

**Brand Management across Cultures:  
An Analysis of LG Electronics Brand Management Strategies  
in the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation**

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# **Brand Management across Cultures: An Analysis of LG Electronics Brand Management Strategies in the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation**

## **Abstract**

Effective brand management is vital for building the necessary bond between an organization and its consumers. LG Electronics serves as a remarkable example of a global company that effectively communicates its brand in two diverse markets: the United Kingdom and Russia. This study highlights critical elements of effective brand management across different cultural contexts. While keeping the global “LG” logo and stressing the “Life is Good” slogan, LG Electronics carried out differentiated and mixed brand advertising strategies for similar products in the U.K. and Russia. The U.K. ad targeted individualistic, low-context, low power-distance, low uncertainty-avoidance, and masculine consumers promoting functional product characteristics; the Russian ad focused on collective, high-context, high power-distance, high uncertainty-avoidance, and feminine consumers advertising product quality and their collective use. The uncovered differences in LG Electronics print and television advertisement in two distinct cultures augment contemporary brand management research.

*Key words:* Cross-cultural brand management; Brand personality; LG Electronics, United Kingdom; Russian Federation.

## **1. Introduction**

Effective brand communication and management is instrumental for forming a necessary bond between a company’s brand and its customers. Effective brand management enables a firm to utilize its competitive advantage in developing and sustaining its business cross-culturally (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 1999; Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra, 1999; Interbrand, 2004). Consumers bring their own cultural values that influence their perceptions about the value of the brand, and they can ultimately co-create the brand values (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Merz, He, and Vargo, 2009). Hence, understanding customers and their culture is critical for the operational effectiveness of a company’s brand strategy.

Multinational companies often demonstrate successful marketing and brand strategies in different markets. For instance, LG Electronics and Samsung Electronics, which are headquartered in Korea, have been listed as the world’s largest corporations ranking 69<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> respectively among Fortune 500 companies (CNN, 2009). These companies have been ranked as 11<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> respectively among other competitive companies in Asia (CNN, 2009). Taking a closer look at LG Electronics, the company is expanding its brand by positioning itself as a global leader and technology innovator in consumer electronics, mobile communications, and home appliances (LG, 2009a).

Such a re-positioning is often critical when a company expands into international markets where consumers share different cultural values (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004; Johar, Sengupta, and Aaker, 2005; Milas and Mlačić, 2007; Sentis and Markus, 1986). A consumer’s culture plays an important role in how brands and their personalities are being perceived. Furthermore, in order to make the brand appealing and the advertising messages successful, companies can select different media

and advertising presentation formats to communicate their brand personalities effectively (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy, 2005; Wang and Nelson, 2006).

In this paper, we shed light on the important elements of effective brand management and communication in different cultural contexts. We particularly focus on LG Electronics and its cross-cultural brand management and strategies through their print and TV advertisements in the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation. We believe that culturally-sensitive brand management continues to be critical for companies to increase their competitive advantage in the international marketplace. In the following section, we first discuss brand-related and consumer-related constructs that are central to effective cross-cultural brand communication. Second, we analyze communication channels and message composition. Finally, we report on an analysis of the print and television advertisements of a global corporation, LG Electronics, in the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation.

## **2. Brand characteristics and advertising strategies**

### *2.1. Brand Personality*

Brand personality is referred to as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Consumers often imbue brands with human personality traits. The brand personality construct comprises of five dimensions: 1) sincerity (down to earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful), 2) excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up to date), 3) competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), 4) sophistication (upper-class, charming), and 5) ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough) (Aaker, 1997; Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003). These dimensions of brand personality were found in 10 brands in 10 product categories (Marriot vs. Holiday Inn Hotels, Macy’s vs. Sears stores, The Wall Street Journal vs. USA Today newspapers; Aaker, 1997).

