


Themes and Language Style in Advertising Slogans of Vietnamese Banks and American Banks

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: slogan themes, slogan discourse, Collectivism, individualism, high context culture

Advertising slogans are important in branding companies and attracting customers. Businesses emphasize global thinking but tailor actions to local preferences, initiating advertisers to consider local culture when crafting advertising slogans. However, studies on advertising slogans are not abundant. This study used a qualitative approach to analyze and compare 50 Vietnamese and 69 American banks' advertising slogans in three aspects: themes, vocabulary, and syntax. Unlike previous multimodal studies on advertisements, this research highlighted the impact of culture on advertising, namely the influence of collectivism/individualism and high/low-context culture on advertising themes, vocabulary, and syntaxes. The study identified one similarity and three differences in the themes and pinpointed distinct words and syntax in these two groups of advertising slogans. Hopefully, the research will provide a deeper understanding of cultural influence on advertising so that advertising professionals can avoid potential cultural crashes in multi-national working environments.

Introduction

Slogans are crucial tools for banks to create and develop their images. They serve as one of the main channels of official communication through which companies introduce themselves to customers and partners. Through subtly embedded information in easy-to-remember and understand, advertising slogans have a long-lasting impact, enabling companies to approach customers and persuade them to buy or use services (Heath et al., 2023). Therefore, it is pivotal for companies to constantly seek effective ways to create advertising slogans.

A variety of studies have been done on the influence of culture on advertising themes and language. Muller (1991) identified and compared the distinguished features in advertisements in American and Japanese magazines. Cheng & Schwitzer (1996) compared and contrasted American and Chinese TV commercials. Han & Shavit (1994) did research on advertisements

in American and Taiwanese magazines. In Vietnam, Hue (2019) compared the reflection of Collectivism and individualism in American and Vietnamese print advertisements, and Anh (2022) compared the domain choices of American and Vietnamese coffee commercials. Tam (2022) compared the themes and language in magazine advertisements. Therefore, bank slogans in two countries (America and Vietnam) have a gap for researchers along with the author wherein the similarities and disparity in their themes and language styles can be exploited.

Literature review

The culture in which individuals are raised influences the way they conceive of themselves in terms of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies. In his research involving more than 50 countries and territories, Hofstede (2001) pointed out the United States, with a score of 91/100, as a country with a unique individual culture, while East Asian countries, represented by China with a score of 21/100 is a nation with typical Collectivism. According to Goodykunst (1996), while members of individualistic cultures learn the major values of their culture (e.g., independence, achievement) and acquire preferred ways for how members of the culture are expected to view themselves (e.g., as unique persons), members of collectivistic cultures learn different major values (e.g., harmony, solidarity) and acquire different preferred ways to conceive of themselves (e.g., as inter-connected with others). Schwartz (1992) contends that the themes of **power, achievement, self-direction, hedonism, and stimulation** serve individual interests, whereas those of **tradition, conformity, and benevolence** serve collective interests.

Goodykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) argued that Individualism and Collectivism affect the way people communicate. They contended that low-context communication is used predominantly in individualistic cultures, whereas high-context communication is used predominantly in collectivistic cultures. Hall (1976) said that using high-context communication involves using and interpreting messages that are not explicit, minimizing the content of the verbal message, and being sensitive to others. Using low-context communication, in contrast, involves being direct, precise, and open.

Moreover, Goddard (2002) stated that advertisements use sense-provoking words to convey personal messages while employing precise and scientific-sounding language to focus on product information for the general audience. In addition, Singh and Bartikowski (2009) said that in slogans with individualism, fewer figurative words are used, whereas slogans with Collectivism see an opposite trend. Meanwhile, according to Singh and Bartikowski (2006) and Zhang (2004), slogans of individualism use more scientific and objective words, and in slogans with Collectivism, there is a prevalence of words that indicate feelings and emotions and are subjective.

