

# Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Attitude Towards Outdoor Advertising in Internet Era

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**Abstract**—Outdoor advertising has had very long history. In this internet era, it is interesting to investigate whether outdoor ad will fade out or not. This paper compares the attitudes toward outdoor ad with Internet ad. Moreover, it examines cross-cultural differences in attitudes toward outdoor advertising and investigates the effects of different belief factors on consumer attitudes. Data were collected from university students in China, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. The results show that Hong Kong and Chinese respondents held the most favourable attitudes toward outdoor advertising while UK respondents held the least favourable. Furthermore, the respondents from the three areas had more favourable attitudes toward outdoor advertising compared with Internet advertising. The results also suggest that the advertisers should consider seriously the spending on outdoor advertising which is still favourable in the internet era.

**Keywords**— attitude, outdoor advertising, cross-cultural perspectives

## I. INTRODUCTION

Corporations spend vast sums of advertising each year on advertising to achieve their corporate objectives. As more corporations go international, the importance of advertising is increasing. Global advertising net expenditures in 2011 were US \$481.56 billion (ZenithOptimedia, 2011). Among the expected consequences of this huge spending on advertising are an increase in consumer demand for and interest in advertised products, thereby triggering consumer intentions to buy in order to produce an enormous increase in sales volume. Studies (Larry and Shimp, 1985; Scott, Lutz and Belch, 1986) have indicated that attitudes toward specific advertisements influence attitudes toward brands and eventually purchase behavior. In other words, if consumers have a favorable attitude toward an advertisement, that favorable attitude will then be transferred to the advertised product.

Outdoor advertising includes advertising on bill boards or signboards, outside of a building and often by the roadside (BusinessDirectory.com, 2012). Outdoor advertising has had very long history. For example, “thousands of years ago, the Egyptians employed a tall stone obelisk to publicize laws and treaties” (Outdoor Advertising Association of America, 2012).

Contrast to the “old” outdoor advertising, Internet advertising is a very new medium, only emerging in 1990s. Since then, Internet advertising has grown very fast. In 2011, Internet ad spend was 16.1% of the total global advertising expenditure while outdoor ad was only 6.7% (ZenithOptimedia, 2011). Furthermore, Internet ad was predicted increasing by double digits in the coming few years while outdoor advertising was at best stagnant, if not decreasing. In this digital age, will outdoor advertising be replaced by Internet advertising? It is important to know the people’s attitude toward outdoor advertising. It is also interesting to know whether attitudes toward outdoor ad are different from those toward Internet ad. Due to cross-cultural differences among different areas, it is predicted that the attitudes toward outdoor advertising should differ across

different cultures. Thus this paper also tries to compare the attitudes towards outdoor advertising across different areas.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Cultural Background Influencing Attitudes toward Advertising

Levitt (1983) argues that people around the world share the same tastes and desires and will therefore be persuaded by universal advertising appeals. On the other hand, Mooji (1994) and Muller (1996) argued that cultural factors have a strong impact on communication strategies and thus standardizing advertising across different markets is difficult to achieve. These two arguments stem from customer cultural values, which are the most significant element affecting consumer beliefs and thus attitudes toward advertising.

Considerable research has been conducted to indicate cross-cultural differences as a barrier of advertising standardization (Mooji, 1994; Mooji, 1997; Jones, 2000). Witkowski and Kellner (1998) examined attitudes toward TV advertising in Germany and America and showed that although cultural differences existed, attitudes in these two countries were largely convergent taken as a whole. As noted by Taylor and Miracle (1997), US and Korean participants responded differently to television commercials with varied levels of information content, a phenomenon that could be attributed to cultural differences. Apart from TV advertising, Guo et al. (2006) provided empirical evidence that cross-cultural differences also exist in attitudes toward Internet advertising.

