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The Influence of Power Distance Beliefs and Advertising Appeal on Consumers' Purchase Intentions

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Abstract: The global economic integration in the digital era, crafting marketing messages that resonate across diverse cultural landscapes poses a significant challenge for businesses. This study examines how consumers' power distance beliefs and the use of exclusivity and authenticity in marketing communications influence their preferences. Through Study 1a and 1b, we find that the interaction between power distance beliefs and marketing appeals significantly impacts consumer purchase intentions. Further, Study 2 demonstrates these results and sheds light on the underlying psychological mechanism. This research contributes to the extant literature by elucidating the complex dynamics between power distance beliefs, advertising appeal, and cross-cultural consumer behavior in the digital economy. Additionally, it offers practical insights for firms aiming to craft effective marketing messages for culturally diverse audiences through digital marketing and e-commerce.

Keywords: advertising appeal; power distance beliefs; authenticity; exclusivity; self-identity

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1. Introduction

Brands are increasingly emphasizing specific attributes of their products through advertising campaigns in order to capture consumer attention and drive sales in the digital age [1]. In particular, authenticity and exclusivity appeals have become prominent aspects in modern marketing strategies, emerging as influential factors [2,3]. The authenticity portrayed in advertising emphasizes aspects such as the product's origin, its historical lineage, and its adherence to traditional craftsmanship, thereby reinforcing its dependability and cultural significance [4–6].

For example, Chinese MOUTAI liquor highlights its traditional craftsmanship deeply rooted in Maotai town, Guizhou province, encapsulating profound historical heritage and embodying the quintessence of Chinese culture. Meanwhile, advertising exclusivity emphasizes the scarcity, distinctiveness, and limited accessibility of a product, presenting it as a luxurious or exceptional experience attainable only by a privileged few [7,8]. Louis Vuitton, for instance, exudes an air of exclusive opulence by strategically emphasizing limited editions and product exclusivity. Similarly, Lamborghini emphasizes the iconic status of its luxury sports cars, positioning them as exclusive high-end luxury commodities. Beyond the realm of luxury goods, diverse product categories encompassing gastronomy and other commodities, also place an emphasis on authenticity or exclusivity appeals.

Coca-Cola, for instance, emphasizes its enduring recipes and manufacturing processes rooted in the United States, thereby underscoring its cultural and historical heritage.

Previous research has highlighted that consumers generally demonstrated favorable responses towards claims of authenticity and exclusivity in product offerings [9–11]. The pursuit of authenticity often signified a longing for an enhanced product experience [12,13], resulting in more favorable product attitudes, heightened purchase intentions, and improved product evaluations [9,14]. Similarly, the scarcity associated with exclusive products tends to enhance consumers' purchase intention due to the perceived value of limited availability [7,15]. The phenomenon is exemplified by the demand for Hermès Birkin bags, wherein consumers willingly endure extended waiting periods and pay premiums to acquire the cachet of rarity. However, the effectiveness of these appeals is not absolute and can vary across different cultural and market contexts. The emphasis placed by Red Bull on its Austrian heritage and the invigorating properties of its formula proved highly successful in Europe yet encountered challenges in China due to cultural misalignments [16]. Coca-Cola aims to establish a connection with consumers in the Indian market by highlighting its genuine and traditional recipes originating from the United States. However, this advertising strategy has not yielded the anticipated success. Therefore, understanding the moderating factors that influence the success or failure of these advertising appeals across different markets is of utmost importance in the digital economy. This study attempts to fill this gap by investigating the role of power distance beliefs (PDBs) in this context.

