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The relationship between culture and advertising appeals for services

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This paper contributes to our limited knowledge of international service advertising. It first compares the type of advertising appeals utilised in service advertisements in both France and the UK. Second, it explores whether the cultural dimensions of the two countries are related to the type of appeals being utilised by using the work of Albers-Miller (1996) who posited links between the advertising appeals identified by Pollay (1983) and individual cultural dimensions utilised in Hofstede's (2001) framework. Such an exploration has been undertaken for business advertising appeals previously but not consumer services. The results indicate first that English advertisements use more rational appeals than French advertisements, as predicted, but that both countries use more emotional appeals than rational for both utilitarian and experiential services. Second, that France, identified as having a higher Uncertainty-Avoidance dimension, makes greater use of the appeals linked with that dimension.

Keywords: services; advertising; appeals; culture

Introduction

As businesses continue to expand their operations across national borders the need to appreciate and manage the challenges of international advertising becomes increasingly important. As any well-travelled casual observer of advertising will know, advertisements vary across the globe in terms of appeals and executional tools. This variation needs to be understood before any effective international advertising plan can be constructed. The task is complicated further when the advertising plan is for a consumer service, a phenomenon that cannot be uncommon with services now accounting for over 65% of global output (World Bank 2004). The distinct characteristics of services (i.e. intangibility, simultaneity, heterogeneity and perishability) mean that general advertising approaches are not always applicable. Indeed, services may be more susceptible to cultural influences because of the personal involvement that is often required during consumption (Kanso and Kitchen 2004). There is therefore a need to strengthen our knowledge of international services advertising which, until recently, has received little attention.

Background

Although services advertising is beginning to gain recognition as an important area of academic research little activity has been undertaken on services advertising in the international environment. An overview of the international services advertising literature by Stafford (2005) identified 15 articles that have performed some cross-country comparison and a small number of these have examined advertising appeals and their

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relationship with culture. The main contributions are by Albers-Miller and colleagues who have conducted a number of studies using the Pollay (1983) list of advertising appeals. Pollay (1983) identified 42 appeals commonly found in product advertisements and classified these as either emotional or rational. Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999a) proposed that 28 of these appeals were relevant to services and have utilised this shortened list to examine services advertising content.

Their most substantial study examined utilitarian and experimental service advertisements across 11 culturally diverse countries (Albers-Miller and Stafford 1999a). It was found that, overall and within each country, emotional appeals were being used for experiential services and rational appeals were used for utilitarian services. This finding is in line with the contingency approach put forward by Johar and Sirgy (1991) whereby the type of appeal matches the type of product. While this seems quite logical it is in direct contrast to the work of Stafford and colleagues who proposed that rational appeals were more effective for both experiential services and utilitarian services (Stafford and Day 1995; Stafford 1996). The study also found that the number and the choice of advertising appeals per advertisement varied significantly across the different countries and this variation was considered to be a consequence of the culture of each country. A similar variation of appeals was found in a study that specifically examined financial services (Albers-Miller and Straughan 2000). However, no direct relationship between the appeal and the culture was explored.

Another study in the same year looked at goods and services advertisements across four countries, Brazil, Taiwan, Mexico and the USA (Albers-Miller and Stafford 1999b). It was concluded that emotional appeals were being used more for services than for goods and thereby culture was having a bigger impact on services advertisements than on goods advertisements. The rationale provided for this finding is that emotions vary more across different cultures than cognition (Plummer 1986). An example of the impact of culture on advertising appeals was put forward from studies in Taiwan where group membership is highly valued and emotional appeals relating to belonging such as 'popular' and 'family' are being utilised. Contradictory results were obtained in a more recent study by Bang et al. (2004) who compared appeals in service advertising in the USA and Korea. They found that both countries, despite having different cultural influences, used rational more than emotional appeals. One explanation for these findings is that their sample of magazines was entirely based on business and professional magazines. A difference in the two sets of advertisements was evident, however, in terms of quality dimensions. For example, the Korean advertisements held more tangible cues, which the article proposes may be because of the high level of Uncertainty-Avoidance characteristic in their culture.

Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999a) called for further research to examine countries that were at similar stages of economic development and to investigate more closely the relationship between appeal use and cultural values. Stafford (2005) also identifies the need for further research into the use of rational and emotional appeals and message issues generally. More specifically she recognises Europe as 'an area ripe for empirical research' (2005, 82). This current study is a response to all these calls. First, it explores two countries within the European Union, where 70% of the workforce is currently involved in the service industry sector, accounting for two-thirds of the economic development (European Business 2006). The importance of this sector has been recognised and the 'Service Directive', presently being discussed with the European Union, will lead to fewer national barriers and more trading of services across member states (European Commission 2008a). The two countries being examined in this study are the UK and France. These countries have been chosen due to their similarity in terms of population

(approx. 60 m) and economic activity as they both presently fight for fourth place in the world economic rankings and second place in the EU after Germany (WARC 2008). They also have similar advertising industry infrastructure and living standards (Whitelock and Rey 1998). Second, the study responds to the call by Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999a) for further research into rational and emotional appeals and the relationship between advertising appeals and cultural values.

Comparison of French and British advertising

A small number of studies have compared French and English advertising to establish whether a standardised advertising approach can be adopted for the two countries. An early study by Boote (1982) did not research advertising specifically but explored the culture of France and the UK by examining the values of 500 women in each country. Despite revealing strong differences in these values, he was able to identify similar groups of values among women and concluded, tentatively, that there was enough similarity for standardised advertising to be effective.

However, evidence of commonality in terms of advertising appeals is limited. Cutler and Javalgi (1992) examined French and UK goods advertisements in terms of graphic design and found that 40% of the advertising characteristics being measured were different. The French advertisements, for example, utilised a symbolic process and an abstract approach. The researchers concluded that it was not possible to standardise across these two countries due to substantial dissimilarities. An examination of food and beverage advertisements in France and the UK indicated that, although the two countries had a lot in common the French advertisements were more serious and less humorous than their UK counterparts in terms of appeals and positioning strategies (Appelbaum and Halliburton 1993). The most recent study by Whitelock and Rey (1998) found that 65% of TV commercials for products being sold in France and the UK used different advertisements and that standardised advertisements tended to be aimed at homogeneous groups such as business executives (e.g. IBM). UK advertisements contained more humour and were more straightforward. French advertisements were more artistic and 'dream-like'. Whitelock and Rey (1998) also concluded that the UK and France were too culturally dissimilar to allow much scope for standardised advertising. It would therefore appear that differences between French and UK advertising are evident, despite increasing economic and political collaboration resulting from membership of the European Union (e.g. new consumer credit law, single market for online content, etc. (European Commission 2008b)). These differences may be explained by examining Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions.

Before proceeding further it is important to acknowledge that the work of Hofstede is not without its critics. McSweeney (2002) proposes that the methodology of the model is flawed and questions whether culture can systematically cause differences in behaviour. More specifically, he questions whether the five dimensions are enough to capture the complexity of culture and proposes that the model is too simplistic. The basis of McSweeney's (2002) argument however, has also been questioned. Williamson (2002) suggests that McSweeney's (2002) criticisms are based mainly on Hofstede's use of a positivist epistemology and that although weaknesses can be identified, the Hofstede research is still useful to researchers working both within and outside the functionalist paradigm. Meanwhile a study by De Mooij (2003) proposes that Hofstede's model explains the majority of consumer behaviour across Europe. Hofstede's model has been utilised here because it is one of the few cultural frameworks that identifies differences

Table 1. Comparison of Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

| Hofstede's cultural dimensions | Index (ranking) | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------|------------|
| | UK | F | Difference |
| Individualism/Collectivism | 89 (3) | 71 (10) | 18 (7) |
| Long/Short-Term Orientation | 25 (28) | 39 (17) | 14 (11) |
| Power-Distance | 35 (17) | 68 (15) | 33 (27) |
| Masculinity–Femininity | 66 (9/10) | 43 (35) | 23 (25) |
| Uncertainty–Avoidance | 35 (47) | 86 (10) | 51 (37) |

between countries that are very similar in terms of geographical location and economic development and is used extensively in cross-cultural studies across numerous subject disciplines, thereby enabling comparisons with other work to be made.

