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A comparison of advertising strategies used in Korean and American Television commercials: Cross Cultural Comparison

Introduction

Albeit, technology is improving with unprecedented speed, Television remains the most effective advertising medium. According to a study done by MarketShare, TV was the only medium to maintain its effectiveness while the other advertising media, both online and offline, declined more than 10 percent (as cited in Lynch, 2015). Following this fact, both Korea and America are spending increasing amount of money on advertising each year (Statista, 2015). Therefore, more companies endeavor to create global TV commercials to attract not only their domestic markets but also international markets. Korea is the 13th largest trading nation in the world and sixth largest trading partner of the U.S (as cited in Bang et al., 2005, p.313). Korea is also considered a potential trading partner for the U.S. given the growth rate of services and GDP. It is expected that Korea will increase total amount of spending on advertising about seven percent annually (Bang et al., 2005, p.313). Since the U.S. and Korea are attempting to strengthen their relationship, advertising market trade to each country will become more active (U.S state department, 2015). However, the first step should be to understand each culture in order to successfully persuade targeted audiences through advertising because the U.S. and Korea have distinguishable cultural differences. Those distinctive cultural values are embedded in TV commercials in each country and that is why each country uses different advertising strategies in order to attract the audiences. Thus, it is indispensable to deeply comprehend each other's culture and analyze how those unique cultural values are presented in TV commercials.

This study attempts to examine different cultural values between the U.S. and Korea based on the Inglehart-Welzel's World Cultural Value map. The World Values Map is a worldwide investigation of political and socio-cultural change (Inglehart, p.5). This is depicted in two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation including Traditional/Secular-rational and Survival/Self-expression values (Inglehart, p.6). Analyzing this data provides a comprehensive measurement identifying different cultural values in each country and comparing correlation with two major dimensions. Understanding the meaning of the map and the specific position of the two countries are important for this study.

The study will also use Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory in order to compare relative scores in different value dimensions. Hofstede's typology provides a rationale for cross-cultural differences in advertising (Moon & Chan, 2003, p.6). The model consists six dimensions including: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance long term orientation, and indulgence. Those dimensions indicate that advertisings vary from one country to another and unique creative cues are executed in different cultures. According to Cho Bongjin and his colleagues (1999), collectivism serves more dominant concept in Korean TV commercials while individualism is more stressed in U.S commercials (p.60). This is a core dimension of cultural variability and it reflects different types of persuasive appeals that are effective in each country (Han & Shavitt, 1994, p.326). Thus, the study will focus on individualism versus collectivism and discuss these concepts more in depth.

The completed project will analyze the different strategies used in Korea and

America, explore how different they are in terms of unique cultural values, and define how significant of an impact one's culture has on advertising's approach in society. Disseminating the cultural values of America and Korea will help us to understand different cultures embedded in advertisements and their societies. This will allow us to have better comprehension of consumers' reactions and behaviors toward Korean and American advertisements.

World Value Map

I. How to examine the World Value Map and its change?

The image below is the sixth version of the World Value Map for 2015. After the analysis of the data, political scientist Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel assert that Survival vs Self-Expression Value and Traditional vs Secular-Rational Values are two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation in the world (World Value Survey, n.d.). The map shows different scores of each country on these two dimensions. Moving upward reflects the country is shifting from Traditional value to Secular-rational, and moving rightward reflects the country is shifting from Survival to Self-Expression values (World Value Survey, n.d.). Those countries that locate closer to the Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, parent-child ties, deference to authority and traditional family values. Moreover, people in those countries have high levels of national pride and a nationalistic outlook rejecting divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide (World Value Survey, n.d.). On the other hand, countries with high secular-rational values have opposite preferences (Inglehart, p.6). They are less concerned with religion, traditional family values and authority. Moreover, suicide, abortion, euthanasia, and divorce are seen as relatively acceptable (World Value Survey, n.d.). According to the Inglehart (2012), many countries have shifted from Traditional to Secular values since more countries have been industrialized. But he also argues that there is a new cultural change moving to new direction because global transition occurred from industrial society to knowledge society. This transition influenced a shift from Survival values toward Self-expression values. With this change, people priorities quality of life and well-being rather than overwhelming emphasis on economic security (Inglehart, p.6). Survival values place weight on physical and economic security and those societies tend to have low levels of trust and tolerance. However, Self-expression values countries have high priority to environmental protection, rising demands for participation in decision-making in economic and political life as well as equality of sex-minority (World Value Survey, n.d.). The current change from Survival to Self-expression values also includes child-rearing values and place high values on individual freedom and self-expression. Those people have an active political orientation which is crucial for democracy (Inglehart, p.7).

