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Preferences for Specific Identity-based Message Type under A Chinese Cultural Background

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Abstract

The current research aims to explore which type of identity-based message can be more persuasive for Chinese consumers to form positive restaurant brand attitude based on their cultural orientation, and to examine the roles of brand objective relevance and psychological power state in the persuasive process. The study employs a 2(identity expression focus: warmth vs. competence) × 2(message description manner: identity-defining vs. identity-referencing) × 2(experienced power state: high vs. low) between-subjects design, and conducts an online survey where 240 Chinese participants in total has responded to the questionnaires. SPSS and AMOS programs have been used to examine the hypotheses. The findings suggest that, first, the warmth-focused messages (identity-defining messages) more positively affected Chinese consumers' object relevance than the competence-focused messages (identity-referencing messages); Second, high power-experienced Chinese consumers rather than low power consumers tend to perceive more object relevance at the warmth self-defining messages; Third, brand object relevance revealed a mediation effect in the process of the warmth-focused messages (identity-defining messages) affecting brand attitude. This research offers new insight into the relationships between consumers' cultural orientation, understandings of power, and identity-based consumer behavior, suggesting marketers should take those social influences and consumer diversities into account when developing the message to persuade consumers.

Keywords: Brand Attitude, Culture, Identity-based Message, Power, Object Relevance

JEL Classification Code: C83, L81, M31, P46

1. Introduction

Because of the interruption caused by COVID-19, most physical shops have been greatly affected in China because people turn to online shops rather than visiting the physical stores. (Al-Mansour & Al-Ajmi, 2020). However, as people have been in home quarantine for long periods, they are very eager to shop offline. Thus, in the face of the post-pandemic

era, it is extremely important to design absorbing marketing messages for physical shops that want to attract consumers. Consumer identity has been proved to be a powerful factor to affect consumers' preferences and purchases (Oyserman, 2009). "Identity driven effects" are everywhere due to the basic motive of expressing who one is. And consumers are found to perceive more object relevance to identity-linked offerings, advertisements, and even behaviors (Reed et al., 2012). Thus, inducing identity into marketing messages is a useful strategy for physical stores to catch consumers' attention because they are sensitive to the stimuli related to an identity.

Prior research has mentioned that warmth and competence are two universal dimensions that consumers pursue to express when interacting with others (Fiske et al., 2007). People driven by the communal motive usually show positive reactions to the information focused on a warm self, while those driven by the agentic motive reveal a favor for competent self-related information (Dubois et al., 2016). But Bhattacharjee et al. (2014) suggest that messages clearly defining an identity and an identity-expression behavior can backfire if the target consumer has salient needs for agency.

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However, even though consumers prefer products or information linked to their desired identity, few works have explained what kind of identity people want to focus, and what kind of identity expression manner they prefer from a cultural perspective. Actually, the desired identity that consumers want to display is usually determined by their persuasive value (Schwartz, 1992). Culture not only has a powerful influence on shaping people's dominant value, but also can affect the relationship the residents build with others (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). Compared to people in individualist cultures who claim independence and personal competence, those in collectivist cultures advocate to be interdependent and get well along with each other (Schwartz, 2006).

Another function of culture is to interfere with people's understandings of what is the meaning of power (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). Usually, people in vertical individualism culture view power in a personalized term, while those in horizontal collectivism culture view power in a socialized term. These cultural orientation differences lead to either self-oriented or other-oriented beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Triandis, 1996). Although power can be a strong factor to moderate the diagnosticity of information (Feldman & Lynch, 1988), little research understands the concept of power from a cultural perspective, nor explain consumer behavior from this perspective.

