

# WARM VODKA AND SWEATY WOMEN

## CHANGING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN RUSSIA

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### PREFACE

The paper describes a search for communications insights in Russia to create a powerful communication capable of changing current consumer behaviour: to encourage women to use Rexona deodorant every day.

We will argue that qualitative research alone, as a traditional method of exploring insights, cannot generate the necessary depth to instigate fundamental changes in consumer behaviour. It is our belief that consumer behaviour is generated by cultural contexts and processes that remain largely unconscious symbolic practices. So instead of attempting to 'drill deep into minds of consumers', we have explored the codes of relevant Russian culture through semiotics and cultural theory.

Semiotics have been combined with ethnography and focused qualitative research, designed to observe and learn about the mundane and everyday experiences rather than attempt that misguided theological probing of the consumer's inner soul that often characterises inappropriate visions of qualitative research's capabilities to generate insights.

This paper outlines how semiotics, ethnography and qualitative research came together to generate genuine insights into ways forward for Rexona in Russia.

### INTRODUCTION

Translated jokes are not usually very funny, but they can tell us quite a lot about a culture. Anybody who has ever struggled through Freud's 'Jokes and the Unconscious' will understand this. His comedy material would never have given Woody Allen any worries,<sup>1</sup> but the

jokes therein nevertheless demonstrate the social and symbolic concerns of the community at that time.

We uncovered a pertinent joke during the course of a semiotic analysis of Russia for Rexona deodorant:

*What is worse than a nuclear war? Warm vodka and sweaty women!*

This traditional joke, while deftly avoiding the boundaries of hilarity, tells us a few useful things about Russian culture. The cultural fear of imminent catastrophic demise generated by a symbolic Other (the USA) over which one had no agency echoes the everyday life of many Russians. Denied a sense of genuine participation in the structures of power, most Russians have created a coping strategy. An average Russian's agency in terms of power in the big scheme of things is limited; hence power tends to be activated on a micro and relativistic level.

Of course the same could be said of the West. As individuals, or even on a collective basis, we don't have too much influence on the forces of power. The difference is that Europeans have internalised their repression to such a degree that they've forgotten the possibility of genuine resistance. Through a strange ideological loop, Western Europeans enact their social repression by seeking ever more explicit means of having fun.<sup>2</sup>

Russia's social repression is at a less developed or sophisticated stage of development. It comes from top-down in a more authoritarian way. Conversely, people judge their sense of their own status by comparing themselves to others in their immediate community. Rather than the absolute idealist dreams of material

success that characterises the US, Russians want to feel an equanimity with the neighbours.

So this combination of a traditional 'Strong Leadership' on the macro level and relativistic measures of status on the micro level creates interesting tensions for the deodorant sector, and particularly for Rexona. Russia's tradition of dark but humorous pessimism has been one coping strategy that attempts to resolve this tension. As we see in the 'joke', the potential for personal suffering in the landscape of the everyday ("warm vodka and sweaty women") comically outweighs instant incineration. The nuclear war represents a symbolic and ultimate closure of self and society, but the sweaty women represent the unremitting awfulness of the mundane.

So, some of the thinking above framed the deep context for the semiotic analysis of Russia. This process allowed us to generate new insights for the brand and sector, based on picking through some of the complexities and paradoxes within Russian cultural and symbolic relations. Greg Rowland (of Greg Rowland Semiotics) used these insights as a means of generating some proto-concepts in a workshop in Moscow.

Our marketing objectives were straightforward: to develop communication that will instigate a change in consumer behaviour, i.e. drive women to use Rexona deodorant more often. We were asked to find the current 'hot buttons' that we needed to press to promote everyday use, rather than just on 'special occasions'. We needed to transform the insights into platforms that would inform the advertising brief.

The semiotics may have provided the basis for inspiration, but the process wouldn't have worked without the ethnographic stage, which demonstrated the uses of the product in people's actual lives. One particular image, of the deodorant placed on the mantelpiece, suggested the privileging of the brand, but also its usage limitation. The ethnography brought to life the precise nature of the barriers we were up against.

A programme of qualitative research was also conducted, offering further depth in terms of the personal attitudes

of consumers to the brand and sector.

By combining various methodologies from the traditional to the more exploratory, we really felt that we were breaking new ground in uncovering actionable and creative insight platforms for Rexona in Russia. Our eventual brief created a piece of communication that was not afraid to oppose the vanity of Russian women against the stark and pessimistic realities of bodily stink. Rather than the gentle reminders of the West, we had created a Strong Leadership position, able to account both for the obsession with material status reflected through glamour (the Moscow influence) and the notion of keeping up with the neighbours (the micro-social parallel development level.)