### B. Attitudes toward Advertising

Consumer attitudes toward advertising can be categorized into several dimensions. Numerous studies have identified different belief factors that determine attitudes. The classic study of Bauer and Greyser (1968) classified belief statements into two dimensions: economic and social. Larkin (1977) designed belief statements about advertising on the basis of four attitudinal areas (economic, social, ethical and the regulation). The results of a Q-analysis showed that respondents clustered into five types according to their responses to the belief statements with respect to the four aspects. Sandage and Leckenby (1980) study showed that respondents held more favourable attitudes toward the institution of advertising than toward the instruments used to implement an institution’s functions.

Pollay and Mittal (1993) further categorized attitudes toward advertising into seven factors, including three personal utility factors (product information, social image information, and hedonic amusement) and four socioeconomic factors (good for economy, fostering materialism, corrupting values, and falsity/no-sense). The authors proposed a comprehensive model of beliefs about advertising by identifying those factors attributable to the beliefs and investigating the relationship between belief factors and overall attitudes.

Marketers should examine the effectiveness of advertising before selecting a particular medium. As noted by Shimp (1981) and MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986), attitudes toward advertising are a predictor of consumer brand attitude, and hence of advertising effectiveness. Therefore, consumer attitudes toward outdoor advertising should provide insight into the effectiveness and cost efficiency of using outdoor as an advertising medium.

One newer study, Osmonbekov (2009), focused on the materialism of people and claimed that the more agreeable view on "money can buy happiness" had positive relationship with attitudes toward advertising. Ewing (2013) studied Australian TV viewers' attitudes toward advertising in quasi-longitudinal approach in 4 different years from 2002 to 2010 and found that the consumers had been stable over time.

### C. Outdoor Advertising

Compared with other media, there has been relatively less literature on outdoor advertising. Most of the studies focused on the measurement of effectiveness of outdoor advertising, especially recall and recognition (e.g., Donthu, Fitts and Hewett, 1977, King and Tinkham, 1989; Bloom, 2000, Wilson and Till, 2011). There have been not many studies on attitudes (e.g. Shavitt, Vargas and Lowrey, 2004).

## III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

There are various factors affecting the attitudes towards outdoor advertising. Following Lakin (1977)'s classification of five dimensions, including economic influence, social influence, personal influence, ethical influence as well as government regulations, Cultural differences also play an important part in affecting the five dimensions, and in turn, attitude towards outdoor advertising.

From Hofstede (2008), China, Hong Kong and United Kingdom have huge differences in at least 3 out of the 5 dimensions (difference in "power distance", "individualism/collectivism" and "long-term orientation"; while the other two are "uncertainty avoidance" and "masculinity/femininity"). We should predict that the three areas will have different attitudes towards outdoor advertising.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

### A. Exploratory study

A pre-test with twelve students was conducted to explore their ideas on different aspects of advertising. Their answers to open-ended questions, including the good or bad effects of advertising on personal, economic, social, ethical, and regulatory aspects, were recorded. The responses were then coded and they aided in designing the measurement items for the main study.

### B. Sampling and Data Collection

Beijing, Hong Kong and Warwick are chosen for our samples of study. As most of the Chinese cities are dominated by ethnic Chinese, it is natural to pick Beijing (the capital) to represent China. From the U.K. Census 2001, the whites were about 92% of the total population in U.K. The percentage of white people was far below in London with approximately 66% for Inner London and 75% for Outer London. On the contrary, the percentage of whites in Warwick was nearly 93%. From the viewpoint of cultural representative, Warwick is a better choice than London. Thus we used Beijing, Hong Kong and Warwick in our cross-cultural study.

University students were chosen in the sample as they have similar demographic make-ups and thus minimize the

heterogeneous element within a group. This may help achieve our purpose in making cross-cultural comparison. Moreover, students represent a very sizeable target market with substantial disposable income (Cheng, 1999). They stand for an attractive source of future advertising personnel (Dubinsky and Hensel, 1984). A total of 462 college students at universities in Beijing, Hong Kong and Warwick were recruited and 458 questionnaires were successfully completed. Data collection was carried out separately in the three cities. Personal interview was used to collect data in the main study. All interviewees were briefed and trained before conducting the interview.

