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**WHITE PAPER**

**CROSS-CULTURAL MARKETING**

**– The Impact of Polish Culture On  
Marketing in Poland**

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## White Paper

# Cross-Cultural Marketing Strategies

## THE IMPACT OF POLISH CULTURE ON MARKETING IN POLAND

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## 1. Abstract

Poland appears to be an attractive consumer market, based on strong demand for consumer products during the past several years, after introducing free market economy instead of centrally-planned. Furthermore, as a result of European integration and globalization Poland becomes open, investors and consumers from all over the world show more interest in the country. Therefore, it is essential to realize that cultural differences play a very important role in achieving success in Poland marketplace.

The purpose of this report is to give an overview of Polish culture and Polish consumer behavior. Moreover, it may provide marketers with clues on how the culture may affect on marketing mix decisions and how the consumer perception of price looks like on Polish marketplace.

## 2. Introduction

The impact of culture on international marketing decisions is essential. When elaborating a marketing strategy, marketers use many marketing tools. One of the classifications, called 4P, is presented by *McCarthy*. According to him, the marketing mix deals with the way in which a business uses price, product, distribution and promotion to market and sell its product. Moreover, the marketing strategy needs to take into account the culture, consumer needs and expectations, shopping habits, buyers' behaviour of people from targeted country<sup>1</sup>.

Cross-cultural marketing is defined as the strategic process of marketing among consumers whose culture differs from that of the marketer's own culture at least in one of the fundamental cultural aspects, such as language, religion, social norms and values, education, and the living style. Cross-cultural marketing demands marketers to be aware of and sensitive to the cultural differences; to respect the right to culture by the consumers in various cultures and marketplaces, marketers should understand that they deserved the right to their cultures. If the marketers want to be the winners in the cross-cultural marketing they must create the marketing mix that meets the consumer's values on a right to their culture<sup>2</sup>.

Culture has a very significant impact on many domains of science- from anthropology and sociology to management. Hence many definitions have been created for the use of every discipline. For the needs of this article *culture* is defined as *customs, beliefs, art, music and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a certain*

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<sup>1</sup> Kotler (1994, 89)

<sup>2</sup> Bettman (1989, 40)

*time*<sup>3</sup>. The most important elements of every culture are: material life, language, social interactions, aesthetics, religion, education, and value system<sup>4</sup>.

Culture may have its sources in different aspects of human life such as: language, nationality, education, profession, group, religion, family, social class, corporate culture<sup>5</sup>. All these elements influence every member of a society and thus, during reciprocal interactions, culture is learnt and transmitted to others. Culture cannot be limited only to the sum of elements. It is an ongoing process of acquiring and transmitting those factors.

People say that culture on a world is becoming more and more similar because of rising income levels, communications and globalization of information. There are a lot of well-known global brands on a market like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Nike, and Reebok; however, it does not mean that people buying these products share the same values and beliefs all over the world. It shows only the fact that some products are universal. Only by cultural aspects can be explained the difference between eating and shopping habits for two countries with the same income per capita<sup>6</sup>. Although each country has different cultures, however, in Poland it is quite popular, especially for teenagers, to adjust the American Way of Life which might be one of the reasons why culture is becoming more similar.

An important fact for marketing consultants is that culture influences buyer behaviour. This is the essential task for them under the marketing concept. Consumers vary really strong in age, income, educational level, taste and mobility patterns. Thus, it is important to satisfy all consumer groups<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, people have different values and attitudes that also determine their choices. This is why predicting buyer behaviour without knowing the culture of a society is fairly impossible.

### **3. Polish culture**

#### **3.1 Language**

Language is a significant aspect in marketing and business communications. It is an important issue in advertising, as well as in negotiations. Language is a message transmitted by words, or by other nonverbal forms such as gestures, eye contact or other body movements.

