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Television Advertising and Child Consumer: Different Strategies for U.S. and Japanese Marketers

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the consumer socialization of Japanese and American children from a socio-cultural and economic perspective. It presents the cultural differences between the two countries, and how these differences influence the marketing strategies in each country. Taking into consideration the television viewing habits and routine advertising strategies in Japan and USA, the paper offers the implications for Global Marketing Managers. Finally, the need for future research is addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the cross-cultural child-centered family research has been explored from a micro perspective (Roedder John, 1997; Rose, 1998, Herbig, 1999; and Hagan, 1999). This paper attempts to focus on the macro or global implications of child consumer socialization in two major markets, specifically the implications of the child's attitude toward television advertising. Television advertising is deemed the most controversial form of marketing (McNeal, 1998).

“Japan and the United States have the largest economies and are arguably the most sophisticated consumer cultures in the world” (Rose, Bush, and Kahle, 1998). For this reason, Japan and the United States provide a reasonable setting for addressing differences in consumer attitudes toward advertising, specifically that of children.

Children, because they are classified as vulnerable consumers, are controversial target for any marketers. In 2002, the U.S. advertisers spent \$230 billion on advertising. Of that \$13 billion was targeted to American children (McNeal, 2003). Advertisers in Japan spent over \$8 billion in 2002 on children's television, an increase of over \$7.7 billion in six years (McNeal, 2003). Children present a large market for focusing advertising dollars. However, little research has been done to see what role culture and family communication have on attitudes toward advertising (McNeal, 2003). Typical criticisms about advertising are that it makes false and misleading claims, promotes undesirable values, and exploits vulnerable groups (Rose, et al, 1998). Advertising to children has become a big business and a big controversy. For example, in Japan, well-liked and recognized actor, Arnold Schwarzeneger, hawks the virtues of Direct TV during children's programming (Rose, et al, 1998).

Cultural Differences

The concept of culture recognizes that individuals from different backgrounds are exposed to different traditions, rituals, customs, and religions. All of these factors provide human beings with various learning environments, which cause significant variations in standards, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

Individualistic v Collectivist

Table 1 describes many cultural differences between Japan and the United States. Modern collectivist cultures, like Japan, have strong ties to family and country. Self is defined in terms of others and behavior is governed by group norms. Collectivists accept the superiority of the group over the individual. They sacrifice their personal goals to further the group interest (Lin, 1993; Belch, 1998). In terms of advertising, generally, the Japanese have a more positive and receptive view of advertising (Crowe, 1997).

Table 1	
Cultural Differences Between the U.S. and Japan	
<u>United States</u>	<u>Japan</u>
* Individualistic culture; essence of supremacy	* Collectivistic culture; essence of harmony
* Low-context society	* High-context society
* Highly heterogeneous	* Highly homogenous
* Flexible ties to family and group	* Strong ties to family and group/country
* Respect immediate family	* Respect family (especially elders)
* Direct, frank communication norm	* Indirect, implicit communication norm
* Individual decisions valued	* Group decisions (consensus) valued
* Behavior is governed by self-interest	* Behavior is governed by group norms
* Individual accomplishments valued	* Team accomplishments valued
* More negative view of advertisements	* More positive view of advertising
* Hard sell orientation (logic appeal)	* Soft sell orientation (status/emotion)

Individualistic cultures, like the United States, have flexible ties to group and their behavior is governed by self-interest. If there is a conflict between individual goals and group goals, personal goals take precedence (Belch, 1998). Americans believe that the ideal person is one who is autonomous and self-reliant; thus they see themselves as individuals not representatives of their respective families or communities (Lin, 1993; Belch, 1998). This behavioral affect is often viewed as selfish by other cultures. In terms of advertising, Americans have an overall negative view of advertisements. They view ads with skepticism and disbelief. Even American children are suspicious of advertising and as one study related, “American children, as young as four, are unimpressed with most advertisements’ overall appeal” (Belch, 1998).

Family Influence and Consumer Socialization

In order to better explore advertising and reactions toward advertising, one must look at the influence of the family in both Japanese and American cultures. Consumer

socialization or the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace is derived from family communication patterns (Ward, 1974). Socialization is an inherently cultural process in which children, through insight, training, and imitation acquire the habits and values that help them adapt to their culture (Baumrind, 1980). Socialization was one of the first topics in cross-cultural research. Carlson and Grossbart state, “family communication provides a means of assessing the interaction between parents, children, and their mass media environment (1988).”