Research Questions

The study aimed to find out the typical themes and prominent language features, including vocabulary and syntax, in these two groups of slogans; from that, comparison and contrast were made to explore their differences and similarities in three aspects of themes, vocabulary, and syntax under the influence of culture. Thereby, the study was seeking to answer the following

research questions:

1. What are the typical themes, prominent words, and syntax used in advertising slogans of Vietnamese and American banks?
2. What are the similarities and differences in themes, words, and syntax in these two groups of advertising slogans under the influence of cultural factors?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

It is interdisciplinary research between language and culture, analyzing themes, lexical, and syntactic features of banks' advertising slogans and justifying the differences and similarities in these aspects from cultural perspectives of individualism/collectivism and high/ low context culture communication.

This research involved 50 Vietnamese advertising slogans of banks in Vietnam and 69 English advertising slogans of banks in America. A qualitative approach was mainly used to analyze slogans in terms of themes, words, and syntax and justify their differences from cultural perspectives. Intervening in these two stages, comparison and contrast were employed to pinpoint the differences and similarities between the two groups of slogans.

Design of the Study

The study was conducted using the following steps.

First, Vietnamese advertising slogans of banks in Vietnam and English advertising slogans of banks in America were collected. Second, a qualitative approach was employed to analyze the collected slogans to find typical themes and prominent lexical and syntax features. Third, comparison and contrast were done to pinpoint the differences as well as the similarities in three aspects of these slogans. Finally, justifications were made from cultural perspectives to explain the gap.

Data collection & analysis

Vietnamese and American banks' slogans were collected through their present websites. The banks selected here are purely domestic, without joint ventured foreigners. Besides, slogans merely advertising short-term products/services or promoting a specific business stage were not the subject of the research. The research only focused on slogans that position the bank's brand and are associated with the bank's history for at least 10 years. Hence, only 50 Vietnamese banks' slogans and 69 American banks' slogans were the subject of this study.

After being collected, the Vietnamese and American slogans were considered in three aspects: themes (according to Schwartz's 7 Themes (1992)), vocabulary (finding frequently used words in the two types of slogans), and syntax (including sentences, phrases, and words).

Results/Findings and Discussion

Themes of Vietnamese bank advertising slogans and a comparison with American bank advertising slogans

Advertising slogans of Vietnamese and American banks are grouped into eight themes: power (showing the bank's superiority in the business field), achievement (towards customers' success), self-direction (orientation of the bank), hedonism (customers' pleasant experiences), and stimulation (to encourage customers), tradition (towards tradition), conformity (toward the common benefits/community), and benevolence (support and companionship of the bank and customers).

Vietnamese banks' advertising slogans have been categorized into eight themes.

Table 1

The allocation of themes in Vietnamese banks' advertising slogans

	Themes	Examples	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Power	"Cam kết lợi ích cao nhất" (Committed to the highest benefits- HCM City Development Bank)	1/50	2%
2.	Achievement	- "Điểm tựa thành công" (Fulcrum of Success- Dai A Bank) - "Hoài bão của quý vị, ưu tiên của chúng tôi" (Your ambition – Our Priority - State Bank - SVB)	3/50	6%
3.	Self-direction		0/50	0%
4.	Hedonism	“Nâng giá trị cuộc sống” (Improving Living Standards – Vietinbank) “Kết nối giá trị cuộc sống” (Connecting Living Values – SEABANK)	2/50	4%
5.	Stimulation	"Cùng vươn tầm" (Reach out Together - MSB Bank) Vì một Việt Nam thịnh vượng (For a prosperous Vietnam - TP Bank)	1/50	2%
6.	Tradition		0/55	0%
7.	Conformity	“Niềm tin của mọi nhà” (Trust of all Families – Trust Bank)	4/50	8%
8.	Benevolence	- "ngân hàng không khoảng cách" (Bank with no distance - PV Combank) - "Ở đâu có người nghèo, ở đó có ngân hàng" (Bank for Poor People - Policy Bank)	16/50	32%

The table demonstrates that **benevolence** is the most frequently used theme (32%), followed by **conformity** towards the common benefit of the community, such as "Niềm tin của mọi nhà" (Trust of all Families - Trust Bank), "Vì một Việt Nam thịnh vượng" (For a Prosperous Vietnam - TP Bank). The third popular theme is **achievements** "Điểm tựa thành công" (Fulcrum of Success - Dai A Bank), "Hoài bão của quý vị, ưu tiên của chúng tôi" (Your ambition, Our Priority - State Bank). Themes that are not used are **Tradition**, **Self-direction** (0%) or rarely

used are **Power** and **Stimulation** (2%)

Meanwhile, 69 American banks' advertising slogans have also been categorized into eight themes.

