been introduced to hundreds of new global brands of products and services and the associated attitudes and behaviors. Deodorant, tampons, condoms, and other hygiene and health products as well as financial services have been brought to this consumer market of approximately 400 million people, or 10% of the world’s population (Shama) by VISA, Master Card, Procter and Gamble, BBDO Zagreb, DMBB Warsaw, Leo Burnett Warsaw, J Walter Thompson Prague, and so on. And while Secret, Tampax, Crest, and VISA are household brands in the US and western Europe, in Central and East Europe they are just establishing their place in the market and in consumers’ daily rituals.

To establish the marketing infrastructure in these substantial and highly diverse markets, Western advertisers bought agencies in the capitals, media corporations bought local newspapers and set-up television and radio broadcast networks (Hiebert 1994; Kelly-Holmes). Western manufacturers entered partnerships or bought many local companies, improved operations and marketing, and made some of the first free market profits. In 1991, Philip Morris bought VEB Kombinat Tabak, an East German cigarette company reassured smokers of VEBs brand F6 that “the taste has not been changed”, and sales increased. Nestle bought Czech cookie producer, Cokolodovy, to manufacture and sell Nestle in Czech republic using cookie maker’s infrastructure. In turn, Cokolodovy sells cookies in the West (Blackett). In Poland, private firms accounted for 50% of GDP and 60% of the workforce in 1991 (Hooley). Between 1989 and 1995, inflows of foreign direct investment to the region (excluding the former East Germany) amounted to U.S. \$43 billion. Between 1995 and 1997, the rate doubled. Approximately five to ten billion dollars of that investment flows from the U.S. (Auer, Reuveny & Adler 2001).

In 1998, Europe made up 30% of world adspend. Within that, Eastern Europe made up ten of the fastest growing markets. Romania grew by 77%, the Czech

Republic by 40%, in Slovenia by 40%, and Slovakia by 28% from 1997-98 (World Advertising Trends 2000). Just ten years earlier, the self-censored media was funded by the state and the economy planned. Consumers lived in an economy of shortages of goods and information. Considering that people in CEE have largely been shoved into the 21st century, global marketplace after forty years of near isolation, the pace of change is breathtaking. At the same time, it has “become increasingly clear that the transition to capitalist, market-based economies is an often one which cannot be achieved overnight. The popular optimism of the early 1990s is giving way, in some countries at least, to doubts, particularly the social costs, of the transition,” (Hooley).

Part of the social cost, many argue, could be a loss of the local through globalization of consumptionscapes – advertising and consumer culture (Ger). Globalization of mass media and export of popular culture – MTV, fast food, movies from the West, brands, and advertisements moves people to adoption of the same consumption ethic throughout the world. The advertising of multinational brands fosters global consumer communities in which people feel a sense of community through consuming the same brands. To answer the question of what to believe in a changing world, people may turn their beliefs to Rolex, BMW, Johnny Walker, and Sony, the global quintessential brands that speak the global language of status (Ger & Belk). “The globalizing world, dominated by transnational firms, requires a culture of mass consumerism that responds to mass advertising” (van Ham 2001). Advertising of local brands imitates that of global brands, expanding and endorsing the growth of consumer brands and desires. Western goods and “modern” advertising for foreign goods has accelerated already existing consumer desires. Consumer culture is a culture in which the majority of consumers avidly desire (and some noticeable portion pursue, acquire, and display) goods and services that are valued for nonutilitarian reasons, such as status seeking, envy provocation, and novelty seeking (Belk 1988). In spite of the power of advertising and consumer culture, the foreign image of US culture is different in significant ways from US culture. This is largely because of the power of local rituals.

As scholars throughout consumer behavior research assert, the socialist legacy as well as the desire to maintain local traditions mediates the impact of the global consumptionscape flow on local culture (James, Lofman). In the globalization process in Central and Eastern Europe, the global consumptionscape influences the local consumptionscape, yet locals also influence and affect the meanings and images of the local consumptionscape. Through the creolization process – the meeting and mixing of meanings in which local and global actors create a new, local form of global forms, globalization does not necessarily result in mere replication of US advertising and consumer culture but a global theme made local (Ger).

