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The rapid development of global business brings along a highly competitive environment among industries across cultures. Companies have been seeking ways to win customers over their rivals around the world, using technological development and know-how for their marketing. Communication tools and strategies to convince consumers about the superiority of their brand are becoming increasingly subtle, while social and cultural aspects are gaining in importance. But successful businesses know that it is not only about a good advertisement for their products or services, but also good relationships with a wider range of audiences.

The presented paper focuses on the way marketers, in their attempts to establish themselves within their industry over competition, manage comparative advertisement strategies. The study does not analyze factual consumer behavior or perceptions, but provides a socio-linguistic perspective on advertisement as a communication act. In a pursuit to show the dynamics enacted in advertisement messages, it focuses on the pragmatic function of offense, its socio-cultural contexts, and external effects on the interaction between companies and their customers. Examples of advertisement wars between industry rivals are analyzed to demonstrate how the use of comparative advertisement strategies affects the actors and their audiences. The results show that when adopting the linguistic format of offense, a communicative act problematic in nature and ensuing normative processes, it is of utmost importance to carefully consider the end audiences, their interests and feelings, as well as the consequences if the message hits the wrong target.

1 Introduction

There is no doubt that the success of companies largely depends on proper marketing communication with their audiences. Many modern companies understand the importance and deliberately work on building positive relationships with a wide range of stakeholders. Some marketers, however, believe that even negative attention is good advertisement, as it catches attention easily, quickly, and effectively. Is it a good advertisement in the long run, though? Can it build trust and positive relations between the brand and consumers?

This study does not aspire to research consumer behavior and attitudes. Rather, it focuses on the linguistic act of offense in advertisement, its function, role, and potential in communication with the end audiences. A sociolinguistic approach to analysis will be applied on selected marketing messages in comparative advertisements with a specific focus on the pragmatic function of offense as a speech act. Three samples of „advertisement wars“ using the format of offense were identified to test the hypothesis that even though negative attention-seeking communicative acts may be noticed by the customers more quickly and instill in their minds more effectively, it may not be a good strategy in the long run.

1.1 Comparative advertisement

Ever since the emergence of a consumer society rising along with capitalism and the industrial revolution, advertisement has played a major role in the public space. Brands use a wide range of media or platforms to win over consumers to buy their goods or services. The 21st century digital revolution has accelerated this trend by providing more sophisticated tools of communication through information technologies, internet, and social media.

The widening possibilities in marketing tools and strategies increase the occurrence and quality of advertisement. This brings along a rise of consumption and economic growth, and thus, increases consumer buying power. Wealth yields demand for more products, and thus, opens space for larger competition. This spiral development poses high challenges to companies on high standards of their marketing strategies. To be able to compete, rival brands strive to create strong marketing messages to convince the consumer that their products are the best.

To differentiate themselves from competition, some brands within single sectors use comparative advertisement strategies. These include messages that directly or indirectly comment on competition and its products. Some of them use comparison to convince the audience that their products are better than the others', some use parodies or hints, some apply direct comparisons that vary in the degree of aggressiveness. To protect the targeted companies, comparative advertisement has been regulated by international as well as national laws and must comply with specific rules. According to the Czech Civil Code (Občanský zákoník 2012), comparative advertisement messages must not lie, counterfeit, or mislead, must refer to the same type of product, must be measurable, must not denounce the opponent, and must not fake trademark products. When these conditions are fulfilled, comparative advertisement presents an opportunity to draw attention to win over the audience within competition, but as this paper will show, it must be treated with care.

Comparative advertisement campaigns are sometimes known as advertisement wars, as rival businesses compete through attacking" each other using various marketing communication strategies. Among the companies who have been known to lead these never-ending battles through advertisement are Microsoft with Apple, Apple with Samsung, Fedex with DHL, Coca Cola with Pepsi, Burger King with McDonald's, Nike with Callaway, Starbucks with Costa, or Mercedes-Benz with Jaguar, to name a few.

While engaged in advertisement wars, ethical standards still need to be respected. Advertising codes that have been tacit or openly articulated in the international advertisement law prohibits advertisers to break social or moral norms, lower human dignity, or discriminate. Breaking these norms may qualify marketing practices as unfair competition or false advertising and may result in financial or other types of sanctions, or companies may lose reputation and the consumer favor (Dornis 2017).

In recent times, however, one can observe some basic social paradigms, taboos, and value systems being challenged across various social spheres. Invoking the claim that „negative attention is also advertising”, some individuals or companies challenge social norms while balancing at the narrow edge of the socially or even legally acceptable. This trend of attention-seeking messages has been observable not only in selected advertisement war campaigns, but it has been particularly visible in the political scene with the rise of populism (Argandoña 2017, Roth 2017, Rovella 2017). Its protagonists build on the fact that negativity attracts attention more easily and quickly, and stores in memory longer (Müller 2018, Seib 2016, Denari 2014).

