Cultural Themes in
Brazilian and U.S. Auto Ads:
A Cross-Cultural Comparison

Richard Tansey
Michael R. Hyman
George M. Zinkhan

Do Brazilian and U.S. advertisers employ different themes in print advertisements? If so, what can we conclude about cross-cultural differences in values? In our study of automobile ads that appeared in the business magazines of Brazil and of the U.S. during the 1970s, we found that (1) urban themes were used more frequently in Brazilian ads than in U.S. ads, (2) leisure themes were used more frequently in U.S. ads than in Brazilian ads, (3) work themes appeared as frequently in Brazilian ads as in U.S. ads, and (4) work themes appeared more frequently in U.S. ads as the 1970s progressed. Thus, our study suggests that values differ between the business subculture of Brazil and that of the United States. Importantly, our latter two findings disaffirm the theories of many historians and sociologists. Because the application of historical and sociological theories may produce erroneous advertising decisions, we advise advertisers to research carefully each national market before using a “standardized” advertising theme.

Richard Tansey (Ph.D., University of Texas-Austin) is assistant professor of marketing, Louisiana Tech.

Michael R. Hyman (Ph.D., Purdue University) is associate professor of marketing, University of North Texas.

George M. Zinkhan (Ph.D., University of Michigan) is associate professor of marketing, University of Houston.

Advertising effects a “transfer of value” through communicative connections between what a culture conceives as desirable states of being and products . . . The analysis of value-charged references as unifying cognitions in ads has become a standard concern in advertising research, although once again there is no definitive list of categories. (Leiss et al. 1986, p. 222).

The controversy continues to rage over the wisdom of sharing advertising themes among countries. In the beginning of this nearly thirty-year-old debate, authors such as Roostal (1963), Elinder (1965), and Fatt (1967) recommended that advertisers use standardized ad campaigns because the needs and values of international customers were becoming increasingly alike (due to increasing international communication). More recently, Levitt (1983) argues that there is now a “global village” of millions of consumers who share common needs and common social values.

Advocates of a “standardized” approach believe that advertisers who develop just one set of ads for their multinational markets will realize benefits such as reduced costs (through either economies of scale or experience curve effects), increased control over ad content, stronger brand images, and simplified strategic planning. These benefits should help multinational firms compete more effectively in foreign markets.

Other authors have questioned the wisdom of sharing advertising themes among countries (Harris 1984; Kotler 1986a; Onkvisit and Shaw 1987). Harris (1984) argued that standardized ad campaigns are inappropriate for most brands; the few exceptions either demand an “international image” or are best promoted by ads with low information content (i.e., image ads). Green et al. (1975) and Hornik (1980) concluded that product universality is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for successful standardized ad campaigns. Walters (1986) argued that differences across cultures hinder marketing uniformity. Marquez (1975) and Hong et al. (1987) suggested that advertising that portrays the values of the indigenous culture is more effective than advertising that ignores these values. Kashani (1989)
argued that the tales about successful standardization are often one-sided; no mention is made of the concomitant complexities and risks.

Advocates of a “tailored” approach believe that advertisers who follow the marketing concept will realize increased profits. On this view, advertisers should be sensitive to, and should carefully monitor trends in, the targeted cultures of the countries in which they advertise; to generalize among cultures is likely to result in unsound advertising strategies.

A policy of standardized advertising must assume a high degree of cultural and economic homogeneity between countries. However, advertising policies are more sensitive to cultural differences than are policies of product, price, and distribution. As Boddewyn et al. (1986) said, “standardizations of product, brand, and advertising do not necessarily move apace, and advertising is more resistant to uniformization than are the other two” (p. 73).

Several authors have found cross-cultural differences in the ways ads depict values. Belk et al. (1985) found differences between the way Japanese and U.S. ads portray (1) relative status and (2) standing out (being highly visible) versus standing in (quietly cooperating). They concluded, “In order to communicate successfully, advertising must appeal to values that are salient in the culture of its intended audience” (Belk et al. 1985, p. 11). Tse et al. (1989) speculated that the different values that have been stressed in the print ads of Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China, and Taiwan are due to the societal differences in attitudes toward consumption.

