Beyond Polarized Cultural Values  a New Approach to the Study of South Korean and Us Newspaper Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

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A New Approach to the Study of South Korean and US Newspaper Advertisements

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"The right relationship is everything"—CHASE bank slogan (US)
"Investment for future"—CHEIL bank slogan (S. Korea)

Polarized views of cultures and values dominate advertising and consumer behavior literature, particularly comparisons of US and East Asian cultural frames (see Cho, Kwon, Gentry, Jun, and Kropp 1999; Moon and Franke 2000). On the whole, these studies are based on the assumptions that: (1) There are clear distinctions between Eastern versus Western cultural values; (2) cultural values are mutually exclusive and bipolar; and (3) the cultural dimensions constructed with multiple cultural indicators are equivalent across the compared cultures. But what if Eastern and Western cultures share values—or if indigenously individualist nations promote collectivist values like the US bank slogan above? Most cross-cultural advertising research examines cultural values reflected in advertisements, using a bipolar cultural typology such as Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance, or the cultural distinction of time orientation (e.g., Albers-Miller and Gelb 1996; Cho et al. 1999; Tak, Kaid, and Lee 1997). Although these studies have usually hypothesized that ads in Western cultures (e.g., the US) hold more individualistic and future-oriented value indicators and those in Eastern cultures (e.g., China, Japan, South Korea) employ more collectivistic and traditional value indicators, their results do not always follow their predictions.

Another potential shortcoming of previous cross-cultural advertising studies pertains to a certain lack of methodological rigor. One of the primary methodological issues in cross-cultural research is to establish comparability in the compared cultures (Van de Vijver and Leung 1997). In cross-cultural advertising research, for instance, the individualism/collectivism dimension has been assumed rather than tested based on certain cultural indicators set from previous studies. Such assumptions could cause a bias that eventually threatens the validity of the cross-cultural comparison (see Van de Vijver and Leung 1997, for detailed cross-cultural methodological issues).

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to contribute to the cross-cultural advertising literature in two ways. First, we challenge assumptions that ads in Eastern versus Western cultures today will carry distinctly polarized values by considering social and value changes due to globalization forces. Second, we statistically test whether the accepted cultural factors that have been used previously for Eastern versus Western cultures are equivalent across the two cultures by adopting an advanced and rigorous statistical method.

In this study, US and South Korean newspaper ads are compared. South Korea (Korea, hereafter) was selected because of its economic importance, as the US’ ninth largest import and export market in 1998 (Moon and Franke 2000) and as the world’s tenth largest advertising market in 1999 (Ad Age International 1999). With close ties between the two countries, a number of cross-cultural studies between the US and Korea have been conducted including examinations of cultural values reflected in ads (Cho et al. 1999; Han and Shavitt 1994; Tak, Kaid, and Lee 1997), advertising execution styles and appeals (Miracle, Chang, and Taylor 1992), consumer attitudes (Yoon, Muehling, and Cho 1996), and work ethics (Moon and Franke 2000). We add to the knowledge of advertising and values for these two national cultures by examining advertising value content, focusing on one widely used cultural dimension (individualism/collectivism) and one relatively neglected cultural dimension (time orientation).

Why Examine Advertising and Cultural Values?

Cultural values, the deepest manifestations and expressions of culture and collective mental programming (Hofstede 1980), are thought to be relatively stable features of individuals and societies and correspond to personality and cultural characteristics (Triandis 1995). How these cultural values are transferred to the individual might be explained according to social adaptation theory (Kahle 1983), which posits that values form the point of intersection between individuals and society. Essentially, this means that some of culture’s values are learned or internalized through socialization processes from family, friends, media, and other cultural influences. Thus, cultural values influence one’s personal values. If values lie at the deep structure of personality that influences perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Pollay 1987, p.106), then we can learn about cultures and individual consumers within those cultures by understanding their media and ads. Indeed, advertising influences and reflects cultural and personal values so that messages are more readily accepted by and more persuasive to the consumers within a given culture (Albers-Miller and Stafford 1999; Tse, Belk, and Zhou 1989).
Individualism/Collectivism (I/C, hereafter)