Therefore, based on the fact that Chinese consumers infiltrated by vertical collectivism and edified by Confucianism culture, their communal motive and altruistic goals may play a dominant role, the present study aims to explore whether Chinese consumers are more likely to perceive more object relevance in the face of messages with such warmth characteristics (e.g., friendly, sincere) as messages clearly defining who they are, as well as messages that directly defines their warmth. Besides, the work also intends to explore whether the power holders will respond more favorably to those message types. An empirical study was conducted to test seven hypotheses in total, and in the next sections, literature review and hypotheses development are provided.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Object Relevance and Brand Attitude

Individuals usually own more than one identity to present different sides of the self, which they use to self-categorize and self-express (Reed II et al., 2009). Psychologically, a product or brand can be strongly linked to consumers' identity if it apparently reveals their personality traits (Aaker, 1997) or self-images (Belk et al., 1982). Self-relevance of a stimulus can be understood in terms of an instrumentality of the stimulus to the

self-expression. Object relevance exists between consumer identity and product when the product concerned with making a decision is perceived to be a membership of the symbolic constellation set of products that define the identity (Kleine et al., 1993; Reed, 2004). As an example, anyone who perceives himself or herself as a professor may give more self-association to a vehicle that is perceived to be safe and practical in transporting his or her students to the tourism destination, since the one has the professor identity which emphasizes safety and practicality. The self-association may be common with brands when they "fit" with a particularly activated identity (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

In the consumer research domain, identity is regarded as a primary and cogent engine of actions (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Oyserman, 2009). And consumers tend to state, enhance, and deliver their identities through purchasing identity-related products or brands (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Generally, object relevance between consumers and the brand is more likely to be experienced when the brand is perceived to have the same characteristics as those of their traits or self-image. Researchers suggest that identity can affect attitude and consumption choice in an identity salience situation (LeBoeuf et al., 2010; Reed, 2004). And they are inclined to form a positive attitude toward the brand when the brand information matches the identity they belong to (Oh & Park, 2020). Thus, the current research assumes that,

H1: the extent to which consumers perceive brand object relevance positively affects their brand attitude.

2.2. Message Type based on Identity Expression

Consumer identity is usually considered as a means of targeting consumers because consumers show greater interests to products or brands focused on their identities, and to messages communicating their identities (Choi et al., 2019). Social cognition psychology suggests that warmth and competence are two universal dimensions of human social cognition revealed when encountering others (Fiske et al., 2007). Generally, warmth reveals that person has the qualities like friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, and trustworthiness, while competence reveals that a person has intelligence, skill, and efficacy. Individuals can be distinguished from each other through the label of warmth or competence. Some consumers tend to show themselves as competent, while other consumers are inclined to display themselves as warm (Dubois et al., 2016). These differences of identity expression focus usually lead to a different preference for the message type. Consumers who pursue a warm self-image prefer information focused on warmth, while those who want to present a competent self are more likely to prefer messages related to competence.

On the other hand, consumers who have a different tendency for identity expression manner can lead to a different preference for message description type. Some consumers favor the message that has a direct description of a specific identity and has clear guidance for choice (i.e., identity-defining message) (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), because messages directly defining an identity-expression manner and suggesting the action for self-expression create a specific match between brand and consumer identity, which can help consumers exactly define and express who they are (Chernev et al., 2011). For example, “If you call yourself a sports fan, you gotta have DirecTV!” (Bhattacharjee et al., 2014). Conversely, some of them reveal an avoidance tendency to that kind of information and turn to choose messages simply referring a specific identity and the symbolic function of the brand (i.e., identity-referencing message), because it suggests that buying the target may satisfy consumers’ needs for their self-expression, which can fulfill the need for agency and personal control. An example could be “DirecTV. All the sports you love, all in one place.” (Bhattacharjee et al., 2014).

The marketing message can be regarded as an important intermediary between a marketer and a consumer. Thus, to catch consumers’ attention, the designer should figure out the target consumers’ identity expression focus (e.g., warmth or competence) and their preference for message description manner (e.g., identity-defining or identity referencing) before developing marketing messages for a brand. This research tries to deal with this problem from a cultural perspective.

