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## **The Influence of Culture on Responses to the Globe Dimension of Performance Orientation in Advertising Messages – Results From the U.S., Germany, France, Spain, and Thailand**

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This study proposes a conceptual framework for cultural influences on the perception and evaluation of a standardized international advertising message incorporating a performance-oriented appeal. Performance orientation is one of the cultural dimensions outlined in the GLOBE investigation (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Program) (House, et. al., 2004). Drawing upon literature on performance orientation, as well as reference value theories, hypotheses are developed regarding the influence of individual level as well as societal level performance orientation on the perception and evaluation of a standardized performance-oriented advertisement. Data employed to test the conceptual framework stems from a survey of 698 consumers in the United States, Germany, France, Spain, and Thailand. Overall, preliminary results from the study support the model. Implications for the use of performance-oriented appeals in international advertising are discussed.

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# The Influence of Culture on Responses to the Globe Dimension of Performance Orientation in Advertising Messages – Results from the U.S., Germany, France, Spain, and Thailand

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## INTRODUCTION

In many societies, individuals place a high level of importance upon performing well, for instance, in the workplace, in sports and in the marketplace. For both researchers and practitioners in the area of international advertising, it is of interest to know whether fashioning ads that incorporate performance-oriented appeals is likely to result in more favorable responses to such ads and whether local culture influences the perception and evaluation of these appeals.

The current paper proposes a conceptual model, which attempts to explain the impact of the cultural dimension of performance orientation on the perception and evaluation of a standardized advertisement. Little is known regarding factors which influence the success of standardized international campaigns (Zinkhan, 1994; Taylor, 2005) and research examining how standardized international campaigns are perceived and evaluated in different countries has been limited (for instance, Hudson, Hung, and Padley, 2002; Callow and Schiffman, 2004). The basic concept behind the model presented here is that a given standardized advertising stimulus is likely to be perceived and evaluated differently in various cultures, dependent upon the level of importance individuals place on performance orientation (individual level performance orientation) as well as the level of performance orientation in the environment surrounding that individual (societal level performance orientation). Hence, the model explicitly differentiates between cultural dimensions on an individual level versus cultural dimensions on a societal level.

By proposing a culturally-based conceptual model that explains the perception and evaluation of international advertising, the manuscript contributes to the development of a more general theory of culture's impact on advertising, which was identified as a key area for future research in international advertising (Taylor, 2005).

## THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF PERFORMANCE ORIENTATION ACCORDING TO THE GLOBE FRAMEWORK

The conceptualisation of performance orientation in this investigation is based on a framework entitled GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program), which identified performance orientation as one of nine cultural dimensions capable of describing cultural variation among a large number of countries (House et al., 2004). As the GLOBE project provides data on societal performance orientation for a wide scope of nations—among them all major markets in terms of total global advertising expenditures—both academics and practitioners have access to a priori information on this cultural dimension. Terlutter, Mueller, and Diehl (2005) have applied GLOBE's cultural dimension of assertiveness to international advertising (see also Terlutter, Diehl, and Mueller, 2006).

GLOBE researcher Javidan (2004, 239) defines performance orientation as “the extent to which a community encourages and rewards innovation, high standards, and performance improvement.” Performance orientation, as outlined by GLOBE researchers, has its roots in McClelland's (1961) concept of need for

achievement, which is defined as the need to continually do better (McClelland, 1987). According to McClelland (1987), individuals with a high need for achievement tend to obtain pleasure from steady improvement. They prefer to work on tasks with moderate probabilities of success as these represent a challenge. Such individuals take personal responsibility for their actions and search out information on how to do things better. Performance orientation in the GLOBE study has also similarities to Schwartz and Bilsky's (1987) concept of achievement. They define achievement as “personal success through demonstrated competence” (p. 880).

GLOBE provides data on the societal level and explicitly differentiates between societal values and societal practices. The distinction between cultural values and cultural practices was incorporated to correspond with Schein's (2004) concepts of artifacts vs. espoused values as two unique levels of culture (House and Hanges, 2004). Artifacts are the visible products, processes and behaviors of a culture. They mainly reflect the “as is” and, therefore, the cultural practices. Espoused values are the individuals' or society's sense of what ought to be, as distinct from, what is. They primarily reflect the “should be” and, therefore, the cultural values.

