

Cultural Factors in Product Valuation

Cross-Cultural Study on Cultural Design-Crafts Products

Yuri Na

*University of Art and Design Helsinki
Helsinki, Finland, yna@taik.fi*

Abstract: This paper expounds cultural factors in valuations of ‘cultural design-crafts products’ (CDCP), which is a superior concept to that of souvenir and is rather a designed product reflecting culture. The present study investigates how different consumers’ values regarding CDCP were affected by and through culture, and collects data from respondents representing 16 nations through both surveys and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal different values in regards to CDCP based on a conceptual model of the purchase process through ‘*expectation*’ and ‘*experience*.’ Both Asians and Westerners answered that the decisive reason for buying CDCP was to participate in cultural enjoyment and keep memories of the place visited. However, differing cultural factors in valuations are illustrated between Westerners’ tendencies to consider their personal experience as meaningfully tied with the product, and Asians’ tendencies to consider intrinsic attributes of the products with more contextualized views. This paper concludes that different cultural values should be considered in the early stages of the design process for CDCP.

Key words: *Consumer Value, Cultural Design and Crafts Products, Souvenir, Design Strategy*

1. Introduction

Cultural design-crafts product (CDCP) is a superior concept to that of souvenir. CDCP is seen as a designed product in terms of quantity and usability, purchased as a culturally reflexive activity. Cultural products in the *creative industry* are not only for tourists but also local people, to improve the quality of life by interacting daily with such products. However, the practical range of consumers in this study is limited to tourists, focusing on tourism products as a part of CDCP for the initial stage of the design process. The nature of crafts products differs in a way from mass produced products. This study attempts to establish a blueprint of crafts-design research for commercialized crafts products partly adopting design research approaches. While there have not been many approaches to consumer studies, as compared to user studies, that deal specifically with CDCP in a cross-cultural light, this paper aims to build a theoretical model of CDCP in the initial design process for designers, small-to-medium sized companies, and governmental organizations. As Holfstede [4] insists that value is a broad tendency toward preference at the ‘cultural level’, this paper explores consumers’ valuations in different cultures; as reflecting the culture is a given for cultural products, it should also be reflected in the kind of value systems diverse consumers, who adopt new and different cultures, possess towards the product.

2. Methods

To examine aspects of both individual perceptions and to touristic activities, this study used surveys and in-depth interviews. The surveys consisted of five written questionnaires and a stickered tally of preferred postcards [figure 2]. Randomly selected people from several cities (Dubai, Helsinki, New York, Seoul, Tokyo and Zurich) participated in the survey at airport duty free shops, museums, and touristic streets. The data collected from respondents represented 16 nations (Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, U.K., and U.S.A.) and totaled 126 people. For this first pilot study, the samples were broadly divided into Asian and Western groups, with 59 and 67 samples, respectively. Most respondents were tourists, and all had visited other countries and had experienced buying souvenirs. Based on the findings of the survey, interviews were used to obtain more detail regarding consumers' intuitions and differing perspectives of 8 people of varying age, gender, nationality, and travel frequency.

3. Value = (Expectation + Experience) ÷ Time, Space

This study demonstrates consumers' value systems as a conceptual model of process in order to analyze values and motivations systematically. Figure 1 displays the model that consumers' values were established and influenced by expectations and experiences affected by purchase and opportunity within time and space.



Figure 1. Process affected by purchase and opportunity

3.1 Expectation

Respondents chose one postcard in regards to a question: 'If you send a postcard to your friend or relative while traveling abroad, which image of the postcard will you pick among the three?' These images were divided in two sets [figure 2]. This question can be paraphrased: which image is most authentic to the place in mind? The selected images from respondents were interpreted as having two underlying factors: the first factor was selection due to scenery that respondents cannot experience in their home countries, and the second factor was selection due to a well-known structure of the visited place, as well as scenery which they can only see in the visited place. This inquiry examined images that generally popped up in respondents' heads as well as their expectations toward the places. Their expectations considered the places in the postcards in connection with a preconceived idea, and attached a desire based on their own relative importance in terms of difference ('novelty' or 'exoticism') which stimulated an attraction toward otherness. Thus, respondents explained that the selected image is the most representative and authentic, bringing the place (and all connected ideas of the place) quickly to their consciousness with just a glance.



Figure 2. Two image sets of six postcards

As Cohen [3] asserts, one of the main tourist activities, shopping, spontaneously connects the purchasing of cultural products. The next question let respondents answer whether they had an idea of a specific item or product they wanted to buy in a certain country, regardless of whether they had visited it or not. 54.8% answered 'yes'. What is notable in this investigation is that 72.5% of respondents who said 'yes' were Asian. Asians' expectations are directly related to the items, it would appear, and their greater expectations overpass the process of experience to the step of purchase, as shown in figure 1.

