

# Is it Necessary to Adapt Advertising Appeals for National Audiences in Western Europe?

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**ABSTRACT** *Previous studies have documented cultural differences in responding to advertising appeals. In the majority of these studies, the responses of US students to different value appeals were compared to those of Asian students. As a result, the type of value appeals studied is limited to appeals to individualistic and collectivistic values. In this study, two experiments are reported on in which the students come from a number of Western European countries (Belgium, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain) and in which appeals to different values are used (modesty, success, adventure, safety). The results revealed clear preferences for the modesty and the adventure appeals regardless of the participants' nationality. The results raise questions about what would make participants from different cultures respond differently to different value appeals and whether adaptation of values is necessary in Western Europe.*

**KEY WORDS:** Value appeals, cultural differences, persuasion, international advertising, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity

## **Introduction**

In an increasingly globalizing world, the issue of international advertising is becoming more and more important. To reach their goals with respect to growth, successful companies have to expand (and export) their activities to other countries and other cultures. Therefore, we believe that the question as to whether companies can use the same communication strategy in a foreign market that was apparently successful in their home market, is now of utmost importance.

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Studying value appeals in this context is only one of many possible executional variables (see e.g., Aslam (2006), who theorizes on the importance of colours in international marketing). However, value appeals are a logical choice for two reasons. First, they are considered an important executional variable in marketing communications and as such they have played an important role in those studies that try to relate the effectiveness of marketing communications to the characteristics of these communications. In these studies, value appeals are virtually always included (Stewart and Furse, 1985, 1986; Frazer *et al.*, 2002). Second, through reference to a number of well-established theories on the nature of cultural differences, it is possible to predict and explain cultural differences in the persuasiveness of different value appeals.

The issue of cultural differences in value appeals has received research attention already (Albers-Miller and Gelb, 1996). The majority of these studies have been of a content-analytic nature (Taylor, 2002). Although the results of such studies (Frazer *et al.*, 2002) are strongly suggestive of cultural differences in the persuasiveness of value appeals, and they do provide evidence for the claim that advertisers have different intuitions on what makes a value appeal persuasive in different cultures, they can by no means be considered as conclusive. To assess whether these intuitions are indeed correct, appropriate experiments need to be conducted as is argued by Taylor (2002).

In the subsequent sections of this introduction, a number of such experiments are discussed. This discussion reveals that the majority of them have concentrated on comparing the US to the South-East Asian countries. In this study, we report on two experiments that complement these studies by focusing on possible differences between Western-European countries in the persuasiveness of different value appeals. These countries are much more homogeneous with respect to their social and economic circumstances. Furthermore, the two experiments we report here do compare more than one country to another. As a result, we believe that they provide a useful and timely contribution to the existing empirical research on cultural differences in value appeals. It will enable an answer to the question as to whether cultural differences in Western Europe make the adaptation of value appeals necessary.

### **Why would Value Appeals be Culturally Sensitive?**

Values are important in explaining the response to persuasive communication because values influence the evaluation and decision processes of the individual (Feather, 1990, 1995). For instance, when people carefully evaluate the benefits of a product, they use their values to rate the product's attributes. Values are also used to distinguish between different brands of otherwise functionally equivalent products (value-added branding). Therefore, differences in value hierarchies between individuals may have far-reaching consequences for their evaluation of an object. Several studies have indeed shown that value hierarchies play an important role in consumer decision-making processes (De Mooij, 2000, 2001; Vinson *et al.*, 1977).

Differences in value hierarchies have been used effectively to describe cultural differences. Smith and Schwartz (1997) review this line of research and conclude

that (1) countries consistently differ from each other with regard to value priorities; and (2) that these differences in priorities show a meaningful and consistent relationship to other societal attributes. Sociologists conducting such studies carefully point out that their descriptions of cultural differences in value hierarchies pertain to the group level and do not apply directly and completely to each and every person brought up in that culture. The fact that a certain culture can be described as valuing achievement more than harmony does not imply that every individual from that culture values achievement more than harmony. For certain individuals, the opposite may hold. However, due to socialization processes the chances are higher that a given person will value achievement more than harmony rather than the other way around. Therefore, the specific value hierarchy of a culture can be expected to be reflected to some degree at an individual level.

Combining the facts that (1) cultures differ with respect to which values are considered important; (2) people growing up in such a culture internalize the culture specific value hierarchy to some degree; and (3) people use their value hierarchy to evaluate a given product, leads to the prediction that the persuasiveness of a value appeal depends, at least partly, on its match with the value hierarchy of the culture. This prediction has been tested in several experiments as will be discussed below.

### **Empirical Research on Cultural Differences in the Persuasiveness of Value Appeals**

The number of experiments addressing cultural differences in the persuasiveness of advertisements is rather limited. The majority of these studies were designed to test the prediction that there are cultural differences in the persuasiveness of a specific value appeal. An example of such a study is the experiment conducted by Zhang and Gelb (1996). They developed advertisements for a fictitious camera brand and a fictitious toothbrush brand. For each product, two advertisements were designed that only differed with respect to the value they appealed to. One appeal for the camera advertisement read, 'Come and indulge in the joy of self-expression,' while the other read, 'Share the moments of joy and happiness with your friends and family.' They then had these appeals translated into Chinese and presented the advertisements to American and Chinese students.

