



THE INFLUENCE OF AD DESIGN AND CONTENT ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS OF LOW AND HIGH CONTEXT CULTURES

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# **The Influence of Ad Design and Content on Purchase Intentions of Low and High Context Cultures**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Empirical evidence is supportive of the influence of low context (LC) and high context (HC) cultures on advertising design and execution (focused on text or context) and the content of the appeal (what utilities are highlighted). Specifically, functional, and socially conspicuous content appeals that stress those utilities are suggested to be more effective in LC cultures while emotional appeals in HC cultures. While the text focused ads are suggested to be more effective in LC cultures, where context focused ads in HC cultures. The objective of this research is to examine the effect of ad content and context in different cultures. This will clarify whether different marketing adaptation in content and context of the message is required for each culture.

**Methodology:** Data were collected using an online experiment in two cultures considering LC and HC cultures (N of LC culture=97; N of HC culture=111) for two different product categories, cars and refrigerators.

**Findings:** Some claims are consistently better with text or structure, beyond the HC and LC cultures, hedonic claim is better with the ad's structure than the text for both LC and HC in the car category and functional claim is better with the text than the structure for both categories. social claim yielded Higher PI (Purchase Intention) from HC and LC cultures in both categories and the functional claim in the refrigerator category yield higher PI in LC than HC. Unexpectedly, the text claims were rated higher for HC than LC in the car category. Especially the social claim focusing on text yield higher PI from HC individuals.

**Practical implications:** Stereotypical cultural targeting is examined if it is justified when trying to encourage products purchase intention. Finding suggest that adapting the message or the context of the ad to the culture might be necessary to increase purchase intention, the practical suggestions should be designed based on the category examined. For technical products it seems text is more preferred among HC participants. While functional content was the most preferred for both cultures.

**Originality:** This is the first study that examines cultural differences in the interactive effect of two crucial elements of the ad on purchase intention. This examination is important both theoretically (are different cultures are different in this context?) and practically (knowing if and what changes are needed when creating ads for each culture).

**Key words:** cultural differences; international marketing communication, Purchase intention.

## **Introduction**

One of the core decision in international marketing is the degree of adaptation or standardization of marketing messages, including advertising (Baack & Singh, 2007; Khang, Han, Shin, Jung, & Kim, 2016). This decision has become crucial, specifically because it directly influences the company's performance measures (Wei & Yazdanifard, 2014). Some scholars have claimed that the world is becoming more global, and similar in terms of environmental factors and customer requirements irrespective of cultural differences (Allen, Lee, & Escalera, 2016; Wei & Yazdanifard, 2014).

In contrast, other scholars are emphasizing the concept of culture as influencing consumer behavior (Lovelock, 2007; Luna & Forquer Gupta, 2001). Most marketers believe people living in a certain nation-state share common behavioral and communicative patterns that give that country a distinctive character from other nations (Hall, 1976). Thus, studying culture is believed to help firms in gaining competitive advantage in international markets as they are adapting their offering to the specific culture (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010; Hong, Muderrisoglu, & Zinkhan, 1987; Sobol,

Cleveland, & Laroche, 2018). Hofstede (2001) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of a group or category of people from others”. Even though there are subcultures in each national culture, national culture is viewed as a useful tool to explain cultural differences between consumers in different countries for strategic decision making (Clark, 1990). National culture is used as a model distribution of traits or a pattern of tendencies, explaining the general behavioral patterns of a nation (Wong, 2017).

Generally, most marketers believe people in different cultures hold different values as salient, thus differences in advertising strategies and content are needed across countries (Albers-Miller & Royne Stafford, 1999; Terlutter, Diehl, & Mueller, 2010). For example, ads targeted to Low context (LC-nearly everything is explicit in their communication, such as USA, Germany, UK) or High context (HC- much of the information is implicit, such as East Asian countries) cultures can be different in the content appeal, literally focusing on different utility, or in the structure and execution of the ad itself (Leonidou & Leonidou, 2009). The literature in the field of cultural differences had rarely separated the two dimensions, some examined the ad design and execution, while other focused on the content of the claim assuming both may signal emotional or rational appeal (Singh & Matsuo, 2004; Würtz, 2005).

The classical literature has regarded functional and emotional appeals as dichotomous (Copeland, 1924). Rational appeals stimulate a logical thinking process enabling consumers to clearly measure the advantages of the product advertised, focusing on content related to specific product features, such as quality, value, and performance (Gilbert, Churchill, & Peter, 1998) and on text focused design of the ad (Würtz, 2005). In contrast, emotional appeals centers on content creating a state of heightened psychological emotional arousal (Hawkins, 2004) and on context-structural dependent design of the ad (Würtz, 2005). In reality, most advertisements are not purely rational or purely emotional, but rather most appeals combine both rational and emotional characteristics (Chan, 1996; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2009). The ad can have different emotional or rational elements in the design or content. An ad might have contextual-structural focused design

(considered as more emotional) with a rational claim or text focused design (considered as more rational) with an emotional claim (Singh & Matsuo, 2004; Würtz, 2005). The examination of the interactive effect of ad design and ad content is needed to better capture the realistic situation.

Examples of adaptive content appeals can be found in the use of rational appeals for USA consumer and emotional appeals for Asian consumers is the advertisements of Minivan in the US, where it is positioned as “Kid mover” while in China it is positioned as “The hot new ride for executives”. Similarly, Toyota in the US focuses on “Dependable affordability” while in China it focuses on “A hot button political issue” that relates to their emotional state relating to their self-identity.

These examples analyze only the content of the messages, stating functional utility is stressed in the American cultures, while in Asia, social conspicuousness, emotional and symbolic appeals are more highlighted<sup>1</sup>.

Other recent campaign that demonstrates the adaptive ad design according to culture, is McDonalds digital ad in China and in the US. Both pages are using hedonic claims with different ad design, when appealing to different core audiences: text focused ad in the American market (LC culture) and a context-structural focused ad in the Chinese market (HC culture). In the Chinese landing page (the front page): The natural center of the page is a giant image of a product. There’s also a colorful motion video and sounds, with minimal text, focusing on peripheral experiential or visual cues. While the American version is more straightforward, the natural center of the page is stable text content (It’s a fresh new world with the Premium McWrap), with a smaller accompanying image of the product (Würtz, 2005)<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to examining the effect of both dimensions of the ad (design and content), the effectiveness of using different combinations of these elements on different cultures will be examined.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/car-stereotypes-in-china-and-the-us-2014-10?IR=T#bmw-in-china-a-symbol-of-corruption-4>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.activemarketing.com/blog/strategy/context-marketing/>

Using several performance measures such as “ease of use of the web”, “positive attitudes toward the ad or the product”, “positive intentions toward the product”, “brand trust” and “brand satisfaction” (Cyr, 2008; Vyncke & Brengman, 2010), some have found that cultural congruent websites had a positive attitudinal performance measures, for example people said they prefer the web that is congruent with HC and LC cultures (Fink & Laupase, 2000; Tai & Pae, 2001). But other researchers did not find better performance measures (Cui, Yang, Wang, & Liu, 2012; Cyr, 2008; Vyncke & Brengman, 2010).

