

# **Bachelor's Thesis**

**Consumer's persuasion knowledge in response to scarcity & reciprocity tactics between individualist/ collectivist culture and its influence on persuasiveness.**

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## Abstract

The study provides insights into consumer's persuasion knowledge in response to scarcity & reciprocity tactic between individualist and collectivist culture, as well as its influence on persuasiveness. In the experiment, 230 Dutch and Vietnamese participants evaluated ads with different persuasion tactics by filling in a questionnaire. Using inferences of manipulative intent as indicators, the result revealed Vietnamese & Dutch participants differed in the level of inferences of manipulative intent in response to the advertisement using scarcity and reciprocity appeal and slightly differed regarding the neutral ad. In addition, consumers' PK was found to affect ad attitude and purchase intention i.e. persuasiveness. The result indicated that consumers' PK differed between individualists and collectivists, hence, influence consumers' responses to persuasion tactics and the persuasiveness of the advertising.

*Keyword:* persuasion knowledge, inferences of manipulative intent, persuasive strategies, appropriateness, persuasiveness.

## Introduction

In the context of globalization, especially regarding marketing, understanding cross-cultural differences is often considered a key prerequisite for successful international advertising (Orth, Koenig & Firbasova, 2007). As advertising is influenced by and also has an impact on cultural values, consumers from a particular culture are likely to respond congruently to their cultural values and norms because culture plays an influential role in shaping their attitude & behaviour patterns (Zhang & Neelankavil, 1997). Hence, not only does understanding these cultural characteristics provide the opportunity for targeting a specialized market, but also limits the choice of advertising themes used in one particular culture.

The two common methods used by businesses when making cross-cultural advertisements are standardization (the same design except for the translation of the text/slogan) and localization (considering cultural particularities of the countries, hence, varies across countries) (Diehl et al. 2003). Previous research has shown that a culture-catered message/ theme is oftentimes more persuasive than just mere translation (Khaled et al., 2006 & Diehl et al. 2003). Therefore, in cross-cultural advertising, the choice of persuasion strategy in a message is also affected by the cultural characteristics of the host country (Orji, 2016). On the other hand, in the domain of social science, individualism-collectivism was regarded as the most basic dimension of cultural variability, covering awareness of cultural & work values, social systems, morality and constitutional structure (Han & Shavitt, 1994). Hence, it could be inferred that the persuasion tactics used in advertising should also be catered to the individualistic/collectivistic nature of the host country.

On the other hand, consumers' persuasion knowledge (PK) (Friestad & Wright, 1994) i.e. consumers' accumulated knowledge of persuasion strategies and their increased ability to recognize those, also play a major role in deciding the effectiveness of a persuasion strategy (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). Generally speaking, in understanding persuasion, consumers use their PK to consider two elements: recognition of persuasion and appropriateness. Consumer's ability to recognize the persuasive strategies was shown to have both positive and negative responses (Campbell & Kirmani, 2004, 2008). Regarding appropriateness (consumer's belief that it is right or wrong to use the tactic), if a persuasion attempt is perceived as inappropriate,

consumers would likely respond negatively, which could result in inferences of manipulative intent (Campbell & Kirmani, 1995, 2008).

Therefore, to have consumers recognize and respond positively towards an advertisement, the cultural element and the choice of persuasion tactics have to go hand in hand. However, until now, lesser attention has been given to cross-cultural consumer research than message appeal (Orth et al., 2007). In addition, as the field of PK has only received direct research attention in the last few years, few studies had been carried out on the interaction of PK and cross-cultural differences, as well as its influence on persuasiveness (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). Hence, this study sets out to investigate the effect of the individualist/collectivist cultural dimension on consumers' inferences of manipulative intent (IMI) in their response to the persuasion strategy used (to scarcity & reciprocity appeal), as well as whether this differences in IMI moderates the effect of persuasiveness on consumer' purchase intention and attitude towards the ad.

### Literature review

According to Campbell & Kirmani (2000, p.1), “consumers’ theories about persuasion and related beliefs about marketers’ motives, strategies, and tactics; effectiveness and appropriateness of persuasion tactics; psychological mediators of tactic effectiveness; and ways of coping with persuasion attempts” is referred to as persuasion knowledge. Consumers’ attitudes towards an influence agent or a product are drawn readily from the storage of PK (Friestad & Wright, 1994). From this definition, in 1994, the “Persuasion Knowledge Model” (PKM) was developed, which suggested the basic idea of how consumers develop knowledge about persuasion and use this to “cope” with persuasion episodes (see Figure 1). In the PKM, the three knowledge structures required to respond to a persuasion attempt are PK, topic knowledge (beliefs about the topic) and agent or target knowledge (beliefs about traits, competency and goals of the persuasion agent) (Friestad & Wright, 1994). These knowledge structures are indicators of when and how consumers react to persuasive intent.

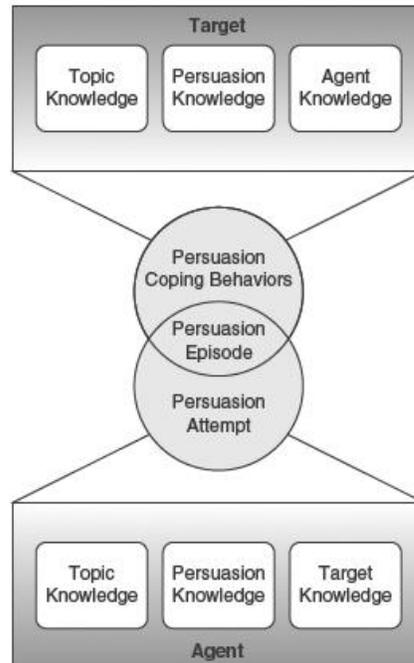


Figure 1. The Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright, 1994)

As shown in Figure 2, the content of PK, which includes cognitive resources, accessibility of motive and persuasion expertise were identified as factors that directly influence the activation of persuasion knowledge (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). In this model, the central factor is consumers' beliefs about marketers' motives, which according to Campbell & Kirmani (2000), could be viewed as indicators of PK activation. Therefore, it could be understood that within an interaction, the potential of persuasion must be recognized to use PK, or in other words, consumers' recognition of persuasive intent equates to immediate activation of PK (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008).

