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MATERIALISM AND INDIVIDUAL DETERMINISM IN U.S. AND JAPANESE PRINT AND TELEVISION ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT -

Hypotheses that Japanese advertising would approach or surpass U.S. advertising in the level of materialism evinced since World War II were supported. Hypotheses that U.S. advertising would be more likely to stress actively changing the environment (primary control) rather than adapting to it (secondary control) were also supported, but more strongly in print than in television advertising. Cross-cultural and cross-media differences in consumption appeals are discussed.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND CONSUMER MATERIALISM

Materialism is defined by Belk (1983) as the tendency to view possessions as the primary sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in life. As Belk and Pollay (1985b, 1985c) have shown, twentieth century U.S. print advertising has increasingly depicted and appealed to a materialistic lifestyle among American consumers. Although it is unclear whether such advertising is leading or following cultural value changes regarding materialism, it cannot be denied that advertisements at least support and reinforce materialistic values. The present study sought to further explore materialism and related values as displayed in magazine and television advertising in the U.S. and Japan since World War II. Differences over both time and culture were of interest.

While there are many reasons for cultural differences based on factors such as religion, political history, geography, language, and traditions, an even more important factor shaping materialism and derivative consumption aspirations may be the ratio of economic growth to work force growth. This ratio is important for at least two reasons. One is that it reflects the relative increase or decrease in the availability of goods and services, which in a free market system thereby affects prices and consumer expectations of what they will be able to acquire. Secondly, given a level of technology and a relatively fixed ratio of imports to exports, economic growth relative to work force growth also reflects the surplus or scarcity of available jobs and an individual's potential rate of job advancement as older more or less numerous workers retire and as new jobs are created through economic growth.

The impact of these factors on consumer materialism was seen by both Inglehart (1971, 1977) and Easterlin (1980), although they reached opposite conclusions about its effects. Both agreed that the economic climate when one is growing up should have a strong impact on adult consumption aspirations. However, Inglehart concluded that growing up during the post-war economic growth decades in the U.S. and Japan (as well as Europe) should satisfy lower order consumer needs (Maslow 1954) so that less materialistic higher order needs would gain prominence. Easterlin on the other hand concluded that one who, for instance, grows up in the suburbs and is driven or drives to school, friends, movies, and stores will come to regard an automobile as a necessity along with all of the other products of affluence. Thus Inglehart predicted decreasing materialism among a generation raised in a time of abundance, while Easterlin predicted increasing materialism. While the value changes of the 1960's made it appear that Inglehart was correct, subsequent increases in materialism among the U.S. and British baby boom generations and the parallel Japanese "bulge" generation (which quit bulging about a generation earlier in Japan--Reischauer 1977) contradict Inglehart's predictions and appear to support Easterlin's predictions of increasingly materialistic attitudes (Ike 1973, Marsh

It is also necessary to consider the relative rates of economic growth in the U.S. and Japan in order to make predictions about the relative rates of growth in materialism that are expected in these two countries. Between 1960 and 1975 the U.S. economy grew at an average real dollar growth rate of 3.7 percent per year while the Japanese economy grew at a rate of over 10 percent per year (Yoshino 1975). Since 1975 Japanese real growth has only been about 5 percent, due in part to high inflation in 1976-1978, but U.S. growth has also slowed and as U.S. trade deficits climb, Japanese trade surpluses rise (Morton 1984). All this means that Japanese buying power has risen much more rapidly than U.S. buying power since World War II and there have also been considerably greater opportunities for jobs and job advancements in Japan than in the United States. Given the much stronger growth in the Japanese economy, we expected to find a much greater rise in materialism reflected in Japanese advertising than in U.S. advertising.

