

“Cross-cultural analysis of the UK advertising content from non-UK perspectives”

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## Cross-cultural analysis of the UK advertising content from non-UK perspectives

### Abstract

Along with increased globalization and anything prefixed with “global”, there is a pressing need for what is referred to as standardization or globalization in advertising. This heated debate on localization versus standardization, in which “one size fits all”, have occupied recent advertising research. This research will lead to relevant strategic implications for the UK marketers and Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies seeking to enter international markets. The findings are expected to fill a gap in the existing literature by incorporating several cultural aspects embedded in an international advertising policy. This research attempts to explore advertising content in the UK, especially from the level of information provided, stereotypes portrayed and the individualist and collectivist values that may be embedded in advertisements. The article employs Content Analysis (CA) using both closed- and open-questions. Chain referral sampling is utilized to select the respondents from various countries to evaluate advertisements randomly from UK magazines. The findings suggest that UK FMCG printed advertisements contain both individualist and collectivist values. Although they are informative, they are prone to containing stereotypes with regards to their portrayal of men and women. The strategic implications of the findings are that the creativity and delivery techniques of UK advertising can be accepted by people from other countries with cultural modifications in relation to the issue of the standardization versus adaptation. The research also suggests that UK advertising has not been fully optimised to attract a minority audience.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural, content analysis, standardization-adaptation, individualist-collectivist.

### Introduction

Advertising has been the subject of cultural research in several disciplines such as international communication, anthropology and others (Fu and Wu, 2010; Schaeffer, 2003; Ger, 1999; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Appadurai, 1990). These cultural aspects – to what extent a multinational company should change its global advertising messages from one country to another – have been debated in management literature for many decades (Hung, Li and Belk, 2007; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Cheng, 1997; Boddewyn, Soehl and Picard, 1986). Nevertheless, the debate over the use of standardized versus localized advertising has never been settled. For example, standardized advertising follows the global marketing theory proposed notably by Levitt (1983, cited in Mueller, 1986), which argues that “people all over the world have the same tastes and desires, and they are remarkably alike regarding love, hate, fear, greed, joy, patriotic, pornography, material comforts, mysticism and the role of food in their lives”.

Advertising is also one of “the most universal and pervasive channels of communication” (Mayne, 2000; Javalgi, Cutler and Malhotra, 1995). Viewers recognize and understand advertisement through its context (Pateman, 1983 cited in Mayne, 2000). As a form of communication, advertising should also be seen as “a part of a historical and social process firmly linked to the economies of westernized industrialized nations” (Dyer, 1988, p. 15). Particularly in Britain, the Industrial Revolution put down a

marker as an indication of an important transition in the character of advertising. Advertising was seen as something novel and even odd, but it has gradually gained acceptance as a “commercial weapon”, and is now seen as a means of generating demand from customers (Zhao and Belk, 2002; Nevett, 1982).

The development of the press has also affected the advertising world considerably, given the fact that social habits, consumption patterns and communication devices are now so varied among countries. The existence of specialist magazines catering for everyone’s interests and hobbies, for example, has enabled advertisers to be more selective in choosing the right media through which to advertise its products or services. Accordingly, research about cross-cultural advertising has become an important subject due to globalization and the integration of the world economy. This type of research can “identify specific differences and similarities in advertising strategies, expressions and manifest cultural values, norms and stereotypes of the target audience and larger culture” (Ahmed, 2000). The knowledge of these cultural values, norms and stereotypes could be used to address questions about the emerging world market and consumer behaviors around the globe.

Advertising research is a specialized area of marketing research, which is normally carried out to improve the efficiency of advertising effects (Young et al., 2008). Two types of research on advertising effects can be identified, the first of which is operational and the second critical. Operational refers to the research of advertising effects as “indicators of policy and marketing decisions” (Dyer, 1988, p. 73), while critical assessment, or the research of adver-

tising effects, and generally discusses short- and long-term media presentation's impacts on the society. Another type of advertising research is related to cultural values. In this type of research, researchers are generally looking for evidence to prove that "advertising plays a part of defining reality in a general or anthropological sense" (Dyer, 1988, p. 77). In relation to this research, advertising is seen as having a central role in the economy in that it has to be powerful enough to persuade viewers, in terms of available resources and channel of communication. Further, Chang et al. (2000) highlighted that in culture-related advertising research, "culture tends to be singled out as an explanatory factor". Arguably, a more advanced methodology may be required to analyze the relationship between cultures and advertising. Mueller (1986) supported the argument that culture tends to be prevalent in advertising; hence, to be more successful, advertisers should be aware of this particular culture within which advertising operates, especially since consumption patterns of a particular population can also be shaped by this culture.

Following relevant literature (Hung, Li and Belk, 2007; Schaeffer, 2003; Ger, 1999; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Cheng, 1997; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Appadurai, 1990; Boddewyn, Soehl and Picard, 1986; Levitt, 1983), the aim of the research is to examine critically how cultural aspects may influence advertising content, whilst the detailed research objectives are: (1) to investigate specific linguistic variables of UK FMCG advertisements as they appear in randomly selected magazine advertisements and (2) to analyze whether different communication contexts affect a person's assessment of linguistic codification (informational, directive, poetic) and visual codification (portrayal of men and women) and to evaluate whether UK advertisements in general portray individualistic values.