I/C is the most well known and widely studied construct of cultural values used mainly to understand differences between Western and Eastern cultures (Oyserman et al. 2002). I/C can be defined as “people taking care of themselves and their immediate family only in a loosely knit social structure, versus people belonging to in-groups to look after them in a tightly knit social organization” (Hofstede 1980, p.87). In individualistic cultures, people are “T”-oriented and self-accomplishment is important. In collectivistic cultures, people are “we”-oriented and their identity is based on the society and groups in which they belong (Cha 1994). Advertisements in individualistic cultures appeal more to individuality, self-reliance, success and self-benefit, while ads in collectivistic cultures typically relate to group belonging, benefits to others, harmony with others, and group fulfillment (Cho et al. 1999; Han and Shavitt 1994; Miracle et al. 1992; Mueller 1987).

Although cultural theories might predict that the advertising of Western countries reflects individualism and that of Eastern countries reflects collectivism, studies have shown inconsistent results. For instance, Han and Shavitt (1994) found that magazine ads in the US employed more individual benefits, self-accomplishment, and independence than those in Korea, while Korean ads emphasized group benefits, harmony, and family integrity to a greater extent than did US ads. In contrast, Cho et al. (1999) found that Korean television commercials did not employ collectivistic appeals more frequently than individualistic appeals. Meanwhile, some studies highlight changes reflected in advertising in a given culture (Cheng and Schweitzer 1996; Zhang and Shavitt 2003). Zhang and Shavitt (2003) found that Chinese ads (especially those in magazine ads targeting generation Xers) actually reflected modernity and individualism values rather than traditional, collectivist values.

This body of research suggests ads in Eastern versus Western cultures may not solely reflect the polarized indigenous cultural values as currently conceptualized, and that individuals within those cultures may not prefer ads conveying those indigenous values. Shavitt, Nelson, and Yuan (1997) found both American and Taiwanese subjects preferred collectivistic to individualistic appeals. These results are inconsistent with the finding of Han and Shavitt (1994) that U.S. subjects in their experiment were more persuaded by individualistic benefits, while Korean subjects preferred collectivistic appeals.

Perhaps I/C is not a polarized construct but may represent dynamic and multi-faceted values (Triandis 1993), such that all individuals contain elements of individualism or collectivism, but they differ with regard to ‘how often’ or ‘under what circumstances’ they rely on particular values (Triandis 1995). According to Triandis (1995), individualistic values are a consequence of cultural complexity and heterogeneity, affluence, and social and geographic mobility. In the context of Korea, the country experienced drastic socioeconomic changes in a short time period, including a foreign money crisis that attacked Asian countries in 1998 (i.e., the “IMF event,” see Paek, Nelson, and McLeod 2002; Shim and Cho 2000 for more detailed discussion). Such unexpected economic hardship and corresponding social mobility changed consumers’ values as well as specific lifestyles (Shim and Cho 2000). Korean society has faced a tidal entry of multinational media such as Cosmopolitan and MTV, global advertising agencies, foreign retailers and business practitioners. During this period, multinational advertising agencies recorded an increase in market share from 4% in 1996 to 37.5% in 2000, explosively increasing by 124.2% from a 169.1% increase in 1999 (Lee, 2001). Advertising, as a very-sensitive trendsetter and value indicator, may reflect such social changes, reflecting more individualistic and westernized values in Korea.

