

# Influence of Culture on the Execution of Advertisements: Cross-culture & with in Culture

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**Abstract:** Numerous studies investigate the relationship between cultural values and effectiveness of advertising. The present paper attempts to examine the influence of culture in the execution of advertisements through a qualitative cross-cultural study. The study takes into account two distinct cultures. On considering the much accepted Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, the study endorses India as a collectivist and America as an individualistic culture. It exemplifies how cultural factors affect the content & execution of advertisements through content analysis of 15 advertisements from the electronic media. With the Asia-Pacific Rim emerging in world trade, lot of studies have concentrated on countries like China and Korea. India owing to its large market share, plentiful opportunities for economic growth and development as the third largest economy, has not received much attention for these studies. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the debate on standardized versus specialized approaches to international advertising. The results illustrate significant divergence in the way advertising messages were executed in these two countries and that different cultural values were reflected in their advertising expressions. The evidence of cross-cultural differences further supports the assumption that truly standardized advertising is rarely feasible. Further, this study also explores how change within a culture affects the execution of advertisements by focusing on three-product line. The findings revealed that there is a change in the execution pattern of advertisements that can be attributed to globalization of economy and culture.

**Keywords:** Cross-culture study, Individualism, Collectivism, Hofstede, Culture Dimension, Cultural change

## 1. 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Asia Pacific Rim as a major trading zone has strengthened the attention towards the understanding of Asia's market and its consumers.

However, very few empirical research have been done on India in comparison to 'The Rising

Dragon'<sup>1</sup>. India, as the third largest economy in the world, constitute more than 1.2 billion consumers

[12]. This very fact draws attention of numerous multinational companies and investors to India. Several studies have projected that India has the potential of being a 'Superpower' and will beat par with 'Developed' nations such as China and the United States by 2020.

According to researchers, for the growth of International business, it is important to accentuate on the understanding of the cultural context of the market and the marketing techniques. This understanding will increase the acceptance level of the product and ultimately will profit the corporate.

In a study, Mooij claims, "There may be global products, but there are no global people. There may be global brands but there are no global motivations for buying those brands"

[11]. This issue of standardization or adaptation of local culture in international advertising has continued to be a major yet under-researched topic in international advertising. Given the complexity of cultures, it can be expected that much more emphasis is needed in this area of research [2]. Though many of the research done in cross-culture are quantitative in nature, not much emphasis has been given to the qualitative research as a result there is a lack of understanding of multiple reality of a context [11].

This piece attempts to understand how does culture influence the execution of advertisements. It compares the cultural aspects of the content and execution of Television advertisements of two varied cultures. In west US has been recognized

as 'highly individualistic' and a 'low context culture' [1]. It has been recognized as the most active participant in the global trade and has the largest and influential advertising industry in the world [1]. Research such as Hofstede et al. [1] have noted that in the east India represents highly collectivist and a high context culture.

Since 1960s, the debate on if to standardize (globalize) or localize international advertising has been continuing. However, studies on global advertising strategies have not explored whether and to what extent advertisements delivered by a global media brand are globalized in local editions [9].

It further critically examined the studies which advocate for the standardization of advertising strategies.

## 2. AFTER SUSTAINED DOUBLE-DIGIT GROWTH FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, ITS GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT REACHED 4.38 TRILLION YUAN IN 1994, AND 11.8 PER CENT INCREASE COMPARED WITH THE PREVIOUS YEAR. 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Individualism and collectivism

Understanding of cultural differences is deliberated as a compulsory requirement for the success of the international advertising as cultural values influence advertising likeability [4]. Consumers are habituated to a particular culture's values systems, beliefs, and perception processes. They respond to advertising messages in a manner that is congruent to their cultural values and norms. As a result, the social values and cultural norms of the target audience may limit the preference of advertising themes used for a particular culture [14]. Therefore, it is significant to note that the cultural norms, values, beliefs play a crucial role while constituting the theme of advertisement.

Culture is a complex, multidimensional construct. One of the most basic dimensions of culture is the individualism-collectivism dimension.

According to existing literature on culture, major traits of an individualistic culture are self-orientation, importance of self-sufficiency, pursuing of individual's goal, which need not be incongruent with the group goals, pride from individual achievements etcetera [14]. A collectivistic culture on the other hand is characterized by importance of group's goal over personal interests, emphasis on group welfare, group harmony, sharing, and co-operation [14].

Numerous studies have concentrated on this crucial aspect of culture with respect to interaction of individuals with one another in social setting and the variation in one's social perception and behavior. According to Hofstede, individualism-collectivism is the connection between the individual and the collectivity that persists in a particular society [5].