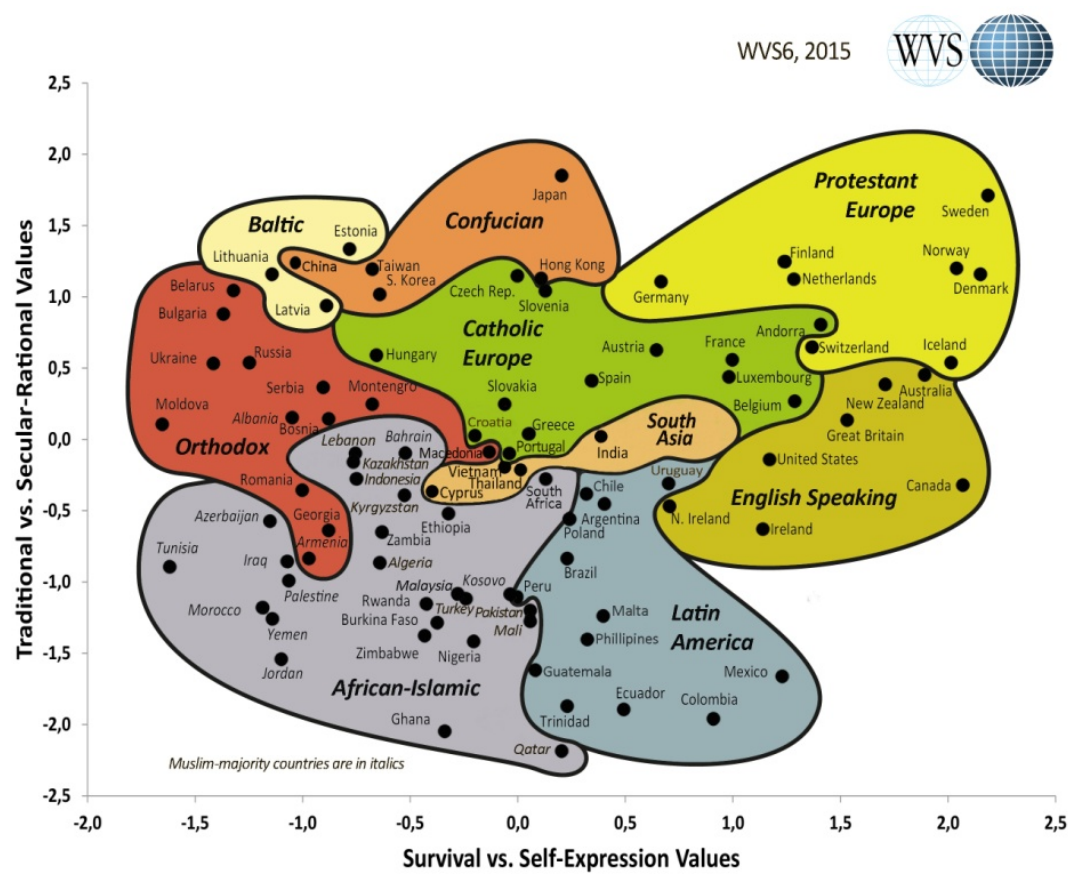
II. Explain the cultural change in both America and Korea with the time shift (2008 VS 2015)

