

Why are childlike portrayals appealing in East Asia?

A cross-cultural comparison between
Taiwan and the US

Chingching Chang
National Chengchi University

Hairong Li
Michigan State University

This study compares the effectiveness of childlike and adult-like portrayals in Taiwan and the US. It is argued that culturally shaped self-concepts affect responses to ads using these two types of portrayal. Childlike portrayals should exert a positive influence on ad evaluations in cultures where such images are generally relevant to and congruent with the self-concept. Findings of an experiment showed that, in both cultures, childlike portrayals were perceived as friendlier than adult-like portrayals. Taiwanese participants, however, whose interdependent self-concepts focus on interpersonal relations and harmony, reported more warm feelings and a stronger self-brand connection, as well as more favourable attitudes towards the ad and the brand, following exposure to the childlike portrayal. In contrast, American participants did not respond to the two portrayals differently, presumably because they found the childlike image to be less relevant to their independent self-concepts.

Introduction

It is fashionable to be childlike in East Asia. Smiling, childlike models can easily be spotted in magazine ads and outdoor advertising. Models smile and appear girlish in a Japanese version of the teen magazine *Seventeen*, but are more defiant in the US version (Maynard & Taylor 1999). Maynard (2002) reasoned that, in the cult of cute culture, the Japanese are socialised to be fond of playful childlikeness. Childlike visuals are thus used purposively by advertisers to build up rapport. However, research has not

addressed whether using childlike portrayals is an effective advertising strategy in East Asia. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature.

There are two dominant research trends in the cross-cultural advertising research literature. The first concerns how underlying cultural values are reflected in creative strategies, information content, appeal usage, and other advertising content (e.g. Zandpour *et al.* 1994; Albers-Miller & Gelb 1996; Zandpour & Harich 1996; Cho *et al.* 1999). For example, content analyses found that advertising content differs in individualist versus collectivist cultures (Mueller 1987; Zandpour *et al.* 1994; Zandpour & Harich 1996; Cho *et al.* 1999) and masculine versus feminine cultures (Albert-Miller & Gelb 1996). The second trend suggests that cultural values not only affect advertising content but also account for systematic variation in advertising effects across cultures. The core assumption of this research trend is that cultural values critically influence the cognitive structures and self-concepts of individuals, in turn affecting their responses to advertising information (Markus & Kitayama 1991). In Taylor's (2005) article discussing the future agenda for international advertising research, he also pointed out the importance of identifying and explaining why cultures influence consumers' responses to certain executional techniques.

This second trend initially received little attention from advertising researchers, but is gaining in importance as cognitive psychologists demonstrate processing differences across cultures (e.g. Nisbett 2003). Some research in this area stems from the idea that cultural values significantly impact the self-concept, and alter the way people communicate or process information (e.g. Markus & Kitayama 1991; Singelis & Brown 1995; Kim *et al.* 1996; Taylor *et al.* 1997). The idea is that, the more dominant certain values are within a given culture, the more frequently they will be sampled in the self, and the more accessible they become over time. This study follows the second trend and examines the question of why Asian consumers are so attracted to models' portrayals of childlikeness.

Individuals in collectivistic and individualistic cultures develop different self-concepts (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Those in collectivistic cultures such as Taiwan form interdependent self-concepts, which emphasise interpersonal relationships and harmony. Those in individualistic cultures such as the US develop independent self-concepts, which emphasise independence and autonomy. Most important, divergent self-concepts define the nature of experience, having consequences for both cognition

and emotion (Markus & Kitayama 1991). For example, self-concept differences can explain why people in different cultures respond more favourably to certain product information and advertising appeals (Aaker & Maheswaran 1997; Wang *et al.* 2000; Aaker & Schmitt 2001).

Under the assumption that culture shapes the self-concept, thus affecting responses to persuasion messages, this study proposes a theoretical framework to explain why childlike portrayals are more popular and potentially more effective than adult-like portrayals in Taiwan but not in the US.