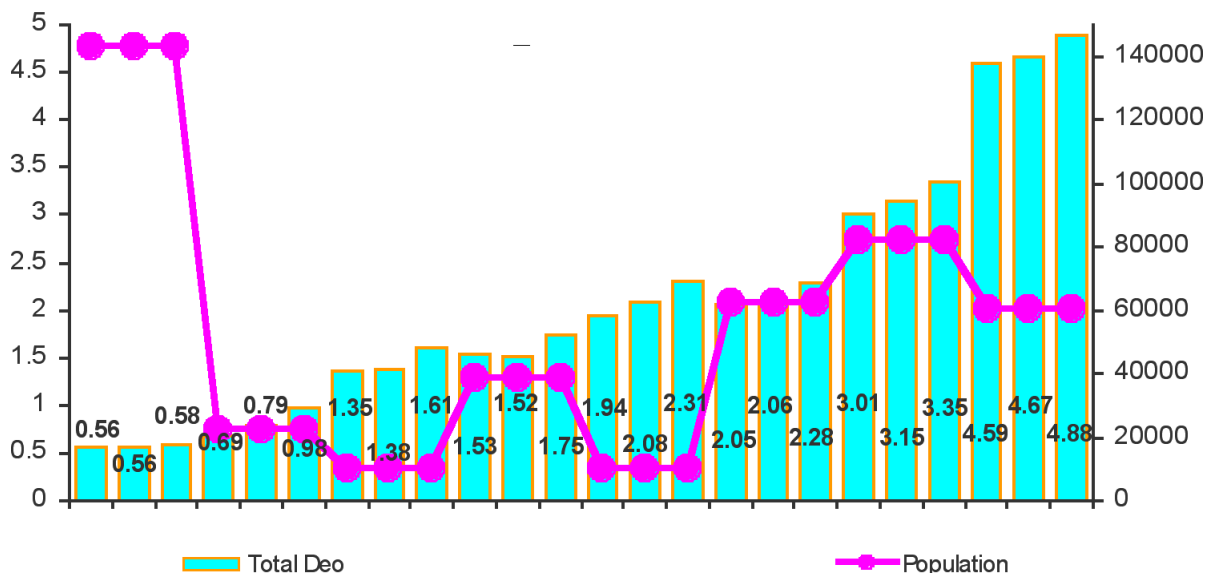
The critical lynchpin in the process was Matt Hart, who convened the workshop in Moscow. Over two days the findings and insights were drawn together and platforms for advertising were developed. The relaxed efficiency of this process was a long way from the over-stretched and overly intuitive approaches of some 'inspiration' agencies that seek to base development on an often misguided notion of democratic creativity.

This paper will therefore explain how the research insights were generated, how they were managed and negotiated in the workshop process and, ultimately, how they created a bold new cultural space for communicating the sector in Russia.

### **"I USE IT EVERYDAY": LIES, DAMN LIES AND RUSSIAN CONSUMER RESPONSES**

"I use deodorant every day," our consumer said. Let's call her Tatiana. We sat behind the one-way mirror, watching the focus group in which she participated and we believed her. We have also conducted quantitative surveys and again it seemed that the majority of people in Russia were using deodorants regularly. But then we saw our sales figures and the figures for the sales of all deodorants in Russia, and the numbers didn't confirm what Tatiana was saying. The average Russian consumed half a pack of deodorant a year whereas the average person in the UK consumes almost five packs. (See figure 1.)

FIGURE 1  
NUMBER OF DEODORANT PACKS PER CAPITA AND POPULATION SIZE



Was Tatiana lying? Yes, she was, and it wasn't for the first time. She lied, years ago, when she was forced to announce in public that she believed in the victory of the proletariat and in Lenin. She believed and believes that lying to those who hold power is not wrong but expected, encouraged and rewarded.

As in the old joke: Lenin, Stalin and Brezhnev are taking a trip by train. Suddenly, the train stops in the middle of nowhere. The three leaders start debating what to do in order to get moving. "Let's explain to the engine driver that it is in the interest of the proletariat to immediately fix the problem!" says Lenin. "Let's shoot the son of a bitch!" shouts Stalin. "No," says Brezhnev, "let's just hop up and down on our seats and pretend that the train is still running."

In order to survive during the years of Brezhnev, Tatiana was hopping up and down, pretending. If she weren't she would have been singled out and punished. She laughed and cried about all that in her own kitchen, with her family and most trusted friends.

She then took the old habit with her to the new Russia and she continues to try to appear to be doing the "proper" thing such as using deodorant everyday.

### THE PLAN – PUTTING RESEARCH IN CHARGE

In fact, Tatiana has a pack of deodorant in her home. When we visited her in her home she proudly showed us the pack, displayed on a bookshelf or top of TV, together with a bottle of perfume: it seemed like she really was using deodorant everyday. However, when we borrowed the pack and tried to open it, it was quite hard because it had not been opened for a while. The fact that the deodorant wasn't in a bathroom but in the living room suggested clearly that it was not a product used everyday. (See figure 2.)

Visiting consumers in their homes proved indispensable for this project – and in fact, is indispensable for any research project which is "sensitive" enough to drive consumers to post-rationalize their behaviour. While Tatiana might tidy up her living room before our visit, she will, in the language of crime novels, not be able to destroy all the leads and traces because she doesn't know what it is in her surroundings that will give her away.

One in-home visit will most likely not reveal the "truth". The key to observational research is to conduct a large number of observations across locations and across time.

FIGURE 2



The Unilever program of in-home visits in Russia was not limited to this project alone. The program, under the name of project “Window”, is led by the Russian CMI managers and results in hundreds of direct consumer contacts. The CMIs are in charge of regularly moving the key marketing people out of the office to the homes of consumers and to accompanied shopping trips.

We realized that we had to persuade Tatiana (we have targeted women like Tatiana, those who live in bigger cities, are educated and have middle incomes rather than going after people who are extremely poor and have never used deodorant) to start using deodorant every day.