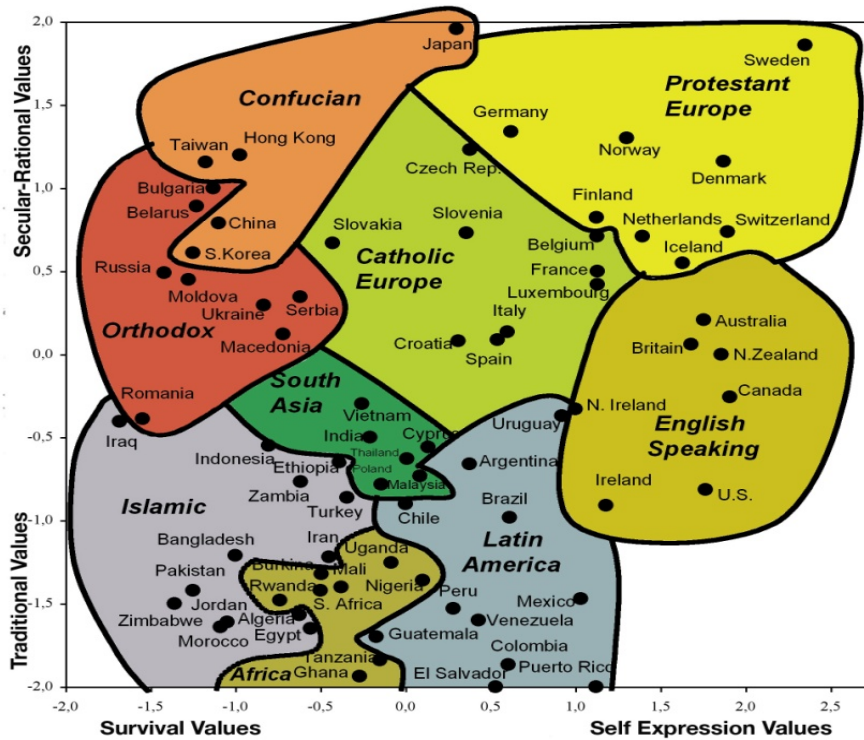
Second map is the one designed in 2008 which was 7years ago from now so that we can compare the shift from 2008's cultural values to 2015's cultural values in both U.S and Korea. In 2008, Korea was scored about 0.5 in Y axis and -1.3 in X axis. In 2015, however, Korea scored 1.0 in Y axis and -0.4 in X axis.

III. Analysis of cultural change in both America and Korea in the World Value Map

With those two data, we can explain that Korea is moving toward Secular-Rational values from Traditional values and from Survival to Self-Expression values. Although Korea is still under the Confucian group, which has family oriented society, Korean cultural value is changing and becoming more westernized. The country has better economic condition and security than in the past. Therefore, people started to accept Self-expression values due to globalization and modernization tolerating foreigners and advocating gender equality.

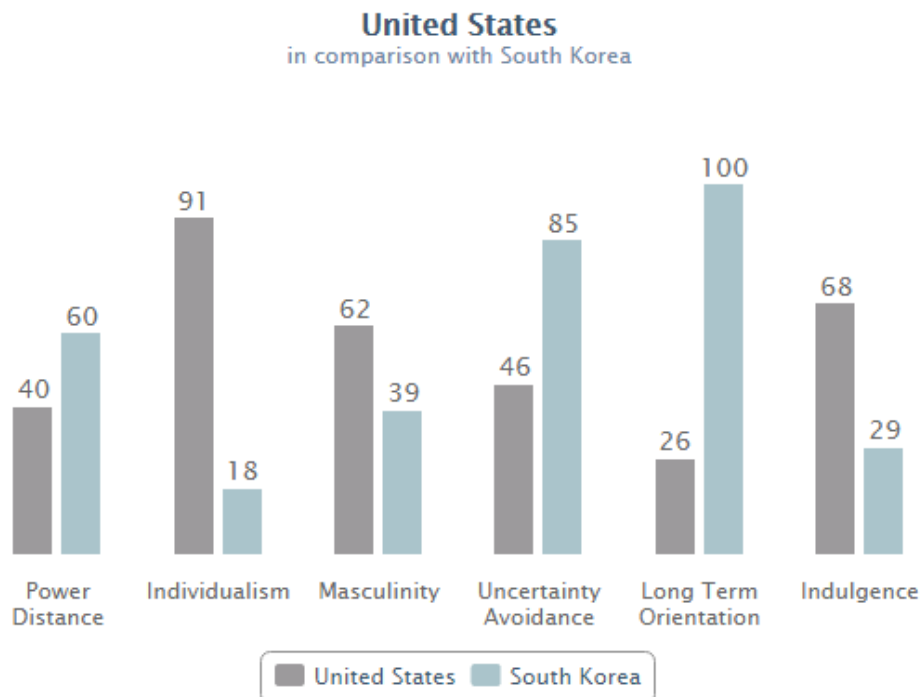
Moreover, people are moving toward Secular value and that represent more people are thinking in liberal ways and the country has long history (Inglehart, p.7). On the other hand, U.S. that is occupied in English speaking group, in 2008, scored about -0.8 in Y axis and 1.8 in X axis. In 2015, U.S scored about -0.2 in Y axis and 1.2 in X axis. Although the change was smaller than that of Korea, we can see U.S is shifting from Traditional to Secular values but differently with Korea from Self-Expression to Survival values. This change can be explained by American's increased uncertainty of physical and economic security compared to 2008. Also, people concern more about religion and this would likely align more with conservative ideologies (Sterbenz, 2014). However, compared to Korea, America still largely emphasizes Self-expression values and prosperity of democratic institution in a society (World Value Survey, n.d.). Based on these results, different advertising strategies used in both countries can be easily defined and understood.





Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

Hofstede’s cultural typology contains six different dimensions and each of them will be examined and compared more in detail.



1. Power Distance

I. Americans have lower power distance than Koreans.

A. How we know this

U.S scored 40 and Korea scored 60 for power distance.

B. What it means

Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organization in a country recognize that there is unequally distributed power. Thus people and their leaders both endorse power inequality. The U.S has lower power distance than Korea and this tells us Korea accept a hierarchical order that everyone has a set position without further justification. Thus, it is predictable that more frequent clandestine fraudulent conduct and bribery among leaders are happening in Korea (the Hofstede center).

C. Implications for Advertising

According to Cho and his colleagues (1999), countries high power distance such as Korea shows collective nature of society and low power distance such as U.S shows more individualistic nature of society (p.60). This is because people in high power distance country place priority on respecting elderly and superiors which is an agreement among its citizens (Cho et al., 1999, p.60).

2. Individualism vs collectivism

II. Americans have high individualism than Koreans.

A. How we know this

U.S scored 91 and Korea scored 18 for individualism.

B. What it means

This dimension address the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. According to the Hofstede (1991), U.S is the most individual and least collectivist which defines oneself in terms of “I” or “We” of the 53 countries studied (as cited in Choi et al., 2004, p.75). This is also one of the characteristic as an English speaking country discussed in World Value Map above. However, Korea is collectivist society with low individualism ranked 43rd out of the 53 countries (as cited in Choi et al, 2004, p.75). People belong to “Groups” and they are loyal to parent and country. They value relationships with other so that they are part of cohesive groups in their society (Bang et al., 2005, p.312). People are interested in social and economic standard and reputation from other rather than being as an individual. U.S has low Power distance and one of the highest Individualism and this well explains their premise of “liberty and justice for all”. They pursue equal rights to all employees and managers and hierarchical order does not exist. Moreover, parents are not required to support their children with authority and people are not shy to obtain information from someone that they don’t know (the Hofstede center).

C. Implications for Advertising

a) America (low-context message) VS Korea (high-context message)

The commercials in U.S emphasize individual goals over group goals and have weak social ties between individual and society (Choi et al., 2004, p.75). American prefers direct and clear communication that they value the clarity as key to effective communication. Thus the advertisements convey explicit messages with low-context. In contrast, the commercials in Korea, with collectivistic cultures, use more indirect communication and contain high-context. The advertisements deliver implicit messages and people find it aggressive if low-context is used in ads, whereas Americans find low-context advertisements more persuasive and informative. Nevertheless, in present study, both U.S and Korean advertising used rational appeals about three out of four times (Bang et al., 2005, p.321). This is interesting because through the past research, high context culture like Korea tends to appeal to emotions

while in low context culture like U.S tends to use rational appeals (Bang et al., 2005, p.321). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that advertisers in Korea found it necessary to use an informational approach to educate their consumers about unfamiliar products by using factors and figures (Bang et al., 2005, p.321).

b) America (comparative ads) VS Korea (non-comparative ad)