Past and Future Time Orientation (P/F, hereafter)

A second cultural dimension that can be examined within the context of Eastern versus Western culture is that of time orientation. Time orientation has been defined in various ways distinguishing East and West including long-time versus short-time orientation (Chinese Culture Connection 1987) and monochronic versus polychronic time orientation (Hall 1976). These conceptions share a couple of common ideas: (1) time orientation is conceptualized as looking toward the past, present, or future (Hall 1976), and (2) people from East Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Korea tend to be past-oriented, and Westerners such as Americans and Northern Europeans show more of a future-time orientation (de Mooij 1998). As a product of a culture, though, time orientation has received little attention in the content analysis of cross-cultural advertising with a few exceptions (e.g., Cho et al. 1999; Ko and Gentry 1991; McCarty and Hattwick 1992).

While the time orientation dimension needs more work for a clear scale construct (Ko and Gentry 1991), the scale used in previous studies suggests that a past-time orientation emphasizes tradition, history, past accomplishments, and maintenance of the past; future orientations place more value on plans for tomorrow (Cho et al. 1999). Usually youth are likely to appear as models, and copy such as “future generations,” “new and innovative,” “improvement,” and “progress” is used in ads (Cho et al. 1999).

Hypotheses and Research Questions

We operationalize the I/C and P/F dimensions based on the previous studies (see Table 1 below). Rather than assume that the two cultural dimensions will be comparable across the two cultures, however, we start with the following research question to test statistically for equivalence of the cultural dimensions across the two cultures:

RQ1: Do US and Korean ads share a common factor structure that can be constructed by the given cultural indicators?

One rationale for the disconnection between cultural expectations and advertising content findings may lie in the argument put forth by McCarty (1994), who argued that advertising, particularly in developing societies, might not reflect current value orientations but the orientations of a society that the culture is progressing toward. As cultures progress, they tend to become more individualistic and future-oriented (Triandis 1995). This argument is consistent with Mueller (1987), who proposed that cultural values mirrored in developing countries’ advertising may not be the indigenous ones that the culture holds, but the ones in the same direction as the culture is evolving toward.

Given seemingly inconsistent findings of previous cross-cultural studies that have examined the I/C and P/F cultural dimensions, and allowing for the possibility of changes in social values, we hypothesize that Korean ads will actually employ more future-oriented and individualistic cultural values than past-oriented and collectivistic cultural values. We hypothesize the same value dimensions and directions for the US ads. Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1a: Korean ads will have more individualistic than collectivistic indicators.
H1b: US ads will have more individualistic than collectivistic indicators.
H2a: Korean ads will have more future-oriented than past-oriented indicators.
H2b: US ads will have more future-oriented than past-oriented indicators.
Following McCarty’s argument (1994), ads in such a developing and drastically changing society as Korea might be even more individualistic and future time-oriented than those in the US, but there is no rigorous theoretical background and literature supporting this argument. Thus, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ2: Which country’s ads employ more individualistic indicators?
RQ3: Which country’s ads employ more future-oriented indicators?

**METHOD**

Content analysis was used to compare cultural value differences in US and Korean newspaper advertising. Newspaper advertisements were chosen because they are relatively comparable and generalizable for all target segments due to the vast differences in media environment, but are rarely used much in cross-cultural advertising studies.

Sampling. Advertisements in Chosun-ilbo (Korea) and the New York Times (US) were selected randomly. Both newspapers are relatively well matched (Tak et al. 1997) in that each is arguably the most salient and influential newspaper in each country and has nationwide readership. Based on constructed week sampling, newspapers throughout the year 2000 were collected. Sunday-issued newspaper, duplicate ads, local ads, classified and movie ads were excluded to avoid lack of matching and sampling bias. In addition, international product ads in the Korean newspaper were excluded to focus on the cultural dimensions inherent in each country’s ads. As a result, 1262 (638 for Chosun-ilbo; 624 for The New York Times) ads were analyzed.

Coding Procedure. This study developed mutually exclusive, exhaustive and reliable coding categories, based on previous research on I/C and P/F cultural indicators (e.g., Cho et al. 1999; Han and Shavitt 1994; Ko and Gentry 1991).

