



**Global  
Propaganda**

**Creativity across borders,  
a new approach**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent years globalisation and technological progress have changed the environment of advertising dramatically, bringing great opportunities but also new challenges. One of the biggest challenges is how to advertise across different languages and cultures.

### 1.1. The new environment

Translating international advertising campaigns is a relatively recent problem, however its scope and complexity has increased exponentially in the past five to ten years and the main reasons for this evolution can be identified as follows:

#### 1.1.1. The multicultural nature of a global market

If post-globalisation markets are significantly bigger and more attractive than the old home market, these are also infinitely more complex. When going global, a brand has to become multilingual and multicultural. Each market has special requirements and will perceive a brand in a different way. In each market the brand will have a different positioning in consumers minds dictated by the context of culture, language, history of the brand, competition, etc.

#### 1.1.2. The atomisation of the media

The first multinational brands could afford to tackle local markets one by one with local agencies using local creative work developed after certain guidelines, and they could easily reach their target market via a very limited and centralised number of mass media.

With the advent of satellite, cable, the Internet, and so on, the media has become very atomised and specialised making it difficult and expensive for brands to communicate effectively with their target audience.

International travel, mass tourism and the Internet have practically deleted borders, making cross-border branding discrepancies apparent and increasing the level of consumer expectations.

#### 1.1.3. Increased competition and expectations

If globalisation has made the market bigger, it has also made it more crowded with competitors. Therefore, if access to new markets is a great opportunity for a brand, access to its home market by an army of new foreign competitors is a threat for its home market share.



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Big companies are in a dilemma. For some of them the only way to keep growing is to expand abroad, though this means taking on the challenges of cross-cultural communication. But the arrival of new competitors on the home turf entails a greater need to defend the brands at home with outstanding communication and a level of quality in the products and services able to compete with foreign entrants. The likely result of this process is that the total target market of each company will be more multilingual and that the share of the target who are speakers of the same language spoken in the home market of the company will shrink.

Given the nature of globalisation, cross-cultural communication will therefore become a way of life for brands, and very often the only way to survive.

#### **1.1.4. The interactive nature of new media**

The Internet and the new media are responsible for another major shift in the brand-consumer dialogue.

In the past the only information consumers had over a brand came through TV and radio ads, printed material and little more. The possibilities of feedback were very limited, and the interaction was limited to a few postal exchanges. The communication was very much one-way. As a consequence, in order to know more about their target audience, companies had to interview samples of people in the street and at home or organise focus groups. It would take a long time to gather the information. The Internet has brought brands in the era of two-way communication. Websites have become one of the privileged sources of information about brands. Consumers have become accustomed to interacting with the brand, writing emails, volunteering information, shopping online. This dialogue helps companies know their audience much better, but the audience has come to expect very high standards in service, speed of response, and quantity of information.

#### **1.1.5. Budget limitations**

Moreover, all these changes and increased expectations have taken place in a context of falling advertising budgets, thus forcing brands to rethink their communication in terms of greater efficiency and increased return on investment.



## 1.2. The consequences of the changes

### 1.2.1. Brand communication in the two-way dialogue global market

The first consequence of globalisation and of the Internet revolution is the booming amount of content production needed to feed a continuous stream of two-way communication dialogues in several languages.

The old days of one-way mass communication are truly over. In the past choice was more limited both in terms of brands and media, people were more receptive to mass communication, since it was new and exciting, and the message was trusted just 'because it was on TV'. The message was also seen as more reliable because the values it expressed were usually shared by consumers, as they were produced by their own culture for that culture. Over the years trust has been eroded and choice in brands and media has increased. Consumers have learnt how to chase for information to make more informed decisions. As Antonio Bueno García (2000:37, our translation) put it "the receiver transformed into an active information seeker". This new kind of proactive consumer is also known as *prosumer* and, as Marian Salzman (2003:196) explains "prosumers not only seek out information and opinions prior to purchase, they are marketing savvy and demand that retailers, marketers and manufacturers are aware of their value as consumers and treat them accordingly".

