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**Linguistic and Cultural Elements in Advertising
Marketing in the Context of Globalization: The Case
of China and English Speaking Western Countries**

Yifan Guo

Tutor: Elena González-Cascos Jiménez

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The work presented in this MA thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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Yifan Guo

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Elena González-Cascos Jiménez

Abstract

In the context of globalization, transnational advertising and marketing is becoming increasingly significant in international relations as a result of the increasing frequency of international commercial operations and the increasing prevalence of brand entrance into foreign markets. Although corporate advertising aims at economic profitability, advertising communication itself carries the function of concept and value exchange. Taking Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as the theoretical framework, this paper discusses the transnational advertising communication and marketing of corporate brands from both linguistic and cultural perspectives, combining real cases of internationally famous brands such as Coca-Cola, D&G, McDonald's, IKEA, and so on, and explaining and analyzing the elements that need to be paid attention to when carrying out international advertising marketing by comparing the cultural differences between China and the West.

Keywords

Cultural difference, Advertising, Language, International marketing

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1. Introduction

Transnational marketing and advertising are increasingly important in international relations due to the rise of commercial activities and brand entry into other markets. This paper analyzes real-world advertising marketing cases, focusing on factors like language translation, language variants, society, cultural awareness, diversity, religion, and number. Miscommunication can arise when trying to communicate across cultural boundaries, and enterprises must address these difficulties to succeed in a complex global multilingual setting. Businesses should be aware of language elements in foreign advertisements and take precautions to ensure successful translation versions in the target country. Cultural differences should be acknowledged and respected by brands to improve communication and business with local markets. Targeted localized marketing should highlight the best aspects of local cultures while highlighting national culture's core values. The English translations of the Chinese reference materials cited in this research are the author's own translations, and they should be subject to the original language.

2. Theoretical Framework: Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural psychology, developed by Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist. There are six key aspects of national culture country comparison scales, including: the power distance index (PDI), individualism vs. collectivism (IDV), motivation towards

achievement and success (MAS, formerly masculinity versus femininity), uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), long term orientation versus short term normative orientation (LTO), and indulgence versus restraint (IVR). But in this paper I will only focus on PDI and IDV as my theories, because these two points are more relevant to the examples of advertisements I will be analyzing here.

2.1 Power Distance Index (PDI)

The power distance index is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 9). A higher degree of the Index indicates that hierarchy is clearly established and executed in society, without doubt or reason. A lower degree of the Index signifies that people question authority and attempt to distribute power. In the societies with high power distance, the boss makes final decisions, the employees follow instructions, while societies with low power distance tend to have an equal distribution in power, and employees are much more likely to be asked for their input in decisions.

2.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)

This index explores the "degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups" (Hofstede 11). Individualist values view the individual as a separate being, highlighting his or her distinctiveness and emphasizing the individual's rights, independence, self-fulfilment, originality and privacy. Collectivist values, on the other

hand, view the individual as a member of a collective and emphasize the individual's belonging, integration and loyalty to the collective, as well as the collective's protection and support of the individual.

The individual is viewed as an independent being with inherent rights and liberties from an individualistic viewpoint. Individualism is a political and cultural ideology that places a strong emphasis on one's own liberties, rights, and accomplishments. In this type of culture, people are seen as independent and autonomous. Social behavior tends to be dictated by the attitudes and preferences of individuals. Cultures in North America and Western Europe tend to be individualistic. Where people in collectivist cultures might be more likely to turn to family and friends for support during difficult times, those living in individualist cultures are more likely to go it alone (Cherry). A prevalent way to understand the self in individualistic societies is to see it as an autonomous and socially independent entity that carries a stable set of attributes across situations (Hamamura et al. 370).

A collectivist viewpoint emphasizes the value of the group or community as a whole. Individual liberties and rights are frequently subordinated in favor of group objectives and duties. People who live in collectivist societies are more likely to prioritize social harmony and cooperation over self-interest and to strongly identify with their in-group, such as their family. Therefore, it's usually frowned upon to stand out from the crowd. Furthermore, such culture prioritizes harmony within the group and people in such society tend to avoid conflict. Contrast individualism with a collectivist culture where people might sacrifice their own comfort for the greater

good of everyone else. Such differences can influence nearly every aspect of behavior ranging from the career a person chooses, the products they buy, and the social issues that they care about (Cherry).

As for the communication style, individualistic societies tend to be low-context cultures, meaning they typically favor direct communication, while collectivist societies tend to be high-context cultures, meaning people are generally talked in an indirect way and rely on both the verbal communication and the non-verbal communication such as the context of the situation.

3. Discussion

3.1 Language

The development of globalization has drastically transformed the organization of human affairs, by expanding people's activities across regions and continents, which as a result has led to an increasing number of international business interactions and contacts. However, cross-cultural business practices and business communication among business actors are not always smooth, and anxiety or even conflict due to misunderstanding often occurs. How to communicate effectively and conduct business operations smoothly in a complex global multilingual and multicultural environment is a great challenge and an urgent problem for enterprises to solve when conducting international business activities. The intensification of worldwide relations has inevitably highlighted the importance to share a common language to be used for contacts with business partners living in widely different and distant places. In present

times, English has become the preferred contact language employed for communication purposes all around the world.

