

Engaging Audiences Across Cultures: Linguistic and Advertising Strategies of Volkswagen and Fiat

Nowadays, many international companies advertise their products and services on social media to reach diverse target audiences. To achieve successful communication with potential customers, companies need to adapt their advertising messages to the target audience's cultural values and communication styles. This research explores the linguistic solutions in advertisements of two car companies: Germany-based Volkswagen and Italy-based Fiat, targeting German and Italian customers. The study examines how these companies align their advertising strategies with the cultural values of their respective markets and how this influences online engagement from potential car buyers. In order to explore this relationship, the collected advertisements are analyzed from the semiotic perspective. Discourse and semiotic analysis demonstrate which cultural values (based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory) and brand-related qualities the companies render in their advertising through engagement language and various advertising strategies (such as celebrity endorsement and green advertising). The analysis of online customers' engagement (number of likes and comments) allowed for exploring the pragmatic effect of the linguistic and advertising solutions of Volkswagen and Fiat. The results revealed similarities and differences in the language and focus of the two companies' advertising. Both companies refer to specific cultural values (for example, long-term orientation). However, each company renders these values through different linguistic and advertising instruments. As for the pragmatics of the advertising language, specific linguistic and advertising solutions (such as engagement language and user-generated content) increased user activity. The research proves the importance of cultural sensitivity in international advertising, demonstrating that tailoring language and content to the preferences of the target audience is crucial for successful intercultural communication.

Keywords: intercultural communication, advertising, culture, discourse analysis

Zielgruppen über Kulturen hinweg begeistern: Linguistische und Werbestrategien von Volkswagen und Fiat

Heutzutage bewerben viele internationale Unternehmen ihre Produkte und Dienstleistungen auf sozialen Medien für diverse Zielgruppen. Um eine erfolgreiche Kommunikation mit potenziellen Kunden zu erreichen, müssen die Unternehmen ihre Werbebotschaften an die kulturellen Werte und den Kommunikationsstil der Zielgruppe anpassen. Ziel dieser Forschung ist es, die sprachlichen und werblichen Lösungen von zwei Automobilunternehmen - dem deutschen Volkswagen und dem italienischen Fiat - zu untersuchen, die sich an deutsche und italienische Kunden richten. Dabei wird analysiert, wie diese Unternehmen ihre Werbestrategien an die kulturellen Werte ihrer jeweiligen Zielmärkte anpassen und welchen Einfluss dies auf das Online-Engagement potenzieller Autokäufer hat. Um diese Beziehung zu untersuchen, werden die gesammelten Anzeigen aus semantischer und

pragmatischer Perspektive untersucht. Diskurs- und Semantik-Analysen zeigen auf, welche kulturellen Werte (basierend auf Hofstede's Theorie der kulturellen Dimensionen) und markenbezogenen Eigenschaften die Unternehmen in ihrer Werbung durch die Verwendung von Engagement-Sprache und verschiedenen Werbestrategien (wie z. B. Prominentenwerbung und Öko-Werbung) vermitteln. Die Analyse des Online-Engagements der Kunden (Anzahl der Likes und Kommentare) ermöglichte die Untersuchung des pragmatischen Effekts der sprachlichen und werblichen Lösungen von Volkswagen und Fiat. Die Ergebnisse zeigten sowohl Ähnlichkeiten als auch Unterschiede in der Sprache und dem Fokus der Werbung der beiden Unternehmen. Beide Unternehmen beziehen sich auf spezifische kulturelle Werte (z. B. langfristige Orientierung). Jedes Unternehmen vermittelt diese Werte jedoch durch verschiedene sprachliche und werbliche Instrumente. Was die Pragmatik der Werbesprache betrifft, so führten spezifische sprachliche und werbliche Lösungen (wie z. B. Engagement-Sprache und nutzergenerierte Inhalte) tatsächlich zu einer erhöhten Aktivität der Nutzer. Die Untersuchung belegt die Bedeutung kultureller Sensibilität in der internationalen Werbung und zeigt, dass die Anpassung von Sprache und Inhalt an die Präferenzen der Zielgruppe für eine erfolgreiche interkulturelle Kommunikation entscheidend ist.

Schlüsselwörter: interkulturelle Kommunikation; Werbung; Kultur; Diskursanalyse

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, international companies face the challenge of reaching diverse target audiences. Social media platforms like Facebook have become powerful advertising channels, allowing companies to connect with global audiences instantly (Clow/Baak 2010: 56). However, to effectively convince customers to make a purchase, companies must understand the cultural values, beliefs, and communication styles of each target audience (Mohsen/Eatidal/Konstantinos 2022: 598, connected to brand names see e. g. Gondek/Szczek 2018: 252, Kovács 2022: 78).

