1. Introduction

Many marketing scholars have applied findings from psychology to examine the effectiveness of advertising appeals. It is noted that some Chinese American bicultural consumers favour advertising appeals, which may include cultural conflicted information, whereas, other Chinese American biculturals are less like to favour such appeals (Lau-Gesk, 2003). Dialectical thinking captures one’s degree of tolerance for cultural conflicted information (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). However, to my best knowledge, no researches have pinpointed the mechanism explaining why some biculturals favour advertising appeals that contain conflicted cultural values. Filling this gap is important, both in relation to advertising theory and practice. The experiment findings suggest that one’s degree of dialecticism can be used to pinpoint the mechanism driving such differential attitudinal responses. It presents an agenda for inquiry of dialecticism, which merits concerted efforts to understand how bicultural individuals differ from one and another on the degree of dialecticism and substantiate the role of dialectical thinking in advertising literature.

This research has two purposes. First, existing psychology and marketing literature do little to address the individual antecedents that would explain why a given dialectical individual remains dialectical or moves away from dialectical thinking style to analytical thinking style which emphasizing synthesis of conflicted information (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). 10 in-depth interviews are conducted with Chinese biculturals in the UK to understand the predictors of one’s degree of dialecticism. Second, an experiment is designed to examine the causal relationship between dialectical thinking and the persuasiveness of dual-focused ads appeals. I contrast the biculturals’ attitudes towards shared products with personal used products. This cross product type comparison supports my assumption that the individuals’ differences in dialecticism predict their attitudes on the dual-focused advertisements when shared products are promoted.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Dialecticism account for cultural difference

Past studies on dialecticism claim that dialecticism offers an alternative to the conventional approach of cultural differences in reasoning about psychological contradiction account, in part, for the East-West variance in well-being (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). The conventional approach of individualism-collectivism and independent-interdependent self-construal are the most popular individual difference variables which have received much attention and been widely researched in psychology and advertising literature (e.g. Zhang, 2009; Lau-Gesk, 2003). Dialectical thinking has offered deeper insights into cultural differences from individuals’ thinking perspective. Dialecticism refers to folk epistemologies, which influence people’s reasoning about contradiction as well as their tolerance for ambiguity (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). East Asian epistemologies tend to “tolerate, rather than eschew, psychological contradiction” (Peng et al., 2001). For dialectically oriented individuals such as Chinese, the nature of the world is that conflicting elements can coexist within the same object or event (Peng et al., 2001). In contrast, Westerners tend to have more linear cognitive orientation, which they consider both sides of an opposing argument and then search for resolution of incongruity (Thompson et al., 1995). Biculturals pose both theoretical and practical challenges to traditional cross-cultural advertising research as well as psychological research. Since dialectical thinking has been studied at the cultural group level, little is known about whether it differentiates one Chinese bicultural from the others (individual level). Based on the evidence that certain individual abilities can affect the process of cultural adaptation (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005), do all the Chinese biculturals share a similar degree of dialecticism? Individual differences in degrees of dialecticism may be linked to particular abilities relevant to the acculturation process. The qualitative study aims to answer this question. Additionally, if Chinese are more tolerant of contradiction, does
it mean that they all favour dual-focused advertising appeals, which may include cultural conflicted values? The experiment is designed to examine the causal relationship between dialectical thinking and the persuasiveness of dual-focused advertising appeals.

3. Method:

I recruited ten Mainland Chinese female students from the University of Manchester. All interviewees were born in China, 23-30 years of age and living in Manchester, UK, with lengths of stay between 2-5 years. Participants’ characteristics are included in Appendix 1. This paper is part of a large project. The large project compares the role of dialecticism in two different bicultural groups in two countries, China and the UK. Age is a critical variable in determining whether the Chinese in China are biculturals. This is particularly important in this research because Zhang’s (2010, 2009) research suggest that young Chinese in China aged 18-35 are biculturals when compared with older people. Moreover, after reviewing relevant advertising literature, gender is not expected to play a significant role in determining the types of advertising appeals that biculturals favour (Zhang, 2009; Lau-Gesk, 2003). Bicultural individuals’ perceptions of the compatibility of East and West culture are not differed in gender (Benet-Martinez et al., 2004). Therefore, Chinese biculturals’ preferences for advertising appeals are not expected to differ in gender. However, gender issue could be a limitation and should be acknowledged, and it is worthwhile in future to interview male participants to ensure the findings are free from gender biased.

