

VISUAL FEATURES OF ADVERTISING DESIGN ACROSS CULTURES: ADAPTATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract. *This paper explores the role of visual code as a carrier of values and meanings in intercultural communication. Particular attention is given to the specific visual presentation of advertising materials in the USA, Japan, and Ukraine as culturally diverse countries. The study examines typographic features, color schemes, composition, and narrative strategies shaped by the sociocultural environment. The importance of adapting visual content to the local context is defined as a prerequisite for effective brand-audience interaction in a globalized market.*

Keywords: *ADVERTISING DESIGN, GLOBALIZATION, CULTURAL ADAPTATION, VISUAL CODE, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION.*

In the second half of the 20th century, the process of globalization encompassed not only economics and politics but also culture, communication, and visual arts. In design, globalization manifests primarily through the spread of universal visual solutions, interface standardization, the use of common stylistic approaches (such as flat design, minimalism, responsive design), and the formation of a shared aesthetic environment. As a result, today's consumer can easily recognize the visual style of Google, Apple, or Nike, regardless of the country.

However, in parallel, the importance of localization is growing – a process of adapting design to a specific culture. Brands that ignore cultural differences risk losing audience trust and making strategic communication mistakes. Therefore, more companies are striving to combine the universality of visual messaging with the flexibility of cultural adaptation [1]. Visual design in the context of globalization is no longer limited to transmitting universal values. It becomes a tool of a “hybrid” approach, where global standards intertwine with local visual codes.

A cultural code is a system of visual, verbal, and emotional signs that are meaningful within a particular cultural community. In design, this code is expressed through color palettes, typography choices, composition, use of archetypes, symbols, depictions of people, and spatial elements. What is considered elegant or persuasive in one culture may appear banal or even offensive in another.

For example, white color in European cultures is often associated with purity and simplicity, while in China, it may signify death or mourning. Similarly, the image of a woman in revealing clothing may be acceptable in U.S. advertising but inappropriate in countries with conservative values. Such examples highlight the importance of cultural context in visual communication [2].

Design adaptation is a process of deeply transforming visual messages, taking into account the sociocultural, linguistic, and aesthetic context of the target audience. It goes beyond mere text translation – it involves changing colors, imagery, iconography, characters, symbols, and even fonts. For instance, Arabic script or Japanese kanji require special layout techniques and a compositional approach distinct from Latin scripts.

Designers working in international markets must possess not only technical knowledge but also intercultural competence – an understanding of value systems, taboos, and aesthetic preferences. The adaptation of visual content should be grounded in empathy for local experiences and cultural worldviews [3].

To explore the visual features in greater depth, this study examines three culturally and historically distinct countries: the United States of America, Japan, and Ukraine.

1. United States of America.

American advertising design has developed within a low-context culture, where information is conveyed directly, and the main emphasis is placed on message clarity and the effective delivery of ideas to the consumer. This principle is visualized through the use of concise, well-structured layouts, dynamic typography, and a vivid color palette [4].

Typography in the US favors bold sans-serif fonts, such as Helvetica, Impact, or Arial, which are easily perceived and instantly draw the consumer's attention to the main message. A significant feature is the use of typefaces that visually associate with technology or innovation, especially in IT, finance, or startup sectors. The color palette is oriented toward quickly capturing attention and creating a strong emotional impulse – popular combinations include red (passion, action), blue (trust, stability), and yellow (energy). These colors are actively used in retail, sports, food, and politics [5]. Compositionally, American design is built on a clear hierarchy: a dominant headline, a strong image, and a call to action. Advertising often appeals to individual achievement, self-realization, and personal benefit – concepts that are key in America's individualistic society.

2. Japan.

Japanese advertising design combines the aesthetics of high-context communication and collectivism, where great attention is paid to detail, indirect symbolism, and the social meaning of content [4]. In Japanese visual culture, symbolism plays a crucial role, and the perception of color, composition, and text differs from the Western model.