The two slogans were chosen because they appealed to values that were expected to differ in their relative ranking for the US and Chinese cultures. To ensure that they did, Zhang and Gelb had the slogans developed by American-born and Chinese-born university students in several rounds. Zhang and Gelb reasoned that 'joy' in combination with 'self-expression' appealed to hedonism and self-direction, both values that are closely associated with individualistic cultures, such as the United States. This line of reasoning was confirmed in a series of pre-tests. In contrast, the friends and relatives slogan was expected to appeal to values considered important in collectivistic cultures such as China, in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which continue to protect their members throughout their lives in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Zhang and Gelb's results show that the American students did form attitudes that were more positive toward the advertisement and toward the brand after processing the self-expression appeal, whereas the Chinese students did form

attitudes that were more positive toward the advertisement and toward the brand after processing the friends and relatives appeal. These results provide support for the claim that cultural differences do indeed influence the persuasiveness of a value appeal.

Other studies have been conducted in a similar fashion to address the question as to whether appealing to important values in a culture yields a more persuasive advertisement than appealing to less important values (Aaker, 2000; Aaker and Williams, 1998; Han and Shavitt, 1994; Lepkowska-White *et al.*, 2003; Wang *et al.*, 2000). These studies show that cultural differences do play a significant role in the persuasion process. An obvious similarity between the studies is the countries from which participants were recruited. With only one exception, the responses of US participants were compared to those of participants from Asian countries: the People's Republic of China (Aaker and Williams, 1998; Wang *et al.*, 2000; Zhang and Gelb, 1996), Japan (Aaker, 2000) and South Korea (Han and Shavitt, 1994). In the study by Lepkowska-White *et al.* (2003), the responses of, again, US-participants were compared to those of Polish participants. Clearly, this restricted sampling of cultures imposes some limitations on our knowledge of cultural differences in the persuasiveness of value appeals, as follows.

First, only one cultural dimension on which cultures may differ from each other has so far been taken into account. The US on the one hand, and the Asian countries as well as Poland on the other hand, differ from each other on the collectivism-individualism dimension. In all experiments, values were appealed to that were either important in collectivist or individualistic cultures. None of the other cultural dimensions that Hofstede (1984, 2001) distinguishes were used to design different value appeals. A second problem resulting from the selection of countries is that the US differs from Asia and Poland with respect to many more societal aspects than with regard to values alone. Number of competitors, the maturity of the market, as well as advertiser and consumer experience in producing and processing advertising, differ widely between the US and, for instance, the People's Republic of China (which has only allowed commercial advertising since 1978). With respect to Poland, Lepkowska-White *et al.* (2003, p. 64) note that 'advertising is still relatively new in Poland and these consumers are therefore not as refined in their preferences for specific appeals as consumers in free-market economies.' Given these differences between the countries that are compared, it is difficult to exclude the possibility that the differences in responses are caused by factors other than the difference in value hierarchy.

Based on these considerations, it is clear that an experiment on cultural differences with respect to the persuasiveness of value appeals in a number of Western-European countries would be a useful addition to our understanding of cultural differences in international advertising. Western-European countries are clearly more similar to each other in terms of their political and economic situation than the countries featured in the studies discussed. At the same time, Hofstede (1984, 2001) reports large cultural differences between the countries of Europe, suggesting that there may be relevant differences in value hierarchies between them. Interestingly, these cultural differences lie on other dimensions than the individualism-collectivism dimension used in previous studies.

### **Cultural Differences in Europe**

Hofstede (2001) distinguishes five cultural dimensions on which cultures can be compared. These are individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity-femininity, and long-term versus short-term orientation. For several of these dimensions, European countries do not differ widely from each other. For instance, most European countries are positioned at the individualism extreme of the individualism-collectivism dimension, at the short-term extreme of the long- versus short-term orientation and at the medium and low power distance extreme of the power distance dimension (Hofstede, 2001, pp. 87, 215, 356). On the remaining two dimensions, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity, however, European countries do differ from each other. The focus in this study is on these two dimensions.

Hofstede (2001, p. 161) defines uncertainty avoidance as ‘the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.’ European countries can be found at the top (e.g. Portugal and Belgium), in the middle (e.g. Austria, Germany) and at the bottom of the list (e.g. Sweden and Denmark). The masculinity–femininity dimension is defined as:

Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life’ (Hofstede, 2001, p. 297).

Again, European countries are found at the masculinity pole of this dimension (e.g. Austria, Italy), in the middle (e.g. Belgium, France), and at the femininity pole (e.g. The Netherlands, Sweden).

If cultural differences in Europe are mainly located on the uncertainty avoidance and masculinity dimensions, cultural differences in responding to value appeals that are relevant to these dimensions are to be expected. Only one study tested this assumption. Hoeken *et al.* (2003) conducted an experiment in which they investigated whether appealing to the value of adventure led to a more persuasive advertisement in a low uncertainty avoidance culture (the Netherlands), whereas appealing to the value of safety led to a more persuasive advertisement in high uncertainty avoidance cultures (Belgium, France, Spain). No significant differences were obtained for any of the countries despite the fact that the statistical power to detect a (medium-sized) effect was sufficient. However, as Hoeken *et al.* (2003) note themselves, to decide whether or not cultural differences in Western Europe make the adaptation of value appeals in international advertising necessary, needs a firmer basis.

