



Research Article

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Study on Hofstede's Cultural Dimension in Car Advertisement of Different Cultures

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the demand of cars has increased a lot. Car advertisement, as the media of introduction, promotion and sales of automobile, has played an important role in car industry. Therefore, in today's society, the research of car advertisement is urgent. As different audiences live in different social and cultural environment, thus in accepting the advertising propaganda and in performing purchasing action, consumers show different cultural characteristics. This article is based on the power distance and individualism and collectivism in Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. The author makes a comparative analysis from cultural perspective on Chinese and Western car advertisement so that to find out the cultural differences and to explore their influence and limitation in car advertising. The study on the car advertising will not only help domestic and foreign car production and sales providers better grasp of the current car consumption of customers, also helps them to adjust their product performance, more good to meet the automotive needs of different residents, more to help see the quality of advertising behind the car.

Key words: car advertising; cultural dimension; culture; globalization

INTRODUCTION

As the development of the economy and technology becomes faster and faster, advertisement plays a more and more important role in our daily life. Actually, we are living in a world of advertisement which permeates every aspect of our social life. The function of advertisement is to give a deep impression on the readers and persuade the potential consumers to buy their products. Advertising helps to make people aware of products, service and ideas, also enlarge market and promote sales and profits.

Soon after the advent of autos in the world, auto advertising made its appearance to the public and has been receiving much attention from auto manufacturers and consumers from then on. In most cases, advertising works by using language in a given cultural environment. This is one of the thesis's major points. Because advertisement has a profound cultural meaning, the cultural values such as "home", "relative sentiments" in the Chinese advertising and the cultural value "individualism" in the American advertising are often used as selling appeals and work powerfully and effectively. But at present, many Chinese advertisements, particularly the commercials in CCTV, have begun to urge young people to show their personality, or individualism, by using the products advertised. This change is obviously and helpful. Therefore, the car industry has faced increasingly fierce competition. How to give the cars a good introduction and sell them to consumers has become a problem of automobile industry. Advertisements as a link between merchants and consumers, in today's multimedia environment, inevitably become businessmen's favor.

ADVERTISEMENT AND CAR ADVERTISEMENT

Depending on different people's point of view, the definitions of advertisement are various. The word "advertise" originated from the Latin word "advertere" means "to inform somebody of something" or "to make known to the public". A Chinese dictionary *Cihai* gives the word "advertising" a modern meaning: Advertising is a type of

publicity made to public something like goods, services or entertainments, usually through newspapers, magazines, television, posters, films, slide shows, window shows, etc. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines advertising as “the action of attracting public attention to a product or business, as by paid announcements in print or on the air”. Alexander stated that “Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor”. The Definition Committee of American Marketing Association (AMA) defined “advertising” as “the non-personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media”. Until now, there is no agreed definition given to advertising, and different scholars have different approaches to it. It can be seen that it is hard to define advertisement concisely. As a matter of fact, advertisement is an important way to establish enterprises’ relationship with the potential consumers, which acts as a medium for interaction and negotiation between the advertiser and the potential consumers. As for advertisers, the function of advertisements is to give a deep impression on the readers and persuade the potential consumers to buy their products. While, for the customers, advertisement gives them an easy way to know the image and the advantages of a specific product, brand or service and thus helps them to understand and evaluate experience with the products and services they want to buy.

The appearance of car advertisement, as a way of knowing new brands and new cars, has shown an upward trend in recent years. As for the customers, it is the most direct way to get the information about the products when they have the intention to buy vehicle among many brands and different models by reading the auto advertisement. Compared with early advertisements, today’s auto advertisements contain not only much more detailed information about mechanical characteristics, but also richer cultural elements which exert a profound impact on people’s mind.