2.3. Relationship between Message Type and Brand Object Relevance based on Macro Cultural Orientation

From a macrostructure perspective, a cluster of scholars try to use the cultural orientation framework made of by horizontal individualism (HC), vertical individualism (VI), horizontal collectivism (HV) and vertical collectivism (VC) to explain the cross-culture difference (Shavitt et al., 2006). Chan and Drasgow (2001) demonstrated that individuals living in VC culture usually hold a strong responsibility and obligation with their hierarchy society. Usually, they will emphasize the importance of preserving hierarchies and traditional group interest. Residents in a particular cultural orientation are guided by the dominant culture value (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). For example, China, strongly affected by the culture of Confucian, is regarded as a hierarchy-oriented nation which attaches more importance to particular values such as authority and power, as well as humility and modesty (Schwartz, 2006). China was explored to be a typical representative of VC cultural orientation which gives

more attention to the submission to authority and pursues in-group goals at the expense of sacrificing their self-interests, and tends to be interdependent with in-groups members but supports competition with out-groups.

On the other side, Bakan (1966) uncovers that human behaviors can be fundamentally motivated by agency and communion. Particularly, agency is thought to emphasize the personal goal of pursuing independence and improvement, while communion mainly concentrates on building a friendly interpersonal relationship. Thus, in the respects of consumers’ pursuing an identity, agentic orientation helps consumers give their attention to the information that relates to their competence whereas communal orientation induces their focus on the information associated with warmth (Dubois et al., 2016). The current research insists that Chinese consumers who belong to VC culture and are strongly influenced by Confucianism culture will advocate tradition and conformity values and attach high importance to an interpersonal relationship that emphasizes amity, warmth, and modesty rather than pursue such personal goals as being unique and independent. In this vein, communal orientation rather than agentic orientation can more explain Chinese behavior given that they focus on interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it can be suggested that Chinese consumers could perceive more object relevance when facing messages focusing on warmth rather than focusing on competence, because they will more self-associate with the warmth characteristics of the message. Thus, the current study assumes that,

H2: Chinese consumers will feel more brand object relevance at the warmth-focused advertising messages than at the competence-focused advertising messages.

Meanwhile, maintaining hierarchies and pursuing traditional group interests are important to the people in VC culture. Thus, Chinese consumers are likely to avoid their self-interests, and to follow the requests from the authority in pursuing in-group goals. Therefore, the current research proposes that compared to the identity-referencing message, the identity-defining message is more likely to persuade Chinese consumers to perceive brand object relevance because they will be interdependent with in-groups members and focus on submitting to authority and in-group goals. Hence,

H3: Chinese consumers will feel more brand object relevance at the identity-defining advertising messages than at the identity-referencing advertising messages.

Furthermore, based on the hypotheses proposed above, the current research assumes that there will be an interaction

effect between message description manner (identity-defining vs. identity-referencing) and identity expression focus (warmth vs. competence) on the perceived brand object relevance. And Chinese consumers will feel more brand object relevance at the warmth self-defining advertising messages than at the other three messages like competence self-defining, competence self-referencing, and warmth self-referencing advertising messages. Therefore,

H4: *Chinese consumers will feel more brand object relevance at the warmth self-defining advertising messages than at the competence self-defining, the competence self-referencing, or the warmth self-referencing advertising messages.*

2.4. Roles of Experienced Power

Previous researchers indicate that a person can be regarded as powerful if he or she holds a relative control of resources and outcomes (Fiske, 1993; Keltner et al., 2003). In general, on one side, powerful individuals can control over both theirs and other's outcomes; on the other side, high power people usually have superior accessibility not only to material resources (e.g., money and career) but also to social resources (e.g., knowledge, respect, and affection) (Mourali & Yang, 2013). There is no doubt that powerful people are always viewed as less relying on others when making decisions compared to low power people (Rucker et al., 2012). Besides, in contrast to powerless individuals, people who perceived more powerful are found to show a preference for individualistic orientation and exhibit superior behavioral adaptability (Guinote et al., 2002). Galinsky et al. (2006) demonstrated that perceiving a state of high-powerfulness spur individuals to be more self-oriented and are less prone to take the perspective of others.

