
Through the Lenses of Culture: Chinese Consumers' Intentions to Purchase Imported Products

Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology
XX(X) 1–15
© The Author(s) 2010
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0022022110383315
jccp.sagepub.com


Shuang Liu¹, Joanne R. Smith², Peter W. Liesch³,
Cindy Gallois⁴, Yi Ren⁵, and Stephanie Daly⁶

Abstract

This study examines the influence of culture on Chinese consumers' intentions to purchase Australian products. Data were obtained from an online survey completed by 3,171 respondents across 20 cities in China. Results indicate that ingroup influence, product perception, but not marketing efforts have a significant main effect on purchase intentions. In addition, ingroup influence moderates the effects of product perception and marketing efforts on intentions. When ingroup influence is low, product perception has a greater impact on purchase intention than when ingroup influence is high. Similarly, marketing efforts have a greater impact on purchase intention when ingroup influence is low than when it is high. In addition, self-identity as a consumer of imported products also moderates the strength of association between product perception and purchase intention. When self-identity is low, product perception has a greater impact on purchase intention than when self-identity is high. Implications of the findings for theory and practice, in the context of trade between an individualistic culture like Australia and a collectivistic one like China, are discussed.

Keywords

Chinese consumers, ingroup influence, product perception, purchase intention, self-identity

China is now emerging as the largest viable consumer market in the world as a result of the economic restructuring, rising living standards, increased affluence, and innovative retailing practices initiated by the nationwide economic reform since 1978 (Arnett, 2002; Cui & Liu, 2001; Xiao & Kim, 2009). As of the first half of 2008, the total value of consumer spending reached 5104.3 billion RMB—approximately US\$729 billion (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2008). Many foreign firms have entered the Chinese market, fuelling an explosion of product categories from food and cosmetics to household goods, electronic appliances, and automobiles

¹School of Journalism and Communication, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

²School of Psychology, University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom

³UQ Business School, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

⁴Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

⁵University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia

⁶Middle Kingdom Pty Ltd., Australia

Corresponding Author:

Shuang Liu, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia.

Email: s.liu1@uq.edu.au

(Zhou & Hui, 2003). Despite increasing research attention to this market of 1.3 billion consumers and evidence from previous studies that has revealed the influence of culture on consumer behavior (Zhang & Khare, 2009), there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of Chinese consumers culturally (Gong, 2003). Although Chinese consumers prefer imported and high-quality products, they shop for improved choice and value rather than simply buying Western (Zhao, 1998). Hence, presence of foreign products in the Chinese market does not translate directly into sustainability of foreign firms. It is important to understand the culture-related factors that influence Chinese consumers' decisions to purchase imported products.

This research examines the impact of culture, particularly collectivistic orientation, on Chinese consumers' intentions to purchase imported products. The term *collectivistic orientation* is defined as people's tendency to view the self as derived from a specific reference group (e.g., family, friends, relatives) such that their behavior is likely to be under the influence of members of this reference group or important others (Fischer, Vauclair, Fontaine, & Schwartz, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Cross-cultural research has highlighted that people in collectivistic cultures, such as China, Japan, and Korea, emphasize the social context and seek to comply with the wishes of important others when making decisions (Harb & Smith, 2008; Lee & Green, 1991). For example, the value placed on the ingroup has traditionally encouraged Chinese consumers to turn to family, relatives, and friends, rather than marketers, for trustworthy product information before making purchase decisions (Zhou & Wong, 2008). Nevertheless, the economic transformation over the past three decades has changed China from a country with next to no advertising to one with contemporary advertising through various media channels (Gong, 2003). Against this backdrop, the issue of the extent to which increased media advertising efforts interact with ingroups as information sources in influencing purchase decisions for consumers in collectivistic cultures warrants further research (Zhang & Khare, 2009).

Impact of Culture on Purchase Intentions

Cultural value orientation plays a significant role in individual decision making because it is an antecedent of psychological process (Triandis, 2000). One widely known value dimension that has a significant impact on behavior in all cultures is individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1980). The individualism-collectivism dimension describes the relationship between the individual and the groups to which the individual belongs or within which the individual is embedded. In conceptualizing the level of connectedness between the individual and various others, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed a distinction between an independent self-construal and an interdependent self-construal. The independent self is perceived as being autonomous and valuing uniqueness, individual accomplishments, and high achievement, whereas the interdependent self is perceived as being part of a larger group and valuing conformity, group harmony, safety, and security. Research has revealed that members of Asian collectivistic cultures often show a more interdependent self-construal, whereas members of Western individualist cultures often show a more independent self-construal (Harb & Smith, 2008). Following this differentiation, people from individualistic cultures engage in behaviors based on their personal attitudes and needs, whereas the behaviors of people from collectivistic cultures are more likely to be guided by group norms, duties, conformity, and obligations (Triandis, 1995).

China has long been regarded as a collectivistic society in which individuals pay more attention to ingroup goals and give less consideration to personal ones (Fischer et al., 2010; Xiao & Kim, 2009). This is because collectivists are more likely to comply with the wishes of the ingroup than individualists. A country's cultural orientations have much to do with the development of consumer behavior in that culture (McGregor, 2000). For example, consumer researchers have investigated the effects of self-construals on brand choice and found that people are more likely to positively evaluate brands that are consistent with their primed self-construals (Agrawal &

Maheswaran, 2005). Steenkamp, Hofstede, and Wedel (1999) found that collectivists emphasize social approval when making a purchase decision and seek conformity to group norms. Similarly, Lee and Green's (1991) study showed that the extended family, neighbors, and friends have greater influence on purchase decisions for Korean than for American consumers.