Power distance beliefs (PDBs), as an important cultural value at the individual level, pertain to an individual's expectations and acceptance of hierarchical structures and social inequalities in interactions [17]. PDBs significantly influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards self-expression [18], which in turn may affect their responses to authenticity and exclusivity appeals in advertising. The present study aims to contribute to the extant literature by incorporating PDBs within the realm of consumer behavior to examine the efficacy of distinct advertising appeals, specifically authenticity appeals and exclusivity appeals [19,20]. We consider PDBs to be a pivotal factor influencing consumers' self-identity, subsequently impacting on their responses to diverse appeals in product marketing information. On one hand, the demands for authenticity and exclusivity are considered crucial values for consumers to express their individuality [21,22]. On the other hand, PDBs play a significant role in shaping consumers' reactions to these appeals. Furthermore, our study not only explores the influence of PDBs on advertising appeals but seeks to provide insights into how companies can adapt their marketing messages to different cultural contexts, taking into account the variability in PDB levels among different consumer groups.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

2.1. Power Distance Beliefs

In the digital economy, cross-cultural consumption researchers have expanded the nation-level construct of power distance to encompass the individual-level concept, including power distance beliefs [23]. Power distance (PD) at the national level refers to "society's expectations and acceptance of unequal distribution of power" [24], while power distance beliefs at the individual level reflect the individual's expectations and acceptance of unequal distribution of power [21,25].

Power distance beliefs encompass the individual's perceptions of entitlement and inequality, exerting various influences on consumer behavior [26]. For instance, consumers with high power distance beliefs are more inclined to demonstrate deference towards authorities by respecting and accepting their opinions and suggestions. Moreover, they are more susceptible to environmental cues and social pressures, thereby increasing the

likelihood of impulsive buying behaviors [27]. Additionally, these consumers exhibit a greater propensity for positive responses towards advertisements and brands endorsed by celebrities [25,28,29].

Simultaneously, consumers with high power distance beliefs are more inclined to opt for products designed by companies rather than those designed by users due to their appreciation of the company's expertise and perception of higher product quality [30,31]. Additionally, when a company engages in an ethical violation, consumers with low power distance beliefs may exhibit greater empathy towards the victim, intensifying their perception of harm and negative moral emotions towards the offending company. Consequently, this leads to a decline in their favorable impression of the company [32].

Power distance beliefs also play a significant role in influencing consumers' price sensitivity. According to Lee et al. [33], consumers with high power distance beliefs may exhibit lower price sensitivity. This is potentially because they focus more on meeting immediate demands and prefer to stick with current offers, which leads to quick purchase decisions instead of continuously searching for better prices. Additionally, individuals with high power distance beliefs heavily rely on price as an indicator of product quality, aligning with the notion of "you get what you pay for" [34].

In summary, power distance beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions, product preferences, price sensitivity, and responses to corporate ethical violations. Building upon prior research, this study introduces the concept of power distance beliefs within the advertising marketing context with diverse demands and reveals its influence on consumers' advertising preferences across different contexts, with particular relevance in the digital economy due to the increasing virality of advertising content [35].

2.2. Advertising Appeal: Authenticity/Exclusivity

Advertising appeal refers to the focal content of products that is emphasized in advertising, serving as the fundamental element of advertising information, and playing a crucial role in impressing or persuading the target audience [36]. Various categories of advertising appeals exist. In this paper, we will specifically discuss authenticity appeals and exclusivity appeals [17].

In terms of authenticity, early scholars have argued that it underscores the socio-historical associations between products and their respective cultures, traditions, and histories [19]. For instance, Brown et al. posit that authenticity is intertwined with a sense of historical legacy and tradition, encapsulating the "essence of bygone eras" [37]. Grayson and Martinec contend that the notions of "heritage" and "connection to place of origin" inherently imply the intrinsic authenticity embedded within a product [38]. Furthermore, consumers are more inclined to assess the authenticity of a brand based on their appreciation for fine craftsmanship rather than financial incentives [39].

Subsequently, scholars have further expanded the concept of authenticity. For instance, Bruhn et al. define authenticity as encompassing continuity (a sense of timelessness), originality (perception of creativity and innovation), reliability (keeping promises), and naturalness (perceived authenticity) [40]. Napoli et al. propose that consumers' perceived authenticity is indicated by quality commitment (maintaining quality standards), heritage expression, and sincerity [41]. Morhart et al. define it as comprising continuity, reliability, integrity (demonstrating strong ethics), and symbolism for establishing self-branded connections [42]. In summary, while scholars' definitions of authenticity may not exhibit complete consistency, they do converge on certain fundamental criteria for determining authenticity. Building upon the definitions and insights provided by previous researchers, this study categorizes advertisements that emphasize "historical", "traditional", and "authentic" elements as authenticity appeal advertisements [17,43].

