Influence of Cultural Differences on Marketing Cars to U.S. and Japanese Consumers

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The American and Japanese car markets differ significantly in terms of demand, consumer behavior, product requirements, and marketing strategies. In order to succeed in both markets, Japanese car companies such as Toyota, Honda, Mitsubishi, and Suzuki must be able to understand the cultural differences and adapt their advertising strategies and content when marketing towards U.S. and Japanese consumers.

By examining primarily television commercials and internet advertisements by the four major Japanese car companies from advertising campaigns aired between 2005 and 2012, this research seeks to explain how advertisements differ according to the U.S. or Japanese market.

This research shows that cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan greatly influence the various aspects of the advertising campaigns used in terms of overall strategies and executional elements. Japanese car commercials focus more on creating a mood or atmosphere whereas American car commercials focus on the car itself. Japanese commercials are significantly more likely than American commercials to use celebrity endorsements. Collective ideals are more obvious in Japanese commercials, whereas American commercials tend to depict individual gratification. The conclusions drawn from the content analysis also outlines factors unique to the Japanese cultural context such as a “foreign factor” and the use of English in Japanese commercials.

Introduction:

1. Cultural and Business Background

In order to better understand the style and content of advertisements created for Japanese car companies marketing to U.S. and Japanese consumers, it is important to first understand both the cultural and business background that has influenced these marketing campaigns. When analyzing the cultural background for U.S. and Japanese consumers, Geert Hofstede’s research is an excellent resource for information. In his 1983 article, Hofstede reports the results of his study analyzing four dimensions of culture: “power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity” (Hofstede, 1983, p. 46). According to Hofstede, the four dimensions are meant to “apply to countries as social systems, not to individuals within those countries” (Hofstede, 1983, p. 59). Through the results summarized in Hofstede’s report, we can make certain generalizations about cultural differences between Japan and the U.S.
Power distance refers to the level of formality associated with different levels of a hierarchy. In other words, how much formality and respect is given to someone of higher authority than oneself. The greater the power distance, the more emphasis on etiquette, respect and honor for one’s superiors. The less power distance, the more informal the relationships between manager and subordinate. On a power distance spectrum, Japan is closer to the “supreme power distance” side than the U.S. (Hofstede, 1983, pp. 51, 52). This means that Japan tends to place more value on a hierarchical order. There is a clear line between superiors and subordinates, the powerful and the powerless. The U.S., in contrast, tends to place more value on equality and cooperation across hierarchical levels (Hofstede, 1983, p. 60). Based on our own cultural experiences of living and working in Japan, we have found that Americans are much more likely to use first names when conversing with colleagues – suggesting a more casual, informal, equal relationship – whereas Japanese colleagues would often refer to each other first by their titles and by their last names – resulting in a high degree of formality and importance of ranks. First names imply more familiarity and less power-distance.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the willingness to take risks. In terms of uncertainty avoidance, Japan’s score of 92 is significantly closer to the “extreme uncertainty avoidance” side of the spectrum compared to the U.S. score of 46 (Hofstede, 1983, pp. 52, 53). Since Japan has a high propensity for uncertainty avoidance, it tends to be more inward-looking and conservative in its policies and actions. Known facts and statistics, guidelines, and regulations provide a means of avoiding significant risks. This also means that Japanese marketers and companies in general tend to do significant research, consider potential negative effects, and plan as much as possible before committing to a particular marketing activity or campaign. They want to be absolutely sure that the project will not fail and cause a significant loss for the company. To ensure risk-avoidance, there is often a very stringent set of procedures that do not treat exceptions particularly kindly. On the other hand, the U.S. is less averse to uncertainty – it is more willing to take risks and adapt regulations as necessary (Hofstede, 1983, p. 61). U.S. companies are more flexible and open to change. While a procedure may be established to routinize certain activities, the procedure is adjusted as needed to accommodate exceptions. U.S. marketers and companies are also more open to experimenting with activities that have not been tried before or extensively researched.