Advertisers have a central role in creolization through their social position high in cultural capital and as producers of social texts: advertisements (Bourdieu

1984, Marchand 1985). Research of advertising audience lifestyle, marketplace preferences, and efficacy of persuasion is often included in the advertising production process, and in that way consumers might be included. Yet the level of marketing research used and the relationships with the clients can determine the outcome of the creation of these social texts (della Femina 1970). The self-perception of the comparative social position of these actors can also play a role in the creative process, as well as social forces such as global agency network standards (Miller 1997). Advertising can mirror a culture's beliefs, attitudes, and values, and society can mirror advertising in its hopes to live the promised lifestyle (Fox 1985). This can be an especially frustrating part of globalization of consumptionscapes in transition economies as consumers face the reality of economic transition amid promises of the good life (Belk, James). Of course, consumers may also rely on their consumption rituals more than these images.

Yet we are only beginning to understand the role of historical and social forces, and the meaning of current outcomes (Arnould 1993). Croatia is an excellent site for researching this. After 1948 when Stalin expelled the SFRY from the COMECON, Tito developed a unique system of socialism in SFRY which adapted some principles of marketing; later, loans from the west connected SFRY to capitalism, and creation of the nonaligned movement drew SFRY into emerging political forces (Erstin 1991). Zagreb, Croatia's capital, was the regional center of marketing and advertising in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and in Central and Eastern Europe in the socialist era (Erstin; Hanson 1974; Pecotich, Renko, Rocco 1992). The government's foreign loans allowed citizens to participate in global consumer culture through traveling, shopping, and working abroad, which fueled a consumption aspiration. Local social norms, specifically envy, fueled consumption aspirations (Belk 1988; Pecotich, Renko & Shultz 1994).

Unique social, political, and economic forces combined to create a specific, political and social meaning for consumption and a local consumer society on the periphery of the west and east. Croatia's high standard of living and open socialism are interpreted as points of difference by Croatians in comparison to neighbors. Many scholars interpret Croatia's vote for independence in 1991 as a desire to leave regional associations and to join modern, western consumer culture, democracy, and capitalism rather than the commonly misunderstood view of a "Balkan" tendency for fratricide (Allcock 2000; Pecotich et al 1994).

In spite of the SFRY's political and economic global and regional status, Croatia is only in 2003 tentatively entering NATO and the European Union, while many of its post-socialist neighbors are already or soon to be members of NATO or EU. Certainly, the Homeland War (1991-1995), privatization and democratization has uniquely complicated the transition in Croatia: unemployment is at 22% currently and political involvement in privatization blocks economic progress

(Udovicki and Ridgeway 1997). At the same time, new, US style shopping malls in Zagreb and its suburbs, and more and more advertisements creates the image and feel of western consumer society and rapid change. All of the global advertising agencies have successful Zagreb offices. Meanwhile, the meaning and outcome of the changes is under negotiation.

While we might expect the transition to be similar as in other post-socialist states, Croatia's unique socio-economic socialist legacy promises a unique, naturally occurring experiment that may show us the local process of market globalization. How consumers, advertisers, and political elites manage the transition will in no small way be determinative of Croatia's future politically, economically, and socially.

Overview of Research Activity

The discrepancy between the appearance of western consumer culture and the economic and political situation was noticed by the researchers while studying Croatian in Zagreb and Dalmatia in the summer of 2001. At the same, literature review on the region did not as a whole explain and describe the fantastic and confusing sensations of the forces of transition on a daily level, especially the market forces. The focus on political analysis often only created distance between the reader and the society in transition. This led one of the researchers to return in the summer of 2002 for a year of doctoral research on the experience of consumers and advertisers in the global transition. This authors is an American of Croatian heritage and the other one is Croatian professor of Marketing at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics.

The goal was not merely to analyze from the outsider's view, but more to describe from the view of those experiencing the transition. The research question was more of recording in rich detail the process of managing overwhelming social forces and the interrelationships between those connected by these global and more local forces and the outcome of their relationship.

Data is collected through naturalistic, qualitative ethnographic inquiry (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs in situ develops through observation of and participation in consumption and other daily activities in natural settings and multiple sites throughout Croatia, social interaction, and composing fieldnotes - observations, thick descriptions, emerging analysis, and reflections – and photos. Analysis and interpretation of data is compared constantly with topical literature. Emergent design, purposive sampling, depth interviews, (McCracken 1988; Glaser and Strauss 1967) and focus groups explore and test analysis.

