

CULTURAL PREFERENCES FOR VISUAL AND VERBAL COMMUNICATION STYLES IN SPORT ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract

Culture is a key issue in the development of marketing communications in international markets as cultures develop distinctive preferences for visual and verbal communications. The individualistic nature of American culture lends itself to a preference for simple, direct visual communication and low-context verbal communication. Koreans are expected to prefer more symbolic communication like complex visuals and high-context verbal communication. This mixed-method study employed an experimental design to examine the effects of context on attitude-to-the-advertisement and attitude-to-the-brand. Sixty-four Korean international students and 64 U.S. American students participated. As hypothesised, Koreans reacted more favourably to advertisements with complex visuals and high-context text. Americans did not exhibit a strong preference for any specific advertisement type. A follow-up interview study examined the reasons for the quantitative findings.

Key words: Sport advertisement; Visual communication; Verbal communication; Cultural preference.

INTRODUCTION

For brands aspiring to reach international markets, advertising has been a pivotal communication approach that enhances brand awareness (Aaker & Biel, 2013). Culture is a key issue in communicating with international markets (Alden *et al.*, 1999; Laroche *et al.*, 2001; Samiee *et al.*, 2003). Visual and communication norms are significant cultural elements that influence advertising effects in international markets (Callow & Schiffman, 2002; Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2006; Mikhailitchenko *et al.*, 2009; Mooij, 2009). Given the significant role of cultural convention in inducing advertising effects, prior communication literature suggests a contextual communication framework that posits cultural differences in visual and verbal communications (Hall, 1971; Mikhailitchenko *et al.*, 2009).

Within this framework, a vast array of empirical work conceptualised visual images and preferences as two distinct entities: simple and complex (An, 2007; Mooij, 2010). In line with this notion, communication studies elaborate two distinct constructs: low and high context communication (Hofstede, 2001; Mooij, 2010). Under the contextual framework, cross-cultural communication literature suggests that the appropriate use of visual and verbal components is

culturally sensitive and increases advertising effects due to the influence of visual and verbal communication cultures (Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2006; Bu *et al.*, 2009; Mooij, 2010). This suggests that cultural differences in visual and verbal communication preference have the potential to influence the effectiveness of advertising in international markets.

Sport advertising relies heavily on visual images and verbal headlines to communicate messages to consumers. Investigating cultural influences on the effectiveness of sport advertisement is a new attempt in international marketing contexts. However, this study employed a contextual communication framework to establish hypotheses of the impact of these two cultural elements (visual and verbal communication preferences) on sport advertising effects with a mixed method approach.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Cultural differences in visual processing and preferences

Previous socio-cultural studies suggest that people learn the method of viewing and processing objects from society (Scott, 1994; Mooij, 2010). Many empirical works conceptualised visual images as two distinct types, simple and complex (Phillips, 1997; Callow & Schiffman, 2002, 2004; An, 2007). A simple visual image is a pictorial depiction that relies largely on explicit meaning. Many product and service advertisements tend to use simple visual framing by merely portraying the products' appearance. A complex visual image is a pictorial representation that relies predominantly on implicit meaning. The picture is essentially a metaphor and viewers must comprehend the implicit visual meaning that is known as an implicature (Grice, 1975).

Audiences from some cultures are better equipped than others to derive and process implicit meaning from the metaphorical visual images (Phillips, 1997). Prior cross-cultural work found that complex visual images can be better processed by consumers in collectivist cultures who are more accustomed to deriving meaning from context, than by consumers in individualist cultures who are more accustomed to simple visual images that carry explicit meaning (An, 2003, 2007; Callow & Schiffman, 2004). The visual execution style of visual images also varies by culture (Koga & Pearson, 1992; Okazaki, 2004; An, 2006, 2007). An (2007) compared advertising visuals of 99 multinational brands appearing on 253 local websites across six countries: three Asian countries (Korea, Japan, and China) and three Western countries (U.S., U.K. and Germany). He found that 70% of the advertisements from collectivist countries used symbolic visuals, while only 42% of the advertisements from individualist countries used symbolic visuals. Finally, An (2007) concluded that in contrast to Western advertisements, Asian advertisements frequently used more implicit visual portrayals of the product.

