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Publisher: Routledge

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International Journal of Advertising: The Review of Marketing Communications

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rina20>

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Published online: 07 Jan 2015.

To cite this article: Marieke de Mooij & Geert Hofstede (2010) The Hofstede model, International Journal of Advertising: The Review of Marketing Communications, 29:1, 85-110

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2501/S026504870920104X>

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The Hofstede model

Applications to global branding and advertising strategy and research

Marieke de Mooij and Geert Hofstede

Recent years have seen increasing interest in the consequences of culture for global marketing and advertising. Many recent studies point at the necessity of adapting branding and advertising strategies to the culture of the consumer. In order to understand cultural differences, several models have been developed of which the Hofstede model is the most used. This article describes elements of this model that are most relevant to branding and advertising, and reviews studies that have used the model for aspects of international branding and for advertising research. It provides some cautious remarks about applying the model. Suggestions for more cross-cultural research are added.

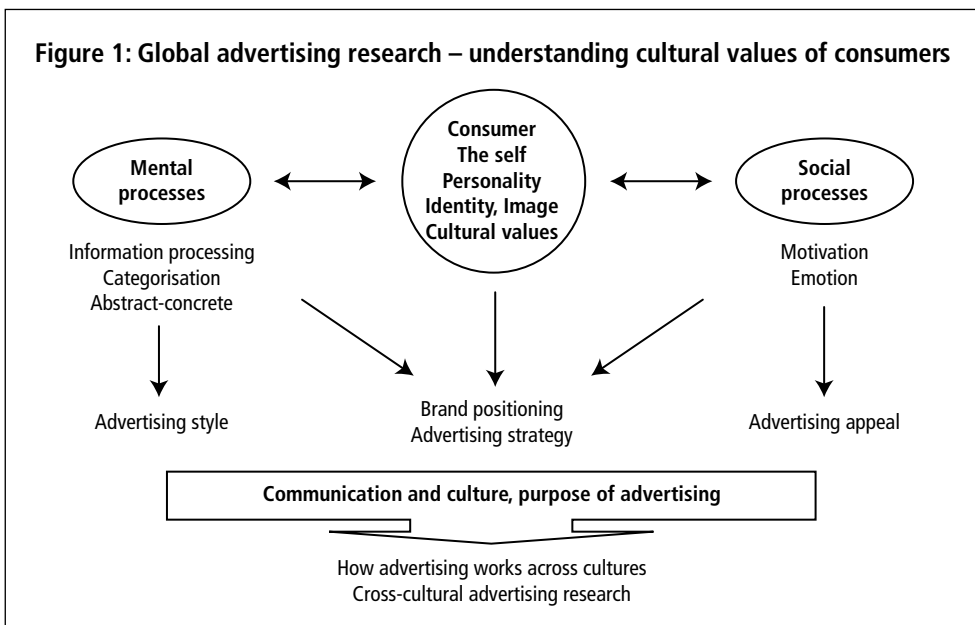
Introduction

The study of culture for understanding global advertising results from the global–local dilemma: whether to standardise advertising for efficiency reasons or to adapt to local habits and consumer motives to be effective. Only recently have studies included performance criteria and several have demonstrated that an adaptation strategy is more effective (Dow 2005; Calantone *et al.* 2006; Okazaki *et al.* 2006; Wong & Merrilees 2007). As a result, understanding culture will be viewed as increasingly important. In the past decades, various models have emerged of which the Hofstede model has been applied most to global marketing and advertising.¹ Geert Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture has been applied to various areas of global branding and advertising, and the underlying theories of consumer behaviour. The model has been used to explain differences

¹ When we use the term global marketing and advertising, we refer to advertising worldwide, not to standardised advertising

of the concepts of self, personality and identity, which in turn explain variations in branding strategy and communications. Another area is information processing, including differences in perception and categorisation that influence interpersonal and mass communication, and the working of advertising. This article summarises various elements of consumer behaviour that affect global branding and advertising strategy, and that have been explained by the Hofstede model. Referring to several issues from Taylor's (2005, 2007) research agenda, we not only cover advertising research, but also questions concerning global brand image, brand equity, advertising and consumer behaviour theories in cross-cultural contexts.