Because of the value of group orientation, Chinese consumers traditionally rely more on personal word-of-mouth communication as a credible source of product information. Once a new product has been adopted by someone within one's ingroup, this ingroup influence tends to have a greater persuasive power in influencing purchase decisions (Xiao & Kim, 2009). If a reference group has established a product as the normative standard, Chinese consumers are unlikely to deviate (Gong, 2003). However, such a tradition of ingroup influence has been shaken by economic growth and increasing contact with the West (Arnett, 2002). Influenced by globalization processes and increased affluence, Chinese consumers, particularly younger and urban consumers, pursue individualistic values of ambition, pleasure, and achievement as well as traditional collectivistic values of conformity, harmony, and loyalty (Takano & Sogon, 2008). Moreover, along with the rapid economic transformation, China now has a contemporary advertising infrastructure in place. The increasing amount of information presented in media advertising has inevitably increased exposure to foreign products and stimulated more consumer searching activity. These changes in the social systems in contemporary China pose challenges to the predominant role of ingroup norms in influencing purchase decisions.

In addition to ingroup influence and advertising, purchase intention is influenced by perceived product quality and its symbolic representation (Zhou & Wong, 2008). Because the price of imported products tends to be much higher than similar local products, thrifty Chinese consumers place a great emphasis on product quality when making purchase decisions, as evidenced in Zhou and Hui's (2003) study that identified quality as a strong predictor of Chinese consumers' intention to purchase Canadian pork sausages. Symbolic representation also influences Chinese consumers' preferences of foreign products to locally made products (Zhou & Wong, 2008). For consumers in transitional economies like China, imported products signify modernity, status, novelty, and faddishness (Ger & Belk, 1996). Therefore, Chinese consumers may purchase imported products to create or maintain a self-identity as being cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and modern.

Self-identity is the salient part of an individual's self that relates to a particular behavior (Smith et al., 2007). Consumer behavior is one such domain of behavior in which the role of self-identity has demonstrated consistent influence. Research indicates that when an identity is accessible (i.e., its mental representations are salient), individuals tend to respond favorably to stimuli consistent with the identity (Arnett, 2002; Zhang & Khare, 2009). Sparks and Shepherd (1992) found that self-identity as a green consumer predicted intention to consume organically grown vegetables. Similarly, Cook, Kerr, and Moore (2002) found self-identity contributes significantly to intentions to purchase genetically modified food. Zhang and Khare (2009) noted that the accessibility of consumers' global versus local identity influences their preferences for global versus local products. Thus, variations in the extent to which Chinese consumers perceive themselves as the type of person who purchases imported products may moderate the effect of ingroup influence and marketing efforts (e.g., advertising) in influencing their intentions to purchase imported products.

Elicitation Study and Hypotheses

An elicitation study was conducted on a small sample of respondents ($N = 25$) in order to identify salient factors that influence Chinese consumers' intentions to purchase imported (i.e., Australian) products. The respondents came from eight cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Ningbo, and Guangzhou. The sample consisted of eight males (32%) and 15 females

(60%) with two persons unspecified (8%), from 19 different occupational groups, such as manager, administrative officer, musician, teacher, and journalist. The youngest participant was 24 years old and the oldest participant was 69 ($M = 31$ years). Participants were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions on their knowledge of Australian products (e.g., "Are there any products that come to your mind when thinking about Australia?"), the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing Australian products (e.g., "What do you see as the advantage of purchasing Australian products?"), and factors that might influence their decision to purchase Australian products (e.g., "Please write down the factors that might help or encourage you to buy Australian products").

Descriptive analyses of the elicitation study data revealed that the major advantages of purchasing Australian products were good product quality, good brand reputation, new technology, cultural experience, and harmony with environment. The major disadvantages identified were high price, problems with warranties and after-sales service, no Chinese instructions, and inconvenience due to lack of supply in China's market. These disadvantages also emerged as factors that might discourage them from purchasing Australian products. With regard to factors that might encourage them to purchase Australian products, the respondents listed family or friends' recommendations, requests from family members, advertising, personal interest, and media reports.

At a general level, the factors identified could be grouped into three categories: people, organization, and product. The people-related category is concerned with favorable views of Australian products from the ingroup, such as family, friends, and colleagues; hence, we named this factor *ingroup influence*. The organization-related category is concerned with favorable views of Australian products from agencies, such as government, mass media, and advertising; hence, we referred to it as *marketing efforts*. The product-related category is concerned with product perceptions, such as availability of after-sales service, product quality and reliability, price, and suitability to the needs of Chinese consumers; hence, we called it *product perception*.

Higher ratings on all three factors (ingroup influence, marketing efforts, and product perception) should relate positively to purchase intention. However, in light of previous research on consumers in collectivistic cultures, we predicted that family, friends, and colleagues would have a stronger impact on Chinese consumers' purchase decision than government, mass media, or advertising. Hence, the following hypotheses were derived:

Hypothesis 1: Ingroup influence, marketing efforts, and product perception will relate positively to Chinese consumers' intentions to purchase Australian products.

Hypothesis 2: Ingroup influence has a greater impact on purchase intentions than marketing efforts.

