

Cultural Influence on Brand Personality Preferences: Individualists Prefer Sophisticated and Competent Brands while Collectivists Prefer Sincere Brands

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Abstract: - In this research, we examine the extent to which culture influences brand personality preference, based on specific personality dimensions. This research focuses on two main group-level cultures: individualists and collectivists. We introduce and examine the variations in preferences of Sincere, Competent, and Sophisticated brand personalities and how cultural orientations influence brand personality preference. Based on previous literature, we suggest that consumers in collectivistic countries show a higher preference for brands with Sincere personalities. Moreover, we suggest that consumers in individualistic countries show a higher preference for brands with competent and sophisticated personalities. We also suggest that the mechanism underlying these effects is the perceived symbolic meaning of the brand. This effect is moderated by the cultural background (collectivistic vs. individualistic) of the consumer. This research contributes to the literature on brand personality traits, brand symbolic meaning, and cultural orientations. We discuss implications for marketers for global marketing strategies.

Key-Words: - Branding, Culture, Brand Personality, Collectivism, Individualism

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1 Introduction

Extant research has highlighted the importance and variability of brand personality dimensions, e.g., [1], [2], [3], [4]. However, previous research is still silent on the relationship between specific cultural traits—i.e., individualism and collectivism—of consumers and their preference for brand personalities—i.e., sophistication and competence. Additionally, past research has not investigated a novel mechanism that we focus on to explain the relationship between cultural traits and brand personality preference: the perceived symbolic meaning of the brand. Brand personality is formally defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand", [1]. Brand personality has been considered as one of the most crucial aspects of the brand, and has thus received great attention from researchers, [5]. The brand personality dimensions may have a large impact on consumer behavior: consumers can link their personality in

different contexts to the perceived salient personality of the brand, and thus base the brand selection on the congruity of the preferred personalities, [1]. The connections that may be created between the consumer's personality and the brand's personality can influence the strength and the duration of the relationship that the consumer forms with the brand (e.g., sincere brands develop a longer relationship while exciting less durable ones, [3]). The study, [6], demonstrated that the choice of a brand with a specific personality is not only a function of the personality of its user: the reverse is also possible (i.e., the user's personality can be perceived differently from others by the used brand's personality). The authors have demonstrated that brand attributes can have an impact on the perception of the personality traits of the brand's owner.

Research has also highlighted the importance of cultural differences in consumer behavior, e.g., [7],

[8], [9], [10]. Previous literature has shown that culture can influence individuals' psyche, their norms, and their beliefs, [11]. Moreover, culture can influence preference for specific brand personality dimensions, [2], [3].

Two of the main cultural traits are individualism versus collectivism which can have either a horizontal or vertical direction, [12]. These orientations of culture can affect product evaluations, brand evaluations, goals, and self-construal of individuals, [8], [9], [10].

The purpose of this paper is to propose a relationship between the preference for specific brand personality dimensions and the different group-level cultural orientations. More specifically, we theoretically propose that in collectivistic cultures, consumers show a higher preference for brands with Sincere personalities. Differently, in individualistic cultures, consumers show a higher preference for brands with Sophisticated and Competent personalities. However, these effects are further moderated by vertical and horizontal cultural orientations. Specifically, we suggest that the preference of individualists for Sophisticated (vs. Competent) brand personalities would persist only for vertical (vs. horizontal) individualists. Such distinction would not hold for consumers with collectivistic group-level culture, as the preference for Sincere brands would persist for both vertical and horizontal collectivistic cultural orientations. The suggested mechanism behind these effects is the perceived symbolic meaning of the brands. Hence, this work aims to review past research on the topic and propose ways in which future research can extend insights on this topic and the relationship between culture and preference for specific brand personalities.