We had conducted extensive qualitative research and learned that we had to talk to Tatiana in very gentle way. The researchers told us that Russian women are extremely feminine and that we shouldn't communicate any message related to body odour to them, as this would be perceived as an insult. But we weren't persuaded. Could we really be gentle and still persuade the consumer to change her behaviour?

A new round of simple qualitative research revealed much more simple and useful findings. We talked to a large number of women who used deodorant infrequently. We asked simple questions without forcing them

to justify or rationalize their behaviour, and we have listened more carefully. One of the key findings was the issue that the infrequent users of deodorants thought that *everybody* was an infrequent user of deodorants. In other words, the women didn't feel guilty about their infrequent usage as this seemed to be the norm. We also asked the women to show us how they apply deodorant when they do use it. They lifted their arms shyly and pressed the imaginary deodorant spray for a millisecond. It dawned on us that they were playing back to us what they had seen in the advertising for deodorants: what was intended as shortcut illustration in the advertising was taken literally by the consumer, who had little experience with the category.

We decided not to rely on the qualitative research results alone. We have re-defined and tightened the objectives. The task became to instigate the cultural and symbolic meanings that underpinned Russian women's attitudes and usage of deodorant.

This project put CMI at the forefront of advertising development, demonstrating that creative and exploratory ways of thinking about consumers and their culture could be the springboard for real influence in the marketing process. Unilever CMI has therefore

developed a model of fast, efficient insight activation that puts CMI at the driving seat of inspiration, rather than taking the back seat.

### INSIGHT ACTIVATION – THE FAST WAY

We had only a limited time for the task; just a couple of months. The first priority was to organize a small task force, a cross functional team of people: CMI, marketing people from within Unilever in Russia and in the Innovation Centre in the UK, a semiotician, and representatives from qualitative research and the advertising agency.

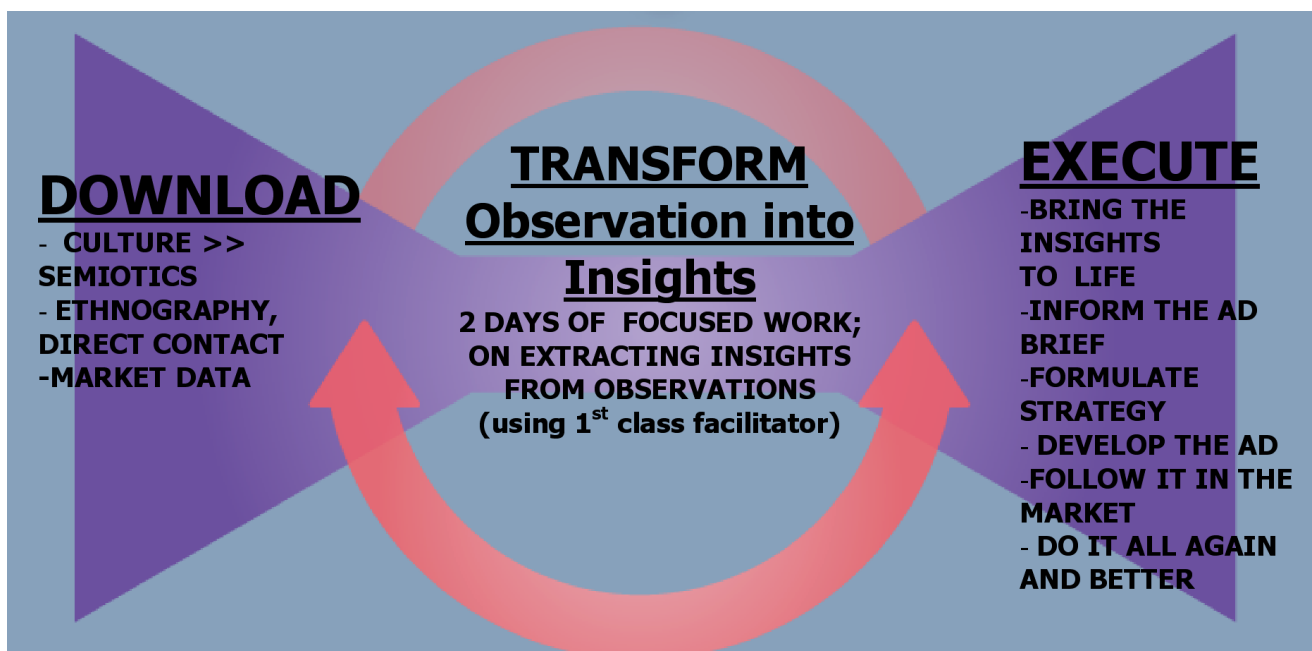
We had used a simple process for the insight activation, consisting of three key phases. During the first “download” phase we went through all the available data and sources of inspiration: we visited the Russian consumers in their homes, re-visited the market data and the data on habits and attitudes and – most importantly – we began to understand to understand Russia, its culture and people through semiotics. (See figure 3.)

