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## Horizontal and Vertical Cultural Differences in the Content of Advertising Appeals

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### Abstract

The distinction between vertical (emphasizing hierarchy) and horizontal (valuing equality) cultures yields novel predictions regarding the prevalence of advertising appeals. A content analysis of 1211 magazine advertisements in five countries (Denmark, Korea, Poland, Russia, U.S.) revealed differences in ad content that underscore the value of this distinction. Patterns in the degree to which ads emphasized status benefits and uniqueness benefits corresponded to the countries' vertical/horizontal cultural classification. These and other patterns of ad benefits are analyzed and the predictions afforded by the vertical/horizontal distinction versus the broader individualism-collectivism distinction are compared and tested.

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In an ad appearing in an in-flight magazine, an attractive woman turns to stare at a man in a coffeeshop who is holding a sleek cellular phone. The ad headline reads: “*Turning heads with America's Thinnest Phone!*”

Although appeals promising to enhance a consumer's status and impress others, such as the one just described, seem commonplace in our society, culture may play a role in the degree to which such ads speak to consumers' motivations. As a result, status appeals may be more prevalent in some cultural contexts than in others. This article addresses the role of culture in the use of persuasive appeals that emphasize status benefits as well as other benefits. Our predictions derive from a consideration of *horizontal* (valuing equality) versus *vertical* (emphasizing hierarchy) cultural differences and their implications for persuasive appeals. As we will argue, a focus on this cultural distinction stimulates predictions not anticipated by existing cross-cultural distinctions between individualism and collectivism.

### Culture and Persuasive Appeals

The link between culture and the content and persuasiveness of appeals has attracted significant research attention (see Shavitt, Lee, and Johnson, 2008, for a review). That

research has established that the content of advertising appeals varies by culture (e.g., Alden, Hoyer, and Lee, 1993; Choi and Miracle, 2004; Han and Shavitt, 1994; Kim and Markus, 1999). A consumer's culture or cultural orientation also influences the nature of information processing that accompanies a message (e.g., Aaker and Maheswaran, 1997; Aaker and Williams, 1998; Aaker and Sengupta, 2000; Alden, Stayman, and Hoyer, 1994), as well as the types of goals that motivate consumers (Aaker and Lee, 2001).

However, nearly all of the studies on culture and persuasive appeals have dealt with one broad cultural distinction – the distinction between *individualistic* and *collectivistic*, or independent and interdependent, cultural variables. In individualistic (IND) or independent cultures, people tend to prefer independent relationships with others and to subordinate the goals of their in-groups to their own personal goals. In collectivistic (COL) or interdependent cultures, in contrast, people tend to prefer interdependent relationships to others and to subordinate their personal goals to those of their in-groups (Hofstede, 1980). Studies on advertising and consumer persuasion have established that ad appeals emphasizing independence, uniqueness, and personal rewards and goals are more prevalent in IND cultures and contexts, whereas appeals emphasizing group goals, interdependent relationships, harmony, conformity, and consensus, are more prevalent in COL cultures and contexts (e.g., Han and Shavitt, 1994; Kim and Markus, 1999; see Shavitt, et al., 2008 for a review).

The IND-COL distinction represents the most broadly used dimension of cultural variability for cross-cultural comparison (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988), and the core insights in the field are focused on this classification. However, we suggest that examination of other distinctions can yield important new insights and a more nuanced understanding of the link between culture and persuasive appeals (see Maheswaran and Shavitt, 2000). Specifically, we examine the implications of a recently proposed distinction within individualist and collectivist categories. This classification emerged from the observation that American or British individualism differs from, say, Swedish or Danish individualism in much the same way that Korean or Japanese collectivism differs from the collectivism of the Israeli kibbutz. Describing a delineation of different “species” of individualism and collectivism, Triandis and Gelfand (1998; see also Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand, 1995; Triandis, Chen, and Chan, 1998) proposed that, within each category, some societies are *horizontal* (valuing equality) whereas others are *vertical* (emphasizing hierarchy).

In vertical individualist societies (VI; e.g., U.S., Great Britain, France), people tend to be concerned with improving their individual status and with distinguishing themselves from others via competition. In contrast, in horizontal individualist societies (HI; e.g., Sweden, Denmark, Australia), people tend to view themselves as equal to others in status, and the focus is on expressing one's uniqueness and self-reliance. In vertical collectivist societies (VC; e.g., East Asia, India, Eastern Europe), people focus on complying with authorities and on enhancing the cohesion and status of their in-groups, even when that entails sacrificing their own personal goals. In horizontal collectivist societies (HC; exemplified historically by the Israeli kibbutz), the focus is on sociability and interdependence with others in an egalitarian context.

