Regional Variation in Brand Referencing and Evaluation Focus: Evidence from AliExpress China Headphone Reviews

Yudi Cao[1, a]

[1] School of Foreign Languages, Northeast Normal University, Changchun 130000, China

[a] caoyudii@163.com

Abstract. Brand globalization is an inevitable path for shaping the international image of Chinese brands. In brand communication strategies, direct comparison with competitors is a common approach. Similarly, consumers frequently make comparative judgments when evaluating products and making purchase decisions, and their comparative statements reflect core product concerns. Due to historical and economic disparities, global markets exhibit distinct cultural patterns and consumption norms, leading to different reference benchmarks and preference structures across regions. Clarifying these differences helps Chinese firms implement regionally tailored brand communication. This study analyzes 648 consumer comments collected from the AliExpress platform across four major markets: North America, East Asia, South America, and Western Europe. It explores how overseas consumers evaluate Chinese headphone brands. Drawing on reference dependence theory, appraisal theory, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, the analysis addresses three questions: (1) regional differences in consumers' choice of reference brands; (2) market-specific evaluation focuses; and (3) consumers' discursive strategies in comparative statements. The results show that cross-regional differences in reference benchmarks, evaluation focuses, and comparison strategies are significantly associated with market characteristics. Ultra-low-price brands are mainly compared with peer Chinese brands across regions. In contrast, mid-to-high-end brands exhibit strong regional heterogeneity in reference patterns. Positive evaluations generally use intensified language, while negative evaluations vary significantly by culture. This study contributes theoretically to cross-cultural consumer behavior research and provides practical guidance for Chinese headphone brands to design region-specific international marketing strategies.

Keywords: Chinese brands, consumer evaluation, reference dependence, appraisal theory, cross-border e-commerce, regional differences.

1. Introduction

Chinese brands have entered a new stage of global competition based on differentiated positioning (Liao & Yang, 2023)[1]. With industrial upgrading and technological innovation, Chinese brands have gradually overcome early stereotypes and gained wider global recognition (Rotunno, 2024)[2]. Nevertheless, compared with established Western brands, Chinese brands still face perceptual and evaluative challenges in overseas markets (Zhou et al., 2025)[3]. Online reviews are user-generated and reflect genuine consumer perceptions and evaluation logics. Analyzing these reviews helps firms understand consumer reference behavior and evaluation priorities, and design locally adapted marketing strategies (Han & Han, 2023)[4]. This study uses AliExpress reviews of Chinese headphone brands to address three research questions:

(1) Do consumers prefer local or foreign brands as reference points, and does this preference vary by region?

(2) How do evaluation focuses and discursive strategies differ across markets?

(3) What implications do these differences have for brand positioning and international communication?

2. Literature Review

Consumers often refer to other products or user choices when evaluating brands or making purchase decisions. Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1988)[5] argues that judgments depend

more on relative differences from reference points than on absolute values, providing a foundation for studying reference behavior. However, this theory does not distinguish types of reference points and lacks systematic testing in real business contexts. Keller (2000)[6] extended reference dependence theory to brand communication, suggesting that firms can highlight competitive differences through comparative framing. His work focused on firm-initiated comparative advertising rather than spontaneous consumer comparisons. Subsequent studies examined consumer attitudes toward local and global brands (Steenkamp, 2019)[7] and verified the effects of competitive brand referencing (Berendt et al., 2024)[8]. Still, existing literature lacks fine-grained classification of reference objects, especially distinguishing local national brands, foreign regional brands, and other Chinese brands when examining overseas perceptions of Chinese brands. This gap limits understanding of real reference structures and weakens practical guidance for internationalization.

Online reviews are user-generated and reflect genuine consumer opinions, making them a valuable data source to address these gaps (Dellarocas, 2003)[9]. Mudambi and Schuff (2010)[10] found that review informativeness, sentiment, and brand comparisons significantly influence consumer decisions. Zhou et al. (2025)[11] conducted cross-border review research on AliExpress and identified clear regional differences in cross-border comments, confirming the feasibility of cross-cultural comparison using online reviews and supporting the sampling and design of this study.

Appraisal theory and discourse analysis enable linguistic interpretation of consumer comparative behavior in online reviews. Developed by Martin and White (2005)[12], appraisal theory analyzes evaluative language through attitude, engagement, and graduation, making it suitable for uncovering attitudinal and judgment patterns in natural discourse. However, it has not been applied to research on Chinese brands' overseas reference behavior or cross-market comparative analysis of cross-border reviews. Bednarek (2008)[13] integrated corpus methods to refine discourse evaluation, while Qi and Jin (2024)[14] and Xie (2025)[15] applied appraisal theory to online shopping reviews, advancing its use in e-commerce contexts. Yet no study combines appraisal theory with Chinese brand international communication or spontaneous consumer referencing.