A search of the literature identified three main socializing agents for children: parents, schools, and peers. Most studies indicate that parents are the main source of rational influence, until approximately the age of adolescence when peers become favored (Ward, 1974; Moschis and Moore, 1980; and Revoldt, 1999). As for television acting as a socialization agent, “television is seen as a steady, irrational, relatively unimportant influence on consumer socialization” (Revoldt, 1999, p.5). If we agree that socialization agents have a great influence on children, then to what extent do those agents control a child’s behavior as a consumer and to what extent can marketers use that knowledge?

Family communication, central in both Japanese and American consumer socialization processes, can help explain the nature of parental control. As children receive their consumer socialization education from parents, specifically mothers, family communication patterns provide a general measure of parent-child communication that should be related to specific parental attitudes and practices toward advertising. A 1998 family communication study by researcher, Dr. Gregory Rose, examined the difference between family communication patterns of Japanese and American parents and their respective attitudes toward advertising. The researcher developed a questionnaire and distributed it to mothers of pre-operational children, preschool and elementary school children between the ages of three and eight, in medium-sized cities in the U.S. and Japan. The researchers chose moderately populated areas that seemed to reflect the rest of the respective nation. Mothers were sampled because of their dominant influence on a child’s consumer socialization (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988).

The results of Rose’s study showed that “American mothers held more negative attitudes toward advertising in general and toward children’s advertising” (Rose, 1998). The researcher found the following to be true: American mothers, in general, seemed to discuss advertising more with their children than did Japanese mothers. In addition, American mothers more actively mediated what their children watched, as well as, limited their exposure to advertising. Rose concluded that the information gleaned from his study could help advertisers better segment the market and formulate more effective advertising strategies. “The implication is that perhaps advertisements or marketing communication programs can be developed and used across international borders, once family communication style is understood” (Rose, 1998).

Marketing in Japan and the United States

American management guru, Peter Drucker once said, “when the rest of the world was talking about marketing, the Japanese were doing it; they just didn’t know it” (Herbig, 1999). The Japanese view marketing differently from the United States. In Japan, marketing is second to manufacturing and production; it is deemed a necessity that initially moves the product into the consumer marketplace. Because Japan is a modern collectivist culture, once a product is “hot” everyone has to have it (Herbig, 1999). “The Japanese get very close to their customers, however this is not equated with strong marketing, as Americans know it” (Crowe, 1997). Some changes have occurred in Japan over the last decade. Japan is on its way to becoming a nation of pleasure seekers who are more concerned with personal fulfillment than ever before. “Eighty percent of Japanese workers questioned, consider personal fulfillment more important than the traditional goals of professional advancement” (Herbig, 1999). The United States is noted for its emphasis on self-reliance and autonomy. Marketing is customer-centered and even individually tailored at times.

Japanese marketers and ‘westerners’ marketing to the Japanese typically use emotional rather than informational appeals. This does not mean that Japanese ads are devoid of product information; it means that they avoid mentioning product benefits, guarantees, and safety (Ramaprasad and Hasegawa, 1990). Japanese marketers believe that stressing a company’s reputation and image is a more impressive and effective way to transfer feelings to consumers and gain preference. Stressing product benefits and detailing product attributes is deemed ‘insulting’ to Japanese consumers’ intelligence and their ability to discern. Therefore, a company’s image is central to Japanese ads and such imagery is communicated through a ‘soft sell’ that, in a dignified way, wins consumers trust and respect.

American marketers tend to be more logical, scientific, and systems or procedure-oriented. American ads reflect more individualism and direct speech (Tansey, Hyman, and Zinkhan, 1990). It is not uncommon to see an American ad feature the product, while describing the price, a special offer, performance, the warranty/guarantee, all components, independent research, and safety cues in *one* ad; thus being extremely info-rich.

Marketing to kids in both cultures is common albeit different. Japanese advertising stresses the company’s reputation even in ads geared toward the child of the family. It is thought that those ads will be screened by an adult, thus co-viewed and discussed with the child by the adult present. American ads, characterized as hard sell, target children directly with messages encouraging them to ‘pester’ for the advertised item; it is not intimated that an adult is co-viewing with the child (Tansey, Hyman, and Zinkhan, 1990).