The Internet has become one of the prosumer's favourite tools to gather information about brands and products. In recent years, when global companies and their online advertising agencies started creating international websites, they had to go through a steep learning curve. Very often they had to learn the do's and don'ts of international communication the hard way. Communicators also had to learn that multi-language online strategy is about more than translating a website into a handful of languages. It is about meeting global business objectives by tuning into the cultural dynamics of the local markets, in other words the world of commercial communication discovered the Skopos theory. On the Internet, the interaction between consumer and brand is the longest of all media and on average visitors to a website spend several minutes interacting with a brand, compared to few seconds for TV, radio and press ads. This means that the content provided comes under much closer scrutiny, therefore any error or gaffe is a lot more likely to be picked up.



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The need for greater information is also dictated by the fact that brands have acquired greater importance in the life of the consumer. Brands are chosen according to the values they stand for; they have become a political choice. Choosing a brand is the equivalent of casting your vote and, in order to be sure that you are voting in accordance to your beliefs and values, you will have to gather as much information as possible on the brands you can choose from.

The Internet helps in this situation. People can find many answers on websites, and when they do not, they send an email to the company (or call the free phone number) asking about a certain issue. The company is expected to reply, and often in real time. Failure to do so could alienate the consumer. If the issue is recognised as important by the brand, then a correction in the communication will be brought to the website as a result.

What used to be the communication in pre-Internet times, i.e. the advertisements, is now only considered a starting point for a discussion, a statement of intent, which is up for negotiation with the consumer.

Communication is an ongoing two-way process. The fact that this two-way process takes place in a global environment means that the brand is expected to be able to carry out its dialogue with the consumers in their own language: after all no politician would dream of asking you for your vote in a language other than the one you speak, since only in your language will they be able to truly reach you and persuade you. The same applies to brands.

In foreign markets, respect is measured in accordance to the effort that each brand shows in understanding the local culture. And respect is just the prerequisite a brand has to earn to gain the right of engaging into a dialogue with the local target.

## **1.2.2. Creative and communication process not adapted for an international target**

Here is a very simplified portrait of the traditional creative process: At the centre of the creative process lies the Creative Director who is in control of the whole creative process, from the briefing to the output of the campaign. If the brief lacks information, he may require some extra clarifications from his client or his planners then he interprets what the client wants and thinks of a way of conveying the message to the target audience. This is followed by the phase of approval/negotiation of the idea with the client, and then by the production and implementation of the campaign. The Creative Director is then able to decipher and assess the feedback directly and immediately, the results appear clear and



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obvious straightaway and praise, or blame, can be attributed with a certain level of certainty.

This approach breaks down when it comes to international campaigns. The Creative Director finds himself in front of unfamiliar cultures. Even if a brief is very detailed and complete with regard to the consumers of a foreign country, he will lack the cultural parameters to evaluate the data and the expectations in their context. He may fail to ask questions and clarifications because they do not even occur to him. What are vital issues in a foreign market are irrelevant to him. External consultants might warn him about the most obvious pitfalls, but he will never have the ease and confidence of perception that he enjoys in his home market: the Creative Director and his team suffer from a knowledge deficit. Since they cannot produce a campaign with the full awareness of its potential effect, their communication becomes disempowered, and the creative leadership is exposed to criticism and challenge by local agencies and markets. At this point the traditional process can follow two routes: either the campaign is developed as if it were for the home market and then translated and adapted for the foreign market by translators and localisation specialists (a similar approach to the one predicted by David Ogilvy back in 1983 in his book *Ogilvy in Advertising*), or the creative work is carried out by different creative teams in each of the relevant markets. Let's analyse them in detail:

## *a) The centralised approach*

In this case the Creative Director, and the client too, feel reassured because they are acting within known territory, only to risk big disappointments when the campaign is launched in foreign markets: the Creative Director and his team could end up creating content which, with a better awareness of the target market, they would never release. Additionally, this approach entails that the creation of the foreign campaign is totally entrusted to an external translator, whose work will be difficult to evaluate by the Creative Director and which could, therefore, not be in line with what the client wants. Traditionally, to overcome this problem, the evaluation and final approval is performed by the client's country managers, but this practice is fraught with dangers: country managers can evaluate if the language is correct, but they do not have the wider picture of the whole campaign and lack the sensitivity that a professional creative/copywriter has to tell a good translation from a great translation. They might also disagree with the corporate line and try to tweak the message to suit them. Moreover, relying on the client (the country manager is also the client) for linguistic feedback and cultural consultancy can make both the Creative Director



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and the client nervous for fear of repercussions, and it gives the client an extra chance to judge the agency.

