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**Article**

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# STANDARDIZATION OR ADAPTATION IN COSMETICS WEBSITES MARKETING ? AN EMPIRICAL STUDY.

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**Abstract:** *The websites marketing is becoming an important tool both for multinationals and SMEs, in their effort to internationalizing their business.*

*This study focuses on the international opportunities that are present within the European markets. The paper aims at identifying the degree of websites marketing standardization vs. adaptation, as a marketing tool for cosmetic products. Moreover, the study examines in a comparative manner the standardization strategy of multinationals and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), leaders in European markets, for different cosmetic categories.*

*The evaluation of online advertising standardization is based on the modified Model for Testing Advertising Standardization, developed by Whitelock and Chung. The web sites degree of localizations are analyzed based upon 98 criteria, as resulted from an adapted methodology of ProfNet Institut fur Internet Marketing, Munster (Germany). The sample includes the 101 leaders from European markets.*

*The research outcomes reflect a standardized websites marketing policy for SMEs and localized for multinationals. Also, for perfumes, dental care products and toiletry, European cosmetic leaders implement standardized websites marketing policies and balanced for the other cosmetics categories. The hypothesis concerning a strong correlation between standardization and handling dimension was supported.*

**Keywords:** websites marketing, SME, multinationals, online interactivity, cosmetics, standardization, adaptation

**JEL Classification:** M37, L66

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays a website can provide growing opportunities, in the context of stagnation markets, consumer behavior changes and the loss of national marketing autonomy. At the present, the European Union markets of perfumes, cosmetics, and hygiene products reach 69.5 billion Euros. (Colipa report, 2010). In the same time, online sellings increased every year and communication with customers via

online becomes popular as well as effective. The increasing use of Internet in business activities is lately a topic of wide interest, both for researchers and for practitioners. The researches on Websites' Marketing strategies are constantly evolving based upon the changes in the competition field in European markets. The Internet is not considered a media itself, but a technology platform that integrates various media: chat, forum discussions, websites, terminal type mobile phones and traditional media and press, radio, Television. It is considered the future of marketing, because it facilitates close relations, is considered a new culture, a state of mind developed by the young (or very young).

According to specialists (Strauss and Frost, 2005; Michael and Salter, 2007), the main Website marketing tactics taking into account Word Wide Web, Net Marketing and E-mail Marketing. Websites can be marketing tools of a domestic or international company designed in order to achieve the following goals (Lendrevie et al, 2006):

- Direct sale of products;
- Providing advisory services;
- Opening a dialogue to customers;
- Building an image that certifies expertise in a specific area;
- Carrying out market research among current and potential customers;
- Building a database of email clients that are interested in specific products;
- News or promotions;
- Provide information about new products.

Under the threats of economic crisis effects, companies seek ways to increase awareness and consumer confidence in their products and services. In the context of global environment's dynamic changes, it can be observed two existing trends: on the one hand, *consolidation of multinationals/transnational's position on the European market and, on the other hand, encouraging the SME's development.*

In recent years, SMEs, by using electronic commerce tool, successfully compete with large companies, with developed IT resources. From this point of view, SMEs are able to accelerate their trade internationalization, through the Internet, in a larger extent (Saarenketo et al, 2008).

The main keys for SME's e-commerce adoption are IT resources and increased flexibility for employees (Fahtian et al, 2008; Bayo-Moriones and Lera-Lopez, 2007). Another important element in

developing electronic commerce for SMEs was the communication between partners (business to business) (Deeter-Schmeltz et al, 2005).

Several studies (PricewaterHouse Cooper) display the dynamic development of website Marketing. In the last five years, websites marketing reaches an average of 30% growth. Although, websites-marketing doesn't imply important expenses, SMEs have adopted this specific strategies and tactics in a small extent (Filis and Wagner, 2006; Morgan, 2009).

Increasing exports and creating a favorable image on an effective web site are not entirely exploited by SMEs at full potential. Recent studies show that most SMEs benefit of the Internet advantages, especially by lowering the cost of listing promotional materials (Quinton and Khan, 2009). However, several researchers (Jelasi and Enders, 2005; Kula and Tatoglu, 2003; Pavic et al, 2007) demonstrate that small firms could obtain competitive advantages (that would enhance its credibility), would respond to questions about the products / offered benefits and integrate their Website marketing strategies in the general strategy of the company. Although, SMEs encounter a series of problems in Website marketing adoption. The most common are: lacking of specialized staff (who maintain the website), inappropriate website design, poor measurement of website effectiveness, irrelevant links etc. Given these evidences, *the premise* of this article is (from online competition point of view) that SMEs can successfully face direct competition, as larger companies. That is the reason we have analyzed, in the present article, both the websites marketing of SMEs and those belonging to the multinationals. We choose *cosmetics' sector* because outlining the websites marketing policies in such a dynamic industry, can be very challenging. This global market has constantly increased, even in the crisis environment. Another reason is that cosmetic industry has the highest frequency for launching new products, because of the cruel competition and the almost saturated market.