On the individualism versus collectivism spectrum, the U.S. is on the extreme individualistic side whereas Japan is much closer to the collectivist side (Hofstede, 1983, pp. 52, 54-55). Being more individualistic, the U.S. is very much focused on “I” – individual achievements, privacy, leadership, and self-expression. Japan, being more collectivist, is focused on “We” – group identity, ideals, loyalty, and harmony within the group (Hofstede, 1983, p. 62).

On the masculinity versus femininity spectrum, Japan is more masculine than the U.S. (Hofstede, 1983, pp. 52, 54-55). The masculinity index “indicates the relative importance in the country of the job aspects [sic] earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge” (Hofstede, 1983, p. 55). Qualities that seemed more in line with “assertiveness and self-reliance” were associated with masculinity while qualities that seemed to connote “nurturance and responsibility” were associated with femininity. If a country is considered to be more masculine, it means that both male and female
respondents for that country in Hofstede’s series of studies tend to “emphasize job aspects usually associated with the male role” – “assertiveness and self-reliance” – and there is a gap between the values of the genders. If a country is more feminine, it means that both male and female respondents tend to “emphasize job aspects usually associated with the female role” – “nurturance and responsibility” – and there is less of a gap between the values of the genders (Hofstede, 1983, p. 55). As a more masculine country, Japan is very much in line with the “live to work” philosophy, often stringent differentiation of gender roles, and the belief that men should be dominant. As a more feminine country, the U.S. favors more flexible gender roles, and more gender equality (Hofstede, 1983, p. 63). Specific gender roles are the rules in Japan: Women are not often promoted because the company expects them to leave the company after getting married; young women in the office are often referred to as “office flowers” – decorative pieces meant to be seen but not heard; and it is not unusual for a mother who wants to return to work instead of raising her children and cleaning the house all day to be referred to as a “demon wife” – inferring that her desires are selfish and malicious towards the wellbeing of her husband and family. Japanese men do not face these prejudices; instead, they are expected to give their life to the company and support their family financially. The men are viewed as the head of the household and the women are often expected to quietly follow their husbands’ decisions.

In the U.S., it is not unusual for both parents to pursue careers – and the wife will not be perceived as betraying her family in desiring to return to work after having children. There is more gender equality in the U.S. In 2005, in the U.S., nine Fortune 500 companies – just 1.8% – had female CEOs (Wiseman, 2005). In 2012, in the U.S., that number has more than doubled: twenty-one Fortune 500 companies – or 4.8% – have female CEOs (Women CEOs of the Fortune 1000, 2013). In comparison, by 2005, only “5.64% of all registered Japanese companies” had female executives, “according to the research firm Teikoku Databank” (Wiseman, 2005). While this is an improvement from 5.53% in 2000 (Wiseman, 2005), the same research firm found that, in 2012, “less than 6% of company presidents in Japan” were female (Wakabayashi, 2012). Furthermore, according to a Grant Thornton International Business Report from 2012, 17% of senior management in U.S. companies was female compared to 5% of senior management in Japanese companies (Grant Thornton International Ltd., 2012, p. 5). An estimated 6% of U.S. companies had female CEOs – double the estimated 3% of Japanese companies (Grant Thornton International Ltd., 2012, p. 8). Clearly, U.S. companies have worked to decrease the gender gap in the boardroom more efficiently than Japanese companies.

In 1991, Hofstede added a fifth dimension for cultural analysis based on Michael Bond’s research and international study (The Hofstede Centre, National cultural dimensions, 2013). The fifth cultural dimension, called long-term orientation, is related to a culture’s view of morality and situational analysis. For example, short-term oriented societies are likely to prioritize an absolute objective Truth, respect traditions but do not save much for the future, instead focusing on the present and immediate results. Long-term oriented societies on the other hand, are likely to consider truth to be situation-dependent, adapt traditions according to changing times, a tendency to save for the future, and focus more on achieving results over time rather than on achieving results today and now (The Hofstede Centre, Dimensions, 2013). On this index, Japan is
significantly more long-term oriented than the U.S. In fact, Japan's long-term orientation index score is more than twice that of the U.S. This means that on a time orientation spectrum, the U.S. is much more likely to be focused on short-term results and what is going on now whereas Japan focuses on saving up for tomorrow and working to reach a goal over time to achieve long-term success (The Hofstede Centre, Japan, 2013).