In summary, three main gaps remain. First, brand reference points are broadly defined, without clear separation of local national brands, foreign regional brands, and other Chinese brands. Second, research on comparative discourse style, dimensions, and sentiment characteristics is limited. Third, there is a lack of empirical studies using real cross-border reviews and focusing on reference type differences to inform communication strategy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Source

AliExpress covers major consumer markets in Europe, America, East Asia, and South America, and hosts abundant genuine consumer reviews of Chinese international brands (Fang & Ma, 2024)[16]. Reviews include a buyer_country field, enabling direct identification of consumer nationality and avoiding biases from site-based inference. This aligns with the research questions. Prior work has confirmed the cross-national representativeness and validity of AliExpress review data (Zhou et al., 2025)[11]. Thus, AliExpress serves as the data source.

To examine regional differences, comments are grouped into four regions: North America, East Asia, Western Europe, and South America. This classification follows UN geographic standards and accounts for cultural homogeneity within regions (House et al., 2004)[17].

3.2. Data Collection and Preprocessing

The study focuses on headphones. It selects mainstream Chinese brands with high international visibility, large sales volumes, and sufficient reviews for discourse analysis: Baseus, Edifier, Lenovo, Xiaomi, QCY, and KZ (Joseph & Hemalatha, 2025)[18].

Data were collected using Python crawlers using the keyword “Chinese headphones”. The collection period was April 2–15, 2026. Fields included review ID, rating, text, date, and buyer country. The initial sample contained 32,063 reviews.

After filtering non-target regions, incomplete texts, image-only comments, and non-substantive content, duplicate and invalid entries were removed. The final sample includes 648 valid comparative reviews: 209 from North America, 142 from Western Europe, 124 from East Asia, and 173 from South America. Table 1 presents regional distribution.

Table 1. Data Overview

Region	Country	Count	Total
North America	United States	131	209
	Canada	48	
	Mexico	30	
Western Europe	Spain	29	142
	France	34	
	Germany	36	
	Italy	25	
	United Kingdom	18	
East Asia	South Korea	88	124
	Japan	36	
South America	Brazil	126	173
	Chile	34	
	Colombia	13	

North America has the most reviews and East Asia the fewest. This reflects differences in market penetration and sales volume, not differences in review willingness or response rate.

Preliminary observations show that ultra-low-price Chinese brands receive more reviews, mostly comparing different models within the same brand. Evaluation patterns may differ by price tier. To avoid confounding effects, the sample is divided into ultra-low-price Chinese brands and other Chinese brands for separate analysis.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The study integrates reference dependence theory (Kim et al., 2026)[19] and appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005)[12]. Reference dependence theory explains reference point selection and relative judgment in brand comparison. Appraisal theory provides tools to analyze attitude, engagement, and graduation in reviews. A three-level coding scheme is developed for AliExpress headphone reviews (Table 2).

Table 2. Review Coding Scheme

Level	Dimension	Options	Description
Level 1: Comparative Behavior	Reference brand type	Ultra-low-price Chinese brand (e.g., QCY) / Other Chinese brand (e.g., Baseus) / Foreign regional brand / Local national brand	Which brand consumers use as a reference
	Comparison direction	Positive (Chinese brand better) / Negative (Chinese brand worse) / Neutral	Sentiment orientation
	Evaluation focus	Price/value / Basic functionality / Comfort & fitness for sports / Advanced technical performance / Additional experience & design	Most salient product attributes
	Comparison strategy	Intensified / Non-intensified	Discursive strategy type
Level 2: Evaluative Language	Attitude resources	Affect / Judgment / Appreciation	Appraisal theory—attitude system
	Engagement resources	Monogloss / Heterogloss	Appraisal theory—engagement system
	Graduation resources	Intensification / Mitigation	Appraisal theory—graduation system

The analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitatively, regional distributions of reference type, evaluation focus, and discourse strategy are analyzed, and chi-square tests assess significance. Qualitatively, representative reviews are annotated using appraisal theory to compare discursive patterns across regions, with Hofstede's cultural dimensions explaining observed differences.