Nowadays, in Poland lots of young people know foreign languages (mostly English and German), and even if they do not, they know some common and popular expressions from TV. It

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<sup>3</sup> Longman Dictionary of Contemporary British, 1987

<sup>4</sup> Kotabe, Helsen (2001, 109-121)

<sup>5</sup> Usunier (2000, p. 12)

<sup>6</sup> Bradley (1999, 139)

<sup>7</sup> Kotler (1988, 173)

can be used in commercials which are targeted to specific group of young, active, high-educated consumers. A good example is Nike's advertising campaign "Just do it". Because of this short message Nike was able to standardize its promotion campaign even in Polish media. Furthermore, slogans like "I'm lovin' it", "Connecting people", "Be inspired" are well-known among young people. What is worth noticing in advertising of some products in Poland, that luxury and branded products usually have foreign language slogans. For example for cars the preferable language is English or German, because with these products those languages are perceived to be more professional. For perfumes the best foreign language is French. This language is connected with luxury, beauty and an upper-class life. It is also possible to base the marketing strategy on a foreign brand. Poles prefer the brand names that are in a language of country-of-origin.

Another important aspect is language in negotiations. In fact, Poland does not have its own negotiation style. Usually, negotiation styles are adopted from Western neighbours. However, some things should be pointed out. When doing business in Poland a firm handshake with good eye contact is important. When meeting or departing from a group, people should ensure that individual contact is addressed separately rather than a wave for the group. Moreover, when considering Hofstede dimensions, Poland is classified as a country with High Power Distance. Hence, Poland is rather formal and hierarchical culture. As a result first names are rarely used initially in the business context. On business meetings people should address Pan (Mr.) and Pani (Mrs.) plus the surname.

### 3.2 Social system

The sociocultural system consists of education, demographic, political system, economic system and health system. During the last 15 years a lot of things have changed. Now all goods are available and there are no empty shelves in shops anymore<sup>8</sup>. After years of communism, Poles still try to benefit from their new opportunities as much as they can: spending the weekends in a shopping mall is preferable and really popular in Poland.

From Central and Eastern economies, Poland has very attractive business environment and its economy is developing fast<sup>9</sup>. Nowadays, many Poles use modern technology, e.g. mobile phones (42%), laptops and PCs (26%), internet (20%). About 72% of Polish people do their shopping in supermarkets; also a lot of them use internet banking. But on the other side, 42% of Poles say that they cannot fulfil their basic needs. Despite of this, people buy products with expensive brands even if they cannot afford them. In Poland it is difficult, but not impossible, to observe a class structure. Monthly salary is around €500 and 94% of all people who pay taxes do not earn more than €7,400 per year<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Undefined, *Poland's marketing paradox. Brand Strategy*. London: Feb. 2004. p. P.56

<sup>9</sup> Tiusanen, Kellens (2000, 15)

<sup>10</sup> Undefined, *Poland's marketing paradox. Brand Strategy*. London: Feb. 2004. p. P.56

Every social class has different consumption behaviour; a fact that has to be taken into consideration. In Poland, the dominant social class is the lower class; the next is the middle class and then there is the upper class. This social class structure is not good, neither for economy nor for companies.

People from varying social classes have different buying behaviours. Generally, the upper class is a target group for companies that offer financial investments, expensive cars and clothes. The middle class is interesting for shops with house equipment. Lower classes are potential clients for gutter press and tacky plastic house decorations<sup>11</sup>.

The social class structure has also a huge influence on a brand's positioning. For example, brands like Lipton or Jacobs Kroenung are normal brands in Western Europe, but in Poland they are seen as premium ones. Lipton is the leader on the market (33%) and "it enjoys the leader's position because its premium unit price is not a barrier for people with aspirations to the European lifestyle"<sup>12</sup>. And this is the kind of paradox that Poles for whom brand image is really important will choose more expensive international brands even if Polish products have the same quality. In Poland foreign brands are connected with better quality and modern lifestyle. One of the best examples is popularity of Mercedes. Only in Germany the number of these cars on roads is bigger. Of course, in Poland they usually are aged about 15 or more years. But from the other hand, Poland is a country with an 18% of unemployment; that is why buying Polish brands is seen to have positive impact on economy<sup>13</sup>.