Most research stated what utility seems to be important to emphasize in the communication for LC and HC cultures in general based on the characteristics of the culture (Grice, 1975; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Levine, 1985; Okabe, 1983). Dozens of researches had examined the nature of current appeals in different cultures using content analysis of ads and explored what is the most widely employed appeals in cross-cultural advertising research (Terlutter et al., 2010).

Indeed, commonly believed stereotypes exist, assuming functional and informative advertising work best in the US and UK. While in Asian and European cultures ads aim to inspire emotional connection from their audiences are most effective using both content and design to emphasize the right appeal for each culture<sup>3</sup>. Aligned with these stereotypical views, most of the literature on the topic have demonstrated the same pattern of difference. For example, purchasing research has mainly claimed that LC cultures care more about functional (performance and quality), and conspicuous utilities (impressing others), while HC are more hedonically oriented, caring about pleasure derived from the brand (e.g. Grice, 1975; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim, 2016; Levine, 1985; Okabe, 1983; Yee & Yazdanifard). As all agreed regarding the functional and emotional appeal, some scholars have claimed differently regarding social conspicuous utility, and found HC cultures care more about social conspicuous utility compared to Americans (Cui et al., 2012; Phau & Prendergast, 2000; While, 1993).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.translatemedia.com/translation-blog/rational-vs-emotive-marketing-best-global-audiences/>

In this research, we question whether such messages are effective in leading different cultures to intent to buy the product. If stereotypes lead to the development of these campaigns, they may not address the real needs of the culture segments, so the purchase intentions of the product when different ad elements are presented and combined should be analyzed.

## **Theoretical background**

### *General cultural differences*

Using classification of countries on the basis of cultural differences, there are fundamental consequences for international marketing purposes (Cho, Kwon, Gentry, Jun, & Kropp, 1999; Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

There are many ways categorizing cultures, one known conceptualism is Hall's cross-cultural theory (1976), which divided cultures according to their ways of communicating, into high-context and low-context cultures. In the high-context communication cultures, such as Asian and Middle Eastern countries, the majority of the information necessary to understand the message is dependent on context, little is said explicitly. Members of this culture have close relationship and share a similar background, education and values, they are considered to be collectivists, to value interpersonal relationships, so they are able to read "between the lines" to understand the unsaid. In contrast, in the low-context communication cultures like Switzerland, Germany and United States, the message is taken explicitly as its literal meaning. This culture is characterized by short term relationship, and its members tend to follow rules and standards closely. They are also considered to be task oriented. According to Hall (1976) a High Context communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the code, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A Low context communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. Gudykunst et al. (1996) identified high context communication to be indirect, ambiguous, maintaining of harmony, reserved and understated. In contrast, LC communication was identified as direct, precise, dramatic,

open, and based on feelings or true intentions. HC cultures tend to be collectivistic prioritize group welfare over the goals of the individual. While LC cultures tend to be individualistic, emphasis the goals and accomplishments of the individual rather than the group (Würitz, 2005). Another characteristic of cultures is the level of power distance, HC cultures are characterized by high power distance, in which many hierarchical levels, autocratic leadership, and the expectation of inequality and power differences exists. While, LC cultures are characterized by low power-distance that have flat organization structures, consultative or participative management style, and the expectation of egalitarianism (Würitz, 2005). Thought patterns in LC cultures are believed to be linear and emphasize rationality and logic, whereas HC cultures are believed to communicate in a nonlinear way with less emphasis on rationality (Liao, Proctor, & Salvendy, 2008). Although no culture exists exclusively at one end of the scale, American culture is toward the lower end of the scale as the German and Scandinavian ones. China, as well as Japan, the possessors of a great and complex culture, are on the high-context of the scale (Hall 1976).

#### *Documented cultural differences in purchasing behavior*

The literature in the field of consumer behavior presents long documented cultural differences in purchasing decisions and behaviors (Ellis, McCullough, Wallendorf, & Tan, 1985; Hirschman, 1981; Shim & Gehrt, 1996; Sood & Nasu, 1995).

Tai and Pae, (2001) found that Chinese consumers had more favorable attitudes towards local made advertisements than standardized ones. They rated them as more interesting and understandable and less irritating. Thus, they gained higher preference and purchase intention (PI) than the brand in the standardized ads.

Individualistic, LC cultures, place greater value on direct, verbal messages than collectivist, HC cultures (Okabe, 1983). LC communication also involves being precise (Grice, 1975) and use more hard-sell approach: discounts, promotions, coupons, and emphasis on product instrumental advantages using explicit comparison. Use of superlatives such as “we are the number one”, “the top company” and “world’s largest” demonstrate conspicuousness of the product, rank or prestige



of the company. Being explicit and practical: stating the terms and condition of purchase: product-return policy, warranty, and other conditions associated with the purchase (Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

HC cultures place greater emphasis on external and indirect elements of the message (Okabe, 1983). HC communication, involves transmitting implicit, indirect messages (Levine, 1985) adjusting communication to maintain harmony (Gudykunst et al., 1996) and are considered to use more Soft-sell approach: use of affective and subjective impressions of intangible aspects of a product , more entertainment theme , love and harmony appeals and focus on Aesthetics (Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

Supporting this, (Hong et al., 1987) found that content appeals of advertisements in the United States (a low-context culture) tend to utilize more rational appeals, communicating information, evidence, and facts relating to product benefits as well as reasons for buying. In contrast, advertisements in Japan (a high-context culture) adopt appeals that focus on emotional elicitation and image-building.

Based on their research (Albers-Miller & Royne Stafford, 1999) suggested US advertisers should consider increasing the number of rational appeals used in advertisements. While in Taiwan marketers should rely more on emotional appeals.

Overall, empirical evidence is highly supportive of the influence of HC and LC communication styles on ad design and execution, focused on text or context, and the content of the appeal, i.e. what utilities are emphasized (Usunier & Roulin, 2010).

Three main utilities will be reviewed in the next section: functional, hedonic, and conspicuous social utilities (Bei, Wang, & Lee, 2015; Eunjung Kwak & Sojka, 2010; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001)) as they capture the perceived value of the product and are related to its choice (Olson, 2013).