China is the world’s fastest growing automobile market. In 2008, 9.345 million motor vehicles were manufactured in China, surpassing United States as the second largest automobile maker, after Japan. As of November 2009, China has overtaken the U.S. as the world’s largest car consumer. With the estimated 13 million vehicles in 2009, China would also become the world largest automobile producer. Especially in this global economic downturn, in the coming 2015, auto industry is expected as one of the key enablers of the continuous growth and employment. Compared with auto advertising abroad, auto advertising made its first appearance in China much later. In 1956, the first Chinese auto named *Liberation* was produced by the Changchun First Motor Vehicle Plant. Since then, the curtain of China’s auto manufacturing industry was raised. Auto advertising in China has gone through more than 30 years and presented different characteristics in different time period.

Before the 1980s, only two China-owned car brands existed in China which were “Hongqi” and “Shanghai” respectively. These cars were only used by government officials. With planned economy prevalent in China at that time, the manufactured auto products were limited in number and disposed by the country. Since no competition was involved in this situation, there was no need for launching advertisements by the manufacturers. Since 1978, with the brought forth of the reform and opening up policy, especially after the establishment of planned commodity economy based on socialist public ownership in 1984, large numbers of imported autos entered into Chinese market which drove the development of auto advertising in China. Chinese auto manufacturers just began to be aware of the function of advertisements and auto brands such as Hongqi, Xiali and Jiangling began to appear in advertisements. The prevalent form of auto advertisements at this period was characterized by salient symbols, simple words and big pictures of the products. Since 1990s, with China’s further opening up to the outside world, more and more Sino-foreign joint ventures were built in China, and many joint brands such as Shanghai Volkswagen, Beijing Jeep, Guangzhou Peugeot, Citroen and Jetta appeared. With more individuals being financially capable of affording autos, the demand for private autos increased rapidly. These auto advertisements not only stress the quality, technology and function of the products, but also attach great importance to brand image and individuality. After joining in the WTO in 2001, Chinese auto industry entered into a new area. Almost all famous foreign auto manufacturers have built joint plants in China and compete in Chinese market. Auto manufacturers depend more heavily on abundantly advertising to compete with each other. Auto advertisements appear in media, such as color page of magazines, television, Internet and outdoor billboards. The concern of auto advertisements has shifted from the auto products to consumers. Now, as an important part of advertising industry, auto advertising in China is developing rapidly with the fast growth of the auto market.

GEERT HOFSTEDÉ’S CULTURAL DIMENSION

Advertisement is a kind of appearance of culture. Or rather, advertising is created by a particular culture. Different culture will influence the consumers’ needs and wants, and the messages they are most likely to respond to. Every element can find its place in advertisements. As advertising appeals are the expression of cultural values in advertising, to study the cultural differences reflected in advertising, the relation between cultural dimensions and advertising appeals are of great importance. Hofstede’s work was one of the earliest attempts to use extensive statistical data to examine cultural values. Geert Hofstede who developed a comprehensive model of culture by doing a ten-year quantitative research was of great importance. This model was made based on data collected from

an extensive IBM database for which 116,000 questionnaires were used in 50 countries and in 20 languages. His theory includes four dimensions: power distance index, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity and uncertainty avoidance index. More recently, a fifth dimension, long verse short-term orientation, was added.

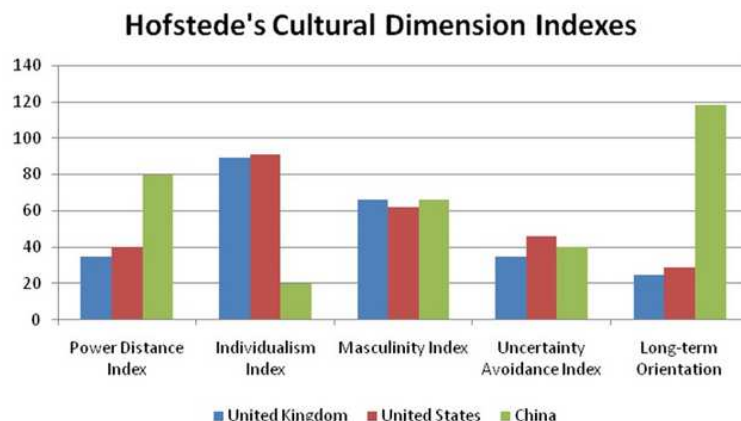


Figure 1: Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Indexes for China, U.S. and U. K.