Why is it important to understand cross-cultural differences in the way that values are expressed in ads? Values provide the context for interpreting ads, are frequently implied by ads, vary between countries, and can be used for market segmentation. Values are manifest in advertising “in every way possible” (Pollay 1983, p. 74). The determination of cultural differences, as reflected by differences in values, is an important element in formulating international advertising strategies (cf. Munson and McIntyre 1979). Targeting consumers by their values has proven to be an effective marketing strategy (Henry 1976; Munson and McIntyre 1979; Vinson et al. 1977).

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McCracken (1986, 1987) argued that advertising is meaning-centered, rather than information-centered, and that the culturally-based values of viewers determine the meanings that viewers derive from ads. On this view, “the consumer is an individual in a cultural context engaged in a cultural project” (McCracken 1987, p. 121), “[c]onsumer goods, in their anticipation, choice, purchase and possession, are an important source of the meaning with which . . . [consumers] construct . . . [their] lives” (McCracken 1987, p. 122), and “[a]dvertising is a conduit through which meaning constantly pours from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods” (McCracken 1986, pp. 75-76). Friedmann and Zimmer (1988) suggested that advertising be examined for its psychological meaning, rather than lexical or philosophical meaning, because “the behavior of consumers or target audiences is neither fully rational nor conventional” (p. 32). Earlier, Freidman (1986) argued that “psychological meaning” is the key to decisions about ad standardization.

To examine the generalizability of several major ad themes, we studied the cross-cultural differences, as expressed in consumer ads, between a North American and a South American country. We chose Brazil and the U.S. for the following three reasons.

(1) Levitt (1983) pointed to Brazil as a country for which multinational firms use standardized advertising strategies.

(2) The United States is the dominant economic power in North America, and Brazil is the fastest growing, most economically developed country in South America. Both countries have the largest consumer market in their respective continents. Trade, measured in dollars, is greater between the U.S. and Brazil than between any other two countries from each continent.

(3) Conventional wisdom suggests that the cultures of both countries greatly changed during the 1970s; the work ethic lost some of its appeal in the U.S. and became more popular in Brazil. Because the social values of the two countries seem to be converging, a comparison between Brazil and the U.S. would be an ideal test case for ad theme standardization.

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Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Cultural values influence, and are influenced by, consumer advertising. Advertising, more than any other institution, may alter consumer values (Belk and Pollay 1985). On the other hand, the social values of a particular target audience may limit an advertiser’s choice of themes.

We focused on the following two pairs of print ad themes in our cross-cultural study:

(1) the urban theme and the wilderness theme, and
(2) the work theme and the leisure theme.

These two pairs of advertising themes were selected for five reasons. First, historians and sociologists have argued that the cultures of Brazil and of the U.S. represent very different values concerning work, leisure, and urban life. In fact, they believe these values are important ways of differentiating the two societies.
Second, effective ads often depict the use of a product in an appropriate physical setting. Frequently, this physical setting is either an urban or wilderness environment.

The [ad] director must decide where the properties desired for the ad reside in the culturally constituted world... Place must be selected, and the first choice here is whether the ad will have a fantasy setting or a naturalistic one. If the latter is chosen, it must be decided whether it will be an interior or exterior setting, an urban or rural landscape, or a cultivated or untamed environment. (McCracken 1986, p. 75).

A depiction of a product being used in one of these four settings—in the city, in the wild, at work, or at play—suggests a proper context for using that product. For example, a printed ad that showed a family driving a Volkswagen Fox on a camping trip would suggest that it is appropriate to use a Volkswagen Fox in leisure and wilderness settings. Of course, the same automobile may be presented in an urban and work setting.

Third, values toward work and leisure are central to all cultures. McCracken (1986) indicates that categories-of-time, such as work-time or leisure-time, are comparable across all cultures. Dunn (1976) includes “attitude toward work” as an important cultural factor. Terpstra and David (1985) insist that values concerning work deserve careful attention from managers who are preparing for intercultural communications. Belk and Pollay (1985b) recommend applying their own content analysis about the “portrayal of the good-life in ads” to workplace themes.