Additionally, translating a ready-made campaign into a foreign language places an unreasonable burden on the translator. He is considered sole responsible of the success or failure of a campaign in a given market, even when that specific market's needs and culture were not considered during the creation of the campaign in the first place.

## *b) The decentralised approach*

In this case, brand and message consistency are at risk and the result might alienate the client who can feel that certain markets have strayed too far from the core values of the brand. But there are worse implications to the decentralised approach. Not only does the implementation of a single big idea become practically impossible - thus totally undermining the creative leadership - but because of what we will call the '*primadonna effect*' (creatives from different local agencies squabbling about the superiority of their ideas), local creative teams will be very reluctant to recognise such leadership. Local centrifugal forces will tend to make an overall control of the campaign practically impossible. In the end it becomes difficult for the lead agency to determine who is responsible for what. According to campaign results, there is a serious chance that a client might envisage a change of lead agency, albeit within the same network, and this is a result that no agency aspires to.

## **2. A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS**

What we have seen so far indicates that a new radical approach needs to be envisaged, allowing the creative and communicative process to be nimble, reactive, multilingual and multicultural, and last but not least economically viable.

We have designed a new way of handling international advertising campaigns that we believe achieves the requirements of modern international advertising campaigns. Our approach can be summarised as follows:

1. Prioritisation of communication according to the principles of the *Skopostheorie* as defined by H. Vermeer.
2. Integration of the *trans-creator* in the creative process.



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3. Usage of the Internet to understand the target audience.
4. Synergised integrated communication on all media.
5. Centralised co-ordination of multilingual communication with the help of trans-creators.

A consequence of this approach will be the convergence of the various national sub-brands towards a global brand, which can be built in the very space that advertising can create, i.e. the space of imagination. But before going any further, let's see our approach in detail:

## **2.1. Application of *Skopostheorie* to the translation of advertising**

If we slightly modify Vermeer's definition of translation (1987:29) for the subject of our paper: "to translate *advertising* means to produce an *ad* in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances". Note that Vermeer's definition makes no mention of the source text. In fact, for him, as well as for us in advertising, the source text is nothing else than "an offer of information". Explaining Vermeer's theory of the purpose or *Skopostheorie*, Nord (1997:11) indicates that "Vermeer considers translation to be a type of transfer where communicative verbal and non verbal signs are transferred from one language into another". She also outlines "that this transfer contains an intention while being part of a situation. Since situations are embedded in cultures, any evaluation of a particular situation, of its verbalized and non-verbalized elements, depends on the status it has in a particular culture system." We believe that Vermeer's approach is key in the field of cross-cultural advertising. We believe it fully satisfies the needs of the advertising world in opposition to, for instance, Toury's definition of translation (1980:17): "Translation is communication in translated messages within a certain cultural-linguistic system, with all relevant consequences for the decomposition of the source language, the establishment of the invariant, its transfer across the cultural-linguistic border and the recomposition of the target message". In cross-cultural advertising the problem would be the *establishment of the invariant*, since in many cases there would not be such thing when translating marketing communications. The key message an advertiser wants to communicate to one culture/market is not necessarily the key message the advertiser wants to communicate to another culture/market. Therefore Vermeer's more functional and flexible approach to translation is what cross-cultural advertisers need.



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## 2.2. Integration of the *trans-creator* in the creative process

This rapidly evolving market situation and the brand communication needs it requires mean that, as we mentioned before, most creatives and copywriters no longer have a full picture of who their target market is. Very often the Creative Director of an international campaign and the majority of his target market do not speak the same language and do not share the same culture. This is a problem for most brands, since foreign markets have become very sizeable and important.