4. Regional Analysis of Consumer Differences

4.1. Regional Differences in Reference Brands

Given the substantial positioning disparities of Chinese headphone brands in overseas markets (Alibaba Electronics, 2026; Wonderfully Tech, 2026)[20], this study divides these brands into two categories. The first category is represented by QCY, which are overwhelmingly ultra-low-priced headphones in the research dataset. The second category covers brands such as Baseus and Edifier, which are primarily positioned as mid-range headphones in overseas markets. Although some brands have product layouts across all price tiers, this classification is determined based on their mainstream product positioning. The sample size distribution across different regions is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Reviewed Brands by Region

Brand Type	North America	East Asia	Western Europe	South America	Total
Ultra-low-price Chinese brand (e.g., QCY)	52(24.88%)	33(26.61%)	9(6.34%)	70(40.46%)	164
Other Chinese brand (e.g., Baseus)	157(75.12%)	91(73.39%)	133(93.66%)	103(59.54%)	484
Total	209	124	142	173	648

Overall, other Chinese brands predominate in the Western European market, accounting for 93.7%, while ultra-low-price brands take a relatively large share of 40.5% in the South American market. Statistical observations reveal that consumers tend to compare different models of the same brand in reviews concerning ultra-low-price products. By contrast, they adopt diversified reference objects including local regional brands and other competing brands when evaluating other types of headphones. Accordingly, the following analysis elaborates on comparison benchmarks separately by price segment, as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Reference Brand Type by Region

Target Brand Type	Reference Type	North America	East Asia	Western Europe	South America
Ultra-low-price Chinese brand	Ultra-low-price Chinese brand (e.g., QCY)	50(96.20%)	33(100%)	7(77.80%)	63(90 %)
	Other Chinese brand (e.g., Baseus)	2(3.80%)	0(0%)	1(11.10%)	7(10%)
	Local national brand	0(0%)	0(0%)	1(11.10%)	0(0%)
	Foreign regional brand	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Total	52	33	9	70
Other Chinese brand	Ultra-low-price Chinese brand	2(1.30%)	0(0%)	2(1.50%)	7(6.80%)
	Other Chinese brand	29(18.50%)	27(29.70%)	36(27.1%)	82(79.61%)
	Local national brand	75(47.80%)	37(40.70%)	28(21.1%)	0(0%)
	Foreign regional brand	51(32.50%)	27(29.70%)	67(50.4%)	14(13.59%)
	Total	157	91	133	103

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

For ultra-low-price brands, reference patterns are highly consistent across regions, with over 77% referencing peer Chinese brands. Figure 1 illustrates this pattern.

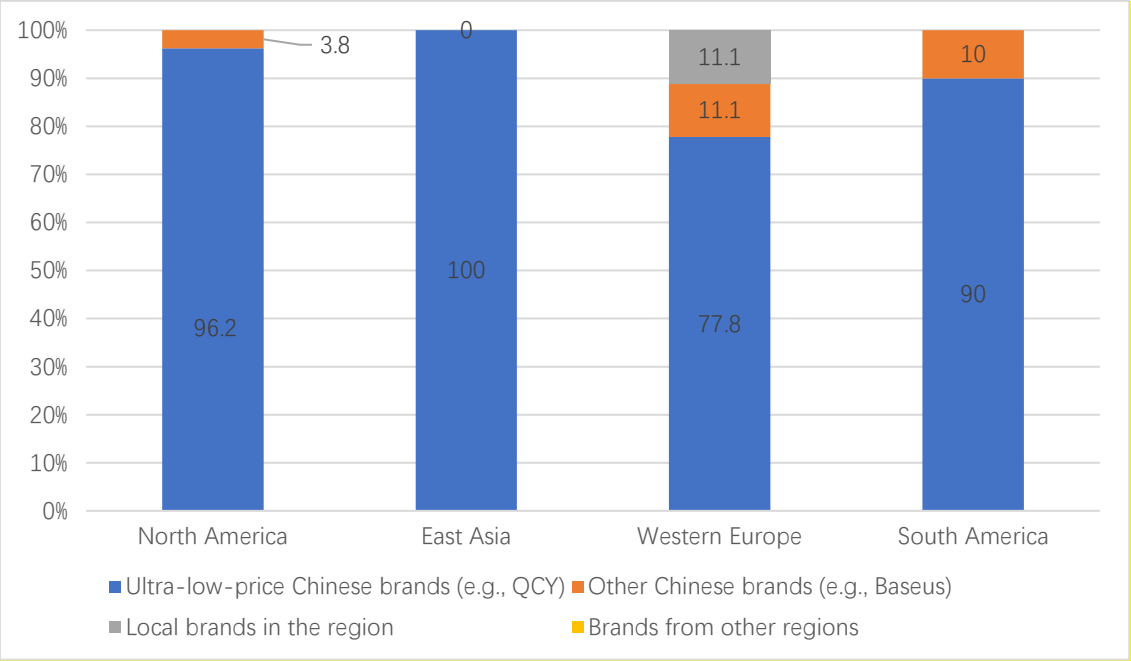


Figure 1. Distribution of Reference Brands for Ultra-Low-Price Chinese Brands Across Regions (%)

