

# WARM VODKA AND SWEATY WOMEN

CHANGING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN RUSSIA

Greg Rowland  
Greg Rowland Semiotics, UK

Jaroslav Cír  
Unilever, UK

WORLD

ESOMAR

RESEARCH



# “Warm vodka and smelly women” Driving deodorant usage in Russia

## Outline

- Conventional research techniques had been unable to find the key insights necessary to drive behavioural change around Russian women’s relatively infrequent use of deodorant.
- Qualitative research had reproduced the prejudices of the sector
- Semiotics, ethnography and market analysis provided a means of generating new insights around Russian women and their use of deo.
- This unique methodological process inspired the creation of a powerful communication that both raised and resolved specifically Russian tensions around sweat, body odour, beauty and femininity.

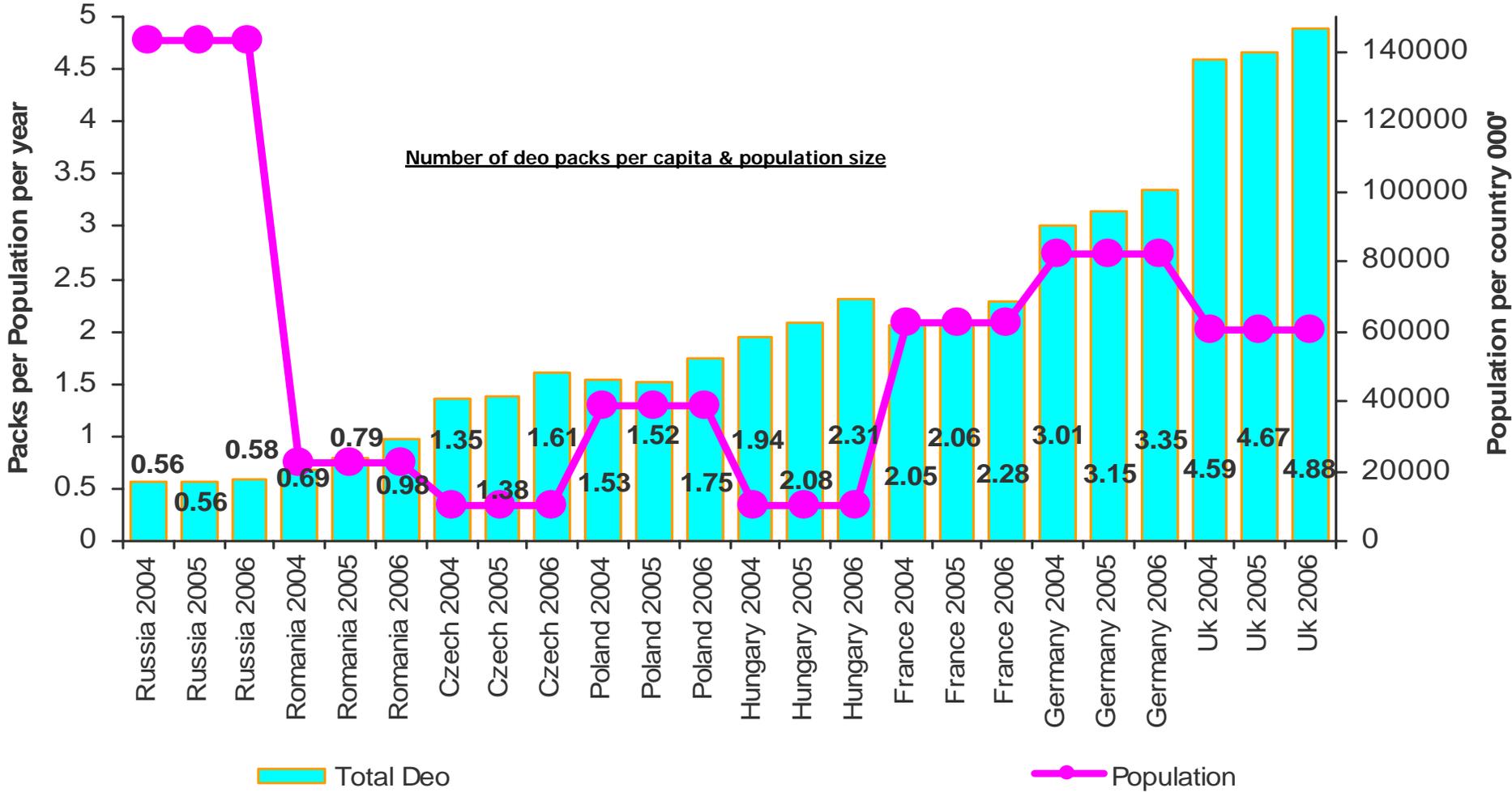




### The business objective:

To develop communication for Russia that would instigate a change in consumer behavior, i.e., drive women to use Rexona deodorant more often.