Comparative advertising is widely used in U.S which is an example of individualistic. Lyi (1998) found that, in Korea however, comparative advertising is perceived as unconvincing and undesirable compared to non-comparative advertisements (as cited in Choi et al., 2004, p.76). This is because advertising agencies are concerned about controversy and legal disputes after the use of such technique (Choi et al., 2004, p.83). Furthermore, U.S commercials stress product benefits and self-improvement while Korean commercials focus on groups and family. Alden and his colleagues reported (1993) that ads in high collectivistic society create great number of humorous advertisements with three or more central characteristics, whereas individualistic countries rarely make advertisements with three or more characteristics (as cited in Choi et al., 2004, p.76). This indicates Korean commercials are often based on the groups of people while single person or individuals are more easily shown in U.S commercials. When making purchase decision, Korean people mostly rely on family or groups they belong and ask their approval (Jung & Sung, 2008, p.30). This is especially common with highly visible products such as fashion items and cosmetics (Jung & Sung, 2008, p.30). However, Americans make purchase decision on their own rather than following family members' choice or other people's opinion. Different use of self-construal can be detected in Korean and U.S commercials.

c) America (independent self-construal) VS Korea (interdependent self-construal)

Self-construal is concept that shows relationship from one person to other and their distance. This is important factor in shaping consumers' reactions to comparative or non-comparative advertisements (Choi et al., 2004, p.83). There are two types of self-construal: independent and interdependent (Choi et al., 2004). According to the Wilcox and his colleagues (1996), they are highly correlated with advertising effectiveness and each of them represents the self in Korea and America (as cited in Choi et al., 2004, p.78). Many researchers concluded that independent self-construal represents individualistic culture while interdependent self-construal reflects collectivistic cultures (Choi et al., 2004, p.77). In other words, U.S consumers are more likely to have independent self-construals so many commercials are unique and have unambiguous vocal tactics. Consequently, this increased the importance of outcome-oriented constraints with straightforward communication strategies.

d) Correlation between self-construals and comparative ads

The American's independent self-construals can be linked to their preference toward comparative advertisements as well. They believe comparative advertisements are more informative in that make them easier to compare different products. Grewal and his colleagues (1997) reported that comparative advertisements generate more positive brand attitude of consumers and increase their purchase intention (as cited in Choi et al., 2004, p.78). Therefore many commercials compare their products with other products outstanding appealing to consumers with products' benefits. Korean consumers, however, have high interdependent self-construals and they prefer commercials which they can feel sense of belonging and reflect family values. Paik (1990) found that Confucian has influenced Koreans to put more weight on spiritual values and dislike advertisements that mainly focus in earning a profit (as cited in Choi et al., 2004, p.83). Moreover, people do not find comparative advertisements more convincing and appealing. Thus, many advertisements use

indirect conversational strategies with formality and non-comparative advertisement are prevalent in order to create positive brand attitude to consumers (Choi et al., 2004, p.78). Once consumers' obtain positive brand attitude, they patronize the brand company that they have good relationship with (Bang et al., 2005, p.314). Korean people have higher brand loyalty than American (Jung & Sung, 2008, p.32). Companies' commercials in Korea build long-term trust with consumers and this leads to brand loyalty of consumers (Bang et al., 2005, p.314). This is in contrast with American commercials which focus on brands and its immediate benefits.

e) Identity Fusion & Ethnocentrism - America (low loyalty) VS Korea (high loyalty)

Level of loyalty and identity present a great distinction between individualistic and collectivistic country (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.83). This came from the concept of Identity Fusion which was introduced by Swanne and his colleagues (2009) (as cited in Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.83). This assumes that fused person retain personal self while feel associated with groups (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.83). Individualists like Americans are less likely to show loyalty to groups and family but they rather give priority to personal goals than collective goals (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.85). In contrast, collectivists like Koreans do not make distinction between personal and collective goals. Triandis (1989) argues that they subordinate their personal goals to collective goals (as cited in Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.85). Thus person's identity in Korea is defined as part of society as a whole while that of in U.S seen as a separate entity. Moreover, identity fusion is related to consumer ethnocentrism (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.87). This can be defined that individual's own economic behavior is extended to involve one's morality of love and concern for one's concern for the country. Consumers with high ethnocentrism tend to purchase more domestic products than foreign product (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.87). Sharma et al., (1995) asserts that collectivistic country reveals more intensive ethnocentrism among consumers than individualistic country (as cited in Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.87). Therefore, ethnocentrism is much stronger in Korean consumers than U.S. consumers (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.93).