The results are expected to provide a better understanding of UK advertising content from non-British perspectives. The research will be useful for UK advertisers and international companies seeking to enter international markets, by giving insights into advertising practices from several different countries around the world, as well as on how the portrayal of men and women may differ from one country to another. However, this research carries limitations, since it uses limited advertisements randomly from the magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Essentials* and *GQ*. Accordingly, it is intended as a direction to stimulate further studies with larger random samples. A chain referral sampling method was employed to select a variety of respondents ( $n = 60$ ) from different nationalities, to answer survey questionnaires and semi-structured

interviews. It is expected that future research to employ larger samples from a variety of countries to deduce wider generalization.

## 1. Research methodology

Content Analysis (CA) was employed in this research. It is defined as a qualitative data analysis (QDA) methodology for making critical inferences by systematically identifying specified characteristics of interview texts (Berelson, 1972; Krippendorff, 2004). Further, the interview texts were examined as to their authenticity, conceptual and structural meaning. CA belongs to the "phenomenology" paradigm, an approach that focuses on "how life is experienced" (Denscombe, 2003).

Contrasting with quantitative analysis such as Factor Analysis, Regression, Multivariate Analysis of Variance and others, qualitative data analysis (QDA) does not aim for empirical generalization using larger samples but concentrates on the subjective and deeper meanings of the social construction of reality using smaller sample size (Denscombe, 2003; Krippendorff, 2004; Saunders et al., 2008). Accordingly, smaller samples are more often used rather than large samples. Owing to this limitation (relatively small samples of 60 respondents), this research is intended to serve as an exploratory research. Hence, it is restricted in terms of producing wider generalization. In order to counter the limitations, apart from answering multiple-choice questions, the respondents were also asked to elaborate further insights (open-ended questions) into advertisements practices in their home countries as a way to give enlightenment on how UK advertising practices may differ and what can be improved from the existing communication and advertising practice.

Following relevant literature (Bloor and Wood, 2006; Richard, 2009; Saldana, 2009; Binsardi, 2010), the process of coding was implemented by using an NVivo software package. Firstly, open coding entailed assigning the interview texts to categories identified from the data, using the concept free and tree nodes in NVivo. Secondly, axial coding was undertaken by spotting relationships between the categories. Thirdly, selective coding was implemented by warranting that all interview texts were associated with an emerging category to support the conceptualization of a theoretical framework.

The international respondents were non-British, from several different countries found in South Asia (India, Bangladesh and Nepal), South East Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam), East Asia (China and Japan), South America (Mexico) and Europe (Spain). These countries were purposefully chosen owing to their high index of collectivism (Hofstede,

2001; Usunier and Lee, 2005). Accordingly, it was expected that the variety of countries (respondents) would enhance the reliability of the findings and give different cultural angles to this research.

The respondents were selected by using chain-referral sampling. The reasoned justification for using a chain referral sampling techniques is due to the fact such populations are difficult, costly to identify and very hard to locate vis-à-vis their international location. That is, it is very costly (vis-à-vis time and resource) to ask international respondents from different nationality to participate and answer survey questionnaires. Although, there is a sample framework such as International Yellow Pages and individual country's Internet, this information inaccessible to us vis-à-vis time and resource. In chain-referral sampling, after observing the initial respondent, the researcher asks for assistance from the respondent to help identify other international respondents with a similar interest. This sampling strategy is justified following relevant literature (Reynolds et al., 2003) in that it is more appropriate in international studies, especially if one of the purposes is to evaluate cultural differences (Denscombe, 2007). In addition, due to the nature of British magazine readership, the respondents selected purposefully were within the 21-40 years old age group. One hundred questionnaires were sent out to prospective respondents, attached to the advertisements that needed to be assessed. After eliminating incomplete questionnaires and missing data, the net response rate for this research was 60 respondents.

The magazine population of this research was made up of advertisements taken from nationally circulated British magazines. The advertisements used featured human (in the form of models or photographs) and other illustrated pictures. Full-page advertisements were used because of the dominant use of this type of advertisement in the magazines, and to give general uniformity and follow a general established procedure of advertising content analysis following earlier literature (Biswas et al., 1992; Harmon et al., 1983 cited in Ahmed, 2000).

This research focuses purposefully on FMCG magazines belonging to the personal products category (Shavitt, 1990). FMCG are defined as Fast Moving Consumer Goods such as packaged food, beverages, toiletries, and tobacco. They were chosen because advertising plays a more prominent role in the promotion mix of consumer products and services than other products (Advertising Age, 1989 cited in Saimie, 2003). In addition, this type of product would usually be purchased or consumed by oneself, and the purchasing process does not usually involve collective decision making, while the benefits sought

from the products belong more to individual benefits. Further, Han and Shavitt (1994) argued methodologically that this type of product will be more accurate in assessing the informativeness level, since they are normally used personally and do not particularly have collectivistic appeal; they tend to be promoted in relation to individual benefits.