While existing research recognizes the importance of cultural elements in global advertising, there is a gap in understanding how these values translate into effective social media strategies (Margariti/Boutsouki/Hatzithomas/Zotos 2019: 2, Septianasari/Baihaqi/Abqoriyyah/Syaputri 2021: 74–76). The present research addresses this gap by examining the impact of cultural values on verbal and visual choices in automotive Facebook advertising targeting German and Italian audiences. We explore how cultural differences manifest in language, persuasion, and overall message delivery, as well as how these linguistic and advertising solutions influence the online engagement of customers. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do Facebook advertisements of Volkswagen and Fiat reflect cultural characteristics of the German and Italian cultures?
2. How do potential customers react online to different linguistic and advertising strategies used by the company?

This research aims to uncover the relationship between linguistic choices, cultural values, and audience engagement by comparing linguistic and advertising solutions across different audiences, providing insights into more effective cross-cultural advertising.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Advertising across Cultures: Adaptation and Standardization

In the field of international marketing, we can witness an ongoing debate lasting for more than 50 years: whether standardization or adaptation of advertising is the more effective approach (De Mooij 2010: 2, Xuenan/Zuohao/Zhiling 2016: 17). The supporters of standardization believe that the fundamental human needs, as well as the purposes of advertising, are universal and do not depend on a particular target audience (Gülmez 2019: 145–146, Pagani/Goldsmith/Perracchio 2015: 702). The opposite strategy – advertising adaptation – implies consideration of the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the target audience (Burton 2008: 117, Wang/Yang 2011: 26). In this research, we explore international advertising solutions through the example of two automobile companies operating in the global market: Germany-based Volkswagen and Italy-based Fiat.

The research focuses on how the target cultures – Germany and Italy – are represented in Facebook posts of the two companies. Advertisements are analyzed from the point of strategies and persuasive techniques used to attract attention and influence customers' decision-making. Below, we introduce the most common marketing strategies in social media advertising.

2.2 Social Media Advertising: Peculiarities and Strategies

This research examines the linguistic and cultural aspects of Facebook advertising, a dominant channel for brand promotion and customer engagement due to its widespread use (Abeza/O'Reilly/Reid 2013: 121). Facebook advertising, unlike traditional forms, allows for two-way communication, enabling companies to receive the audience's feedback through different metrics, such as likes, comments, and reposts (Koontz/Mon 2014: 272, Shouman 2020: 2). This interaction allows companies to understand customer needs and gather insights about advertised products.

In this paper, the linguistic and cultural differences reflected in the advertising of the two companies are analyzed in the view of online advertising solutions used for customers' engagement. Below, the use and effectiveness of some of the frequently used advertising tools are described in detail.

1. Green advertising, also known as sustainable or eco-advertising, is a marketing strategy that emphasizes a product or service's environmental benefits (Kao/Du 2020: 1). It aims to appeal to consumers' growing environmental consciousness and desire for sustainability.

2. Celebrity endorsement refers to engaging widely recognized personalities, such as actors, entertainers, and athletes, to endorse a range of products, services and ideas. According to several research works, participation of a celebrity increases the credibility of advertising and positively influences the engagement of the audience (Shouman 2020: 2).
3. Interactive marketing is a customer-centric strategy that emphasizes engaging with consumers through two-way communication channels to build relationships and create personalized experiences (Li/Bernoff 2011: 56).
4. User-generated content (UGC) is defined as “content posted by users on social networking sites” (Kurian/John 2017: 559). It involves users creating and sharing brand-related content, thereby fostering engagement and building brand advocacy.
5. Hashtag campaigns have become increasingly popular on social media platforms as an effective tool for promoting brand visibility and generating conversation (Zappavigna 2018: 26). A hashtag campaign involves the use of the symbol “#” followed by words or numbers referring to a specific topic; the campaign aims to encourage users to contribute related content (Bernard 2019: 70).

In this research, we consider the abovementioned strategies from the cultural perspective; therefore, it is important to introduce the cultural aspect in advertising.

