

## Effects of Acculturation on Attitudes Towards Advertising

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**Abstract**—Existing in a world where interaction between nations is extremely frequent, modern people have increasingly numerous channels for getting in touch with foreign culture. Acculturation therefore happens all the time because of the conjunction of two or more cultural systems. Since effective communication depends largely on the understanding of different cultures in a world economy, the role of culture in advertising is undoubtedly essential and worthy of investigation. The following cross-cultural study combines qualitative and quantitative methods to provide valuable insight into how levels of acculturation affect linguistic preferences, impressions of cultural symbols and attitudes towards advertising.

**Keywords**- *acculturation; culture; advertising*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of transportation and communication, modern people have increasingly numerous channels for experiencing foreign culture. Take Taiwan as an example, over 8.1 million persons living in Taiwan traveled abroad for various reasons during 2009 (Source: Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transportation and Communications, Taiwan). Additionally, thousands of magazines, publication prints, television programs, and movies also provided other channels through which Taiwanese could obtain knowledge of other countries. Even for those who do not read books or watch television, various imported goods are important to daily life and convey information on the place of production.

According to the information of the Ministry of Education Taiwan, in 2009, there are approximately 33 thousands Taiwanese participants studying in other countries, over 10% of them in the United Kingdom (UK). Furthermore, numerous Taiwanese stay abroad owing to immigration or business reasons. Since it is impossible for a person to divest himself of their own culture, some changes may occur when he has opportunities to contact with other cultural groups, which also implies that following living in a foreign country for a period of time, individuals inevitably change when they contact with other cultural groups, and thus Taiwanese who live in the UK long-term may be affected by British culture, changing their original cultural values.

International cultural exchange is not limited to educational and personal exchanges. Global economic development has also produced numerous cross-cultural marketing efforts. Presently, globalization appears to be the ultimate goal of every corporation, leading to the creation of

global brand, products and advertising campaigns. Although global communication campaigns generally contain certain levels of standardization, cultural factors still are important for effective communication. Marketers and advertisers in particular, because of dealing with communicating with people with various cultural backgrounds, are highly aware of the demands associated with understanding different cultures. This situation also reflects on the unending debate on standardizing versus localizing advertising.

Regardless of the answer to this debate, or even no optimal solution exists, cultural factors are clearly essential in marketing communication. If marketers can understand the characteristics of customers from different cultures and with diverse acculturation levels, then acculturation level will provide a useful criterion helping marketers to establish more accurate communication strategies catering to specific customers, in other words, the role of culture in advertising is undoubtedly essential and worthy of investigation. Therefore, the following study explores the relationship between levels of acculturation and attitudes regarding advertising, and moreover views how contact with British culture changes the perceptions of Taiwanese towards advertising.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Cultural effects on advertising

Cultural aspects are particularly important in advertising since the effectiveness of messages transmitted via the mass media is determined mostly by the appropriateness of the words and other symbols they employ [1]. Nowadays, understanding cultural differences is frequently considered a prerequisite for successful international advertising [2]. The reasoning is that consumers grow up in a particular culture and hence become accustomed to the value systems, beliefs, and perception processes of that culture. Consequently consumers respond to advertising messages that are congruent with their culture, rewarding advertisers who understand that culture and tailor ads accordingly [3].

Although culture has been widely recognized as a significant factor in global marketing communication, it is more and more difficult to identify individuals' cultural origins because of possible cultural exchanges by all kinds of channels. If international advertisers are interested in producing culturally congruent advertising appeals, acculturation levels of local consumers must be considered as an important moderating factor.

### B. *Acculturation and advertising*

Acculturation is frequently defined as “the culture exchange that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems” [4]. This definition has since been adopted in numerous cross-cultural studies, and provided the basis for the development of related researches. Acculturation to another culture is most compelling in the case of actual migration, but also occurs via other forms of cross-cultural contact.

To date, numerous researchers have investigated the relationship about acculturation degree and attitudes towards advertising. These academic studies obtained many valuable findings. For example, native or English language advertisements generated similar responses from both the low and the high, acculturated subjects [5]. The best way to target new immigrants may be through bilingual advertisements because such an approach makes new immigrants aware of the fact that the advertiser respects their values, while simultaneously making them feel included in mainstream society [6]; Advertisements using ethnic symbols tend to be perceived positively if the advertiser shares the culture of the viewer and negatively if they share the host country culture [7] and the use of acculturation as a segmentation variable should be considered in conjunction with the desired communication goal [8].

