

# CROATIA AND EUROPEAN CONSUMERISM

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In its European Agreements with Central and Eastern European countries (Croatia has yet to be included) the EU has spelt-out a commitment towards helping them integrate with the EU. The evolution of these economies from centrally planned to market economies is important to achieving this. A characteristic of the transitional processes of these countries is the emergence of a pan-European consumer culture which can be described, as suggested in this paper, using their TV-commercials. An analysis of TV-commercials for a six-year time span for Croatia and Slovenia with the EU confirms a recognisable convergence of these two countries towards pan-European consumerism. No significant statistical difference between Slovenia and Croatia was found for 1998. Results call for an enhanced EU relationship with Croatia: for the EU to respect its commitment towards 'offering opportunities, not restrictions' and show concern which goes beyond globalisation processes..

A lie has been perpetuated for years and years... The lie is that people are different. Yes there are differences among cultures, but a headache is a headache. And aspirin is aspirin.  
Barnet and Cavanagh (1994: 169)

## **INTRODUCTION**

Exemplified by the ECU, integration and free trade have become key words in Europe today. Central to our understanding of these two concepts is the process of harmonisation of European member states through common policies aimed 'to promote democracy, peace, prosperity and a fairer distribution of wealth' (Eurostat 1997: 3).

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By extending potential EU membership to several central and eastern European countries, the EU has carried its commitment towards integration and free trade in Europe beyond its own borders. Similarly, many of these countries have declared full EU membership as their ultimate goal. The evolution of these non-centre countries from centrally planned to market economies is important to achieving this:

To achieve this goal much preparation has to be made by both the candidate countries, by the EU itself, and by both sets of partners working closely together... At the core of these efforts are the 'Europe Agreements' negotiated with each country, and which aim to open up free trade, provide economic and technical assistance and establish closer political dialogue (EU (b) 1996: 13).

A direct consequence of this evolution is the emergence of a common EU regime of household consumption: a global process, sometimes referred to as Coca-colonisation (Hannerz 1992).

The complete range of items now produced in one country and sold in another is bewildering. To make matters more complicated, it is not only finished goods that are being shipped from one part of the world to another. More and more trade involves intermediate products as the production process, particularly for complex high-tech goods, and is spread across several countries or continents (EU 1995: 3).

The economic indicator 'household consumption' is an important statistic included in standard of living EU key figures (Eurostat 1997). Officially, household consumption is described by the EU using both quantitative statistical indicators, for example, GDP per head, household consumption per head, consumer spending, private equipment (cars, television) and qualitative data collected through consumer surveys which show the trends in consumers' perception of certain subjects (financial situation, unemployment, major purchases, general economic situation) (EE 1997). The full usefulness of consumer surveys is realised under the assumption that ex ante qualitative results collected through the consumer survey closely resemble the ex post quantitative statistical data.

This paper describes household consumption, what we shall call consumerism, from a different angle – TV commercials. Electronic media are typically seen as societal homogenising forces (Bredin 1994). Advertising, which reflects a large number of socio-economic factors, is a consumer-led medium through which such movement and change can be monitored. Covering a wide range of consumer goods TV-commercials are ideal for such research which has proven to be especially illuminating for describing post-modern consumerism, that is,

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the relationship between consumers and commodities in a post-modern society (Fox 1999: 235-239).

Specifically, the paper is directed at answering the question whether EU consumerism is being established in Croatia: a question important too for the EU in formulating its future relationship towards Croatia. To provide an appropriate perspective Slovenia is included in our comparison.

## **RESEARCH MODEL**

In November, 1993, a corpus of TV-commercials (C1993) for family viewing channels SKY 1 (Great Britain), RTL (Germany), RAI UNO (Italy), HR 1 (Croatia) and SL 1 (Slovenia) were recorded for 5 consecutive days during peak viewing time (19:30 to 21:30). Comparing the TV-commercials a very high level of similarity between GB, D and I, particularly for types of products advertised (food, cars, detergents) and advertising strategies used (humour, vicarious learning, famous person) was confirmed. Comparing Croatia and Slovenia with these three countries a statistical dissimilarity was confirmed. Croatia and Slovenia were similar. In a like way, subsequent corpora have been recorded for the following years: C1994, C1995, C1996, C1997, C1998.

Using C1993 we will first describe the analytical method used giving results for the two mentioned areas: types of products advertised and advertising strategies. We will then compare the yearly corpora to provide an answer to our question whether EU consumerism is being established in Croatia.