Thus, although individualist societies all share a focus on self-reliance, independence, and hedonism, Scandinavians and Australians (HI) show aversion to conspicuously successful persons and to braggarts, emphasizing instead the virtues of modesty (e.g., Askaard, 1992; Daun, 1991, 1992; Feather, 1994; Nelson and Shavitt, 2002; Triandis and Gelfand, 1998). In contrast, people in the U.S. (VI) have been shown to aspire to distinction, achievement, success, and being or having “the best” (e.g., Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis and Gelfand, 1998; Weldon, 1984). In fact, in the U.S., “success is communicated, shared and displayed because it is natural to show off” (de Mooij, 1998, p. 195).

Similarly, although collectivists share an interdependent worldview, Koreans and other East Asians (VC) emphasize deference to authority, filial piety, and preservation of harmony in the context of hierarchical relations with others. Indeed, the status of one's family or other in groups establishes one's individual social standing in VC cultures. In contrast, in the Israeli kibbutz (HC), the emphasis is neither on harmony nor status. Instead, honesty, directness, and cooperation are valued, within a framework of assumed equality (Gannon, 2001; Triandis and Gelfand, 1998).

In support of the horizontal/vertical distinction, Oyserman, Coon and Kimmelmeier's (2002) influential meta-analysis indicated that hierarchy and personal competition functioned independently of IND-COL. Comparing results across scales that measure IND and COL cultural orientation, they found that, “when competition was included in the scale, the difference between American and Japanese in IND disappeared, suggesting that competitiveness is a construct unrelated to IND. This conclusion finds support in Triandis's advocacy of assessing competition as a cultural factor separate from IND” (p.16).

## The Horizontal-Vertical Distinction and Persuasive Appeals

The articulation of these horizontal and vertical categories offers opportunities to extend predictions beyond those based on the broad individualism/collectivism cultural classification. Methods for measuring these specific cultural orientations at the individual level have been developed, and studies have validated the dimensionality and supported the cross-cultural generality of these HI, VI, HC, and VC categories (Singelis, et al., 1995; Triandis and Gelfand, 1998; Triandis, et al., 1998).

Indeed, evidence is beginning to accumulate for the value of the horizontal/vertical distinction in anticipating cultural differences not predicted by the broader IND-COL distinction (e.g., Zhang, Nelson, and Mao, 2009; see also Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, and Torelli, 2006, for a review). Some of this research has suggested that effects attributed to the broader individualism-collectivism distinction may in fact differ depending on whether HI versus VI (or HC vs. VC) is considered. For instance, Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2000) found that the tendency to favor products from one's own country over foreign products (the country-of-origin effect) emerged more strongly in Japan than in the U.S. Mediation analyses indicated that this cross-national difference was accounted for by the vertical dimension of individualism/collectivism, and not by the horizontal one. This is consistent with the description of vertical (but not horizontal) collectivists as emphasizing the superiority of the ingroup over others.

What are the consequences of these specific cultural categories for the content of persuasive appeals? Studies on the differences between IND and COL ad appeals have compared only VI (U.S.) and VC (East Asian) societies (see Shavitt, et al., 2006, for a review). It is unclear whether the differences observed reflect broad differences in the ad themes of IND and COL societies or differences specific to vertical societies. Would a consideration of vertical and horizontal differences, e.g., between HI and VI societies, predict new patterns?

Because the horizontal/vertical distinction primarily highlights differences in the emphasis placed on hierarchy, status, authority, and power it stands to reason that the prevalence of these types of status themes will be greater in vertical cultures than in horizontal ones. However, such appeals have not been a significant focus of research on persuasion and culture, despite the prevalence of such appeals in modern communications. To our knowledge, no studies have addressed the degree to which cultures differ in the prevalence of ads that appeal to such status motivations.

Some studies have yielded evidence about consumer values that is relevant to this issue. Research among U.S. respondents has demonstrated positive relationships between a VI cultural orientation and achievement and power values (Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, and Suh, 1998) and between VI and a motivation to protect and restore personal power (see Shavitt, Torelli, and Wong, 2009). Cross-national research in the U.S. (VI) and Denmark (HI) has also demonstrated differences in the importance that individuals place upon achievement and the display of success. In open-ended responses and quantitative ratings, U.S. individuals discussed the importance of achievement more frequently and evaluated achievement values more highly than Danes did (Nelson and Shavitt, 2002).

This evidence suggests that advertising messages with status themes that emphasize achievement, distinction, hierarchy, and competition may be more culturally appropriate to vertical compared to horizontal cultures. Therefore, our primary hypothesis is that,

**H1:** Advertising appeals emphasizing status benefits will be more prevalent in countries characterized by a vertical compared to horizontal culture.