Hofstede (2001) examined 50 countries in terms of five cultural dimensions and provided an index for each dimension. These indexes and the disparities between France and the UK are provided in Table 1. The table also includes the rankings so that some appreciation of the position of the countries compared with the other 50 can be provided. So, for example, although the two countries were more differentiated by Individualism than Orientation in terms of the index (18 compared with 14) in comparison with other countries they were closer together (seven compared with 11). As the range of index scores varies between the five dimensions it is useful to also compare the rankings to identify dissimilarity.

It can be seen that in terms of Individualism and Orientation the two countries are relatively similar. Both countries received low scores for Orientation, which indicates a society which plans for the future and which suffers short-term consequences such as diligence and prudence to reach those goals. Its opposite pole, evident in many East Asian countries, indicates a respect for tradition and need to fulfil social obligations. Both countries are also similar in terms of Individualism, which indicates that links between individuals are loose and people tend to fend for themselves. The opposite is a collective society where an individual is part of a strong group that look after each other. However some cultural differences are evident through analysis of the other three dimensions. France has a higher Power-Distance measure than the UK (ranked 15 and 42 respectively), a lower Masculinity–Femininity dimension (ranked 35) than the UK (ranked 9/10) and a high Uncertainty-Avoidance dimension (ranked 10) compared with the UK (ranked 47). In summary, with respect to Hofstede's extensive explanation of the dimensions, compared with the UK, France is seen as having a more hierarchical structure where subordinates respond to power and authority, a more caring and modest attitude to life and a strong national sense of the need to avoid or minimise risk and uncertainty.

The impact of these cultural characteristics on advertising has been explored by De Mooij (1998). She identifies the impact of the strong Individualism and Masculinity culture in the UK by the popularity of showing individuals and couples in the advertisements rather than groups and the appeals of 'do your own thing' and 'be an individual'. The representation of young people being listened to is seen as an indication of the small Power-Distance. Generally, in line with the studies discussed previously, the British advertising style is described as subtle, often containing entertainment and intelligent humour. De Mooij (1998) states that the French advertising is influenced by their culture being not only high in Individualism but also in Power-Distance. The combination of these two traits means that the desire for Individualism has to been

satisfied but not at the expense of respect for authority or elders, which can manifest itself in the use of the bizarre, fantasy and symbolism. The higher Power-Distance is reflected in the utilisation of elders advising the younger generation.

Zandpour et al. (1994) also adopted some of the Hofstede (2001) dimensions to examine the relationship between culture and creative strategy. Their findings indicated that countries that were high in both Power-Distance and Uncertainty-Avoidance (e.g. France), would utilise testimonials because of the direct assurances they provided from a reputable source and a lecture format because this provided clear directions and conclusions, minimising the level of risk. Conversely, and rather confusingly, countries with a high Power-Distance were also more likely to use a psychological appeal, containing little factual support because such a culture is not likely to question the factual content of such claims.