Moreover, ingroup influence can also moderate the influence of individual-level factors because of the value placed on conformity and loyalty in the Chinese culture. For example, when ingroup support is low, people may rely more on their own product perceptions and/or information from extrinsic sources such as media advertising as sources of information for purchase decisions. Hence, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 3: When ingroup influence is low, product perception and marketing efforts have a greater impact on Chinese consumers' purchase intention than when ingroup influence is high.

Previous research in social psychology illustrates that self-identity is a significant predictor of behavior across a range of consumer domains from food choice (Cook et al., 2002; Sparks &

Shepherd, 1992) to luxury items (Mannetti, Pierro, & Livi, 2002). Self-identity has also been found to moderate the impact of other factors that influence behavioral decisions. For example, Smith et al. (2007) found that when self-identity is high, behavioral intentions are determined less by past behavior than when self-identity is low. It is possible that a strong sense of oneself as a particular type of consumer acts as a heuristic, or “short cut,” to behavior, minimizing the impact of other factors that typically play a role in behavioral decisions. In line with this reasoning, we predicted that people with a strong sense of identity as a consumer of foreign products would be less influenced by other considerations, such as ingroup influence, product perception, or marketing efforts, but those whose self-concept is not tied up with being a consumer of foreign products would take other factors into consideration, such as other people’s views and their perception of the product. Thus, the following hypothesis was derived:

Hypothesis 4: Ingroup influence, marketing efforts, and product perceptions have a stronger influence on intention at lower, as opposed to higher, levels of self-identity.

Method

Participants and Procedures

In order to reach a wide range of potential respondents throughout China, a local media research firm was employed and an online version of the survey was created. An invitation to participate in the online survey was sent to a random sample of 35,000 people who were selected from the research firm’s representative panel of 789,500 people in mainland China. At the completion of the survey, 3,171 questionnaires were completed.

Of the 3,171 respondents, 57% were female. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to over 65 years, with the majority of respondents (80%) under the age of 35. Respondents came from over 20 cities and provinces. These cities and provinces were classified according to the China Development Index (2007), which divides 31 provinces and cities of China into four tiers in terms of their development level in health, education, economy, and the environment. Tiers 1 and 2 include the more developed cities (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou), whereas Tiers 3 and 4 include less developed regions (e.g., Heilongjiang, Hunan, Tibet). The majority of the respondents came from Tier 1 (33%) and Tier 2 (35%) cities; the rest came from Tier 3 (23%) and Tier 4 (9%). The respondents held a diverse range of occupations from senior management, government officials, skilled workers, and professionals to students, unemployed, and retirees. Approximately 60% of respondents had a monthly income of around 3,000 RMB (US\$1 = about 7 RMB); only 5% of respondents had a monthly income greater than 9,000 RMB. This income distribution is representative of the Chinese population (China Statistical Yearbook, 2007).

Measures

At the start of the survey, respondents were given a definition of Australian products and services. Australian products were defined as products with Australian branding, irrespective of whether they were manufactured in Australia or overseas (e.g., wool and knitwear, food and beverage, and appliances). A number of Australian services were mentioned, such as tourism, education, and banking. All questions were close-ended and were constructed based on scales adopted from literature and the information obtained from the elicitation study. All items were assessed on 7-point Likert-type scales.

Intention. Items measuring purchase intention were based on the widely used model of theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2002; Armitage & Conner, 1999) where intention to perform

a certain behavior forms the outcome variable. Intention to purchase Australian products and services was assessed with four items (e.g., "I intend to buy Australian products and/or services in the near future"; 1 = *definitely do not*, 7 = *definitely do*). Responses were combined to form the purchase intention index ($\alpha = .89$).

Product perception. Items measuring perception of Australian products were similar in format to the index employed in Darling and Van Wood's (1990) study that examined changes in Finnish perceptions of U.S. and Japanese consumer products and marketing efforts. The selection of the nine items was also informed by data from the elicitation study (e.g., "Australian products and services are reliable"; "It is convenient to use Australian products and services in China"; "Australian products and services are of high quality"). Respondents rated each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .84$).

Ingroup influence. Respondents rated how favorable the views of three referents would be regarding purchasing Australian products and services on a 7-point scale (1 = *extremely unfavorable*, 7 = *extremely favorable*). The three referents—family and relatives, friends, and people at work—were selected on the basis of the elicitation study ($\alpha = .86$).

Marketing efforts. Similar to ingroup influence, the marketing efforts variable was measured by three items: government, mass media, and advertising. Respondents rated how favorable the views of each referent would be regarding purchasing Australian products and services (1 = *extremely unfavorable*, 7 = *extremely favorable*; $\alpha = .88$).

Self-identity. Four items measured identity as a consumer of imported products (e.g., "I am the type of person who buys imported products and/or services"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The items were based on those used in Spence and Townsend's (2006) study that examined consumer behavior toward genetically modified food in Britain. The four items were combined to form a scale such that high scores reflected a stronger sense of self-identity as a consumer of imported products ($\alpha = .89$).

Demographics. Respondents were asked to provide information regarding their gender, age, marital status, income, occupation, and employment status.