However, power themes (e.g., displays of success vs. supporting others) can vary depending on widely shared cultural values. The associations with power can be used to communicate the shared cultural values. Torelli and Shavitt (2010) argued that the insight of "power" could vary with the cultural orientation a person is living in. Chinese people living in a VC culture are viewed to maintain a complicated comprehension of power. Specifically, even though they tend to hold a personalized motivation for status enhancement (Singelis et al., 1995), they would like to reveal a social power motivation for altruism (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). That is, in Chinese cultures, there might be nurturant types of power goals evoked for helping others. Especially after personal power source was experienced, the nurturant types of power goals shared in Chinese VC culture are likely to be more accessed to the power holders.

On the other side, as power displays a function of controlling resources, choice is also found to have the

ability to satisfy individuals' needs of personal control (Zuckerman et al., 1978). Generally, it is not easy for an individual to perceive the sense of control in a choice situation especially when there is no obvious difference among alternative options or the choice is based on external motivation (Botti & McGill, 2011; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Since that power and choice can meet individuals' needs for control and agency, Inesi et al. (2011) imply that not only power and choice can be used in satisfying the desire of personal control (substitutability effect), but it can also be diminished when another has fulfilled the need for control in advance (threshold effect). Baumeister and Leary (1995) explored that there was quite a flexibility in using individual's utilizing different, interchangeable instrumental means to restore motivational deficits when a basic need has already been satisfied. That is, when the power of personal control was experienced in advance, at the additional choice the sources of control will provide diminishing benefits.

Expressing consumers' identities by using a brand is a function of the availability of alternative tools in their expression of the identities (Chernev et al., 2011). The mere act of experiencing self-expression in advance can reduce consumer preferences for the brands that are subsequently considered to express the self. Even though the control sources are available to high power consumers, if they experience the sense of personal control in advance, they need not seek alternative competence information to satisfy their control motive, on the contrary, they turn to increase the motivation for warmth-related information. Therefore, combined with the theories above, the current research assumes that,

H5: *Experienced power will moderate the effect of warmth-focused messages on Chinese consumers' brand object relevance. The effects of warmth-focused messages versus competence-focused messages on brand object relevance will be higher for high power-experienced Chinese consumers than for low power-experienced Chinese consumers.*

H6: *Experienced power will moderate the effect of identity-defining messages on Chinese consumers' brand object relevance. The effects of identity-defining messages versus identity-referencing messages on brand object relevance will be higher for high power-experienced Chinese consumers than for low power-experienced Chinese consumers.*

H7: *Experienced power will moderate the effect of warmth self-defining messages on Chinese consumers' brand object relevance. The effect of warmth self-defining messages rather than the other three types of messages will be higher for high power-experienced Chinese consumers than for low power-experienced Chinese consumers.*

3. Research Method

3.1. Experimental Object and Design

The current study adopted “Chicken Restaurant” as an experimental object, for the reason that chicken is one of the most popular and familiar dishes among every age group of people in China and is commonly accepted by every religion in the Chinese society. And in order to remit brand name effect on brand object relevance and brand attitude, the research adopted a fictional “K” as a brand name. The study employed a 2(identity expression focus: warmth vs. competence) \times 2(message description manner: identity-defining vs. identity-referencing) \times 2(experienced power: high vs. low) between-subjects design to develop eight types of questionnaires.

3.2. Development of Scenarios, Messages, and Measurements

Experienced Power Manipulation and Measurements. we created two opposite role-playing scenarios by adopting the experiment design of Dubois et al. (2016), in which high-power state was primed by concentrating on a boss role as follows.

“As a boss, you are in charge of directing your subordinates in creating different products and managing work teams...As the boss, you have complete control over the instructions you give your employees...The employees have no opportunity to evaluate you”.

and low-power state was primed by concentrating on an employee role as follows.