FMCG product advertisements were randomly taken from different UK publications and given to the respondents by using random number generators (RNGs). The magazines were *Good Housekeeping*, *Essentials* and *GQ (Gentlemen's Quarterly)*. Full-page and color advertisements were used to ensure that the advertisements had the same degree of persuasion and informativeness. The respondents were given a questionnaire with ten different UK-printed FMCG advertisements attached for assessment. The survey questionnaire included both open-ended (essays) and closed-ended (multiple choice) questions so that the researcher could get a better understanding of the data collected. The variables analyzed by the respondents were linguistic variables (directive speech), visual variables (image portrayals, stereotypes) and degree of informativeness (level and type of information provided).

The selection criteria of the sampling (magazine advertisements) are as follows: firstly, they are FMCG product advertisements published in the UK magazines three months before and after the research was conducted. Secondly, the advertisements chosen should feature both text and images to avoid semantic biases. Thirdly they should portray images of men and women as well as cartoon or other graphic images.

## 2. Findings and analysis

The composition of international respondents were 29 female and 31 male. With regard to ethnic origin, Figure 1 reveals that 20 respondents were Indonesian, 12 were Chinese, 11 Indian, 4 Bangladeshi, 1 Malaysian and 12 were from other countries such as Japan, Pakistan, Philippine, Nepal, Thailand and Thailand. Accordingly, their views are expected to represent those of East, South and Southeast Asian countries.

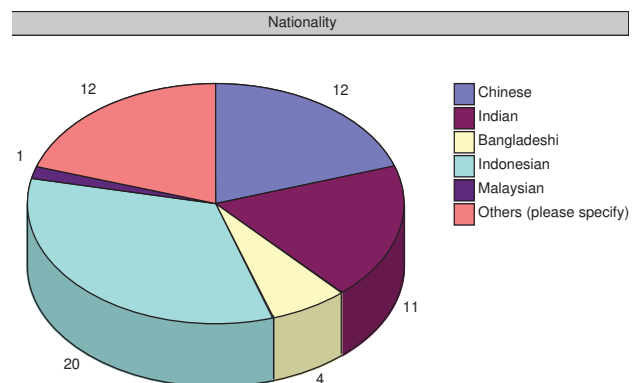


Fig. 1. Respondents' ethnic origin



The majority of respondents (38 respondents or 75% of total samples) have high exposure to advertising (Figure 2). This is advantageous for the research because it means that the respondents would have the necessary knowledge to answer the comparative questions asked.

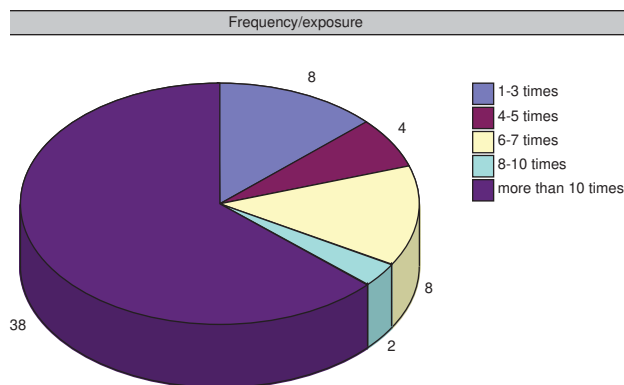


Fig. 2. How many times in a week do you normally see any advertisement?

Figure 3 indicates that 30 international respondents are exposed to television advertisements (50% of total respondents), 21 respondents are more exposed to printed advertisements (35%). This is followed by remaining 9 respondents, who were subjected to other types of media such as the Internet, billboards, etc. These findings are not in agreement with recent studies (AER, 2011; Sharma, 2011), which indicates the Internet has surpassed TV as the most essential and popular medium. One possible explanation is that international respondents from less developed countries do not access to the Internet as much as the customers from more developed countries such as the UK. Nevertheless, television in general is still widely accepted to have a wider audience reach, and therefore typically generates more attention than other media outlets. This finding offers relevant strategic advertising implications to employ different promotional medium to attract international customers owing to lower PC and Internet access per capita.

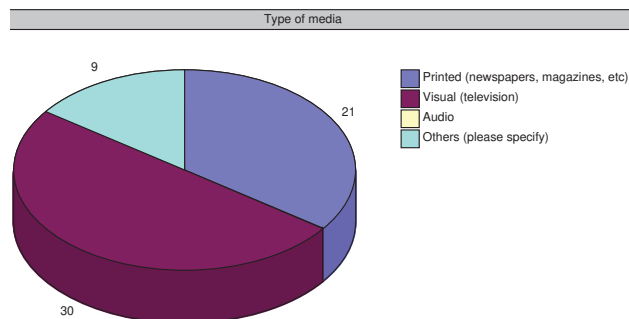


Fig. 3. Which type of advertisements do you usually more exposed to?