*Functional utility.* (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991) noted that the functional value of a product/brand is the perceived practical-usefulness derived from the product's performance, making it the core value of the product. Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000) established that quality and

performance are important considerations in the choice.

*Hedonic utility.* Hedonic utility is the perceived enjoyment of using the product or/and the brand (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Sherman, Mathur, & Smith, 1997). As Sprecher and Sedikides (1993) explained, hedonic utility refers to emotional enjoyment, whereas emotions encompass positive and negative feelings. This utility induces pleasure, fantasy, arousal and emotional value (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994a; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994b; Bloch & Richins, 1983; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Langrehr, 1991; Roy, 1994; Wakefield & Baker, 1998).

*Conspicuous utility* (also referred to as socially conspicuous utility). Consumers see product/brand as a means of improving their social standing and creating a positive impression on significant others. (Ajzen, 1991) asserted that the subjective norms (the opinion of important others about a certain behavior) might influence the intention of engaging in the behavior. Walsh et al. (2008) referred to this utility as social approval for the choice of a particular product/brand. In this context, consumers derive satisfaction from the audience reaction to their purchase (Mason, 1984). Such approval may satisfy higher level needs such as the desire for recognition or acceptance from others; the improvement of one's self-esteem or self-respect; or the enhancement of one's social well-being (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Chen, Shang, & Lin, 2009; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). This utility also relates to impression management because people use it as a means of leaving their impact on important others (Khan & Khan, 2011). It reflects the desire to enhance or support one's self-concept and self-image in the eyes of others (Bearden & Etzel, 1982).

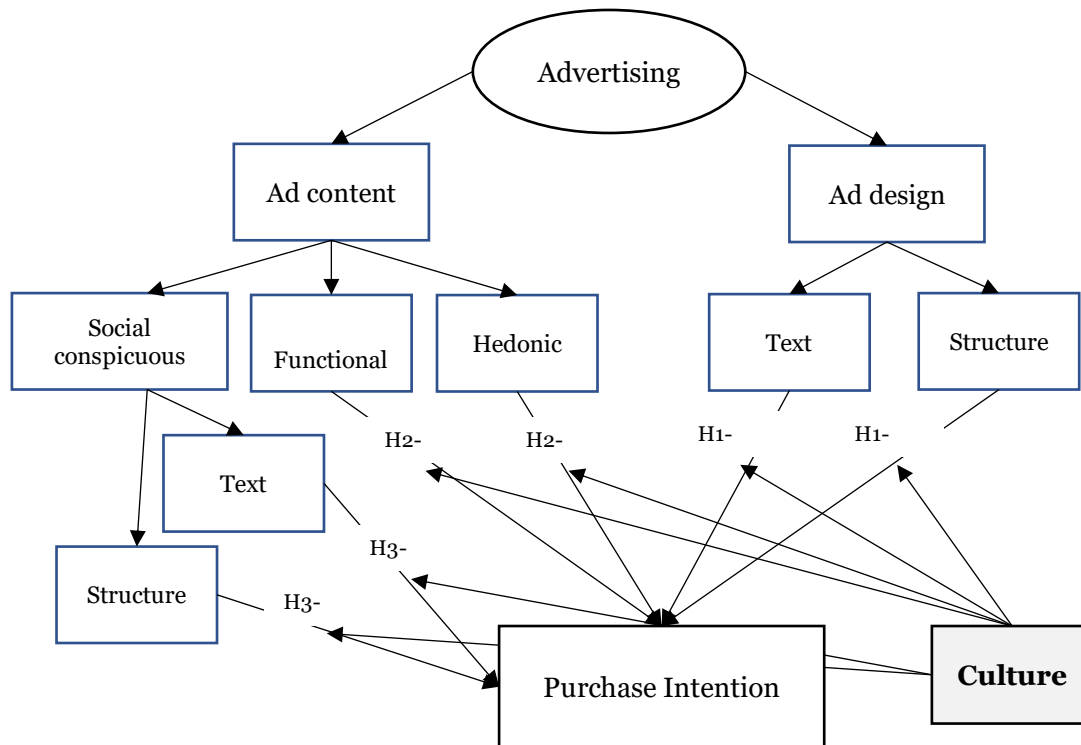
Based on mainstream popular notion and the majority of academic literature that we reviewed, we posited several hypotheses, that we thought would be confirmed in both categories: exhibit 1 present the conceptual model.

**H1:** Culture will moderate the relationship between ad design and PI: LC cultures will have higher PI when text will be presented (compared to structure); HC cultures will have higher PI when context-structural ad will be presented (compared to text)

**H2:** Culture will moderate the relationship between ad content and PI: LC cultures will have higher PI when functional claim will be presented (compared to hedonic claims); HC cultures will have higher PI when hedonic claims will be presented (compared to functional or conspicuous claims). As social conspicuous was found in the literature to be sometimes related to LC and sometimes for HC we expected an interactive effect when different levels of claims and ad designed are combined (content X design X culture interaction).

Specifically we expected that, **H3:** HC cultures will have higher PI than LC, when social conspicuous claim will be presented in structure while LC cultures will have higher PI than HC when social conspicuous claim will be presented in text.

Exhibit 1. The conceptual basic model



## The research

### *Sample*

Participants were recruited on November and December 2018 by the help of Prolific Platform an on-line survey company<sup>4</sup>, that enabled us to screen participants based on their nationality.

Respondent were paid to answer the questionnaire. We asked for English speaking participants because the questionnaire was distributed in English. Two samples were recruited in the research, one formed by Low Context culture people, coming from USA and UK and Germany, one formed by High context culture people, coming from China, Japan, India and Philippines. Each sample is formed by about 100 respondents (97=LC, 114=HC), 211 respondents in total.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.prolific.ac/>

Overall 59 male and 141 were females, from 24 to 60 years old. Mean age 33.20 years (sd=9.95). 34% were single, 47% married and the rest had other family status. Regarding income on a five points scale most were about average relative to their annual national income (mean=3.21, sd=1.47).

### *Procedure*

In order to verify the hypotheses of the research a questionnaire was developed.

Respondents were asked to assume they are interested in buying a new car and a refrigerator and being financially capable of purchasing both before answering the questionnaire.

The respondents were asked to watch six ads (three for car and three for refrigerators) and rate their purchase intentions of the product in the ad. In the last section, they were asked to answer questions regarding LC-HC cultures basing on (Ohashi, 2001) along with demographic questions about their gender, age, family status and income.

