**Cross-Cultural Differences in European and Asian Men and Women’s Consumption of Fragrance**

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*In a cross-cultural study that compares European (N=32) and Asian (N=36) men, Asian men demonstrate significantly more collectivist consumer behaviour but no significant differences in their brand loyalty behaviour for fragrance consumption. This pattern is not found for European (N=38) and Asian (N=70) women. Asian women exhibit significantly more collectivist values in their consumer behaviour for fragrance consumption, while European women exhibit significantly more individualistic values for brand loyalty. The findings for men may be explained in that fragrance consumption is a relatively new behaviour for both the largely collectivist Asian countries and the largely individualist European countries.*

**Research Gap**

Understanding how people from diverse cultures consume products and respond to brands is becoming ever more important for marketers in the global marketplace with, for example, international brand managers being increasingly sensitive to cultural differences in designing advertising strategies, such as, whether to standardise or localise (Kanso & Nelson, 2007). While national culture has been determined as an important characteristic for consumer behaviour (Hsieh, Pan & Setiono, 2004), little is known about whether men and women from national cultures with differing value characteristics such as the individualism/collectivist dimension of Hofstede (2001) have similar or differing consumption and brand perceptions for fragrance products, which until recently was considered a gender-stereotyped product. This study compares men from European and Asian cultures, and women from European and Asian cultures on their consumption of fragrance to address such gaps.

**Literature Review**

Culture is the ‘blueprint’ of human activity (McCracken, 1988). Hofstede (1991) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind. He argues that culture influences behaviour through its manifestations in values, heroes, rituals and symbols and he believes that values may be the most important of the four manifestations of culture that can be used effectively to distinguish one culture from another. As one way of understanding the values and beliefs of diverse cultures Hofstede (2001) outlined a classification system based on a number of dimensions: individualism/collectivism, low/high power distance, low/high uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, short/long-term orientation, and low/high context. Of these dimensions, the individualism/collectivism dimension has received much attention from researchers with Triandis (2001, p907) considering it to be “*the most significant cultural difference among cultures.*” Some, though, have criticised Hofstede’s taxonomy as lacking construct validity when applied at the individual level (Blodgett et al., 2008). Others, however, have argued that “*Hofstede’s framework constitutes a simple, practical, and usable shortcut to the integration of culture into studies*.” (Soares, Farhangmehr & Shoham, 2007, p283).

Individualism is defined as relating to “societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family” ([Hofstede, 1991, p. 51)](http://www.emeraldinsight.com.ueaezproxy.uea.ac.uk:2048/journals.htm?issn=0309-0566&volume=38&issue=9&articleid=853959&show=html&PHPSESSID=n9v6q6ch7bs9uviapg9bgsb154#idb17). Individualists value emotional independence, autonomy, individual initiative and variety. Personal goals are given priority over the goals of the group, so affording individual interests to prevail over the interests of the group ([Leung and Bond, 1984](http://www.emeraldinsight.com.ueaezproxy.uea.ac.uk:2048/journals.htm?issn=0309-0566&volume=38&issue=9&articleid=853959&show=html&PHPSESSID=n9v6q6ch7bs9uviapg9bgsb154#idb21)). Collectivists, in contrast, are group-oriented people who value such characteristics as sharing, conformity, the “We” consciousness, emotional dependence, and group solidarity ([Hofstede, 1991](http://www.emeraldinsight.com.ueaezproxy.uea.ac.uk:2048/journals.htm?issn=0309-0566&volume=38&issue=9&articleid=853959&show=html&PHPSESSID=n9v6q6ch7bs9uviapg9bgsb154#idb17)). Western (e.g. United Kingdom and USA) cultures are considered more individualistic in nature than Asian cultures (e.g. Indian and Chinese) which are considered more collectivist (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Triandis, 1990). Individualistic cultures value freedom and independence and a high level of competition while collectivist cultures value harmony and interdependence and a low level of competition (Hofstede, 2001). Consumers in an individualistic society have been found to value variety and seek more stimulation than those from a collectivist society (Herrmann & Heitmann, 2006). In a cross-cultural study of status consumption, British (individualism) consumers were found to focus on how they viewed themselves, while Indian (collectivism) consumers focussed on how others saw them as they wished to signal ostentatious behaviour (Shukla, 2010).