To do this, this paper reviews the extant literature on brand personality dimensions in different cultures and product categories. Moreover, this research aims to distinguish between collectivist and individualist cultures and to predict differences in the preference for specific brand personality dimensions, following the research on the effect of culture on consumer behavior, [8], [9], [10]. The theoretical findings of this research are beneficial to brand managers to better satisfy the needs and preferences of consumers based on their cultural traits.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Brand Personality Traits

The concept of brand personality has its roots in brand personification (i.e., when a specific brand resembles a person; e.g., an endorser of the brand). Consumers perceive the existence of personality congruence between the endorser of the brand and the brand per se. This way, the brand would gain meaning in the eyes of the consumers. This would lead to higher brand preference, [4]. Brand personality is "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands", [4]. The concept of personality dates back to Martineau in 1958. This concept first referred to the non-material character of stores, [4], [13]. However, research in brand personality measurement is mainly based on [1], who developed the highly-referred dimensions of brand personality.

Past research on brand personality argues that brands can be used in symbolic ways when consumers humanize their personality. This phenomenon is known as animism, [14], or personification, [1]. To understand brand personality, is important to clarify human personality first. The reason for this is that human personality precedes brand personality. Human personality is "a clear construct, different from cognitive aspects of the person, or his or her skills and abilities," [4]. The most important model to describe human personality traits is the Big Five Personality Traits. These traits are known by the acronym OCEAN (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism).

In, [4], the authors proposed that the right approach to define the brand personality traits is to follow the approach for defining the human personality traits. Indeed, to develop a scale for the brand personality traits, [1] followed the steps that previous research has used to determine the human personality traits.

The study, [1], has demonstrated in her research that brands can have salient personality traits (i.e., Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness) just like people do (i.e., Big-Five personality traits). Sincere brands are perceived as being domestic, honest, genuine, and cheerful. Exciting brands are perceived as being daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date. Competent brands are perceived as being reliable, responsible, dependable, and efficient. Sophisticated brands are perceived as having glamour, pretentiousness, charm, and romance. Lastly, Rugged brands are perceived as being tough, strong, outdoorsy, and rugged. The study, [1], employed 114 adjectives (or traits) to develop these five brand personality

dimensions. She tested these dimensions across 37 brands in various and diversified product categories. While there is literature doubting the existence of only these five brand personality traits or the extent to which these traits can be applied to different categories, [4], most of the other research on brand personality traits, has its roots in [1]. For instance, in research conducted in Spain on brand personality traits, Sincerity, Excitement, and Sophistication overlapped the five brand personality traits, [2]. In Japan instead, Ruggedness was substituted with Peacefulness, [2]. Similarly, [15], have proposed a German brand personality scale, [16], a Croatian scale, and, [17], a Dutch scale for measuring brand personality traits, [18]. Instead, [18], constructed a different scale to measure brand personality traits. The authors suggested five alternative brand personality dimensions: Responsibility (i.e., down to earth, stable, and responsible), Activity (i.e., active, dynamic, and innovative), Aggressiveness (i.e., aggressive, and bold), Simplicity (i.e., ordinary and simple), and Emotionality (i.e., romantic and sentimental). Similarly, [19], developed another scale, whose dimensions correlated to the Big Five human personality traits. The authors suggest these brand personality traits: Trusted (i.e., trustful, reliable, and persevering); Sociable (i.e., creative, friendly, and outgoing); Exciting (i.e., active, adventurous, and cool); and Sincere (i.e., simple and caring). Conscientious individual personality and Trusted brand personality support the theory of self-congruity between brands and customers' personalities as a driver of brand preference and choice. Neuroticism was correlated to a Trusted Brand personality and Extraversion and Openness to experiences to a Sociable Brand personality.

However, most of the previous literature has used the scale suggested by [1], and tested how it differs in their context, [2], [20], [21], [22]. In line with previous research, in this paper, we theoretically investigate how preference for specific personality traits differs based on the cultural background of consumers.

2.2 Effects of Brand Personality on Consumers

Previous research has studied the importance of brand personality on consumers. For instance, [6], has proved a strong link between brand personality and perceived user personality. More specifically, the authors suggest that the "salient brand personality dimensions may affect consumer perceptions of personality traits of the owner of the brand", [6]. For instance, consumers wearing a "competent" brand are perceived as more competent

