

# Standardization and Localization Approaches: Longitudinal Study of Informational and Emotional Approach in American and Japanese Advertisements

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## Abstract

The standardization and localization approaches are known as two strategies for creating advertisements in different cultures. By comparing a total of 480 Japanese and American TV commercials, I attempt to see how each country's advertisements employ informational or emotional appeals in order to examine whether the standardization or localization approach is utilized in these two countries. This study was conducted both in the 1990s and 2000s to examine time differences as well. The results reveal that informational appeals were used significantly more in American TV commercials in the 1990s. During the same time, emotional appeals were employed significantly more in Japanese TV commercials. Though this result seems to support the localization approach, the 2000s study did not find any significant differences between Japanese and American TV commercials, and this shows that the standardization approach is utilized to create advertisements.

標準化アプローチと現地化アプローチとは他文化における広告制作法として知られている。このどちらのアプローチが日米で使われているかを検証するために、計 480 個の日本とアメリカの CM における情報アピールと感情アピールの日米比較を行った。またこの検証は年代による違いが見られるかどうかを検証するために 1990 年代と 2000 年代両方でデータが集められた。結果、1990 年代の CM における情報アピールはアメリカの方が日本の CM よりも多く有意差が見られた。逆に同時期における感情アピールは日本の CM が多く、こちらも有意差が見られた。これだけを見れば現地化アプローチがとられているように見受けられるが、ただし 2000 年代の日米のデータからは有意差は見つからず、これは標準化アプローチがとられたことを示している。

## Informational and Emotional Appeal of Advertisements

The standardization approach claims that what is considered to be an effective advertisement strategy is the same in different countries (Peebles, 1978). On the other hand, the localization approach believes that effective strategies differ in each country and is supported by a great deal of scholars (Duncan & Ramaprasad, 1995; Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993; Hong,

Muderrisoglu, & Zinkhan, 1987; Johansson, 1994; Kanso & Nelson, 2002; Keown, Jacobs, Schmidt, & Ghymn, 1992; and Lin & Salwen, 1995). Pae, Samiee, and Tai (2002) and Tai's (1997) study results show that it is important to employ the localization approach in Asia.

This study compares informational and emotional appeals shown in Japanese and American TV advertisements in order to examine whether or not each country employs one of the appeals more than the other. Consequently it indicates whether the localization or the standardization approach is utilized to create advertisements. Informational appeals show information about a product including price, quality, performance and research (Harmon, Razzouk, & Stern, 1983) and "supplies factual, arguably verifiable information, or logically relevant to the product, to such an extent that consumers acquire greater skills in the assessment of the product attributes after viewing this kind of advertisement" (Royo-Vela, 2005, p. 16) to appeal to the consumers' logical decision.

Emotional appeals, on the other hand, focus more on image rather than information about a product "which aims to arouse a range of feelings in the audience. The aim of emotional or sentiment advertising is to trigger an emotional response in the receptor when exposed to the commercial" (Royo-Vela, 2005, p. 16) and utilize visual imagery (Batra & Ray, 1983) to convince consumers to make emotional and not rational decisions. Many studies made a comparison of these two kinds of appeals (Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet, 1992; Caballero et al., 1986; Dowling, 1980; Hong, Muderrisoglu, & Zinkhan, 1987; Koudelova & Whitelock, 2001; Mueller, 1987; Royo-Vela, 2005; Stern & Resnik, 1991). Stern and Resnik's (1991) study found a higher tendency to use informative appeals in the United States than in other countries, and Koudelova and Whitelock's (2001) study showed that British samples utilize informational appeals more than Czech ones. In addition, Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet's (1992) study revealed that emotional appeals were employed more in French than American TV commercials, while the latter had more informational appeals than French ones.