We have pulled a number of topics of this article together in Figure 1. First of all, we view cultural values as an integrated part of the consumer's self, not as an environmental factor. For developing effective advertising the consumer must be central. Cultural values define the self and personality of consumers. Next we distinguish mental processes and social processes. Mental processes are mostly internal processes, how people think, learn, perceive, categorise and process information. Social processes are about how we relate to other people, including motivation and emotions. Both processes affect interpersonal and mass communication, which in turn affect advertising appeals and advertising style. All elements must



be taken into account when researching how advertising works across cultures. Cultural models help to analyse culture's consequences for the self and personality, mental and social processes, and how these influence global advertising strategy.

Cultural models applied to advertising research

Cultural models define patterns of basic problems that have consequences for the functioning of groups and individuals, e.g. (a) relation to authority; (b) the conception of self, including ego identity; and (c) primary dilemmas of conflict and dealing with them (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck 1961; Inkeles 1997). These basic problems can be recognised in the Hofstede model (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005), and have been found in other studies, such as those by Trompenaars (1993), Schwartz (1994; Schwartz & Bilsky 1987), and the recent GLOBE study (House *et al.* 2004).

Although these models find similar basic value differences, they are different with respect to the number of countries measured, the level of analysis (individual versus culture level), the dimension structure (one-poled or two-poled categorisations), the number of dimensions, the subjects (Schwartz – teachers and students; GLOBE – middle managers; Hofstede – all levels of employees in a company), and conceptual and methodological differences (e.g. measuring what *ought* versus measuring what *is*). These differences in research design can cause different results when applying dimensional models to international branding and advertising. In particular the differences resulting from asking for the desired or the desirable influence research results. The desirable is how people think the world ought to be, the desired is what people want for themselves. Statements about the desired, although closer to actual behaviour, do not necessarily correspond to the way people really behave when they have to choose (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). Advertising tends to appeal to the desired, as the desirable is too far from reality. Dimensional models based on questions asking for the desirable may be less useful for measuring differences in consumer attitudes, motives and advertising appeals. A most important area of research would be to analyse and compare the working of the various models in this respect.

A reason for the widespread adoption of Hofstede's classification of culture lies in the large number of countries measured and the simplicity of

his dimensions, which are straightforward and appealing to both academic researchers and business people. Comparison of different models for the purpose of measuring cultural distance for international marketing strategy shows that the more recent cultural frameworks provide only limited advancements compared with Hofstede's original work (Magnusson *et al.* 2008).

None of the cultural models was developed for analysing consumer behaviour. When using them, the manifestations of culture that are relevant for consumer behaviour have to be selected and interpreted. Too often, cross-country research begins with a research instrument without consideration of the underlying conceptual framework (Douglas & Craig 2006), and research method focuses almost exclusively on sophisticated statistical analyses (Schwarz 2003). There is a variety of manifestations of the Hofstede dimensions to consider before setting hypotheses. The next section describes the manifestations of the five Hofstede dimensions that are most relevant to branding and advertising. These elements are based on findings from cross-cultural psychology and meta-analysis of consumer behaviour data (De Mooij 2004, 2010).

The Hofstede dimensional model of national culture

The Hofstede model (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005) distinguishes cultures according to five dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-/short-term orientation. The model provides scales from 0 to 100 for 76 countries for each dimension, and each country has a position on each scale or index, relative to other countries.

The power distance dimension can be defined as 'the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally'. In large power distance cultures, everyone has his or her rightful place in a social hierarchy. The rightful place concept is important for understanding the role of global brands. In large power distance cultures, one's social status must be clear so that others can show proper respect. Global brands serve that purpose. Luxury articles, some alcoholic beverages and fashion items typically appeal to social status needs.

Individualism/collectivism can be defined as 'people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to

in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty'. In individualistic cultures, one's identity is in the person. People are 'I'-conscious and self-actualisation is important. Individualistic cultures are universalistic, assuming their values are valid for the whole world. They also are low-context communication cultures with explicit verbal communication. In collectivistic cultures, people are 'we'-conscious. Their identity is based on the social system to which they belong, and avoiding loss of face is important. Collectivistic cultures are high-context communication cultures, with an indirect style of communication. In the sales process in individualistic cultures, parties want to get to the point fast, whereas in collectivistic cultures it is necessary to first build a relationship and trust between parties. This difference is reflected in the different roles of advertising: persuasion versus creating trust.