### THE SEMIOTICS STAGE: UNCOVERING HIDDEN INSIGHTS FOR INSPIRING CREATIVE PLATFORMS

British semiotics is a wide church — we tend to look through a number of cultural theoretical lenses in order to generate ideas about a culture that provides the basis for building subtle and nuanced metaphorical visions that can help business achieve its objectives. We happily embrace history, psychoanalysis, gender studies, post-modernism, identity politics and even some forms of Marxist inspired ideological analysis: as long as it’s interesting, distinctive and helps us get the answer we’re happy to provide a rich cake, full of tasty theoretical ingredients.<sup>3</sup>

As ever with semiotic analysis, we began by identifying the codes around the brand, the sector and the wider popular cultural world that they occupy: in this case the wider sphere was represented by the worlds of femininity and beauty. In order to understand this we looked at Russian advertising, magazines, movies and TV. But this is only half the story. In tandem with a crack team of Russian academics, Greg Rowland used a wide

FIGURE 3  
DOWNLOAD, TRANSFORM, EXECUTE





panoply of theoretical devices to attack the problem. By taking the broadest overview of Russian history and sociology, reading it as a client might watch a mood tape from an agency, we were able to expand from these small crumbs into some big thematic concepts. Essentially, there are two important areas of stimulus material to bring to any semiotics or cultural theoretical task: one is the stuff at hand (the ads, the packs, the magazines and movies) and then to embrace within the context of everything potentially useful and interesting that you have ever thought or learnt.

So we started with thinking around a vaguely leftist psycho-analytical model,<sup>4</sup> a fairly distant cousin of classical semiotics. The notion that desire is an energy, a free-flowing libidinal force that can never be truly resolved or satiated, is well explored in psychoanalytic thought.<sup>5</sup> This idea, prosaically, that 'too much is never enough' clearly underpins the appeal of consumerism. In those cultures that exemplify the most advanced consumerism, those that we might privilege as 'modern', the issue of exploring personal identity through consumption has been so thoroughly intertwined that it is hard to see the boundaries between the person and the shopping bag.

However, the Russian experience is more complex than the UK/US model. On the one hand we have a symbolic appeal to consumerism – post-modern capitalist symbolism has been thrust on Russia without the previous decades of cultural experience and filtration that the West enjoyed. Russians have fallen in love with the notion of consumerism as an idea, but often don't have the material means to fulfil complete participation. The country has been suddenly thrown into the deep end of capitalism and consumerism without the years of cultural training (and checks and balances) that characterised the West.

While rich Muscovites can compete to over-spend each other on luxury brands, the mass of Russians can only look on the Gucci-class with resentment and envy. However, an FMCG brand like Rexona represents a means of symbolic participation in consumer culture. It's not a commodity absolutely necessary for survival –

more of a symbol of participation in civilised modernity. Brands like Rexona offer a gateway into the self-realizations of consumerism that are within the financial means of many Russians.

The clear business objective was therefore to encourage consumers to use Rexona on a daily basis, as in the Western model of volume use. It needed to become part of the regular social and cultural flow of life, rather than being inappropriately elevated to the world of special occasions and higher forms of feminine enhancement through fine fragrance.

It was important to understand the nature of the Rexona brand in essence, in order to find a route for Russia that would be accountable to the brand as well as the realities of the symbolic or cultural nature of the region. Consumer need is the third part of the triangle of brand accountability: but one corner should never overwhelm the other. It's clear that a great deal of consumer research and marketing strategy concentrates on the consumer need to the detriment of the *brand's needs* and to those critical issues that are thrown up by the complex interplay of culture, society, symbolism, representation and codes that create the framework by which all collective meanings are generated and understood.

So we found some connections between the Rexona brand offer/image and that of the symbolic nature of Russia itself, to ensure that we were bridging the gap. It was important here to change consumer perceptions and practices, not merely to echo them. As far as Russians were concerned, Rexona already answered the 'need state' for occasional protection against sweat and odour. We needed to educate them that there was a bigger, more symbolically redolent need state than the one they currently practiced.

Previous work had identified the unique nature of Rexona for Women: offering an absolute certainty of trust at the efficacy level coupled with a sense of fuzzier aspects of the specific emotional benefits for women. A quick, and probably rather insulting, overview of Russian history showed a strange parallel to the brand: Russia had

always favoured strong leaders (the rational efficacy brand of rule) to avoid some sense of chaos and the unconscious (the feminine) that always threatened to overturn the Motherland if it was not kept in check by a strong hand. It was almost as though Russia considered itself to be that most hapless of distraught women – the woman who actually thinks she needs a ‘good slap’ once in a while to keep her chaotic feminine nature within the bounds of respectability. Of course we neither condone cruelty on a national, historical or inter-personal scale – but somehow the parallel has some traction.

Although we are clearly insulting an entire nation with a vague simile about hysterical women, we nevertheless felt that this insight could act as a point of cultural navigation for Rexona: its firm inherently masculine efficacy promise could promise a strong hand of leadership, but, unlike the worst historical Russian leaders, also privileged feminine qualities of beauty, play and the unexpected. Our experience has shown that those brands that take oppositional and paradoxical ideas in a given culture, and then find a means of metaphorically resolving them, can really prosper in the marketplace.

This distinctively Russian sense of ‘everything’s probably going to go horribly wrong’ can be encapsulated as a ‘joyful pessimism.’ Rather than those insecurities of the persistent pursuit of personal happiness that characterises the West, the Russian pessimistic spirit is actually a locus of security. The worst events are rarely shocking, and only occasionally just about as bad as they could possibly be. The Russian, by avoiding misery – as opposed to striving hierarchically and competing for happiness – probably remains a more psychologically grounded individual than her Western European counterpart.

