

# Research on the Communication of National Image Based on the Cultural Dimension Theory—Take the Comparison between Chinese and Western Commercial Slogans as an Example

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**Abstract:** Under the background of economic globalization, the shaping and communication of national image has become the focus of all countries. As a cultural product, commercial slogan is the basic way to disseminate the national image. This paper draws on two dimensions of Hofstede's cultural dimension theory: collectivism VS. Individualism and uncertainty avoidance, and studies the differences of cultural values behind Chinese and Western commercial slogans by combining with advertising examples. In addition, it puts forward strategies of slogans to enhance the awareness of cultural differences, avoid ethnocentrism and pay attention to emotional resonance, having certain enlightenment significance to the shaping and communication of national image.

**Keywords:** Hofstede's cultural dimension theory; National image; Cultural differences in advertising

## 1. Introduction

National image represents a country's soft power, and it is an inevitable requirement to pay attention to the shaping of National image under the background of globalization. As a social and cultural product, commercial advertising reflects the cultural values behind the enterprise and its nationality. With the globalization of economy and the rapid development of modern mass media industry, commercial advertising has gradually become one of the basic ways of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, based on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, this paper makes a comparative study of the differences of cultural values between Chinese and Western commercial slogans, and explores the strategies of national image communication.

## 2. The importance of national image

National image refers to images of different countries. In recent years, theoretical experts at home and abroad have carried out a lot of research on the shaping of national image. Boulding (1959), a famous American political scientist, believes that the national image is a combination of a national subject's cognition of itself and that of other countries in the international system, and it is a "well-structured information capital".<sup>[1]</sup> In China, Fan Hong (2013) put forward that "A good national image represents higher credibility, stronger acceptability and broader development space."<sup>[2]</sup> Yin Zhanwen and Deng Shuhua (2009) pointed out that "Image is related to a country's political, economic, military, cultural, social, ethnic, government behavior and development model. It is an interaction of the international community."<sup>[3]</sup> From the above research results, it can be concluded that although scholars at home and abroad have different definitions of national image, they basically agree that national image is composed of domestic cognition and foreign cognition, which is an important part of a country's soft power, and a good national image can promote a country's development and progress.

## 3. The comparison between Chinese and Western advertising culture

Cultural dimension theory was formed by Hofstede (1972), a Dutch management expert, who investigated the cultural values of 116,000 IBM employees from 40 countries and regions around the world, and then analyzed and summarized into a theory.<sup>[4]</sup> It has five dimensions to measure people's values under different cultural backgrounds: collectivism VS. individualism, uncertainty avoidance,

masculinity VS. femininity, power distance and long-term orientation VS. short-term orientation. Together, they constitute the national cultural dimension model and become the most influential theory in cross-cultural management theory. This paper analyzes the cultural differences between Chinese and western slogans in different cultural backgrounds from two dimensions: collectivism VS. individualism and uncertainty avoidance.

### **3.1. Collectivism VS. Individualism**

The social feature of collectivism is that people value collective goals and emphasize obligations, obedience and loyalty. Hofstede's experimental research shows that most of the countries that tend to collectivism are the eastern countries represented by China and Japan. However, in an individualistic society, people are less clustered, and they pay more attention to personal interests, personal goals, rights and achievements. The United States, Britain and Canada are typical individualistic society countries, whose core is to pursue conquest and advocate truth. Collectivism and individualism are embodied in Chinese and Western commercial advertisements as follows:

- (1) Haier made in China. (Haier Group)
- (2) Drink Tsingtao beer, know China/In China, if you are late, drink three cups, which will punish you for human kindness and reward you convinced. (Tsingtao Beer)
- (3) China will always be in my heart. (Chinese Toothpaste)
- (4) Sweep away hunger and be yourself. (Snickers)
- (5) Just do it. (Nike)
- (6) I'm lovin' it. (McDonald)
- (7) Probably the best beer in the world. (Carlsberg Beer)

In the above seven advertisements, we can clearly see that the words "China" and "Chinese" tend to appear in China's advertisements, with strong patriotism, putting the interests of "everyone" first, full of human feelings and reflecting its collectivism atmosphere. For example, in the transnational advertisement of Tsingtao Beer mentioned above, the idea conveyed is that Chinese fine drinking is not "unreasonable", but reflects the emotive and generous temperament of Chinese people, and gives full play to the color of collectivism. In western slogans, there are usually feelings of yearning for independence and freedom, full of competition consciousness and realizing self-worth. For example, the most classic "Just do it" has become the slogan of people's pursuit of freedom; "Be yourself" in Snickers and "I" in McDonald's slogan all highlight personal status and value.