### **Research Hypotheses**

In this study, we intend to further the knowledge of the existence and relevance of cultural differences in Western Europe to the adaptation of advertisements. We

conducted two experiments in which three instead of the usual two countries were included and in which two cultural dimensions (uncertainty avoidance, masculinity) were targeted instead of one. In the first experiment, the differences in persuasiveness of appeals to adventure and safety were studied for two high uncertainty avoidance cultures (Belgium, Spain) and one low uncertainty avoidance culture (the Netherlands). In the second experiment, the difference in the persuasiveness of appeals to modesty and achievement are studied for two masculine cultures (Germany, the UK) and one feminine country (the Netherlands). The following hypotheses are tested:

- H1: Appealing to a high uncertainty avoidance value yields a more persuasive advertisement in Belgium and Spain whereas appealing to a low uncertainty avoidance value yields a more persuasive advertisement in the Netherlands.
- H2: Appealing to a masculine value yields a more persuasive advertisement in Germany and the UK whereas appealing to a feminine value yields a more persuasive advertisement in the Netherlands.

## **Method**

### *Stimuli*

For each experiment, two versions of an advertisement for a mobile phone were developed. We selected a mobile phone because it may be seen as relevant to the participants from each of the five countries and because it is a socially visible product. Zhang and Gelb (1996) report that cultural values are especially influential in the evaluation of socially visible products. They reason that a consumer is more likely to take into account group norms if other people can see the brand. A fictitious brand name was chosen (Tanaka) to prevent prior attitudes toward existing brands from influencing the participants. Given the fast growing market for mobile phones, it seemed plausible that the participants could be confronted with an advertisement for a brand with which they were unfamiliar.

The next step was to identify value appeals that were either closely connected to high or low uncertainty avoidance, or to masculinity or femininity. The selection of these appeals was guided by a study conducted by Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996). Albers-Miller and Gelb presented six coders from five different continents with an elaborate description of the dimensions distinguished by Hofstede and a detailed description of 42 common advertising appeals that were identified by Pollay (1983). These coders were asked to relate each appeal to one end of a single cultural dimension or to indicate that the appeal did not relate to any of the dimensions.

With respect to high uncertainty avoidance, *safety* (further operationalized by Pollay as security from external threat, carefulness, and caution) was considered a related appeal by the coders in Albers-Miller and Gelb's study. With respect to low uncertainty avoidance, they considered *adventure* (further operationalized as daring, seeking thrills, excitement) as a congruent appeal. This is in line with Hofstede's (2001) more recent description of this dimension. He claims that low uncertainty avoidance is reflected in a willingness to live day to day whereas high uncertainty

avoidance is reflected in a tendency to worry about the future and to plan ahead (Hofstede 2001, p. 181).

With respect to masculinity, *productivity* (further operationalized as references to achievements, success, and ambition) was selected by the coders as a relevant 'masculine appeal', whereas *modesty* (further operationalized as being modest, demure, bashful) was considered a feminine appeal. Again, the coders' judgments are in line with Hofstede's (2001, p. 298) description of these dimensions. In the definition of the masculinity dimension cited above, both *success* and *modesty* are named as central values on the poles of this dimension.

In the advertisements used in the experiments, the *safety*, *adventure*, *productivity* and *modesty* values were appealed to. Pollay (1983) has shown that such appeals are common in advertisements. The coders in the Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996) study regarded these appeals as related to Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance and masculinity dimensions. A closer inspection of Hofstede's definition of these dimensions lends further support for the claim that, if these dimensions are described correctly, these appeals should be related to values that important on either one or the other pole of the dimension.

Next, several pairs of advertisement concepts were developed in Dutch with each member of the pair appealing to either adventure (achievement) or safety (modesty). A slice-of-life approach was used, that is, the advertisements contained the description of a situation in which someone was using the mobile phone. For the uncertainty avoidance dimension, the advertisements contained (one end of) a telephone conversation involving someone who had just arrived in Rome for a holiday. In the safety version, the conversation made clear that the holiday had been carefully planned and consisted of a completely guided tour. This was considered as the type of behaviour guided by the value *safety*: the person was cautious and planned ahead. In the adventure version, it became clear that the speaker went to Rome on the spur of the moment (and a last minute ticket) and still had to figure out where to sleep etc. This type of behaviour was regarded as in line with the value *adventure*. The person sought out excitement and did not plan ahead.

For the masculinity dimension, the advertisement described a telephone conversation in which a student reported on the outcome of an examination. In one version, the person said that he had scored the highest mark whereas the examination had proved too difficult for more than half of the students. This version was considered to appeal to *productivity* as it clearly was about success and achievement.

In the other version, the person said that he had passed the examination but only reluctantly admitted that he had the highest mark and that the exam had been very difficult. This version was considered to appeal to *modesty* as the person did not volunteer the information of his success.

A pretest was conducted to assess whether the manipulation had been successful. Forty students (36 women, 4 men, age ranging from 19 to 28 years) at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands read the text of one version of each pair of the advertisements. They were asked to indicate which value the advertisement appealed to, the options being 'a varied life (filled with challenge, novelty, and change)', 'successful (achieving goals)', 'humble (modest, self-effacing)', 'certainty (knowing what lies ahead, no unpleasant surprises)'. The appeals to adventure and success

were identified correctly by all participants. The appeal to modesty was identified correctly by 70% of the participants whereas 25% mistook this version as an appeal to success. Finally, only 45% of the participants reading the ‘organized tour’ version regarded it as appealing to safety. Half of the participants thought this version appealed to adventure. To increase the ‘safety’ appeal, information was added to indicate that the person on the phone had made exactly the same trip the year before.