Table 2	
U.S. versus Japanese Marketing	
<u>United States</u>	<u>Japan</u>

* Marketing central to the firm	* Marketing second to manufact/production
* Emphasis on self-reliance and autonomy	* Emphasis on family and community
* Customer-centered/individually tailored	* Company-centered/team tailored
* Marketing viewed as strategy	* Marketing viewed as necessity
* Information and logic preferred	* Emotion over information preferred
* Favor use of demographics/behaviors	* Favor use of psychographics (lifestyle)
* Testimonials select (celebrity and none)	* Testimonials common (celebrities/icons)
* Benefits & indiv. determinism conveyed	* Quality, prestige, and status conveyed
* Info-rich messages are ideal	* Symbolic messages are ideal

Marketing to kids has become increasingly desirable because the youth market is huge, has more disposable income/pester power than in the past, and is said to be more brand conscious. Considerable marketing expenditures toward this youth market bear this out.

Television Viewing and Advertising in Japan and the United States

The United States and Japan have traditionally led the world in television viewing and advertising expenditures. The Japanese people spend more time watching television than any other Asian group, approximately 2.5 hours a day (Hagan, 1999). However, as a group, Japanese children much watch less television than American children, approximately 1.5 hours a day, this is due to Japanese children having more rigorous study habits and earlier bedtimes. According to 1999 study done by Sherry, Greenberg, and Tokinoya, in Japan the bulk of television viewing is done by older adolescents conversely in the United States younger children do most of the television purveying. In America, children watch an average of 3 hours of television a day (Nielsen Media Research, 1997). Advertising in the United States is more strictly controlled through a series of governmental regulations and restrictions. The U.S. federal government limits advertising on children's programming, whereas in Japan, advertising is less regulated, specifically concerning children (Belch, 1998). Interestingly, Sherry, Greenberg, and Tokinoya found that 71 percent of American children reported having their own television sets while only 28 percent of Japanese children reported having personal sets (1999). What is clear is that television advertising geared toward children can be lucrative given their access to television and their inherent interest in television viewing.

Table 3
Differences in TV-Viewing and Advertising in Japan and the U.S.

<u>United States</u>	<u>Japan</u>
* Children watch twice as much TV	* Children watch half the TV
* Bulk viewed by younger children	* Bulk viewed by older adolescents
* Advertising more federally regulated	* Advertising less federally regulated
* 71% children have personal TV	* 28% children have personal TV
* Children skeptical about advertising	* Children attentive toward ads

* Children beg and barter for advertised item “pester” adults	* Children request less from adults viewed as “pushy”
* 60-70% yielding to children	* 40-50% yielding to children
* TV ads geared to kids seen as the norm	* TV ads geared to kids is still novel
* Low parental control	* High parental control

Advertising Strategies in Japan and the U.S.

Pinpointing specific differences in advertising strategies across cultures leads many researchers to surmise that Japanese ads tend to be image-oriented using a ‘soft sell’ approach (Belch, 1998). Japanese ads rely on celebrities, catchy slogans, and attractive music and graphics to sell products and services. American ads use a ‘hard sell’ approach with fact-based messages using analytical logic and product comparisons. American commercials tend to be more informational and direct (Belch, 1998; Rose, 1998). Commercials in Japan have an emotional appeal that stresses company reputation and image to win the trust and respect of the viewer. Japanese men are portrayed as “remote corporate warriors who haven’t a clue what their families are up to” (Ono, 1997). The two countries also differ in terms of the regulatory environment. The U.S. regulates advertisers more stringently than the Japanese government.

Japanese companies are trying new advertising strategies to reach the younger family segment of the Japanese market. For example, McDonalds, in Japan for some 25 years, has teamed up with the highly successful advertising agency of Leo Burnett to produce more family-centered advertisements for the Japanese market. One such ad shows a Japanese father pedaling a bicycle up a hill with his young son in tow. As the father pedals, he says that he cannot wait to get home and eat his meal with his precious son. This ad would be common in America, but not so in Japan. Generally ‘warm and fuzzy’ ads are seldom seen, especially those depicting a tender moment between a father and a child. Surprisingly, this sweet ad met with overwhelming approval from the Japanese public (Ono, 1997).

