

CROSS-COUNTRY ADVERTISING: GLOBALISE OR LOCALISE?

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ARTICLE



INTRODUCTION

Advertising, through mass or targeted media, is an important tool that marketers can employ to improve their brands' in-market performance. Virtually, all advertising aims to eventually drive consumer purchasing behaviour (and thus sales) – either directly or indirectly by building a more favourable image for the brand (Vakratsas & Ambler 1999). At the same time, substantial variation exists in the degree to which ads turn out to be successful in actually achieving these goals (Sutherland & Sylvester 2000). An important predictor of advertising effectiveness with respect to (changes in) purchase behaviour is formed by consumers' attitude towards the ad. In turn, this is driven by various dimensions, such as likeability, funniness, distinctiveness, objectivity, relevance, and understandability (Brown & Stayman 1992; MacKenzie & Lutz 1989; Muehling & McCann 1993). Together, these dimensions determine how appealing an ad is to a consumer – and thus its chances of persuading him or her into buying the advertised product.

DIFFERENCES AMONG CONSUMER GROUPS

However, not every dimension necessarily has equal weight in shaping the consumer's eventual response to an ad. In fact, what is regarded as more or less important can differ across consumers, as various academic studies have already shown. For instance, female consumers tend to process the central message of an advertisement more elaborately than male consumers do, and as a result tend to be more critical

of this message (e.g., in terms of what added value is provided by the advertised product) (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal 1991). Similarly, older consumers respond more strongly to emotionally loaded advertisements than to those that employ a more rational argumentation style, while younger consumers do not exhibit such a clear preference (Fung & Carstensen 2003). Such variation stems from differences in wants and needs between different consumer groups. Women have a lower tolerance for risk, explaining their increased focus on ad relevance (Putrevu 2001), whilst an increased perception of time being limited among older people explains their interest in emotionally meaningful information (Fung & Carstensen 2003).

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Besides sociodemographics, another factor that has a substantial impact on the needs and wants of different consumers is formed by (national) culture. Different cultures come with different norms and beliefs, which in turn influences what receives more and less attention, and what is more and less valued by members of these cultures (Steenkamp 2001). Therefore, it seems plausible that cultural differences will also play a role in determining what dimensions of advertising attitude play a more versus less pronounced role in shaping consumers' eventual (purchase) response to an ad.

While the impact of culture on advertising effectiveness has already been frequently studied, prior literature has mainly focused

on how different cultures' response to advertising is shaped by very specific executional elements (such as the inclusion of celebrity endorsers or sexual cues, e.g. Ahn et al. 2022; Biswas et al. 2009; Yoon & Yoon 2002) – rather than the more broadly defined dimensions of advertising attitude. Given that more brands seek to obtain “global reach” through “local touch” in

their advertising (Zandpour et al. 1994), it would be interesting to assess how these dimensions may play different roles across different cultures. This way, marketers are provided with a more general idea of what their ads should focus on across different cultures – rather than limiting their creativity by prescribing the inclusion of specific executional elements.

A CROSS-COUNTRY STUDY ON ADVERTISING RESPONSE

To obtain more insight into the relative importance of different advertisement-attitude dimensions across countries, and to assess to what extent this is driven by the countries' cultural profiles, DVJ Insights conducted a large-scale online survey among +27,000 respondents from 30 different countries. For each of these respondents, four TV commercials (that were recently broadcast in his or her country-of-residence) were fully shown to the respondent. These commercials cover multiple product categories – Table 1 provides information on the number of commercials through which each category is represented in our study.

Product category	Number of commercials	
Fast-moving consumer goods (food)	187	17%
Retail	163	15%
Fast-moving consumer goods (non-food)	134	12%
Electronics	115	11%
Automotive	104	10%
Finance	90	8%
Telecom	70	6%
Fast food	60	6%
Services	39	4%
Energy & utilities	18	2%
Transport	17	2%
Health	16	1%
Non-profit	15	1%
Leisure	13	1%
Living	12	1%
Other	27	3%
Total	1080	100%

Table 1: Absolute and relative coverage of product categories through TV commercials included in the study

For each of the four ads (which were selected-at-random for each respondent; out of a pool of 24 to 64), the respondent was asked to:

1. provide their perception on the TV commercial with respect to aspects such as likeability, fit with the advertising brand, personal relevance, understandability et cetera (which led to data on how the commercials scored on different dimensions of advertisement-attitude)
2. express to what extent the TV commercial improved their (cognitive, affective and/or behavioural; Rosenberg & Hovland 1960) attitude towards the advertising brand (which led to data on how the commercials fared with respect to expected in-market performance)

Both types of data were collected by presenting different statements, accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale through which the respondent could indicate the extent to which they (dis)agreed with the statement. Table 2 provides an overview of what aspects of advertising appeal and performance were captured, and what each of them conceptually measures.