The present study performs *the first assessment of Romanian cosmetic leaders' standardization degree of their websites marketing*, using an adapted methodology, through an integrative manner, in order to maximize their efficiency in today's virtual cosmetic field.

*The main goal of this research* is to find if the online communication through websites of an exporting company is standardized or adapted for different markets/segments.

The study has been performed in two steps. First, we try to emphasize the differences between a company's website in three different markets/countries (if it exists) or content of the same website, in different languages. The complex variable used in this procedure was layout, content, navigation and

interactivity. Secondly, we have analysed the *degree of standardization of online advertising, using the Model for Testing Advertising Standardization, developed by Whitelock and Chung.*

*Findings will aid marketers in planning their strategies and tactics, to promptly react to changes in cosmetic market.* In the following, we shortly present the main evidence from global cosmetic industry and its advertising, emphasizing on latest communication trends in the field, the multinationals practices and European marketing communication laws.

## 1. STANDARDIZATION AND ADAPTATION IN ONLINE MARKETING COMMUNICATION POLICIES

Companies operating at the international level may choose to standardize the marketing communication through websites or adapt it to its target segments. Many researchers argue that the impact of culture is the strongest ingredient in the marketing communication strategy. Douglas and Dubois (Douglas and Dubois, 1977) consider four main ways that cultural factors influence the marketing communication:

- choosing the theme;
- connotation of words and symbols;
- interpretation of the conventions pictorials;
- selection of the medias.

As in traditional advertising, in online advertising **standardization** can be achieved in different ways and at different levels (Pop, 2004):

- standardization of the "promising" and the main axis, the basic strategy ;
- standardization on the message;
- standardization for the selection of virtual media resources.

In addition to reducing costs of design and campaigns planification, the most important benefit of standardization is creating and strengthening a global image of a product/company in the respect of a European consumer. Although, the main inconveniences involved in standardization policy are cultural differences and, the eterogeneity of advertising laws.

*However, **adaptation of online advertising** is sometimes essential because:*

- there are negative connotations of names in different languages;
- promotional messages must take into account national attitudes and behaviors;

- availability and efficiency of virtual medias are not the same in every country;
- there are different law's and constraints regarding promotional mix .

In addition to high costs, a major weakness of adaptation is losing image identity.

The firm may adopt another strategy, placed in the middle of these two extremes: **homogenization strategy**, according to which companies choose an identical positioning of the product and, in the same, deciding to use in each country adequate resources.

The specialists' opinions are divided in three categories. One of them is the theory of ads standardization - based on assumption that people from all over the world have the same tastes and desires. They react almost identically to love, beauty, fear etc.(Lynch, 1984) Another category plead to messages personalization, suggesting that the ad is the most difficult element that can be standardized, because culture acts as a barrier (Mueller, 1987).

The majority of researchers state that a local approach is required, especially by media channels settings, because of the different mass audience and the different regulations from country to country. In a previous study of advertising standardization vs. localization of fashion products, Seitz and Johar found that advertisements of perfume brands were highly standardized in Italy, France, Spain, England and Germany, while advertisements of cosmetic brands fell somewhat in the middle between localization and standardization (Seitz and Johar, 1993).

## 2. GENERAL REGULATIONS OF PROMOTION IN EU

During the years, we can notice a remarkable progress in the standardization of the online promotion legislation in European Union, but still important aspects differ in some countries. The European Union is currently reviewing the regulatory framework for electronic communication networks and services (Huigen and Cave, 2008), a process which began in late 2007 with the publication of legislative proposals by the Commission (European Commission, 2007). Therefor, the international companies' entrepreneurs should take into account to develop distinctive online promotion strategies in every country (Greffé and Greffe, 2004). In addition to consumer rights, to protect economic interests and the right to honest and complete information, the *focus is today on the source's obligation to probe the truth of the advertising message*.

In order to limit the unfair competition through traditional or online promotions and to protect consumers, there are prohibited the following abusive procedures (Diaconescu, 2000):

- False indications about the nature of the products or services;
- Misleading prices;
- Use of packaging that may mislead the consumer about the quantity or nature of the product;
- False indication on the geographical or commercial origin of the product;
- Inaccurate comparison in promoting;
- Advertising to certain categories ("defenseless" persons): children or sick persons;
- Coupled sales etc.

Comparative advertising is widely used in the U.S.A. and is prohibited in most countries in Europe, because it is considered unfair competition. Directive 84-450, transposed today in all European Union countries, partial authorizes it (84/450/CEE, 1984). Ads must: compare objectively important characteristics of goods and the services of the competitors, not create confusion or to denigrate the competitor, not use the competitors' image for launching an identical product at a lower price.