Next, equivalent versions of the advertising copy were created in the relevant languages (i.e. the adventure – safety versions into Spanish; the success – modesty versions into English and German). To ensure equivalence of documents, we did not employ the translation – back translation method (Brislin, 1980, p. 431). Translating the Dutch conversation into another language may be successful at surface level, but may also give it an ‘untrue’ ring. Therefore, the dual focus approach propagated by Erkut *et al.* (1999) was employed. Native speakers of the various languages were presented with the scenarios (e.g. you are calling a close friend after arrival in Rome on a trip, etc.) and were asked to write down what they would say. After they had developed these texts, the writers conferred with each other to make the texts as similar as possible while meeting the requirement that it was a natural conversation for their own culture. The English advertising copy of the different versions is presented in Table 1.

The advertising copy was supplemented with a photograph of a man and a mobile telephone. A picture of the mobile phone was included in the left hand corner of the page. The Appendix contains the complete advertisement as it was used in the experiment. The advertisements were presented explicitly as draft versions to the participants.

**Table 1.** Advertising copy of the different versions

Uncertainty avoidance: high - low	‘Hi, it’s me...’	‘Hi it’s me...’
	‘You’ll never guess where I am right now.’	‘We’ve arrived safely in Rome.’
	‘On a Roman terrace.’	We’re staying in the same hotel as last year.’
	‘You know, with a last minute ticket.’	‘Yeah, the people in the group are nice.’
	‘First we’re gonna do some checking out tomorrow.’	‘The tour guide is the same as well.’
	‘Still have to find some place to sleep.’	‘She recognized us straight away.’
	‘We’ll be staying for a couple of days for sure.’	‘Tomorrow we’ll make the city tour by bus.’
	‘Yeah, I’ll call you.’	‘Yeah, I’ll call you.’
	Discover the unknown.	Know what to expect.
	With the Tanaka 2005.	With the Tanaka 2005.
Masculinity - femininity	‘Hi, it’s me...’	‘Hi, it’s me...’
	‘The results are out!’	‘The results are out!’
	‘And guess what? I came top with 95%!’	‘It was a really difficult exam and only half of us passed.’
	‘And it was a really difficult exam.’	‘What did I get?’
	‘More than half of the class failed.’	‘Well, 95%.’
	The Tanaka 2005	‘I guess I was just lucky.’
A remarkable achievement!	The Tanaka 2005	
	A modest achievement	

### Participants

In order to investigate the differential impact of appeals to adventure and safety for countries differing from each other on uncertainty avoidance, participants from Belgium, Spain, and The Netherlands were selected. Hofstede's index scores on Uncertainty Avoidance for the first three countries are higher (Belgium: 94, Spain: 86) compared to that of The Netherlands (53). Given that the mean and standard deviation for the 53 countries in Hofstede's sample are 65 and 24 respectively, the difference between these countries is considerable.

To investigate the differential impact of appealing to success and modesty for countries differing from each other with respect to masculinity, participants from the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands were selected. Germany and the UK score higher on Hofstede's masculinity index (both 66) compared to the Netherlands (14). Given the mean and standard deviation of Hofstede's sample (49 and 18 respectively), this difference is meaningful. Participants were asked for their nationality. If the nationality did not correspond with the country the experiment took place, the participant was excluded from the dataset. Table 2 contains a summary of the participants' characteristics. In each sample, the number of female participants outnumbered the number of male participants.

All the participants in the study were students at a university. Students were chosen for three reasons. First, in cross-cultural research, it is important that the samples from the different cultures are as similar as possible on all aspects other than culture. Second, a mobile phone is a product that is particularly relevant to this target group. Third, in all previous studies showing cultural differences in the persuasiveness of advertisements, students were employed as participants. If such differences are obtained for this group, it becomes interesting to explore how general these effects are. Obviously, using students as participants has important limitations with respect to the external validity of the study. In the discussion section, these limitations are discussed.

### Dependent Variables

A questionnaire was used to measure the relevant dependent variables. The translation back-translation method was used to develop equivalent questionnaires in Dutch, English, German, and Spanish (Brislin, 1980). This procedure was

**Table 2.** The participants' characteristics

	<i>n</i>	Age	Men	Women
Experiment 1				
Belgium	87	20.3	40.2%	59.8%
Spain	202	21.2	43.3%	56.7%
The Netherlands	73	21.6	24.7%	75.3%
Experiment 2				
The UK	74	20.9	16.5%	83.5%
Germany	98	21.2	21.9%	78.1%
The Netherlands	79	24.0	32.3%	67.7%

undertaken for each of the items except for the Schwartz value list, which was used to measure the individual participant's value hierarchy. This list had already been translated and validated in numerous previous studies (Schwartz, 1992). The items on the questionnaire are discussed in more detail below. The order of discussion is the same as the ordering of the items in the questionnaire.