The masculinity/femininity dimension can be defined as follows: 'The dominant values in a masculine society are achievement and success; the dominant values in a feminine society are caring for others and quality of life.' In masculine societies, performance and achievement are important; and achievement must be demonstrated, so status brands or products such as jewellery are important to show one's success (De Mooij & Hofstede 2002; De Mooij 2010). An important aspect of this dimension is role differentiation: small in feminine societies, large in masculine societies. In masculine cultures, household work is less shared between husband and wife than in feminine cultures. Men also do more household shopping in the feminine cultures. Data from Eurostat (2002) show that low masculinity explains 52% of variance of the proportion of men who spend time on shopping activities.

Uncertainty avoidance can be defined as 'the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations'. In cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, there is a need for rules and formality to structure life. This translates into the search for truth and a belief in experts. People of high uncertainty avoidance are less open to change and innovation than people of low uncertainty avoidance cultures. This explains differences in the adoption of innovations (Yaveroglu & Donthu 2002; Yeniurt & Townsend 2003; Tellis *et al.* 2003). Whereas high uncertainty avoidance cultures have a passive attitude to health by focusing on purity in food and drink and using more medication, low uncertainty avoidance cultures have a more active attitude to

health by focusing on fitness and sports (De Mooij & Hofstede 2002; De Mooij 2010).

Long- versus short-term orientation is 'the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-orientated perspective rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view'. Values included in long-term orientation are perseverance, ordering relationships by status, thrift, and having a sense of shame. The opposite is short-term orientation, which includes personal steadiness and stability, and respect for tradition. Focus is on pursuit of happiness rather than on pursuit of peace of mind. Long-term orientation implies investment in the future. An example is the relationship between LTO and broadband penetration (De Mooij 2010). Broadband asks for large investments by business or governments.

The concepts of self and personality – implications for global branding and advertising

The concepts of self, personality, identity and image that are applied to branding strategy are derived from an individualistic worldview. A host of knowledge from cross-cultural psychology is now available that helps understand the basic differences between the concepts of self and personality in different cultures.

The concept of self

The concepts of self and personality, as developed in the individualistic Western world, include the person as an *autonomous entity* with a distinctive set of attributes, qualities or processes. The configuration of these internal attributes or processes causes behaviour. People's attributes and processes should be expressed consistently in behaviour across situations. Behaviour that changes with the situation is viewed as hypocritical or pathological.

In the collectivistic model the self cannot be separated from others and the surrounding social context, so the self is an *interdependent entity* that is part of an encompassing social relationship. Individual behaviour is situational; it varies from one situation to another and from one time to another (Markus & Kitayama 1991). The very first words of little children in China are people-related, whereas children in the United States start talking about objects (Tardiff *et al.* 2008). In Japan, feeling good is more

associated with interpersonal situations such as feeling friendly, whereas in the United States feeling good is more frequently associated with interpersonal distance, such as feeling superior or proud. In the United Kingdom feelings of happiness are positively related to a sense of independence, whereas in Greece good feelings are negatively related to a sense of independence (Nezlek *et al.* 2008).

How the self of young people develops is not the same either. In individualistic cultures, a youth has to develop an identity that enables him or her to function independently in a variety of social groups apart from the family. Failure to do so can cause an identity crisis. In collectivistic cultures, youth development is based on encouragement of dependency needs in complex familial hierarchical relationships, and the group ideal is being like others, not being different (Triandis 1995).

Next to individualism, masculinity explains variation of the self-concept. Whereas in feminine cultures modesty and relations are important characteristics, in masculine cultures self-enhancement leads to self-esteem. A relationship orientation, including family values, not only is specific to collectivistic cultures but also is found in individualistic cultures that are also feminine (Watkins *et al.* 1998).

Personality

Personality generally is defined as unique and cross-situationally consistent and is usually described in terms of traits such as autonomy or sociability. In collectivistic cultures, people's ideal characteristics vary by social role, and behaviour is influenced by contextual factors (Church 2006). Easterners believe in the continuous shaping of personality traits by situational influences (Norenzayan *et al.* 2002).