Language and culture are closely related; language reflects culture and culture influences language. Language is the most direct form of cultural expression, any language in the world has its own unique grammatical structure, expression, connotation and extension. In carrying out international business activities, understanding and making good use of the language of the target country is a necessary condition for successful international marketing, which requires marketers to understand the deeper cultural meanings of the target language, pay attention to the applicability of the language and characters, so as to formulate a brand name and marketing strategy that is more acceptable to and loved by local people.

3.1.1 Translation

Given that Chinese has a completely different language system from Indo-European languages such as English, and that each of its characters has many different meanings, and that many of its vocabularies have the same pronunciation but diametrically opposed meanings, therefore, ambiguities are very easy to arise. As a result, for international brands looking to head over to the world's largest market, they have an incredibly important decision to make (Bhasin). With the acceleration of global economic integration, international trade has become an important driving force for the economic development of all countries in the world. Trademark translation plays a pivotal role in the sales of goods in the international market, and

many internationally famous trademarks have become the intangible assets and great wealth of enterprises, while excellent brand translation can help enterprises establish a good image, thus expanding the market of the target country. Coca-Cola is a good example.

In 1920, the American firm Coca-Cola set its sights on the Chinese market with the goal of introducing the popular American beverage, at the time known as Coca-Cola, to the Chinese people. Coca-Cola's tongue-twisting Chinese name at the time was "ke dou ken la," which translates to "tadpoles gnawing on the wax". Sales of the product were surprisingly poor, with a name that could be easily misinterpreted and a bottle of black liquid that looked like Chinese herbal medicine.

Following a torturous hardship, The Coca-Cola Company eventually retranslated the disagreeable and unpronounceable phrase "ke dou ken la," which means "tadpoles gnawing on the wax," into the new name "ke kou ke le," which means "delicious fun." This translation is considered a miracle in the field of translation. The combination of the first two characters, which indicates "delicious and tasteful, suitable to eat or drink," and the last two, which indicate "happiness," results in the term "delicious cola" or "delicious and happy." As a result, the four characters seem friendly to the clients. "ke kou ke le" perfectly satisfies the Chinese cultural psychology of seeking happiness while also preserving the English language's syllables and reflecting the brand's central idea of "Deliciousness and Happiness." Therefore, Chinese people feel the translation beautiful and excellent, attractive and

acceptable, because it reveals the psychological identity and acceptance, and it is closely related to the Chinese cultural psychology (Ran 216).

Concern should also be given to the brand's feature in the translation. Its simplicity and memorability come first. Trademarks and brands possess the power to draw in consumers, stimulate their interest, generate a lasting impression, and motivate them to make purchases. Coca-Cola is an example of successful brand, which is easy to read, easy to understand, and readily spread among consumers. The second feature is full of connotation and association. Brands must be associative for target readers and leave good impression on them, since “culture impacts and constrains translation” (Li et al. 130), and language is tightly connected to culture. In this regard, brands ought to be considerate of the linguistic and cultural behavioral patterns of their customers. Because of their positive associative and connotative meaning, good brands have positive effects. Coca-Cola's promotional goal to make Chinese people believe that the drink is lovely, acceptable, appealing, and simple to comprehend and remember was thus expressed in the Chinese translation. However, the translation achieved the goal of brand translation — that is, it recognized the Chinese people's psychological identity. After all, translation is “seen as a form of acculturation” (Li et al. 130), and is “the exploration of an unbridgeable gap and of a tension between cultures, variable according to the historical time and the socio-economic motivations of the assessment, its function is to develop cross-cultural constructions while at the same time bridging and underlining the differences” (Hewson and Jacky 25). As the Chinese translation of Coca Cola shows,

the function of Coca Cola is to attract the consumer to like it, it must express its attractive function.

Consequently, Coca-Cola swiftly paved the way for entry into the Chinese market and came to represent the bourgeois lifestyle in China. Once an American beverage brand that no one asked for, it evolved into a sought-after exclusive beverage that currently dominates the Chinese beverage market.

Impressive translations can also be found in other well-known businesses, like Nike, whose Chinese label, "Nai-Ke," means "enduring and persevering" in Chinese culture, yet its English equivalent refers to "the Greek goddess of victory" (Nike Definition & Meaning). Furthermore, in the Chinese market, the German brands "Benz" and "BMW" are translated as "ben chi" and "bao ma," which literally translate as "running fast and furious" and "precious stallion," respectively. In addition to being an impeccable translation from German to Chinese, it also strikes up those reading it the image of a swiftly moving car on the road, which aptly captures the essence of true luxury. China is a country of high power distance, and Chinese people prefer to buy brands that symbolize their status, because in this social circumstance, the influence of social status is omnipresent, and those high-end brands can help them to show their social status and reflect their economic level.