Apart from advertising, there is one other aspect that marketing communication practices have to consider when striving to gain the consumers' favor: it is the growing importance to build long-term relationships with their wider audiences. The communication explosion of the third millennium caused the originally distant world to shrink and speed up while public attitudes and opinions become decisive and influential. As a result, the power of the masses rises and the power of leaders weakens accordingly. Likewise, the tendency to use free will in accepting new ideas, products, or trends depends on the willingness of the masses as well as individuals. Experts point that due to

these global changes, it will become increasingly more difficult to influence people (Svoboda 2006, p. 17, Theaker 2016, Kotler and Armstrong 2015).

Building public relations (PR) as a marketing practice of growing importance, however, differs from advertising in many aspects. Advertising aims at selling goods and services with the goal to increase profits; PR on the other hand, works on positive image and reputation, to build long-term trust. Both work with media, but differ in how. Advertisement buys media space and time, but PR influences the way journalists spread positive messages on their own and permanently. Finally, PR and advertising differ in how language is used and accepted. While advertising represents a one-way communication aimed from the marketer to a potential customer with a high degree of control over the messages, PR leads a mutual dialogue with a much wider range of stakeholders with lower chances to influence how the dialogue develops. For that reason, it is of utmost importance to pay extra attention to how marketing messages are formulated in respect to the general public from a long-term rather than short-term perspective. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion about communication forces and language functions in marketing with a socio-linguistic analysis of communication strategies adopted in advertisement wars and their impacts on the intended audiences on a global scale. In particular, the speech act of offense is being scrutinized for its functions in marketing communication and its ultimate effect on PR.

1.2 The pragmatic function of offense

One of the typical communication acts that can be traced in advertisement wars is offence. This section focuses on analyzing the function of offense from the perspective of language pragmatism, that is, traces and describes its socio- and psycholinguistic role and interaction patterns.

Offence has numerous functions in speech. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary and thesaurus, it is described as „an act of attacking“, as an act of „displeasing or affronting“, or as „something that outrages the moral or physical senses“. A similar, negative feeling evoking the nature of offence is accentuated in other sources, adding that offence violates customs, rules, or laws and as such, causes annoyance, displeasure, anger, or resentment brought about by a perceived insult or disregard of someone (Oxford Dictionary, The Free Dictionary).

In human interaction, speech acts imply paired sequences (Heritage and Atkinson 1984), meaning, they occur between at least two parties who are expected to react to each other verbally, paraverbally, or nonverbally. Individual speech acts, then, imply specific responses, and thus, expectations. Offense as a negative invoking act generally inspires apology. From the perspective of the addressee, apology is the expected, „preferred“ (Pomerantz 1984) response to speaker offensive acts. Therefore, no matter if intended or unintended, offense generates expectations of an apology from both the speaker and the addressee. If not delivered, the general communication principles are violated and yield relevant reactions.

The seriousness of an offense and its related contexts, thus, influence responses accordingly (Mai Kuha 2003, Saleem and Azam 2015, Zareipur 2010), depending on varied cultural norms, situational circumstances, and on individual levels of sensitiveness to maintaining individual self-image called „face concerns“ (Spencer-Oatey 2000). Research shows that people use a wide range of apology strategies according to the perceived severity of the offence (Saleem and Azam 2015, p. 4). These include statements expressing regret, taking responsibility with self-blaming, exhibiting lack of intent, admitting fault, downgrading responsibility with excuses or justification, claiming ignorance, reducing the severity of offence by offering redress, etc. (Dewi 2009).

Offence in marketing communication, however, enacts different dynamics and therefore, requires paying special attention to the face concerns of the audiences represented in their sense of one's image of self, positive social value, or social approval. Advertising is generally defined as one-way communication, the addressee is physically absent, and thus, cannot provide the immediate reaction to the offensive forces of the messages. The marketer also has limited possibilities to appropriately react with an expected apology or other situation relevant redress. An apology, if ever intended,

then, becomes a domain of PR rather than advertising.

The limited possibility to deliver an apology would not be a concern in advertisement wars where offensive communication acts aimed at the competition are to a certain degree deliberate. But because advertisement messages occupy a big part of the public space, advertisement wars have a wider range of audiences, and their end messages inevitably reach the customers. This paper is to claim that for this reason, the marketers, when planning their attacks at their competitors, must watch for how they formulate their offensive messages in respect to the consumer and their socially or culturally shaped face concerns.

2 Methodology

To demonstrate the dynamics of the marketing messages of offense in advertisement wars, this paper analyses three comparative advertisement cases in which the intended attack hit the wrong targets. These include the „Lemmings“ TV commercial run by the Apple Computer company in the USA in 1985, the Apple „Get a Mac“ campaign run in the USA between 2006 and 2009, and the Hyundai tug-of-war with Škoda Auto in the Czech Republic from 2013 until recently.

All of the samples for analysis share similar attributes. They are created in the format of a video commercial. They all are financed by a multinational commercial subject within varied industries with intensive competition building on current technological development, namely the computer and car industry. They all classify as comparative advertisement with patterns of advertisement wars, meaning, they all adopt the format of offence aimed at their rivals which sometimes balances on the edge of advertisement law boundaries. All three cases, however, differ in their end audience structures, as well as in the reception from their competition, experts, the public, and the end consumers.