## **1993 CORPUS**

### **Research rationale**

Initial classifications for types of products advertised, (see for example Eurostat 1997), and advertising strategies (see for example Statt 1997), were checked and expanded until at least 95% of all the GB, D and I commercials were classified. Final classifications were then used to classify and quantitatively analyse commercials (including Croatia and Slovenia). Pearson rank correlation coefficient  $P$  (one-tailed,  $= 0.05$ ) was used to test correlation between countries.

### **Product group**

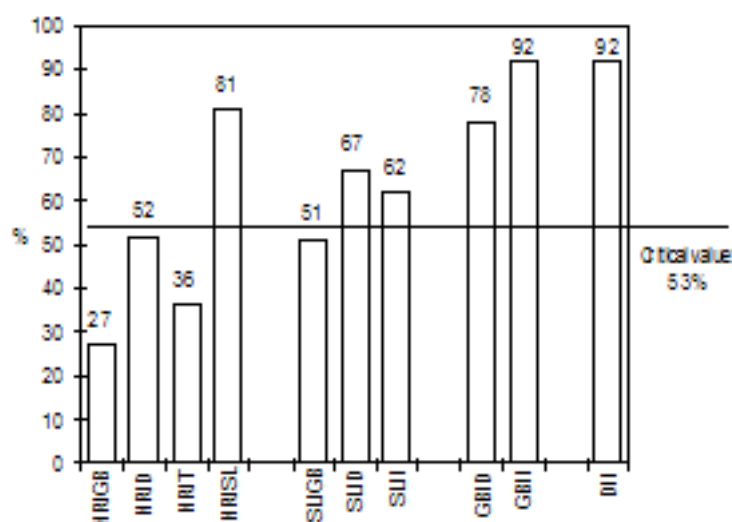
Classification of commercials by product group provides a description of a country's consumer product market, i.e. goods and services bought exclusively for personal and/or family use (household consumption). For this paper a simple 12 group classification is used. A quantitative analysis for individual countries is presented in Table 1, and diagrammatic represen-

tation of correlation between countries' consumer product markets (as a percentage) and critical value (53%) in Figure 1.

Product Group	GB	D	I	HR	SL
1. Alcohol & Tobacco	4%	10%	3%	2%	0%
2. Household appliances and cost	14%	11%	9%	12%	10%
3. Banking, insurance, post	3%	7%	1%	8%	12%
4. Food & non-alcoholic drinks	21%	15%	33%	18%	24%
5. Toys & games	12%	6%	12%	1%	0%
6. Books, music, film	7%	11%	8%	23%	16%
7. Cosmetics & medication	15%	13%	14%	7%	15%
8. Fashion, sport, outfittings	7%	8%	5%	6%	1%
9. Furniture	1%	4%	2%	4%	6%
10. Travel & restaurants	2%	3%	0%	4%	3%
11. Detergents	11%	7%	11%	1%	3%
12. Not classified	3%	5%	2%	14%	10%

TABLE 1  
Analysis as per  
Groups of Products  
Advertised for  
Individual Countries  
for 1993

FIGURE 1  
Comparison of  
Consumer Product  
Markets for Individual  
Countries



A strong positive correlation between the EU states (GB, D, I) confirms a homogenous pan-European consumer product market. The main groups of articles advertised are food and non-alcoholic drinks, cosmetics and medication, cars and household appliances. Compared with ex post quantitative statistical data for consumer spending (Eurostat: key figures) an almost identical resemblance is found, which confirms the viability of the research approach.

The Croatian consumer product market is statistically different to the pan-European. The leading group of commercials are newspapers and films. Unlike the pan-European market, the product groups: toys and games, cosmetics and medication, and detergents are barely present. And although the group food and non-alcoholic drinks is highly ranked it does

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not take first place. The high percentage of the group non-classified commercials for Croatia and Slovenia consists mostly of lotteries.

The Slovenian consumer product market is notably closer to the European. An interesting characteristic is the high percentage of the product group banking, insurance and post (present too for Croatia).

### **Advertising strategy**

Any human communication cannot consist of only rules to be applied to all people all the time. The rules would become too general to provide criteria for quick selection, or too specific to be used on a wide range of application: strategies have to be developed (de Beaugrande 1988: 17) Based on market segmentation and consumer research TV-Commercials are created using advertising strategies. Multi-national corporations often use the same advertising strategies for years: a famous person (Coca cola), referential reference group (Camel), Metaphor (Opel – horse, Peugeot – lion, Nissan – wolf), Humour (Levi's). Perhaps the best known is Rosser Reves's Unique Selling Proposition. There are of course many more (see below). We emphasise that we are not concerned here with the originality of the commercial, (although it is often this that will determine its success) which of course cannot be classified, only acknowledged.