The Western habit of describing oneself and others in terms of abstract characteristics has led to the development of characterisation systems of personal traits. The most used set of personality traits is the Five-Factor Model, also called 'Big Five' (McCrae 2002). Although these five factors are found in many different cultures, they vary in weight across cultures and these variations relate to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede & McCrae 2004). Although research using the same set of questions has resulted in similar five-factor structures across cultures, this doesn't imply that these are the only existing conceptions of personhood; it merely

shows that a set of English-language questions, when translated, results in similar five-dimensional structures (Schmitt *et al.* 2007). There may be other conceptions of personality that are not found. The different factors also vary as to different facets (Cheung *et al.* 2008). Personality research in East Asia suggests a 'Big Six' structure, including a factor 'dependence on others' (Hofstede 2007).

The practice of attaching personalities to brands is typical of individualistic cultures. Several studies have found brand personality factors that are culture specific (e.g. Aaker *et al.* 2001). For example, in the United States 'Ruggedness', in Japan and Spain 'Peacefulness', and a specific Spanish dimension, labelled 'Passion'. A study of Korean brand personalities (Sung & Tinkham 2005) of well-known global brands like Nike, Sony, Levi's, Adidas, Volkswagen and BMW found two specific Korean brand personalities, labelled 'Passive Likeableness' and 'Ascendancy'.

Consumers across cultures attribute different brand personalities to one and the same global brand. The Red Bull brand has been marketed with a consistent brand identity, but consumers attribute different personalities to the brand (Foscht *et al.* 2008). A commercial cross-cultural brand value study (Crocus 2004, in De Mooij 2010) found that a brand characteristic like 'friendly' is most attributed to strong global brands in high uncertainty avoidance and low power distance cultures. 'Prestigious' is a characteristic attributed to global brands in high power distance cultures, and 'trustworthy' is most attributed to strong brands in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. In cultures of the configuration low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance, people attributed 'innovative' and 'different' to these brands. So consumers project their own personality preferences on to global brands. The companies that own global brands want to be consistent in their messages worldwide, but consumers attribute personalities to such brands that fit their own cultural values, not the values of the producer of the brand. More research is needed to find whether consumers link brand personalities to brands and, if they do so, consumers' personality preferences across cultures.

The need for consistency also is at the basis of preferences for standardisation strategies of US multinationals. It drives the wish of companies to build uniform brand images (Duncan & Ramaprasad 1995) and academic focus on standardisation instead of adaptation. Taylor (2002) mentions a preoccupation with questions of whether campaigns should be

standardised to the detriment of seeking answers for pragmatic execution across markets. Consistency needs drive several research assumptions and questions, such as the assumption that a uniform brand image plays a key role in building global brands, and questions about the role of standardised advertising in building a uniform brand image (Taylor 2005, 2007).

Another consequence of consistency need is the relationship attitude–behaviour. Individualists want consistency between their attitudes, feelings and behaviours. As a result, under certain conditions, the behaviour of consumers can be predicted from their attitudes towards products, services and brands, and a purchase prediction is derived from a positive attitude. In collectivistic cultures, however, there is not a consistent relationship between attitude and future behaviour. It may even be a reverse relationship: behaviour (product usage) comes first and defines attitude (Chang & Chieng 2006). This implies that measurement of attitude towards the advertisement (A_{ad}) for measuring advertising effectiveness will not work the same way in collectivistic cultures as it does in individualistic cultures.

The most widely known model that measures the relationship between attitude and behaviour is the Fishbein behavioural intentions model, in which a normative or social component refers to social pressures on behaviour such as expectations of others. What in Western terms is called ‘social pressure’ (Lee & Green 1991) has relatively weak influence on individualists, who will refer to their own personal attitudes as having influenced their buying decisions. This is different in collectivistic cultures where the norm is to live up to the standards of one’s position, to save ‘face’. The social norm component of the Fishbein model doesn’t capture ‘face’. Face motivates collectivists to act in accordance with one’s social position. If one acts contrary to expectations of one’s social position, ‘a shadow is cast over one’s moral integrity’ (Malhotra & McCort 2001).