Each of the cases uses a transcription of the messages from the commercial script for a content analysis, and some of them are complemented with messages and slogans from other company campaigns, for example: billboards, posters, or media ads. Each message is first analyzed from the sociolinguistic perspective pursuing the pragmatics of the speech act of offense in advertising, including its format, functions, and related interactional processes it enacted in space. Each analysis defines the intended audience of the message, that is, the competition it was originally aimed at, as well as discussing the end audience the message ultimately reached. The analyses further assess the character and degree of the offence and surveys its actual impact on wider audiences, including the competition reaction, expert evaluations, critics or rewards, authority participation, or the consumer reception. The company ensuing business results are also discussed, if available.

3 Sample analyses

3.1 Lemmings: Apple vs. IBM

One of the areas of intense competition is the IT and computer industry, in which the rivalries between Apple, Microsoft, and IBM have been those that stand out. The following two samples trace their advertisement battles fighting to convince the audience about one brand supremacy over the competition.

„Lemmings“ is a TV commercial run by Apple Computer to announce the impending launch of the Macintosh office. Created by the Chiat Day agency and directed by Tony Scott, it was aired on TV on the occasion of the National Football League Championship Super Bowl game in the USA in 1985. The video spot is constructed on a plot surrounding the myth that lemmings, a type of rodent, are believed to commit mass suicides. The goal of the campaign was to label the competition PCs (mainly represented by IBM, cheaper and quite widespread at that time), old fashioned.

The implicit attacks on the competition are apparent from all aspects of the ad: the soundtrack, scene, and the script. The spot starts with a whistling melody of the „Heigh-Ho” song from the Walt Disney animated film „Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, showing a black and white video track of blindfolded businessmen in suits marching in a long line toward a cliff to fall off into a deep ocean one after another, until the last man stops to uncover his eyes and realize there is another way. It is the organized behavior, groupthink, as well as the blindness leading to an apparent death that is being contrasted by suggesting an option for open-mindedness and survival represented by Apple. The gloomy, depressive, and even morbid tone of the video is enhanced by the scene depicted through a sky with heavy black clouds and a whistling windstorm, as well as by a laconic text „On January 23rd, Apple computer will announce the Macintosh Office. [pause] You can look into it, [pause] or you can go on with business as usual” indicating the same, you either use tools from competition and kill yourself, or choose Apple for life.

Although quite audacious, unconventional, and dramatic, there has been a far-reaching consent that the commercial was an apparent failure, because instead of hitting the competition, it resulted in offending the consumers (Seibold 2011). This resonated from the numerous reactions of critics. Advertising Age magazine referred to the nationwide J. Walter Thompson survey results showing that lemmings ranked “very high both in terms of being most liked and least liked”, to explain that the commercial „made the people who wear suits in real life feel like they weren’t invited to the revolution” (1985). Both, Forbes as well as Slate magazines ranked the ad as one of Apple’s worst commercials of all time (Peters 2016, Smith 2014). Forbes magazine pointed out the situation to the company and its immediate developments claiming that the ad „almost killed Apple” (Allen 2012), as its failure came at a time when, according to Advertising Age, the company „profit margins were also tightening” and „cheap PCs with visual interfaces undercut the Macintosh on price” (1985). This was repeated by Allen in Forbes magazine who compared the company results recorded after the ad introduction with the one of 1984 a year before. He pointed out that „after the 1984 ad aired, Apple sold 72,000 computers in 100 days, 50 percent more than even its most optimistic sales projections.”, while „after Lemmings, Apple closed three of its six plants that year and laid off 20 percent of its employees” (2012). And regardless of the company’s current success, it is also worth noting that along with the famous event of the firing of Steve Jobs from his own company by his partners, this also became part of the series of important events of that time. And finally, although quite active in creating daring advertisements, after the „Lemmings” failure, Apple did not come with another Super Bowl commercial until 1999.

Feeling the urge to apologize, the company representatives publicly admitted that they missed the target. Steve Hayden, the author of the commercial, put forth a detracting but self-critical remark saying „I often remind people about „Lemmings” as proof of Karmic balance” (Allen 2012) to contrast the failure with the outstanding success received from a TV commercial called „1984” from the previous year. John Skully, an Apple CEO, added accepting: „From the Mac faithful it got a standing ovation. But to the very customers it was trying to reach, it was a disaster” (Allen 2012). Apple even publicly apologized. The commercial was not only retracted, but also, to redress the unintended offense of their potential customers, Hayden admitted for Forbes: „First of all, you can’t make fun of the customers you’re trying to reach. The very business customers we had been trying to go after felt they had been disrespected. That was not our intention” (Allen 2012).

