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The Influence of Cultural Differences on
Product Evaluation Processes
among Chinese Consumers

Abstract

A fundamental premise which underpins much of the study of cross-cultural consumer behaviour, is that there exist significant differences in consumer behaviour between the domestic and foreign markets. Further, it can be argued that such differences in the behaviour of foreign and domestic consumers can be attributed to differences in culture. This paper explores this question by examining the relationship between product evaluation processes and the cultural orientations of consumers from different regions of China. Specifically, it examines the question of whether differences in cultural orientation among Chinese consumers are associated with differences in product evaluation processes. From a sample of consumers in three Chinese locations (Hong Kong, Shanghai and Chongqing), groups displaying varying levels on Hofstede’s cultural indices were examined for differences, if any, in their product evaluation processes. The product chosen was domestic air-conditioners. Results indicate that groups of Chinese consumers displaying differences in Hofstede’s cultural dimensions do not differ significantly in their product evaluation processes. Findings and implications also discussed.

Introduction

The field of international marketing is, by now, a topic which has been extensively researched and documented. An underlying premise of the study of international marketing is that, significant differences exist between marketing in the “home” and “foreign” countries, typically based on differences in the behaviour of buyers or consumers and/or selling firms. After all, if no differences existed, the study of international marketing would be largely superfluous. A principal focus of research in this field is the study of product evaluation processes and choice behaviours. Typically, the focus of international marketing studies is comparing consumer behaviour in the home and foreign countries where the contrast is made at the level of the foreign country-as-a-whole, and in which results are reported at the level of the foreign country (or countries). In such studies, buyers in foreign countries are implicitly treated as a single, homogeneous group. For many relatively homogeneous countries, this may be a safe assumption. For some countries, however, this may be misleading. Thus, for large and/or culturally diverse countries, such as China, the implicit assumption of homogeneity in consumer behaviour may be erroneous.

This study, which is the third part of a larger study (Tam and Elliott 2006a, and 2006b) examines the relationship between product evaluation processes of consumers of different cultural orientations in three geographic regions of China. More particularly, it examines the question of whether or not differences in product evaluation processes are associated with different cultural orientations.

Product Evaluation Processes
Over the past 30 years, a great deal of research has been done in studying the role and influence of information cues used by consumers in evaluating products (Schoeter 1965; Olson and Jacoby 1972, Szybillo and Jacoby 1974, Zeithaml 1988, Tellis and Gaeth 1990, Samiee 1994, Ahmed and d’Astous 1996, Li, Fu and Murray 1997, Erevelles, Roy and Vargo 1999). Consumers often judge the quality of a product or service on the basis of multiple informational cues (Bednall, Schiffman, Watson, and Kanuk 1997). Fundamentally, information cues can be categorized into two major types: intrinsic and extrinsic cues (Olson et al. 1972, Szybillo et al. 1974, Jacob, Szybillo, and Schach 1977). Intrinsic cues are information directly associated, or inextricably linked, with the physical characteristics of a product such as product design, style, colour, size, or aroma (Bednall et al. 1997). On the other hand, extrinsic cues are information indirectly associated with a physical product such as country-of-origin, brand name, price, warranty and word-of-mouth. These intrinsic and extrinsic cues, either jointly or separately, provide the basis for the perceptions of product and/or service quality (Bednall et al. 1997). Because of the multiplicity of intrinsic and extrinsic cues, the task of inferring or predicting consumers’ evaluation processes and their outcomes is thus often difficult and unreliable. Despite these challenges, the current research seeks to develop a product evaluation model which incorporates, inter alia, country-of-origin, brand and price. The potential influence of these variables on consumers’ judgements has been extensively researched and a brief review of this literature is discussed below.

