

1-1-2000

# Advertising and Culture: Variations on the Theme of Individualism in Korean and American Magazine Advertising

Joyce M. Wolburg

*Marquette University*, [joyce.wolburg@marquette.edu](mailto:joyce.wolburg@marquette.edu)

Hoh Kim

*Marquette University*

# Advertising and Culture: Variations on the Theme of Individualism in Korean and American Magazine Advertising

Joyce M. Wolburg  
*Marquette University*

Hoh Kim, *Edelman Public Relations Worldwide, Seoul, Korea*

Social scientists regard the U.S. and the Republic of Korea as countries with opposing cultural values. Given this contrast, the advertising of each culture is expected to differ. An examination of magazine advertising indicates that American ads strongly express the individualistic culture; however, the Korean ads not only express collectivistic ideas but individualistic ones as well. Although this phenomenon is not entirely surprising given the strength of Western influence, Korean individualistic messages are different from American individualistic messages. This suggests that expressions of individualism in ads blend with the elements of each culture to produce uniquely different messages..

## INTRODUCTION

Of all the world's regions, Southeast Asia is thought to hold the greatest promise for multinationals looking to expand their reach due to the huge population, impressive economic growth rates, and open door for foreign investments (Fannin, 1997). Despite the economic reversals that many Southeast Asian countries have faced in recent years, most countries are fully recovering (Guerin, 1999). Southeast Asia continues to hold a strong attraction, which makes it imperative for outside advertisers to develop a greater understanding of its many countries and cultures.

Among the countries of Southeast Asia, the Republic of Korea (i.e., South Korea, hereafter, the ROK) holds considerable economic importance; yet, the contrast with the U.S. is enormous. The U.S. consistently ranks first in worldwide spending while the ROK's projected rank for the year 2000 is 12th place, the same as in 1999 (Koranteng, 2000). Projected 2000 ad spending for the two coun-

tries is \$4.5 billion for the ROK and \$134 billion for the U.S. (Koranteng, 2000), while the advertising industry worldwide is approximately \$400 billion annually (*Advertising Age*, 1996).

One thing is to understand a country's economics while another is to understand its culture, and one path to understanding is to gain insight into the cultural values of a given society, especially through cultural products such as advertising. Certain values have been investigated extensively by social scientists, and individualism and collectivism – two terms that represent polar opposites in the way the individual relates to society – are held as the most important dimension of cultural differences (Triandis, 1989).

The concepts of individualism and collectivism have generated numerous cross-cultural studies, many of which are important for advertisers (Gundykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988; Han and Shavitt, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; 1991; Triandis, 1995; Wilcox et al., 1996). Yet, more investigation is

needed. For example, Han and Shavitt (1994) compared American and Korean advertising and found that American ads employ more appeals to individualism than Korean ads, and Korean ads employ more appeals to collectivism than American ads as predicted. This finding makes the advertising in the two countries "culturally consistent" since the U.S. is regarded as an individualistic country and the ROK a collectivistic one. However, when examining the persuasiveness of ads, Han and Shavitt found a moderating effect by product category. Koreans rated individualistic messages as more persuasive than collectivistic messages for certain products, while Americans found individualistic ad messages to be more persuasive than collectivistic messages throughout.

These findings raise questions concerning the possibility that the cultural value of collectivism may be giving way to individualism, at least within some product categories and among young adults in the ROK, since most Korean studies have been conducted among college students. One explanation for a shift to individualism is that today's youth, regardless of cultural origin, are more homogeneous across cultures than members of different ages within the same culture (Mueller, 1987). Findings such as these suggest that more in-depth comparisons are needed for a fuller understanding of advertising content in the U.S., a country that strongly supports individualism, and the ROK, a traditionally collectivistic country of growing economic importance that may be undergoing a shift in cultural values.

The study begins with an overview of social scientists' view of individualism and collectivism, traces the historical context of values in the two countries, and proceeds to an interpretive analysis of advertising content for consumer products.

#### *Social Scientists' View of Individualism and Collectivism*

The Dutch social scientist, Geert Hofstede (1980; 1991), has researched the

many ways in which individualism and collectivism affect family life, occupations, education, and relationships in the workplace. He notes that families in most collectivist societies consist of many people living closely together including parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and servants. This "extended family" is the only secure protection against the hardships of life, and loyalty to this group is expected to last a lifetime. Collectivistic cultures instill a "we" consciousness, encourage harmony, and expect families or clans to care for members.

Families within individualist cultures traditionally consist of parents and children only, including single parent families since other relatives often live at a distance. This "nuclear family" teaches the child to be independent, and children are expected to leave the parental home once they are self-sufficient. Individualistic cultures instill an "I" consciousness, encourage speaking out, and expect members to take care of themselves.

Hofstede identified the U.S. as the most individualistic nation in the world when ranked against 53 countries, just above Australia and Great Britain. At the other end of the spectrum, the least individualistic (most collectivistic) countries are Guatemala, Ecuador, and Panama. The ROK ranks 43rd among the 53 countries, which places it firmly among the collectivistic countries (Hofstede, 1991, p. 53).