Translation of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was translated using back-translation. The original English version was independently translated by two Chinese bilingual speakers. Disagreements were resolved through discussion to create a revised copy of the Chinese version of the questionnaire. Both the revised copy of the Chinese questionnaire and original English version were then sent to a bilingual speaker in China, who was independent of this study, to ensure that the two versions were equivalent. Minor modification of wording was made. The finalized Chinese questionnaire was then back-translated into English by a native English speaker fluent in Chinese. The back-translation was cross-checked against the original English version to ensure there was no meaning lost during the process of translation.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables are presented in Table 1. Significant intercorrelations were found among the predictor variables ($r_s = .35$ to $.66$), but these did not exceed the mean scale reliabilities, suggesting that the scales are empirically distinct (Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

In order to check the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using AMOS. This approach was used because it enables the modeling of the covariances and common method variance between the latent variables. To counteract the problems that are associated

Table 1. Descriptive Data for the Variables Included in the Regression Analysis ($n = 3,171$)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Ingroup influence	4.81	1.23	—	0.66 ^a	0.45	0.50	0.45
2. Marketing efforts	4.65	1.20	(0.79) ^b	—	0.40	0.42	0.35
3. Product perception	4.05	1.03	(0.56)	(0.48)	—	0.48	0.49
4. Self-identity	4.40	1.55	(0.57)	(0.57)	(0.57)	—	0.47
5. Purchase intention	4.80	1.53	(.051)	(0.41)	(0.60)	(0.53)	—

a. All correlations are significant at the $p < .001$ level.

b. Correlations for the latent variables are shown in parentheses in the lower diagonal.

with complex models made up of many variables and parameters (e.g., poor fit, increased measurement error), partial disaggregation models were used (Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994). This type of model uses aggregates of items to form two or more indicators per construct. Two subsets of items were used as observable indicators for product perception (one subset of four items and one subset of five items), ingroup influence (one subset of two items and one subset with one item), marketing efforts (one subset of two items and one subset with one item), self-identity (two subsets of two items), and intention (two subsets of two items). Good model fit was assessed as a Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) of greater than .95 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of less than .05. Due to the large sample size, the significance of χ^2 was not used as an index of fit.

The measurement that included the following five latent factors was assessed: product perception, ingroup influence, marketing efforts, self-identity, and intentions. All latent factors were allowed to covary. The results of this analysis indicated that the overall fit of the five factor model was good (GFI = .99, RMSEA = .047) and that all the factor loadings were significant, ranging from .66 to .92. The disattenuated correlations between latent factors, generally higher than raw coefficients, are all substantially less than 1 (Bagozzi, 1993), ranging from .41 to .79 (see Table 1).

Effects of Ingroup Influence, Marketing Efforts, Product Perception, and Self-Identity

Hierarchical moderated regression was used to regress intentions to purchase products onto ingroup influence, marketing efforts, product perception, and self-identity (see Table 2). The demographic variables of gender, age, marital status, employment status, occupation, and monthly income were entered at Step 1. Ingroup influence, marketing efforts, product perception, and self-identity were entered at Step 2. The two-way, three-way, and four-way interaction terms were entered at Steps 3, 4, and 5, respectively. Interaction terms were based on centered scores (see Aiken & West, 1991).

At Step 1, the demographic variables accounted for a significant amount of the variance in intentions, $R^2_{ch} = .05$, $F(6, 3,164) = 25.71$, $p < .001$. Significant effects were found for age, $\beta = .05$, $p < .05$, $sr^2 = .001$, and for monthly income, $\beta = .19$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = .031$. As age and monthly income increased, so did intentions to purchase Australian products and services.

Inclusion of the main effects produced a significant increase in the variance explained, $R^2_{ch} = .30$, $F(4, 3,160) = 356.36$, $p < .001$. Inspection of the beta weights revealed significant positive effects for ingroup influence ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = .015$), product perceptions ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = .055$), and self-identity ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = .032$), but no significant effect was found for marketing efforts ($\beta = .02$, *ns*). Respondents who perceived more favorable views from their ingroup to purchasing Australian products and services, those who had a more positive

Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Purchase Intention ($n = 3,171$)

	Predictor	$R^2_{adjusted}$	R^2_{change}	F_{change}	β
Step 1	Gender	.05	.05	25.71**	.01
	Age				.06*
	Employment status				.00
	Occupation				-.02
	Monthly income				.03
	Marital status				-.01
Step 2	Ingroup influence (IG)	.34	.30	356.61**	.19**
	Marketing efforts (ME)				.04
	Product perception (PP)				.31**
	Self-identity (SI)				.23**
Step 3	IG \times ME	.35	.01	9.83**	-.09**
	IG \times PP				-.09*
	IG \times SI				.01
	ME \times PP				.07+
	ME \times SI				-.01
	PP \times SI				-.04+
Step 4	IG \times ME \times PP	.35	.003	4.07*	-.04
	IG \times ME \times SI				-.01
	IG \times PP \times SI				.13
	ME \times PP \times SI				-.10*
Step 5	IG \times ME \times PP \times SI	.35	.000	0.12	.01

The beta weights reported are the values at the final step.
 $+p < .075$. $*p < .05$. $**p < .001$

perception of Australian products and services, and those who identified strongly as a consumer of imported products were more likely to intend to purchase Australian products and/or services.

Inclusion of the two-way interaction terms was associated with a significant increase in the variance explained, $R^2_{ch} = .01$, $F(6, 3,154) = 9.83$, $p < .001$. Inspection of the beta weights revealed significant Product Perception \times Ingroup Influence ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .024$, $sr^2 = .001$), Product Perceptions \times Self-Identity ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .020$, $sr^2 = .001$), and Ingroup Influence \times Marketing Efforts ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .001$, $sr^2 = .004$) interactions.