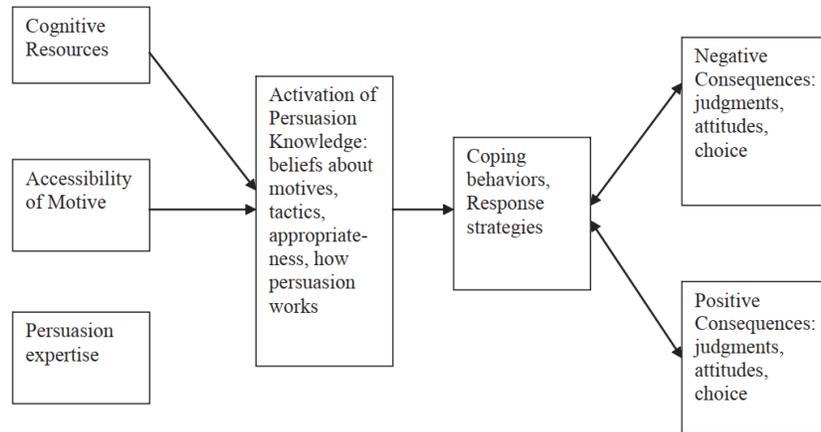


Figure 2. Antecedents and Consequences of Persuasion Knowledge Model (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008)

In addition to realizing the underlying motives of marketers, consumers' conceptions of tactics used are also relevant. In order to perceive the marketers' behaviours as having persuasive intent (e.g. promotional materials, product advertising, etc.), consumers must be able to recognize the persuasion tactics used (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). Friestad and Wright (1994) referred to this process as "change of meaning", which occurs when the agent actions that previously were not assigned any particular meaning is interpreted as having persuasion tactics. The "change of meaning" process could be externally prompted, which had been shown in the study by Williams et al. (2004) to have an effect on consumers' responses. When consumers were educated on the persuasive impact of intention questions (the mere act of asking a question about something leads to biased responses and potentially change the underlying behaviour), their responses changed compared with a non-exposure environment i.e. not aware that the intention questions carried persuasive intent (Williams et al., 2004).

During this process, consumers' considerations of the marketer's motives and tactics are bound to arise. Regardless of their functionality, consumers assess the extent to which they believe that it is right or wrong to use the tactic (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). If the persuasion tactic was perceived as inappropriate, consumers would be more likely to respond negatively, e.g., in Campbell's study (1995), unexpected borrowed interest appeal was perceived more negatively. Inappropriate or negative perceptions of persuasion attempts would likely result in inferences of manipulative intent, which is how the use of persuasion tactics might lead

consumers to infer that they are being manipulated by the advertiser (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008).

Both recognition of persuasion and appropriateness had been proven to influence the persuasiveness of the agent. Many previous studies had shown that the recognition of persuasive intent would lead to negative responses in terms of persuasion, which was the target coping behaviours (Friestad and Wright, 1994). For example, within the interpersonal sales setting, activation of PK was found to lead to less favourable perceptions of a sales agent's sincerity (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). In 2004, Campbell & Kirmani found that consumers' coping behaviours are used in both negative and positive responses to not only react to the marketers but also to attain their own goals. In terms of appropriateness, Campbell (1995) also demonstrated that advertising persuasion as measured by ad attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions was lowered by inferences of manipulative intent.

While a persuasion episode/ attempt would be ineffective without consumers activating PK for interpretation, this recognition was also found to differ with regards to individuals' accumulated experience in their lifetime, including cognitive skills, experience and learning. Friestad and Wright (1994) explored PK development with regards to age, pointing out the increase in the mental processing and persuasion expertise between childhood and adolescence. A study by Campbell & Kirmani (2004) also extended on this finding, claiming that as certain experiences would not occur until young adults (e.g. exposure to various persuasion episodes), the response strategies' quality and quantity used increased with age. Specifically, Rozendaal (2011) confirmed that age affected the recognition and understanding of PK, as advertising recognition of the 8-10-year-old children sample was significantly lower than adults & 8-11-year-old scored significantly lower in the understanding of persuasive intent than among the adult sample.

Culture plays a very influential role in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviours, affecting individuals' responses before and after persuasion, depending on the centrality of the topic of persuasion is to the culture (Khaled et al., 2006) In deciding persuasion strategy in cross-cultural advertising, it is key to have a thorough understanding of the culture most basic elements, such as the cultural & work values, social systems, morality and constitutional structure (Orth et al., 2007). According to Trinandis (2001), the individualism-collectivism

dimension accounted for the most significant variances cross-culturally. Individualism-collectivism was described in terms of “the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society”, and were characterized by differences in the self-perception, the relationship with the in/ out-groups, values and the pattern and style of social interactions (Hofstede, 1980, in Han & Shavitt, 1994, p.327).

