

Assessing the link between cultural influences and persuasibility in online daily deals

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Abstract

Individual's susceptibility to persuasion and cultural values are important factors that influencing consumer buying behaviour. This paper assesses the linkage between an individual's persuasibility to cultural values in online Daily Deals (DD) in their tourism and hospitality deal choices. DD websites are the online platforms that offer a variety of deals and display different types of persuasive information to influence buying decisions. Using correlation analysis of 423 online DD buyers, this paper shows that individual differences in persuasibility significantly link to specific cultural values and thus extends the persuasion literature. It also provides relevant practical implications on the role of cultural values in persuasive communications.

Keywords: Individual-cultural values, susceptibility to persuasion, daily-deals

1. Introduction

Persuasibility refers to the extent of an individual's response to different types of persuasive communications (Janis, 1954). The emergence of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the Internet has provided a more effective channel of communicating (Puri, 2007). It enables new ways of doing business with an ability to use persuasive communication techniques without boundaries. When discussing persuasion in the context of online shopping, online daily-deal (DD) websites are those well-established online intermediaries' platforms with a combination of merchants' offers and social networks (Lee, Kim, Chung, Ahn, & Lee, 2016). The DD websites have attained popularity among tourism and hospitality operators (Kattiyapornpong & Ditta-Apichai, 2014; Ong, 2015; Kukar-Kinney & Xia, 2017). DD retailers have been employed the combination of different persuasion strategies including offering a steep discount available for limited time (Krasnova, Veltri, Spengler, & Günther, 2013), showing the number of existing purchases (Nakhata & Kuo, 2014; Kukar-Kinney & Xia, 2017), and encouraging daily-deal users to share information in their social network sites to promote the deals (Ditta-apichai, Gretzel, & Kattiyapornpong, 2013; Luo, Andrews, Song, & Aspara, 2014). Such different types of information potentially persuade consumers in their decision making, especially in tourism and hospitality which offers intangible products.

Considering that consumers use different types of information as cues to form a buying decision (Olson, 1972), knowledge of factors relevant to persuasibility is critical to communicate the effective messages because the degree of persuasibility varies across individuals (Clark & Goldsmith, 2006). The majority of persuasion research has been dedicated to the influence of persuasibility on consumer's attitude and intention changes (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). However, academic researchers have paid little interests in the investigation of factors associating with susceptibility to persuasion (Kaptein & Eckles, 2012), especially individual's personal factors. Thus, a complete understanding of the association between individual differences and their susceptibility to persuasion (e.g., the relationship between an individual's cultural values and susceptibility to persuasion principles) is still needed.

Regarding the gap in the current literature, this paper focuses on investigating consumer's susceptibility to persuasion relating to cultural values. Because culture a source of individuals' thinking, feeling and acting which is shared across society and generations (McCort & Malhotra, 1993; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), it therefore influences consumer's attitude and behaviour (Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). The better understanding of the relationship between individual's cultural values and persuasibility will help both academic scholars and practitioners in planning and designing the effective marketing communication strategies to attract both local and international consumers, especially in an online market where the physical contact is absent. The paper provides an important contribution to persuasion theory. Specifically, it links persuasibility with culture to investigate whether differences in susceptibility to persuasion potentially relate to an individual's subscription to particular cultural value orientations. Focusing on online DD buyers, this paper is also significant from a practical perspective as marketers can use the information to increase the effectiveness of persuasive cues in their messages, such as through priming of specific values with persuasive cues regarding cultural background of audiences.

2. Literature review

People differ in their susceptibility to persuasion (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1990). That is, the level of their persuasibility determines the extent that to which an individual is susceptible to persuasive messages (e.g., opinions and behaviours of others) (Clark & Goldsmith, 2006). An individual who scores highly in their susceptibility to persuasion is more likely to be influenced than one who is less so (Kaptein, Markopoulos, de Ruyter, & Aarts, 2009).