than those wearing an "incompetent" brand, [6]. However, the personality of the brand extends to the personality of the brand owner if there is consistency between the brand and the context (e.g., a Boss t-shirt will affect the personality of the user when it is worn for golfing but not when it is worn for hiking). These findings are in line with previous research on consumer-brand congruity. Research in this area suggests the greater the congruity between human characteristics and brand characteristics, the greater the brand preference, [23], [24]. If consumers perceive the brand with a particular personality, they link their personality to that of the brand, [1], [26]. Moreover, not only will consumers be affected by the brand personality, but they will also be perceived by others in line with the personality of the brand they are using. This happens because of the transfer of personality characteristics from the brand to its user, [6]. So, the greater the congruity between the human characteristics and the brand, the greater the brand preference, [23], [24]. The study, [25], compares the choice of brands with the choice of friends. The author suggests that "people choose their brands the same way they choose their friends; in addition to the skills and physical characteristics, they simply like them as people," [4].

Previous research has demonstrated that brand personality – when it is high self-expressive value and distinctive – can positively affect the attractiveness of the brand personality. When this occurs, consumers show a higher preference for the brand. Hence, brand personality directly affects positive word-of-mouth reports and indirectly affects brand loyalty, [22]. When the brand personality trait is perceived as unique and distinct, consumers conserve a favorable memory of the brand in their memory. This, in turn, increases brand equity, [5], [27], [28]. Conclusively, when the brand personality trait is well-established and well-defined, consumers show higher brand preference, [23], [24]. Moreover, consumers strengthen the emotional relationship they have with the brand, [29], and they behave more loyal to the brand, [30]. Brand personality is so important to consumers and being that it can affect the choices of brands, i.e., choosing the brand that has the personality traits they search for or that are congruent with their personality, [1], [26], we focus our attention on brand personalities and how preference for them is established by consumers' characteristics (i.e., cultural background).

2.3 Cultural Orientation and Brand Personality

One of the most representative characteristics of individuals is their cultural background. Cultural orientation is the extent to which consumers differ in their norms and values. Moreover, it is a major determinant of the behavioral differences across cultures, [11]. Research suggests that there is a strong relationship between culture and individuals. More specifically, research shows that culture is connected to psychology and sociology, [31]. Culture can influence individuals' psychology and behavior (e.g., how people behave in individualist/collectivist cultures, [32]).

Two of the main cultural orientations are individualism versus collectivism, [33], and they represent substantial behavioral differences. The study, [34], suggests that individualists are more focused on details and on objective attributes of the objects to categorize them. Differently, collectivists are more holistic and do not only focus on the objective attributes of the object but also other secondary (i.e., non-diagnostic) parts. In line with this, [35], have extended the holistic-analytical processing to the brand extension theory. The authors showed that if there was a high-perceived fit between brand family and brand extension, there was analytic processing and no difference in brand extension evaluations across cultures (Koreans as Western Asians vs. Americans). Instead, when the perceived fit between the brand family and the extension was perceived as moderate or low, Koreans (vs. Americans) would engage more in holistic processing.

Previous literature suggests that people in individualistic cultures have an independent construal, while those in collectivistic cultures have an interdependent one. In the former case, people prefer independent relationships with others, discounting in-groups' goals to their own goals. In the latter case, people prefer interdependent relationships, discounting their own goals to their in-groups', [33], [36], [37], [38]. We summarize the main differences between the individualistic and collectivistic cultural traits in Table 1, based on previous literature covered throughout this section.

Table 1. Individualistic versus Collectivistic Culture

Individualistic Culture (e.g., United States, UK, France)	Collectivistic Culture (e.g., Korea, Japan, India)
Comparison of others in relation to the self	Comparison of self in relation to the self
Emphasis on separateness	Emphasis on connectedness
Emphasis on self-identity	Emphasis on relationships
Emphasis on hierarchy	Value equality
Value superiority of products in evaluating them	Might not value the superiority of products in evaluating them
Value innovativeness of products	Value familiarity of products
Concerned with improving status	Focus on expressing one's uniqueness
Independent self-construal	Interdependent self-construal
Concerned to stand out	Focus on establishing one's capability to be successfully self-reliant