The age, social class and incomes have a huge influence on buying habits. The majority of Poles think that on the Polish market there is enough supply of high quality products with a not too high price. This attitude is held by 71% of housewives and 69% of managers, but 40% unemployed people do not have this same opinion. This point of view is connected with incomes; the higher the incomes are the more people think that prices are not too high. About 29% of Poles never buy high quality product because they are too expensive for them but on the other hand, 6% of people buy only this kind of products even if prices are too high for them.

About 9% of Polish households are young and single. This is a target group for companies which offer cars, modern high technology systems and travel agencies. Young marriages without children (10% of households) have got usually better incomes than singles, because both of them work. This is a group that usually buys furniture and house equipment. Young marriages with children amount about 17% and they look on their children needs. They are the main target group for companies offering insurances and products for children. Middle age marriages with children represent 23% of households and usually they have got more

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<sup>11</sup> Przybyłowski, Hartley, Kerin, Rudelius (1999, 133)

<sup>12</sup> Undefined, *Poland's marketing paradox. Brand Strategy. London: Feb. 2004.* p. P.56

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. P.56

money than young marriages with children. This group usually buys house equipment. Marriages in middle age without children amount to 20% and usually, they have got a lot of money. They are the target group for companies that offer expensive house equipment and cars.

Old people represent about 13%. They are a target group for companies that offer medicines and medical services<sup>14</sup>.

Marketing research looking for historical and sociological background of a society has a chance to affect positively the success of sales campaigns. However, in Poland, marketing agencies still have problems understanding differences between targeting groups. They mostly ground their knowledge on stereotypical image of a Polish receiver. It means that again the majority of receivers are put into a stereotype based on statistical data and the results of polling surveys.

As it can be perceived through the examination of adverts, the most typical Polish consumer is: anti-feminist, materialistic, traditional, romantic, family-oriented, and lacking an abstract sense of humor. There are plenty of examples of advertisements which overuse these statistically derived features; they take for granted the acceptance of the typical audience and what is (unfortunately) not surprising, they rarely fail. One of these is the latest advert for *Okocim* beer, targeted at young men between the ages of twenty five and forty who have an average family life, average income and simple needs, in other words, polling stereotypes. The image of a woman presented in this advert continues the vicious stereotype of “the little woman” – a silly, boring nag from whom a “real man” should escape from time to time. The producer simply used the deeply-rooted topos of “male rationality vs. female stupidity”, and through denigrating women, gained the approbation of most of the male audience.

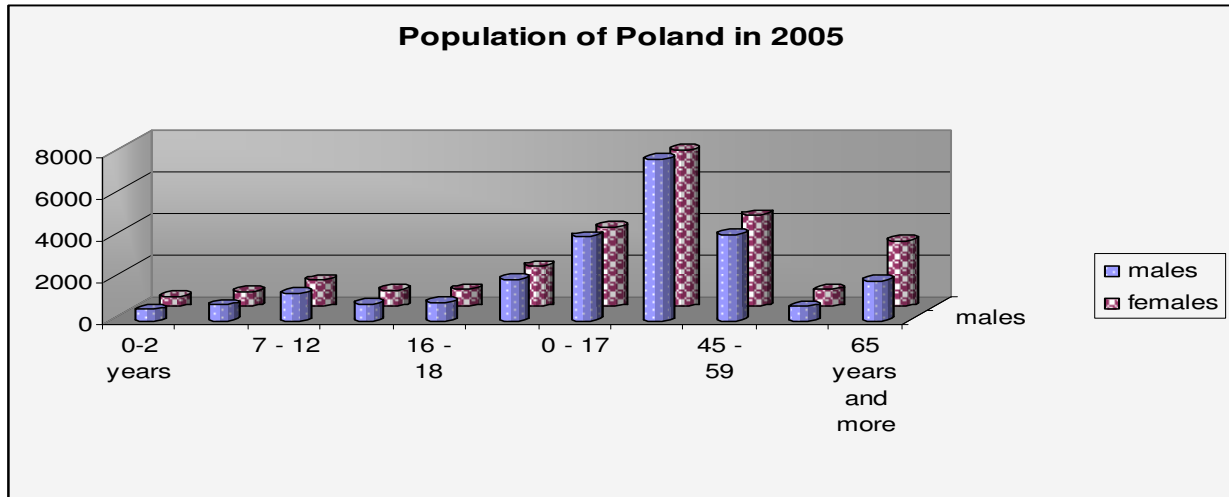
The results of polling surveys establish the stereotyped picture of the society which is then translated into commercial images, and, as follows, reinforce stereotypes already present in the consciousness of the audience. A relationship between reality and advertisement might be considered in terms of the following syllogism: Polish advertisements are simple because the society is simple, but the society is simple because advertisements foster simplification. It is a kind of a vicious circle which cannot be broken without courage on the part of the producers to undertake a risk of novelty.