In 2010, Hostede added a sixth dimension known as Indulgence versus Restraint (The Hofstede Centre, National cultural dimensions, 2013). This spectrum measures indulgence in terms of gratification of the drive for enjoyment, leisure, and fun while restraint is measured in terms of suppression of gratification through "strict social norms." Since the sixth dimension is relatively new and still being studied, there does not appear to be an index that scores several countries according to this measure at this time (The Hofstede Centre, Dimensions, 2013). However, through personal experience, we have heard opinions from both Americans and Japanese that Americans are generalized as indulgent while Japanese are generalized as restrained. As Hofstede himself noted though, these dimensions are meant to describe a national culture in general and can by no means account for individual personalities and preferences within the countries studied (Hofstede, 1983, p. 59).

2. Literature Review

In 1993, Graham, Kamins, and Oetomo analyzed the content of various German and Japanese print advertisements and promotional materials from Indonesia, Spain, and the U.S. In an article reporting their studies, the three authors cite a 1973 article that defines international marketing approaches as being “ethnocentric, polycentric, or geocentric” (Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993). If the strategy is ethnocentric, then the firm will use the same strategy globally that it uses in its home-market. A polycentric strategy means that marketing activities are specifically adapted according to the foreign market. Geocentric strategies attempt to take foreign market specifics into account while developing a standardized global marketing strategy (Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993). Due to great cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan, it would be unwise for Japanese companies to use the same strategy that they use for the Japanese market to appeal to U.S. consumers. This explains why Japanese cars seeking to market in the U.S. formed subsidiaries and invested directly in the U.S. in order to bridge the cultural gap and cut manufacturing and importing costs. A polycentric or global marketing strategy would likely be much more successful than an ethnocentric strategy in this case.

Graham et al found that Japanese companies in general focus on “stability and long-term growth” when developing international marketing campaigns because culturally they are averse to significant risks and prefer to plan for long-term gains (Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993). This suggests that their preference for avoiding uncertainties and analysis of “stability and long-term growth” potentials in foreign markets leads Japanese companies to take a polycentric approach. A polycentric approach allows for more localized marketing activities in individual foreign markets.

Since the Japanese culture values “hierarchy and harmony” greatly, companies frequently market via mass media, depicting techniques and product designs that appeal to consumer preferences. As a result of focusing more on consumer preferences
and harmony than the company itself or the product, Japanese advertisements “tend to use symbolism and emotional appeals to a greater extent than do western firms” (Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993). The Japanese culture and language is highly contextual, so it is not surprising that their advertising would depend on indirect messages, subtle symbolism, and nuances to communicate their product’s value to consumers. The Japanese tend to focus on the process leading to the purchase: the mood to buy, pricing policies to encourage the purchase, and then consumers’ interactions with the product (Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993).

Japanese companies tend to adapt their advertisements to the market. Of the magazine ads examined in their research, Graham et al found that Japanese companies included more information for U.S. advertisements than they would perhaps include in advertisements for their home market. U.S. consumers culturally are more content-driven since English is a low context, high content language. Thus, the Japanese, adapting to the cultural tendencies of their foreign consumers, included more information. Japanese companies tend to localize their advertising campaigns to their target foreign markets because they are aware that foreign consumers do not necessarily follow the same cultural beliefs and tendencies that they do (Graham, Kamins, & Oetomo, 1993).