When we distinguish between individualistic and collectivistic societies, it is important to consider the vertical versus horizontal orientation of these traits. When comparing collectivists with individualists, these differences probably refer to the vertical individualistic and collectivistic traits. This orientation is different from the horizontal and can hardly be extended to horizontal individualistic and collectivistic societies, [12]. The study, [37], explains the distinction between individualism and collectivism, based on previous research on these topics. The authors summarize important comparisons between horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. Vertical individualistic cultural societies tend to focus on "self-reliance, independence, and hedonism", and "on improving individual status via competition, seeking achievement, power, prestige, standing out, display of success and status," [37]. However, horizontal individualists show aversion to showing off, to conspicuous consumptions, to achieving people. They appreciate modesty, [37]. Some differences are also noted between vertical and horizontal cultural traits of collectivism. Vertical collectivists appreciate defense to authority and achievement of balance and harmony in comparison to others. Horizontal collectivists instead, emphasize honesty and are direct and cooperative with others. They ensure and focus on equality. Hence, the horizontal orientations of individualistic and collectivistic cultures provide a "pure" measurement of these traits, given the lack of hierarchy and comparison with others, [12]. Hence, based on previous literature, there are differences in

preferences, behaviors, and psyche of individuals based not only on their individualistic versus collectivistic cultural traits but also on the orientation dimension of their group-level culture: vertical versus horizontal.

So far, we have reviewed previous literature suggesting that/how culture is related to psychology and sociology. Culture can influence individuals' psyche, their norms, and their beliefs. Two of the main cultural traits are individualism versus collectivism which can have either a horizontal or vertical direction. These orientations of culture can affect product evaluations, brand evaluations, goals, and the self-construal of individuals. Based on this, in the next session, we focus more in detail on cultural orientations and brand personality traits.

As previously mentioned in this paper, specific brand personality dimensions can have a specific impact on consumers. For instance, Sincere brands are perceived as being domestic, honest, genuine, and cheerful, [1]. This personality dimension can be present both in large and small companies. Small and new brands embrace sincerity when they want to show themselves as caring, especially more caring than big rivals (e.g., Gateway Cow campaign). Large companies use sincerity to bring the interaction with the customer to a more "down-to-earth" and tangible level (e.g., MetLife's use of Snoopy). Hence, a sincere personality would flare the feeling of "nurturance, warmth, family orientation, and traditionalism" in brands. These traits are positively correlated to relationship strength, [3], feeling of trustworthiness, and brand dependability, [1]. Sincerity can thus trigger vulnerability and the growth of the relationship between the brand and the user, [3], [39].

2.4 Cultural Orientation and Brand Personality

In, [2], the authors suggest that individuals, institutions, and practices, can be carriers of culture. However, also brands and the messages they convey can be transporters of cultural meaning, values, and beliefs. The authors demonstrate how and to what degree the personality traits of brands carry specific cultural meaning, based on the parallelism that brand personality traits have with human personality traits, [1]. Hence, the authors suggest that one way to investigate the relationship of individuals with culture is by focusing on brands that individuals use, as an extension to nonhuman and symbolic objects. The fact that brand personality and cultural symbolism are strongly related goes back to the theory of symbolism, which argues that consumers consider their preferred brands as extensions of

themselves. This theory suggests that the consumption and purchasing decision is driven by the symbolic value of the brand, [40]. This symbolic consumption of brands can have a positive impact on consumers because brands can satisfy and inflate the self-consistency and the self-esteem of consumers, [41]. To explain more in detail the process and the mechanism behind the symbolic consumption of brands and products, [24], revised the self-concept theory, to apply it to consumer behavior. The author suggests that consumers do not only consider brands and products for their physical and apparent characteristics but also for the symbolic image that they convey and how this image is related to the self. Being that the symbolic image is highly personal, the same brand will not be equally evaluated by all consumers and in all situations. Hence "consumption of a brand may be highly congruent with self-image in one situation and not at all congruent with it in another," [24].

Brand personality can thus produce symbolic benefits. As previously mentioned, brand personality is the set of human characteristics associated with the brand, [42]. The goal of brand personality is exactly that of "describing the perceptual reality for the consumer perception". For this reason, consumers make purchasing decisions based 2 aspects: 1) on the similarity of the personalities (his and the brand's); and 2) whether the personality of the brand he consumes is the one he wants to convey to others, [43], [44]. In, [2], the study suggests that the symbolic meaning and value that brands carry are not only affected by the individuals' perceptions but also by the cultural characteristics of the country where the consumers live. For instance, the authors have demonstrated that the traits of brand personality may encounter differences from Japan to Spain (both allocentric and at the same development stage, but less emotional vs. more emotional, specifically).