Social processes: motivation and emotion

Assumed universal emotions and consumer motives are fundamental to standardisation issues, but both motives and emotions are culture-bound. Understanding the variations in what motivates people is important for positioning brands and for developing advertising appeals in different markets. Many motives are category-bound, such as status motives for luxury brands, but the strength of such motives will vary across cultures

(De Mooij 2004, 2010). More research should be done to find different category motives and the relationship with culture.

Emotion psychologists have argued that emotions are universal. An argument in favour of universal basic emotions is that most languages possess limited sets of central emotion-labelling words, such as anger, fear, sadness and joy. However, display and recognition of facial expressions, intensity and meaning of emotions vary and are culturally defined. Emotions are, for example, more subdued in high power distance and collectivistic cultures (Kagitçibasi 1997). East Asian collectivists try to display only positive emotions and tend to control negative emotions. Probably this is the reason why, in emotion-recognition studies, Chinese people are less able to identify expressions of fear and disgust (Wang *et al.* 2006). A comparison of emotion expression across 32 countries showed a significant correlation with individualism for overall emotion expressivity and in particular expressing happiness and surprise (Matsumoto *et al.* 2008). People also weigh facial cues differently. When interpreting the emotions of others, the Japanese focus more on the eyes, whereas Americans focus on the mouth. This difference may explain why emoticons differ between Japan and the United States (Yuki *et al.* 2007). Researchers using emoticons – assumed to be more neutral than the faces of real people – should be aware of these differences. As the same expressions may have different meanings in different cultures, this should be an important research area for international advertising researchers.

Mental processes and the implications for branding and communication

How people see, their worldview, how they think, how language structures their thinking, how they learn and how people communicate are mental or cognitive processes. We discuss cross-cultural studies of three such processes: abstract versus concrete thinking, categorisation and information processing.

Abstract versus concrete thinking

Whereas in individualistic cultures brands are made by adding values or abstract personality traits to products, members of collectivistic cultures

are more interested in concrete product features than in abstract brands because they are less used to conceptual thinking. For members of collectivistic cultures where context and situation are important, the brand concept is too abstract to be discussed the way members of individualistic cultures do. The *Reader's Digest* Trusted Brands survey in 2002 asked people in 18 different countries in Europe about the probability of buying unknown brands. The responses 'extremely/quite likely to consider buying a brand which I've heard of but haven't tried before' correlated significantly with individualism ($r = 0.82^{***}$).² Instead of adding abstract personal characteristics to the product, in collectivistic cultures the brand is linked to concrete persons, in Japan called talents (Praet 2001). Whereas American companies have developed product brands with unique characteristics, Japanese companies have generally emphasised the corporate brand. In essence, this means inspiring trust among consumers in a company and so persuading them to buy its products. As a result, Japanese and Korean companies, in their television advertisements, display corporate identity logos more frequently than do US and German companies (Souiden *et al.* 2006).

The unfamiliarity with abstract brand associations leads to variation when measuring brand equity of global brands across cultures. An important element of brand equity is consumer equity, which is measured in part by brand associations. Many of these associations are abstract. In this respect, Western measurement systems are not adequate to measure global brand equity. Hsieh (2004) demonstrated that the brand value calculated based on brand associations for 19 car brands in 16 countries varied significantly. In Europe, the average brand value of the 19 brands was higher than in the Asian countries. These differences appear to correlate with individualism ($r = 0.68^{***}$). Other studies confirm that different cultural conditions lead consumers to different brand evaluations (Koçak *et al.* 2007).

² For correlation analysis, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is used. Correlation analysis is one-tailed. Significance levels are indicated by $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$ and $***p < 0.005$. Regression analysis is stepwise. The coefficient of determination or R^2 is the indicator of the percentage of variance explained.

Categorisation

How people categorise other people and objects varies with individualism-collectivism. Collectivists tend to pay attention to relationships between objects, whereas individualists categorise objects according to rules and properties (Choi *et al.* 1997). Chinese children will group items together that share a relationship, whereas Canadian children will group items together that share a category (Unsworth *et al.* 2005). Such findings explain variation of acceptance of brand extensions. American consumers view a brand extension of a different product category as not fitting with the parent brand. However, collectivists view the parent brand in terms of the overall reputation of or trust in the company. So they perceive a higher degree of brand extension fit also for extensions in product categories far from those associated with the parent brand than individualists would (Monga & Roedder 2007).