3.2 Experience

We can observe that souvenir shops are usually located at exits and not entrances of touristic places. It appears that experience facilitates in maintaining more meaningful interactions between products and ourselves. Experience in this context stands for not only a direct experience of, say, a ceramic product purchased after the first-hand experience of touring a crafts village, but also an indirect experience of, say, a souvenir purchased in regards to the emotions attached to the hearing of a sad folktale in one's travels. Special or meaningful products defined as such by consumers are mostly linked to their experiences. In general, cultural design-crafts products are bought at the end of a day's cultural sightseeing after new experiences. 84.1% of respondents in the survey answered that 'the most decisive motivation when [they] purchase an item is to remember the visited region' or 'to keep the memory of the place.' It indicates that the product plays the role of a token which transports and represents their total experience. The product is a piece of memorable evidence, like a photo, that aids people's reminiscing over the visited place.

3.3 Two Models of Cultural Enjoyment and Possession in Different Values

Through in-depth interviews consumers' sub-motivations were revealed under the main motivation as to how culturally different value systems affect their decision making in CDCP. *"I had nice tea here, so I brought some tea and a tea-pot. I will enjoy it at home."* / *"My hobby is collecting cat statues. Whenever I visit some place, I always look for cat statues."* (Quotes from in-depth interviews) Interviewees from Finland, Switzerland, UK and USA agreed that the meaningful relationship between their experience and the product are the most significant value when they purchased the products. One's personal experience as meaningfully tied with the product is analyzed as a core of Westerners' value system. This meaningful relationship consists equally in consumers' personal tastes as well as the experiential relationship tied to their trip. *"I have heard that the wooden products are well known in this country. I want to buy something small for my mom and friends. [...] I will buy something impossible to get in my country."* / *"[T]his vase is one of the 'must-have' items. People who have visited this country have at least one at home."* (Quotes from in-depth interviews) Interviewees from China, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea frequently mentioned about buying something for family and friends, and rather than the element of the experience, they cared more about intrinsic attributes of the products, as well as whether the products are famous in and authentic to the visited place. They already perceived which items are reputable in the place and they took into account the rarity value of the items in their home countries.

Consumers' decision-making process for buying CDCP displayed a comparison with three factors: 1) Westerners valued the relationship between their experience and the products while Asians took account of the relationship between their destination and its products. 2) For Westerners, personal taste or hobbies were firmly reflected in their purchases, while for Asians, cultural ownership shared with their family or friends was importantly considered for purchase. 3) While Westerners valued creativity of CDCP in artistic aspects, Asians highly regarded the scarcity of a CDCP in relation to socially influenced expectations. [figure 3] As Nisbett points out that *'Westerners are the protagonists of their autobiographical novels; Asians are merely cast members in movies touching on their existences'* [7], Westerners' vital values in this paper are surrounded by and focused on *'myself'* based on their individualistic or independent nature, while Asians' values are determined by many external factors such as social and cultural standards. Westerners preferred to add meanings to the products through their experience in visited countries, making meanings in the products. In Asians' contextualized views,

their own tastes and direct relationship between product and self did not seem to be deeply involved in decision-making. A general feature of Asians' cultural backgrounds can be explained by Hofstede's idea of 'collectivistic culture' (even though Japan presents higher individualism than other Asians.) [4] However, in some cultures, which still hold a sense of exclusiveness toward tourism and 'leisure', which Veblen defines as 'evidence of one's pecuniary ability to afford not to work,' [5] the products are treated as a symbol encountered in social perception. Baudrillard's 'panoplie effect' in *the consumer society* [1] and Bourdieu's 'distinction' in classes [2] can both edify this aspect. It favors the importance of symbolic value, rather than the value of use. Asians' strong expectations are established through symbolic attributes toward social value connected to scarcity value which also implies that the product is marked from others. Finally, the product purchased in the visited place became an intermediation between a narrative of the consumer's personal experience and the visited country upon return to their home country.

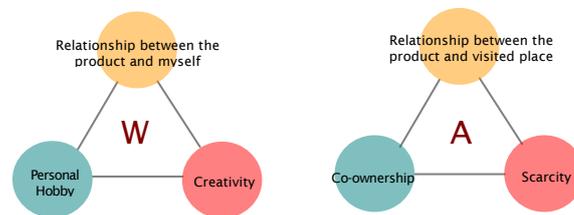


Figure 3. Western model and Asian model of value systems in CCDP

4. Conclusions

As a comparative pilot study, this paper examined culturally different values and motivations towards CDCP based on consumers' *expectation* and *experience*. Asians formed intermediate purchasing decisions influenced through the stage of *expectation*, and the expectation was implemented more actively than with Westerners who emphasized the process of creating the values through their experience. Consumers attached culturally different values toward CDCP. These factors reflected by culturally different value systems should be considered in the early stage of design development because this subject demands close investigation for both designers who need to understand what consumers want and the nations or societies promoting their identity. It will need to be subdivided into less broad cultural categories with more samples. For further research, it is suggested that design strategy of CDCP incorporating target segments via cultural zones needs to be studied.

5. References

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