Fourth, other scholarly work suggests that these ad themes are important. For example, many of the values contained in the Pollay (1983) typology of the cultural values manifest in advertising (i.e., traditional, old, natural, technological, untamed) are related to urban and wilderness advertising themes. Friedmann and Zimmer (1988) list “while on vacation” and “while at work” as two contexts within which consumers realize psychological meaning. Belk and Pollay (1985b) also recommend extending their analysis to travel, outdoors, and transportation themes.

Finally, marketing and leisure are interconnected. Specifically, advertising is important in suggesting appropriate or appealing settings for the use of products. As Kernan and Unger (1987) assert:

Marketing both creates and enhances leisure... Marketing not only increases the quantity of leisure time; it enhances the quality of the experience as well... marketers have the opportunity to affect life satisfaction favorably, by enlarging and improving the leisure domain (p. 239).

Values Concerning Urban and Wilderness Environments

In the United States, as early as the 1820s, many city dwellers disliked their living conditions (Warner 1968). This anti-urban attitude, which has persisted for over a century (Callow 1982), can be traced to Jeffersonian ideals, which held the independent farmer to be the backbone of an ideal American democratic state. Today, many persons in the U.S. associate city life with such ills as pollution, traffic jams, and violence. Surrounded by the chaos and clutter of modern city life, they often yearn for the idyllic lifestyle symbolized by the independent farmer of the 19th century.

Modern U.S. business executives, whenever they leave the city on weekends and vacation, illustrate this desire for rural settings. For example, the headline of a 1965 Business Week article read: "The Double Life Pays Off." The article goes on to suggest “A second home—on the water, on wheels, in the wilderness—gives new masses of Americans a life apart from their workaday existence, served by whole new groups and industries.”

Brazil, before 1950, was a rural society; agricultural production supported its economy. Since 1950, economic and social changes, with their promise of jobs and the other cultural advantages offered by urban life, have enticed millions of Brazilians from their rural homes (Kronish and Mericle 1984). In Brazilian cities, traditional rural values have yielded to a new work ethic and a love for urban culture (Kahl 1966).

 Brazilians have grown more enamored of the city. Kahl (1966) reports that Brazilians tend to disagree with the statement “Life is better in small cities where you know everybody,” and with the statement “People in a big city are cold and impersonal” (p. 33). However, it does not necessarily follow that they dislike the wilderness. In fact, there is no scholarly work suggesting that Brazilians hold anti-wilderness attitudes.

The preceding discussion suggests the two following hypotheses:

H₁ Urban themes are used in a greater percentage of consumer ads in Brazil than in the United States.

H₂ Wilderness settings are used in the same percentage of consumer ads in Brazil as in the United States.

Values Concerning Work and Leisure

The cultures of Brazil and of the United States grew from very different roots (Fiechter 1975). One major influence on the U.S. character was English Puritanism, with its strong work ethic and its strict moral code. Moreover, Puritan leaders felt that a spirit of community and of mutual obligation could flourish only within the town (Lockridge 1970). In contrast, the major influence on the Brazilian character, prior to 1900, was a transplanted Portuguese culture, dominated by the wealthy planters in their isolated plantation homes. This small elite of rural planters disdained most work and pursued a life of idleness (Freyre 1946).

The U.S. work ethic has evolved during the last four centuries. For the
early Puritans, work was a life-long religious calling; in the 19th century, work became a secular duty that profited both the individual and society; in the 1970s, work entailed the autonomy and self-actualization of the individual.

Yankelovich's (1981) survey of U.S. citizens suggests that the 1970s witnessed a growth of interest in leisure and a change in the work ethic. The respondents reported spending more time at physical and social leisure, and thought of work as a means of exploring and developing their abilities. Thus, by their refusal to work in excess of forty hours a week, many respondents announced their preference for family life and leisure pursuits over wealth.