Childlike appeals

Maynard and Taylor (1999) introduced the term 'girlishness' to describe the childlike portrayals in Japanese advertising, defining it as 'a socially constructed, often playful childlike pose, spoken or acted out, that explicitly displays the vulnerability of approval seeking' (p. 40). In addition to playfulness, a key feature of girlish portrayals is the smile. Maynard and Taylor (1999) argued that girlishness is displayed not only by young girls, but also by women in general. According to this definition, childlikeness and childlike behaviours are the chief constituents of girlishness. As such, 'girlish' could conceivably be used to describe boys or men as well. For this reason, we have decided instead to use the terms 'childlike' and 'childlikeness' in reference to such types of ad portrayal.

As mentioned above, childlike portrayals in advertising are very popular in East Asia. Maynard and Taylor (1999) found that 70.2% of ads in a Japanese version of *Seventeen* featured happy, playful, childlike images, in contrast to 40.2% in the American version. American models instead tend to be depicted with 'images of independence, determination and even defiance' (Maynard & Taylor 1999, p. 46). Asian female models in advertising are less likely to be in seductive or sexually suggestive clothing than American models (Cheng 1997; Frith *et al.* 2004). Maynard and Taylor (1999) also concluded that the Japanese ads used more intimate language in their headlines than the American ads.

What do people see in childlike portrayals? Maynard and Taylor (1999) argued that childlikeness not only describes the manner in which people act or behave but also indicates such attributes as conformity, non-aggressiveness, non-competitiveness and vulnerability. The vast majority of the

female models in the Japanese magazines were found to be portrayed not only as childlike but also in a non-threatening and affected manner. The social psychology literature has shown that a childlike facial appearance is positively associated with warmth, naiveté, kindness and social closeness, and negatively associated with aggression (Berry & McArthur 1985; Berry & Brownlow 1989). This perception bias has been documented in both Eastern and Western cultures (McArthur & Berry 1987). Accordingly, it is predicted in this study that childlike portrayals will convey a sense of 'friendliness' to people in both Taiwan and the US:

H1: Models portrayed as childlike will be rated as friendlier than models portrayed as adult-like in both Taiwan and the US.

Culture and the self-concept

Individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in their emphasis on the self versus self-other relations, a difference that shapes the self-concepts of individuals in these cultures (Markus & Kitayama 1991). In collectivistic cultures in East Asia and elsewhere, which emphasise relationships and group membership, people develop interdependent self-concepts. As a result, they focus on interpersonal harmony and affiliation with others. In contrast, in individualistic cultures such as those found in North America, which emphasise autonomy, achievement and independence, people develop an independent self-concept. Consequently, they are more concerned with detachment from others and displaying the quality of uniqueness (e.g. Singelis 1994).

Culture, self-concept, and childlike portrayals

Cultures not only determine social experiences but also render certain aspects of the self more accessible, influencing cognition and emotion (Markus & Kitayama 1991). That is why independent and interdependent self-concepts can account for variability in responses to product information or advertising messages across Eastern and Western cultures (Wang *et al.* 2000; Aaker & Schmitt 2001). For example, consumers in South Korea had more favourable ad attitudes when the ads featured group benefits, whereas consumers in the US viewed the ads more favourably

when they featured individual benefits (Han & Shavitt 1994). Wang and colleagues (2000) found advertising messages stressing interdependence to be more persuasive than those stressing independence among Chinese, who tend to see themselves as extensions of others, whereas the opposite effect was found among Americans, who tend to view themselves as distinct identities. Aaker and Schmitt (2001) found that Chinese consumers preferred products framed by affiliation themes to those framed by differentiation themes, whereas the reverse was observed among Americans.

Culturally congruent information is believed to be more relevant than culturally incongruent information and thus more readily accessed when making judgements (Aaker & Maheswaran 1997). Therefore, some product information is relevant for individuals with an interdependent self-concept but not for those with an independent self-concept. For example, Aaker and Maheswaran (1997) found that consensus information – ‘information involving others’ opinions about or evaluations of an attitude object’ (p. 317) – was useful in forming product evaluations for individuals in collectivistic cultures, who place greater importance on others’ opinions because their interdependent self-concepts are orientated to conformity. However, consensus information only influenced individuals in individualistic cultures when their motivation to process was low. It has also been demonstrated that consensus information exerts a positive influence when individuals’ interdependent self-concepts are primed but not when their independent self-concepts are primed (Chang 2010). This research suggests that information that is diagnostic for individuals with certain self-concepts is more likely to be influential than information that is not diagnostic.

