

A Content Analysis Study: Cross - Cultural Advertising Research between the Years 2006-2010

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine comparative advertising research over time and across space. The effort is to move comparative advertising research forward by identifying critical issues related to the topic and studies published in the journals. As one of the most visible products of culture industries, advertising can be shaped by the culture within which it is practiced. Cultural values either influence the production and execution of advertising or are reflected in the content itself. This study reports results from a content analysis of cross-cultural advertising research studies published in 11 major journals between the years 2006-2010.

Keywords: content analysis, cultural values, international advertising

Introduction

Several empirical studies were employed in order to examine similarities and differences in advertising content between various countries. Cultural content analysis usually incorporate theories such as Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, Pollay's (1983) typology of values and Hall's (1989) high-context vs. low-context paradigm (Gao, 2009). In this study, first, we briefly review the content analysis literature on cross-cultural advertising. Second, we describe the methodology of how content analysis is made. In the fourth section, we discuss the results. Finally, we provide a discussion of implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

As one of the most visible products of culture industries, advertising in both print and electronic forms can be shaped by the culture within which it is practiced. Existing studies of comparative advertising suggest that cultural values either influence the production and execution of advertising or are reflected in the content itself (Chang *et al.*, 2009). Adorno (1975) defined the culture industry as referring to any industries whose products 'are manufactured more or less according to plan' and 'are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption'. Because their products are the ingredients of popular culture, the mass media obviously constitute a major part of the culture industry (Chang *et al.*, 2009). Interest in cross-cultural advertising research has led to several empirical studies that examine similarities and differences in advertising content between various countries. Researchers have tried to predict the relative frequency of certain advertising appeals and techniques employed in two or more countries based on cultural stereotypes (Lerman and Callow, 2004).

Gao (2009) argued for a paradigmatic shift away from the current cultural framework that dominates content analyses of international advertisements. The content of international advertising papers published in the Journal of Advertising in a period of 10 years was examined in Taylor's study (2005). Macias *et al.* (2008) analyzed 13 years (1990-2002) of data about survey research methodology in communication journals by using content analysis. West (2007) explored the International Journal of Advertising (IJA) during the period 1992–2006. Pitt *et al.* (2005) found out the state of theory in three premier advertising journals over an 11-year period by utilizing a content analysis.

Methodology

Üsdiken and Pasadeos (1995) pointed out that the studies of the scholarly literature can be categorized along six dimensions. These are:

1. Comprehensive reviews that are generally qualitative in nature.
2. Meta analyses of research findings are quantitative and aggregate findings from multiple studies on the same topic in order to draw data-based conclusions.
3. Methodological investigations evaluate the research methods used in multiple studies on the same topic or in the same discipline.
4. Studies of publishing productivity focus mostly on authors and their institutions contribute in what ways to the literature.

5. Studies of specific journals are in-depth investigations of one or more aspects of scholarly publications.
6. Citation studies investigate the citations listed as footnotes or references of scholarly works.

In this study, a content analysis of the published articles of comparative advertising research was utilized allowing the comparisons of advertisements across two or more geographical or social units. Following the study by Chang *et al.* (2009) where they analyzed 11 journals between the years 1975 to 2005, this study period covered comparative advertising studies published during the years 2006-2010. As in the original study by Chang *et al.* (2009), the following 11 peer-reviewed journals were considered: Communication Research, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, Journal of Communication, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly and International Journal of Advertising. The unit of coding and analysis is the published study, regardless of its length. A coding sheet included the following seven measures: countries compared, discussion of the comparability of countries selected for analysis, number of media outlets under study from the countries, use of theory or theoretical perspective, discussion of conceptual and functional equivalence of concepts involved, approach of inquiry and within-variance analysis as in the original study.

Findings

Referencing the study by Chang *et al.* (2009), they have found out that within a time span of more than 30 years and among 11 journals, the number of comparative advertising studies is small and far between. From 1975 to 2005, a total of 36 such studies were identified. In all of the 36 studies, culture as a key concept is seldom explicitly defined. It tends to correspond to a particular geographical boundary. This paper argues the findings of studies made between the years 2006-2010 and among the same 11 journals. During 5 years, 5 studies were published in International Journal of Advertising and 1 study in Journal of Advertising Research and none in the other journals.

Countries Compared Of the 6 studies, 2 studies compared two countries while the remaining 4 studies looked at three to six countries. Except one of the studies, the U.S. appeared with one or more nations. In one study, culturally similar markets were examined and only two of the journals published cross-cultural studies with a method of content analysis.

Comparability of Units In all the examples, advertising content was compared and examined. The countries were compared mostly based on their cultural and communication pattern differences.

Use of Theory and Approach of Inquiry Except for 1 study, the rest of the 5 studies either tested hypothesis and / or searched answers for the questions. Most of the papers referenced Hall (1976)'s communication differences between high/low context cultures, Taylor *et al.* (1997)'s and Hofstede (1980)'s cultural dimensions.