Information processing

How people acquire information varies with individualism-collectivism and power distance. In collectivistic and/or high power distance cultures, people will acquire information more via implicit, interpersonal communication and base their buying decisions more on feelings and trust in the company, whereas in individualistic cultures of low power distance, people will actively acquire information via the media and friends to prepare for purchases. Frequent social interaction causes an automatic flow of communication between people, who as a result acquire knowledge unconsciously (De Mooij 2010). Cho *et al.* (1999) state that, in China, consumers rely on word-of-mouth communication because of the high contact rate among group members. A 2002 consumer survey by Eurobarometer (14 countries) asked people to what degree they view themselves as well-informed consumers. The answers 'well-informed' correlate with low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, and individualism; individualism alone explains 61% of variance.

Culture and communication

If we want to understand how advertising works across cultures, we'll first have to learn how communication works. One of the clearest distinctions is between high-context and low-context communication of collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Whereas in individualistic cultures communication is more or less synonymous with information, in collectivistic cultures communication varies with roles and relationships, with concern for belonging and occupying one's proper place (Singelis & Brown 1995; Miyahara 2004). Different interpersonal communication styles are reflected in advertising styles across cultures. Related to this distinction are people's expectations of the role, purpose and effect of communication. Is advertising persuasive by nature, or can it have another role in the sales process?

How advertising works

There is not one universal model of how advertising works. One of the first scholars to demonstrate this was Gordon Miracle (1987). In individualistic cultures, advertising must persuade, whereas in collectivistic cultures, the purpose is to build relationships and trust between seller and buyer. Japanese advertising focuses on inducing positive feelings rather than providing information. The different purposes are reflected in the difference in timing and frequency of verbal or visual mention of the brand name in television commercials (Miracle *et al.* 1992). In a typical Japanese television commercial, the first identification of a brand, company name, or product occurs later than in a typical US television commercial. In Chinese commercials, brand acknowledgement appears later than in US commercials (Zhou *et al.* 2005).

Western models of how advertising works presuppose that consumers want to be informed, gather information actively and want to solve problems. This is the model for individualistic and low power distance cultures. The focus on information is reflected in the Resnik and Stern (Stern & Resnik 1991) typology, in which the criterion for considering an advertisement informative is whether the informational cues are relevant enough to assist a typical buyer in making an intelligent choice among alternatives. Next to the fact that in some cultures people do not consciously search for

information, what is relevant information to members of one culture may not be relevant to members of another culture.

Models also follow the assumption that the advertising concept is what classical rhetoricians call an 'argument from consequence'. Information is an instrument to persuasion. Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM) distinguishes a central route and a peripheral route of persuasion. In the theory, the peripheral route generally includes visual cues like the package, pictures or the context of the message. This theory is embedded in Western advertising practice, which uses pictures as illustration of words. Various studies have been conducted to find the influence of pictures, in both the central route and the peripheral route. Experiments conducted by Aaker and Maheswaran (1997) suggest that the dual process model works across cultures but evaluation differences exist between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Advertising appeals and style

Content analysis based studies have revealed culture-specific appeals in advertising that can be explained by the Hofstede dimensions (e.g. Albers 1994; Zandpour *et al.* 1994). In collectivistic cultures such as China and Korea, appeals focusing on in-group benefits, harmony and family are more effective, whereas in individualistic cultures like the United States, advertising that appeals to individual benefits and preferences, personal success and independence is more effective (Han & Shavitt 1994). The use of celebrities in advertising is related to collectivism, where the function of a celebrity is to give a face to the brand in a world of brands with similar product attributes (Praet 2001).

Current research questions (Taylor 2005, 2007) are about the effectiveness of various executional techniques and which elements of advertising to standardise and when. These questions assume that consumers process various elements of advertisements separately. Consumers, however, observe the whole picture. Distinguishing what one says from how one says it may not be the way to understand how advertising works across cultures. Often the communication style is decisive for consumers' acceptance of advertising. For example, the direct style of individualistic cultures may be offensive to members of collectivistic cultures. Various advertising researchers have studied differences in style such as the direct

versus indirect styles used in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (e.g. Cutler *et al.* 1997; Cho *et al.* 1999). As the right advertising style may be more influential to success than executional aspects of advertising, more research is needed to understand advertising styles across cultures. This also applies to communications on the internet.