The above cross-cultural advertising research provides an empirical rationale for expecting cultural differences in visual processing and preferences between collectivist and individualist cultures. Clearly, visual preferences influence consumers' attitudes (Seo, 2010; Delbaere *et al.*, 2011). In the study of visual persuasion in sport product advertising, Seo (2010) found that for Koreans, the implicit pictorial image induces a more positive attitude toward the advertisement and the brand than the explicit visual image. Thus, for members of a collectivist culture, if the

visual image in the advertisement appears to be implicit, it is anticipated that the viewer's attitude towards the advertisement and brand will be enhanced. Using the same logic, members of an individualistic culture would be expected to have more positive attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand when exposed to explicit visual images. Therefore, it is expected that:

H1A: Koreans will be more likely to show positive attitudes toward the advertisement with complex visual images than the advertisement with simple visual images.

H1B: Americans will be more likely to show positive attitudes toward the advertisement with simple visual images than the advertisement with complex visual images.

H2A: Koreans will be more likely to show positive attitudes toward the brand using complex visual images advertisement than the brand using simple visual images advertisement.

H2B: Americans will be more likely to show positive attitudes toward the brand using simple visual images advertisement than the brand using complex visual images advertisement.

Cultural differences in communication processing and preference

A volume of communication work suggests that people learn their way of communicating with others and processing the verbal information from their social world (Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Pekerti & Thomas, 2003). Hall (1971) distinguished cultures as low-context and high-context communication cultures according to the amount of context used (and preferred) in their communication systems. Context refers to the degree of implicit versus explicit information employed in the formation of meaning (Callow & Schiffman, 2002; Mooij, 2010). Conceptually, low context communication is verbal expression that relies primarily on exact and direct meaning. This verbal message usually describes the attributes of products or services. On the other hand, high context communication would encompass verbal messages that rely mainly on symbol and metaphor, so the audience is required to comprehend the implicit meaning from the broader context.

Hall (1976) categorised Western countries as low-context cultures and classified Asian countries as high-context cultures. In line with Hall's (1976) claim, a plethora of empirical evidence supports the notion that collectivism is associated with high-context communication frameworks, and individualism is associated with low-context communication frameworks (Mooij, 2010). There is a great deal of research suggesting that the differential communication styles of high- and low-context cultures effect a variety of advertising and marketing outcomes (Taylor *et al.*, 1997; An, 2007). For example, in a cross-cultural advertising study examining the effects of information level on attitudes, Taylor *et al.* (1997) compared the effects of two different levels of verbal information (low- vs. high-context verbal messages). Results revealed that the Korean participants preferred TV commercials with low levels of information (high-context communication style), while the U.S. consumers showed more favourable reactions to commercials with high information levels (low-context communication style). Numerous studies on the execution of advertisements also support Hall's contextual framework (Kang, 1988; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Cho *et al.*, 1999; El Refaie, 2003; Okazaki, 2004). In a study comparing cultural values in TV commercials between Korea and the U.S., Cho *et al.* (1999) compared contents of commercials from six national broadcasts: three Korean national TV networks (MBC, SBS and KBS2), and three U.S. national TV networks (ABC, CBS and NBC). Results showed that Korean commercials (37%) employed metaphorical verbal messages (high context) more often than did their U.S. counterparts (5%), while U.S. advertisements (88%)

used information related to product features and the utilitarian needs for products (low context) more frequently than did Korean commercials (53%).

These findings support the notion that a society's communication culture can be described as either low- or high-context communication, and that its cultural presence influences members' responses toward verbal messages. More specifically, they indicate that implicit verbal expression in advertising would be more effective and prevalent in Korea. Thus, it is expected that people in a high context culture will show more positive attitudes toward indirect (implicit) verbal messages than toward direct (explicit) messages. With the same rationale, it is logical to expect that individuals in a low context culture will show more positive attitudes toward direct (informative) verbal messages than toward indirect (implicit) messages. Thus, the following hypotheses were derived:

H3A: Koreans will be more likely to show positive attitudes toward the advertisement with a high context communication style than the advertisement with a low context communication style.

H3B: Americans will be more likely to show positive attitudes toward the advertisement with a low context communication style than the advertisement with a high context communication style.

H4A: Koreans will be more likely to show more positive attitudes toward the brand using a high context communication style advertisement than the brand using a low context communication style advertisement.