Conceptual and Functional Equivalence of Indicators In the first study, the same indicators were used in three dimensions: creative, placement and budget strategies. Second study the main question of the study was whether the culture-congruent visual forms would actually be effective on consumers' attitude towards the ads and the brand advertised. Culture - congruent visual forms in ads from both cultures were found but in relative terms. Third study was established to use of the same soft-sell appeals and status appeals. Fourth study covered the differences and similarities between the cultures in TV advertising. Next study focused on advertising in a culturally similar market with socio-economic differences. The basic promise was that when advertising in markets similar in culture but with socio-economic differences, advertisers use standardization for culturally normative ad content but not for product-related categories. In the last study, the visual elements in web ads were compared by major functions of visuals, use of celebrity models, photographs vs illustrations and product portrayal.

Analysis of Within-Country Variance built up no results in this study (For all the results see Table 1).

Table 1. The breakdown of the studies by seven dimensions

	Countries compared	Comparability	Number of media outlets	Theory / theoretical perspective	Discussion of conceptual and functional equivalence of concepts involved	Approach of inquiry	With in variance analysis
1st study	Eastern countries (China, Korea, Japan) and Western countries (U.S., Europe)	Compare countries by similarities and differences in internet advertising in terms of -Creative strategy -Placement strategy -Budget strategy	47,131 internet ads	-Hall (1976) concept of contextual differences of culture -Taylor <i>et al.</i> (1997) high/low context cultures -Hofstede	The study speculates the contextual differences of culture may affect the creative, placement and budget strategies	3 hypotheses & 3 research questions	none
2nd study	Korea and U.S.	Compare high context versus low context cultures	642 ads from 24 magazines	-Hofstede (1980, 2001) individualism/collectivism -Triandis (1995) vertical/horizontal - Taylor <i>et al.</i> (1997) high/low context cultures	Effects of culturally matching the visual forms on consumers' attitude towards the ads and brand	5 hypotheses	none
3rd study	Japan and U.S.	Compare countries by usage of local appeals and culture & communication patterns	899 US ads 853 Japanese ads	-Mueller (1987) values, norms -Hofstede (1980) model of national culture -Hall and Hall (1987) high/low context cultures -Martenson (1989) high/low context cultures	Use of the same soft-sell appeals and status appeals	3 research questions	
4th study	U.S. and Arab World	Compare countries by culture, religion, occupational role and communication pattern differences	721 TV commercials	-Maslow (1954) basic needs -Hofstede (1984) individualism/collectivism -Abernethy & Franke (1996) cross-cultural differences in advertising content -Taylor (2005) -Rokeach (1973) value system -	Differences and similarities between the cultures in TV advertising	None	none
5th study	Egypt, Lebanon & United Arab Emirates	Compare countries by culturally normative and product related patterns	949 advertisements	-Cross-cultural differences -Issue of standardization -Hofstede's (1980) cultural typology -Hall's (1976) high/low context cultural framework -Taylor <i>et al.</i> (1997) effect of information on ads -Cutler <i>et al.</i> (1995) status appeals	culturally similar setting with socio-economic differences among nations	5 hypotheses	none

6 th study	U.S., UK, Germany, Japan, Korea & China	Compare countries by culture and communication patterns	253 web ads	-Hall (1973) information context value -Hall and Hall (1990) high/low context cultures - Taylor <i>et al.</i> (1997) -Frith & Mueller (2003) culture-based ads -Simon (1970) typology of ads -de Mooij (1998) cultural paradoxes	Compare the practice of ad visual strategies crafted in global brands' local web ads for six national markets in two contrasting groups	6 hypotheses	none
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Conclusion

Based on the original study by Chang et al. (2009), 11 journals were examined in order to clarify the articles on cross-cultural studies. Between the years 1975-2005, 36 studies were recognized and analyzed. The same journals were scanned between the years 2006-2010 and only the two of the listed journals covered cross-cultural studies. As a result, six articles were published during this period. As in the literature review, Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, Pollay's (1983) typology of values, Hall's (1989) high-context vs. low-context paradigm and some more theoretical perspectives established the framework of the studies.

As a conclusion, it can be recommended to conduct a research with the remaining journals containing advertising research. In addition, the coding sheet can be enlarged with more dimensions.

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Appendix: Comparative Advertising Studies under Examination, 2006-2010

- 1st study - 'Internet Advertising Strategy for Multinationals in China: A Cross-cultural analysis'
- 2nd study - 'Determinants of visual forms used in print advertising: a cross-cultural comparison'
- 3rd study - 'Evolution in the usage of localized appeals in Japanese and American print advertising'
- 4th study - 'Television Advertising in the Arab World: A Status Report'
- 5th study - 'Content analysis in cross-cultural advertising research: insightful or superficial?'
- 6th study - 'Advertising visuals in global brands' local websites: a six country comparison'