

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

Cultural distinctions nourished Europe's embrace of mobile

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Image courtesy of Michael Kors

By JEN KING

NEW YORK By not properly acknowledging slight cultural differences, even between Europe and the United States, marketers' efforts can be upended, according to an executive panel at ad:tech New York 2016.

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During the Nov. 3 session titled "A view from Europe: New advances that will shape our future," panelists discussed the similarities and differences between the European and U.S. markets, a dialogue that is often focused on Asia Pacific cultural norms ([see story](#)). By having a handle on individuals' behavior and the technology embraced in different regions, marketers may fare better when trying to make a connection or expand their reach.

"I'm a big fan of finding similarities, and not getting bogged down too much by differences," said Monika Schulze, global head of marketing at **Zurich Insurance**. "You have product strategy, brand strategy, business strategy and marketing strategy and if you're pretty sure what your brand stands for, you also have to look for the differences. But, the starting point is always similarities.

"Strategy is one thing, but execution, you have to be sensitive to a country's needs. There are big differences, even in Europe," she said. "If you look at the European Union, we have officially registered 24 different languages. You have to respect the differences [and] the psychology of the people."

Culture shock

Moderator Mark Cripps, executive vice president of branding and digital marketing at The Economist, kicked off the conversation stating that he feels Europe is a single, homogenous entity. As a result of Europe's singularity, the U.S.'s learned takeaway is nonexistent because the market cultures are too similar as it is with individual states.

Although pinpointing similarities in cultures has its benefits, and is often the starting point of an initiative, embracing differences can be a better marketing approach.

Coming from Europe, respecting and understanding of neighboring cultures is important, even if a brand is strongly represented and means the same to consumers regardless of borders.



Image courtesy of Bloomingdale's

Germany-based Zurich Insurance's Ms. Schulze explained that as a health insurance provider in 170 countries, the brand's meaning is the same regardless of locale. But, having a grasp on cultural differences impacts execution.

For example, in Germany 80 million consumers are native German speakers, but in neighboring Switzerland 8 million individuals speak four languages. Even at such a large-scale level, knowing which languages to develop communications in can help a brand better its positioning and create a connection that is authentic.

Also, localized communications can be vastly unifying, even if they are across social media platforms. Facebook for example is available in 24 European languages, but its interface is standardized.

Visual social channels such as Instagram also play off this because marketers do not need to rely on language to convey brand lifestyle.

"The hope is that with these new platforms, or these established platforms and technologies, that in fact, there is much more communication," said Jon Carney, CDO, [MRM McCann](#).

"Despite there being 24 official languages in Europe, everybody uses the same Facebook. YouTube is the same YouTube," he said.

"You see the rise of platforms which are specifically and uniquely visual, such as Instagram and Snapchat. Where it gives us the ability to delivery campaigns which don't rely on language in anyway whatsoever."

The Economist's Mr. Cripps asked panelists if localized and culturally aware strategy efforts are needed.

"Brands have never had more tools to show up in a relevant way," Mike Harp, [Facebook's](#) director of global accounts said in response. "Global brands are empowered now in ways to be consistent but also relevant. It is worth the effort, and it doesn't have to take a lot of work.

"But, you do need to revamp your planning and production process though to allow for that," he said. "First, starting off with a very clear set of brand ideals that are communicated, a business objective, enlisting your local markets in the process earlier so you know what their needs are and you know what the audiences' needs are."

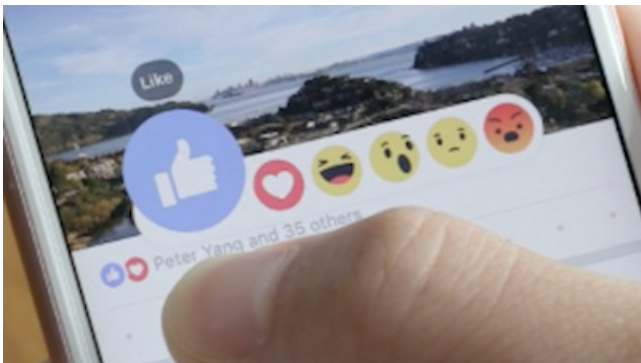


Image courtesy of Facebook

Global heterogeneity presents many obstacles for brands looking to maximize their share through localization efforts, according to a 2015 L2 report.

The share of ecommerce sales in the luxury industry has tripled since 2009 and is set to triple again by 2025, but obstacles such as currency, language, selection and payment method may make it difficult for brands to expand and capitalize on their reach. As social media, the Web and the development of BRIC, Asian, and Sub-Saharan Africa

in the future give brands more visibility, it is essential that they monetize global consumers ([see story](#)).

Mobile-first culture

Culture has impacted consumer behavior and attitudes toward technology, especially mobile device use for daily tasks.

European countries such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Romania, Finland and Belgium led in mobile payments, with the top 10 rounded out by Turkey and Israel. The U.S., and even the United Kingdom, do not place.

Consumers in Europe are also vastly more comfortable with mobile banking than their U.S. counterparts. Online banking is used by 66 percent of Europeans due to its advanced mobile culture.

Mobile use is stronger in Europe because of reasons outlined by Ross Sleight, CSO of Somo, during the panel.

Mr. Sleight explained that mobile has become a European normality due to a high percentage of retailers enabling payments via handheld devices and a high penetration of Android smartphones, optimal for built-in payments, and because much of Europe did not have the same desktop penetration the U.S. saw.

As a result, Central and Western European countries have developed a mobile-first culture where about 20 to 30 core tasks, done on a daily or monthly basis, are conducted on smartphones.

"It's very challenging for brands that still exist in the old world' to make that leap completely. It's not just about being mobile-first, it's about being mobile-only for these guys," [Somo's](#) Mr. Ross said.

"I believe that it comes down to behavior, it's not about vocation. It's ultimately about behavior," he said. "The point is, that if you give people the real quality-use cases, like mobile payments, mobile banking in the States is still decades behind where it will be in Europe in terms of functionality.

"If you give people functionality, they will utilize it and in doing so, they will become much more mobile-only. That's what we have to do. The U.S. needs to rethink how it does banking, one of four fundamentals things, besides social and communication, that people do on their mobile on a day-to-day basis."

1 thought on "Cultural distinctions nourished Europe's embrace of mobile"

1. Monika Schulze says:

[November 5, 2016 at 4:57 am](#)

Thanks for summarising our discussion, Jen.

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