SELLING TO A DIFFERENT BRAIN DOMINANT CUSTOMER

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This paper analyzes a potential problem in applying global marketing techniques to Japan. One hundred brain-dominance questionnaires were distributed to 50 native-born Americans and 50 native-born Japanese. The results demonstrate that, for those surveyed, native-born Japanese tended to be less left-brain dominant than the American native-born.

Many Americans are concerned over the trade imbalance between the U.S. and Japan. Many Japanese products, are dominant in the market where once American companies owned major shares. (Konrad, 1984) Why is it that the Japanese can market their products successfully in the United States while American companies do not seem to be able to do the same in Japan? Several explanations have been offered for this phenomenon. These include trade barriers put up by Japan, policies of assistance to exporters offered by the Japanese government or Japanese government agencies, such as the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), a lower labor rate, the superiority of Japanese management or the quality of Japanese products.

None of these explanations are necessarily the case. American companies may well have superior products but not the know-how to sell them in the Japanese market.

Some think that the problem may be with advertising. (Advertising World, 1985) American advertisements are often seen as aggressive in Japan. For example, comparative advertising is infrequent in Japan. American advertisements may ask for the sale...now. Japanese advertisements are less likely to do so. Other forms of "hard sell" concepts in advertising which work effectively in the U.S. are often shunned by Japanese advertisers.

Japanese advertisements generally appeal to positive emotions in a very understated fashion. They seek to promote feelings of "tranquility and happiness" without going directly for the sale. In other words, successful Japanese advertising campaigns are usually based on "subtle-sell" rather than "hard sell". (Merrill, 1981)

Why the difference? It could be mere cultural preference, but some researchers give another reason. This has to do with the fact that there may be a difference in brain hemisphere dominance between the two cultures. According to Dr. Tadanobu Tsunoda, the working of the Japanese brain is not identical to that of Americans. (McKean, 1985) Unlike Americans, who are often found to be dominant in their left brain hemisphere, the Japanese tend to be more dominant in their right brain.

As you might expect, the left brain is verbal, logical, quantitative and analytical (Miller, 1985) whereas the right brain is creative, holistic, and spatial. (Boulgarides, 1985)

Simple translations of ads into foreign language have been successful in Europe, Latin America, and parts of Asia. (Konrad) But translations alone almost never work well in Japan. (Advertising World) This research will explore differences in left and right brain dominance in Americans and native-born from Japan. Its existence, as theorized, will offer some confirmation that American ads for the Japanese market must be specially developed and that standardization is not possible for this market.

Methodology

A modified questionnaire developed for brain dominance study by Ivan Muse, a professor of education at Brigham Young University, was used to conduct the research. The original questionnaire had three sections with a total of 34 questions. However, the last two sections were excluded from this study because of potential language difficulties and ambiguities for Japanese respondents.

The revised questionnaire consisted of 20 questions regarding attitudes and behavior given a particular situation. For each question (except one), the respondents were asked to select only one answer.

Responses to each question were allocated 5, 3, or 1 points. Five points were given to answers that expressed left-brain preference while one point was assigned to those answers that showed preference for right-brain use.

Three points were given to those answers with no preference. The total sum was then calculated and interpreted to show brain-hemisphere preference for each respondent. (Muse, 1986) Because one question (14) required two answers, maximum point score per questionnaire was 105 points and minimum 21 points.

One hundred questionnaires were distributed. Fifty were given to native-born Americans and 50 to native-born Japanese living in the U.S. The questionnaires were color-coded to separate the two sample types. Of the 50 distributed to each group, 49 (n = 49) from the American sample and 31 (n = 31) from the Japanese sample were completed and included in the analysis.

The repondents were allowed as much time as they needed to complete the questionnaire. The mean time was approximately 15 minutes.

Results

The responses to many questions showed little differences between Japanese and Americans. For example, the answers to questions 4, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 20 demonstrated left brain dominance in both groups and questions 6, 7, 11, 13 and 19 right brain dominance in both groups (Table 1). The answer to question 9 showed a clear preference for Japanese being left brain dominant and Americans right brain dominant rather than the reverse. However, questions 6, 7, 11, 13 and 19 supported Dr. Tsunoda's contention that Japanese are right brain dominant while Americans are left brain dominant. When Dr. Muse's methodology was followed (Table 2), the 49 Americans surveys resulted in 3402 points and the 31 Japanese surveys 1917 points. Adjusting these results for equal number of respondents from both groups, there is an approximately 10% difference in response. Using a chi-squared analysis, this difference is statistically significant at a level of .05. However, from Figure 2 it can be seen that neither American nor Japanese have a preference which can be determined from the results. Therefore while the Japanese respondents were less left brain dominant (more right brained dominant) than the Americans surveyed, they were not right brained in an absolute sense.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the research which must be considered. Due to the lack of time, the sample was collected on a convenience sampling technique basis in a limited geographical area and the sample consisted mostly of students. Therefore, the results may not represent all Americans and all Japanese accurately.

Question 14 asked the respondent to pick two answers. However, some of the respondents chose only one answer. An examination of questionnaires indicated that about equal percentage of Japanese respondents did this as Americans. Therefore, the decision was made not to exclude the results of this question from the analysis. While this could conceivably influence the results in parts, it could not affect the overall point score significantly.