Table 4	
Japanese Strategies versus American Strategies	
<u>United States</u>	<u>Japan</u>
* ‘Hard sell’ approach	* ‘Soft sell’ approach
* Fact-based messages	* Rely on celebrities, catchy slogans, and attractive music
* Informational and direct	* Emotional appeal
* More stringent federal regulations	* Less stringent federal regulations

In comparison, the most popular Japanese ads rely heavily on celebrities and superheroes. Pepsi has 'PepsiMan,' a muscular guy in tights with bulging biceps, who flogs the Pepsi brand as the 'brand of heroes.' American baseball player, Mike Piazza, pitches a Japanese apparel company and as mentioned before, the actor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, sells everything from Lipton Cup O'Noodles to Direct TV on Japanese television.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been suggested that any advertising directed at children is "bad" because it exploits children's vulnerability. The question is whether children understand the intent of the advertisement and whether children are vulnerable or sophisticated viewers. Moschis suggests that American children are more sophisticated when it comes to evaluating television advertisements, thus they are more cynical (1987). Japanese children are deemed less cynical and less sophisticated when it comes to evaluating television advertisements (Moschis, 1987). "When a commercial was embedded in a television program, American children were able to pick out the ad, whereas Japanese children were unable to do so" (Moschis, 1987). However, older children from both nations were better able to understand advertisements' multiplicity of meanings. Television advertising is pervasive in American culture and in the lives of American children. Over time, a child's encounter with advertising becomes interwoven with some product experience. This makes the impact of advertising on children difficult to research.

American and Japanese parents share many goals for their children; like, academic achievement, furtherance of education, consumer savvy, and economic security, however they differ dramatically in the way those goals are communicated. People in the United States are socialized to become distinct autonomous individuals, whereas Japanese are socialized to become integrated with society. "Nationality has a comprehensive influence on parental beliefs, specific socialization practices, and parent-child interaction, thus differences in consumer socialization across nations were related to general differences in culture" (Rose, 1998). Japanese parents are generally indulgent toward children. They focus on maintaining and strengthening the adult-child bond until the child internalizes the adult standards (Rose, 1999). This holds true for attitudes toward advertising and the media. Japanese children are less skeptical because their parents are less skeptical toward the media's relative influence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL MARKETING MANAGERS

Marketers interested in targeting children in the United States need to understand that American children are cynical and skeptical purveyors of advertising, who view advertising, by and large, as entertainment. For advertisers to have an impact on the child consumer market, an advertising message must be direct and factual. Further, younger American children participate in television co-viewing with a parent or parents, therefore parental influence must be taken into account when designing any message. Lastly, advertisers need to hone in on the needs and wants of the child viewer, as American children have significant 'pester power,' if not purchasing power, with which to make purchases and influence family purchase decisions.

Marketers intent on targeting the Japanese child consumer must understand that Japanese children are seen as more vulnerable to advertising messages, often not recognizing an embedded commercial. Further, as Japanese children watch less television than American children, advertisers have a smaller window of opportunity with which to impact the viewer, therefore advertisements should employ an emotional appeal. Japanese children tend to prefer and react more positively to an emotional rather than a rational appeal. Lastly, advertisements need to focus how the product/service will interact with and/or impact the family unit not just how it will satisfy the needs and/or wants of just the child.

Table 5
Implications for Global Marketing Managers

<u>United States</u>	<u>Japan</u>
* Children more cynical and skeptical	* Children more vulnerable to messages
* Children view advertising as entertainment	* Children don't recognize embedded commercials
* Message must be direct and factual	* Children watch less TV
* Rational appeal	* Emotional appeal
* Parental influence accounted for	* Smaller window for message impact
* Children have purchasing power based on wants of child	* Children have purchasing power based on impact on family

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research is needed to specifically test the relationship between cross-cultural television co-viewing and parental mediation on the effectiveness of advertising. This research should be viewed from a triadic standpoint, i.e., mother, father, and child as co-viewing participants. Additionally, cross-cultural research on advertising to the child market should focus more from the child's point of view: what do they think about when watching television; what do they think about when making a purchase; how do they use advertising (to extract valuable consumer information? entertainment?). These are important considerations as advertising is linked to children's consumer socialization, as well as familial purchase patterns and practices.

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