H4B: Americans will be more likely to show positive attitudes toward the brand using a low context communication style advertisement than the brand using a high context communication style advertisement.

Finally, in light of Korean consumers' preference for both complex visual images and high context communication style, there is reason to believe that synergetic effects will emerge when a Korean consumer is exposed to advertising with both a complex visual image and high context communication style. On the other hand, it is logical to expect that when an American consumer is exposed to advertising with both a simple visual image and a low context communication style, synergetic effects will emerge. Therefore, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H5A: Koreans will be likely to show positive attitudes toward the advertisement with both a complex visual image and a high context communication style.

H5B: Americans will be likely to show positive attitudes toward the advertisement with both a simple visual image and a low context communication style.

H6A: Koreans will be likely to show positive attitudes toward the brand when it appears in an advertisement with both a complex visual image and a high context communication style.

H6B: Americans will be likely to show positive attitudes toward the brand when it appears in an advertisement with both a simple visual image and a low context communication style.

STUDY 1: EXPERIMENT

In Study 1, the effects of visual image and communication style on the response to advertising in two cultures were examined. The proposed hypotheses were tested by using a 2 (culture: American vs. Korean) x2 (visual image: complex vs. simple) x2 (communication style: high vs. low) between-subjects design with product involvement as a covariate. The set of TIZA brand athletic shoe advertisements was employed as the advertising stimuli. Visual image and communication style were manipulated as per the stimuli development phase. Culture was operationalised quasi-experimentally through country status.

METHODOLOGY

Stimuli development and manipulation check

A series of advertisements were designed that varied systematically in their use of visual image (simple versus complex) and communication style (low versus high context). Athletic shoes were selected as a product class. Three advertisement sets for fictitious athletic shoe brands (TIZA, Hi-Kicks and Allsports) were created to minimise the confounding effects of subjects prior brand exposure and to enhance internal validity of the experiment. Each advertisement set included four versions: simple image/low context wording, simple image/high context wording, complex image/low context wording and complex image/high context wording. Linguistic equivalence of the English and Korean advertisement sets was established via a translation/back translation method (Van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004).

A pre-test was used to select the set of advertisements with the most distinctive visual image and communication style profiles. Sixty-four (64) Korean international students and 64 U.S. American students viewed each of the three fictitious advertisement sets (TIZA, Hi-Kicks, and Allsports) and rated each advertisement on two scales. Participants rated their perceptions of the visual image on three 7-point semantic differential scales, namely indirect/direct, ambiguous/unambiguous, and implicit/explicit (Mooij, 2010). The communication style was rated on four 7-point semantic differential scales: inexact/exact, non-informative/informative, not detailed/detailed and implicit/explicit (Cho *et al.*, 1999). Also, advertisement and brand familiarity were evaluated, using a 7-point semantic scale, namely not at all/extremely familiar. Results indicated that the set of TIZA advertisements featured the most distinctive visual image and communication style, compared with the other two sets (Hi-Kicks and Allsports). The set of TIZA advertisements was selected as the advertising stimuli for the remainder of the study.

Equivalent measure development

In order to generate equivalent measures for American and Korean participants, a three-step procedure was used. Firstly, English measures were extracted from previous literature. Measures of attitude toward the advertisement (Aad) and attitude toward the brand (Abrand) were adopted from Ang and Lim (2006). Product involvement measures were adopted from Zinkhan and Locander (1988). Secondly, to generate the linguistically equivalent Korean measures, a translation/back-translation method was employed. Three bilingual native Korean speakers and a primary researcher collectively translated the English measures to Korean. The translated Korean version was confirmed through an iterative revision process. Lastly, test/retest reliability was established using twenty bilingual native Korean speakers (10 female

and 10 male). The results revealed significant correlations between the English and Korean language measures (Aad=0.88, Abrand=0.73, Product involvement=0.81).

Participants

College students were recruited from the United States (n=120; mean age=20.6 years; 60 female and 60 male) and South Korea (n=120; mean age=23.2 years; 60 female and 60 male). For the American student sample, only Caucasian American students were recruited, and students of other ethnicities were excluded in order to limit the cultural diversity of the sample. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions (simple/low context, SL; simple/high context, SH; complex/low context, CL; complex/high context, CH). To control for potential gender effects, each of the four conditions was matched for gender (15 female and 15 male). Participants were asked to rate their level of involvement with athletic shoes first, and asked to evaluate their assigned advertisement via their attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand.