3.2 Get a Mac: Apple vs. Microsoft

The computer working style as a central theme was the aim of another advertisement campaign from the area of the computer industry called „Get a Mac” (Devin 2015, Nudd 2011), launched by Apple Computer in 2006. Created by the company’s advertising agency TBWA\Chiat\Day, and directed by Phil Morrison of Epoch Films for TBWA Media Arts Lab, the campaign aimed at contrasting their Macintosh with personal computers (PC) using the platform of Microsoft Windows. The messages embedded in the campaign’s main theme were to highlight modern features of the

new Macs through labeling the PCs as boring and old-fashioned. A series of videos, starring two popular American humorist artists John Hodgman and Justin Long, ran in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The choice of the actors was not occasional, as there was a clear resemblance between them and the compared computer company owners. The Mac was personified by younger looking, laid-back Long and the PC by more conservative, tight Hodgman (Kelton Rhoads 2007, p. 1). The series consists of 66 30-second video spots for TV and 16 shorter videos for various websites. To reach its audiences globally, international adaptations were also created for other foreign markets, in particular, Great Britain and Japan.

Each of the TV ads was accompanied by a song called „Having Trouble Sneezing,“ composed by Mark Mothersbaugh. The scene of all the commercial spots is set in the Apple typical minimalist style depicted by a simple white background. In all the samples, „Mac“ represents a modern looking young man wearing a business casual modern outfit acting informal, confident and free, while „PC“ appears as a conservative looking technician wearing glasses, and clad in old-fashioned, unfitting grey shirt, he acts formal, reserved, and helpless.

The leading idea of the campaign, to show the attributes of a Macintosh in comparison traditional PCs, was demonstrated through one of the samples called „Out of the Box“. The „in and outside a box“ idea refers to a popular English idiom to symbolize the contrast between open and narrowmindedness. In this commercial, „PC“ sits in a big brown box exercising with his hands while „Mac“ sits in relaxed position in a white one. The contrast between being locked into routines and thinking out of the box can be seen in the type of activities the protagonists are discussing with each other. After introducing themselves to each other by „Hello, I am a Mac“ and „Hello I am a PC“, the two men discuss their plans after they get out of their boxes. While „Mac“ shows excitement for varied creative and playful activities he is planning to do („I might make a home movie or maybe create a website, try out my built-in camera“), „PC“ is shown to be locked inside his concerns for work and limited to numerous uninteresting jobs („well I firstly have to download those new drivers, and I have to erase the trial software that came on my hard drive, and I’ve got a lot of manuals to read“). This is being sarcastically commented by „Mac“ who, after evaluating „PC“ plans with an indifferent „sweet“, and further remarks „you know it sounds like you have a lot of stuff to do before you do any stuff so I’m just gonna get started „cuz I’m kinda excited; let me know when you’re ready“ and jumps outside the box. The spot ends with „PC“ staying inside the box mumbling for himself „actually the rest of me is in some other boxes so I’ll meet up with you later“. The choice of formal vs informal variety of speech register for each actor seems also to be deliberate. While „Mac“ speaks slang, „PC“ uses standard language, to accentuate the flexibility of Apple computers against the constraints of Microsoft PCs.

Unlike „Lemmings“, the „Get a Mac“ campaign was mostly positively received by the critics as well as reportedly helped the company sales. In 2007, it gained the Grand Effie Award for the most successful marketing campaign of the year (Sullivan 2007). In 2010, Adweek reported it as „one of the best advertising campaigns of the first decade of the new century“ (Nudd 2011). The campaign was featured until 2009, but it has continued to entertain consumers for years. Its success might also have contributed to the company results reported at the end of the fiscal year in 2006. Apple announced a 39% increase in sales in that year, while shipping 1.3 million Macs within the US market (Bulik 2006).

Nonetheless, from the perspective of the marketing communication strategies with its audiences, the campaign contained a few problematic elements. This can be traced not only in the critical remarks of some experts, but also in the reaction of the targeted competition. Both, Slate magazine in the USA, as well as The Guardian in the UK evaluated the marketing strategy as too arrogant. Slate called the commercials too „mean spirited“ (Stevenson 2006), while The Guardian, referred to the „smug superiority (no matter how affable and casually dressed)“ as „a bit off-putting as a brand strategy“ (Brooker 2011). PC Magazine also disputed the relevance of the presented differences between the Mac and PC computers. They see the advertised messages as overstatement, claiming that the pertinent strategy, rather than to advertise for assets, was chosen to prevent the consumers

to „realize that the differences Apple is trying to tout aren't quite as huge as Apple would like ... to believe" (Ulanoff 2008).

From the perspective of the end audiences, similar to „Lemmings", the „Get a Mac" campaign, targeting the competition, ended up stereotyping the PC users in general, that is, hit the consumers instead. What is more, unlike in the case of „Lemmings", no apology followed to remedy the effects of offense on the unintended audiences. Although the ads were most likely not meant to offend the consumers, the campaign resulted in offending them all, that is, not only those traditional PC users satisfied and faithful to the competition brands (Brooker 2011), but also „those users who may not consider Macs when purchasing but may be persuaded to when they view these ads" (Rhoads 2007, p. 6). In other words, when attacking its rivals, Apple in some way offended their potential customers.