This link between culture and advertising appeals has been developed more explicitly by Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996) who related the appeals identified by Pollay (1983) to individual cultural dimensions utilised in Hofstede's (2001) framework and thereby enabling a relationship between the appeals and cultural values of a country to be examined. This relationship is based on the premise that consumers will respond to appeals that they perceive to be relevant and important to them and this perception is influenced by the values that are prevalent in the society in which they live due to the processes of socialisation (Hoeken et al. 2003). This Hofstede/Pollay framework was utilised to examine business advertising appeals across 11 different countries (Albers-Miller and Gelb 1996). The study found some evidence of the link between advertising appeals and culture, particularly with Hofstede's Power-Distance dimension. Although the study examined advertisements for two types of goods (office and clothing) and two types of services (financial and travel) these figures were brought together for the analysis so no comparison between the goods and services was undertaken. Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996) stated in their conclusion that concentrating their study on business magazines could mean that the advertisements reflect fewer cultural values due to the characteristics of the target group (e.g. well travelled, globally aware and well educated). The Hofstede/Pollay framework has not previously been utilised to examine service advertisements specifically, nor for consumer advertisements.

Pollay (1983) originally produced a list of 42 different rational and emotional advertising appeals. When Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996) attempted to relate the appeals to the Hofstede (2001) framework they found that such a relationship could not be found for all the appeals. The list was therefore reduced to 30 appeals. Since then Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999a) have proposed that 28 of the original 42 appeals are relevant for services. Appendix 1 presents the 28 services advertising appeals, their rational or emotional classification and their link with a Hofstede dimension if available.

As France and the UK are considered to be fairly similar in terms of Individualism/Collectivism and Long/Short-Term Orientation, as indicated in Table 1, it was felt appropriate to concentrate on the three other cultural dimensions where there is less congruence between the two countries. An application of the Pollay/Hofstede framework (Albers-Miller and Gelb 1996) would first suggest that countries at the high end of the Uncertainty-Avoidance dimension (i.e. France), would be expected to have more 'durable', 'safety' and 'tamed' appeals than countries that have a lower level of this dimension. It would be expected that UK advertisements would contain more 'effective', 'convenient' and 'productivity' appeals than countries that have a lower level of the Masculinity-Femininity dimension. Lastly the French advertisements should

contain a high number of 'ornamental', 'dear', 'vain' and 'status' appeals than the UK advertisements as these appeals are linked to the Power-Distance dimension.

As Appendix 1 indicates, Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996) also identified some negative relationships between the Pollay appeals and Hofstede dimensions. As there was only one negative appeal for the three areas of concern to this study it was decided to concentrate on the positive relationships.

Hypotheses

The literature comparing advertising appeals in French and British advertising would so far suggest that the British approach is more logical and straightforward while the French advertising is more 'dream-like' and symbolic. From these descriptions it is possible to propose that the British advertisements will be more likely to use rational advertising appeals compared with the French style of advertising, which would seem more in line with emotional appeals. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed for testing:

- H1a: UK advertisements will contain more rational appeals than French advertisements.
- H1b: French advertisements will contain more emotional appeals than British advertisements.

Second, the Pollay/Hofstede framework enables a relationship between advertising appeals and cultural values to be explored. More specifically the literature provides evidence for the following hypotheses:

- H2a: French advertisements will contain a higher number of appeals linked to the Power-Distance dimension (i.e. 'ornamental', 'dear', 'vain' and 'status') than the UK advertisements.
- H2b: UK advertisements will contain a higher number of appeals linked to the Masculinity-Femininity dimension (i.e. 'effective', 'convenient' and 'productivity') than the French advertisements.
- H2c: French advertising will contain a higher number of appeals linked to the Uncertainty-Avoidance dimension (i.e. 'durable', 'safety' and 'tamed') than the UK advertisements.

The paper will now explain the methodology utilised to test these five hypotheses.

Methodology

This exploratory study analysed magazine advertisements from the UK and France using the quantitative content analysis technique. Content analysis is a widely used and reputable research tool (Cutler and Javalgi 1992), which facilitates the observation of advertising across national borders and can provide scientific rigour to the data generated (Kassarjian 1977).

To ensure a broad selection of magazine advertisements the sampling frame consisted of eight randomly selected issues of *Le Point* (published in France) and *The Economist* (published in the UK) from the time period spanning December 2003 to February 2004. Both are nationally circulated, weekly publications in their respective countries. Likewise, three randomly selected issues of *Marie Claire* (published monthly in France) and *Marie Claire* (published monthly in the UK) were selected from the time period spanning October 2003 to February 2004.