Table 2

The allocation of themes in American banks' advertising slogans

	Themes	Examples	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Power	- "The Difference is Access" (Access National Bank) - "Your First Choice" (1st National Bank of South Florida).	13/69	18.8%
2.	Achievement	" Our Solutions, Your Success" Commercial Bank of California	1/69	0.01%
3.	Self-direction	- "We'll Find a Way" (Continental Illinois National Bank) - "Let us guide you home" (Compass)	2/69	0.02%
4.	Hedonism	"Banking for people with better things to do!" (Abington Bank).	10/69	14.5%
5.	Stimulation	- "Do the right thing" (JP Morgan Chase) "Grow with us" (1st National Bank)	7/69	10.1%
6.	Tradition		0/69	0%
7.	Conformity		0/69	0%
8.	Benevolence	- "The bank that's always with you" (Bank of America) - "Today, tomorrow, together" (Absa Bank).	10/69	14.5%

Table 2 shows that the themes of **tradition** and conformity are not used in this business's advertising slogans, and few slogans of **achievement** and **self-direction** are used. On the other hand, three top choices are involved in Power, showing the top position or unique attributes of banks (18.8%), followed by **Benevolence** and **Hedonism** with an equal percentage of 14.5%.

Table 3

The comparison of themes in American and Vietnamese banks' advertising slogans

No	Themes	Vietnamese slogans		American slogans	
		Quantity	Percentage	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Power	1/50	2%	13/69	18.8%
2.	Achievement	3/50	6%	1/69	0.01%
3.	Self-direction	0/50	0%	2/69	0.02%
4.	Hedonism	2/50	4%	10/69	14.5%
5.	Stimulation	1/50	2%	7/69	10.1%
6.	Tradition	0/55	0%	0/69	0%
7.	Conformity	4/50	8%	0/69	0%
8.	Benevolence	16/50	32%	10/69	14.5%

Table 3 shows the differences and similarities in the frequency of themes in these two groups of slogans. The noticeable difference is the proportion of advertising slogans with the theme of **power**. This is the leading theme in American advertising slogans, demonstrating the bank's position (the best bank, the bank that brings the highest benefits to customers that competitors cannot match), taking up 18.8%, however, this topic only accounts for 2% of English advertising slogans. The second major difference relates to the theme of **hedonism**, concerning pleasant experiences of **fulfillment** and **satisfaction**. The proportion of these topics in English and Vietnamese advertising slogans is 4% and 14.5%, respectively. On the contrary, in these advertising slogans, the theme of **benevolence** leans toward Vietnamese advertising slogans. These differences are consistent with American and Vietnamese people's individualist and collectivist cultures. Americans value unique persons, while Vietnamese people consider themselves inter-connected with others (Gudykunst (1996)). Besides, Americans have a pragmatic lifestyle, focusing on real experiences in the present instead of unrealistic things, so the theme of **hedonism** prevails. On the other hand, Vietnamese people see themselves as part of an encompassing social relationship and realize that one's behavior is determined by what he perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship (Markus and Kitayama (1991)), so the theme of **benevolence** is more.