Yankelovich's results find support in the business literature. For instance, Rose (1985) contends:

A characteristic item in the Harvard Business Review finds the source of what it calls explicitly "the moral crisis of American capitalism" in a "precipitous" decline, above all amongst professionally qualified employees, in commitment to the work ethic. Numerous similar examples can be cited [page 13].

Kotler (1986b) claims that in the U.S., the number of hours worked per person per week is dropping, while the number of hours spent on leisure activities is rising. Some evidence suggests that the use of leisure themes in advertising is increasing in North America. A survey of ads in two Canadian popular general-interest mass-circulating magazines from 1910-1980 shows that the percent of ads with leisure themes changed as follows: 1930-1940, 1 percent; 1940-1950, 5 percent; 1950-1960, 7 percent; 1960-1970, 13 percent; 1970-1980, 18 percent (Leiss et al. 1986).

However, several authors question whether Yankelovich's results apply to people involved in business. Riesman (1964), citing a 1957 survey in Fortune magazine, suggests that top executives and other professionals have always worked long and hard hours. More recently, Roberts (1978) argues that the average weekly number of hours worked by business executives has increased during the 20th century. These additional hours are required by competitive careers, which require considerable education and frequent retraining. Statistics cited in Harris and Trotter (1989) support Roberts' argument: professionals work an average of 52.2 hours per week, and the owners of small businesses work an average of 57.3 hours per week.

Because private and social leisure are becoming more important in the United States and less important in Brazil, one may expect Brazilian and U.S. attitudes toward leisure to be converging. Thus, we propose the null hypothesis, H₀:

H₀: Leisure themes are used in the same percentage of consumer ads in Brazil as in the United States.

Research Design

Research Constructs. We used content analysis, a widely used research tool in cross-cultural studies, to measure the verbal and visual elements of U.S. and Brazilian ads (see Tse et al. 1989).

To the extent that current advertising does successfully appeal to cultural values, cross-cultural comparisons of advertising themes should detect differences in salient cultural values (Belk et al. 1985, p. 11).

The first step in a content analysis is to develop a comprehensive, unambiguous, and workable scheme for coding the relevant ads. Clearly, this scheme should be based on careful definitions of key terms. Normally, a good source of such definitions would be the existent literature; however, our search of this literature proved fruitless. For example, though there is an extensive literature about leisure (e.g., Journal of Leisure Research; Leisure Sciences; Leisure Studies), there is no generally accepted definition of leisure (cf. Kernan and Unger 1987). Though leisure is often defined in terms of discretionary time (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Kernan and Unger 1987), there are conceptual problems with measurement (Kernan and Unger 1987). Other authors have defined leisure a priori in terms of particular activities, such as active sports or cultural activities (cf. Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Kernan and Unger 1987).

Because there are no generally accepted methods in marketing for identifying urban ad themes, wilderness ad themes, work ad themes, or leisure ad themes...
themes, we developed our coding scheme from definitions in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1984). Figure 1 gives these definitions, some key properties of these definitions, and examples of what is, and what is not, subsumed by these definitions.

It should be noted that we agree with Roberts (1978) that leisure is a multidimensional construct, one dimension being physical and the other dimension being social. Our measure of total leisure is the result of summing both types of leisure.

Controlling for Extraneous Variation: Cross-Subculture Comparisons. In assessing cross-cultural differences, one must consider the economic differences between nations. For example, in the U.S. the per capita GNP is approximately six times higher than it is in Brazil (Kronish and Mericle 1984). One also must take into account the different levels of education in these countries; in Brazil, illiteracy is two or three times higher than it is in the U.S. We minimized both problems by limiting our study to the business subcultures.