These are predictions about the relative growth rates in materialism in America and Japan. To make predictions about the relative levels of materialism displayed in one country versus the other it is also necessary to consider additional cultural differences. The U.S. has long been known as a highly materialistic nation (e.g., De Tocqueville 1835), but apart from some imperial and feudal splendor lasting into the mid-nineteenth century, Japan has not traditionally been known as a highly materialistic nation until lately. There are several reasons for Japan's less materialistic traditional reputation. One is that since its feudal era, there have not been wide income disparities in Japan. In addition, conspicuous consumption has generally been viewed as violating egalitarian norms (Cassassus 1985, Christopher 1983, De Mente and Perry 1967). And the devastated state of the Japanese economy at the close of World War II left limited discretionary incomes and a scarcity of consumer goods on which to spend them. However, with the unprecedented economic gains of post-war Japan, as well as a period of openness to Western influences (Belk and Pollay 1985a), materialism began to grow. By the 1960's it became popular to joke that the three imperial regalia (mirror, sword, and jewel) had been superseded by three greater treasures for the Japanese consumer: the car, color TV, and cooler (air conditioner), or the three C's (Fukutake 1974, 1982). Cleaver (1976) suggested that even these, now owned by the majority of the population, have been replaced in consumer aspirations by newer treasures such as the summer cottage, electric oven, and central heating. This rise in materialism has not gone uncriticized in Japan (Burton 1985; Fujiwara 1985; Fukutake 1974, 1982; Guerin 1981; Kikusawa 1979). While the level of consumption by the Japanese consumer is still short of that of the American consumer (due to smaller incomes, smaller dwellings, and greater savings for house and retirement), we expected that the level of advertising emphasis on materialistic themes would be as high or higher in Japan during the current period.

INDIVIDUAL DETERMINISM IN THE U.S. AND JAPAN

Individual determinism is used here to mean the belief that one's acts as an individual determine one's outcomes; that is, the belief that we are each masters of our own fate and we succeed or fail based on individual initiative. This is a particularly western view that is related to individualism and has been studied recently as "standing out" and "primary control" (Bairy 1967, Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder 1982, Weisz, Rothbaum, and Blackburn 1984). There are two aspects to these beliefs. One is the desire to stand out from the group and be perceived as personally responsible for one's actions. The other related aspect is the desire to actively control situations, people, and events in order to produce desired outcomes. If these are the patterns that characterize Americans, it should not be inferred that the Japanese lack any concern with individual identity and trust their futures to fate. Both of these would be mistaken assumptions. However, the Japanese are believed to prefer "standing in" over standing out and "secondary control" over primary control. Standing in refers to seeking to be a part of the group and derive nurturance and feelings of identity through this association and its collective actions. Secondary control is the preference for adapting to one's environment rather than trying to change it; thus producing harmony rather than challenge and conflict. Producing this harmony is seen as a matter of character and strength and not, as it would more likely be seen in America, as an absence of character and a weakness (Reischauer 1977).

Such differences in individual determinism between the U.S. and Japan were expected to be reflected in advertising in two major ways. First, we expected to find fewer Japanese advertising appeals to use a product or service because it would make one unique or successful as an individual. Secondly, we expected that the U.S. ads would be more likely than the Japanese ads to claim or show that the product could help one do or change things by affecting others or the environment. Unlike the materialism predictions, these differences were not expected to increase or decrease over the time period studied.

OTHER DIFFERENCES

A number of other cultural differences were examined in the comparisons of U.S. and Japanese advertising (see Belk, Bryce, and Pollay 1985 and Belk and Pollay forthcoming), but only a few will be presented here and these will be restricted to the television advertising samples. These differences may be grouped under the headings of advertising execution styles and interpersonal relationships, including sex roles. Because there are some important and somewhat subtle differences between the U.S. and Japan in terms of norms for interpersonal relationships, they require some comment.

As Reischauer (1977) points out, the public display of affection and emotion, even with a spouse, is considered inappropriate in Japan. Thus we expected to see fewer intimate glimpses of family life and less physical contact in Japanese ads. At the same time, as Morley (1985) and Trucco (1984) note, Japanese advertising portrayals of females in ways that would currently be regarded as sexist in the U.S., are not regarded as unusual or objectionable in Japan. Such sex role attitudes have also been used to explain the greater use of female spokespersons in Japanese television commercials as a way to defuse what would otherwise be an inappropriate status challenge in an ad suggesting that the viewer take an action such as buying the brand advertised (Smith 1983). For instance, the imperative tone of a message such as "Drink Coca Cola!" would only be appropriate for a superior speaking to a subordinate within the structure of Japanese language and status hierarchy. To avoid such a condescending tone (demanded by the language), in addition to coquettish women, Smith (1983) found the use of children and ingratiating comedians in commercials designed to avoid offending the viewer.

Such subtle differences in communication reflect the relatively greater burden placed on nonverbal communication in Japan (Barthes 1982) and suggest a reason why television advertising, with its greater ability to convey such messages, is even more popular in Japan than in the U.S. In 1980 just over one-third of Japanese advertising dollars were spent on television versus somewhat under one-third in the U.S., (J. Walter Thompson 1982). We were not certain what other differences might be found between television and print advertising in Japan, but it seemed likely that there would be some.