Men and women experience their culture within roles which are to a large extent gender determined and this affects their consumption of products. It is thus not surprising that there is a paucity of research on gender differences in men and women’s consumption of grooming products, such as cosmetics and fragrances, as men tended not to consume such products. Or if they did consume products, such as fragrance, very often these were bought for them by women. Possibly for such reasons, it has been argued that men’s consumer behaviour regarding grooming products has received little attention (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). On the other hand, change is afoot. While Coley & Burton (2003) found that men and women process information differently with regard to shopping behaviour, Loo-Lee et al (2005) argue men are increasingly involved in shopping for themselves while retaining their masculine identity and, as such, are more comfortable and ready to purchase their own grooming products. Indeed, the cosmetic industry has developed differing marketing strategies to address such increasing shopping involvement by men (Weber and de Villebonne, 2002), with L’Oreal leading the way in using celebrities like Hugh Laurie and Matthew Fox to advertise their cosmetic products for men.

Given understandings regarding consumption of grooming products across genders has been hampered by the male stereotype, is there a greater understanding of cross-cultural consumption? Cultural models, such as Hofstede’s (1991) model, have been developed that explain differences and which help marketers and advertisers develop strategies that target consumers across cultures more effectively (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). The result is that an increasing body of knowledge is available that helps explain differences in consumption across cultures but mostly in relation to advertising appeals rather than actual consumer behaviour. Within a given gender and product, such as fragrance, little academic research is known about how women in Western cultures and women in Eastern cultures vary in their consumption, consumer behaviour and brand perception. Markham & Cangelosi (1999) are the exception. In their study comparing American, European and Asian women, which investigated respondents’ familiarity with and preference for the unisex fragrance concept, they found significant differences for 7 of the 10 factors they investigated: European fragrance, price, brand purchased as a gift, mood season, container and colour. Men’s consumption, consumer behaviour and brand perception fare little better. While the “*male niche cosmetic market is growing at a fast pace*” (Souiden & Diagne, 2009, p97) little attention has been given to research on males’ attitudes regarding consumption of grooming products (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). Souiden & Diagne (2009) compared two groups of Western men (French and Canadian) and found they had different motivations for buying grooming products. No study has compared the fragrance consumption, consumer behaviour and brand perceptions of men from European cultures with those from Asian cultures. This research addresses these gaps.

**Research Questions/Hypotheses**

There is a lack of research comparing men from Asian (collectivist) cultures with those from European (individualist) cultures in their consumer behaviour, and brand experiences for fragrances. The same can be stated with regard to comparing women from Asian (collectivist) cultures with those from European (individualist) cultures in their consumer behaviour, and brand experiences for fragrances. Two main points, however, stand out from the research literature as highly salient. The collectivist (Asian) /individualist (European) dimension and the fact that men purchasing aftershave fragrances is a relatively new phenomenon. Taking these points into consideration, the following Hypotheses are generated:

H1: Men from Asian (collectivist) cultures are significantly more likely than those from European (individualist) cultures to seek other sources of information prior to purchasing aftershave fragrance.

H2: Men from Asian (collectivist) cultures are similar in their brand loyalty to those from European (individualist) cultures, as for both cultures aftershave fragrance use is a relatively new phenomenon.

H3: Women from Asian (collectivist) cultures are significantly more likely than those from European (individualist) cultures to seek other sources of information prior to purchasing perfume.

H4: Women from Asian (collectivist) cultures are conflicted about loyalty to a particular brand of perfume as compared to those from European (individualist) cultures, because expression of brand loyalty to a perfume is about an individual expressing their personal choice which is contra-indicated in a collectivist culture.

