

Analysis of Cultural Values in Intercultural Advertising Communication from the Perspective of “Glocalization”

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Abstract

Multinational corporations carry out the strategy of “glocalization” to adapt their products for the local environment of the destination country. This strategy can be reflected in the intercultural advertising communication. In order to understand the intercultural advertising communication and its effectiveness, this paper analyzes the advertising appeals by three multinational corporations’ advertising cases based on the theory of cultural values. The results show that the optimal sharing of cultural values of source culture and target culture is the key to the success of the glocalization strategy.

Keywords

Glocalization, intercultural advertising communication, cultural values.

1. Introduction

Glocalization is a combination of the words “globalization” and “localization”. The term is used to describe a product or service that is developed and distributed globally but is also adjusted to accommodate the user or consumer in a local market. It is the adaptation of global and international products into the local contexts they’re used and sold in. The term was coined in the Harvard Business Review, in 1980, by sociologist Roland Robertson, who wrote that glocalization meant “the simultaneity—the copresence—of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies (Robertson 1992).”

In regards to a particular product or service, this means the adaptation of globally marketed products and services into local markets. A global product or service, something everyone needs and can get used out of, may be tailored to conform with local laws, customs, or consumer preferences. Products that are “glocalized” are, by definition, going to be of much greater interest to the end user, the person who ends up using the product. This is because while it’s something that everyone can use and has use for, as a global product, it’s localization makes it more specific to an individual, their context, and their needs.

Glocalization campaigns often involve intercultural advertising communication to encourage the acceptance of foreign products among a local audience. The effectiveness intercultural advertising communication lies in whether the cultural values embedded in advertising can be consistent with the cultural values of local audiences. Through the analysis of the cultural values of the commercial advertising cases of three multinational corporations, this paper attempts to interpret the cultural values contained in the intercultural advertising communication and the effectiveness of the communication related to them.

2. Cultural Dimensions by Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch interculturalist. His cultural dimension theory is perhaps the most significant study of work-related cultural values and the breakthrough quantitative and

analytical work. From the initial results and later additions, Hofstede developed a model that identifies four original and primary dimensions---Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, and later two additional dimensions of culture--Long- versus Short-Term Orientation and Indulgence versus Restraint that help explain how and why people from various cultures behave as they do (Hofstede 2008). Power distance indicates the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally among individuals. These cultures with high power distance expect and favour inequalities. It is desirable for children to obey their parents and teachers; employees execute their managers' decisions. On the contrary, in these countries with low power distance, people hold that inequality in society should be minimized and they should have access to that power. In management, decision-making in the workplace is decentralized; employees can participate in the decision-making process.

Uncertainty avoidance indicates the extent to which a society feels threatened by ambiguous situations and tries to avoid them by providing rules, believing in absolute truths, and refusing to tolerate deviance. When the uncertainty avoidance index is high, you tend to make a lot of rules, so that you may have as little uncertainty as possible. You may emphasize uniformity and dislike deviance. When the uncertainty avoidance index is low, you tend to accept differences and feel more relaxed about them. People are controlled, easy-going, quiet, and do not easily show emotions.

Of these dimensions, the third dimension Individualism versus collectivism is the most widely researched. Individualism indicates the extent to which a society is a loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families. There is more emphasis on "I" than on "we". Collectivism emphasizes common interests, conformity, cooperation, and independence. It indicates a tight social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups to look after them.

Masculinity indicates the extent to which the dominant values in a society tend towards assertiveness and acquisition of things and away from concern for people and quality of life. "Masculinity" comes from "masculine" and implies assertiveness, while "femininity" comes from "feminine" and pays attention to people's feelings and needs. In a society with high masculinity score, men dominate in society and gender differences are clear. By contrast, in a society with low masculinity, gender roles are more flexible, and there is equality between sexes. Quality of life has a high priority. One works in order to live. In their work, they pursue good working relationships, cooperation and employment security rather than controlled by a dominant and assertive figure.

The fifth dimension is based on Hofstede's student, Bond's investigation. He conducted a Chinese Value Survey. The scope of Bond's study was much smaller, involving a survey of 100 (50% women) students from 22 countries and 5 continents. Bond's study emphasized the fifth cultural dimension. It eventually was renamed "long-term versus- short-term orientation" to reflect how strongly a person believes in the long-term thinking promoted by the teachings of Chinese philosopher Confucius. Values oriented towards the future, like thrifty and persistence are promoted in the long-term orientation. Values rather oriented towards the past and present, like respect for tradition and fulfilling social obligations are popular in the short-term orientation. Importantly one may embrace Confucian long-term values without knowing a thing about Confucius.