ADVERTISEMENT AND CULTURAL VALUE

As noted before, "Advertisement is not only a commercial activity, but also a kind of cultural exchange. And advertisement functions as an invisible hand to play its role in our life styles and habits of consuming." In other words, as a form of social and cultural communication, advertisement is not only a carrier of information, but cultural values. People understand advertisement messages by relating them to culture and to the shared values or beliefs held in common by most people. Thus, advertisement messages must get under the cultural skin of the society they're targeted at, and they can be powerful tools of persuasion only if the advertisers know the cultural context of the audience. Advertisement plays an important role in the consumption of culture and is both a reflection of culture and a participant in the creation of culture. When advertising abroad, the advertiser must take into consideration the cultural values. For example, is there a religion that is accepted by the majority of the people? Is the society collectivist or individualist? Is it family orientated? Is it hierarchical? Is there a dominant political or economic ideology? All of these will impact an advertising campaign if left unexamined. Advertisement is also a way for culture dissemination not only because it contains various cultural value, but also because it can help to spread information and ideas to consumers. Especially in modern social and different cultural background, advertising has become one of the most important media for cultural disseminating. And that is also an extension of advertising's informative function.

All the above theories show that advertising appeals in a given culture are often likely to reflect that culture's values and adapting appeals to cultural values is likely to be an especially important contributor to persuasive success. The trend of adapting advertising appeals to culture can be seen to be spurred not only by the increasing globalization of brands and products but by the consequent need to address the question of the degree to which advertising can be standardized across cultures as opposed to culturally adapted. Based on the above point of view, the importance of studying the relationship between advertisement and cultural value has been realized by many scholars. And the thesis is built on the conceptual framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. His theory consists of four parts, and in this thesis, the author mainly uses two of them, they are: power distance index and individualism and collectivism index. In the following part, the author will introduce them in detail.

POWER DISTANCE

Power distance means how power is distributed within a society and the degree that society accepts this distribution. A high power distance culture prefers strong leaders and a high regard for authority. While, a low power distance culture tends to put personal responsibility and autonomy into the first place. The societal norm in a country with a high score on the PDI dimension is for powerful people to look as powerful as possible. People with power are considered to be right. Powerful people are expected to have privileges. In countries with large power distance, the exercise of power gives satisfaction and powerful people try to maintain and increase power differences. Therefore, the ornamental and vain appeals are expected to be related positively to PDI. Relative frequency of ornamental appeals and vain appeals are correlated positively with country scores on the power distance dimension. In the low power distance culture, they have certain characteristics: individuals viewed as equals, superiors and subordinates are interdependent, subordinates do not accept superiors' orders at face value, obedience of children to parents is not valued highly, old people not respected or feared and latent harmony between powerless and powerful. In the high

power distance culture, things are different. In their point of view: individuals viewed as unequal, emphasis on coercive/referent power, subordinates are dependent on superiors, subordinates do not question superiors' orders, obedience of children to parents is valued highly, old people respected and feared, and latent conflict between powerless and powerful. Furthermore, in countries with a high power distance dimension, expensive symbols of status acquired through conspicuous consumption are used to show power, wealth, and elitism. This societal norm suggests a positive relationship between PDI and the dear and status appeals. Relative frequency of both dear appeals and status appeals are correlated positively with country scores on the power distance dimension. Powerful people in societies at the low end of the power distance scale are more willing to admit a need for support. On the other hand, it also suggests a negative relationship between PDI and the humility appeal. Relative frequency of humility appeals is correlated negatively with country scores on the power distance dimension.