Different sets of themes would likely be motivating and therefore prevalent in horizontal cultures. For instance, the horizontal individualist cultural orientation emphasizes uniqueness and self-reliance (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998). People with an HI (but not VI) cultural orientation engage in a self-presentation style that highlights their capability to be self-reliant (Lalwani, Shavitt and Johnson, 2006). Thus, whereas appeals regarding status are expected to be appropriate in VI cultures, appeals regarding being new, unique, and different should be especially appropriate in HI cultures. These types of appeals would frame consumption of the advertised product as a form of individual self-expression, appropriate to people for whom being distinct and different (rather than better) is an important concern.

Kim and Markus (1999, Study 4) have shown that U.S. ads are more uniqueness oriented than are Korean ads. Although this suggests that ads focused upon uniqueness themes will be prevalent in any IND versus COL context, our analysis distinguishes between benefits relevant to the horizontal and vertical forms of IND. Uniqueness benefits appear to be particularly relevant to an HI cultural context, especially when they are differentiated from

status-focused ads that emphasize distinguishing oneself via competition. Therefore, we expect that,

**H2:** Advertising appeals emphasizing uniqueness benefits will be more prevalent in a horizontal individualist (HI) culture compared to other cultural categories.

In addition to examining benefits specific to horizontal versus vertical cultural motives, we also explored the prevalence of benefits linked to the broader IND and COL categories. One theme likely to broadly distinguish individualistic from collectivistic ads is an emphasis on pleasure. Individualists place greater weight on personal pleasure and hedonic goals than do collectivists (Triandis, 1995) and thus ads that emphasize the pleasures associated with product use may be more prevalent in individualistic contexts. Therefore, we expect that,

**H3:** Advertising appeals emphasizing pleasure benefits will be more prevalent in countries characterized by individualist cultures compared to collectivist cultures.

Finally, appeals emphasizing social relationships, including themes of family, friendship, romantic relationships, community, and group identity are an important category of advertising appeals. Previous research (Han and Shavitt, 1994; Kim and Markus, 1999) would suggest that such relationship themes would be more prevalent in any collectivist compared to individualist culture (e.g., VC compared to VI cultures). However, that research has defined collectivist ad themes broadly, incorporating an emphasis on norms, trends, and other themes concerning the views of others. For instance, in their content analysis, Kim and Markus (1999, study 4) included popularity and celebrity endorsements as collectivist themes that address conformity motives; Similarly, Han and Shavitt (1994, study 1) coded an emphasis on attending to others' views as a collectivist theme.

An analysis that incorporates cultural differences in status motivation would suggest that such other-focused appeals may be just as relevant to the goal of impressing others and gaining status as to the goal of strengthening or nurturing one's relationships. We expect that appeals focusing on impressing others and gaining status (including celebrity appeals, popularity appeals, etc.) should be prevalent in both VC and VI cultures, as noted in H1. In the present analysis, relationship appeals are defined more precisely as appeals emphasizing sociability and interdependence without hierarchy or status themes. Such appeals may be particularly prevalent in HC contexts (although our sample of countries did not include such cultural contexts). Indeed, the absence of hierarchy themes may make such appeals appropriate for HI contexts, as well. Thus, rather than offering specific predictions for the prevalence of relationship appeals, we address this research question:

**RQ1:** How will the prevalence of advertising appeals emphasizing the relationship benefits of sociability and interdependence vary across cultures?

## Method

### Sample Characteristics

**Countries and Magazines**—To address the hypotheses and the research question, over 1200 advertisements were analyzed from five countries representing three of the cultural categories. The United States was chosen to represent a VI culture. The VC cultures

included Korea (Triandis, 1995) as well as Russia and Poland (Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, Butner, and Gornik-Durose 1999; Naumov and Puffer 2000; Reykowski 1994 and 1998). Denmark was chosen to represent an HI culture (Nelson and Shavitt 2002).

In each country, six types of popular, major magazines were selected for the sampling frame in order to obtain ads relevant to a broad set of readers and product categories. For example, in the United States, *Business Week*, *McCall's*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *Time*, and *TV Guide* were selected. Counterparts that paralleled the editorial content for these six magazines were chosen in each of the other countries. In Russia and Poland, we sought corresponding publications with a relatively stable circulation and financial situation, due to the relative instability of the consumer magazine industry in those countries. See Table 1 for the chosen magazine titles by country. For each magazine, several issues were sampled throughout the publication year. All of the issues sampled were published between 1998 and 2000.