In many countries there are severe forms of control in the field of promotion that can be exercised by consumer bodies, institutions and specialized committees. Thus, certain promotional techniques are prohibited. The code on the promotion over the Internet refers to moral values, messages addressed to children and the protection of personal data of the consumer.

### **3. COSMETICS MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES - BETWEEN STANDARDIZATION AND ADAPTATION. LATEST TRENDS**

In the world of cosmetics, advertising does not serve to “announce the existence of the product” (Klein, 2002), but rather, in “producing an image around a particular brand of it”.

*The promotion mix in the cosmetic market* is frequently articulated around traditional and online advertising, promotional actions and merchandising. Sponsorship and public relations plays only a secondary role, but, for some companies, these instruments represent ways of getting some notable competitive advantages. (Kumar, Massie and Dumonceaux, 2006) Due to the very little differentiated products on cosmetics market, sometimes it is difficult for firms to create a true consumer preference for a brand. For this reason, companies allocate an important budget for online promotional activities, to the detriment of traditional advertising. In this way, the consumer will be sensitive to those brands that offer often temporary benefits. In sales promotion, offering free samples or free trial sessions for beauty care products and reducing prices by offering a product that contains an additional quantity or a

price discount (for hygiene products) are the most used tools in cosmetics industry. The most frequent media advertising for cosmetic products is the Internet, television, followed by magazines for women. Statistics show the highest spending in Internet advertising were for shampoos in Europe in 2009 (Euromonitor, 2010). Some studies (Domzal and Unger, 2001) on the promotion standardization policy show that marketing communication for *perfumes has an extremely high degree of standardization* because it expresses universal appealing fundamental themes. Also, 45% of body care products using the same product and marketing communication policies in all European market (for example Colgate, Gillette, L'Oreal, Unilever).

Beside the usual elements of marketing promotion (advertising, sales promotion, public relation, sales force, direct and on-line marketing), the website marketing insist on a variety of *symbolic* meanings, too (Adascalitei, 2001). In the same time, the brand of the product and the design of packaging are considered as belonging to promotion policy (not to product policy). Also, few researchers argue the website marketing should include in promotion policy the enterprise (through its appearance, employee, who are in direct contact with the public of the company: prescribers, distributors, media or mouth-to-mouth advertising. (Lendrevie and Lindon, 2000)

In the cosmetics industry, the majority of the international companies opted for a global strategy of brands. Marieke de Mooij (De Mooij, 2005) and Keegan & Green (Keegan and Green, 2005), believe that *a global brand is available in most countries all over the world and share the strategic principles and positioning, even if their marketing mix may vary*. Johanson (Johanson, 2006) view is that global trade occurs when there are three factors: *global demand, "global" buyers and scale economies*.

Gillette, Colgate, L'Oreal are positioned the same in all markets and they have a substantial marketshare and loyal consumers. Megabrands have a name and a logo that can be recognized all over the world, but the product may not be standardized. The most successful example of marketing standardization on cosmetics market is Revlon cosmetics. Colgate also is strongly approaching the standardization strategy, with few exceptions because of the legislation concerning imports: in Germany, for example, antimicrobial triclosan substance is forbidden: the water contains a high percentage of fluorine in England; in France there is the constraint that toothpaste with high fluorine content has to be sold in pharmacies, in Italy and Spain promotion is primarily made by stomatologists and the distribution is made through pharmacies. Colgate Total is the most standardised product which is sold in 104 countries (Uлага, 2002).



Of all the cosmetic categories, perfumes *are the products with the highest standardisation rate*. They are globally launched with a similar strategy. This strategy seems to be profitable for all companies. For example, Avon chooses the same ingredients and packages for its global perfume brands, and the profit is 4% higher than regional and local brands (Keegan and Green, 2005).

However, *none of the companies is launching products with a pure standardized promotion policy*. A reason could be the product labels which, according to the existing legislation must be translated in all languages from that country. The *umbrella promotion* for a brand belonging to a product line is the most present in the cosmetics industry. Nivea, Dove, Yves-Rocher, Florena offers products for face, cleansers, body milk, soaps, deodorant.

Among the latest *trends in promotion strategies (online or traditional) from cosmetics industry* are:

- Brands rationalisation or focusing on main brands (Global Marketing). In late twentieth century, the 10 most important L'Oreal brands represented 90% of the company's turnover. Procter & Gamble has reduced the number of brands with approximately one third, and Unilever 75% (from 1600 to 400).

- Switching from *monobranding* to support branding, due to high cost launching and the development of new brands

- Purchase of local brands and their internationalization

- Developing brand's extensions: L'Oreal began in 1907 with hair care products and has expanded the corporate brand name toward skin care products and beauty products or bath and shower. Beiersdorf started with a universal cream, Nivea, in 1911, and extended the brand for a wide range of personal care products. Gerber has extended the line of care products for babies to eat, drink, clothes, health products. Brands like Shiseido, Avon has extended to new categories of cosmetics or other sectors.