Another limitation was that all of the Japanese respondents lived for at least sometime in the U.S. While brain dominance is unlikely to shift totally, influences from the Western culture could distort the results of the study. In fact this may be one reason for less of a right brain preference among Japanese than was anticipated.

Yet another limitation was the fact that the questionnaire had expressions which may not have been understood completely or accurately by some of the Japanese respondents. This might also affect results. For more accurate results, the questionnaire would have had to been translated into Japanese.

This abbreviated study does not confirm that Japanese are right brained dominant. It does however indicate that they tend to be less left brain dominant than Americans. It therefore suggests that American advertising translated into Japanese with no other changes would probably be less successful than the original ad in the U.S. However, because of the limitations inherent in the study, it should be replicated using a larger population sample, with a cross section of Americans geographically and demographically compared with a geographical cross section of Japanese in Japan. Further the survey questions should be translated into Japanese for this purpose. It is likely that such a study would demonstrate a greater preference for right brained dominance than would be indicated by this research.

TABLE 1

QUESTIONS ILLUSTRATING VARIOUS BRAIN DOMINANT RESULTS

QUES.	BOTH LEFT BRAIN DOMI-NANT	JAPANESE LEFT, AMERICAN RIGHT	AMERICAN LEFT, JAPANESE RIGHT	BOTH RIGHT BRAIN DOMI-NANT
1			X	
2			X	
3			X	
4	X			
5			X	
6				X
7				X
8			X	
9		X		
10	X			
11				X
12			X	
13				X
14			X	
15	X			
16	X			
17	X			
18	X			
19				X
20	X			

FIGURE 1

AMERICANS

(N = 49) Min Score 49 x 21 = 1029 Pts.
Max Score 49 x 105 = 5145 Pts.

Actual Score 3402

Adj. Score		Adj. Max	
	3402		5145
	-1029		-1029
	2373		4116

2373 / 4116 = 57.6% of Total

JAPANESE

(N = 31) Min Score 31 x 21 = 651 Pts.
Max Score 31 x 105 = 3255 Pts.

Actual Score 1956

Adj. Score		Adj. Max	
	1956		3255
	- 617		- 651
	1305		2604

1305 / 2604 = 50.1%

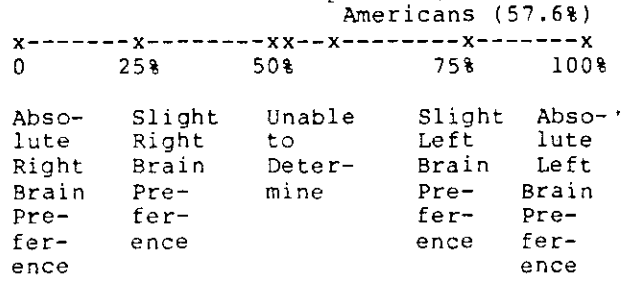

TABLE 2

RESULTS FROM SURVEY

QUES.	AMERICANS #	AMERICANS %	AMERICANS PTS	JAPANESE #	JAPANESE %	JAPANESE PTS
1a	08	16%	40	02	06%	10
b	07	14	07	05	16	05
c	34	[illegible]	102	24	78	72
2a	26	53	130	12	39	60
b	23	47	23	19	61	19
3a	26	53	130	12	39	60
b	23	47	23	19	61	19
4a	18	37	18	11	35	11
b	31	63	155	20	65	100
5a	27	55	135	10	32	50
b	22	45	22	21	68	21
6a	25	51	25	18	58	18
b	24	49	120	13	42	65
7a	03	06	15	01	03	05
b	02	04	10	00	00	00
c	02	04	02	05	16	05
d	42	86	42	25	81	25
8a	29	59	145	12	39	60
b	05	10	05	06	19	06
c	15	31	45	13	42	39
9a	26	53	26	14	45	14
b	23	46	115	17	55	85
10a	29	59	145	20	65	100
b	20	41	20	11	35	11
11a	06	12	06	03	10	03
b	26	53	78	17	55	51
c	17	35	85	11	35	55
12a	01	02	03	01	03	03
b	06	12	18	03	10	09
c	34	70	170	13	42	65
d	08	16	08	14	45	14
13a	00	00	00	02	06	02
b	39	80	195	20	65	100
c	10	20	30	09	29	27
14a	30	61	150	09	29	45
b	10	20	10	14	45	14
c	16	33	16	12	39	12
d	14	29	42	06	19	18
e	09	18	45	08	26	40
f	02	04	02	04	13	04
15a	14	29	14	12	39	12
b	35	71	175	19	61	95
16a	28	57	140	21	68	105
b	21	43	21	10	32	10
17a	13	27	13	10	32	10
b	36	73	180	21	68	105
18a	41	84	205	23	74	115
b	08	16	08	08	26	08
19a	14	29	70	07	23	35
b	23	47	23	14	45	14
c	12	24	36	10	32	30
20a	21	43	21	15	48	15
b	28	57	140	16	52	80
			3402			1956
	A = 49			J = 31		

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