The outcomes of this ‘joyful pessimism’ create huge reservoirs of humour – a classic coping strategy for races and societies that have had too large a share of hardship and disruption. But at an even more fundamental level there’s a sense of ‘parallel equanimity’ that drives Russian consumers. It’s an idea familiar to older incarnations of consumer culture in the UK, summed

up in the phrase “keeping up with the Jones”. Eighty years ago, before the big consumer revolutions of the 1960s, the average Englishman was concerned with achieving equivalence with his neighbours – not wanting to get ‘above himself’ by having more, but not feeling left behind either. This led to a culture where acquisition and aspiration was not the driving force but where a sense of social equanimity instead flourished. Of course these concerns do not create dynamic entrepreneurial cultures. It was always different in the US (and modern Britain) where the idea was to aspire beyond your immediate community, to ‘reach for the stars’ by expressing your inalienable individual right to make money and ‘really become somebody’.

So Russia, and this may change if consumerism develops further and the Muscovite codes of rampant consumerism becomes dominant, is generally all about coveting each other’s asses, rather than wanting to own an entire ass ranch or start an ass-burger franchise with outlets across the world. This has a peculiar resonance for thinking about a brand like Rexona, and the mechanisms by which we seek to create change in usage to maximise volume potentials. If, by some communicational mechanism, we could convince Russian women that everybody else was wearing Rexona everyday, the notion of social equivalence would play strongly for the brand.

The consequences of social embarrassment and sense of relative inferiority are critical notions for Russia. Again, we see a reflection of nations like Britain in earlier stages of consumerist development. Rather than following a rampant individualism and the free flowing of self expression as a mode of generating a sense of personal significance (however illusory that may be), Russians are more concerned with conformity and compliance: they are more concerned with questions like “what will others say? What will others think?” than their Western counterparts. Essentially, standing out from the crowd is undesirable for Russians in several respects. Clearly, for a brand like Rexona, the fear of ‘being discovered’ is a strong potential motivator. The central issue is the specific division between public and private in Russian

culture. In micro-social groups and in private, Russians can be joyful, expressive and exuberant. But in the public sphere, Russians tend to emphasise conformity, a certain gloomy 'keeping your head down'.

The cultural origins of these attitudes are not hard to discern. It's clearly a consequence of the relative lack of public freedoms that emanate from the tendency to live with strong leaders and a generally more authoritarian regime than the West. Obviously this has had more extreme forms in Russian history during Stalinist and post-Stalinist eras, but it would seem that the current political leadership, while lacking the explicit violence of Stalinist regimes, nevertheless has an increasingly strong grip on the public attitudes of the community: the idea of 'Managed Democracy'. So many people may genuinely love Putin, but many of those who don't will generally stay pretty quiet about discontent.

Presenting a public face that borders on a certain expression of understandable dishonesty is therefore a cultural norm in Russia. Behind the scenes, and in your private soul, you may rally against the system and the government. But in the public sphere, compliance is key. For a deodorant brand, this relationship between private and public selves is critical. Body odour emanates from the private self, but is accessible by the public. Odour gives away your innermost private bodily nature to the masses. There is, not to put too fine a point on it, a huge potential for exploiting this paranoiac social attitude.

This dissonance between a sense of public and personal spheres also gives rise to a culture wherein official rules are interpreted as loose guidelines. Beyond explicit corruption there is a clearly evidence of Russia's functioning on a micro-social scale through the notion of 'shared concepts' (*po ponyatiyam*.) Russian society is built around personal networks, the exchange of favours, the bending of the official rules and, on occasions, genuine corruption. We should not apply our lofty Western European morals to this (where of course corruption is rife, but tending to be confined to a more elitist level of society.) In Russia, the social 'spin', the 'ducking and diving', merely reflects the non-functioning

of the rational. The paradox remains that in authoritarian official cultures the greater the micro-community response will be in terms of dodging the supposedly official rational social structures. There thus arises the idea in Russia that almost anything can be overcome by a certain amount of spin, of clever manoeuvring. It was critical for Rexona to persuade that where sweat and odour were concerned this was a strictly 'no-spin' zone.

We have talked about Russia as a generality in this paper. There are of course many Russias. But marketing cannot generally account for a variety of local differences and needs to make broad generalisations about culture. Occasionally, however, contrasting different cultures within a nation can provide useful angles for brand development. In particular we should draw attention to the contrasts between Moscow and the rest of the nation. Moscow is where the money is; where for many, the promise of rampant consumerism has become a lived reality. Here, luxury Western brands are key to social status. Younger women, in particular, have taken up materialist glamour as a token of self-esteem in a more extreme and upfront way than almost any other women in the West. Suffice to say that most non-Muscovites consider Moscow another country, while the inverse in terms of Muscovite snobbery is true. The glamorous status-driven Moscow look is simultaneously admired and resented by their poorer cousins outside the city. While non-Muscovites object to the excessive materialism of these hyper-glamorous women, there is also a sense that, given half a chance, most women would be glad to join them. It's important to remember that Russia is still a more unapologetically patriarchal society – a woman's glamorous appearance is still critical in terms of status, a good marriage and career prospects. That's not to say that all these issues have been solved in the West, but the Russian experience is generally less advanced in dissociating women as objects of desire and women as people of equal talent and capability to men.