Given the purpose of the interviews, I conducted 10 semi-structured (Punch, 2005), one-to-one interviews in Manchester, UK. To maintain consistency, I used a semi-structured interview guide. All participants following a simple open question: how does British culture impact on you? A follow up question: how did you deal with the cultural conflicts? All interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and were digitally recorded, and subsequently transcribed by me and cross-checked by a Chinese doctoral student of Manchester Business School. Spiggle (1994)’s analysis method is used in this study.

4. Interview results

4.1 Perspective-taking

It is not surprising that Chinese students experience cultural conflicts in their daily life. In the process of dealing with cultural conflicts and interacting with British culture, some Chinese have developed abilities in adopting the perspectives of the British, whereas other Chinese have not. The data shows that thinking from their British counterparts’ perspective is an important ability of some mainland Chinese participants. The ability of considering the viewpoints of another cultural group of individuals is a form of perspective-taking, where some participants reveal that they are able to understand the cultural differences by imagining themselves as British. For example, Celina discussed her experiences of dealing with cultural conflicts when she was working with a team of both Chinese and British. The analysis results are included in appendix 2 and appendix 3.

Celina: “I learned their culture, including their ways of thinking. Once I spoke fluent English and understood their culture better I would explain Chinese culture to British people. For example, when we encountered conflict during a meeting I would put myself in their position and explain to my Chinese colleague that the British are generally very individualistic and express their views directly. On the other hand, I would explain to my British colleague that the Chinese value face and personal relationships; they tend not to refuse people directly. The reason for doing that is to let team members understand each other.”

However, the interview results also demonstrated that not all Chinese in the UK have developed such ability of seeing things from British perspectives. Some participants seem to be more ‘conservative’ than others when dealing with cultural conflicts. ‘Conservative’ Chinese, such as Yu and Chen, found it hard to accept some of the British cultural practice.

Yu: “I bought new clothes yesterday from Top Shop. When my housemate saw me wearing them today she said the colour did not suit me, in front of other housemates. I find she was a bit offensive to say that; I cannot accept it.”
4.2 Flexibility and openness

Flexibility and openness ability arose for some Chinese participants as they tried to cope with cultural conflicts. Some participants demonstrated that one way for them to interact with analytical thinkers is to become flexible and open to such cultural differences. Here Lei discusses her attitudes in comparison to monocultural Chinese, who tend to have a single perspective: she regards this as a “typical Asian characteristic”.

Lei: “I think the monocultural Chinese tend to love the country more than I do…, it seems that they hate other countries, especially in the last ten years, when China has grown at a fast rate. They cannot bear any different ideas which come from other countries. For me, I think their behaviours are really unnecessary. Easterners, I think they prefer to view everything through a particular lens, such as they define South Korea as less developed among the developed countries. Therefore, the Chinese tend to view everything through that lens and understand all Korean people from that point of view. I personally believe that is a typical Asian characteristic.”

On the other hand, the interview results also suggested that not all Chinese participants are flexible and open to cultural conflicts to the same extent. Although some Chinese have experienced cultural conflicts while living in the UK, such experiences do not make them accept the conflicts. To illustrate this point, Penny discussed her attitudes towards whether children should provide financial support to their parents and Wen talked about her experiences of meeting friends at a local pub.

Penny: “In China, it’s like a social norm that I should provide financial support to my parents when they need it. If I get a job after graduation I will definitely give my parents some pocket money to spend. I do not understand why British people do not support their parents financially after they retire. Lots of children become independent when they reach their late teens or 20s.”

5. Hypotheses

It is inappropriate to claim that all immigration-based Chinese biculturals are excellent perspective takers, despite the evidence that bicultural experiences may contribute to one’s perspective-taking ability development. The qualitative study results show that some Chinese biculturals are better perspective takers than others. Such individual differences may indicate the degree of impacts of analytical thinking on themselves. According to Aberson and Haag (2007), contact with out-group members leads to increase understanding of out-group members’ perspectives; that in turn promotes more positive relationships with out-group members. It may be difficult for those Chinese who are mainly in contact with their own ethnic peers to have the opportunities to develop and improve their perspective-taking skills that are needed in multicultural environments. Accordingly, I propose the following hypotheses as follows:

\[ H1: \text{Immigration-based Chinese biculturals' perspective-taking ability negatively predicts their degrees of dialecticism.} \]