Analysis of data

Advertising effects were assessed by two dependent variables: attitude toward the advertisement (Aad) and attitude toward the brand (Abrand). Each was measured via four, 7-point semantic differential scales: not appealing/very appealing, not interesting/very interesting, dislike/like, and bad/good (Ang & Lim, 2006). The items were averaged to determine an overall score for each scale. Product involvement (PI) was measured via four 7-point Likert scales (Zinkhand & Locander, 1988). Internal consistency was established for each variable via Cronbach's alpha (Aad=0.91, Abrand=0.90, PI=0.86).

RESULTS

Attitude toward the advertisement

The results of the ANCOVA on attitude toward the advertisement yielded a non-significant 3-way interaction among culture, visual image and communication style ($F_{1,231}=2.84$, $p=0.093$). Thus, hypotheses 5A and 5B were rejected. However, a close examination revealed a 2-way interaction of culture and verbal communication style ($F_{1,231}=9.17$, $p=0.003$). Subsequent contrasts showed that the Americans positively evaluated both low ($M=4.09$) and high context verbal styles ($M=4.44$; $F_{1,118}=2.19$, $p=0.142$). For the Koreans, however, a high context verbal style ($M=4.02$) induced a more favourable attitude toward the advertisement than did the low context verbal style ($M=2.62$; $F_{1,118}=26.31$, $p=0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3A is supported, while Hypothesis 3B is not.

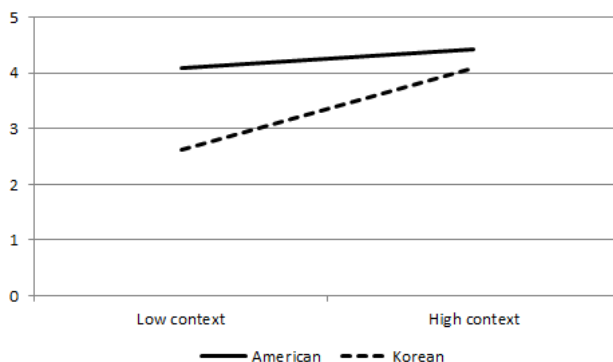


Figure 1. TWO-WAY INTERACTION OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION STYLE FOR ADVERTISEMENTS

Note: Y axis is adjusted means of attitude toward the advertisement

Unexpectedly, the ANCOVA revealed that for the Americans, the complex visual image ($M=4.55$) induced more favourable attitudes than did the simple visual image ($M=3.92$; $F_{1,117}=8.34$, $p=0.005$). As expected, the complex visual image ($M=3.98$) induced more favourable attitudes in the Koreans than did the simple visual image ($M=2.73$; $F_{1,117}=18.92$, $p=0.001$). Based on this result, Hypothesis 1A is supported, while Hypothesis 1B is not.

Attitude toward the brand

The results of the ANCOVA on attitude toward the brand yielded a significant 3-way interaction among culture, visual image and communication style ($F_{1,231}=4.78$, $p=0.03$). Subsequent contrasts indicated (Table 1) that for the Koreans, as expected, the combination of a complex visual image and a high context communication style ($M=4.48$) produced the most favourable attitudes compared to the other three combinations ($F_{1,115}=18.84$, $p=0.001$). Unexpectedly for the Americans, the combination of complex visual image and high context communication style ($M=4.39$) also induced the most favourable attitudes toward the brand when compared to the other three combinations ($F_{1,115}=4.06$, $p=0.009$). Therefore, Hypothesis 6A is supported and Hypothesis 6B is not (Figure 2).

Table 1. ATTITUDE TOWARD BRAND AS A FUNCTION OF CULTURE, VISUAL IMAGE AND COMMUNICATION STYLE

Variable	Korean		American	
	Simple	Complex	Simple	Complex
Low	2.51 (0.214)	2.71 (0.214)	3.66 (0.214)	4.09 (0.217)
High	2.49 (0.214)	4.48 (0.214)	3.48 (0.214)	4.39 (0.214)

Indicators represent adjusted means for brand attitude and standard error.

