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Culture Differences between China and U.S. Reflected in Advertising of Everyday Technology

As a widely known saying says, “technology liberates hands”, the swift development of science and technology brings great convenience to modern people’s daily life. Lots of intellectualized and information products continue to emerge with the computer and embedded technology that coming into our life, among which are the products that I am going to introduce and analyze. As Carolyn A. Lin, the author of the article “Cultural Values Reflected in Chinese and American Television Advertising”, asserted in her article, Chinese and American television advertisings are different from each other due to the different cultural values. More generally, it is logical to postulate that not only television advertising but also other mediums of advertisement campaigns have similar distinctions between Chinese advertising and American advertising. Hence, I will compare and contrast two campaigns, which respectively market towards China and the U.S.. The one that markets towards China is a series of television advertisings of Apple Inc. celebrating Chinese New Year, and they are aimed at advertising one of the company’s product­—iPad pro. And the other one that markets towards America is two videos of Lenovo that respectively advertise IdeaPad Tablet K1 and Yoga Tablet which are both tablet computers and are similar as iPad in respects of the touch-screen function, portable feature and operations that similar to normal computer.

The advertising campaign of Apple Inc. that I choose includes Chinese New Year celebrating commercials for 2016 and 2017. The advertisement for 2016 is a video called “A New Year Song for You” which is about a minute long. This advertising displays a scene that several people play a traditional Chinese song which has been adapted using iPad pro. The other advertisement which is for 2017 is a video as well, and this video that called “Surplus Year after Year” presents a girl making new-year paper cutting decorations. To generate comparisons, the advertising campaign of Lenovo that I choose contains two videos, which includes one commercial shows the daily work of Ashton Kutcher, an American actor who has an additional post of Lenovo’s product engineer, employing Yoga Tablet produced by the company, and the other shows the daily life of an ordinary girl preparing for her party with her friends with the help of Lenovo’s IdeaPad Tablet K1. Like what Lin has done for her article, I contrast two campaigns in order to figure out the culture differences between China and U.S. that reflected in everyday technology. Conversely, rather than do sample investigation with a large number of samples, I pay close attention to the two campaigns that advertise by emphasizing the role of technology so as to be more specific. From my perspective, different cultural values determine the strategies that companies take to show how technology contributes to people’s daily life when advertising.

Lin has hypothesized and proved in her article that, “Chinese commercials will use more group consensus appeals than will their U.S. counterparts” (86), and, “U.S. commercials will use more individual/independence appeals than will their Chinese counterparts” (86). While contrasting my two campaigns in terms of the oppositional relationship between collectivity and individual, Lin’s theory roughly corresponds to their differences. Focusing on the characters perform in the commercial “A New Year Song for You” and the commercial for Yoga Tablet, I notice that the Chinese one involves three main characters forming a music band together, and the American one, on the contrary, involves merely a single main character through the whole advertisement. In the Chinese commercial, the lead singer who is popular in China called Li Zongsheng owning an unassuming and moving voice plays the Chinese song with his two students, which reflects the harmony among them. Oppositely, there is only a single character, Ashton, who is famous as well, stars in the American commercial. Rather than showing the harmony and satisfaction that the tablet product can provide to the group, the American one presents the benefits that the product can bring to individuals.

While Lin describes the U.S. way of advertising as “time-oriented” (86), which refers to a fast pace of life, the difference between the commercials of two countries can be homoplastically distinguished if we focus on the pace of the advertising performance which can be revealed from the lifestyles that two advertisings show and the background music as well in the commercial “Surplus Year after Year” and the commercial for IdeaPad Tablet K1. With the slow and smooth background music played by guitar, the Chinese commercial applies details, for instance, the gentle action of the girl and the streaming cup containing tea, that show a slow-pace lifestyle. Different from the Chinese one, the American commercial uses an upbeat melody mingled with the sound effects of the tablet product and a series of quickly switched frames to imply a swift pace of life corresponding to American lifestyle.

In my point of view, though the four commercials do not deny the statement claimed by Lin that “Chinese commercials will portray more veneration of elderly models than will their U.S. counterparts” (86), the two Chinese commercials cannot reflect that they have more veneration of old than the U.S. commercials if we only judge them by the traditional contents of them, specifically, Chinese paper cutting, traditional music and red packets which the American commercial does not contain. Because it can be effortlessly inferred that the target of Apple Inc. is to launch an advertising campaign specially aiming at Chinese New Year, and it is required for the commercials to involve Chinese traditional elements beyond doubt. In spite of that, the contrast between both can still be implied if we focus on the original intention of the Apple Inc. rather than the form of expression. The existence of the campaign itself is particularly for the Chinese New Year. Therefore, it is adequate to embody the emphasis of Apple Inc. on Chinese veneration of elderly models. Otherwise, the company will not advertise its products by displaying scenes of New Year primarily.

According to what Lin admits in her article that “U.S. commercials will have a higher ratio of hard-sell to soft-sell appeals than will their Chinese counterparts” (86), advertisings marketing towards America emphasize product itself while commercials for China focus more on the impression that is supposed to be received by audiences. Likewise, the four commercials have this feature as well. By presenting the perform work and publicity work that Ashton does with the tablet as visual rhetoric and the dialogue between characters like “Eighteen hours one charge?” and “Yeah, eighteen hours, let’s see what you’ve got”, the video advertising Yoga Tablet shows the strong performance, various functions and the convenience it brings to the customers. In contrast, the video “A New Year Song for You” shows customers a harmonious and comfortable impression on account of the scene that the family reunites on New Year’s Day as visual rhetoric and the traditional song they play as a special type of language. Nevertheless, from my perspective, the contrast of the sell methods depends on the orientation and features of the company brand as well. In other words, not only the different target customers under different cultural values but also the difference between the goal of Apple to sell faith and the goal of Lenovo to sell technology have effect on the sell methods that two companies choose.

In a world that various advertisings emerge increasingly with the help of the advanced media technology, it is significant for people to know why some of the advertisements appeal them much more than others. The sellers of the merchandises take advantage of advertisings to attract customers, and as Lin asserts in her article 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), companies tend to specialize their product commercials in order to decline the marketing cost. In consequence, the commercials seem more appealing, and the customers are more willing to purchase. For purpose of reducing unnecessary consumption, I think consumers should be capable to judge why a commercial attract them and consider whether the product is serviceable and worthwhile or not. That is to say, in my point of view, the thing that matter is the trust of customers to companies which can be queried due to the strategies that companies take to appeal particular group of consumers reflected from the contrasts between the two advertising campaigns about tablet computers marketing towards China and America as we focus on the culture differences between China and U.S. that reflected in daily technology.

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