METHODS AND RESULTS

Study 1: Magazine Advertising

Methods and results for the U.S. sample of magazines have been described elsewhere (Belk and Pollay 1985b, 1985c). Briefly, a systematic random sampling procedure was used to select 250 ads per decade from the ten largest circulation magazines for that period. Of these ads, those retained for the present analysis had illustrations showing the interior or exterior of a home. This resulted in 220 ads distributed as follows:

1943-1947 100 ads

1953-1957 59 ads

1963-1967 32 ads

1973-1977 29 ads

Total 220 ads

The comparison sample of Japanese ads was obtained, also using the criterion of illustrations of the home, from the three largest circulation Japanese magazines since World War II: Bungei Shunju (Literary Digest), Chuo Koron (Central review), and Shukan Asahi (Weekly Asahi). In this case a census of all such ads was taken from each issue of these magazines every fifth year, resulting in the following sample of 332 ads:

1953 40 ads

1958 29 ads

1963 40 ads

1968 55 ads

1973 45 ads

1978 75 ads

1983 48 ads

Total 332 ads

Coding also was done comparably to that for the American ads with three judges, except in this case all were fluent in reading Japanese. One was a Japanese graduate student and the others were American graduate students who had each spent at least five years in Japan. Inter-judge reliability (percent agreement--Kassarjian 1977) averaged .85 and disagreements were arbitrated by majority rule. In addition, these judges coded ten of the U.S. ads and produced an average agreement level of .84 with the coders for these ads (who were about comparably consistent within the ads they coded). Coding definitions for the themes reported here were:

Luxury/Pleasure: Explicitly mentions luxury (or related terms such as leisure, pleasure, regal, or pampered) or else depicts such pleasures visually.

Status/Prestige: Shows or discusses prestige or social standing relative to others or uses high prestige source or association.

Having: Either a person is displaying or referring to owned object(s) or a house or room is shown from eye level into which the viewer seems to be invited.

Being: Shows or discusses what the reader can become or how people will treat the reader with the help of this product or service.

Doing: Shows or discusses a reader activity that is aided or provided by the product or service.

There were some differences in the portions of the two at samples involving various product categories, but comparisons with product category held constant produced no meaningful disparities in results to those from the overall sample. Materialism was measured in the ads by the frequencies of appeals involving luxury and pleasure, status symbolism, and "having" the product or service advertised for its own sake (rather than for the person it will help one be or become or the activities it will help one to). Table 1 shows that each materialistic theme was less frequent in Japan for the earliest years and grew to become the more frequent in either the sixties or seventies. Appeals stressing the status symbolism of the advertised brand were far more frequent in Japan starting in the 1960's, even in comparison to the height of U.S. status appeals in the 1930's (Belk and Pollay 1985b, 1985c). High status persons from prominent occupations are typically used in this advertising in order to impart symbolism to the advertised brand. Thus, as predicted, Japanese materialistic appeals not only grew more rapidly than U.S. materialistic appeals, but exceeded U.S. levels at some point before the end of the sample period. Recent apparent declines in Japanese materialistic appeals may be responding to the same changes in values creating the recent journalistic criticism of such traits in Japan.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF U.S. AND JAPANESE ADS USING VARIOUS THEMES

The last two columns of Table 1 show two alternate existential states to having (Sartre 1956). The more interesting of the two is doing which reflects the primary control hypothesized to be more common in the U.S.. On the basis of these results the hypothesis is strongly supported.

Study 2: Television Advertising

Because an historical archive of Japanese and U.S. television advertising was not available, television advertising for both countries was only studied for the year 1984. The U.S. advertising was recorded off the air in late summer and early fall in Spokane. The Japanese sample was recorded for a similar time period in Tokyo. A random sample of times of day, days of week, and stations was obtained in both cases. These ads were not restricted to those showing a home.

Japanese television saturation is comparable to the U.S. and programming is also similar (Gardner 1961). Generally, television advertising is not as regulated in Japan as it is in the U.S. (Ward, et al. 1985), but an exception is the prohibition of comparative advertising. Nevertheless, all of the Japanese advertising in our sample could have been shown on U.S. TV, although the use of cartoon characters in some of the children's advertising might meet with some criticism.