What's more, the Chinese name of bedding manufactures Simmons is "xi meng si". The word "xi", meaning a mat made of grass or reeds to sit or lie on, is a very appropriate word to refer to a bed or a mattress, while "meng" means "dream", and "si" means "deep in thought" or "yearn for". So from the surface meaning of the word,

people can immediately visualize the image of lying on a comfortable bed resting and having sweet dreams, which bring us a thought that how comfortable a bed can make people think in their dreams. This translation version of Chinese not only has the sense of aesthetics, but also very similar to the English pronunciation, which make the name and its products perfectly blend.

As a world-renowned home brand, IKEA is not only leading in design, but also in the translation of its product names with ingenuity and uniqueness. "Yi Jia" is a phonetic translation of "IKEA" in Chinese retaining the pronunciation and spelling of the original name while being easier to pronounce and remember. This translation method not only makes it easy for Chinese consumers to understand and accept the brand, but also culturally closer to Chinese people's consumption habits and concepts. Moreover, semantically, the name "Yi Jia" has a profound meaning in Chinese. The character "yi" means "suitable," "appropriate," or "proper," while "jia" means "home" or "family." This perfectly aligns with IKEA's long-standing brand philosophy of being family-friendly, affordable, and offering high-quality products. Yi Jia is not just a name for a brand, but a perfect interpretation of the concept of home and lifestyle. In terms of brand communication and marketing, IKEA's choice of "IKEA" as its name in the Chinese market demonstrates its profound cultural wisdom. This strategy not only makes the brand more approachable and localized in the Chinese market, but also effectively conveys its global brand value and core psychological concept. It combines IKEA's global advantages with the cultural background and consumer needs of the Chinese market, bringing Chinese consumers a more convenient and

enjoyable home shopping experience. In summary, the choice of "IKEA" is not just a translation of the brand name, but also a profound understanding of cultural integration and market demand. the brand philosophy and cultural wisdom behind this name.

All in all, the trademark name translation should not only be semantically consistent but also integrate the name with the product, as this has a significant influence on the consumer's choice of which one to purchase. Additionally, in order for it to be widely accepted by the recipients and even create a significant amount of brand value, it must convey their rich cultural connotations and reflect their profound cultural meaning. subsequently it is critical to consider the linguistic characteristics of the target country's language and the cultural background of the clientele while conducting international marketing.

3.1.2 Language Variants

In today's age of globalization, English is no longer the authentic Standard English, or English of England, but common wealth English with colonial imprints, and the changed English with the characteristics of speakers' own language, or interlanguage varieties of English such as Chinglish, Spanglish. The most influential model of the spread of English has undoubtedly been that of Kachru (1992: 356) which are three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle (Jenkins 15). With the increasing prevalence of English in the Inner Circle countries and the Expanding Circle countries all over the world, on the one

hand, it makes the strong position of English more and more consolidated, on the other hand, this phenomenon leads to the variability and hybridization of the English language, and at the same time creates the diversified development of the culture.

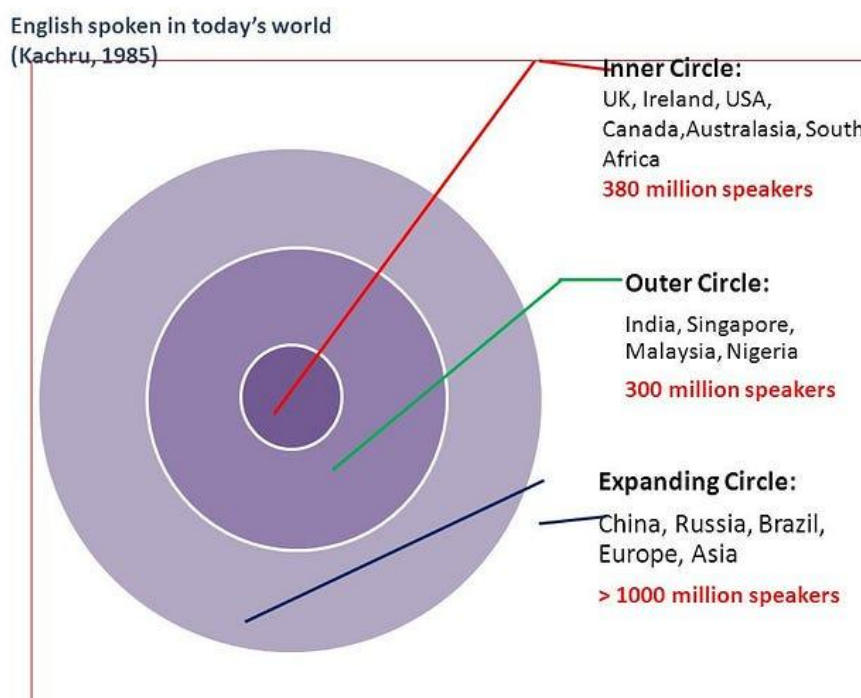


Figure 1. Valpa, Ana. “Kachru Model ‘The Three Circles of English’ - Ana Valpa -

Medium.” *Medium*, 30 Mar. 2022,

agvalpa.medium.com/kachru-model-the-three-circles-of-english-b53b86e63d46.