Many countries diverge in this important cultural characteristic. For instance, in countries of Europe and North America, individuals prefer independent relationships to one another, and individual goals take priority over group goals. However, in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Asian-Pacific region people are expected to have an interdependent relationship with one another within a collectivity [14].

India is regarded as a collectivist culture. Moreover, previous researchers have identified about the cultural traits of India, which can be classified as the highly collectivist and high-context culture where the context is considered as the crucial part of the communication in the Indian advertisements. "Indirectness, subtlety, and symbolism are important characteristics of the Indian culture and collectivist interest and goals prevail over individual interests and

goals. The Indian culture values loyalty to a group over individual accomplishments" [1].

In contrast, the USA is presumably a country recognized for its "rugged individualism" [14]. As compared to individualistic culture that emphasizes self-sufficiency and interdependency, the so-called American rugged individualism means that one is not only self-sufficient as a matter of fact but that one must make every effort towards it as an ideal [14]. Thus, individualism is considered central to the American character and the American values such as individual achievement orientation and encouragement of the attainment of material prosperity are rooted in individualism.

### 2.2. Hofstede's framework

Various perspectives have been used in the research on advertising across culture. According to Dahl, there are three categories [6]. The sociological perspective that tries to contrast culturally inspired norms such as gender roles across different countries [6]. According to Wiles, the ethnology perspective relies on a set of historical and general societal values to explain perceived differences in advertising in two or more countries [6]. The third category by Albert-Miller & Gelb provides a somewhat deeper explanation of observed differences in advertising by linking appeals and observations to cultural dimensions, and hence tries to forecast the value and appeal differences in various countries [6].

Various dimensions of culture have been put forward and some of the more widely used. One of those widely accepted dimensions is that of Hofstede [11]. Hofstede's four dimensions were built up for the comparison of work-related values [5]. The four dimensions were Power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism and masculinity/femininity [5]. Afterwards, Hofstede came up with the fifth dimension, long-term/short-term orientation. Since the 1990s, various researchers in marketing and advertisements have acknowledged the prospective application of Hofstede's dimensions. The dimensions are also of relevance to culture-related values as it can elucidate the difference in values and motivations used in the content of advertisements across various cultures [14]. In Hofstede's framework, numerical values were assigned to each dimension for various countries.

#### 2.2.1 Individualism

Individualism refers to the extent to which individual's decisions and actions are promoted by the society, thus signifying the way people live together.

In an individualistic culture individuals are expected to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. Each individual is permitted to have his or her own opinion, rather than conforming to a collective consensus. According to Hofste

de, people from highly collectivist society or a society with low individualism demonstrate strong emotional attachment and loyalty to their families and social organizations. A highly collectivist society generally necessitates social harmony to be accomplished through personal conformity to the surroundings, and most of the times people forgo their personal interests for the sake of group benefits.

### 2.2.2 Power distance

Hofstede's power distance dimension takes into account the extent to which people give consent to unequal distributions of power in society and organizations. This dimension gives details about how basic human inequalities in social status, prestige, wealth, and power are perceived by the members of a society.

### 2.2.3 Long-term orientation

Long term orientation in Hofstede's cultural dimensions refers to the promotion of qualities that are oriented towards future return in contrast to present and past. Countries with strong long-term orientation very much look upon perseverance and continuous endeavor towards slow result. On the other hand, societies with weak long-term orientation give more importance to immediate response.

### 2.2.4 Masculinity/femininity

This dimension refers to the distribution of values among the gender. The characteristics of masculinity and femininity have been taken as a societal characteristic rather than individual. In collectivist countries there are typical gender roles whereas in individualistic countries the gender roles are not strictly prescribed.

### 2.2.5 Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to a society's tolerance for uncertainty. It specifies to what degree a culture conditions its members to feel comfortable in an unstructured situation. By an unstructured situation we mean unknown, surprising and different from usual. Culture with low uncertainty avoidance tries to avoid that situation by strict behavioral rules and disapproval of deviant opinions.

## 2.3 Cross Cultural Studies

Various studies have pointed out that consumer's reaction to advertising appeals varies from culture to culture and the appeals dependent on cultural values elicit favorable response [2].

There are obvious differences in culture between Eastern countries and Western countries. Hence, it is logical to assume that the advertisements in the two countries will depict different cultural values. Pollay claims that advertisements are carriers of cultural values and "typical advertising endorses, glamorizes, and inevitably strengthens cultural values" [2]. Yong Zhang and James P. Neelankavil [14] in their paper have attempted to analyze the cultural differences that exist between the USA and China, which influence the choice of advertising appeals and strategies. They

found differences exist in the liking of the advertising appeals, which are used to advertise different products. Overall, US subjects preferred the individualistic appeal to the collective appeal, while Chinese subjects generally favored the collectivistic appeal. Cultural differences along the individualism/collectivism dimension may play an important role in assessing the persuasiveness of advertising appeals employed across these two countries.