Dimensions of advertisement-attitude	
Enjoyment	whether the ad was perceived as likeable
Excitement	whether the ad made the viewer feel good and/or energised
Brand fit	whether the ad was perceived to have a good fit with the brand
Distinctiveness	whether the ad was perceived to be different from other ads
Credibility	whether the ad was perceived to have a believable message
Relevance	whether the ad was perceived to be relevant to the viewer's personal interests
Understanding	whether the ad was perceived to be easy-to-understand
Fun	whether the ad was perceived to be funny
Novelty	whether the ad taught the viewer something new
Indicators of in-market performance	
Brand appeal	whether seeing the ad led the viewer to have a more positive image of the brand
Brand interest	whether seeing the ad led the viewer to become more interested in the brand
Purchase intent	whether seeing the ad led the viewer to be more inclined to purchase the brand

Table 2: Overview of main independent and dependent variables collected through the survey

Next to demographic and psychographic variables (i.e. each respondent's gender, age, and general opinion on advertising) that are already collected through the survey, we augment our data set by adding information on the (national) cultural profile of each respondent's country-of-residence. To do so, we follow the well-known Hofstede cultural dimensions framework (Hofstede 2011), which uses survey-based data to give countries a (relative) score on six different dimensions:

- **Power distance:** the degree to which society members with less power expect, as well as accept, that power is not equally distributed
- **Individualism:** the degree to which society members prefer loose (rather than tight) social networks and are expected to care for only themselves and their own household (rather than for a more broadly defined circle of family members and friends)
- **Masculinity:** the degree to which a society prefers assertiveness over modesty, competition over cooperation, heroism over caring for the weak, and material rewards over quality-of-life
- **Uncertainty avoidance:** the degree to which members of a society are uncomfortable (rather than comfortable)

with uncertainty and unorthodox matters, and make use of rigid rules and principles (rather than having a more relaxed attitude) to maintain as much control as possible

- **Long term orientation:** the degree to which members of a society promote continually adapting themselves and "doing things differently" to prepare themselves for a changing future (rather than adhering to their traditions and norms)
- **Indulgence:** the degree to which a society allows its members to freely pursue goals related to enjoying life and having fun (rather than regulating and/or suppressing such drives)

The closer a country's score is to 100 (0) on a particular dimension, the more (less) that dimension is applicable to the country's national culture. Figure I shows a "correspondence map" for the 30 countries in our study in relation to the six cultural dimensions on which they can be profiled. The closer a country is located to a certain dimension in this map, the more that dimension is applicable to that country's culture (relative to other countries). In a similar fashion, countries that are mapped closer to (further from) one another exhibit more (less) similar cultural profiles.



Figure I: Correspondence map of studied countries and Hofstede's cultural dimensions

AN EXPLORATIVE INSIGHT INTO CROSS-COUNTRY DIFFERENCES

To obtain initial insight into whether and how the role played by different advertisement-attitude dimensions (in determining eventual performance) differs across countries, we ran separate regression models for each country in which respondents' ratings of the different advertisement-attitude dimensions were linked to their intent to buy the advertised product (the third measure of in-market performance, as indicated in Table 2). These links were modelled in both a direct and indirect fashion – the latter being through in-between increases in brand appeal and/or interest (i.e., the first and second measures of in-market performance, as

indicated in Table 2). We then used a "R2 partitioning" technique to obtain so-called "Shapley values" for each country's regression model (Grömping 2006). These values indicate what percentage of the variation in the dependent variable (i.e. purchase intent) that is explained by the explanatory variables (i.e. the different dimensions of advertisement-attitude) can be attributed to each separate dimension. In other words, these Shapley values represent the **relative importance** of each advertising-attitude dimension within a specific country. These values are reported in Table 3.

