

**The Effectiveness of Within-Brand Comparison (WBC) advertising:  
Comparing the Effects of Cognitive Brand Associations on the Brand  
Trust-Affection-Purchase Intention Relationship in the U.S. and Japan**

**Abstracts**

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Within-Brand Comparison (WBC) advertising affects consumers' purchase intentions in Japan and the U.S., compared to Across-Brand Comparison (ABC) advertising. We focus on the effect of WBC advertising on the mechanisms by which cognitive brand associations shape purchase intention. In addition, we examine the mediating roles of brand trust and brand affection. We also consider the effect of the cultural differences between Japanese and the U.S. consumers.

Our study finds that in Japan, WBC advertising significantly influences purchase intention through brand trust. In contrast, in the U.S., brand affection plays a key role in enhancing purchase intention. This study underscores the importance of developing comparative advertising strategies tailored to the cultural backgrounds of target countries. Such strategies are essential to maintain competitiveness in international markets.

**Keywords:** ABC advertising, WBC advertising, cognitive brand association, brand trust, brand affection, purchase intention

**(7,937words)**

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## I. Introduction

With the rapid development of globalization, companies are searching for advertising methods that keep them competitive in international markets and effectively engage consumers (Okazaki & Mueller, 2007). Comparative advertising has garnered significant attention from practitioners and researchers due to its unique approach that effectively attracts consumers (Pechmann & Stewart, 1990). Comparative advertising involves comparing a company's own brands or products with those of competitors to emphasize superiority, thereby influencing consumers' purchase intention and consumption behavior (Romano, 2004). This form of advertising is called Across-Brand Comparative (ABC) advertising (Yagci et al., 2009). However, ABC advertising carries significant legal risks, and many countries restrict its use (Wozna-Burdziak, 2021). For example, in Poland, the aspects relating to comparative advertising have been regulated under the Act of 1993 on Combating Unfair Competition (Wozna-Burdziak, 2021). Similarly, ABC advertising is also regulated in Japan, the EU, and several other countries (Tsujiimoto, 2019). Given these limitations, it is necessary to explore low-risk methods to effectively utilize comparative advertising in practice.

In response, Yagci et al. (2009) proposed Within-Brand Comparison (WBC) advertising as a method that avoids legal risks by comparing products within the same brand rather than with competitors. However, research on WBC advertising has not

advanced as much as that on ABC advertising. As a result, the use of WBC advertising in the global marketplace and its connection to consumers' purchase intentions have not yet been fully elucidated. Building on these gaps, this study investigates the mechanisms through which WBC advertising influences consumer behavior and examines whether cultural differences modulate these effects. By focusing on the mediating roles of brand trust and brand affection, this research aims to uncover the underlying processes driving purchase intentions and explore how these processes differ between collectivist and individualist cultures, represented by Japan and the U.S. respectively.

## **II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

### **1. Research Trends in ABC Advertising**

Research on ABC advertising has been conducted primarily in the U.S. since the Federal Trade Commission implicitly approved the use of comparative advertising in 1979 (Beard, 2013). Early studies tested the effectiveness of ABC versus non-comparative advertising, confirming that ABC advertising has a stronger impact on consumers (Cai & Xiang, 2024). Subsequently, there have been various discussions on how ABC advertising affects consumer behavior (Kim et al., 2018; Yagci, 2009). Furthermore, researchers have focused on the legal regulation of ABC advertising, debating the extent of its permissibility (Cai & Xiang, 2024). As a result, the prevailing

view was that comparative advertising can be misleading or unfair, leading to regulations in many countries to ensure fair competition (Muk et al., 2016). Thus, despite its recognized effectiveness, legal regulations make it difficult for companies to use ABC advertising (Jeon & Beatty, 2002). Therefore, we focus on WBC advertising, which faces fewer legal restrictions and offers a practical alternative to comparative advertising methods. Yagci et al. (2009) pointed out that the theoretical understanding of WBC advertising on consumer behavior is still insufficient. Although research on WBC advertising remains relatively limited, its potential as a culturally adaptable and legally compliant advertising strategy underscores the need for further exploration (Yagci et al., 2009). De Mooij (2010) indicated that, as globalization progresses, the importance of companies seeking advertising approaches to adapt to each country's market is increasing. By circumventing the legal challenges commonly associated with ABC advertising and providing flexibility to address diverse consumer preferences, WBC advertising emerges as a valuable tool for multinational corporations. In particular, its capacity to bridge cultural differences through tailored messaging while complying with various regulatory frameworks offers a significant strategic advantage in the context of an increasingly globalized marketplace.

This study examines the specific impact of WBC advertising on consumer behavior, employing Keller's (2001) brand resonance theory as a framework. Brand resonance theory has become a cornerstone in quantitative advertising research due to

its comprehensive structure, which captures the progression of consumer relationships with brands (Pappu et al., 2005). Its focus on brand trust, affection, and resonance aligns closely with the objectives of many advertising studies, making it a robust and adaptable tool for examining consumer responses (Enehasse & Sağlam, 2020; Hanaysha, 2022). By adopting Keller's (2001) brand resonance theory, this study establishes a comprehensive framework for analyzing how WBC advertising impacts consumer trust and emotional affection, thereby influencing purchase intentions. This application not only addresses a gap in existing literature but also demonstrates the adaptability of brand resonance theory to innovative advertising strategies.