In fact, if one compares Brazilian and U.S. wealth, education, and attitudes toward time, one finds more commonality between the average business persons of the two countries than between the average citizens. Most Brazilian executives can afford to buy automobiles (often two or more per family), middle-class or upper-class houses, and many of the same consumer goods enjoyed by U.S. executives (Kronish and Mericle 1984); many have some college education; many work for multinational

FIGURE 1
Definitions for Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Key Properties</th>
<th>Examples of ads that fit the categories</th>
<th>Examples of ads that do not fit the categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Of, relating to, characteristic of, or constituting a city.  (A city is an inhabited place of greater size, population, or importance than a town or village.)</td>
<td>1. highly populated. 2. technologically sophisticated. 3. being a regional or national center of commerce or culture.</td>
<td>1. a cityscape. 2. a scene of heavy traffic.</td>
<td>1. a picture of a single building. 2. a street scene without enough information to show whether it is an urban, suburban, rural, or small town setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilderness</td>
<td>A tract or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings.</td>
<td>1. pristine. 2. beginning at the frontier.</td>
<td>1. a scene featuring a mountain chain in the background. 2. a scene of underdeveloped beach.</td>
<td>1. a view of some mountain cabins. 2. a scene at a yacht club. 3. a restaurant scene. 4. an auto showroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>The labor, task, or duty that is one's accustomed means of livelihood.</td>
<td>1. directed to the fulfillment of professional obligations. 2. outside the home.</td>
<td>1. a scene in which executives at the foot of an office building are talking.</td>
<td>1. a picture of someone driving children to school. 2. people in business suits, shown outside of a work setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Leisure</td>
<td>Freedom provided by the cessation of activities; esp.: time free from work or duties. (Also defined here as physical leisure plus social leisure.)</td>
<td>1. pleasurable or self-fulfilling. 2. can be pursued alone or in a group.</td>
<td>1. physical leisure (see below) 2. social leisure (see below)</td>
<td>(see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Leisure</td>
<td>Time free from work or duties spent doing a strenuous physical activity.</td>
<td>(same as Total Leisure above)</td>
<td>1. a picture of a man jogging on a mountain road.</td>
<td>1. a scene of a professional athlete in training. 2. a scene of someone repairing their automobile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Leisure</td>
<td>Time free from work or duties spent doing a social activity.</td>
<td>1. can be pursued in a group only. 2. emphasizes culture or conversation.</td>
<td>1. a scene at an art show.</td>
<td>1. a picture of a grandmother baby-sitting her grandchildren.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
firms. In 1979, the average executive in Brazil earned more than fourteen times what the average Brazilian worker earned (Kronish and Mericle 1984).

Concerning attitude toward time:

The older version of time still exists not only in less-developed countries of the world, but in subcultures of more-developed countries. In Brazil there is a great difference between the Sao Paulo industrialist and the farmer living in the interior (Terpstra and David 1985, p. 122).

Thus, in terms of hours spent working, income, literacy, education, and economic opportunity, the average Brazilian business person is more like a U.S. business person than like the average Brazilian worker.

Selected Magazines and Product Category. We chose two prominent and widely circulated magazines for study: Business Week, a weekly U.S. publication, and Visao, the leading business magazine of Brazil, published bimonthly. We examined every issue printed in the ten-year period between 1971 and 1980.

To test our hypotheses, we needed ads targeted for consumers and not for corporate or industrial buyers. Visao only advertised a few consumer products, chief among these were automobiles. Thus, we examined only consumer ads for automobiles. Four auto makers—Volkswagen, Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler—controlled the Brazilian automobile industry. These companies also dominated the U.S. automobile market between 1971 and 1980. Thus, we had comparable sets of companies, products, and advertising practices.

Furthermore, several authors have successfully related automobile preferences and ownership to personal values. Preferences for specific automobile attributes have been found to be related to differences in general values (Vinson et al. 1977), and to differences in specific and economic values (Scott and Lamont 1973). Concerning automobile ownership, differences in personal values have been found related to size category (Henry 1976) and prestige (McCrohan and Finkelman 1981).

The final sample consisted of 819 automobile ads that appeared between 1971 and 1980; 623 of these ads appeared in Business Week, and 196 appeared in Visao. Of course, not all ads show a setting or discuss a context for using the product. For example, cars may be displayed against a colored background. As such, not all ads fit into one of the four categories we studied (although all percentages are based on the total number of ads sampled). However, over the ten-year period, there were enough ads to make the analysis meaningful.

. . . the average Brazilian business person is more like a U.S. business person than like the average Brazilian worker.