Cross-cultural research has emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the influence of culture on an individual level, versus on a national or societal level (e.g., Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1995; Singelis and Brown, 1995; Malhotra, Agarwal, and Peterson, 1996; Kacen and Lee, 2002). As individuals are socialized through values that are held and behaviors that are practiced within their cultures, it is very likely that they adopt values and practices that are shared among members of their society (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). With regard to societal and individual performance orientation, culture-level data and individual level data on performance orientation can be expected to have similar, but not necessarily identical patterns. While GLOBE provides data on the societal level, i.e. culture-level, it does not do so on the individual level. This investigation collects data on performance orientation at the societal as well as the individual level.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Performance orientation is seen as desirable among members of many societies. Countries exhibiting high levels of performance orientation achieve—though typically within several decades time—an above average increase in economic wealth (McClelland, 1967). On an individual level, according to Schwartz and Bilsky (1987), performance orientation generally results in increased social acceptance and the admiration of others. Performance orientation also leads to increased status (Trompenaars, 1993). Hence, performance orientation is often viewed as something desirable at both the societal as well as the individual level. With regard to advertising, employing performance-oriented appeals may therefore be an effective means of enhancing the success of a commercial. It is thus expected that the level of perceived performance orientation in an advertisement leads to a more positive evaluation of the ad.

*H1a: Perception of a higher level of performance orientation in an advertisement leads to a more positive evaluation of that advertisement.*

The relationship between the level of perceived performance orientation in an advertisement and the evaluation of the advertisement is expected to be positive in all countries, but its strength may vary depending on the importance that individuals in each country place upon performance orientation. If performance orientation is perceived as an important value by individuals of a given country, then the level of perceived performance orientation in an advertisement will have a stronger influence on the evaluation of the advertisement. The greater the importance of performance orientation, the more central it becomes in the individual's evaluation of an advertisement. On the other hand, if performance orientation is perceived as less important by individuals in a particular country, then the level of perceived performance orientation will likely play a less significant role in the judgment of that advertisement. Therefore, it is expected that in those nations in which individuals place greater importance on performance orientation, influence of the level of perceived performance orientation in an advertisement on the evaluation of that advertisement will be stronger, compared with those nations in which individuals place less importance on performance orientation. Hence, we hypothesize:

*H1b: The influence of the level of perceived performance orientation in an advertisement on the evaluation of that advertisement will be stronger in those nations in which individuals place greater importance on performance orientation, compared with those nations in which individuals place less importance on performance orientation.*

One might expect that the country ranking highest in terms of performance orientation would most positively evaluate ads incorporating performance-oriented appeals. However, individuals' perceptions and evaluations of commercial messages are also based on the individual's frame of reference. Helson's (1948) adaptation-level theory and Parducci's (1965) range-frequency theory postulate that, based on previously encountered stimuli and the stimuli of a particular situation, the individual has a given adaptation-level, which serves as a comparison standard for subsequent perception and evaluation of stimuli.

In terms of advertising, both, adaptation-level theory as well as range-frequency theory suggest that the perception of performance orientation in commercial communications may be dependent upon the level of performance orientation surrounding the individual, which serves as a comparison standard for the perception of performance orientation in a given commercial. If the cultural environment, i.e. the society to which an individual belongs, is highly performance-oriented and places great importance on success, this level of performance is likely to serve as a frame of reference. This suggests that, in a culture with a high comparison standard regarding performance orientation, an ad designed to incorporate a performance-oriented appeal may be perceived as only mildly performance-oriented in nature. Conversely, in a cultural environment that is less performance-oriented, where individuals have a lower reference value regarding performance orientation, the very same ad may be viewed as highly performance-oriented in nature. In other words, a consumer socialized in a performance-oriented environment might perceive a given advertisement as significantly less performance-oriented than a consumer socialized in a relatively less performance-oriented environment would evaluate that very same ad.

It is expected that, given a standardized advertisement designed to incorporate a performance-oriented appeal, individuals in highly performance-oriented cultures will perceive a lower level of

performance orientation in that advertisement than individuals in less performance-oriented cultures.

*H2: Subjects from nations with lower performance orientation scores will perceive higher levels of performance orientation in a standardized advertisement incorporating a performance oriented appeal, compared with subjects from nations with higher performance orientation scores.*

Figure 1 displays the proposed conceptual framework of the analyses.