## **2. Overview of Brand Resonance Theory**

Brand resonance theory systematically shows the process of how consumers form brand loyalty (Keller, 2001). According to the theory, consumers first establish a cognitive brand association. They then proceed via either the cognitive or affective route to develop brand loyalty. The cognitive route builds trust in the brand, while the affective route strengthens affection for the brand, ultimately forming strong brand loyalty (Keller, 1993). Cognitive brand associations refer to the specific images and characteristics that consumers have of a brand, especially evaluations based on its features and qualities (Keller, 1993). These associations form the basis for the next stage of development, which is brand trust and brand affection. Brand trust, a key

component of the rational route, refers to consumers' confidence in a brand's reliability and integrity (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) point out that brand trust has a significant impact on brand loyalty and reinforces consumers' tendency to repeatedly choose a brand. Brand affection, part of the affective route, indicates the emotional connection with consumers. According to Thomson et al. (2005), a deepened emotional connection leads consumers to develop a strong affection for a brand, which in turn forms brand loyalty. Brand loyalty represents a state in which consumers have strong loyalty to a brand (Aaker, 1991). Consumers with high levels of brand loyalty are less likely to switch to other brands and tend to support that brand over the long term (Aaker, 1991).

### **3. Limitations of Brand Resonance Theory and the Importance of Purchase Intention**

Although Brand Resonance Theory effectively explains how consumers strengthen their relationship with a brand and ultimately become loyal to it, limitations have been noted (Keller, 2016; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Keller (2016) highlights that brand loyalty, as conceptualized in the theory, is a highly abstract construct, which makes it challenging to measure clearly and consistently. This ambiguity complicates the connection between emotional brand associations and measurable consumer behaviors, thereby reducing the theory's practical value for developing effective

marketing strategies.

Furthermore, Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) emphasize that although brand loyalty strongly influences purchasing behavior, external factors such as price, and the appeal of competing products also have a significant impact. Even highly loyal consumers can be affected by these external factors, showing that brand loyalty does not always lead directly to purchasing decisions. To address these limitations, this study focuses on purchase intention. Purchase intention can be an indicator that can more directly predict consumer purchasing behavior. According to Ajzen (1991), purchase intention is considered as a strong predictor of purchase behavior.

Therefore, focusing on purchase intention is necessary to complement the limitations of brand loyalty. In fact, literature has confirmed that brand trust and brand affection enhance purchase intention (Ling et al., 2023). There is a strong positive relationship between purchase intention and brand loyalty (Shah & Sharma, 2018). Thus, this study employs not only brand resonance theory but also purchase intention in our model to examine the effect of WBC advertising.

#### **4. Comparison of ABC and WBC Advertising**

Many studies have indicated that ABC advertisements can cause negative reactions in consumers (Beard, 2016; del Barrio-Garcia et al., 2020). The reason is that consumers often perceive ABC advertising as more aggressive, unreliable, and



manipulative than non-comparative advertising (Chang, 2007). On the other hand, WBC advertising is less likely to provoke negative reactions among consumers, because it involves comparisons within the same brand, reducing perceptions of aggressiveness or manipulation (Yagci et al., 2009). Yagci et al. (2009) confirm that, regardless of brand image, unrelated features led to more negative advertising and brand attitudes for ABC advertising than for WBC advertising.

Given these circumstances, WBC advertising is likely to have a stronger positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions compared to ABC advertising.

## **5. Country-specific differences in WBC advertising effect**

With the advance of globalization, companies are seeking effective advertising methods in international markets. For this reason, it is necessary to elucidate how WBC advertising affects consumer behavior in countries with different cultural backgrounds compared to ABC advertising. Considering this context, this study examines the impact of WBC advertising in markets with different cultural backgrounds, focusing on the individualism-collectivism framework of Hofstede's national culture theory. Individualism is both an important indicator for measuring cultural values in different countries, and an essential framework for understanding how consumers perceive themselves and their relationships with others (Hofstede et al., 2010). It has been shown that in individualistic cultures, consumers act based on their own self-interests

and individual judgments, while in collectivist cultures, consumers are more likely to act in harmony within the group and with the opinions of others (Hofstede et al., 2010). Moreover, cultural differences in the perception of advertising are significantly influenced by this dimension. Han & Shavitt (1994) demonstrated that individualistic consumers tend to respond more positively to advertising messages emphasizing personal benefits and self-enhancement, whereas collectivistic consumers prefer messages that highlight group benefits and social harmony. These differences underline the importance of individualism-collectivism in shaping consumer responses to advertising strategies. Furthermore, various scholars have pointed out the need to analyze how responses to comparative advertising may vary by target audience traits, such as culture or national characteristics (Choi & Miracle, 2004; Shao et al., 2004).

In addition, Triandis et al. (1988) identified individualism-collectivism as the most fundamental dimension of cultural diversity identified in cross-cultural research, so this study adopted this dimension. Using this framework, we can clarify how comparative advertising is perceived differently in markets with different cultural values, and how it influences consumer behavior.

In cultures with strong collectivism, consumers expect to establish a relationship with a brand through the rational route of brand resonance theory. This is because collectivism tends to decide not on the behavior of the individual's intentions but on the opinion of others and objective evidence. The more functional and reliable a product is,

the greater the preference (Choi & Nisbett, 1998). So, consumers trust brands based on cognitive brand associations with brand features and qualities, and this trust has a strong influence on purchase intention (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010). Therefore, brand trust, which belongs to the rational route takes precedence over brand affection in collectivist cultures. It is thought to have a strong influence on purchase intention.

On the other hand, consumers in highly individualistic cultures think of building relationships with brands through the effective route. Because individualism emphasizes ego-focused emotional appeal, affection for the brand is an important consumer value. And individualists tend to express themselves and seek emotional connection through brands (Aaker & Williams, 1998). So, consumers develop a relationship with a brand through emotional affection for the brand, and this affection is assumed to have a strong influence on purchase intention (Park et al., 2010). Thus, in individualistic cultures, brand affection part of the affective route, is considered to take precedence over brand trust, leading to stronger purchase intention.

