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“Specialization” approach reflected in Chinese and American Advertisement Campaigns

With the development of computer science, computers become smaller and smaller, which turns laptops into reality. To fit in with the situation where consumers tend to choose laptops as their personal computers, many famous companies, such as Huawei and Apple, release different kinds of laptops to meet the demand of computer market. Apart from the product itself, advertisement campaigns also play an important role in the success of selling a new laptop. When Carolyn A. Lin (2001) talks about the reflection of different cultures in her article “Cultural Values Reflected in Chinese and American Television Advertising”, she indicates that “though consumers in China and America share similar needs, they vary in the way they characterize the products that can satisfy those needs” (84), from which it is logical to infer that different cultures have some effect on people’s way of thinking. On the one hand, companies need to be aware of the effect of culture on people’s thoughts and come up with corresponding advertising strategies to maximize profit as well as minimize costs. On the other hand, consumers, like me, also need to care about the effect of culture and advertising strategies to avoid unnecessary consumption.

In this essay, I will focus on core cultural values in Eastern and Western culture represented by China and the United States, respectively. Particularly, I will pay close

attention to time perceptions, individualism, modernity, social status and Chinese habits, which are the core cultural values reflected in two advertising website pages that are conducted by Huawei for the same product Huawei Matebook X towards Chinese and American market, respectively. By comparing and contrasting these two pages, I will try to figure out the role of culture plays in advertisement campaigns and the trend of global advertising. From my perspective, culture dominates advertisement campaigns. Particularly, advertising strategies tend to get close to the cultures of their objective markets to reduce their costs, which is referred to as “specialization” approach in global advertising.

When it comes to perceptions of time, an essential aspect of culture, Lin indicates that “time perception is found to be strongly influenced by the degree of industrialization in a culture” (86). Specifically, Lin suggests that “time orientation in Western cultures is treated as “monochronic”, whereas in Eastern cultures, it is considered “polychronic”” (85) and that the monochronic perspective tends to stress promptness while the polychronic perspective views time as something that is relevant to events (85) when she talks about the time perception in Western cultures and Eastern cultures. On the page for Chinese advertisement campaign, Huawei stresses convenience and safety in terms of its two-in-one power button and fingerprint recognition sensor. Convenience is related to promptness, but it is the combination of promptness and turning on the laptop, an event, rather than promptness itself, from which we can see the polychronic perspective of Eastern culture. However, Huawei asserts that “Huawei MateBook X's two-in-one power button and fingerprint recognition sensor helps you boot up quickly and safely to operate at the speed of your life” on its

American advertising website page. The words, “quickly” and “speed”, are used to directly give American consumers a sense of speediness, trying to appeal to them from the time perceptions in Western culture, which is consistent to the monochronic perspective. It is obvious that more time-oriented appeals related to time perceptions are used in the American advertisement, which is corresponding to Lin’s statement that “U.S. commercials will use more time-oriented advertisements than their Chinese counterparts” (86). In this case, Huawei applies monochronic and polychronic perspectives to American and Chinese advertisements, respectively, to attract consumers by approaching their traditional cultures.

When Lin talks about the symbol of Eastern and Western cultures, she indicates that “just as collectivism and tradition are found to represent typical Eastern cultural values, individualism and modernity are typical of Western culture” (86), from which it is logical to infer that “group consensus is an effective commercial appeal for Chinese audiences, though advertisements originating in the West would be more likely to emphasize such values as individualism or youth and modernity” (86). However, if we pay close attention to these two advertising website pages, we can find that though they do not deny the previous inference, they reflect a new trend that both American and Chinese advertisements tend to use modernity and individual appeals. Though modernity appeals are used in both advertising pages, they are conducted in different ways. On the Chinese advertising website page, white and silver are used as simple backgrounds without any patterns, which gives consumers a modern sense of conciseness. In contrast, Huawei uses a picture of the Earth with the Sun shining on the skyline taken from the outer space as background. This background attracts

consumers with the sense of modernity, because it involves the picture of the Earth taken from the space, which can only be achieved with the help of high technology, a symbol of modernity. It is logical to indicate that modernity appeals in American advertisement are stronger than those in its Chinese counterpart, because American advertisement provides its consumers with direct sense of modernity by using a picture taken in outer space as background while its Chinese counterpart only uses white and silver to form concise backgrounds. Therefore, though both Chinese and American advertisements use modernity appeals, it is not opposed to my thesis statement that advertising strategies tend to get close to the cultures of their objective markets, because in this case modernity appeals in American advertisement are stronger than those in Chinese advertisement, which is consistent to Lin's statement that modernity is more important in Western culture than in Eastern culture (86).