#### *Attitude Toward the Brand*

The respondents' attitude toward the brand was initially measured using seven items: four seven-point semantic differentials and three seven-point Likert-items. A balanced scale was employed for the semantic differentials. The items were developed and employed in an earlier study on cultural differences in the persuasiveness of advertisements in Western Europe. First, the correlation between each item and the scale resulting from the other items was computed. If for any of the countries, the correlation was below 0.20, the item was excluded. This procedure led to the exclusion of two items in the study on uncertainty avoidance and of one item in the study on masculinity. The reliability of the resulting scale was adequate for each of the countries (Uncertainty avoidance study: The Netherlands:  $\alpha=0.80$ ; Belgium:  $\alpha=0.72$ ; Spain:  $\alpha=0.75$ ; masculinity study: the Netherlands:  $\alpha=0.74$ ; the UK:  $\alpha=0.76$ ; Germany:  $\alpha=0.74$ ). Examples of the items are 'I think this mobile phone is 'very unattractive – very attractive' and 'I am interested in buying the mobile phone featured in the advertisement.'

#### *Attitude Toward the Advertisement*

The respondents' attitude toward the ad was measured using the clause 'I think this advertisement is' followed by five seven-point semantic differentials. Again, a balanced scale was used. These items had been used in a previous study on cultural differences in the persuasiveness of advertisements in Western Europe, examples being: 'boring – interesting' and 'appealing - unappealing'. The correlation of each item to the scale based on the other items was higher than .20 for each of the countries. Again, the reliability of the scales was at least adequate (Uncertainty avoidance study: the Netherlands:  $\alpha=0.75$ ; Belgium:  $\alpha=0.85$ ; Spain:  $\alpha=0.82$ ; Masculinity study: The Netherlands:  $\alpha=0.81$ ; the UK:  $\alpha=0.84$ ; Germany:  $\alpha=0.79$ ).

#### *Equivalence of Measurement Instrument*

The main dependent variables in the experiments were the attitude toward the brand and the attitude toward the advertisement. A factor analysis was conducted to assess the equivalence of the measurement instrument in the different countries. The results showed that for each of the countries the attitude toward the brand items loaded on one factor whereas the attitude toward the ad items loaded on another factor. The percentage of explained variance by these factors was approximately equal for each of the countries. These results suggest that the measurement instrument to assess the attitudes toward the brand and the advertisement were equivalent in the different countries.

### *Schwartz Values List*

The Schwartz values list was used to measure the participants' value hierarchies. The original list consists of 56 values that can be clustered into ten categories (Schwartz, 1992). For the present study, 28 values were selected which included the values that most closely resembled those that were appealed to in the different versions of the advertisement: an exciting life (stimulating experiences), certainty (knowing what lies ahead, avoiding unpleasant surprises), success (achieving goals), and modesty (self-effacing). The original instructions from Schwartz were used, i.e., participants were instructed to rate the importance of each value as a guiding principle in their life. The rating scale ranged from -1 (this value opposes the principles that guide you), through 0 (this value is not at all important), 3 (this value is important), 6 (this value is very important) to 7 (this value is of supreme importance).

After completing the Schwartz value list, participants were asked to indicate which of the following descriptions they would use to describe the advertisement. The participant could choose between four options, namely: 'achieving success in life', 'modesty', 'living an adventurous life', or 'creating certainty in life'.

After reading the alternative version of the advertisement, four questions were asked in which the participants were required to choose between the two versions. These were forced-choice questions as follows: 'Which advertisement do you think is more persuasive?', 'Which advertisement appeals to you most?', 'Which of the two would you recommend for the British market?', and 'The two advertisements include the texts of two different conversations. In the same situation, which of the two do you think you are most likely to have?'

Finally, a number of questions were included about the participant's use of mobile phones, gender, age, nationality and university studies.

### *Design*

The data on the attitude toward the brand and the attitude toward the advertisement were gathered using a between-participants design. Each participant had read only one version of the advertisement when responding to these items. The data on the forced choice items were analyzed as resulting from a within-participants design. Each participant had read both versions of the advertisement before responding to these items.

### *Procedure*

The experiment was conducted during a lecture. The lecturer introduced the experiment as a survey about the introduction of a new make of mobile phones onto the market by a large Japanese manufacturer. Next, the different experimental booklets were distributed randomly. There were two versions of the experimental booklet that only differed with respect to the version of the advertisement that was presented first. The two versions were distributed at random. On the first page, the information on the (supposed) goal of the study was repeated. Next, the text read that 'we would like to ask your opinion about the draft of an advertisement that may be used to introduce this new product on the market. It is a draft: that is, the

advertisement is not yet fully designed.’ The first page also contained instructions on how to respond to the Likert scales and semantic differentials.

The advertisement appeared on the third page. The following pages contained the items measuring the attitudes toward the brand and the advertisement, the control questions, the Schwartz value list, and the manipulation check item asking the participant to indicate to which value the advertisement appealed.

The manipulation check item was followed by ‘The advertisement that you just evaluated is not the only possibility that was created for the same advertising campaign. On the next page, you will find a second text for the same product. Look at the advertisement and then answer the following questions.’ The next page contained the second version of the advertisement. After reading this advertisement, the participants turned to the final page. The right hand side of the page contained the forced choice items and the questions on the participants’ characteristics, and the left hand side of the page contained the two versions of the advertisement printed next to each other with the version that they had read first, always shown on the left.

After the experiment, the lecturer told the participants about the real goal of the experiment and answered any remaining questions. The experimental sessions lasted approximately 12 min.

