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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Individualism and Collectivism in Advertising: An Overview

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| **ABSTRACT**
Advertising is increasingly important in every corner of the world. It has become an indispensable part for both producers and consumers in modern society to boost the production and consumption of the products. To succeed in advertising, one component that advertisers cannot ignore is cultural values because they are one of the determinants of customers' behaviour. Of the cultural dimensions, individualism and collectivism are considered the most important ones. This study, therefore, sets the light on an overview of how individualism and collectivism are manifested in advertising in terms of advertising themes, creative advertising tactics and linguistic advertising features in empirical studies. It then specifies what has and has not been done on the topic alike so that anyone interested in the field will find the gaps for their future research.

| **KEYWORDS**

Advertising, individualism, collectivism, overview, advertising themes, creative tactics, linguistic features

1. Introduction
For many years of development, advertising has become an indispensable part of the business. There has been a continual scholarly interest within the need for relating advertising to culture over the past decades (Cheng, 1994, 1997).

Once, advertising was supported to be standardized by many scholars to downplay cultural differences and treat the globe as if it had been one homogenous market. However, on the opposite side, critics of standardization argued that sharing advertising themes among countries is inappropriate in most cases which effective advertising must be tailored to particular cultures. As a kind of social and cultural communication, advertising may be a carrier of cultural values (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, 1990; Pollay, 1983, 1986; Pollay and Gallagher, 1990). Although the investigation of the connection between advertising and culture dates back to the first 1960s (Cheng, 1994), it absolutely was not until the first 1980s, when Pollay (1983) developed his seminal coding framework for measuring cultural values manifest in advertising, that analytical studies were dedicated to the cultural values reflected in advertising content.

The national culture of any country is formed with its values. These values are usually reflected in advertisements because advertisement is taken into account as a cultural institution in addition to a style of social communication (Zhang, 2004). Of all cultural values, individualism and collectivism are considered important and prevalent. There are a substantial number of empirical studies handling the reflection of individualism and collectivism through advertising.

The primary purpose of this study is to relinquish a short overview of the manifestation of cultural values, orientations and linguistic features of individualism and collectivism in advertising.

2. Individualism and collectivism
Among the authors of the studies comparing transnational cultural values from a dimensional perspective, authors such as Geert Hofstede, Triandis, etc., are considered great.

The Hofstede model (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005) distinguishes cultures according to 5 dimensions: *the power distance-* the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally; *the masculinity/ feminity* – the dominant values in a feminine society caring for others and quality of life; *uncertainty avoidance-* the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations; *long- versus short- term orientation-* the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-orientated perspective rather than a conversational historic or short-term point of view; *and individualism/ collectivism* – people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to in-group that look after them in exchange for loyalty.

Among these dimensions, *individualism and collectivism* are undeniably the most popular concepts in contemporary cross-cultural psychology, both theoretically and empirically. The individualism and collectivism dimension has been used to describe, explain, and predict differences in attitudes, values, behaviours, cognition, communication, attribution, socialization, and self-concepts (Kagitcibasi, 1997; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeicer, 2002). Typically scholars use individualist traits to characterize people from Western contexts, whereas non- Western personalities are described with collectivist characteristics.

Triandis (1995) found differences in the individualism-collectivism manifestation of various dimensions such as self-construal, social perception, attribution, emotional pattern, motive structure, and communication style.

With the *self-construal dimension*, scholars like Aaker & Maheswaran (1997), Markus & Kitayama (1991) and Singelis (1994) found out the differences between individualists and collectivists in social perceptions and social relationships. With social perception, collectivists consider themselves interdependent and connected with important others, base identity on close relationships such as family, whereas individualists consider themselves independent and emotionally detached from the in-group, and base identity on individual personality and achievement. With social relationships, collectivists value harmony, unity, cooperation, group consensus, and social approval, accept established norms of social order and social roles, and respect those high in the social hierarchy; however, individualists value competition, individuality, non-conformity, equality, are less likely to be constrained by social norms and group welfare considerations, and more inclined to distinguish themselves among the group.

With attribution, individualists tend to attribute events to internal causes and personal factors, thus emphasizing ability as a determinant of performance. However, collectivists attribute events to external causes and contextual factors, thus emphasizing effort as a determinant (Cousins, 1989; Smith & Bond, 1994).

With emotions, collectivists tend to have "other-focused" emotions (i.e., having another person as the primary referent), such as *empathy, indebtedness, and shame*, whereas *individualists tend to have "ego-focused" ones* (i.e., having one's own internal state or attributes as the primary referent), such as *anger, pride, and happiness* (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individualists are found to be more likely *to seek fun and pleasure*, whereas collectivists are more likely to *seek interpersonal harmony* (Matsumoto, 1989).