### C. Questionnaire

The questionnaire measured beliefs and attitudes toward outdoor advertising. It consisted of 20 belief statements and 2 attitude statements measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "1" being "strongly disagree" to "7" being "strongly agree" with "4" being "neutral." The belief statements reflected both positive and negative aspects of advertising and assessed five attitudinal areas: economic influence, personal influence, social influence, ethical influence, and advertising regulation. All items were adapted from Larkin's (1977) study with adjustments made in reference to the data collected from the exploratory study. Apart from the belief measurement, overall attitudes toward advertising were also measured. Respondents were asked to indicate their extent of agreement on two attitude statements: "I consider outdoor advertising a good thing," and "I like outdoor advertising."

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the analysis, the Likert scales were transferred from "-3" (strongly disagree) to "3" (strongly agree) with "0" as neutral. In addition, all negative belief statements were reversed to positive statements for consistent comparison.

### A. Analysis of Beliefs about and Attitudes toward outdoor Advertising

Table 1 shows the mean of each of the 20 belief items and tests of whether any cross-cultural differences exist on these means. A positive value implies a positive view of the statement, whereas a negative value implies a negative view. The respondents from the three locations possessed different opinions on 18 belief items significantly at  $p < .01$  and 1 item at  $p < .05$ . HK respondents held the most positive view on 18 belief items, while both China and UK respondents held the most positive view on only 1 belief item each.

Respondents' views on the two attitude statements about outdoor advertising are different among the three cities: for "I consider outdoor advertising a good thing", the mean values of China, Hong Kong and UK are 0.67, 1.20, and 0.08 respectively; for "I like outdoor advertising", the mean values are 0.37, 1.15 and -0.18 respectively. F tests and mean differences between any of the three areas show that respondents from the three areas possessed different opinions on both attitude statements at  $p < .01$ . The Hong Kong respondents had much stronger positive views on advertising on both statements, whereas UK respondents had the most negative views.