Releasing an offense but omitting an apology, the campaign triggered a relevant reaction. Microsoft took advantage of the situation to reassert their brand image and reestablish their PR and delivered the apology to the affected customer segment on their own. It responded with an analog campaign called „I am a PC" in 2008, contrasting John Hodgman with the company employee Sean Siler who is declaring pride to be a PC user. Microsoft constructed the video on presentations of individuals both famous and ordinary next to each other proudly identifying themselves as a „PC". Opening with Sean Siler's words „hello, I'm a PC and I have been made into a stereotype", the video features an African-America teacher in front of a white board stating „I'm a PC and I know what you call hit", Bill Gates in person holding a paper shopping bag saying „I'm a PC and a wear glasses" followed by other ordinary people from diverse ethnic and social background proud of wearing glasses, too. Other people are featured to be wearing jeans, studying about jeans, or designing jeans; the ad further shows people self-confidently reiterating to be „a PC" while holding diverse ordinary professions, such a designer of green buildings, an ecologist trying to save polar bears, a student, a lawyer, a street artist, a blogger, broadcaster, diver, farmer, pilot, driver, singer and manager, to name a few. The video is made to accentuate solidarity by celebrating diversity of gender, age, race, name, disability, or geographic location. The shot is closed by the famous writer Deepak Chopra reaffirming „I'm a PC and a human being; not a human doing, not a human thinking, a human being" and an advertisement slogan „Windows - life without walls".

No doubt that Apple by giving the offense to the Microsoft customers opened a gate for its competition. After Microsoft, other companies also used the „Get a Mac" campaign to parody Apple in order to draw attention at themselves, such as Novell to promote Linux, Vavle to promote Steam on Mac, or an American TV channel to promote a return of their show, to name a few. As an unexpected result, these organizations took the chance and downplayed Apple for their own marketing purposes, while publicly enhancing some of the Apple covert weaknesses, mainly their displays of superiority or arrogance. In other words, the campaign in an act to stereotype its rivals, contributed to promote biases of their own.

3.3 The neighbor from Boleslav: Hyundai vs. Škoda Auto

In addition to the IT sector, the car industry is another area where audacious advertisement wars are frequent. The importance of proper communication with the consumers when choosing to compare a brand with its rivals as the company marketing strategy can be demonstrated by the example of the tug-of-war pushed by Hyundai Motor Company against Škoda Auto on the Czech market.

To understand the aspects of their competition, it is important to introduce the two companies' backgrounds. One of the oldest car manufacturers in the world, Škoda Auto is a Czech company with a tradition reaching back to 1895 when established as Laurin & Klement in Mladá Boleslav, a small town of roughly 40 thousand inhabitants located in northern Bohemia. The company received its name after Emil Škoda, an entrepreneur who bought it in 1926. After being nationalized by the state during the communist era, and again privatized from 1991, Škoda was acquired by the Volkswagen

Group in 2000. Currently, the company has its plants in numerous countries worldwide and its cars are being sold in over 100 countries. Considered to be one of the country's most successful businesses and employers of the current times, the company became the pillar and the main driver of the Czech economy (Škoda Auto a.s. 2018, ČTK 2017).

Hyundai Motor Company is an international car producer with a South Korean owner, also well-established worldwide. Its European production plant is located in the industrial zone of Nošovice, a town of roughly 1000 inhabitants located in the very north end of the Moravian-Silesian region. The company entered the Czech automotive market in 2006 and soon became a strategically important employer quickly drawing jobs, people, and money into an area in need. Ever since, it has been demonstrating an ambition to establish itself against the dominance of Škoda Auto on the local market currently selling roughly 25% of the number of cars compared to the Škoda sales in the Czech market (Accountant team 2017, ČTK 2017, SDA-CIA 2018).

In order to demonstrate further possible impacts of comparative advertisement on its wider audiences, a TV commercial promoting the Hyundai i30 model called „The Neighbor from Boleslav” [soused z Boleslavi] will be analyzed along with a set of slogans collected from further series of Hyundai campaigns targeting Škoda in current history. The samples chosen for the analysis show a varied set of strategies adopted by Hyundai to attack its rival, ranging from indirect hints or puns to a direct reference to the competitor attributes, some of them challenging the advertisement laws. All these vary in the reaction of both: the competition as well as the public.

One of their frequently used indirect strategies is playing on word connotations. Hyundai has often teased its competitor through taking advantage of the homonymous meanings of the company's name „Škoda” in the Czech language which can stand for damage, shame, harm, loss, or a pity in varied contexts. This strategy was first applied in 2013 (Novotný 2013) when it appeared in an advertisement slogan posing a rhetorical question to the consumers „Do you prefer a car with fewer facilities? And isn't it a „shame“?” [Chcete dát přednost vozu s nesrovnatelně menší výbavou? A není to škoda?]. Soon after, the same strategy showed in one of the campaigns launched after the floods that affected the Czech Republic in 2013. Their slogan „Hyundai goes with you against „damage“” [Hyundai jde s vámi proti škodám] was offering the Hyundai car owners free service and discounts for repairs. The same trick was used again later in 2017 in the Hyundai i30 Combi campaign called boldly „Slow-Witted Neighbor” [nechápvý soused], advertizing to Škoda Auto from Mladá Boleslav. In their intent to convince potential customers to choose their brand over competition, the advertisement slogan from the TV commercial proclaims „even a slow-witted neighbor will change seat; and if not, then his „pity“.” [I nechápvý soused přeseďne. A když ne, tak jeho škoda.].