## Results

The results for the two experiments are presented separately. First, the results of the countries differing in uncertainty avoidance are discussed.

### *Uncertainty Avoidance: Comparing Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands*

First, it was checked whether participants from these countries differed in their use of the endpoints of the scales. A one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey’s HSD tests revealed that the Spanish participants used the extremes more often ( $M=3.91$ ) than the Belgian ( $M=2.47$ ) and Dutch ( $M=2.93$ ) participants ( $F(2, 360)=10.61$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Given that differences in the extremity of response may provide a distorted picture of the statistical effects, the scores of the individual participants on all seven-point Likert-items were standardized using the mean and standard deviation on all of these items for their respective countries. The data of the standardized scores are given in Table 3.

Next, it was checked whether the participants from different countries differed with respect to their value hierarchy. Each participant was classified as either considering ‘certainty’ more important than ‘an exciting life’ if the score of the former exceeded the score on the latter. If the opposite held, the participant was classified as considering ‘an exciting life’ as more important than ‘certainty’. A chi-square was computed to assess whether the distribution of these different value hierarchies was different for the countries. This proved not to be the case ( $\chi^2(2)=2.56$ ,  $p=0.28$ ). The distribution of different value hierarchies was approximately two-third favouring ‘an exciting life’ versus one-third favouring ‘certainty’ for each of the three countries.

The number of participants recognizing the value appeal correctly differed per country. Whereas for the Dutch and Belgian participants approximately 80%

**Table 3.** The mean attitude towards the brand and attitude toward the ad as a function of value appeal (adventure, safety) and culture (low uncertainty avoidance, high uncertainty avoidance)

	Attitude toward the brand			Attitude toward the ad.		
	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>
Low uncertainty avoidance culture						
The Netherlands						
Appeal to safety	-1.70	1.28	27	-1.20	1.39	27
Appeal to adventure	-0.89	1.57	30	-0.21	1.49	30
High uncertainty avoidance cultures						
Belgium						
Appeal to safety	-0.93	1.73	30	-0.70	1.64	30
Appeal to adventure	-0.98	1.42	42	+0.34	1.53	42
Spain						
Appeal to safety	-0.39	1.54	64	-0.53	1.36	64
Appeal to adventure	-0.76	1.49	59	-0.01	1.63	59

identified the value appeal correctly, only 60.6% of the Spanish participants did so ( $\chi^2(2)=17.33, p<0.001$ ). Only the results of the participants that identified the value appeal correctly were entered into the analysis. Table 3 contains the standardized attitudes toward the brand and toward the ad scores as a function of culture and value appeal.

A 3 (country)  $\times$  2 (value appeal) Manova was conducted on the attitudes toward the brand and toward the ad. If cultural differences lead to differences in the persuasiveness of different value appeals, a significant interaction should arise. This proved not to be the case (Wilks'  $\lambda=0.97, F(4, 490)=1.73, p=0.14$ ). However, the analysis revealed significant main effects of country (Wilks'  $\lambda=0.95, F(4, 490)=2.97, p<0.05$ ) and of value appeal (Wilks'  $\lambda=0.95, F(4, 490)=2.97, p<0.05$ ). Subsequent univariate analyses revealed that the main effect of country did arise only for the attitude toward the brand ( $F(2, 246)=4.65, p=0.01, \eta^2=0.04$ ) but not for the attitude toward the advertisement ( $F(2, 246)=2.22, p=0.11$ ). Contrasts showed that this effect was the result of the Dutch participants scoring lower than the Spanish participants did. None of the other contrasts was significant. With respect to the main effect of value appeal, univariate analyses revealed that the effect did arise only for the attitude toward the advertisement ( $F(2, 246)=17.89, p<0.001, \eta^2=0.07$ ). The appeal to an exciting life was rated more positively ( $M=0.06, SD=1.57$ ) than the appeal to safety ( $M=-0.72, SD=1.45$ ). The effect on the attitude toward the brand was not significant ( $F(2, 246)<1$ ).

The preference for the appeal to an exciting life was further corroborated by the responses to the forced-choice questions. For each of the countries, the proportion of participants that believed the appeal to an exciting life to be more persuasive ( $M=0.75$ ) and more attractive ( $M=0.84$ ) outnumbered the participants who believed the appeal to safety to be more persuasive (for each question, and for each country:  $p$ -values $<0.001$ ).

*Masculinity – Femininity: Comparing Germany, the UK and the Netherlands*

The participants from Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands did not differ in their use of the endpoints of the scales ( $F(2, 248) < 1$ ). As in the previous experiment, each participant's value hierarchy was classified as either attaching more importance to 'modesty' or to 'success'. A chi-square was computed to assess whether the distribution of these different value hierarchies was different for the countries. This proved not to be the case ( $\chi^2(2) = 4.56, p = 0.10$ ). The distribution of different value hierarchies was approximately one quarter favouring 'modesty' versus three quarters favouring 'success'.