For ultra-low-price brands, East Asia only compares with other ultra-low-price Chinese brands (100%). Western Europe is more diverse, including local brands (11.1%) and other Chinese brands (11.1%). North America and South America occasionally reference other Chinese brands (3.8% and 10%). For other Chinese brands, reference patterns diverge strongly across regions (Figure 2).

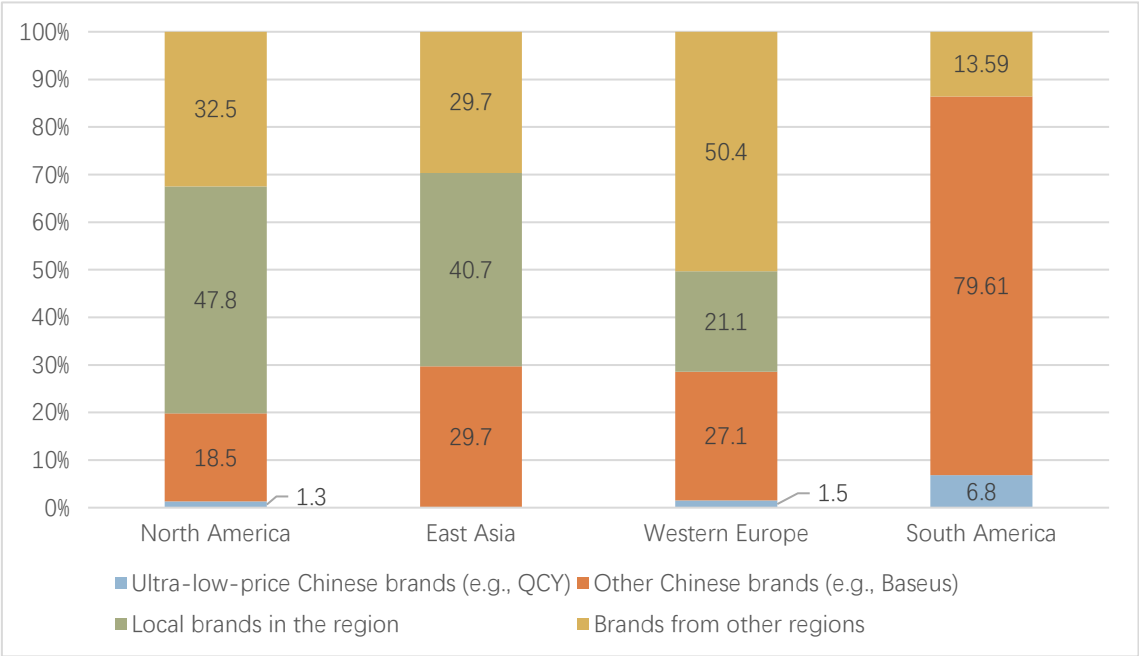


Figure 2. Distribution of Reference Brands for Other Chinese Brands Across Regions (%)

As illustrated in Figure 2, consumers in the North American market tend to make comparisons with local regional brands (47.8%), and rarely take ultra-low-price brands as references (1.3%). In the East Asian market, local regional brands serve as the primary benchmark (40.7%), while mentions of other Chinese brands (29.7%) and brands from other regions account for nearly equal proportions. For the Western European market, brands from other regions constitute the dominant comparison reference (50.4%), with over 20% of reviews referring to other Chinese brands and local brands respectively, and merely 1.5% drawing comparisons with Chinese ultra-low-price products. In the South American market, other Chinese brands are the major comparative benchmark (79.6%), and

almost no comparisons are made with local brands, which may result from the scarcity of local headphone brands in this region (Mordor Intelligence, 2026)[22]. The chi-square test verifies that such distribution differences are statistically significant($\chi^2 = 166.84$, df = 9, $p < 0.001$). These divergences lay a foundational premise for the subsequent analysis of evaluation focuses and discourse strategies.