Coding Procedures. Three coders evaluated the visual and verbal components of the ads. One coder was Brazilian and had graduated from high school in Brazil. She translated all 196 Brazilian ads from the Portuguese into English. The second and third coders were both from the United States, one female MSS and one male MBA. Coders one and three evaluated the Visao ads; coders two and three evaluated the Business Week ads.

First, the coders examined forty truck or non-consumer fleet ads randomly selected from issues of Business Week or Visao that appeared in 1973 or 1977. The coders then gave examples of each type of setting—urban, wilderness, work, or leisure—and examples of settings that did not fit any of these types. This exercise ensured consistent usage.

Because only two of the three coders examined any given ad, the coding evaluations for each country are not strictly comparable. Consequently, we assessed inter-coder reliability before coding the ads for each country. Each coder examined a subset of fifty ads from each magazine. As Table 1 shows, the inter-coder reliability coefficients ranged from 0.85 to 0.95, and thus exceeded the minimum levels suggested by Kassarjian (1977) and Nunnally (1978).

Results

H<sub>1</sub> says that urban themes are more likely in Brazilian ads than in U.S. ads; H<sub>2</sub> says that Brazilian and U.S. ads are equally likely to feature a wilderness theme. Table 2 shows the percentages of U.S. and Brazilian ads that contain each theme (i.e., percentages are based on data pooled across all ten years of ads, and represent the percentages of all ads that contain each theme; e.g., the 24.4 percent of U.S. ads containing a wilderness theme represents 169 ads). The results show that urban themes appear in a significantly higher percentage of Brazilian than of U.S. ads (p < .001), whereas wilderness themes are present in as high a percentage of Brazilian ads as they are in U.S. ads. Thus, H<sub>1</sub> is rejected, but H<sub>2</sub> is supported.

H<sub>3</sub> says that Brazilian ads and U.S. ads are equally likely to include a work theme. Table 2 shows that work themes appear with equal frequency in the two business magazines. Thus, H<sub>3</sub> is also supported.

H<sub>4</sub> says that Brazilian ads and U.S. ads are equally likely to include a leisure theme. As Table 2 shows, U.S. ads are marginally more likely to include leisure themes in general (for total leisure p < .10) and physical leisure themes in particular (p < .10). Thus, H<sub>4</sub> is confirmed for social leisure themes, and rejected for both physical leisure and total leisure themes.

Finally, although we did not develop specific hypotheses about trends in depicting the four themes discussed here, we nonetheless analyzed the changes over time in the use of these themes. The Spearman rho correlations presented in Table 3 test for trends in the
TABLE 1
Inter-Coder Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Agreement</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Wilderness</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Physical Leisure</th>
<th>Social Leisure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian and</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Male Rater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Female</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Female Rater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between U.S. Male</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and U.S. Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2
Cultural Differences Between U.S. and Brazilian Automobile Advertisements (Cross-Sectional Data 1971-1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Concept</th>
<th>Percentage Present in U.S. Ads (N = 623)</th>
<th>Percentage Present in Brazilian Ads (N = 196)</th>
<th>Hypothesized Relationship</th>
<th>Z Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>B = U.S.</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilderness</td>
<td>24.40</td>
<td>22.96</td>
<td>B = U.S.</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>16.33</td>
<td>B = U.S.</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Leisure</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>B = U.S.</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Leisure</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>B = U.S.</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Leisure</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>B = U.S.</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: B > U.S. indicates test of hypothesis that the percent of Brazilian ads is greater than the percent of U.S. ads (i.e., one-tailed test of significance)
B = U.S. indicates test of hypothesis that the percent of Brazilian ads equals the percent of U.S. ads (i.e., two-tailed test of significance)
Significance levels are (a) p < .100 (for two-tailed test), and (b) p < .001 (for one-tailed test).

use of these themes in Brazilian and U.S. auto ads. (Because we were interested in the annual change in the percent of ads using each theme, and we collected only ten years of data, the Spearman-Rho correlation, rather than the Pearson Product-Moment correlation, is appropriate.) In U.S. ads, use of urban and social leisure themes is significantly increasing (p < .05), and use of work themes is marginally increasing (p < .10). In Brazilian ads, use of leisure themes in general (i.e., total leisure) and social leisure themes in particular are significantly decreasing (p < .025). Thus, the use of urban themes, leisure themes in general, and social leisure themes in particular, is increasing in U.S. auto ads and decreasing in Brazilian auto ads.