Cialdini (2001) proposes six persuasive principles used to elicit behaviour compliance and a persuasive request. The summary of these principles are:

- *Reciprocity*: individuals are likely to return a favour.
- *Scarcity*: individuals are likely to associate greater value with things which are difficult to obtain.
- *Authority*: individuals are likely to follow the lead of authority figures and credible, knowledgeable experts.
- *Commitment*: individuals are more likely to commit to a choice or stand they previously made.
- *Social Proof*: individuals follow the wisdom of crowds especially those who are similar to them.
- *Liking*: individuals are likely to comply with a request from those they like.

Cultural values are seen as sources of patterns of thinking, feeling and acting that influence consumer behaviours, especially information acquisition (Van Everdingen, 2003). Hofstede (2011) identifies six cultural values: individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. These cultural values can be simply explained:

- *Individualism versus Collectivism* describes the level of conformity with the majority in the society or groups that individuals have.
- *Power Distance* refers to the extent of acceptance in authority in the society.
- *Uncertainty Avoidance* is associated with the level of tolerance when individuals face unknown situations or uncertainty.
- *Masculinity versus Femininity* refers to dominant values of the gender roles in society.
- *Long-term versus Short-term Orientation* relates to what extent individuals place values on long-term fulfillment (versus immediate gratification).
- *Indulgence versus Restraint* refers to the extent of self-indulgence or gratification of life individuals have.

The small number of research has provided evidence that culture influences consumer buying intentions and behaviours. For instance, Little research has examined the associations between specific cultural values and individual's response to persuasive communications. Of a small number of above studies, Cialdini et al., (1999) show that the social proof principle to persuasion is more persuasive among Polish people who are considered to be collectivists than Americans who are individualists. Added to that, Dawar, Parker, and Price (1996) find that individuals living in countries that have high scores in uncertainty avoidance and power distance were more persuaded by information given by experts. Ng (2013) found that cultural differences (collectivism and uncertainty avoidance) significantly moderate the relationship between social interactions and purchase intentions in online shopping. McNeill, Fam and Chung (2014) also showed the influence of masculinity on individuals' price sensitivity. That is, people with a high score in masculinity are vulnerable to sales promotions such as coupons or discounts which reinforces their self-perception as a smart shopper. Despite that, the potential association between each cultural value dimension and individuals' persuasibility remains uninvestigated, especially in online shopping (e.g., Daily-Deal shopping) in which consumers can rely on available information only because of the absence of physical offers.

DD websites provide deals with highly discounted rates available on time and/or quantity limit and the set minimum number of buyers for deal activation (Stulec & Petljak, 2013). The set minimum number of buyers to activate offers is called the "tipping point". Online DD consumers can obtain the discounted deal (usually more than 50%) and pay for their purchase only when a number of purchasing orders were more than the "tipping point", which can be one purchase or more depending on deal conditions. An example of the current online DD retailers is Groupon, a group-buying industry leader launched in 2008 (Liu & Sutanto, 2015). DD websites send daily personalised deals to the consumer's email account or mobile phone to persuade consumer's purchase decision (Hughes & Beukes, 2012). Online DD buyers can also observe other details of the offers such as deal descriptions, terms and conditions of the offers, and the number of existing orders (Park & Chung, 2012). Furthermore, some DD companies also encourage online consumers to share information on social network sites (e.g., *Facebook*) (Piccoli & Dev, 2012). Such different types of information significantly influence the success of online DD offers (Liu & Sutanto, 2015). However, the understanding of individual factors potentially influences online daily-deal purchasers' buying decision is still limited (Che, Zheng, Peng, Lim, & Hua, 2015).

Regarding the gap of the persuasion and DD literature discussed above, this paper aims to investigate associations between an individual's susceptibility to persuasion and cultural values in the context of daily deal shopping. The research question in this study is: Are online DD buyer's persuasibility and their cultural values linked?

