

DIFFUSION OF A NEW PRODUCT IN INDIVIDUALISTIC VERSUS COLLECTIVIST CULTURAL CONTEXTS : IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

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Abstract

This article explores the influences of social milieu on a consumer's adoption and retention of a new product in two different cultural contexts (individualism and collectivism). The mechanisms of social influences discussed include compliance, identification, and internalization. The arguments in this article can be used to explain why people in collectivist societies, in general, are slow in adopting new product, but loyal to their current product when adopted.

Keyword : New Product Diffusion, Cultural Influences, Social Influences, Individualism, Collectivism

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INTRODUCTION

Marketers are often advised to possess a long-term perspective when entering Asian and Japanese markets (collectivist cultures) (Hall 1976 ; Lazer 1985 ; Yau 1988). Consumers in a collectivist culture are slower in adopting a new product than those in an individualistic culture (Johansson 1986 ; Yau 1988). Marketers need to establish strong corporate and brand images in a collectivist culture before they can successfully persuade consumers to adopt their products. Once consumers in those cultures adopt the new products, these consumers are said to be among the most loyal in the world (Chiou 1993 ; Johansson 1986 ; Yau 1988). In other words, the diffusion process in a collectivist society is more likely to be a *sigmoid* shape than it in an individualistic society (Gatignon and Robertson 1985). The slow progress of a new product at the early stage in a collectivist culture is a common phenomenon.

Based on the Bass model (1969), the process of a new product diffusion is caused by two major variables--the effectiveness of the internal communication channel and the effectiveness of the external communication channel. The adoption of a new product is made by both innovators and imitators. Innovators are more likely to be influenced by external channels (e.g., mass media), while imitators are more likely to be affected by internal channels (e.g., word of mouth effect and social influences). The relative strength of both communication channels can determine the diffusion pattern of a new product. When the effectiveness of the internal channel is very strong, the diffusion process tend to follow *sigmoid* pattern (Gatignon and Robertson 1985). On the other hand, when the influences of the external channel dominate the influence of the internal channel, an *exponential* diffusion pattern is expected (Fourt and Woodlock 1960) (Figure 1). In addition, the repeat purchase rate of a new product is determined by the loyalty of current consumers. When consumers are loyal to a product, they will tend to purchase the product repeatedly.

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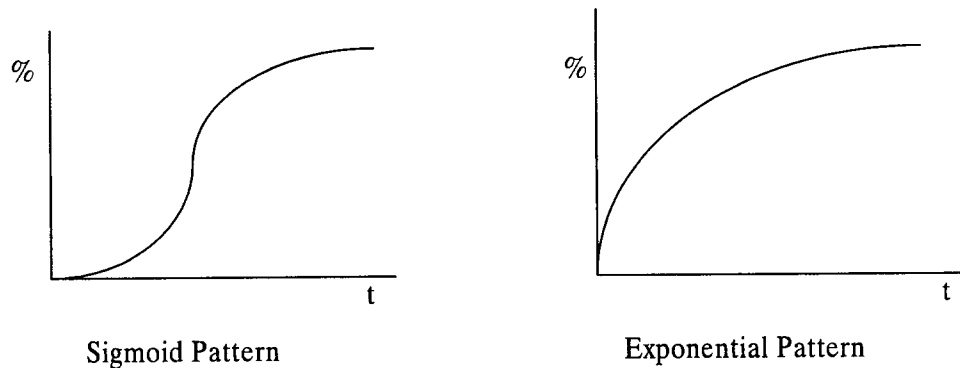


Figure 1 Sigmoid and Exponential Diffusion Pattern

Therefore, to explain the differences of diffusion process of a new product in different cultures, one needs to explore at least three factors within each culture ; i.e., external channel, internal channel, and consumer loyalty. Deeper explorations about the reasons behind diffusion process not only can enrich our understanding about consumer behaviors across cultures, but also can assist global marketers in developing effective strategies for their global markets.

The main objectives of this article are to examine how the cultural context can influence an individual's new product adoption and repeat purchase decisions. As an extension to Gatignon and Robertson's (1985) work, this article intends to incorporate the accumulated knowledge of social influence studies into the diffusion and repeat purchase process, and to develop a thorough framework regarding the mechanism of social influences within two different kinds of cultural contexts--individualism and collectivism.