For investigating international comparisons, this research focuses on the G7 countries since they are the world's major economic powers, and their advertising markets are very large and mature. Especially, digital advertising expenditures account for more than 55% of all advertising expenditures in the G7 countries, and the digitalization of the advertising market is progressing rapidly (Dentsu United States, 2022). This factor makes it possible to analyze the use of comparative advertising and

its effects on consumer behavior from multiple perspectives by targeting the G7 countries. In this study, among these G7 countries, Japan and the U.S. were selected as comparison countries because of their significant cultural differences in the use of comparative advertising. In Japan, the use of comparative advertising is extremely low, whereas it is high in the U.S. (Donthu, 1998). Furthermore, Hofstede et al. (2010) show that Japan is the most collectivist society in the G7 countries, while the U.S. is the most individualistic society.

As mentioned above, this study constructs a model in which cognitive brand associations influence purchase intention through brand trust or brand affection. We examine how WBC advertising influences consumer behavior in Japan and the U.S. Figure 1 shows our model and hypotheses. As literatures have consistently confirmed the direct influence of cognitive brand associations on purchase intention, we also examined this relationship. Given them, we propose the following hypotheses.

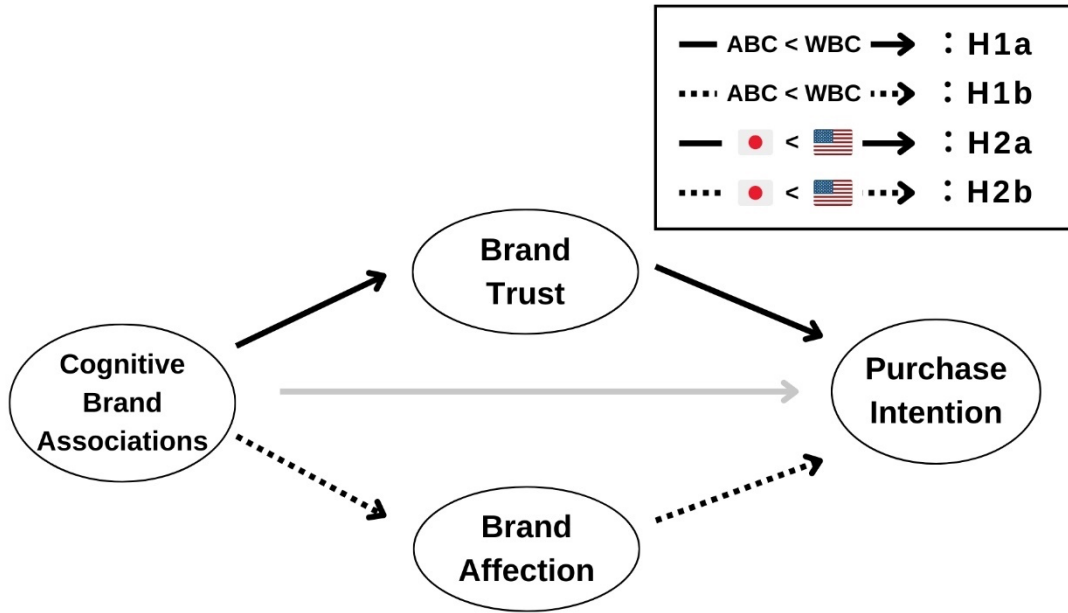
H1a: The effect of cognitive brand associations on purchase intention via brand trust is more pronounced in the case of WBC advertising than ABC.

H1b: The effect (H1a) of WBC advertising in Japan is stronger than the U.S.

H2a: The effect of cognitive brand associations on purchase intention via brand affection is more pronounced in the case of WBC advertising than ABC.

H2b: The effect (H2a) of WBC advertising in the U.S. is stronger than Japan

Figure 1: Conceptual model



Source: Authors.

### III. Methodology

#### 1. Scale

In this study, we used four scales that reliability and validity have both been established in previous studies, detailed in Table 1. To measure cognitive brand associations, Kaplan's (2007) cognitive brand association scale was employed. Brand trust and brand affection were gauged using Kruger et al.'s (2013) scale. The Bian & Forsythe (2012) scale was used for purchase intention. Some were partially modified by replacing the subject with "Brand A" to fit the purpose of the survey content of this research. All questionnaire items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with responses

ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

In this study, we prepared items in Japanese and English to make a comparison between Japan and the U.S. The four English scales were translated into Japanese by using the back-translation method to ensure translation accuracy, involving four native English and Japanese speakers (Usunier, 1998). The translations were compared and scrutinized by the author, and the Japanese version of the scale was finalized (Usunier, 1998).

Table 1: Measurement Scale

Concept	Measurement scale	References
Cognitive Brand Associations	COG1 Brand A perform as expected	Kaplan (2007)
	COG2 Brand A offer value for price	
	COG3 Brand A are reliable	
	COG4 Brand A are functional	
	COG5 Brand A are usable	
	COG6 Brand A are durable	
	COG7 Brand A have technical sophistication	
Brand Trust	BT4 Brand A guarantees satisfaction	Kruger et al. (2013)
	BT5 This company which owns brand A will be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	
	BT6 I could rely on the company which owns brand A to solve a problem I experience with the brand	
	BT7 The company which owns brand A will make any effort to satisfy me	
	BT8 The company which owns brand A will compensate me for a problem I experience with the brand	
Brand Affection	BA2 Brand A makes me happy	Kruger et al. (2013)
	BA3 Brand A gives me pleasure	
Purchase Intention	PI1 If I were going to purchase a product, I would consider buying this brand	Bian & Forsythe (2012)
	PI2 If I were shopping for a car brand, the likelihood I would purchase this brand is high	
	PI3 My willingness to buy brand A would be high if I were shopping for a car brand	
	PI4 The probability i would consider buying brand A is high	
COG: Cognitive Brand Associations ,BT: Brand Trust BA: Brand Affection ,PI: Purchase Intention		※Some items with extremely low factor loadings were excluded (Hair et al., 2014) .