3. Research method

3.1 Sample

Seeking to understand the linkage between individual cultural values and persuasibility, online daily-deal buyers who lived in Australia and Thailand and had purchased at least one deal in the preceding 12 months were recruited. Australia and Thailand were selected because of their significant growth of online shopping (Thirlwell, 2017) and cultural differences. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), Australia is an individualist country (rank = 2) with a lower score in power distance (score = 36), uncertainty avoidance (score = 51), long-term orientation (score = 31), and a higher score in masculinity (score = 61). However, Thailand is a collectivist country (rank = 56-61) with a higher degree of power distance (score = 64), uncertainty avoidance (score = 64), long-term orientation (score = 56) and a lower degree of masculinity (score = 34). Back-translated English and Thai self-reported questionnaires were distributed to experienced DD buyers through an online survey from October 2014 to March 2015.

3.2 Measures

This research used Kaptein's et. al., (2009) susceptibility to persuasion measurement items to assess individuals' persuasibility because they were developed with regard to Cialdini's (2001) six principles to persuasion. The measurement scales of indulgence, collectivism, power distance, and long-term orientation were modified from Sharma, Sivakumaran, and Marshall's indulgence measurement scale (2011) and the CVSCALE measurement scale (Yoo & Donthu, 2002). For masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, the researchers developed measurement items based on each cultural dimension's definition provided by Hofstede (2011).

3.3. Analysis

Following the guideline suggested by Hardesty and Bearden (2004), the content validity of each measurement scale was tested by expert judges. Furthermore, we recruited eight post-graduate students to validate the individual item and its conceptual definitions. The final results showed that all measurement items were valid.

423 usable questionnaires (249 English and 174 Thai) were used for analysis. Cronbach's Alpha score of susceptibility to persuasion was .989. For individual cultural values, Cronbach's alpha of each cultural dimension was above .70 ($\alpha_{COL} = .973$, $\alpha_{PD} = .904$, $\alpha_{UA} = 0.930$, $\alpha_{MAS} = .892$, $\alpha_{LTO} = .984$, $\alpha_{IN} = .945$). Thus, the measurements were considered to have a high reliability. Finally, we employed correlation analysis to answer the research question.

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The total of 423 respondents represented a wide range of characteristics and buying experiences (Table 1). Of them, 70.1% were female and 23.4% were male. Approximately 43% were between 18 to 30 years old, 16% were between 31 and 40 years old, and around 16% were over 40 years old, and finally, 25% preferred not sharing the information. The majority of respondents had a bachelor's degree or above (around 71% or 299 individuals), while about 14% (n = 59) had finished high school, technical college or the equivalent. These details of respondent characteristics are in accordance with the literature identifying that the majority of online DD consumers are females aged 35 years or younger who had obtained an undergraduate degree or higher (Che, Peng, Lim, & Hua, 2015).

Table 1: Respondents' demographics and buying experiences

Demographics	Number	Percent
Country		
Australia	249	58.87%
Thailand	174	41.13%
Gender		
Male	99	23.4%
Female	297	70.1%
Unidentified	27	6.5%
Age		
18-30 years old	182	43.03%
31-40 years old	68	16.0%
Over 40 years old	67	15.84%
Unidentified	106	25.0%
Education		
High school	25	5.91%
TAFE/Diploma	34	8.04%
Bachelor's degree	134	31.68%
Post graduate degree	165	39%
Other/unidentified	65	15%
Buying Experiences		
Duration		
Up to three months	28	6.61%
Over three months to one year	118	27.9%
Over one to two years	96	22.7%
More than two years	181	42.79%
Frequency		
Less than once a month	266	62.9%
Once a month	92	21.75%
More than once a month	60	14.18%
Other/unidentified	5	1.17%

Regarding buying experiences, approximately 43% of respondents had had purchased deals for more than two years, about 23% had over one to two-years' buying experience, about 28% for over three to 12 months; and less than 7% had purchased deals on daily-deal websites less than three months. The largest number of respondents (62.9%) purchased deals less than monthly, about 22% purchased once a month, and slightly over 14% bought deals more than once a month. These findings are consistent with DD research conducted previously indicating that the greatest number of online DD buyers have purchased a few DD offers per year (Lacerda, Santos, Veloso, & Ziviani, 2015).