Why Individualistic Vs. Collectivist Culture

The individualistic vs. collectivist cultural dimension is chosen because it is usually used to distinguish between the Western and Eastern societies by cross-cultural researchers (Hofstede 1983 ; Hsu 1981 ; Hui 1988 ; Hui and Triandis 1986). Western societies can be portrayed as individualistic societies, while most of the Eastern and developing countries can be described as collectivist societies (Triandis 1994). In addition, this dimension is more similar to other social

or culture characters that have been proposed by other scholars and applied most often in marketing literature. For example, this dimension is similar to Riesman's (1950) inner/other directed social character. In Riesman's classification, inner-directed social character is defined as that the behavior of a person is mostly guided by the early instilled internalized values. On the other hand, an other directed person will tend to be more sensitive to the expectation and preferences of others.

Another example is Hall's (1976) high/low cultural context classification. Within a high context society, the social and culture system dictates the behavior and value system of an individual. An individual needs to adapt to the consensus and authority of his/her reference group to behave adequately. Likewise, in a low context society an individual has more freedom in making his/her decisions. The social and value system has less influences on his/her behaviors..

In the following, this paper will first review related literature. The literature review section is followed by discussion regarding the impacts of social influencing mechanisms on a new product's diffusion and retention rate within the two different cultural contexts. The paper concludes with discussion of marketing implications and limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this article, the definition of a new product is based on the consumer's perception. The product can be continuous, dynamically continuous, discontinuous innovation (Robertson 1967), or even a new brand name. It is not limited to a durable or nondurable, service or physical products. In the following, the definition of individualistic and collectivist culture will be discussed first. The section is followed by discussion regarding the media of culture influences : i.e., reference/social influences. Finally, the detailed mechanisms of social influences are elaborated. The general framework is presented in Figure 2. The impacts of cultural contexts on

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the effects of internal vs. external channels (which determine the diffusion pattern) are mediated by social influencing mechanisms.

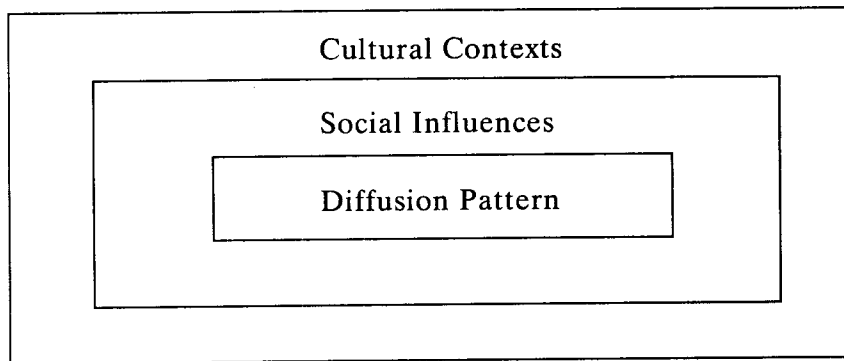


Figure 2 The Framework

Individualistic vs. Collectivist Culture Contexts

Culture is, in essence, a collective mental programming as defined by Hofstede (1983). The mental programming is shared by the members within a nation, region, or group, but not members of other nations, regions, or groups. The dimension of individualistic and collectivist culture context is traditionally considered as continuum (Hofstede 1983 ; Hui 1988 ; Hui and Triandis 1986). A collectivist society is said to have a close-knit social structure, where people neatly distinguish between members of the in-group and members of the out-group. Everybody in the group is expected to look after the group's interests and to hold the group's beliefs and opinions. Several Asian and Eastern countries represent this kind of culture. For example, Yoshino (1971) states that "In traditional Japan one belonged to a number of different collectivities, such as one's family, neighborhood groups, occupational groups, the village" (p.69).

In an individualistic society, however, the social fabric is much looser. People are motivated by self-interests. Their behaviors are mostly motivated by guilt rather than by shame. Therefore,

they are supposed to care mostly for themselves. Individuals in this kind of cultural context are granted a larger degree of freedom in making their own decisions. American and several developed Western societies are normally categorized into this kind of cultural context (Hofstede 1979 ; Hsu 1981). In Hofstede's (1983) study, he found that the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and other Western countries rank high on the individualistic dimension, while Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and other developing Asian countries rank low in the dimension.