Source: Authors.

## 2. Sampling and Research Design

We conducted an online survey using panel provided by a research agency to examine the effects of comparative advertising in Japan and the U.S. Respondents were presented with two advertising formats (ABC and WBC advertising) using fictitious car brands A through C, and asked to answer questions based on the car brands that actually came to mind for them to the extent that they matched each condition (Appendix 1,2). The reason for using fictitious brands was to eliminate subjects' preconceived notions of existing brands and to purely measure responses to the ad format itself (Campbell et al., 2003). The comparison advertising images were adapted from Jain et al. (2012) research design which used automobiles as a highly involved product category. Details are provided in Appendix 1,2. We collected a total of 500 samples across four groups: Japan  $\times$  ABC advertising, Japan  $\times$  WBC advertising, the U.S. $\times$ ABC advertising, and the U.S. $\times$ WBC advertising, with 125 samples each from the group. All participants were over 18 years old in both countries, reflecting an age range where individuals might consider purchasing a car. We used an equal allocation method to ensure that each age group was equally represented across generations. In addition, an attention check was introduced to ensure appropriate responses. The results showed a significant negative relationship between age and purchase intention as demographic variables for WBC advertising in Japan ( $\beta=-0.007$ ,  $p<.005$ ). The sample description is in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample description

		N (Japan)	% (Japan)	N (The U.S.)	% (The U.S.)
Gender	Male	144	57.6%	99	39.6%
	Female	106	42.4%	151	60.4%
Age	<19	30	12.0%	1	0.4%
	20-29	44	17.6%	23	9.2%
	30-39	44	17.6%	69	27.6%
	40-49	46	18.4%	40	16.0%
	50-59	44	17.6%	43	17.2%
	60<	80	16.0%	74	29.6%
Income level	low : 0	94	37.6%	136	54.4%
	mid : 1	106	42.4%	73	29.2%
	high : 2	50	20.0%	41	16.4%
Children	None	180	72.0%	79	31.6%
	More than one	70	28.0%	171	68.4%

The definitions of the household income level in each country are as follows: Japan: 0 = less than JPY 2,999,999; 1 = JPY 3,000,000-7,999,999; 2 = JPY 8,000,000 or more. U.S.: 0 = less than USD 49,999; 1 = USD 50,000-99,999; 2 = USD 100,000 or more.

Source: Authors.

Automobiles are high-involvement products and durable goods for which consumers spend a lot of time gathering information and making comparisons (Harmon et al., 1983). Therefore, using automobiles as a product category allows for a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes in comparative advertising (Grewal et al., 1997). In this study, we presented subjects with two types of comparison advertisements and evaluated the impact of the different formats of comparison advertisements on consumer behavior. To confirm that subjects accurately understood the differences between the two types of comparative advertising, we checked their level of understanding. As a result, statistically significant differences were confirmed in the



comparison using fictitious brands A through C based on the two comparison advertising formats, confirming the validity of the experimental setting used ( $t(18.0) = 2.39, p < .05$ ). This confirmed that the subjects were fully aware of the differences between the advertising formats before making their evaluations.

### **3. Sample and scale reliability and validity**

To test the reliability and validity of the instrument and sample, we followed the two-step approach proposed by Anderson & Gerbing (1988), using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). SPSS Statistics (Ver. 28.0.4.0) and AMOS (Ver. 28.0.0.0) were used to verify reliability and validity. First, EFA was conducted using the Promax rotation method and the maximum likelihood estimation method to check the factor loadings for each term. Since unstable factor loadings were found, so that these items were excluded from subsequent analyses based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014).

Next, CFA was used to assess the goodness of fit, convergent validity, internal consistency (reliability), and discriminant validity of the model. The model fit index is good:  $\chi^2 = 232.032$ ,  $df = 126$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , CFI = 0.983, TLI = 0.980, SRMR = 0.030, RMSEA = 0.044, meeting all recommended criteria (Hair et al., 2014).

Convergent validity was confirmed as the factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2014) To

further verify internal consistency and construct validity, Cronbach's alpha and Reliability Coefficient Omega and Composite Reliability (CR: Composite Reliability), and all values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming the appropriateness of both indicators (Hair et al., 2014) Details are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Convergent Reliability

Concept	Measurements	Average Value	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading	Cronbach $\alpha$	$\omega$	CR (Compsite Reliability)	AVE (Average Variance Extracted)
Cognitive Brand Associations	COG1	4.77	1.21	0.72	0.92	0.92	0.89	0.62
	COG2	4.76	1.03	0.63				
	COG3	4.76	1.24	0.74				
	COG4	4.90	1.22	0.97				
	COG5	4.96	1.37	0.79				
	COG6	4.79	1.24	0.68				
Brand Trust	COG7	4.87	1.19	0.64	0.91	0.91	0.86	0.55
	BT4	4.47	1.26	0.51				
	BT5	4.47	1.21	0.89				
	BT6	4.56	1.26	0.78				
	BT7	4.43	1.26	0.69				
Brand Affection	BT8	4.40	1.18	0.79	0.88	0.90	0.67	0.54
	BA2	4.45	1.37	0.42				
Purchase Intention	BA3	4.45	1.35	0.94	0.93	0.93	0.91	0.73
	PI1	4.60	1.45	0.76				
	PI2	4.37	1.41	0.91				
	PI3	4.46	1.42	0.89				
	PI4	4.41	1.51	0.84				

COG: Cognitive Brand Associations ,BT: Brand Trust

BA: Brand Affection ,PI: Purchase Intention  $\chi^2 = 232.032$ ,  $df = 126$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , CFI = 0.983, TLI = 0.980, SRMR = 0.030, RMSEA = 0.044.