Table 1 illustrates the respondents' answers with regards to whether the advertisements mention the company name or not. The mean of 3.23 indicates

that the majority of respondents (15+16+18=39 respondents or 65% of the total samples) agree that the selected UK FMCG advertisements mention the company details. This means that the advertisements directly give away company information such as name, website address, contact number/helpline, etc., instead of simply advertising the product. In addition, the advertisements do not mention competitors' products by using comparative methods since most respondents disagree that the UK advertisements mention about competitors' products. This finding does not seem to support an earlier research (Bennett, 1997; Zhang, 2004), which stated that advertisements from individualistic countries such as the USA and the UK contain comparative claims. In general, the international respondents reveal that the UK advertisements focus more on their own products (non-comparative claims), without comparing them with competitors. Although, the disadvantages with a comparative-claim strategy are to give the opponent free exposure and name recognition, but it creates a positive perception of a product among the public by showing the product is superior as compared to the competition. In addition, it is more effective in generating attention, brand awareness and increased purchase intention (Grewal et al., 1997).

Table 1. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the UK advertisements shown generally talk about the company

Direct speech act	No cit.	Percent
1	5	8.3%
2	16	26.7%
3	18	30.0%
4	6	10.0%
5	11	18.3%
6	4	6.7%
Total obs.	60	100%

Note: Mean = 3.23; standard deviation = 1.42.

Relevant literature (Keown et al., 1989) indicates that a comparative-claim strategy can be viewed quite differently across countries. For example in the USA, comparative advertising is deemed beneficial to the viewers, since it can facilitate informed choice and disclose more information (Maheswaran and Shavitt, 2000). However, in some collectivistic countries, such as Thailand and Indonesia, this type of advertisement is banned, while it is not widely used in Japan because it is considered "impolite" (Keown et al., 1989). The findings indicate that the UK advertisements are considered by international respondents to resemble those of collectivistic countries in relation to non-comparative advertising.

The findings also indicate that the majority of the respondents (46 respondents or 76.7%) agree that the UK advertisements explicitly advises the view-

ers to act upon the information they have received from being exposed to the advertisements. Relate this finding with the concept of illocutionary speech acts (Searle, 1975). This finding clearly indicates that the UK advertisements use “directive speech acts” which are to cause the hearer to take a particular action such as commands and advice from by being exposed to the advertisements. This finding is aligned with Mooij’s (2001) suggestion that intentions and meanings are expressed and displayed clearly through direct communication in a low-context culture such as the UK. This finding reiterate relevant literature (Hofstede, 2001) indicates that low-context cultures such as the UK rely on the literal and precise meaning of the words, explicit conversations where words convey the bulk but not the entire message, written communication that does not need to include the subtlety of non-verbal communication. Examples of countries with low-context cultures are the USA, Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries. Conversely, in a high-context culture, indirectness can be linked to politeness, where it is considered inappropriate to directly ‘command’ people to do something (Chan, Diehl and Terlutter, 2007; Keown et al., 1989). Another reason for utilizing direct speech in the UK advertisements can be that directive speech conveys specific messages that are expected to entice positive behavioral changes/actions concerning the products being advertised. The findings of this research reflect Takahashi’s (1987) research, which compared Japanese (high-context) and British (low-context) advertisements and concluded that Japanese advertisements employ a more indirect approach in general. Accordingly, although in a low-context country, directness or direct speech are more common in the UK advertisements, it is recommended to use an indirect approach since it more effective and more stable over time than directly induced persuasion.

Consequently, because British advertisements ‘order’ the viewers to do something, they will also need to “create a reason for him or her to perform the act in question” (Burkhardt et al., 1990, p. 218). In relation the findings, Leech (1966, cited in Gass and Neu, 1995) explained that the high frequency of directive speech acts in UK advertising is because commercials should be obvious in declaring their intention, the need for attention value, memorability and selling power.

There are three questions pertaining iconic and portrayal of men and women (questions 18, 19, 20 in Appendix). Question 18 asks about “traditional” portrayals of the UK advertisements. Traditional portrayals here refer to women’s portrayed as housewives and/or “unequal” as compared to men. Question 19 relates to stereotyped images of women. Ste-

reotype refers to a generalized or simplified concept of image. Whilst, question 20 asks about the portrayal of men/women portrayed in the ‘Western’ society.

When the international respondents were asked questions 18, 19 and 20, the responses are almost divided into two in terms of the evaluation of whether the advertisements portray traditional, stereotyped and unrealistic images of women. On the average, the first half of the respondents agrees that the portrayals in the UK advertisements are traditional, stereotyped and unrealistic, whereas the other half of respondents does not share this point of views. Hence, it is concluded that on the issues of iconic and portrayal of men and women, the research is inconclusive. Past research (Gupta and De, 2007; Frith, Katherine and Wesson, 1991; Hong, Moderrisoglu and Zinkhan, 1987) indicates that respondents from other cultures tend to view the iconic and portrayal from the opposite side. Interestingly, this survey indicates differently that the perception of respondents might have changed dynamically overtime. Possible explanation of this dynamic change is that people who are more exposed to advertisements consider that “advertising may itself have set gender signification in conceptual concrete” (Elliott et al., 1993). Hence, it may have become a part of daily life so that they become real and are no longer seen as “a carrier of ideology and false consciousness” (Chadwick, 1988, cited in Elliott, 1993).