**Table 1: Mean values of belief items on Outdoor Advertising: China, Hong Kong, and the UK**

Belief Items	China <sup>b</sup>	Hong Kong <sup>b</sup>	UK <sup>b</sup>	F Statistic	Effects on the 3 cities <sup>c</sup>
<i><u>Economic Influence:</u></i>					
Outdoor advertising helps raise our standard of living	0.36 <sup>***</sup>	0.68 <sup>***</sup>	-0.47 <sup>***</sup>	25.61 <sup>***</sup>	mixed
Outdoor advertising is essential to economic growth	0.17	0.79 <sup>***</sup>	0.12	11.05 <sup>***</sup>	
In general outdoor advertising results in lower prices	-0.55 <sup>***</sup>	-0.46 <sup>***</sup>	-0.29 <sup>**</sup>	1.67	-
Outdoor advertising results in a better product for the public	-0.05	0.15 <sup>*</sup>	-0.39 <sup>***</sup>	6.99 <sup>***</sup>	mixed
<i><u>Personal Influence:</u></i>					
Outdoor advertising provides entertainment for people	0.35 <sup>***</sup>	0.88 <sup>***</sup>	0.11	11.38 <sup>***</sup>	
Outdoor advertising provides free information for product choice	0.57 <sup>***</sup>	1.09 <sup>***</sup>	0.46 <sup>***</sup>	8.15 <sup>***</sup>	+
Outdoor advertising creates more career opportunities	0.34 <sup>***</sup>	0.78 <sup>***</sup>	0.04	11.45 <sup>***</sup>	
<i><u>Social Influence:</u></i>					
Outdoor advertising does not often persuade people to buy things they really don't need <sup>a</sup>	-0.33 <sup>***</sup>	-0.23 <sup>**</sup>	-0.82 <sup>***</sup>	8.24 <sup>***</sup>	-
Outdoor advertising does not lead to materialism, i.e., create a tendency to give undue importance to possessing material goods <sup>a</sup>	0.08	-0.07	-0.78 <sup>***</sup>	17.15 <sup>***</sup>	
Most outdoor advertising is not silly and ridiculous <sup>a</sup>	0.37 <sup>***</sup>	0.64 <sup>***</sup>	-0.04	10.32 <sup>***</sup>	
Outdoor advertising should not be more realistic <sup>a</sup>	-0.77 <sup>***</sup>	-0.28 <sup>***</sup>	-0.07	11.55 <sup>***</sup>	
Outdoor advertising is not making us a nation of conformists <sup>a</sup>	0.59 <sup>***</sup>	0.76 <sup>***</sup>	-0.06	14.60 <sup>***</sup>	
<i><u>Ethical Influence:</u></i>					
There is not too much exaggeration in outdoor advertising <sup>a</sup>	-0.11	0.43 <sup>***</sup>	-0.03	8.11 <sup>***</sup>	
There is not too much fear and violence in outdoor advertising <sup>a</sup>	0.35 <sup>***</sup>	0.69 <sup>***</sup>	0.59 <sup>***</sup>	2.71 <sup>*</sup>	+
Most outdoor advertising is not false or misleading <sup>a</sup>	-0.35 <sup>***</sup>	0.30 <sup>***</sup>	0.02	10.96 <sup>***</sup>	mixed
There should not be less stress on sex in outdoor advertising <sup>a</sup>	-1.25 <sup>***</sup>	-0.43 <sup>***</sup>	-0.44 <sup>***</sup>	16.03 <sup>***</sup>	-
Outdoor advertising does not set bad examples for children <sup>a</sup>	0.11	0.38 <sup>***</sup>	-0.36 <sup>***</sup>	10.60 <sup>***</sup>	mixed
<i><u>Advertising Regulation:</u></i>					
There should not be less outdoor advertising <sup>a</sup>	-0.08	0.98 <sup>***</sup>	-0.24 <sup>**</sup>	34.27 <sup>***</sup>	mixed
There should not be a ban on outdoor advertising of harmful or dangerous products <sup>a</sup>	-1.57 <sup>***</sup>	-1.20 <sup>***</sup>	-1.67 <sup>***</sup>	4.61 <sup>***</sup>	-
There should not be more government regulation of outdoor advertising <sup>a</sup>	-1.52 <sup>***</sup>	-0.61 <sup>***</sup>	-0.82 <sup>***</sup>	18.97 <sup>***</sup>	-

Notes:

a Items are reverse statements from the original questionnaire.

b The means are tested compared with 0.

c "+" means that the belief statement is significantly positive for all the 3 cities (at p&lt;0.05); "-" means that the belief statement is significantly negative for all the 3 cities (at p&lt;0.05); "mixed" means that at least 2 cities have different significant views on that statements (at p&lt;0.05).

\*: p&lt;.1, \*\*: p&lt;.05, \*\*\*: p&lt;.01

**B. Effect of Beliefs on Attitudes toward outdoor Advertising**

The items in the belief constructs were averaged to form five composite scores representing the five aspects of belief. A regression was then conducted by testing the effects of the five dimensions on attitude. Let Eco = Economic Beliefs, Per = Personal Beliefs, Soc = Social Beliefs, Eth = Ethical Beliefs, Reg = Regulatory Beliefs. To incorporate the cross-cultural differences among the three cities, two dummy variables were added in the regression: HK (1 if Hong Kong respondents and 0 otherwise) and BJ (1 if Chinese respondents and 0 otherwise). The results are shown as below:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Attitude} = & 0.05 + 0.53 \text{ HK} + 0.38 \text{ BJ} + 0.32 \text{ Eco} + 0.51 \text{ Per} \\ & (0.11) (0.13)^{***} (0.13)^{***} (0.06)^{***} (0.05)^{***} \\ & + 0.12 \text{ Soc} + 0.18 \text{ Eth} + 0.07 \text{ Reg} \\ & (0.07)^* (0.06)^{***} (0.05) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.46, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.45, Number of observations = 456  
 Note: Figures within the parentheses beneath the coefficients are the standard errors of the respective coefficients.  
 \*\*\* p < .01, \*\* p < .05, \* p < .1

The results show that the two dummy variables have significant effects on attitudes toward outdoor advertising, demonstrating cross-cultural differences on these attitudes. Specifically, Hong Kong respondents possessed the most positive attitude and UK respondents the least positive. These differences may be explained by outdoor viewing habits in Hong Kong. Moreover, among the five factors of belief, four have positive effects on attitudes: economic, personal, social and ethical factors. The only insignificant factor is regulation.