The Media of Culture Influences : the Reference /Social Group

The influences of culture on a person's behaviors are multi-faceted. The influencing mechanisms may include language, material and symbolic productions, and social institutions (Usunier 1993). For the purpose of this paper, the argument will center on the social institution, especially the influences from reference or social groups. It is posited that people within the two cultural contexts (collectivism and individualism) possess different sensitivities toward the influences from their reference/social groups.

A reference/social group is defined as a person or a group in the social environment that is salient or relevant to a person, and has a significant positive/negative influence on the individual's evaluation and behavior. The reference/social group can be a group that the focal person formally or informally belongs to (Witt 1969), or a group that the focal person aspires to belong to (Cocanougher and Bruce 1971).

The Theories of Social Influence

Earlier social influence research can date back to Sherif's (1935) and Asch's (1951) studies. At the beginning, most of the interest in this research stream focused on situations in which an individual's private position is in conflict with the position of another individual or group (Allen 1975). The area is known collectively as the study of conformity in the early era (Nail 1986). However, latter extension by other researchers broadened this research stream. The focus went beyond the area of conformity study, other social influence mechanisms were also explored.

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Among them, Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) work is a classical. They believed that earlier investigators of social influences (e.g., Asch 1951 ; Sherif 1935) did not carefully classify the impacts of different kinds of social influence in their experiments. They claimed that an individual agrees with the majority's answer may be due to the purpose of information rather than group conformity. That is, the individual may use majority's answer as an important information input for his/her judgment. Therefore, the judgment is not necessarily from the pressure of social conformity. Deutsch and Gerard (1955), then, divided social influences into two different categories-- normative social influences and informational social influences. Normative social influence is that people conform with the positive expectations of another, while informational social influence is that people accept information obtained from another as the evidence of reality.

Another important contribution in the social influence literature was proposed by Festinger (1953). He further distinguished normative social influences into two different subclassifications. According to Festinger(1953), normative social conformity (it was termed congruence in his paper) can be accompanied by private congruence or incongruence with the source's position. When the public conformity is consistent with the private position, it was called conversion. People will act according to the social influences even when no supervision is presented. When the public conformity is not congruent with the private standing, it was termed compliance. People will behave differently when no supervision is presented.

Kelman's (1961) classification presented a more comprehensive theoretical extension for this research stream. According to Kelman (1961), there are three major processes of social influence--compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance is said to occur when an individual accepts influence because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from another person or group. This is consistent with Festinger's (1953) definition of compliance. Identification is said to occur when an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfactory self-defining relationship to another person or a group. The influence

will exist even in the private situation. For example, people identify themselves to a superstar. This is similar to Festinger's (1953) definition of conversion. Finally, internalization is said to occur when an individual accepts influence because the induced behavior is perceived as being inherently instrumental to the attainment of his/her goals. That is, an opinion will be internalized if it is perceived as enhancing the individual's knowledge of his/her environment. This is similar to the definition of the informational social influences by Deutsch and Gerard (1955).

When an individual accepts an opinion through internalization, s/he believes in the opinion and incorporates it into his/her value system. S/he will behave according to the opinion both in public and private situations. When an individual adopts a opinion through identification, the opinion remains tied to the external source and is dependent on the existence of the social support. The opinion is not integrated into the individual's value system (Katz 1960 ; Kelman 1961). Finally, when an individual accepts an opinion just for compliance, s/he will behave according the opinion only when the social influence sources are presented.

Kelman (1961) also showed that different conditions can promote the effectiveness for each of the three processes. For compliance, the surveillance of the influencing agent is the most important factor. For identification, the salience of the individual's perceived relations to the influencing agent is most important. Finally, credibility of the influencing agent is the major factor in influencing the effectiveness of internalization. This article will apply Kelman's classifications in the following sections because it is the most comprehensive one.

PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

Based on the above discussion, this section incorporates the studies in social influence, new product diffusion, and cultural characteristics to explore how social influence has an impact on

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a consumer's new product diffusion and retention behaviors within two different cultural contexts. Individual proposition will be presented at the end of each discussion.