In a 1994 article for the Journal of Advertising, Johansson describes Japanese commercials as utilizing the “soft-sell” approach more so than U.S. commercials. He writes that the “soft-sell, fantasy oriented approach” means limited product demonstrations, little discussion of product features, a tendency for animated characters, and energetic soundtracks which “all add up to a fantasy-filled, mood-creating, ‘un-serious’ audience experience in Japanese advertising.” In other words, the fantasy elements sell a mood that persuades prospective consumers to recall the brand and find out more about the product where it is sold. He adds that while voice-overs may be used, the style, message, and appeal is still quite different “from the straightforward one-two-three benefits propounded by many U.S. TV commercials” (Johansson, 1994). In other words, Japanese advertising focuses on the indirect message and connotation conveyed whereas U.S. advertising tends to be much more direct with its information and appeals.

Johansson also suggests that there is a greater need for Japanese advertisers to make their commercials appeal more broadly than for U.S. advertisers. In Japan, limited land means higher population density, so “local media such as TV stations have a much greater audience reach” (Johansson, 1994). A general good mood in a commercial is more likely to appeal to the vast audience, is less likely to “offend the sensibilities of the viewer,” and also helps to defuse audience objections (Johansson, 1994). This also explains why Japanese advertisers tend to favor selling a mood – an emotional appeal – in their commercials rather than selling rationally through tangible product benefits and specifications. Product specifications may not be particularly resonant with viewers, but an emotional appeal is more broad and likely to appeal to a greater audience.

Johansson explains that the preference for the “soft-sell” approach may be attributed to cultural factors. Culturally, the consumer is viewed as honorable and superior in the business relationship – the consumers are clients who choose sellers to fulfill their needs and desires. Sellers are expected to provide high quality products and services and cater to consumers. Since products are already assumed to be of high
quality, “a Japanese consumer is naturally suspicious of someone who needs to extol the virtues of a product” (Johansson, 1994). A “hard-sell” approach that details the product’s tangible benefits seems redundant, unnecessary, and leads Japanese consumers to wonder if this approach is intended to hide a flaw or “catch.” Thus, the “soft-sell” approach is often favored in hopes that the “honorable customer” will “be kind enough to take a closer look at the product” (Johansson, 1994). Unlike the perception in the U.S. that sellers are doing consumers a favor by providing them with products and services, the perception in Japan is that consumers are doing businesses a favor with their patronage (Johansson, 1994).

Further argument against the “hard-sell” approach is the Japanese preference for harmony. Japan’s education system influences individuals to adapt to society, and conform to the group to maintain harmony. Since personal opinions stated clearly and emphatically may disrupt the group dynamic, “They don’t feel comfortable ‘clearly stating their point view [sic],’ trying to influence people by elaborating on why their product is better than the competition’s” (Johansson, 1994). Thus, comparative advertising or grounds for direct comparisons between two products are less likely to appear in Japanese advertising. Indeed, Johansson explains that since Japan favors group dynamics and social influences whereas the West favors individual opinions and logical appeals, “it seems reasonable to expect that the Western emphasis on individual-level information processing is misguided in Japan” (Johansson, 1994). Instead, a broad social appeal that suggests that Japanese consumers will fit better within their social circle if they purchase a particular product or service may be more likely to succeed.

Rather than appealing to individuals directly, Japanese advertising attempts to appeal to social influences and depict group acceptance through individuals’ purchases. Although, at first glance, the Japanese advertising seems to appeal to the individual’s need to dream, and provides an escape from their daily life, on a more subtle level the commercial appeals to the individual’s desire for social acceptance (Johansson, 1994).

Johansson suggests that if the Japanese become increasingly “more Westernized and individual gratification becomes more important,” then perhaps Japanese advertising will adapt to a more Western style approach including “hard-sell” appeals. Yet the traditional Japanese cultural values of group harmony and social acceptance are unlikely to disappear so easily (Johansson, 1994).