4.2. Regional Differences in Evaluation Focus

After identifying the comparison benchmarks adopted by users in different regions, this study further statistically analyzes consumers' evaluation focuses across areas. The evaluation focuses are categorized into five dimensions: price and cost performance, basic functions, wearing comfort and sports applicability, advanced professional performance, as well as additional experience and design (Maidar et al., 2024) [21]. The regional distribution results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of Evaluation Focus by Region

Evaluation Focus	North America	East Asia	Western Europe	South America
Price/value	29(10.36%)	21(11.17%)	20(11.49%)	18(5.49%)
Basic functionality	118(42.14%)	58(30.85%)	44(25.29%)	159(48.48%)
Comfort & fitness for sports	80(28.57%)	30(15.96%)	27(15.52%)	78(23.78%)
Advanced technical performance	45(16.07%)	70(37.23%)	39(22.41%)	59(17.99%)
Additional experience & design	8(2.86%)	9(4.79%)	44(25.29%)	14(4.27%)
Total	280	188	174	328

Note: All percentages in the table are rounded to two decimal places, so their total sum may not equal 100%.

As shown in Table 5, there exist significant regional differences in consumers' evaluation focuses (x^2=98.76, df =12, $p < 0.001$). North American users mainly focus on basic functions (42.14%) as well as wearing comfort and sports applicability (28.57%), laying stress on daily user experience. East Asian consumers take advanced professional performance as the core concern, with a mention rate of 37.23%. Western European users pay equal attention to basic functions (25.29%) and product design (25.29%), while South American consumers concentrate predominantly on basic functions (48.48%). To visually illustrate the distribution disparities of each dimension across regions, a radar chart is constructed as shown in Figure 3.

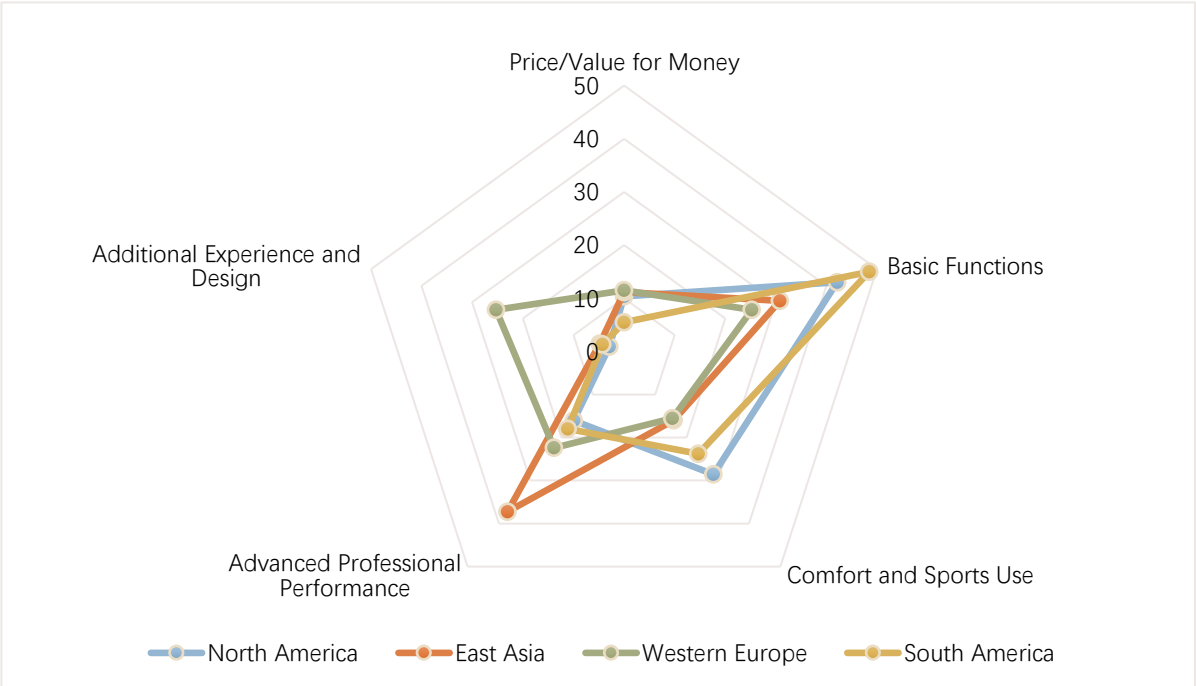


Figure 3. Mention Rate of Evaluation Focus by Region (%)