In the same way, the feature of childlikeness, which signals friendliness, should be more relevant for individuals in collectivist cultures, where the emphasis is on interpersonal relationships and social harmony. They should exhibit more favourable responses towards ads featuring childlike portrayals than individuals in individualist cultures, for whom this feature is neither relevant nor important.

Warm feelings associated with childlike ad portrayals

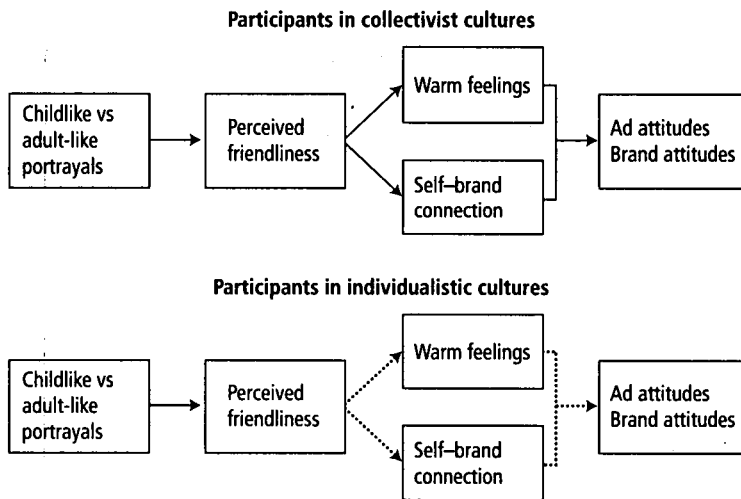
In addition, culturally shaped self-concepts can also influence emotional experiences (Marcus & Kitayama 1994), with some emotions more likely

to be experienced and expressed in collectivistic than individualistic cultures. In general, individuals with interdependent self-concepts are more likely to experience other-focused emotions, whereas individuals with independent self-concepts are more likely to experience ego-focused emotions. For example, Kitayama *et al.* (1991) found that participants in a collectivistic culture (Japan) reported experiencing more emotions pertaining to social engagement (e.g. friendly feelings) than social disengagement (e.g. pride), whereas those in an individualistic culture (the US) did not show this difference. Stephan *et al.* (1998) found people in a collectivistic culture (Japan) to be more comfortable expressing relationship-maintaining emotions (e.g. compassion) than individual-based emotions (e.g. pride in oneself). Grimm *et al.* (1999) found that participants in the Philippines (a collectivistic culture) reported more interdependence-related emotions than participants in the US.

The appraisal theory of emotion posits that, when encountering a stimulus, an individual determines what emotions should be called forth by evaluating what the stimulus implies for his or her goals or desires (for a review, see Smith & Kirby 2001). For example, Lazarus (1982) reasoned that people first evaluate how relevant and congruent a new stimulus is to their goals. Because this evaluative appraisal is a reflection of what the stimulus means to the person, different persons will respond to the same stimulus with different emotions (see also Smith & Lazarus 1990).

Based on Lazarus's appraisal theory of emotion, Aaker and Williams (1998) reasoned that culturally derived self-concepts play a role in the appraisal process and activate positive responses only when participants believe that the appeals elicit culture-congruent and self-relevant emotions. They found that people in collectivistic cultures responded more favourably to ads evoking other-focused emotion, which were culture-congruent and self-relevant to them, and that those in individualist cultures responded more favourably to ads evoking ego-focused emotion, which were culture-congruent and self-relevant to them.

As discussed earlier, childlike models should be seen by all as friendlier than adult-like models. However, it is not necessary that individuals with interdependent self-concepts and those with independent self-concepts should experience the same degree of warmth from viewing the childlike image. Based on the appraisal theory of emotion, individuals with an interdependent self-concept might be expected to find the friendly, childlike

Figure 1: The conceptual model

Note: Solid lines indicate significant relationship. Dotted lines indicate insignificant relationship.

image congruent with and relevant to their goals of making connections with others, and thus warm feelings will be called forth to this stimulus (see Figure 1). Individuals with an independent self-concept, on the other hand, may not find a friendly childlike image congruent with or relevant to their goals, and thus such feelings will not be activated:

H2: Individuals in collectivist cultures (e.g. Taiwan) will experience more warm feelings when viewing ads featuring childlike portrayals than those featuring adult-like portrayals, whereas those in individualist cultures (e.g. the US) will not.