While the terms individualism and collectivism are generally regarded as mutually exclusive, Triandis (1989) argues against an overly simplistic view and maintains that it is possible for elements of both values to co-exist within the same culture. Furthermore, expressions of individualism and collectivism vary across different countries. For example, Taylor and Wolburg (1998) concluded that the expression of individualism is different for three individualistic countries – France, Spain, and the U.S. – just as Vogel (1963) concluded that the expression of collectivism varied among three collectivistic countries –

Japan, China, and South Korea.

### **The Evolution of Individualism in the U.S.**

The 16th and 17th centuries brought about an increase in social mobility and the cessation of the fixed social hierarchy during medieval times (Baumesiter, 1987). Concepts of individuality began to be articulated, and the basic unit in society began to shift from the community to the individual. For the first time it was conceivable that the individual's interests could be in conflict with those of society.

Outside the U.S., Englishman John Locke became a prominent spokesperson for the belief that people are inherently good, are endowed with inalienable rights, and are of equal privilege in the pursuit of rank. These ideas were embraced by Americans as well, but in a manner that reflected the unique cultural and historical influences in the U.S. Anthropologists Arensberg and Niehoff (1975, p. 363) speculate on the blending of individualistic ideas within the American value system as follows:

...The values derived from life on the frontier, the great open space, the virgin wealth, and the once seemingly limitless resources of a "new world" appear to have affected ideas of freedom. Individualism seems to have been fostered by a commitment to "progress" which in turn was derived from expansion over three hundred years. Much of the religious and ethical tradition is believed to have come from Calvinist (Puritan) doctrine, particularly an emphasis on individual responsibility and the positive work ethic. Anglo-Saxon civil rights, the rule of law, and representative institutions were inherited from the English background; ideas of egalitarian democracy and a secular spirit sprang from the French and American Revolutions...

Historically, the concept of individualism has resonated with Americans since the early

founding of the country and is articulated in the Declaration of Independence, which guarantees that "...all men are created equal, that they are endowed...with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (p. 1).

### ***The Role of Collectivism in the ROK***

Founded in 2333 B.C., Korea has been influenced by Confucianism to a greater extent than other ideological systems, such as Buddhism or Taoism (Yum, 1987a). Confucianism has provided an elaborate system in explicating proper human relationships and specifying proper ways to handle the rituals that maintain social order. Accordingly, the son is subordinate to the father, the younger to the elder, the wife to the husband, and the subject to the ruler. Though hierarchical in nature, these relationships respectively offer the virtues of love, order, deference, and loyalty. The bond between friends is the one relationship that is horizontal rather than hierarchical and offers the virtue of trust (Cho, 1994). Filial piety (honoring one's parents and ancestors) is held as the most important bond of all, for it is the starting point of all relationships (Yum, 1987a).

Confucianism guides two significant, collectivistic components of interpersonal relationships. The first is social reciprocity, which refers to social obligations. Collectivistic cultures generally bestow great importance upon these obligations, which cannot be refused or avoided without the loss of respect and goodwill. Rather than being contractual or calculating in nature, the sense of obligation is intended to create warm, lasting relationships. In contrast, individualism is at odds with the concept of social reciprocity because it places obligations upon relationships that threaten personal freedom. In cultures such as the U.S. members of a group retain their independence and form bonds voluntarily; members can drop out without group sanctions (Yum, 1987b).

The second aspect of interpersonal rela-

tionships is interdependence – a mutual dependence among in-group members. In the ROK strong in-groups exist among families, those from the same school (classmates and teachers), and people from the same geographical region. Identification with these groups of people over long periods of time establishes a clear distinction between in-group and out-group and requires different behavior toward in-group members (Yum, 1987b). Within the individualistic U.S. identification rests upon the individual rather than the group, and the concept of in-group versus out-group is largely absent, despite the fact that individuals may also be members of groups. The in-group/out-group concept is also at odds with the notion of equality because "applying different ethics according to whom you are dealing with is unacceptable [in Western thought], but in Confucian ethics it is natural" (p. 90).

### *Self-Enhancement*

Advertising messages across boundaries typically depict people. Depending upon the strategy and the medium chosen, advertising techniques include spokespersons' recommendation of the product, personal testimonials about product use, demonstrations of how people use the product, depictions of the lifestyle of the users of the product, dramatic portrayals of people in slice-of-life situations, and depictions of people that achieve humor and entertainment (de Mooij, 1998). Regardless of technique, advertising typically shows ways that products improve or enhance the lives of people. Furthermore, ads associate people with products in ways that fit the culture. A neutral word that captures this concept is "self-enhancement." Its use in the following research questions simply means that the ad enhances the person(s) in the ad, which can be achieved in either an individualistic or collectivistic manner.

### *Research Questions*

Given the different historical backgrounds

that promote individualism in the U.S. and collectivism in the ROK, some differences are expected in the way that advertising depicts people in the two countries. This study poses two broad research questions.