“As an employee, you are responsible for carrying out the orders of the boss in creating different products... As the employee, you must follow the instructions of the boss...You have no opportunity to evaluate your boss.”

Finally, 4 items (i.e., “I am feeling powerful”, “I feel in charge of the situation”, “I feel in control of the things”, and “I feel I am strong”) were used to measure the degree of participants perceiving their experienced power state referring to previous research (Dubois et al., 2016). And 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) were used to measure the items.

Advertising messages development and measurements. According to the 2 \times 2 \times 2 between-subjects design, the current research developed four types of messages in each power condition. Specifically, the messages used the words “skillful competent consumer” (“friendly warm consumer”) to symbolize a competent self-image (warm self-image). And

the identity-defining messages used the sentence pattern “If you are a (skillful competent/friendly warm) consumer and a chicken fan, you gotta use K chicken restaurant to express who you are”, the identity-referencing messages used the sentence pattern “All the chicken (skillful competent/friendly warm) consumers love, all in K chicken restaurant you as a consumer meet”, referring to the researches of Bhattacharjee et al. (2014) and Choi and Dhakal (2017).

Measurements of Identity Expression Focus and Message description manner. Following with the designed message, we asked whether the message focused on “1 = competence identity” or “7 = warmth identity” to make sure each message precisely displays the nature of competence/warmth self-image, and we asked whether the message “1 = just mentions a certain identity” or “7 = clearly defines who I am” to make sure each message precisely displays the nature of identity-defining/referencing manner (Choi & Dhakal, 2017).

Measurements of Brand Object Relevance and Brand Attitude. To measure the object relevance between participants and K restaurant we used five items: “K restaurant’s image and my image can connect to each other”, “K restaurant’s image and my image can be bound together”, “K restaurant’s image can be channeled to my status”, “K restaurant’s image is similar to my image”, “K restaurant’s image and I are matched together” (Reed, 2004). And 7-points scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) were used to measure these items.

Finally, we adopted 4 items (i.e., “I like the K restaurant”, “I am in favor of the K restaurant”, “I think the K restaurant is attractive”, “I think the quality of the K restaurant is good”) from the research of Choi and Dhakal (2017) to measure the attitudes of responders toward K restaurant on a 7-points scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

3.3. Data Collection

The current research conducted an online survey in China, in which 30 people participated in each of the eight questionnaire types respectively, that is, a totally of 240 people in China replied to the questionnaires distributed to them.

4. Results

4.1. Manipulation Checks

Participants were reported to experience more power in a high-power situation ($M_{\text{high power}} = 5.2417$) than in a low-power situation ($M_{\text{low power}} = 3.4083$), and this difference was significant ($F_{(1, 238)} = 112.179$, $P < 0.01$). Participants were found to prime warmth self at the warmth-focused message ($M_{\text{warmth}} = 3.24$), and prime competence self at the competence-focused message ($M_{\text{competence}} = 4.58$) ($F_{(1, 238)} = 45.163$, $P < 0.01$). Similarly, participants reported that messages

in an identity-defining manner clearly define who they are ($M_{\text{defining}} = 5.11$), while messages in an identity-referencing manner just mentioned a certain identity ($M_{\text{self-referencing}} = 3.15$) ($F_{(1,238)} = 202.165, P < 0.1$).

4.2. Testing Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses, we divided the data into high-power group and low-power group according to the questionnaire scenarios. As for the independent variables, the current research adopted dummy variables to redefine them. Specifically, we used -1 (1) to stand for identity-defining messages (identity-referencing messages) and also used -1 (1) to stand for competence-focused messages (warmth-focused messages). And the interaction of message description manner and identity expression focus was made of by the product of the two dummy variables. Brand object relevance was defined as the mediator, and brand attitude was set as the dependent variable.