Individualistic cultures often consist of autonomous members that are interdependent from their in-groups which members are often associated with independence, freedom and are not bound with the norms of their in-groups (Trinandis, 2001). Instead, individualists give priorities to their personal goal and behave in accordance with their attitudes (Han & Shavitt, 1994). On the other hand, in a collectivistic culture, people behave according to in-groups' norms as well as work for the shared goal. Collectivists are interdependent within their in-groups and identify with traits such as harmony, social hierarchies and security (Trinandis, 2001). Asia and Africa are the typical representatives for collectivistic culture whereas the individualistic pattern is found in Northern Europe and America (Hofstede, 1980).

As culture shapes the mind-set of its people, advertising cross-culturally should also differ regarding the individualist/ collectivist cultural orientation. Firstly, these variances in culture affect the response to ads, shown in a study by Shavitt et al. (1997). In an ad reflecting experiment, the cognitive responses of participants were categorized into product-oriented or ad-related cognitions. The study showed that product-related claims received more attention from U.S. subjects (individualistic) while Taiwanese subjects (collectivism) evaluated the ad “appropriateness” more. Moreover, the cultural construct also directly affects the persuasiveness of certain types of ad appeals in each culture. For example, Han & Shavitt (1994) showed that in the US, an individualistic country, advertisements with individual benefits, preferences and personal success were more persuasive, whereas with ads in Korea, a collectivistic country, emphasizing in-group benefit, harmony and integrity was proven to be more effective. A more specific study in food advertising by Cheong et al. (2009) also supported this direction: appeals such as community, popular, health and status were found to appear more frequently in China, and independence appeal was reflected more commonly in the US. From these examples, advertising appeals in global markets should be reflective of the dominant cultural values in each country.

On the agent side, the choice of an accurate persuasion strategy is also crucial in a persuasion episode to elicit (positive) responses from the consumers. However, to create an ad on the basis of only individualistic/ collectivistic appeal is a vague and difficult task, which is where the persuasion tactics come into relevant. The most well-known principles that captured the process of “being tricked into saying yes” are the six basic appeals by Cialdini (2001, p.1). The six strategies are reciprocation (people feel obliged to return a favour/ payback naturally), consistency (people strive to be consistent), consensus (observe the behaviour of others to help our decision making), liking (people can be easily influenced or persuaded by someone they like), authority (people defer to experts) and scarcity (people place more value on things that are in short supply) (Kaptein et al., 2009).

The effects of Cialdini's principles have been widely studied in the field of persuasion. A study on individual's susceptibility to persuasion by Kaptein et al. (2009) showed that respondent's compliance to a request was related to their susceptibility to cues, hence adapting the persuasive strategies to users would increase compliance to their behavioural request. Oyibo et al. (2017) also demonstrated that the effectiveness of persuasion strategies was influenced by personality traits when studying the influence of the Big Five personality traits on Cialdini's six persuasive principles. These principles were also examined in a cross-cultural context, for example, in Oyibo et al. (2018). The susceptibility to persuasion strategy was measured in Canada and Nigeria, showing that Nigerians are more susceptible to authority and scarcity, while Canadians are more susceptible to reciprocity, liking and consensus.

However, in this respect, little has been found when looking specifically at the relationship between individualism/ collectivism and susceptibility to persuasion strategies. While Oyibo et al. (2018) did not give any conclusion with regards to individualism/ collectivism between Canada and Nigeria but based on the Hofstede cultural score, Canada was rated an individualistic country (score 80 in individualism) and Nigeria is collectivistic (score 30 in individualism). Therefore, it could be indicated that collectivist found authority and scarcity more susceptible, while individualist is more susceptible to reciprocity, liking and consensus. Another study on susceptibility by Orji (2016) revealed a slightly different result, claiming that authority, reciprocity are being significantly more persuasive with collectivist, and scarcity is the only strategy that the individualist perceived as more persuasive.

In addition, as previously demonstrated, consumers' responses to different persuasion strategies were also affected by their PK. Aguirre-Rodriguez (2013) had looked at the effect of consumers' PK on the persuasiveness of scarcity appeals, revealing that it was less likely to be activated by supply-related scarcity appeal ad messages, and persuasiveness was only affected by the specificity in ad content, hence, did not elicit awareness of a persuasion tactic. Campbell (1995), in contrast, showed that negative perception of persuasive appeals triggered consumers' inferences of manipulative intent and lower persuasion. Based on these findings, it could be seen that PK in terms of appropriateness of strategies in a cross-cultural perspective has not been studied widely.

Therefore, this study will investigate the difference between the individualist/collectivist cultural dimension in consumers' PK in terms of perceived appropriateness of the persuasion strategy used using the IMI scale. In response to a specific persuasion tactic, the IMI had been proven to allow researchers to investigate the extent to which consumers activate their subjective PK. The IMI then also become a mediator to assess its influence on participants' purchase intention and attitude towards the ad. More specifically, the study is going to be carried out with Vietnam and the Netherlands as representatives of the individualist/collectivist cultural dimension, with Vietnam being collectivist (score 20) and the Netherlands being individualist (score 80) (Hofstede, 2021). In addition, the study would not examine all six appeals presented by Cialdini (2001). Based on Orji's study (2016), reciprocity appeal was found to be significantly more persuasive with collectivist, and scarcity is the only strategy that the individualist perceived as more persuasive. Therefore, the effect of the cultural dimension will be investigated with regards to only the scarcity and reciprocity appeals. Lastly, as this is a consumer-based study, persuasiveness will be measured by the consumer's attitude towards the ad, and purchase intention. Based on the previous evidence, the hypotheses for this study are:

H1: Vietnamese participants (collectivistic culture) and Dutch participants (individualistic culture) differ in the level of inferences of persuasive intent in response to the advertisement using scarcity and reciprocity appeal.