Self-brand connections

Consumers use certain brands to communicate to others who they are (Sirgy 1982). They can thus form connections between these brands and their self-concepts, a phenomenon referred to as 'self-brand connection' (Chaplin & John 2005, p. 119). The theory is that consumers have specific self-concepts and that they recognise the images associated with different brands. When the congruency between the self-concept and brand image is high, a strong self-brand connection develops.

Individuals should thus form strong self-brand connections only when the depicted product image is important to defining their self-concept. In this study, then, when exposed to ads featuring childlike (and thus friendly) images, individuals with an interdependent self will be more likely to form connections with the advertised brand because the brand image is congruent with their self-concept:

H3: Individuals in collectivist cultures will form stronger self-brand connections when viewing ads featuring childlike rather than adult-like image portrayals, whereas individuals in individualist cultures will not.

Ad and brand attitudes

Ad-evoked warm feelings have been shown to result in more favourable ad attitudes (Aaker *et al.* 1986), and ad-evoked positive emotions in general have been shown to enhance ad and brand attitudes (e.g. Batra & Ray 1986). Moreover, the formation of self-brand connections is related to favourable brand attitudes (Escalas 2004). Therefore, this paper predicts a significant interaction between culture and model portrayal on ad and brand attitudes:

H4: Individuals in collectivist cultures will exhibit more favourable ad (H4a) and brand attitudes (H4b) when the ads feature childlike rather than adult-like portrayals; whereas individuals in individualist cultures will not.

Methods

Design

The experiment featured a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects factorial design. The factors were culture (collectivist vs individualist), model portrayal (childlike vs adult-like) and model gender. A common practice in advertising is to feature female models when products target women and male models when products target men. The reason is that consumers may infer whether a product is for them based on the gender of the model. To

eliminate the influence of self-model gender incongruity, female participants were randomly assigned to the conditions featuring female models, and male participants were randomly assigned to the conditions depicting male models. Specific hypotheses about the influence of gender were not made. To eliminate the influence of self-model ethnicity incongruity, American participants viewed only ads featuring Caucasian models, and Taiwanese participants viewed only ads depicting Asian models.

Stimuli

The ad was for a bodywash with a fictitious name: 'P & LH Balanced Glow Body Wash'. The copy and layout of the ads were held constant across all conditions.

To reduce the effect of model attractiveness across the two model portrayal conditions, we used the same four models (one Asian man, one Asian woman, one Caucasian American man, one Caucasian American woman) for both portrayal types. Photographs were taken of each model in the same eight childlike and eight adult-like poses identified from a search of magazine ads. Ten graduate students in Taiwan then rated the poses on maturity and childlikeness. The pose for each model having the highest 'mature' ratings and the pose with the highest 'childlike' ratings were used to create ads for a formal pretest.

In the pretest ($N = 64$ Taiwanese college students), each of the 32 female participants was randomly assigned to the two ethnicity conditions and asked to rate the same female models in two ads (one in a 'childlike' pose and one in a 'mature' pose) on a scale of 'childlikeness', which was comprised of two items: the degree to which they found the image childlike (1) versus adult-like (5), and the degree to which they found it immature (1) versus mature (5). Similarly, each of the 32 male participants was randomly assigned to the two ethnicity conditions and asked to rate the same male models in two ads (one in a 'childlike' pose and one in a 'mature' pose) on the same scale of 'childlikeness'. As expected, repeated measures ANOVA showed that the mature pose generated significantly higher ratings than the childlike pose, $F(1, 63) = 157.41$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.71$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 2.12$, $SD = 0.83$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 4.04$, $SD = 0.79$. The results were significant for all four models, all F s > 23.40 , all p s < 0.01 .

Participants

American participants of Caucasian heritage ($N = 96$, 47.92% male) were recruited from a Midwestern university, and Asian participants ($N = 145$, 48.28% male) were recruited from a university in Taiwan. To recruit participants, research assistants posted ads and circulated flyers on the campuses. American participants were paid US\$10 and Taiwanese participants US\$3 for their participation.