- Ethnic differences of consumers began to be exploited in promotion campaigns. Procter & Gamble launched Cover Girl Queen Collection, a line of cosmetics for women who are not part of the Caucasian race (Davies, B., 2006).

- Positioning the products as "green", natural. Estée Lauder launched Origins Natural Resources, a line that is sold in recyclable packaging and has been promoted emphasizing on avoiding the animal testings, Revlon came up with New Age Naturals, skin care products, entirely made of

degradable ingredients. Procter & Gamble and Lever Brothers already have in the portfolio hundreds of "friendly animals (Kumar, 2004)" product.

Some companies develop online promotion strategies for all major brands, without corporate communication (eg. Procter & Gamble), others prefer to emphasize on the manufacturer (especially small firms, which have a wide variety of brands like Neutrogena). Between those two extremes are most multinational cosmetics companies, trying to bring a balance between the two types of communication (Nivea, L'Oreal, Colgate).

For example, L'Oréal uses in this respect two main approaches: emphasis on basic French origin like L'Oréal Paris, Lancôme and promote them internationally, with some minor adaptations. The other approach, more radical, is the acquisition of strong local brands, repositioning them and their overall sales. Maybelline, Softshen / Carson, Helena Rubinstein are some successful examples of the second strategies.

#### **4. ADAPTATION OR STANDARDIZATION IN EUROPEAN COSMETIC WEBSITES MARKETING**

In the present article, we have conducted an empirical study focused on standardization and localization degree of websites advertising by evaluating online advertisements. In order to achieve our goals, we have analyzed four complex variables: layout, content, navigation and interactivity.

##### **4.1. Research objectives**

*The main goal of this research is to find if the online communication through websites of an exporting cosmetic company is standardized or adapted for different markets/segments.*

The *specific objectives* are the following:

- Determine the degree of standardization vs. localization of cosmetics websites advertisements;
- Analyze the differences between a company's website promotion policy by cosmetics categories in three different languages;
- Assess the standardization and adaptation of multinationals' websites vs. SMEs websites.

According to the case studies presented, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: Handling is the most standardized dimension from all websites assessment dimensions

Handling is the most technical dimension in a websites. We consider that the frame of navigations must be identical in every site version of a company in order to keep their global identity.

H2: For being competitive in the battle with the multinationals, SMEs have the most localized websites marketing policy. Online battle involves advantages for SMEs by their increasingly flexibility to rapidly meet consumers demands.

H3: From all cosmetic categories, perfumes and dental care products websites are standardized and the other products are ballenced.

In traditional adverstising, the most standardized cosmetic products are perfumes and dental care.

## 4.2. Research methodology

We use in standardization/adaptation websites analisys for cosmetic products a methodology based on other two existing models (aproaches). First, we have taken into consideration *Model for Testing Advertising Standardization, developed by Whitelock and Chung*, with some adjustments for cosmetic field (Seitz, 1998) Secondly, we applied a modified version of a *Prof net Institut from Munster website assessment method*, in order to evaluate standardization or adaptation of the four criteria: content, navigation, interactivity and layout.

This study compares advertisements posted *on home page* of every website assesed, using the content analysis methodology. As a research tool, content analysis provides the opportunity to examine the feelings, beliefs and attitudes of a culture in their environment (Rice and Lu, 1988). Moreover, content analysis is a common tool employed in cross-cultural studies when measuring visual and verbal elements of advertisements (Tansey *et al.*, 1990).

The comparison of two ads of the same brand was accomplished according *size, color, general layout, slogan and other texts of a print* (in a similar manner with the traditional printed advertising). For differences in each criterion, it was given a point. For example, if the text was written in the same language but had different meanings, a half of a point would be given. If the slogan or other texts were written in the country's own language (with the same meaning) a point would be given, but, finally if slogan or texts were written in the country's own language but had a different meaning, then two points would be given. Points were summed and could range from zero to five. For example if the picture was totally different the maximum five points would be given, since all evaluative criteria would be

different. In this case, the advertisements were totally localized. Hence, a *score of zero implied total standardization while a score of five implied total localization*.

In order to assess websites standardization/localization we use an identical method of assessing: five points for localization and none of points for standardization. In a previous study (Constantinescu, 2010), ProfNet method, designed especially for websites assessments, was adjusted, cutting some of the original criteria and adding suited criteria to the cosmetic field. We think those criterias are suitable to use it in standardization/localization study because the end-consumers' perception frame is identical. From a internaut point of view, a quality website consist in finding easily the requested information, the appropriate atmosphere and a feedback given in time.

Even tough, we have cutted more criteria, those who have not been found in any investigated website. Finally, the sites standardization were *qualitatively* assessed through 98 criteria, grouped around the above-mentioned complex variables, as following: 36 criteria for *content*, 26 criteria for *handling*, 19 criteria for *interactivity* and 17 criteria for *layout*.