The vocabulary of Vietnamese banks' advertising slogans and a comparison with American banks

Vietnamese bank advertising slogans often use figurative words that appeal to customers' emotions. This study identified three common groups of words. Firstly, words like "niềm tin (trust)," "đồng hành (companion)," and "cam kết (commitment)" are frequently used. Banks with these words in their advertising slogans account for 23 out of 50. With financial products involving high risks, the banks possess advertising slogans that often play on the psychological desire of customers to share risks and to be shoulder to shoulder through hardships. The second group includes words like "thịnh vượng (prosperity)," "phát triển (development)," and "ước mơ (dreams)." Banks with these slogans take up 16 out of 50. These slogans often instill confidence in customers by painting a bright, open business future for them. The third group involves the word "giá trị (value)." Money is closely linked to value; in business activities, money needs to be generated to create sustainable stability, so 9 out of 50 advertising slogans use the word " giá trị (value)" such as "giá trị vượt thời gian (value beyond time)", "tạo giá trị bền vững (creating sustainable value)", "kết nối giá trị cuộc sống (connecting life values)." These words are very popular in the advertising slogans of Vietnamese banks due to the Collectivism associated with high-context communication (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988)); glossy words, evoking emotions instead of reason are commonly used (Singh and Bartikowski (2009)).

Table 4

The frequency of figurative words in Vietnamese banks' slogans

Words	Number of Vietnamese banks' slogans
niềm tin (trust), đồng hành (companion), cam kết (commitment)	23
thịnh vượng (prosperity), phát triển (development), ước mơ (dream)	16
giá trị (value)	9
miscellanea	2
Total	50

In contrast, Americans with typical individualism engage in low-context communication (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988)). They prioritize practical living, emphasize efficiency in both work and life, and often convey messages directly, so shiny phrases, promises, and future commitments are not used. However, words related to ensuring good service and benefits are mentioned, such as "Committed to World-class Service," and "Better Banking. Everyday," "Simple... Better Banking." In this context, frequently used words include *better, first, best, and prime*. However, these words appear in only 10 out of 69 phrases.

In addition, direct communication with a low-context culture, which is not or less dependent on nonverbal communication, leads American banks' slogans to frequently use the words "bank" and "money," accounting for 20 out of 69.

Furthermore, Americans value individualism and respect personal interests, which is clearly reflected in the slogans of American banks. Instead of "spreading joy everywhere", slogans convey the meaning of building the bank for the customer, such as "We built this bank for you" (1st Mariner Bank), "Banking for you" (American State Bank), or "Our prime interest is YOU" (Bank of the West). The pronoun "YOU" is often the subject that banks serve, as seen in slogans like "We are good for you" (Apple Bank) or "Here for you. Everyday" (Carolina Alliance Bank). Among the 69 slogans collected from American banks, 26 use the word "YOU."

Table 5

The most frequently used words in Vietnamese and American banks' advertising slogans

Words	Vietnamese slogans	American slogans
niềm tin (trust), đồng hành (companion), cam kết (commitment)	23	1
Tốt hơn (better), tốt nhất (best), cao nhất (prime), hàng đầu (top/first)	2	10
thịnh vượng (prosperity), phát triển (development), ước mơ (dream)	16	1
giá trị (value)	9	0
ngân hàng (bank), tiền (money), tài chính (finance)	7	20
Bạn (YOU)	6	26
Khách hàng (customers), quý vị (valued customers), mọi người (people)	6	4