At Step 4, the inclusion of the three-way interaction terms did produce a significant increase in the variance explained, $R^2_{ch} = .003$, $F(4, 3,150) = 4.07$, $p = .003$. However, none of the individual three-way interaction terms were significant. The inclusion of the four-way interaction term at the final step did not produce a significant change in the variance explained, $R^2_{ch} = .000$, $F(1, 3,149) = .12$, $p = .73$.

Simple Slopes Analysis of Self-Identity and Ingroup Influence

Simple slopes analysis was used to follow up the significant two-way interaction terms (see Aiken & West, 1991). In relation to the Product Perception \times Ingroup Influence interaction, analysis revealed that the relationship between product perceptions and purchase intention was stronger when ingroup influence was low ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$) than when ingroup influence was high ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). That is, when ingroup influence was low, individuals were more likely to rely on their personal product perceptions when making their decisions than when ingroup influence was high (see Figure 1).

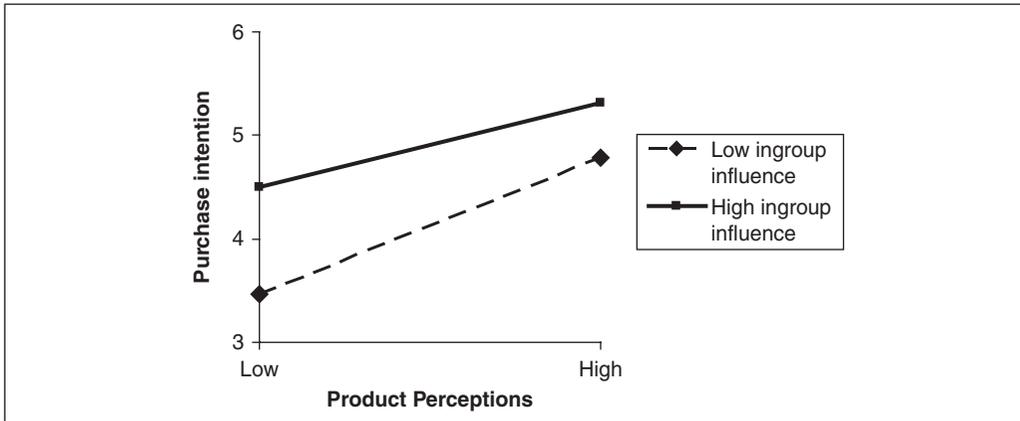


Figure 1. Interaction of Product Perception and Ingroup Influence

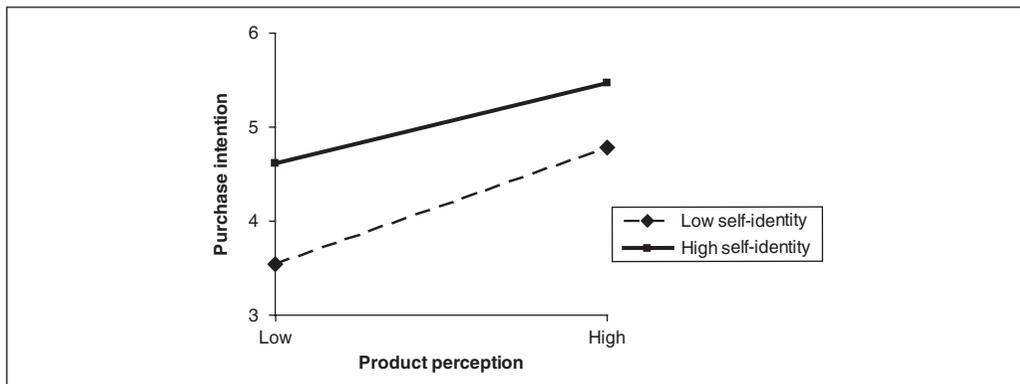


Figure 2. Interaction of Product Perception and Self-Identity

In relation to Product Perceptions \times Self-Identity interaction, analysis revealed that the relationship between product perceptions and purchase intention was stronger when self-identity was low ($\beta = .40, p < .001$) than when self-identity was high ($\beta = .28, p < .001$). That is, individuals who did not identify strongly as a consumer of foreign products were more likely to rely on product perceptions when making their decisions than individuals with a strong self-identity as a consumer of foreign products (see Figure 2).

Finally, simple slopes analysis on the Ingroup Influence \times Marketing Efforts interaction revealed that the relationship between marketing efforts and purchase intention was stronger when ingroup influence was low ($\beta = .17, p < .001$) than when ingroup influence was high ($\beta = .03, p = .31$). Individuals were more susceptible to the influence of marketing efforts when the perceived level of normative support was low (see Figure 3).