### **Age and health care**

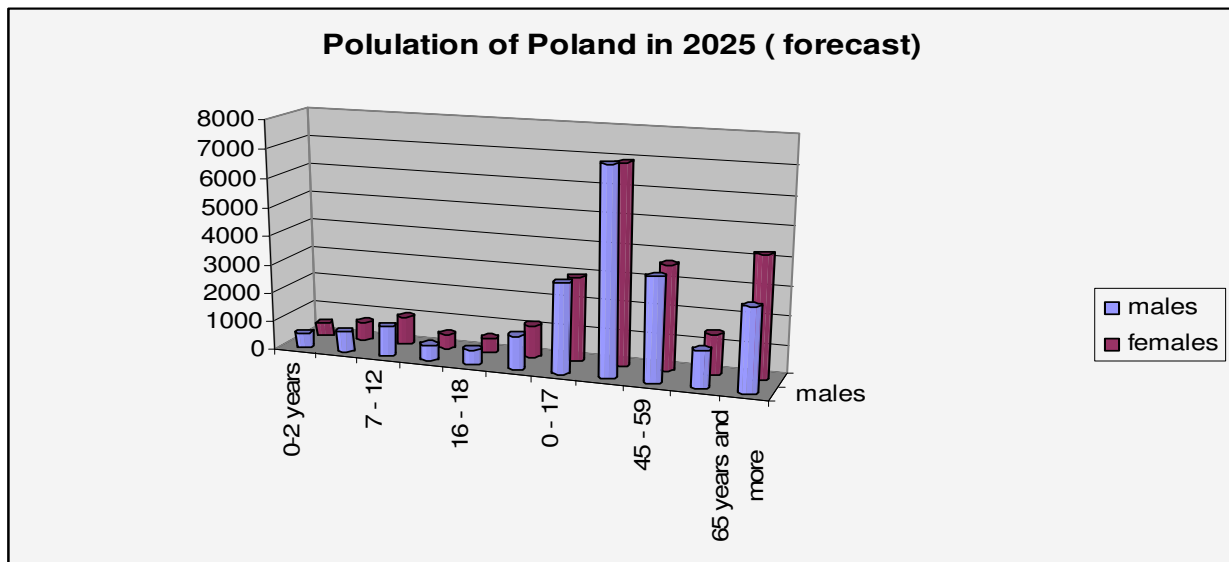
Another crucial indicator of advertising perception is the age rate. The structure of population in Poland in 2005 and a forecast for 2025 are presented on diagrams below.

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<sup>14</sup> Przybyłowski, Hartley, Kerin, Rudelius (1999, 130)



Source: Central Statistical Office, Poland



Source: Central Statistical Office, Poland

Older people are still used to the former lifestyle and way of thinking under communism, which actually means having no lifestyle and the surrender of independent thinking. Since they were brought up with the totalitarian system making decisions on their behalf, they find it difficult to accept abstract messages which require interpretation. Productions targeted at these groups of people have to be realistic, simple, and clear.

