

**Book review: *The Handbook of International Advertising Research*, 2014,  
Edited by Hong Cheng**

**By Astrid Van den Bossche**

As stated in the introduction of the handbook, international advertising research is timely and ubiquitous, but also underdeveloped as a field. Edited by Hong Cheng, *The Handbook of International Advertising Research* therefore aims to compile the field's current knowledge, pendant concerns, and future directions. This includes, in its eight sections and 28 chapters, questions of methodology, history, economics, management, strategy, and consumer research, but also law, ethics, and some excursions beyond the commercial world to situate research within other global considerations, such as politics, education, and industry. For the researcher and student of advertising with an international outlook, this tome promises to build foundations and open avenues for the reader.

Yet one wonders what "international" means in this content. Though still biased towards American researchers, the extensive list of authors does include a wide variety of institutional affiliations across Europe, North America, Oceania, and Asia. That said, readers looking for researchers in the Middle East, India, or any African or South American country would find the compilation lacking. This observation is in line with Gordon E. Miracle's opening chapter, in which he points out that although a few universities in these parts of the world do teach advertising, its faculty tends not to engage in research. For an exception, see Maya F. Farah and Lamis El Samad's *An Assessment of Advertisements for Controversial Products in Lebanon: The Influence of Gender* in this very same issue. Likewise, consult Linda M. Scott's commentary on Maasai women for an idea of what advertising and marketing research *could* yield in these underexplored settings.

Yet not everything can always be included, and so this shortcoming should not keep the reader from considering the handbook a valuable starting place for the field. A brief overview of each of the book's eight sections follows.

### *Part I: Historical and Methodological Underpinnings*

As heralded in the title of the first chapter, “International Advertising Research: A Historical Review,” Miracle’s historical overview provides extensive commentary on the state of advertising research within the international context. Particularly salient is the difficulty of conducting international research due to differences in national research, education, and culture, as well as capturing the complexity of the interplay between national interests and international repercussions. Miracle concludes that the standardisation of branding and advertising practices warrants more scholarly attention, hand-in-hand with the maturation of the methodologies put in practice.

Charles R. Taylor and John B. Ford elaborate upon this last point in the second chapter, “Research Methods for International Advertising Studies: A Practical Guide.” Exploring issues facing cross-national researchers, Taylor and Ford formulate 11 guidelines to help conceptualise robust studies and establish construct equivalence between research settings. Given their foundational nature, both chapters in this section prove to be valuable introductions to the questions, issues, and concepts at stake in international advertising research.

### *Part II: International Advertising Industry*

John Philip Jones makes the striking claim that advertising’s greatest impact on society is not cultural or social, but economic. Chapter 3, “The Economics Effects of Advertising: How Research Can Untangle Them,” walks the reader through the basics of economic advertising research, advertising’s influence on consumer prices, and its understudied macroeconomic effects. Concluding that advertising does lower overall costs for the consumer in a variety of ways, the industry can still vastly improve on its own efficiency.

Delving into what the industry looks like at the international level, Kwangmi Ko Kim follows with her chapter, “Research on Transnational Advertising Agencies: Management, Structure, and Entry Strategies.” TNAAs are complex organisations

that must navigate multiple market settings and questions of effectiveness and standardisation, as well as the macro concerns of the business environment that come to the fore. Kim reviews current research on TNAAs development, their primary markets, and the competitive landscape, as well as entry modes and strategies.

One major activity at any advertising agency is, of course, account planning—whether contained within national boundaries or with an eye on the global. Yet as Padmini Patwardhan and Hemant Patwardhan state in “Account Planning: International Perspectives” (Chapter 5), academic research on this well-established practice lags far behind industry adoption. Similarly, Yunjae Cheong closes this section by reviewing research on the media planning process in “The State of Research on Media Planning, Buying, and Selling” (Chapter 6). Both chapters position the familiar subjects in the challenging context of global advertising, and both point to the changing nature of consumer engagement (a consequence of evolving media landscapes) around the world.

### *Part III: International Advertising Audience and Media*

Focusing on consumer and media research, Marieke de Mooij employs cultural models, such as Hofstede’s seminal dimensions, to explain consumer differences in “International and Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior” (Chapter 7). In Chapter 8, “Magazines and International Advertising,” Katherine Frith and Kavita Karan delve into the world of magazine advertising such as found in *Vogue*, *Elle*, and other local publications, whilst Ran Wei turns to digital channels in Chapter 9, “New Media and International Advertising.” As the former point out, magazines turn out to be rich sources of cultural data and shifting consumer trends. The latter pushes the boundaries of traditional channels to point out the opportunities and difficulties of border-spanning media.

Bringing these insights to a conclusion, and anticipating the focus of part IV, Petya Eckler and Shelly Rodgers discuss how to conceptualise viral advertising in Chapter 10. “Viral” has, by nature, the potential for global impact beyond the campaigns’ original target. The authors review definitions, its historical

evolution, key examples, and the state of scholarly research. They conclude that one of the key aspects that need to be considered in future studies are the diversity of the audience and how content (e.g., level of provocation) may play amongst these differences.

#### *Part IV: International Advertising Creativity and Strategy*

The world is undergoing a “creative renaissance,” according to Sheila L. Sasser in Chapter 11, “International Advertising Creativity,” and advertising is at the heart of it. She reviews seminal pieces of work on advertising creativity across decades and national research communities. Ending on a question mark, Sasser wonders what the future of marketing as well as general human creativity entails considering our latest technological advances.