Country-of-Origin

One widely discussed product cue is that of “country-of-origin” (COO hereafter). When consumers make use of COO as an information cue to assess the quality of a product and ultimately affect the purchase decision for that product, this phenomenon is referred to as the COO effect. Since Schoeter’s (1965) pioneering work, many studies have demonstrated that consumers have different perceptions of products made in different countries. In research on Chinese consumers, Zhang (1996) found that products from Japan and the US were preferred to those from South Korea. COO was thus identified as a significant factor in the product evaluation process of Chinese consumers. While COO is generally found to be a significant influence in consumers’ decision-making, its importance relative to other extrinsic cues, such as price and brand, is less conclusive (Okechuku 1994, Lee and Gopala 1999, Elliott and Acharya 2003, Hamin and Elliott 2006).

Brand Name

A second commonly used extrinsic cue is brand name. Consumers form impressions of a brand name which is a composite of elements including product knowledge, packaging, advertising and pricing (Ahmed et al. 1996). An important function of brand name is to minimize the information searching costs (Zeithaml 1988). While brand name is undoubtedly important (Okechuku, 1994), its relative importance compared with COO is the subject of conflicting research findings. A number of studies (Tse and Gorn 1992, Andaleeb 1995, Han and Qualls 1985, Nebenzahl and Jaffee 1996, Hulland 1999) suggest that COO can be more influential than brand. However, the effect of brand image was found to be stronger than that of country image in other studies (Lee et al. 1999, Elliott et al. 2003, Hamin et al. 2006).

Price Level
Price is an obviously important extrinsic cue which has been studied extensively in product evaluation research (Erickson and Johansson 1985, Erevelles et al 1999, Yoon and Kijewski 1997). Price has two opposite implications to consumers in terms of risk taking (Erickson et al 1985). The first implication is that consumers may want to buy a product of higher price because of less risk expected with the performance of a more expensive product: "price seeking behaviour", (Leavitt 1954, Tellis et al. 1990). The second, contrary implication is that consumers may be exposed to a greater financial risk when buying a more expensive product. Higher price will eventually become a greater barrier to product purchase. In "price aversion behaviour", consumers will choose the lowest-priced brand to minimize immediate costs (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, Tellis et al 1990). Empirical evidence on this question is mixed. Owing to the divergent results, it has been argued that the price-quality relationship may be product dependent and culture specific (Erevelles et al. 1999).

The Impact of Culture

The impact of culture and cross-cultural study have been thoroughly discussed and researched in marketing and management literature. In general, in the context of cross-cultural consumer behaviour, it can be argued that there are two opposing schools of thought. The first argues that the differences in cultural factors do not generally exert a significant influence on consumer behaviour (Bannister and Saunders 1978, Levitt 1983, Douglas and Samuel 1992, Dawar and Parker 1994). This is often generalized as the trend towards cultural "convergence" i.e. that cultural differences generally, and differences in consumer behaviour between cultures, in particular, are not significant and are being eroded over time. Such convergence in consumer behaviour is generally attributed to the effects of global marketing activities. These may include the penetration of mass communication campaigns, multi-national and global distribution, the adoption of advanced telecommunication technology, and formation of international strategic alliances.

Following this argument, the effects of differences in languages, educational institutions, customs, and other culture-specific factors are swamped by the converging forces of mass media advertising and globalized market competition (Levitt 1983). The argument for convergence is supported in a range of studies Bannister et al. (1978), for example, conducted interviews between two geographic areas of UK, West Yorkshire and Cheshire, to reveal any potential differences in attitudes towards foreign products that might arise from the effects of acculturation. The differences in attitudes were found to be insignificant. Further evidence of "convergence" was found in a study by Douglas et al. (1992) in which strong similarities among the consumers across countries were found in terms of their information seeking patterns, responses to advertising, and levels of involvement with products.