In her 1993 article for the Journal of Advertising Research, Lin suggests that “Western models, celebrities, language, artifacts, and settings are used in Japan to convey the symbol of prestige, quality, modernism, and status of a product” (Lin, 1993). Yet she also notes that while Western aspects may be included in Japanese advertising, the style of persuasion is largely Japanese – a soft-sell approach. She goes on to explain that American advertisements tend to focus on information and the individual whereas Japanese advertisements rely more heavily on emotion and status symbol appeal. Lin mentions that while Japanese advertisers mention price more frequently than American advertisers, American advertisers tend to make more use of sales and discount specials.

She suggests that companies in Japan compete more on the corporate level with “reputation and image” and hesitate “to use comparative advertising, which connotes a confrontational (or even shadowy) practice to unfairly denigrate competitors” (Lin, 1993).
Therefore, it might be argued that American companies tend to compete at the consumer level by attempting to differentiate their product specifications from those of competitors' and therefore they will not hesitate “to use comparative advertising” (Lin, 1993). American companies generally use a hard-sell or direct approach in advertising and depend on their products' features rather than brand name to sell to consumers.

In her research, Lin found that Japanese advertisers included more information on “product packaging and availability” while American advertisers focused more on price, product specifications, and procedures/policies (Lin, 1993). As a result, 15-second commercials are more common in Japan than in the U.S. Japanese advertisers have less information that they need to convey in their commercials, so the 15-second format is often sufficient (Lin, 1993).

Methodology and Research Hypotheses:
The above research into cultural differences and how cultural background has affected advertising lead to a number of research hypotheses before conducting a content analysis of US and Japanese commercials aired by four major Japanese car manufacturers (Toyota, Honda, Mitsubishi, and Suzuki) for the years between 2005 and 2012. Fifty-eight U.S. commercials and forty-two Japanese commercials were reviewed in this sample. This sample was composed of forty-nine Toyota commercials, fifteen Honda commercials, twenty-two Mitsubishi commercials, and fourteen Suzuki commercials.

Commercials were chosen mainly on an as-available-online basis and only included models that were sold in both the U.S. and Japanese markets.

Specific elements of the commercials were examined and recorded, and included variables such as: Voiceover (male, female, both, none), written copy (presence, absence, timing), branding (timing), humor (used or not used), overall appeal (group, individual), background music (presence or absence), song (presence or absence), and celebrity (presence or absence).

A breakdown of the commercials included in the sample follow in Table 1 and Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>U.S. Commercials Examined</th>
<th>Japanese Commercials Examined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitsubishi</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzuki</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Commercial Sample by Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S. Commercials Examined</th>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Japanese Commercials Examined</th>
<th>Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Toyota Prius Toyota Camry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Toyota Prius Honda Accord</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda Civic</td>
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<td>Honda Civic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Alto</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Solio</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Toyota Prius Toyota Prius</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Toyota Prius Honda Civic</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda Civic</td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda Civic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mitsubishi Eclipse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Alto</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mitsubishi Endeavor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Toyota Camry Toyota Prius</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Toyota Corolla</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Toyota Prius Toyota Camry</td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda Insigt</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Honda Civic</td>
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<td>Suzuki Solio</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mitsubishi Eclipse</td>
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<td>Suzuki Swift</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suzuki XL7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2008</td>
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<td>Toyota Corolla</td>
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<td>Toyota Camry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mitsubishi Lancer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Toyota Prius</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda Accord</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Toyota Prius Toyota Prius</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Toyota Prius</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mitsubishi Lancer</td>
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<td>Honda Accord</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Alto</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Swift</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>Toyota Prius Toyota Prius</td>
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<td>Honda Insigt</td>
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<td>Honda Civic</td>
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<td>Suzuki Solio</td>
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<td>Honda Insight</td>
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<td>Suzuki Swift</td>
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<td>Mitsubishi Lancer</td>
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<td>Mitsubishi Outlander</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Kizashi</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Toyota Camry Toyota Corolla</td>
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<td>Toyota Corolla</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Toyota Prius Toyota Prius</td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda CR-Z</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda Accord</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mitsubishi i-MiEV</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Honda CR-Z</td>
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<td>Suzuki Solio</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mitsubishi i-MiEV</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mitsubishi Outlander</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Toyota Camry Toyota Corolla</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Toyota Camry</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Toyota Prius Toyota Prius</td>
<td></td>
<td>Toyota Prius</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honda Accord</td>
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<td>Mitsubishi Mirage</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Kizashi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mitsubishi Outlander</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suzuki Solio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis 1:** Japanese commercials would focus on an emotional appeal – creating a mood for the audience; whereas American commercials would focus on a more rational appeal – focused on product features.