These studies seem to support the localization approach, as one country's advertisements show a higher number of either informational or emotional appeals than another country's advertisements. Through the comparison of Japanese and American commercials, Akiyama (1993) discussed how important it was for Japanese advertisements to employ soft-sell approaches and consequently put more nonverbal elements such as scenery and facial expressions into their advertisements than verbal persuasion used in American commercials. Lin's (1993) study also compared commercials from these two countries and found that while American commercials focused on providing information about a product such as price, quality, and performance, Japanese commercials added more information about packaging and availability.

Furthermore, Lin and Salwen's (1995) study found that informative commercials which included information about the product such as price, performance, quality, safety, and independent research, were significantly preferred for use in more American than Japanese commercials.

In addition, Nishimura's (1988) study revealed that information such as functionality, savings, and safety did not have the same degree of appeal to Japanese compared to American customers. While information such as acquisitions and savings, companionship and affiliation, imitation and conformity, and humor, had been emphasized more in American commercials, other elements such as aesthetic enjoyment, pleasant sensations, curiosity, and relief from restraint were focused upon in Japanese commercials. In Hong, Mudderrisoglu, and Zinkhan's (1987) study, emotional elements were found more in Japanese than American commercials, though the number of informational elements was not significantly different between these two countries. Gaumer and Shah's (2004) study also found higher numbers of image-centered elements seen in Japanese advertisements and information-focused elements in American advertisements.

Therefore, these studies seem to indicate that American advertisements place importance on emphasizing informational elements and Japanese advertisements focus on emotional aspects. Yet, there is still inconsistency about what are considered to be effective advertisements. For instance, Caballero et al. (1986) and Hong, Muderrisoglu, and Zinkhan (1987) found a higher number of informational appeals in Japanese than American advertisements. In addition, Keown, Jacobs, Schmidt, and Ghymn (1992) and Hong, Muderrisoglu, and Sinkhan (1987) found that there were no significant differences between Japanese and American advertisements, and that both countries rely on performance and content in their advertisements. These studies led me realize the necessity of re-examining whether or not American and Japanese advertisements employ different strategies. In addition, it would be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study to see if there are differences in time for effective advertisements.

## **Research Methodology**

Content analysis is employed in this study to compare the number of informational and emotional appeals in Japanese and American advertisements. Twelve informational cues, which include being nice (saving money/having a higher quantity, financing, and other values), quality (characteristics of a product that make it distinct from others), performance (what a product does and how well it does compared to other similar products), availability, special offers, taste (it is proven that one's product tastes better than others), nutrition, packaging (types of package the company offers), safety, independent research, company research, and new ideas/models (something very distinct and new about a product), proposed by Resnik and Stern (1977) and

Stern, Krugman, and Resnik (1981), were examined in this study. There are a few changes in informational cues made between my samples from the 1990s and 2000s. For the 2000s samples, two categories; components (ingredients) and warranties, were added. In addition, another two categories including packaging and safety were not examined, since there were no commercials found to contain these two elements. There are 11 emotional appeals examined in my study, including veneration of the elderly and status (Mueller, 1987), harmony with nature (Wagennar, 1978), and humor, tradition, future, romance, drama, fear, health/diet, feel/warmth, and real life situations (Hasegawa, 1990).

## Sample

Four hundred and eighty commercials were collected for this study in which half of them were from the 1990s and the other half were from the 2000s. The 1990s data was taken from 1996 in Japan and 1998 in the United States, while the 2000s data was chosen from 2006 in both countries, in which 120 commercials were randomly selected for each country and time frame. With regard to the 1996 Japanese advertisements, TV programs were randomly recorded in Tokyo for one and a half months in October and November from randomly selected broadcast channels between 8 and 9 pm once a week. The 2000s Japanese advertisements were recorded for a total of 42 hours within the two largest regions of Japan; Tokyo (east of the Japan mainland) and Osaka (west of the Japan mainland), in April and May of 2006 from 7 to 10 pm. The American commercials were recorded from NBC, ABC, FOX, and WB in September between 7 and 8 pm and from NBC, WB, and ABC in November and December between 8 and 11 pm.

