

The Influence Of Culture And Product Consumption Purpose On Advertising Effectiveness

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Abstract

Consumers are accustomed to the value systems, beliefs and perception processes in the particular cultures in which they grow up. Thus a necessary prerequisite to develop successful global advertising campaigns is for marketers to understand the fundamentally different values, norms and characteristics in different cultures. The advertising messages that embed the cultural values and norms will meet with greater success due to higher consumer acceptance. The effectiveness of a particular advertising appeal may therefore vary in markets that are culturally incompatible. A consequence of this is the necessity to determine the types of advertising appeals that will satisfy the consumers in different cultures. The emerging global consumer culture may be an exception in this respect.

In addition to the influence of culture, product related factors affect advertising effectiveness and global marketers need to understand their influence on advertising. This study investigated the influence of culture and product related factors on advertising effectiveness and, in particular, the effectiveness of individualistic versus collectivistic advertising appeals on the two cultures (individualistic and collectivistic) and the moderating effects of the consumption purpose (social or personal) of consumer products on culturally congruent advertising. The results of the study and managerial implications are discussed.

Introduction

Advertising works. Paradoxically, despite the great amount of advertising research, it is still not known with certainty how it works. Alden, Steenkamp and Batra analysed the effects of global consumer culture positioning strategies as opposed to local and foreign consumer culture positioning on advertising (1999). They concluded that effectiveness of advertising could be improved by first identifying the country, consumer segment and product category factors that favour the use of different positioning. Besides global consumer cultural positioning strategies, other dimensions of culture and factors, such as the product consumption purpose, influence the effectiveness of advertising.

A culture is a multifaceted complex construct. It is an interactive aggregate of common characteristics that helps to distinguish one group of people from another (Hofstede 1991). A basic dimension of culture is the value placed on individualism versus collectivism. Individualism is giving priority to personal goals over the goals of the in-group, the reverse of which is collectivism (Triandis 1989a). This dichotomy reflects the basic value emphasis at the cultural level (Schwartz 1990). In individualistic cultures such as New Zealand, individuals prefer independent relationships with each other and individual goals take precedence over group goals. In collectivist cultures such as in Sri Lanka, interdependent relationships with one another and group goals take precedence over individual goals. This study examines the influence of individualism and collectivism dimension of culture and the product consumption purpose on advertising effectiveness.

The individualism versus collectivism dimension of culture influences consumer behaviour and advertisers need to tailor their advertisements to reflect such cultural values in order to increase advertising effectiveness. The advertising messages that embed the cultural values and norms will meet with greater success due to higher consumer acceptance. Advertisers, therefore, can achieve positive consumer responses by developing advertisements with culturally congruent appeals. Such advertisements carry messages that endorse, reinforce and glamorise cultural values in the headline copy, body copy and in the illustrations. This leads to hypotheses one and two, which state:

H1: In individualistic cultures, the culturally congruent individualistic appeals will generate more favourable attitudes towards the ad, brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions than culturally incongruent collectivistic appeals.

H2: In collectivistic cultures, the culturally congruent collectivistic appeals will generate more favourable attitudes towards the ad, brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions than culturally incongruent individualistic appeals.

Product use conditions influence the effectiveness of value expressive appeals as opposed to utilitarian appeals in advertising (Zhang & Gleb 1996). Consumers purchase products for the purposes they serve. Some products consumers own are used mostly in private and such products serve a personal purpose (eg. a razor). Other products used in public may often serve a social purpose of self-projection (a public purpose) or status communication (eg. a car). Meeting consumers' expectation of self-projection is significantly influenced by the consumption visibility of such products. Therefore, the consumers' need to conform to cultural norms and values when purchasing a product may depend on the consumption purpose it serves, which may be private or public. A razor that is used in private need not reflect the prevailing collectivist societal values in a collectivist culture. Therefore an ad appeal that emphasises social benefits (culturally congruent ad appeal) may be more effective in promoting a product whose consumption serves a social purpose rather than a personal purpose in a collectivist culture. This leads to hypothesis three, which states:

H3: In collectivist cultures, culturally congruent collectivistic appeals will generate more favourable attitudes towards the ad, brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions when used for products that satisfy consumption purposes that are social rather than personal.

In a parallel way, in a predominantly individualistic culture, an advertising appeal for a product that satisfies a social purpose may not need to reflect that society's individualistic culture. An advertising appeal that highlights the individual benefits of a product (culturally congruent ad appeal) may be more effective for privately consumed products than for publicly consumed products in an individualistic culture. Therefore, hypothesis four states:

H4: In individualistic cultures, culturally congruent individualistic appeals will generate more favourable attitudes towards the ad, brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions when used for products that satisfy personal consumption purposes rather than a social purpose.