Beyond playing on the ambiguity of the meaning of the word „škoda”, Hyundai also aimed at other rival attributes when creating their comparative advertisements. These include the interior and equipment, design and shape, corporate color, product line, as well as the company location. Most of these were the target of the „The Neighbor from Boleslav” TV commercial from 2015 which compared the Hyundai i20 version with the new Škoda Fabia. The narrative was a series of interjections favoring the advertised car over Fabia, e.g., „its roomy interior will be hard to digest by the competition” [její obrovský interiér konkurence neskousne] accentuating better spatial qualities of the new Hyundai version, „shapes will amaze” [křivky ohromí] downplaying the more geometric design of Škoda over the Hyundai rounder shapes, or „dogs in the manger will turn green with anger” [závistivci zlostí zezelenají] mocking the Škoda corporate color by referring to a Czech idiom expressing envy, to name a few. The video scene accentuates each of the lines, showing an open mouth with teeth at a large garage gate together with the reference to the roomy interior, or a large octopus painted in the Škoda corporate color when referring to envy. This is best illustrated along with the last interjection „when you arrive in it, your neighbor from Boleslav will be this little” [až v ní přijedete, bude váš soused z Boleslavi takhle malinký] during which the video shows the new Hyundai car arriving in front of a tiny figure, a man in a swimming outfit, standing and staring at the approaching car half under water with a lifebelt aside, his size reaching just the bottom level of the arriving car doors. He clearly contrasts with the size of the car. Hyundai, however, soon removed the

direct reference at Škoda as „the neighbor from Boleslav”, and replaced it with a less direct formulation „a small neighbor will be even smaller“ [malý soused bude ještě menší], to avoid legal troubles or penalties (MediaGuru 2017, Horáček 2015).

In addition to hints or equivoques, some of the Hyundai attacks had been daringly direct. One of the open comparisons with Škoda can be found in another Hyundai i20 campaign from 2015. A show event called „Hyundai is not afraid to be compared” [Hyundai se srovnání nebojí] went on in dozens of the Czech cities and towns. Hyundai provided the visitors with an opportunity to compare their city hatchback i20 with the new generation of the Fabia model which was displayed in their showrooms together with the advertised car. Another bold comparison attack appeared in the advertisement campaign for Hyundai i30 Combi from 2016 comparing it with the Octavia Combi Škoda model in two different slogans „you may already know Octavia, but life and a true ride start when you are thirty” [možná jste už poznali Octavii, ale život a opravdová jízda začíná ve třicítce...] and „you already know Octavia, but if you want a real Czech estate car...” [Octavii už možná znáte, ale pokud chcete opravdu velký český kombík...].

The Hyundai advertisement attacks did not pass unnoticed, yielding varied reactions from different stakeholders, like in the cases from the computer industry analyzed above. One of the stakeholders taking offense were local legal entities who watched over fair-play in advertising practices. Among others, it was the Czech Initiative of Advertising Agencies, Media and Advertisers (RPR) who stepped in a number of times while resolving various legal cases raised against Hyundai. One related to the phrase „the neighbor from Boleslav” which was in the end assessed by the committee as derogatory and confrontational (MediaGuru 2017) and had to be removed. Another case when the Hyundai confrontations were banned by the RPR committee for being unsubstantiated were the direct references comparing Hyundai i30 Combi with Škoda Octavia pointed out in the previous paragraph. While Hyundai was unable to support the content of the claims by facts, the initiative concluded for the advertisement to be unfair (MediaGuru 2017).

Another of the crucial stakeholders involved in advertising is the competition, that is, Škoda Auto in this case. And similar to the „Get a Mac” campaign, many of the Hyundai attacks also turned out to help Škoda to gain popularity or become more visible. Studies show that even some people in the Czech Republic noticed the Hyundai attacks were „free advertisement for Škoda” (Horáček 2015). And Škoda took numerous chances to use them for establishing itself on the Czech market. In reaction to the „Hyundai is not afraid to be compared” campaign, the company used media to joke about Hyundai, suggesting to their dealers to sell the Škoda cars along with their own. A similar strategy appeared in 2013 when Hyundai placed a roadside billboard at the highway exit from the Vaclav Havel International Airport stating „Welcome to the land of Hyundai” [vítejte v zemi automobilky Hyundai]. Written in English, Hyundai apparently made an attempt to establish itself as the local market leader for the international audience just landing in Prague. Škoda, however, responded with another billboard positioned a few dozen meters farther. The message, this time written in Czech, featured a cuckoo clock to joke about the Hyundai ad with a Czech idiom prompting the drivers not to let anyone cheat them [nenechte si nic nakukat]. While in this case, Hyundai evidently missed their audiences by speaking to those who were unlikely to visit the country for buying a car in larger numbers, it was rather Škoda who exploited the message for reaffirming their position within the local market.