Though some studies related to this area exist, none of the previous research on this area has combined levels of acculturation, language and culture preference and attitudes towards advertising to portray a complete picture about this topic. Therefore, in this study, interviews are used to gather thoroughly opinions of fore-mentioned aspects and a large-scale questionnaire is used simultaneously to supplement the results from interviews.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The research design includes both qualitative and quantitative data to provide evidence of the opinions about acculturation levels and advertising. This study is based on three personal interviews with selected subjects and individual questionnaires that supply the required qualitative and quantitative information.

### A. *Qualitative Research Scope*

All the interviews were conducted in the Center of Business Education Board Room at the University of St. Andrews. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, and all discussions were recorded with a digital recorder to aid in presenting the findings. Several Taiwanese respondents who currently study at the University of St. Andrews were invited to participate in the interview. They were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) Taiwanese who had stayed in UK for more than six months, (2) The sample should include at least one respondents of each gender, (3) The respondents were interested in advertising or frequently pay attention to advertising in their daily life. The main interview topics were as follows: (1) Attitudes towards British culture, (2) Conditions of language using in the UK, (3) Perceptions and comments regarding British advertising,

(4) Preferences regarding languages and models in advertising, (5) The link between culture and advertising, (6) Changes in individual attitudes towards British culture and advertising after moving to the UK, (7) Other factors that affected individual attitudes towards advertising.

### B. *Quantitative Research Scope*

Because information derived from interviews only represents comments by few acculturated Taiwanese respondents, an extensive and large-scale quantitative research method must be used to supplement the interviews. The core issues covered in the questionnaire are similar to those dealt with in the interview. Three key concepts, namely levels of acculturation, likes or dislikes related to British culture and attitudes towards advertising were used to obtain necessary data from participants. This investigation measures acculturation based on the length of stay in the UK of the acculturating individual, and their use of English in various situations. On the other hand, feelings regarding British culture are judged based on general impressions about the UK and respondent interest in acquainting themselves with British culture. Finally, the notion of attitude toward advertising was defined as individual agreement with various statement describing advertising communication-related activities [9].

Since this study measures attitude towards advertising during acculturation, both the culture of origin (Taiwan) and the culture of residence (UK) must be covered as anchors. Thus, this study considered two groups of participants, which are Taiwanese respondents and acculturating Taiwanese respondents, respectively. Around 180 university students were asked to join this research. Among the participants, almost half of them were Taiwanese respondents, while the remaining was acculturating Taiwanese who had studied in the UK for over half a year. The Taiwanese respondents were students attending the three major universities in the Hsinchu metropolitan area in Taiwan. Meanwhile, the acculturating Taiwanese were students attending Universities in the UK. Both groups use Chinese as their mother tongue.

## IV. RESULTS

### A. *Results from interviews*

After arranging and integrating the dialogue from interviews, some valuable results are displayed, as follows: first, all of the participants studying in the UK definitely had increased opportunities to practice English compared to those studying in Taiwan. While this study did not seek firm evidence of the improvement of their English ability, these participants were more confident and felt more comfortable in using English, and their acceptance of English advertising was enhanced accordingly. However, this does not mean that these participants prefer advertising in English to advertising in other languages. On the contrary, these participants mostly still favor advertising in English with Chinese subtitles. This is because they view advertising as a communication tool which helps companies to convey messages to target audiences. The critical issue is to help the audience to accurately comprehend and perceive advertising. Since

Chinese remains the first language of acculturating Taiwanese participants, Chinese subtitles play an important role in understanding for such participants.

Second, regarding the localization of advertising, participants indicate several possible influences on their perceptions of the addition of local cultural elements to advertising. The first factor is product category. Products such as washing power or toilet paper, being daily use products that lack distinct product characteristics, should combine with local cultural elements to create feelings of being close to native people's life. Meanwhile, advertising of fashion brands (particularly brands which emphasize their "Britishness" or products with strong UK associations such as English tea and short bread) are better maintain their original tone. The second factor is target audience. Products or brands which target the masses usually localize their advertising to cater to popular taste, while advertising of premium products generally remains the same in different countries to manifest product uniqueness. The reasons for this phenomenon are simple. Premium products, unlike ordinary ones, are produced only for upper reaches of society and therefore do not need to consider the taste of the masses. Additionally, according to opinions of participants, western culture is still the mainstream of world, and most premium products derive from western countries. Consequently, as Taiwanese praise these premium products, they also tend to accept advertising along with these products which represent western culture. Similar concepts can also explain the choices of modals. Western modals are suitable for advertising which remains the same, while for localized advertising, participants prefer native modals.