Are trends in the use of these ad themes in Brazil and in the U.S. diverging? The Fisher r to z transformation to test hypotheses about differences in the related Spearman rank correlation coefficients shown in Table 3 cannot be used because such a test assumes that "the population of interest is bivariate and normal in form" (Winkler and Hays 1975, pp. 652-653).

As an alternative, we propose two rules for comparing related Spearman rank correlation coefficients. We can say that trends in the use of an ad theme are diverging if either:

1. two significant trends exist (i.e., both rhos differ significantly from zero), and the signs of the trends (i.e., rhos) are in opposite directions; or
2. one insignificant trend exists (i.e., rho does not differ significantly from zero) and one significant trend exists (i.e., rho does differ significantly from zero).

Although these rules cannot indicate statistical confidence about the divergence of ad-themes trends, they should clearly indicate if the trends are diverging. By these two rules, Table 3 shows diverging trends in the use of urban, work, social leisure, and total leisure. Although the trends for physical leisure have different signs, no claim about divergence can be made because neither trend is statistically significant. The trends for wilderness themes are both in the same direction, but our rules do not allow us to make claims about convergence.

Discussion

We found that the automobile ads targeted to the business subcultures of Brazil and of the U.S. differed in three important ways. The first difference lies in the use of urban themes. During the 1970s, Brazilian print ads were much more likely than U.S. print ads to include an urban theme (7.14 percent versus 2.89 percent). The second difference lies in the use of leisure themes. During the 1970s, U.S. print ads were more likely than Brazilian print ads to include leisure themes (13.64 percent versus 9.69 percent); specifically, physical leisure themes were more common in U.S. ads than in Brazilian ads (7.38 percent and 4.08 percent). The third difference lies in the trends regarding the use of leisure themes. During the 1970s, the percent of print ads that included social leisure themes increased...
in the U.S. \( (\text{rho} = .588) \) and decreased in Brazil \( (\text{rho} = .661) \). Because these trends are significant and in the opposite direction, the cross-cultural trends in the use of leisure themes appear to be diverging.

Why are these differences important to advertisers? If these differences are typical, then Levitt (1983) and his predecessors are incorrect; a single, monolithic culture is not, at present, emerging. Furthermore, if these differences are a by-product of diverse cultural origins, then it is unlikely that a single, monolithic culture will ever emerge.

We found that urban settings were less prevalent in 1970s U.S. auto ads than in 1970s Brazilian auto ads, and suggest as a possible cause the existence of an anti-urban bias in the U.S. This bias is traceable to the ideals of Jeffersonian Democracy and Jefferson's glorification of the independent farmer as the backbone of the ideal American democratic state (Warner 1968). In contrast, urbanization is a much more recent phenomenon in Brazil, and there is nothing in Brazil's cultural origins to suggest that Brazil will soon, if ever, adopt an anti-urban bias.

We also found that leisure settings were more prevalent in 1970s U.S. auto ads than in 1970s Brazilian auto ads. On the one hand, this result is somewhat unexpected; the American Protestant work ethic has traditionally placed little value on leisure activities. On the other hand, this finding supports those writers (see Yankelovich 1981) who maintain that the work ethic in the U.S. has changed, and that leisure is becoming more valued.

Thus, our results suggest that advertisers should carefully consider the use of "standard" leisure and urban themes in their ads. The differences found in the prevalence of leisure and urban ad settings suggest that the themes are valued differently in Brazil and in the U.S.

However, we also found some unexpected similarities between Brazilian and U.S. auto ads, similarities that suggest that some values in Brazil and in the U.S. are not diverging. In our samples of Brazilian and U.S. auto ads, work settings appeared with equal frequency. Despite the important role that Catholicism has played in Brazil's history, this finding suggests that work is now equally important in Brazil and in the U.S. Also, wilderness settings appeared with equal frequency in our two samples. These two findings are unexpected and important; unexpected in that many historians and sociologists have speculated that the concepts of work and wilderness would have very different connotations within the two countries; important in that they suggest that the world is moving toward Levitt's "global village."