Country	Enjoyment	Excitement	Brand fit	Distinctiveness	Credibility	Relevance	Understanding	Fun	Novelty
Australia	9%	21%	6%	6%	8%	31%	4%	5%	9%
Austria	16%	22%	7%	7%	11%	19%	4%	6%	8%
Belgium	9%	21%	6%	9%	9%	26%	5%	6%	10%
Bulgaria	13%	16%	8%	10%	8%	23%	7%	6%	10%
China	11%	17%	13%	11%	12%	18%	8%	2%	9%
Czechia	5%	23%	12%	4%	9%	23%	8%	3%	14%
Denmark	10%	18%	7%	7%	8%	31%	3%	6%	9%
Finland	12%	20%	7%	6%	7%	25%	5%	9%	9%
France	9%	21%	9%	7%	9%	23%	5%	7%	12%
Germany	9%	21%	5%	6%	9%	33%	2%	5%	*
Hong Kong	11%	17%	7%	10%	10%	27%	4%	7%	8%
Hungary	11%	19%	9%	7%	11%	25%	4%	2%	12%
India	12%	18%	14%	5%	12%	19%	8%	2%	10%
Indonesia	11%	22%	11%	7%	12%	14%	8%	7%	8%
Italy	9%	18%	7%	8%	8%	29%	5%	8%	9%
Japan	7%	16%	11%	8%	11%	18%	10%	9%	9%
Netherlands	10%	23%	6%	9%	8%	25%	3%	7%	9%
Norway	12%	20%	8%	8%	7%	26%	4%	7%	9%
Poland	11%	21%	7%	8%	10%	25%	4%	5%	*
Romania	9%	19%	8%	10%	11%	27%	6%	4%	8%
Russia	15%	18%	9%	3%	10%	26%	6%	3%	10%
Singapore	12%	21%	8%	10%	9%	25%	5%	4%	6%
South Korea	8%	15%	13%	9%	11%	13%	9%	10%	11%
Spain	6%	21%	7%	8%	11%	25%	5%	6%	12%
Sweden	9%	19%	13%	4%	11%	23%	7%	8%	6%
Switzerland	8%	25%	6%	4%	8%	33%	3%	3%	*
Turkey	9%	15%	11%	8%	10%	21%	7%	10%	10%
Ukraine	7%	17%	8%	6%	12%	32%	4%	5%	9%
United Kingdom	10%	22%	5%	5%	7%	34%	3%	5%	*
United States	8%	20%	6%	7%	8%	30%	5%	7%	*
AVERAGE	10%	20%	8%	7%	10%	25%	5%	6%	9%
MINIMUM	5%	15%	5%	3%	7%	14%	2%	2%	6%
MAXIMUM	16%	25%	14%	11%	12%	34%	10%	10%	14%
Δ MAX/MIN	11%	10%	9%	8%	5%	20%	8%	8%	8%

Table 3: Shapley values (relative importance) for advertising appeal dimensions in relation to purchase intent across countries

XX% Country ranks in the top 5 in terms of relative importance of the corresponding dimension

XX% Country ranks in the bottom 5 in terms of relative importance of the corresponding dimension

* Due to the corresponding statement not (yet) being

included in this country's survey, no Shapley value could be computed for this dimension – instead, we assumed this value to be equal to the average across countries for which it could be computed, and scaled the Shapley values for the remaining dimensions accordingly

VARIATION IN IMPORTANCE

As can be seen from the average Shapley values across countries, some dimensions of advertisement-attitude tend to be much more important in determining eventual performance than others – with 2 of them (**excitement** and **relevance**) already accounting for almost 50% of the total variance captured by the 9 dimensions, while dimensions such as **understanding** and **fun** play a less-than-proportional role. Still, comparing the minimum and maximum values for

each dimension shows that there is quite some variation in their importance between countries, with differences often amounting to +/-10 percentage points or more. Using the Shapley values as input, Figure 2 again shows a correspondence map for the 30 countries, but now in relation to eight dimensions of advertisement-attitude (due to missing data, the “novelty” dimension could not be mapped).