Source; Authors

Then, discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) recommended by Henseler et al. (2015). The HTMT was calculated with a maximum correlation of 0.74 between each factor, confirming that all values were below 0.85 and supporting the discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Campbell & Fiske (1959) also observed that when the same subjects respond to multiple characteristics—both independent and dependent variables—in a similar manner, as in the present study, they may unconsciously strive for consistency in their responses, resulting in biased data. To mitigate such bias, this study employed two strategies: first, the questions within each section were randomly ordered; second, subjects were informed in advance that their responses would remain anonymous, alleviating any concerns about identification as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Additionally, this study assessed the extent of common method bias in the collected data. Utilizing the single unmeasured latent method factor approach proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003), we found that the change in standardized coefficients when comparing models with and without the inclusion of a single factor was less than 0.2, confirming that the common method bias in the data was not serious.

Table 4: HTMT (Heterotrait-monotrait ratio) correlation

	1	2	3	4
1 Cognitive Brand Associations (COG)				
2 Purchase Intention (PI)	0.661			
3 Brand Trust (BT)	0.730	0.740		
4 Brand Affection (BA)	0.629	0.719	0.688	

Source: Authors

In addition, Hayes (2018) states that even data from a single point in time can be used to verify consumers' psychological processes by using mediating variables. Through the above process, the sample data and scales used in this study were evaluated to be sufficiently reliable and valid. On this basis, this study conducted covariance structure analysis and mediation analysis with cognitive brand associations as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and brand trust and brand affection as the mediating variables. 2,000 bootstrapping procedures were applied to estimate indirect effects, following the recommendations of Hayes (2018).

## **IV. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Results of a structural equation modeling**

Table 5: Results of the Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis

	Path	Standardized Estimates	Standardized Difference	Test Statistics	p
ABC advertising	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Trust	0.780	0.084	7.864	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Affection	0.804	0.094	9.354	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Purchase Intention	-0.300	0.148	-2.031	*
	Brand Trust→Purchase Intention	0.596	0.142	4.998	***
	Brand Affection→Purchase Intention	0.672	0.116	5.333	***
<b>Japan</b>					
WBC advertising	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Trust	0.831	0.128	6.433	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Affection	0.574	0.128	5.331	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Purchase Intention	0.100	0.189	0.562	n.s.
	Brand Trust→Purchase Intention	0.234	0.179	1.408	n.s.
	Brand Affection→Purchase Intention	0.597	0.099	5.422	***
ABC advertising	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Trust	0.799	0.100	9.849	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Affection	0.738	0.103	9.577	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Purchase Intention	-0.009	0.147	-0.079	n.s.
	Brand Trust→Purchase Intention	0.717	0.106	6.824	***
	Brand Affection→Purchase Intention	0.269	0.080	3.153	**
<b>U.S.</b>					
WBC advertising	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Trust	0.742	0.110	5.924	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Brand Affection	0.833	0.133	6.999	***
	Cognitive Brand Associations→Purchase Intention	-0.119	0.332	-0.492	n.s.
	Brand Trust→Purchase Intention	0.077	0.170	0.703	n.s.
	Brand Affection→Purchase Intention	0.940	0.301	3.845	***

Note : \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p < .10$        $\chi^2 = 232.032$ ,  $df = 126$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $CFI = 0.983$ ,  $TLI = 0.980$ ,  $SRMR = 0.030$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.044$ .

Source: Authors

In Table 5, the results of SEM are shown. For the ABC advertising in both countries, the path from brand trust to purchase intention shows a significant positive relationship in both Japan and the U.S. (Japan:  $\beta=0.596$ ,  $p<.001$ ; The U.S.:  $\beta=0.717$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Similarly, a significant positive relationship was also confirmed between brand affection to purchase intention in both countries (Japan:  $\beta=0.672$ ,  $p<.001$ ; The U.S.:  $\beta=0.269$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In Japan, cognitive brand association was found to have significant positive relationships with both brand trust ( $\beta=0.780$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and brand affection ( $\beta = 0.804$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Significant positive relationships were also found between cognitive brand associations and brand trust ( $\beta=0.799$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and brand

affection ( $\beta=0.738$ ,  $p<.001$ ) in the U.S. The results are consistent with the previous study. However, a significant negative effect of cognitive brand association on purchase intention was observed in Japan, but not in the U.S. (Japan:  $\beta=-0.300$ ,  $p<.05$ ; The U.S.:  $\beta=-0.009$ ,  $p<n.s.$ ).

For WBC advertising, the paths from brand trust to purchase intention were not significant in either country (Japan:  $\beta=0.234$ ,  $p<n.s.$ ; The U.S.:  $\beta=0.077$ ,  $p<n.s.$ ).

However, a significant positive relationship between brand affection to purchase intention was confirmed in both countries (Japan:  $\beta=0.597$ ,  $p<.001$ ; The U.S.:  $\beta=0.940$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In Japan, cognitive brand associations were positively related to both brand trust ( $\beta=0.831$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and brand affection ( $\beta=0.574$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In addition, in the U.S., cognitive brand associations were observed to have positive impact on brand trust ( $\beta=0.742$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and brand affection ( $\beta=0.833$ ,  $p<.001$ ). However, no significant values were found for the direct effect of cognitive brand association on purchase intention were found for WBC advertising in either country (Japan:  $\beta=0.100$ ,  $p<n.s.$ ; The U.S.:  $\beta=-0.119$ ,  $p<n.s.$ ).