**Sampling of Advertisements**—We sampled 240 ads from each country except Denmark (from which we obtained 251 ads), for a total of 1211 ads in the sample. A systematic sampling approach was adopted to select approximately 40 ads from each type of magazine, selecting every few ads per issue. Duplicate ads were excluded, although up to 3 ads from the same ad campaign, but not the same execution, were allowed. All sizes of ads were included, except for classified ads and ads that were larger than a two-page spread.

Because we sought to compare ads that reflected the cultural values in each country, we considered the apparent origin of the content of each ad before including it in the sample. That is, we attempted to screen out ads that clearly had a foreign origin (i.e., ads that appeared to be part of global campaigns designed outside the local culture). Thus, ads were included in the sample only if they displayed some evidence of local content. For instance, ads were included if they mentioned local awards, events, or stores (e.g., ads for imported cars that featured local dealership information), or if they were for locally produced goods and services, or if they featured local personalities, etc. Once included in the sample, ads were further classified by whether they appeared to be, a) *strictly local* in origin or, b) *mixed* local and foreign in origin. We later examined whether the pattern of ad benefits varied by ad origin. The proportion of ads within each country with content that was primarily local in origin ranged from 100% for the United States to 78.8% for Korea. The proportion of local-origin ads in Poland, Russia and Denmark was 99.2, 94.6 and 80.1%, respectively.

It should be noted that, due to the prevalence of global advertising campaigns, many ads with foreign origins likely appeared in the magazines we sampled, and some of them may not have been easily discernable from ads with local origins. This is particularly relevant in those countries with less developed advertising and manufacturing industries. For instance, an estimated 25% of the ads in the Danish sample were for imported goods. Some of these ads may have employed themes that had been developed in the country of origin of the product. This limitation in our ad sample may limit the degree to which the ads serve as cultural artifacts that reflect local values, and thus may reduce the effects one can expect to observe.

## Coding Scheme

Each ad was coded for the degree to which it emphasized five benefits, *Status benefits*, *Relationship benefits*, *Pleasure benefits*, *Uniqueness benefits*, and *Utilitarian benefits*. This last category was included because, although it was not relevant to the focal cross-cultural hypotheses, many of the ads emphasized Utilitarian benefits.

The coding scheme was developed based on extensive discussion among consumers and native, bicultural coders from several of the countries in the sample. We refined the coding categories over multiple iterations in which actual ads were compared to the coding categories and discussed, and then the category descriptions were modified accordingly. Negotiation of ad meanings incorporated both emic and etic standards. For example, if an ad featured luxurious settings and elegant products in the background, this was coded for all countries as conveying status benefits. However, in coding Russian ads in which Persian carpets were visibly depicted, their emic meaning drove the coding decision: Rather than signaling a high-status lifestyle, the Russian coders saw these rugs as commonplace and therefore not reflective of luxury or status.

Appendix A presents the detailed coding instructions for each type of benefit. Status benefits were conveyed through various indicators of status, prestige, competitive victory, or membership in exclusive groups. A Russian ad for sparkling wine, for instance, mentioned that it had been served to the Russian czars, and that it had won numerous gold and silver medals at international competitions.

Pleasure benefits were conveyed through, for example, references to sensual emotions; references to enjoyment or pleasure; and motion or activity that conveys excitement. A Russian ad for a TV channel, for instance, featured a set of emotionally expressive faces reflecting laughter, horror, and sensual arousal, suggesting what consumers could experience when viewing their programming.

Uniqueness benefits were conveyed through references to expressing oneself, through you or the product being modern or different, through making a statement about yourself, or through being self-reliant and independent. For instance, a Danish ad for a kitchen remodeling company emphasized to consumers that kitchens can reflect “your personality” through the company's creative and personalized designs.

Relationship benefits could be conveyed through depicting a product or brand as facilitating or symbolizing warm, cooperative, or otherwise good relations either in family, romance, friendship, community, or work units. For example, in a Polish ad for a detergent, the spokeswoman, who was identified as a pediatrician and mother of four, explained that using the featured product allows her to take better care of her children as well as her patients.

Finally, utilitarian benefits were conveyed through references to characteristics that are intrinsic to the product, including product attributes, performance, quality, taste, and comfort. For instance, a U.S. ad for bar soap emphasized the purity of the soap's ingredients and how effectively it cleanses and cares for one's skin.

## Coding Procedure

Each ad was coded by two independent coders. Those who coded the non-U.S. ads were fully bilingual in English and at least one of the other ad languages (Russian, Polish, Danish, or Korean). One ethnic Russian student served as one of the coders for both the Russian and Polish ads. For each ad, coders evaluated the presence of each benefit on a 3-point scale, with “0” indicating that the benefit is not implied or expressed at all, “1” indicating that the benefit is addressed somewhat or slightly, and “2” indicating that the benefit is addressed strongly or exclusively. Coders were asked to code only what was depicted in the ads without incorporating personal interpretations. They were instructed that an ad could be coded as conveying multiple benefits, or none of the benefits. Thus, an ad could receive all zeros indicating it conveys none of the benefits. However, if an ad conveyed multiple benefits, coders were encouraged to make a clear classification of the ad by scoring it highly on no more than two of the benefits.