For example, some of dimension analysed for content standardization/localization degree of websites are: history, download forms, information about products, calendar events, frequently asked questions, information about industry, the managers, shareholders, jobs. For standardization of navigation, we have evaluate: if the navigation path is displayed similar, holding a security certificate, search functions, for interactivity: Intranet/Extranet, personalized pages for the customer, callback service, hotline, e-cards, chat, online tour, schedules, online makeup as well as online request for company information and for layout: the presence of Avatars, live images, a web camera, phone web, existence Flash.

We have to mention that we excluded the dimensions that are missing from a website version of a company websites, but is present in another version of the same site designed for distinctive markets(for example Romanian version and English version). Moreover, every website in the sample was analysed in at least two versions: the local ones, English or French and maximum 5 version (adding Spanish, German). To be more accurate, if one company have different URL address page for France, England and local, we research on search engines and evaluated those sites. Otherwise, if the company have only one websites (a single URL address) but available in many languages (at least two), we have evaluate the dimension in at least two languages.

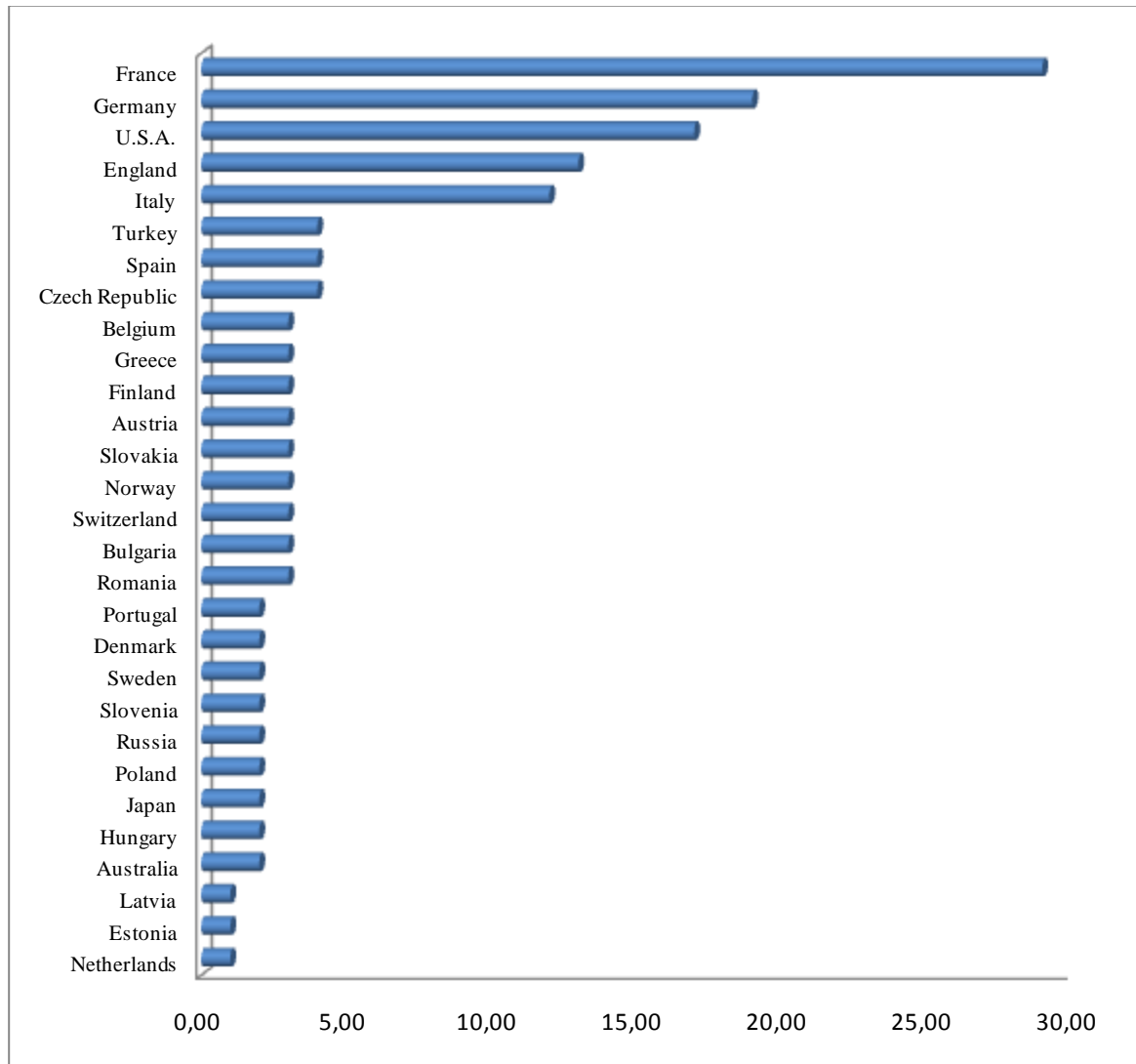
We have established the following interpretation for the obtained scores: between 0-1.33points, the company has a standardized websites marketing policy, if the interval is 1.66-3.33 points, it is balanced and between 3.33-5 is localized.

