

Global Consumer Culture Positioning: Testing Perceptions of Soft-Sell and Hard-Sell Advertising Appeals Between U.S. and Japanese Consumers

Shintaro Okazaki, Barbara Mueller, and Charles R. Taylor

ABSTRACT

This study tests the effectiveness of global consumer culture positioning (GCCP) in terms of perceptions of soft-sell (indirect and image-based) and hard-sell (direct and information-based) appeals across markets. The authors draw the theoretical base for the study from previous research, along with a series of recent conceptualizations on culture and branding based on global consumer culture theory. If the same appeal is homogeneously and favorably perceived in different markets, such an appeal should be a good candidate for use as part of a GCCP strategy. From prior research, the authors predict that soft-sell appeals are more similarly perceived across markets than hard-sell appeals. They conduct a quasi-experimental study in the United States and Japan with a general consumer sample. After choosing six advertisements using rigorous content analysis, they examine the perceptions of soft-sell and hard-sell appeals, including attitude toward the ad, believability, irritation, and purchase intention. The results indicate somewhat more homogeneous acceptance of soft-sell appeals but, surprisingly, also show relatively homogeneous acceptance of hard-sell appeals across markets. These findings are suggestive of both types of appeals having the potential to be used as part of a GCCP across the United States and Japan and perhaps other markets.

Keywords: cultural values, global consumer culture positioning, hard sell, soft sell, Japan

The globalization of markets is an eminent reality. According to InterBrand (2009), many of the top 100 brands have worldwide presence in more than 100 countries. Among them, U.S. and Japanese firms account for more than four-fifths of the total, with 62 and

23 brands, respectively. Global brands represent a sense of achievement and identification for many consumers as part of their participation in a global marketplace and can also symbolize the expected value of membership in a global consumer culture (Ossomer and Altaras 2008). Despite the growing importance of global brands and recent developments in how a global brand should be defined, there has been relatively limited research on how branding translates across cultures and even less about advertising in the context of global brands.

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