Understanding brand personality is critical for building a successful brand across cultures (Aaker, 1984, 1995). Companies develop a unique strategy to communicate its brand’s personality to customers. For instance, eBay developed its brand personality as a firm that is “fun and efficient” (Brand Sequence, 2004, p.3). Coca-Cola, the most prominent global brand, developed an exciting brand identity through the message “open happiness” (Coca-Cola, 2009; Interbrand, 2009). McDonald’s communicated the message “I’m lovin’ it” and created its brand personality with affordable and convenient foods.

Brand personality can be described in terms of the brand’s functional, experiential, or symbolic benefits. For instance, Colgate’s toothpaste for removing stains is considered a functional benefit, while the taste of Coca-Cola is an experiential benefit (Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003). The power of symbolic benefits comes when using a particular brand helps customers develop ideal self-concepts (Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003). Examples of the symbolic benefit are buying Gucci shoes, a Coach handbag, or a new model of Apple’s Macintosh line of computers.

Interestingly, different personality traits operate differently across cultures (Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003). This is because individuals across cultures favor brand associations differently and choose the brand they can identify themselves with (Aaker, 1997). Therefore, understanding consumers’ characteristics is important, such as their experience and familiarity with the brand.

## 2.2. Brand Familiarity

Consumers' relationship, experience, and familiarity with a brand influence their overall evaluation of the brand. For instance, brand familiarity – the extent to which consumers are familiar with a particular brand – captures the extent of a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand (Campbell and Keller, 2003; Kent and Allen, 1994). Brand familiarity captures “consumers' brand knowledge structures, that is, the brand associations that exist within a consumer's memory” (Campbell and Keller, 2003, p. 293). The more familiar a consumer is with a particular brand, the more knowledge a consumer usually has about it. Consumers' familiarity with a brand is likely to have an influence on their attitudes and willingness to purchase a product (Cho, 2007).

Consumers' brand familiarity is accelerated by the use of the Internet and exchanging opinions and consumption-related advice (eWOM; Park and Lee, 2009). The Internet allows the consumers to become more familiar with a brand regardless of their actual purchase of the product (Park and Lee, 2009). The increasing brand familiarity among consumers varies based on different media where consumers receive advertising, such as on TV or online. Companies need to build awareness of consumers' knowledge about their brand and their familiarity with it, which is formed based on different sources.

When consumers are not familiar with products or they are exposed to products from foreign countries, consumer ethnocentrism emerges (Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003). In order to minimize possible ethnocentrism, it is important to create a brand strategy that emphasizes a positive and differentiated brand personality (e.g., when advertising Western brands in foreign markets such as Russia; Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003). Similarly, Supphellen and Rittenburg (2001) discussed the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and consumer information processing about Western brands. That is, Polish consumers who rate high in ethnocentrism process information about foreign brands in a top-down manner, giving unreasonably favorable evaluations of domestic brands and revealing unfavorable attitudes toward foreign brands. Consumers who are low in ethnocentrism process information in a bottom-up manner; these consumers are motivated to spend time understanding advertisements about foreign brands.

Similarly, according to Malaviya, Meyers-Levy, and Sternthal (1999), consumers usually take one of two types of cognitive processing approaches (relational or item-specific) when dealing with an advertising message. To illustrate, the relational processing approach explains the similarities that connect individual piece of information and help consumers categorize information in a related context (Malaviya et al., 1999). On the other hand, the item-specific processing approach seems to occur to “the extent that a particular feature is associated with a specific brand” (Malaviya et al., 1999, p. 102). When consumers receive information about the brand, they encode the product information. Such information remains in consumers' memories and they associate the features of the brand with the brand name itself.