Last but not least, the category shown to be largely affected by offense in advertisement were again the consumers. As the passive observers of the ongoing advertisement war, they, willingly or unwillingly, become the participating third-party of the exchange. The quick negative attention the slogans are to draw, may have questionable impact long-term. According to a pilot survey conducted by a student of the ŠAVŠ online, 46.25% out of 80 contingent online respondents reported to be familiar with the Hyundai slogans as compared to only 20.00% of those from Škoda. When expressing the online respondents’ attitudes to the slogans, however, a considerable number of them assessed them rather negatively. 45% saw them as tactless, unethical, untrue, too aggressive, ironic, unfair, unsubstantiated, false or illegal, while some of them pointed out that Hyundai yet was not a

Czech car (Pokorný 2018).

While conclusions from a single online probe cannot be made, as well as the degree of impact of the Hyundai charges against Škoda on the purchasing decisions of the consumers is difficult to assess with the data available, the two companies' sales and market share reports can offer a clue. According to the Car Importers Association statistical information from 2014 and 2017 (SDA-CIA 2018) covering the period of the most intensive publicly presented tensions between the two companies, the distribution of power within the Czech market remained in favor of the local player. While in 2014, Škoda sales held 27.88% of the local market, Hyundai kept 12.42%. In 2017, then, Škoda controlled 30.97% of the market, while Hyundai's share dropped to 7.88%. This means a decrease from 32.5% of the Hyundai sales against Škoda in 2014 to 25.5% in 2017. Similar patterns show when comparing the two companies' most recent data about growth in sales. According to their annual reports from 2017, although both growing in comparison to 2016, Hyundai grew slower; while Škoda reported 8% growth in customer deliveries, Hyundai registered 1% decrease in sales growth for its local plant compared to the year before (Hyundai 2018, Škoda Auto a.s. 2018). Beyond standard measures, further underlying aspects need to be considered, in order to understand this case. The first one is tradition. Škoda as a local car producer with a long history has been a well-established brand with a firm position on the market. Hyundai, on the other hand, has only one-decade history on the Czech market, possibly not long enough to be able to truly compete. Another aspect is the degree of aggressiveness embedded into the Hyundai slogans. The fact that some of the slogans were even banned by the authorities for trespassing the legal borders of unfair or confrontational advertisement may be proof that even in business, not playing fair may result in a loss of reputation and consumer favor. The last aspect that comes to mind is the socio-cultural context. Targeting the local brand from the position of a foreign newcomer may have been perceived as an attack on the consumer patriotic or cultural identity sentiments. In other words, instead of weakening the market position of Škoda in the eyes of the end audiences, Hyundai may have weakened its own while touching the local national feelings.

4 Conclusions and discussion

Three samples of comparative advertisements to establish themselves against competition employed among a number of business players were used to show the risks when choosing offense as a marketing communication tool. All three cases, which focused on the pragmatic functions of offense, its communication formats, related situational processes, as well as social roles and cultural contexts showed that the speech act of offense must be treated with extra care when used in marketing. When creating their advertisement messages, the marketers must bear in mind the situational dynamics, the impacts over time, as well as the structure and related contexts of their audiences. First, when structuring their messages aimed to attack their rivals, the marketers must make sure they consider the wider audience structure and its situational contexts. All the three cases above are examples when the message hit the wrong target. In „Lemmings”, the message meant to denounce the PCs represented by IBM resulted in offending a large customer segment of the PC users. Similarly, the „Get a Mac” commercial, in an intent to downplay the Microsoft software implemented in the competition PCs, again resulted in stereotyping PC users into boring and old-fashioned IT workers, frequently referred to as „nerds”. Finally, the Hyundai messages aimed at their main local rival Škoda Auto in the Czech Republic, ended up underestimating the patriotic sentiments of its inhabitants.

Second, to prevent the undesired consequences of the marketing messages aimed at competition, offense must be treated with its complete discourse pragmatics in mind. Being a part of a paired communication act, it implies apology as a preferred, and thus expected second-pair reaction. And if apology is missing, it gets compensated. Therefore, when applying offense in advertising, the marketers or company representatives must know which channels to employ to say sorry. This is