Procedures

To discourage participants from discerning the actual purpose of the study, they were told that the first part of the experiment was to examine the effects of various ad layouts and formats on information processing and that the second part was a values and personality survey for college students.

Participants read a filler ad for a pen followed by a stimulus ad. Each person was then told that, to save time, he or she would be asked to provide responses to only one of the ads, and that the ad selected for him or her was the bodywash ad. They then completed instruments assessing how the ad made them feel, and measuring their brand attitudes, ad attitudes, self-brand connection and perception of the model's friendliness. Finally, they completed the second part, which was comprised of items assessing self-concept and filler questions pertaining to values and personality traits.

Independent variables

The translation and back-translation procedure suggested by Brislin (1987) was used to develop Chinese versions of the original English-language instruments. All responses were given on 7-point Likert scales and scale scores were created by averaging responses to scale items. Taking measures to ensure instrument equivalence has been deemed an important issue in international advertising research (Taylor 2005). The analysis of variance approach suggested by Craig and Douglas (2000) was adopted to identify differential item functioning for all scales. The results showed neither uniform nor non-uniform biases of the scales when they were used in the two cultures.

Culture

Taiwan, generally considered to be a collectivist culture (Hofstede 1980, 1991), was compared to the US, an individualist culture. Of 39 countries examined by Hofstede (1980), the US was ranked first and Taiwan 35th on an index of individualism.

Participants rated themselves on items from the self-construal scale used by Gudykunst *et al.* (1996). Responses to interdependent self-construal items (e.g. 'I am careful to maintain harmony in my group', 'I try to meet the demands of my group, even if it means controlling my own desires') and reverse-scored responses to independent self construal items (e.g. 'I prefer to be self-reliant rather than dependent on others', 'It is important for me to act as an independent person') were averaged, with a higher score indicating a more interdependent self-concept (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$). As expected, Taiwanese participants scored significantly higher than American participants, $F(1, 233) = 6.58, p = 0.01, \eta_p^2 = 0.04, M_{\text{Asian}} = 4.29, SD = 0.63; M_{\text{American}} = 4.09, SD = 0.54$.

Model portrayal: childlike portrayal vs adult-like portrayals

Childlike portrayals and adult-like portrayals were manipulated. For manipulation checks, participants rated the models on childlikeness using four items: 'childlike', 'childish', 'immature' and 'juvenile' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). Models in childlike poses were rated higher on this scale than those in adult-like poses, $F(1, 233) = 20.66, p < 0.01, \eta_p^2 = 0.08, M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.07, SD = 1.41; M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.13, SD = 1.40$. In addition, neither the gender nor ethnicity of the model affected the childlikeness rating, and the interaction between model gender and culture was not significant.

Product interest

To control for pre-existing interest in the featured product category, product interest was analysed as a covariate. Participants reported their interest in bodywash using the following items adopted from Laurent and Kapferer (1985): 'I attach great importance to bodywash', 'One can say bodywash interests me a lot' and 'Bodywash is a topic which leaves me totally indifferent' (reverse-scored) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).

Dependent measures

Model friendliness

A scale measuring model friendliness had not been previously developed, so the following items were created for the purpose of this study: 'The model is friendly' and 'The model is trustworthy' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$).

Warm feelings

Three items adopted from Chang (2009) were used to indicate the degree to which the ad made participants feel 'warm-hearted', 'moved' and 'touched' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).

Self-brand connection (SBC)

The following seven items of Escalas' (2004) SBC scale were used: 'I consider this brand to be me', 'The brand suits me well', 'The brand reflects who I am', 'I can identify with this brand', 'I feel a personal connection to this brand', 'I can use this brand to communicate who I am to others' and 'I think this brand helps me become the type of person I want to be' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$).

Ad attitudes

Three items from Chang (2005) were used to measure attitudes towards the ad: 'favourable', 'likeable' and 'interesting' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$).

Brand attitudes

Participants rated the degree to which each of the following evaluative items from Mitchell and Olson (1981) applied to the brand: 'likeable', 'pleasant' and 'good quality' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$).

Results

All hypotheses were tested using ANCOVA with product interest analysed as a covariate.

