

## **Semantic Frames in intercultural brand communication**

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary work, combining the scientific disciplines cognitive linguistics, text theory, and brand management. By using frame theory, I investigated the role of non-verbalized prior knowledge in cross-cultural brand communication.

According to the identity-based brand management approach, a strong brand is characterized by a clearly defined brand identity. Relevant literature suggests that a brand has an unmistakable and unchanging core which should be consistently communicated in brand communication. This ultimately contributes to a uniform brand identity and increases recognition among recipients. However, these assumptions are generally based on brand strategy in one national culture, and so far little research has been done to determine to what extent this also applies to intercultural brand communication. In this dissertation, a detailed comparison of how brands position themselves through communication and how they are perceived by consumers in three different national cultures was conducted, to illustrate different strategies established brands use to operate cross-culturally. The strategy of the unchangeable brand core is a very successful way of international brand communication. However, there are additional ways applied in practice that come with different advantages and disadvantages.

For the investigation of brand communication as well as brand perception, I chose a frame-semantic analysis approach. With the help of frame theory, non-verbalized prior knowledge, which is necessary for comprehension but semantically not included in the sentence, can be captured. Brand communication frequently involves statements which are not explicitly formulated and which have to be cognitively developed by the recipient. Furthermore, the perceived brand image is composed of associations, emotions, and prior knowledge about the brand, among other things. In the case of brand communication, this prior knowledge is fictional and artificially created - therefore, one important research question was how default values that occur within a frame can be communicated as "brand default values". In modern frame research, little research has been done on where default values come from. It is assumed that default values are contained in the recipient's knowledge of the world and can, among other things, be experience-related, which led me to the question of whether "experience-related" can also mean "brand-related" (in the sense of: experience with brands). Through my analysis on brand perception, I was able to show that the supported and un-supported associative knowledge of consumers definitely reflects many also implicitly communicated statements of brands in the form of brand default values. This leads to the conclusion that a person's world knowledge can also be shaped and expanded by strategic, artificially generated influences such as brand communication.

*An online version of this dissertation will be published in the series "European Cultures in Business and Corporate Communication (EUCCO)" by Springer VS.*