Analysing GB, D and I commercials, the following 19 different advertising strategies were found to be used. Most are well known.

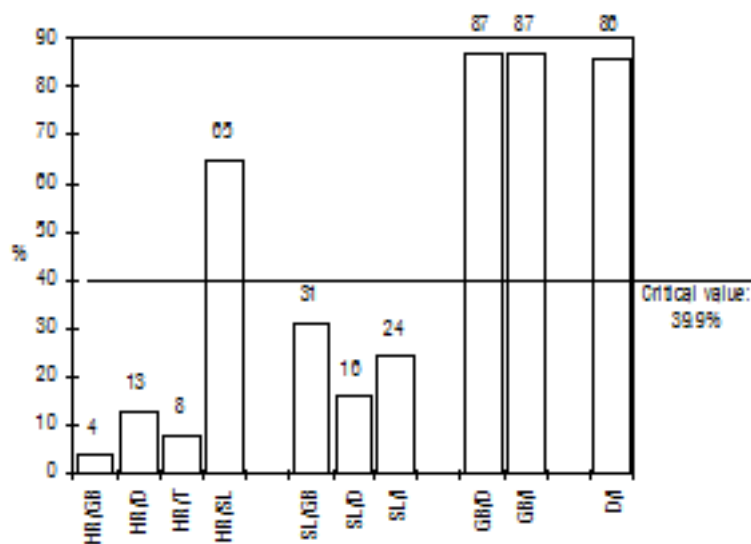
1. Unique Selling Proposition (USP)
2. Humour
3. Metaphor
4. Famous person
5. Referential reference group (RRG)
6. Aspiration reference group (ARG)
7. Dissociate reference group (DRG)
8. Family reference group (FRG)
9. Effect von Restorff
10. Effect Zeigarnik
11. Vicarious learning
12. Prize
13. Animation
14. Verbal information
15. Visual information
16. Product functions as a Present
17. Just Noticeable Difference (JND)
18. Comparison of product with product X
19. Sexual appeal

Classification of commercials as per strategy (sometimes more than one strategy is used) provides an interesting insight into the prevailing consumer product culture. A quantitative analysis for individual countries is presented in Table 2, and diagrammatic representation of correlation between countries' consumer product cultures (as a percentage) and critical value (40%) in Figure 2. (Similar quantitative data is not published by the EU Eurostat)

Strategy	GB	D	I	HR	SL
Unique Selling Proposition (USP)	5%	7%	4%	8%	12%
Humour	25%	20%	20%	4%	11%
Metaphor	3%	1%	4%	1%	8%
Famous Person	9%	7%	4%	8%	7%
Referential Reference Group (RRG)	6%	3%	4%	2%	0%
Aspiration Reference Group (ARG)	1%	6%	1%	2%	1%
Dissociate Reference Group (DRG)	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Family Reference Group (FRG)	1%	5%	12%	3%	2%
Effect von Restorff	2%	5%	0%	2%	2%
Effect Zeigarnik	2%	3%	1%	3%	4%
Vicarious Learning	24%	17%	25%	7%	11%
Prize	1%	0%	3%	1%	9%
Animation	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Verbal Information	1%	0%	0%	14%	9%
Visual Information	7%	15%	13%	14%	0%
Product as Present	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Just Noticeable Difference (JND)	4%	6%	1%	3%	0%
Comparison of Product with Product X	4%	2%	3%	0%	0%
Sexual Appeal	0%	1%	3%	1%	2%
Not Classified	0%	0%	0%	25%	19%

TABLE 2  
 Quantitative Analysis  
 of Advertising Strategies  
 for Individual  
 Countries for 1993

FIGURE 2  
 Comparison of  
 Consumer Product  
 Culture for Individual  
 Countries



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As with the consumer product market analysis a high level of correlation between GB, D and I is present which confirms a pan-European consumer product culture. Similar to each other, Croatian and Slovenian consumer product cultures are different to the pan-European. The large number of non-classified commercials are mostly just a simple written message (poster).

Using the results shown in table 2 as sample distributions and statistically analysing these distributions, Croatia, Slovenia and the pan-European countries can be compared. For practical purposes, two points in the distributions are fixed: mean value (M), and mean value plus two standard deviations ( $M + 2\sigma$ ). Strategies with probabilities above  $M + 2\sigma$  (most frequent) are called global, those between M and  $M + 2\sigma$  (less frequent) specific and those below M (least frequent) individual strategies (Table 3).