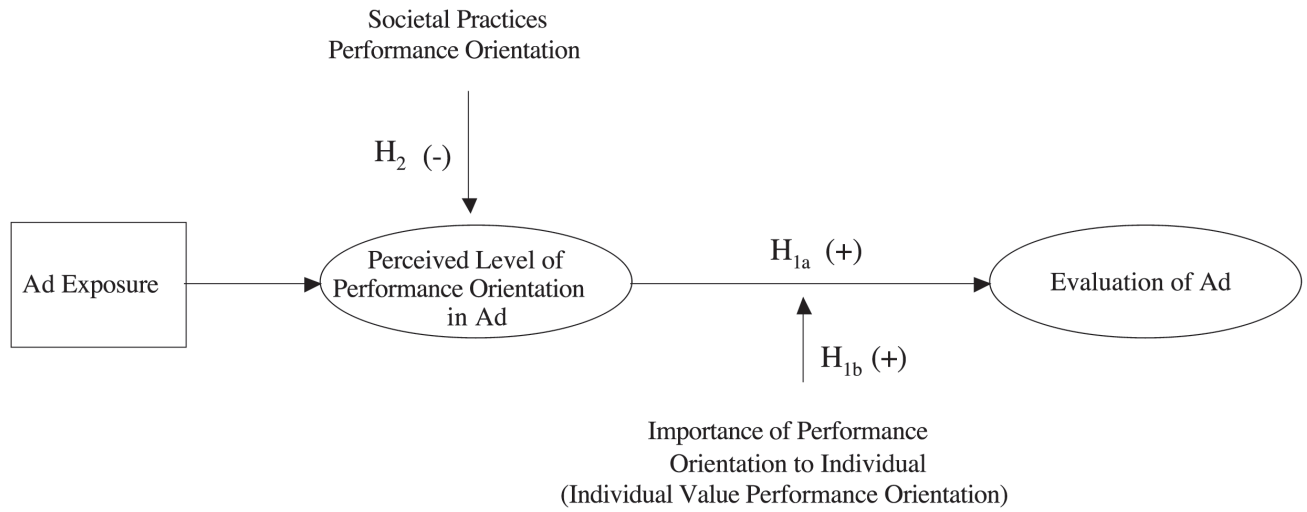
## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To test the above stated hypotheses, a non-student survey was conducted in five countries, the U.S., Germany, France, Spain and Thailand. In-person interviews were conducted in each country. A full-page advertisement for a wrist-watch was developed. The ad portrayed a team on a sail boat, successfully manoeuvring through strong swells, thereby demonstrating performance-oriented behavior. In addition, the slogan in the ad read "Every performance counts." The ad was for a fictional brand of wrist-watches ("Schwartz"), in order to control for attitudes toward established or recognized brand names. The advertisement was designed in black/white to negate the influence of color preferences. The slogan was translated into the local language in the survey instruments for Germany, France, Spain and Thailand. Prior to conducting the investigation, this advertisement underwent a pre-test to ensure that it was indeed perceived as portraying performance-oriented behavior. Figure 2 shows the English version of the advertisement. The current analysis is based on 698 subjects from the five countries (US 180, Germany 142, France 100, Spain 100, and Thailand 176). Participants were between 18 and 74 years of age, with an average age of 32.9 years. The male/female ratio of participants was 50:50. A structured questionnaire was developed. Respondents either filled out the questionnaire independently or, it was administered by trained interviewers. To ensure comparable interviewing situations in all countries, all interviewers received extensive training and were provided with standardized text to employ in approaching subjects. The majority of respondents completed the questionnaire independently, minimizing interviewer influence. Interviewers explained to subjects that the investigation dealt with consumer responses to advertising. Subjects were informed that participation was completely voluntary and that all responses would remain anonymous. A translation/back-translation procedure was applied in the development of the questionnaires. Bi-lingual speakers translated the questionnaires and different bi-lingual speakers back-translated the questionnaires.

