

The translation of Chinese and Western business advertising slogans under Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

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Abstract: With the rapid development of economic globalization, trade exchanges among countries around the world have become increasingly frequent. In order to quickly open up larger international market, national brand enterprises are committed to promoting their products to the world market. One of the most important means to promote product sales is advertising. As a result, the demand for translation of advertisements is increasing, and the translation quality of advertisements is becoming more and more important. However, due to the great differences between China and the West in terms of history, culture, social development and other aspects, when translating advertisements, it is necessary to take the influence of different cultural factors into full consideration, so as to accurately convey the value and emotion of the products. This article is based on Hofstede's four cultural dimensions: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity, as a theoretical framework for research, attempting to explore an advertising translation method that transcends cultural barriers and achieves effective information dissemination.

Key words: commercial slogans; cultural dimension; translation

1 Introduction

Advertising is key to attracting consumers and achieving business success. Language is the most important part of advertising, through which manufacturers can vividly and clearly showcase the advantages and features of their products. If a company can make full use of advertising language, the core concept of their products can be easily conveyed to consumers, which can gain their trust more easily. Language reflects social culture and modes of thinking, so there are many differences in languages across different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, when translating commercial advertisements, it is important to consider cultural factors in order to properly grasp the use of language [7].

In fact, many excellent scholars have conducted research on advertising slogans. They have studied from the perspectives of gender differences, translation, linguistics, and so on. Internationally, Bui Van studied the gender language in contemporary advertising and found that ads for similar products exhibit different characteristics when targeting different genders [3]. Elizabeth and Ekaterina researched the translation and adaptability of advertising slogans in different countries, concluding that content adaptation rather than simple word translation is crucial for commercial advertising in different cultural backgrounds [4]. In China, research in this field is also highly valued. For example, Liu Huijie studied from the perspective of direct and indirect speech strategies, concluding that indirect speech strategies can not only express

the purpose of advertising but also maintain consumers' "face" [6]. Zhai Shu and Lei Ming studied the differences between Chinese and Western advertising slogans from a cultural schema perspective, which can be addressed through appropriate translation methods such as amplification translation [8].

Although there have been many studies on advertising slogans in the past, research on the translation of advertising slogans from the perspective of cultural dimension theory is not common. Therefore, a comprehensive and systematic study of Chinese and Western commercial slogans is necessary. Building on existing research in this field, this paper will analyze the translation of Chinese and Western commercial slogans from Hofstede's four cultural dimensions to reveal cultural factors in commercial slogans and improve translation quality.

2 Commercial advertising slogans

2.1 The definition of commercial advertising slogans

The word "advertisement" originates from the Latin word "adventure", which means "to induce" and "to publicize", and it is essentially a carrier for information transmission [5]. According to the *Advertising Law of the People's Republic of China*, "advertising" refers to the direct or indirect introduction of goods and services promoted by commodity operators or service providers through certain media and forms.

2.2 The characteristics of commercial advertising slogans

Regardless of the types of slogans, they all have a few common characteristics. First, the slogan should capture the core focus; second, the slogan must be clear, simple and catchy, because such words are easily understood by the public and attract the public's attention; third, the expression form of the slogan should be unique and original.

3 Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory stands as a prominent cross-cultural framework. This theory was employed by Hofstede to gauge the cultural disparities among nations. He postulated that culture represents a collective psychological construct among individuals sharing the same environment, which enables the differentiation of groups. Through an extensive study involving a multinational corporation, Hofstede empirically identified four primary cultural variability dimensions: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity [1].

3.1 Individualism-Collectivism

Cultures that prioritize individualism tend to emphasize personal goals over group objectives. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, group goals precede individual aspirations. Hofstede and Bond (1984) highlighted that individualistic cultures encourage "individuals to care primarily for themselves and their immediate families", whereas in collectivist cultures, "people are expected to belong to groups who, in turn, are responsible for their welfare in exchange for their loyalty [2]."