Trends in the themes used in U.S. auto ads suggest that the 1970s represented a watershed period in the U.S. regarding attitudes toward work. Table 3 shows an upward trend in the use of work settings during the 1970s \( (\text{rho} = .539) \). This upward trend suggests that the 1970s represented a transition period between the counter-culture-dominated 1960s and Protestant-work-ethnic-dominated 1980s.

In summary, our results suggest that multinational advertisers should be cautious when using standardized ad themes. Though some of our findings suggest that a "global village" may yet emerge, other findings suggest that seemingly similar cultures may not converge because of important historical differences and deeply-ingrained cultural differences.

**Strengths, Assumptions, and Caveats**. This study has three major strengths. First, it extends the scope of cross-cultural advertising research, which has heretofore mostly included the European Economic Community and East Asia, to include a somewhat neglected geographic area. Second, it is more thorough than many content analyses of international advertising because both the images and the copy of all ads were examined. Third, it is more reliable; rather than samples of ads drawn from only one or two years, ten years of consumer auto ads from each of two magazines were collected.

We have, however, made several assumptions which must be considered. For example, we have assumed that print ads reflect the targeted (sub)culture. There is some justification for this assumption in the consumer behavior literature (see, for example, Belk and Pollay 1985). Though the relationship between a culture's psychosocial development and a culture's ad themes remains hypothetical, we believe that such a relationship exists wherever advertisers practice the marketing concept.

Is it possible that errors by advertisers caused the cross-cultural similarities in ad themes? In other words, did...
advertisers mistakenly use similar themes, rather than purposively select similar themes based upon converging cultural values? Possibly. However, many marketers believe that advertising mirrors and reinforces the values of its target audience. For example, Holbrook (1987) writes:

...most advertising appears to mirror or reflect rather than to mold or shape the values of its target audience. Thus, many scholars have regarded the content analysis of advertising as a useful index of social norms ... (p. 100).

Furthermore, Pollay (1986, 1987) writes about advertising as a “distorted” and “distorting” mirror of underlying values and lifestyles. Advertising is a “distorted” mirror in that it “reflects only certain values and lifestyles” (Pollay 1987, p. 108), and a “distorting” mirror in that it provides

...reinforcement of some values [and thereby] strengthens them or expands their domains of salience. With selective reinforcement of values by advertising feedback into the culture, cultural evolution can be expected toward the values seen in commercial communication (Pollay 1987, p. 108).

Because we assume also that advertisers recognize the underlying values and lifestyles of their targeted audience, we can then assume that cross-cultural similarities and differences in ad themes are caused by cross-cultural similarities and differences.

Because we focused on only one product, two magazines, and two subcultures, readers may criticize this study for its lack of generalizable results. However, we believe that such criticism is inappropriate. A focused study has one major advantage: it serves as a sensitive test of cross-cultural similarity. By studying magazine ads from two a priori similar subcultures, we increase the odds of finding similarities in ad themes. Though it is important to expand the scope of standardization inquiries to include both a larger number of cultures and a larger number of subcultures, homogeneity should not be compromised for the sake of generalizability. Finally, it should be noted that due to the limited availability of Portuguese translators, we performed only one-way translations of Portuguese ads into English. When availability and resources permit, researchers should perform two-way translations to assure accurate translations of ads.

Researchers who are interested in studying the standardization of ad themes could extend our study by (1) sampling ads for other types of products, especially services, durables, and industrial goods; (2) comparing the business subcultures of other Latin America countries to the U.S. business subculture; and (3) studying subcultures other than the business subculture. However, researchers should be alert to two potential problems. First, it is difficult to find a set of brands advertised in both the U.S. and Brazil, and second, several Latin and South American countries, such as Columbia and Mexico, do not have business journals or magazines.

References


Kernan, Jerome B. and Lynette S. Unger

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