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

Individualism, versus its opposite, collectivism, is the degree of people's self-interest versus the interests of the group. That is to say, in an individual culture, free will is highly valued, while in a collective culture, group's needs are at the first place. The contrast between individualism and collectivism can be defined as people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty. In an individualism society, the ties between individuals are loose: people only need to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Whereas, in a collectivism society, people belong to a strong cohesive group, in which people continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. The characteristics of the individualistic culture are: focus on individuals' goals, emphasize on self-realization, and many in-groups affect behavior, little difference between in-group and out-group communication, "I" identity emphasized, value stimulation, hedonism, power, self-direction, independent self-construal. The characteristics of the collectivistic culture are: focus on in-group's goals, emphasis on fitting into in-groups, few in-groups affect behavior, large difference between in-group and out-group communication, "We" identity emphasized and value traditions, conformity, and benevolence interdependent self.

As Ting-Toomey notes "Individualistic and collective value tendencies are manifested in everyday family, school, and workplace interactions." Generally speaking, individualism refers to the doctrine that each individual is unique, special, completely different from all other individuals, and the basic unit of nature. Collectivism is characterized by a rigid social framework that distinguishes between in-groups and out-groups. Every time when we speak of individualism and collectivism, we always think they are separate entities, but we still need to remember that all people and cultures have both individual and collective dispositions.

APPLICATION OF POWER DISTANCE IN CAR ADVERTISEMETN

Geert Hofstede once said, "Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster." People who work in international business always feel strange about how different people in other cultures behave. It is believed that all people are the same, but actually they are not. Therefore, if we go to another country and make decisions depending on how we operate in our own country, the results are we'll make some very bad decisions. By using Geert Hofstede's research, we can know how to think and act when doing business with people in other countries. The following chart is a Chinese and American score table regarding Hofstede's four value dimensions, through which we could form a clear picture of the value differences between Chinese and Americans.

Table 1 Cultural Dimension Scores

Country	IDV	UAI	PDI	MAS
China	20	69	80	66
USA	91	46	40	62
World Average	43	64	55	50

Due to the different historical background and philosophy basis, Chinese and American values have many differences. These differentials are the main reasons that result in the difficulties, misunderstandings and conflicts in the course of the communication between Chinese and American car advertisement. So, it's really necessary to study on the application of cultural value in Sino-American car advertisement. Through this chart, we can find that among the four dimensions, the differences of the scores of IDV and PDI in both China and America are the biggest. In the following part, the author will give a further study on these two dimensions.

Since the majority of the Westerners are Christian, so, they believe "everyone is born equal", in a sense; once a person was born God gives basic rights, namely, the natural human rights to him. The main contents of human rights are the right to liberty and right to equality which means any member of the society is equal in legal status. Therefore, Westerners have no apparent sense of power distance. They think that people can achieve success and get

high status through the efforts of their own regardless of family position. Thus in the Western countries, it is not at all strange that the national president's son is a salesman or a worker. Similarly, in the company, subordinate can directly call the name of their higher authorities, in the schools and in the family children do the same to their teachers or their parents, there is nothing of impolite or inappropriate. Also, in the West, people's life standard is high and the auto has already entered into the people's life as the life necessities for a long time. Thus, the possession of the auto is no longer something meriting to display, it is only a convenient transport tool. In the Western countries, a family owns one or two even more cars are quite normal and the upgrade of the car is also frequent. So the Westerners' attitude to the car is comparatively rational. For them, it's the comfort, pleasure and the concert performances of the auto attract their attention very much.

Generally, the larger the population size, the greater the power distance is likely to be, because the culture must develop additional rules and formal procedures for coping with the increased complexities that arise. And also the more unequally wealth is distributed within a culture, the greater the culture's power distance is and the least decreased tendency to question the authorities. Compared with the Western countries, China has a larger power distance. Since the ancient times, the Chinese feudal society was a centralized system of monarchy for thousands of years. It formed the system of a complete set of "monarch" as the center of the centralization. The so-called "No country can go on if no monarch for one day", as well as "heaven, earth, monarch, blood relatives and teacher" show the high status of sovereigns power. Since the past times, China has been a large agricultural country and people must undertake collective collaboration for the construction of dams, reservoirs and guarding against natural disasters. In such a society, people have been the authority-oriented. So the performance and quality of goods are usually certified by the authority of identified departments of the government. For this reason, the Chinese consumers pay much attention to the prize and honor the product has won. Consequently, in the Chinese advertisement, the advertisers propagate without constraint praise that the automobiles have won the first or the second place in the competition and the praise that the press has made for the autos as well. In the eyes of Chinese advertisers, these praises have a great persuasive force for the target consumer.