What should be done? In our opinion, by working in close contact with a figure that we call a *trans-creator*, the Creative Leader (as opposed to the Creative Director) can retain control of the international campaign to levels that are (almost) equal to that of domestic campaigns.

What is a trans-creator? A trans-creator is an individual with a thorough knowledge of a target culture and language. A trans-creator would usually be a trained translator with expertise in content localisation and with creative awareness. The role of the trans-creator is of mediation between a creative leader and a target culture. The trans-creator would act as an *alter ego* of the creative leader and would provide him with the missing perceptive ability for a given language/culture. It would also provide the needed insight to produce messages adapted to the relevant culture. The trans-creator would guide the Creative Leader in the process of creation, by providing background information, by interpreting feedback, by contributing creative ideas, by managing localisation consistency and by sharing responsibility for success and failures. The trans-creator, finally, would also help to protect brand consistency across markets

In order for the trans-creator to be successful, his or her relationship with the creative leader has to be close. However, the payoff can be substantial: the creative leadership can be restored and a first step towards establishing or consolidating what we call “an international cross-cultural superbrand” is accomplished.

### 2.2.1. The relationship between the creative leader and the trans-creator

In order for the relationship between creative leader and trans-creator to work, they have to realise that they are working together on the creation and implementation of a *single big creative idea* across more than one culture, and



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that this requires a strong leadership. Note that we are talking about a creative idea and not necessarily about a single message that has to travel across cultures. The creative leader and the trans-creator have to be aware that the level of success of a campaign can be consistent across markets only if the creative leader is prepared to listen, trust and use the trans-creator's advice all along the creative process. Being both part of the same team means that comments, suggestions and amendments can be done in frankly, with freedom and confidentiality, without fear of being judged by the client as is the case when these functions are carried out by the country manager.

When the trans-creator eventually translates the campaign that the creative leader has developed, his work will be much easier because the ideas are already adapted to the target culture (thanks the constant contribution of the trans-creator himself), and in the end, when the translation work is done, both can agree whether the overall campaign conveys a consistent idea, and whether this idea carries the desired values in all targeted cultures.

### **2.3. Usage of the Internet to know the target audience**

If new technologies (and the subsequent globalisation of communication) have brought new challenges to advertising agencies and creative teams because of the need for ever-increasing amounts of content and dialogue, they have also brought with them opportunities and solutions which will prove very useful to a trans-creator and the creative team he works for. On the one hand technologies such as the Internet and satellite television and the advent of mass tourism (in particular low cost airlines) have made consumers aware of what is available in other markets and more prone to interact and actively look for information, on the other, those same interactive technologies have made it possible for brands to get to know their target much better and much faster. The introduction of the Internet has produced a platform on which the farthest and most diverse cultures are rubbing shoulders, thus highlighting the challenges of cross-cultural communication in an unprecedented way. Nevertheless, for the first time in history we are offered the opportunity to overcome these challenges by learning much about foreign cultures first hand. Enormous amounts of content produced in the target market are available round the clock to anyone with an Internet connection. By analysing websites from the target market one can immediately notice the difference in the general feel of the local online communication: the things that matter are different (just visit a couple of national newspaper



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websites), attitudes and opinions are different, emphasis is different and the relationship with the brands is different.

The sheer size of the interface between brands and consumers offered by the Internet is unprecedented, and thanks to the quantity of feedback, in a few years of international Web presence, brands can accumulate a staggering corpus of knowledge of local market culture, which can provide precious indications for offline campaigns. What is more, the information gathered is 100% relevant to the brand and does not include a huge amount of unnecessary data. Companies are interested in how the target market relates to them and not in becoming experts in every aspect of a country. Unfortunately most of the time such specific knowledge goes to waste because online communications are kept largely separate from offline activities, leading to error repetition and loss of revenue, this time on a bigger scale.

The first step to take, therefore, to improve the quality and the success rate of international campaigns - thus cutting costs and increasing the return on investment - is to make full use of the enormous cultural quarry represented by the brand's websites. The trans-creator could also help in this area since he would have the means of choosing what is relevant and would be able to identify the values that can be used to build a cross-cultural brand.