# 2006-2005-2004 Deo Consumption per Capita



Source: ACN, Governmental Statistics

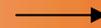
# Developing communication insights for Russia: from focus on eliminating risks to a focus on illuminating opportunities.

The traditional, "fat snake" approach to MR

Few Ideas  
Narrow,  
internal focus



Time and money  
consuming tests  
of concepts & executions



Route to market

Open-ended research model

CONTEXT AWARENESS

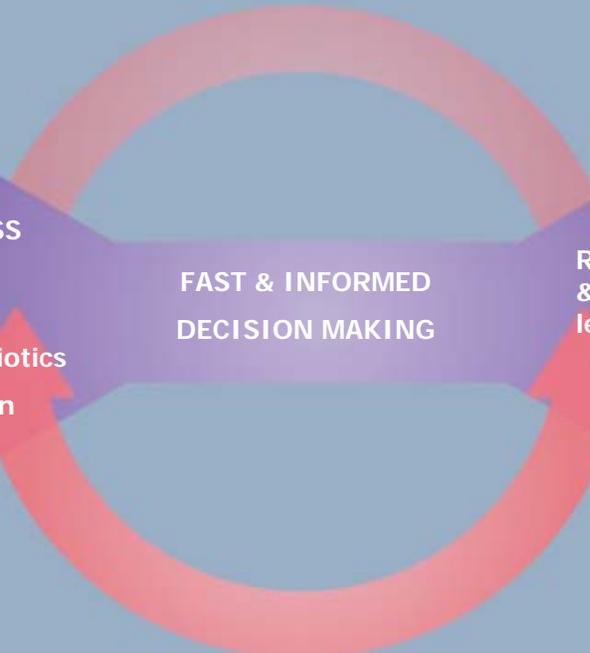
Observations, direct  
immersion

Culture through Semiotics

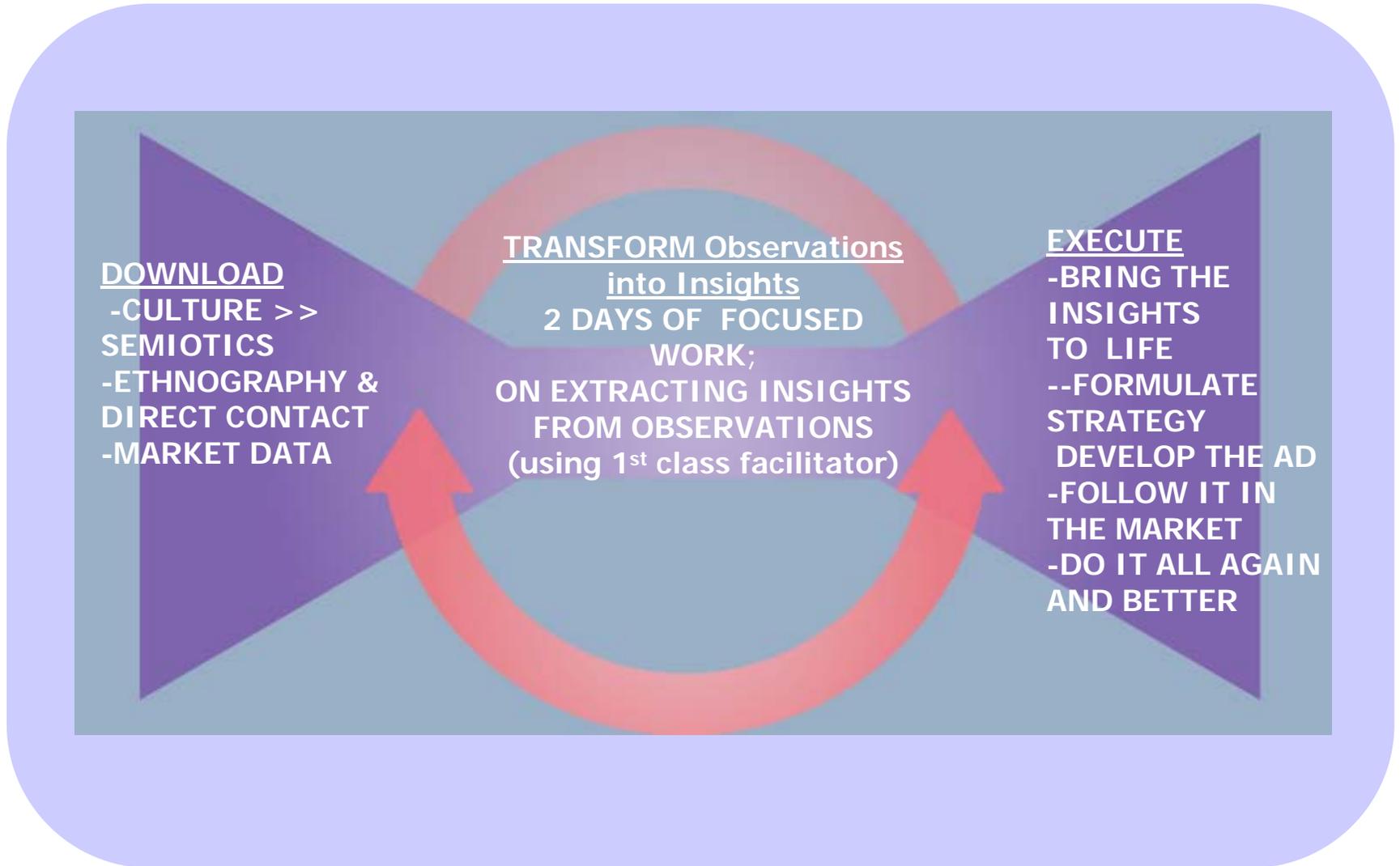
Consumer Co-creation

FAST & INFORMED  
DECISION MAKING

Route to market  
& rigorous post-launch;  
leveraging the Internet