Models portrayed as childlike were seen as significantly more friendly than adult-like models, $F(1, 233) = 43.47, p < 0.01, \eta_p^2 = 0.16$ (see Table 1), $M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.36, SD = 1.30; M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.33, SD = 1.33$, providing support for

Table 1: ANCOVA results

| | Model friendliness | | | Warm feelings | | | Self-brand connections | | | Ad attitudes | | | Brand attitudes | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|------|------------|---------------|------|------------|------------------------|------|------------|--------------|------|------------|-----------------|------|------------|
| | F | p | η_p^2 | F | p | η_p^2 | F | p | η_p^2 | F | p | η_p^2 | F | p | η_p^2 |
| Product interest | 9.19 | 0.01 | 0.04 | 8.84 | 0.01 | 0.04 | 18.72 | 0.01 | 0.08 | 4.98 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 3.84 | 0.05 | 0.02 |
| Culture (C) | 3.10 | 0.08 | 0.01 | 21.18 | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.28 | 0.60 | 0.01 | 0.13 | 0.72 | 0.01 | 4.38 | 0.04 | 0.02 |
| Portrayal (P) | 43.47 | 0.01 | 0.16 | 4.84 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 1.26 | 0.26 | 0.01 | 16.61 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 11.13 | 0.01 | 0.05 |
| Gender (G) | 11.15 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 3.51 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.81 | 0.37 | 0.01 | 7.25 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.25 | 0.62 | 0.01 |
| C \times P | 1.38 | 0.24 | 0.01 | 11.66 | 0.01 | 0.05 | 3.98 | 0.05 | 0.02 | 5.58 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 4.21 | 0.04 | 0.02 |
| C \times G | 1.13 | 0.29 | 0.01 | 0.11 | 0.74 | 0.01 | 3.67 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 5.20 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 2.01 | 0.16 | 0.01 |
| P \times G | 0.01 | 0.92 | 0.01 | 0.06 | 0.80 | 0.01 | 0.30 | 0.58 | 0.01 | 1.95 | 0.16 | 0.01 | 1.93 | 0.17 | 0.01 |
| C \times P \times G | 0.45 | 0.50 | 0.01 | 0.09 | 0.77 | 0.01 | 0.28 | 0.60 | 0.01 | 0.75 | 0.39 | 0.01 | 3.00 | 0.09 | 0.01 |

H1. It is worth noting that the interaction between culture and portrayal was not significant, $F(1, 233) = 1.38$, $p = 0.24$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$ (see Table 2), indicating that the relationship between portrayal and friendliness was similar across the two cultures. Indeed, both Taiwanese participants, $F(1, 141) = 18.90$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.24$, $SD = 1.24$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.39$, $SD = 1.25$, and American participants, $F(1, 91) = 21.92$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.19$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.55$, $SD = 1.38$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.23$, $SD = 1.46$, found childlike portrayals significantly friendlier than adult-like portrayals.

As expected, the interaction between culture and model portrayal for warm feelings was significant, $F(1, 233) = 11.66$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$. Taiwanese participants experienced more warm feelings viewing ads featuring childlike as opposed to adult-like model portrayals, $F(1, 141) = 19.16$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.11$, $SD = 1.14$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.32$, $SD = 1.16$, while American participants did not, $F(1, 91) = 0.66$, $p = 0.42$,

Table 2: Results of simple effects tests for portrayal type among Taiwanese and American participants

| | Childlike | Adult-like | F | p | η_p^2 |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-------|------|------------|
| Taiwanese | | | | | |
| Model friendliness | 4.24 (1.24) | 3.39 (1.25) | 18.90 | 0.01 | 0.12 |
| Warm feelings | 4.11 (1.14) | 3.32 (1.16) | 19.16 | 0.01 | 0.12 |
| Self-brand connection | 3.17 (0.99) | 2.83 (0.86) | 6.47 | 0.01 | 0.04 |
| Ad attitudes | 4.32 (1.08) | 3.36 (1.13) | 29.75 | 0.01 | 0.18 |
| Brand attitudes | 4.18 (1.01) | 3.42 (0.98) | 22.04 | 0.01 | 0.14 |
| Americans | | | | | |
| Model friendliness | 4.55 (1.38) | 3.23 (1.46) | 21.92 | 0.01 | 0.19 |
| Warm feelings | 2.71 (1.14) | 2.86 (1.13) | 0.66 | 0.42 | 0.01 |
| Self-brand connection | 2.64 (1.12) | 2.72 (1.19) | 0.39 | 0.54 | 0.01 |
| Ad attitudes | 3.89 (1.36) | 3.60 (1.36) | 1.02 | 0.31 | 0.01 |
| Brand attitudes | 4.12 (1.22) | 3.90 (1.36) | 0.47 | 0.49 | 0.01 |