To complement this survey, the findings of open-ended questions indicate that clothing and facial expression are major differences identified between UK-printed FMCG advertisements and the respondents’ own countries’ advertisements. One respondent in particular commented freely that “in my country, they wear more appropriate clothes as the norm binds”. The respondents stated that the choice of clothing worn by models in other countries’ advertisements was more ‘modest’ and not too revealing. This suggests that the dressing style of women portrayed in the UK advertisements differs quite significantly, which may be caused by the extent to which women are allowed to be portrayed in different countries because of various cultural and religious reasons.

Another possible reason of the findings could be what Oysterman (2002) stated in his research, which is that “group binds and obligates individuals”. That is, collectivism values are apparent from the respondents’ answers, because “in a collectivistic society conformity and compliance to social or group norms are more frequently displayed by people. This finding suggests that explicit content (sexually-related) in advertising is an indication of cultural liberalism, and therefore such content rarely exists in puritan cultures. In this type of culture, traditional sex role

distinction still exists, and powerful taboos on the public articulation of sexuality are enforced (Hetsroni, 2007; Boddewyn, 1991). Further, Thompson (2000) noted in the research of gender in magazine advertising that “clothing and appearance symbols may be reconstructed in less traditional and less dualistic paradigms”, which could lead to possible changes to the notion of clothing and dress style, and instead introduce what can be termed ‘role fluidity’. This does not necessarily mean that changes can be induced directly by advertising, but rather that they may generate thoughts about how men and women should look and dress. However, it is also apparent that ‘good-looking models’ are a cue that appeared quite frequently in the open-ended answers about similarities found in both the UK and other countries’ advertisements. Another respondent stated that *“the advertisements have people with perfect bodies (slim for women and muscular for men)”* (Respondent 6). This response is similar to several other responses such as *“They are all use beautiful figures to illustrate lives”* (Respondent 44), as well as *“all of those advertisements use men and women as models with the same character”*.

The responses show that the UK advertisements still portray models in ‘uniformity’, as all the women are portrayed as beautiful, whereas the men are portrayed as muscular, powerful and masculine. This finding is also supported by Wiles, Wiles, Tjernlund (1995) and Wolf (1990), who argued that beauty myth is created by advertisements that portray “slim and beautiful people”. The messages that people find in advertisements often invite them to “the world of image that is beyond them” (Mayne, 2000). Therefore, they always evoke feelings in viewers’ minds that they are far from perfect, and there is always room for improvement that can be acquired by using or consuming the products being advertised.

One respondent stated: *“Then again, when portrayals should have been men, we notice it’s the other way round! Which does not represent their target audience”*. This finding can be related to Schudson (1993), who pointed out how women are often treated

as both sexual magnets and social glue. This is supported by another respondent’s answer that *“the portrayal of women in the advertisements in my home country draws more attention and more hype than the portrayal of men”* (Respondent 56).

The existence of stereotypical women in the UK FMCG advertisements may be due to the belief of “simplification”, but this could be risky, since stereotyping could lead to confusion and wrong interpretation. A different approach in the portrayals of women and the depiction of ethnic minorities in advertisements can be a good step forward, especially since these segments will represent a big chunk of companies’ markets in the future. Currently, culturally normative advertising content such as the depiction of women according to societal norms (clothing, etc.) still need to be tailored according to the norms of that particular country or region. It is not advisable for UK advertisers to standardize this element, because it is apparent from the findings that this element differs quite significantly from other countries.

The NVivo dynamic model (Figure 4) shows the significant values that can be found in the respondents’ countries’ advertisements. In particular, religious aspects, cohesiveness, group and family concepts are incorporated into these advertisements. Some advertisements from countries like India, for example, also incorporate religious aspects in advertisements, showing the importance of embracing a particular religion in that country. Some respondents mentioned that advertisements in their countries have educational values for children. Accordingly, the strategic implications are that multinational companies may incorporate these elements to give more meaning to advertisements, in order to convey their products effectively, especially for FMCG product advertisements people use on a daily basis. Although some of the findings are in line with past studies (Hong Jae W. et al., 1987; Hofstede, 2001; Bang and Moon, 2002), some aspects such as color and education are hardly mentioned in the literature.