H2: Both Vietnamese participants (collectivistic culture) and Dutch participants (individualistic culture) will not differ in the level of inferences of persuasive intent in response to a controlled advertisement.

H3: Consumers' persuasion knowledge has an influence on the persuasiveness of the tactic, subsequently, affect ad attitude and purchase intention.

## Method

### Design

In order to investigate the difference between the individualist/collectivist cultural dimension in consumers' PK in terms of perceived appropriateness (IMI) of the persuasion tactics used, as well as its influence on persuasiveness, an experimental survey will be conducted: participants from Vietnam and the Netherlands will evaluate ads with different persuasion tactics. The study will have a between-subject design with cultural dimensions (individualistic/ collectivistic) and persuasion tactics (reciprocity, scarcity and control) as independent variables; the dependent variable includes consumers' inferences of manipulative intent to measure consumers' perceived appropriateness with regards to persuasion tactics. To further investigate the role of PK as a moderator, the design remains the same with cultural dimensions (individualistic/ collectivistic) and the measured inferences of manipulative intent (high/ low) as independent variables. The dependent variables include the consumer's attitude towards the ad and purchase intention.

### Materials

The materials in this experiment were product-based advertisements, and the product was selected with consideration towards its individual/ group orientation (Zhang & Neelankavil, 1997). As products differ in their meanings and goals to different people, all product types and consumption goals could not be fitted under just one appeal. Therefore, incorrect product types could potentially affect the validity of the study. As the study investigates the effect of collectivism/ individualism, the chosen product must be neither group-oriented nor individual-oriented or is able to offer benefits for both individual and the group. Based on this requirement, orange juice was chosen, considering it is consumed widely in both countries, as well as beneficial to both groups and individuals.

The advertising stimuli were produced based on the selected criteria from Geuens & De Pelsmacker's study (2017). The material was adapted into 3 versions (scarcity, reciprocity, control) following the standard procedure: the visual element remained the same throughout, and

the text elements were manipulated to reflect different persuasive tactics (one illustrates the use of reciprocity appeal, one illustrates the use of scarcity appeal and another does not carry persuasive intent, which serves as neutral control). In addition, Canva – a designing software was used to produce the stimuli, keeping them professional yet simple to avoid any distraction and confusion. A hypothetical brand name was included to create realistic stimuli and to avoid the potential effects of previous exposure or experience with existing brands.

The materials were produced in English and translated into Vietnamese and Dutch (the translation process is stated in the procedure).

### *Pre-test*

In total, 10 different versions of persuasive tactics with different textual content were produced (5 stimuli with scarcity appeal and 5 stimuli with reciprocity appeal), as well as an addition of a controlled ad with no tactics. Before the pre-test, two experts checked the manipulations to ensure that the tactics were clearly represented, unambiguous and consistent. The material pre-test was adapted from the procedure of Gaube et al. (2020). A short survey was distributed within 3 days, with participants being international university students recruited from social media. The survey began with an introduction of the purpose of the study and explained Cialdini's persuasion tactics of reciprocity and scarcity (2001). Following, participants were presented with 5 ads/ appeal at a time, and they rated the consistency of each manipulation with regards to the definition provided, using 7-point Likert scales "To what extent is the ad above consistent with the provided definition of scarcity/ reciprocity?" (1 = completely inconsistent and 7 = completely consistent) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .57$ ).

In total, there were 54 respondents, 32 of which being invalid: as the experiment would be based on Dutch and Vietnamese, for selection to be unbiased, Dutch/ Vietnamese nationalities were removed. In 22 valid response (age:  $M = 24.43$ ,  $SD = 8.58$ ; 54.5% female), the ad which scored highest in reciprocity ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 3.91$ ) and scarcity ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) were chosen (Appendix A).

### Subjects

A total of 260 participants took part in the questionnaire, however, further statistical analysis had shown that the uneven number of exposures to different appeals between Dutch and

Vietnamese sample resulted in not normally distributed data. Therefore, using the random select case function, a further 15 participants were randomly deleted from the Vietnamese sample. After excluding invalid responses (incomplete, under 18), the final dataset, consists of 230 valid response (age:  $M = 26.73$ ,  $SD = 9.93$ ; 67% female), in which there were 115 Dutch (age:  $M = 25.96$ ,  $SD = 11.21$ ; 59% female), and 115 Vietnamese (age:  $M = 27.50$ ,  $SD = 8.43$ ; 82.6% female).

A correlation test between age and IMI found no significance ( $r(230) = -.03$ ,  $p = .632$ ). A one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no significant found between participants' educational level and the IMI of both Vietnamese ( $F(4, 110) = 1.49$ ,  $p = .209$ ) and Dutch participants ( $F(4, 110) = .72$ ,  $p = .582$ ). Another one-way ANOVA, in addition, revealed no significant between educational level, ad attitude ( $F(4, 110) = 1.78$ ,  $p = .137$ ) and purchase intention ( $F(4, 110) = .47$ ,  $p = .759$ ) of Dutch. The same effect were found for Vietnamese participants ( $F(4, 110) = 1.53$ ,  $p = .199$ ) ( $F(4, 110) = .24$ ,  $p = .917$ ).