Three claims have been written that serves as the content of the ads:

- Hedonic - Stop and enjoy the moment. Take a good look
- Functional - The ultimate technology, five years guarantee
- Social conspicuous- You can put it in the living room for your guests

Using the three claims, we prepared a number of ads, specifically created for the purpose, considering two types of products: cars and refrigerators. These categories were chosen because they are not connected by gender, they are global, so can be accepted and understood by different cultures, they are shopping-specialty products so they are not affected by impulse purchase, they can be considered (even if in a different extent) functional, social conspicuous, and hedonic. We selected three real cars and three real refrigerators very similar but not exactly the same, in order to reduce maximally the product influence in the PI, but avoiding presenting exactly the same product, that could create a “non-choice” situation. The brands where blinded.

Each questionnaire contains 6 advertisements, 3 structure focus ads (cars or refrigerators) and 3 text focused ads (cars or refrigerators). Thus, two versions of the questionnaire were prepared: in

version one we had the three ads (hedonic, social conspicuous and functional) that focused on the structure when the car was advertised and three ads that focused on the text when the refrigerator was advertised. In version two we had the three ads that focused on the structure in the refrigerator category and three ads that focused on the text in the car category (see appendix B for example of the car ads).

Exhibit 2. First level of different combination of advertisements

PRODUCT	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Test 5	Test 6
Car A	functional text	hedonic text	social conspicuous text	functional structure	social conspicuous structure	hedonic structure
Car B	hedonic text	social conspicuous text	functional text	hedonic structure	functional structure	social conspicuous structure
Car C	social conspicuous text	functional text	hedonic text	social conspicuous structure	hedonic structure	functional structure
Fridge A	Functional structure	hedonic structure	social conspicuous structure	functional text	hedonic text	social conspicuous text
Fridge B	hedonic structure	social conspicuous structure	functional structure	hedonic text	social conspicuous text	functional text
Fridge C	social conspicuous structure	functional structure	hedonic structure	social conspicuous text	functional text	hedonic text

*Each one of the 6 different combinations have been developed in 3 different versions combining texts and structures: in total 18 alternatives*

Eighteen Alternatives have been prepared in order to mix the product and the claim, avoiding to have always the same product with the same claim, risking to create a bias between product and claim. Each version of the questionnaire has been sent randomly to the respondents.

Ad designs were carefully planned: in their text focused and a structure focus forms; in the text focus ads the background is white and the text of the claim is dominating on the top-center part of the advertisement; in the structure focus the background is a picture emphasizing the claim concept, the text is on the bottom, the font is smaller. This was designed in accordance to Wurtz (2005).

After each ad they were asked to rate their purchase intention of the product ranging from 1 (low probability of purchasing the product) to 5 (high probability of purchasing the product).

*HC and LC cultures*

USA and UK and Germany were suggested in the literature as LC cultures- while China, Japan and India as HC cultures, following (Hall, 1976) (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988) suggestion. In order to verify the High-Low Context cultures of the respondents one part of the questionnaire was dedicated analyzing the level of cultural context using three items that examined the high and low context were used basing on Ohashi (2000) scale of LC and HC cultures. Consumer had to state their level of agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) until 5 (strongly agree) when the three items were presented a) Even if not stated exactly, a speaker's intent will rarely be misunderstood, b) Some ideas are better understood when left unsaid and c) The meaning of a statement often turns more on the context than the actual words (See Appendix A for the full questionnaire)

#### *Analysis of the data*

We used T tests, to examine the differences between the two independent culture samples on LC-HC scale. For examining all the interactions, Repeated Measures Manova analysis were used, 2 (ad design: text or structure focused) X2 (culture: LC and HC cultures) when predicting the purchase intentions of the product when three ad claims were presented (content: hedonic, social conspicuous and functional utilities). These procedures were examined in each category separately.

### **Results**

First Oshasi three items were examined and had cronbach's alpha of 0.589.

Than T-test between the two samples were examined and indeed USA, UK and Germany had a significant lower grade on the LC-HC scale than Asians ( $M_{LC} = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ;  $M_{HC} = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ,  $t(174) = -3.211$ ,  $p = .002$ ).

For exploring the interactions, a 2 x 2 MANOVA was conducted when predicting purchase intentions of products with different content in the ad (hedonic, social and functional) with culture (LC-HC cultures) and ad design (Text/Structure) as independent factors. This was examined for each category (car/refrigerator) separately. The main effect of the content of the ad was obtained for both

categories,  $F_{\text{car}}(2, 206) = 49.19, \text{sig} = 0.000$ ;  $F_{\text{refrigerator}}(2, 204) = 95.20, \text{sig} = 0.000$ . The most preferred claim was functional, then hedonic then social overall for both LC and HC.

The interaction ad's content by ad design was significant in both categories  $F_{\text{car}}(2, 206) = 15.35, \text{sig} = 0.000$ ;  $F_{\text{refrigerator}}(2, 204) = 6.54, \text{sig} = 0.002$ . As can be seen from figures 1-4, some claims are consistently better with text or structure (beyond the HC and LC cultures). Only in the car category, hedonic claim lead to higher PI with the ad's structure then the text, (In pairwise comparison between text and structure, for hedonic  $M_{\text{Difference}} = .317, \text{SD} = .163, p = .053$ ), while social claim lead to higher PI with the ad's text then the structure (for social  $M_{\text{Difference}} = -.580, \text{SD} = .174, p = .001$ ). For both categories, functional claim lead to higher PI with the text then the structure (for functional  $M_{\text{Difference}}$ , for cars =  $-.580, \text{SD} = .174, p = .001$ ;  $M_{\text{Difference}}$  for refrigerator =  $-.541, \text{SD} = .164, p = .001$ ).

Ad's content by culture was significant in both categories  $F_{\text{car}}(2, 206) = 8.898, \text{sig} = 0.000$ ;  $F_{\text{refrigerator}}(2, 204) = 6.051, \text{sig} = 0.003$ . Post hoc analyses demonstrated that the social claim yielded higher PI from HC than LC cultures when the car category was examined ( $M_{\text{Difference}}$  for cars =  $-.531, \text{SD} = .162, p = .000$ ) and marginally when the refrigerator category was examined ( $M_{\text{Difference}}$  for refrigerator =  $-.285, \text{SD} = .152, p = .062$ ). Also, the functional claim in the refrigerator category yield higher PI in LC than HC ( $M_{\text{Difference}}$  for refrigerator =  $.387, \text{SD} = .164, p = .019$ ).

Culture by ad design interaction was significant only in the car category,  $F_{\text{car}}(1, 207) = 4.389, \text{sig} = 0.037$ ;  $F_{\text{refrigerator}}(1, 205) = .103, \text{sig} = 0.748$ . Post hoc analysis revealed that only in car category, the text claims were rated higher for HC than LC ( $M_{\text{Difference}}$  for car =  $-.303, \text{SD} = .178, p = .090$ ).