In, [45], the authors showed that in America (i.e., individualist society) people have an interdependent view of the self. This facilitates the accessibility of particular brands (i.e., exemplars). Instead, in Japan (i.e., a collectivist society), people have an independent view of the self. This facilitates the retrieval of brand beliefs (i.e., general descriptive or evaluative thoughts). In, [9], [10], [46], the studies have demonstrated that the orientation of individualistic-collectivistic cultural traits can also be extended to brand preference and liking (based on power perception).

Brands can become mirrors of the cultural traits of individuals in individualistic or collectivistic societies, [47]. This happens because consumers

may link brands to cultural traits, [2]. Moreover, [2], has shown that culture can affect the brand personality dimensions. The authors show that some brands in the United States (i.e., individualistic culture) are perceived as rugged (e.g., Marlboro), and some in Japan (i.e., collectivistic society) as peaceful. The important part is that ruggedness and peacefulness are traits of the culture of these countries, [45]. The brands that are more embraced in the cultural values have higher chances of becoming icons (e.g., Harley Davidson, Nike, Apple, Vodka, etc.) because they create a strong connection with culture, [47]. The study, [47], explains that what stands behind the scenes of this phenomenon of “iconization” is not how the brand performs, but what is the symbolic meaning that it carries with its personality traits. Iconic brands can be perceived as similar to iconic people, they are idealized and people (i.e., consumers) want these icons to become part of their lives. The same happens with iconic brands. But to make iconic brands part of their lives, consumers purchase and use these brands.

Based on the previous literature mentioned in this section that emphasizes how culture can affect consumer preferences related to brands, we theoretically propose that there are differences in specific brand personality preferences based on the distinction between the orientations of individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

3 Propositions

3.1 Individualistic Cultural Traits and Sophisticated Brand Personality

The study, [46], has summarized, based on previous literature, that culture can affect brand decisions. More specifically, [46], mentions that in individualistic cultures, consumers choose brands based on their attributes, advantages, and available information on the brand.

In collectivistic cultures, instead, consumers are influenced by familiarity, friendliness, and perceived honesty of the brand. In, [37], the authors propose that consumers who belong to the vertical individualistic culture may be more driven towards status symbols, such as prestige, and possession, that transmit higher performance and achievement compared to others. In vertical-individualist societies or cultural countries (e.g., the U.S., Great Britain, France), individuals care about status, achievements, and demonstrating themselves to others. However, in horizontal-individualist

societies or cultural countries (e.g., Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Australia), individuals are not prone to differentiation and like to view themselves as one group, with equal members, [48].

In summary, individualists are independent, [45] focused on product attributes, [8], and focused on themselves and their interests, [12]. Individualism is about self-expression; it is about feeling good with the self and being noticed by others, [12]. These characteristics of individualists are very much in line with the Sophistication dimension of brand personality. As mentioned before, this dimension is found to be strongly related to adjectives like: Good-looking, Glamorous, Upper class, Charming, Stylish, Confident in themselves, Chic, Elegant, Selective, Snobbish, and Upscale. Based on the apparent congruence between the personality traits of individualists and Sophisticated brands, more formally, we theoretically propose that:

Proposition 1: In collectivistic (individualistic) cultures, higher brand preference will be observed when the brand is perceived as Sincere (Sophisticated, Competent).

Proposition 2: The perceived symbolic meaning of the brand mediates the effect of group-level culture on brand personality preferences.

3.2 Collectivistic Cultural Traits and Sincere Brand Personality

Individuals with a horizontal collectivistic cultural orientation tend to emphasize “sociability, benevolence, and cooperation,” [37]. Moreover, in horizontal collective societies, people tend to emphasize the value of honesty and equality. In vertical-collectivist countries (e.g., Korea, Japan, India), individuals care about authorities, cohesion, equality, and the achievements of the group more than their ones. In horizontal-collectivist countries (e.g., Israel), individuals focus on sociability and interdependence with others, [49]. In summary, collectivists are interdependent, [45], focused on product familiarity, [8], and on family, rather than on the self. Collectivists put value on equality, harmony, and trust, [12].