4.2.1. Testing Basic Hypotheses

Amos 24 was used to test the overall structure model. Results revealed a good model fit for the high-power group with $\chi^2 = 90.398$ ($df = 47, P = .000$), $CFI = .968$, $NFI = .936$, $TLI = .955$, $RMSEA = .088$, and for the low-power group with $\chi^2 = 197.523$ ($df = 47, P = .000$), $CFI = .948$, $NFI = .912$, $TLI = .926$, $RMSEA = .104$. Further, the examination of the structural path coefficients, presented in Table 1, suggests that hypotheses 1-3 are supported in each power situation. Specifically, Chinese consumers are more likely to form positive brand attitudes if they perceive high object relevance between themselves and the brand (H1) both in a high-power situation ($\beta = .960, t = 9.617, p = .000$) and in a low-power situation ($\beta = .925, t = 8.457, p = .000$). And they revealed higher brand object relevance at warmth self-focused messages (H2) both in high-power condition ($\beta = .226, t = 2.149, p < .032$) and in low-power condition ($\beta = .335, t = 3.243, p = .001$), as well as at identity-defining messages (H3) in high power condition ($\beta = -.671, t = -6.040, p = .002$) and in low power condition ($\beta = -.507, t = -.216, 2, p = .000$).

However, as for the interaction effect of message description manner and identity expression focus on brand object relevance (H4), the effect is significant in high-power condition ($\beta = -.336, t = -3.171, p = .000$) but nonsignificant in low-power condition ($\beta = .023, t = -6.040, p = .829$). Besides, two way-ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of brand object relevance at warmth self-defining messages, warmth self-referencing messages, competence self-defining messages, and competence self-referencing messages. As a result, under the high-power condition, Chinese participants perceived more brand object relevance when exposed to warmth self-defining messages ($M = 5.4000$)

than to competence self-defining ($M = 4.2800$), competence self-referencing ($M = 3.6200$) or warmth self-referencing ($M = 3.3667$). And under the low-power condition, Chinese participants also perceive more object relevance when exposed to warmth self-defining messages ($M = 4.6867$), than to competence self-defining message ($M = 4.0200$), competence self-referencing message ($M = 2.9800$) or warmth self-referencing message ($M = 3.6867$). Combined with the results of two-way ANOVA, even though hypothesis 4 was rejected, Chinese consumers who experienced high power are more likely to perceive higher brand object relevance when exposed to warmth self-defining messages.

4.2.2. Mediation Effect of Object Relevance

The mediation effect was conducted in bootstrap of Amos where brand attitude was defined as the dependent variable, messages types were defined as the independent variables, and brand object relevance was defined as the mediation variable. And before conducting analysis, the number of bootstrap samples was set to 200, and confidence intervals were adjusted to 95%. Mediation analysis results for both high power group and lower power group are shown in Table 2, where all the direct effects in both high power group and low power group are insignificant because the confidence intervals [lower bound, upper bound] include 0 and p values are bigger than .05. However, except for the indirect path of the interaction term \rightarrow object relevance \rightarrow brand attitude for low-power group is insignificant ($CI = [-.111, .175], p > .05$), all the other indirect effects are significant. Hence, brand object relevance does play a full mediating role in the effect of message types on brand attitude.

4.2.3. Moderation Effect of Experienced power

Amos 24 program was used to explore whether experienced power plays a moderating role in the effects of the advertising message types on brand object relevance. As shown in Table 3, experienced power neither moderate the effect of warmth-focused messages on Chinese consumers' brand object relevance ($\Delta \chi^2 = .726, df = 1, p > .05$), nor moderate the effect of identity-defining messages on Chinese consumers' brand object relevance ($\Delta \chi^2 = 1.090, df = 1, p > .05$), which suggest hypotheses 5 and 6 are rejected. However, experienced power shows a moderating role in the interaction effect of message description manner and identity expression focus on Chinese consumers' brand object relevance ($\Delta \chi^2 = 5.629, df = 1, p < .05$). Specifically, the effect of warmth self-defining messages on brand object relevance is significantly higher for high power-experienced Chinese consumers ($M = 5.4000, \beta = .023$) than for low power-experienced Chinese consumers ($M = 4.6867, \beta = -.336$). Hence, hypothesis 7 is supported.