## 2.3. Standardized and differentiated brand marketing strategies

Successful global marketing requires establishing trust with consumers and selecting an effective and appropriate marketing strategy (Kiley and Helm, 2009). Companies usually choose between a standardized or differentiated (non-standardized,

individualized, adapted) marketing strategy (Melewar and Vemmervik, 2004). Standardized brand marketing is grounded in the argument that global consumers have the same basic needs and desires and, therefore, will be persuaded by universal advertising appeals (Marquez, 1979). When using standardized brand marketing, a company considers the host country's environment, product-related marketing factors, and subsidiary-related factors that influence the degree of marketing standardization (Ozsomer, Bodur, and Cavusgil, 1991). When using a differentiated marketing strategy, a company builds on the differences across countries in terms of customers' needs, preferences, and values. A company can adopt a mixed brand advertising strategy by keeping some elements in advertisement standardized and develop other elements to adopt the culture of interest (Melewar and Vemmervik, 2004). Additionally, a significant difference exists across cultures in interpreting the visual component in print advertisement (Cutler, Javalgi, and Erramilli, 1992). This finding forces companies to consider a standardized, differentiated, or compromised advertising strategy (Melewar and Vemmervik, 2004).

#### *2.4. Brand advertising format*

The choice of media in brand advertising is crucial for a successful brand marketing strategy and brand management (Wang and Nelson, 2006), as the effectiveness of different media in brand advertisement varies. For instance, Internet advertising (e.g., email, banner ads) is considered an informative, trustworthy, and cost-effective source of getting information (Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer, 1999). Both print and television ads provide visuals that enhance feelings that consumers can experience. Television ads are considered powerful due to the sound embedded in the visual information (Gorn, 1982; Park and Young, 1986). Advertising messages with visual images can communicate ideas beyond those that are depicted literally (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy, 2005). Visual images provide unwritten ideas of messages that influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes. Investigating the effect of print advertisement on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions, Edell and Staelin (1983) found different effects of the verbally versus visually communicated messages on information processing.

### **3. National culture orientations**

Culture is considered to be one of the important factors that influence the effectiveness of brand communication. Hall (1976, 1983) viewed cultures on a low-to-high context continuum as he distinguished cultures and communication by the information surrounding an event regardless of the verbal message. Low-context cultures, such as the U.K., strive for task-centered communication where relatively little information is needed about a person or a company before business can be transacted (Marquardt and Horvath, 2001). High-context cultures, such as the Russian culture, share meaning implicitly. The listener knows the context and needs little background information and the message is conveyed implicitly (Hall, 1983).

The individualism versus collectivism attitude is the most researched of all cultural dimensions (Chen and Starosta, 1998; Hofstede, 1983). Individualist cultures stress self-identity, self-esteem, awareness, image, and expression; individualism is highly valued in many social settings. In collectivistic cultures, individual values play less significant roles in social interactions; social actors are expected to be more interdependent and to show more conformity to group norms and values. The United

Kingdom is an individualistic culture, while it may be argued that the Russian Federation, as a result of its USSR heritage and pre-perestroika period of the early 1990s, is a collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 1991). Power distance, a degree to which members of a culture expect power to be distributed unequally, determines how a community stratifies its individuals and groups with respect to power, authority, prestige, status, wealth, and material possessions (Hofstede, 1980; Javidan and House, 2001). Low power distance cultures like the U.K. prefer consultation, participation, cooperation, and practicality, while high power distance cultures as Russia prefer autocratic or majority rule decision-making and are reluctant to trust one another.

Uncertainty avoidance indicates whether uncertainty and ambiguity are perceived as threatening within a culture (Hofstede, 1980). Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which people seek orderliness, consistency, structure, and laws (Javidan and House, 2001). Low-uncertainty avoidance cultures, such as Russia, Greece, and Venezuela, demand less structure and are less concerned about following rules and procedures. High-uncertainty avoidance cultures, such as Sweden, Germany, and, to a degree, the United Kingdom, prefer consistency, structured lifestyles, and clearly articulated expectations. Masculinity versus femininity refers to an extent to which stereotypically masculine and feminine traits prevail in the culture (Chen and Starosta, 1998). In masculine cultures, men are expected to be dominant in the society and to show qualities of assertiveness, achievement, competitiveness, and ambition, while women play the nurturing and caring role. In feminine cultures, people emphasize the quality of affection, compassion, emotion, and sensitivity.