The triple interaction of ad's content by ads design and by culture was significant in the car category and not in the refrigerator,  $F_{\text{car}}(2, 206) = 3.01, \text{sig} = 0.051$ ;  $F_{\text{refrigerator}}(2, 204) = 0.100, \text{sig} = 0.905$ .

Pairwise comparisons revealed that, in the car category, the social claim focusing on text yield higher PI from HC individuals ( $M_{\text{Difference}} = -1.063, \text{SD} = .236, p = .000$ ), while marginally, in the refrigerator category the functional claim focusing on text yielded higher PI from LC then HC individuals ( $M_{\text{Difference}} = .427, \text{SD} = .229, p = .064$ ). See appendix B for the means of all conditions.



Exhibit 3a- PI of LC and HC cultures in the structure focus ad-car category

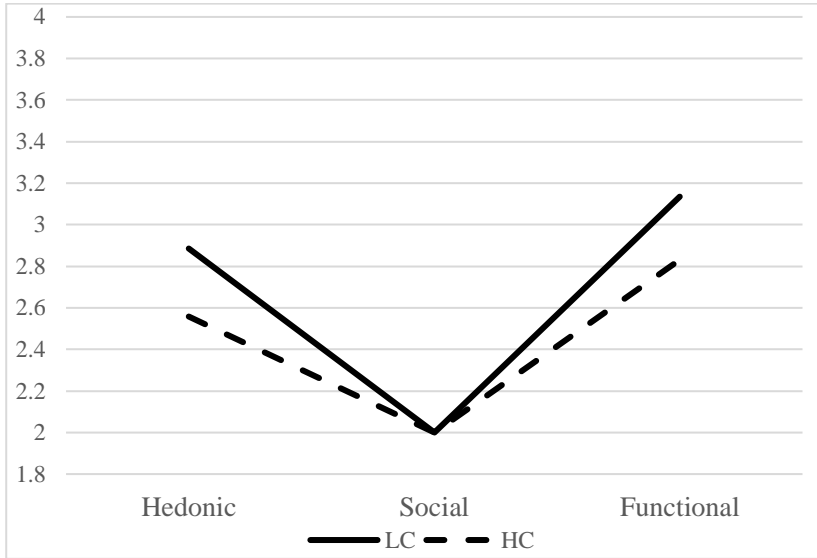


Exhibit 3b- PI of LC and HC cultures in the structure focus ad-refrigerator category

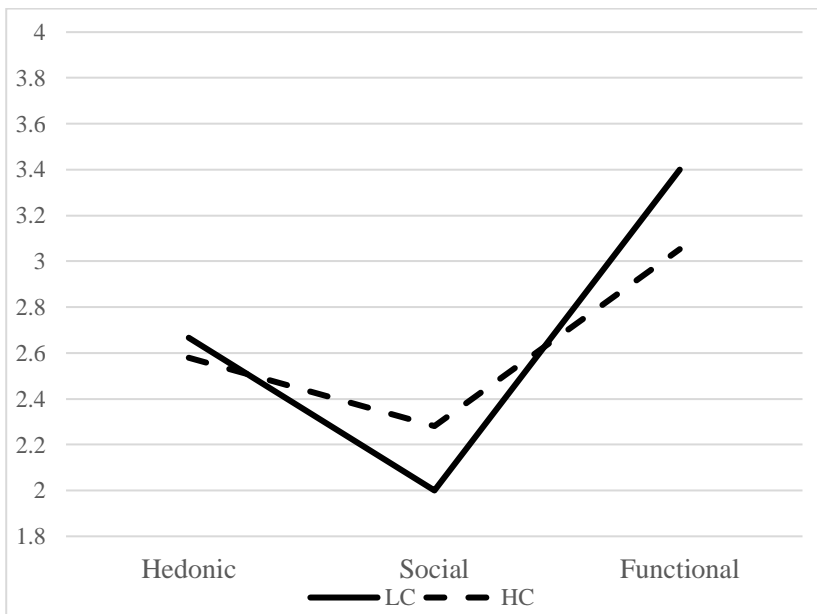


Exhibit 4a- PI of LC and HC cultures in the text focus ad-car category

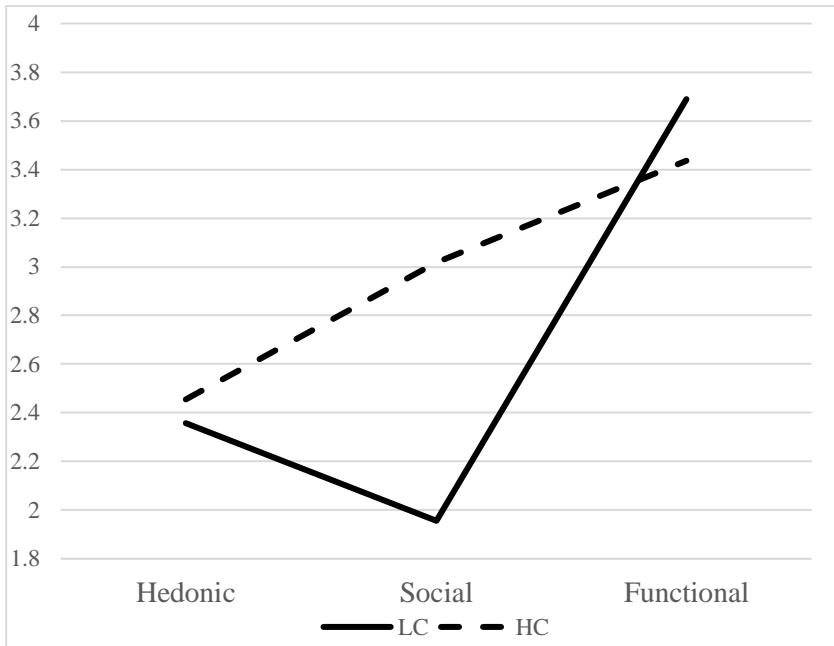
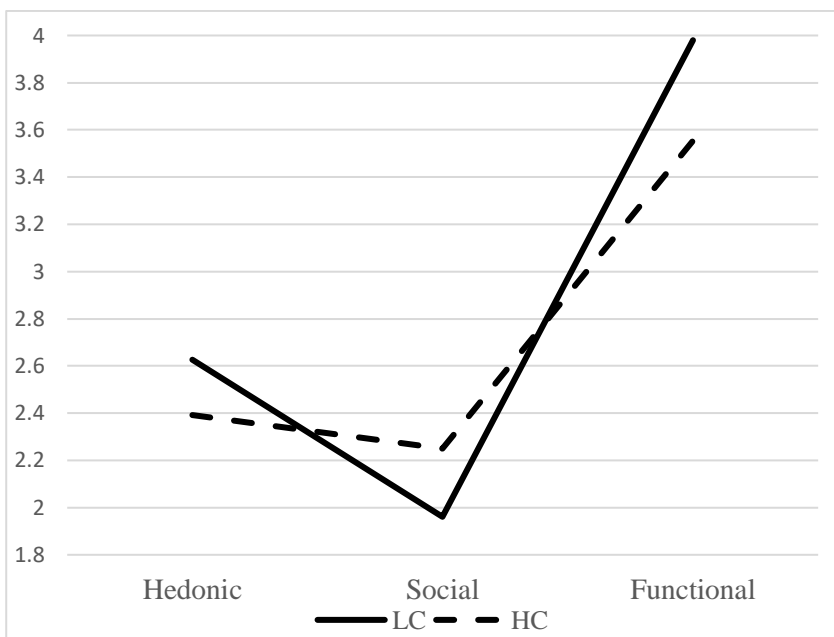