RQ1: How does advertising offer self-enhancement in the main message strategy of Korean and American magazine ads, and how prevalent are these messages of self-enhancement within each country?

RQ2: How do messages of self-enhancement fit within the cultural ideology and belief systems of individualism and collectivism in the two countries?

## METHOD

### *Sample Ads*

A total of 400 ads were drawn as a sample – 200 Korean ads and 200 U.S. ads. Four magazines per country were selected on the basis of similarity in format and target audience (Mueller, 1987), and similarity of advertised products. *Time*, *Esquire*, *Redbook*, and *Better Homes and Gardens* comprise the American magazines; *Weekly Chosun*, *Shin Dong-A*, *Yosong Dong-A*, and *Creative Home Living* (formerly *Better Homes and Gardens*) comprise the Korean magazines. Ads were randomly chosen using alternate months from one 12-month period. A total of 50 full-page ads per magazine were selected.

A preliminary examination of each magazine determined the average number of ads per issue, and depending upon that number, a decision rule was made to draw every 4th, 5th, 6th or 7th ad until 10 ads were drawn per issue. Use of this technique and the use of a random starting point insured that ads from beginning to end of the magazine had equal chances of selection, and that ads from all product categories were equally eligible. A total of 60 ads were drawn from each of the magazines in order to have a final set of 50 after discarding any ads that were unusable due to reproduction quality. Extras were randomly eliminated from sets that contained more than 50 ads.

### *Analytical Process*

*Stage 1 – Category Development.* Stages 1 and 2 were developed to address RQ1 by determining how advertising messages offer self-enhancement. By examining Hofstede's key differences in collectivist and individualist societies and by conducting informal interviews with two Korean and two American natives to learn ways of enhancing the self, the researchers developed a preliminary set of codes or categories for self-enhancement that contained both individualistic and collectivistic themes.

*Stage 2 – Analysis of Self-Enhancement Messages in Ads.* The next stage required the analysis of each ad for a message of self-enhancement and an assignment to a self-enhancement category. To this end, two questions were posed for each ad: (1) does the ad claim to enhance the self (either implicitly or explicitly), and if so, (2) how is the self enhanced (e.g., through which path)? The researchers used the method of analytic induction to develop a working scheme of paths to self-enhancement from the ads and from the preliminary set of categories developed in Stage 1. The researchers then modified and refined the scheme on the basis of subsequent cases (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Ads that did not fit the initial scheme expanded or adapted the original set of message elements. When determining whether an ad carried a message of self-enhancement, the unit of analysis selected was the "main message element," which was defined as the advertiser's intended overall impression to be gained from the ad (Taylor and Wolburg, 1998; Wolburg, 1999). Ads that demonstrated how a product worked, its function, or its application without reference to individuals were coded simply as product attribute ads and were not assigned to self-enhancement categories.

Since one researcher is a native Korean, fluent in Korean and English, and the other a native of the U.S., a team approach was used to achieve "investigator triangulation" – a way

of expanding the interpretive base of the research (Denzin, 1978, p. 245). The researchers examined the ads together, and each served as the "authority" for the country's ads. The Korean ads were translated for the American researcher. With the team approach, the researchers worked until attaining 100% consensus regarding category development and assignment of ads to categories. The categories were further tested on two natives of each culture, who found the categories sufficient for all ads. Nine categories for self-enhancement are identified and listed below, which are not offered as the only correct way but, instead, as one way of representing the data that is grounded in logic and insight. Specific elements of each category are found in the appendix.

1. I can become more attractive/healthy.
2. I can gain self-esteem/status.
3. I can experience sensual pleasure/be nurturing/romantic.
4. I can perform at a certain, though not necessarily optimal, level.
5. I can work more efficiently/increase skill level.
6. I can develop my intellect.
7. I can build relationships/show filial piety (honor my parents).
8. I can be part of a tradition.
9. I can feel at one with nature.

*Stage Three – Calculating Frequencies of Self-Enhancement Messages.* To provide an indication of the overall strength of each self-enhancement category as an advertising strategy across both cultures, the frequencies for each category were calculated. Although statistical analysis is not commonly used in qualitative research, Chi-square analysis was included in this instance because it has been successfully incorporated in other qualitative research (Taylor & Wolburg, 1998), and because it provided additional insight for comparisons of the cultures.

*Stage Four – Analysis of Self-Enhancement Messages within the Ideology and Cultural Val-*

*uses of Each Culture.* To address RQ2 the researchers applied insights from the literature and from the informal interviews with natives of each culture to consider different ways that the self-enhancement categories fit into individualistic and collectivistic beliefs. In this stage the researchers considered the possibility that some categories may be primarily individualistic, some may be primarily collectivistic, while others may be suited to both.