Brand attitude is a buyer's overall evaluation of the brand. Effective advertisements generate positive brand attitudes that stimulate behaviour. Attitude towards the ad influences the attitude towards the brand. The positive or negative feelings towards the ad are transferred to the brand. Therefore, advertising research should consider the measurement of attitude towards the brand and attitude towards the ad as measures of advertising effectiveness.

The best predictor of buyer behaviour is purchase intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). Previous studies conducted have found a significant relationship between intentions and behaviour and many researchers have used intentions to predict behaviour (Granbois & Summers 1975). There were other studies that reported differences between stated intentions and actual purchases (Juster 1966). According to Bemmaor the predictive validity of intention data is questionable (1995). Researchers for such reason have used indices that combined purchase intentions and purchase probability to estimate behaviour (Morwitz, Johnson & Schmittlein 1993). The effectiveness of advertising in this study is measured using attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions.

Method

The experiment conducted to test the four hypotheses stated used a 2 x 2 x 2 full factorial design. The subjects were 280 tertiary students (experimental units), 140 from each country (New Zealand and Sri Lanka). This number was selected to ensure the statistical validity of the results. There were eight cells (experimental groups) in the experiment and each cell had responses from 35 subjects for analysis. This ensured the balance of the experimental design and the ANOVA requirement of 30 respondents per cell. The three independent variables used had two levels each. They were: (a) Advertising appeals (Collectivistic versus Individualistic); (b) Product consumption purpose (social and private); (c) Country (Sri Lanka and New Zealand). The advertising appeals and country were between subject variables and the product consumption purpose was a within subject variable. No blocking variables were used. The three dependent variables used to operationalise advertising effectiveness were: (a) Attitude towards the ad; (b) Attitude towards the brand; and (c) Purchase intentions. There were three covariates. They were: (a) Subjects' product knowledge; (b) Usage experience of the products; and (c) Recent purchase of the product. The individualistic and collectivistic ad appeals were manipulated by varying the headline copy of the advertisements (Zhang & Gleb 1996). The study groups in Sri Lanka and New Zealand were assigned to collectivistic and individualistic appeals on a random basis.

Advertisements were compiled into magazine-like booklets and appeared with filler ads in the following order: filler ad 1, experimental ad 1, filler ad 2, experimental ad 2. Each booklet contained either ads with

individualistic appeals or ads with collectivistic appeals. The booklet with individualistic appeal ads had the following order: filler ad 1, product serving a social purpose with individualistic appeal, filler ad 2, product serving a private purpose with individualistic appeal. The order of ads in the booklet with collectivistic appeal ads was: filler ad 1, product serving a social purpose with collectivistic appeal, filler ad 2, product serving a private purpose with collectivistic appeal. The order of products in the experimental ads was altered to eliminate possible sequential effects. The booklets containing advertisements with individualistic appeals or collectivistic appeals were randomly assigned to the subjects to satisfy the randomness condition of the experiment. The subjects were allowed 10 minutes to read the printed materials and then the questionnaire was administered.

Products and Advertising Appeals

In the study, a car (used in public) was used as the product that served a social purpose. The product chosen to represent the private purpose was a razor. This was selected as it is mostly used in private. Fictitious brand names were given to both products to remove the possible influence of prior brand evaluations and knowledge on the results. The headline copies were solicited from the pre-test subjects using focus group settings. Moderators opening the sessions discussed the influence of culture on advertising and then, specifically, the cultural differences between individualism and collectivism. The individualistic appeals copy developed for each product illustrated the self-direction and hedonism values that are closely associated with the individualistic cultures. The collectivistic appeals copy reflected the family, social conformity and in-group orientation values predominant in collectivist cultures. The advertisements used in both countries, New Zealand and Sri Lanka, were in English.

Measurement

Gill, Grossbart and Laczniaik (1988) used an index calculated summing the responses to a four item 7-point scale that captures both intentions and probability to measure purchase intentions. This study used the identical scale to estimate purchase intentions.

Recent literature on attitude towards the ad indicates there is probably more to this variable than overall evaluation as captured by a unidimensional global affect measure (Olney, Holbrook & Batra 1991). Laczniaik and Muehling (1993) measured the attitude towards the ad by calculating the mean responses to five sets of 7-point adjective scales. This study measured the attitude towards the ad using the same 5-sets of 7-point bipolar scales. A variety of scales have been used in past studies to measure the attitude towards the brand. Wright (1973) used a likert scale with the end points labelled "I like it very much" and "I don't like it at all" to measure attitudinal acceptance of advertised brands. This study used the identical likert scale to measure the attitude towards the brand.