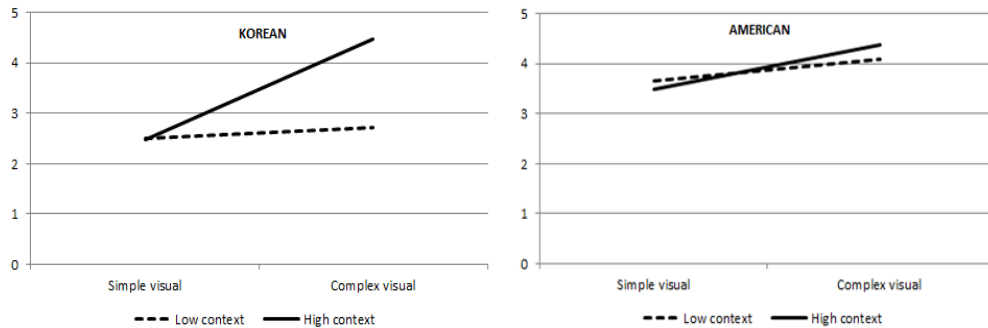


Figure 2. THREE-WAY INTERACTION OF CULTURE, VISUAL IMAGE AND COMMUNICATION STYLE FOR A BRAND

Note: Y axis is adjusted means of Attitude toward the Brand

Furthermore, the results of the ANCOVA showed a 2-way interaction between culture and communication style ($F_{1,231}=7.24$, $p=0.008$). Subsequent contrasts indicated that the Americans evaluated both low ($M=3.88$) and high context verbal styles ($M=3.94$) as somewhat favourable (Figure 3). However, for the Koreans, the high context verbal style ($M=3.49$) induced a more favourable attitude toward the brand than did the low context verbal style ($M=2.61$; $F_{1,117}=11.67$, $p=0.001$). Consequently, Hypothesis 4A is supported and Hypothesis 4B is not.

The expected interaction between culture and visual image preference was not observed ($F_{1,231}=22.02$, $p=0.157$). However, examination of univariate tests revealed that for the Koreans, complex visual images ($M=3.60$) induced more favourable attitudes than did simple visual image ($M=2.50$; $F_{1,117}=19.47$, $p=0.001$). Similarly, for the Americans, complex visual images ($M=4.24$) induced more favourable attitudes than did simple visual images ($M=3.57$; $F_{1,117}=10.99$, $p=0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 2A is supported, while Hypothesis 2B is not.

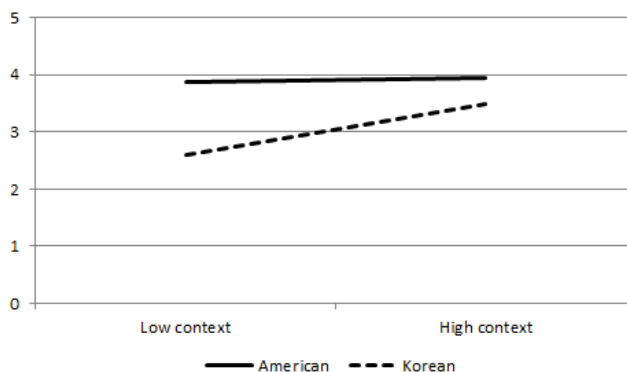


Figure 3. TWO-WAY INTERACTION OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION STYLE FOR A BRAND

Note: Y axis is adjusted means of Attitude toward the Brand

In summary, the experimental results supported the hypotheses for the Koreans. For the Americans, the current results suggested a different view than exists in previous literature. The Americans exhibit the most positive attitudes toward the brand for the complex visual-high context combination. Also, for the Americans, both low and high context verbal messages induced generally positive attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand. Clearly, the current experimental outcomes provide cause for an additional study. A follow-up qualitative inquiry using in-depth interviews probed for potential reasons for these unexpected findings and provided insights to better understand these outcomes.