Previous conventional research had shown that beauty was of vital importance for Russian women – in the



consumers' minds it meant the difference between a happy and prosperous life with a relatively sober husband, and a life of unremitting misery, somewhat akin to the worst aspects of a depressive British soap opera. However, this research, while valuable, had been taken too literally in the past. The semiotics and workshop format allowed us to address the issue of beauty, without fear of creating offence. Indeed, a degree of offence, surprise and even shock were considered useful potential communication attributes.

We're fairly sure that Lenin wasn't talking about marketing deodorants when he asked, "What is to be done?"<sup>6</sup> But this is the essential question that faces anyone who wants to lodge theoretical hypotheses into the lived, material world – whether it's research findings for a brand or Marxism to inform a revolution. How could we bring these semiotic findings to life? How could they help inspire platforms for advertising that would strike new chords in Russian women's minds and really change their behaviour?

The effective use of semiotics lies not only in rigorous analysis but also the application of a specific kind of creativity that comes from this way of seeing the world: specifically the means to build imaginative space (metaphor) on the findings of theory. Some agencies provide rigorous analytical frameworks, other agencies provide pure creative intuition, but the marriage of the two is still too rare in the industry. We are well served with brilliant analysts, but research often finds itself locked into replaying and classifying the known and the verifiable. Semiotics, at its best, creates a positively imagined market, able to deliver new thinking around sectors precisely because it is not bound within the confines of reportage or direct reflection as its starting point. The semiotic promise is not only to explain the hidden meanings of culture, but also to engineer worlds where culture, consumer brands and symbolism can be re-imagined to create commercial benefits.

So, on the basis of much of what has been outlined above, we set about constructing 'Cultural Zones' that would serve as platforms to inspire genuinely salient

brand communications designed to change consumer behaviour. There were several key issues that a communication platform needed to address:

1. *The Culture of Embarrassment*. Rexona Response: not to be afraid to shock and shame people into realising the awful consequences of sweat and odour in everyday circumstances.
2. *The Russian 'Spin'*. Rexona Response: there is no spin around sweat and odour. There's no getting away with it. Other people, causing huge embarrassment, will find you out.
3. *The Obsession with glamour and beauty*. Beauty and glamour are essential for women. Moscow represents a high point of this idea of glamour as status. Communications could represent this beauty, but also allow non-Moscovites a means of feeling superior (the beautiful Moscow woman is actually pretty stinky.)
4. *The Strong Leader*. If sweat and odour is the body's unconscious, then Rexona can act as the strong leader, keeping the chaos of the feminine body under control.

Thus the semiotics suggested a platform that would combine the obsession with beauty, exercising paranoia around social embarrassment and suggesting, true to Rexona's roots, that there is an absolute binary at work here. Rexona works – "it won't let you down" – but when you don't use Rexona everyday there's no means of tricking yourself or other people. You will be smelly, and there's no spin around this, however beautiful you may be.

### BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER TO GENERATE INSIGHT PLATFORMS

The two-day workshop in Moscow was the crucial part of the process. First, we allowed ourselves to think out of the box; looking at the consumers and their culture holistically rather than looking at them as users of deodorants. We have then brought the key observations and inspiration "back to the box", i.e. to the task of instigating behavioural change and driving consumers to use more deodorants. Under pressure

to produce results, we bought in Matt Hart, a creative consultant with whom we had worked before and who would prove vital to us in getting out fast results. Matt has a slightly different take on 'session moderation' and we trusted him to invent an 'experience' that would deliver our objectives.

Matt Hart uses what he calls 'Creative Discipline' – an innovative approach that neither relies solely on creative, intuitive thinking, nor solely on some rigid innovation process that grinds out results. Matt believes there is a 'Third Way' to generating insights. Creative Discipline is simply thinking through a process to produce fresh results. We used this approach to 'hold' the two days together, producing a flow to the session that 'feels' natural, allowing for both individuals and the whole team to move easily between open, exploratory thinking to closed, analytically-driven decision making.

Our two-day session was a dynamic experience led by Matt, utilizing our collective creative power to explore raw consumer data and the semiotic input. This collective approach led to the emergence of compelling insights, using the discipline of the innovation process to encourage and keep us on the commercial track to turn those insights into productive platforms.

The essence of the workshop was the transformation of observations into insights, and into insight platforms directly connected with the key task.

Let's illustrate Matt's approach to insight generation with an example. Matt helped us to initially select a strong, general observation, for instance the thought on "collective and horizontal Russian society". He would then prompt us to find related observations from knowledge that we have gathered. In this case such related observation came from the qualitative research: all the infrequent users thought that everybody else was an infrequent user. We then tried to connect the ideas and generate insight out of that connection. In this case, the headline for the insight was as follows: "everybody else is using deodorant regularly and you don't want to be the last one left out, i.e. not using it." The insight seemed compelling because it was based on our general

knowledge of the Russian culture and the particular knowledge of the consumer and her relationship with the product category.

We produced several insight platforms during the workshop in Moscow and a few days after the workshop we presented the insights to the key stakeholders within Unilever and the advertising agency – and two of the insight platforms were immediately chosen as foundations for the "push and pull" communication strategy. (See figure 4.)