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 Table 1  
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#### **4. LG Electronics brand advertising in the United Kingdom and Russia**

##### *4.1. Brand personality of LG Electronics*

LG Electronics with its global slogan “Life is Good” communicates its brand identity in the United Kingdom through value, promise, benefits, and personality (LG, 2009b, 2009c). This brand communication has allowed LG to develop a reliable and sophisticated brand personality (Aaker, 1997). LG Electronics’ core values are firm, allowing the brand to deliver on its promise to customers. LG Electronics’ brand positioning through a direct focus on value as the brand personality expects to retain consumer loyalty (Lai, Griffin, and Babin, 2009). Value recognition enables customers to understand the benefit of the products. LG Electronics strives to develop intelligent features, intuitive functionality, and exceptional performance of its products (LG, 2009b).

LG Electronics communicates its brand personality with the global logo “LG” and the adapted slogan “Possessed by quality” in Russia. The LG brand enables Russian customers to decide whether they will purchase LG’s products as a form of self-expression or self-satisfaction (LG, 2009c). LG Electronics achieves this goal through its customers taking pride and comfort in LG products (LG, 2009b). LG Electronics successfully communicates its brand characteristics through the messages “Life is good” and “Possessed by quality” in different markets by referring to consumers’ quality of life and the quality of its products.



Figure 1

#### 4.2. Analysis of LG Electronics' print advertising

LG Electronics adopted a differentiated strategy in print advertisement to promote the LCD PC Monitors Flatron 1900 "Fantasy" Series in the United Kingdom and Russia. LG presented its print ads in the U.K. by using the eye-catching slogan "Where fantasy becomes reality." The "Fantasy" Series monitors are displayed on a modern ergonomic, red-legged chair in black and red colors, symbolizing images of sophistication and coolness, making it a masculine-oriented brand personality. This simple and laconic visual presentation of the LCD monitors favors the U.K.'s low-context and masculine consumers. The written messages in the U.K. ad are very descriptive about the functionality and quality of the monitor, underlining product's competence (Aaker, 1997). The U.K. ad generates item-specific information processing from consumers as they are introduced specific and detailed features of the product described in the ad and associate this product with LG Electronics brand (Malaviya et al., 1999).

LG Electronics used a different approach for its brand advertisement in Russia. The Russian ad displays three LCD PC monitors with red poppy flowers on their screens. The monitors are placed next to a bedroom-like place, enhancing the luxury of the experience of using the high-quality LCD PC monitors at home. The visual presentation of monitors in the Russian ad emphasizes delicacy and symbolizes luxury and sophistication. The presence of a young female model in the Russian ad underlines LG's feminine-oriented brand personality. Using a female model as a third person to communicate messages is effective in a collectivistic culture such as Russia. Russian consumers are able to imagine the benefits of using a LCD PC monitor with other people, their friends, families, or colleagues. For the Russian print ad, LG Electronics used the written eye-catchers "Possessed by quality" and "Elegance of high technology." The Russian PC monitor ad motivates consumers to draw associations between themselves and the environment of the model and PC monitors, to engage in relational information processing, and to create a relationship with the LG brand (Malaviya et al., 1999) (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The orientation of the visual images in the LCD PC "Fantasy" Series monitor print ad varies for the U. K. and Russia. The U.K. ad uses a diagonal visual orientation attempting to convey the concept of dynamism and action. The Russian ad uses a vertical orientation of visual images placing the female model, the eye-catcher message, the actual PC monitor, and the ultimate "dream" story of a Stockholm decorator at different hierarchical levels.

#### 4.3. Analysis of LG Electronic' television advertising

The television advertisements for LG Electronics Plasma television communicate the ability of an LG product to make an ordinary person's life extraordinary. The same visual presentations and background music are used in Plasma television ads in the U.K. and Russia. The visual presentation shows a day in a life of an ordinary

person in an extraordinary way: a woman hailing a taxi and a helicopter arriving, a woman drinking royal milk tea with a royal family, reading a book on the deck of a luxurious ship, going for a walk with a tiger instead of a cat or a dog, and watching a Plasma television in her very luxurious and spacious room (Figure 3). For visual advertising communication LG Electronics has used the standardized strategy for both the United Kingdom and Russia (Table 2).