Language changes with society, region, time, social group and individual differences, and the result of these changes are linguistic varieties. There is more than one variant of every language, especially in spoken English. Variants of these languages include standard language, dialects, registers, Pidgin, and Creole. Regional variation in language such as American English, British English; how languages change over time, such as ancient English versus modern English; social variation in

language, or register, is the language we use for different occasions and for different people is quite different.

Although variants of a language are usually not fundamentally different, even variants of the same language should not be confused with the same language because of the grammatical, lexical, and other characteristics of the different variants, which are often very different due to a variety of factors. This is not only because speakers of the different variants can easily recognize the differences between them, but also because these differences often create varying degrees of barriers to use and understanding for different groups. Therefore, using the correct language variant of the target country in the target market is not only a sign of respect for the target users, but also a guarantee of the user experience, as well as an added competitive advantage that makes it easier to stand out in the local market.

The prerequisite for defining the target language is to first define the target market, which also means that enterprises need to do in-depth market research to determine which language variants are suitable for different target markets. Market and language adaptation is the most basic requirement and one of the most indispensable steps in product internationalization. If you want your product or service to gain a huge advantage in the international market, language localization is the right direction.

With the development of economic globalization, more and more brands are shifting their sights to the overseas market. Brands often adopt advertising to open up new markets and achieve the purpose of promoting sales and shaping brand image.

However, advertising is a cultural product, and the content of advertising carries cultural significance. Since there are big cultural differences between brand advertisers and market receivers, some disputes are inevitable in the process of advertisement dissemination, which makes it difficult for advertisements to achieve the original dissemination effect, and even damages the brand's reputation, which in turn generates consumer boycott of the product.

3.2 Culture

With the development of globalization, international exchanges are becoming more and more frequent, and it has become a big trend to explore overseas markets. And in international advertising and marketing, whether it is Chinese brands going overseas or overseas brands entering the Chinese market, the essence is to break through the local culture and integrate into another new culture. Enterprises first need to have cultural awareness and understand the cultural differences between the target country and their own, and then it is the cultural adaptation - expressing the original culture and value of the brand in the culture, way of thinking and language of the host country, and integrating it into the culture of the target market.

3.2.1 Society

I discussed the Power Distance Index and the Individualistic and Collectivist society in the theoretical section. China is a collectivist nation with a high power distance, in opposition to the majority of western nations.

In the people-oriented Western market, the power distance is relatively small, so solution-oriented is the most important brand endorsement. However, in the Chinese market, these may not be the most important points, because Chinese people have a high sense of identification with the hierarchical differences caused by power and wealth, so they are very fond of the products accepted and endorsed by experts and authorities. Since ancient times, China has always been in favor of “top-down absolute authority”, and in Chinese advertising slogans, “Elite”, “Famous Family”, “Guest of Honor”, “Royalty”, etc., are commonplace. The way to attract more consumers in China is to focus on the fact that the brand is recommended by a famous or authoritative organization, or has won an award, or a competition. In short, endorsements are needed to gain more consumer recognition, reflecting the large power distances that characterize China.

From a global perspective, it is impossible to dispute the achievement of McDonald's marketing strategies are in their commercials. As one of the biggest markets in the world, China has seen tremendous success from McDonald's advertising there, largely due to the company's localized marketing strategies that take into account the unique features of the local market and culture. Here are a few examples.

First, McDonald's understands the psychology of Chinese people under high power distance. When McDonald's first entered the Chinese market a few decades ago, it already had a market position of middle-class target customers, because the price of its goods was in the upper middle class in terms of China's consumption level and per

capita income level at that time. Millennials have almost no memories of not growing up in a McDonald's. When we were kids, every time we scored high on a test, our parents took us to McDonald's for dinner as a reward. People regarded it as an honor to dine at McDonald's, not only for mental satisfaction but also as a symbol of economic level. In terms of marketing, McDonald's has always tried to emphasize the connotation that enjoying McDonald's means living a decent life and being happier than those who do not. In the context of the era of increasing purchasing power, McDonald's has aptly combined its fashionability with the desirable aspirations of Chinese consumers.

Secondly, McDonald's has great respect for local traditional culture. McDonald's focuses on traditional Chinese customs and values, such as New Year wishes, respecting the old and caring for the young as well as welcoming the Spring Festival. McDonald's advertisements reflect the profoundness of Chinese culture, as well as respect and understanding of China. Typical examples include launching limited products with elements of the festival. From the naming of the products to the publicity, it can make consumers feel that McDonald's is innovative in integrating Chinese elements. For example, On July 22, 2024, McDonald's officially announced the launch of its 10th annual “Dashu” Day (“Fries Day”) in China on the day of the traditional Chinese holiday of “Dashu” (Major Heat), paying homage to traditional Chinese culture by creating a special theme related to the traditional holiday of the Major Heat, based on the connotations of the holiday and traditional Chinese customs. During the campaign period, consumers could enjoy McDonald's french fries at a

50% discount. Because the Chinese words for “fries” and “Dashu” are pronounced the same way, McDonald's utilized this anecdote to market its fries.