## Instrument

To investigate consumers' responses to the persuasion strategy used, the Inference of Manipulative Intent (IMI) scale by Campbell (1995) was used. As the effect of consumers' PK would be measured in a manipulated manner, as well as playing as a mediator to investigate consumers' ad attitude and purchase intention, the experiment would be situational. Therefore, the target's behaviour towards a given persuasion strategy is likely to differ compared with that in a dispositional context, hence, the IMI would be suitable to assess consumers' PK (Ham et al., 2015)

According to Campbell (1995, p.253), the IMI scale includes six attributional questions: 'The way this ad tries to persuade people seems acceptable to me;' 'The advertiser tried to manipulate the audience in ways that I don't like;' 'I was annoyed by this ad because the advertiser seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control the consumer audience;' 'I don't mind this ad; the advertiser tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative' (reverse coding); 'This ad was fair in what was said and shown' (reverse coding); 'I think that this advertisement is unfair/fair'. All six questions were presented with Likert-scale with 1 = completely agree (unfair), 7 = completely disagree (fair). The reliability rate found was Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.90$ . Notably, even though the IMI scale does not have a specific question about

recognition of persuasive intent, the questions on the scale hinted that what participants saw was a persuasion attempt, which was valid in this study, as the presented materials would be ads.

Following, the purchase intention was assessed with the question, “How likely they would be to choose the brand?” using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = extreme unlikely, 7 = extremely likely). Attitude towards the ad was measured with three 7-point semantic differential scales anchored by pleasant and unpleasant, bad and good, and awful and nice (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ). The measurement for both ad attitude and purchase intention was adapted from Campbell's study (1995, p.237).

In addition, background variables would also be taken into consideration. Participants' age, gender, nationality and education level were recorded as these were considered as factors that could potentially impact the outcome. Finally, a manipulation check for tactic was included to ensure the participants understand the tactic correctly, hence, deciding the validity of the answer. The manipulation check asked participants to rate the consistency of scarcity/ reciprocity in the ad shown against the provided definition of the tactics with 2 questions “To what extent do you see scarcity/ reciprocity appeal in the ad” (1 = totally consistent, 7 = totally inconsistent).

## Procedure

The questionnaire was administered using the online survey tool Qualtrics. The questionnaires were distributed via social media and email, which were the most compatible platforms to reach international subjects. The data collection process lasted around 3 weeks, broken into 2 periods. In the first 2 weeks, both the Vietnamese and Dutch version of the surveys were distributed on social media. At the end of week 2, each survey had had more than 100 response. However, mistakes were found in the Dutch survey as the data was cleaned up for statistical analysis. One question was affected due to the software's bug and another had a wrong scale, which forced the Dutch data to be collected again. In the second stage, the Dutch questionnaire was distributed in different platforms than in the first stage to avoid having the same group participating in the survey. During this week, the Vietnamese survey remained open but received only a few more response.

## *Translation*

The translation was carried out simultaneously for both the ads and the questionnaire. A version of the questionnaire was made in English and then translated into Vietnamese and Dutch using a common method in cross-cultural research: decentering & back-translation (Brislin, 1976). The materials (questionnaire and stimuli) was prepared in English and a bilingual translated them into the target languages (Dutch and Vietnamese). Then, another bilingual blindly translated the material back into the original language (English). There were 2 native translators for each language (2 native Dutch and 2 native Vietnamese) and each first translated the questionnaire by themselves. Following, native Dutch/ Vietnamese translator discussed their translations by each item until a final version was agreed upon. This decentering process took place to avoid any mistakes, as well as mistranslations. All four recruited translators were Radboud University's IBC senior students, who are native Dutch/ Vietnamese, have had at least the English proficiency level at B2 or equivalent and had the full cognitive ability, as well as understanding of the topic to be able to accurately and smoothly convey the meaning.

### Statistical Treatments

Firstly, all scales in the questionnaire were recoded into 1 being negative and 7 being positive so that the scale would be uniform for statistical analysis. Two one-way ANOVAs were used to assess participants' recognition of the tactics used. A two-way univariate analysis of variance was carried out to observe any possible effect of the persuasion tactics used on consumers' PK in terms of perceived appropriateness. The influence of IMI on persuasiveness was investigated using another one-way ANOVA. In addition, frequencies, correlations and additional one-way ANOVAs were also performed to investigate any patterns in the background variables.

## Result

The purpose of this study is to investigate consumers' inferences of manipulative intent of advertising appeals (reciprocity/ scarcity) between the individualist/collectivist cultural dimension, as well as its influence on purchase intention and consumers' attitude towards the ad.

### Manipulation check

Two one-way ANOVAs were carried out with separate manipulations to examine the participants' recognition of the tactics used. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean scores and standard deviations of the manipulation check of reciprocity and scarcity appeals in function of appeal types (1 = completely inconsistent; 7 = completely consistent)

Manipulation check	Reciprocity			Scarcity			Neutral		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Scarcity	3.79	2.13	76	4.35	2.03	78	3.46	1.85	76
Reciprocity	4.26	1.82	76	3.50	1.79	78	3.43	1.72	76

A one-way ANOVA showed significant effect between scarcity manipulation and the ad appeals ( $F(2, 227) = 3.84, p = .023$ ). Based on the definition provided, participants perceived the scarcity ad to have the highest scarcity appeal ( $M = 4.35, SD = 2.03$ ). The neutral ad was rated to have the lowest level of scarcity appeal ( $p = .020$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 3.46, SD = 1.85$ ), followed by the reciprocity ad ( $M = 3.79, SD = 2.13$ ).

Another on-way ANOVA also showed significant effect between reciprocity manipulation and the ad appeals ( $F(2, 227) = 5.11, p = .007$ ). The reciprocity ad were perceived to be the most reciprocal-like ( $M = 4.26, SD = 1.82$ ) compared with the scarcity ad ( $p = .025$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 3.50, SD = 1.79$ ) and the neutral ad ( $p = .013$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 3.42, SD = 1.72$ ).