Another research done by Kathleen Mortimer & Samantha Grierson [8] which aims to examine the type of advertising appeals utilized in service advertisements in both France and the United Kingdom. They establish that there is a difference in the way that services are being advertised in the United Kingdom and France.

Ahmed has tried to compare the print advertising from USA and India to analyze to what extent cultural values are manifested in the advertisements. This study used content analysis in order to compare the verbal and visual content of the samples of the US and Indian print advertising. In order to maintain comparability, the magazines taken in both countries were based on the parameters such as format, audience demographics, circulation and types of products advertised. The study selected *Times* and *Business Week* for US, India

Today, and *Business India* for India. Findings of this study showed that there were significant differences in the advertising messages of the two countries and further cultural values were also reflected through these advertising messages. The study also revealed that US advertisements used different executional techniques, which was more of an individualistic nature. On the contrary, Indian advertisements revealed that they used various executional techniques in the advertisements that reflected collectivist stances. Additionally, Indian advertisements used their indirect verbal collectivist instances more frequently as compared to the US advertisements [1].

In their study on food advertisements, Cheong, Kim & Zheng [2] examined the cultural factors that influence the usage of advertising appeals in China and USA. They found that advertising appeals like community, popular, ornamental status, dear, health, and nutrition appeals are more frequently used in China, which is a collectivist country as compared to advertisements in USA, which is an individualistic country. Also, advertising appeals like independence were found more in the advertisements of USA as compared to that of China [2].

## 2.4 Standardization and Localization Debate

As discussed in the introduction of this paper, the standardization of advertisements at the global level has been a subject of ongoing debate. The advocates of globalization claim that economic development would lead to congregated needs and tastes of purchasers which will make standardization of marketing and advertisements possible. Whereas critics assert that the difference in culture would thwart successful standardization [7].

According to Levitt, arguments of the advocates of standardization are based on shared consumer traits, economic savings and the benefits of a shared global brand, while opponents stress on the risks of global strategies due to varying local market conditions and cultural uniqueness [3].

Some researchers have claimed that advertising helps to break down national economic boundaries along with growing traits and traditions once considered almost unalterable.

In addition, previous studies have also argued that though cultural changes undergo a slow process, cultural values and orientations do shift as a consequence of social, structural, and historical flux. For instance, industrialization and modernization may result into a shift from collectivism to individualism.

The cultural values are undergoing a change especially among young people [12]. Srivastav claims that there has been a shift in the urban population of India. Indian culture is changing from collectivism to individualism. Culture is the rainbow of color [12].

One entry point to study a society's predominant and shifting cultural values and orientations are mass media. This paper argues that though there has been a shift in the execution of advertisements due to globalization, this shift does not necessarily imply that a globalized advertising strategy can be effective. The shift has occurred in relation to targeted audience and is negligibly related to culture.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Selection of television advertisements

To understand the effect of cultural factors on the content and execution of advertisements, twenty-four television advertisements were selected. Out of twenty-four television advertisements, twelve advertisements were selected from each of the two distinct cultures: India & U.S. for the comparative study. These twelve advertisements of each country were selected under three sectors; services sector, machines/automobiles and consumer goods.

Before taking these twelve advertisements from each country, set of inclusions and exclusions were taken into consideration, which are as follows:

- To understand all the television advertisements, English language was taken as the medium of communication.
- Subtitles were reconsidered for the better understanding of the television advertisements.
- Socioeconomic factors of both the countries were not considered in the television advertisements.
- In case of services sector, services with the maximum users were selected from both the countries for comparability.

- In case of the machines/automobiles, different models of the same brand were taken due to the unavailability of the same level of technology in both the countries, at the same time.
- Further, different brands of the same product taken into consideration due to unavailability of the same brands for the same product.
- In case of the consumer goods, different products of the same brand were selected due to unavailability of the same type of product.

Further, to understand the effect on the execution of advertisements due to changes within a culture, twenty television advertisements were selected representing India. In each of the three product line, four television advertisements of four different years are taken, commencing from 1990s, which represented the trajectory of changes in the execution of advertisements. Out of three-product line, two product lines come under the consumer goods and other product line comes under service sector. Set of inclusions and exclusions that were considered under the selection of these twenty television advertisements from India are

- English and Hindi language were taken consideration as the medium of communication
- Subtitles were taken into consideration for the better understanding.
- Four advertisements were considered under each of the five product lines from the year 1990 until the year 2013.
- In case of the consumer goods, ingredients used in the products at different period were not considered.