With motive structures, *internal needs, rights, and personal achievement* goals take priority over group goals tend to motivate individualists, whereas *in-group needs, rights, and group welfare which take priority over personal goals*, tend to motivate collectivists (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Schwartz, 1990). Achievements are self-oriented in individualist cultures and socially oriented in collectivist cultures (Bond, 1986). The social behaviours of collectivists tend to be dictated by social roles and norms, whereas those of individualists tend to be motivated by individual preferences, personal attitudes, and cost-benefit analyses (Miller, 1984).

With communication styles, individualist cultures are considerably different from collectivist ones in communication style. *Collectivists depend on contexts* (e.g., tone of voice, gestures, etc.) to convey meaning, and the *communication style tends to be subtle and indirect. Individualists rely on the content of communication, and the communication style tends to be explicit and direct* (Triandis, 1995). To achieve persuasion, the use of duty and obligation appeals are exploited; however, fear appeals are frequently adopted to adverse consequences if the advocated position is not taken (Gudykunst, 1993).

3. Individualism and collectivism in advertising
3.1 Individualism and collectivism in advertising themes
The manifestation of cultural values in advertising was measured by many studies making cross-cultural comparisons between Western and Eastern advertising.

Muller (1987) comparing dominant appeals in Japanese and American magazine ads showed a contrary cultural congruence hypothesis with more individualist appeals, *soft sell* and *veneration for the elderly and traditional* appeals and fewer *group consensus* appeals by Japanese in comparison with their American counterparts. Cheng and Schwitzer (1996) compared Chinese and American TV commercials and found that there were no differences in the use of individualism appeals (defined as an emphasis on self-reliance, independence, and uniqueness) and *collectivism* (defined as an emphasis on in-group membership). Han and Shavitt (1994, study 1) made an effort to comprehensively measure the manifestation of individualism and collectivism through studying Korean and American magazine advertising with the consolidated cultural congruence hypothesis derived from the individualism

and collectivism framework. Cho et al. (1999) measured the manifestation of individualism and collectivism in advertising themes in the same way as Han and Shavitt's (1994). The study resulted in more American individualism appeals in both advertising themes and creative executions in comparison with Korean ones, but no difference in the use of collectivism appeals in either advertising themes or creative executions in the two data. Lin (2001), whose comparative study of Chinese and American TV advertising adopted Mueller's (1987) measures of individualism and collectivism, found that American commercials used more *hard sell* and *individualist* appeals, whereas Chinese commercials used more *veneration for the elderly* and *group consensus* appeals. Similarly, Ji and McNeal (2001) found that Chinese TV commercials targeting children used more *popularity* appeals, whereas American children's commercials used more *fun* and *adventure* appeals. The empirical analysis study (Malene Gram, 2007) uncovered the values in the global European and Asian advertisements with a special emphasis. Results showed that predominated white faces and Western values (hedonism, modernism, individualism) which were in opposition to traditional Asian values (tradition, family, collectivism, subordination to authority) but not necessarily to the general advertising scene in Asia. Zhang (2009) developed a measurement instrument and applied it in a content analysis of 523 TV commercials aired in 2003 in China to analyze manifest individualism and collectivism in Chinese advertising with results that the predominant cultural orientation reflected in local-product Chinese TV commercials is still collectivism, but not in foreign-product commercials. Zhang & Shavitt (2013) conducted a content analysis of 463 ads examining the cultural values promoted in Chinese advertising: modernity, tradition, individualism, and collectivism. Results indicated that both modernity and individualism values predominated in current Chinese advertising.

From this review, it can be concluded that the manifestation of cultural values, especially individualism and collectivism, have been under serious consideration and of great interest to scholars here and there.

3.2 Individualism and collectivism in advertising creative tactics

The advertising message is taken into account as the foremost important component of an integrated marketing communications program. To convey an advertising message, there are obviously a number of ways; however, an explicit strategy is of underlined ones involving determining what the advertising message will say or communicate and artistic tactics handling how the message strategy is implemented or executed. (ibid)

To find out individualism and collectivism in advertising, creative tactics are of great importance and need to be shown. This is also of great attention from many scholars whose studies focus on argument versus imitation, hard sell versus soft self, drama versus lecture, and comparative claims.