All collaborators were assured of confidentiality and informed that the purpose was to study globalization of markets and advertisers from the consumers' or advertisers' perspective, that the results would be published in the researcher's doctoral dissertation and in some journals, and that they would have access to transcripts of their contribution as well as to the final result.

The depth interviews and focus groups (with students) are conducted in Croatian by the researcher and audio or video tape recorded, and in fieldnotes; the researcher's Croatian American ethnicity collapses distance. Purposive sampling is a deliberate choice of informants for the potential for new insights, based on their potential information richness. For example, if many consumers discuss the social importance of wearing clothing brands, then both consumers who wear brands and those who do not as part of their lifestyle (alternatives) might be sought, as well as sales persons working in the retail store of that brand. Or, if the researcher notices a difference in consumption behavior between young and old consumers, then informants in each age group are sought for their expertise (Lincoln). Four focus groups were conducted, in Split and Zagreb and twelve respondents participated in depth interviews to date.

Discussion centers on comparative feelings of the socialist and capitalist consumption experience, consumption aspirations, political influences, attitude to money, lifestyle, and value and social changes. Also specific advertisements are discussed. Measures of materialism were conducted among marketing students at the Universities of Zagreb, Rijeka, Osijek, and Split (not reported here) (Belk 1984; Ger and Belk 1990; Get et al).

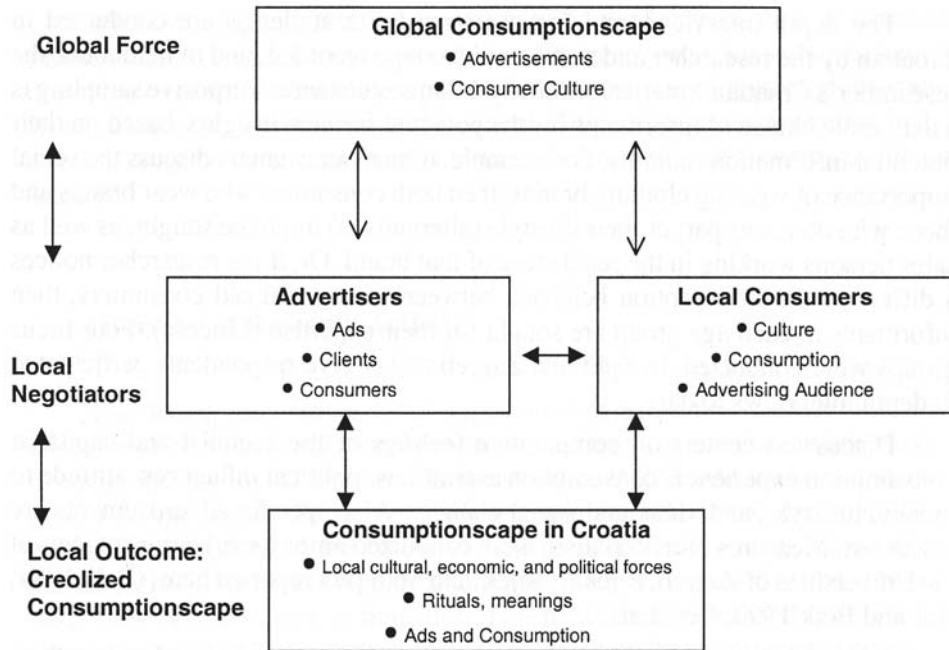
Advertising creatives and managers in Zagreb are interviewed at length to qualitatively access the meaning making process of campaign strategy and views of their social position in the transition as well as the social forces they are involved in (James 1995). They were accessed through the cooperation of a key collaborator in the industry. To date, eight respondents from advertising have participated.

Profs. Fedor Rocco and Josip Sudar, who respectively developed marketing and advertising thought and practice in SFRY and Central Europe and were also professors of marketing at the University of Zagreb Economics Faculty are interviewed to directly access the local expert's view on the historical grounding for contemporary advertising and consumption. The goal was to reveal what may have been purposely excluded from or included in the literature published during the socialist era for political or philosophical reasons. They were accessed through cooperation with the one of the authors at the Faculty of Economics.

In addition, a representative amount of ads are selected to analyze the outcome of the meaning making process. Advertising is text that uses generally understood and acknowledged meanings (Scott 1994). The social accommodation and negotiation (Anderson and Meyer 1989) of ads may reveal how transitional societies are molded by this global force (Askegaard 1999).