#### **4.3. Data collection. The sample**

The data was collected during the period February- April 2011. The sample was planned to englobe 126 sites. Of these, only 101 were functional, 8 did not have a version of the web-site in a language of world circulation and the remaining 7 were under construction, during the assessment period.

The sample structure by countries is displayed in figure 1.

**Figure 1 - The structure of the research sample by countries**



Source : Computed data from our emplirical study

**The sample consists in** the most effective companies on the European market. In order to obtain a representatif sample, we use the companies' turnover rank from different types of cosmetic products. Consecvently, we have chosen those brands/companies present in the top ten ranks, by turnover in each European countries, according to the following categories of cosmetics: skin care products, perfumes, deodorants and antiperspirants, hair care products, shaving products, makeup products, dental and mouth care products, products for hygiene, organic products.

The study bases on the premise that the best companies in the field implement the best websites marketing policy. Thus we consider that our sample illustrate de best practice in Europe.

Euromonitor has conducted a study that examines the market share, by country, of the cosmetics brands in 2009 ([http://www.euromonitor.com/World\\_Cosmetics\\_and\\_Toiletries\\_Marketing\\_Directory\\_2009](http://www.euromonitor.com/World_Cosmetics_and_Toiletries_Marketing_Directory_2009)). We mention that our study examined the *sites of the brands*, for multinational companies which have a distinct site for its own brands or, otherwise, the company's website. For companies that have in their portfolio other products than cosmetic (e.g. Amway), we have evaluated strictly the section which refers to cosmetic products.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULTS

Using the methodology and procedures described above, we have classified the 101 sites depending on differences of their site version, at the time of assessment.

*H1: Handling is the most standardized dimension from all websites assessment dimensions*

In determining the degree of standardization vs. localization of cosmetics websites advertisements, we have computed the scores and clustered them in the mentioned five dimensions.

Table 1 displays the sample's results.

**Table 1 - Sample's scores by each measured dimensions**

Research dimensions	Mean	Std. Dev
Online advertising	3.41	1.082
Content	4.18	1.390
Navigation	2.85	1.047
Layout	4.03	0.996
Interactivity	4.09	1.194
Valid N (list wise)	101	

Source : Computed data from our empirical study

In our sample, the content of websites is the most adapted to the market segments (with a score of 4.18 points), followed by layout and interactivity. Online advertising are rather balanced. The less localized is the navigation on the site. The reason could be the identical frame of websites' distinct versions, designed to support the internaut in finding easily information. Another explanation could be the global regulation on sites security, or security certificates.

Hence, the hypothesis was supported.

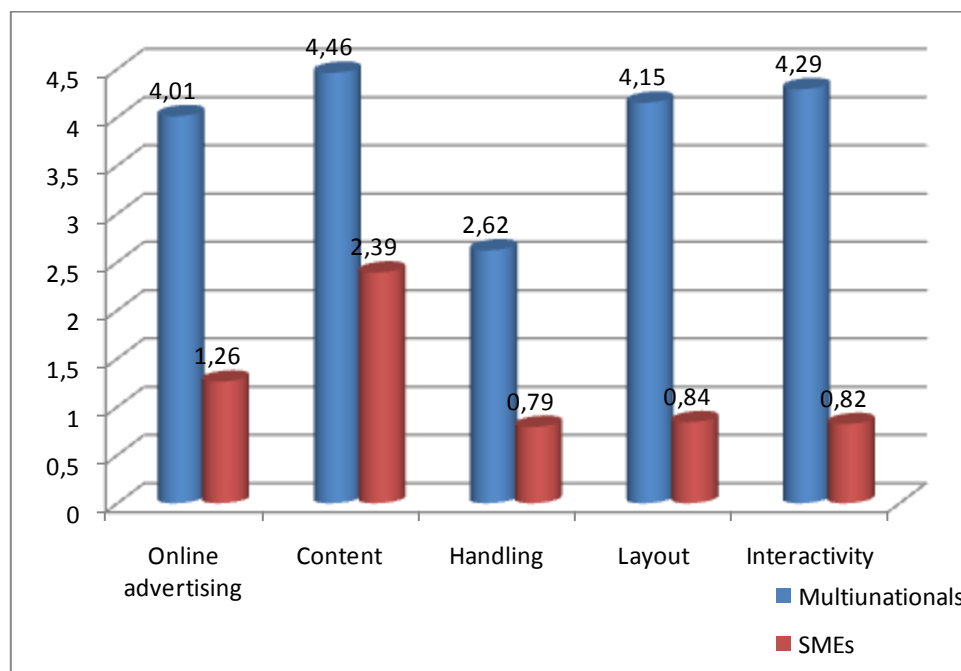
*H2: SMEs have the most localized websites marketing policy*

In our sample, a percent of 12% is represented by SMEs.

