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In some markets, emotional messages help brands connect with consumers. But in other countries, like Japan, consumers respond better when these messages are supported by cold, hard facts. Cultural insights help brands understand when to pump out the power claims.

In a world of fake news, it's hard to know whom to trust. That makes life particularly tricky for brands. Launches, relaunches and reformulations are the kinds of messages that slide by unnoticed. Consumers know brands are trying to sell them something, and that makes them likely to reject or ignore what they have to say.

Enter the power claim – an advertising device that doesn't hide the fact it's a sales message but backs it up by including a fundamental truth about the product. You know the

formula: Brand X is the best because it kills 99% of germs.

Power claims tend to come in two handy sizes. There's the science bit, which often features people in white lab coats and is beloved of haircare commercials. And there's the sales bit, which tells you this is the No. 1 product in its sector (millions of your compatriots can't be wrong, so you should buy it, right?).

The sales bit also has a subclass, the foreign sales success story: "This is the No. 1 product in Country A and you should listen because people there always go for quality/know what they are talking about."

USED BY 9
OUT OF 10
DENTISTS

100%^o
NATURAL

LOWERS
CHOLESTEROL
BY 5% ♥

The power struggle in Japan

One market where power claims are particularly effective is Japan, a country with a rich and distinct cultural identity. According to [Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions framework](#) – which analyses countries based on a number of cultural parameters – Japan exhibits extreme scores on three behavioural measures.

Japan scores highly for Uncertainty Avoidance, which means people prefer to stick with what they know. The country also has an extreme score for Long-Term Orientation; the Japanese see their lives as a short moment in time. In a marketing sense, this makes them rather pragmatic. They don't have time to waste with products that don't work.

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Underpinning this pragmatism is a strong 'know-how' culture. In Japan, people want to know exactly how and why a product works so they can make an informed judgement call about whether it will help them. Emotional messages don't provide this kind of information.

Finally, Japan over-indexes for Masculinity. In this culture, which is mildly collective, masculinity doesn't manifest itself in an aggressively competitive or self-serving way, but rather in a quiet pursuit of excellence across the board. In a marketing sense, this means consumers always look for the best. Detail matters to them.

+ kills 99%
of germs

PROVEN TO
CLEAR SKIN
IN 48 HOURS

20 X FASTER THAN
THE NEXT BRAND

Power plays

Taken together, these scores indicate that in Japan, effective power claims provide consumers with the reassurance and detail they need to make a purchase. They also provide customers with the confidence to change their previous behaviour.

Specificity is key. It's not enough to simply say that compound X is featured in cleaning product Y. Brands have to show that their products make a difference, either by saying they're clinically proven or pulling out statistical evidence.

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In Japan, foreign success stories work when they involve markets people here respect. These are typically countries that share similar cultural qualities. One anomaly is the United States, which has a very different cultural makeup. Of course, the US influences consumerism everywhere, possibly because all consumers tend to become more individualistic – a dominant characteristic in US culture – while shopping.

Some brands overcome Japan's high uncertainty avoidance by referencing their overseas popularity. But these claims still need to be backed up by detail. Japanese always need compelling reasons to buy. One international shampoo brand, for instance, earned immediate trust on launch by revealing it was the best-selling brand on a well-known e-commerce site in two influential markets, the US and France. It has since enjoyed massive success.

*CONTAINS 100%
OF YOUR DAILY
RECOMMENDED
INTAKE —*

*3 OUT
OF 4 WOMEN
AGREE ✓✓✓*

Improves stamina by 20%

Thinking beyond Japan

Other markets likely to respond to power claims include South Korea, France, and Spain, all of which score similarly to Japan for Uncertainty Avoidance. While these countries have less extreme scores than Japan across other measures, brands can still succeed without using statistical proof points (although it will only help them if they do).

While consumers in most markets might not expect as much detail as consumers in Japan, providing too much information is almost always better than providing too little. In short, detail will help brands succeed around the world. And that's a power claim every advertiser should buy into.

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CULTURE