## **2.4 Integrated communication across media**

As we have just seen, the Internet and all interactive new media can become a very precious tool in understanding the target market. The integration of media, therefore, should already start at the level of feedback, since the information gathered can help the brand in adjusting its communication or its products to local needs and, at the same time, understand which traits can reinforce the international super-brand. Besides, brands also have to realise that they need to take into consideration the value and dialogue-based reality of today's target markets, where understanding the feedback from the consumers is as important as the communication itself.

Providing a great amount of two-way communication in many languages and targeting different cultures is certainly desirable for any company, both to increase client satisfaction and to obtain more information on the consumers. However, using the traditional process to achieve this would make costs spiral out of control.



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This is why integrating the trans-creator at the heart of the creative process can save a lot of costs by avoiding long 'ping-pong' email sessions between the creative team, the translators and the local product managers, by saving on added production costs and research costs. It also avoids the added cost of having to use many different creative teams. The greatest savings, however, in an environment of atomised media, are those of using all the possible cross-media synergies, to obtain greater results and reduce costs.

In the past it was not unusual to see the same campaign being translated separately for its use on print, TV or online. However recent experience has shown that such an approach is not only a waste of money but also counter-productive, since people are consumers of multiple media and inconsistencies become apparent immediately. To make an example: a large corporation recently decided to launch a promotional campaign for a product across several countries, in which the TV campaign, the Direct Marketing activity and the online activity would be each led by different agencies competing against each other. This meant that the campaign message was translated three times (loss of money) and in three different ways (loss of consistency). The TV and the DM were to drive traffic to both Points of Sale and to the website. The website was to generate traffic to the Point of Sale. The DM was also responsible for setting up the POS. The discrepancies were therefore going to become practically impossible to miss by the target audience. A few days before the launch of the campaign, by pure chance, a member of the online advertising agency noticed the discrepancy in the advertising headline on the TV ad's superimposed title, and the one used online in his native language. This prompted other checks and the realisation of across-the-board inconsistencies in all languages. Urgent editing work had to be carried out at an enormous cost, and in some cases the discrepancies could not be removed.

If a central repository of content, that included the translations to be used across all media, had been used, this situation could not have happened. This should also be co-ordinated by the trans-creator.

But the need for more media-integrated campaigns is confirmed by another recent finding relating to the way people consume media at present. In summer 2003, Euro RSCG Worldwide conducted an online survey of 764 American adults in an effort to gain better understanding of new trends in media consumption and found that media consumption in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is far less focused than in previous decades. Of those surveyed, 81%



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reported engaging in at least one of 11 named other media consumption behaviours while watching TV. The percentage was even higher among the 151 respondents identified as prosumers, the information-empowered and more demanding consumers who tend to be ahead of the curve in their behaviours. No less than 88% of prosumers reported consuming at least one other media feed at the same time as they watched TV, compared to 79% of the 613 consumers in the sample. 37% of the sample combined TV viewing with at least two other media consumption behaviours. The most popular media consumed alongside TV are emails, online shopping, reading a newspaper or listening to the radio in all sorts of combinations.

For this reason consistency in the communication is now very important, and exploiting the synergies between media is not just good to make savings on production and translation, but also essential to make sure that the message reaches an increasingly multi-tasking target group, without any discrepancies.

## **2.5. Centralised co-ordination of multilingual communication with the help of trans-creators**

As we have seen, the new global advertising environment with its atomised media, its multilingual and multicultural target markets, its multi-tasking media consumers and its information-hungry prosumers requires a completely new creative process which is specifically designed for it.

If a market is truly global, the brand has to speak in several languages at the same time, and address several cultures. This can have a strong centrifugal effect on the core values of a brand, with each culture trying to interpret the brand according to its own values and beliefs.