Based on the evidence that certain dispositional characteristics can affect the impact of the acculturation process (e.g. Chiu et al., 2000), individuals’ differences in flexibility and openness may determine the degree of impact that analytical thinking has on Chinese biculturals’ dialectical thinking. According to Nakamura (1991), when individuals move into a different cultural context it is difficult for them to adopt a new thinking style straightforward and throw away their original one. What elements to adopt and what elements to give up may depend on how flexible and open an immigration-based Chinese bicultural is to the analytical thinking. Therefore, I propose that

\[ H2: \text{Immigration-based Chinese bicultural individuals’ flexibility and openness ability negatively predicts their degrees of dialecticism.} \]

Chinese-American biculturals have developed both Eastern (interdependent) and Western (independent) cultural orientations, and both cultural frames help them respond to their social environment. However, not all biculturals have developed similar attitudes towards two cultures. Theoretical speaking, if individuals are tolerant of contradictory cultural elements, they are likely to be good at integrating these conflicted elements. However, recent
research shows that the more bicultural individuals perceive themselves in dialectical terms, the less they perceive their two cultural identities as compatible and integrated. According to the cultural congruency effect, bicultural consumers are expected to favor dual-focused advertising appeals which may congruent with their dialectical thinking in the domain of self-perception. In particular, biculturals’ with lower degree of dialecticism are expected to favor dual-focused advertising appeals. In contrast, those with higher degree of dialectical self would judge the advertising appeals less favourably. Much research in advertising literature propose that product type matters in designing advertising appeals to attract bicultural consumers (Zhang, 2010). It is reasonable to believe that consumers are mainly focusing on personal benefits rather than shared benefits when promoting personal-used products. Accordingly, I propose the hypotheses as follows:

**H3:** When shared products are promoted in ads, the persuasiveness of dual-focused ad appeals is moderated by participants’ degree of dialectical self. Less dialectical bicultural consumers are more persuaded by dual-focused advertising appeals. More dialectical bicultural consumers are less persuaded by dual-focused advertising appeals.

**6. Experiment**

The objective of this experiment is to examine the relationship between perspective-taking, flexibility and openness and dialecticism, and to test the basic premise that less dialectical biculturals favour dual-focused advertising appeals for shared products only, whereas, more dialectical biculturals tend to react less favourably toward dual-focused advertising appeals when shared products are promoted. To demonstrate that less dialectical biculturals indeed favour dual-focused advertising appeals of shared products, it is important to compare their responses against advertising appeals of personal-used products. To test the hypotheses 1 and 2, I rely on correlation analysis and regression analysis. To test hypothesis 3, I rely on a 2 × 2 (Dialecticism: high vs. low; × products type: shared products vs. personal products) between-subject analysis of variance (ANOVA) design. In order to represent the shared product category and personal product category, I select 7 products to represent shared and personal respectively. According to Han and Shavitt (1994)’s research on product types, car, stereo, TV set, camera, washing machine, fridge and frozen food are chosen to represent shared products. Chewing gum, perfume, underwear, running shoes, toothbrush, cosmetics and jeans are chosen to represent personal-used products. All participants’ responses on perspective-taking scale and flexibility scale are recorded.

**6.1 Pretest:**

Twenty-four postgraduates from The University of Manchester participated in a study aimed to identify the possible product types and product involvement of the chosen 14 product categories. Participants were given a list of 14 product categories and asked to rate each product category based on (a) the decision-making process involved in purchasing an item in the product category on a scale ranging from 1 (never discuss with family or friends whether to purchase) to 5 (always discuss with family or friends whether to purchase or not) and (b) usage pattern of a product category on a scale ranging from 1 (use mostly by myself) to 7 (use mostly with others). Fourteen product categories were classified as personal products and shared products with M=2.02 and M=3.20 respectively. Questions were also asked about the level of product involvement of the fourteen product categories. Participants were asked to rate each product on the nine product involvement criteria (e.g. important, interest, relevant, exciting means a lot, appealing, fascinating, valuable, involving and needed). Both personal and shared products received a product involvement score of M=4.54 and M=4.81 respectively, therefore, product involvement is not considered in the following study.

