

A Tentative Study of Cultural Value Differences in Chinese and Western Food Advertisements

Shangzhi Xue

School of Foreign Languages, Zhengzhou University of Science and Technology, Zhengzhou, Henan, 450064, P.R.China

ABSTRACT

The difference between Chinese and western values has always been a hot topic in contemporary research field. As a matter of fact, values play an important role in our daily life. It lies in every aspect of our lives and guides the behaviors of people. The study of different values between Chinese and western countries show significance to have an in-depth understanding of Chinese and western culture. As an important publicity means of enterprise, advertisement reflects some profound cultural factors from its way to its content. The cultural information that the advertisement conveyed is directly related to economic benefits. So whether a food advertisement is in line with the different cultural backgrounds in different countries, whether it is in line with the public values, will affect whether the food advertising is successful or not. At the first part, this essay focuses on the introduction of five dimensions, then analyses the language of classical Chinese and western food advertisements. And tries to find out the differences between Chinese and western food advertisements in the aspect of cultural dimension. Analyses why a food advertisement is a success or failure, with the hope that these findings may give some enlightenment to cross-cultural commercial advertisement.

KEYWORDS

Food Advertisement; Cultural values; Difference; Chinese and Western

1 Cultural Value

1.1 Hofstede's Five Dimensions

In 1965, Hofstede conducted a personnel research department of IBM in Europe and started a series of data analysis. During the time of 1967 and 1973, he conducted a large survey study which involved more than 40 national across the world. He compared the answers of different samples and found his own identification of "cultural dimensions": power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity. The theory was one of the first quantifiable theories that could be used to explain observed differences between cultures. He focused on the differences between different cultures and published a book in 1980 named *Culture's Consequences*. Then in the later 1980s, another scholar Bond did the "Chinese Value Survey" and put forward a fifth cultural--Long-term orientation dimension into the former system:

The Power Distance Index can be defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally." (Hofstede, Geert, *Psychology and Culture*, 2015.09.) It pay more emphasis on the degree of equality between different countries. Low power distance means that people dare to challenge

authority and attempt to distribute power. Higher power distance means that this country's culture emphasis on established and executed hierarchy in society. For example, Power distance index scores high in Latin and Asian countries, USA and UK scores relatively low.

Individualism (IDV) explores the "the level of people in a society is integrated into groups." (Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations*, 1991) High individualism attaches great importance on personality and personal rights in a society. They emphasize the "I" versus the "we." Its counterpart, collectivism stresses the concept of family and emotional dependency as well as the responsibility for other members in the same group. These groups are loyal and support each other when a conflict arises with other groups. Specifically, there is a gap between Western countries and Eastern countries. North America and Europe can be considered as individualistic with relatively high scores while Asia, Africa and Latin America have collectivist value.

Masculinity (MAS) can be explained as "a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success." (Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations*, 1991) Its counterpart, femininity, can be seen as "a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life." which means that the woman's role emerges more in societies. Feminine societies show the character of modesty, caring the weak and little recognition of gender difference and discrimination. In more masculine societies, women are more emphatic and competitive, but notably less emphatic than the men. Men hold the dominant position in society and that makes them prefer to control other people's thinking. Masculinity scores are very high in Japan and relatively lower in United Kingdom for example.

The Uncertainty Avoidance Index associates with "a society's tolerance for ambiguity" (Hofstede, *Cultures and organizations*, 1991) in which peoples' attitude towards event of something unexpected or unknown. Societies that have high score will create stiff codes of behavior, guidelines, and laws. On the other hand, a lower degree of uncertainty shows more acceptances to tolerance and ambiguity. With low uncertainty, they are more willing to make reformation and take risks. In this dimension, Latin American countries Southern and European countries and Japan are the highest; Anglo, Nordic, and Chinese culture countries are relatively low.

Long-term orientation (LTO) associates the connection of the past with the current and future actions/challenges. That is, whether it is stick to the traditional ideas and values. Countries with a higher degree of this index (long-term) believes that traditions are honored and should be remained. Societies with a lower degree in this index (short-term) views adaptation to new things and problem-solving as a necessity. High scores typically are found in East Asia, especially in China and moderate scores in Eastern and Western Europe, and low in the Anglo countries, the Muslim world, Africa and in Latin America.