The number of participants that identified the value appeal correctly did not differ per country ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.36, p = 0.19$ ). However, the number of incorrect identifications was disconcertingly high: 47%. Further inspection of the data revealed that whereas the correct interpretation of the appeal to success was similar to that of the previous experiment (81.5%), the appeal to modesty was mistaken for an appeal to success by 57% of the participants. Apparently, the fact that the person in the advertisement had a high score for his exam had more impact than his reluctance to provide that information. Analyzing only the responses of participants that had identified the appeal correctly was rejected because of the resulting large differences in cell sizes. Therefore, the scores of all participants were entered into the analysis. If participants really regarded both versions as identical appeals to success, no effects of type of value appeal would be expected. Table 4 contains the attitudes toward the brand and toward the advertisement scores as a function of culture and value appeal.

A 3 (country)  $\times$  2 (value appeal) Manova was conducted on the attitudes toward the brand and toward the ad. Again, the interaction between country and type of appeal was not significant (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.99, F(4, 488) < 1$ ). There were, however, main effects of country (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.86, F(4, 488) = 9.60, p < 0.001$ ) and value appeal (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.94, F(2, 244) = 7.34, p = 0.001$ ). Univariate analyses revealed that the

**Table 4.** The mean attitude toward the brand and attitude toward the ad as a function of value appeal (adventure, safety) and culture (femininity, masculinity)

	Attitude toward the brand			Attitude toward the ad.		
	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>
Femininity						
The Netherlands						
Appeal to success	2.71	0.81	40	2.87	0.93	40
Appeal to modesty	2.58	0.89	39	3.42	1.12	39
Masculinity						
Germany						
Appeal to success	2.96	0.96	49	3.20	1.06	49
Appeal to modesty	2.60	0.76	49	3.35	1.05	49
The UK						
Appeal to success	3.65	1.04	37	3.35	1.07	37
Appeal to modesty	3.40	1.13	37	3.59	1.03	37

main effect of country was only obtained for the attitude toward the brand ( $F(2, 245)=19.78, p<0.001$ ). Comparisons showed that the attitude toward the brand was higher for the British participants than for the German or Dutch participants. The pattern of results for the main effect of value appeal revealed a puzzling picture: Whereas the attitude toward the brand was higher after reading the appeal to success ( $F(1, 245)=4.31, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.02$ ), the attitude toward the advertisement was higher after reading the appeal to modesty ( $F(1, 245)=5.52, p<0.05, \eta^2=0.02$ ).

The responses to the forced choice question were used to assess whether the effects of the different appeals were different for the attitude toward the brand than for the attitude toward the advertisement. When analyzing these responses, there was no significant difference in preferences for one or the other advertisement being more persuasive (the Netherlands: 61% preferred the modesty appeal,  $p=0.07$ ; Germany: 58% preferred the modesty appeal,  $p=0.13$ ; the UK: 52% preferred the modesty appeal,  $p=0.81$ ). However, there was a clear preference for the modesty appeal when answering the question which version the participants considered more attractive: The Netherlands: 70%,  $p=0.001$ ; Germany: 64%,  $p=0.01$ ; the UK: 65%,  $p<0.05$ ). These results suggest that the effect of the type of appeal on the attitude toward the brand is simply a matter of chance.

## **Discussion**

If value appeals are the type of executional variable that should be adapted when advertising in Western Europe, significant interactions between the country and the value appeal should have arisen. Instead, main effects of value appeal were obtained for the attitude toward the ad in each experiment. These main effects indicate that participants preferred the appeal to adventure and the appeal to modesty regardless of their nationality. When participants were able to compare the two advertisements, the appeal to adventure was considered more persuasive as well.

The expectation that the appeal to adventure (or modesty) would be more persuasive for Dutch participants whereas the appeal to safety (or success) would be more persuasive for Belgian and Spanish (or German and British) participants was based on the assumption that the value hierarchies of participants from different countries would differ. More specifically: it was assumed that due to socialization, participants from countries that have been characterized as high uncertainty avoidance would, in general, attach more importance to safety than to adventure, whereas the opposite would hold for participants from countries characterized as low uncertainty avoidance. Similarly, participants from a masculine culture were expected to regard success as more important than modesty, whereas the opposite would hold for participants from a feminine culture. The results of the Schwartz value list proved both assumptions wrong. With respect to the relative ordering of these values, no significant differences between participants from different cultures were found.

The reason for studying value appeals was that in previous studies cultural differences in the appreciation of value appeals were obtained. Several differences between these studies and the present study can explain the difference in results. First, in most previous studies, the responses of US participants were compared to those of participants from East-Asian countries. Nisbett (2003) documents

numerous differences that go beyond differences in value hierarchies between these cultures. One of these is the fact that Western people often have a separated self-schema whereas Eastern people have a connected self-schema. If people have a separated self-schema, they perceive themselves as different from others whereas if people have a connected self-schema, they perceive others as an extension of self. Wang (2000) claims that this difference in self-schema may be an important factor to take into account when developing cultural sensitive advertisements. In fact, empirical studies have shown that these differences in self-schema mediate cultural differences between Chinese and US participants in responding to advertising appeals (Wang *et al.*, 2000) and the cultural differences between Korean and US participants when responding to comparative advertising (Choi and Miracle, 2004). Therefore, it is possible that the cultural differences reported on in previous studies are the result of differences in self-schemas rather than differences in value hierarchies.

Related to this issue is the fact that most of the studies reporting cultural differences focused on only one cultural dimension: collectivism – individualism. This is true for the studies in which the responses of US participants were compared to those of participants from East-Asian countries, but also in part for the study by Lepkowska *et al.* (2003) in which US participants were compared to Polish participants. Consequently, the value appeals used in these studies are often related to appeals focusing on the well-being of the individual (e.g. Lepkowska *et al.*, 2003: 'I like to enjoy life!') versus a more group oriented value ('Have fun with your friends!').