These publications were chosen because of their homogeneous audience across cultures. *Le Point* and *The Economist* are business-orientated publications and thereby cater to business and professional readers who are considered to be a very similar group of people despite geographical location (Albers-Miller and Straughan 2000). However it was also felt necessary to include the *Marie Claire* advertisements to provide a more heterogeneous selection of service advertisements and address a male and perhaps rational bias that may have existed otherwise. The same magazine, published in the two different countries was chosen to again ensure that the publication was being aimed at the same type of reader.

A total of 25 French advertisements (*Le Point*: 21 and *Marie Claire*: 4) and 25 UK advertisements (*The Economist*: 18 and *Marie Claire*: 7) were analysed. This size of sample is similar to the research undertaken by Albers-Miller and Straughan (2000) where they examined 33 advertisements from Finland and 38 from Taiwan, although numbers do vary across studies. The relatively low number of services advertisements drawn from *Marie Claire* (France and the UK) is due to the disproportionately high number of advertisements for physical goods present in each magazine.

The 28 service advertising appeals identified by Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999a) were used to classify the type of appeals manifest in each advertisement. A detailed description of each of these appeals was provided to the coders beforehand for familiarisation and reference purposes. The advertisements were then systematically coded by examining each one to establish which appeals were evident in the advertisement and ticking them off on the checklist. Only appeals identified in visuals, headings, titles and major captions were coded. From this documentation it was possible to examine the frequency of individual appeals. As each appeal was a priori classified as emotional or rational by Pollay (1983), the frequency of each general category could also be established.

All the advertisements were coded by a native English speaker with French fluency (author) and a native French speaker with English fluency. The rationale for using two native speakers was to ensure that cultural dissimilarities in terms of copy and advertising expression were documented accurately and without cultural-bias. Tse, Belk and Zhou (1989) endorsed the importance of coding advertisements in the language of the publication, while Biswas and Olsen (1992) noted the danger of coding advertisements without a deep cultural understanding of the country under consideration. Conflict was resolved through coder discussion but it was minimal.

Further reliability checks were performed by employing a third coder, a UK native with experience of the French language and culture. This approach is similar to that taken by Ha (1998) who also adopted additional coders to examine a subsample in order to ensure suitable levels of reliability. Twenty advertisements, 10 from each country, were randomly selected and coded. The reliability check indicated interrater consistency of 90%, which is above the 85% coefficient of reliability reported by Kassarian (1977) as satisfactory. Discussions were concerned primarily with definitions of 'safety' and 'modern' appeals and the identification of dissimilarities between 'affiliation' and 'status' appeals. No advertisements produced drastically different results from the initial judging and hence the number of advertisements incorporated in the study remained the same.

Results

The 50 advertisements examined in this study promoted a diverse range of services. Utilitarian services, such as financial and banking accounted for 60% of the sample, with

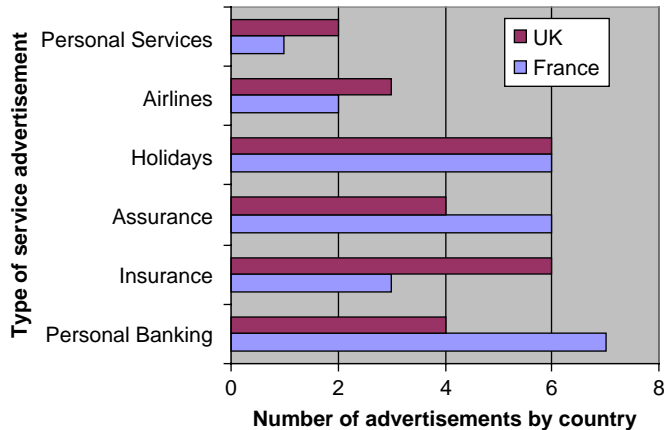


Figure 1. Total advertisements by subcategory and country.

the remaining 40% being experiential services, such as holidays and travel. The breakdown of the advertisements by country and service can be seen in Figure 1.