Figure 3 further demonstrates the regional differences in consumers' evaluation preferences. East Asian and South American consumers show prominent preferences concentrated on single dimensions. Specifically, East Asian consumers attach importance to additional functions on the premise of valuing basic functions, while South American consumers place overwhelming emphasis on basic functions alone. North American consumers present a bimodal preference for wearing comfort and basic functions. In contrast, Western European consumers hold balanced preferences across all dimensions, with particular attention paid to wearing comfort, advanced professional performance, additional experience and product design. Their high emphasis on additional experience and design forms a sharp contrast with that of other regions. Additionally, consumers across all regions show relatively low concern for cost performance.

4.3. Regional Differences in Comparison Strategy and Discourse

After clarifying the regional discrepancies in evaluation focuses, this study further explores the differences in evaluative comparison strategies adopted by consumers from diverse regions. From the perspective of discourse force, such strategies are classified into positive and negative evaluations, each of which is further divided into intensification strategies and non-intensification strategies (Martin & White, 2005; Zheng, 2025)[12] [22]. Relevant statistical results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of Comparison Strategy by Region

Strategy Type	North America	East Asia	Western Europe	South America
Positive intensified	188(77.69%)	121(96.80%)	133(84.71%)	168(96.55%)
Positive non-intensified (neutral + mitigation)	54(22.31%)	4(3.20%)	24(15.29%)	6(3.45%)
Total positive	242	125	157	174
Negative intensified	47(90.38%)	15(25.86)	31(62.00%)	39(76.47%)
Negative non-intensified (neutral + mitigation)	5(9.62%)	43(74.14%)	19(38.00%)	12(23.53%)
Total negative	52	58	50	51

As shown in Table 6, intensification strategies dominate positive evaluations across all regions, with their proportions exceeding 77%. North America witnesses a relatively higher share of non-intensification strategies in positive comments, reaching 22.31%. Regional divergences are mainly reflected in negative evaluations (Alzahrani, 2026)[1]. The chi-square test results confirm significant regional differences in consumers' strategic choices for negative evaluations ($\chi^2 = 54.77$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$).

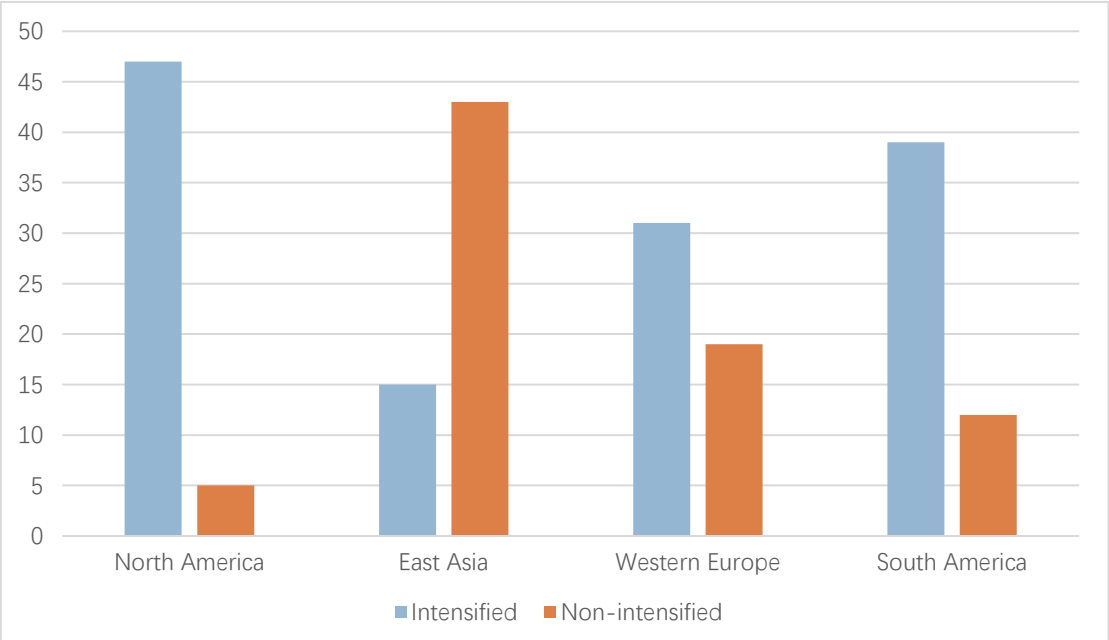


Figure 4. Distribution of Negative Evaluation Strategies (Intensified / Non-intensified) (Frequency)