Some participants describe British advertising as frequently lacking humor. The advertising are boring and fail to impress the audience. Furthermore, one of the participants pointed out that British advertising primarily has a promotional focus, with the content being nothing more than news regarding price discounts (for example, "buy one get one free"). Since these sorts of advertisements do not build image or increase awareness, this participant considered them easy to ignore.

Finally, after studying in the UK for a period, the participants all agreed that their living experience there had improved their attitudes towards both the country and its culture. Such a positive attitude will remain and make them favor UK related matters even after returning to Taiwan. A similar situation also happened in the attitudes of these respondents towards British advertising. Regardless of their feelings regarding the content, such participants undoubtedly would at least take more notice of British advertising after their study in the UK than they had previously. However, the influence was limited to creating awareness, this group remained convinced that their actual buying decisions would not be affected by their stay in the UK.

To sum up, acculturating Taiwanese participants agreed that their experience of living in the UK changed their attitudes regarding British advertising. The main reason for the changes was that British advertising may contain elements which caused them to recall fond memories of their time in the UK and therefore can fix their eyes on those

advertising. Furthermore, compared to Taiwanese participants, acculturating Taiwanese are more familiar with UK numerous aspects, and this familiarity creates their favorable attitudes and impressions regarding the country, and also increases their acceptance of British advertising. However, as mentioned previously, attitudes toward advertising are determined by various factors. Although acculturating Taiwanese may possess positive images regarding British culture and these images then influence their attitudes towards advertising, the influence remains partial and limited, and primarily operated on an awareness level.

#### *B. Results from questionnaires*

Two hundred questionnaires were distributed, among these questionnaires, 161 were answered and returned, providing a total of 159 usable questionnaires for the analysis (Taiwanese=83; Acculturating Taiwanese=76). Since acculturation is directly correlated with time spent in the host nation, knowledge of the language, and positive psychological attitudes about the country [10], the first part of the questionnaire dealt with subjects' knowledge of English and the conditions in which they prefer to use English.

First, although the average time spent on learning English appears to differ little between these two groups, their self-assessments of their English ability differ considerably. Almost half of Taiwanese subjects consider themselves competent users of English and another half consider themselves limited users. Contrarily, acculturating Taiwanese subjects are relatively confident regarding their English level. Approximately 80% of acculturating Taiwanese subjects consider themselves to be competent users, and 18% believe their English ability is very good. Only 3% of subjects in this group consider themselves limited users.

Regarding the use of language in various conditions such as at school or work, at home, among friends, and shopping, Taiwanese subjects use Chinese in almost all situations except at school or at work. However, only a small proportion of subjects use English and Chinese equally at school or at work and none of the Taiwanese subjects said that they used English regularly in daily life.

However, the answers to this question from acculturating Taiwanese subjects differ significantly from those provided by Taiwanese ones. For one thing, these subjects live in an English-based country and are forced to speak English frequently. For another thing, to facilitate their adaptation to their new environment, these subjects tend to use English as their first language, and spontaneously speak English even when it is not necessary (such as being with Taiwanese friends). Over 90% of the acculturating Taiwanese agreed that generally, they used English and Chinese equally frequently. However, careful observation of their use of language in each condition reveals that English is used most frequently at school or work, or for shopping (88% and 87% respectively). The home provides a language environment at the other extreme of the spectrum, with 76% of acculturating Taiwanese stating that they only used Chinese in the home,

while the remainder claimed that they used both languages equally frequently. Finally, 74% of the subjects in this group used English and Chinese together for socializing with friends. This situation may imply that despite living in a foreign country, acculturating Taiwanese subjects still prefer using their mother tongue when socializing with friends who share the same first language. The last two questions considered in this section of the questionnaire investigate participant preferences regarding movies and music. The outcome between Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese subjects are rather close. The majority tends to choose English and Chinese movies with equal frequency, and the same applied for their choices of music.

The second part of the questionnaire examined participant images of the UK. Though impressions about Britain are similar between Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese, they still differ in two aspects. First, 22% of the Taiwanese said they had no special impressions about the UK, but none of the acculturating Taiwanese answered in this manner. A likely explanation for this phenomenon may be only four of the 83 Taiwanese subjects have been to UK. Since most of the Taiwanese subjects have no first-hand experience of living in the UK, they naturally lack of deep impressions about this country. Second, compared with other Taiwanese, acculturating Taiwanese tend to describe their impressions in a more detailed way. Unlike most Taiwanese subjects, who merely wrote a single term or adjective, sentences written by acculturating Taiwanese contain various adjectives and multiple ideas which vividly express their impressions. This situation shares the same cause as the first diversity. Practical experience of living in the UK enables acculturating Taiwanese subjects to understand this country in depth and therefore have more thoughts and feelings about the country. When referring to attitudes of Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese subjects towards the UK, apparently very few subjects hold negative perspectives regarding the UK no matter which group they belong to. However, the attitudes of some Taiwanese subjects are more inclined to be neutral, while acculturating Taiwanese mainly have positive attitudes. Besides, comparing the results from these two groups reveals that, subjects interested in things related to the UK also like things that symbolize Britain, and vice versa.