A descriptive statistical analysis was undertaken in order to assess the relative frequency of each of Pollay's (1983) 28 appeals on a country-specific basis. A preliminary analysis of France and the UK suggests that there are considerable differences in the types of appeals manifested in print services advertisements across the respective countries. This can be illustrated by examining the most popular appeals utilised in each country, as presented in Table 2. It can be seen that 56% of the UK advertisements had some reference to Freedom ($n = 14$). In direct contrast the most frequent appeal utilised in France was Security ($n = 13$). The two countries were similar in that both were utilising emotional appeals extensively, with their two most popular appeals fitting into that category. This observation is confirmed in the statistical tests that follow.

All data were analysed using the SPSS software package. It was felt that *t*-tests were the most appropriate statistical technique since they permit distinctions to be made between the means of separate groups. At this stage of the analysis the raw data were collapsed into rational and emotional appeals of French or UK advertisements. A statistical analysis of the use of rational and emotional appeals was performed using independent groups *t*-tests to examine the differences in the use of the two appeals for each country and to compare the two countries. The significance level was set at the 5% probability level with the confidence interval for the difference between the means set at 95%. The results of this analysis can be seen in Table 3.

Table 2. Most frequent appeals by country.

| Appeal | Appeal type | Number | % of adverts |
|--------------------|-------------|--------|--------------|
| Top UK appeals | | | |
| Freedom | Emotional | 14 | 56 |
| Relaxation | Emotional | 12 | 48 |
| Modern | Rational | 11 | 44 |
| Top French appeals | | | |
| Security | Emotional | 13 | 52 |
| Distinction | Emotional | 11 | 44 |
| Effective | Emotional | 9 | 36 |

Table 3. Use of rational and emotional appeals per advertisement in France and the UK.

| Appeal | France | UK | Both countries | <i>t</i> -value |
|-----------------|---------|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Rational | 1.08 | 1.28 | 1.18 | 4.681* |
| Emotional | 2.48 | 2.40 | 2.44 | 0.111 |
| <i>t</i> -value | 7.272** | 5.6** | 9.1164** | |

*significant at the .05 level; **significant at the .01 level.

The UK advertisements contain an average of 1.28 rational advertising appeals compared with the French advertisements, which had 1.08 rational appeals (a similar result of 1.05 rational appeals in French advertisements was found in the Albers-Miller and Safford (1999a) study). This difference is found to be significant at the 0.05 level ($t(48) = 4.681, p < .05$). This provides support for earlier work that found that UK advertisements were of a more rational and concrete nature (Cutler and Javalagi 1992; Whitelock and Rey 1998). This is despite the fact that the UK sample had slightly more advertisements from *Marie Claire* than the French sample, which was assumed to provide a more emotional input. The H1a hypothesis is therefore supported.

Nevertheless, both are using significantly more emotional appeals than rational appeals, despite the fact that the majority of the advertisements are for utilitarian services ($t(48) = 9.164, p < .01$). The proliferation of emotional appeals in service advertisements was also identified by Albers-Miller and colleagues and provides further recognition of the importance of emotion when promoting services (Stafford and Day 1995). Although the French advertisements are containing more emotional appeals, as expected, the difference between the two countries is not significant ($t(48) = 0.111, p > .05$) and consequently the H1b hypothesis is not supported.

Pollay-Hofstede cultural relationships

Power-Distance dimension

The results show that the appeals linked to this dimension (i.e. 'ornamental', 'dear', 'vain' and 'status') appear with greater frequency in UK advertisements (mean = 0.96) than in French advertisements (mean = 0.64). This difference is significant ($p = 0.044$) but not in the direction predicted, as France has a higher ranking in the Power-Distance dimension than the UK. Therefore H2a is not supported.