Finally, McDonald's focuses on family and affection, which are valued by Chinese culture, in its marketing campaigns, and its advertisements often reflect family atmosphere and parent-child themes. On May 25, 2024, McDonald's hosted a parent-child run in Beijing, with nearly 25,000 families signing up for the event, which raised money for the medical treatment of sick children. This charity event organized by McDonald's not only fosters a sense of community among children, but also promotes their relationships with parents, which reflects the Eastern culture's emphasis on collectivist values such as “family” , “we” and “group” .

3.2.2 Cultural Awareness

Dolce & Gabbana, as an international luxury brand, has a certain brand influence among consumers. Facing the Chinese market, the brand tries to shorten the distance between itself and the consumers by integrating traditional Chinese cultural elements to cultivate the consumption atmosphere of luxury goods in China.

“Eating with Chopsticks” is one of the pre-fashion show advertising campaigns of D&G to showcase the collision and fusion of traditional Chinese culture and classic Italian food. However, this advertisement produced an effect that is contrary to the original intention.

In the advertisement, a Mandarin voiceover begins by "Welcome to the first episode of 'Eating with Chopsticks' by Dolce & Gabbana," deliberately pronouncing

the words incorrectly to make fun of Chinese speech as Chinese folk music plays in the background. The male voice then continues to mansplain the correct way to "properly" eat the food. In another video, he declares, "Let's use these small stick-like things to eat our great pizza margarita" (Xu). The advertisements were condemned for their mispronounced pronunciation, and the voiceover in Mandarin ridicules Chinese speech. The company was charged with demeaning stereotypes and trivializing Chinese culture. The fashion show of D&G in Shanghai had to be canceled because of it, and merchandise were taken down from Chinese internet stores. There has been opposition to the campaign and demands for boycotts.

China is a collectivist society, and people from such a society have a strong sense of national pride. In the eyes of the Chinese, this advertisement is a manifestation of the arrogance and prejudice of the West towards the East, which to this day is still not able to get out of the frame of mind of Orientalism. In Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, he argued that the Western view of the East is based on a misconception and a sense of "Otherness" (Said 9), The Western imagery of the Orient makes the image of the Occident possible, and thus produces a kind of imagined binary ontology (Wani 19). Besides, his concept of the "Other" a prejudiced image on the Orient that has been created and perpetuated through the Western discourse (Mohrem 2).

Although the background, models' costumes and props in the advertisements seem to be in Chinese style, it can be seen that the advertiser do not really understand the deeper connotations of the Chinese culture, but only make a superficial gesture, and the fundamental reason of that is that they don't really accept the Chinese or

Oriental culture, instead, they see them as the Other (Said 9). Moreover, as the Orient is perceived as inferior and lacks morality, it gives path to seeing the greatness of the West. (Altabaa and Nubli 371). In the advertisement, they said "Let's use these small stick-like things to eat our great pizza margarita", so the chopsticks, which belong to eastern culture, are "small stick-like things" while pizza, which belongs to western culture, is "our great pizza margarita". It shows D&G's sense of cultural superiority in spades.

The Western world labeled the Orient, as the "Other". This idea can be summarized in the notion of narrative, the West has the power of narrative and the power of knowledge that is why it is granted the status of a center. Said expresses the binary opposition between the East and the West by arguing that "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 5), and this distorted view of the East justifies Western imperialism and colonization (Maliyana 1). In the advertisement the Chinese model is dominated by the narrator like an emotionless puppet, her facial expressions and movements are very unnatural and make people uncomfortable when they watch it, while the narrator is responsible for giving her the instruction to "pick up the chopsticks and clamp them up like pincers", which shows that their relationship is one of manipulation and being manipulated, which is an implicit reference to the relationship between the West and the East. Said also thinks that the opposition between "our" and "their" worlds implies that "our" world is superior to "their"

world, and their” world is dependent on ‘our’ world. Throughout the advertisement we get a clear sense of dichotomy rather than friendly cultural intermingling.

The disrespect for chopsticks presented in the advertisement is also one of the reasons that infuriated Chinese viewers, as chopsticks are very significant, which holds the Chinese people's worship of traditional culture. Chopsticks are a tool for eating, but they are also a carrier of the Chinese cultural heritage, closely related to Chinese etiquette, marriage, beliefs, art and so on, and occupy an important position in traditional customs, which are the symbols of Chinese culture and the crystallization of the wisdom of the Chinese nation. A pair of chopsticks contains a wealth of emotions of the Chinese people. That's why it's interpreted as extreme insulting that the advertisement misuses chopsticks and describes them as “little stick-like things” .

All in all, for the Chinese audience, the advertisement carries the advertiser's cultural superiority and colonial overtones, as well as the desecration of traditional Chinese culture and core values.

3.2.3 Diversity

In the European and North American markets, Diversity and Inclusion, the new coordinates of marketing, have become more and more visible in recent years, and it seems to have become a marketing traffic code. Blacks, Asians, and American Indians together make up close to one-fourth of the population of the United States.

“Minority” is likely to have a very different meaning in the 21st century (Pollard

and O'Hare 3). Meantime, according to Wikipedia, the total number of national minority populations in Europe is estimated at 105 million people, or 14% of 770 million Europeans in 2002 ("Ethnic Groups in Europe"). Moreover, U.S. adults' identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or something other than heterosexual held steady in 2022, at 7.2% (Jones).