## Variables

*Perceived level of performance orientation in the ad* was measured via four items. The items were derived from descriptions of performance-oriented behavior found in the literature (McClelland, 1967; Trompenaars, 1993; Javidan, 2004). Subjects were first asked to assess the individuals portrayed in the ad. The questions read: "The persons in the advertisement seem to me ..." (1) "performance-oriented", (2) "concerned only with performance", (3) "success-oriented" and (4) "as if success were the most important thing in life" (7-point-scale, 7=high). A one-factor model for the performance orientation measure was used. The four items were factor analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and results indicate a high fit of the model. Alpha values (Cronbach, 1951) in the five countries were between .832 and .889. Given the high

**FIGURE 1**  
Proposed Conceptual Model



**FIGURE 2**  
English Version of the Standardized Advertisement Incorporating a Performance-oriented Appeal



TABLE 1

Values and Practices of Performance Orientation, According to GLOBE and the Current Investigation

	Country Mean				
	Germany	France	Spain	US	Thailand
PO Societal Values GLOBE Study	6.01 <sup>1)</sup>	6.10 <sup>2)</sup>	5.80	6.14	5.74
PO Societal Values Current Study	5.18	4.82	5.03	5.47	5.38
PO Individual Values Current Study	3.74	3.99	4.31	4.44	5.01
PO Societal Practices GLOBE Study	4.25 <sup>1)</sup>	4.43 <sup>2)</sup>	4.01	4.49	3.93
PO Societal Practices Current Study	4.15	3.86	4.00	4.95	5.00
PO Individual Practices Current Study	5.14	4.37	4.90	5.73	4.94

Note:

1) Germany West

2) Bias Corrected Value

internal consistency of the scale, based on the four items, mean values of the perceived level of performance orientation were computed for each country. Following the testing procedure proposed by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), measurement invariance across the five countries regarding the perception of performance orientation in the ad is supported (full or partial configural, metric, scalar and factor-variance invariance). Meaningful comparisons of group means and of association measures can thus be carried out.

*Evaluation of the ad* was also measured via four items, adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989). The questions read: (1) "Overall, I find the ad ..." "not at all good" (=1) to "very good" (=7) (7-point-scale); "The ad is ..." (2) "interesting", (3) "likeable" and (4) "pleasant" (7-point-scale, 7=high). Again, the items were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis. Results showed a high fit of the model. Values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the five countries were between .898 and .920. Following the testing procedure proposed by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998), measurement invariance across the five countries regarding the evaluation of the ad is supported.

*Performance orientation* was conceptualized based on GLOBE. Scales were adjusted and extended for the current investigation. Participants were asked about their individual practices and values, as well as their societal practices and values. Questions for individual performance orientation practices read: (1) "I strive to continually improve my performance." (2) "To perform well in life is very important to me." (3) "Performance is what counts' applies to me." (4) "I am performance-oriented." Questions for individual performance orientation values read: (1) "I should try harder to improve my performance." (2) "To perform well in life should be more important to me." (3) "Performance is what counts" should apply more strongly to me. (4) "I should be more performance-oriented." Questions for societal performance orientation practices read: "In country X people generally (1) "... strive to continually improve their performance." (2) "... reward those who strive for performance and innovation." (3) "... set challenging goals for themselves." (4) "... base rewards on effective performance." Questions for societal performance orientation values read: "In country X people should (1) "... strive to continually improve their performance." (2) "... more substantially reward those who strive to continually improve their performance." (3) "... set more challenging goals for themselves." (4) "... base rewards primarily on effective performance." Subjects were asked to indicate to what extent the statements were applicable on a seven-point scale. Alpha

Values in the five countries of the four subscales were all larger than .72. Given the high internal consistency of the subscales, mean values of the four subscales (individual value, individual practice, societal value, and societal practice) were computed. Table 1 displays GLOBE scores for societal values and practices for performance orientation as well as both individual and societal values and practices obtained from this investigation.

Societal values and practices of the current investigation match, in part, the country scores reported by GLOBE. Among the five countries, overall, the data on societal values and practices of the current study reveal that France and Spain lean toward lower performance orientation, Germany ranks in a middle, whereas the U.S. and Thailand score relatively high on societal performance orientation. When compared to the GLOBE scores, the most noticeable differences were found in the data on societal practices in Thailand. On an individual level, German and French subjects scored low on individual values, while once again, U.S. and Thai subjects, and even Spanish subjects, scored relatively high on individual values of performance orientation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis H1a predicted that a higher perception of performance orientation in an ad would lead to a more positive evaluation of that ad. SEM estimations revealed that a higher perceived level of performance orientation in the ad indeed leads to a more positive evaluation of the ad for all countries. All standardized path coefficients were positive and significant (Table 2). Results Hypothesis H1a is thus confirmed by the data.