The argument for convergence suggests that marketing "universals" usually outweigh the influence of cultural differences. Marketing universals are "segment- and product-specific consumer behaviours that are invariant across cultures or countries" (Dawar et al. 1994, p 81). Thus, "marketing universals" are consumer behaviours, within a cultural segment and toward a particular product category, that are invariant across different cultures. Dawar et al (1994) evaluated whether the use of brand, price, retailer reputation, and physical product appearance as signals of quality were marketing universals for consumer electronic products. The existence,
relative importance, and absolute magnitude of signal use were explored across thirty
nationalities including China, Hong Kong, and Singapore. It was found that there were few
differences in the use of quality signals across different cultures. Thus, it was concluded that the
variances in the use of quality signals are independent of culture and are likely to be driven by
individual factors (Dawar et al. 1994). There is thus evidence that, at least for certain product
categories, the use of brand, price, retailer reputation, and physical product appearance as quality
signals may be universal in existence, relative importance, and absolute importance across
different cultures. Dawar et al. (1994) argued that culture or country boundaries are therefore not
good segmentation criterion for quality signal use behaviours.

The second, contrary school of thought argues that the differences in consumer behaviour across
different cultures are important and increasing (Boddewyn 1981, Fisher 1984, Fournis 1962). This
argument is supported by a range of studies. There is extensive evidence from cross-cultural
COO studies that consumers’ attitudes towards foreign products differ between various countries
(Darling and Kraft 1977, Cattin, Jolibert, and Lohnes 1982, Nagashima 1970, Papadopoulos
Heslop and Beares 1990). For example, Nagashima (1970) surveyed both the US and Japanese
businessmen’s attitudes towards foreign products. This research confirmed that the national
image of any particular country could vary across different cultures, e.g., “made in England” was
found to be significantly more prestigious in Japan than in the US. Anderson and Engledow
(1977) in a cross-cultural study suggested that German consumers were more thorough decision
makers than the US consumers and were less influenced by advertising, branding, reputation and
COO.

There is also evidence to suggest that country image (i.e., the image of a single country, e.g., Japan)
may be perceived differently by the consumers of different countries. Such differences may be
explained by the economic environment in the respondents’ home countries, sample
c characteristics and multinational marketing activities (Lin and Sterquist 1994). Perceived
similarities with source countries’ belief systems (Tongberg 1972), cultural characteristics,
political systems, differences in national stereotypes between countries (Wang and Lamb 1983,
Yevas and Alpay 1986) and experiences with the foreign country or of history may also explain
such differences. For example, a recent study (Fong and Burton 2005) suggest that Chinese
consumers are much less favourably disposed to Japan and Japanese products than US consumers
due to resentment among Chinese of the atrocities committed under the Japanese military
occupation in the 1930’s and 40’s. (The influence of historical animosities is, of course,
commonly discussed but a relatively under-researched field, presumably due, in part, to the
potentially controversial nature of the topic.)

The Current Study

Objectives

The current study seeks to explore these issues by examining consumers’ product evaluation
processes within different regions in China. It also explores whether it is possible to identify
differences in culture between different regions in China. In a previous paper, (Tam et al. 2006b),
found that, indeed there exist significant differences in the product evaluation processes among
consumers in different regions of China (specifically Hong Kong, Shanghai and Chongqing).
Furthermore, it has also been established that there are differences in the cultural orientations of
consumers in these locations. In particular, it was found that for three of the five cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980) and Hofstede and Bond (1988), namely “Power Distance” (PDI), “Uncertainty Avoidance” (UAI) and “Long Term Orientation” (LTO), there were significant differences between consumers as a group from the three locations at a level of 0.05. For the remaining two dimensions of Hofstede, namely “Individualism” (IDV) and “Masculinity” (MAS), the differences between the three locations were not significant. From Table 1, Chongqing is shown consistently to be a pro-Eastern city from the results of PDI, UAI and LTO. Chongqing displays the highest PDI, lowest UAI, and highest LTO. Hong Kong is shown to be consistently a pro-Western city from the results of PDI and UAI. It scored the lowest PDI and highest UAI. In relation to LTO, the position of Hong Kong is replaced by Shanghai in scoring the lowest LTO. However, the difference between Shanghai and Hong Kong in LTO is insignificant. Both cities, in fact, display similar levels of LTO culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Cultural Indices Scores by Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* F and P values are results generated from ANOVA

The focus of this paper is to examine the relationships, if any, between these independent but related sets of findings; in particular, to examine if the differences in product evaluation behaviour can be linked to the differences in cultural orientations. This question is expressed in the following hypothesis.