Table 2

LG Electronics used a differentiated strategy when communicating written messages in the U.K. and Russian advertisements (Table 2). The written messages for the U.K. ad are simple and straightforward, which is appropriate for the low-context culture and low-uncertainty avoidance consumers in the United Kingdom. These messages help consumers to imagine that using a Plasma screen television set will make their lives extraordinary and special (i.e. being able to call a helicopter for transportation instead of a taxi or drinking royal milk tea with a royal family (Table 3). Written messages on the Russian ad are not so straightforward (if you are possessed by ambitious goals, etc.) and encourage consumers to imagine what their life will be like if they were to enjoy a plasma television. Owning a highly-sophisticated technology product, such as plasma television set, symbolizes the superior lifestyle affordable only for wealthy people in Russia.

Table 3

LG Plasma TV television advertisements are clearly attenuated to the cultural differences of the United Kingdom and Russian consumers. The LG television ad that aired in the U.K. was made to appeal to a wide spectrum of consumers. The ad persuades consumers be ordinary: everybody already has a plasma television, so be like everyone else, go ahead and buy new LG plasma television. The opening message on the LG Plasma television ad is "an ordinary day of the ordinary man." In the low-uncertainty avoidance culture such as the United Kingdom, people are open-minded and optimistic, with a happy-go-lucky attitude and faith in their future success (Hofstede, 1991). Stressing the life of an ordinary person with a luxurious product such as a plasma television is appropriate in the United Kingdom.

Figure 3

## 5. Discussion

LG Electronics has been successful in communicating its product brand personality in two diverse markets: the LG brand comes through as cool, sophisticated, and elegant. While the brand personality in the U.K. is focused more on coolness, in Russia it is focused more on elegance. LG's slogans "Life is good" and "Possessed by quality" communicate the company's desire to enhance its customers' lifestyles with high quality. LG Electronics has been using differentiated brand advertising strategies for its products in the U.K. and Russian markets. LG Electronics adopted a differentiated brand advertising strategy to promote the LCD PC "Fantasy" monitors via print advertisements in the U.K. and Russia. While the U.K. ad focused primarily



on functional characteristics of the products in a direct and masculine fashion, the Russian ad focuses on the product in an indirect and feminine fashion. LG used both the standardized (for visual messages) and differentiated (for written messages) brand advertising strategies in television advertisements in the U.K. and Russia.

LG Electronics adapted its brand advertising to consumers in the U.K. and Russia. The advertisements for the U.K. consumers emphasized individualism, low-context message processing, low power-distance, low uncertainty-avoidance, and masculinity. The advertisements for Russian consumers accentuated collectivism, high-context message processing, high power-distance, high uncertainty-avoidance, and femininity. Noticeable differences in the advertisements in the U.K. and Russia exist in the choice of message, visual images such as colors and product positioning, and the presentation format. Future studies can target brand advertising strategies in a larger sample of cultures, compare approaches between other global companies, and investigate differences in foreign-based and domestic companies in Russia and other quickly developing economies.

While this study provided insights into LG Electronics brand strategy in the U.K. and Russia, future research should examine the company's brand strategy in other countries. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine and compare the brand strategy of other brands in the U.K. and Russia. For example, it would be interesting to select brands from different cultures (e.g., the U.S., Germany, Japan, Russia), across different industries (e.g., automobile, cell phone, telecommunication, banking), and across different advertising formats (e.g., Internet, mobile).

This study also provides managerial implications. For example, the different cultural backgrounds of the U.K. and Russia seem to make it necessary for companies to adapt their brand strategy to local peculiarities when it comes to some media (e.g., print) but not when it comes to other media (e.g., TV). The latter fact might help firms save a significant amount of advertising money across cultures. Moreover, the results indicate that it might be fruitful for companies to research whether a localization or standardization approach to their cross-cultural brand strategy is appropriate, rather than imposing a certain brand strategy on a particular culture.