Advertising research across cultures: points of attention

A review of cross-cultural advertising research by Okazaki and Mueller (2007) shows that most cross-cultural advertising research topics were cultural values and the most used research methods were content analysis and survey. Content analysis has been criticised for providing description without prescription (Samiee & Jeong 1994). We have two arguments against discarding the method.

The first is that comparative content analysis does provide insight in cross-cultural advertising practice that also points at what works best in a country. If in a country certain appeals and communication styles are more common than in others, these style elements are used because they are effective (McQuarrie & Phillips 2008). When the values of consumers are congruent with the values reflected in advertising, the link to liking the ad, the brand or the company increases, and advertising will be more effective (Polegato & Bjerke 2006). Consumers are more positively disposed towards local advertisements and find them more interesting and less irritating (Pae *et al.* 2002). This is also relevant to website design. People perform information-seeking tasks faster when using web content created by designers from their own culture (Faiola & Matei 2005). Cultural adaptation not only enhances ease of use of the website but also leads to more favourable attitudes towards the website, which in turn affects the intention to buy (Singh *et al.* 2006).

A second argument for the use of content analysis is for measuring the degree of standardisation of advertising. The usual method is surveys among managers of – mostly – US multinationals. However, the universalistic values of US managers may make them give the desirable answer in the direction of standardisation. Observation of actual practice by content analysis demonstrates what companies do in reality and may as well uncover important advertising appeals and styles for other cultures than the home culture.

A problem of cross-cultural content analysis is the organisation and logistics of a large-scale cross-country study. In particular when using cultural variables like the Hofstede dimensions, comparison should be across more than two countries. Unfortunately most studies compare the United States with one other country (Chang *et al.* 2007), whereas for proper cross-cultural research preferably at least five countries must be compared. Unfortunately, few multiple-country studies have been conducted.

Another point of attention is the use of scales or constructs developed in a North American or European context for the study of another. Examples from advertising research are the application of the Resnik and Stern coding scheme (Al-Olayan & Karande 2000; Mindy & McNeal 2001), the informational-transformational distinction (Cutler *et al.* 2000) and Pollay's advertising appeals (Albers-Miller & Gelb 1996), all developed in the United States to analyse advertising in other countries. Such constructs may not uncover important items of other cultures.

Next to comparing cultures something can be learned from national studies of how advertising works in other countries than the United States, conducted among non-US subjects. This is not facilitated by the way some authors report their findings. An example is a study by Ang and Lim (2006), whose affiliations are with universities in Singapore and Australia. Their paper on the influence of metaphors on perceptions and attitudes is very relevant for understanding how advertising works, but they do not mention the national culture of their respondents, as if their findings are universal. This limits the viability of the conclusions. Another example is a statement like 'Many advertisers standardise general strategy while modifying executions' (Taylor 2005). Are these American advertisers, or also from other countries? This is important information as managers of US firms are more inclined to standardise advertising and to create a uniform brand image than, for example, Japanese managers (Taylor & Okazaki 2006). The degree to which marketing managers customise brand image varies with individualism and uncertainty avoidance (Roth 1995). Any study dealing with information processing, how advertising works, attitudes towards advertising and advertising practice should mention the cultural background of research subjects, because the national culture of respondents may influence the results.

Applying the Hofstede model to research for global branding and advertising

In cross-cultural research we have noted an advance of methodological techniques but less conceptual analysis of cultural dimensions when formulating hypotheses. Some research questions ask for better understanding of how dimensional models work. Examples are the question as to which cultural dimensions are especially relevant to advertising, and the suggestion that cross-cultural studies that examine the impact of culture should actually measure how the individual respondents stand on the cultural dimension investigated (Taylor 2005, 2007).