Therefore H1 is proposed:

H1: There are differences between Chinese groups of different cultures in their product evaluation characteristics

By making use of the five cultural indices, H1 can be further divided into the following sub-hypotheses:

H1a: There are differences between Chinese groups of different PDI's in their product evaluation characteristics
H1a1: There are differences between Chinese groups of different PDI's in their COO attitude
H1a2: There are differences between Chinese groups of different PDI's in their brand attitude
H1a3: There are differences between Chinese groups of different PDI's in their price attitude
H1a4: There are differences between Chinese groups of different PDI's in their perceived product quality
H1a5: There are differences between Chinese groups of different PDI's in their product attitude
H1a6: There are differences between Chinese groups of different PDI's in their purchase intention.

H1b: There are differences between Chinese groups of different UAI's in their product evaluation characteristics
H1b1: There are differences between Chinese groups of different UAI's in their COO attitude
H1b2: There are differences between Chinese groups of different UAI's in their brand attitude
H1b3: There are differences between Chinese groups of different UAI's in their price attitude
H1b4: There are differences between Chinese groups of different UAI's in their perceived product quality
H1b5: There are differences between Chinese groups of different UAI's in their product attitude
H1b6: There are differences between Chinese groups of different UAI's in their purchase intention

H1c: There are differences between Chinese groups of different IDV's in their product evaluation characteristics
H1c1: There are differences between Chinese groups of different IDV's in their COO attitude
H1c2: There are differences between Chinese groups of different IDV's in their brand attitude
H1c3: There are differences between Chinese groups of different IDV's in their price attitude
H$_{14}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different IDVs in their perceived product quality.
H$_{15}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different IDVs in their product attitude.
H$_{16}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different IDVs in their purchase intention.

**H$_{16}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different MASs in their product evaluation characteristics**
H$_{17}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different MASs in their COO attitude.
H$_{18}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different MASs in their brand attitude.
H$_{19}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different MASs in their price attitude.
H$_{20}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different MASs in their perceived product quality.
H$_{21}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different MASs in their purchase intention.
H$_{22}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different LTOs in their product evaluation characteristics.
H$_{23}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different LTOs in their COO attitude.
H$_{24}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different LTOs in their brand attitude.
H$_{25}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different LTOs in their price attitude.
H$_{26}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different LTOs in their perceived product quality.
H$_{27}$: There are differences between Chinese groups of different LTOs in their purchase intention.

To test this hypothesis requires analysis of the differences between four groups of consumers (i.e. low, medium-low, medium-high and high) in each of the five cultural dimensions (i.e. PDI, UAI, IDV, MAS and LTO) in the six aspects of their product evaluation processes (i.e. total COO attitude, total brand attitude, total price attitude, total perceived product quality, total product attitude and purchase intention). The terms “total COO attitudes”, “total brand attitudes”, etc are used in the above hypotheses to signify that multiple item scales were used to construct composite measures. This design therefore seeks to examine if groups displaying differences in each of the five dimensions of culture also display significant differences in their product evaluation processes.