Masculinity-Femininity dimension

The mean number of relevant appeals (i.e. 'effective', 'convenient' and 'productivity') identified in French advertisements is 0.60 appeals, compared to 0.52 appeals in the UK, which does not represent a significant difference between the two countries ($p = .352$). Therefore the H2b hypothesis is not supported.

Uncertainty-Avoidance dimension

French advertisements made significantly greater use of the three appeals (i.e. 'durable', 'safety' and 'tamed') (mean = 0.48) than UK advertisements (mean = 0.20). The difference between the two means is 0.28 and, as $p = .01$, this is significant at the 1% level. Therefore the H2c hypothesis is supported by the findings.

These results indicate that Uncertainty-Avoidance dimension seems to be reflected in the choice of appeals, with France utilising the appeals of 'durable', 'safety' and 'tamed'

more often than the UK. The Masculinity–Femininity and Power–Distance cultural dimensions are not influencing the advertising appeals being utilised in the two countries in the predicted manner.

Discussion

This exploratory research examines the use of advertising appeals in French and UK consumer service advertisements. By utilising both the Pollay (1983) classification scheme and the Hofstede (2001) cultural dimensions, it has been possible to compare the appeals that are popular in each country and to examine whether this choice of appeal is being influenced by the cultural values of that country.

The results indicate that there is a difference in the way that services are being advertised in the UK and France. As previous literature suggests the UK advertisements are more rational and straightforward in nature. Nonetheless the findings also provide strong evidence that emotional appeals have an important role to play in the promotion of consumer services, both in France and the UK. Although the UK has more rational appeals in its advertisements than the French, both countries have more emotional appeals than rational appeals. The importance of emotion has been recognised by some for a considerable time (e.g. Urwin 1975) and yet the acceptance of its role in services advertising has been slow in gathering pace due to the dominance of the traditional rational argument which is the main theme of the conceptual frameworks that underpin the discipline. These results will hopefully contribute to the recognition that emotion plays an important part in the decision-making process when consumers are purchasing not only experiential but also utilitarian consumer services.

The research also explores the relationships between three cultural dimensions of France and the UK and the specific advertising appeals appearing in the two countries. The results indicate that there are differences in the choice of specific appeals and some of this discrepancy may be explained by the attitude that French people have to taking risks and facing uncertainty, that is, the Uncertainly-Avoidance cultural dimension. It is interesting to note that the most popular advertising appeal in France is ‘security’ (52%) and in UK is ‘freedom’ (56%). This clearly reflects the cultural difference between the two countries.

However the other two hypothesised relationships between cultural values and appeals were not proven. Previous research in this area has also found conflicting results. Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996), who did a similar study on business advertising across 11 countries found that only 18 of their 30 hypotheses based on the Hofstede/Pollay relationships were supported, the strongest being the Power–Distance dimension. They concluded that it was possible to identify a variation in advertising appeals across the cultures but that there were other variables having an influence that needed to be defined.

It is interesting to note that Uncertainty-Avoidance is the cultural dimension that differs the most between the two countries, that is, a difference of 37 positions in the ranking. This could be an indication that the cultural difference needs to be of a certain magnitude before the impact on advertising appeals becomes apparent. An advertising experiment performed by Hoeken et al. (2003) examined the influence of Uncertainty-Avoidance values across four European countries, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain. They found that respondents from all four countries responded to security advertising appeals for a watch in a similar way despite the Netherlands having a much lower Uncertainty-Avoidance culture than the other three countries. However the Netherlands is ranked 35 in the Hofstede rankings compared with a ranking of 47 for the UK. Perhaps it is only at the extremes of the cultural values that an influence can be detected. Further investigation is obviously required in this area as discussed below.

Managerial implications

An increasing number of service organisations are finding themselves in the global arena and are thereby required to put together an international advertising strategy. In order to do this effectively an appreciation of the impact of culture on advertising effectiveness is important. Indeed, it has been suggested that the influence of culture on services advertising may be stronger than on goods advertising because services often demand more personal involvement and active participation in their consumption (Kanso and Kitchen 2004).