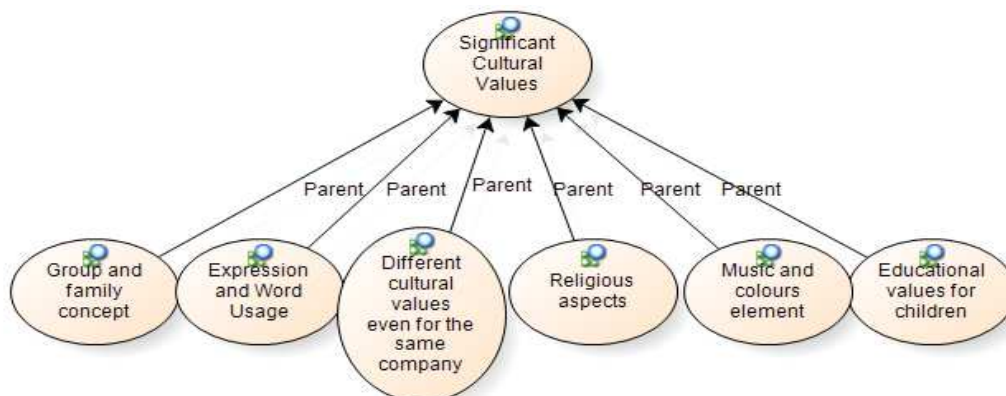


Fig. 4. NVivo dynamic model – significant cultural values



The NVivo dynamic model (Figure 5) shows the three main differences between the UK advertisements and those of other (respondents') countries. In general, the UK advertisements are "cleverer and unpredictable", as they do not necessarily have traditional and cultural values, and do not incorporate religious aspects. Although past research (Usunier and Lee, 2005) has stated that religions act as filters for advertising messages, transforming factual information into culturally interpreted meaning. In the UK, these religious values are not embedded very strongly in daily life, and hence do not necessarily transform the information into something that can be interpreted differently. Most respondents commented that UK advertisements are "a little bit more clever [sic] and uncensored", since advertisements in the respondents' countries of origin are "very predictable and still very cautious in some subject areas".

The strategic implications of the findings are that the creativity and delivery techniques of the UK advertising can be accepted by people from other countries with modifications. For example, in relation to the issue of the standardization of advertisements, it can be observed that it is time to take into account the viewer's perspective first instead of sender's (a multinational company's perspective) delivering a consistent message and corporate identity. The modification recommendation is in line with Van Raaij (1995) and Boorstin (1962, cited in Leiss et al., 1990), who argued that advertising represents people's experiences in a distorted manner and its images replace reality because it consists of 'pseudo-events' and 'pseudo-criteria', things that cannot be found in real life and therefore leave viewers dissatisfied. Advertisement modification can encompass cultural pictures, since there are occasions when pictures are often conceived as "natural, realistic reflections of reality" (Tom and Eves, 1999).

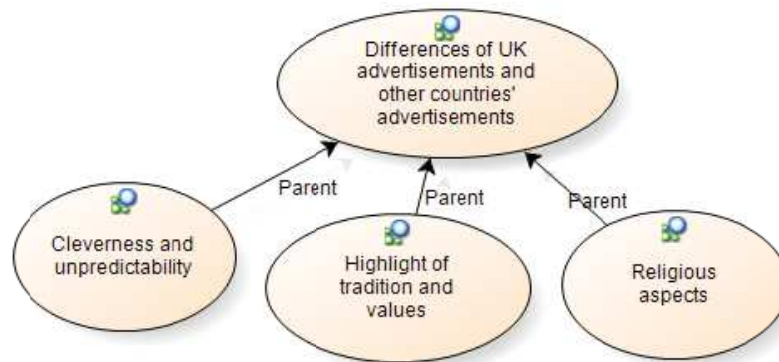


Fig. 5. Differences between the UK and other countries' advertisements

Figure 6 explores the differences between the portrayal of men and women in the UK advertisements. Several respondents quoted mentioning 'housewife' as the image most associated with women in the ads, emphasising the depiction of women as keepers of the household, besides other roles such as daughters or mothers, as indicated by statements below.

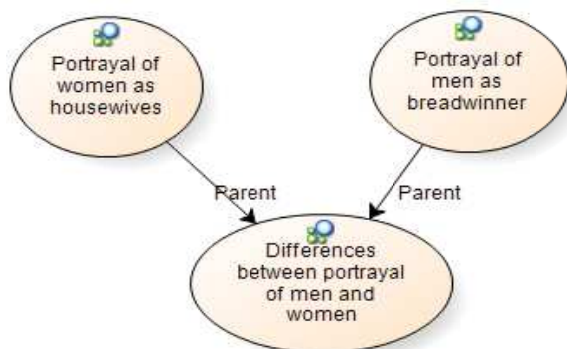


Fig. 6. Portrayal of men and women

*'Woman as a daughter, a good housewife, mother'* (Respondent 1).

*'The occasional stereotypical image (e.g., women as the housewives)'* (Respondent 6).

*'The image of a woman often portrayed as a housewife'* (Respondent 10).

*'Woman often performs the housewife role'* (Respondent 11).

This finding is in agreement with Gronhaug and Heide (1992), who indicate that the debate of stereotyping in advertising is related to specific population segments, in particular women, minorities and the elderly. For women particularly, advertising often portrays them as 'preoccupied with beauty, household duties and motherhood'.