2.3 Cultural Image of Italy and Germany

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory is a framework that helps to understand and analyze the cultural differences between different societies. It identifies six dimensions that can be used to explain how societies differ in terms of values, beliefs, and behaviors: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty

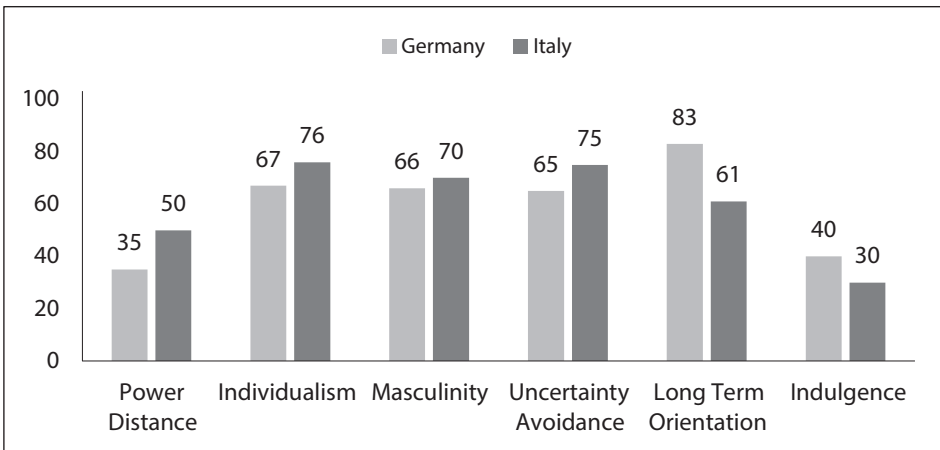


Fig. 1. Comparison of Hofstede’s dimensions of Germany and Italy (based on the scores by Hofstede 1980, Hofstede/Hofstede/Minkov 2010)

avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede 1980, Hofstede/Hofstede/Minkov 2010). Figure 1 demonstrates the scores of Germany and Italy on the six dimensions of Hofstede. This theory is particularly useful when studying the language of intercultural advertising because it provides insights into the cultural context in which consumers interpret and respond to advertising messages (De Mooij 2010: 14).

By applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, advertisers can develop more effective and culturally relevant campaigns, tailoring their language and imagery to resonate with specific audiences across the globe. Further, we will examine the connection between Hofstede's dimensions, engagement language, and specific marketing strategies used in Facebook advertising.

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Data Collection

The current research explores advertising strategies and the language of engagement in Facebook posts of Volkswagen and Fiat. For the analysis, we created a digital database of 96 German and 57 Italian posts of Volkswagen and 38 German and 50 Italian posts of Fiat, totaling 241 advertisements. The data collection was based on the continuous sampling method. All advertisements submitted within six months were gathered for analysis into a digital database and grouped according to the company and the target language/culture.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis focuses on examining both the form and content of language in order to understand how meaning is created and conveyed in various communicative contexts (Johnstone/Andrus 2024: 12). Applying discourse analysis to intercultural advertising, researchers can examine the linguistic strategies and features used by advertisers to engage and persuade consumers from different cultural backgrounds. This can involve exploring the use of language, such as the choice of words, phrases, and expressions, as well as the overall structure and organization of the advertising message.

According to Cook (2001: 219), advertisements rely on a network of semiotic elements, which work together through a multimodal approach to convey meaning. Therefore, in this research, advertising posts are analyzed from the point of linguistic features (words and phrases) and visual elements (such as imagery, colors, and visual symbols), which are related to the abovementioned advertising strategies. By analyzing these elements from the semiotic perspective, we explore the meaning conveyed by marketers, focusing on the representation of the target culture in the language of advertising.

3.2.2 Social Media Analytics: Engagement Metrics

By analyzing engagement metrics, such as likes and comments on posts or advertisements, marketers can assess how well their content is resonating with their target audience (Swani/Labrecque 2020: 280). This information can provide insights into what types of messaging, imagery, or promotions are most effective in driving engagement.

For the analysis, the average number of likes and comments was registered in the case of green advertisements, posts involving celebrities and user-generated content. Besides, in separate cases of interactive marketing, the online behavior of the audience was also taken into consideration.

4. Results

4.1 Advertising Solutions of Volkswagen

The advertising strategies of Volkswagen, as well as the general style and elements of the posts, varied in the case of German and Italian audience. Table 1 below demonstrates the number of German and Italian advertisements, in which different advertising strategies and tools were used.