The final part of the questionnaire investigates participant perceptions regarding advertising which originates from the UK. Although most members of both groups agreed that English with Chinese subtitles is their favorite choice of language, acculturating Taiwanese subjects seem to support this view and dislike advertising that is purely in Chinese. Generally, the average English ability of acculturating Taiwanese exceeds that of Taiwanese subjects, consequently, they are more likely to comprehend and appreciate English advertising. A close resemblance is found between Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese subjects in two other aspects, namely: Most of them prefer western models over local ones and prefer advertising which is directly imported from the UK. However, this tendency is still a little stronger within the acculturating Taiwanese group.

When describing their feelings and comments about British advertising, the typical answer was “nothing special”

(35% in the Taiwanese group and 19% in the acculturating Taiwanese group) or “not bad” (17% in the Taiwanese group and 9% in the acculturating Taiwanese group). However, the acculturating Taiwanese subjects comparatively can recall more details and have specific opinions about the advertising. 28% of the acculturating Taiwanese subjects wrote full sentences or short paragraphs describing their thoughts. The comments from these subjects indicate that their clearer memories make them more critical of the advertising. Negative opinions such as “boring” or a “lack of creativity” frequently occur. Roughly 18% of the comments from acculturating Taiwanese are purely negative.

The final question inquires whether participants have positive attitudes towards advertising containing symbols related to the UK. Compared to the Taiwanese subjects, whose attitudes are 61% neutral, the acculturating Taiwanese subjects had extremely diverse attitudes regarding this question. Less than 40% of the subjects in this group gave neutral as their answer. Meanwhile, a further 41% agreed with the statement while 21% disagreed. Notably, only 4% of the Taiwanese subjects disagreed with the question, which is much fewer than for the acculturating Taiwanese subjects. Another interesting finding is that 66% of the Taiwanese and half of the acculturating Taiwanese gave the same response to “Fond of things which symbolize UK” and “Fond of advertising which contains things symbolize UK”. Therefore, individuals with positive attitudes toward symbols of the UK are highly likely to also like these symbols appearing in advertising.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Research results from this study indicate that some notable differences exist between Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese owing to their different cultural experiences. First, though the average time spent on learning English are similar between Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese, the latter are forced to use English in numerous conditions thus improving both their confidence in using English and their familiarity with the language. Besides, when referring to their perceptions or impressions of the UK and British culture, acculturating Taiwanese participants tend to hold more positive attitudes, while most Taiwanese have neutral views. These differences appear to be caused by differences in life experience. As acculturating Taiwanese have lived in UK for an extended period, they are more familiar with its culture, customs and environment. These understanding then lead them to establish specific and clear attitudes about UK.

The above differences between Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese participants are also revealed in their attitudes regarding British advertising. Acculturating Taiwanese participants have higher acceptance of advertising in English, though they prefer accompanying Chinese subtitles just like Taiwanese participants do. Additionally, from the questionnaire data, both Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese agree that British advertising better matches western models and should not be altered even played in Taiwan. However, acculturating Taiwanese were slightly more likely than Taiwanese to agree with these two

statements. Besides, since acculturating Taiwanese participants possess more positive attitudes towards the UK than do Taiwanese participants, the possibility of holding positive attitudes toward advertising containing UK related symbols was also higher in this group. After analyzing dialogue from each interview, it is obvious that individual attitudes toward advertising are influenced by complex factors. Although acculturation clearly is significant in determining participant attitudes regarding British advertising, other factors such as product category and positioning may also have an equal or even greater influence.

To summarize, this study investigates the possible differences between Taiwanese and acculturating Taiwanese using two dimensions, namely knowledge of English and impressions of the UK, and then investigates how these differences affect their attitudes regarding advertising. For acculturating Taiwanese, experience of living in the UK appears to strengthen their impressions of UK and form clear attitudes about related matters. Since British advertising represents part of the country, the acculturation process also leads acculturating Taiwanese to develop firm opinions rather than simply being neutral. Therefore, to some extent acculturation influences individual attitudes towards advertising, but the directions in which individual attitudes change following acculturation depend on their individual experiences.

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