# Insight Activation: simple and intuitive process to arrive to insights from facts, findings and observations



The power of observation: consumers lie in focus groups, ....but in their homes their own "stuff" gives them away...



\*Deodorant standing next to perfume on a bookshelf suggests an occasional usage

\*This and hundred of other observations fed into the process of insight activation

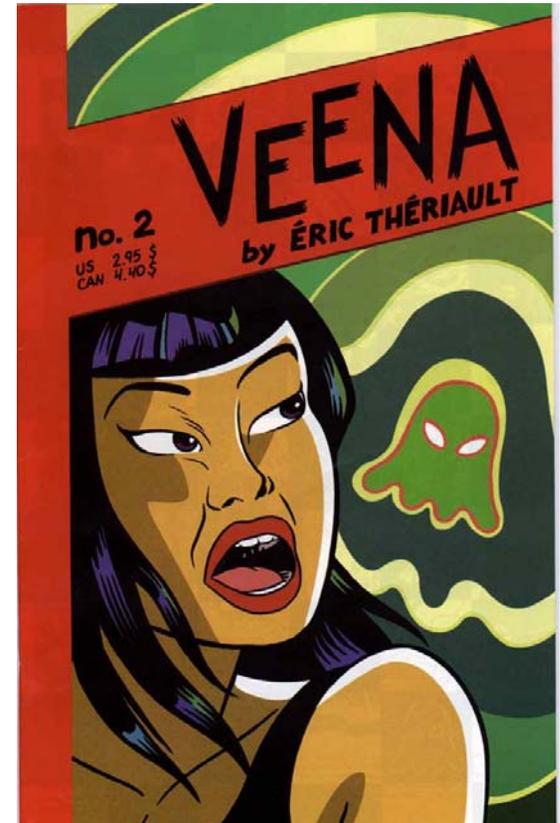
# We identified several cultural themes in Russia

- ◆ **The Strong Leader**
- ◆ Mother Russia as a potentially hysterical woman who loves strong rational leadership
- ◆ A sense that Russia may collapse into emotional anarchy if not bound in by strong rationality and authority
- ◆ Russia as the 'unconscious of the West'