Advertising solution	Number of German-language posts	Number of Italian-language posts
Hashtag campaign	95 (100%)	32 (56%)
Green advertising	24 (25%)	27 (47%)
Celebrity endorsement	2 (2%)	14 (25%)
Interactive marketing	76 (79%)	29 (50%)

Tab. 1. The use of advertising solutions in German and Italian advertisements of Volkswagen

Below, each mentioned tool is discussed in detail in the view of the use of language and Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

4.1.1 Hashtag Campaign

By incorporating the hashtags in advertisements, the company facilitates content search and underlines specific themes and features of the brand. Additionally, hashtags are used for increasing engagement and driving conversations on digital platforms, subsequently enhancing the effectiveness of advertising efforts (Zappavigna 2018: 26). Table 2 demonstrates the hashtags used in German and Italian advertisements of Volkswagen.

Hashtags (German)	Hashtags (Italian)
Name of the company	
#volkswagen (95 cases)	#Volkswagen (3 cases)
Name or type of the advertised model	
#vwtaigo (7 cases), #vwpolo (10 cases), #vwgolf (19 cases), #vwtauareg (5 cases), #vwttiguan (13 cases), #vwid4gtx (9 cases), #vwid5 (7 cases), #vwid5gtx	#ID3 (14 cases), #ID4GTX (14 cases), #GammaID (14 cases), #VWCalifornia (1 case), #VanLife (5 cases), #RealLife (1 case), #NuovoMultivan (1 case), #idbuzz

Hashtags (German)	Hashtags (Italian)
(6 cases), #vwtxcross (7 cases), #vwtxguanallspace (6 cases), #vwpassatGTEvariant (1 case), #vwupGTI (2 cases), #vwpologti (4 cases), #vwgolfvariant (4 cases), #vwtxroc (14 cases), #vwbulli (1 case), #vwidbuzz (1 case), #vwtxrocabriolet (2 cases), #vwgolfGTI (4 cases), #vwgolfgteskylight (1 case), #vwIDlife (2 cases), #vwtxrocabriolet (3 cases), #vwarteonehybrid (1 case), #vwgolfGTE (2 cases), #vwID4 (2 cases), #vwtxguanR (1 case), #vwID3 (1 case), #vwarteonshootingbrake (2 cases)	(4 cases), #vwidbuzz (1 case), #VWVanLife (2 cases), #VanLife (5 cases)
Hashtags related to significant events	
	#GiornataMondialeDellaNeve (1 case), #BlueMonday (1 case), #SpazioAllAmore (1 case), #SanValentino2022 (1 case), #FestaDeiSingle (1 case), #FestaDellaMamma (1 case)
Hashtags referring to specific advertising campaigns	
	#ElettricoPerTotti (14 cases), #ElettricoPerTutti (14 cases)

Tab. 2. Hashtags used in German and Italian advertising of Volkswagen

Some of the hashtags used on the Italian page of the company are associated with different cultural values. For example, *#SpazioAllAmore* ('space for love') refers to Saint Valentine's Day, and *#FestaDellaMamma* ('Mother's Day') reminds the audience about the importance of relationships, love and family bonds, reflecting Femininity and Collectivism.

Another example, *#ElettricoPerTutti* – 'electric for everyone', became a signature hashtag of the advertising campaign with the ambassador of Volkswagen Francesco Totti (an Italian football player). By incorporating this hashtag, the company underlined the importance of sharing the knowledge about electric mobility with the public and making electric automobiles available for everyone. Thus, the hashtag reflects Long-term orientation (environmental protection, care about future generations) and Low power distance (the idea of equality).

4.1.2 Green Advertising

Both German-language and Italian-language posts of Volkswagen contained visual and verbal elements related to environmentally friendly solutions of automobile manufacturing. Verbally, the company expressed its commitment to the environment by underlining the technical advantages of "green" models: *weniger Verbrauch* 'less consumption' (German), *kraftvoller E-Performance* 'powerful e-performance' (German), *meno emission* 'less emissions' (Italian), *semplicemente elettrizzante* 'simply electrifying' (Italian).

Another feature of Volkswagen's green advertising was raising the audience's awareness of different aspects of sustainability and e-mobility. For example, in one of the German-language posts, the company mentioned the Earth Hour – a worldwide event

dedicated to the protection of the environment. The visual part of the post included a video of a Volkswagen car switching off the headlights:

(German) *Habt ihr schon mal was von der „Earth Hour“ (heute 20:30-21:30 Uhr) gehört?*
 ‘Have you ever heard of the „Earth Hour” (today 8:30-9:30 p.m.)?’