The trend towards inclusivity and diversity in international advertising and marketing has been driven by the diversification of Western societies in recent years. Diversity in marketing is not merely a necessity; it represents a significant opportunity. It allows businesses to forge deeper, more meaningful connections with their audience. As marketers, we have the privilege and responsibility to champion diversity through multicultural marketing. This approach facilitates not only genuine engagement with customers from varied backgrounds but also taps into the vast potential of rapidly expanding consumer segments ("The Crucial Role of Multicultural Marketing"). In order to be as inclusive and diverse as possible, brands should take the initiative to break the mold. Beyond gender and race, there are other dimensions of diversity, including those related to age, religion, geographical location, social class, occupation, and more.

Today's consumers want more than just products and services; they seek authentic connections. They want brands to recognize and value their unique cultural identities. However, multicultural marketing extends beyond mere language translation or displaying diverse faces. It requires a genuine and continuous understanding of the distinct histories, traditions, and behaviors of individual cultural

groups. When brands genuinely understand and appreciate diverse cultures, they not only demonstrate social awareness and inclusion but also build lasting trust. This trust often translates into brand advocacy, with consumers championing these brands through word of mouth and on social media platforms (“The Crucial Role of Multicultural Marketing”).

In the rule 6 of *Multicultural Intelligence. Eight Make-or-Break Rules for Marketing to Race, Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation* by David R. Morse (2019), he mentioned that the best way to motivate multicultural groups to take action is to move them, elicit positive emotions from them, and establish an emotional bond with the brand. But before we can effectively establish an emotional bond, we must consider these crucial questions: How do our target groups view themselves? What does our brand look like? Are they satisfied with the goods and services we provide, and if so, why? We must do more than just advertise; we must work through the entire customer buying process, providing them with individualized goods and services, constantly assessing the customer's shopping experience, and seeking out items that satisfy their needs.

There is a good example by Starbucks. The "Every name's a story" advertisement depicts ‘James’ who is transitioning but faces everyday challenges because he does not identify with his birth name, “Jemma”. It culminates with him trying out his true name for the first time at a Starbucks store, by asking to have the name James written on a Starbucks cup, which is called out by a barista (Iris). Starbucks demonstrated its support for LGBTQ+ people through this story. The advertisement won several

awards, including the Advertising Industry Awards, and the value of Starbucks' stock went up a lot in the three months after the advertisement was released.

This shows that authentic and culturally sensitive communication is paramount in building consumer trust. By embracing multicultural marketing, your brand establishes deep-rooted connections that consistently resonate with and bring value to diverse audiences. This trust transcends individual transactions, with consumers gravitating towards brands that display cultural competence and inclusivity (“ The Crucial Role of Multicultural Marketing”).

However, insensitive or tone-deaf marketing can have significant repercussions. Beyond mere disengagement, brands face public backlash, boycotts, and the looming threat of being "canceled". In an era of pervasive social media and heightened online activism, consumers wield significant power to voice concerns and hold brands accountable (“ The Crucial Role of Multicultural Marketing”). H&M is a case in point.

In 2018, H&M came under fire for an advertisement that featured showing a black child in a green hoodie bearing the words “Coolest monkey in the jungle”. The scandal drew public accusations of racism all over social media and this led to H&M facing a serious social media boycott (“H&M Apologises Over Image of Black Child in ‘monkey’ ”).

Therefore, in this age of diversity, advertisements that are multiracial are desirable and even politically correct in some ways, however, international marketers need to keep in mind that cultural sensitivity is a necessity, moreover, the control of

scale is also a factor to be taken into account, the multiracial elements can be used in advertisements to show a certain amount of diversity, while using them incorrectly can have the opposite effect. In the article *Nothing Sells like Whiteness: Race, Ontology, and American Advertising*, Shalini Shankar (2020) explained that Unlike multiculturalism, “diversity” aims to make “race” an unmarked category (Shankar 114). Such a discourse carefully erases the historically negative elements associated with race in an attempt to create an ideal heterogeneous public space where all people can have an equal voice. However, such an ethnic ambiguity, which seems to have no linguistic or cultural specificity, actually exacerbates the rivalry between whites and non-whites, so that “non-whiteness” has become the index of diversity (Shankar 114). The pursuit of non-whiteness will only work against the good intentions of diversity, so international marketers need to truly understand the vision of diversity, as Shankar declares that “the vision of diversity entails consumers of different races finding sameness through brand identification rather than racial identification. Bringing people out of a multicultural past into a racially utopic future means sup-planting multiculturalism’s cultural and linguistic specificities with diversity’s assurances that racial sameness is the way forward” (Shankar 115).

However, overseas brands entering the Chinese market need to consider a completely different aspect in terms of diversity, as the country is characterized by a clear gender binary of male and female. While collectivist China has long promoted monogamy and it is a social norm to marry and start a family at a certain age, and advertisements and slogans promoting happy family life can often be found in the

Chinese media. Sexual minorities often face a series of injustices in such a binary society, including but not limited to being denied admission to schools or jobs due to their third gender identity, and being subjected to insults, verbal abuse and even physical harm, as this is not in line with traditional Chinese ideology. As a result, overseas brands need to be aware that placing LGBTQ+ friendly advertisements in China is not politically correct enough.