STUDY 2: INTERVIEWS

METHODOLOGY

Study 2, being the qualitative study, aimed to explore consumers' thoughts and feelings toward visual images and communication styles of sport print advertising. Seven semi-structured questions were presented to mine their thoughts and feelings toward visual image and communication styles of sport product advertisements. Probing questions were asked to garner more information. The set of TIZA ads was employed as the athletic shoe advertising stimuli. College students were interviewed from the South Korea ($n=12$) and United States ($n=12$). Twenty-four (24) open-ended interviews were conducted with the university students. The students from Study 1 formed the sampling frame and interviews were conducted with randomly sampled students with consideration for country and gender (12 Americans: 6 females and 6 males; 12 Koreans: 6 females and 6 males). Interviews were audiotaped and lasted 35 to 70 minutes. Interview transcripts were analysed by use of qualitative content analysis, allowing for dynamic analysis of verbal data (Sandelowski, 2000).

RESULTS

Simple visual image

Both the Koreans and the Americans agreed that with a simple visual image it was easy to recognise the advertised product. For example, a 24-year-old Korean male Education major replied, "I can see the athletic shoe in it. I can tell this is an athletic shoe". Similar perceptions are observed from interviews with the Americans. A 23-year-old American male Sociology major said, "It shows exactly what they're selling... and it's really simple". Interestingly, the findings indicate that participants perceive a simple visual image as credible because they can see the advertised product directly.

The interview findings disclose that for both the Koreans and the Americans, a simple visual image was perceived as transparent and credible. However, the findings also indicate that the simple visual image did not draw attention because respondents thought that the image was too generalised and common. For instance, a 24-year-old Korean male Chemical Engineering major commented, "Um...but it's also, sort of, almost more generic. It is the same, similar to a lot of other ads". Similar perceptions were voiced by the Americans. A 20-year-old American male Economics major noted, "This ad seems similar to the ads in the newspaper". The findings also revealed that people view the obvious and generic visual image as boring and forgettable.

In summary, both the Koreans and the Americans perceived the simple visual image in a similar manner. Both groups regarded this image as obvious and credible. However, for both ethnic groups, the obvious simple visual image did not draw attention, because it was perceived as generic and boring. The plain nature of explicit visual images appears to hinder their memorability.

Complex visual image

Both the Korean and the American participants perceived the complex visual image as curious and unique. Furthermore, its image led them to become involved with the advertisements and enhanced their recall. When participants saw a complex visual image, they found it difficult to figure out what the advertiser sought to sell. In spite of the difficulty in deciphering the complex visual image, both the Korean and the American respondents evaluated its image as unique and creative. Furthermore, these perceived characteristics compelled participants to be engaged in the advertisement and simultaneously attracted their attention. Another convincing finding showed that the complex visual image evoked mystery, aroused curiosity and led them to be more involved in the advertisement.

Interview findings revealed that the complex visual image aroused consumer curiosity in both cultures and caused them to become more involved with the advertisement. Notably, the mysterious visual image stimulated consumers' cognitive process and it likely helped them remember the advertisement for a longer time. A 19-year-old American female in business school said, "the picture in 3 (CL) and 4 (CH), it's different, you know, you don't see pictures taken like that all the time". It is likely that the unique visual image helps her remember

the advertisement. She continued, "If it is too plain, it becomes boring... and this unique kind of picture stays in my memory for a longer time".

In summary, both the Koreans and the Americans viewed the complex visual image as mysterious and hence felt it was hard to deduce the pictorial meanings. However, they regarded the implicit image as intriguing, creative and attention-grabbing, which caused them to be involved in the advertisements and enhanced their recall.

Low context communication

Both the Koreans and the Americans felt that the low context communication was obvious and informative. However, the Koreans perceived this communication style negatively, as ordinary and lacking credibility. The responses of the Americans were more positive. Most of the Americans believed that its message provided clear descriptions of the product.

While all the Koreans perceived a low context verbal message as generic and boring, the American responses were mixed. Some Americans evaluated its message as positive because the low context verbal message guided them to comprehend key attributes of the product. Furthermore, it seems that a low context verbal message is effective to persuade the utilitarian needs of Americans. An 18-year-old American female Liberal Arts major reasoned, "because it's more product specific... it's directly stating what it is. So, if it just directly states this is what the shoe is doing, it's more like, okay, the traction shoes makes you play better on the court".

In summary, both the Koreans and the Americans agreed that the low context verbal message was obvious and informative. Yet, the findings disclosed a different viewpoint between the Korean and the American participants. The Koreans perceived the explicit verbal communication negatively, citing it as plain, questionable and lacking credibility. The Americans responded more favourably. Some believed that its informative message clearly described the product attributes.