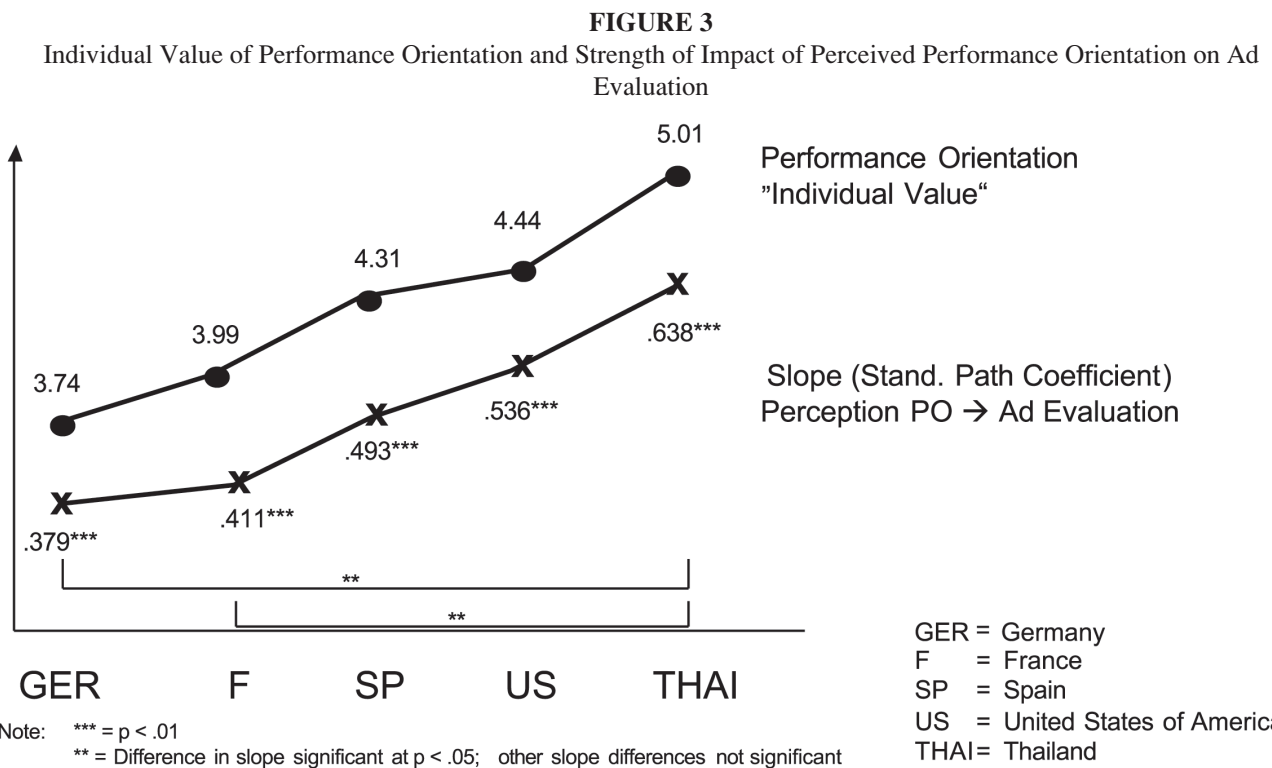
Hypothesis H1b addresses the strength of the relationship between perception of performance orientation in an advertisement and its evaluation. It was hypothesized that the influence of the level of perceived performance orientation in an advertisement on the evaluation of the advertisement will be stronger in those nations in which individuals place greater importance on performance orientation, compared with those nations in which individuals place less importance on performance orientation. As expected, multi-group structural equation modelling revealed that the influence of the perceived level of performance orientation on the evaluation of the advertisement is highest in Thailand, followed by Spain and the US and lowest in Germany and France. Multi-group structural equation modelling with Chi<sup>2</sup>-difference tests was used to analyze whether the relationship between variables differ significantly from one another in the five countries. Results indicate that the relationship

**TABLE 2**  
Influence of Perceived Performance Orientation in Ad on Ad Evaluation

Model	standardized path coefficient	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
U.S.	.536***	273.3	95	.95	.93	.05
Germany	.379***					
France	.411***					
Spain	.493***					
Thailand	.638***					