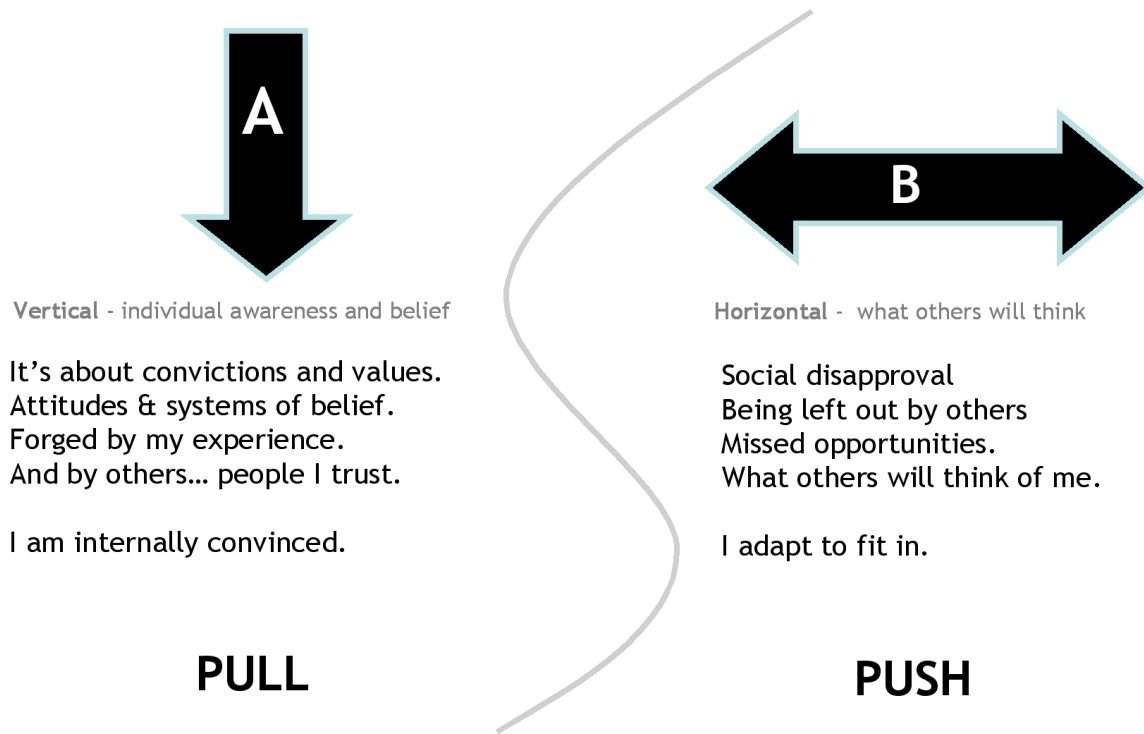
### CONCLUSION: A NEW MODEL OF INSIGHT GENERATION

We will not test the finished advertising. We have developed the communication in close connection with consumers and with people who know the consumers better than the consumers know themselves. This is why we are confident that the communication strategy will work in Russia. Rather than spending on testing, we will focus our energy on following the campaign in market and in following its impact on the frequency of usage of deodorants in Russia. We will then enter the process again and develop new communications based on the knowledge that we have gathered.

The development of the new communication for Rexona in Russia exemplifies the repositioning of the CMI function within Unilever. While traditionally the research department was preoccupied with evaluation of concepts and execution in the middle or towards the end of the innovation funnel, the focus of the new CMI function is on the early stages of innovation and communication development. That shift is accompanied by a fundamental change in the research toolset. Instead of just relying on the repetitive quantitative and qualitative research techniques that can isolate people and products from the context of their existence, we must employ other techniques – namely semiotics and ethnography – those that portray consumers as real people, within the context of their environment and culture.

The traditional market researchers tended to sit in the far corner of the marketing departments, crunching

FIGURE 4  
PUSH AND PULL



numbers and occasionally being asked to execute a test. The only way for market research to re-gain respect internally and externally is by leaving the predictable world of numbers, hum-drum research 'findings' and PowerPoint charts behind. Instead market research can enter the real world: a dynamic site of uncertainty, emotion, intuition, bold thinking and great new opportunities. (See figure 5.)

**Footnotes**

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2. Slavoz Zizek. For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (Phronesis), Verso Books, 16 August 2002.
3. Virginia Valentine, Special Report: Semiotics. Research Magazine. December 2003.
4. Slavoj Zizek. Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture (October Books). The MIT Press, 12 October 1992.