## FINDINGS

### Research Question 1

RQ1 asked how advertising offers self-enhancement in the main message strategy of Korean and American magazine ads and how frequently each path to self-enhancement is used. First, we must acknowledge that the vast majority of ads across both cultures made product claims that do enhance the self. A total of 88 percent of the Korean ads and 93 percent of the American ads went beyond simply describing product attributes and

claimed to make one more attractive, healthy, efficient, etc. Analysis confirmed that the differences in frequency between the two countries were not significant ( $\text{Chi-square} = 2.78$ , NS, df = 1).

To formally answer RQ1, advertising uses nine paths to self-enhancement with varying emphasis in meaning and varying frequencies across the two cultures. The nine categories are described below with examples given from each culture to show differences in meaning and in usage. Table 1 provides their respective frequencies.

*Attractiveness/Healthiness.* A relatively large number of ads in both cultures offer self-enhancement through attractiveness and healthiness (27 percent of the American sample and 31 percent of the Korean sample;  $\text{Chi-square} = 0.59$ , NS, df = 1). The attractive element of this category promises healthy looking skin, a slim figure, youthfulness, etc., and related products are primarily cosmetics, hair coloring, diet programs, and clothing. No perceptible differences in content oc-

*Table 1*  
Distribution of Main Message Strategy  
in Occurrences and Percentages by Culture

Main Message Strategy	U.S.	The ROK	CHI-Square
1. Attractiveness/Health	55 (27%)	62(31%)	0.59*
2. Esteem/Status	28 (14%)	44 (22%)	4.34**
3. Sensuousness	31 (16%)	23 (12%)	1.37*
4. Performance	3 (2%)	4 (2%)	NA
5. Efficiency	64 (32%)	18 (9%)	32.5***
6. Intellect	3 (2%)	9 (5%)	NA
7. Relationship/Filial Piety	0 (0%)	10 (5%)	NA
8. Tradition	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	NA
9. Oneness with Nature	0 (0%)	4 (2%)	NA
Total Ads with Main Message Strategy	185 (93%)	175 (88%)	2.78*
Ads with Product Attributes Only	15 (8%)	25 (13%)	2.78*
Total Ads	200 (100%)	200 (100%)	NA

\* Not significant, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.001

curred across the two cultures except at the execution level; e.g., Korean ads used more poetic expressions for concepts of beauty and were less explicit in their claims. Several Korean products promoted western images of beauty including a brand of cosmetic that promises "the Hepburn look."

While the two cultures expressed attractiveness in much the same way, healthiness was expressed somewhat differently, largely due to differences in implied beliefs regarding sources of healthiness. While ads in both cultures used health claims to promote fruit juices, bottled water, prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, exercise machines, low fat foods, and skin care products, the Korean sample contained ads for some products that do not commonly exist in the U.S. including a bed of stone that promises to energize the user by maintaining the correct flow of energy. Healthiness and attractiveness messages also appeared to have more overlap in the American ads than in the Korean ads, which treated the concepts independently.

**Esteem/Status.** A total of 14 percent of the American ads and 22 percent of the Korean ads use esteem/status claims ( $\chi^2 = 4.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 1$ ). Examples include feeling good about oneself, developing one's personality, being successful, and living up to role expectations. These messages were used across a wide variety of products; however, esteem messages were far more prevalent than status messages in the American ads (12.5 percent esteem and 1.5 percent status), while they were relatively close in number in the Korean ads (12.5 percent esteem and 9.5 percent status).

Ads differed in their expression of esteem across the cultures. American ads placed greater emphasis on expressing one's uniqueness and personality (e.g., Buick Riviera: "No other luxury coupe provides such a personal expression of power, confidence and control," and Joseph Abboud Footwear: "Where others lightly tread, you make an imprint. While

others dress, you make a statement"). In contrast, Korean ads were more likely to express esteem through role fulfillment within a relationship than through uniqueness (e.g., Infiniture Furniture: "A woman feels happy when her family enjoys being at the dining room table...a woman's happiness lives in her husband's smile and her children's joyful words around a well baked pie").

Status claims often appeared in ads for luxury cars, hotels, furniture, and clothing, and they represented a far greater part of the Korean ads than the American ads. For example, the Ritz-Carlton Seoul, modeled after the Palace of Versailles, advertised by inviting members of the upper class to stay at the hotel, and Infiniture Furniture claimed that its furniture style is favored by the English aristocracy. This contrasts sharply with the more egalitarian attitude toward status in the American ads. For example, Northwest Airlines claims, "Some people think you need the kind of connections that come with wealth or fame to get special treatment on an airplane. But on Northwest, all you need is ConnectFirst."

**Sensuousness.** A total of 16 percent of the American ads and 12 percent of the Korean ads used the sensuous message strategy ( $\chi^2 = 1.37$ , NS,  $df = 1$ ). Elements included appeals to the senses and associations with romance, pleasure, fun, tenderness, love, or sex. Sensuous ads for both cultures appeared with products such as fragrances, food, and beverages. Condoms and instructional sex videos (found only in the American sample) also used this strategy.