Figure 4 illustrates the frequency distribution of negative comparative strategies adopted by consumers in different regions. Among North American consumers, 90.4% of negative reviews employ intensification strategies, represented by expressions such as "much worse" and "totally disappointed". Such straightforward and undisguised criticism conforms to the low-context and individualistic communication norms in North America (Gudykunst et al., 1988)[23]. By contrast, East Asian consumers show an entirely opposite tendency: 74.1% of their negative evaluations adopt non-intensification strategies. Consumers tend to use mitigating expressions including "slightly defective" and "not ideal enough". They attempt to save face while pointing out product flaws, which embodies the tact and implicitness typical of high-context cultures (Hyeon-Sook, 2018)[24]. The proportion of intensification strategies stands at 62.0% in Western Europe and 76.5% in South America. Consumers in both regions use a certain number of non-intensified expressions, placing their communication styles between those of North America and East Asia.

To visualize such discourse features distinctly, typical consumer reviews selected from each region are annotated and analyzed based on Appraisal Theory.

North America

These ear clip headphones are perfect for my workouts. I used to have Airpods and Baseus have much worse noise isolation. It is more comfortable for all-day wear. The Bluetooth 6.0 connection never drops during my runs.

This review takes the local brand AirPods as the comparison benchmark, focusing on practical functions applicable to daily scenarios, including sports wearing comfort ("perfect for my workouts"), all-day wearing experience ("comfortable for all-day wear") and connection stability ("never drops"). Appreciation resources serve as the dominant attitudinal resources, as reflected in lexis such as perfect, much worse and comfortable. Intensification strategies prevail throughout the text. Phrases including "perfect", "much worse" and "never drops" enlarge the gap between merits and demerits and form sharp comparative effects. North American consumers tend to express negative views as definite judgments rather than adopting hedges or indirect expressions to maintain interpersonal face (Brand et al., 2022)[25].

East Asia

Compared with the M2S, this product offers better sound quality, battery life and noise cancellation overall. Some reviews claim that the M2S has better sound quality, but it only has heavy bass and low clarity, and the two products are not at the same level. Although this model’s bass is a little boomy, its clarity and overall sound quality are far superior. In terms of full-band noise cancellation, the EP10 performs much better, while the M2S is slightly better only in the ultra-low frequency range. The EP10’s downside is noticeable hissing noise during noise cancellation. Compared with the QCY MeloBuds Pro, it is more comfortable to wear, but worse in both sound quality and noise cancellation.

This review sets other Chinese brands including M2S and QCY as reference objects, with evaluation priorities focusing on advanced professional performances such as sound quality, noise cancellation and sound clarity. Attitudinal resources are mainly manifested via appreciative lexis such as better, far superior and worse, delivering objective technical evaluations. Mitigating graduation devices are adopted to soften negative comments, such as "a little boomy" and "slightly better", while intensified graduation expressions like "far superior" and "much better" are used for positive comments. The prevalent use of mitigation strategies reflects the euphemistic communication logic in high-context cultures, which avoids blunt criticism to preserve social face (Hyeon-Sook, 2018)[24].

Western Europe

When you turn up the volume high, those around you can hear it... The noise cancellation is not very good, I can hear sounds from outside... There's no need to expect much for this money... Now I'll buy AirPods 3 Pro or Galaxy Buds Pro 3... I'll keep this spare in case I need it.

Consumers in Western Europe take international mainstream brands such as AirPods and Galaxy Buds as comparison benchmarks, laying emphasis on noise cancellation performance, sound leakage and comprehensive user experience. Judgment constitutes the core attitudinal resource, as seen in

expressions like not very good and no need to expect much, which help consumers make rational judgments on product value. Non-intensification strategies are widely used with clear standpoints. Phrases such as "not very good" and "no need to expect much" directly convey negative attitudes, and subsequent purchase intention further consolidates personal viewpoints. Such plain and pragmatic evaluation style is in line with the rational and individualized consumption culture prevailing in Western Europe (Trompenaars, 1994)[26].

South America

I thought it was better than the Baseus M2s, but I was wrong. The EP10 is far from being better than the M2s. The sound isolation of the EP10 doesn't work. If you want true quality, choose the Baseus M2s.