## **2. Results of a mediation analysis**

Based on the results of the mediation analysis, we tested the hypotheses to compare the impact of ABC and WBC advertising in Japan and the U.S., analyzing the differences in consumer behavior between the two countries (see Table 6).

Table 6: Results of the mediation analysis

			Estimated Value	Standard error	95%CI (Lower)	95%CI (Upper)	p
<b>Japan</b>	ABC advertising	COG→BT→PI	0.122	0.122	0.275	0.770	***
		COG→BA→PI	0.171	0.171	0.303	0.885	***
	WBC advertising	COG→BT→PI	0.163	0.163	0.448	1.112	***
		COG→BA→PI	0.115	0.115	0.055	0.535	*
<b>U.S.</b>	ABC advertising	COG→BT→PI	0.270	0.270	-0.104	0.706	n.s.
		COG→BA→PI	0.171	0.171	0.128	0.783	***
	WBC advertising	COG→BT→PI	0.126	0.126	-0.156	0.353	n.s.
		COG→BA→PI	0.648	0.648	0.593	2.777	***

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , + $p < .10$

COG : Cognitive Brand Associations ,BT : Brand Trust ,BA : Brand Affection ,PI : Purchase Intention

Source: Authors.

First, we examined the mediating effects of ABC and WBC advertising in Japan. In Japan, cognitive brand associations in ABC ads had a significant positive effect on purchase intention via brand trust ( $\beta=0.122$ ,  $p<.001$ ); in WBC ads, cognitive brand associations also had a significant effect on purchase intention ( $\beta=0.163$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In contrast, in the U.S., neither ABC ( $\beta=0.270$ ,  $p=n.s.$ ) nor WBC ( $\beta=0.126$ ,  $p=n.s.$ ) ads showed a significant effect of brand trust on purchase intention, and H1a was supported only in Japan.

Next, for H1b, we examined whether the effect of cognitive brand associations on final purchase intentions via brand affection is more pronounced for WBC ads than for ABC ads. In Japan, both ABC ( $\beta=0.171$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and WBC ( $\beta=0.115$ ,  $p<.05$ ) advertisements had a significant effect of cognitive brand association on purchase

intention via brand affection. However, the effect was relatively small for WBC ads. In contrast, H2a was supported only in the U.S., as WBC ads ( $\beta=0.648$ ,  $p<.001$ ) had a more significant effect than ABC ads ( $\beta=0.171$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

For H1b, we examined whether the effect of cognitive brand associations in WBC advertising on purchase intentions via brand trust was stronger in Japan than in the U.S. The results supported H1b, as it was significant in Japan ( $\beta=0.163$ ,  $p<.001$ ) but not in the U.S. ( $\beta=0.126$ ,  $p=n.s.$ ), suggesting that the effect is stronger in Japan.

For H2b, we examined whether the influence of cognitive brand associations in WBC ads on purchase intentions via brand affection was stronger in the U.S. than in Japan. The results showed that the influence was stronger in the U.S. ( $\beta=0.648$ ,  $p<.001$ ) than in Japan ( $\beta=0.115$ ,  $p<.05$ ), supporting H2b.

These results indicate that there are differences in the effects of ABC and WBC advertisements on Japanese and the U.S. consumers. Specifically, the mediation effect that has a stronger positive effect of cognitive brand associations on purchase intention differs between the two countries. Hypothesis testing in this study revealed that in Japan, brand trust mainly functions as a mediating variable that increases purchase intention under the situation of WBC advertisement. On the other side, in the U.S., brand affection has an important role on purchase intention. These results suggest that consumers in the two countries have different perspectives on building relationships with brands. In Japan, brand trust was identified as an important factor driving



consumer purchase behavior in WBC advertisement. As a collectivist culture (Hofstede et al., 2010), Japanese consumers tend to value the reputation of others and group harmony. Therefore, brands with high credibility are likely to gain social recognition, provide consumers with a sense of security, and promote purchasing behavior. This assertion is supported by existing research. For instance, brand trust significantly reduces perceived risk and information costs for consumers, which enhances trust and positively influences their purchase intentions (Erdem & Swait, 2004). It is suggested that messages emphasizing brand reliability and quality are effective in WBC advertising strategies in Japan.

In contrast, in the U.S., consumers' cognitive brand associations were found to have a strong influence on purchase intentions via their affection for the brand. As an individualistic culture, the U.S. consumers tend to value self-expression and uniqueness (Hofstede et al., 2010). In such societies, consumers often seek products and brands that reflect and enhance their personal identity as a means of differentiating themselves from others. In other words, this pursuit of individuality leads consumers to form an emotional connection with brands that are closely tied to their identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Therefore, brands that foster an emotional connection and resonate with consumers' self-concept are important drivers of purchase behavior. This suggests that messages that emphasize the emotional connection and intimacy between consumers and brands are effective in WBC advertising in the United States. This

suggests that messages that emphasize the emotional connection and intimacy between the consumer and the brand are effective for WBC advertising in the U.S. Based on these results, it is important for companies to understand the differences in rational and emotional approaches that consumers in each country have toward brands when developing WBC advertising in Japan and the U.S. Specifically, advertising strategies that emphasize brand trust are more effective in Japan, while WBC advertising that emphasizes emotional connection and brand affection is more effective in the U.S. Therefore, companies need to recognize that effectively utilizing WBC advertising is crucial, as it aligns with cultural contexts and consumer values, leading to success in each market.

## **V. Qualitative research**

### **1. Rationale for Qualitative Study**

Our quantitative study indicates that WBC advertising has a stronger impact on consumers' purchase intentions than ABC advertising, with effectiveness varying based on cultural backgrounds like individualism and collectivism.