The sixth dimension is Indulgence versus Restraint. The dimension measures how much people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. Indulgence stands for a society in which people accept giving in to their desires and impulses. Having fun and leisure time is highly valued. Restraint stands for a society where self-discipline is valued and people are expected to exercise restraint to conform to social norm.

3. Cultural Dimension of Commercial Advertising of Multinational Corporations

Culture can affect everything people do and cultural values could be embedded in our daily lives, and it is apparent that it also applies to advertisements about brands originated from different countries. When looking into these advertisements, diverse cultural values can be found. What's more, advertisements could be very condensed. It is a window or a miniature of cultural values because in advertisements people really want to attract consumers by catering to the taste of local consumers. If it is something about the consumers' taste, it's not only about the product itself, but also about what consumers truly need or want. Therefore, on this level, it could be a reflection of cultural values.

Accordingly, in the following, three sets of advertisements of multinational brands—Coca Cola, Budweiser and Mercedes-Benz, launched both in Chinese market and in American market—will be analyzed. It can be found that the advertising appeals would be strongly relevant to cultural values of the local market which reflect the successfully glocalized marketing strategies.

3.1. The Coca Cola Company

Case 1: Coca Cola Advertisement (Chinese version)

On the eve of Spring Festival, the whole family were getting together and having a big dinner. But evidently the young boy was busy playing with his mobile phone and didn't pay attention to the feast and his relatives which made his mother and grandpa upset. With the help of the miraculous power of the cartoon boy and cartoon girl--Fuwa, the boy's bottle of coca cola and his grandpa's were tied together with the magic red lines which at the same time made a clink by the two glasses. The boy who was about to pick up the coke heard the voice, which pulled his thoughts back to the New year's reunion and the whole family enjoyed the most agreeable evening. And then the video ended with the slogan "Chinese New Year is to stick together." (2018)

Case 2: Coca Cola Advertisement (Chinese version)

On the New Year's Eve dinner, the elder brother played jokes on the younger brother taking away the Coca-Cola on the table. The cartoon boy and the girl-- Fuwa wanted to help the little brother, but only to get down the Coke. Just as Coke was about to fall to the ground, the little brother caught it unexpectedly with miraculous Chinese Kung Fu and kept the coke from spilling out of the bottle. Then the brothers also made up with each other and enjoyed the reunion with the whole family (2019).

Case 3: Coca Cola Advertisement (US version)

There is a cowboy working hard in a barren land for a while and he might be exhausted. Obviously he needed to have a rest and therefore he got a bottle of coke from a cooler out of nowhere. Meantime, magically and amazingly, he used a fried branch from the sand to set up a fire. When the fire had some smoke, it stimulated the smoke detector in heaven. And then there was a heavy rain pouring down which helped the cowboy to enjoy his coolness both inside with the coke cola and outside with the heavy rain.

Case 4: Coca Cola Advertisement (US version)

An American boy put a coin into the vending machine and wanted to buy a Coca-Cola. When the coins entered the vending machine, a empty bottle went through a very fantastic, magic kind of journey and was made into a bottle of Coca-Cola reaching the buyer's hands.

Coca-Cola's Chinese and American versions of advertising represent two distinct cultural values. Based on the concept of "glocalization", Coca-Cola adjusts its marketing strategy according to the host country—China's culture and industrial structure—to create a Chinese version of advertising, which is completely different from the values embedded in the American version.

The two Chinese versions of Coca-Cola ads are from the same series, which were launched in China in 2018 and 2019 respectively. They all feature Chinese Spring Festival which are regarded as the peak season of most of commodities and deservedly attract advertisers' attention. From these Chinese Coca Cola advertisements, the cultural dimension of collectivism can be found. First of all, the narrative of the two Chinese Coca Cola advertisements is based on the theme of "a big family". In these advertisements, the happy family is the main advertising appeal. In addition, the harmonious relationship between family members is also a prominent advertising appeal. These advertisements use warm colors—Chinese red colour—to emphasize a very harmonious and happy relationship between family members (See Table 1).

In contrast, America is ranked No. 1 in terms of individualism. Its individualism index, according to Hofstede, is 91 while China is only 20 (Hofstede 2008). In the first American ad, the appeal of desire for changes can be found. In the ad, the guy stimulated the smoke detector to get the heavy rain, which can be regarded as a great endeavour to make changes. And the ad is also highlighting self-confidence and self-dependence. In the cowboy's facial expressions, he was very confident about himself and depends on himself to obtain what he wanted. Moreover, in the second ad, it is highly featuring innovation and originality in the creating of the bottle of Coca Cola. After watching this advertisement, people may be attracted by the imagination and innovation in the advertisement. Maybe everyone, like the one in the ad, will be attracted to the ad and buy a bottle of coke to enjoy what the coke in the vending machine can experience. These are all the typical advertising appeals in American advertisements which clearly represent individualism (See Table 1).