Typography often integrates three writing systems (kanji, hiragana, and katakana), giving the design a layered image. Calligraphic typefaces, stylizations of traditional script (書道), or conversely, very minimalist geometric fonts in modern brands are popular in advertising layouts. This combination creates a balance between tradition and innovation [6, 7]. The color scheme includes both rich tones and pastel shades. The choice of color depends not only on its emotional effect but also on traditional associations. In terms of composition, Japanese design can be either overloaded (with many images, characters, text, and navigation elements) or extremely concise – in the style of Zen-design. For example, an advertisement might contain just a single word and minimal graphics, focusing on atmosphere and suggestion [4, 7].

Cultural specificity is also reflected in narrative delivery: instead of a direct command or call to action, Japanese advertising often tells a story, appealing to communal emotions, family, or seasonal themes [4].

3. Ukraine.

Since 2014, Ukrainian design has undergone a profound visual transformation driven by increased national consciousness, political change, and cultural emancipation. This is

expressed in a growing interest in visual codes related to Ukrainian identity: ornamentation, fonts, colors, and stylization of folk art [8].

Typography increasingly features stylized Cyrillic fonts referencing manuscripts, engravings, Petrykivka painting, or even Cossack chronicles. In the digital space, there is rising popularity of custom typefaces, particularly those by Ukrainian designers (such as Banda Agency), which combine minimalism with an ethnic accent. The color palette is often based on national colors (blue and yellow), but also actively uses red-and-black combinations – symbols of struggle and strength, green – symbol of new hope, as well as soft terracotta or clay tones inspired by folk life [9]. Advertising visual language often supports narratives of unity, freedom, revival, and new identity. Compositionally, contemporary Ukrainian design tends toward geometry and structure, while also working with asymmetry and dynamism.

Adaptation of advertising design to the cultural context is a necessary condition for effective communication with the target audience. Successful global brands such as McDonald's demonstrate the effectiveness of cultural adaptation. Let us examine how McDonald's advertising campaigns have been adapted in the USA, Japan, and Ukraine in recent years.

A good example is McDonald's advertising campaign in the USA featuring John Cena (2025) (Fig. 1), aimed at promoting the new "McValue" platform (https://youtu.be/saOQwq9N1xY?si=Ve8AW4P7L5w_ud5y). The visual component of this campaign is carefully crafted with cultural characteristics and recognizable elements familiar to the American audience in mind. It uses three main techniques: involving a well-known celebrity, bright colors, and nostalgic visuals – let's examine them in detail.



Figure 1 – Fragment of McDonald's advertising campaign in the USA

Famous personality. The inclusion of John Cena, an extremely popular figure in the USA thanks to his wrestling and acting career, is a key element of cultural adaptation. Cena is associated with strength, perseverance, and at the same time carries a self-ironic and humorous public image. His unexpected role as a serious motivational speaker encouraging viewers to take advantage of the "McValue" deals creates a comedic effect that resonates well with the American audience, who appreciate humor and self-irony. Cena's recognizability instantly grabs attention and enhances the memorability of the ad message.

Bright colors. The use of bright yellow in John Cena's outfit and in the overall visual layout of the promotional materials is a direct reference to McDonald's signature brand colors. Yellow is associated with the brand and evokes positive emotions such as joy and energy. This visual decision reinforces brand recognition and makes the ad more eye-catching.

Nostalgic visuals. The concept of the value menu appeals to the idea of affordability and good deals, which can evoke certain nostalgic associations with older McDonald's campaigns that also focused on accessibility. Moreover, John Cena's familiar face may evoke a sense of trust and familiarity for many viewers. The advertisement's visual style is designed with a nostalgic retro aesthetic, noticeable in the stylistic elements of video editing.

Overall, the McDonald's "McValue" campaign with John Cena is a successful example of cultural adaptation. The use of a beloved American celebrity, vibrant brand colors, and an unexpected humorous approach makes the campaign effective and resonant for its target audience in the USA.

Regarding McDonald's adaptation to the Japanese audience, an example can be seen in the campaign "Fandom Feast: McDonald's Live Party" with XG (2025) (Fig. 2), the visual component of which is carefully designed with cultural characteristics and recognizable elements that resonate with the young Japanese audience, especially fans of J-pop/K-pop culture, including: futuristic concept, vibrant hyperbolized images, idol support, narrative brand integration, and visual overload – let's examine them in more detail (<https://youtu.be/uzQ6XGk-ht8?si=aUZ3i2Rh2M--qdvjv>).