# We identified several cultural themes in Russia

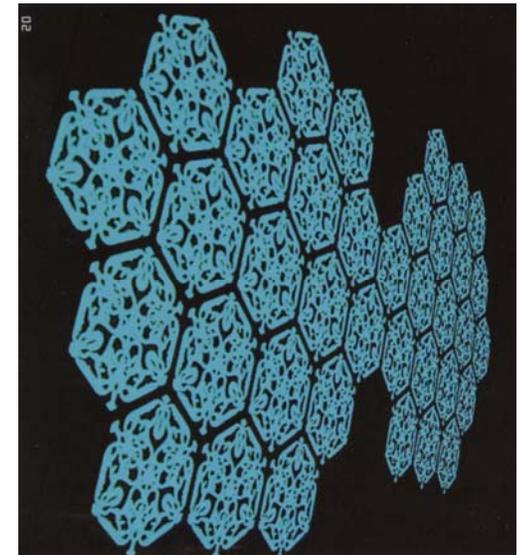
- ◆ **The Joy of Pessimism**
- ◆ If things can go wrong, they will go wrong
- ◆ But ultimately there is a security and comfort in expecting the worst, and dealing with it with a typical dark humour
- ◆ *"We hoped for the best, but things turned out as usual."* (Viktor Chernomyrdin, former Russian Prime Minister, on the death of Yelstin)



# We identified several cultural themes in Russia

## ◆ Shared Concepts

- ◆ Despite the strong leader, society is built upon personal networks, exchange of favours and a fair degree of corruption
- ◆ Despite, or perhaps because of elite authoritarianism, there is a culture of communal 'spin'
- ◆ This culture informs people that there are always short-cuts to any goal



# We identified several cultural themes in Russia

- ◆ **Moscow and Glamour**
- ◆ Moscow represents the materialist elite as the key site of glamour in Russia
- ◆ Glamour is the new ideology — justifying elite behaviours
- ◆ Women outside Moscow may view the capital as desirable and despicable simultaneously



# How did these themes contribute to building a platform for Rexona?

- ◆ **Shared Concepts:** Rexona needed to emphasise that sweat and odour are 'no-spin' zones. However beautiful or lucky you are, you will be let down by your 'liquid unconscious'.
- ◆ **Moscow and Glamour:** could Rexona play on the admiration and jealousy that constructs the specifically elite ideology of Russian glamour?

# How did these themes contribute to building a platform for Rexona?

- ◆ **The Strong Leader:** Rexona should not be afraid of up-front and challenging expressions of its own authority
- ◆ **The Joy of Pessimism:** Rexona had license to find powerful way of suggesting that the best possible moments can be destroyed by sweat and odour

# Semiotics as Inspiration

- ◆ We evolved several platforms based on these themes
- ◆ The variety of platforms gave the workshop stakeholders an opportunity to play with ideas, and to understand their location and relevance in culture
- ◆ Overall, we felt that Russia needed glamorous glossy advertising, but with a challenging marketing message that reflected the relative lack of evolution within the category...

# Examples of Semiotic Platforms for Advertising Inspiration

- ◆ **Sweat Monsters**
- ◆ Bacteria monsters are like gremlins which you can never shake off
- ◆ The gremlins which prevent you from having fun or taking opportunities
- ◆ Rexona as the ray-gun which banishes the gremlins from your life forever!



# Examples of Semiotic Platforms for Advertising Inspiration

## ◆ Educate Your Armpits

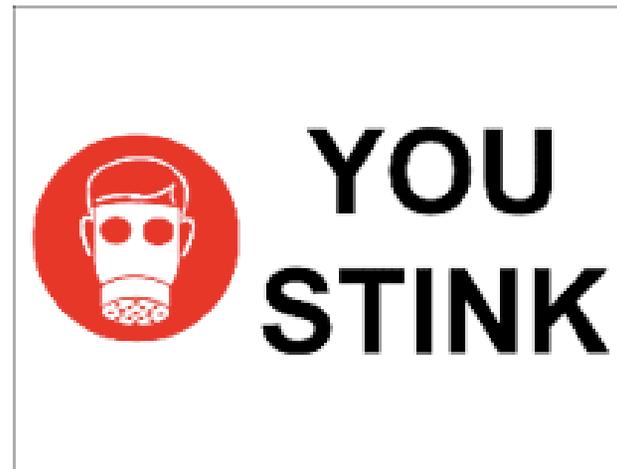
- ◆ Sweat is great for animals and cave people, it marks out who they are — but shouldn't we have advanced a little beyond this?
- ◆ Sweat is gross nature — and armpits are the window to our basest animal form if not cared for properly
- ◆ Rexona is like a civilising process for the armpit and moves us away from the animalistic and unpleasant aspects of the natural...