Multivalent or symbolic adverts might be directed only to a younger audience, as older generations do not want to cope with the uneasy challenge of ambiguous jokes, horror scenes or any kind of obscurity. The audience between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five treats advertisement as the integral element of TV broadcasting and is more open to its innovations.



Health system in Poland is widely available but because of several unsuccessful reforms and sustained lack of money, sometimes Polish patients do not have access to the newest medical technologies. It may have a big influence on an average age. In Poland the average age is 36.43 years, and fatality rate amounts to 10.01 demises per 1000 inhabitants.

The social security system is not perfect. Since Polish government does not give enough support to young mothers the birth rate is quite low and amounts to 10.78 per 1000 inhabitants. It is a big opportunity for medicine producers as well as for health care service. These are not good news for baby food and similar product producers.

This decreasing rate is also a result of a high unemployment, because young Polish women are afraid of losing their jobs. Also young people cannot afford having a child because the unemployment rate is the highest among young people.

### Education

Educational level is really important for marketers. Today, Polish consumers are becoming more and more conscious of how advertisement works. However, this consciousness can be reserved to isolated groups of educated people. Since only 7,6 % of people in Poland have a higher education, advertising agencies, seeking the widest possible audience comprehension, are forced to favour those parts of society who have either basic education or none. This is caused because of fact that most uneducated people trust adverts, yet at the same time they are the most vulnerable group to the advertising persuasion. While educated people, who are able to appreciate the artistic and technological dimension of advertising, tend to be less prone to its persuasive meaning, and more demanding<sup>15</sup>.

### 3.3 Religion

Religion is a really important aspect, because it is a critical element in every culture. Religion affects individual behaviour by its rules<sup>16</sup>; "Most cultures find in religion a reason for being"<sup>17</sup>. For example, in Poland it is easy to see that, especially in the older generations, the worst thing that can be done to people is to offend their religious feelings.

About 96% of Poles are Catholics. Hence, due to intense religiousness and perhaps the influence of the church, commercials in which product or the character of the commercial is Polish are given preference<sup>18</sup> – especially when the target group are old people, or people with elementary or secondary education.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.tns-global.pl/archive-report/id/1365>

<sup>16</sup> Undefined, *Consumption and marketing in Japan*, p. 268-276

<sup>17</sup> Czinkota, Ronkainen (1990, 140)

<sup>18</sup> Barkany, *The influence of globalization on Polish consumer attitudes*, p. 85-89

On the other hand, teenagers and people around thirty years are not as religious as older people and they like controversial commercials. During the last few years it is easy to see that the youngest generation does not care about religion and Church. The Church leaders opinion is not important for them and does not influence their buyer behaviour. It is paradox that despite of increasing religion indifference, and seeing religion important during Christmas or other religious events like weddings, christenings or funerals, more and more companies decide to make a commercial with a religious overtone, counting on attention and even indignation of religious people.

In Poland, major holidays are connected with religion. Poles do not really celebrate their national holidays, and thus, these days do not have an influence on buyer behaviour. However, like in most Western cultures during Christmas time, Poles spend a lot of money for gifts. It is the time when the major advertisements campaigns are targeted. Nowadays it is really popular in Poland to take a loan for Christmas. Furthermore, Poles are convinced that they are an exceptionally hospitable nation and like to be confirmed of this. And not without reason: In the past it was often said "A guest in the home, God in the home", which meant that a guest had to be offered all the best things available especially during Christmas time when family and friends come with visits. Hence, nowadays you can hear the expression "Go into debt, but do it in style". Therefore, Christmas period is good not only for goods but also for banks. So it is a time when demand for loans is really high. Of course banks that are operating on the Polish market noticed this opportunity, and now just before Christmas time there is a huge range of offers to choose from.

### 3.4 Value system and attitudes

"Much of the human behaviour depends on a values and attitudes. Our values and attitudes help to determine what we think is right and wrong, and what is important and what is desirable"<sup>19</sup>. Attitudes are evaluations of alternatives based on values<sup>20</sup>. Values have a really big influence on buyer behaviour; basic values children are learning from their society and family<sup>21</sup>.