A disagreement in coding was defined as coders disagreeing whether a benefit was depicted in the ad – that is, one coder rated “0” and the other coder rated “1” or “2” for the same benefit. Such disagreements were resolved by discussion between the two coders. If coders agreed that a benefit was depicted, but differed in the number assigned (1 versus 2), this was treated as agreement, and the codes were averaged for a final score of 1.5. The *inter-coder agreement rate* was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of coding decisions made.

To ensure that coders understood the coding scheme and established a similar and consistent coding approach, they went through two training stages before coding the main sample of ads. In the first stage, they refined and practiced their understanding of the coding scheme with at least three sets of American ads for which standard coding decisions had previously been established. In the second training stage, they coded 2-3 sets of ads in the same country/language as the main sample of ads they would code later. Acceptable inter-coder agreement levels for each benefit category were achieved before they moved on to code the main sample of ads (U.S.: 79.2%; Russia: 81.3%; Poland: 77.3%; Korea: 86.0%; Denmark: 82.0%). Due to the extensive training, intercoder agreements for the main sample of ads was satisfactory, ranging from 81.7% to 96.7%. See Table 2 for the mean intercoder agreements by country and benefit type.

## Results and Analysis

The coding scores were standardized within country across all benefits, in line with recommendations for cross-cultural comparisons of ratings (see Triandis, 1995). This was done in order to control for any systematic differences across coders in culturally mediated tendencies to employ extreme or middling values when coding.

Because the Utilitarian benefit category was not directly relevant to our cross-cultural hypotheses, coding scores on the other four categories were subsequently re-standardized after this category was removed, and analyses of these measures are reported below. Additional analyses were conducted that examined the original 5-category standardized



scores with the Utilitarian benefit category included. Substitution of these scores had no effect on the findings reported here.

## Descriptive Findings

Standardized scores reflecting the coding for the focal benefit categories are presented in Table 3. As would be predicted by a consideration of vertical versus horizontal cultural values, the scores reveal that in every country but Denmark (HI), status was the dominant ad benefit that was emphasized, as reflected by higher positive z-scores. Pleasure was the dominant benefit emphasized within Denmark.

## Hypothesis tests

The standardized scores were analyzed via multiple linear regression to test each research hypothesis, focusing upon comparisons across cultures. Hypothesis 1 was examined by evaluating differences in advertising emphasis on status benefits between vertical (i.e., U.S., Korea, Poland and Russia) and horizontal (i.e., Denmark) cultures. Results supported this hypothesis, as ads from the vertical cultures were rated significantly higher in terms of status benefits ( $b = 0.38$ ,  $se = 0.09$ ,  $t = 4.22$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In a separate analysis, results from Korea, Poland and Russia were grouped together to represent VC cultures, and their scores were compared to those from the VI (U.S.) and HI (Denmark) countries. As expected, this analysis revealed that ads in both VC cultures ( $b = 0.41$ ,  $se = 0.09$ ,  $t = 4.54$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and VI ( $b = 0.29$ ,  $se = 0.11$ ,  $t = 2.52$ ,  $p = .01$ ) were rated higher than was the horizontal culture in the emphasis on status. In other words, although the U.S. and Denmark are both IND societies, their advertisements differed significantly in their emphasis on status, reflecting these countries' VI versus HI cultural values. Differences between the VI and VC countries were not significant ( $b = -0.13$ ,  $se = 0.09$ ,  $t = -1.38$ ,  $ns$ )

The second hypothesis addressed the prevalence across cultures of advertising appeals that emphasized uniqueness benefits. We predicted that these types of appeals would be more common within HI cultures compared to other cultures. Evidence consistent with this hypothesis emerged from a regression model that compared the uniqueness benefit scores in the HI culture (i.e., Denmark) with those for both the VI and VC cultures. Specifically, ads in Denmark placed a greater emphasis on uniqueness compared to all other cultures examined ( $b = 0.11$ ,  $se = 0.04$ ,  $t = 3.07$ ,  $p = .002$ ). When examined as separate cultural categories, both the VI (U.S.) and VC (Korea, Russia, Poland) cultures were found to place less emphasis on uniqueness, compared to the HI culture (Denmark;  $b = -0.11$ ,  $se = 0.05$ ,  $t = -2.44$ ,  $p = .02$ ; and  $b = -0.11$ ,  $se = 0.04$ ,  $t = -3.97$ ,  $p = .003$ , respectively), as expected. Differences between the VI and VC countries were not significant ( $b = -0.003$ ,  $se = 0.04$ ,  $t = -0.002$ ,  $ns$ ). Again, these results indicate that although the U.S. and Denmark are both IND societies, their advertisements differed significantly in their emphasis on uniqueness. As expected, uniqueness appears to be a benefit that is more relevant to HI versus VI (and VC) cultural values.