### Inferences of manipulative intent (IMI)

A two-way univariate analysis of variance was carried out with ad appeals and nationality as between-subject factors on the IMI score. Significant main effects were found for both nationality ( $F(1, 224) = 45.88, p < .001$ ) and ad appeals ( $F(2, 224) = 9.86, p < .001$ ). The interaction between nationality and appeals, however, was found to be insignificant ( $F(2, 224) = 1.76, p = .175$ ).

Table 2 Mean scores and standard deviations of IMI mean score of Dutch and Vietnamese participants in function of appeal types (1 = completely disagree; 7 = completely agree)

	Reciprocity			Scarcity			Neutral		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
IMI mean score									
Dutch	5.31	.94	38	5.25	.91	39	5.65	.84	38
Vietnamese	4.17	1.14	38	4.18	1.35	39	5.09	.91	38

Table 2 shows the result of separate one-way ANOVAs carried out by nationalities. The analysis showed a significant effect of ad appeals on the IMI score of Vietnamese participants ( $F(2, 112) = 8.01, p = .001$ ). The IMI score were found to be slightly higher for neutral ad ( $M = 5.09, SD = .91$ ) compared with reciprocity ( $p = .002$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 4.17, SD = 1.14$ ) and scarcity ad ( $p = .002$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 4.18, SD = 1.35$ ). On the other hand, the effect of ad appeals were insignificant for Dutch participants ( $F(2, 112) = 2.22, p = .113$ ).

**Ad attitude and purchase intention**

First, a median split was carried out to categorize the IMI score into 2 levels. Separate one-way ANOVAs were carried out with purchase intention and ad attitudes as dependent variables. The result is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Mean scores and standard deviations of IMI mean score in function of ad attitude and purchase intention (1 = extremely negative/ unlikely; 7 = extremely positive/ likely)

	Low IMI			High IMI		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
Ad attitude	4.13	1.13	117	5.27	1.18	113

Purchase intention	3.15	1.31	117	4.04	1.74	113
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The analysis showed a significant effect of the IMI score on participants' attitude toward the ad ( $F(1,228) = 55.70, p < .001$ ). Participants with higher IMI score ( $M = 5.27, SD = 1.18$ ) had more positive attitude towards the ad than those who scored lower ( $M = 4.13, SD = 1.13$ ). Similarly, significant effect was also recorded between the IMI score and purchase intention ( $F(1,228) = 18.96, p < .001$ ). Participants with higher IMI score ( $M = 4.04, SD = 1.74$ ) also had higher purchase intention than those who scored lower ( $M = 3.15, SD = 1.31$ ).

## Discussion & Conclusion

The study set out to investigate consumers' inferences of manipulative intent of advertising appeals (reciprocity/ scarcity) between the individualist/collectivist cultural dimension, as well as its influence on purchase intention and consumers' attitude towards the ad.

First, regarding recognition of the tactic used, scarcity was rated highest for participants exposed to the scarcity-appealed ad. The same effect was recorded for reciprocity. The result from the manipulation check had shown that participants were able to recognize the tactics used in the ad when provided with a definition, in other words, consumers' PK had been activated, which also confirmed the validity of the study (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). In addition, as the definition of the tactics were only provided at the end of the survey, the participants were not educated on the persuasive impact of the ad, hence, their response remained unbiased (Williams et al., 2004).

While the participants were able to identify the tactic used, the manipulation check also revealed that the degree of recognition between the scarcity ad and the neutral ad (in the reciprocity manipulation) was roughly equal. The same effect was found between the reciprocity ad and the neutral ad (in the scarcity manipulation), which indicated that participants perceived little significant difference between the two. This could be due to the definition of the tactics (as explained by Orji, 2016) included in the survey being not clear enough for the participants.

Another possible reason for this lack of differentiation could be that the adaptation of the actual tactics on the ads was not perceived as matching their definitions.

H1 predicted that Vietnamese & Dutch participants would differ in the level of inferences of manipulative intent in response to the advertisement using scarcity and reciprocity appeal. The result aligned with this prediction revealed that overall, Dutch participants had a higher IMI score than Vietnamese with both ads using scarcity and reciprocity tactic. As the scales were reversed into 1 being negative and 7 being positive, this means that the Vietnamese, in general, displayed a higher degree of inferences of manipulative intent in seeing scarcity and reciprocity tactics than Dutch participants. According to Campbell & Kirmani (2008), the result indicated that Vietnamese participants were more negative towards the persuasion attempt and the persuasion tactic used.

The outcome was unexpected as Orji (2016) indicated that collectivists could be persuaded easier using reciprocity, while Vietnamese appeared to be more negative towards both tactics. On the other hand, the ratings for both appeals were found to be roughly equal for both Dutch and Vietnamese. The lack of significant differentiation between scarcity and reciprocity ratings demonstrated that neither collectivists nor individualists were more susceptible to any of the two tactics. These findings were contrary to Orji's study (2016), with reciprocity being more persuasive with collectivists and scarcity is the only strategy that the individualists perceived as more persuasive, as well as the implications from Oyibo et al. (2018), as discussed in the literature review. The difference in result might be attributed to the lack of variety in the subjects. In Orji's study (2016), while the difference in the number of participants was not large, the participants were from collectivist/ individualist countries worldwide. Even when the cultural nature remains the same, the variation in the degree of collectivistic/ individualistic might be an agent. The participants of Oyibo et al.'s study (2018), on the other hand, were not representative as approximately 69% were from an individualist country.