High context communication

The high context communication style features implicit verbal expression that has low information value. The high context verbal message stimulated the curiosity of the respondents and caused both groups to be engaged in the advertisement. As participants become more intrigued and think further about the meaning, it directly increases their interest in the advertisement. A 24-year-old Korean male Chemical Engineering major added, "This caption forces me to think about what the advertisement is referring to. So it is appealing to me and I became interested in the ad. In order to become interested, I have to be curious." A 20-year-old American female Radio-Television-Film major expressed, "I think they, they, um... sort of make you think a little bit more, you have to sort of figure out what is going on, and what it is about".

As observed, both groups commonly perceived the high context verbal message as ambiguous, mysterious and curious. These perceptions led them to be more engaged in the advertisement. However, the interview findings revealed that there were different perceptions among the Koreans and the Americans in evaluating the high context verbal message. The Koreans generally perceived the high context verbal message as symbolic. This is because

Koreans are used to processing implicit meaning so that they perceive its message as symbolic, not as unique. The Americans tended to evaluate it as original and creative. For the Americans, these perceptions induced favourable evaluations for the high context verbal message. For instance, a 20-year-old American female English major said, "You have to look at it longer to understand the message, which I think is good in an advertisement." She continued, "...the slogan on the first one... I just think it is more unique, it is less like what you would expect". Another 20-year-old American female RTF major commented, "Definitely, the message in [SH] and [CH] is more interesting, you know... you have to sort of think about it and really get on your own. I like that. More original". It appears that they are not accustomed to implicit verbal messages and so they tend to perceive such messages as unusual and creative, unlike the Koreans.

In summary, the findings showed that Koreans perceive the high context verbal message as symbolic and they prefer pondering the implicit meanings. These observations support the arguments of Halls (1976) contextual framework. Nonetheless, a different view emerged from the Americans. The findings indicated that the Americans also positively evaluated high context verbal messages. At first glance, the high context verbal message seemed mysterious and unusual to the Americans. Yet, similar to observations of the Koreans, the Americans felt that the mysterious nature of the message was charming, stimulated curiosity and led them to become involved in the brand advertised.

DISCUSSION

The current results supported the majority of the hypotheses for the Koreans. For the Americans, however, the majority of the experimental hypotheses were not supported. Interview findings were consistent with the results of the experiment. This unexpected outcome may be understood through an examination of external and internal influences embedded in American society.

External Factor 1: *Increase in multi-cultural interactions in American society*

Immigration has been a major source of population growth and cultural change throughout much of American history (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The volume of international migration appears to be growing with the number of immigrants who live in the United States, which is now 13% of the American population (CBS News, 2008). More specifically, foreign-born immigrant populations are approaching 37.3 million. Among these populations, 78% (29 million) come from Latin American and Asian countries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Members of American ethnic groups from collectivist cultures, such as Asia, Africa or Latin America, are assumed to emphasise interdependence and orientation toward the group (Phinney, 1996). Also, Halls (1976) contextual framework posits that a preference for the interdependent nature of collectivist members is positively related to the high context communication framework. Given the increasing number of immigrants from collectivist countries and their influences, it is believed that in daily life, Americans have much greater opportunity to communicate with collectivist individuals in the high context manner. Furthermore, given the multi-ethnic American society, Americans are likely to become more accustomed to decoding other cultural

meanings, compared to Koreans whose society is more homogenous. In this vein, it is deemed that while Koreans overwhelmingly evaluate the explicit communication negatively, Americans enjoy interpreting the implicit communication and evaluate it in a positive light.

External Factor 2: *Increasing use of imagery in US marketing messages*

American consumers, especially young adults, are frequently exposed to marketing communication messages that blend product performance and imagery to create rich and varied consumer responses to the brand (Keller, 2001). Compared to past communication strategies mostly centring on the utilitarian needs of consumers, the emphasis in American advertising messages has moved away from presenting factual information toward the symbolic connotations of commodities (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2002). This shifting trend in framing marketing messages is also observed in sport brand communications in America. For example, in a study examining Nike's image change, Levin and Behrens (2003) found that Nike frequently relies on shorthanded sport metaphors in their messages, taglines or slogans. Also, this study observed that in terms of verbal style of the title used in media, sport imagery is typical in reporting about Nike. As discussed, American markets are becoming culturally diverse. In this sense, this metaphorical symbolic communication approach can be effective. This is because brands can provide multi-ethnic American markets with multiple points of attachment and enjoyment, while they decode metaphorical semantic meanings based on their own cultural lenses (Alden *et al.*, 1999).