3.2.4 Religion

It is important for marketers to understand the influence of religion on consumer culture in the markets where they operate, so that their marketing activities can be appropriately sensitive. Failing to respect religious beliefs can seriously undermine the reputation of a company or brand. At the same time, marketers who are attuned to the impact of religion on local culture can find great advantage in aligning marketing messages and promotional opportunities to religious practice.

Religious beliefs lead to sensitivities about certain products. For example, in the countries where Islamic law is strictly observed, images displaying the uncovered arms or legs of the female body are considered offensive.

Each religion has its own symbolic items and the misuse of them due to the misinterpretation of the religion could cause the catastrophe of the advertisement marketing. For example, the Cross Necklace has no religious or cultural meaning to the majority of non-religious Chinese, but just a fashionable ornament, so adding this concept to advertising in a country where Christianity is prevalent is bound to have a

negative impact. Similarly, in Thailand, where Buddhism is the national religion, the elephant is a holy symbol that should not be blasphemed or belittled, so international marketers should pay attention to the religion of the target country as well as its related issues in order to carry out advertising and marketing smoothly.

3.2.5 Number

The significance of numbers varies across different cultures, with each number carrying its own unique meaning. It is important to recognize that what may be considered unlucky in one country can be perceived as lucky in another. And this is why it's so important to understand the aspect of global numerical value (Smith).

While many people often overlook the significance of numbers, various cultures assign profound meanings to them based on age-old traditions and cultural beliefs. These numbers hold spiritual connotations tied to an individual's life path. In addition to their spiritual implications, numbers also possess symbolic meanings that influence the physical world within different cultural contexts (Smith).

However, difficulties may arise when numbers carry associations with superstitions, religion, or mythology. Complications intensify when considering that numbers may hold favorable meanings in certain countries but evoke different responses elsewhere.

Across the globe, diverse cultures attribute various meanings to numbers based on religious or traditional beliefs. Some numbers are considered unlucky, while others are deemed auspicious (Smith). Let me give some examples here.

3.2.5.1 Number 4

The number “four” in Chinese is pronounced similarly to the word “death”, which is why the number “four” is particularly taboo among the Chinese. More importantly, the number “14” should be avoided because it is pronounced “yaosi”, which is similar to the word “die”, and “44” (si shi si) which sounds like “to die ten times”. In addition, there are many pejorative terms related to the number four in idioms, such as “si fen wu lie”, which means “to be completely split up and fragmented beyond recognition”, and “zhao san mu si”, which means “to be in a state of disarray”. This idiom originally refers to being good at using tricks to fool people, but nowadays it is used to describe changing tricks to deceive others, or being indecisive and capricious.

In Western traditions, however, the number 4 symbolizes stability, security, and practicality. It is often associated with the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water, representing a strong foundation and balance in life (Saha). What’s more, the four parts of the day: morning, midday, evening, and midnight; besides, the four seasons. The number 4 derives its Bible meaning from creation. On the fourth day of what is called "creation week" God completed the material universe (“Meaning of the Number 4 in the Bible”). Their purpose was not only to give off light, but also to divide the day from the night on earth, thus becoming a basic demarcation of time.

3.2.5.2 Number 6

In Chinese culture, “six” symbolizes good fortune, happiness and well-being. Since ancient times, China has had a traditional concept of honoring “six” .

Many things are related to “six” , for example, the kinship was summarized as “six relatives” in ancient times; there is a popular folk saying of “liu liu da shun”, means “things will go smoothly” (Syau); the days with “six” in the lunar calendar, such as the sixth, sixteenth and twenty-sixth, are regarded as auspicious days for weddings.

In the Bible, on the contrary, 6 is an unpopular number because its meaning is related to human weakness, the evils of the devil and the manifestation of sin. Besides, man was created on day six of creation week (“Meaning of the Number 6 in the Bible”). As a result, there are many pejorative terms related to the number six in English idioms, such as “at sixes and sevens” according to Cambridge Dictionary, means “in a confused, badly organized, or difficult situation”; “knock somebody for six”, means “to shock or upset someone very much, or to make someone very ill”, and “be six feet under”, which means “to be dead and buried” etc.

Many Chinese businesses display the number 6 to bring good fortune. Unlike in western culture where 666 is associated with the devil, multiples of 6 is good in Chinese culture.

3.2.5.3 Number 8

The number “Eight” (“ba” in the pronunciation of Chinese) and “fa” are homo-phonic words, “fa” means “prosper” and “wealth” in Chinese. Therefore, the

number “ba” brings to mind “fa”, which is a positive connotation. Moreover, “8” also means “thoughtful”, “peaceful” and “honorable”. For example, the Chinese call a table with 8 people sitting on it “ba xian zhuo” which literally means “Eight Immortals Table”; when receiving guests at home, the hosts often serve 8 dishes; “cai gao ba dou ” or “eight bushels of talent” is used to describe a talented person. Multiples of eight are even better, as 88 bears a resemblance to “shuang xi”, or “double happiness”. While the Chinese will go to great lengths to avoid 4 in daily life, they will try to incorporate 8 wherever they can. For example, in the Beijing summer Olympics in 2008, the opening ceremony began at 8:08 pm on 8/8/08 (It is the Chinese way of writing date) (Syau).