**C. Would Outdoor Advertising be Replaced by Internet Advertising?**

An advertiser faces the problem of choosing a medium or a mix of media for promotion. In face of the digital era, an advertiser has to seriously consider how many resources are allocated in traditional media and Internet. Consumer attitudes provide at least some information about such effectiveness. In this paper, as our focus is outdoor ad, thus we compare the attitudes toward outdoor ad and Internet ad.

To make a broader comparison of the belief items, we combined them into the five dimensions: economic influence, personal influence, social influence, ethical influence, and advertising regulation (Table 2). Both Hong Kong and UK were more favorable on all the five dimensions toward outdoor ads. China has more favorable scores on personal influence, social influence, ethical influence, and advertising regulation. The only exception is economic influence for which the values were insignificant for both outdoor ad and Internet ad.

Table 3 shows the comparison between attitudes toward outdoor ads and Internet ads on the two attitude statements by the three areas. All three areas had significantly favorable scores for outdoor ads against Internet ads on both comparison between “I consider outdoor advertising a good thing” and “I consider outdoor advertising a good thing”, and between “I like outdoor advertising” and “I like Internet advertising”. The results confirm that outdoor ads are viewed most favorably in all the three areas.

**Table 2: Values of attitudes and the five dimensions on the Internet and Outdoor Ads in the three cities<sup>a</sup>**

	China		Hong Kong		UK	
	In <sup>b</sup>	Out <sup>c</sup>	In <sup>b</sup>	Out <sup>c</sup>	In <sup>b</sup>	Out <sup>c</sup>
Economic influence	<u>0.03</u>	-0.02	0.14*	<u>0.29</u> ***	-0.53***	<u>-0.25</u> **
Personal influence	0.38***	<u>0.41</u> ***	0.67***	<u>0.91</u> ***	-0.44***	<u>0.20</u> *
Social influence	-0.15**	<u>-0.01</u>	0.11	<u>0.17</u> ***	-0.48***	<u>-0.35</u> ***
Ethical influence	-0.75***	<u>-0.25</u> ***	-0.12*	<u>0.28</u> ***	-0.59***	<u>-0.05</u>
Advertising regulation	-1.20***	<u>-1.06</u> ***	-0.99***	<u>-0.27</u> ***	-1.75***	<u>-0.93</u> ***

Notes:  
 a: Underlined items show the highest value among the four media.  
 b: In=Internet ad  
 c: Out=Outdoor ad  
 \*: p < .1, \*\* p < .05, \*\*\* p < .01

**Table 3: Comparison between Mean Values of Attitude Statements**

(i) “I consider outdoor advertising a good thing” versus “I consider Internet advertising a good thing”

	“I consider outdoor advertising a good thing”	“I consider Internet advertising a good thing”	Difference of Means <sup>a</sup>
China	0.67***	0.36***	0.31**
Hong Kong	1.20***	0.35***	0.85***
UK	0.08**	-0.97***	1.05***

(ii) “I like outdoor advertising” versus “I like Internet advertising”

	“I like outdoor advertising”	“I like Internet advertising”	Difference of Means <sup>b</sup>
China	0.37***	-0.14	0.50***
Hong Kong	1.15***	-0.43***	1.58***
UK	-0.18**	-1.57***	1.39***

Notes:  
 a: The difference between means: “I consider outdoor advertising a good thing” - “I consider Internet advertising a good thing”.  
 b: The difference between means: “I like outdoor advertising” - “I like Internet advertising”.  
 \*\*: p < .05, \*\*\*: p < .01

**VI. BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS**

This paper found that respondents had the most favorable attitudes toward outdoor advertising on matters of personal influence (Table 1). It becomes importance for advertisers or advertising agencies to maintain the functions of providing entertainment and information of outdoor advertising. On the other hand, the respondents in the three areas in general agreed that there need to be regulations on restricting outdoor advertising. The advertising industry may like to alarm on the people’s opinions and may like to enhance the industry ethical codes.