Argument and imitation were found to reflect individualist and collectivist orientations. Zandpour et al. (1994) reported differences in applying these advertising approaches in individualist and collectivist cultures. While the argument approach offering consumers facts and reasoned arguments to justify the use and purchase of the product was more frequently used in an individualist culture, the imitation approach providing testimonials by sources whom the viewer identifies as credible, authoritative, or familiar, e.g., celebrities, experts, or average consumers was under more frequent use in a collectivist culture where people value authority and consensus. Similar findings were reported from experimental studies (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991) in which Eastern consumers processed and evaluated ads based on consensus information while Western consumers did so based on the product attribute information.

Hard sell and soft self are also under great interest for studying cultural differences in communication styles. Mueller's (1987) and his 5-year-later study with a different source of data reported the same findings of more *soft sell* and *veneration of elderly* appeals in Japanese magazine ads and more *hard sell* and *product merit* appeals in American magazine ads. Lin (2001) also had the same findings for her comparative study of American and Chinese TV commercials.

Drama and lecture were found in many previous studies. Lecture-style advertising directly addressing and usually imposing a conclusion on the audience was present in collectivist cultures where a low tolerance for uncertainty and more power distance and hierarchy in social structures is present. However, drama-style advertising (telling a story without directly addressing the audience or imposing a conclusion) was found to be more prevalent in individualist cultures where there is a higher tolerance for uncertainty and less veneration for the authority (Wells, 1988; Zandpour, Chang, & Catalano, 1992; Zandpour et al., 1994).

Comparative claims are also an indicator of individualism and collectivism in advertising. Mueller (1987) report reflected individualist preference for comparative claims (comparing one's own products or services to those of business competitors). This was against the collectivist preference for social harmony. Lin (2001) also concluded that more comparative claims were found in American ads than in Japanese. Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) had the same findings- more comparative claims in American ads when comparing American ads with Arabic ones.

3.3 Individualism and collectivism in linguistic
advertising features

Like other forms of languages, advertising language is additionally a big component of culture and could be a comprehensive collection of various aspects of culture. In turn, it reflects the culture in its own way. Mentioning the connection between advertising and communication, de Mooij and Hofstede (2010) stated that understanding how advertising works across cultures needs understanding how communication works.

One of the clearest distinctions between the communication of collectivist and individualist cultures lies in high- and low-context communication. The context dimension proposed by Hall (1976) classifies cultures into high and low. In low-context societies, information gets communicated explicitly, and fewer are hidden within the context surrounding the communication. High-context societies, therefore, emphasize general politeness (repeto), a soft-selling approach (strong use of emotions, etc.), and harmony in interpersonal communications (Cho et al., 1999; Mueller, 1987). In contrast, low-context societies, like the overall American culture, use more hard-selling approach (e.g., through explicit comparisons or confrontational promotion announcements), superlatives in argumentation (e.g., "the best in town"), simplicity (decisive rhetorical styles), ranking information, and more explicit information on terms and conditions (Culture & Javalgi, 1992; Mueller, 1987).

Politeness as a linguistic phenomenon has been under the great attention of researchers in exploring the different areas of its theoretical and practical issues. Among different areas of research conducted on politeness strategies, there exist many focusing on advertising on cross-cultural scales (e.g. Geis, 1982; Hardin, 2001; Lakoff, 1973; Lin, 2005; Schmidt et al., 1995). The politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) are categorized into five super strategies. They include (1) bald-on-record, a direct and concise way without redressive action; (2) positive politeness oriented towards the positive face of the hearer with redressive action;(3) negative politeness oriented towards the negative face of the hearer; (4) off-record allowing the act to have more than one interpretation; and (5) avoidance. Of these five, the first four ones have been investigated more on the advertisements and are directly related to the individualist and collectivist cultural traits. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) and Nguen Quang (2019), negative records and bald-on records are two popular strategies for individualist features, while positive and off-record politeness strategies are popular in collectivist ones in advertising.

Singh & Bartikowski (2009) carried out a cross-cultural analysis of print advertising targeted to Hispanic and non-Hispanic American consumers in an attempt to explore the differences or similarities in their depictions of cultural values based on previous theories- the individualism and collectivism level and high-/low- context appeals; there are some linguistic features drawn. In a collectivistic and high-context culture, linguistic features should carry politeness, flowery language, indirect expression, high toughness, emotions, use of affective and subjective impressions, and entertainment theme, whereas, in individualistic and low-context culture, there should remain explicit comparison, promotions, superlatives such as "number one", "the top", etc., direct and explicit impressions and rank.