3.2.5.4 Number 13

Thirteen is regarded as an auspicious number in China. There are thirteen Buddhist sects in China; most of the towers in ancient Chinese architecture have thirteen floors; there are thirteen Confucian classics; and there are thirteen mausoleums of the Ming emperors, collectively known as the “Thirteen Tombs” /”Ming Tombs”.

However, the number "13" is unquestionably the most unlucky for people in the west, such as Americans and British. As a result, door signs, floors, and other numerals are made as unlikely as possible to have the number "13". There's a panic among many if Friday falls on the 13th. Some people are afraid to work on this "Black Friday" and to carry out their plans. Even a phrase for this fear of the number

13 exists: "triskaidekaphobia." , which differs from a standard clinical phobia. The number 13 has a long history of being connected to several well-known yet unwelcome dinner guests (Markovsky). In Christianity, the thirteenth guest at the Last Supper was Judas, the apostle who betrayed Jesus.

3.2.5.5 Even numbers

The Chinese have always had a mentality of pursuing symmetry, balance, harmony and stability. Therefore, even numbers carry auspicious cultural connotations in the Chinese context. Chinese people pursue good things in their daily life and desire double happiness. Double gifts are given in interpersonal interactions. From the couplets on the doors of Chinese homes to the rhetorical pairs in Chinese literature, all reflect Chinese people's fondness for even numbers. And four-character phrases or idioms are also favored.

Chinese people think that four-character phrases or idioms are very beautiful and popular, which is the reason why there are so many four-character idioms in Chinese. In the translation, one of the principles of translation into Chinese is translators' preference to Chinese four-character idioms and expressions. In the Chinese translation of Coca Cola, the four-character translation is the representation of Chinese aesthetic tendency to the usage of simple Chinese characters and four-character idioms (Ran 217).

Global business owners must grasp the significance of numbers and their associations to formulate effective marketing strategies. These associations often stem

from deeply rooted traditions and beliefs passed down through generations. To adapt to local cultures, companies may translate their websites, localize marketing materials, and make changes to product branding. However, it is equally important not to overlook the impact of numbers, as they can wield significant influence that may not have been initially perceived. The internationally famous hotel Marriott is a good example. Since entering the Chinese market, Marriott has been developing very rapidly. Its success in the Chinese market is related to many factors, but it is undeniable that it cannot be isolated from the great advantage of naming. It's translated as "Wan hao" in Chinese ; “wan” means “ten thousand” or “a lot”, and it is an even number which is auspicious in the Chinese context, while “hao” means “luxury” or “wealth”, so "Wan hao" literally means "10,000 wealthy elites", giving Chinese consumers a sense of "high quality luxuriousness" (Lee), perfectly capturing the psychology of the people in this highly power-distant nation.

These examples highlight the diverse interpretations of numerical value and their significance across different cultures. It is essential to consider these cultural beliefs and superstitions when engaging in international business, marketing, or even personal interactions to ensure a respectful and appropriate approach that resonates with the target audience (Smith).

To conclude, by understanding the cultural symbolism and interpretations of numbers, individuals and businesses can navigate these intricacies and tailor their strategies to effectively connect with and engage diverse audiences worldwide (Smith).

4. Conclusion

Globalization has significantly impacted human affairs, leading to an increase in international business interactions. However, cross-cultural communication and practices can be challenging, causing anxiety and conflict due to misunderstandings. To conduct business operations smoothly in a complex global multilingual environment, enterprises must address this urgent problem. The intensification of worldwide relations has highlighted the importance of sharing a common language for contacts with business partners in distant places. English is now the preferred contact language worldwide. Companies should pay attention to linguistic features in international advertisements and be cautious of the pragmatic failure of the translation version in the target country.

Cultural aspects are just as crucial for international marketers to consider in their commercials as language aspects. Globalization as a social phenomenon, is not only the transnational flow of products and capital in the economic sphere, but also the spread of various cultures and trends of thought on a global scale, using information as a vehicle. Every nation in the world has its own unique cultural form and cultural personality. Cultural differences are beautiful, and it is precisely because of the blossoming of different cultures from all over the world that make our world become so rich and colorful. If the world's languages and cultures were to be unified one day, then the end of culture would be near. We cannot judge the attitudes of people who come from other cultural backgrounds through our own cultural views, we need to

respect the differences meantime learning about their cultures in order to better communicate with them, and as international brand, it is also helpful to conduct business activities better with the people from the local market of the target country.

Therefore, in the process of entering foreign markets, brands should realize the objective existence of cultural differences, pay attention to the psychological characteristics of consumers in different cultural environments, and proactively understand and integrate into the consumer environment of the target country, and carry out targeted localized marketing according to the characteristics of local culture and market. Not only to promote the essence of the national culture, but also to draw on the excellent culture of local countries and apply it to the international advertising and marketing strategy.

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