Several Italian-language posts were united by a hashtag *#ElettricoPerTotti* “electric for everyone”, referring to the availability of electric mobility to the public. Another example of green advertising is the slogan *Volkswagen way to Zero*, which emphasizes the company’s constant development in sustainable technologies.

To summarize, both German and Italian campaigns emphasized concern about the environment, reflecting Long-term orientation. The green advertisements in the German language received an average of 387 likes and 75 comments, which did not exceed the average number of likes (423) and comments (91) per post. Italian-language posts, on the other hand, were liked and commented on 885 and 68 times respectively, which exceeds the average number of likes (685) and comments (60). The social media metrics demonstrate the increased attention of the Italian audience toward the features of sustainable car manufacturing in advertising.

4.1.3 Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrity endorsement is a marketing strategy, which uses the status and image of a celebrity for the promotion of the brand (Sufian/Sedek/Lim/Murad/Jabar/Khalid 2021: 1525). In German-language advertising of Volkswagen, celebrity endorsement was used in two posts.

In one of the advertisements, a German actor, Sebastian Koch, is depicted sitting inside and standing next to the electronic Volkswagen ID.4 GTX. The text of the advertisement implies that the celebrity prefers the advertised electric model of Volkswagen:

(German) *Schauspieler Sebastian Koch hat Spaß vor der Kamera. Im ID.4 GTX hat er eine ganze Menge davon. Warum Elektromobilität für ihn der richtige Weg ist, könnt ihr hier lesen.*
 ‘Actor Sebastian Koch has fun in front of the camera. In the ID.4 GTX he has a lot of it. You can read here why electromobility is the right way for him.’

Another post features a German musician and performer, Wincent Weiss. Similarly to the previous example, the post emphasized the importance of electric mobility and referred to the celebrity’s opinion about the use of sustainable technologies in automobile production:

(German) *Musiker Wincent Weiss schafft es nicht nur regelmäßig in die Charts, sondern mit dem ID.4 GTX auch in die eindrucksvollsten Ecken Norwegens.*
 ‘Musician Wincent Weiss not only makes it into the charts regularly, but also into the most impressive corners of Norway with the ID.4 GTX.’

Volkswagen’s Italian-language campaign featured football star Francesco Totti as brand ambassador, presenting electric mobility in a mini-series format. The campaign

emphasized the company's commitment to sustainable mobility, aligning with the dimension Low power distance and highlighting the accessibility of electric vehicles for everyone. Hashtags *#ElettricoPerTotti* and *#ElettricoPerTutti* reinforced the idea of equal access to sustainable mobility.

In both German-language and Italian-language advertising, celebrity endorsement was used to promote electric mobility. In German-language advertising, celebrity endorsement posts were liked 383 times on average and received 58 comments, which does not exceed the average number of likes and comments per post (423 and 91 respectively). In Italian-language advertising, the posts featuring Francesco Totti received the average of 1523 likes and 133 comments, which is higher than the average number of likes and comments per post (685 and 60 respectively).

4.1.4 Interactive Marketing

In Volkswagen's advertising, different linguistic and marketing techniques encouraged direct communication of the company with the audience. For example, in several cases, the caption of the post included rhetorical or thought-provoking questions:

(Italian) *Chi l'ha detto che prestazioni ed efficienza non possano convivere?*
'Who said performance and efficiency can't coexist?'

In another post, marketers addressed customers to learn about the audience's preferences in relation to the advertised white and red-color Volkswagen automobiles:

(German) *Welcher ist euer Favorit?*
'Which is your favorite?'

In both German and Italian advertising, marketers included games and challenges to increase users' interest and encourage commenting. For example, in one of the Italian-language posts, users were invited to guess the name of the advertised Volkswagen model only by the image of its headlights¹. The post, indeed, received 71 comments, which exceeds the average number of comments per post.

Similar "challenges" were found in several German posts of Volkswagen:

(German) *Zu wem gehören wohl diese eindrucksvollen 17-Zoll-Leichtmetallfelgen „Ventura“?*
'Who do you think these impressive 17-inch "Ventura" alloy wheels belong to?'