Figure 1

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE RESEARCH

**Major Findings**

Advertisers in Croatia link Advertising to Local History and Global Environment

- History of Advertising in Croatia
- Pride in history of advertising in Croatia
- Global Agency Network
- Regional, not national market approach
- Place Croatia in CEE
- Campaigns mere adaptation by local office
- Shortsighted marketing plans in Croatia
- Croatia market size: 4.3 million; GDP \$5,000 per capita
- "Usually big companies produce [ads for global brands] in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria because that's the cheapest way ... there was a new

coffee [brand] ... The commercial was about [serving coffee from a] jezva in a coffee shop ... You don't have a coffee shop in Croatia that, they all have espresso, but it was cheap, and it was for Bulgaria, and ... I mean, Croatia is close to Bulgaria? This is offensive, and they don't understand."
A., Manager of Zagreb office of global agency network.

Advertiser Links to Local Environment

- Socialist legacy: intellectual work generally not valued
- Client side marketing education level
- Does not use research: "The main problem here is that we don't have research, we don't have insight on the consumers ... the client is very slow."
–B. Agency manager
- Clients have more power than agency in determining look of campaigns.

Advertisers and their social position

- Affluent, educated, influential
- Aware of social position
- Recognized as influential social group by outsiders
- Ads might reflect ideas of clients more than agency or consumers
 - o Clients seek western lifestyle image

Consumers: Consumption Linked to Political/National Identity

- o "You would come to the west, and ... see this shop window with a nice design ... that's the experience, wow, how can they do it and we can't, why are so stupid, why are we so stupid, that was the common question, even now, you still ask that question..." Gordana, female, 29, Zagreb

Linked to National/Political Identity: Comparison to other countries

- o "Other countries have a jet set, we do have, but we are a very small country, so I don't know those people, who are they? Everything that less

states have we have to have because we didn't have any of this ... We are as good as the others from the outside" Jadranka, 25, Lošinj

Linked to Comparison with SFRY

- "When [my husband] went to Budapest [for business] he carried with him a lot of lemons and chocolate that he gave to the people in the hotel. They were so happy to see the lemon and chocolate or coffee. Unbelievable. Here we have [that] always. Yugoslavia never had such kind of socialism that was so closed ... I remember my husband would bring back a lot of things ... for example a washing machine ... of course now, all things you can buy in Zagreb, this is the difference." Marija, 55, Zagreb

Linked to Changing Social Structure

- o "Snobs, here in Croatia there is like a new class of people, those who don't have a lot of money but seem to have. They are buying good cars but don't have at home basics for life, they are living on credit." Ivana, Zagreb, 35
- o "There is such a big gap between the two classes in Croatia, and the problem ... is that there used to be a middle class, and people lived much better, and they were more equal in pay and standard of living, and they were happier ... and now there is so much frustration in society, and I don't believe Croatia will go further ... in next 10 years and the problem goes from everywhere, politics, economics, and people are unhappy." Jadranka, 26, Losinj

Linked to Social Differentiation

- o "I was really surprised when I first came to the University and people asked me about my shirt, 'What brand is that?' It was a shock that no one said oh, I like that, or it looks good on you." Ivana, 20.
- o "The most important for people is their outside appearance, if you wear Cartier or Gucci, whatever, oh, then you are a good person. And if you wear a regular shirt, then people are not as nice to you" Ivana D., 19

Linked to Changing Values

- o Greater materialism: belief that happiness lies in things rather than people or experiences, although materialism has been found to be associated with unhappiness (Ger and Belk 1996).
 - “We look at brands only, and in the last 12 years we really became a consumer society, we all need a mobitel, apartment, furniture...” Gordan, male 20 Sibenik

Feelings of Powerlessness

- o Can't express political voice:
 - “Problem [with globalization] in a transition country is that you get the good and the bad effects and there is no institution that has the attitude to say hey, that won't be happening here.” Gordan 20, Sibenik
- o Advertising and Media offers lifestyle they can not afford and has nothing to do with their reality.
- o Low employment, low wages, high prices of food, housing

Consumers Ask: What Went Wrong?

- o “We were, among the socialist countries on top, now ... where is Croatia? So this is disappointment ... why didn't we take this advantage, just the opposite?” Marija, 55 Zagreb
- o Assigning Blame:
 - Internal social groups: politicians, political parties, citizens
 - External forces: socialist legacy, war aggressors, globalization
- o The ethnic and political group usually associated with the blame is also the most conspicuously consuming group according to consumers.