4.2 Correlation analysis results

The results are presented in Table 1. The findings indicate that an individual's susceptibility to persuasion significantly corresponds with individual cultural values. Specifically, the results of the Pearson correlations showed a significant association between an individual's susceptibility to persuasion and collectivism ($r = .207$,

$p < 0.001$), uncertainty avoidance ($r = .160$, $p < 0.001$) and long-term orientation ($r = .261$, $p < 0.001$). These meaningful relationships mean collectivists, high uncertainty-avoidance individuals, and long-term orientation people are likely to comply when provided with persuasive information. Surprisingly, the positive correlation values indicated that collectivism ($r = .207$) had a weaker association with the susceptibility to persuasion than long-term orientation ($r = .261$) but have a stronger relation than uncertainty avoidance ($r = .160$). In addition, the findings suggested that an individual's persuasibility does not have any correlations with an individual's cultural value regarding power distance, masculinity and indulgence.

Table 2: The associations between an individual's susceptibility to persuasion and cultural values.

Persuasion/ Personal factors	Susceptibility to persuasion
	Correlation (r)
Collectivism	.207**
Power Distance	-.083
Uncertainty Avoidance	.160**
Masculinity	.062
Long-term orientation	.261**
Indulgence	.032

** $p < .001$

5. Discussion

This paper illustrates the value of considering cultural differences in relation to the degree of an individual's persuasibility. The findings indicate that persuasive messages are more influential among collectivists, individuals who highly avoid uncertainty, and long-term oriented persons. These findings are consistent with the literature relating to cultural values and persuasion (Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Importantly, this research confirms the literature indicating that interpersonal relationships (Cialdini et al., 1999) and uncertainty (Dawar et al., 1996) play a significant role in persuasive communications. One of possible explanations of the findings is that collectivists value harmony in society and are likely to conform to others (Hofstede et al., 2010), and thus are likely to accept information than those people who are less collectivistic. High uncertainty avoidance persons, on the other hands, desire to avoid ambiguity (Hofstede, 2011), and thus seek more information as their uncertainty avoiding strategy. Because high long-term oriented people value thrift and perseverance (Hofstede, 2011), they possibly associate the persuasive messages (e.g., discount rates and opinions of other buyers) encountered during their online DD shopping with benefits of promotional offers and thus are persuaded easier than others.

The findings show no link between an individual's persuasibility and cultural values regarding power distance, masculinity and indulgence. The findings are in accordance with the theory indicating that people who favour power inequality are likely to comply to those who hold power (Hofstede et al., 2010). Therefore, they are not persuaded by persuasive messages provided by online consumers or marketers. High masculine people are egocentric, independent and competitive (Hofstede, 2011), and therefore, are less agreeable. Finally, Hofstede's (2011) indicates that highly indulgent individuals value gratification and are likely to purchase products to indulge themselves. Because of that, indulgent people are more likely to focus on products or services that benefit them and suit their needs and thus are not easily convinced by persuasive messages presented on DD websites.

6. Conclusion

This research paper provides both practical and academic implications. The findings of this study extend the persuasion knowledge that individual's persuasibility relates to specific cultural values discussed previously. Put into practice, this present paper provides an opportunity for marketing practitioners and persuaders to get insightful information regarding the role of an individual's cultural value on persuasibility in order to design and plan their online marketing communications. The success of framing persuasive messages depends on better knowing what cultural values to prime before exposing different audiences to specific persuasive cues. This research, however, can be criticized for its limited scope with samples from only two countries; Thailand and Australia. The research also focused only on online DD consumers. The sample may not represent a wide range of people because the majority of online DD buyers are considered high educated, young female consumers (Che, Peng, et al., 2015). Thus, the extent of persuasibility and cultural values of the DD consumers may differ from general online consumers. Therefore, this topic remains challenging for further investigation to provide more empirical evidence.

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