\*\*\* p<.01

Note: Estimation Maximum Likelihood



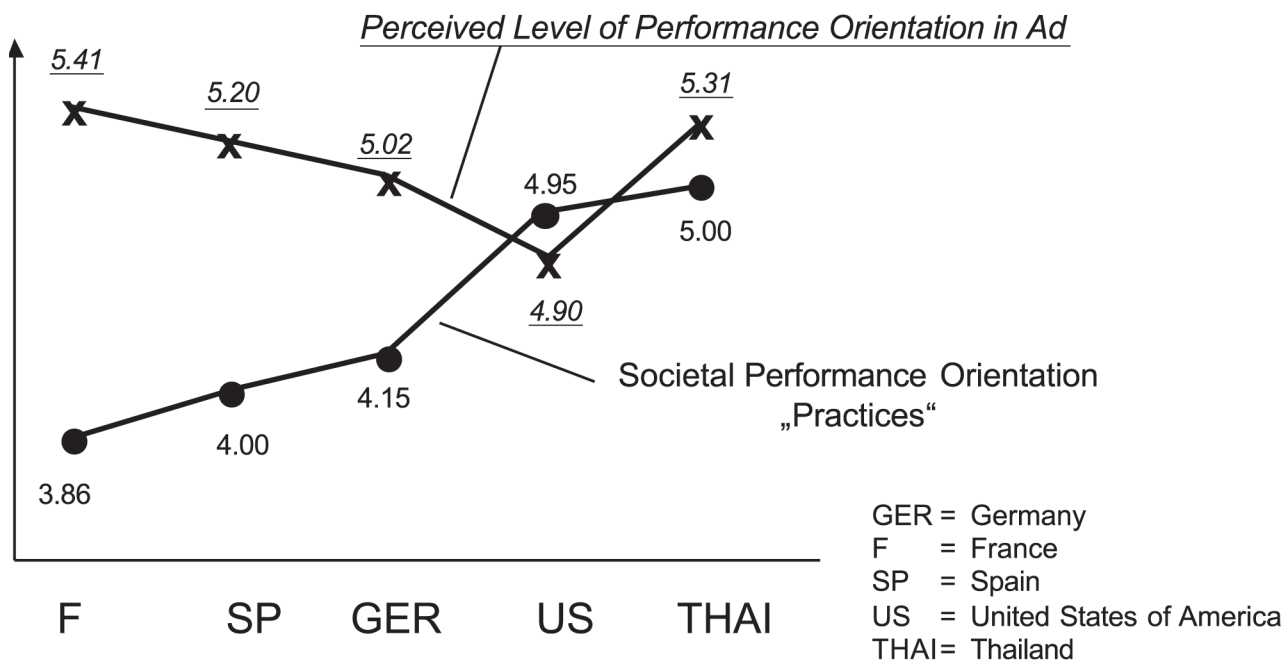
between the German and the French data set differs significantly from the dataset from Thailand, but that the relationship between the other datasets did not differ significantly. The rank order of the heights of path coefficients are as expected in the five countries, however, not all differences are significant. Thus, the results lend only partial support for hypothesis H1b. Figure 3 illustrates these findings.

Hypothesis H2 predicted, based on reference value theories, that subjects from nations with higher performance orientation scores will perceive lower levels of performance orientation in the advertisement, whereas subjects from nations with lower performance orientation scores will perceive higher levels of performance orientation in the ad. The study's country scores of societal practices suggest that Thailand and the U.S. are the nations with the highest level of performance orientation, whereas Germany, Spain, and in particular, France tend to have lower scores on societal

practices. Figure 4 shows that the perceived level of performance orientation in the ad indeed clearly differs between the five countries. In line with the stated hypotheses, U.S. subjects perceived the lowest level of performance orientation in the standardized ad, whereas the French, the Spanish and the German subjects perceived higher levels of performance orientation in the standardized ad. The results for Thailand, however, contradict our hypotheses. Thai subjects perceived a much higher level of performance orientation in the ad than was expected. While many Thai strive for higher performance and behave in a performance-oriented fashion, Thai society appears not to have caught up with this shift. One reason may be that as an emerging East Asian market (Aglionby, 2006), Thailand has only recently experienced a substantial economic success. Despite strong economic growth in 2006, and projected real GDP growth of 5% for 2007-2008 (EIU ViewsWire, 2007), Thailand still lags far behind the other four nations with regard to

FIGURE 4

Societal Performance Orientation Practices and Perceived Level of PO in Ad



numerous economic indicators, e.g., gross national income per capita (in US \$, 2005, cf. World Bank): Thailand 2,750 versus US 43,740; France 34,810; Germany 34,580; and Spain 25,360). Thus, while Thai citizens value performance orientation, this cultural dimension is not yet omnipresent in Thai society.