Exhibit 4b- PI of LC and HC cultures in the text focus ad-refrigerator category



## Discussion

The objective of the research was to analyze the influence of culture in the advertisement structure perception and effectiveness. We considered the Hall model of High and Low cultures, but obviously there can be other factors interfering with these two main fields, according to Hofstede

(2018)<sup>5</sup> as well as Schwartz (2009)<sup>6</sup>, Hammerich and Lewis (2013)<sup>7</sup> and Trompenaars (2012)<sup>8</sup> models. However, the models they developed have some overlaps and they present a number of cultural dimensions (6-7), certainly useful in explain the characteristics of a culture, but too complex to be consider in a conceptual framework on how advertising can affect PI. Hall's model is more useful in order to study how advertising structure could influence the choice of the customer in different cultural contexts as a conceptual basis because of its clear simplicity and focus on communication aspects of culture.

The results of the research show consistent differences in appreciation of the claims, even if in some examinations there were no significant differences between HC and LC cultures (exhibits 3 and 4). All the respondents prefer the functional appeal, then the hedonic and last the social one. In almost all the cases (exhibit 3a-b and 4b) HC respondents show the same structure of preference as LC: best functional, second hedonic, last social. Anyway, HC assign higher score when social claim was presented, compared to the LC in both categories. Therefore, for HC culture people the social claim is more attractive than LC even not in a great extent as it is still ranked last in most examinations. There is an exception in car text focus advertisement (exhibit 4a), where HC respondents prefer significantly the social conspicuous claim more than the hedonic one.

This evidence rises some questions. Social claim for cars reaches the maximum preference for this claim, in the text advertisement and the minimum in the structure advertisement. We speculated that social claim will be more important for HC when the structural context will be presented. But actually, when the text is proposed, HC purchase intentions is higher. This finding can be explained by the fact that HC respondents can imagine the context as they prefer, imagination relies in the

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<sup>5</sup> Hofstede considers six dimensions to explain cultural differences: individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-terms orientation, and indulgence

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz built a cultural map of 77 cultural groups (countries) considering seven dimensions: harmony, embeddedness, hierarchy, affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, and egalitarianism.

<sup>7</sup> Hammerich and Lewis distributed 21 cultural groups (74 countries) on three main cultural types: linear active (cool, factual, planners), multi active (warm, emotional, loquacious, impulsive), and reactive (courteous, amiable, accommodating, compromiser, good listener).

<sup>8</sup> Trompenaars identifies seven dimensions of culture: universalism vs. particularism, individualism versus communitarianism, natural vs. affective, specific vs. diffuse, achievement vs. ascription, attitude to time, attitude to environment.

eyes of the respondent. In designing the structure of the advertisement, we referred to a western living room, probably not consistent to the Chinese culture and therefore not appreciated by the Chinese taste. So, the structure claim received the worst score probably for two reasons: a) the structural context is important in the judgment, and b) the design of this context was wrong for the respondents.

The first outcome of the research is that for social claim, the structural context should be culturally adapted and not globally designed, else-text is preferred. Marketers should not use the same cultural structural-context for LC and HC when using a social conspicuous claim.

Overall, functional and hedonic claims got the same rating in text or structure. Functional and hedonic structures were perceived as neutral, acceptable in both cultures, while the social one was more related to the social context of the different cultures.

In general, functional/technological claim is preferred in all the situations. Maybe this output is due to the fact that the product categories we used are mostly technical. Hedonic claim is usually the second claim preferred, but with some differences in the car category when text ads were examined, in which HC preferred the social conspicuous more than the hedonic claim. In cars' structure claims reaches relatively high score for LC [2.885] second best after the functional/technological one [3.135], while social claim is low [2.000]. LC culture people are assumed to be more individualistic and functional, so hedonic benefit is more important than social one. For HC culture social claim is more important [3.018] than hedonic [2.455] only in products with social value, i.e. the car more than the refrigerator, because the people are more sensible to relationship values. But, in both categories social claims got higher ratings from HC compared to LC participants.

Specifically, the product "car" has a great social value, this is important especially for collectivistic LC cultures as Chinese is. Therefore, the social value of the product "car" is high. The 'structure' claim had a very low score for the context (living room) that probably didn't fit with the cultural

expectations of the HC respondents. Overall in the car category, text was more preferred for HC than LC, contrary of the expectations.

For a global campaign, text should be preferred to structure in social claims, referring to different social contexts. Future research should examine the effect of social structural claim that is adapted to Chinese culture whether it influence positively on purchase intentions. For hedonic claims text appears be poor in order to create emotional feelings and the respondents, both HC and LC, prefer structure than text.

In conclusion, compared to the refrigerator, the car is a product having more hedonic and social value, and that fact is affecting the results. The evidence is that in product car, for LC-individualistic culture hedonic and functional claims are preferred to social, while HC-collectivistic the social claim is more important than the hedonic one. Using a culturally non-consistent context the value of the claim decreases dramatically, so we have the evidence that HC culture affects heavily not only in positive, but also in negative way on the perception of advertisement. If you create a wrong structural context you have negative effects more in HC culture than in LC one. It means that the context is important in any case for HC culture on key cultural factors as social value of specific products. The refrigerator is considered a functional product so hedonic and social claims are not attractive for the respondents.

HC and LC cultures, referring to a technical product, do not approach really differently, even if they have light differences in the preference for the 3 claims. HC seems to prefer more social claim compared to LC but still functional is always best preferred.

To summarize the results regarding our hypotheses, **H1** is not confirmed, we expected HC will prefer structure more than LC, and was surprised to find the opposite in the car category. Only in the car category contrary to expectations HC had higher ratings than LC when text ads were presented.

**H2** is partially confirmed, because LC culture respondents have higher PI than HC respondents when functional claim has been presented in refrigerator. Moreover, HC respondents have a higher

PI for social claim than LC respondents for both categories examined. No difference between cultures was found regarding the hedonic claim.