It can be found that Chinese people have a higher power distance than the American. This is a determinant basic to all societies that Hofstede has named. It is describing the distribution of "power" among individuals and groups in the society, and how inequalities in power are dealt with in these societies. It is impossible to have-no-power distance, because this means everyone is exactly equal (skills, actions, genetics, etc) unless of course you are on about a bunch of identical lumps of rock. Inequality can take many forms: the differences of physical and mental characteristics (genetics, fitness, education, IQ, etc), social status, and prestige, wealth, political power, laws, rights, and privileges, etc. All of these are somewhat independent of each other, and in fact the link between them is culturally dependent. From the following table we can see different attitudes in high and low power distance countries.

Table 2: Different Attitudes

	low power distance	high power distance
1.	Inequality should be minimized.	Inequality is a fact of life. Everyone has their rightful place
2.	All people should be interdependent.	Some are independent, others are not
3.	Hierarchy is an inequality of roles for Convenience.	Hierarchy is something that exists and is accepted.
4.	Superiors\Subordinates are people just like me	Superiors\Subordinates are different to me.
5.	All have equal rights.	Power gives privileges.
6.	Powerful people should not to look too powerful.	Powerful people try to look as powerful as possible.

This difference mainly comes from different cultural background, so when the advertiser puts their advertisement in different region, they should take into consideration the different cultural values. When putting car advertisement in the high power distance country, like China, the advertiser had better use some pictures or words that have much concern about statue and power. On the contrary, when putting car advertisement in the low power distance country, like America, the concern of the advertiser is different. They think the equality of opportunity is of great important, but it does not mean that everyone is or should be completely equal. It means that each individual should have an equal chance for success. Americans treat much of life as a race for success. For them, equality means that everyone should have an equal chance to enter the race and win. From example, the "You" attitude rather than "I" attitude is emphasized. This kind of humble expression gives a lot consideration to people's varied wishes, demand, interest and difficulties. And in the example "Life is a journey Enjoy the ride", "Owner's fun, innovative limit". Here all have equal rights to enjoy what life has promised, and superiors or subordinates are people just like me.

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN CAR ADVERTISEMENT

Individualism shows the extent to which a society is a loosely framework in which people only needs to take care of themselves and their closely families. They pay more emphasis on "I" than on "we". According to Hofstede's study of IBM, the U.S.A. ranked number 1 of the world. Collectivistic cultures emphasize "we"-consciousness, and

identities of people are based on the social system to which they belong. Collectivistic society is “shame” culture. When one has done something wrong, it reflects not on oneself, but on the group to which one belongs and one therefore feels shame.

Being the most important value pattern in America, “individualism dominates American culture”. It was a long history about the origin of individualism. The earliest settlers came to the North American continent to establish colonies free from the controls that existed in European societies. They then separated church from state and forbade title of nobility. They also managed to separate alienable rights which could be voluntarily surrendered to the government from those inalienable rights which could not be surrendered, even to a government “of the people, by the people and for the people”. The basic proposition of American became “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. Compared with those Chinese advertisements whose language emphasizes cultural contents “home”, “community” and “relative sentiments”, many American advertisements emphasize cultural value “individual” or “individualism”, and often take them as selling appeals. The self-awareness holds the dominant position in the Americans’ thoughts penetrates and affects people’s action in the form of individualism. What’s more, Americans have a strong conception of self-oriented since the day when they were born. In advertising language, in many cases the word “you” or “your” virtually reflects the “self-” or “individual” in an indirect way. As a whole the headlines or copies reflect the American individualism.