3.2 Uncertainty avoidance

The degree to which members of a given culture attempt to evade uncertainty defines uncertainty avoidance. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance exhibit less tolerance for ambiguity, manifesting in elevated anxiety, greater energy expenditure, a stronger need for clear rules and absolute truths, and reduced acceptance of divergent ideas or behaviors. Conversely, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance tend to have lower stress levels, more flexible moral codes, and a higher tolerance for dissent and risk-taking.

3.3 Power distance

Power distance refers to "the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Cultures with high power distance perceive power differentials as a societal norm. Consequently, superiors and subordinates alike recognize their distinct roles. In high power distance

cultures, power is seen as an inherent social fact, emphasizing coercive or referent authority. By contrast, members of low power distance cultures advocate for legitimate use of power and prefer expert or legitimate authority.

3.4 Masculinity-Femininity

Cultures scoring high on masculinity prioritize material wealth, power, and assertiveness, whereas cultures scoring high on femininity value people, quality of life, and nurturing. Cultural systems with strong masculinity traits emphasize achievement and ambition, whereas those with feminine traits prioritize quality of life and service orientation.

4 The application of cultural dimension theory in advertising translation

Advertising is not only an indispensable means of promoting goods to the market, but also a carrier of culture. Therefore, commercial slogans are different in different countries. Next this article will translate and analyze the Chinese and Western commercial slogans from Hofstede's four cultural dimensions.

4.1 The translation of Chinese and Western commercial advertisements under the dimension of individualism-collectivism

ST: Delighting You Always

TT: Jiā néng, gǎn dòng cháng zài

This is an advertising slogan placed by Canon, a famous Japanese digital camera company, in the United States to promote the Canon DSLR series. The theme of the advertisement centers around personal photography, indicating that Canon cameras always let you experience the joy of taking pictures. The use of the second person "You" is in line with the Western value of "individualism". When Canon advertises in the Chinese market, if "Delighting You Always" is directly translated as "kuài lè yǒng yuǎn bàn suí zhe nǐ", it will not be able to arouse the strong emotional resonance of Chinese consumers. Because China promotes the value of "collectivism", the translation should focus on the theme of family and collective photography, which is translated as "Jiā néng, gǎn dòng cháng zài", indicating that Canon cameras can help Chinese consumers record every touching moment. Such a translation of the advertisement fully takes into account the values of Chinese society, which emphasize collectivity.

ST: Only you can prevent forest fires

TT: sēn lín fǎng huǒ, rén rén yǒu zé

This is a well-known forest fire prevention advertisement in the United States. The two words "Only you" fully embody the Western value of "individualism", emphasizing individual responsibility and power. If translated directly as "zhǐ yǒu nǐ néng zǔ zhǐ sēn lín huǒ zāi", it completely contradicts the Chinese value of "collectivism". In China, people advocate the power and the interests of the collective, so it should be translated as "sēn lín fǎng huǒ, rén rén yǒu zé".

4.2 The translation of Chinese and Western commercial advertisements under the dimension of uncertainty avoidance

ST: Enjoy your freshly squeezed orange juice and embrace the vitality it brings to your day

TT: 100% chéng zhī, xiān chū nǐ de jiàn kāng huó lì

This is an advertisement for a fruit juice drink, and if it is directly translated as "xiǎng shòu xiān zhà chéng zhī, yōng bào mǎn mǎn huó lì", it will not be able to stimulate consumers' purchasing desire. Considering that China, as a strong uncertainty avoidance country, pays more attention to safety and stability, its consumers also pay more attention to the purity and freshness of the products when purchasing food and beverages. Therefore, it is translated as "100% chéng zhī, xiān chū nǐ de jiàn kāng huó lì", in which the words "100%" and "jiàn kāng" can immediately catch consumers' eyes and satisfy their desire for healthy products with high freshness, thus increasing their purchasing desire.