**6.3 Design and procedure**

Eighty-two female participants were recruited from The University of Manchester. All participants are in the age group of 20-30 to avoid the possible impacts of age and gender
besides culture. Each participant was randomly assigned either dual-focused ads appeals for
shared products or ads appeals for personal products. Next, participants proceed to respond to
a series of questions about the advertising appeals. Singelis (1994)’s self-construal scale and
Luna and Peracchio (2001)’s language proficiency scale were included as a manipulation
check of bicultural individuals. The self-construal scale was combined to yield two measures:
interdependent and independent scores. Interdependent self and independent self have
received a score of M= 5.05 and M=4.74 respectively. Participants have similar level of
proficiency in both Chinese (M=4.72) and English (M=4.01). Therefore, the participants
recruited for this study are biculturals.

7. Results and discussion

Correlation and regression analysis were conducted to examine the relationships
between dialectical thinking, perspective-taking and flexibility and openness. Consistent with
the hypothesis H1 and H2, perspective-taking was negatively correlated with dialecticism, r
(159) = -.23, p<0.01 and flexibility and openness is negatively correlated with dialecticism r
(159) = -.18, p<0.05. A 2 × 2 ANOVA on the evaluation index (Cronbach α=0.96) yielded a
two-way interaction, F (1, 78) =10.70, p< 0.05. Low dialectical biculturals reacted more
favourably (M=4.71), F (1, 37) = 5.24, p< 0.05 toward the dual-focused appeals for shared
products than the high dialectical biculturals (M=4.04). Moreover, consistent with the
prediction that attitudinal differences between high and low dialectical biculturals do not exist
when personal used products are promoted. For personal products, a dialecticism × ad appeal
ANOVA did not yield any significant effects, F (1, 41) =1.35, p>0.05. Consistent with the
prediction, more dialectical biculturals (M=4.42) reacted in a similar way to less dialectical
biculturals (M=4.18).

The correlation analysis results suggest a negative relationship between perspective-
taking, flexibility and openness and dialecticism. The standard regression analysis results
suggested individuals’ perspective-taking ability and flexibility and openness accounts for
significant variations in dialecticism. According to Nisbett et al. (2001), dialectical thinkers
tend to assign causality to the entire context, explaining and predicting events on the basis of
the relationships between a focal object and the context. In addition, Quintana’s (1994) work
pointed out that substantial bicultural experiences are the prerequisite of one’s ethnic
perspective-taking ability. Although all immigration-based Chinese biculturals in this research
are living in the UK, they may interact with the British culture differently. Williams’ (2005)
and Chang’s et al. (2012) study that experiences of studying abroad demonstrates better
flexibility and openness skills. However, they also suggested that the quantity of overseas
travel may not guarantee enhancements of flexibility and openness. Experiences of being
abroad in and of itself are not lead to flexibility and openness skills improvement. Students
must interact in the culture to improve such skills. More importantly, biculturals’ degree of
dialecticism deserves attention. Although dialectical thinking has been used to elucidate East-
West differences (Spencer-Rodger et al., 2004), the experiment results suggest that dialectical
thinking is an only significant individual difference variable when shared products are
promoted. High dialectical consumers are relatively unlikely to resolve the conflicts and
contradictions by drawing out the single “correct” solution. The existence of two seemingly
conflicting cultural values tends to create psychological taxing. Therefore, high dialectical
consumers tend not to favour dual-focused advertising appeals, which may active the two
seemingly conflicting cultural orientations. Last but not least, one possible limitation may
stems from using female samples. Although using female participants allowed for a more
homogeneous sample, there is no reason to think that men Chinese would acculturate to
Western culture in different ways. It is worthwhile for future research to use different samples
(e.g. male sample) to explore the role of dialectical thinking in predicting the persuasiveness
of dual-focused advertising appeals.
References