Park & Hastak (1994) evaluated manipulation checks asking three direct questions from the respondents. This study used the technique of asking direct questions to check the individualistic-collectivistic manipulation of advertising messages. Each manipulation was checked using a 3-item 5-point Likert Scale. The covariates (subjects' product knowledge and usage experience) that could bias the results of the study were measured using 7-point bipolar scales. The other measurements included were the demographics of the subjects and the recent purchase of the product advertised.

Analysis of Results

The reliability of the scales used to measure the attitude towards the ad (Aad) and purchase intentions was assessed using Cronbach's alphas. Their high values (Cronbach's alphas: Aad = .83, PI = .87) confirmed the reliability of the scales used. The descriptive statistics for individualistic and collectivistic ad appeals confirmed successful ad manipulations.

The analysis of responses from the tertiary students in New Zealand and Sri Lanka indicated significant main effects. Students from New Zealand preferred individualistic appeals (mean values: Aad = 24.79, Abr = 3.75, PI = 22.69) to collectivistic appeals (mean values: Aad = 19.37, Abr = 2.28, PI = 16.61). The F-statistic (Aad = 13.79, Abr = 10.47, PI = 14.18) and the p-values (Aad: p = .000, Abr: p = .000, PI: p = .000) for dependent variables confirm this significant effect. The results from Sri Lankan students indicated a reverse in preference. Their scores on collectivist appeals (mean values: Aad = 25.72, Abr = 3.78, PI = 17.21) were higher than the scores for individualistic appeals (mean values: Aad = 18.21, Abr = 2.31, PI = 15.97). The p-value (Aad: p = .001, Abr: p = .003, PI: p = .013) and the F-statistic (Aad = 14.28, Abr = 11.45, PI = 15.23) indicated that these differences were significant. These results confirm that culturally congruent appeals elicit higher attitudes towards advertisements, attitudes towards brand and purchase intentions and support hypotheses one and two.

ANOVA conducted within the individualistic ad appeal type in New Zealand showed significant product consumption purpose effect for culturally congruent ad appeals (F-statistic: Aad = 26.4, Abr = 33.7, PI = 25.3 and p-values: Aad = .002, Abr = .012, PI = .001). Similarly for Sri Lankan subjects the ANOVA conducted with collectivistic appeal type showed a significant product consumption purpose effect for the culturally congruent ad appeals (F-statistic: Aad = 25.6, Abr = 32.7, PI = 23.9 and p-values: Aad = .004, Abr = .023, PI = .001). These results support of hypotheses three and four. Analysis of covariates using MANCOVAs indicated that they did not have a significant effect on dependent variables.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the use of culturally congruent advertising appeals is a powerful means to enhance advertising effectiveness. Therefore, marketers should seriously consider aligning advertising messages with culture to increase the productivity of their advertising dollars. The findings of the study suggest that even though the basic needs and wants of people in different countries are the same, global marketers need to carefully conceive the implications of culture in deciding on the type of advertising appeals to international markets. This questions the wisdom of standardisation of advertisements for consumer products in the global market place where the emergence of the global consumer culture is still in its infancy.

In addition to culture product related factors impact advertising. The effectiveness of culturally congruent advertisements is further enhanced when the consumption purpose (social or personal) of the product matches the cultural norm (social or personal). The consumption purpose a product serves impacts the effectiveness of advertising appeals across contrasting cultures. The results of this study provide empirical evidence to support the use of culturally congruent advertising appeals, specifically in situations where there is a match between cultural norms and consumption purposes of the product.

Contribution, managerial implications and future research

The study adds to the growing body of knowledge on advertising by determining the effects of aligning the ad message to cultures. The results of the study suggest that the message strategy appropriate for different products in different cultures should be determined after a careful examination of the motives the target consumers have for purchasing different products. This implies that marketers, in addition to the economic and demographic characteristics of the target markets, should also consider the psychological variables when determining the strategies to enhance advertising effectiveness. Standardised advertising, which uses a global consumer culture positioning, should only be considered in situations where sizeable world consumer segments that share similar attitudes, lifestyles and aspirations exist due to globalisation. Future research should, therefore, be directed to identify the consumer segments receptive to global consumer cultural positioning and also examine the influence of other cultural dimensions such as “uncertainty avoidance” on advertising effectiveness.

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