### **3.2. Uncertainty avoidance**

According to the definition of Hofstede (1980), "uncertainty avoidance" means that when people are in a situation where they feel unclear, disorganized and unpredictable, they will feel nervous involuntarily, so that they want to avoid this uncertainty by following strict guidelines.<sup>[5]</sup> In school education, students in high-uncertainty avoidance society tend to be structured learning and always pursue standard answers; However, students in low-uncertainty avoidance society prefer open learning methods, and they are not pursuing the only truth. In the field of work, high-level managers in high-uncertainty avoidance society will pay more attention to the daily operation of enterprises; There will be more innovative talents in enterprise organizations in a low-uncertainty avoidance society. In the political field, high-uncertainty avoidance society has complex laws and strives for accuracy, and social personnel are used to doing things according to the rules; However, people in a low-uncertainty avoidance society advocate democracy, freedom and autonomy more, and don't like being bound by laws. Based on the above characteristics, the research results show that China is a country with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance while Sweden, the United States and the United Kingdom are countries with a low degree of uncertainty avoidance.

In the corpus of collecting mobile phone advertisements, Huawei and Apple have a sharp contrast on uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance in Huawei's mobile phone advertising is particularly prominent. In the introduction of mobile phone functions, Huawei mobile phones use common technical terms such as "Leica dual camera" and "graphene" to illustrate that the quality and safety of products are first-class. On the contrary, Apple's advertising shows a low degree of uncertainty avoidance. Even in the introduction of mobile phone functions, Apple only uses comparative adjectives

or simple short sentences to briefly describe mobile phone functions, but its slogans are more creative. Such as "A chip that's all pro", "Go from pics to video faster than a speeding toddler" and "Creating tougher glass is not rocket science".

In addition, China's slogans of "seeking stability" highlights the characteristics of ease, harmony and inheritance.<sup>[6]</sup> For example, the slogan of Good Time Food is "Waiting for Time to Travel, Sharing Good Times"; the slogans of China International Airlines are "We treasure every encounter", "We blossom everyday" and "Journey with a caring smile"; the slogan of Bank of China is "A hundred years of BOC, walking with you". However, the classic slogan of LV "The journey is life itself, where will life take you" and the slogan of Hennessy wine "To me, the past is black and white, but the future is always color" can show the western concept of "seeking change" and encourage people to conquer nature and change the world.

#### **4. The communication of national image based on cultural theory**

Under the background of economic globalization, it has become an inevitable trend for brands to go abroad and go international. In this paper, the following strategies are put forward to spread the national image with slogans as the carrier:

##### ***4.1. Enhance the awareness of cultural differences***

For national brands which want to go international, it is necessary to understand the local cultures of various countries, add national elements in slogans to better spread the national image. Taking China Liquor as an example, the internationalization of many liquors is only to enter the international market, and the consumers are only from China. Zhao Yu, Deputy Secretary-General of China Wine Industry Association, once mentioned: "The internationalization of China liquor should be de-Chinese, in order to do well in internationalization." How to do internationalization well? Jiang Xiaobai, a liquor maker in the new era, has set a good example for how to truly internationalize China liquor: Jiang Xiaobai believes that the first element of liquor internationalization is cultural translation, not language translation. Jiang Xiaobai has been telling foreigners through product packaging and brand activities that Chinese people's happy events, the relation to classmates and friends are all inseparable from liquor. Jiang Xiaobai built himself into a national cultural communicator, telling the story of China, and at the same time taking into account the cultural differences with the cultural recipients.

##### ***4.2. Avoid ethnocentrism***

In the face of international exchanges and communication with different ethnic groups, we should get rid of the influence of "ethnocentrism" on our way of judging things and doing things. Everyone will have their own sense of cultural superiority, thinking that their own national culture is the best, but this national sentiment is not conducive to cultural exchange and Communication. For example, in China, people claim to be descendants of dragons, and the status of dragons is supreme, but in European countries, on the contrary, dragons are monsters that breathe fire everywhere in many European legends, so they prefer dragons as a symbol of evil. As an enterprise in China, we should avoid "dragon" appearing in cross-cultural slogans. Therefore, when designing cross-cultural slogans, we should fully understand other cultures and respect cultural differences, so as to avoid ethnocentrism as much as possible.

##### ***4.3. Pay attention to emotional resonance***

Man is the animal with the most perceptual thinking in the world, and emotion is the soul of human beings. If the slogans can really touch the hidden cultural feelings of consumers from the spiritual and cultural level, so that they can have a shock and resonance from the depths of their hearts, they can be emotionally favored by consumers. For example, Li Ning's "Anything is possible" and Maxwell's Coffee's "Good things should be shared with good friends" can stimulate people's thinking and understanding of friendship or dreams no matter which country they are placed in, so as to achieve emotional resonance.

## 5. Conclusions

Advertising culture is a subsystem of national culture, which can reflect the differences between China and the West in values and cultural psychology. From the comparative study of commercial slogans in China and the West, we can find that China's slogans are more patriotic, and the collective interests are generally higher than personal interests. Western slogans inherit the pursuit of freedom and equality, and pay more attention to personal interests. Therefore, under the guidance of Hofstadter's cultural dimension theory, using commercial slogans as a tool to spread national images can not only promote global economic development, but also promote cross-cultural exchanges between China and the West, so that China and the West can exist in harmony and make progress together.

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