TABLE 3  
Continuums of  
Strategies for GB, D, I,  
HR, SL for 1993

	GB	D	I	HR	SL
GLOBAL STRATEGIES	humour vicarious learn.	humour vicarious learn.	vicarious learn. humour	unclassified verbal inf. visual inf.	unclassified
SPECIFIC STRATEGIES	famous person visual inf. RRG	visual inf. famous pers. USP JND ARG	visual inf. FRG	USP famous pers. vicar. learn.	USP humour vicarious learn.
INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES	USP comparison JND metaphor Zeigarnik von Restorff DRG present prize FRG ARG animation verbal inf.	von Restorff FRG Zeigarnik RRG comparison present animation sexual appeal metaphor	JND metaphor famous person RRG comparison prize sexual appeal animation JND ARG Zeigarnik present	humour Zeigarnik JND FRG RRG ARG von Restorff metaphor animation prize present sexual appeal	prize verbal inf. metaphor famous person Zeigarnik FRG von Restorff sexual appeal ARG present
NOT USED	sexual appeal	DRG prize verbal inf.	DRG von Restorff verbal inf.	DRG comparison	RRG DRG animation visual inf. JND comparison

As it is a paradox of mass media which allows communication to reach both the individual and society simultaneously, we are able to define global strategies as those aimed at consumers with little if any consumer (viewer) differentiation;

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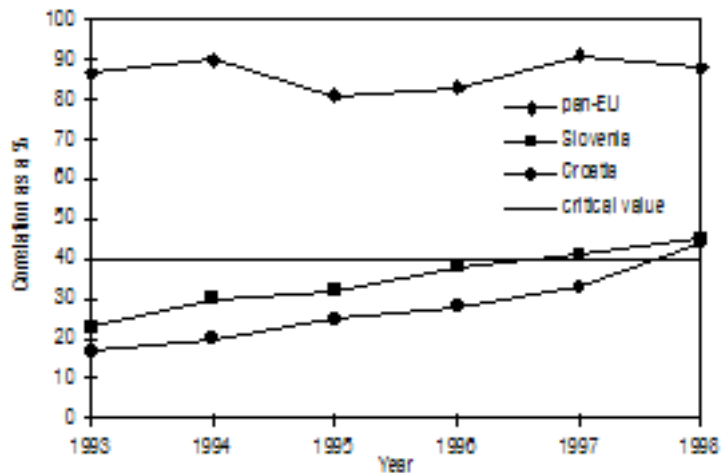
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specific strategies as those aimed at certain groups of consumers; and individual strategies as those aimed at individual consumers. In other words, the lower the probability of the advertising strategy, the more it differentiates the advertised commodity from other commodities.<sup>1</sup> The dominance of the global advertising strategies humour and vicarious learning for the pan-European continuums is the main difference separating Croatia and Slovenia from pan-Europe.

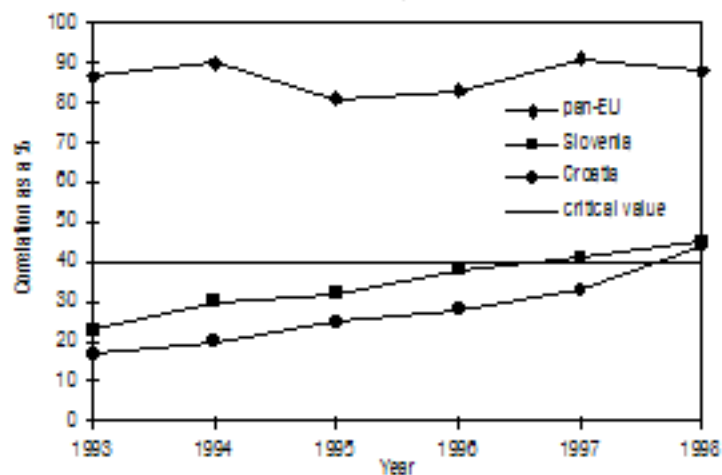
### SUBSEQUENT 1993-1997 CORPORA

Analysis and comparison of subsequent yearly corpora with C1993 provided a 6-year trend analysis for the consumer product market (Fig. 3) and consumer product culture (Fig. 4). Average yearly pan-European correlation values were calculated using the formula:  $(GB:D + GB:I + D:I)/3$ , and for Croatia and Slovenia:  $(HR:GB + HR:D + HR:I)/3$  and  $(SL:GB + SL:D + SL:I)/3$ .