$\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 2.71$, $SD = 1.14$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 2.86$, $SD = 1.13$. This finding supports H2.

Also as expected, there was a significant interaction between culture and model portrayal for self-brand connection, $F(1, 294) = 3.98$, $p = 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. Taiwanese participants had higher self-brand connection ratings when the ad featured a childlike model portrayal, $F(1, 141) = 6.47$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 3.17$, $SD = 0.99$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 2.83$, $SD = 0.86$. For American participants, there was no difference in self-brand connection across the two ad portrayal conditions, $F(1, 91) = 0.39$, $p = 0.54$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 2.64$, $SD = 1.21$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 2.72$, $SD = 1.19$. This result is consistent with H3.

The interaction between culture and model portrayal for ad attitudes was also significant, $F(1, 294) = 5.58$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. Among Taiwanese participants, ads featuring childlike model portrayals were rated more favourably, $F(1, 141) = 29.75$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.32$, $SD = 1.08$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.36$, $SD = 1.13$. Among American participants, there was no difference in favourability ratings across conditions, $F(1, 91) = 1.02$, $p = 0.31$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 3.89$, $SD = 1.36$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.60$, $SD = 1.36$. This supports H4a.

Finally, there was also a significant interaction between culture and model portrayal for brand attitudes, $F(1, 294) = 4.21$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. Taiwanese participants had more favourable brand attitudes when the ad featured a childlike model portrayal, $F(1, 141) = 22.04$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.18$, $SD = 1.01$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.42$, $SD = 0.98$, whereas American participants did not, $F(1, 91) = 0.47$, $p = 0.49$, $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$, $M_{\text{childlike}} = 4.12$, $SD = 1.22$; $M_{\text{adultlike}} = 3.90$, $SD = 1.36$. This supports H4b.

Discussion

This study adopts the research paradigm suggesting that cultural values significantly impact the self-concept and alter the way people communicate or process information to demonstrate why Asian consumers are so attracted to childlikeness. This research is a response to the call from Taylor (2002) for more research on why certain advertising tactics or executions are effective in specific cultures. Previous research on the influence of cultural differences in advertising has been limited to a focus on how people in individualist cultures and collectivist cultures respond

differently to interdependent or independent appeals. This study extends the extant literature by demonstrating that culture differences can be found in other advertising features relevant to the self-concept. When ads portray an image that signals attributes valued in a particular culture, consumers in this culture will respond favourably.

Specifically, this study showed that, even though childlike model portrayals were seen as friendlier than adult-like portrayals in both cultures, they evoked more warm feelings and stronger self-brand connections among Taiwanese participants. It is likely that because being friendly is important to them and congruent with their interdependent self-concepts, they express more favourable ad and brand attitudes when viewing ads that feature friendly portrayals. In contrast, images depicting 'friendliness' are probably less important and relevant for Americans, who have a more independent self-concept.

The finding that a friendly image evoked a greater level of warm feelings than an adult-like image among Taiwanese participants is also consistent with the literature on culture and emotion, specifically the appraisal theory of emotion. Warm feelings may have been evoked by the friendly image in those with an interdependent self-concept because they found it relevant to their primary motivation to form and nurture self-other connections. The same feelings would not be expected to come forth in individuals with an independent self-concept, for whom friendliness is not as relevant.

Consumers use brands to represent themselves to others. To the degree that a brand exhibits an image that is important and congruent to consumers' culturally shaped self-concepts, it is more likely to develop greater self-brand connections. Childlike images depicting friendliness are desirable for consumers in Asia and therefore can be employed to enhance self-brand connections. Even though self-brand connections are recently developed constructs (Escalas 2004), their roles in shaping brand meanings or affecting brand attitudes have been established (e.g. Escalas 2004; Escalas & Bettman 2005; Moore & Homer 2008). Narrative advertising has been shown to be effective in building self-brand connections (Escalas 2004). This paper extends this line of research by showing that model portrayal can influence self-brand connections.