Measuring individual respondents on scales of cultural dimensions

In comparative cross-cultural research, the properties of individuals as observed within a country are aggregated and then treated as culture-level variables. These variables can be used to explain variation of phenomena (other aggregate data) at country level (e.g. differences in ownership of computers between countries). The aggregated data represent a mix of different people because a society consists of a variety of people. So culture is not one king-size personality that can be used for measuring individuals. Patterns of associations observed at the culture level (also called the ecological level) can be different from patterns at the individual level. For example, Schwartz (1994, p. 104) has shown that patterns of associations with 'freedom' are different at the individual and at the cultural (national) level. Within countries, individuals who score high on the importance of 'freedom' also tend to score high on the importance of 'independence of thought and actions'. But if the scores for all individuals in each nation are averaged, the nations where on average 'freedom' is scored as more important than in other nations are not those scoring higher on the importance of 'independence', but those scoring higher on 'protecting the welfare of others'. The individual associations are based on psychological logic, the national associations on the cultural logic of societies composed of different, interacting individuals. Measuring individual respondents on scales based on aggregate data is an ecological fallacy.

Cultural dimensions relevant to advertising

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) have best described the influence of the various dimensions of culture on verbal and non-verbal communication styles, which are reflected in advertising styles. The three dimensions that explain variance of communication styles are power distance, individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance. For appeals and motives reflected in advertising, generally the product category defines the most relevant dimensions (De Mooij 2003, 2004, 2010). The dimensions that are relevant for a product category can be discovered only by correlating the data with the GNI/capita and country scores of all five dimensions.

Setting hypotheses

Sometimes researchers challenge the predictive value of the Hofstede model because their hypotheses were not supported, instead of challenging the formulation of the hypotheses. Several aspects of the Hofstede dimensions must be considered when formulating hypotheses: (1) Some manifestations of each dimension are more work-related, whereas others can be applied to consumer behaviour and advertising; (2) often it is a configuration of dimensions that explains variation; (3) value paradoxes have to be taken into account. It is not easy to recognise values in advertising as advertising appeals may reflect both the desired and the desirable (De Mooij 2010). Other problems are: (4) misunderstanding the content of a dimension, and (5) the effect of the researchers' cultural roots when selecting and interpreting manifestations of the values of the dimensions. Some examples are as follows.

- Power distance is about the relationship between bosses and subordinates, but it is also about everyone having his or her rightful place in society versus equality. The latter explains the need for luxury brands as status symbols in high power distance cultures.
- An important value of masculine cultures is achievement. When combined with individualism, success can be shown, less so when combined with collectivism. Innovativeness and the wish for change are low in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, but combined with high power distance, appeals like modernity and innovation provide status. High

scores on masculinity and power distance explain status needs. In high power distance cultures, status brands demonstrate one's role in a hierarchy. In masculine cultures, status brands demonstrate one's success. The configuration of high power distance and uncertainty avoidance explains the importance of personal appearance. The Japanese (high PDI/high UAI) judge people by clothes, which is not the case with the Chinese (high PDI/low UAI). Whereas, in Japan, the proper way things are done and one's social status provide face, for the Chinese face is related to one's economic capability (Suedo 2004).

- In content analysis of advertising, the picture of a family is assumed to be a reflection of collectivism, but paradoxically it can also be a reflection of individualism where people are afraid that family values are disappearing. In collectivistic cultures advertisers may even feel a lesser need to depict families because the family is part of one's identity; it is not the desirable. Comparison of the number of people shown in advertisements is not a measure of individualism/collectivism. A better measure is measuring the directness of communication – for example, by comparing the use of personalised headlines.
- Uncertainty avoidance tends to be confused with risk avoidance (Roth 1995). The degree to which people insure themselves is not related to uncertainty avoidance. Instead, more life insurance policies are sold in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures. In the former, should one die early, one cannot count on family to support one's dependants (Chui & Kwok 2008). Showing people in relation to others can be a reflection of collectivism, but also of the affiliation needs of feminine cultures.
- Collectivism is not about subordinating oneself to the group. The latter is the typical description from an individualistic view of the person. The group itself is one's identity. Power distance is about *accepting* and *expecting* inequality – it is a two-way street. Female nudity in advertising should not be confused with sex appeal, as researchers from masculine cultures may assume. There is no relationship with masculinity (Nelson & Paek 2008).

Conclusion

The number of cross-cultural consumer behaviour studies has been increasing over the years. The Hofstede model of national culture has proved to be a useful instrument for understanding consumer behaviour differences across cultures. Applying the model to branding and advertising, which originally sought answers to work-related value differences, needs conceptual insight in the various manifestations that are relevant to these business areas. This paper has reviewed many recent studies that help gain conceptual insight.

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