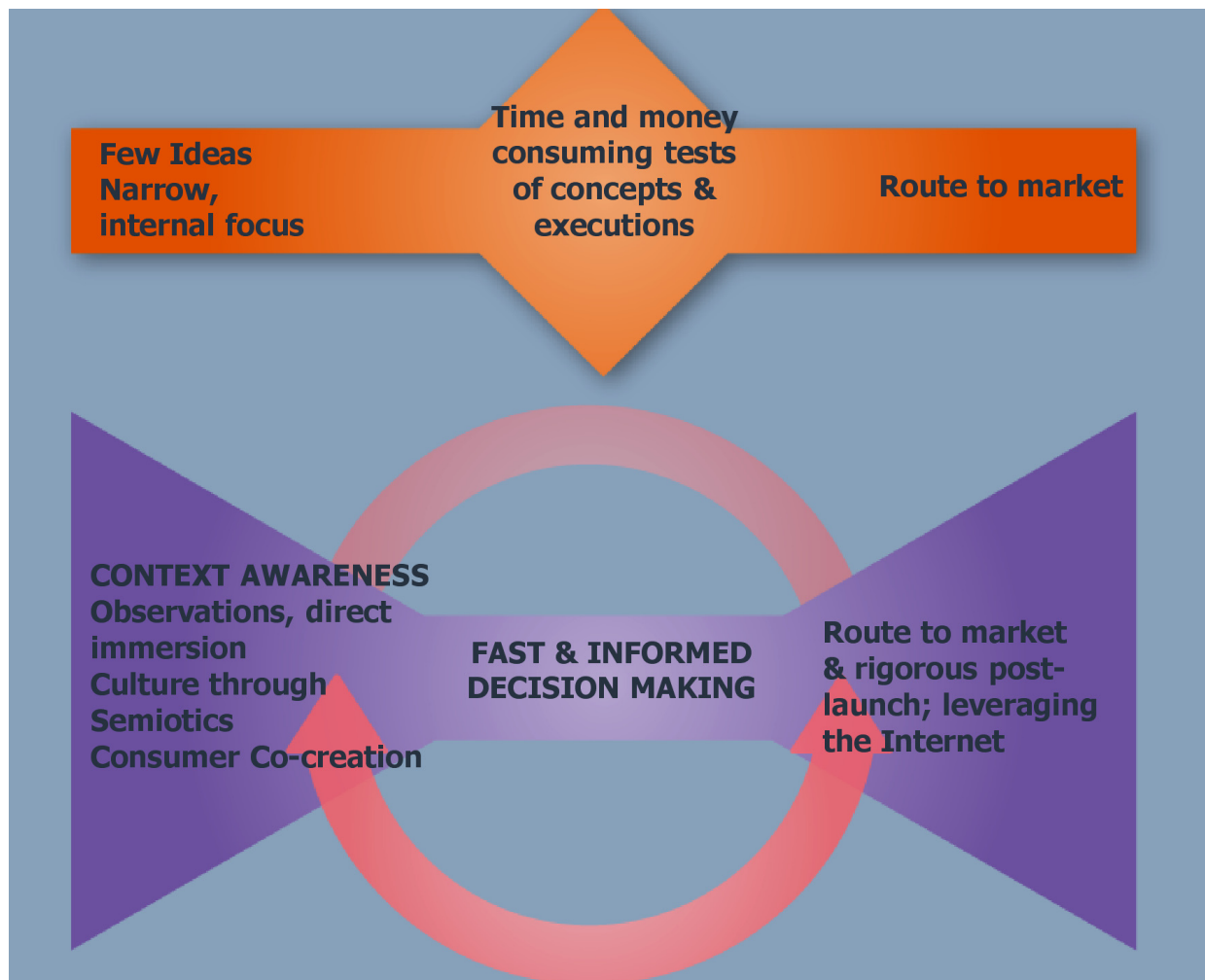
5. Jacques Lacan. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

6. V.I. Lenin. What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement. Foreign Languages Press, December 1996.

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FIGURE 5  
THE TRADITIONAL "FAT SNAKE" APPROACH TO MR



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APPENDIX A: THE CONCEPTS

FIGURE 6  
HEADLINE: MY BEAUTY INSURANCE



**CONSUMER INSIGHTS**

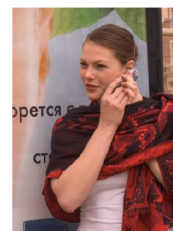
“Preserving my beauty and femininity is a key to my success in life.”  
 “If I smell, all of my efforts and aspirations to be beautiful will fall apart.”  
 “I invest a lot into making myself beautiful in the morning – and I want to preserve the picture throughout the day.”



**OBSERVATIONS**

“A shower would be enough to get me through the day if the day lasted 4 hours.”  
 “I know which small things help to preserve my looks.”  
 “I know the recipe for making myself beautiful, and making that beauty last.”  
 Personal space is increasingly a luxury leaving you constantly exposed to inspection and judgment.  
 Russian women invest a lot into their beauty/grooming rituals. They want to preserve the picture they create.  
 Russian women need to be beautiful to get a husband and get ahead – it’s an instinct for survival.

FIGURE 7  
HEADLINE: MOSCOW WOMEN – SHOW THEM THE WAY!



**CONSUMER INSIGHTS**

“I know that it is the time to get ahead in Russia and I don’t want to miss the train”  
 “It’s ok to stand out in a confident way.”  
 “I don’t like those arrogant women from Moscow but I really want to be one of them.”



**OBSERVATIONS**

Brands and products help point the way to success.  
 “I see examples of success and I want to become successful myself.”  
 “Using deodorant is a normal part of my daily beauty routine for a modern woman.”  
 “Russian women need someone to show them that deo should be used every day.”  
 Women from Moscow lead beauty and style trends in Russia.  
 “Russia is a hysterical female: sometimes she needs to be slapped”  
 Russia is becoming modern progressive country. It’s unacceptable for a modern and stylish woman to smell bad.

\*Moscow is used as metaphor for a modern, successful Russian



APPENDIX B: THE ADVERTISING BRIEF

FIGURE 8  
TATTOO

# Tattoo

“You are beautiful so don’t get branded by BO.

Body odour is a serious flaw in your beauty – we communicate odour with a strong visual symbol.

Creative idea:

**Disgusting tattoos.** A little tattoo suddenly appearing on the body can be sexy, charming and beautiful– except when it symbolizes strong body odour. The shocking revelation of different smelly-symbol tattoos on beautiful women strongly communicate how BO can brand you and take away from your beauty.