Korean ads for fragrances, food, and beverages included more romantic or nurturing messages while American ads promoted self-indulgence. For example, a Korean ad for sesame seed oil conjured the nurturing feelings of a mother's love when it claimed, "Even though time has passed, there is a taste that has not changed. Sesame oil is the oil of the mother – it is made with the attitude of a mother's love for her family." In contrast, an

American ad for Dove Chocolate portrayed an attractive woman relaxing alone in a chair with the caption, "The world will just have to wait...The lusciousness of a deep and lingering chocolate...lingers in the sweetness of the moment...you can't hurry Dove."

Sensuous Korean ads also evoked more romantic feelings than indulgence in sexual passion. For example, White Misty brand aftershave implied romantic sensuousness when a woman said, "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday - a man is very competitive. Saturday and Sunday a man becomes tender...it is an instinct that cannot be denied." The ad plays off a cultural belief that men must be strong in business but sensitive in relationships. In contrast, an American sensuous ad for men's Raw Vanilla fragrance favored a strong sex appeal over the more romantic appeal. The ad showed a couple locked in a passionate embrace while the copy also evoked passion, "In the Raw. In the Raw Vanilla...Rich vanilla crisp leaves...create a unique environment of natural warmth and pure masculinity."

**Performance.** Ads in this category comprised only two percent of all ads for each culture (Chi-square was not applicable due to small cells). This self-enhancement message references the ability to perform tasks without any claim that the performance is better or faster than that of others, which is part of the efficiency category. Ads using this form of enhancement are indistinguishable between the two cultures. For example, an American ad for Post-It Tape Flags simply claimed, "One day the people of the world will use these by the billions...Post-it Tape Flags. They tab. They mark. They color code, highlight and index." A Korean ad for Kaiser small appliances informed consumers that they will be pleased by what the products can do (bread-maker, blender, and razor). No ads claimed the products performed in a superior manner or could make the user superior.

**Efficiency.** Efficiency is the largest category (32 percent) among the American ads but only 9 percent of the Korean sample (Chi-

square = 32.5, p<.001, df = 1). Ads in this category included claims that the individual can be enhanced for performing tasks more skillfully or more quickly, for being more competitive, or for using money or time to a better advantage. The large number of these ads for both cultures in comparison to the performance category indicates how much stronger a claim can be made for an ad that promises superior performance; however, the larger number of American ads compared to Korean ads suggests that efficiency offers a stronger path for self-enhancement in the U.S. than in the ROK.

American efficiency ads were associated with a variety of products including electronics, business and finance, automobiles, and household goods while the Korean efficiency ads used a narrower list of product categories, usually electronic goods and automobiles. Among the American ads, efficiency examples were plentiful: Canon "perfects the home office," the Principal Financial Group can "give you an edge...if you savor growth and security," and FedEx claims, "We ship sizes you never thought of to places you never heard of. No matter what you ship overseas, no one gets it there like FedEx."

American efficiency ads also contrasted with the Korean ads by offering more time-saving benefits. The U.S. is a monochronic culture that views time as a commodity - one that can be saved, spent, or lost (Hall & Hall, 1990). As a polychronic culture, the ROK does not commodify time, and the ads often promoted the value of efficiency without using time-ordered efficiency claims. For example, a Korean Daewoo ad promotes two benefits for the price of one - a wide TV set that allows buyers to view either regular or wide-screen broadcasting. However, no time saving claims are made.

**Intellect.** This category only appeared in 2 percent of the American ads and 5 percent of the Korean ads (Chi-square NA). American ads with intellect claims were limited to those for media companies and for books. Korean ads used stronger claims and included a greater

variety of product categories including socks, strollers, foreign language courses, dictionaries, and CD ROM encyclopedias. Colorful socks with animal designs from the Intarsia Company "stimulate the imagination" while MC Square, an electronic device used with sunglasses, stimulates brain activity. According to the ad's testimonial, a child ranked 202nd in his class moved to first after using the product.

An American ad that promoted development of the intellect and the personality also offers young children a blueprint for achieving individualism through independence and uniqueness. An ad for the Nickelodeon Jr. cable network claimed that "at Nick Jr. kids have a great time while learning to have self-confidence, think for themselves, and appreciate the uniqueness in everyone."

*Relationship Building.* This strategy is used in 5 percent of the Korean ads and none of the American ads (Chi-square NA). Ads in this category emphasized the value of the relationship above all other forms of enhancement. While relationships were often depicted in American ads, as a whole they took secondary role to the task at hand. For example, an American ad for Dining a la Card (a credit card that automatically discounts 20 percent at participating restaurants) showed a couple dining together, but the product benefit emphasized was the financial savings and the ability to obtain a discount without the use of discount cards or coupons. Similarly, a Sallie Mae Financial ad showed a father and daughter completing a loan application for college, but the ad promoted the company's ability to provide savings for college loans rather than emphasizing the relationship between the two.

Koreans believe the most important of all relationships is filial piety, the bond between child and parents (Yum, 1987a). Two Korean ads strongly emphasize this – a long distance carrier reminds people that they can practice filial piety by calling their parents on the phone, and a Samsung insurance ad portrays a new mother making a vow to her baby. In a

very touching ad she promises to pass down her own mother's teachings:

Because of you I exist now and my child also [exists]. [I will talk about you] so that your deep love, which protects this world can be continued. Mom, you lived your whole life with the hope that your child would live sincerely. As you brought me up I am bringing up my child.