This also supports Cheng's (1997 cited in Tan et al, 2002) findings that in advertisements, men tend to be portrayed in occupational roles whereas women are very often in non-occupational roles. On the other hand, one of the earliest gender portrayals in advertising also concluded that 'women are depicted mostly as sex objects, wives and mothers, but rarely as professionals or working wives' (Dominick and Rauch, 1972, cited in Tan et al., 2002; Wiles and Wiles, 1995). The findings of this research can be further illustrated by Pringle's findings (1992, cited in Mayne, 2000) which argued that 'the dominant



female images in advertising are of woman either as alluring object of sexual gratification or as a successful housewife and mother who tends to a beautiful happy family and still has time to be soft and gentle with her husband'. With the increasing female workforce in society, this type of portrayals may lose its significance in the next few years to come.

The findings also support what Goffman (1979) observed from the existing and marketing literature, that men are 'homemakers and breadwinners', and to some extent tend to have bad household skills. This is aligned with the research by Kacen and Nelson (2002) about the existence of stereotypes and prejudices in advertising, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century media.

With regards to sex-role stereotyping for example, the findings do not support Wee et al.'s findings (1995, cited in Usunier and Lee, 2005, p. 420) that 'sex role stereotyping appears to be more prevalent in more traditional and religious cultures'. The UK society is neither particularly traditional nor religious, yet the sex-role stereotyping still exists in its advertisements in more or less similar degree as compared to other countries. These are statements from the respondents with regards to the portrayal of men and women in the advertisements:

*'Men as the breadwinner'* (Respondent 6).

*'Man is often described as the successful person in career'* (Respondent 24).

*'The one who use the detergent is always female and the one who is getting ready to go to the office wearing clean clothes is always male'* (Respondent 26).

*'Men are depicted as the workers in some cases'* (Respondent 36).

### Conclusion and strategic implications

The significance of this finding is that there is a pressing need for the UK advertisers to gradually

shift their emphasis to portraying women in occupational roles, something which might be considered uncommon in the past, but has gained more acceptance in the modern era.

It is also apparent that the UK advertisements, so far, have not utilized the segmentation of minorities and foreigners in advertisements, as stated by one respondent, who felt that some UK advertisements seem to "neglect minorities or other cultural backgrounds". The UK advertisers may advance their approach in portraying women and possibly start using ethnic minorities, since these segments will represent a big chunk of companies' markets in the future.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that multinational UK companies should pay greater emphasis to whether they should be advertising in individualistic or collectivistic countries. Understanding the varying degrees of collectivism and individualism in different countries is crucial in understanding customer behavior. It can also be observed that the word 'family' appears quite frequently in respondents' answers, which indicates the tendency of the respondents (that come from collectivistic countries) to follow group norms (family norms) and value people's opinions, expectations and feelings. Therefore, family-themed FMCG advertisements would substantially attract viewers from collectivistic countries, especially if they are designed using affective messages instead of cognitive ones. With regards to stereotypes, the research suggests that the UK advertising has not been fully utilized to attract a minority audience. Given the fact that the UK ethnic minority groups are growing in terms of numbers (ONS, 2011). As suggested by Cottle (2000), a growing 'multiculturalist' sensibility is required due to technological proliferation, accelerating global reach, fragmenting markets and increased competition.

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## Appendix

### 1. Survey questionnaires ("A Cross-Cultural Analysis of UK Advertising Content")

All the questions below are intended to investigate a relationship between demographics and perception towards UK advertising from non-UK perspectives. Your answer will be treated anonymously and will be used for statistical purposes only following the spirit of Data Protection Act 1998. In addition, you may withdraw your participation at any time without giving any reason. Thank you for your participation.

#### Demographic questions:

1. What is your gender?  
(1) Female; (2) Male
2. What is your age group?  
(1) Less than 21 years old; (2) 21-40 years old; (3) 41-50 years old; (4) 51 years old and above
3. What is your ethnic origin?  
(1) Chinese; (2) Indian; (3) Bangladeshi; (4) Indonesian; (5) Malaysian; (6) Pakistani; (7) Japanese; (8) Others; please specify .....

### Main research questions:

4. (Frequency/exposure) How many times in a week do you normally see any advertisement?  
(1) 1-3 times; (2) 4-5 times; (3) 6-7 times; (4) 8-10 times; (5) More than 10 times
5. (Type of media) In your country, which type of advertisements are you usually more exposed to?  
(1) Printed such as newspapers, magazines, etc; (2) Visual such as television, internet etc; (3) Audio such as radio etc; (4) Others, please specify .....

Base your answers on the advertisements provided in the next page. Please rate your answer according to Likert-scale choices provided from 1 = strongly agree to 6 = strongly disagree, by ticking one (v) of the choices available.