If the self-schema is the major driving force between the cultural differences reported and the advertisement's values appeals are geared to such differences in self-schemas, then perhaps this combination of factors is responsible for the cultural differences reported in previous research. People from Western-European countries do not differ much with respect to their self-schema (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, if self-schema is the cause of differences in response to various value appeals, no differences between Western-European countries are to be expected. To test this explanation, an experiment should be conducted in which the responses of US and East-Asian participants to either self- or group-directed appeals are studied and in which the participants' self-schema as well as value hierarchy are assessed. This would enable a more stringent test of whether a difference in value hierarchy or a difference in self-schema is responsible for the results obtained.

Finally, the history, political system, and economy of the countries in this study are much more homogeneous than those of the countries in the other studies are. Especially the fact that all participants live in free-market economies with a long tradition in advertising may be of interest. In such economies, the number of competitors producing more or less functionally equivalent products is rather high. Therefore, advertisers try to distinguish a brand from that of the competitor by adding a value to it. The success of this strategy does not necessarily depend on the position taken by that value in the cultural value hierarchy. For instance, the Dutch beer brand Amstel has won several prizes for having run one of the most effective advertising campaigns. In their campaign the value of 'friendship' is appealed to. The value of 'friendship' is a 'collectivistic' value (Lepkowska *et al.*, 2003), whereas the Netherlands is considered one of the most individualistic countries in the world.

Apparently, the position of the value in the culture's hierarchy may be less important than the fact that it represents something desirable and that it is a different value than the value associated with a competitor's brand.

The data on the individual participants' value hierarchies provide further evidence for the assumption that the persuasiveness of a value appeal does not depend on the value's position in the individual's value hierarchy. Overall, the British, German, and Dutch participants attached more importance to 'success' than to 'modesty' in the Schwartz value list. Nevertheless, the appeal to modesty was considered more attractive. Aaker and Williams (1998) have pointed out that the novelty of the ad appeal may influence its persuasiveness. Perhaps an appeal to modesty was different from what participants usually encountered, thereby giving this appeal an edge on the more common appeal to success. The conclusion may be that cultural differences in responding to different value appeals may depend on the extent to which the participants are familiar with the use of values in advertising to distinguish otherwise equivalent brands from each other.

The absence of an interaction between country and value appeal replicates the results reported by Hoeken *et al.* (2003), who also studied the effect of different value appeals in Western-European countries. The findings of the present study extend these results by taking into account a second cultural dimension, and by using a different product and a different execution of the value appeal. This extension provides a more solid foundation for the suggestion that value appeals may be less culturally sensitive in Western-European free-market countries.

#### *Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research*

Of course, there are limitations to this study. The studies were conducted in a classroom setting with six convenience samples. Female participants outnumbered male participants in all of the samples. Furthermore, all participants were students at a university. Each of these factors limits the generalizability of the results. For instance, it may be questioned whether students are a valid embodiment of the cultural values of a nation. One of the reviewers suggested that students in almost any country are culturally closer to one another than to the general population of that country. Although we cannot prove these claims are incorrect based on our results, we would like to point out that previous studies providing evidence for the existence of cultural differences in the response to value appeals in advertisements, without exception, employed students as participants. These results suggest that despite a shared 'student culture', culture can still influence the responses of these participants in a unique way. To assess whether a different sample would result in a different outcome, Noordhoek (2003) had Dutch and Spanish high school teachers respond to the advertisements developed in Hoeken *et al.* (2003). In her samples, the number of male and female participants was approximately equal and the average age was much higher (44 years). She, too, reports a preference for the appeal to adventure regardless of the participants' nationality. Although definitely not conclusive, this result suggests that the results obtained with students may be applicable to other parts of the population as well.

Another limitation of the study is constituted by the advertisement used. Only one advertisement for only one product (a mobile phone) was used in each of the

experiments. It should be noted that the absence of cultural differences in the persuasiveness of a value appeal is in line with the results reported by Hoeken *et al.* (2003) and by Noordhoek (2003) using a different product (a watch) and a different advertisement. In each of these experiments, the power to detect such differences was sufficiently high (at least,  $\beta=0.80$ , medium size effect).

The results of our study suggest that value appeals can be standardized when operating in Western-European countries. Dutch, Belgian, and Spanish consumers preferred an appeal to adventure over an appeal to safety. Dutch, German, and British consumers preferred an appeal to modesty over an appeal to success. In the discussion, the question has been addressed as to why no cultural differences were obtained in Western Europe whereas such differences have been reported in other studies. We have pointed out that these differences may have been the result of a difference in self-schema rather than a difference in value hierarchy or of consumers being familiar with the strategy to add values to a brand to distinguish it from a functionally equivalent competitor. As such, it provides an exciting research agenda for the future to understand more fully, under which conditions value appeals can be standardized, or, to put it more succinctly: under which conditions – if any – should the adaptation of value appeals be guided by cultural differences in value hierarchies.

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Appendix

**"Hi, it's me..."**

*"The results are out!"  
"And guess what? I came  
top with 95%!"  
"And it was a really difficult  
exam."  
"More than half of the class  
failed."*



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