It is really a threat to the traditional advertising, including outdoor advertising in face of the rapid development of Internet

advertising. From the results on the attitudes toward Internet advertising, it is a relief on the traditional advertising. Comparing outdoor advertising and Internet advertising, the respondents in all the three areas overwhelmingly had more favourable attitudes toward outdoor advertising. Thus at least in the near future, outdoor advertising should still have an important place.

In each of the three areas, outdoor advertising spending involves only a small share among different media: China 5.3% (*China Advertising*, 2007), Hong Kong 5.2% (*AC Nielsen*, 2007), and UK 5.7% (*The Advertising Statistics Book*, 2007). In view of the favourable attitudes toward outdoor advertising, the advertisers should seriously review their spending on outdoor ads.

From the recent trends of promotion programmes, we can see the integration of Online games, mobile advertising as well as outdoor promotion activities. Furthermore, the advance in digital technology provides new blood to outdoor ad. The outdoor advertising industry is experiencing a paradigm shift as static ad displays are being converted to digital materials. It is common to find digital package of outdoor advertising: digital signage in retail stores, hotels, restaurants, and corporate buildings; digital TVs in gas stations; interactive video messages in outdoor Point of Purchase (POP) Displays; and digital billboards with changing images.

Two examples can illustrate the trend of digitalize of outdoor advertising. An example is that Polo Ralph Lauren made use of 4D digital outdoor experience in 2010 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of its US e-commerce site and the launch of the UK version. Describing the event as "[t]he ultimate collision of fashion, art and technology," advanced architectural video mapping technology was projected onto the façade of the firm's flagship locations on Madison Avenue and Bond Street to give a visual seven-minute journey through the world of Ralph Lauren. Another example is the launching of Samsung Galaxy S2 in Hong Kong in 2012. Samsung announced the time and location of catching virtual SII i-butterfly via the Samsung Tablet 3D Video Wall located in a busy street. This promotion activity created mass awareness and publicity.

The application of various forms of digital applications in outdoor does show the vigorous life of outdoor advertising.

## VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

From our studies on attitudes toward outdoor advertising among China, Hong Kong and the UK, the respondents from Hong Kong had more positive attitudes toward outdoor ads compared with China and the UK respondents while respondents from China had more positive attitudes compared with UK. The results show that there should be cultural differences among the three areas.

Comparing the attitudes across three areas, China, Hong Kong and UK, the findings show that the attitudes are not consistent. These should be a reference for caution of standardization of multinational enterprises' advertising plans in different areas.

Even though in the digital era which Internet has emerged as a main medium, it is quite interesting that the young people, the target respondents of our studies, were more favourable toward outdoor advertising in all the three areas. The results suggest that the advertisers should not neglect the effectiveness of outdoor advertising in the new era.

The recent development of digital outdoor ads can point out the new life of an old medium in the digital era. Until this date, there is no sign of fading out of outdoor advertising. Instead,

the advertisers should seriously consider whether they should increase the spending on outdoor rather than the other media.

It is admitted that the study has some limitations. The first limitation is that the survey focused mainly on young and educated people (university students). Other groups of consumers may provide more insights. Next, it compared only three areas, while additional areas may provide further insights into cultural differences. The expansion to other consumer groups and more cultures should be future research.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would also like to thank Amy Cheung, Cheris Chow, Niu Haipeng, Han Jidong, Ren Xiyuan and James Yates, survey assistants. The authors take full responsibility for all errors.

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