2 Case Analysis

2.1 Different Cultural Values in Different Countries

2.1.1 Main Values in China

Compared with western culture, Chinese core values adapt the way to combining people with the social environment. It pays more attention to the individuals' evaluation and the feedback of the society.

In TV series, values are being reflected as sacrifice, such as in *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*. When their army trapped into a dangerous position in the battle of red cliff, HuangGai suffering a lot and making self-sacrifice, to accomplished the wining of the war. And this war can be seen as a classic example to defeat enemy troops with a force inferior in number. This is an example for individual concessions in collective annotations.

2.1.2 Main Values in Western Countries

Compare with the Chinese culture, western culture mainly character itself in the cognition concept of "self", which can be seen as the individualism of the dimension.

In films and television works, the difference is also obvious: In Hollywood blockbusters, the leading actor always confront the situation alone. For example, *The Resident Evil*, *Iron Man*. From these films, the personal heroism is deductive incisively and vividly.

2.2 Different Reflections in Food Advertisements

This essay focus on the Hofstede 's five theory dimensions, found that different advertisements in different countries stress different elements. And based on the theory of cultural dimensions to analyze the food advertisement.

2.2.1 Food Advertisements in China

In terms of food advertisement, the elements of Chinese traditional culture values mainly focus on interpersonal dimension which can be seen as the collectivism dimension and long term-orientation because it gives priority to families and traditions.

Jian Nan Chun, the famous Chinese wine manufacturer, was far and near known for its long history, as early as in Tang Dynasty. It's said that the famous poet Li Bai once sold his fur-lined jacket here for the wine, thus leaving our later generations a much-told story of "trading ermine for a drink". So one of its advertisements in China said "Imperial wine in the dynasty of Tang. ---Jian Nan Chun Chiew". This advertisement not only shows the recognition of traditional culture. Through the analysis of cultural dimensions, we can describe this to the long-term orientation. Using the elements of Tang Dynasty also shows another dimension of high power distance. The Tang Dynasty is the most magnificent period in feudal society which values the centralization of authority. The purpose of using the element of Tang Dynasty is to telling us the wine was praised by emperor, thus shows its elite status.

Another dimension of culture---collectivism and individualism can also be found in food advertisements. Chinese people show the tendency of collectivism. With the forms of advertisement, it always show to cherish the family friendships and get their families reunion. For example, one of the famous beer brewery, Tsingtao Beer, once launched the advertisement in China. Advertisement said "Gather together for this cup. ---Tsingtao Beer." The concept of being together with your family and friends has been demonstrated completely.

In terms of the dimension of Masculinity, in food advertisements, they will pay more attention to the concept of harmony with the nature and the slogan may be honorific to show their awe. So advertisements not only stress the concept of being harmony with nature, but also shows the Chinese modesty attitude. For example, one of the well-known advertisements of mineral water manufacturer in China, says "We are not manufacturers of water. We are just porters of nature. ---Nongfu Spring". It stresses the original taste and flavor of water, the word "just" perform the modesty and awe, which can be seen as a successful commercial advertisement.

2.2.2 Food Advertisements in Western Countries

Comparing with the Chinese food advertisement, western advertisement shows differently. Culture and values reflected in western countries mainly focus on the dimension of individualism, relatively low Uncertainty Avoidance, and lower index of the power distance.

Obey your thirst. ---Sprite. Enjoy life. ---Coca Cola.

These two advertisements highlight customer's feelings of enjoy. That indicates they pay more attention to the feeling of oneself, pursuing their own desire. It reflects the dimension of individualism. With such kind of slogan, customer will take the idea of I can fulfill my desire and enjoy immediately into consideration.

Comparing with the some Chinese brand which emphasizes their long history and rich cultural deposits. Some famous brands in western countries who shares the same long history stress not that much to its history. However, they may more attention to the group of young people, because they treat the young people as the target group in commercial activities. This thought reflects the western people's mind toward adaption to youth and advanced in time. For example:

1) The choice of a new generation. ---Pepsi

2) Taste the once that's forever young. ---Pepsi

They try to use fashionable notion to attract the audience. At the same time, advertisers prefer to use the youth to telling people that the old brand restore freshness. As we mentioned in the former text, the adaption and advance can echo to the short-term orientation. In that culture, people may more attention to the demand of young generation, because they know the young group could be able to lead the development.