ST: Adventure is in our DNA

TT: lù hǔ, shí lì pài yuè yě wáng zhě

This is an advertisement of a vehicle brand, in which the product concept is "As an off-road vehicle, it can meet the needs of all adventurers". Since the uncertainty avoidance index is low in Western countries, the word "adventure" is a good fit for the Western public's love of adventure and exploring new things. However, if it is directly translated as "mào xiǎn shì wǒ men de tiān xìng", it is not in line with Chinese consumers' values of pursuing safety and stability. Because China is a strong uncertainty avoidance country, and people are more inclined to some trustworthy and safe brands when purchasing products, it should be translated as "lù hǔ, shí lì pài yuè yě wáng zhě". The words "wáng zhě" and "shí lì pài" well explain the safety and authority of this product, which can better win the trust of Chinese consumers.

4.3 The translation of Chinese and Western commercial advertisements under the dimension of power distance

ST: què cháo kā fēi bàn lǚ, mò mò fèng xiàn, wèi xiāng nóng jiā fēn

TT: Coffee's perfect mate

This is an advertisement for Nestle coffee, and the words "mò mò fèng xiàn" highlight the fact that Chinese people are deeply influenced by traditional thinking and have a strong sense of hierarchy. If the advertisement is translated directly, I am afraid that it will not be recognized by Western consumers because Western countries have a low power distance dimension and believe that everyone is equal, and "mò mò fèng xiàn" will make them feel that they have lost themselves. Therefore, when translating, for the words that do not conform to the Western values, we can adopt the method of omission, translate them as "Coffee's perfect mate". The word "mate" reflects the equal relationship, which is in line with Western people's respect for equality.

ST: xiào jìng bà mā, nǎo bái jīn

TT: Say goodbye to insomnia and constipation, and hello to a happier you.

This is an advertisement for a health product. China has a high power distance index, which means people expect children to obey their parents and respect and care for their elders. So this advertisement caters to the Chinese cultural value of filial piety, which has received positive feedback. However, if translated directly as "Honoring Our Parents, Melatonin", it may not resonate well with Western consumers, as Western countries have a low power distance dimension—they emphasize equality and view their relationship with parents more like a friendship. Therefore, in translation, it is important to focus on the product benefits and be straightforward. A more suitable translation could be "Say goodbye to insomnia and constipation, hello to a happier you".

4.4 The translation of Chinese and Western commercial advertisements under the dimension of masculinity-femininity

ST: In Search of Excellence

TT: xīn jìng, zhì yuǎn, zhì zài qiān lǐ

This is an advertisement for Buick automobile. Western countries tend to be more male-oriented societies and prefer to use competitive and assertive words in their advertisements, so the word "Excellence" is in line with the Western values of pursuing success and competitiveness. However, China is a more feminized society and prefers words that reflect gentleness, firmness, unity and love in its advertisements. This Chinese translation not only conveys an inner serenity and outer vision, but also expresses the high performance and reliability of Buick vehicles, giving people an elegant, introverted yet powerful feeling, which is in line with the Chinese values of modesty and love.

ST: Can't beat the feeling

TT: dǎng bú zhù de gǎn jué

This is a Coca-Cola advertisement. The word "beat" means "defeat" or "hit", which matches the exuberance and vitality expressed by "feeling", reflecting the image of radical exuberance dominated by Western masculinity. However,

when translating, one must fully consider the values under the dominance of Chinese femininity, and translate it as "dǎng bú zhù de gǎn jué", using "dǎng" to convey the original meaning of "beat", further weakening the aggressive connotation of the word, while also expressing the meaning conveyed in the advertisement concisely and briskly.

5 Conclusion

This article conducts a translation study on Chinese and Western commercial advertising slogans from a cultural perspective. Western countries have a sense of equality and individualism, a preference for adventure and innovation, and male-oriented consciousness. In contrast, Chinese people respect authority, have a collectivist mindset, prefer a quiet and stable life, and have female-oriented consciousness. The translation of commercial advertising should incorporate these national cultural characteristics into the translation principles. Only in this way can consumers have a deeper understanding, recognition, and imagination of the product, generate a sense of identification, which can stimulate consumption desires, and truly achieve the promotional value equivalent to the original advertisement.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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