Table 1. Advertising Appeals, Sub Cultural-dimensions and Cultural Dimensions of Coca Cola

Advertising Appeals	Sub Cultural-dimensions	Cultural Dimensions
Family, Harmony, Relationship	Reflection of the integrity of or belonging to family or social group	Collectivism
	Emphasis on conformity or harmony	
	Reflection of interdependent relationships with others	
	Emphasis on the family or group members' relations and emotions	
	Emphasis on the benefits to families or others of group members	
Desire for changes, Self-confidence, Self-dependence, Innovation, Originality	Features individuality or independence	Individualism
	Emphasis on uniqueness or originality	
	Reflections of self reliance, hedonism, or competition	
	Emphasis on self fulfillment, self development, self realization and freedom	
	Emphasis on the benefits or rights to an individual	

3.2. The Budweiser Company

Case 1: Budweiser Advertisement (Chinese version)

The towering icebergs, a golden wheat field, green and fresh lupulus and Budweiser were shown on the screen. Simultaneously the screen showed these advertising slogans in turn: "only select imported high-quality barley, imported superior lupulus, lock freshness by freezing technology and enjoy the leading trend and freshness."

Case 2: Budweiser Advertisement (American version)

A tough American guy was walking into a bar in the western United States, while two people were running out of the bar awkwardly. The light in the bar was dim, and in the corner sat a few gangster-like men. Everyone looked threatened, and the atmosphere in the bar was depressed and tense. There was only one bottle of Budweiser left in the fridge, when one of the men who looked like a leader said to the bartender: "one Bud." At this time, the protagonist also said that he wanted this last bottle of Budweiser, and a fierce battle was inevitable. At this time, a flashback shot was inserted in the film, in which the protagonist practiced all kinds of martial arts skills, such as Chinese martial arts, taekwondo, karate, and worked hard to develop excellent martial arts. The film ends with the protagonist's victory--- get the last bottle of Budweiser.

The Chinese version of Budweiser's advertisement highlights the carefully selected first-class ingredients and emphasizes that imported raw materials can ensure high quality and food safety. At the same time, the superior procedures of processing raw materials and the freshness of raw materials are also emphasized. These advertising appeals are related to food quality and safety, and to our strong concern about food safety in recent years, which has led advertisers to emphasize these demands. The great anxiety about food quality and safety shows that the Chinese people have low tolerance to uncertainty and fuzziness, and show the characteristics of high uncertainty avoidance (See Table 2).

The American version of Budweiser's advertisement is like a miniature version of a Hollywood movie. This mini-version of the film even has its title -- Great Preparation. The film tells the story of a hero who gets a bottle of Budweiser through extraordinary efforts and full preparation. The protagonist in the advertisement is very adventurous, which is also respected by the American society. It just manifests the feature of low uncertainty avoidance in America. Generally speaking, the Americans have the spirit of innovation and risk-taking. They are willing to cope with uncertainties inherent in life and can tolerate and accept new ideas and strangers. They love changes and prize initiatives. They depend not so much on experts or authorities as on themselves. They like to challenge whatever is difficult and dangerous in their work and life and take various risky forms of recreation and relaxation. They always dream that life should be something full of miracles. So they work hard to create wonders. Therefore, visuals featuring individuals being adventurous, experiencing miracles and being rejuvenated can be frequently found in American ads (See Table 2).

Table 2. Advertising Appeals, Sub Cultural-dimensions and Cultural Dimensions of Budweiser

Advertising Appeals	Sub Cultural-dimensions	Cultural Dimensions
High quality, Food Safety, Superior procedures, Freshness	Emphasis on rules, limit dissent	High Uncertainty Avoidance
	Inclination to continuity and stability	
	Be reluctant to the challenge in an unknown field	
The spirit of risk-taking, Love changes and prize initiatives, Challenge whatever is difficult and dangerous, Tolerate and accept new ideas and strangers	Dislike rules, accept dissent	Low Uncertainty Avoidance
	Emphasis on less formality	
	Welcome changes and innovations	
	Preferring to the challenge in an unknown field	

3.3. Mercedes-Benz

Case 1: Mercedes-Benz Advertisement (Chinese version)

An upper-class gentleman who must be a celebrity invited a graceful young lady to have dinner. What the gentleman is driving is just the Mercedes-Benz. When they arrived at the originally booked restaurant, they found that there were many paparazzo around who were waiting for them in order to take photos of them. To avoid the following of these paparazzo, the gentleman got an out-of-the ordinary idea-- he drove the Mercedes at high speed to a chic restaurant which was in a remote alleyway and finally they enjoyed the dinner in a quiet and elegant circumstance.