This study indicates that advertisers of both utilitarian and experiential services need to consider the use of emotional advertising appeals to communicate benefits to their consumers. However they also need to be aware of local cultural differences. Even two countries, such as France and the UK, which are similar in many ways and are often grouped together under a 'European' umbrella, have distinct cultural characteristics that have an impact on advertising appeals. In this case the two countries have very different cultural values with reference to Uncertainty-Avoidance, which is of particular relevance to services as the purchase of a service is perceived to be a high risk activity due to its intangible nature and lack of search qualities. The multiple effect of a high risk purchase in a country with a strong Uncertainty-Avoidance culture may explain why there seems to be a strong influence on the advertising appeals being used. Practitioners promoting their services in countries that have different levels of this cultural dimension may find that a standardised advertising campaign is not the most effective approach. Instead it may be necessary to include more reassurance and present a more trust-worthy image in countries that have a high Uncertainty-Avoidance cultural value.

Limitations and future research

This study is based on a small sample size and should be replicated on a larger scale to explore the relationships between cultural dimensions and advertising appeals further. This would probably result in sourcing a number of publications due to the shortage of service magazine advertisements, compared with goods. Alternatively a similar study could be undertaken examining TV commercials to establish any media effects.

Results so far in this area would suggest that there may be other variables that are mediating or moderating the relationship between cultural values and advertising appeals. Some exploratory studies into their identity would strengthen our understanding. One possible area to consider would be the type of service being advertised. Mortimer (2002) proposes that services can be classified in terms of involvement and levels of emotion. Lovelock (1983) created a classification scheme that includes such variables as tangible versus intangible service acts and continuous versus discrete service delivery. It would be worthwhile to discover whether there is a variety of appeals in these different categories of services.

Lastly this exploratory study is the first step in establishing the cultural differences that exist between countries of similar economic development and the impact they have on services advertising appeals. It is now necessary to undertake similar studies on other European countries. A brief overview of Hofstede's Cultural Index Table indicates that there is a significant variation between the EU members. For example, in terms of the Masculinity dimension, Austria is ranked two and Denmark is ranked 50. Greece is ranked one in terms of Uncertainty-Avoidance compared with Ireland, which is ranked 47. As these countries debate the inclusion of new members into the club it is important to establish the impact that this present diversity already has on the promotion of services.

Notes on contributors

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Appendix 1. The Pollay 28 service advertising appeals linked to the Hofstede dimensions

| Pollay appeal | Classification | Hofstede dimension | Relationship |
|---------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Adventure | Emotional | UAI | Negative |
| Tamed | Rational | UAI | Positive |
| Safety | Rational | UAI | Positive |
| Durable | Rational | UAI | Positive |
| Plain | Emotional | PDI | Negative |
| Vain | Emotional | PDI | Positive |
| Status | Emotional | PDI | Positive |
| Ornamental | Emotional | PDI | Positive |
| Dear | Emotional | PDI | Positive |
| Natural | Rational | MAS | Negative |
| Productivity | Rational | MAS | Positive |
| Effective | Rational | MAS | Positive |
| Convenient | Rational | MAS | Positive |
| Popular | Emotional | IDV | Negative |
| Community | Emotional | IDV | Negative |
| Affiliation | Emotional | IDV | Negative |
| Security | Emotional | IDV | Positive |
| Independence | Rational | IDV | Positive |
| Distinctive | Emotional | IDV | Positive |
| Traditional | Emotional | | |
| Modern | Rational | | |
| Wisdom | Rational | | |
| Relaxation | Emotional | | |
| Enjoyment | Emotional | | |
| Morality | Emotional | | |
| Freedom | Emotional | | |
| Healthy | Rational | | |
| Neat | Rational | | |

UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance Index, PDI = Power Distance Index, MAS = Masculinity, IDV = Individualism.