Gift giving also played a special role in the Korean sample for its ability to strengthen relationships. Several products were advertised as appropriate gift items including a Waterman pen, which exemplified the meaning of relationships as a young man says, "I give this pen to the person who has always taught me something. To my teacher who taught me the difference between self-confidence and over-confidence."

Tradition. Only 1 percent of ads from each culture emphasized tradition above all other message elements (Chi-square NA). While other ads included a secondary emphasis on tradition, one ad emphasized tradition above all else. Jeong-ro-hwan, a brand of stomach remedy, advertised by showing an older man and his daughter who said

Though time passes, our medicine has not been changed...For 25 years this has been our medicine. It has been with us for a long time...even from the time when we used an abacus (instead of a calculator), when we used fans (rather than air conditioning), when school children wore black shoes and black uniforms, and when we had to wind our clocks — from those times until now.

The closest comparison among the American ads celebrated longevity to emphasize product quality (e.g., Maxwell House Coffee: "Americans have been sitting down to a cup of our coffee every morning for the past 103 years"). While the ad is about longevity, the use of the product is not necessarily a family tradition. Both the Korean and American products have endured many years, but

the ads speak differently about tradition.

*Oneness with Nature.* This message strategy is used in 2 percent of the Korean ads and in none of the American ads (Chi-square NA). These ads go beyond simply stating that the product is made of natural ingredients and claim that consumers can be in harmony with nature. For example, the LG Green brand of wood floor offers a product that is an "artistic meeting between wood and people...Wood is the material that can understand people. It...will achieve the dream of being with nature."

### Research Question 2

In response to RQ2, some self-enhancement categories are ideologically more aligned with individualistic cultures, while some are more aligned with collectivistic culture. Several work within the cultural expectations of both cultures but appear to be used toward different ends. Thus, the potential exists for various forms of self-enhancement to be valued in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures although they appear to achieve different ends. To illustrate these points, the nine categories are briefly re-evaluated to illustrate their relationship to individualism and collectivism.

*Attractiveness/Healthiness.* Although attractiveness is valued in both cultures, it appears more socially acceptable to openly value attractiveness in the U.S. than in the ROK. In the U.S. the attractive person can stand out and be admired without reservation because attractiveness is its own reward. In the ROK it is impolite to be too boastful about one's appearance. Attractiveness appears to be a highly desirable quality but one that is pursued less openly.

Healthiness not only benefits the individual in ways that are valued in individualistic cultures, e.g., allowing the individual to achieve personal recognition for athletic skills, but it also carries a group benefit. The healthy individual can fulfill collectivistic obligations, such as being a productive mem-

ber of the group, being able to look after parents or relatives, or being able to do his or her share of the work.

Because no group benefits were shown or stated explicitly with attractiveness or healthiness claims, the ads appeared primarily appeared individualistic; however, the researchers concede that it is possible for consumers to think beyond the literal ad and bring other ideas to the interpretation process according to the expectations of that culture, particularly for people accustomed to a more indirect, implicit form of communication (Hall, 1976).

*Esteem/Status.* Esteem claims differ in the two cultures. The "uniqueness" message in the American sample fits the individualistic culture well, while the role-fulfillment message in the Korean sample reinforces the value of collectivism. Status claims in the American ads emphasize a democratic, egalitarian view of individualism while those in the Korean ads emphasize the social hierarchy, a structure more suited to collectivism. Thus, while esteem/status ads are used in both cultures, subtleties in the messages differentiate them.

*Sensuousness.* All ads in this category appeal to the senses; however, they differ in the use of relationships as context for the ads. The American ads promote self-indulgence over nurturance, and sexual passion over romance. The use of relationships is key to these differences since indulgence and sexual passion center on the individual while the nurturance and romantic themes reference seemingly permanent, on-going relationships in the Korean ads. In this case the pursuit of sensuousness in the American sample easily fits the individualistic culture, while its pursuit in the Korean sample provides a way to express individualism within the context of a relationship, making it appear less self-indulgent.

*Performance and Efficiency.* Performance ads are very similar for each culture, which suggests that good performance is valued in

both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The self-effacing nature of the message is one that would intuitively fit better in a collectivistic culture where humility is valued; however, it is seldom used in either culture. It appears that both the U.S. and the ROK regard mere performance on a lower plane than efficiency.

Aside from the time-ordered aspect that differed across cultures, efficiency claims differ according to the type of reward implied. American efficiency ads place more emphasis on the practical benefits of accomplishing the task at hand and less emphasis upon benefits to relationships. While others may share the benefits of efficient choices made by individuals, e.g., financial planning, the reality is that it is not necessary for others be enhanced. When other people are shown, they always include nuclear rather than extended family members.