f) Patriotic appeals in both countries' ads

Tendency above can be explained by consumers' behavior and responses after exposing to patriotic messages in advertisings. Patriotic appeals are used both in Korean and U.S commercials. The advertisings contain strong symbols or slogans to intensify patriotic thought and feelings by audiences (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.88). These intensive appeals associate self to one's nation encouraging them to purchase domestic products (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.88). For example, in U.S, after the 9/11, use of patriotic appeals was prevalent not only in TV commercials but also newspapers and magazines (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.87). Advertisers used symbols of statue of liberty, American flag, and United We Stand and these appeals dramatically reinforced the relationship between consumption and citizenship in the U.S. market (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.87). Although audiences in U.S increase favorable attitude to patriotic appeals in advertisings, the finding resulted in more significant attitude change among audiences in Korea (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.95). Therefore, advertisers in Korea use patriotic appeals in order to create consumers' favorable attitude toward brands and convince them to purchase the products. The advertisements largely influence consumers to interact and identify themselves with advertising message (Yoo & Swann, 2014, p.97).

International advertisings is now became indispensable market worldwide and both Korea and U.S are investing and extending this market to each other in order to reach out to more consumers. In order to be successful, Korean commercial agencies should use comparative advertising which can appeal to U.S consumers while U.S use non-comparative advertising

which can attract Korean consumers. It is the first step to acknowledge collectivistic and individualistic cultural values then examine consumers' reaction and buying behavior with domestic advertisements.

3. Masculinity vs Femininity

III. Americans have higher masculinity than Koreans.

A. How we know this

U.S scored 62 and Korea scored 39 for masculinity.

B. What it means

A High masculine on the dimension indicates that the society is driven by competition and achievement and winner is defined as someone who is best in that field. A low score means that standing out from the crowds is not admirable and the key value is to care other and quality of life. Thus, U.S score can be explained that Americans tend to talk freely their successes because they have "can-do" mentality that they believe themselves always can do better with great possibility. Moreover, they live to work so that they obtain higher status with rewards if they made achievement. They believe conflicts are motivating since it brings best of people and the winner can take all. However, this causes polarization and court cases that undermines the U.S premise of liberty and justice for all. This widens the gap between rich and poor. On the other hand, Korea is considered as a feminine society. People hardly speak up their successes to other because it is regarded as such an impudent behavior. They work in order to live and managers strive for consensus. This consensus oriented society shows that cooperation, modesty, and caring are key values in their life. The conflicts are resolved by compromise and negotiation such as incentives giving free time.

C. Implications for Advertising

There was no significant difference between two countries in emotional appeal used in advertising message. Surprisingly, however, empathy cues are more frequently used in American commercials than Korean commercials (Bang et al., 2005, p.317). Korean TV advertising used more feminine appeals such as courtesy and family. This shows that Korean advertising is largely influenced by Confucianism that has been descended throughout the history (Moon et al., 2003, p.56).

4. Uncertainty avoidance

IV. Americans have lower uncertainty avoidance than Koreans.

A. How we know this

U.S scored 46 and Korea scored 85 for uncertainty avoidance.

B. What it means

This represents how the society deals with ambiguous future and extend to which its' members feel threatened. The U.S scored below the average and this indicates fair degree of acceptance for new ideas, willingness to try new or different in any field of areas such as business or technology. They do not require strict rules and less express emotionally than Korea. However, Korea is one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world. They maintain rigid rules and codes in order to prohibit original and unorthodox ideas. Although most of these rules are not worth to observe, people have inner urge to keep themselves busy and work hard. Precision and punctuality are vital norm and innovation is resisted. Thus, security is an important element in Korea.

C. Implications for Advertising

In Korean commercials, there are more tangible cues that make advertising more effective

to consumers since they are worried about intangibility of products and not being able to touch or examine those products (Bang et al., 2005, p.319). According to Bang and his colleagues, their study resulted that 49.3 percent of the Korean commercial provided tangible cues while 17.8 percent of U.S showed tangible cues (Bang et al., 2005, p.321). Korean commercials target consumers who want to avoid equivocal and esoteric part of the products. Thus Korean commercials more frequently feature the person who is using the products and comparing before and after images. This helps consumers better understand the products and reduce their uncertainty. According to the Yoon and Donthu (2002), perceived quality had greater impact on Korean consumers than U.S in their purchase decisions because of cultural differences in the level of uncertainty avoidance.