**Methodology**

To answer these (and other) research questions, sample survey research was conducted in three Chinese regional locations, namely, Hong Kong (SAR), Shanghai and Chongqing. These three locations were chosen as representative of different points along a notional “Traditional/Chinese” to “Modern/Western” continuum. It was felt that these three locations would provide a sufficiently wide range of responses as to answer whether, or not, there exist any significant differences in the product evaluation behaviours of consumers in these three diverse locations. For hypothesis H$_1$, the hypothetical product chosen was domestic air conditioners, of Samsung (South Korea) and Midea (China) brands, made in China or South Korea and at high and low price levels. Both brands of air-conditioners are available in all three Chinese locations. The choice of domestic air-conditioners was made carefully as the study sought to focus on a relatively high-involvement product, but also one which was within the purchasing power of a

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1 The transformations of the dependent variables are summarized as follows:
   1. Total COO attitude = COO attitude (quality) + COO attitude (technology) + COO attitude (reputation)
   2. Total brand attitude = brand attitude (quality) + brand attitude (technology) + brand attitude (reputation)
   3. Total price attitude = price attitude (quality) + price attitude (technology) + price attitude (reputation)
   4. Total perceived product quality = perceived quality (innovation) + perceived quality (design) + perceived quality (prestige) + perceived quality (workmanship)
   5. Total product attitude = overall rating + overall confidence

Chicharking alpha ranged from 84 to 89 for all composite indices, indicating satisfactory reliability.

1 Hofstede’s five cultural indices are calculated from the following linear transformation where PDI stands for the Power Distance Index calculated for the whole sample population of each city.
broad cross-section of Chinese consumers. Similar published studies have used cars (e.g. d’Astous and Ahmed 1992, Schaefer 1997) and televisions (e.g. Andaleeb 1995, Kim and Pysarchik 2000, Hamin et al. 2006), but, in this case, it was felt that cars would not be within the purchasing power of the majority of respondents. Conversely, televisions are probably almost universal in China which would have made the purchase scenarios unrealistic (e.g. a high priced Midea television made in Korea). A further reason to choose air-conditioners is the importance of selecting a gender-neutral product (Hong and Toner 1989). The limitations imposed by such artificial purchase scenarios are, however, acknowledged.

To test the hypothesis that differences in cultural orientations are associated with differences in product evaluation processes the study employed the familiar four-dimensional model of culture pioneered by Hofstede, (1980), although, for this study, the four dimensions of PDI, UAI, IDV and MAS were supplemented by the fifth dimension of LTO, developed by Bond and Hofstede (1988, 1989). This LTO was incorporated as it has been proven to be an important, independent dimension, particularly in Asian cultures. This study employed Hofstede’s (1997, 2001) VSM94 Questions, an abbreviated version of Hofstede’s earlier questionnaires. The five Cultural Indices were calculated using the following formulae:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{PDI} &= 35m(03) + 35m(06) + 25m(12) - 20m(15) - 20 \\
\text{UAI} &= 25m(11) + 20m(14) - 50m(16) - 15m(17) + 120 \\
\text{IDV} &= -50m(01) + 30m(02) + 20m(04) - 25m(08) + 130 \\
\text{MAS} &= 60m(05) - 20m(07) + 20m(13) - 70m(18) + 100 \\
\text{LTO} &= -20m(09) + 20m(10) + 40
\end{align*}
\]

Sample size

In order to infer significant differences between each of the factorial combinations of hypothetical products, a minimum quota of thirty respondents per cell was specified. A total of 795 responses were obtained by the combination quota/convenience sampling. This sample size was also deemed sufficient to reveal significant differences, if any, in the cultural dimensions between the three Chinese locations, and also to test for demographic covariates such as age, gender, occupation and education. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in suburban shopping malls in each of the three regional Chinese cities, namely, Shanghai, Chongqing and Hong Kong.

Analysis

For H1a to H1f, five dimensions of cultural orientation are tested for their association with the six product evaluation variables. ANOVA tests were carried out with each of the six product evaluation variables tested as a criterion variable with each of the different cultural groups treated as the predictor variable. Testing for each criterion variable separately raises the possibility of increased risk of Type I error, which can be reduced by setting a more stringent alpha value using Bonferroni adjustment. The normal alpha value (normally 0.05) is divided by the number of ANOVA tests (six) to give a p value of 0.008

Results

For H1, the detailed results are shown in Table 2. ANOVA results indicate that for all hypotheses and sub-hypotheses, there are no significant differences among the five cultural groups for each
of the six product evaluation variables at a level of 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis $H_1$, that there are differences between Chinese groups of different cultures in their product evaluation characteristics is rejected. Thus, Chinese consumers of different cultural orientations generally do not differ significantly in their product evaluation processes.