#### 3.2 Data analysis

The data was produced from the directed approach of content analysis. Analysis of the data is researcher driven.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After the analysis of the data through Hofstede's cultural dimension, the researchers found out certain characteristics which are shown in the advertisements. Although each of the advertisements did not show all the five dimensions at least characteristics of three out of the five cultural dimensions were present in the advertisements.

The advertisements from India depicted characteristics like power differences and submission of oneself under the high power without questioning it, many levels of hierarchy which is autocratic in nature, obeying the person who is superior in hierarchy, respect for the authority and soon. All these characteristics exemplify that advertisements of India show a higher power distance. The advertisements from US illustrated a horizontal power dimensions without much hierarchy along with challenging the authority. It depicts an egalitarian system.

The advertisements from India showed that the systems had structured and standardized course of action, deviant behavior is not accepted, consensus is required and planning is needed. In the advertisement of US, the risk taking behavior was present, deviant behavior is not only accepted but acknowledged too and there are no hard and fast

rules. Hence, India has more characteristic of strong uncertainty avoidance whereas US has more characteristic of weak uncertainty avoidance.

The Indian advertisements showed traits like behaving in accordance to social norms, greater tendency to maintain social harmony, consider the in-group members with respect to their behavior and decisions, emphasize on hierarchy, and have regard for norms and rules of the group. The traits that are found in the US advertisements are emphasis on self for most the near and dear ones, own wants and purpose have a higher place, appreciation of independence and self-sustainability, giving more importance to fun and enjoyment and having one's own belief. These differences in traits in the advertisements of both the countries suggest that India is more collectivistic and less individualistic as compared to USA.

In the advertisements of USA characteristics related to long-term orientation was much more viewed as compared to advertisements in India. Perseverance, continuous efforts, future planning, long-term accomplishments is more evident as compared to India. The advertisements of India did not emphasize more on appeals that are related to long-term orientation.

The characteristics of masculinity and femininity were depicted in the advertisements of both the countries. In the advertisements of India, specific and typical gender roles are represented. Household chores like cooking, cleaning, taking care of children and other family members and a dutiful wife, mother and daughter-in-law are associated with women whereas characteristics like taking major decision of homes, responsible and protective towards family members are associated with men.

In the advertisements of USA the gender roles are not definite as in the advertisement of one product a male is shown washing clothes and in another advertisement gives message of girls pursuing sciences subjects. Hence there is a notable difference in prescribed gender roles in the advertisements of USA and India.

In order to analyze if standardized advertising appeal will be effective or not, the advertisements did not show a significant shift in cultural dimensions though there are a minor shift in certain advertising appeals. In fact, there is a significant shift in the targeted audience. Another significant change that is shown in terms of advertising appeal is related to long-term orientation. Previously the advertisements focused on short-term goal like beauty, taste of the food etc. whereas the recent advertisements have focused on long-term orientation like health. It is also important to note that certain appeals related to the culture of India such as hierarchical structure, definite gender roles, in-group relation, interdependence among the members of a community is still prevalent in the recent advertisements suggesting that a minor change is not a quota to assume that standardized advertising appeals will be successful.

The findings suggest that consistent with the hypotheses of Hofstede traits such as acceptance of hierarchical structure, prioritizing one's community rather than oneself, specific gender roles, interdependence

is more common in the advertisements of India. On the other hand, characteristics such as self-sufficiency, accomplishment of individual goals, promotion of one's uniqueness is more prevalent in the advertisements of USA.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The implication of this study is that international advertisers should be careful about implementation of standardized advertising appeal in a culturally diverse market. The difference in the advertising appeal of both the countries can be attributed to their varied culture. This verifies the notion that different cultural values and norms of the audience have a

crucial impact on the selection of advertising appeals in a particular culture.

Although, this paper outlines many significant aspects related to cross-cultural study done on two distinct cultures: India and U.S. and further contributes to the debate of standardization vs. localization, but it also shows several limitations that should be taken into consideration for the future research. This study focused on only two countries (U.S. as individualist & India as collectivist). Various other factors like economy, living standard, people's choices, religion etc. are not encapsulated during the research process. There is certainly a need to widen the research ground covered in this study. Study only takes into account the television advertisement (electronic media) as the one parameter of advertisements during the discourse of cross-culture variation. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings of this study to other media and situations. For analyzing the television advertisement, Hofstede's cultural dimension theory was taken as a variable, which only considers five dimensions. Moreover, Hofstede's cultural dimension theory recently derived with the sixth dimension (Indulgence vs. Restraint), which should be taken into consideration along with the five dimensions. For the study conducted on debate of standardization vs. localization, the product line was taken for the study, which limits the research. Researcher-driven data analysis could be another limitation. Instead, the data analysis should be respondent-driven because this methodology gives an opportunity for the respondent to freely express and expand their opinions about topic being investigated that will be helpful in enriching the data for the future research.

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