In H2, both Vietnamese and Dutch participants were predicted to not differ in the level of IMI in response to a controlled advertisement. The hypothesis was partially supported, as the IMI score for the neutral ad of Dutch and Vietnamese participants only slightly differed. The IMI scores recorded were the highest for both Dutch and Vietnamese compared with when scarcity/ reciprocity was applied, showing that the population displayed the least inferences of

manipulative intent towards the neutral ad (which did not employ any tactics). While none of the previously discussed studies included a control without any tactics in their experiments (see Orji, 2016; Oyibo et al., 2017, 2018 & Kaptein et al., 2009), the findings supported the fact that perceived appropriateness was more likely to be affected in the presence of a persuasion strategy (Campbell & Kirmani, 1995, 2008).

While Orji's study (2016) implied that individualists perceived scarcity as more persuasive due to their tendency to value differentiation and uniqueness, surprisingly, the effect of ad appeals on the IMI score of Dutch participants was found to be insignificant as the score of reciprocity, scarcity and neutral ad were approximately equal (5.31, 5.25, and 5.65). This indicated that Dutch participants found little differentiation among the 3 ads. The higher IMI score in the 3 categories also supported the fact that the individualistic representative perceived the tactics more positive, with lower inferences of manipulative intent. Aguirre-Rodriguez (2013) gave a possible explanation for this contrast, even without cultural specifications, indicating that supply-related scarcity ad was less likely to activate PK, which was indeed adopted in this study.

On the other hand, while gender was not the subject of discussion regarding the IMI in this study, the variable remained as a potential factor. There was a difference in gender distribution between Dutch and Vietnamese: 82.6% of Vietnamese participants were female compared with 59% of Dutch. According to Campbell & Kirmani (1995), inferences of manipulative intent was not affected by gender. However, Friestad and Wright (1994, p.23) implied that "women were more influenceable", yet, the perspective dated from the 1970s and was found more or less contingent.

Lastly, H3 predicted consumers' PK would have an influence on the persuasiveness of the tactic, subsequently, affect ad attitude and purchase intention. The prediction was confirmed as significant effects were found between the IMI score, ad attitude and purchase intention. Participants with a high IMI score, i.e. low degree of inferences of manipulative intent were shown to have a more positive attitude towards the ad as well as higher purchase intention, which also aligned with previous findings by Campbell (1995). While brand attitude was not included in the experiment, advertising persuasion as measured by ad attitudes, and purchase intentions were lowered by inferences of manipulative intent (Campbell, 1995).

From the outcome, it could be implied that Dutch participants (with higher IMI score) displayed a more positive attitude towards the ad as well as had higher purchase intention while the persuasiveness was found to be lower and more negative for those with lower IMI score, i.e. Vietnamese. The findings provided further support for Shavitt et al.'s study (1997), which demonstrated that individualists focused more on product-related claims (product and company information) while the collectivists concerned more with evaluating the ad "appropriateness" (psychological insights, brand familiarity, etc.). The study also suggested the feel-do-learn sequence for advertising processing, implying for collectivists, the first goal should be to elicit positive feelings and familiarity, then sell the product, which was also reflected in the outcome (Shavitt et al., 1997).

In addition, the statistical treatments also revealed that no correlation was found between age and the IMI score. Moreover, no significance was found between the educational level and the IMI score, ad attitude and purchase intention. These findings were different from the previous study by Campbell & Kirmani (2004) and Friestad and Wright (1994), but they were expected due to imposing an age restriction on the questionnaire. As participants were at least 18, they would have had substantial exposure to various persuasion episodes, and the mental processing and persuasion expertise to interpret the persuasion tactics/ attempts.

## Limitations

The study has several limitations that need to be addressed. First, due to the scale of the study, only Dutch and Vietnamese were included as representations of individualist/ collectivist culture, therefore, the result might need further support if generalized for every individualist/ collectivist countries. Secondly, as the surveys were distributed, even when the materials were intended to be kept clean and clear, prevalent feedback was the illustration of tactics and visual stimuli were a bit simple compared with one in reality. In addition, as the questionnaire and the as were initially created in English, then translated into Dutch and Vietnamese, some of the meaning was bound to be lost due to the difference in the lexical and semantic capacity of each country (Brislin, 1976). While the procedure was strictly followed, the translators were not professionals, hence, there was a possibility of subjective bias. Further study should employ professional designers and translators to ensure the materials were better prepared. In addition,

due to procedural mistakes, the gap in distribution time led to certain differences between the 2 datasets. Meanwhile, this did not affect the result of the study due to statistical treatments, a better-thought out plan could yield better data. Finally, the manipulation check was a carry-on from the pre-test, hence, were fairly simple with only 2 contrasting scales. As a result, the reliability rate could not be computed, hence, future research can consider improving on this scale.

This study has taken an initiative to expand on previous research on consumers' PK, appropriateness and persuasiveness of strategy in a cross-cultural context. Specifically, the study found that individualists and collectivists differed in the level of inferences of manipulative intent in response to the advertisement using scarcity and reciprocity appeal, and slightly differed regarding the neutral ad. In addition, consumers' PK was found to affect ad attitude and purchase intention i.e. persuasiveness. The result contributed to cross-cultural consumer research on the interaction of persuasion knowledge and susceptibility to persuasion strategies as well as its influence on persuasiveness. By using IMI as a mediator, this might be one of a few studies that had looked at all 3 regards, contributing valuable insights to the field of international advertising and cross-cultural persuasiveness. Future research should look into improving the limitations, while further expanded with different variables such as brand attitude, gender, or other cultural dimensions, which would provide more understanding in academics as well as cross-cultural marketing.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

Advertisements Result from the Pre-test



## Appendix B

Advertisements in the Survey

Dutch version:



Vietnamese version:



**Appendix C**  
The Questionnaire in English

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender

Male

Female

Others

3. What is your educational level?

Compulsory education

College

Bachelor degree

Master degree

Phd

Others

**IMI scale**

4. The way this ad tries to persuade people seems acceptable to me.

1 – Completely agree

2 – Agree

3 – Somewhat agree

4 – Neither agree or disagree

5 – Somewhat disagree

6 – Disagree

7 – Completely disagree

5. The advertiser tried to manipulate the audience in ways that I don't like.

- 1 – Completely agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Somewhat agree
- 4 – Neither agree or disagree
- 5 – Somewhat disagree
- 6 – Disagree
- 7 – Completely disagree

6. I was annoyed by this ad because the advertiser seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control the consumer audience.