The Effectiveness of the Internal Influence on New Product Adoptions in the Two Cultural Contexts

Internal influences are the influences via interpersonal channels rather than mass media channels. Past research already showed that the internal influence coefficient in the Bass model is higher in countries characterized by a high context culture than countries characterized by a low context culture (Takada and Jain 1991). However, the detailed mechanisms of the internal influences are not clearly explored. As discussed, the major influencing mechanisms of the interpersonal channels are compliance, identification, and internalization. It is proposed that people in collectivist societies are more likely to be influenced by these three mechanisms than those in individualistic societies when making product adoption decisions.

Compliance

Unlike people in individualistic societies, people in collectivist societies normally belong to a few in-groups (Hui and Triandis 1986). The distinction between in-groups and out-group is very important for them. More importantly, these in-groups are, in most of the time, defined by their cultural system. For example, in Japan and other collectivist cultures, family, classmates, and neighbors constitute important in-groups (Triandis 1994). An individual's relationship with his/her in-groups is so important that it is too costly to disconnect. Therefore, when an individual is afraid of his/her group rejection, s/he will have higher motivation to comply with his/her group opinions (Newcomb 1963 ; Thibaut and Kelley 1959). For example, in earlier articles, Back (1951) and Festinger et al. (1952) both demonstrated that the higher the cohesiveness of the group, the stronger the group compliance pressures. In a cross-cultural study of the Fishbein's behavioral intentions model, Lee and Green (1990) found that social pressures play a major role in the formation of the Korean student sample's behavior intentions, while social pressures have a weak influence on the American counterparts.

Furthermore, the compliance pressure is especially strong when the consumption behavior is conspicuous to others. When the consumption behaviors are observable by others, s/he will concern more about the influences from his/her reference/social groups (Childers and Rao 1992). The product s/he uses must be acceptable to other members in the group.

On the other hand, people in an individualistic society have more social groups, they are less dependent on a specific group (Hui and Triandis 1986). It is not difficult for them to switch among groups (Triandis 1994). When a group's opinion is quite against their owns, there is less social pressures for them to comply with the certain group's opinion. Therefore, people in an individualistic culture have higher freedom to adopt a new product even when the product is against their group's social norms.

Proposition 1-1 : When making new product adoption decisions, consumers in a collectivist culture have higher motivation to comply with social norms than do consumers in an individualistic culture. The compliance pressure is especially strong when the new product is conspicuous to others

Identification

The adoption behavior of a new product in a collectivist culture may also be influenced by reference/social groups through social identification. People in collectivist societies have clear expected social roles. They believe that their societies are intricately woven together. A person's misbehavior is not only a dishonor to himself/herself, but also a disgrace to the groups (Hui and Triandis 1986). The expected social role is part of the cultural belief system that is gradually formed through cultural mechanisms. Yau's (1988) description about Chinese relational orientation can serve as a good example for this point.

"Chinese have to observe and act according to the norms prescribed for each instance of interpersonal relations. Thus, the king must be kingly, the minister ministerly, the husband husbandly, the wife wifely, brothers brotherly, and friends friendly" (p.49).

In order to perform the expected social role, an individual has to consider the implications of his/her actions for the whole collectivity. If a product concept is different from his/her pre-

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defined self-concept, s/he will have difficulties in adopting it. For example, it is hard for older people in Chinese societies to adopt a new product that is associated with modern or radical image, whether the consumption behavior is conspicuous or not. The cultural belief causes consumers to have less personal freedom in adopting new products.

Proposition 1-2-1 : Consumers in a collectivist culture are more likely to identify themselves to culturally defined social roles than those in an individualistic culture. Therefore, the identification effect of social influences is stronger for consumers in a collectivist culture than in an individualistic culture

Although people in an individualistic society may also be influenced by the identification mechanism, the group for identification is neither fixed nor stable. They do not limit themselves to groups pre-defined by their cultures. They may identify themselves to a certain group for certain moment or certain period of time, depending on whether the group is attractive to them or not (Kelman 1961). For example, they may identify themselves to a football player, national hero, or superstar. However, when they change identification groups, they may also change their consumption preferences. Therefore, the identification effect on a culturally defined role is weaker for consumers in an individualistic culture than in a collectivist culture.