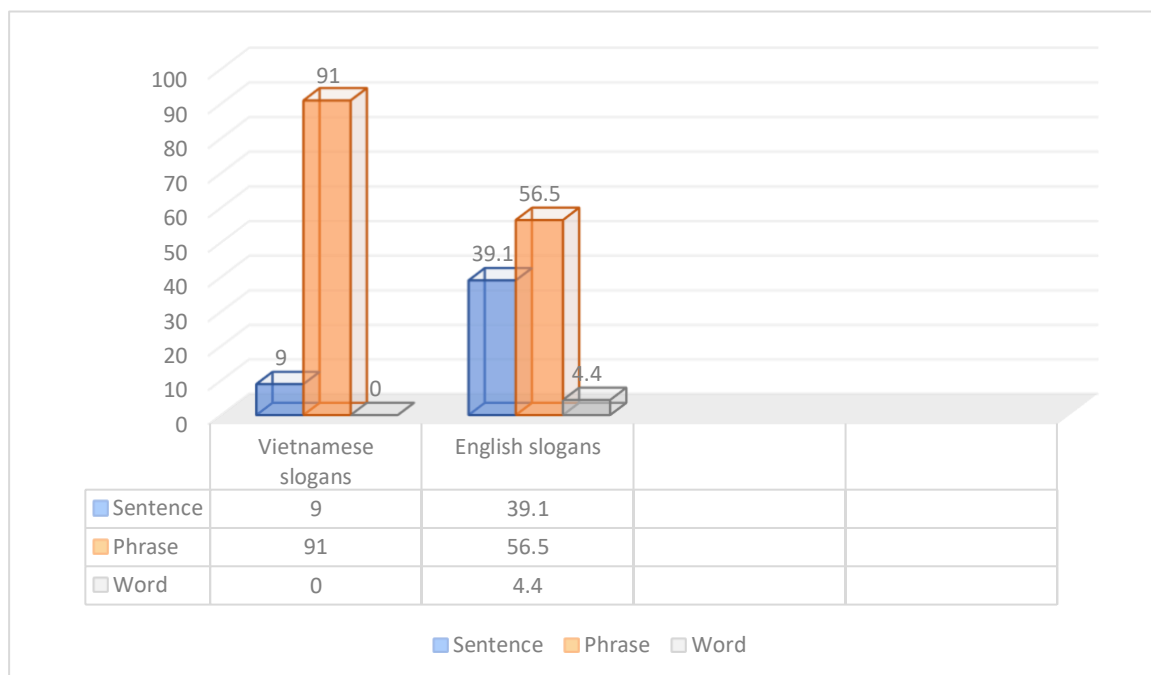
Syntax in Vietnamese bank advertising slogans and comparison with English bank advertising slogans

Vietnamese advertisements utilize simple and concise grammatical structures for various reasons related to cost-saving in advertising. Simplifying the structure helps ad writers eliminate irrelevant information and vocabulary, focusing on key points to make an impression on the readers. Hence, 91% of Vietnamese bank advertising slogans are phrases, while the remaining 9% are sentences. The common number of words in these phrases ranges from 4 to 8, with only 1 slogan having fewer words, consisting of 3 words: "Cùng vươn tầm" (Together reaching) by MSB bank, and 2 slogans having more than 8 words: "Ở đâu có người nghèo, ở đó có ngân hàng chính sách xã hội" (Where there are poor people, there is Social Policy bank) and "Hoài bão của quý vị, ưu tiên của chúng tôi" (Your dreams, our priority). Despite the limited number of words, many Vietnamese bank advertising slogans are structured into two parts, such as "Niềm tin mới, giá trị mới" (New trust, new value); "Trải nghiệm mới, giá trị mới" (New experience, new value); "Chia sẻ cơ hội, hợp tác thành công" (Share opportunities, successful cooperation); "Vững bước tiên phong, đồng hành phát triển" (Leading confidently, accompanying development). Slogans with a two-part structure account for 21.2%.

Similar to Vietnamese banks' advertising slogans, English banks predominantly use phrases, accounting for 56.5% but only half as many as the number of Vietnamese advertising slogans using this form. In contrast, the number of English slogans in sentences quadruples that of Vietnamese. In addition, one-word/or word advertising slogans do not appear in Vietnamese but are present in English advertising slogans like "OPEN" or "Money. Wise."

Figure 6

The frequency of syntactic items in Vietnamese and American banks' slogans.



Conclusion

It is clear that individualism and Collectivism influence the theme expressed in advertising slogans of Vietnamese and American banks. While Vietnamese slogans with individualism prominently convey the theme of benevolence, American banks are themed with power, and hedonism prevails. Additionally, individualism engaging with low-context communication affects the way Americans deliver their message, and they tend to prefer conveying messages directly, clearly, and concisely. In contrast, Vietnamese people with collectivism are associated with high-context communication, like to use more figurative words, and are more emotion-driven than rational. Finally, Vietnamese advertising slogans have less diverse syntax than American ones, which consist of sentences, phrases, and words.

The study, using a limited number of advertising slogans, unavoidably draws superficial conclusions. However, it hopes to bring useful understanding to advertising creators in their multi-national working environments.

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Biodata

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