In Chapter 12, “Visual Rhetoric and International Advertising,” Barbara J. Phillips and Edward F. McQuarrie assess whether current understandings of visual rhetoric are applicable in international contexts. Formulating five major research questions, the authors propose: exploring how cultural dimensions influence the efficiency and application of rhetoric and regulation; the existence of similar consumer segments across demographic, market, and other borders; the potential for polysemy; and the place of branding of in different cultures.

Considering the elusive nature of the creativity issues set out by Sasser, Phillips, and McQuarrie, it seems apt to close the section on questions of strategy, which “is the path to satisfy objectives” (p. 251). Stephen W. Marshall and Marilyn S. Roberts do just so in “International Advertising Strategy” (Chapter 13). Unpacking what has often been referred to in previous chapters, the authors delve into the debate between the “standardization” school, the “adaptation” school, and the “contingency” perspective on multinational strategy. Calling for a refreshed approach, they conclude by proposing new ways forward for strategy research.

#### *Part V: International Advertising Content*

From comparisons of general value profiles between settings to evaluations of specific cultural themes and tropes (e.g., materialism, youth), cultural messaging is a cornerstone of international advertising research. Yuan Zhan reviews the literature in Chapter 14, “Cultural Messages in International Advertisements,” providing a discussion of the methods, theories, and challenges that dominate the field. Ping Shaw, Martin Eisend, and Yue Tan deepen the discussion by focussing on gender portrayals in different countries in Chapter 15, “Gender-Role Portrayals in International Advertising.” Both articles point to the difficulties in registering, interpreting, and quantifying cultural values, as (social, economic, political) context turns out to be just as important as the image evaluated.

#### *Part VI: International Advertising Effects*

From the content of advertising to the content of minds, part VI turns to the consumer cognition and helpfully reviews research in mono-cultural settings before bringing in cross-cultural studies. In Chapter 16, “Attention and Memory Effects of Advertising in an International Context,” Mahdi Rajabi, Nathalie Dens, and Patrick De Pelsmacker consider the literature on attention and memory. Whilst some researchers find cross-cultural processing differences, others deny their significance—clearly, there is much to be explored here still.

Cognition is closely related to content, so the following two chapters focus on the effects of sex appeal (Chapter 17), and celebrity endorsement (Chapter 18). Fang Liu determines that although recognition of cross-cultural studies is important, particular attention should be given to how context and setting may mediate the way consumers process sex appeal. In relation to celebrity endorsements, Wei-Na Lee and Nam-Hyun Um add that cross-cultural research highlights aspects that we are yet to understand fully: government regulations, multiple product endorsement, social media, standardisation, and scandals, to name but a few.

Finally, bringing these points to a conclusion, Chapter 19, “International Branding: Findings, Shifts, and Challenges,” by Fengru Li spells out the domains of the research on branding in a global context. From domestic brands extending

abroad to internationalisation as integral to consumer and brand identity, the field has seen shifts both in subjects and methodologies while concern about global trade has grown.

*Part VII: International Advertising Law, Regulation, and Ethics*

As the former chapter points out, doing business in a global context can lead to ethical quandaries. Part VII concerns itself with the legal framework that underpins advertising in both national and legal contexts. In Chapter 20, Ross D. Petty recapitulates studies on formal advertising law as well as the nature of self-regulation across nations, and proposes a tripartite road for further research: the level of consumer protection, the definition of deception, and the qualification of unfair tactics. In Chapter 21, Kara Chan focuses on children and discusses how they feature in the Chinese marketing environment. Spanning from policy to perception, Chan maps the formation of the child-age Chinese consumer and the state's regulatory shortcomings. Finally, it is the turn of CSR endeavours to be cast under the global lens in "Social Responsibility in International Advertising" (Chapter 22 by Xiaoli Nan and Hye-Jin Paek, who highlight research in key areas such as cause-related marketing and "green" marketing).

*Part VIII : Beyond International Commercial Advertising*

The book's closing section brings together additional subjects and perspectives that didn't quite fit in the previous seven—but are not less pertinent when considering rich avenues of research. It becomes clear from the offerings in Chapter 23, "Integrated Marketing Communication Research," by Don E. Schultz, Ilchul Kim, and Kyoungsoo Kang; Chapter 24, "Sibling Rivalry: How Public Relations and Advertising Continue to Grow and Live Together," by Barbara DeSanto and Curtis B. Matthews; Chapter 25, "Now Starring Brand X: Product Placement as a Local, Global, and Glocal Branding Communication Tool," by Michelle R. Nelson and Alexandra M. Vilela; and Chapter 26, "International Sponsorship Research," by Ellen L. Bloxsome, Mark R. Brown, Nigel K. Ll. Pope, and Kevin E. Voges), that the advertising industry has many domains to play in. Finally, Chapters 27 and 28, on political advertising and advertising education in

general, bring the tome to a close that looks more towards societal repercussions.

Overall, the handbook allows students and researchers alike to get a vast sense of the global dimensions of advertising phenomena. Most chapters are a combination of a literature review and commentary on the state of the field and are consequently very useful introductions to the area in question.

### **Astrid Van den Bossche**

Astrid Van den Bossche is a doctoral student in Management Studies at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. Under the supervision of Professor Linda Scott, her research spans across marketing history, consumer culture theory, and branding. Prior to beginning her studies at Saïd Business School, Astrid obtained a Master of Studies in Film Aesthetics at the University of Oxford. She then taught as an Alumni Tutor at her undergraduate college, University College Maastricht in The Netherlands, before completing a Master in Management at London Business School. Her particular interest in branding and marketing was awakened during her work experience as a brand strategist.

### **Contact details**

Saïd Business School Park End Street

Oxford, OX1 1HP, UK

E-mail: [astrid.vandenbossche@sbs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:astrid.vandenbossche@sbs.ox.ac.uk)