Discussion

The present research used a large representative sample of Chinese consumers to examine the impact of culture on Chinese consumers' intentions to purchase Australian products. This point

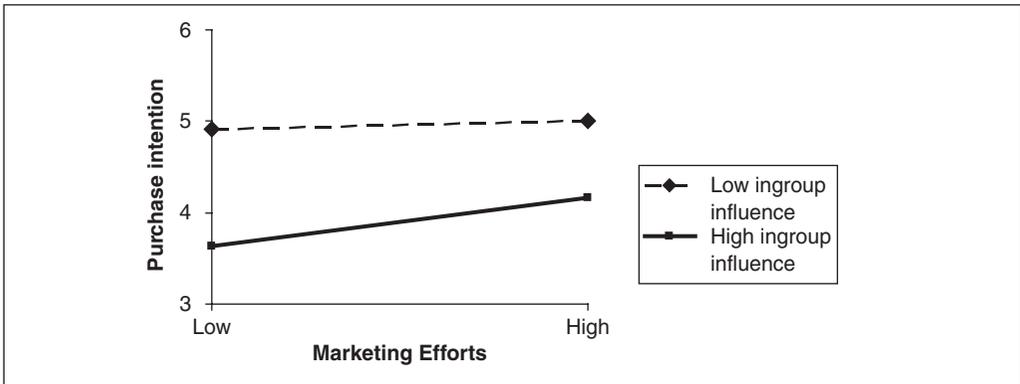


Figure 3. Interaction of Ingroup Influence and Marketing Efforts

is notable, given that other research on Chinese consumer behavior has used samples from limited urban areas or used convenience samples (e.g., Chan & Lau, 2001; Xiao & Kim, 2009). Our findings suggest that favorable views of ingroup members, as represented by family and relatives, friends, and colleagues, have a significant positive effect on Chinese consumers' purchase intentions, consistent with collectivists' high motivation to comply with their important others or the reference group. This ingroup orientation is seen as a key feature of collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 2000; Zhang & Khare, 2009) whereby group membership is considered more important than individuality (Fischer et al., 2009; Takano & Sogon, 2008). Findings from our study provide further support for this argument in the context of Chinese consumers' intentions to purchase imported products.

Product perceptions, as represented by the individual's evaluation of quality, reliability, adequacy of after-sales service, price, and other product-related characteristics, also have a significant positive effect on purchase intention, supporting the claims made by previous researchers that Chinese consumers are not simply buying Western products because of their imported status (Zhao, 1998) but evaluate the products carefully before purchase, given the high price of imported products as compared to similar local Chinese products. While consumers tend to associate price with quality, believing that a cheaper price often suggests reduced quality, paying more for a product than necessary is not in line with the highly praised Chinese virtue of thrift. Thus, the subjective notion of price can play a dual role in product perception (Gong, 2003). Future research might investigate if a curvilinear relationship exists between price and perceived value.

It should be noted that the effects of product perception were moderated by the extent of ingroup support for the target behavior. Specifically, individuals were more influenced by their own perceptions of the products when the level of ingroup support was low than when it was high. This suggests that a supportive normative climate might override individual considerations in decision making, a position that is consistent with the role of groups in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Harb & Smith, 2008; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Markus & Kiyamata, 1991) and with the social identity approach (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). The Chinese people tend to maintain strong ties with their family, relatives, and friends (Arnett, 2002; Xiao & Kim, 2009). Thus, both the main and moderating effects of ingroup influence highlight the importance of groups and social influence in collectivistic cultures and of a supportive normative climate in purchase behavior.

Marketing efforts, as represented by favorable views on the products from government, mass media, and advertising, is not a unique and independent predictor of purchase intentions. This

finding could be specific to the case of Australian products because they have not been as well advertised in China as their U.S. or Japanese competitors' products. In addition, although China now has various modern advertising channels, Chinese consumers may still hold a reserved opinion about advertising due largely to some deceptive and exaggerated advertisements from the 1980s (Gong, 2003). However, marketing efforts did interact with ingroup influence to influence purchase intentions. Specifically, marketing efforts had a positive effect on purchase intentions when ingroup influence was low but no significant effect when ingroup influence was high. Perceived low levels of ingroup support could prompt people to seek information about the product from other sources, such as advertising, leading to a greater impact of marketing effects on purchase intentions. Taken together, the strong effect of ingroup influence and the weak effect of marketing efforts on purchase intentions have important practical implications. Given that Chinese consumers appear to place more importance on the views of ingroups than those of external sources in decision making, social reinforcement of purchase decisions such as word-of-mouth communication or a referral program might be more effective in increasing their intentions to purchase imported products.

Self-identity as a consumer of imported products was found to be a strong predictor of purchase intentions. Respondents who perceived themselves as the type of person who purchases imported products were more likely to intend to purchase Australian products. Despite debates on whether self-identity effects simply reflect overlap with other constructs in predicting behaviors (e.g., past behavior; see Smith et al., 2007), self-identity made an independent contribution to purchase intention in this study. Thus, our findings validate the role of self-identity in consumer behavior: people appear to behave in ways that are congruent with and that express their self-identity (Cook et al., 2002; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992). This finding has important theoretical implications. The observed effects of self-identity show that this is a useful variable to be added to theoretical models (e.g., Choi & Geistfeld, 2004; Lam & Hsu, 2004; Smith et al., 2009), predicting behaviors not just in individualistic cultures but also in collectivistic cultures. Further research may investigate how self-identity develops in people from collectivistic cultures and what it means to have a self-identity as a consumer of imported products in collectivistic cultures.