Proposition 1-2-2 : The object group for identification is less stable for consumers in an individualistic culture than in a collectivist culture. Therefore, the identification effect of social influences is weaker for consumers in an individualistic culture than in a collectivist culture

Internalization

Reference/social groups in collectivist societies can also promote the internalization process by providing trustful information. Because of the strong relationship among people within a group, the individual may regard the information provided by other members as more trustworthy than the information from mass media (Weening and Midden 1991). Trustworthy information can better convince an individual to internalize the information. Therefore, people in collectivist societies are more likely to be influenced by internalization process through the influence from their reference/social groups. Past research found that people in collectivist

societies rely more on word of mouth from their in-groups when making purchasing decisions. For example, Yau (1986) claimed that Chinese consumers tend to rely on word of mouth communication for their consumption information. Johansson (1986) also stated that media in Japan is not as effective as in United States. Consumers rely more on the information provided by the long established retailers. In this case, the retailer is actually part of the individual's reference group (Rosenberg and Thompson 1986).

On the other hand, consumers in an individualistic culture are more likely to treat the information from external sources as credible as the information from their reference/social group. The information from their reference/social groups is treated as another input for their consumption information only (Triandis 1994).

Proposition 1-3 : Consumers in a collectivist culture trust more on the consumption information from their in-group members than from out-group members, while consumers in an individualistic culture discriminate less between the consumption information from in-groups and out-groups. Therefore, the internalization effect is stronger in a collectivist culture than in an individualistic culture

The Effectiveness of External Influences on Product Adoptions in Two Cultural Contexts

People in collectivist societies consider the interpersonal relationship implications in addition to the true character of a new product. For example, Johansson (1986) stated that it takes time to create acceptance of a new product in Japan even for a superior product. Japanese have to consider the social implications of adopting the product thoroughly before adopting the new product.

On the other hand, people in an individualistic society will care more about the truth of the product information (Hall 1976). They do not have to conform to the social belief and expectations as much as those in the collectivist societies. Their decisions will base more on rational evaluations than the other-directed considerations. They may accept all kinds of information as long as it is useful. Therefore, they are more inclined to accept new innovations through external influences. If producers can demonstrate that their products are superior to

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the existing products, consumers in an individualistic society will be more likely to adopt the new products/brands.

Proposition 2-1 : Consumers in an individualistic culture care more about the truth of the information than consumers in a collectivist culture, while consumers in a collectivist culture consider the information's social implication more than consumers in an individualistic culture. Therefore, the external influences is stronger in an individualistic culture than in a collectivist culture

As stated, people in individualistic societies may belong to several social in-groups. The relationships within the groups won't be as strong as those in a collectivist society. This kind of group can be called weak tie group (Granovetter 1973). According to Granovetter (1973), for the purpose of information diffusion, weak tie group may be more advantageous than strong tie group, because a weak tie relationship can prevent information from remaining inside clique boundaries. People in individualistic societies, therefore, have more chances to receive different informational sources from different groups as the base for their judgments than those in collectivist societies.

Proposition 2-2 : The group relationship in an individualistic culture is more likely to be weak tie relationship than in a collectivist culture. A weak tie relationship is more advantageous for information dissemination. Therefore, the external influences is stronger in an individualistic culture than in a collectivist culture

Similar to the argument in Proposition 1-3, since the information credibility of the in-group in the individualistic societies is not as high as that in collectivist societies, they may consider the external influence as important as the internal influence. Therefore, the influential power of external sources (mass media) becomes relatively stronger in individualistic societies when compared to that in the collectivist societies. For example, Gatignon, Eliashberg, and Robertson (1990) found that countries with cosmopolitan characteristics will tend to have a higher external influence coefficient. In addition, in a study regarding housewives' acceptance of innovations, Donnelly (1970) found that a housewife with an inner-directed social character will be more likely to accept new innovations. In a later study, Donnelly and Ivancevich (1974) also found that there is a positive relation between inner-directed and innovator characteristics.