**H3** not confirmed. We expected the social claim focusing on structure will yield higher PI from HC individuals compared to LC. While we found only in the car category, the social claim focusing on text yield higher PI from HC individuals. Furthermore, we found that in the refrigerator category the functional claim focusing on text yielded higher PI from LC then HC respondents.

## **Conclusions**

The research broke some general stereotypes about HC and LC cultures regarding their preference for advertisement claims. The complexity of the behavior is greater than what was considered by the previous literature.

Summarizing the outcomes of the research we can say that:

- a) The structural context should be culturally adapted for social claims and cannot be the same in the advertisements addressed to different cultures. Functional claims are more globalizable, connected to technology, hedonic claims and context are commonly accepted in different cultures even if not having exactly the same importance.
- b) HC cultures are more collectivistic than LC, so the social claim is rated more important than the hedonic one in products with social value as cars and less in products with lower social values as refrigerators. But overall social claim got higher ratings from HC than LC participants.
- c) The preference for a functional claim could depend on the type of product considered, as we included in this research technical products as cars and refrigerators. For other product categories (as fashion products, toiletries, food, etc.) the preference could vary among functional, hedonic or social claims. This should be explored in future research, as different product categories might yield different results.

- d) For a global campaign text ads should be preferred to structure ones in social claims, referring to different social contexts as people can imagine the relevant social context. While for hedonic claims text would be too poor in order to create emotional feelings. In the case of hedonic claims, the respondents, both HC and LC, prefer structure than text. It might be the hedonic has, as technological/functional the same globalized perception for both cultures. For stating that, more product categories should be examined.
- e) LC culture shows a constant higher preference for functional claim especially significant in refrigerator category compared to HC culture while HC respondent prefers social claim.

### **Limitations and future research**

This research was only the first step to a deeper analysis of the influence of culture factors on PI. One limitation of the study is that it didn't measured other cultural factors except for LC/HC, and assumed geographical difference will show cultural differences on several known factors (such as individualistic/collectivistic or low/high power distance cultures etc.). The scale measured to test LC and HC did yielded small but significant differences between the cultures but a more elaborative scale should be developed to capture all the relevant aspects of LC and HC as Hall described it elements (High-Low context, Monochronic-Polychronic time, High-Low territoriality). This is a limitation of the study as we used a single cultural model (Hall), while we realized that the cultural complexity hardly can be analyzed using a relatively simple tool.

An interesting objective for further research could be to consider in the culture description a composite model, including factors from other cultural models (Hofstede, Lewis, Schwartz, Trompenaars), for example collectivistic-individualistic factor.

The products we used for the test were mostly technical products, even if with different social value. This fact might lead to a preference for functional claims. One limitation of this research is that it examined only two product categories.

Product type is one factor that determines the effectiveness of different advertising appeal types, for example emotional appeals are better for services who are more experimental in nature (Wang, Kim, & Agrusa, 2018), thus the findings are restricted to durable high involvement products. Future research should examine other product or service categories and examine the product category as a moderator. Future research should include convenience products and luxury products to test the difference of cultural influence considering these categories, where functional social and hedonic motivation can differ.

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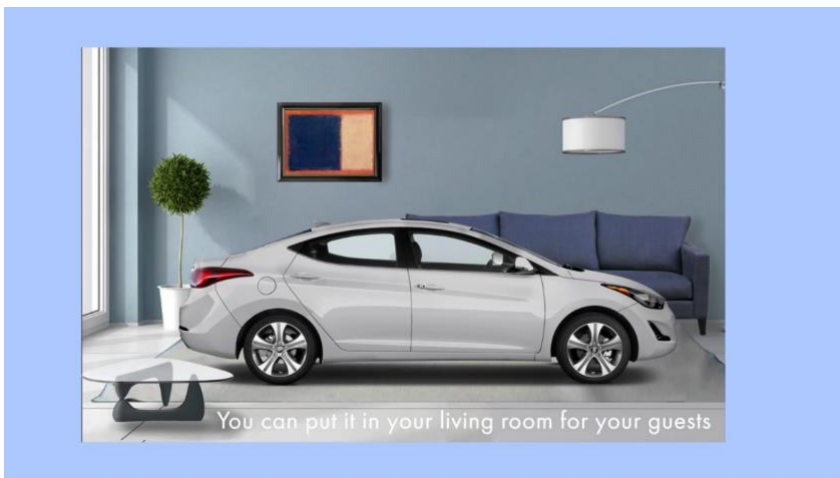
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## Appendix A- full questionnaire

### Example of Questionnaire type 1

This questionnaire is about consumers' evaluation of advertisements for different products. Filling out the questionnaire indicates your agreement to participate in this survey. We appreciate your honest and complete answers. Thank you for your cooperation.

Three car advertisements will be presented next. Assume you are interested in buying a new car and you are financially capable of purchasing one. Please answer the following questions.



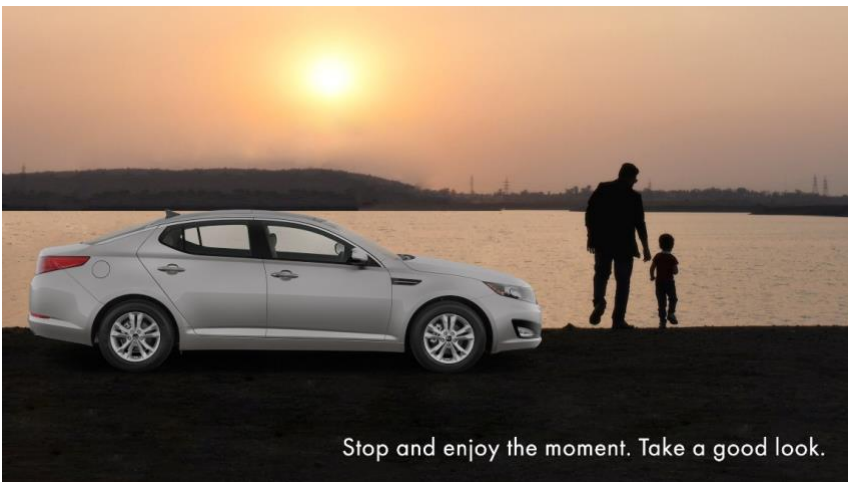
Please watch this car ad and rate your purchase intention of the car 1

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this car ad and rate your purchase intention of the car 2

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this car ad and rate your purchase intention of the car 3

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)

When examining the three advertisements claims together, please rank them by their likelihood of leading you to purchase. In the first place the most convincing ad, in the second place the second and last- the least convincing.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

Three refrigerator advertisements will be presented next.