**Rationale:** Japanese advertisers prefer a soft-sell approach – indirectly marketing their products to the audience and creating a mood to buy rather than trumpeting the product’s latest features. Americans prefer a hard-sell approach and American
Advertisers tend to satisfy the cultural desire for more content – concrete details and product specifications.

The Japanese advertisers also have to appeal to a broader, less segmented audience because the population concentration is significantly higher than that of the U.S. This means that Japanese advertisers cannot rely on regionalizing their commercials or segmenting their target audience as much as U.S. advertisers.

**Hypothesis 2:** Japanese commercials would be more likely to use celebrity endorsements than American commercials.

**Rationale:** Japanese advertisers and consumers alike seem to be fascinated with celebrity endorsements. Endorsements in Japan are another way for celebrities to increase their fame and recognition. The Japanese see these endorsements as a way of celebrities being humanized – “Oh, my favorite celebrity uses this brand too!”

**Hypothesis 3:** Japanese commercials would appeal to a collective/group ideal while American commercials would appeal to an individual desire for gratification.

**Rationale:** According to Hofstede’s studies, Japan leans more to the collectivist side of the individualist/collectivist spectrum. Therefore, we would anticipate that Japanese commercials would appeal to consumers’ desire for acceptance by the group.

Since Americans tend to be more individualistic and focused on individual – and instant – gratification, American commercials would more likely target individual drivers and their desire for independence, and freedom.

**Discussion of Results**

**Hypothesis 1:**
Japanese advertisements generally focused on creating a particular mood or atmosphere for the product more so than the American advertisements. However, contrary to our expectations, American advertisements did not always focus on product features.

To explain the difference, the Japanese commercials seemed to sell a particular emotion or “dream.” American commercials seemed to sell a connection to the car – what it felt like to actually *drive* one.

Specific product features (usually technology such as GPS, MP3 player, etc.) were emphasized more in American advertisements than in Japanese advertisements.

**Table 3: Common Appeals Used In U.S. and Japanese Commercials Examined.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractive features</td>
<td>Mood/emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced technology/modern</td>
<td>Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel efficiency</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost-effective</td>
<td>Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-friendly</td>
<td>Fuel efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Attractive Features</td>
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<td>Speed</td>
<td>Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Advanced technology/modern</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Speed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typical appeals found in the Japanese commercials included: mood/emotion, family, nature, harmony, sporty/cool/popular aspect. The gas mileage or hybrid aspect and cost-effectiveness of the vehicle were also often focused on.

**Hypothesis 2:**
Japanese commercials were more likely to make use of celebrity endorsements than American commercials. Only 5% of American commercials examined used a celebrity or group of celebrities in contrast with 48% of Japanese commercials examined.