## Results

### Informational Cues

This study revealed that the number of informational appeals in the 1990s was not significantly different ( $n = 152$  and  $153$  for the Japanese and American commercials, respectively), but the Japanese advertisements had a significantly higher number of such appeals in the 2000s ( $n = 153$  and  $115$  for Japanese and American commercials, respectively), as  $\chi^2(1, n = 268) = 5.39, p < .05$ . This indicates a clear tendency for Japanese commercials to focus more on informational appeals in 2006 than in 1996.

A comparison of American and Japanese commercials shows that the most frequently used information cue was feature/performance in both countries in each year ( $n = 56$  in 1996 and  $n = 69$  in 2006 in Japan; and  $n = 48$  in 1998 and  $n = 62$  in 2008 in America). This seemed to be intuitive because explaining a product is what an advertisement is supposed to do.

When comparing time differences within each country, there were significantly higher numbers of “new models and ideas” in 1996 compared to 2006 (26 ads in 1996 and 7 in 2006), for  $\chi^2(1, n = 33) = 10.94$ ,  $p < .01$  in Japanese advertisements. This indicates the tendency of Japanese commercials to focus on “new-ness.” For American commercials, a total number of informational appeals in the United States for the 1998 study ( $n = 153$ ) showed a significantly higher number than in the 2008 study ( $n = 115$ ), for  $\chi^2(1, n = 268) = 5.39$ ,  $p < .05$ . Thus, American commercials in the 2000s do not focus as much on informational cues as in the 1990s.

## Emotional Cues

After comparing the number of emotional appeals in Japanese and American commercials, it could be seen that the overall number of emotional cues in the 1990s study was significantly higher in Japanese ( $n = 160$ ) than it was in American commercials ( $n = 77$ ), as  $\chi^2(1, n = 237) = 29.07$ ,  $p < .001$ . Interestingly, this trend is reversed in the 2000s study, as the overall number of emotional cues are significantly higher in the American than Japanese commercials ( $n = 95$  and 63 for American and Japanese ads, respectively), as  $\chi^2(1, n = 158) = 6.48$ ,  $p < .05$ .

By examining differences between the 1990s and 2000s in each country, it was found that there were no significant differences in the number of emotional cues between 1998 and 2008 American commercials. On the other hand, the following five emotional appeals showed significantly higher numbers in 1996 than 2006 Japanese commercials: Health ( $n = 17$  and 1 in 1996 and in 2006, respectively), for  $\chi^2(1, n = 18) = 14.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ; real life ( $n = 52$  and 19 in 1996 and in 2006, respectively), for  $\chi^2(1, n = 71) = 15.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ; tradition ( $n = 20$  and 1 in 1996 and in 2006, respectively), for  $\chi^2(1, n = 21) = 17.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ; the elderly ( $n = 11$  and 1 in 1996 and in 2006, respectively), for  $\chi^2(1, n = 12) = 8.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and romance ( $n = 15$  and 2 in 1996 and in 2006, respectively), for  $\chi^2(1, n = 17) = 9.94$ ,  $p < .01$ . No emotional cues have significantly higher numbers in 2006 than in 1996 Japanese advertisements.

## Discussion

The results showed that informational appeals were seen significantly more in Japanese than American advertisements in the 2000s but not in the 1990s. There were significantly more emotional appeals in Japanese than American advertisements in the 1990s, but this was reversed in the 2000s. This seems to support the localization approach. However, in the 2000s there seem not to be significant differences in terms of informational or emotional appeals utilized in American and Japanese advertisements, which further indicates the popularity of the standardization approach in the 2000s.

## Limitation

This study counted informational cues only once, as was done in Abernethy & Franke's (1996) study, even when the same information was repeatedly shown in the advertisements. However, advertisements that show price information ten times do not have the same impact on the consumers' minds as advertisements which show price information only once. Besides, it is my impression from this study that while Japanese advertisements show information about price in small letters at the corner of the screen only for a few seconds, American advertisements keep giving information about price in large letters in the 1990s advertisements. Therefore, future research should examine how many times the same information is presented and how it is shown in advertisements.

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