Assume you are interested in buying a new refrigerator and you are financially capable of purchasing one. Please answer the following questions.



Please watch the refrigerator ad and rate your purchase intention of the refrigerator 1

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this refrigerator ad and rate you purchase intention of the refrigerator 2

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this refrigerator ad and rate your purchase intention of the refrigerator 3

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)

When examining the three advertisements claims together, please rank them by their likelihood of leading you to purchase. In the first place the most convincing ad, in the second place the second and last- the least convincing.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



Even if not stated exactly, but adding also non-verbal communication, a speaker's intent will rarely be misunderstood.

- 1 Strongly disagree (1)
- 2 Disagree (2)
- 3 Not sure (3)
- 4 Agree (4)
- 5 Strongly agree (5)

Some ideas are better understood when using many contextual references instead only direct clear communication.

- 1 Strongly disagree (1)
- 2 Disagree (2)
- 3 Not sure (3)
- 4 Agree (4)
- 5 Strongly agree (5)

The meaning of a statement often turns more on the context than the actual words.

- 1 Strongly disagree (1)
- 2 Disagree (2)
- 3 Not sure (3)
- 4 Agree (4)
- 5 Strongly agree (5)

What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Your income relative to annual national income in your region is:  
(In China is about 70,000 Yuan; in Japan is about 5,000,000 JPY; in the USA is \$ 50,000; in European countries € 45,000).

- Above average (1)
- Slightly above average (2)
- About average (3)
- Slightly below average (4)
- Below average (5)

What was is your age (in years)

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Do you have any comments about this survey?

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Example of Questionnaire type 2

Q332 This questionnaire is about consumers' evaluation of advertisements for different products.

Filling out the questionnaire indicates your agreement to participate in this survey.

We appreciate your honest and complete answers.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Three car advertisements will be presented next.

Assume you are interested in buying a new car and you are financially capable of purchasing one. Please answer the following questions.



Please watch this car ad and rate your purchase intention of the car 1

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this car ad and rate your purchase intention of the car 2

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this car ad and rate your purchase intention of the car 3

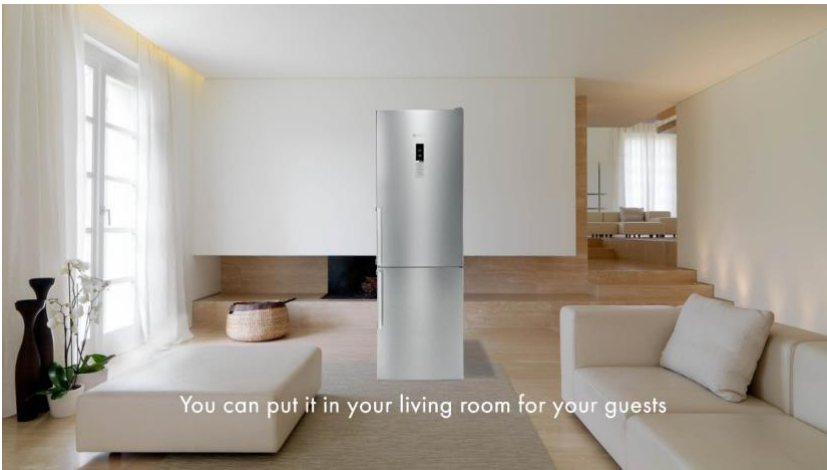
- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)

When examining the three advertisements claims together, please rank them by their likelihood of leading you to purchase. In the first place the most convincing ad, in the second place the second and last- the least convincing.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Three refrigerator advertisements will be presented next.  
Assume you are interested in buying a new refrigerator and you are financially capable of purchasing one. Please answer the following questions.



Please watch the refrigerator ad and rate your purchase intention of the refrigerator 1

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this refrigerator ad and rate you purchase intention of the refrigerator 2

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)



Please watch this refrigerator ad and rate your purchase intention of the refrigerator 3

- 1 low probability of purchase (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 high probability of purchase (5)

When examining the three advertisements claims together, please rank them by their likelihood of leading you to purchase. In the first place the most convincing ad, in the second place the second and last- the least convincing.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Even if not stated exactly, but adding also non-verbal communication, a speaker's intent will rarely be misunderstood.

- 1 Strongly disagree (1)
- 2 Disagree (2)
- 3 Not sure (3)
- 4 Agree (4)
- 5 Strongly agree (5)

Some ideas are better understood when using many contextual references instead only direct clear communication.

- 1 Strongly disagree (1)
- 2 Disagree (2)
- 3 Not sure (3)
- 4 Agree (4)
- 5 Strongly agree (5)

The meaning of a statement often turns more on the context than the actual words.

- 1 Strongly disagree (1)
- 2 Disagree (2)
- 3 Not sure (3)
- 4 Agree (4)
- 5 Strongly agree (5)

What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Your income relative to annual national income in your region is:  
(In China is about 70,000 Yuan; in Japan is about 5,000,000 JPY; in the USA is \$ 50,000; in European countries € 45,000).

- Above average (1)
- Slightly above average (2)
- About average (3)
- Slightly below average (4)
- Below average (5)

What was is your age (in years)

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Do you have any comments about this survey?

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## Appendix B- means of all conditions

Category	Cultures	Ad design	Ad content	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Car	LC	structure	Hedonic	2.885	.163	2.563	3.206
			Social conspicuous	2.000	.163	1.679	2.321
			Functional	3.135	.174	2.792	3.477
		text	Hedonic	2.356	.175	2.010	2.701
			Social conspicuous	<b>1.956</b>	.175	1.611	2.300
			Functional	3.689	.187	3.320	4.057
	HC	structure	Hedonic	2.559	.153	2.258	2.861
			Social conspicuous	2.000	.153	1.699	2.301
			Functional	2.831	.163	2.509	3.152
		text	Hedonic	2.455	.158	2.142	2.767
			Social conspicuous	<b>3.018</b>	.158	2.706	3.330
			Functional	3.436	.169	3.103	3.770
Refrigerator	LC	structure	Hedonic	2.667	.164	2.343	2.991
			Social conspicuous	2.000	.163	1.679	2.321
			Functional	3.400	.176	3.053	3.747
		text	Hedonic	2.627	.154	2.323	2.932
			Social conspicuous	1.961	.153	1.660	2.262
			Functional	<b>3.980</b>	.166	3.654	4.307
	HC	structure	Hedonic	2.579	.146	2.291	2.867
			Social conspicuous	2.281	.144	1.996	2.566
			Functional	3.053	.157	2.744	3.361
		text	Hedonic	2.393	.147	2.102	2.683
			Social conspicuous	2.250	.146	1.963	2.537
			Functional	<b>3.554</b>	.158	3.242	3.865