Bonferroni tests revealed that differences between the U.S. and France, as well as between the U.S. and Thailand are significant (all  $p < .05$ ). Though the differences in the perception of performance orientation in the ad are not significant between the subjects from Germany, Spain and France, the rankings are as expected.

These results suggest that an identical, i.e. standardized, ad is perceived differently in terms of the level of performance orientation reflected in the ad, dependent upon the subjects' country of origin and the level of performance orientation in those cultures (Figure 4). To summarize, the results lend partial support for hypothesis H2.

### SELECTED IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the proposed conceptual model was supported by the data. The results of this investigation suggest that, by incorporating a performance-oriented appeal in commercial messages, advertisers can positively influence the evaluation of those messages. As hypothesized, data revealed a significant relationship between the perceived level of performance orientation in an ad and the overall evaluation of the ad. This proved to be true for every country. Because performance orientation is a positively held value in many countries, it can therefore be seen as an appeal type suitable for cross-cultural standardized advertising campaigns. Results also revealed that, overall, a higher individual value of performance orientation increases the strength of the impact of perception of performance orientation and ad evaluation.

Results of this investigation suggest that a given, standardized ad incorporating a performance-oriented appeal may well be perceived quite differently in various markets. An important finding of

this study is that it is not consumers from the country with the highest performance orientation scores who perceived the highest level of performance orientation in a standardized advertisement. Instead, data suggest that countries with higher performance orientation in terms of societal practices perceive lower levels of performance orientation in the ad and vice versa. Advertisers employing a standardized approach in their international efforts must be aware that an ad incorporating performance-oriented appeals may well be perceived differently from one country to the next, dependent upon the role that performance orientation plays in that particular market. This also means that advertisers attempting to achieve a specific level of performance orientation in their campaigns will likely need to adapt the ads to various countries. For instance, if the general marketing strategy is to position a given brand with a performance oriented appeal, the execution in different countries will need to be adapted with regard to content and design of the commercial message. According to this investigation, in performance-oriented countries, stronger performance orientation cues may be needed if consumers are to perceive the ads as performance oriented in nature. In less performance-oriented countries, weaker cues may be sufficient to obtain the same level of perceived performance orientation.

Overall, the GLOBE framework has proven useful in this investigation. It guided the development of assumptions regarding the perceived level of performance orientation to be expected by consumers exposed to advertisements in the different countries. However, it is advisable researchers replicate cultural dimensions to be analyzed in future investigations. In assessing performance orientation in this investigation, based on GLOBE measures, major differences were found in societal practices in Thailand. While GLOBE reported relatively low scores of societal practices of performance orientation, the current study revealed relatively high values on that dimension. It appears that while many Thai strive for higher performance and behave in a performance-oriented fashion, performance orientation is not yet omnipresent in Thai society. This

might be explained by the fact that Thailand has only recently experienced a substantial economic success. This discrepancy in the results for Thailand need not be perceived as a weakness in the GLOBE data, but rather it underscores the importance of replicating the cultural dimensions in question for each specific country to be investigated.

### LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to the above reported findings. Future examinations of performance orientation should include countries that differ even more significantly in their performance orientation scores, per the GLOBE data, than the five countries analyzed in this investigation. Performance orientation should be analyzed in the context of advertisements for additional product categories, as well as for services.

Further, in addition to the dimension of performance orientation, the GLOBE framework offers a number of other dimensions worthy of examination. For instance, humane orientation, future orientation, and gender egalitarianism may all prove fruitful. It would be of interest to explore whether the conceptual model proposed in this paper is applicable to the other GLOBE dimensions. Another particularly interesting question was not addressed in this investigation. It might well be that an overly strong performance-oriented appeal could negatively impact evaluation of an advertisement. The question arises whether there might be a threshold beyond which the positive influence of performance orientation on the evaluation of an advertisement turns into a negative influence. Future investigations may wish to examine whether this threshold can be identified, and how it differs between nations.

A final limitation addresses the general applicability of the GLOBE data reported by House et al. (2004). In some cases, the country scores of the current study differed from those reported by GLOBE. Additional empirical evidence on the validity and reliability of the GLOBE data on cultural dimensions would be of value.

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