### Questions on: individualistic-collectivistic stance:

6. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisements portray one or two individuals in a stand-alone context. Stand-alone context here refers to the way the individual is presented in the advertisement. That is, the figure in the advertisement is portrayed as one/alone/individual instead of as a part of a group/a couple/a family.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
7. If the advertisements portray more than two individuals, they are portrayed in a group or family context.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.

### Questions on the directive speech act:

8. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the UK advertisements shown generally talk about the company.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
9. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the UK advertisements shown mention about competitors' products.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
10. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisement(s) ask(s) the consumers directly to do something or think about something.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
11. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisement(s) utilize(s) poetic or rhetoric devices as a persuasion method.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.

### Questions on informational speech:

12. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisement(s) provide(s) information about the price or value of the product(s).  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
13. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisements provide(s) information about the product(s) attributes.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
14. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisements provide(s) information about the components or ingredients included in the products.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
15. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisement(s) in general use persuasion methods that can be easily understood by the intended viewers.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
16. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisement(s) provide adequate information about the shape/packaging to the viewers.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
17. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisement(s) use(s) independent/company research to give more information about the product benefits.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.

### Questions on icon/portrayal of men/women:

18. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the portrayals of men/women in the UK advertisement(s) are traditional portrayals. Traditional portrayals here refer to women's portrayed as housewives and/or "unequal" as compared to men.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
19. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the advertisement(s) in general has/have stereotypes and unrealistic images of women. Stereotype refers to a standardized/simplified concept of image.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.
20. Compared with the advertisements in your country, the men/women portrayed in the UK advertisement(s) represent(s) something that exist(s) in the Western society.  
(1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Slightly agree; (4) Slightly disagree; (5) Disagree; (6) Strongly disagree.

Part II. Open-ended questions. Please write down your answers freely. Detailed and rigorous answer would be much appreciated

- 1) Compared with the advertisements in your country, please discuss freely any similarities and differences between the UK advertisements and your home country advertisements? If necessary, please elaborate your answer with examples.
- 2) Compared with the advertisements in your country, please explain any significant cultural values that can be found in your home country advertisement that can also be found in the UK advertisements.
- 3) Compared with the advertisements in your country, please explore the difference of portrayal of men and women in your home country advertisement? If necessary, please elaborate your answer with examples.
- 4) Compared to the UK advertisements provided, are there any differences between the portrayal of men and women in your home country advertisements?
- 5) Do you find any significant difference between the advertisements in the UK and your home country in terms of the amount of information provided? If necessary, please elaborate your answer with examples.
- 6) Compared with the advertisements in your country, do the UK advertisements have the necessary level of information and persuasion to attract the potential customers/viewers? If necessary, please elaborate your answer with examples.

## 2. Selected open-ended responses texts

### *Comparative claims*

'UK advertisements focus more on their own products without comparing it with competitors'. My home country ads have more emphasis on the products being the best amongst others' (Respondent 27).

### *Similarities*

Yes. Even in my home-town Indonesia, the ads published with less smart-joke or unique-and-funny-puzzle (which are common in western countries). Mostly, they send more direct-straight messages, using more popular figures or unrealistic fantasy-images to convince viewers. But, due to 'western' influential lifestyle, the similar glamorous images have become "easily-digested" (Respondent 10).

'Yes. The viewers from each of country have strong belief on public figures (like movie and sport stars) as the trusted opinion-maker to shape their lifestyle' (Respondent 10).

'It's almost the same, especially for magazine advertisement. All of those advertisements use man and woman as the models with the same character. I think magazine's advertisement is greatly influenced by the western magazines, but it's a bit different with advertisement in television' (Respondent 31).

'Family context is the common factor used' (Respondent 2).

### *Portrayal of men and women*

'Portrayal of men and women are different, as the culture is different. In India, more importance is given to family relationships, so men will be as a good son, husband or father as well as women as daughter, a good housewife, mother. But in the UK each are different entities, it is about individuals' (Respondent 1).

'I am not sure. But maybe both of them are shown to be perfect figures as everybody wants to be like them'.

'The ads have people with perfect bodies (slim for women and muscular for men). They make us feel bad about our bodies and want to buy the products to hopefully make us look better' (Respondent 6).

'Aside from the occasional stereotypical image (e.g. women as the housewives and men as the breadwinner), I do not recall any differences' (Respondent 5).

'There is no much difference between men and women but they give much preference to women compared to men as a belief of that women can be attractive and eye catching one' (Respondent 22).

The portrayal of women or men in my country is more modest (not too much part of body is revealed) (Respondent 25).

'Yes. In quantity, the number of women physical body used is still believed as "the stronger weapon". In quality to certain limit, the ads exploit human physical-body used to advertise men products has also being or reaching across the line (allowing nudity, sexuality etc)' (Respondent 31).

'Maybe in Mexico some products are directed to women and depict women as the keeper of the household whilst men are depicted as the workers in some cases. Not always though' (Respondent 36).

'In Western ad, women are mostly used as a symbol of sex whereas in my country men and women are portrayed more traditionally' (Respondent 37).

'Yes sometimes. Usually in the family themed ad where woman = wife and man = husband' (Respondent 40).