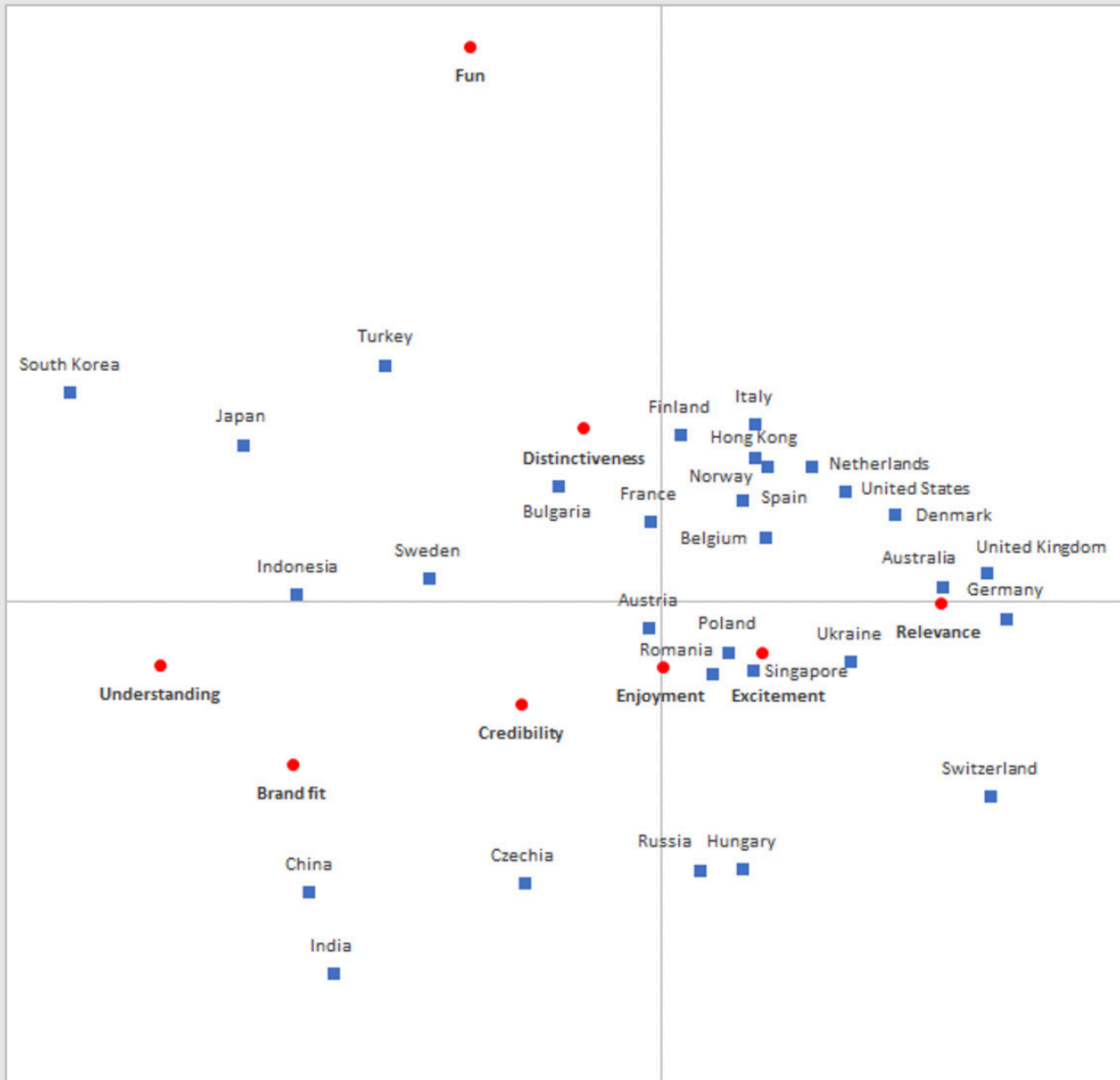


Figure 2: Correspondence map of studied countries and relative importance of advertisement-attitude dimensions

The map shows that the main differences between countries primarily apply to the importance of **relevance** and **excitement** (relatively high for many “Western” countries) on one hand, and **brand fit** and **understanding** (relatively high for many “Eastern” countries) on the other. With this in mind, we also already saw similar differences between countries when it comes to their cultural profile (Figure 1), with clusters of both Western (such as Australia, United Kingdom, and United States) and Eastern (such as India, Indonesia,

and Singapore) countries manifesting themselves. As such, this forms a first indication that there indeed may be a relationship between a country’s cultural profile and the relative importance played by different advertisement-attitude dimensions in determining advertising effectiveness.