In the Korean set, efficiency ads for products such as insurance, cell phones, video-teleconferencing, and other communication devices almost always depict product use as benefiting relationships, and the relationship with family is emphasized over others including co-workers. The context of relationships provides a justification for what might otherwise appear to be an individualistic pursuit.

*Intellect.* Only a small number of ads emphasize this path to self-enhancement, but one noteworthy difference is the nature of the reward for intellectual achievement. In the U.S. attaining recognition for one's intellect is of primary value for the individual; however, in the ROK it offers the means to a highly coveted end – the admission to the top universities (Yum, 1987b). Recognition and success are ends in themselves in the U.S. because they can help the individual compete against other individuals. In the ROK the highest intellectual achievement gives admission to a prestigious collective group that will bestow benefits on its members. Because intellect can be the means to a collectivistic end, it is not the same individualis-

tic pursuit in both cultures.

*Relationship Building.* True to expectations for the cultures, the American ads emphasize the task over the relationship, even though relationships are often depicted. The Korean ads emphasize the relationship over the task at hand and consistently show benefits to the group rather than to the individual. Korean ads both explicitly and implicitly value relationships, which appears more suited to collectivism. This appeared to be the most consistent difference throughout all ads.

*Tradition.* Few ads use tradition, but those that do provide a clue to how the claim varies across cultures. In the U.S. the claim is used to imply product quality, e.g., that the product must be good in order to survive in the marketplace over time. In the ROK the basis for the belief in tradition relates to the need to honor the past and recognize one's ancestors, which is strongly tied to collectivism.

While tradition has a special meaning in the ROK, some Korean ads suggest that the value may be eroding among the younger members of the culture. For example, an ad for Michelangelo brand of men's clothing shows a man who states, "There is no one path that the world has given us. Now I decide my own way. This is the beginning of a new age, and it is beautiful."

*Oneness with Nature.* Collectivistic cultures often regard nature as something to respect and obey (Kluckhohn & Strodebeck, 1961), unlike individualistic cultures, which value the mastery of nature (Arensberg & Niehoff, 1975). Not only do Americans modify the landscape to "overcome, to improve, to tear down and rebuild in a better way," they attempt to conquer disease and other natural phenomena. An ad for Cancer Treatment Centers of America reflects this stance by reaffirming the "need to make decisions and choose the treatments which are right for you. You need to be in control and take charge."

The few ads in the sample that offer One-

ness with Nature are Korean, and they appear to offer a way of belonging – not to a group of people, but to the land instead.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the U.S. sample, self-enhancement messages are a celebration of individualism, while in the ROK they carry a mixture of cultural messages. Some Korean ads embrace collectivism; some embrace individualism almost identically to American ads; and others stop short of fully embracing individualism by placing the message in the context of relationships or through a lack of explicitness. These ads politely offer a way of self-enhancement without appearing offensively self-indulgent or lacking in humility. Many Korean ads offer dual interpretations of enhancing the individual for his or her own sake, or enhancing the individual for the good of the group.

Kim (1997, p. 100) found similar evidence of a balance between individualism and collectivism for Korean corporate advertising, which used a "negotiation strategy." In a series of ads that made heroes of people who were "the first" or "the best" in their fields, Samsung encouraged this commitment to individualism because it offered the only way for Korea to compete in the world. Thus, individualism was the means to an end and was acceptable for the sake of the collective good.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

The results of this study are based on samples drawn from exemplars from the two cultures, which are appropriate for a study whose purpose is to identify and develop cultural categories (Stake, 1994). Future studies using a broader sample of magazines or using other media may refine existing findings by reporting additional categories or showing differences in the distribution of patterns already reported. Since some indications suggest that the younger Koreans adopt individualistic ideas more readily than older

members of the culture, research using media vehicles that target different age groups may provide additional insight. Longitudinal studies will also be important for tracking changes in values over time.

### *Expectations for the Culture and Applications for Advertisers*

Predictions for the future continue to see the U.S. firmly rooted in individualism. Predictions for the ROK suggest the country is headed for a cultural revolution in the 21st century in which "every kind of economic activity will be affected" (Lee, 1996, p. 2). This revolution will largely be characterized by "the pursuit of individual interests" in which "the individual will be put on a pedestal." If Lee's predictions are correct, purely individualistic messages may become more common to both countries. In the meantime, it is acceptable to be individualistic in the ROK as long as benefits to the group are implied, or as long as the message is not too arrogant or self-indulgent.

This study shows that not all individualistic messages are created equal. What is acceptable as an end in itself in American advertising is open to the dual interpretation of being an end in itself or the means to an end in Korean advertising. This is accomplished by placing the message within the context of a relationship or by a lack of explicitness. Advertisers communicating with both cultures need to understand that what may appear as the same cultural value has a different history in the U.S. and the ROK, and messages may need to maintain these differences in order to resonate with members of the culture.

## REFERENCES

- Advertising Age*. (1996). Advertising's top 100. (September 30): 29.
- Advertising Age International*. (1999). 1999 Media Map. (February 8): 54.