In terms of the index of uncertainty avoidance. The relationship between human and nature can manifest their lower avoidance of uncertainty, western countries always show the concept of adventure and conquer the world. The peoples' attitude towards event of something unexpected is to face it.

This typically shows the notion of adventure, peoples' attitude towards event of something unexpected, and low uncertainty avoidance. Brand Redwood Creek has a famous advertising: "Satisfy your taste for adventure!". The slogan shows the idea of get ready to accept the challenges. These shows they can easily accept the changeable environment. Thus perform of the uncertainty avoidance very well.

3 Guidelines for a Successful Food Advertisement

3.1 Successful Cross-cultural Advertisement

With the development of economy and the emergence of multinational Corporation, cross-culture advertisements become more and more popular. Therefore, knowing the different cultural value between the domestic and target county should not be ignored. There are some successful examples:

Good things to share with good friends ---Maxwell House. In order to open market in Taiwan, Maxwell Company designs this advertisement slogan. In fact, before Maxwell goes into Taiwan market, Nestlé takes a dominant position in Taiwan. So it is very difficult for Maxwell Company to take the market share and win the competition. But this slogan presents to be successful for helping Maxwell make benefits. The reason why it wins success is that it adapts the Chinese value. Chinese people cherish friendships and interpersonal relationship because its long-time dimension. This slogan embody those two factors, and successfully using it to attract customer.

3.2 Suggestions

The cause of difference value in advertisements covers many aspects, such as different environment, the different cultures, different habits of people, different development stages of counties, different public cultural consciousness. Advertising was created in a certain specific

cultural background, thus closely related to values. The differences between Chinese and western food advertising mainly exist in two aspects: First is the different culture between Chinese and western countries. China and western countries have different cultural forms: Chinese culture is based on continental, with characters of conservative and restraining; while the western culture based on marine culture, with the characters of freedom and open-mind. The second reason is the different national development process. Therefore, across-culture advertisement should be pay attention to the different culture background and values in order to adapt to the local culture, and using the appropriate elements in target country to achieve value-added effect. What's more, using the appeals of advertisement according to Polly also should be stressed. Previous research by Polly (1983) provided a list of common advertising appeals. In 1986s, Polly set up a framework, which includes 42 cultural values. That is, effective, convenient, cheap, dear, popular, traditional, modern, natural, technological, wisdom, productivity, relaxation, enjoyment, maturity, youth, morality, modesty, adventure, plain, freedom, independence, security, status, affiliation, nurturance, family, community and healthy are the other main appeals in advertisements. However, Polly points out those not all cultural values can be used in advertising industry. Generally speaking, different values have different influence on advertisements. If better, trying to find the different appeals the people valued in different country, and uses it in advertisement. But the most important factors is to develop your products and attach great importance to the quality of products.

4 Conclusion

Food advertisement reflects different value-orientation, which is a common category of cultural differences. With the rapid development of world economy, foreign trade has become increasingly important, thus making advertisement more and more frequently used by company. In order to win initiative position in business, advertisement should be used properly. A successful advertisement should use different cultural dimensions to adapt the common value in target country. Many facts show that a successful advertisement is directly related to economic benefits. Because there exist a lot of differences between China and western countries, as a language tool and a reflection way, advertising plays an irreplaceable role in foreign trades. The accordance with local values helps to achieve the goal of gaining profits.

This thesis has studied food advertisements of China and western countries. In terms of cultural values, this paper adopted Hofstadter's Five Dimensions to analyze different advertisements. Using case analysis, we discussed advertisements of both countries. In the last chapter, we discussed some reasons and divided them into social reasons, historical reasons and religious reasons. Then put forward the appeals of Pollay. Finally give enlightens to the across-culture advertisement in three points, that is, adapt the different culture dimensions in target country, try to use the right appeals of advertisements, and improve the quality of product.

About the Author

Shangzhi Xue (1993.11-), Female, Han ethnicity, Luoyang, Henan Province, Master's Degree of Translation, Lecturer at the School of Foreign Languages, Zhengzhou University of Science and Technology. Research interests: Translation, Chinese and Western cultures, etc

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