In several Italian posts featuring the ambassador of Volkswagen Francesco Totti, marketers offered games for the audience. In four of the collected posts, Francesco Totti was depicted holding a paper with several emojis. The task of the audience was to determine which feature of Volkswagen was encrypted by the emojis (such as the acceleration of

¹ Source: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenDE/photos/5329168957109812>, date of access: 28.10.2024.

the advertised model, its autonomy, and charging mode). An example below demonstrates how the convenient charging of the electric car is encrypted with the emojis of an electric plug, an automobile and a house:

(Italian) *Francesco Totti ti sfida ancora con delle nuove emoji per raccontare un altro modo efficiente per ricaricare ID.4. Senza troppi giri di parole.*

'Francesco Totti challenges you again with new emojis to tell you about another efficient way to top up ID.4. Without too many words.'²

This advertisement received 950 likes and 101 comments, which is higher than the average engagement numbers per post.

Call to action (CTA) was another frequently used verbal advertising strategy in both German and Italian posts. The company used two types of CTA: prompts referring to the company's webpage with more information about the advertised product or service and CTAs encouraging the customers for particular behavior or action. The following example demonstrates how CTA conveys the "masculine" value of being at the center of attention:

(German) *Losfahren und auffallen!*

'Drive off and get noticed!'

It is possible to conclude that interaction with the audience generally led to the increase in customers' engagement. In response to the company's prompts, questions and challenges, the users actively commented the posts and discussed the advertised automobile models.

4.2 Advertising Solutions of Fiat

In addition to the techniques used by Volkswagen, the advertising solutions of Fiat included user-generated content; celebrity endorsement strategy was not used by Fiat marketers. Table 3 demonstrates the frequency of advertising strategies and techniques used by the company for each target market.

Advertising solution	Number of German-language posts	Number of Italian-language posts
Hashtag campaign	30 (79%)	39 (78%)
Green advertising	17 (44%)	12 (24%)
User-generated content	–	13 (26%)
Interactive marketing	30 (79%)	37 (74%)

Tab. 3. The use of advertising solutions in German and Italian advertisements of Fiat

Further, the use of each advertising technique, their effect and the way they reflect cultural values are discussed in detail.

² Source: <https://www.facebook.com/VolkswagenIT/photos/a.241190629236569/5178248622197387/>, date of access: 28.10.2024.

4.2.1 Hashtag Campaign

Approximately 80% of German-language and Italian-language advertisements contained hashtags (see Table 4). In both cases, the hashtags indicated the name of the brand (*#Fiat*) or particular model (e. g. *#Eulyse*, *#FiatTipo*). At the same time, some hashtags referred to significant days and events (e. g. *#Muttertag22* ‘Mother’s day 22’), *#GiornataMondialeDelDisegno* ‘International Design Day’ or entire advertising campaigns (*#FiatSocialClub*).

Hashtags (German)	Hashtags (Italian)
Name of the company	
#Fiat (14 cases)	#Fiat (14 cases)
Name or type of the advertised model	
#Fiat500 (1 case), #New500RED (7 cases), #Fiat500 (12 cases), #PandaRED (3 cases), #TipoRED (1 case), #Eulyse (2 cases), #FiatTipo (3 cases), #FiatRED (1 case), #Fiat500XHybrid (3 cases), #500X (2 cases), #RED (1 case), #FiatGarmin (1 case), #PiùDolcevita (1 case), #Fiat500Hybrid (1 case), #500XPiùDolcevita (1 case), #500PiùDolcevita (1 case), #500 (1 case), #500ShadesOfRed (2 cases), #Fiat500e (1 case), #FiatPanda (1 case), #FiatEulyse (1 case), #Fiat500Elektro (1 case)	#Nuova500RED (6 cases), #Nuova500 (9 cases), #FiatTipo (1 case), #TipoRED (2 cases), #RED (2 cases), #Eulyse (3 cases), #PandaRED (1 case), #500hybrid (1 case)
Hashtags related to significant events	
#CES2022 (1 case), #Muttertag22 (1 case), #Fiatred-weeks (1 case), #anniversary (1 case), #100years (1 case), #Bocelli (1 case), #FiatLaPrimaByBocelli (1 case)	#CES2022 (1 case), #AlessandroVolta, #Birthday, #Elictrification (1 case), #AunTrattoUnaFiat, #GiornataMondialeDelDisegno (1 case), #SanValentino, #500SfumatureDiRED (3 posts), #TheSoundOfAnIcon, #Eurovision2022, #ESCita (4 posts), #dolcevitabydesign (1 case)
Hashtags referring to specific advertising campaigns	
#FiatGermany (1 case), #FiateCoins (1 case), #KIRI (1 case)	#FiatSocialClub (13 cases)

Tab. 4. Hashtags used in German and Italian advertising of Fiat

Some of the hashtags contributed to conveying particular cultural values related to the brand. For example, hashtag *#FiatSocialClub* used in Italian-language referred to a marketing campaign, in which the drivers of Fiat could share their stories and experiences connected with the brand. The hashtag can be referred to the value of Collectivism, as it encourages sharing experiences and unites the digital community of Fiat drivers.