Despite these findings, the actual usage and implementation of WBC advertising strategies by companies remain unclear within the scope of quantitative analysis. Quantitative data alone cannot fully capture the complexities and practical realities of how these strategies are employed in real-world settings. Additionally, although

extensive research has been conducted on ABC advertising, our study demonstrates that its effectiveness is lower compared to WBC advertising. Recognizing that evaluating the practical effectiveness of WBC advertising requires more than quantitative metrics, we deemed it essential to conduct qualitative research. By engaging in semi-structured interviews with industry professionals, we aimed to gain deeper insights into the actual practices, challenges, and perceptions surrounding WBC advertising. This qualitative approach is indispensable for bridging the gap between theoretical findings and practical application, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of WBC advertising's role and effectiveness in the industry.

## **2. Methodology**

We identified the top 10 companies with the highest global market share in the advertising industry based on data from Euromonitor International's Passport database. These companies were chosen based on their significant market share, suggesting a strong emphasis on understanding consumer behavior across international markets and implementing global advertising strategies. Therefore, they were deemed highly suitable for the objectives of this qualitative study. Following requests for participation, two companies, Dentsu and Hakuhodo, ultimately agreed to be part of the research.

Table 7: Qualitative Research Subjects

	1	2
Company name	DENTSU GROUP INC.	Hakuhodo DY Holdings Inc.
Business Details	Advertising Agency	Advertising Agency
Headquarters	Japan	Japan
Countries of Expansion	Approx. 120 (including Japan and the U.S.)	19 (including Japan and the U.S.)
Sales	5,953,391 millions of yen ( Integrated Report 2024)	1,338,240 millions of yen (Financial Fact Sheets 2024)
Overseas Ratio	56.3% (Revenue ratio) (Annual Securities Report 2024)	15.8% (Billings ratio) (Financial Fact Sheets 2024)
Survey Date	15st November 2024	19st November 2024
Research Method	ZOOM	ZOOM
Position	Business producer	Corporate Management Planner

Source: Authors.

This research employed a case study method, as demonstrated in studies by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and Eisenhardt (1989). This approach is well-suited for investigating academic research topics from a practical perspective.

This qualitative study formulated two structured preliminary questions. First,

practitioners of each company were asked whether they believed each advertising method, ABC and WBC advertising, was practically effective. Additionally, the study explored the impact of cultural background on advertising effectiveness, identifying specific differences.

### **3. Findings**

According to the representative from Dentsu, WBC advertising is considered more practical and effective than ABC advertising. This perspective is supported by the fact that WBC advertising avoids direct comparisons with competitors, reducing the likelihood of consumer discomfort. As a result, WBC advertising is perceived to stimulate a stronger desire to purchase. Furthermore, the representative noted that ABC advertising faces significant legal restrictions, which limit the scope of comparative claims and make its application challenging. She cited this regulation as another reason why ABC advertising is less practical for use in actual business scenarios.

Similarly, the representative from Hakuhodo emphasized that WBC advertising is more practical and easier to use than ABC advertising. He explained that ABC advertising requires consent from the competitor, making it challenging to implement in practice. While ABC advertisements have been produced upon client requests, the company does not proactively propose ABC advertising to clients due to these

constraints. Additionally, the representative acknowledged that WBC advertising is more effective in driving purchase intentions. Specifically, WBC advertising is expected to ultimately stimulate purchase intentions by involving consumers.

Both representatives agreed that WBC advertising is a more practical and impactful method than ABC advertising. This perspective aligns with the quantitative findings, confirming that WBC advertising more effectively drives purchase intentions. Regarding ABC advertising, both representatives noted that prior consent from competitors is required to conduct comparative advertising, and strict legal regulations in Japan make its practical application challenging. This viewpoint supports the findings of this study, where the legal constraints surrounding ABC advertising were highlighted and validated by industry practitioners.

Industry practitioners highlighted the importance of adapting advertising strategies to cultural contexts. The Dentsu representative acknowledged that while adapting to cultural differences is effective, there is no clear guidance on which specific methods to adopt, partly because proposals rarely consider cultural contexts and focus instead on the client's envisioned target audience. The Hakuhodo representative observed that emotional appeals using humor are more effective in eliciting consumer emotions in the United States, whereas in Japan, appeals emphasizing quality and functionality connect better with consumers. However, he noted that these approaches often rely on practitioners' experience and intuition rather than a formal understanding

of cultural backgrounds.

In summary, while practitioners recognize the need to adapt advertising to cultural differences, they are uncertain effective appeals. Our study demonstrates that emotional appeals are more effective in individualistic cultures, while functional appeals matter more in collectivist cultures. The identification of humor in emotional appeals offers a new avenue for future cross-cultural advertising research.

## **VI. Conclusion**

### **1. Academic Implications**

This study makes two important contributions to the field of comparative advertising. First, we clarified the impact of WBC advertising on consumer purchase intention in Japan and the U.S., highlighting the differences between the two countries. In Japan, WBC advertising has a strong effect on increasing purchase intention through brand trust, whereas in the U.S., it exerts a strong effect through brand affection. Especially in the U.S., the effect of WBC advertising on purchase intention through brand affection was more pronounced. This result suggests the cultural background influences advertising effectiveness and confirms that WBC advertising works through different mechanisms in both countries. Japanese consumers tend to emphasize harmony with others and place a high value on trust, leading brand trust to increase purchase intention. Conversely, the U.S. consumers

value personal emotional ties and self-expression, making brand affection the main factor reinforcing purchase intention.