Given the shifting trends of framing marketing messages in America, consumers are likely becoming accustomed to implicit marketing communication and are enjoying its metaphorical nature. Hence, it is less surprising that American consumers display positive attitudes toward the advertisements and the advertised brand using implicit communication.

Internal Factor: *Presence of symbolic sport schema in Americans' sport message processing*

Concerning the attitudes of Americans toward implicit visual-verbal messages, this unexpected outcome may be understood by considering symbolic sport schema. Sport schema are "pre-existing meaning structures that guide perception, thought and action based on prior experience of stimuli gained through sport experience and sport media exposure" (McDaniel, 1999:168). One of the key features of a schema is its ability to cue affective and behavioural responses to stimuli, such as advertising.

Sport sociology and consumer behaviour research suggest that people often experience symbolic benefits when consuming sport media and brands (Bauer *et al.*, 2008). Today's American sport media outlets are delivering a number of contextual-oriented stories, which seem to harness the emotional concerns of audiences (Schultz, 2005). Also, American sport brands are often sending out their marketing messages, which appeal to both rational and symbolic needs (Keller, 2001). In international markets, importantly, multi-national brands more often use a "soft-sell" approach that relies on visual imagery and implicitness (Alden *et al.*, 1999). This is because this implicit communication reduces the risk of mis-specifying the semiotic meanings of foreign target markets and provides multiple points of attachment (Alden *et al.*, 1999).

Given the prevalence of symbolic communication in sport, Americans may have developed sport schema, a symbolic oriented process. Framed messages and stories can systematically affect how audiences come to understand the events and formulate a meaning structure (Price *et al.*, 1995). Notably, it is likely that the global communication culture of the sport consumers is formed by sport schema, which is enhanced by worldwide sport media programming centring on emotional and symbolic experiences. Thus, as the communication culture of a society reflects its members' cultural norm, the communication cultural norm of sport markets also mirrors its members' schema, which is universally shared. Therefore, it is expected for the symbolic interactions in sport consumption to have commonalities across cultures. As a result, it is anticipated that when Americans consume sport products and brands, they are accustomed to symbolic interactions and are apt to decode the implicit meanings in a symbolic and emotional manner. Given the current results and symbolic sport schema, it is suggested that the symbolic and metaphorical nature of the implicit visual-verbal messages induces positive attitudes toward the advertisement and the advertised brand for Americans.

LIMITATIONS

As with most experimental and qualitative studies in the social sciences, this study has certain limitations that should be noted. Concerning external validity, which relates to the generalisability of findings to the 'real world' (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), a limitation can be found in the sampling frame of this study. Since the sample groups were limited to undergraduate students representing one particular city in the U.S. and South Korea, age, income and level of education were similar for participants. By focusing heavily on a limited database of college students as research subjects, consumer research might have produced systematic biases in its 'portrait of human nature' (Sears, 1986). It has been suggested that college students vary from adults out of colleges in that they are more homogeneous (Brown & Stayman, 1992).

Firstly, this study employed a mixed method in which quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined. In terms of the validity issue in mixed research, to the degree to which the qualitative participants are similar to a quantitative sample, the problem of generalisability will be reduced (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Even though in Study 2 (interview) the students from Study 1 (experiment) formed the sampling frame, the unrepresentative sample from Study 2 would affect generalisability.

Secondly, in this study it is likely that college students enjoy interpreting the advertisements' visual and verbal meanings with elaborated processing (Park *et al.*, 2015). This is because college students more likely are apt to learn and investigate the information than non-students. The homogeneity of college students' results in stronger hypothesis tests than if non-students were the research subjects. This is because there is less noise or extraneous variation associated with college students than with non-students (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Kraus, 1995). Also, due to similar age or developmental stages in college student population, it is likely that different effect sizes from non-student subjects will be produced that may not be theoretically

predictable or expected. Given the lack of generalisability of the student sample, the findings of this study may limit the ability to be generalisable to the overall population of low and high context cultures.

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