# Examples of Semiotic Platforms for Advertising Inspiration

## ◆ Odour as Tell-Tale

- ◆ There's no disguising, no getting around it, no spin around stinkiness
- ◆ Odour as a revelation of your innermost Self: it's like leaving your finger prints at a scene
- ◆ The consumer can choose to leave a more elegant Calling Card than a residual stink...



# The Transformation of Observations into Insights & Insights Platforms.

Everybody is already using it!: example of transformation

## OBSERVATIONS

- Russia is a horizontal society; people feel strong need to keep up with their neighbours
- The infrequent deodorant users believe that everybody around them is an infrequent user

## TRANSFORM

### Observations into Insights

## INSIGHT

-“I don’t want to stand out – to be the last one who is not using deodorant everyday.”

# ...and the Insight Platforms

## HEADLINE

Everybody is already using it!



## CONSUMER INSIGHTS

“I don’t want to stand out – to be the last one who is not using deo today.”  
“It is important not to be ahead of but at the same level as one’s neighbours.”  
“I use deo rarely – because everybody else uses deo rarely.”

## OBSERVATIONS

Frequent users think that everyone uses deo. Occasional users think that everyone uses only occasionally.

It’s about social “pull” rather than social disapproval.

Not wearing deo is like going out without any clothes on.

Horizontal vs. Vertical Society: I choose to play not to lose as opposed to playing to win.

Russia is a communal society, not individualistic.



## 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.”

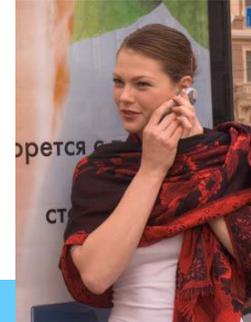
Personal space is increasingly a luxury leaving you constantly exposed to inspection and judgment.

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.

## 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.”**

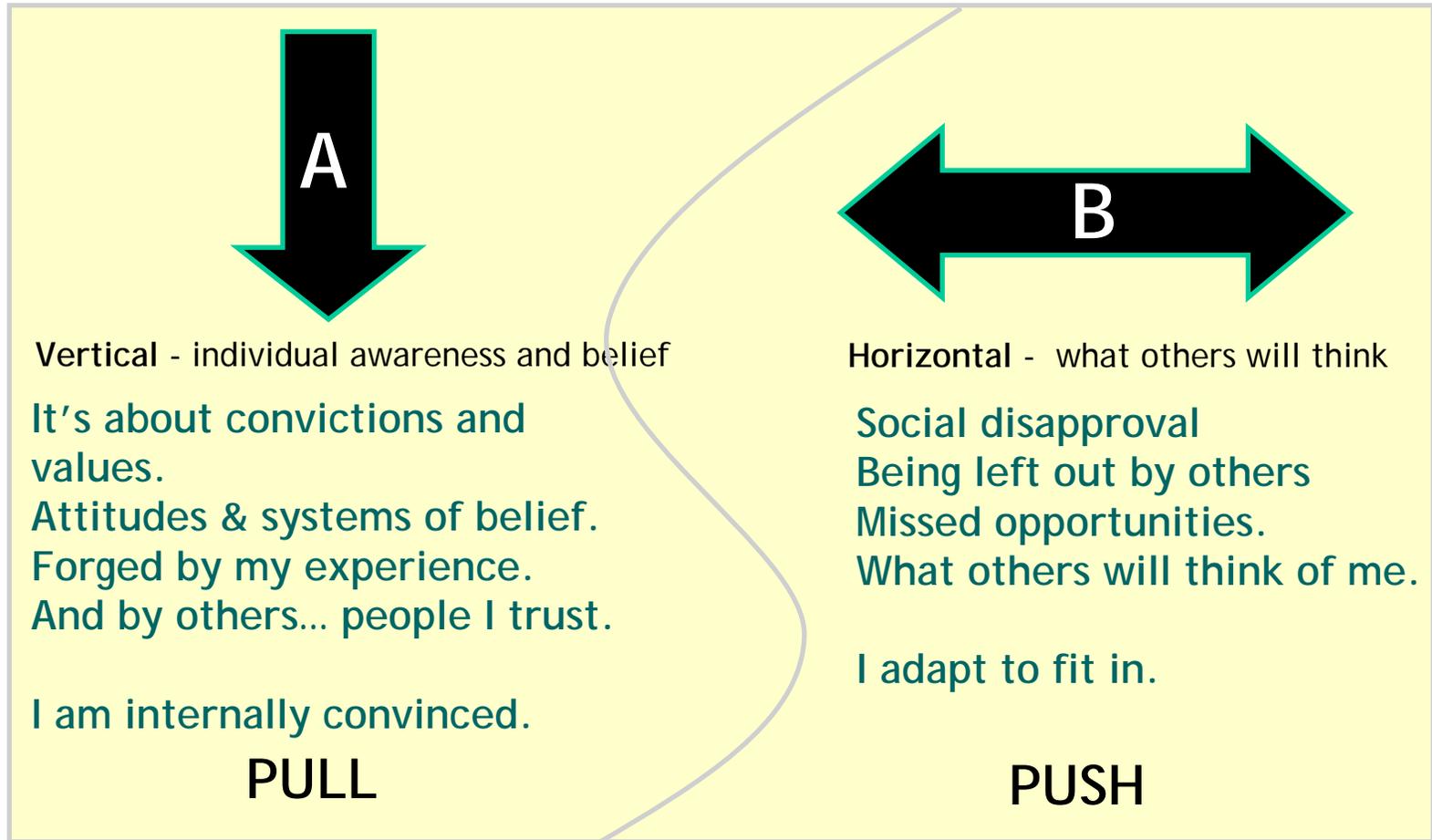
**Women from Moscow lead beauty and style trends in Russia.**