Second, this study applied brand resonance theory to examine the relationship between WBC advertising and consumer behavior, focusing on purchase intention as the dependent variable. Brand resonance theory explains how consumers develop trust and affection for a brand, clarifying how these factors influence purchasing behavior. Notably, purchase intention, identified as a key indicator for evaluating marketing effectiveness and optimizing advertising strategies (Chandon et al., 2005), was found to be strongly influenced by WBC advertising.

## **2. Practical implications**

Based on these findings, it is imperative for companies to gain a profound understanding of the rational and emotional orientations that consumers in each country possess toward brands when formulating their advertising strategies in Japan and the United States. Considering that WBC advertisements are perceived more favorably by consumers than ABC advertisements—particularly in Japan—WBC ads that underscore brand credibility are more effective in Japan, whereas in the U.S., WBC ads accentuating emotional connection are more impactful. Moreover, qualitative research indicates that in the U.S. market, the incorporation of humor amplifies the effectiveness of emotional appeals.

Therefore, companies should focus on developing WBC advertising strategies



that are deeply embedded in the cultural context and consumer values of their respective markets. By strategically leveraging humor, companies can optimize their advertising effectiveness and achieve greater success in their target markets.

### **3. Limitations**

Several issues remain to be addressed in future research. First, the detailed mechanism by which brand trust and brand affection influence purchase intention requires further investigation. Such research will enable a deeper understanding of consumers' psychological processes and the impact of advertising. Second, further studies across different countries and regions are also needed to confirm whether the results of this study can be generalized. Identifying differences in advertising effects across various cultural contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumers' psychological mechanisms. Third, it is necessary to examine the applicability of this research's results to different product categories and services. Such an examination would clarify how advertising effectiveness depends on product and market characteristics, allowing companies to utilize advertising strategies in more diverse markets.

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## Appendix 1

### ABC advertising

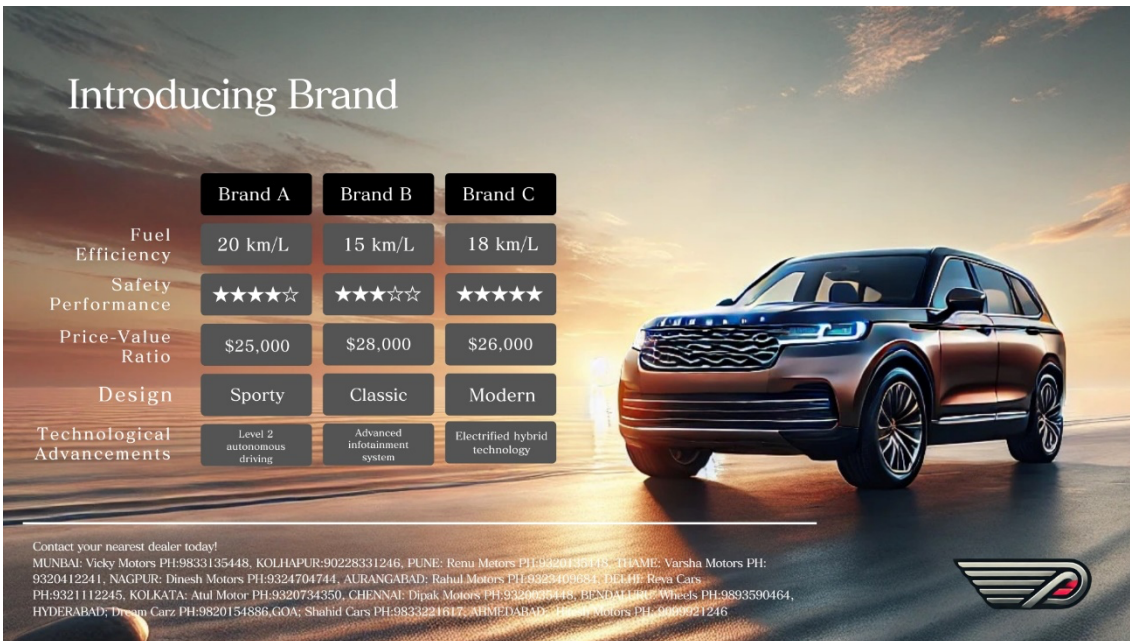
The attached image is a comparative advertisement of brands sold by different car companies. Brands A, B, and C represent brands from different car companies. Please answer each of the following items on a 7-point scale by associating the name of a real car brand you know with each of the brands A through C, based on the criteria provided above.

### WBC advertising

The attached image is a comparative advertisement featuring brands sold by a car company. Brands A, B, and C represent different brands from the same car company. Please answer each of the following items on a 7-point scale by associating the name of a real car brand you know with each of the brands A through C, based on the criteria provided above.

Source: Authors.

## Appendix 2



**Introducing Brand**

	Brand A	Brand B	Brand C
Fuel Efficiency	20 km/L	15 km/L	18 km/L
Safety Performance	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★★
Price-Value Ratio	\$25,000	\$28,000	\$26,000
Design	Sporty	Classic	Modern
Technological Advancements	Level 2 autonomous driving	Advanced infotainment system	Electrified hybrid technology

Contact your nearest dealer today!

MUMBAI: Vicky Motors PH:9833135448, KOLHAPUR:90228331246, PUNE: Renu Motors PH:9320135448, THANE: Varsha Motors PH: 9320412241, NAGPUR: Dinesh Motors PH:9324704744, AURANGABAD: Rahul Motors PH:9323409684, DELHI: Reva Cars PH:9321112245, KOLKATA: Atul Motor PH:9320734350, CHENNAI: Dipak Motors PH:9326075448, BENDALURU: Wheds PH:9893590464, HYDERABAD: Dream Carz PH:9820154886, GOA: Shahid Cars PH:9833221617, AHMEDABAD: Hachi Motors PH:9069921246

Source: Authors from Jain et al. (2012).