A MODEL OF ADVERTISEMENT-ATTITUDE AND -PERFORMANCE

To formally test this relationship, we estimated a multi-layer (respondent-level) regression model using structural equation modelling. In this model, the main explanatory variables were respondents' ratings of the TV commercials on the nine dimensions of advertisement-attitude, while the dependent variables were formed by respondents' claimed changes in brand **appeal** (layer 1), brand **interest** (layer 2) and **purchase intent** (layer 3) as a result of seeing the ad. In model layers 2 and 3, the dependent variable(s) of the previous layer(s) were included as additional explanatory variables. This way, we account for direct as well as indirect (through increased brand appeal and interest) relationships between the dimensions of advertisement-attitude on one hand, and eventual (improvement) in purchase intent on the other.

DETERMINING THE DIMENSION'S IMPACT

In this model, the (tier-specific) parameters for the different dimensions of advertisement-attitude will capture their (relative) impact in determining the effectiveness of a TV commercial. To assess whether the magnitude of this impact is dependent on the viewer's country's national culture, our model also incorporates interaction terms between the advertisement-attitude dimensions on the one hand, and the Hofstede cultural dimensions on the other. A negative

and statistically significant interaction parameter between **credibility** and **power distance** would then for example imply that credibility becomes less important in driving the effectiveness of an ad in countries with a higher acceptance of inequalities in power. For the sake of clarity, we restrict these interaction parameters to be equal across the three layers of the model.

CONTROL VARIABLES

Finally, our model also includes several control variables. We include each respondent's gender, age and general opinion on advertising (i.e. their choice of best-fitting description when it comes to their stance towards advertising: "negative", "indifferent" or "positive") both as direct drivers of advertising performance (i.e. brand appeal, brand interest and purchase intent) as well as moderators that can, similar to the Hofstede dimensions, have an influence on the relative importance of each advertisement-attitude dimension in determining performance. In addition, we allow that scores given to a commercial for brand appeal, brand interest and purchase intent may depend on the product category that is advertised (through dummy variables), as well as on the length of the commercial (through its duration in seconds). A graphical representation of the model's setup is provided through Figure 3.

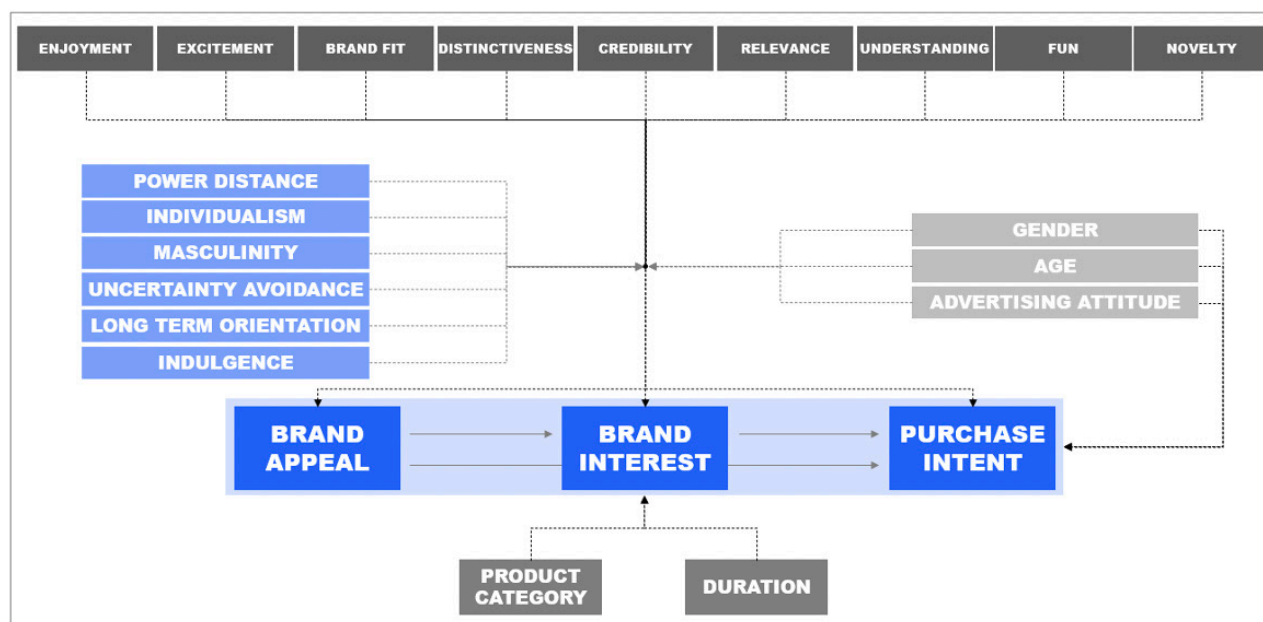


Figure 3: Graphical representation of the three-layered structural equation model