<p>| Table 4: Presence of Celebrity in U.S. Commercials |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Table 5: Presence of Celebrity in Japanese Commercials |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As explained previously, the Japanese have a much different perspective of celebrity endorsements than Americans. Perhaps the Japanese cultural preference for cooperation and harmony within one's social group can also account for the use of celebrities in these commercials. In some of the cases, the celebrities benefited not only from revenue for making the commercial, but also from what they were permitted to advertise in the commercial with the car. For example, KAT-TUN – a group of five male singers managed by Johnny’s Entertainment – was able to present a brief sound byte of their latest single in each of the commercials they were in. In another example, Doraemon, a very popular Japanese children’s cartoon character, presents a new model of the Toyota Prius. Doraemon is a great choice for the advertisement’s appeal because he embodies something nostalgic (the audience’s favorite childhood cartoon) as well as something futuristic (a cat robot sent from the future). However, the owners of Doraemon’s trademark must have also benefited significantly from the publicity of various associated Doraemon goods – such as stuffed toys that resemble the one used in the commercial.

In the commercials where the celebrity was an actor rather than a music group or trademark character, the actor still benefits from the extra publicity – especially when the endorsed commercial is aired around the time when said actor is appearing in an upcoming drama. The endorsement may help generate interest in the actor – and therefore interest in the dramas they will be appearing in.

**Hypothesis 3:**
Japanese commercials appealed to the audience based on a collective/group ideal while American commercials tended to favor an appeal based on individual gratification.

Many of the Japanese commercials seemed to be in line with the collective/group ideal as they emphasized family, nature, and harmony. Many of the American commercials seemed to be in line with individualism and instant gratification because
the focus on power, speed, and the cool factor was often associated with a single driver throughout the commercial. In other words, while Japanese commercials often had several family members or friends in the same vehicle, American commercials tended to have an individual driving alone – just them and their car.

Table 6: U.S. - Individual/Collectivism Appeal in Commercials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appeal</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Japan - Individual/Collectivism Appeal in Commercials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appeal</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Conclusions and Limitations:

Overall, the content analysis research results were in line with the cultural background information. Cultural differences certainly influenced the content and format of the commercials in the study.

The research had several limitations. Due to time constraints and the limited availability of television commercials from 2005 through 2012 archived online for Toyota, Honda, Mitsubishi, and Suzuki, only one hundred commercials were reviewed for this content analysis study.

Future areas of investigation may include examining differences between major U.S. car manufacturers’ advertisements for the U.S. market versus for the Japanese market.

This research remained very valuable in terms of its timeliness. Academic articles exploring Japan’s economic viability and cultural differences from the West dated back to the 1980s and 1990s and few have been published since then.

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http://geert-hofstede.com/japan.html

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Wiseman, P. (2005, June 8). Female CEOs signal change at Japan firms. USA TODAY. Tokyo, Japan.

Women CEOs of the Fortune 1000. (2013, January 1).