Another example is connected to Short-term orientation, which was reflected through the idea of respect towards the company’s traditions and significant events. Hashtags *#anniversary* and *#100year* referred to the anniversary of Fiat 500 in Germany, thus demonstrating that respect to history and traditions of Fiat’s automobile manufacturing is an essential value of the company.

To summarize, while both Volkswagen and Fiat employ hashtags extensively, Volkswagen focuses on model identification, while Fiat uses hashtags to engage with different cultural values.

4.2.2 Green Advertising

For each target culture, Fiat demonstrated concern about the environmental risks resulting from car manufacturing and use. Prioritizing sustainable solutions in automobile production became the major idea of Fiat 500 RED advertising campaign. The company actively used the strategy of standardization: nine German and nine Italian-language posts representing Fiat RED contained identical messages and a similar image and were only different in terms of language. Posts including the features of green advertising underline the devotion of Fiat to creating a “better future” and the idea of “love for the planet”:

(Italian) *Accomodate e guida verso un futuro Migliore.*

‘Take a seat and drive towards a better future.’

(German) *Für den Planeten: Dein Fußabdruck der Liebe.*

‘For the planet: your footprint of love.’

In terms of the visual elements related to the idea of sustainability and electric mobility, it is important to underline the role of the red color. Since most of the collected posts demonstrated the innovative solutions of Fiat RED, the red color became the symbol of the company’s love for the planet:

(German) *Wir werden (RED) aus Liebe zu unserem Planeten. Denn wir glauben, Liebe kann #500ShadesOfRed haben.*

‘We become (RED) for the love of our planet. Because we believe love can have #500ShadesOfRed.’

The idea of love for the planet was rendered similarly in German and Italian language, through the standardized use of particular verbal and visual elements. The company’s orientation towards a green, sustainable future can be considered a reflection of the long-term orientated nature of Italian and German cultures. However, green advertising did not encourage customers’ activity. German-language posts received 170 likes and 8 comments on average, while Italian-language posts – 1895 likes and 135 comments, which is, in both cases, less than average.

4.2.3 User-Generated Content

A unique feature of Fiat advertising style was the frequent implementation of user-generated content. Out of 50 Italian posts of Fiat, 13 included photos taken by Fiat drivers, as well as the stories of their driving experience.

Each post involving user-generated content included a hashtag *#FiatSocialClub* referring to the idea of Fiat drivers sharing their experiences connected with the brand. Through customers’ stories, the company could underline specific features and values of the advertised models. For example, in one of the posts, a client emphasized that Fiat 500 serves as a bond connecting him with his father:

(Italian) *A casa, la 500 è la passione che lega me e mio padre. Prima con Rossella, una 500L del 1971, poi con Marina, la nostra Nuova 500!*

'At home, the 500 is the passion that binds my father and me. First with Rossella, a 1971 500L, then with Marina, our New 500!'

It is possible to say that through the story of a client, marketers emphasized the feminine and collectivistic features of the brand. The company highlighted that Fiat is a family-oriented car and demonstrated the popularity of the brand among the clients belonging to different generations.

Another example of user-generated content conveys the features of Masculinity: it underlines the attractive style of the car and the idea of being at the center of attention:

(Italian) *Riuscire a immortalare un'icona di stile è difficile. Poterne fotografare due è un lusso: grazie a (user's name) e la sua Nuova 500 per questo scatto pieno di stile.*

'Being able to immortalize a style icon is difficult. Being able to photograph two of them is a luxury: thanks to (user's name) and her Nuova 500 for this stylish shot.'

The value of Long-term orientation reflected through the idea of green solutions in the automobile industry was also rendered in a user-generated post:

(Italian) *Amo scoprire nuovi posti e sono felice di farlo con un'auto che rispetta l'ambiente!*

'I love discovering new places and I'm happy to do so with a car that respects the environment!'

The content created by costumers themselves increases the credibility of the company's message, as potential clients can view the brand from the current consumers' perspective (Djafarova/Bowe 2021). The engagement metrics analysis showed that user-generated content, indeed, increased the engagement of the audience. The posts featuring the first-hand stories and photographs of Fiat drivers received an average of 2979 likes and 135 comments, which exceeds the average visibility numbers per post (2276 likes, 152 comments).