In analyzing the standardization vs. adaptation of multinationals and SMEs websites marketing policy, a surprisingly trend can be drawn: multinationals are adopting a localization strategy (a total of 3.90 points), while SMEs prefer to adopt the same websites tactics for each markets/countries (1.22 points).

The obtained results are presented in figure 1.

**Figure 2 - Multinationals vs. SMEs websites marketing dimensions**



Source: Computed data from our empirical study

Assessing in depth, the only SMEs dimension adapted in a very small extent for certain markets is content (2.39 points). To be more accurate, SMEs offer distinctive information about local market, efficiency/effectiveness indicators or additional information concerning the distribution or accessibility, online payment details etc.

Instead, the content of multinational websites is more adapted to specific market segments (4.46 points). The displayed news are entirely localized (press releases, new products launches, opening a new store/ branch etc.)



With 3 exceptions, none of SMEs from the sample have more than one URL addresses for different local markets. This strategy can become in short time a weakness, because every local URL address can achieve growing search engine optimization (SEO) advantages, with insignificant costs. In the sample there is a multinational that chose to have only one global URL: dior.com, disposable only in English.

The SMEs websites are available in maximum 5 foreign languages, but the most sites offer the possibility to navigate in local language version, simultaneously with English version.

Many researchers outline the preference of the young Internet users for websites in English (Planken, van Meurs and Radlinska, 2010). However, the analysed cosmetic websites offer products for a large segment of consumer, not only for teenagers. In this way, a large segment cannot be targeted by company, through websites tactics and plans.

Unlike the SEMs, multinationals have at least 5 language versions. For example, Nivea offer the possibility to choose between 89 distinct languages.

The majority of SMEs in the sample disseminates on the main page of their sites identical *advertising* images, in very few cases using a translate copy (scoring 1.26 points). On the other hand, multinationals have obtained a score of 3.41 points for online advertising, which means a medium localization. A percent of 70% from multinationals in the sample implement a highly adaptation policy of homepage advertising in terms of positioning, layout (dimensions, images) and texts. In skincare products case, the most frequent differentiation is by changing the prescriptor, who is usually a local star.

Multinationals' *interactivity* score reach 3.69 points, which represent a localization situation of their websites marketing. Beside the usual elements of this dimension (existence of communication forms, chat, forum), websites in the sample offer the possibility to communicate through socializing sites (like Facebook or Tweeter). Various contests determine the web sites navigators to be more implied, to communicate their attitudes, beliefs and impressions. They are challenged by companies to be creative, to discuss with other people about their hope, experiences, or achievements. Among other benefits (like growing the new products notoriety), these policies are designed to consolidate the navigator's fidelity. Another important outcome is the SMEs use in the same extent like multinationals those tactics, especially meant for attracting young segments. These tactics, using socializing network are almost recently implemented to attract and maintain the visitors on the websites. We conclude that

SMEs followed “frog leaps” in adopting and successfully applying websites marketing by avoiding certain developing stages.

Taking a holistic look, we must notice that the *interactivity* score is lower than *content* score. This result is interesting because interactivity dimension, by its goal (those of active communication, in real time), is designed to be very adapted to navigators needs from all other website’s elements. In our opinion, a low score can indicate the limited acces to requested information or to debates on products and company issues. Even the language can be an important barier to effective communication. On the other side, could be possible that navigators, familiarized with the social networks, don’t feel any threat in a standardized approach.

*Navigation* possibilities of websites in the sample are balanced in multinationals case (score of 2.62 points) and standardized in SMEs’ case (score of 0.79 points). We can find all the variables in multinationals websites versions, but most time at different pages /location.

The largest gap between multinationals and SMEs scors occurs in *layout* dimensions assessment (4.15 points, respectively 0.84 points). In comparison with websites belonging to other industries, cosmetic sites display much animation, color, music, a vivid atmosphere are designed to enjoy the visitors and put them in a good and relaxant mood. For this reason SMEs must realize the importance of using audio or visual features, adapted to specific cultures.

In our assessment, L’Oreal and Sheido obtained the biggest score (7.72, respectively 4.70 points) representing a very localizate website policy, meanwhile Chanell and Dior are less adapted.

Taking into consideration the mentioned results, the mentioned hypothesis was supported.

*H3: From all cosmetic categories, parfumes and dental care products websites are standardized and the other products are ballenced.*

Companies from cosmetic field implement distinctive websites marketing policies for different product category. The study’s scores are depicted in table 2 and figure 2.