Interdependent and independent self-concepts were employed to explain participants' different responses to the ads and advertised

products documented in this study. It is possible there are other cultural differences that caused the results. For example, other cultural value differences – such as assertiveness or performance orientation, identified by House *et al.* (2004) – might explain the findings demonstrated here.

Nevertheless, two alternative explanations can be ruled out. The first alternative explanation for why participants in Taiwan like childlike portrayals that can be ruled out is cultural differences in masculinity and femininity. Among the 50 countries explored in Hofstede's (1998) study of masculinity, femininity and culture, Japan was ranked first, therefore a very masculine culture, whereas Taiwan was ranked 32nd and is better described as a feminine culture. Yet, childlike or girlish portrayals are popular in both cultures. Therefore, variation in masculinity or femininity does not seem to be a good explanation for why participants in Taiwan preferred childlike portrayals.

The second alternative explanation pertains to sexual cultures in Asia. Research on sexual cultures in East Asia argues that the Taoist philosophy emphasises intercourse with virgins, which is believed to enhance men's health (Micollier 2004). This would suggest that men should desire childlike women. However, in this study, participants were exposed to ads featuring models of the same gender as theirs. Most important, preference for childlike portrayals was robust across male and female participants. It does not seem that sex-related theories can explain why both female and male participants in East Asia preferred childlike same-gendered portrayals.

The findings of this study should be interpreted with an awareness of the study's limitations. First, only one product category – bodywash – was examined. Bodywash may be more relevant for women than men. Moreover, a friendly image is probably not immediately relevant to purchasing this product. In cases where friendliness is more product-relevant, a childlike image may result in more favourable ad and brand attitudes among Americans as well. However, as this study suggests, even when friendliness is not particularly relevant, Taiwanese participants still respond more favourably to ads depicting such images. Thus, being friendly may well be a chronically accessible ideal for consumers in Taiwan. If so, promoting a friendly image can influence ad responses even when being friendly is not relevant to specific product judgements. Future studies can nevertheless benefit from examining a wider range of product categories.

A second limitation is that the participants in both cultures were exclusively college students. It is possible that older adults in Taiwan may not be attracted by childlike portrayals. Indirect evidence suggests, however, that this is not the case. A national survey of Taiwanese consumers showed that a high percentage of women, regardless of age, indicated that they liked products marketed with animated characters (76%, 76% and 56% for the 20–29, 30–39 and 40–49 age groups, respectively). This was also the case with men (52%, 47% and 47%, respectively) (Professional Lifestyle and Consumer Market Consultant 2006). The most popular cartoon characters in Taiwan (e.g. Hello Kitty, Doraemon and Snoopy) are cute and non-aggressive, similar to the childlike portrayals examined in this study. Still, it would be informative to test this more directly by examining the effects of childlike advertising portrayals among older consumers.

Regardless of its limitations, this study represents a serious attempt to address an intriguing issue of cultural difference in advertising within a coherent theoretical framework. The findings of this study have important implications for international advertisers. When portraying models in Asian markets, they should be aware of Asians' interdependent self-concepts and their preference for childlike models.

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About the authors

Chingching Chang (PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison) is a Professor of Advertising at National Chengchi University in Taiwan. Her research interests include advertising psychology, health communication and consumer behaviours. She has published in *Communication Research*,

Communication Theory, Health Communication, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Communication, Journal of Business and Psychology, Journal of Health Communication, Media Psychology, Political Communication, Psychology and Marketing, The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics and Sex Roles.

Hairong Li (PhD, Michigan State University) is a Professor of Advertising at Michigan State University. His research covers issues of interactive advertising, media management and global communications. His articles have appeared in many academic journals including *International Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Psychology and Marketing, Journal of Interactive Marketing* and *Journal of International Business Studies*.

Address correspondence to: Professor Chingching Chang, Advertising Department, National Chengchi University, No. 64, Sect. 2, ZhiNan Road, Taipei City 11605, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Email: shenc@nccu.edu.tw

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