4.2.4 Interactive Marketing

Reflecting Volkswagen's advertising solutions, Fiat used different methods encouraging interaction between the company and customers. One of the techniques was asking the audience rhetorical or thought-provoking questions:

(Italian) *Siete pronti per una breve lezione di storia Fiat?*

'Are you ready for a short Fiat history lesson?'

(German) *Wie fährst du in Richtung Zukunft?*

'How are you heading towards the future?'

Call to action as an advertising strategy was frequently used in both Italian and German posts of Fiat. The company addressed the audience directly to encourage them for action or to explore the benefits of the brand. Some of the advertisements aimed to increase customers' activity, for example, through commenting or "tagging" other users:

(Italian) *Quale momento romantico ti ha fatto arrossire dall'emozione? Scrivilo in un commento e tagga la persona con cui lo hai condiviso! #SanValentino.*

'What romantic moment made you blush with emotion? Write it in a comment and tag the person you shared it with! #Saint Valentine.'

In addition, Fiat marketers attempted to encourage the audience for socially responsible actions. For example, they emphasized that driving a Fiat allows customers make their own contribution to shaping a sustainable future, thus reflecting Long-term orientation.

Compared to Volkswagen, Fiat used less diverse ways of interaction with the audience. Besides, the interactive methods did not produce a significant effect on the customers' activity, as the number of comments remained below average.

5. Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that the two companies managed the adaptation of verbal and visual elements across cultures differently. While Volkswagen adapted its advertising and linguistic solutions to each target audience, Fiat often used standardized posts.

Both Volkswagen and Fiat extensively use hashtags in their advertising with varying purposes. While Volkswagen primarily uses hashtags to identify models, Fiat incorporates hashtags reflecting brand values like family and relationships, demonstrating a broader engagement strategy. Both companies actively employ green marketing, emphasizing sustainable technologies in manufacturing. However, Fiat specifically promotes a "better future" and emphasizes customer responsibility, aligning with a long-term cultural orientation focused on future generations (Kao/Du 2020). In addition to the abovementioned strategies, Volkswagen and Fiat actively use interactive marketing techniques. The analysis of the users' activity demonstrated that these techniques increase the engagement of the audience and encourage their online activity (such as commenting, tagging other users or sharing posts).

The unique marketing strategies of the companies were celebrity endorsement, used in Volkswagen's Italian and German advertising, and user-generated content, used in several Italian posts of Fiat. As demonstrated by social media engagement metrics, both strategies evoked positive response from the audience. While celebrity endorsement can create initial excitement and awareness (Sufian/Sedek/Lim/Murad/Jabar/Khalid 2021: 1525), user-generated content provides a more authentic and relatable connection, solidifying trust and promoting engagement (Kurian/John 2017: 560).

Answering the first research question – How do Facebook advertisements of Volkswagen and Fiat reflect cultural characteristics of the German and Italian cultures? – it is possible to say that Volkswagen showcased a greater use of culturally specific content, tailoring posts for German and Italian audiences. In contrast, Fiat frequently utilized standardized content, reflecting a uniform approach to its global marketing. Some of the frequently used cultural values translated through both companies' engagement language were Femininity, Collectivism, Long- and short-term orientation, and Low power distance.

Answering our second research question – How do potential customers react on-line to different linguistic and advertising strategies used by the company? – we can highlight that some of the advertising and linguistic solutions, indeed, increased on-line activity of the audience. Interactive marketing techniques, such as calls to action, games, and rhetorical questions, effectively increased customer engagement, encouraging commenting, tagging, and sharing. Additionally, celebrity endorsement in the German campaign of Volkswagen and user-generated content proved successful in eliciting positive audience responses. Green advertising, however, led to increased users' activity only in the case of Italian audience of Volkswagen.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of Volkswagen and Fiat advertisements reveals distinct approaches to addressing different target cultures. Both brands utilize similar strategies like hashtagging, green marketing, and interactive marketing; however, they differentiate themselves through unique verbal and visual elements. Specific techniques, such as interactive language and user-generated content, contribute to increased online activity; however, the reactions towards “green” advertisements and celebrity endorsement varied across cultures. The research highlights the complexity of cross-cultural advertising, emphasizing the need for international corporations to appeal to cultural values and employ effective advertising techniques to influence consumers' decisions.

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