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## Tables

Table 1

Comparison of the United Kingdom and Russia on the national culture orientations

Culture orientation	United Kingdom	Russia
Context richness	low	high
Individualism/collectivism	individualistic (89)	collectivistic (39)
Power distance	low (35)	high (93)
Uncertainty avoidance	low (35)	high (95)
Masculine/feminine	masculine (66)	feminine (36)

Scores are based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1991).

Table 2

LG Electronics print and television advertising strategy comparison for the United Kingdom and Russia

Product and ad category	United Kingdom	Russia
Printed LCD Fantasy monitor		
visual message	differentiated	differentiated
written message		
Plasma TV television		
visual message	standardized	standardized
written message	differentiated	differentiated

Table 3  
Television advertisement for Plasma TV for the United Kingdom and Russia

United Kingdom	Russia
Opening statement A day in life of an ordinary person	Opening statement If you are possessed with ambitious goals
<b>09:00</b> Calling a taxi A businesswoman with a phone with a luxurious house and “air taxi” helicopter on the background	<b>in place of 09:00</b> If you are possessed by beauty A businesswoman with a phone with a luxurious house and “air taxi” helicopter on the background
<b>11:00</b> Royal milk tea The same businesswoman has tea in a royal apartment with the Queen and Lords	<b>in place of 11:00</b> If you are possessed by pleasure The same businesswoman has tea in a royal apartment with the Queen and Lords
<b>15:00</b> Reading a book The lady reads a book lying on the yacht under the sun	<b>in place of 15:00</b> If you are possessed by emotions The lady reads a book lying on the yacht under the sun
<b>17:00</b> Playing with the cat The lady is walking a tiger	<b>in place of 17:00</b> If you are possessed by style The lady is walking a tiger
<b>19:00</b> Watching TV She watches LG Plasma TV in a chic apartment The message “LG Plasma, ordinary TV for ordinary people” runs on the screen	<b>in place of 19:00</b> If you are possessed with ambitious goals She watches LG Plasma TV in a chic apartment. The message “LG Plasma, ordinary TV for ordinary people” runs on the screen

Source: REN-TV, Sobytia News Block, Russia.



## Figures

Figure 1  
LG Electronics logo and slogan in the United Kingdom and Russia

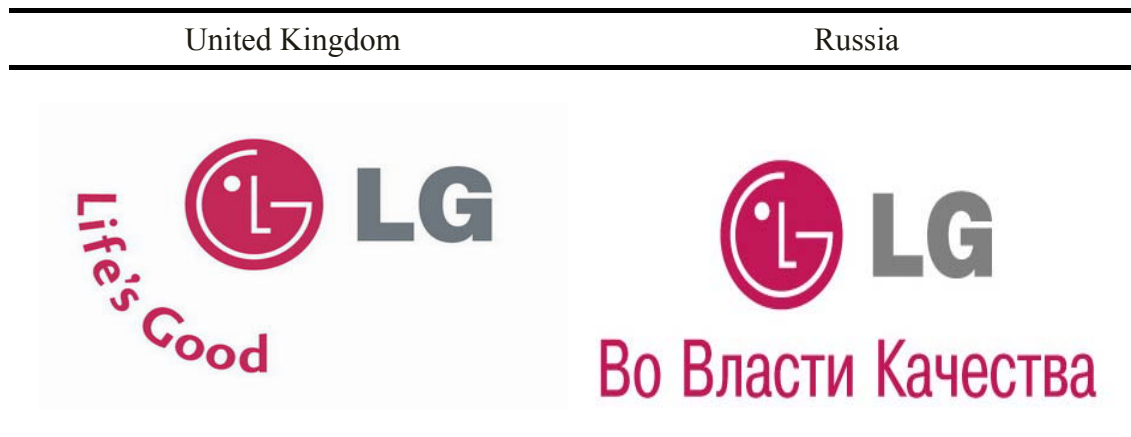


Figure 2  
Printed LG Ads for LCD Monitors Fantasy in the United Kingdom and Russia



Figure 3  
LG television ads for Plasma TV in the United Kingdom and Russia

1.



4.



2.



5.



3.



6.