The third hypothesis was that ads that emphasize pleasure benefits will be more common in individualist, compared to collectivist, cultures. Multiple regression models examining this hypothesis supported this relationship, as ads in collectivist cultures (Korea, Russia, and

Poland) were found to place less emphasis on this benefit ( $b = -0.13$ ,  $se = 0.06$ ,  $t = -2.71$ ,  $p = .03$ ) compared to ads in individualist cultures. When examined separately, there was no difference between ads in the two individualist societies, Denmark (HI) and the U.S. (VI), in their emphasis on pleasure benefits, as expected ( $b = 0.05$ ,  $se = 0.10$ ,  $t = 0.53$ ,  $ns$ ). Pleasure benefits were emphasized significantly more in the HI ( $b = .16$ ,  $se = 0.08$ ,  $t = 2.07$ ,  $p = .04$ ) compared to the VC cultures examined. Differences between VI and VC cultures were directionally as expected but not statistically significant ( $b = 0.11$ ,  $se = 0.08$ ,  $t = 1.39$ ,  $ns$ ).

Finally, we addressed the research question regarding cultural differences in advertising appeals emphasizing specific relationship benefits. A multiple regression model revealed that relationship benefits were somewhat less emphasized in ads in the collectivist compared to the individualist cultures examined, but this difference was not significant ( $b = -0.08$ ,  $se = 0.06$ ,  $t = -1.41$ ,  $ns$ ). An additional analysis revealed no differences in emphasis on relationship benefits between the VI culture (U.S.) and the collectivist cultures examined ( $b = 0.02$ ,  $se = 0.07$ ,  $t = 0.32$ ,  $ns$ ). A marginally significant difference was found between the collectivist cultures in the sample and the one HI culture (i.e., Denmark) examined, with Danish ads having somewhat greater emphasis on relationship benefits ( $b = 0.14$ ,  $se = 0.07$ ,  $t = 1.88$ ,  $p = .06$ ). There was no significant difference in emphasis on relationship benefits between ads in the two individualist societies, Denmark (HI) and the U.S. (VI) ( $b = 0.11$ ,  $se = 0.09$ ,  $t = 1.25$ ,  $ns$ ).

### Effects as a Function of Magazine Type

All models were re-specified to include a series of five dummy variables that enabled us to adjust for potential variability across the six types of magazines from which ads were sampled in each country. Controlling for these additional variables had no effect on the associations just described between cultural dimensions and prevalence of ad benefits.

### Effects as a Function of Ad Origin

In each of the models examined above, a binary indicator of ad origin -- whether an ad appeared to have a strictly local origin versus a mixed local and foreign origin -- was included as a covariate. In none of the models examined did ad origin independently predict ad benefits (i.e., as a main effect). To examine whether ad origin moderated the effects of the cultural dimensions examined in our hypotheses, each model was re-examined after including an interaction term between the cultural categories and ad origin. These interaction terms were not significant in any of the regression models that examined hypotheses 1-3. The only significant interaction was found in the model that examined the research question regarding relationship benefits (ad origin \* cultural category interaction:  $b = -0.38$ ,  $se = 0.19$ ,  $t = -1.98$ ,  $p = .048$ ). This interaction reflected the fact that, in the IND cultures, there was a greater emphasis on relationship appeals when the ads were of a mixed local/foreign origin versus of strictly local origin. This effect of ad origin on relationship themes in the ads did not emerge in the collectivist countries.

## General Discussion

Our content analysis of magazine advertisements from several countries representing VI (U.S.), HI (Denmark), and VC (Korea, Russia, Poland) cultural contexts supported expectations about the prevalence of appeals in vertical versus horizontal cultures. In particular, the observed emphasis on status in ad appeals – including depictions of luxury, or references to prestige, impressing others, prominence, membership in high status groups (e.g., ivy league graduates), endorsements by high status persons (e.g., celebrities), or other distinctions (e.g., “award-winning”) – corresponded to the cultural profiles of the countries. Ads in all three VC societies (Korea, Russia, Poland) and the VI society (the U.S.) evidenced a greater emphasis on status benefits than did ads in the HI society (Denmark). Indeed, status appeared to be a dominant ad theme (relative to appeals that emphasized pleasure, uniqueness, or relationships) in all of the vertical societies we examined. In contrast, pleasure appeals dominated in the HI society.