Case 2: Mercedes-Benz Advertisement (American version)

A man was driving the Mercedes-Benz at fast speed in the woods, and suddenly a strange old man appeared on the passenger's seat next to the driver, and he said sorry to the man in a deep voice. Getting into a panic, the man found himself was about to hit the front constructing crane. Thanks to the excellent braking power of the Mercedes-Benz, he avoided an accident that could be fatal. Then he replied to the strange old man "sorry" as well. From these scenes, the audience can also understand that the old man's identity is death. This advertisement, with the theme of "dare to say sorry to death", shows the superior braking power of the Mercedes.

China is a high power distance index country while America is a low power distance index country. According to Hofstede, power distance index for China is 80 which is quite high (Hofstede 2008). Therefore, for Chinese consumers, people could have the strong sense of appreciation towards the luxury goods because it could be a symbol of power, a symbol of higher social hierarchy. That can in certain extent explain why luxury goods could be so popular and so prosperous in the Chinese market. Based on the statistics by Bain & Company, in 2018, China was ranked No 1 in terms of consumption of luxurious goods in the whole world (Bain & Company 2019). Chinese consumers, according to the understanding of power distance, could just be more ready to accept power distance on the one hand. On the other hand, Chinese consumers, on the lower level of social status, are very like to be influenced by the people on the upper level. It means that everybody is expecting and hoping that he or she can climb up the social ladders sooner or later. Therefore, Chinese people could be easily influenced by the people who take the higher social position (See Table 3).

In the Chinese commercial of Mercedes, it is highlighting the advertising appeals—the power of the character. In this ad, everything is about power or the symbols of power. The protagonist in the ad is a celebrity—George Clooney. In his movie, it often plays the figure like the "Mr Big" kind of figure and he himself is a very famous celebrity. He is widely known. And from the other scene the very beautiful lady was beside George and George was followed by paparazzi which also reflect the power and success of the gentleman. Besides, the scene was taken in a metropolis. And all this could be the symbol about prestige and about luxury consumption. Of this ad itself, to take George as the main character itself has already raised the level of the consumer. Mercedes Benz could be the choice of George Clooney that can attract a lot of attention from the Chinese consumers, Chinese audience.

In contrast, in the American ad, the main character is an ordinary guy. Nobody knows him. At least nobody knows him in China. He appears to be an ordinary guy. And he was in the woods rather than in a big city. He was not surrounded by paparazzi and by all the symbols of power. The contrast of emphasis on power, the differences are quite sharp. In America, people assume that informality is a prerequisite for sincerity. They are likely to feel uneasy when others treat them with too much deference. Those with high and powerful positions usually behave just like the everyday person on the street. Authority figures—such as priests, professors, and supervisors—are often called by their first names rather than their formal titles and last names (See Table 3).

Table 3. Advertising Appeals, Sub Cultural-dimensions and Cultural Dimensions of Mercedes-Benz

Advertising Appeals	Sub Cultural-dimensions	Cultural Dimensions
Social Status, Dearness, Wealth	Celebrity endorsement	High Power Distance
	Extensive approbation of hierarchy	
Being ordinary, Informality	Featuring ordinary people's equality with authorities or youth's equality with veneration	Low Power Distance
	Emphasis on the equality of status and opportunity	

4. Conclusion

According to the above analysis, the intercultural advertising communication of the three multinational companies is undoubtedly successful, since they have adopted the glocalization strategy--the company's products have been adjusted to adapt to users or consumers in the local market. Coca Cola's Chinese versions of advertising embody collectivism, while the American versions of advertising embody individualism; the Chinese version of Budweizer shows high uncertainty avoidance, while the US version shows low uncertainty avoidance. Mercedes-Benz's Chinese version of advertising reflects a high right distance, while the American version of advertising reflects a low right distance. It can be said that the product adaptation to the local market is essentially the adaption to local cultural values. Therefore, the glocalization strategy adopted in the effective communication of intercultural advertising must be based on cultural values and must be in line with local cultural values.

Intercultural advertising communication faces audiences from all over the world who have different worldview, customs, consumption patterns and habits. In the process of intercultural advertising communication, only by implementing the correct intercultural advertising communication strategy can multinational corporations overcome all kinds of obstacles. That is to say, in the process of intercultural advertising communication, the basis is to correctly disseminate the content of intercultural advertising, to "localize" the global business philosophy of multinational corporations, and to optimize the sharing of source culture and target culture, so that the audience can understand the content of advertising expression in order to resonate with and be affected with the advertising text.

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