**Method**

***Respondents***

On the basis of their nationalities and on the basis of their geographical location to fit with the European/Asian dimension, the 224 consumers who participated in the study were categorised into Asian (collectivist) or European (individualist) cultures according to Hofstede’s taxonomy (2001). The European nationalities included United Kingdom (89), Italian (76), Swedish (71), Spanish (51), and Russian (38). The Asian nationalities included Indonesian (14), Taiwanese (17), Thai (20), Chinese (20), Vietnamese (20), Malaysian (26), and Japanese (46). The average scores for each country on the individualist/collectivist dimension (in brackets immediately after nationality) are taken from information on the Hofstede Centre website (geert-hofstede.com). Below an average score of 30 was deemed to be a collectivist country and above 50 an individualist country. Russia and Japan do not fit this classification but were included on the basis of their geographical location as European and Asian, respectively. Forty-eight subjects could not be classified because they did not purchase such products or they omitted their nationality, or it was illegible, or it was unclassifiable within the limitations of the taxonomy used, for example, Brazilian.

As younger men are more likely than older males to shop for aftershave fragrance (Coley & Burgess, 2003), which some researchers see as evidence of the gender blurring of males behaviour (Kacen, 2000) and some as evidence of metrosexuality (Clarkson, 2005), only men and women under 40 years of age were included in the study.

Sixty-eight men age range 19 to 38 years with a mean age of 26.40 (SD=6.92) years and 108 women age range 18 to 39 years with a mean age of 24.77 (SD=6.63) years were included in the study. All were resident in the United Kingdom at the time of the study.

***Product***

Men are more likely to shop for functional grooming products while women shop for aesthetic improvement grooming products (Rook & Hoch, 1985). To overcome this bias, the product chosen in this research was fragrance (perfume for women and aftershave for men) as fragrance combines both functional and aesthetic elements so making it appealing to both men and women.

***Design, Procedure and Analyses***

The study employs a cross-sectional survey based design with a convenience sample obtained through snowballing respondents. Consumers were asked to complete a brief demographic profile outlining their gender, age, and nationality and to denote their fragrance preferences and usage. They were also asked to respond to 8 statements by indicating on a seven point scale whether they strongly agree (1), agree (2), slightly agree (3), neither agree nor disagree (4), slightly disagree (5), disagree (6) or strongly disagree (7). These statements cover consumer behaviour prior to purchase, and brand loyalty. The study’s analyses compare the two groups (European and Asian) within the two genders. Although a convenience sample was used and the scale of measurement of the statements is ordinal, the data are considered robust enough to test statistically using parametric measures: In this case the student t-test for two independent samples.

***Findings***

From Table 1a there is no significant difference in European and Asian men seeking advice from friends and family nor buying on impulse. Three significant differences in the consumer behaviour of European men as compared to Asian men, however, are found. Thus H1 is partially supported. Men from European (mainly individualist) cultures disagree that they use the internet and magazines, and slightly disagree that they seek the advice of shop assistants, to search for brand information before buying aftershave fragrance as compared to Asian men. These Asian men neither agree nor disagree that they use the internet and seek the advice of shop assistants, and they slightly disagree that they use magazines.

**Table 1a: European and Asian Men’s Consumer Behaviour Regarding Brands Prior to Purchasing Aftershave**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Mean Scores (Standard Deviations)** | | | | **T value** | **Significance** | **Consumer Behaviour Elements** |
| **European**  **(N=32)** | | **Asian**  **(N=36)** | |
| 4.31 | 2.05 | **4.50** | 2.12 | *-*0.37 | P=0.713 | **Asks friends and family for their opinions before buying aftershave** |
| **5.75** | *1.46* | 4.17 | *2.14* | *3.59* | P=0.001\*\*\* | **Uses the internet to search for brand information before buying aftershave** |
| **5.63** | 1.64 | 4.78 | 1.93 | 1.98 | P=0.050\* | **Uses magazines to search for brand information before buying aftershave** |
| **5.25** | *1.50* | 4.06 | *2.04* | *2.71* | P=0.008\*\* | **Always seeks the advice of shop assistants for brand information before buying aftershave** |
| 4.25 | 1.74 | **4.50** | 1.63 | -0.61 | P=0.543 | **Buys brands of aftershave on impulse** |

No significant differences were found for brand loyalty (see Table 1b). Thus H2 is supported. Men from Asian (largely collectivist) cultures are similar in their brand loyalty to those from European (largely individualist) cultures, as for both cultures aftershave fragrance use is a relatively new phenomenon. Both slightly disagree that they are loyal to a particular brand and neither agree nor disagree that they would be willing to pay a premium for a brand. While European men slightly agree that they rarely buy a new brand of aftershave and Asian men neither agree nor disagree, this is not significant.