Table 2: Association between Cultural Dimensions and Product Evaluation Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$H_{1a}$</th>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Criterion Variable</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig (p value)</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$H_{1a1}$</td>
<td>PDI level</td>
<td>Total COO attitude</td>
<td>4.728</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.182</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.871</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{1a2}$</td>
<td>PDI level</td>
<td>Total brand attitude</td>
<td>11.339</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.835</td>
<td>.682</td>
<td>.604</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{1a3}$</td>
<td>PDI level</td>
<td>Total price attitude</td>
<td>8.692</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.173</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{1a4}$</td>
<td>PDI level</td>
<td>Total perceived product quality</td>
<td>30.144</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.536</td>
<td>1.040</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{1a5}$</td>
<td>PDI level</td>
<td>Total product attitude</td>
<td>9.513</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.378</td>
<td>1.382</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{1a6}$</td>
<td>PDI level</td>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>3.745</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>1.091</td>
<td>.360</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{2a1}$</td>
<td>UAI level</td>
<td>Total COO attitude</td>
<td>6.072</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.518</td>
<td>.598</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{2a2}$</td>
<td>UAI level</td>
<td>Total brand attitude</td>
<td>4.415</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.104</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{2a3}$</td>
<td>UAI level</td>
<td>Total price attitude</td>
<td>42.014</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.503</td>
<td>1.616</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{2a4}$</td>
<td>UAI level</td>
<td>Total perceived product quality</td>
<td>42.532</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.633</td>
<td>1.471</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{2a5}$</td>
<td>UAI level</td>
<td>Total product attitude</td>
<td>2.044</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.511</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>.881</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{2a6}$</td>
<td>UAI level</td>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>1.615</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.404</td>
<td>.469</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{3a1}$</td>
<td>IDV level</td>
<td>Total COO attitude</td>
<td>24.137</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.034</td>
<td>1.593</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{3a2}$</td>
<td>IDV level</td>
<td>Total brand attitude</td>
<td>6.858</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.714</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.800</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{3a3}$</td>
<td>IDV level</td>
<td>Total price attitude</td>
<td>45.105</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.276</td>
<td>1.736</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{3a4}$</td>
<td>IDV level</td>
<td>Total perceived product quality</td>
<td>32.940</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.235</td>
<td>1.137</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a1}$</td>
<td>IDV level</td>
<td>Total product attitude</td>
<td>5.095</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.274</td>
<td>.738</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a2}$</td>
<td>IDV level</td>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>4.389</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.097</td>
<td>1.280</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a3}$</td>
<td>MAS level</td>
<td>Total COO attitude</td>
<td>12.742</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.186</td>
<td>.838</td>
<td>.501</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a4}$</td>
<td>MAS level</td>
<td>Total brand attitude</td>
<td>45.362</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.841</td>
<td>2.635</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.013</td>
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<tr>
<td>$H_{4a5}$</td>
<td>MAS level</td>
<td>Total price attitude</td>
<td>40.375</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.094</td>
<td>1.552</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a6}$</td>
<td>MAS level</td>
<td>Total perceived product quality</td>
<td>27.795</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.949</td>
<td>.959</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a7}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Total product attitude</td>
<td>12.264</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.066</td>
<td>1.785</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a8}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>11.489</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.872</td>
<td>3.385</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a9}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Total COO attitude</td>
<td>6.313</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.104</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>.646</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a10}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Total brand attitude</td>
<td>12.850</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.283</td>
<td>1.033</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a11}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Total price attitude</td>
<td>31.071</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.357</td>
<td>1.592</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a12}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Total perceived product quality</td>
<td>26.183</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.091</td>
<td>1.837</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a13}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Total product attitude</td>
<td>12.506</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.169</td>
<td>2.431</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{4a14}$</td>
<td>LTO level</td>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>1.948</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.649</td>
<td>.755</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Five samples with missing LTO values were removed