Two bilingual graduate students coded the ads. Considering the potential for gender differences and cultural biases (Miracle 2001), one female bilingual Korean American who lived in the US for more than 15 years coded the entire data set. The other coder was a Korean male who had just arrived in the US. He coded 170 randomly selected sample ads, which exceeded ten percent criteria (Wimmer and Dominick 1994), to calculate intercoder reliability.

Throughout multiple training sessions, the hypotheses-blind coders worked independently, to examine all elements of the advertising such as headline, subhead, body copy, illustration, caption, and slogan when making coding decisions. After examining the ad in its entirety, the coders were instructed to enter a simple “yes” or “no” to indicate the presence or absence of each cultural value indicator. In the next step, scales were constructed of each cultural dimension as shown in Table 1 below. For the intercoder reliability, this study adopted Krippendorff’s alpha, which takes chance agreements into account (Krippendorff 1980). All reliability values of the variables were at or above the conventionally accepted value of .75 (Wimmer and Dominick 1994), ranging from .79 to .98. One item, “conformity,” with substandard agreement was discarded for the construct of collectivism. Before calculating t-tests, Cronbach’s alpha was computed. All items of each cultural dimension were within an acceptable reliability (Nunnally 1978), ranging from .70 to .81.

Measure. Cronbach’s alpha warrants internal reliability, but does not guarantee cross-validity for comparing each scale between the two cultures. For RQ1, multi-group confirmatory factor analyses (MGCFA) were performed to ensure cross-culture comparability of the factor structure. Since all the items have binary values (yes=1, no=0), in the first step, tetrachoric correlations were performed among the items within each of the cultural dimensions using the PRELIS program (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996a), to reduce the problem of underestimating the correlations in product-moment correlations. In the second step, MGCFA was performed using the LISREL program (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996b). As a prerequisite for a valid comparison across the two cultures, the goal of these analyses was to obtain a common factorial model that could be comparable across ads in the two cultures.

**RESULTS**

First, a MGCFA model was conducted to examine the degree to which the two separate two-factor models of cultural value factors (I/C model and P/F model) capture the structure of correlations among the value items and whether the structure remains comparable between the two cultures. The results show that the two-factor model of P/F yields a good fit (chi-square(32)=74.47, p=.00; RMSEA=.044, NNFI=.99, and CFI=.99). Since the chi-square test is sensitive to a large sample size, several goodness-of-fit indices are considered together (Kline 1998). The model that allowed the factor loadings to be invariant across the two groups still demonstrates a good fit, implying the time orientation dimension is a very rigorous factor structure that is stable across the two cultures ads. The loadings for the time-orientation factor in which the ads from the two national newspapers share range from .57 to .75 and the total variance accounted for by the model is up to .68 (see Table 2).

While the factor structure for the P/F dimension supported the comparability of the ads across cultures, the two-factor model of I/C failed to produce a good fit. Lack of fit in the model implies that the factor structure of the I/C dimension with the given indicators may not be stable across the ads. Therefore, for the I/C cultural value comparison, we examined each indicator rather than focusing on the overall dimension, when comparing ads in the two cultures.

The first two hypotheses predicted that both Korean and US ads would carry more individualistic than collectivistic indicators. Table 3 shows that these hypotheses were supported, in that Korean ads contained more individualism indicators than collectivism indicators. Likewise, the second hypotheses predicted both Korean and US ads would convey a greater number of future-oriented indicators than past-oriented indicators.

Along with within-culture analyses, the two research questions asked which country’s ads would employ more individualistic (RQ2) and future time-oriented cultural indicators (RQ3). Independent samples t-tests were performed, using a Bonferroni-type correction to guard against type 1 error for multiple mean comparisons, which adopts a more stringent alpha level.

To investigate RQ2, each cultural indicator was compared rather than the overall I/C dimension, based on the finding with respect to RQ1 that the factor structure for this dimension was not comparable across the two cultures. As shown in table 4, mean differences between Korean and US ads for each cultural indicator show mixed results.