Self-identity has also moderated the effects of product perception on purchase intentions. When self-identity was low, product perception had a greater impact on purchase intention than when self-identity was high. People with a strong sense of identity as a consumer of foreign products are less influenced by other considerations, whereas those whose self-concept is not aligned with being a consumer of foreign products take other factors into consideration, such as what they think of the specific product in question (product perception). The predicted interaction between self-identity and ingroup influence, however, was not significant. One possible explanation is that self-identity and ingroup influence represent separate and independent sources of motivation for engagement in a behavior. Self-identity is related to the definitions that people apply to themselves because of the roles they inhabit or the behaviors they engage in and this represents a more individual-level motivation for behavior. In contrast, ingroup influence is related to the groups to which people belong and represents a more collective-level motivation for behavior. The impact of each source of motivation will depend on the salience or accessibility of that particular level of self-definition (see Arnett, 2002; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Given that different selves can be more or less salient (or accessible) at different times (Turner et al., 1987), it is possible that self-identity and ingroup influence could play independent roles in the prediction of purchase intentions. For example, Ybarra and Trafimow (1998) found that the accessibility of different selves can determine whether behaviors are under attitudinal control (e.g., product perception) or normative control (e.g., ingroup influence).

Limitations and Further Study

While highlighting the significant contribution of this study to theory and practice, we also acknowledge some limitations. First, the present research relied on quantitative measures. Future research may incorporate qualitative methodologies, such as observations of shopping behavior or in-depth interviewing. Findings from a mixed method approach will yield a greater understanding of the magnitude as well as the depth of the influence of culture on consumer behaviors.

Second, the present research did not employ direct measures of cultural dimensions (see, e.g., Fischer et al., 2010; Hofstede, 1980), such as individualism-collectivism, but used extant literature to classify Chinese consumers as collectivistic-oriented. Future research could use cultural dimension indexes to further delineate the impact of collectivistic orientations on consumer behavior and to test the applicability of those indexes in the current Chinese context.

Third, this study treated collectivistic orientation, represented by ingroup influence, as an individual difference variable rather than as a cross-cultural variable. As a result, we are not able to compare the identified relationships across cultures that vary in the extent to which they can be characterized as individualistic or collectivistic. Future research may test these relationships across cultures to examine the generalizability of our findings.

Finally, this study did not specify the types of products. Previous research suggests that consumers' purchasing motives tend to vary depending on the level of conspicuousness of a product (Zhou & Wong, 2008). Future research may test the impact of (in)conspicuous characteristics of imported products on the effects of ingroup influence, marketing efforts, self-identity, and product perception on purchase intentions.

Conclusion

China's consumer market has the potential to account for a disproportionate and significant share of growth for foreign firms. The challenge for these firms is to navigate the risks and obstacles while taking full advantage of the opportunities created by China's rapid growth. This will involve understanding Chinese consumers culturally and tailoring marketing strategies accordingly. The present research contributes to existing literature on the influence of culture on consumer behavior. To further delineate the role of cultural orientation in influencing consumer behaviors, it is critical that researchers continue to examine the interplay among ingroup influence, marketing efforts, product perception, and self-identity. Findings from such research, as Gong (2003) noted, have important implications not only for tapping the Chinese market but also for understanding other Asian societies such as Singapore and Malaysia, where collectivistic values still have a profound influence regardless of economic achievement.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interests with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

Financial Disclosure/Funding

This research is supported by the Australian Research Council (Grant LP0776272). We also acknowledge the support of our industry partners: Queensland Government – International Collaborations, Middle Kingdom (Aust.) Pty Ltd, and The Chamber of Commerce & Industry of Queensland.

References

Agrawal, N., & Maheswaran, D. (2005). The effects of self-construal and commitment on persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*, 841-849.

- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ajzen, I. (2002). *Constructing a TPB questionnaire: Conceptual and methodological considerations*. Retrieved November 12, 2007 from <http://wwwunix.oit.umass.edu/~ajzen/pdf/tpb.measurement.pdf>
- Armitage, C. J., & Conner, M. (1999). The theory of planned behaviour: Assessment of predictive validity and "perceived control." *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 38(1), 35-54.
- Arnett, J. J. (2002). The psychology of globalization. *American Psychologist*, 57(10), 774-783.
- Bagozzi, R. P. (1993). Assessing construct validity in personality research: Applications to measures of self-esteem. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 27, 49-87.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Heatherton, T. F. (1994). A general approach to representing multi-faceted personality constructs: Application to state self-esteem. *Structural Equation Modeling*, 1, 35-67.
- Campbell, D. T., & Fiske, D. W. (1959). Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix. *Psychological Bulletin*, 56(2), 81-105.
- Chan, R. K., & Lau, L. B. Y. (2001). Explaining green purchasing behavior: A cross-cultural study on American and Chinese consumers. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 14(2/3), 9-40.
- China Development Index. (2007). Retrieved April 9, 2008, from <http://finance.people.com.cn/GB/1037/5417031.html>
- China Statistical Yearbook. (2007). Population and its composition. National Bureau of Statistics of China. Retrieved April 9, 2008, from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2007/indexeh.htm>
- Choi, J., & Geistfeld, L. V. (2004). A cross-cultural investigation of consumer e-shopping adoption. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 25(6), 821-838.
- Cook, A. J., Kerr, G. N., & Moore, K. (2002). Attitudes and intentions towards purchasing GM food. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 23, 557-572.
- Cui, G., & Liu, Q. (2001). Executive insights: Emerging market segments in a transitional economy: A study of urban consumers in China. *Journal of International Marketing*, 9(1), 84-106.
- Darling, J. R., & Van Wood, R. (1990). A longitudinal study comparing perceptions of US and Japanese consumer products in a third/neutral country: Finland 1975-1985. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 21(3), 427-450.
- Fischer, R., Ferreira, M. C., Assmar, E., Redford, P., Harb, C., Glazer, S., et al. (2009). Individualism-collectivism as descriptive norms: Development of a subjective norm approach to culture measurement. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 40(2), 187-213.
- Fischer, R., Vaclair, C. M., Fontaine, R. J., & Schwartz, S. H. (2010). Are individual-level and country-level value structures different? Testing Hofstede's legacy with the Schwartz value survey. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 41(2), 135-151.
- Ger, G., & Belk, R. W. (1996). I'd like to buy the world a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the "less affluent world". *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 19(3), 217-304.
- Gong, W. (2003). Chinese consumer behavior: A cultural framework and implications. *The Journal of American Academy of Business*, 3(1/2), 373-380.
- Harb, C., & Smith, P. B. (2008). Self-construals across cultures: Beyond independence interdependence. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39(2), 178-197.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58, 255-269.
- Hui, C. H., & Triandis, H. C. (1986). Individualism-collectivism: A study of cross-cultural researchers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 17(2), 225-248.
- Lam, T., & Hsu, C. H. (2004). Theory of planned behavior: Potential travelers from China. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 28(4), 463-482.
- Lee, C., & Green, R. T. (1991). Cross-cultural examination of the Fishbein behavioral intentions model. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 21(2), 289-305.