- 1 – Completely agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Somewhat agree
- 4 – Neither agree or disagree
- 5 – Somewhat disagree
- 6 – Disagree
- 7 – Completely disagree

7. I didn't mind this ad; the advertiser tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative.

- 1 – Completely agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Somewhat agree
- 4 – Neither agree or disagree
- 5 – Somewhat disagree
- 6 – Disagree
- 7 – Completely disagree

5. This ad was fair in what was said and shown.

- 1 – Completely agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Somewhat agree
- 4 – Neither agree or disagree
- 5 – Somewhat disagree
- 6 – Disagree
- 7 – Completely disagree

8. I think that this advertisement is

- 1 – Extremely unfair
- 2 – Unfair
- 3 – Somewhat unfair
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat fair
- 6 – Fair
- 7 – Extremely Fair

#### **AAd scale**

9. The participants will respond to three 7-point semantic differential scales anchored by pleasant and unpleasant, bad and good and awful and nice.

Unpleasant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Pleasant
Bad	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Good
Awful	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Nice

#### **PI scale**

10. How likely would you be to choose the brand? Rated from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely)

Extremely unlikely    1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Extremely Likely

**Manipulation check**

11. To what extent do you see scarcity appeal in the ad?

- 1 – Totally consistent
- 2 – Consistent
- 3 – Somewhat consistent
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat inconsistent
- 6 – Inconsistent
- 7 – Totally inconsistent

12. To what extent do you see reciprocity appeal in the ad?

- 1 – Totally consistent
- 2 – Consistent
- 3 – Somewhat consistent
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat inconsistent
- 6 – Inconsistent
- 7 – Totally inconsistent

## Appendix D

### Checklist Ethics Review

#### 1. Is a health care institution involved in the research?

*Explanation: A health care institution is involved if one of the following (A/B/C) is the case*

- A. One or more employees of a health care institution is/are involved in the research as principle or in the carrying out or execution of the research.
- B. The research takes place within the walls of the health care institution and should, following the nature of the research, generally not be carried out outside the institution.
- C. Patients / clients of the health care institution participate in the research (in the form of treatment).

No → continue with questionnaire

Yes → Did a Dutch Medical Institutional Review Board (MIRB) decide that the Wet Medisch Onderzoek (Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act) is not applicable?

Yes → continue with questionnaire

No → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch [CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen](#) → end of checklist

#### 2. Do grant providers wish the protocol to be assessed by a recognised MIRB?

No → continue with questionnaire

Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch [CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen](#) → end of checklist

#### 1. Does the research include [medical-scientific research](#) that might carry risks for the participant?

No → continue with questionnaire

Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch [CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen](#) → end of checklist

### Standard research method

4. Does this research fall under one of the stated [standard research methods](#) of the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies?

- Yes → 1. Standard evaluation and attitude research → continue with questionnaire
- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist

### Participants

5. Is the participant population a healthy one?

- Yes → continue with questionnaire
- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

6. Will the research be conducted amongst minors (<16 years of age) or amongst (legally) incapable persons?

- Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- No → continue with questionnaire

### Method

7. Is a method used that makes it possible to produce a coincidental finding that the participant should be informed of?

- Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- No → continue with questionnaire

8. Will participants undergo treatment or are they asked to perform certain behaviours that can lead to discomfort?

- Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- No → continue with questionnaire

9. Are the estimated risks connected to the research minimal?

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

10. Are the participants offered a different compensation than the usual one?

- Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- No → continue with questionnaire

11. Should [deception](#) take place, does the procedure meet the standard requirements?

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

12. Are the standard regulations regarding [anonymity and privacy](#) met?

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

### **Conducting the research**

13. Will the research be carried out at an external location (such as a school, hospital)?

- No → continue with questionnaire
- Yes → Do you have/will you receive written permission from this institution?

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

14. Is there a contact person to whom participants can turn to with questions regarding the research and are they informed of this?

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

15. Is it clear for participants where they can file complaints with regard to participating in the research and how these complaints will be dealt with?

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

16. Are the participants free to participate in the research, and to stop at any given point, whenever and for whatever reason they should wish to do so?

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

17. Before participating, are participants informed by means of an information document about the aim, nature and risks and objections of the study? (zie [explanation on informed consent](#) and [sample documents](#)).

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)
- Yes → continue with questionnaire

18. Do participants and/or their representatives sign a consent form? (zie [explanation on informed consent](#) and [sample documents](#)).

- No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → [go to assessment procedure](#)

Yes → checklist finished

## Appendix E

### Statement of own work

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CIW English

#### Statement of Own Work

Student name:

Hong Anh Tran

Student number:

S1021562

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

#### DECLARATION:

- a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (<https://www.ru.nl/facultyofarts/stip/rules-guidelines/rules/fraud-plagiarism/>) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.
- b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words
- c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature:

 Hong Anh Tran

Place and date:

Hanoi, 07 June 2021