Implications and Conclusions

From the above results, it can be concluded that differences in cultural orientation among Chinese consumers are generally not associated with differences in product evaluation. This result is, perhaps, surprising as it runs contrary to the basic premise of cross-cultural research, namely, that
cultural differences exist and that these differences would be expected to influence the consumer behaviour of different cultural groups. On the face of it, these findings provide strong endorsement of the “cultural convergence” (Ferraro 2006, De Mooij 2004) argument. That is, despite differences in cultural orientations, there are no significant differences in product evaluation behaviours; at least as measured in this study. *Prima facie*, these findings suggest that consumer behaviour may be converging around universal preferences. Of course, the implications of such a finding are profound for both marketing practitioners and for international marketing and international consumer behaviour scholars. In particular, this finding challenges the basic tenet of international marketing and cross-cultural consumer behaviour i.e. that the differences between the domestic and international markets and between domestic and foreign consumers are significant and, that, as such, they warrant development of different marketing strategies and tactics in foreign markets compared with those of the home market. Of course, such a conclusion needs to be supported by more universal evidence but, notwithstanding, these results are noteworthy and, potentially at least, profound.

While potentially significant, it should also be acknowledged that these results may be purely artefactual and purely a result of the particular research design, conditions and parameters. These limitations can be readily identified. In particular, the use of Hofstede’s typology can be seen, in hindsight, to be inappropriate or, at least, less-than-ideal. Hofstede’s typology was selected as it represents the most widely researched and accepted cross-cultural typology and instrument and also because it incorporates a Chinese-oriented “emic” (e.g. Triandis 1972, 1992; Sue 1983; Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen 1992) dimension (i.e. “long term orientation”). Nevertheless these results and further analysis (not reported here) of the underlying factor structure of Hofstede’s instrument give cause for concern. Furthermore, it should also be acknowledged that the focus of Hofstede’s research was IBM workplace culture, from which he and other extrapolated to draw sweeping conclusions regarding national cultures. On the basis of this observation and the results of this study the universal validity of Hofstede’s findings can be questioned. With the benefit of hindsight, the choice of Hofstede’s model was, perhaps, naïve although, hitherto, there has been little criticism of Hofstede’s work in the field of cross-cultural marketing. These results suggest that use of alternative cross-cultural consumer values scales such as those of Singelis, Triandis, Bhasuk and Gelfand (1995), Shim and Eastlick (1998) or Kahle (1983) may have lead to a different conclusion.

Beyond the use of Hofstede’s instrument, other parameters of this study may have also contributed to the potentially anecdotal results. In particular, the choice of a consumer durable product i.e. domestic air-conditioner may have also influenced the findings and conclusions. It could be argued that consumer durable products such as a car, television or air-conditioner may be “culture free” in a way that some consumer non-durables such as food and clothing and intangible products such as entertainment may be “culture-dependent”. Thus, because the entire world prefers Sony televisions and Mercedes-Benz cars, does not suggest that there are no important cultural differences in consumers’ product evaluation behaviours. In similar vein, the location in China chosen for study (Hong Kong, Shanghai and Chongqing), though relatively diverse in geographical and historical terms, are nevertheless majority ethnic “Han” Chinese, thus potentially “washing out” gross differences in culture.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings in the design and execution of this study, the conclusion is nevertheless provocative and suggests further fruitful lines of enquiry for marketing researchers.
While it makes little sense to replicate this study, on the basis of these findings, there is certainly justification for extending the approach to other geographies and product categories and for comparing results using Hofstede’s and other instruments to measure international consumer culture.

Bibliography