Another study was dispensed by Frith and Wesson (1991) to explore how cultural values are manifested in advertising chosen to check the expression of 4 core American cultural values: (1) Individualism, (2) Egalitarianism, (3) Respect for authority and (4) Direct speech. A content analysis method was employed with four hypotheses, two of which are directly associated with individualism and collectivism dimension, and direct communication was supported. Specifically, the values of individualism, egalitarianism and direct speech were found to be significantly different between the two samples. Direct speech hypothesis was built with two categories, including direct rhetorical devices with headlines (an imperative, news or straight information about the merchandise, and a label) and indirect rhetorical devices with headlines (tell a story, ask argument question, use poetic, philosophic, euphemistic or historical devices, simile, metaphor, humor, pun or double meaning, or no headline). One possible implication of the results is that British consumers are more conscious of indirect sales messages delivered to audiences than their U.S counterparts.

Another study (Incelli, 2017) investigated the use of interpersonal markers or metadiscourse - "the linguistic resource used to organize a discourse or the writer's stance towards either the content or the reader", dealing with "the ways writers project themselves into their discourse" (Hyland and Tse, 2004, p.156-157) in English and Italian tourism advertisements. The study was on the mainstream of cross-cultural communication linking to high-context and low-context culture theories by Hall *(19*89) and individualism and collectivism by Hofstede (2001). Three findings are really important for the basis of the theoretical framework for finding differences in linguistic features of individualism and collectivism in advertising. The first one is that self-mention presenting a discoursal self (Ivanič, 1998), which can produce a powerful rhetorical strategy for constructing authorial identity, becomes a key strategy for implementing competitive marketing through positive identity construction exploited more in English corpora than it was in Italian corpus. The second- hedge devices generally indicating "the writer's decision to withhold complete commitment to a proposition" (Hyland, 2005, 178) create a defense strategy in marketing the products in English corpora, whereas those in the Italian corpus focus on modifying the illocutionary force of the proposition for politeness and mitigation. The third

finding indicated that directives and personal reader markers are more represented in English corpora than in the Italian corpus, in which persuasion is realized differently through politeness or evaluative language.

From the above empirical studies, linguistic components of the advertisements in individualistic and collectivistic cultures should prove to carry more of the following features:

	Individualist cultures	**Collectivist cultures**
	Individualist personal markers	Collectivist personal markers
	Bold-on record and negative politeness strategies	Off-record and positive politeness strategies
Linguistic features	Direct message	Indirect messages
	Fewer 'showing off' words	More "showing off"/ flowery words.
	Hedges for marketing strategy defense	Hedges for Politeness and evaluative function
	More comparative or superlative structure	Fewer comparative or superlative structures
	Scientific and objective markers	Emotional, affective and subjective Makers

Table 1: Linguistic features in Individualism-Collectivism cultures summarized from empirical research by various authors (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Triandis, 1995; Singh & Bartikowski, 2009 and Incelli, 2017)

4. Conclusion

A review of the Individualism-Collectivism paradigm set a base for the development of a cultural congruence theory in advertising: In Western advertising, individualist values and orientations are employed and manifested to a greater extent, whereas in Eastern advertising, individualist values and orientations are used and manifested to a lower level. Moreover, multiple dimensions of individualist and collectivist values and orientations, including self-construal, social perception, attribution, emotional pattern, motive structure, and communication style, were reflected in advertising content.

The paper then reviewed prior research on cultural values and orientations in advertising themes and creative tactics to map major findings and identify remaining questions to be answered and methodological issues to be addressed.

Most of these findings were based on one-dimensional measurements of the multidimensional constructs of individualism and collectivism. The values and appeals represent dimensions of individualism and collectivism such as self-construal, social perception, emotion, and motivation, thus supporting the cultural congruence theory. If these variables are incorporated into the measurements of individualism and collectivism in advertising, the conflicting findings may be resolved. Recent studies have attempted multidimensional measurements (e.g., Cho et al., 1999; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Zhang & Shavitt, 2003; Zhang, 2009).

Moreover, the theoretical base for individualism and collectivism communication in general and in advertising discourse, in particular, were dug into so that main linguistic features were shown. However, this matter was not fully exploited when each of the research carried out just only focused on single features, one or several parts of the advertisements but the whole one including headlines, subheads, slogan and body text or in one single level (lexical or syntactic level). Therefore, all the features, parts of the advertisements, and all levels exploited simultaneously could be a good idea for enhancing individualism and collectivism cultural-linguistic features in the advertisements.

In conclusion, this paper has fulfilled the aims of providing an overview of how cultural dimensions – Individualism and collectivism influence advertising in terms of cultural values, orientations and linguistic features. This will provide a basic foundation for anyone trying to figure out and continue to dig into this field.

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