These traits of collectivists are in line with the Sincere dimension of brand personality because this trait is found to be strongly related to adjectives like: Down-to-earth, Wholesome, Cheerful, Reliable, Sincere, Family-oriented, Small-town, and Friendly. Brands with Sincere personality flare the feeling of nurturance, warmth, family orientation, and traditionalism. These traits are positively

correlated to the feeling of trustworthiness, and brand dependability, [1].

We thus theoretically suggest that culture influences the preference for specific brand personality traits. However, these findings would not be enough to provide insights into the specific dimensions of culture that explain the mechanism behind these effects. As we can see from Table 1, horizontal collectivists are described as individuals who are sociable, cooperative, and benevolent, and as people who emphasize honesty and equality. Over similar lines, vertical collectivists would sacrifice their interests over the interests of the group, and they can be characterized as people who value conformity, harmony, and protection. Thus, cultural differences in preference for sincere brands can be explained by both horizontal and vertical orientations of collectivism.

Alternatively, in individualist cultures, over the vertical axis, people are focused on achievement, power, prestige, status, and success. Thus, vertical individualism would explain the higher preference for sophisticated brand personality. On the contrary, on the horizontal axis, they do not appreciate conspicuous consumption and do not prefer to brag. This goes against the sophisticated brand personality trait, which is more about showing off style, charm, glamour, upper class, and good-looking (Table 1). For this reason, horizontal individualism would not explain the preference for a Sophisticated brand personality in an individualist culture. Hence, put formally:

Proposition 3a: The vertical dimension of individualism (but not the horizontal one) moderates the effect of group-level culture on Sophisticated brands' preferences.

Proposition 3b: The horizontal dimension of individualism (but not the vertical one) moderates the effect of group-level culture on Competent brands' preference. The conceptual model representation of our study is presented in Figure 1.

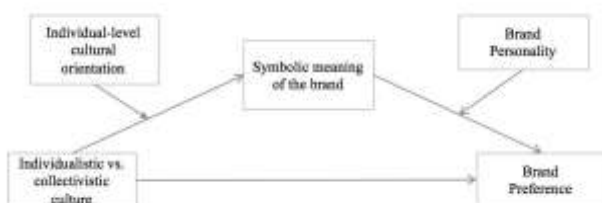


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model Representation

4 Theoretical Contributions and Future Research

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

This work first contributes to research on branding and branding, extending the research on brand personality traits. Moreover, this research contributes to the cultural variations in branding literature, by proposing an additional way in which culture influences brand preference.

The current findings contribute to the extant body of research on brand personality. Previous literature has proposed five main brand personality dimensions: Sincerity, Sophistication, Competence, Excitement, and Ruggedness, [1]. After the first dimensions were introduced, literature continued suggesting variations to them and proposing new ones, like Peacefulness instead of Ruggedness in Japan, Passion instead of Competence in Spain, [2]. Similarly, other researchers proposed other dimensions such as Solidity, Genuineness, Enthusiasm, Unpleasantness, [20], Conviviality, [21], and Integrity and Nurturance, [50]. Some new dimensions originated from the Big Five Personality Traits proposed: Emotional Stability, Openness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, [51].

Literature shows that brand personality can influence consumer behavior. More specifically, consumers are more attracted to brands that have a congruent personality with theirs, [1], [26]. Also, the more distinct and well-established the brand personality is, the higher the brand preference, [23], [24]. Moreover, the personality of the brand can influence how the users of the brand are perceived by others, [6].