**“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 women**

# The Strategy based on the insight platforms: 'push' & 'pull' communication



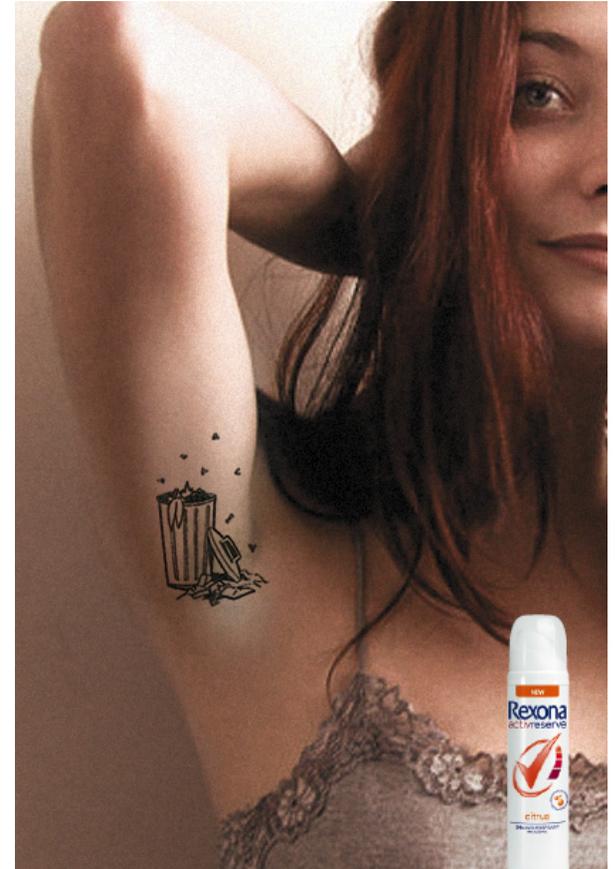
# The Execution of the push approach: Tattoo TV ad

“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.



# The Implications for Market Research

- **The development of the new communication for Rexona in Russia exemplifies the repositioning of the CMI function within Unilever.**
- **Focus of the new CMI function is on the early stages of innovation and communication development.**
- **A change in the research toolset: focus on semiotics and ethnography - portraying consumers as real people, within the context of their environment and culture.**
- **To re-gain respect internally and externally market research must enter the real world of UNCERTAINTY, FEELING, INTUITION and great new OPPORTUNITIES.**