**Table 2 - Sample’s scores by cosmetic cathegories**

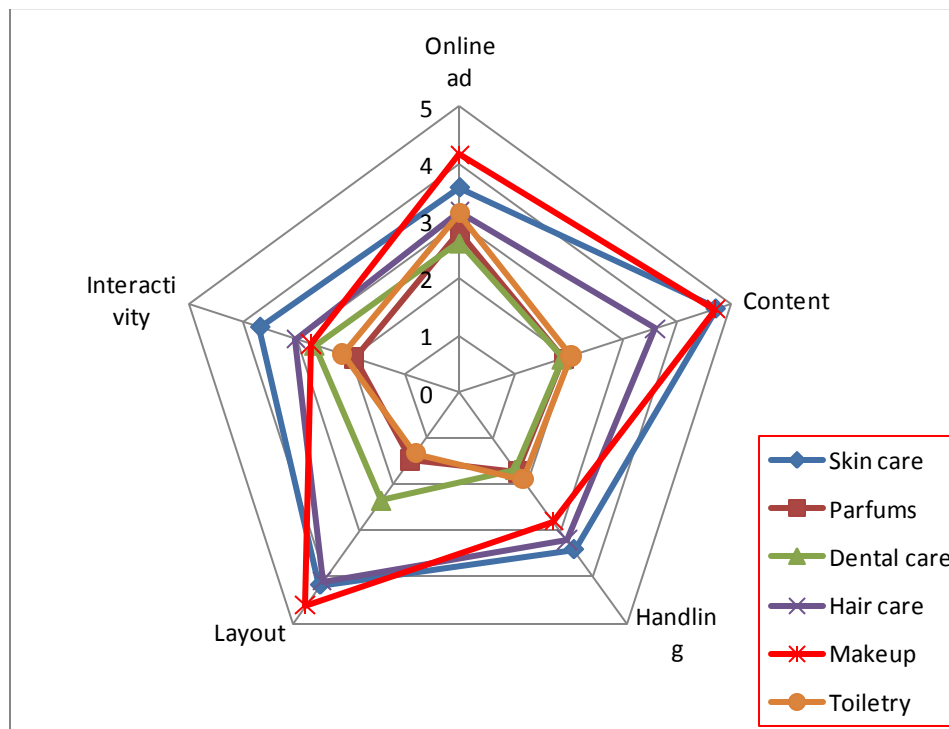
	Skin care	Perfumes	Dental care	Hair care	Makeup	Organic	Toiletry
Online advertising	3.59	2.81	2.62	3.17	4.16	3.6	3.14
Content	4.73	1.92	1.89	3.6	4.72	3.2	2.05

Navigation	3.41	1.73	1.67	3.2	2.8	2.2	1.89
Layout	4.18	1.47	2.34	4.1	4.62	1.7	1.32
Interactivity	3.69	1.94	2.68	3.02	2.74	1.2	2.16
TOTAL	3.92	1.974	2.24	3.418	3.81	2.38	2.11

Source : Computed data from our empirical study

Analizing the results, the global websites strategy belonging to perfumes, dentalcare products and toiletries is standardization. According to previous researches concerning marketing standardization degree of cosmetic products, perfumes and dental care products obtained the highest degree of standardization (Seitz, 1998). These findings are also validated by our assessment. Perfumes got 1.97 points and dental care 2.24 points. Moreover, standardization in toiletries websites marketing strategies varies from a traditional approach, where advertising is balanced for different markets. This result is important given the lower cost of online localization than in traditional advertising. Although the companies decide to advertise global toiletries.

**Figure 3. Cosmetic products' websites marketing dimensions**



Source : Computed data from our empirical study

The most adapted are websites of skin care products, make-up and hair care products. The most standardized dimension belongs to organic products, for interactivity (1.2 points). This result can be explained by the sample consistency: the majority of SMEs owns the most organic sites and SMEs don't pay much attention on local features.

In conclusion, this hypothesis was partially supported.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As cosmetics are increasingly associated with personal fashion and consumers are becoming more brand-conscious, websites marketing must be assumed by SMEs in order to sustain or increase sales. Advertising costs can be particularly daunting for small companies, as large companies already have the customer base and the big budgets to spend on promotion. Large international firms and their subsidiaries dominate the cosmetics market. Nevertheless successful small businesses are making their presence felt. Some of these firms have been able to change the core values of the cosmetics industry by offering consumers the opportunity to make purchase decisions based on their enthusiasm for these innovative ways of doing business. Hence, websites marketing offer to the SMEs the opportunity to successfully compete with multinationals.

The findings reflect a standardized websites marketing policy for SMEs and localized for multinationals. Therefore, SMEs' marketers have to take into consideration that websites marketing strategy could change their competitive advantages through growing flexibility and interactivity with the existing or potential customers.

Websites for perfumes, dental care products and toiletry are the most standardized on European markets, while the other cosmetics categories implement a balanced websites strategy. From all dimensions of a website, handling is the most standardized dimension.

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