Also as expected, the emphasis on uniqueness in ad appeals – including depictions of differentiation, self-expression, self-reliance, and novelty – was greater in HI versus VI (and VC) cultures. These types of appeals frame the product as a form of self-expression, appropriate in cultural contexts that emphasize being distinct and self-reliant (rather than better than others).

Thus, although the U.S. and Denmark are both considered IND societies, their advertisements differed significantly in their emphasis on uniqueness and in their emphasis on status in ways that were consistent with their vertical versus horizontal cultural values. These patterns would not have been anticipated by analyses based on the broader IND-COL classification.

In addition to generating novel hypotheses, a consideration of vertical and horizontal cultural values offers refinements to predictions about the kinds of appeals that distinguish IND and COL cultures. For instance, past research suggests that U.S. appeals are more focused on being unique than are Korean appeals (Kim and Markus, 1999), but uniqueness was defined broadly in that research, incorporating themes of choice and freedom. Our analysis suggests that appeals that more specifically emphasize uniqueness and self-expression (e.g., being different, not better than others) may be especially relevant to an HI cultural context. Thus, in our study, ads in VI versus VC societies did not differ in their focus on the specific uniqueness themes we examined. Future research could address whether, for instance, status appeals in VI societies such as the U.S. are more focused on “sticking out” and being admired, whereas those in VC societies such as Korea are more focused on fitting in or being included in successful groups. This would be congruent with findings indicating that in the U.S. (VI) celebrity endorsers are frequently identified by name or profession and their credentials are used to pitch the product directly to the audience, whereas in Korea (VC), celebrities are not often identified by name and they frequently play a character embodying a family or traditional role (Choi, Lee, and Kim, 2005).

As expected, the prevalence of ads emphasizing pleasure benefits generally varied according to the IND-COL nature of the society. That is, pleasure benefits are relevant to the personal

hedonic goals valued in IND cultures. Thus, those ads were more prevalent in the IND versus the COL cultures we examined, although only the comparison between HI and VC cultures was significant.

Finally, the prevalence of relationship appeals did not appear to parallel the patterns observed in past research (e.g., Han and Shavitt, 1994; Kim and Markus, 1999). Instead, no significant differences emerged across IND and COL cultures. However, as noted earlier, the present coding scheme defined relationship appeals more precisely than did prior research. Our coding focused on sociability, nurturing, warmth, and belongingness. Many references to others' opinions or to group memberships (e.g., “impressing others” or “membership in exclusive groups”) – although addressing social relationships – were coded as status appeals because their focus on hierarchy and prominence was central to the research issue addressed here. For instance, an ad for Cardinal suits from Korea depicted a well-dressed group of men seated together at an elegant piano bar. The ad copy identified them as graduates of Stanford University and claimed that Cardinal is the name that ties together leaders in fashion and in society. This ad and similar others were coded here as emphasizing status because their focus was on the prestige of the brand via its link to an impressive social group. As noted earlier, the possibility that VC compared to VI status appeals are more focused on relationships with prestigious groups is worthy of further investigation.

Future research could also examine a broader range of societies and cultural categories than those examined here. One significant limitation of our sample of countries is that we had no HC context represented. Another drawback is that some cultural categories were represented by only a single nation (VI by the U.S., HI by Denmark). It would be preferable in future studies to examine ads from multiple representatives of each of the cultural categories to enhance confidence in the conclusions offered here.

In sum, examination of the horizontal/vertical cultural distinction can increase our understanding of the consequences of culture and expand the key dimensions of persuasive appeals under consideration. Interestingly, status appeals have not been a significant focus of cross-cultural research, despite their prevalence in modern advertising. Indeed, the broad IND-COL cultural framework does not lend itself to predictions about the prevalence of such appeals. Researching the cultural patterning of themes relevant to vertical versus horizontal contexts offers fruitful directions for future research and for further development of cross-cultural theory.

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## Appendix A: Coding Categories

### Status benefits

these benefits may be conveyed through indicators of status, prestige, or membership in exclusive groups. Logos or similar brand indicators, luxurious settings, elegant products in the background could convey status appeals. So could presenting the brand as a mark of royalty, importance, influence; or presenting the brand a mark of foreign culture(s). So could suggesting that the product impresses other person(s). So could suggesting that the product is for people who are smarter, more successful, more sophisticated, or whatever.

- a. Luxurious/wealthy
- b. Prestige
- c. Foreign appeal (or using a foreign model/spokesperson)
- d. Status image
- e. Impressing others
- f. Prominence/success
- g. Success through competition or as revealed by competitions (e.g., a prize-winning)
- h. Product symbolizes that user is superior to other person(s).