Proposition 2-3 : Consumers in an individualistic culture consider the external influence as important as the internal influence, while consumers in a collectivist culture consider internal influences more important than external influences. Therefore, the external influences is stronger in an individualistic culture than in a collectivist culture

The Effectiveness of Reference Groups on the Retention of a New Product in the Two Cultural Contexts

The importance of repeat purchase for a new product is not specified in the conventional diffusion model (e.g., Bass 1969 ; Rogers 1983). The objective of a diffusion model is to represent the spread of an innovation in a given set of prospective adopters. There is no discussion about the retention or repeat purchase rate for the adopter. However, most products have their re-purchase cycle. For some consumer products, the timing of re-purchase cycle may be less than one week. In fact, repeat purchase is the major success factor for most of the new products (except for the durable goods with a long or no replacement time). If the repeat purchase rate is low, the product will eventually be out of the market. More importantly, repeat purchase is not influenced by the consumer's rational satisfaction alone, the power of reference/social group is another key factor that forces an individual to continue purchasing a specific product (brand) in collectivist societies.

It is proposed that people in collectivist societies will tend to repeatedly purchase a same product, because of two reasons. First, external new product information can not reach every segment in the collectivist societies as easily as in individualistic societies (Granovetter 1973). People in collectivist societies also tend to trust the informational from their reference groups more than the information from the mass media. Therefore, even though they are reached eventually by the media, they won't give as much credibility to the media as to the informational from their reference groups. That is, mass media can not easily persuade them to adopt a new product. They, therefore, are more likely to purchase their products repeatedly.

Second, due to the close tie of the group, people tend to follow the group norms on most of the consumption behaviors. They won't switch their product/brand unless significant evidences

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showing that the new product is more suitable for them. Even a group opinion leader may not be as free in adopting the new product as an outsider might think. An opinion leader still needs to assume social pressure when adopting new products. The adopting behavior by an opinion leader not only implies an endorsement for the product (Fisher and Price 1992), but also indicates that the product is congruent with the group's belief. The gain or loss of adopting a new product has broader meanings than just personal issues of the opinion leader. For example, in an information diffusion study, Weening and Midden (1991) found that the effectiveness of community program is positively related to the strength of network ties. The higher the network tie, the higher the eventual adoption rate of energy conservation program.

Therefore, people in collectivist societies may tend to be more brand loyal. They tend to purchase a same brand/product repeatedly. They even buy the same brand/product from same retailers (Yau 1986 ; Johansson, 1986). Consumers in an individualistic culture, are not as loyal as those in other societies to their brands (Usonier 1993). They may enjoy change more than stability. They are not especially rewarded by their loyal behaviors.

Proposition 3 : Consumers in a collectivist culture is more likely to purchase the same product repeatedly than those in an individualistic culture because of the lower information dissemination rate between groups and social compliance pressures

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

There are several strategic implications for global marketers when they want to introduce new products in a collectivist society.

The Implications of Internal Influencing Mechanisms

New Product Sales Potential Forecasting

Most popular forecasting models for new product in the market, such as BASES and ACCESSOR, only consider the external channel effect. The internal channel effect is ignored in

these models. This kind of omission may be acceptable when the sales forecasting is conducted in an individualistic culture. However, it won't adequately predict the performance of a new product in a collectivist culture. Without the inclusion of the internal channel effect, the sales forecast at the early stage will be over-estimated. This over-estimation will cause a manager to make an incorrect decision in the early stage of a new product launch. To adequately predict the sale volume in the early stage, the model should estimate the internal channel effect coefficient in a collectivist culture market. This coefficient can be estimated by experimental research.

The Identification Effect

Marketers should be very careful in applying identification effect. The object for identification should be accepted by the culture. As stated, people in collectivist societies have a clear expected social role. The expected social role is part of their culture belief system that is gradually formed. If the object for identification is consistent with the culture value, the identification effect will be more effective. For example, if the culture regards hard working is a good virtue, then a celebrity with this characteristic will be easier to be the object for identification.

The Importance of WOM Effect

Marketers have to make sure that their products are as good as they claim to solicit positive WOM effects. As described in this paper. The effect of the internalization is stronger in a collectivist culture than in an individualistic culture. Therefore, a marketer should manage the effect of WOM very carefully in a collective culture. A reference group can provide more trustworthy product information than external communication channel for an individual. A positive WOM can significantly improve the position of the product in the market, while a negative WOM will hurt the product badly. More importantly, a WOM effect not only will affect the success of the new product, but also will affect the image of the company. The image of the company will affect the future business of the corporation in that society.