**Table 1b: European and Asian Men’s Brand Loyalty to Aftershave Purchases**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Mean Scores (Standard Deviations)** | | | | **T value** | **Significance** | **Brand Loyalty Elements** |
| **European**  **(N=32)** | | **Asian**  **(N=36)** | |
| 3.87 | 1.93 | **4.33** | 1.55 | -1.09 | P=0.282 | **Willingness to pay a premium for a brand of aftershave** |
| 3.44 | 1.61 | **3.94** | 1.57 | - 1.32 | P=0.193 | **Rarely buys a new brand of aftershave** |
| 4.63 | 1.64 | **4.72** | 1.65 | - 0.24 | P=0.809 | **Is loyal to one particular brand of aftershave** |

In total, out of a possible 8, only three significant differences were found for men from Asian (largely collectivist) cultures as compared to men from European (largely individualist) cultures.

From table 2a all statements were found to be significantly different for women from European (largely individualist) cultures as compared to women from Asian (largely collectivist) cultures. Asian women fell in the neither agree nor disagree class for all statements but on the slightly agree side, with the exception of the statement “seeks the advice of shop assistants”. European women slightly disagree that they use the internet and magazines or score significantly higher in the neither agree nor disagree class which places them in the class toward the slightly disagree side. Thus H3 is supported. Women from Asian (largely collectivist) cultures are significantly more likely than those from European (largely individualist) cultures to seek other sources of information prior to purchasing perfume.

**Table 2a: European and Asian Women’s Consumer Behaviour Regarding Brands Prior to Purchasing Perfume**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Mean Scores (Standard Deviations)** | | | | **T value** | **Significance** | **Consumer Behaviour Elements** |
| **European**  **(N=38)** | | **Asian**  **(N=70)** | |
| **4.47** | 1.87 | 3.77 | 1.62 | 2.04 | P=0.044\* | **Asks friends and family for their opinions before buying perfume** |
| **5.47** | 1.69 | 3.69 | 1.81 | 5.01 | P=0.000\*\*\* | **Uses the internet to search for brand information before buying perfume** |
| **5.21** | 1.73 | 3.71 | 1.71 | 4.32 | P=0.000\*\*\* | **Uses magazines to search for brand information before buying perfume** |
| **4.47** | *1.45* | 4.29 | *1.07* | *4.45* | P=0.000\*\*\* | **Always seeks the advice of shop assistants for brand information before buying perfume** |
| **4.21** | *1.73* | 3.60 | *1.41* | *1.98* | P=0.050\* | **Buys brands of perfume on impulse** |

All 3 statements to measure brand loyalty are found to be significantly different (see Table 2b). Women from Asian (largely collectivist) cultures fall in the neither agree nor disagree category across all three statements while women from European (largely individualist) cultures slightly agree that they are willing to pay a premium for a brand and that they rarely buy a new brand. On the other hand, European women contradict themselves in that they fall at the high end of the slightly disagree class suggesting that they are not loyal to one particular brand of perfume. This might be interpreted, however, as European women being loyal to more than one particular brand, Thus H4 is supported. Women from Asian (largely collectivist) cultures are conflicted about loyalty to a particular brand of perfume as compared to those from European (largely individualist) cultures, because expression of brand loyalty to a perfume is about an individual expressing their personal choice.

**Table 2b: European and Asian Women’s Brand Loyalty to Perfume Purchases**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Mean Scores (Standard Deviations)** | | | | **T value** | **Significance** | **Brand Loyalty Elements** |
| **European**  **(N=38)** | | **Asian**  **(N=70)** | |
| 3.11 | 1.47 | **3.74** | 1.40 | -2.23 | P=0.028\* | **Willingness to pay a premium for a brand of perfume** |
| 3.42 | 1.78 | **4.23** | 1.49 | - 2.51 | P=0.013\* | **Rarely buys a new brand of perfume** |
| **5.47** | 1.45 | 4.49 | 1.49 | 3.32 | P=0.001\*\*\* | **Is loyal to one particular brand of perfume** |

In total for women, out of a possible 8, all statements were found to be significantly different.