In the collectivism dimension, Korean ads appealed more to ‘relationship/ harmony’ cultural item than did US ads. In the individualism dimension, Korean ads focused significantly more on status of the consumer (KO=.84, US=.77, t (.1225.9)=3.33, p<.001), ‘self-indulgence’ (KO=26, US=19, t (.1204.5)=3.09, p<.001), and ‘benefits to an individual target audience’ (KO=.73, US=.62, t (.1245.2)=3.82, p<.001) cultural indicators than their US counterparts. In contrast, US ads contained a greater number of ‘belonging’ indicators in the collectivism dimension than did Korean ads, and a greater number of ‘self-reliance’ items in the individualism dimension than did Korean ads.
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TABLE 1
Operationalization of Cultural Dimensions and Indicators

Collectivism: (.81)
1. Appeals about the integrity of or belonging to family or social groups (.90)
2. Emphasis on harmony. Being together. Friendship, partnership, companion. (.87)
3. Sharing, gift-giving (.89)
4. Emphasis on the accomplishments of the family or social group (.86)
5. Emphasis on the benefits to families, group members, or others (.87)

Individualism: (.70)
1. Focus on the individuality or status of the consumer (.97)
2. Uniqueness, creativity, originality. Focusing on being different, or standing out. (.96)
3. Escape or stay out of the current position (.89)
4. Self-indulgence: excessive or unrestrained gratification of one’s own appetites, desires, or whims. Enjoyment, fun, pleasure, instinct gratification (.93)
5. Mentioning of ranking, competition, winning, the best and the most (.92)
6. Self-direction or self-reliance. Freedom, choosing own goals, self-esteem (.87)
7. Self-fulfillment or self-development (.84)
8. Self-benefit (.90)

Past-Time Orientation: (.76)
1. Emphasis on being classic, historical, memorable, old, or antique. Worth of age of product itself (.94)
2. Emphasis on accumulated experience or knowledge. Mentioning the companies’ history (.91)
3. Respect for tradition, legacy, heritage, elders and ancestors (.87)

Future-Time Orientation: (.81)
1. Emphasis on youth. Challenge, adventure, being new of company or people (.92)
2. Introducing a new product/service or new benefits (.86)
3. Emphasis on the future of being progressive (.98)
4. Focus on positive change such as innovation, development, improvement, and success (.98)

Note: Numbers in the parenthesis of each dimension indicate the alpha reliability
Numbers in the parenthesis of each item indicate the intercoder reliability

TABLE 2
Multi-group Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Time Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Values</th>
<th>Korean Ads (n=638)</th>
<th>Common metric loadings</th>
<th>The US Ads (n=624)</th>
<th>R²</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past-time orientation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Antique</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future-time orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>New Product</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>.37</td>
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</table>

Global goodness-of-fit indices  \[\chi^2(32)=74.47\ (p=.00),\ RMSEA=.044,\ NNFI=.99,\ CFI=.99\]

Note: Coefficients are from the completely standardized solutions. The factor loadings and the latent factors are invariant across the two cultures.
For RQ3 examining which country’s ads have more P/F cultural dimensions, results of independent-samples t-tests indicate that Korean ads were more future-time-oriented than the US ads (see table 5). More specifically, although not reported here, Korean ads conveyed significantly more of all the four items indicating a future-time orientation, such as ‘youth’ appeal (t(1250.4)=7.87, p<.001), emphasis on future (t(1247.5)=6.17, p<.001), positive change (t(1251.6)=6.18, p<.001), and introducing new products (t(1191.3)=9.04, p<.001). In terms of past-time orientation, however, ads in both countries were not statistically different.

### DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to challenge the dominant polarized framework of cultural values reflected in Western and Eastern culture ads. In addition, the study advances a more valid and rigorous methodology to compare ads cross-culturally. A majority of cross-cultural studies adopting Hofstede’s cultural typology framework have supported their hypotheses that advertising in Western countries reflects individualistic values and a future-time-orientation, whereas advertising in Eastern countries reflects collectivist values and a past-time orientation (Han and
Shavitt 1994; Mueller 1987). Some other findings have shown mixed results, in that collectivistic and individualistic indicators are confounded in the US ads and those in Eastern cultures such as China (Lin 2001), Taiwan (Huang 1995), Japan (Mueller 1992), and Korea (Cho et al. 1999). For instance, advertising in developing Eastern countries such as China plays a role as “the pacesetter for Western cultural values” and “a double distorted mirror,” revealing the commercial nature of advertising (Cheng and Schweitzer 1996). Recently, Chinese ads have been found to adopt more modern and Western appeals (Lin 2001; Zhang and Shavitt 2003).

This study demonstrates the complexity of cultural values and supports the notion that individualism and collectivism are not mutually exclusive categories existing solely in ads from one culture or another. We showed empirically that South Korean newspaper ads do not merely convey traditional Eastern cultural values such as sharing with others, collective fulfillment, and respect for tradition and emphasis on antiques. Rather, such ads appeared to readily accept individualistic values such as indulgence, accomplishment and competition, and future-oriented values such as youth and change. Similarly, the US ads promoted group belonging as well as individualistic and future-oriented values. These value results, while contradictory with some past advertising studies (Han and Shavitt 1994; Miracle et al. 1992), are in line with the ones reported in a meta-analysis of I/C psychology research (Oyserman et al. 2002). Oyserman et al. (2002) concluded that Americans may not be significantly different in collectivism from Koreans, and “may even report higher collectivism than others when collectivism is assessed with sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘seeking others’ advice” (p. 20). Thus, it may be more accurate to measure each cultural indicator separately, rather than to measure mean-scored I/C dimensions. In addition, our multi-group confirmatory factor analysis indicated that a priori assumptions about cultural dimensions constructed by given indicators might not be valid across cultures. In line with more rigorous cross-cultural methodology advocated by Van de Vijver and Leung (1997), we suggest that the factor structures of cultural dimensions should be statistically tested and confirmed.

Alternative explanations of our findings suggest that Korean ads may in fact reflect the evolving value orientations of the culture (McCarty 1994). Experiencing social change and Westernization in the globalization process, Korean ads may portray future orientations rather than past beliefs. If advertising reflects desired or future values, then the content analyses may not match cultural value expectations. For instance, Cho et al. (1999) found that Korean ads were not more collectivistic than the US ads, even though Moon and Franke (2001) reported that Korean advertising practitioners held more collectivistic and traditional work ethics than their US counterparts.

Finally, the question of whether advertising reflects current cultural values might be explained by the commercial nature of advertising itself. For example, Mueller (1987) pointed out that Japanese advertising would adopt Western appeals, “if it fits the consumer needs.” Korean advertising might also adopt more Western and individualistic values to appeal to the interests of younger target audiences. For instance, the headline of one camera ad, “My baby doesn’t need a father (Because I can use this product for my baby without its father’s help),” featured a young businesswoman holding her baby. The emphasis in this ad may not reflect mainstream cultural values, but might appeal to independent-minded young Korean women. Such an argument lies at the core of Pollay’s assertion (1986) that advertising is a distorted mirror, because it reflects only certain values and lifestyles, not a full array of them. Thus, the cultural values portrayed in Korean ads may not be well correlated with past values. We suggest that cross-cultural advertising studies should go beyond bipolar (Western versus Eastern, Individualism versus Collectivism) frameworks and reconsider assumptions that advertising reflects aggregate cultural values that are fixed and constant over time. Considering that advertising is influenced by every facet of political, economic, social, and cultural life from within and between cultures, we should understand advertising content under a greater variety of social contexts (Lester 1994).

Although this study leaves more questions than answers, we believe that we addressed some important issues for cross-cultural advertising literature, within limited data and space. Future studies may explore further to what extent advertising reflects cultural values in the very society along with theoretical modeling to fit better for Western versus Eastern advertising comparison.

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