Personal Selling

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Marketers may utilize sales representatives or retailers as important reference groups for the consumers. For example, in Japan several traditional stores are still very successful in competing with modern stores. The function of the retailer is not only a media for exchange, but also a provider for consumption information. In addition, direct marketing may be a very effective vehicle in persuading consumers to adopt a new product. However, to be effective, the direct sales person must act as the important reference/social group function. For example, Amway believes that personal relationship is at the heart of its marketing system in Japan because personal influence is so important in the market.

The Implications of External Influencing Mechanisms

Communication Channel

Marketers should be very versatile in adopting communication channels in a collectivist culture. To influence consumers effectively, traditional media (i.e., TV, radio, and newspaper, etc.) is not enough. The communication media should be considered as the stimulus for enhancing the effectiveness of the internal channel. As long as the media can enhance the strength of the internal channel, the form (or format) of the media is not important. In addition, marketers also should explore which kind of reference/social groups has the most influential power in persuading the consumers to adopt their products. The communication program should reach all these groups instead of target markets only. Let members in the social/reference group get acquainted with the product and know its benefit. This can reduce the resistance from these groups. If marketers have strong confidence in their products, they can use product samples to reduce the consumer's perceived risks in adopting the product. As stated, the perceived risk not only is about his/her personal gain or loss, but also is related to the implication to the whole collectivity. The more consumers accept the product, the higher the possibility of product adoption by the rest of the population. Proctor & Gamble uses samples very frequently in the Asia Pacific markets because managers there believe that their products

out perform competitors' products tremendously. The sampling program can significantly reduce consumers' initial resistance in adopting a new product.

The Implications of Consumer Retention Arguments

Long Term Relationship in a Collectivist Culture

Finally, marketers should possess a long term perspective when doing business in collectivist societies. The slow growth at the early stage can be a normal condition. At this stage, the most important thing that a marketer should check is whether his/her product is accepted gradually and consumers are satisfied with the product. The positive effect of WOM and continuous external communication effort can induce the market to adopt the product eventually. More importantly, when a consumer becomes a customer of our company, s/he will tend to be very brand loyal and purchase our product repeatedly. Therefore, it is very important that marketers should possess a long term relationship perspective in a collectivist culture. Short term results should not blur the long term purposes.

DISCUSSIONS

Several issues should be discussed here. First, cultural tendencies in a societies are not permanent. With the progress of the economic development, a country tends to become more and more individualistic (Hofstede 1983 ; Triandis 1994). Marketers should monitor cultural environment in their target markets frequently to have an updated cultural characteristics of the markets. They should not automatically assume the cultural tendencies in a country based on the past data. In addition, culture normally has the least influence on the young generation. For this segment, global standardized marketing programs should be more workable.

Second, different types of reference/social groups may have different levels of influential power in different national cultures. For example, the most important reference/social group

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for Chinese may be family and extended family (Yang 1972), while for Japanese, it also may include their colleagues (Hall 1987). Identify the most influential reference/social group for each society can help marketers design an effective marketing program.

Third, a macro approach can only suggest a modal distribution of characters or patterns within each society or class. The distinction of the different types of influences is a matter of degree. That is, even in individualistic societies, the influence of conformity exerted by reference groups may still exist in nearly every aspect of life. Researchers should not underestimate the importance of the individual differences in a specific culture. When conducting cross-cultural studies, researchers also should measure the individual's degree of individualism or collectivism, and include the measure as a covariate in their studies. Hui's (1988) individualism--collectivism scale can be a good candidate.

Finally, the approach presented here can be applied to a subculture analysis. For example, there are different subcultures in every country. Some of them are more cohesive than the others. The framework of this model can certainly be utilized in analyzing the difference and similarities among the specific subcultures.

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新產品在個人主義及群體主義文化下的擴散：國際行銷上的應用

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摘 要

本文章探討在不同的文化下，社會環境機制如何影響消費者採用及留用一個新產品。根據社會心理學的文獻，本文所探討的社會環境機制包括服從、認定、及內化。本文認為相對於個人主義的文化，在群體主義的文化下，服從、認定、及內化等三大社會機制對消費者的影響比較強烈。因此群體主義文化下的消費者在採用新產品的行為上比在個人主義文化下的消費者較為保守。同時，當消費者一旦採用一個新產品後，在群體主義文化下的消費者比在個人主義文化下的消費者不敢隨意轉換。

關鍵字：新產品擴散，文化影響，社會影響，個人主義，群體主義