MAIN EFFECTS OF ATTITUDE DIMENSIONS

With regards to the model estimation results, we first focus on the main effects of the nine advertisement-attitude dimensions. Table 4 provides the (standardised) coefficients for each dimension in relation to the three indicators of in-market performance – brand appeal, brand interest and

purchase intent. It also shows each dimension's **overall** impact on eventual purchase intent, which is the sum of both **direct** and **indirect** effects (the latter manifesting through the dimensions' links with brand appeal and brand interest, which themselves in turn are related to purchase

intent as well – as can be seen from the coefficients in the bottom two rows of Table 4). Similar to the pattern emerging from the Shapley values discussed in Table 3, we again see that, in general, **excitement** and **relevance** play (by far) the largest role in determining whether one intends to buy a

product after seeing a commercial in which that product is advertised. On the other hand, the impact of **fun** and (especially) **understanding** in this regard tends to remain limited at best.

Dimension	Brand appeal	Brand interest	Purchase intent	Overall effect
Enjoyment	.108	.036	.006	.032
Excitement	.242	.179	.135	.223
Brand fit	.114	.044	.037	.065
Distinctiveness	.031	.018	.008	.017
Credibility	.113	.029	.028	.052
Relevance	.171	.260	.235	.336
Understanding	.058	.001	-.006	.002
Fun	-.002	.014	.022	.027
Novelty	.128	.134	.042	.099
Brand appeal		.203	.078	
Brand interest			.299	

Table 4: Main (layer-specific and overall) effects of advertisement-attitude dimensions on advertising performance indicators

.000 Statistically significant positive effect (under 99% confidence level)

.000 Statistically significant negative effect (under 99% confidence level)

ATTITUDE VS. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

However, the primary goal of this research is to assess whether the specific weight each dimension has in determining advertisement performance may stem from the cultural profile of the viewer's country-of-residence. For the sake of clarity, we will focus this discussion on the five dimensions that have the largest impact in general. After all, it wouldn't make much sense from a practical standpoint to highlight cultural differences for a dimension that, even for cultures that attach more value to it than others, still

ends up playing an insignificant role in the grand scheme of things. Table 5 displays the interaction coefficients between the five advertisement-attitude dimensions with the largest impact on purchase intent (following the overall effect sizes reported in Table 4) on the one hand, and the six Hofstede cultural dimensions on the other. The significant relationships (for which a conceptually sound explanation could be found) will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Dimension	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long term orientation	Indulgence
Excitement	.012	.001	-.007	-.003	.010	.021
Brand fit	.006	-.018	-.003	.001	-.003	.002
Credibility	.001	-.016	.007	.001	-.003	.004
Relevance	.016	.051	-.010	-.002	.001	-.017
Novelty	-.007	.023	.013	-.001	.004	-.009

Table 5: Interaction effects between advertisement-attitude dimensions and Hofstede cultural dimensions

.000 Statistically significant positive relationship (under 99% confidence level)

.000 Statistically significant negative relationship (under 99% confidence level)

EXCITEMENT:

- **increases** in importance among cultures that are more **oriented** towards the **long term**: as the goals people work towards generally lie further into the future and take more effort to achieve, appeals that help in energizing and motivating oneself will be better appreciated
- **increases** in importance among more **indulgent** cultures: as people are more appreciative of emotions being expressed, and better able to memorize the (positive) emotions they themselves experience (Heydari et al. 2021) – increasing their likelihood of influencing future (purchase) decisions

RELEVANCE:

- **increases** in importance among cultures with a higher **power distance**: as people are used to others in higher power settings outlining clear expectations, they are much more outcome-focused than process-focused (Tu et al. 2022) – and are thus more interested in what the actual end benefits of an advertised product are, and whether these benefits are of any value to them
- **increases** in importance among more **individualistic** cultures: as people tend to focus on caring for themselves rather than for others, they will be extra critical of whether an advertised product actually caters to their own specific needs
- **decreases** in importance among more **masculine** cultures: as one simply desire to buy a product because it provides materialistic rewards, rather than because it helps to improve one's quality-of-life (through the fulfilment of personal needs)
- **decreases** in importance among more **indulgent** cultures: as people allow their purchase decisions to not be driven by utilitarian (rational) reasons alone, but by more hedonic (emotional) motives as well (Heydari et al. 2021)