well demonstrated in all the three cases analyzed in this study. In „Lemmings”, when the force of the offense hit its unintended audiences, the apology soon arrived. The involved company representatives apologized using the media channels to assure the consumers that offending them was not their intention. In the „Get a Mac” campaign, when the apology did not arrive from the offense resource, it was skillfully delivered by the competition. Microsoft took advantage of the situation, expressed solidarity with the affected audience, and reasserted their company image, and PR. And when no apology arrived upon the repetitive Hyundai attacks at Škoda whatsoever, it was the „aggressor”’s reputation and possibly business results that apparently suffered the most. Škoda not only did not lose its market, but continues to grow, while Hyundai seems to be paying the toll; it did not gain the hearts of the local consumers by raising their popularity nor did it win over in sales. Third, this brings in the time aspect to be considered when choosing offense for advertising. This study shows that even though negative attention-seeking acts may raise more immediate interest, in the long run, if not properly redeemed, it is not a good PR strategy. Marketers must make sure that their messages of offensive nature are properly compensated, are not too aggressive, and do not prevail in their communication style. The cases analyzed in this study confirm it. Apple did not lose in the long run. Their marketing messages tend to be audacious, but when hitting the wrong target, the company needs to be able to deliver a humble apology. Above this, the failure with „Lemmings” was also well balanced with an undoubted success of their other advertisement campaigns. The campaign called „1984” run a year before can be used as an example. The plot applied a similar idea aimed at IBM, and thus, the PC users as a possible side effect. However, to prevent the potential customers to take the message personally, the authors succeeded to skillfully embed a message giving the „viewers a sense of empowerment if they opted to use the Mac” (Seibold 2011) and promising them protection from the competitor’s practices depicted as invasive and dangerous (Burnhan 1984, Cellini 2004). This is not the case of Hyundai, though, as their „war” against Škoda has been long-term, sometimes violating advertising taboos, uncompensated, and apparently touching the national feelings within the local market. In this battle, it is the rival who seems to be the long-term winner.

In conclusion, marketers must realize the importance of building long-term relationships with their customers in a globalized world. The potential customer feelings must be taken seriously. Negative messages spread quickly, but remain in the virtual world of internet, and instill firm in the human minds. For that reason, companies when aiming their messages of offensive nature at their competition, must make sure they do not hit the wrong target, misunderstand the socio-cultural context or overdo it. The consumers’ favor is fragile, their sentiments alive, and the rivals are ready to take advantage of mistakes.

4.1 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study focused on the pragmatic function of offense and its implications for marketing communication from the socio-linguistic perspective. It is therefore descriptive in nature and does not report about the live customer attitudes and feelings. To confirm the hypotheses posed, further field and market research of both quantitative as well as qualitative nature, studying the patterns of customer perceptions and behaviors would be needed. In addition, the analysis of the selected samples for this study is by far not exhaustive and further examples might bring in more aspects that need to be considered when trying to understand the dynamics of advertising messages, in order to adopt offense in comparative advertisement or engage wars among business rivals efficiently. Examples of good practice, in addition, might contribute when creating a list of functional communication strategies in marketing and PR.

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Klíčové slová/Key Words

marketing communication, marketing strategies, comparative advertisement, public relations, speech acts

marketingová komunikace, marketingové strategie, srovnávací reklama, public relations, mluvní akty

JEL klasifikácia/JEL Classification

M31, M37

Résumé

Reklamní vojny? Sledujte, koho opravdu urážíte.

Globalizace a s ní spojený rozvoj mezinárodního obchodu s sebou přináší vysoce konkurenční prostředí jak mezi průmyslovými odvětvími, tak napříč socio-kulturním spektrem. Konkurence hledá způsoby, jak získávat přízeň zákazníků na svoji stranu. K tomu je využívána škála moderních nástrojů pro rozvoj komunikačních, marketingových a reklamních strategií, které nabízí současné prostředí technologického a online světa. Zatímco nástroje marketingové komunikace a s tím související reklamní strategie získávají na důmyslnosti, na důležitosti nabývají i socio-kulturní aspekty a jazykové nuance reklamních sdělení. Stejně tak klíčové je udržování dobrých vztahů se zákazníky i širokou veřejností.

Předložený text nabízí interdisciplinární pohled na dynamiku marketingové komunikace mezi obchodními společnostmi, jejími zákazníky a širokou veřejností. Studie se nezabývá průzkumem trhu s cílem porozumět vnímání reklamy a jejího dopadu na spotřebitele, ale poskytuje socio-lingvistickou sondu do fungování verbálních útoků ve formátu „urážky“ jako komunikačního aktu cíleného na konkurenci. Studie předkládá analýzu ukázkových případů tzv. reklamních válek ve snaze rozkrýt

mechanismus pragmatických jazykových funkcí ofenzivních sdělení zaměřených na prosazení vlastní značky před konkurencí a identifikuje sociokulturní souvislosti v rámci interakce mezi společnostmi, konkurencí a zákazníky. Výsledky analýzy naznačují, že perspektivou lingvistických funkcí a následných normativních procesů se reklamní sdělení ofenzivního charakteru jeví jako problematický akt, u kterého je nanejvýš důležité pečlivě vážit cílové publikum, jeho zájmy a pocity, jakožto i důsledky, pokud sdělení cílené na konkurenci zasáhne špatný cíl.

Kontakt na autorov/Address

Mgr. Dagmar Sieglova, MEd., Ph.D., ŠKODA AUTO University, Na Karmeli 1457, 293 01 Mladá Boleslav, Czech Republic, e-mail: dagmar.sieglova@savs.cz

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