### Relationship benefits

these could be family, romantic, friendship, community, or work-related relationships. This is not just ads that have other people in them. This category refers to ads where the product is depicted as *facilitating or symbolizing* warm, cooperative, or otherwise good relations with another person or with one's group. These benefits may be conveyed through references to human relationships, harmony, cooperation, love, caring, warmth, or with reference to the goals of one's group. Focus is not on impressing others as much as it is on maintaining good relationships. [For sexual appeals. If focus is on pleasure, code P. If focus is on intimacy or caring about others, code R. If both, code for both]

- a. Show your love
- b. Warmth or nurturance (e.g., taking care of another person)
- c. Intimacy (but not necessarily sexual pleasure)
- d. Close connections with others
- e. Friendship
- f. Group identity or working toward group goals
- g. References to the expectations of other person(s)
- h. Charity/community giving.

## **Pleasure/Excitement/Fun/Intensity of Affect as delivered by product benefits**

these benefits may be conveyed through references to sensual emotions; references to enjoyment or pleasure; motion or activity that conveys excitement; laughter or other facial expressions; references to emotional experience associated with the product or event (e.g., “spine-tingling,” “engrossing,” “riveting”).

- a. Pleasure
- b. Sensual/sexual; includes sensual references to taste or scent/aroma
- c. Excitement (including sports excitement)
- d. Having fun/enjoyment/being playful
- e. Providing an engrossing emotional experience

## **Uniqueness/Differentiation benefits**

these benefits may be conveyed through references to expressing oneself, through you or the product being modern or different, through making a statement about yourself, or through being self-reliant and independent. This is more than just the ad saying that a product's formula is new and improved. It is about setting yourself apart or making you feel different from other people, through use of the product. It is important to note that different doesn't mean better or above other people.

- a. Express yourself
- b. Being individual and/or self-reliant
- c. New/trendy/modern
- d. Different or unique
- e. Describing the product or user as the alternative to the standard.

## **Utilitarian benefits**

these benefits may be conveyed through references to *characteristics that are intrinsic to the product*, including product attributes, performance, quality, comfort, etc. For example, references to a warranty or guarantee or some specific product feature could signal utilitarian benefits.

- a. Practical/functional
- b. High quality product components/performance
- c. Quality assurance (warranty, guarantee, seal)
- d. Price or value
- e. Utility/comfort/durability
- f. Health

- g. Convenience
- h. Taste good (except highly sensual appeals, which belong as Pleasure benefits)

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Table 1

## Magazine Titles by Country

	Money and Finance	Women's	Politics/Lifestyle	Lifestyle	General News	Entertainment/Celebrity gossip
U.S.	Business Week	McCall's	The New Republic	The New Yorker	Time	TV Guide
Russia	Profil	Krest'ianka	Vlast	Karavan	Itogi	7Days
Poland	HomeandMarket	Claudia	Polityka	Sukces	Wprost	Przyjaciolka
Korea	Economist	Women Dong-A	Hangyure 21	Samigieunmool	Sisa Journal	TV Guide
Denmark	Pengeog Privatøkonomi	Alt For Damerne	Bobedre	Mad og Bolig	Børsens Nyhedsmagasinet	Billed Bladet

Table 2

## Mean Intercoder Agreement by Country and Benefit Category

	Status	Relationship	Pleasure	Uniqueness	Utilitarian
U.S.	81.7	87.1	83.8	96.3	83.8
Russia	81.7	90.8	82.5	96.7	96.3
Poland	81.7	93.8	88.8	94.2	95.8
Korea	88.3	87.9	89.2	90.4	90.4
Denmark	88.5	88.1	86.1	96.4	90.8

Note: These values represent the percentage of intercoder agreement averaged across the six magazines.

**Table 3**  
**Benefits Emphasized in Advertising Content by Country**

	(n)	Status		Relationship		Pleasure		Unique	
		Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)
Denmark	(251)	0.04	(1.02)	0.07	(1.13)	0.12	(1.09)	-0.24	(0.65)
U.S.	(240)	0.30	(1.23)	-0.07	(0.89)	0.11	(1.11)	-0.34	(0.50)
Korea	(240)	0.57	(1.32)	-0.04	(0.97)	-0.17	(0.78)	-0.37	(0.45)
Russia	(240)	0.36	(1.28)	-0.11	(0.90)	0.09	(1.11)	-0.34	(0.28)
Poland	(240)	0.39	(1.27)	-0.11	(0.94)	0.04	(0.98)	-0.32	(0.54)

Note: Tabled values are based on coding scores that were standardized within culture.