There were again some differences in the frequency of ads for various product categories as shown in Table 2, with the most extreme case being that 30 of the 191 Japanese ads were for non-alcoholic beverages while only 3 of 203 U.S. ads were in this category. But when analyses were done within a single product category (health and beauty products), results were similar to the overall results presented below.

TABLE 2

Coding of the television ads was similar to coding of the print ads, with similar coding categories and two sets of three graduate student coders for each country's ads (in this case one coder overlapped in the two sets of judges). Partly because of a reduced number of coding categories compared to the print ads, inter-judge reliability averaged a $r = .95$ for the television ad coding.

In terms of format, 68% of Japanese commercials were 15 seconds in length whereas over 90% of U.S. commercials were 30 seconds long. The only other major difference was that more Japanese commercials used music throughout (83.8% versus 69.5%) and fewer used no music at all (3.1% versus 24.15). Differences in the thematic content and styles of these commercials are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY OF U.S. AND JAPANESE 1984 TELEVISION ADVERTISING THEMES AND STYLES

Again the comparable use of materialistic themes and especially high status spokespersons is seen in the Japanese ads. However, the primary control doing theme is no more common in the U.S. TV ads than in the Japanese TV ads. The reason for this is largely the greater number of product demonstrations in the Japanese ads, often involving demonstrations by high status spokespersons. Clearly the U.S. ads were more likely to use individualistic appeals to be unique or successful however, and were more likely to employ superlatives. In addition to not encouraging viewer individuality, the Japanese ads seemed not to stress brand uniqueness or relative advantage to any great degree. By law, no Japanese ads were comparative, while 7.4 percent of U.S. ads used a comparative format. Toshio Yamaki (1984) in a comparison of Japanese and U.S. print ads also found that U.S. ads were more likely to be comparative and to stress individuality, success and the enhancement of consumer performance.

Differences in stylistic execution are also seen in the greater tendency of U.S. ads to stress test results, ingredients, and product performance, and the Japanese ads' greater tendency to stress price. Also while the U.S. ads more frequently used voiceovers throughout, the Japanese ads more frequently used superimposed writing throughout. Finally, some anticipated sex role differences are seen in the Japanese ads' greater use of sexy female models and the U.S. ads' greater tendency to show families and people touching one another.

DISCUSSION

It is a basic premise of advertising that a successful ad must appeal to the values and needs of its intended audience (McNeil and McDaniel 1984). If the ads studied here have explicitly or implicitly adhered to this premise, then it is clear that differences remain in Japanese and U.S. consumer values. While there has been some convergence in the amount of materialism displayed in these ads, Japanese emphasis on status symbolism remains substantially higher and U.S. emphasis on individualism and standing out remains higher as well. The predicted U.S. preference for primary control over secondary control was evident in the print ad sample, but less so for the television ad sample. It may be that this difference is brought about by the near necessity of television to show action of some sort, but it is also possible that the greater nonverbal communication potential of television makes it more amenable to expressing new values than more traditional print media (Barthes 1982).

Cross-cultural value differences also bear on the likely effectiveness of advertisements dubbed from one culture to be presented in another. Such ads were relatively rare in the present sample. In the Japanese TV ad sample, while 11.5% of the ads were for U.S. products, only about one-third of these were dubbed from English language versions. In the U.S. TV ad sample only 2.0% of the ads were for Japanese products and none of these were dubbed from Japanese. Nevertheless, given the recent calls for universal advertising appeals by Theodore Levitt and others, some comment might be made from the present results. Given the value differences noted above we are very skeptical of the potential for universal advertising appeals. Furthermore, more subtle communication differences such as sex of the announcer, amount of touching, and prevalence of active "doing" appeals, make universal advertising campaigns a more difficult proposition still. If such differences are present in the few appeals examined here, they are undoubtedly present in others as well.

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thesis. Historical materialism. Okishio's theorem. Overaccumulation. Technological determinism seeks to show technical developments, media, or technology as a whole, as the key mover in history and social change.[8] It is a theory subscribed by "hyperglobalist" who claims that as a consequence of the wide availability of technology, accelerated globalization is inevitable. The printing press, the computer, and television are not therefore simply machines which convey information. They are metaphors through which we conceptualize reality in one way or another. They will classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it, enlarge it, reduce it, argue a case for what it is like.