- Arensberg, C. M., & Niehoff, A. H. (1975). American cultural values. In J. P. Spradley & M. A. Rynkiewich (Eds.) *The Nacirema*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.
- Baumeister, R. (1987). How the self became a problem: A psychological review of historical research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52 (1), 163-176.
- Cho, N. G. (1994). The emergence of individualism in Korean organizations. In G. Yoon & S. Choi (Eds.) *Psychology of the Korean People*. Seoul, Korea: Dong-A.
- Denzin, N. (1978). *The Research Act*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.
- de Mooij, M. (1998). *Global Marketing and Advertising*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fannin, R. (1997). All roads lead again to heart of Asia. *Advertising Age International*. (October 19): 14.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Guerin, D. (1999). Asia-Pacific returning to days of sake & roses. *Advertising Age*. (October 25): 60.
- Goetz, J., & LeCompte, M. (1984). *Ethnography and Qualitative Designs in Educational Research*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). *Culture and Interpersonal Communication*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Doubleday.
- \_\_\_\_\_, & Hall, M. R. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural.
- Han, S., & Shavitt, S. (1994). Persuasion and culture: Advertising appeals in individualistic and collectivistic societies. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 30, 326-350.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1991). *Cultures and Organizations - Software of the Mind*. London: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Kim, H. (1997). *Korean Chaebol's Co-Cultural Identification Strategies in Corporate Advertising* (1994-1996). unpublished thesis.
- Kluckhohn, F. R. & Strodtbeck, F. L. (1961). *Variations in Value Orientations*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Co.
- Koranteng, J. (2000). Ranking the top global ad markets. *Advertising Age International*, (May): 17-20.
- Lee, H. (1996). *The Korean Economy: Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Mueller, B. (1987). Reflections of culture: An analysis of Japanese and American advertising appeals. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 4 (June/July): 51-59.
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Taylor, R. E., & Wolburg, J. M. (1998). Messages of individualism in French, Spanish and American TV advertising. *World Communication*, 27 (3), 3-30.
- Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*, 96 (3), 506-520.

- \_\_\_\_\_. (1995). *Individualism and Collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Vogel, E. F. (1963). *Japan's New Middle Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wilcox, J.S., Ko, G., Gentry, J.W., Stricklin, M., & Jun, S. (1996). Advertising presentations of the independent versus interdependent self to Korean and U.S. college students. *Advances in International Marketing* 7, 159-174.
- Wolburg, J. M. (1999). Time: The 'silent' cultural value in American television advertising. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 76 (3), Autumn, 419-432.
- Yum, J. (1987a). Korean philosophy and communication. In D. L. Kincaid (Ed.) *Communication Theory from Eastern and Western Perspectives*. New York: Academic Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1987b). The practice of uye-ri in interpersonal relationships. In D. L. Kincaid (Ed.) *Communication Theory from Eastern and Western Perspectives*. New York: Academic Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1994). The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in East Asia. In L.A. Samovar & R.E. Porter (Eds.) *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, 7th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

## **Appendix**

### ***Elements of the Message Strategies***

#### ***Attractiveness***

1. My appearance can be enhanced
2. I can wear clothes that make me look more attractive
3. I can be more attractive, beautiful
4. I can look younger

#### ***Health***

1. I can be healthier physically
2. I can be healthier mentally, emotionally
3. My energy can be restored
4. The energy in my body can be optimized
5. I can get well from illness, overcome pain

#### ***Sensuousness***

1. The product appeals to my senses (taste, feel, see, hear, smell)
2. The product suggests romance, pleasure, tenderness, or sex
3. The product gives me the feeling that I am loved

#### ***Esteem***

1. I can feel good about myself
2. I can develop my personality
3. I can feel good about my role in life (using this product will make me a good wife, mother, husband, father, friend, etc.)
4. I can take good care of my family
5. I will feel good about realizing dreams, accomplishing goals
6. I will feel successful
7. I can challenge myself and succeed
8. I feel superior to others
9. I feel proud, patriotic

#### ***Status***

1. The product will elevate my class to others
2. I will be treated as a high ranking person, member of royalty, member of high class
3. It gives me prestige
4. It elevates my position in business/in general
5. I will be admired/impress others

#### ***Performance***

1. I can perform/accomplish tasks (though not necessarily better, faster)

#### ***Efficiency***

1. I can perform tasks better, faster than others or better/faster than before
2. I can use money to my best advantage
3. I can use time to my best advantage
4. With this product I can get two things in one (two or more functions for one product)

#### ***Intelect***

1. I can improve my skills
2. I can develop creativity, intellect
3. I can raise my IQ
4. I can increase knowledge, vocabulary

#### ***Builds Relationships***

1. The product can strengthen the ties between people (husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, friend and friend, company owners and customers, etc.)

#### ***Filial Piety***

1. I can show respect for my parents or ancestors

#### ***Tradition***

1. I can use products with a long history
2. I can feel connected to the past
3. Using the product preserves a tradition

#### ***Oneness with Nature***

1. I can be at one with nature