The Polish attitude to advertising differs from the experience in other countries. As a consequence of their strong patriotism, the most popular mediums are those which emphasise national values. The most important Polish national values are as follows: language, history, traditions and religion. There have been many examples from history when Poland was under oppression<sup>22</sup>. Researchers in Poland have found out that national pride is influencing

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<sup>19</sup> Bradley (1999, 146)

<sup>20</sup> Czinkota, Ronkainen (1990, 141)

<sup>21</sup> Kotler (1988, 175)

<sup>22</sup> Barkany, *The influence of globalization on Polish consumer attitudes*, p. 85-89

consumer behaviours<sup>23</sup>. Empirical research shows that consumers have been purchasing domestic products for their daily necessities, due to lower prices and patriotism. Over 60% of Polish consumers claim that when purchasing products it is an important fact whether the product is Polish or not<sup>24</sup>.

The improvement in quality of domestic products increases the willingness of consumers to purchase Polish brands, especially the ones for everyday use. Polish people try to support the Polish economy. Moreover, consumers are buying products based on price and quality, and not just because the product is of Western origin.

When buying a luxury product, Poles pay big attention to the country of origin. For example it is really important for them where wine was produced and bottled. The quality of a product is important for people but only if the price is not too high. Main factors that make Poles to decide to buy a particular product are price (85%), quality (77%), product that is safe for environment (30%), well-known producer or brand (24%), product made in Poland (23%), family's or friend's opinion (17%), and packing (7%). Usually, customers depend on customer affluence, which is why for the poorest people such factors like country of origin or brand are not as important as price.

An empirical research shows that Poles have a more collectivist orientation. It said that communism in Poland left "strong association link between individual citizens"<sup>25</sup>, and that is the way it promotes and influences on a collectivist values.

Poles have high score of uncertainty avoidance. It reflects an anxiety about the future and is synonymous with insecurity. The fact that this score is so high is connected with Poles' feeling of permanent instability connected with sustained transformations and political changes during the last fifteen years<sup>26</sup>.

Collectivism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance have a huge impact on predicting the reactions to ad appeal. For example societies who are more individualistic prefer commercials with high information levels. Countries that score high power distance put more attention to the brand images. It was also shown that collectivism societies prefer collectivist brand name strategies that show group membership and benefits that are a result from affiliation. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance respond more amenable to communication that offers exact and logical information of how to reduce perceived uncertainty<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Mussey, *Buyers want better value in Europe*, p. 1-18

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.tns-global.pl/archive-report/id/1453>

<sup>25</sup> Lepkowska-White, Brashear, Weinberger, *A test of ad appeal effectiveness in Poland and the United States: The Interplay of Appeal, Product, and Culture*, p. 57

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem; p. 57

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem; p. 57

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, when elaborating a marketing strategy for Poland, marketers should deeply examine the market, putting huge attention on Polish culture, shopping habits, values and beliefs of Poles. It is not easy to establish target groups which have the same ideas and similar shopping habits on other markets.

However, marketers should realize that Polish consumers are becoming more and more conscious about price and quality. The brief summary of Polish culture may give hints for marketers and people interested in Polish economy.

Moreover, consumers' ethnocentrism, country of origin and product necessity influence product quality perceptions of Polish consumers. It is interesting to note, that Western companies trying to launch and promote their "everyday use" products should not promote their country of origin, due to the national pride of Polish people and their price consciousness when shopping for "necessary products". The majority of Poles still perceive Western products with higher prices. Therefore, companies wishing to market "non-necessary", luxury goods to Poles should promote the country of origin.

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**For further information, please do not hesitate to contact us:**

ClusterStar KG  
Werderstr. 1  
86159 Augsburg  
Germany

Office +49 (0) 821 26 12 084  
Cell +49 (0) 176 213 003 52

E-mail: [service@clusterstar.com](mailto:service@clusterstar.com)  
Skype: clusterstar

[www.clusterstar.com](http://www.clusterstar.com)