In American culture, the loyalty of individualists to a given group is very weak. They feel they belong to many groups, or leaving one employer for another. In this culture, competition rather than cooperation is encouraged; personal goals take precedence over group goals. Despite this, the American people also love their country; they support their country as a whole, especially relating to the “American dream”. In the American heart and mind, it is of great importance, no matter what kind of people they are. The American Dream is a concept that for better and worse has proven to be amazingly elastic and durable for hundreds of years and across racial, class, and other demographic lines. Therefore, advertisements with dreams as the selling proposition can be found without much effort.

In contrast to Americans’ individualism, the Chinese are characterized by our adherence to collectivism. Collectivism places one’s orientation or identification with a group rather than with oneself and values the goals of the group, whatever the group may be, ahead of the goals or aspirations of individual. Collectivism means greater emphasis on: (a) the views, needs, and goals of the in-group rather than oneself; (b) social norms and duty defined by the in-group rather than behavior to get pleasure; (c) beliefs shared with the in-group rather than beliefs that distinguish self from in-groups; and (d) great readiness to cooperate with in-group members. Collective behavior has its deep historical roots in Confucianism which is the ethical and social system based on the teaching of Confucius and his followers. With this value as the guiding principle, the Chinese usually feel at ease when they belong to a group of persons rather than when they are different from others.

What’s more, Chinese usually behave cautiously in order not to offend others. Chinese people regard modesty as one of our traditional virtues and we will not claim to be the best one as naturally and proudly as the Americans. This is proved by the fact that such words as “the best” are hard to be found in Chinese auto advertisements.

So, when placing car advertisement in China, the advertiser should notice that collectivism as a cultural norm has shown great influence upon the Chinese car advertisement. The relative frequency of advertising appeals like “popularity, affiliation, family, and community” is correlated positively with Chinese high score on collectivism dimension. Being proud of a Chinese, working hard to revitalize Chinese culture and making their voices heard in the world are dreams of thousands of Chinese people nowadays. So in the course of globalization, many Chinese companies hold high their banners to stress Chinese image as a whole which can be defined as “popular or universal” appeal. On the contrary, when putting car advertisement in America, the concern of the advertiser is different. United States is a society with a more individualistic attitude and relatively loose bonds with others. The populace is more self-reliant and looks out for themselves than for others. To a higher degree, members of an individualist society will more often choose a course of action because the ends will directly benefit them. The focus is on personal freedom rather than on the good of the group. In advertising relative frequency of independent and distinctive appeals is correlated positively with America’s high score on the individualism dimension. Qualities like independence, distinctiveness, competitiveness, and self-determination are highly praised in the United States. From “Reach higher (Lincoln)”, to “Unique in all the world (Ford)”, these famous advertising taglines all typically expose the Americans’ worship for “self-reliance and self-sufficiency” and “uniqueness” which constitute American value system throughout history.

CONCLUSION

Based on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, the author did this study about the application of power distance and individualism and collectivism in car advertisement. From what has been discussed above, it is known that it is very important for the advertiser to have a better understanding on the different cultural values in different region. Several findings from this study should be of interest to advertisers who are planning to launch cross-cultural car advertisements. Generally speaking, the American car advertisement has a low power distance index and pays more attention to individual, while the Chinese car advertisement has a much higher power distance index and pays more attention to the communities. The American advertisers, for example, like to refer to their products as "the best" or "the finest" while the Chinese rarely describe their products in this straight way. The American advertisers like to highlight magic, adventure and uniqueness while the Chinese counterparts do not show so much interest in it. The advertisers in China like to highlight the economic and affordable nature as well as safety of their auto products. In addition, Chinese auto advertisement usually featured by a group of people together to show their stress on family, community and affiliation. Finally, the author hopes that the study can not only help domestic and foreign car production and sales providers better grasp of the current car consumption of customers, also helps them to adjust their product performance in order to meet the automotive needs of different residents and to see the quality of advertising behind the car.

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