Table 1: Result of Testing Basic Hypotheses in High/Low Power Group

Hypotheses	Path	power condition	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Results
Hypotheses 1	Object relevance → brand attitude	High	0.960	0.100	9.617	0.000	supported
		Low	0.925	0.109	8.457	0.000	supported
Hypotheses 2	Competence/warmth → object relevance	High	0.226	0.105	2.149	0.032	supported
		Low	0.355	0.109	3.243	0.001	supported
Hypotheses 3	Defining/referencing → object relevance	High	-0.671	0.111	-6.040	0.000	supported
		Low	-0.507	0.111	-4.552	0.000	supported
Hypotheses 4	Interaction of messages types → object relevance	High	-0.336	0.106	-3.171	0.002	supported
		Low	0.023	0.108	0.216	0.829	rejected

Table 2: Mediation Effect of Brand Object Relevance

Dependent Variable	Path Type at Each of Power Conditions (H and L)		95%CI [Lower, Upper]	p	Mediation Type
Brand Attitude	Direct(H)	Competence/Warmth → Brand Attitude	(-0.201, 0.057)	0.341	Full Mediation
	Indirect(H)	Competence/Warmth → Object relevance → Brand Attitude	(0.024, 0.284)	0.026	
	Direct(L)	Competence/Warmth → Brand Attitude	(-0.168, 0.175)	0.981	Full Mediation
	Indirect(L)	Competence/Warmth → Object relevance → Brand Attitude	(0.090, 0.385)	0.006	
Brand Attitude	Direct(H)	Defining/Referencing → Brand Attitude	(-0.196, 0.112)	0.539	Full Mediation
	Indirect(H)	Defining/Referencing → Object relevance → Brand Attitude	(-0.686, -0.311)	0.002	
	Direct(L)	Defining/Referencing → Brand Attitude	(-0.189, 0.185)	0.932	Full Mediation
	Indirect(L)	Defining/Referencing → Object relevance → Brand Attitude	(-0.487, -0.136)	0.016	
Brand Attitude	Direct(H)	Interaction of Messages Types → Brand Attitude	(-0.115, 0.123)	0.893	Full Mediation
	Indirect(H)	Interaction of Messages Types → Object relevance → Brand Attitude	(-0.398, -0.101)	0.026	
	Direct(L)	Interaction of Messages Types → Brand Attitude	(-0.239, 0.042)	0.152	No Mediation
	Indirect(L)	Interaction of Messages Types → Object relevance → Brand Attitude	(-0.111, 0.175)	0.817	

Note: H stands for high-power condition, L stands for low-power condition.

Table 3: Moderation Effect of Experienced Power

Model Comparisons	Independent Variables	Dependent: Brand Object Relevance								
		df	$\Delta\chi^2$	p	NFI	IFI	RFI	TLI	H	Results
High-power group vs. Low-power group	Competence/Warmth(a)	1	0.726	0.394	0.000	0.000	-0.001	-0.001	H5	Rejected
	Defining/Referencing(b)	1	1.090	0.296	0.000	0.000	-0.001	-0.001	H6	Rejected
	a × b	1	5.629	0.018	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.002	H7	Supported

5. Discussion

5.1. Research Summary

Identity-based marketing message has been widely used to attract consumers' attention because it builds a fit between offerings and consumer identity (Chernev et al., 2011; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Prior researches repeatedly proved that messages engaging in the match of consumer identity and brand are able to stimulate consumption (Reed et al., 2012). Our research explored this match from the perspective of identity expression focus (warmth vs. competence) and message description manner (identity-defining vs. identity-referencing). And it focused on the relationships between identity-based marketing message types and consumer behavior, and emphasized the role of cultural background consumers living in. Through an empirical study, the current work finds that Chinese consumers, who belong to the vertical collectivism culture, tend to perceive more object relevance between the advertising brand and self when exposed to the warmth-focused advertising message (hypothesis 2), and the identity-defining advertising messages (hypothesis 3). Furthermore, our work takes the perspective of psychological power, and demonstrates that the warmth self-defining advertising messages are more likely to positively affect brand object relevance for Chinese consumers who experienced high power versus low power (hypothesis 7). In addition, the findings have proved that brand object relevance plays a fully mediating role in the effect of message types on brand attitude, based on the finding that brand object relevance positively affects brand attitude (hypothesis 1).