Today, a brand wishing to retain its strength and credibility at global level must be able to communicate core values that are universally recognised, and at the same time be able to add a local spin in each target market. The reason for this is that by delivering a constant message around a certain core value, every new communication will reinforce the association between that value and the brand. Any contradiction in the message could confuse the consumer, and damage the association with the universal value. The way in which this universal value needs to be delivered depends very much on the target culture since, as Child points out, “in presenting the same face to the world, a company risks presenting the wrong face to entire nations (2002: online)”.

We believe that the only way of guaranteeing consistency in the core values and the respect of local needs is to have a centralised process, which includes a person who can help the brand communicate its values to the target markets,



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the trans-creator. The same person will be able to decipher the feedback and feed the new cycle of communication. However, this function (i.e. the linguistic function of advertising) can be properly exerted by the trans-creator only if he/she becomes a permanent part of the creative process. As Guidère acknowledges, “the language function needs to be permanently ingrained in the communication process, a language function which covers a much wider spectrum of competences than that of pure linguistic transcoding” (2002:online).

Since we are talking of commercial communication, the ultimate function of the trans-creator is that of helping the creative leader create the most effective and flexible adaptations, with a wide range of applicability to various media, in order to save costs. This means that his/her influence on the creative idea is bound to be significant, especially because according to Anholt “creative people are often quite bad at distinguishing between concepts that are striking because they sound good in their own language, and concepts that are good because they are actually based on a more universal truth which will appeal to human beings on a profounder level, irrespective of language and culture” (1998, online).

By helping identify those values that are universally recognised, the trans-creator can help brands discover what their core values will have to be in a completely new market, the global market.

Again, modern technology can help the trans-creator find solutions in his work. Translation memory tools, glossaries, intranet systems, content management systems allow the trans-creator, the creative leader and their team (including planners) to be in control of the communication and to guarantee a maximum of consistency and flexibility across media and across cultures. The process does not need to be duplicated in each market, thus increasing effectiveness through economies of scale and reducing costs.

One of the consequences of reduced production costs especially when it comes to the adaptation of advertising, is that foreign markets which were previously unviable in terms of communication return on investment, can now be explored thanks to the money saves and therefore making the brand even more international.

### **3. TOWARDS A TRULY GLOBAL BRAND**

Dirk Delabatista (1990:97) asserted that “advertising texts – like literature - are a clear representation of the social and cultural environment of a given language or country; its nature is dynamic and metamorphic: the influence it receives



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could be comparable to the one it exerts.” When Delabatista wrote these lines the two-way dialogue was not yet the normal way of proceeding in corporate communication. This statement however can help us understand the nature of the interaction between corporate communication and culture. If it is true that corporate communication has to move within the culture it addresses by using codes that are familiar to it, it also has the possibility of contributing towards the evolution of a culture. By co-ordinating the communication of various target markets according to the principles of the skopos theory, in this case according to their commercial and branding objectives, brands can achieve a cross-cultural convergence towards a super-brand, with core values that are shared across all markets, and additional local values which increase the relevance of the message it conveys to specific markets.

The main difference between a trans-creator and traditional translators, even those involved with advertising campaigns, is that he/she knows how to put his/her knowledge of the target culture at the service of specific commercial aims or skopos.

Creating an internationally shared ideology by focusing on the core values and on the aims of the brand means that the messages created will be less likely to need extensive adaptation, and that very little material will be deemed untranslatable, streamlining the process of trans-creation. Nevertheless to achieve this level of streamlined communication a great amount of work is needed upstream, by the trans-creator who will be instrumental in the construction of the international super-brand.

What remains to be defined is where in each culture the super-brand and its core values can find a suitable place. While it is true that each culture has a very specific and rich heritage to draw from, and some very distinctive contexts, there is an area which each culture offers to the creative mind: the world of imagination, which happens to be the remit of advertising. By creating a new layer in the collective imagination of consumers worldwide, a strong cross-cultural core of values can be established, capable of naturally interacting with each culture in its own terms and of overcoming cultural antagonisms. But in order to define this new space two fundamental sets of skills are needed the linguistic and cultural skills of the trans-creator, and the creativity and imagination of the creative leader. When these skills work together at their best,



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then core values can be conveyed to many cultures, as brands like Nike or Coca-Cola know.

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