Appendix A

Links to Commercials Reviewed for Content Analysis

**U.S. Commercials:**
1. 2005 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9d0PMsbbol](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9d0PMsbbol)
2. 2005 Honda Civic. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7jxKbw3Nd4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7jxKbw3Nd4)
3. 2006 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyISDeZINl1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyISDeZINl1)
4. 2006 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0mVUCDNOq0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0mVUCDNOq0)
5. 2006 Honda Civic. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuEQIYGCXcy](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuEQIYGCXcy)
6. 2006 Mitsubishi Eclipse. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_2C0Ei0iC8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_2C0Ei0iC8)
7. 2006 Mitsubishi Eclipse. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM3cZfC0lk0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM3cZfC0lk0)
8. 2006 Mitsubishi Endeavor. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X507NES2szw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X507NES2szw)
9. 2007 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Mlftr3e5P4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Mlftr3e5P4)
10. 2007 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsILPiHBe-DA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsILPiHBe-DA)
11. 2007 Toyota Camry. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9GPyFM6lT0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9GPyFM6lT0)
12. 2007 Toyota Camry. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtFpbFh6TH0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtFpbFh6TH0)
13. 2007 Toyota Camry. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TJ3hwnccsU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TJ3hwnccsU)
14. 2007 Mitsubishi Eclipse. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXY0xlb_fC](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXY0xlb_fC)
17. 2008 Toyota Corolla. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxPCcZ0Viw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxPCcZ0Viw)
18. 2008 Mitsubishi Lancer. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4poG605U-A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4poG605U-A)
19. 2008 Mitsubishi Lancer. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNPjQWk2Qm4s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNPjQWk2Qm4s)
20. 2009 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R17U7YJty_0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R17U7YJty_0)
22. 2010 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBqBWQeABH0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBqBWQeABH0)
25. 2010 Toyota Camry. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=286exMmUd_E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=286exMmUd_E)
26. 2010 Toyota Corolla. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkIjHhca8-q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkIjHhca8-q)
27. 2010 Honda Civic. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFRWDeIdhw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFRWDeIdhw)
28. 2010 Honda Insight. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJjdNLmCkMo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJjdNLmCkMo)
29. 2010 Mitsubishi Outlander. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vReZVjssw7k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vReZVjssw7k)
30. 2010 Mitsubishi Outlander. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=091YxWlmHEA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=091YxWlmHEA)
31. 2010 Mitsubishi Lancer. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv-EvUOZkh](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv-EvUOZkh)
32. 2010 Mitsubishi Lancer. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sy8hHfWppL8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sy8hHfWppL8)
33. 2010 Suzuki Kizashi. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pe1CD38i3xA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pe1CD38i3xA)
34. 2011 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sowd8g6-QA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sowd8g6-QA)
35. 2011 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9NWcnmctj](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9NWcnmctj)
36. 2011 Toyota Camry. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E15P7jGT0U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E15P7jGT0U)
40. 2011 Honda Accord. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm9ddEAuxvl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm9ddEAuxvl)
41. 2011 Honda CR-Z. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0nE_VSZn9Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0nE_VSZn9Q)
42. 2011 Mitsubishi Outlander. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db5MqEAKJV8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db5MqEAKJV8)
43. 2011 Mitsubishi Outlander. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nltng7ww6ls](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nltng7ww6ls)
44. 2011 Mitsubishi i-MiEV. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jzj9XmQyyb6](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jzj9XmQyyb6)
45. 2012 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YHY0gGkXkQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YHY0gGkXkQ)
46. 2012 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8aCqmHr3o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8aCqmHr3o)
47. 2012 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwhUI7E6iE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwhUI7E6iE)
49. 2012 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCfljzQtkW8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCfljzQtkW8)
51. 2012 Toyota Camry. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXmWvDgg3_w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXmWvDgg3_w)
53. 2012 Toyota Camry. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkeqKqM24TQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkeqKqM24TQ)

**Japanese Commercials:**
1. 2005 Toyota Corolla. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YmgVynPs00](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YmgVynPs00)
2. 2005 Honda Civic. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZnHemr3Dyk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZnHemr3Dyk)
4. 2005 Suzuki Solio. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCn2my6Ma0U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCn2my6Ma0U)
5. 2006 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkbP2IYrqgc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkbP2IYrqgc)
6. 2006 Honda Civic. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkeqKqM24TQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkeqKqM24TQ)
7. 2006 Suzuki Alto. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4ltrmtU9Lg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4ltrmtU9Lg)
8. 2007 Toyota Corolla. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HhtlsYiz04k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HhtlsYiz04k)
9. 2007 Mitsubishi Outlander. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQoyXksUiVM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQoyXksUiVM)
10. 2007 Mitsubishi Lancer. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXmWvDgg3_w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXmWvDgg3_w)
11. 2007 Mitsubishi Galant. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c40keZEzZE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c40keZEzZE)
12. 2008 Toyota Prius. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ojxmIoo3FA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ojxmIoo3FA)
30. 2011 Mitsubishi i-MiEV. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAy2HITPNxo
33. 2012 Toyota Prius. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYn1mSaDL9A
34. 2012 Toyota Prius. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SkBeeHVqKQ
38. 2012 Mitsubishi Mirage. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7wHzwUFbTc
40. 2012 Mitsubishi Mirage. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11gFF8tfP2M
42. 2012 Suzuki Solio. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jaAsHGobS4