Appendix 1

**Table 1: Table of Participants Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>National origin</th>
<th>Years in the UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Hao</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celina</td>
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<td>Chinese</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wen</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lei</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ji</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>The University of Manchester</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Examples of High Perspective-Taking and High Flexibility and Openness Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>High perspective-taking descriptions</th>
<th>High flexibility and openness descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celina</td>
<td>When I encountered conflicts during a meeting, I would put myself into the other team member’s position and explain to my colleague that the British are generally very individualistic and express their views directly. On the other hand, I would explain to my British colleagues that the Chinese value face and personal relationships and they tend not to refuse people directly. The reason for doing this is to let team members understand each other.</td>
<td>I am much more tolerant now. In other words, I believe that more than one possibility exists in the world. I went to a party last week; everybody brought food from their own country so I prepared something to represent Chinese cuisine. To my surprise, an English guy asked me whether the food was contaminated and also asked how I cooked the food. I felt embarrassed to answer his question in front of lots of other people. I paused about 10 seconds but then I realised the cultural difference in ways of expressing viewpoints. I don’t mind at all. I patiently answered his question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa</td>
<td>I thought about the appropriateness of the content in the email and I tried to bring myself back to the context where we met in China. I remind myself not to be too direct and give the interviewees face and make them feel comfortable after reading my invitation. I have to think about everything twice now.</td>
<td>British people drive smaller cars than the Chinese drive. A lot of British people bought small cars for practical reasons. If they do not have a big family, why buy a big car. I totally understand them. Chinese people tend to buy big cars, because they believe that a car is an important indicator of social status and personal welfare. Driving a big car means a lot to Chinese people. But that is the cultural difference. We all need to acknowledge the difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hua</td>
<td>When I was in China all the news that I heard in the Chinese media about the BBC was that the BBC did not broadcast the right information and did so on purpose in order to ruin China’s global reputation. But my view has changed since I came to the UK and I find myself holding neutral views now. I believe that May be after I came to the UK, started to understand the culture and make some friends with gays and lesbians. I realized that I gradually changed my perception on this particular group of people. I became open and tolerant and regard being gay as quite a normal thing. We should respect everybody’s life style.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the information that the BBC broadcasts is neither completely true nor completely incorrect. I would think from the British perspective. The media is the mouthpiece of an organization, organizational conflict is very common, so I now understand why the information that each media broadcasts is different.

| Lei | Some people may find it hard to work as a team with people from different cultures, I find it quite interesting. It is always a good idea to know how other people think. Even though sometimes I believe I am right, I still listen to other people. | British and Chinese parents have different ways of teaching their child. One of my friends told me that a social worker came to her family last week because the teacher in her son’s school has found a redness area around the child’s eyes and they suspect the child was beaten up by somebody in the family. When the social worker came to find her, she had to explain the causes of the redness on her son’s face. In China, some of parents beat their child up if the child misbehaves. I don’t think it is a bad behaviour. The UK has a different social system from China. I fully understand why a social worker was involved in my friend’s case. |
| Hao | One of my female friends dated an English guy and they went out for dinner. The guy did not pay for her bills and she felt sad; it was hard to accept. I encouraged her to think about the culture where he grew up. It is normal in the UK. | I am interested in learning the cultural differences and this is the reason for studying in the UK. I am quite happy to meet different people and this is always a good way to understand the worldwide culture. |
### Appendix 3

**Table 3: Examples of Low Perspective-Taking and Low Flexibility and Openness Descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Low perspective-taking descriptions</th>
<th>Low flexibility and openness descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>In China it’s like a social norm that I should provide financial support to my parents when they need it. If I get a job after graduation, I will definitely give my parents some pocket money to spend. I do not understand why British people do not support their parents financially after they are retired. Lots of children become independent when they reach late teens or 20s.</td>
<td>All of my friends share a common interest in sports. I don’t really like to make friends with those who don’t share my interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wen</td>
<td>The pub is a common place to meet up with friends. It seems very strange to me that people just meet up in pubs for drinks only. I met a few local friends at a pub down Oxford Road last week; it is unbelievable to me that they have stood in the pub for hours without having any proper food. I don’t like it. I prefer to meet up with friends for dinner, have some drinks while we have dinner.</td>
<td>I don’t really understand why some British people spend hours in the pub just for drinks. It must be really boring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu</td>
<td>The majority of my friends in the UK are still Chinese; it is much easier to communicate since we share a lot in common, like personal hobbies, language and even ways of thinking.</td>
<td>When I worked with some British students in a team, I found it really hard to communicate with them sometimes. I feel really embarrassed if they criticise my work in front of me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>I rarely have any local friends. They tend to go out regularly for a drink. But I do not drink. It seems to me that lots of students build up their friendships in pubs. A night out to pubs means</td>
<td>I don’t think I am the one who can make friends with people from different cultures. Many of them go to pub at least once every week. I don’t like pubs. I think we share different kinds of interests.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

nothing to me. I don’t think drinking is a good way of relaxing. This is probably the reason why I don’t have many local friends.

Ji

I encountered many cultural conflicts such as communication styles, I must be very tired to take British people’s perspectives into consideration all the time

I will definitely going back to China after graduation. I cannot imagine myself live in the UK for years. I don’t think I could possibly live a fulfilling life in the UK. I found it hard to adapt to lots of things here. I would not accept if my parents and I were financially independent; theirs is mine and mine is theirs.