Previous research suggests that culture may affect consumer behavior. More specifically, culture influences product evaluations regarding country-of-origin, [8], persuasion, [7], or comparative advertising, [52]. Culture has influence also in the branding literature. One of the most influencing dimensions of culture is the individualistic-collectivistic trait, [33]. This cultural orientation can influence brand extension evaluations, [35], but it can also influence brand personality dimensions, [2]. This article extends the stream of research on cultural influence on brand personality dimensions. However, we do not focus on the construction of personality dimensions, [2]. Instead, we focus on brand preference, given its personality, among different cultural groups. Throughout the studies of this paper, we demonstrate that in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan), consumers have a higher

preference for Sincere brands. Instead, in individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States), consumers prefer more Sophisticated brands. Previous literature has shown that there is a high congruency and overlapping of these brand personality dimensions and the cultural traits of those societies, so we base our reasoning on this. Moreover, we show the underlying mechanisms behind these effects. Among the collectivists, individual horizontal and vertical collectivism explain the higher preference for Sincere brands. Among the individualists, individual vertical (but not horizontal) individualism explains the higher preference for Sophisticated brands.

We believe that given the constant interest in culture and brand personality traits, future research can investigate further their combination. More specifically, future research can investigate the boundary conditions of these effects. For instance, [8], has shown that product familiarity and superiority of the attributes are differently important to collectivists and individualists when evaluating products based on their country of origin. Specifically, in collectivistic (individualistic) cultures, familiarity (innovativeness) is important for more positive product evaluations. Moreover, the superiority of product attributes is important for individualists (but not for collectivists) to increase product evaluations. Similarly, future research can investigate whether collectivists would prefer more Sincere brands if they are familiar with them. We expect them to do so. On the contrary, we anticipate that individualists would prefer more Sophisticated brands if they are innovative. The same effect should not hold for collectivists. Regarding product attributes superiority, we expect this to enhance the Sophisticated brand preference for individualists, but not to affect the Sincere brand preference for collectivists.

4.2 Practical Implication

Our research offers several practical marketing implications. Firms put a great emphasis on branding, given that it is one of the main assets that a company has and the great impact brand preference has on consumer choices and thus on company profitability, [53]. Given this, firms would greatly benefit from an increase in preference for their brand. Our findings indicate that there are at least three important issues for managers to consider when trying to increase consumers' brand preference: (1) focusing on addressing consumer needs based on their country's culture, (2) making the brand be perceived as a Sincere or Sophisticated according to the cultural traits of their country, (3)

individualizing the congruence that can be created between the brand and the user's personalities.

The findings of this paper suggest that managers should differentiate their branding strategies according to the cultural traits of that country. The study, [1], proposes that brand personality can be manipulated to convey a specific personality (e.g., Sincerity). In collectivist countries, brand strategies should be directed at conveying a Sincere personality for their brands. By doing so, brand preference would be enhanced. Moreover, by transmitting a Sincere personality of their brands, consumers are more trustworthy of the brand and more willing to forgive eventual "mistakes", [3]. The same with Sophisticated brand personality. Brand managers can convey the Sophistication of their brand through typical colors associated with it (e.g., Tiffany light blue), through details (e.g., the white ribbon in Tiffany's boxes), or the logo (e.g., the Tiffany font), [54]. This affects how consumers feel and how they feel about the brand.

Next, when the brand is vested with a Sincere or Sophisticated personality, consumers too will be perceived as such in turn, based on the self-congruency literature, [6]. Since being Sincere (Sophisticated) is in line with the cultural attitude of collectivistic (individualistic) countries, consumers will feel better when using the brand. When the brand makes the consumer feel better psychologically, he will create a stronger connection to the brand, [55].

5 Conclusions

To summarize, this research reviewed past findings relating the construct of brand personality to traits of consumer culture, focusing specifically on two main group-level cultures: individualists and collectivists. In this study, we introduced and theoretically examined the variations in preferences of Sincere, Competent, and Sophisticated brand personalities and how cultural orientations influence different brand personality preferences. In light of what we summarized from past research, we suggest that consumers in collectivistic countries would show a higher preference for brands with Sincere personalities, and consumers in individualistic countries would show a higher preference for brands with competent and sophisticated personalities. We theoretically propose that the mechanism underlying these effects is the perceived symbolic meaning of the brand. This effect is moderated by the cultural background (collectivistic vs. individualistic) of the consumer. While we believe that the study has merits as it extends research in branding and culture,

future research could employ either an experimental approach to test the propositions or a bibliometric approach to enrich the review of the literature on the topic, [56].

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