➡ FIGURE 3  
 Six-year Trend Analysis  
 of pan-European,  
 Croatian and  
 Slovenian Consumer  
 Product Market



➡ FIGURE 4  
 Six-year Trend Analysis  
 of pan-European,  
 Croatian and  
 Slovenian Consumer  
 Product Cultures





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Results show how the Croatian and Slovenian consumer product markets and cultures are undergoing change and steadily converging towards pan-European consumerism. For the last year, 1998, there is no significant statistical difference between pan-Europe and these markets for types of products advertised and the advertising strategies used. An 85% domination of synchronised foreign TV-commercials for Croatia for 1998 supports these results.

## CONCLUSION

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We have used TV-commercials to describe and compare household consumption, i.e. consumer culture, for the EU and Croatia and Slovenia. Analysis of a six-year time period of samples of TV-commercials confirms a strong convergence of Croatian and Slovenian consumer cultures towards a pan-European with no significant statistical difference for 1998. A consumer culture similar to that of the EU is present in Croatia. Croatia has opened its consumer market to the EU.

Our research confirms also, the 'price' of Croatia's convergence towards the EU – globalisation: a flow of goods and values from the West to the rest of the world centred on the presumed intentionality of the producer (Tobin 1992).

If the EU is truly committed towards a free market to "offer opportunities, not restrictions" (EU (b)1996: 5), our research offers strong support for the EU to enhance its relationship with Croatia and officially encourage its integration. To go beyond a relationship which is based on consumer culture globalisation processes.

## NOTE

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<sup>1</sup> Advertising strategies enable recontextualisation of commodities whereby commodities can be assigned meanings (through the TV-commercial) appropriate to the culture of reception: often referred to as creolisation (Hannerz 1992, Jourdan 1994). Research has shown, for example, that multinationals do use different advertising strategies for the same product depending on the country where it is being advertised. Nescafe (has been advertised in Britain using the advertising strategy humour, in Italy USP and Germany JND (Fox 1992). For the sophisticated European consumer it is the products' sensual presence in relation to other products (TV-commercials) – that is the ultimate arbiter of their meaning and value (Howes and Classen 1991).

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## Hrvatska i europska potrošačka kultura

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U svojim Europskim sporazumima sa srednje i istočnoeuropskim zemljama (kojima se Hrvatska tek treba priključiti) Europska se zajednica obvezala pomagati u njihovoj integraciji u EU. Razvoj privreda tih zemalja od centralističko-planskih do tržišnih ekonomija vrlo je važan za ostvarenje spomenutih integracija. Jedna od osobitosti pretvorbenih procesa u tim zemljama je pojava sveeuropske potrošačke kulture koju se može opisati, kako se predlaže u ovom radu, uz pomoć televizijskih reklama. Usporedna analiza televizijskih reklama u šestogodišnjem razdoblju na području Hrvatske i Slovenije s Europskom zajednicom potvrđuje prepoznatljivo približavanje tih dviju zemalja sveeuropskoj potrošačkoj kulturi. U 1998. godini nije bilo statistički značajne razlike između Slovenije i Hrvatske. Rezultati upućuju na potrebu jačanja odnosa EU s Hrvatskom: kako bi Europska zajednica poštivala svoju obvezu "pružanja prilika, umjesto ograničenja" i pokazala brigu koja nadilazi globalizacijske procese.

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## Verbraucherkultur in Kroatien und Europa (*consumerism*)

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In den Europäischen Abkommen mit mittel- und osteuropäischen Ländern (denen sich Kroatien erst anschließen muß) hat sich die Europäische Gemeinschaft dazu verpflichtet, die Integration dieser Staaten in die EU zu unterstützen. Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung dieser Länder von zentralistischen Planwirtschaften zu Marktwirtschaften ist für die Verwirklichung der erwähnten Integrationen äußerst wichtig. Ein Spezifikum des Wandlungsprozesses ist die Erscheinung der gesamteuropäischen Verbraucherkultur, die – so der Vorschlag des Verfassers dieser Arbeit – anhand von Fernsehwerbespots beschrieben werden kann. Die vergleichende Analyse von Fernsehwerbespots, die über einen Zeitraum von sechs Jahren in Kroatien, Slowenien und den EG-Ländern zu sehen waren, bestätigt die Annäherung Kroatiens und Sloweniens an die gesamteuropäische Verbraucherkultur. Im Jahre 1998 gab es in dieser Hinsicht keine statistisch relevanten Unterschiede zwischen den beiden genannten Staaten. Die Ergebnisse verweisen auf die Notwendigkeit, die Beziehungen zwischen der EU und Kroatien zu vertiefen: die EU muß ihre Verpflichtung, "Chancen zu bieten, statt Einschränkungen aufzuerlegen", wahren und ein Interesse bekunden, das die Globalisierungsprozesse übersteigt.