5. Long term orientation vs Short term normative orientation

V. Americans have lower long term orientation than Koreans.

A. How we know this

U.S scored 26 and Korea scored 100 for long term orientation.

B. What it means

This dimension indicates how every society maintains its past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future. The U.S is normative society which scored low and they are prone to analyze new information whether they are true. Thus not most Americans are pragmatic and this should not be bewildered with their “can-do” mentality with high masculine. This does not change the fact that American is practical. In business, companies measure employees’ performances on a short-term basis with profits and loss statements. This drives individuals to focus on quick results making them present-oriented. On the contrary, Korea is one of the most pragmatic, long-term oriented societies in the world. People plan for their future and tends to follow others examples of being practical. In business, Korean corporations emphasize steady growth of market rather than immediate improvement and result. They serve the durability of the companies and concern with next generation.

C. Implications for Advertising

Korean advertisers, with long- term orientation, insert practical value of its products to contribute to the future success of the companies. This connects to the fact that consumers in Korea have positive brand attitude toward products that they are personally intimate with. Thus rational appeals are prevalently used in advertisings (Bang et al., 2005, p.321).

6. Indulgence vs Restraint

VI. Americans have higher indulgence than Koreans.

A. How we know this

U.S scored 68 and Korea scored 29 for indulgence.

B. What it means

This dimension defines the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses. The U.S is an indulgent society and this can be combined with a normative score as short term oriented society. People tend to work hard but play hard allowing their natural drives to enjoy their life. Since the society has high indulgence, drug use is prevalent and it is one of the most serious problems. The states have highest drug addiction among other wealthy countries. On the contrary, Korea is a restraint society. There are high tendency to cynicism and pessimism and thus they do not allow much leisure time. Companies prefer employees who can forgo one’s private life and devote one’s life to work. Thus many people

control their gratification of their desires. Their actions are also restrained by social norms and feel that indulging oneself is wrong and above their desert.

C. Implications for Advertising

There had not been found much research papers that address clear distinction of indulgence and restraint in both Korean and American commercials. However, it is not difficult to find advertising in Korea that uses restraint attracting consumers' sympathy toward the ads. Not only indulgence but also some advertisers use indulgence that creates vicarious satisfaction by viewers, which they desire to, but arduous to achieve in real life.

Conclusion

Ads that we can expect to be successful should be different in the two cultures. Because Americans tend to value individualism, masculinity, and indulgence while Koreans tend to value collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Ads aimed at Americans, to be maximally successful, should present individualism in commercials using single actor emphasizing the term "I". It is also important to deliver direct and immediate message to audiences about the products with low-context. Advertisers should create the ads that clearly express benefits and practicality of the products that could capture the eyes of consumers and this will eventually lead them to purchase the products. To be specific, comparative advertising can be one of the tactics to stress the product benefits effectively. This is because Americans found those ads more persuasive that compare their products with other brands and differentiate them with others. Using comparative advertising will increase consumers' purchase intention as well as positive brand attitude.

Ads aimed at Koreans should convey collectivism as a core value because people prefer to define themselves in terms of "Groups" instead of "I" or "We". Since Koreans have high family value and respect to elderly, advertisers need to come up with ways to connect those values into their products. Once the idea is generated, advertisers should use communication that is more indirect and contain high-context. Koreans find high-context advertising more informative because they prefer the advertisings that contain cues that are more tangible. This can be connected with high uncertainty avoidance. Moreover, non-comparative advertisings should be used in that Koreans have high interdependent self-construals and find those ads more desirable. Another strategy can be using patriotic appeals such as containing strong symbols or slogans to intrigue the audiences' feeling. This will increase Korean consumers' loyalty and this will turn into a strong brand loyalty in the future.

All things considered, it is important to keep in mind that expectation of consumers in each country is different based on their unique cultures. Thus, advertisements in one culture should not expect that it would be accepted automatically in other cultures. Before moving into new market, it should be prioritizing to check equivalency and transferability from one to other (Bang et al., 2005, p.322). Advertisers must create advertisements that fit with a country's culture. This eventually leads to success of international advertisements between Korea and America gratifying each audience's need with different cultural value.

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APPENDIX

Examples of Television Ads with Patriotism (US)



Examples of Television Ads with Patriotism (Korea)