5.2. Theoretical Contribution

With the important findings of the study, several theoretical contributions have been summarized. First, identity is regarded as a basic and potent driver of consumer behavior (Oyserman, 2009). Relevance perceived from the object and self-image is helpful to purchase intention (Reed et al., 2012). Our study extends the literature on identity-based behavior by demonstrating that the message focused on the identity Chinese consumers pursuing (i.e., warmth identity) and the message presented in a suitable manner (i.e., identity-defining) can increase perceived object relevance between the advertising brand and self, and then increase positive brand attitude.

Second, this study built a connection between cultural orientation in a macro lens and human value in a micro lens, and explained why Chinese consumers living in a particular culture favor specific message type. It not only emphasized the important role of culture in shaping consumers' self-expression focus (i.e., warmth and competence), but also

offered a new explanation for consumers' preference for self-expression manner from a cultural perspective.

Third, the current work induced a new insight into understanding the psychosocial power based on the fundamental culture, and emphasized the role of experienced power in consumer behavior. Consumers in individualistic cultures view power as an excuse for self-focused action, but those people in collectivist culture regard it as the reason to keep responsibility and benevolence (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). This difference in understanding forces people to show different preferences for message type. Furthermore, our study shows evidence that consumers tend to decrease the need for personal control if they have been experienced power in advance, which responds to the threshold effect claimed by Inesi et al. (2011).

5.3. Managerial Implication

Also, our work can provide managers with lessons. First, the findings that Chinese consumers are more likely to perceive identity relevance when exposed to warmth-focused messages, identity-defining messages, and warmth self-defining messages suggest that the cultural background and dominant values are necessary considerations when making marketing strategies. Thus, in the post-pandemic era, physical shops in China should put weight on the idea about how to help consumers to express and define themselves as friendly, sincere, and helpful when designing marketing messages, especially those superior stores which can make customers feel a sense of power in psychological should do more. For example, managers can reveal the information that 2% of consumers' payment will be donated to the farms that frustrated by COVID-19 when developing the advertising message. Or let customers know the company's contribution to society during the outbreak. In doing so, the company are more likely to attract customers who want to present a warmth self-image. Besides, since the identity relevance is an important mediator between marketing stimulus and brand attitude, managers should build a strong association between a brand and consumer identity through focusing on the relevance when developing marketing messages.

5.4. Limitation and Future intention

Current research only concentrated on the Chinese consumers; it is necessary to confirm the practicability of our results through cross-culture research. Because of the huge gaps in cultural backgrounds and ideas about values, future research needs to explore whether our findings can apply to culturally similar countries such as Japanese and Korea. On the other hand, which messages will be attractive for countries such as Americans sharing different cultural values from China? Do those consumers have a similar preference

for message types as Chinese consumers? Future research needs to make it clear.

Additionally, Banfield et al. (2011) demonstrated that the residents differ in their system confidence when considering whether their society is justified, legitimate, and desirable. These differences may lead to a phenomenon that high system confidence holders endorse the dominant value whereas low system confidence holders pursue the opposing value (Shepherd et al., 2015). In the current research, the experienced power did not show a significant moderating role in testing hypotheses 5 and 6. It seems plausible that the participants' system confidence makes an effect in this process. That is, what the power means in Chinese cultures may be affected by responders' level of system confidence. People with low system confidence are more likely to view power as self-centered conceptualization. Thus, future research can try to figure out the role of system confidence based on the current findings.

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