Similarly, both American and Chinese advertisements use individual appeals, but they use them in different ways. American advertisement uses pictures as individual appeals while its Chinese counterpart uses language. When Huawei suggests its lightness, a beauty in white taking out a Huawei Matebook X from a package held by one hand easily with the other hand is used as background on its American advertising website page, which gives consumers a vivid sense that the Matebook X is very light and easy to be carried. Besides, when Huawei mentions its product is powerful, it uses a handsome man using its product dedicatedly as the background, which implies that this powerful product is attractive. Using individuals as backgrounds, which does not happen on Chinese advertising page, shows Huawei's approach towards individualism in Western culture. On its Chinese advertising page, Huawei stresses

that its product helps you handle complex tasks easily when it talks about the powerfulness of its product and asserts that its product can bring you into a comfortable and quiet world when it talks about its fan-needless product. It is obvious that Huawei focuses on “you”, individuals, rather than a group of people when it talks about advantages of its product, which reflects individualism, a relatively new concept in Chinese culture. When Lin talks about the change of culture, she suggests that “when cultures change, the core values remain stable, but a more contemporary interpretation of those core values may emerge” (92). Particularly, a contemporary interpretation of collectivity in traditional Chinese culture may have proportion of individualism. From this perspective, we can see that Huawei also tries to fit in with contemporary Chinese culture, which is, again, corresponding to my thesis statement that advertising strategies tend to get close to the cultures of their objective markets.

When Lin talks about social status, another core culture value, she indicates that “the value of social status is often reflected by a person’s material possessions, which are reflective of economic achievements, and economic upward mobility is an important goal for which people are expected to strive in a Confucian society” (87). Affected deeply by Confucian culture, Chinese advertisers use some appeals related to high social status to attract Chinese consumers while its American counterparts may not utilize them in this case. On the Chinese advertising website page, Huawei mentions that no matter where you are, both Huawei Matebook X and you will become the focus, which implies that consumers’ inherent quality in the eyes of others can be improved if they buy Matebook X. Focus and improved inherent quality in the eyes of others give consumers a sense of high social status, because

they imply that consumers are not only paid attention to but also admired by others. On the contrary, no relationship among people is mentioned on the American advertising website page, which suggests that status appeals may not be used in the American advertisement. Therefore, it is obvious that more status appeals are used by Chinese commercials than by their U.S. counterparts in this case, which is different from Lin's conclusion that "the use of status appeals are not significantly different between the Chinese and U.S. commercials" (91). Affected deeply by Confucian culture, social status is core culture value in Chinese culture (Lin 86). By using status appeals in Chinese advertisement and not using them in American one, Huawei, again, tries to adjust to the cultures of its objective markets.

In a word, advertising strategies of Huawei are to get close to the cultures of its objective markets, which is a representation of "specialization" approach in global advertising. When Lin talks about "specialization" approach, she suggests that "this argument lends support to proponents of the "specialization" approach in global advertising, even though the barriers to developing that specialized advertising approach may be many and difficult to anticipate." (83), which indicates that "specialization" approach in global advertising may be a good strategy. It is important for both companies and consumers to be aware of this kind of strategy. As Lin indicates, "as advertising is a cultural product in its own right, when the East meets the West without a conjoining point, the marketing costs borne by advertisers could be unexpectedly exorbitant; such costs may come in the guise of missed opportunities or, worse yet, a battered product image" (83). "Specialization" approach can provide the conjoining point by helping companies fit in with the cultures of their

objective markets, which eventually reduces the costs of companies and maximizes their profit. When it comes to the consumers, if consumers, like me, are able to learn about the “specialization” approach and realize the advertising strategies related to their own cultures, they can make their consumption decision on the basis of the product itself rather than the advertisement to avoid unnecessary consumption. That is to say, in my opinion, “specialization” approach is a trend in global advertising, which is reflected in Huawei’s advertisements towards Chinese and American markets, and it can help companies minimize their costs and maximize their profit as well as urge consumers to avoid unnecessary consumption.

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