- Mannetti, L., Pierro, L., & Livi, S. (2002). Explaining consumer conduct: From planned to self-expressive behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 32*, 1432-1456.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98*(2), 224-253.
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2000). Using social and consumer values to predict marketplace behaviour: Questions of congruency. *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics, 24*, 94-103.
- National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2008). *Overview of economy in second quarter of 2008: Consumption takes the lead – expecting more effective measures*. Retrieved October, 26, 2008, from http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/ztfx/2005sbnjjspt20080731_402495701.htm
- Smith, J. R., Liu, S., Liesch, P., Gallois, C., Ren, Y., & Daly, S. (2009). *Through the eyes of Chinese: The theory of planned behavior and Chinese consumer behavior in relation to Australian products and services*. Proceedings of the Australia & New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference, Melbourne, Australia.
- Smith, J. R., Terry, D. J., Manstead, S. R., Louis, W. R., Kotterman, D., & Wolfs, J. (2007). Interaction effects in the theory of planned behavior: The interplay of self-identity and past behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 37*(11), 2726-2750.
- Sparks, P., & Shepherd, R. (1992). Self-identity and the theory of planned behavior: Assessing the role of identification with “green consumerism.” *Social Psychology Quarterly, 55*, 388-399.
- Spence, A., & Townsend, E. (2006). Examining consumer behaviour toward genetically modified (GM) food in Britain. *Risk Analysis, 26*(3), 657-669.
- Steenkamp, J. E. M., Hofstede, F., & Wedel, M. (1999). A cross-national investigation into the individual and national cultural antecedents of consumer innovativeness. *Journal of Marketing, 63*, 55-69.
- Takano, Y., & Sogon, S. (2008). Are Japanese more collectivistic than Americans? Examining conformity in in-groups and the reference-group effect. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 39*(3), 237-250.
- Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review, 96*, 506-520.
- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Triandis, H. C. (2000). Culture and conflict. *International Journal of Psychology, 35*(2), 145-152.
- Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Xiao, G., & Kim, J. O. (2009). The investigation of Chinese consumer values, consumption values, life satisfaction, and consumption behaviors. *Psychology & Marketing, 26*(7), 610-624.
- Ybarra, O., & Trafimow, D. (1998). How priming the private self or collective self affects the relative weights of attitudes and subjective norms. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 24*(4), 362-370.
- Zhang, Y., & Khare, A. (2009). The impact of accessible identities on the evaluation of global versus local products. *Journal of Consumer Research, 36*, 524-537.
- Zhao, V. (1998). Chinese protectionism or simple competitiveness? *Business Week, 19*, 5.
- Zhou, L., & Hui, M. K. (2003). Symbolic value of foreign products in the People's Republic of China. *Journal of International Marketing, 11*(2), 36-43.
- Zhou, L., & Wong, A. (2008). Exploring the influence of product conspicuousness and social compliance on purchasing motives of young Chinese consumers for foreign brands. *Journal of Consumer Behavior, 7*, 470-483.

Bios

Shuang Liu, PhD, is a senior lecturer of communication in the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Queensland. Her research focuses on the influence of culture on attitudes and communication behavior, particularly in intercultural and intergroup contexts.

Joanne R. Smith, PhD, is a senior lecturer of social psychology in the School of Psychology at the University of Exeter. Her research focuses on social influence and behavior change, with a particular focus on how group processes and identities influence attitudes and actions.

Peter W. Liesch, PhD, is a professor of international business in UQ Business School at the University of Queensland. He researches the processes and nature of firm internationalization and investigates the nature of international business operations abroad, from export through to wholly owned subsidiaries.

Cindy Gallois, PhD, is a professor of psychology and communication at the University of Queensland. Her research focuses on intercultural and intergroup language and communication, particularly in health and organizational contexts. She is a fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australian and an Associate Editor of *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*.

Ren Yi, PhD, is the Director of Office of Research and Higher Degrees at the University of Southern Queensland. His main research areas are economic geography, international business, emerging markets, attitude studies, cultural diversity, research ethics, and research integrity.

Stephanie Daly is the Managing Director of Middle Kingdom (Aust.). Her firm focuses on creating Sino-Australia business partnerships.