Reviews from South America mainly refer to domestic Chinese brands represented by Baseus, attaching great importance to sound insulation effect and the reliability of basic functions. Judgmental attitudinal resources including I was wrong, doesn't work and choose are adopted to present firm evaluation standpoints. Intensification strategies occupy a dominant position. Strong graduation expressions such as "far from being better" and "doesn't work" directly convey negative opinions. This evaluation feature is consistent with the local consumption characteristics shaped by South American cultural traits marked by high uncertainty avoidance and low individualism, where consumers prioritize reliable and practical products (Hofstede et al., 2004)[27].

The above typical cases are highly consistent with the quantitative statistical results. To sum up, North American consumers express opinions frankly with distinct attitudes; East Asian consumers tend to make mild comments even when pointing out defects; Western European consumers are inclined to make objective evaluations based on practical experience; South American consumers pinpoint core functional problems directly without redundant descriptions.

5. Conclusion

Based on 648 consumer reviews involving brand comparisons collected from the AliExpress platform, this study adopts Reference Point Theory, Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005)[12] and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory as the analytical framework, and explores the regional disparities in consumers' evaluations of Chinese headphone brands across four regions: North America, East Asia, Western Europe and South America. The results reveal significant divergences among these regions in three core dimensions, namely selection of comparison benchmarks, evaluation focuses and comparative discourse strategies.

First, in terms of comparison benchmarks, consumers in all regions take domestic peer brands as references for ultra-low-price brands such as QCY, with insignificant regional differences. For high-end positioned Chinese brands including Baseus and Edifier, distinct regional variations emerge: North American consumers benchmark local native brands, Western European consumers refer to other international brands, South American consumers mainly make comparisons within Chinese brand groups, while East Asian consumers adopt diversified reference structures. Second, regarding evaluation focuses, East Asian consumers attach the greatest importance to advanced professional performance; consumers in North America and South America prioritize basic functions; Western European consumers lay equal emphasis on advanced professional performance as well as additional user experience and product design. Third, with respect to comparative discourse strategies, all regions predominantly employ intensification strategies in positive evaluations. In negative evaluations, East Asian consumers overwhelmingly adopt mitigation strategies with implicit and mild expressions; North American and South American consumers tend to use intensification strategies for straightforward and explicit criticism; Western European consumers fall in between the two extremes.

This study makes theoretical contributions in three aspects. Firstly, it introduces Reference Point Theory to explore regional differences in consumers' reference brand selection in cross-cultural brand evaluation contexts. Secondly, it verifies the applicability of the graduation subsystem of Appraisal

Theory in cross-cultural consumption discourse analysis. Thirdly, cross-border e-commerce review data can effectively reflect consumers' authentic perceptions, which can serve as a supplement or alternative to traditional questionnaire surveys. Such data sources help avoid leading biases (Kübler et al., 2025)[28].

From a practical perspective, Chinese headphone brands should abandon homogeneous global marketing strategies and shift towards refined regional operation. Ultra-low-price Chinese brands represented by QCY shall highlight product upgrades compared with previous generations in promotion, and enhance consumers' purchase intention through detailed dimensional introductions. Other Chinese brands represented by Baseus are suggested to implement differentiated promotion strategies in line with market characteristics. In the North American market, brands should emphasize practical functions and wearing experience, and directly benchmark local leading brands. In the East Asian market, it is essential to strengthen the promotion of high-end technical parameters and product quality to meet strict demands for professional performance, with global renowned brands such as Sony, Samsung, Apple and Bose as references. The Western European market requires balanced promotion of professional performance and design experience against world-famous brands. The South American market shall focus on the reliability of basic functions and cost-performance advantages, and highlight competitive edges over other Chinese rival brands. Overall, unified global strategies prove ineffective, and refined regional positioning is particularly crucial (Poulis, 2024)[29].

Several limitations of this study leave room for further research. Firstly, the data are solely sourced from AliExpress; future research can conduct triangulation verification by combining data from Amazon, social media platforms and offline questionnaires. Secondly, this research focuses exclusively on the headphone category, and cross-category comparative studies are required to verify whether the research conclusions can be generalized to other consumer electronic products. Thirdly, although discourse annotation has passed reliability tests, subjective judgment cannot be completely eliminated (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020)[30]. Computational linguistic methods can be adopted in future studies to improve the objectivity and scalability of empirical analysis (Berger & Packard, 2022[31]; Malik & Bilal, 2024)[32]. Fourthly, this study adopts a cross-sectional research design and fails to track temporal changes in consumer evaluations. Longitudinal research designs can be applied in follow-up studies to investigate the dynamic evolution of Chinese brand images amid marketing campaigns and product iterations.

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