BRAND FIT:

- **decreases** in importance among more **individualistic** cultures: as people attach less importance to how they are perceived by their peers, they are less likely to think about the in-group status that certain brands can give them (Liao & Wang 2009) – and thus will also be less critical of whether these brands' advertisements can indeed confirm their social value

CREDIBILITY:

- **decreases** in importance among more **individualistic** cultures: as people make purchases primarily for their own benefit (rather than also for their group of peers), the consequences of a wrong choice also remain mostly for themselves to bear – reducing the need to check the credibility of a source of information (e.g., an advertisement) to lower this risk
- **increases** in importance among more **masculine** cultures: as people tend to be less agreeable and less trusting of external information (Marušić & Bratko 1998; Novikova 2013), having a credible advertising message will be more important to still be able to win this trust

NOVELTY:

- **increases** in importance among more **individualistic** cultures: as people are encouraged to differentiate themselves from others (Van Baaren & Ruivenkamp 2007) and to seek variety in life (Triandis et al. 1990), higher value will be placed on obtaining information that is not (yet) common knowledge
- **increases** in importance among more **masculine** cultures: as an increased focus on competition makes one more focused on (new) information with which one can obtain an advantage over others
- **decreases** in importance among more **indulgent** cultures: as people consider it less important to fully rationalize the purchases they make; they are also less focused on those purchases always having to add value to things they were already familiar with

GLOBAL STRATEGY, LOCAL NUANCES?

Overall, our study shows that, even across widely different countries, a clear hierarchy exists in the role different dimensions of advertisement-attitude play (in determining the eventual impact of an advertisement on purchasing behaviour). Specifically, we found that among the nine dimensions included in our analysis, **excitement** (the ad's ability to energise and/or invoke a good feeling among its

viewers) and **relevance** (the degree to which the ad conveys a message that its viewers deems a relevant and/or close to their personal interests) are always either ranked #1 or #2 in terms of relative importance. Taken together, these two dimensions consistently have high explanatory power with regards to distinguishing between ads which do and do not perform well with regards to purchase activation. This first

has important implications for marketers. Regardless of the country(ies) in which one wants to advertise, the primary focus can more or less always lie on designing a campaign that will be perceived as both exciting and relevant by its target audience. On top of that, these results also bode well for marketing researchers – as they show that consistency in interpreting copy testing results across countries can be a viable option.

Still, substantial variation does certainly exist between countries. For instance, while excitement and relevance always form the top 2 dimensions in terms of relative importance, their combined explanatory power (relative to the nine dimensions as a whole) ranges from a low of +-30% to a high of +-60%. And in countries where these dimensions explain a smaller “part of the puzzle”, others logically increase in significance instead. Our study has shown that such cross-country differences in the role played by

different dimensions of advertisement-attitude, can at least partly be attributed to differences in national culture. For instance, compared to Western(ised) countries that tend to be highly individualistic in nature, people in more collectivist (e.g., Eastern) countries tend to be less driven by the degree of excitement and relevance in an advertisement, but give an above-average weight to **brand fit** as well as to **credibility** in their decisions. While the outcomes of our study thus do not necessarily imply that global brands need an entirely different strategy for designing commercials across different countries and cultures, some aspects may warrant a bit more (or less) attention when moving towards the final cuts per country. In the sense that perceptions of believability, brand fit, and relevance can often already be changed by adding or removing specific scenes, or even by changing their order, applying local nuances to a global advertising strategy can definitely prove a fruitful endeavour.

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ABOUT THE COMPANY

DVJ Insights is a quality-based research and consultancy agency with a global footprint. We help our clients understand how to realise growth by identifying relevant drivers, optimising communication, improving the customer experience and introducing winning products and solutions in organisations.

We believe that research is all about listening. Listening to our clients to make sure the research is embedded in the organisation and answers the right questions, and listening to consumers by giving them the opportunity to express their feelings and share their stories.

We add value by leveraging the experience and expertise of our seasoned research and consultancy team, and staying true to our innovative mass qualitative philosophy.

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