Reasons for the disparity between the findings for men and women within the cultural and geographical dimensions may be explained by the varying patterns of fragrance use comparing the two genders. European men have a significantly different pattern of aftershave use from Asian men (chi square 17.751, df=3, p <0.001). Only 19% of European men use aftershave daily in the morning preferring to save it for a special occasion (44%), as compared to 63% and 25%, respectively, for those men from Asian cultures. European and Asian women do not significantly differ in their pattern of perfume use with 53% of European women using it daily in the morning and 19% for special occasions, as compared for Asian women of 59% and 23%, respectively.

**Discussion**

Understanding diverse cultures is critical for business success (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). This is the first study of its kind to explore the consumption of fragrances across cultures within genders using Hofstede’s (2001) model of the construct of collectivism/ individualism.

Recently, the use of Hofstede’s (2001) model to measure cultural dimensions has been criticised by Brewer & Venaik (2012) and Veniak & Brewer (2013). They critically examined the methodology used by Hofstede and GLOBE to arrive at their national culture scores, and conclude that there is a need to be very cautious in applying such constructs. de Mooij (2013), however, responded that Hofstede’s model remains valid. Indeed Reisinger & Crotts (2010) using Hofstede's original instruments found few differences between Hofstede's 2001 national cultural measures with their current study's data. Thus, they argue, providing strong support for Hofstede's dimensions as a measure of central tendencies of visitors from different nations. Further, they add that their analyses identify international regions that cluster closely together, demonstrating that national cultural differences do not end at national borders.  However, they also note that there is within-nation variability indicative of sub-cultures. It is argued here that one such dimension along which there may be sub-cultural differences is gender.

The findings of the study are highly salient for marketers and advertisers especially in emergent markets in the Far East and in the growing market for Men’s fragrances. Converging technology and disappearing income differences across countries will not lead to homogenization of consumer behaviour (de Mooij, 2003). In other words, for example, what works in the Netherlands in terms of effectively marketing a product does not directly translate to Nigeria. De Mooij argues as consumer incomes converge across countries, the manifestation of value differences will become stronger and so consumer behaviour will become more heterogeneous. She further argues, such a phenomenon makes it increasingly important to understand the values of national cultures and their impact on consumer behaviour.

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***Limitations***

There are a number of methodological concerns. This study only looked at one dimension of Hofstede’s (1997; 2001) taxonomy – individualism. Consideration of the other dimensions may enhance or mitigate the outcomes. This as yet needs to be empirically determined. Including Russia and Japan due to their geographical location as an individualist and a collectivist country respectively is not borne out by their scores on Hofstede’s individualism construct of 38 and 46, respectively. On the other hand, to obtain such strong evidence of support for the Hs in spite of including such countries is indicative of the strength of the findings. Further, the findings from the consumers sampled may not be capable of generalisation to wider populations as the study used the snowball method to obtain a convenience sample. Furthermore, the numbers within groups varied with the United Kingdom accounting for over 50% of the European sample and Taiwan accounting for over 50% of the Asian sample. Further studies could be conducted to address such concerns with similar numbers for each nationality, a more rigid approach to implementing a classification system with perhaps 3 clusters based on Hofstede’s scores: high, moderate and low, as well as geographical location. Plus other Hofstede’s dimensions may be considered in the rubric.

***Conclusion***

Understanding how culture influences consumer behaviours is crucial for success in international marketing (Chui, Kwan, Li, Peng & Peng, 2012). In a review of the salient literature in this area, Johar, Maheswaren, & Peracchio (2006) have called for a broader perspective on consumers’ different cultural backgrounds, such as individualism, in order to better understand how it affects consumption. The findings of this research support their argument and show that it is important to consider the cross-cultural dimension of collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 2001) and also to take account of the role of gender within cross-cultural studies.

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