Figure 2 – McDonald's advertising campaign in Japan

Futuristic concept. The use of a futuristic alien setting is a bold visual decision that appeals to the young audience's interest in new and unusual images, particularly appealing to a generation raised in the era of technological progress and the expansion of reality through virtual space.

Vibrant hyperbolized images. The visual aesthetic of the campaign is characterized by vibrant colors and exaggerated images, typical of J-pop and K-pop music videos and advertisements. Bright pink, purple, blue, and yellow colors create an energetic and festive atmosphere, resonating with the emotional and dynamic culture of fan communities.

Idol support by fans. The "Fandom Feast" campaign directly appeals to Japanese "Oshikatsu" culture – the active support of idols. The video shows elements that emphasize the importance of shared experiences and interaction between artists and their fans. The anticipation of the "Live Party," the joint preparation, and the joy of being part of the fan community are central

themes. Visual elements may include symbols related to XG, fan reactions, and an atmosphere of unity around the group, which is a key aspect of idol culture in Japan.

Narrative brand integration. Unlike direct advertising, the McDonald's brand is integrated into the narrative of preparing for the "Fandom Feast." Depicting McDonald's meals as part of the shared experience and elements of the party preparations makes the message less intrusive and more organic. This approach aligns with the content consumption trends of the younger generation, which values authenticity and non-intrusiveness.

Visual overload. The video is characterized by a high density of visual elements and fast editing, which is a typical feature of modern pop culture production, especially in Asia. The overload of details and dynamics creates a sense of energy and excitement, which can be appealing to a young audience. However, the design remains organized to avoid overwhelming the perception.

For the Japanese audience, the "Fandom Feast: McDonald's Live Party" campaign with XG is a successful example of cultural adaptation.

In Ukraine, McDonald's has been running the "Ukrainian Burgers" campaign for many years, and we will analyze the example from late 2021 (Fig. 3) (<https://youtu.be/u6vXko5MkLc?si=M6xzR4ApF1pqIPIN>). The visual component of the campaign employs several key techniques: the use of traditional elements, nature, and a focus on national pride. Let's examine them in more detail.



Figure 3 – McDonald's advertising campaign in Ukraine

Traditional elements. The commercial video actively uses traditional Ukrainian musical instruments, such as the sviryi and cymbals, to create an authentic atmosphere. The music not only accompanies the visual but also emphasizes the emotional component of the advertisement, evoking feelings of nostalgia and pride in the national heritage. The costumes of the characters are also stylized in traditional Ukrainian fashion, though in a modern interpretation, avoiding direct copying but maintaining recognizable elements. The font used for the company name is also created with reference to traditional motifs.

Nature. The commercial video showcases picturesque Ukrainian landscapes, from vast fields to lakes and forests. This not only creates a beautiful backdrop but also emphasizes the connection with the native land and its beauty. The use of familiar and pleasant-to-the-eye landscapes evokes positive emotions and reinforces the sense of belonging to Ukrainian culture.

Appeal to national pride. The campaign appeals to national pride, highlighting the uniqueness of Ukrainian culture and products. National colors – yellow and blue – are prominently featured in the posters of the campaign.

The long and consistent development of the "Ukrainian Burgers" campaign indicates its effectiveness for the Ukrainian audience and serves as a successful example of achieving emotional resonance, demonstrating a deep understanding of cultural values and identity.

Such examples show that a deep understanding of local cultural codes by global brands like McDonald's enables them to form an emotional connection with consumers and strengthen their market position.

Cultural sensitivity in advertising design involves not only aesthetic adaptation of content but also awareness of the values and social norms of the target audience. The absence of such an approach can lead to misunderstandings, cultural barriers, and loss of trust in the brand. Therefore, the primary task of advertising design is not so much following trends as accurately and appropriately conveying a message that takes into account the cultural context and fosters a strong, positive connection between the brand and the audience.

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