Expressions of Power are Multi-Directional

- o Reject sameness in brand use and meaning
- o Seek quality

- o Build local advertising industry within global network
- o Power on Side of Marketers
- o Ads look western more as a result of power of client

Rituals and Meanings as Creolization

- o Hedonistic
- o Envy-provoking consumption
- o “If my neighbor has new satellite dish, then I need to have it, tomorrow ... I have to reach the same status as he does.” Boris, 29, Zagreb
- o Individualistic expression of style
- o Borderland identity: Western vs. “Balkan”
- o Culture
 - “We have a western consumer society and an eastern mentality. A girl watches *Sex in the City* and she wants to have that lifestyle, but she does not work for those things like in the show, she asks Mommy and Daddy every day for 10 kunas.” Ivana D., 19
- o Consumption Rituals:
 - Dolac, Diona, Getro

What is unique about Consumptionscape in Croatia?

- Consumption and advertising is an expression of aspirations for western political, economic and cultural ties and local control.
- Economic history of shortages plus shopping abroad means consumers and advertisers are aware of brands and use them for differentiation.
- Lifestyle is better than social class as predictor of consumption.
- Rituals and Meanings
- Consumption linked to political identity: what went wrong?

Directions for Further Research

- Marketing management decision-making
- Ethnocentrism and attitude to brands
- Values Change: Attitude to money
- Longitudinal
- Lifestyle Research
- Consumption and Politics: what went wrong?

The transition means embracing new opportunities and questioning new values. It means different things to different social groups. Younger consumers seem more singularly accepting of globalization. Older consumers are more disillusioned. Advertisers are, indeed, creating a social text that more mirrors global consumer desires over reality of consumption in transition economies, perhaps not just the reality of those who are less fortunate. While family structure is changing, many aspects of society are less so. Class differentiation is increasing, but it is less fragmented than in the US. The role of the church is strong. A tradition of Slavic anarchy (Allcock) is not lost, either. The desire to express individuality and differentiation through fashion is constant, and could be researched through lifestyle marketing. In Croatia, Mediterranean hedonism and constructs of time are still strong. In response to advertising's messages, young consumers – teens – are trying the beliefs, but as respondents report, by University age, they have outgrown the tendency to believe these promises. Advertising messages are still more a product of the client, with little consideration of the reality of consumers. Advertising is more an image of global consumer culture with local stars than it is the reality of consumers or advertisers. As advertisers try to express the local view, they are closer to the consumers than the marketing managers. We think that the ads, and many respondents say so as well, are very far from the reality or dreams of most consumers, at least for the majority of ads. Perhaps the exception is the best ads. While most ads do seem to replicate global advertising, there are many ways in which the lived experience is different than the appearance of globalized consumptionscapes. The “ironic distance” may inform a tendency for consistency in culture in spite of social forces of change. As the respondents reminded us, the outcome is still uncertain – it is too early to tell.

Finally, the critical point of the research is to create an understanding between the readers and the respondents. Since most of the North American audience shares with the respondents the experience of living with the forces of market economies, advertising and consumer society, this might create a bridge across cultures and illuminate the nature of these social forces in globalization (Denzin). Since the

respondents usually first link consumption with politics, Douglas and Isherwood's (1979) idea that consumption must be included in an understanding of politics and economics is not denied.

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OGLAŠIVAČI I POTROŠAČI U TRANZICIJI

Sažetak

Globalizacija u potrošnji i oglašavanju prevladavajući su trendovi postsocijalističke ekonomske i društvene tranzicije u Srednjoj i Istočnoj Europi. Hrvatska je izvrstan primjer za proučavanje toga, te su autorice nastojale istražiti kako potrošači, s jedne strane, te lokalni oglašivači (agencije za oglašavanje) s druge strane, shvaćaju te promjene, posebice u svjetlu povijesnih utjecaja koje je Hrvatska iskusila. Autorice smatraju da će prilagođavanje lokalnih oglašivača i potrošača procesima globalizacije u velikoj mjeri odrediti društvenu, ekonomsku i političku budućnost Hrvatske.

Kroz godinu etnografskog terenskog istraživanja provedenog u Hrvatskoj, autorice su pokušale razjasniti lokalno značenje procesa tržišne globalizacije.

Ključne riječi: globalizacija potrošnje, oglašavanje, tranzicija, Hrvatska, etnografsko istraživanje