Exclusivity is defined as the characteristic or attribute that distinguishes oneself from others rather than affiliating oneself with others [44]. The exclusivity of a product can be attained through limited availability, wherein only a select few individuals have access to and can enjoy it [45]. Consequently, exclusivity carries implications of scarcity as perceived by consumers [46]. Although previous studies have demonstrated that exclusivity and scarcity are distinct concepts [47], it has become a prevalent marketing strategy to imply a sense of scarcity in exclusive advertisements [46]. Building upon the definitions and operationalizations provided by prior scholars, this paper categorizes advertisements emphasizing "rare" and "unique" as their primary selling points as exclusive appeal advertisements [17].

On one hand, a substantial body of the literature has extensively documented the manifold advantages of authenticity. For instance, empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that authenticity is positively correlated with favorable brand attitudes and purchase intentions [17,48]. Furthermore, it has been found to be associated with enhanced perceived quality [49]. Additionally, authenticity plays a pivotal role in fostering brand trust [49,50] and can cultivate an attitude of tolerance and understanding even amidst brand controversies [51].

In addition, the prior literature has also demonstrated that exclusivity exerts a positive impact on purchase intention, brand attitude, and perceived value [3,52–54], particularly in contexts involving limited-edition designs and scarcity. These favorable effects persist, endowing the product with symbolic significance as a manifestation of consumer uniqueness. The restricted availability caters to consumers' distinct needs while simultaneously augmenting their perception of product worth [55].

While the previous literature has demonstrated the positive impact of authenticity and exclusivity on consumers, their contribution to effective advertising strategies remains unclear, particularly when promoting products in culturally diverse regions. It is possible that one appeal may be more persuasive than the other; however, the current understanding of this phenomenon is relatively limited. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the influence of power distance beliefs on consumers' advertising preferences.

2.3. Power Distance Beliefs and Interactive Advertising Appeals

Power distance beliefs encompass the individual's perceptions and responses towards inequality in social interactions, specifically pertaining to status (power, wealth, and prestige) disparities [21,24]. Extensive research has indicated that consumers with high power distance beliefs exhibit heightened inclination towards status-oriented thinking [56], possess an intensified need for status [57], and perceive status products as potent symbols of social standing [58]. Moreover, they demonstrate greater interest in enhancing or showcasing their societal position through various means [59].

For instance, individuals who hold high power distance beliefs are more inclined to exhibit their superior social status through behaviors that signal their status, such as the consumption of material luxury goods (as opposed to experiential ones) [57]. Alternatively, they may express interest in purchasing luxury handbags only when these items are publicly displayed to others [58]. Conversely, consumers with low power distance beliefs perceive themselves as being part of a socially egalitarian relationship and do not seek to enhance or maintain their social standing through the acquisition of products that signify status [60].

Exclusivity appeal serves as a means to fulfill the distinctive preferences of consumers [17], wherein unique demand refers to the pursuit of differentiation from others through acquisition, utilization, and handling of commodities, thereby fostering personal and social identity development [61]. This aligns with the fundamental need of consumers with high power distance beliefs to attain status by exhibiting superiority and distinctive-

ness [62]; in other words, individuals holding such beliefs may opt for exclusive products as a mechanism to acquire and showcase their elevated social standing.

Moreover, recipients of exclusive transactions perceive exclusivity as a favorable form of inequality compared to non-recipients [63,64]. Consumers with high power distance beliefs are generally more inclined to accept and even prefer this type of inequality, perceiving it as a "favorable inequality" that imbues them with a sense of uniqueness or superiority [30,64]. This mindset also fosters the desire to showcase their superiority through consumption choices, which is evident in their preference for luxurious, limited edition, or distinctive products [7].

From a social comparison perspective [65,66], products that possess exclusivity through high cost, limited availability, or non-duplicability offer consumers a means to establish and assert their superior social status. Consequently, the exclusivity of such products confers significant social value, particularly among individuals who frequently engage in social comparisons [67]. Individuals with high power distance beliefs (compared to individuals with low power distance beliefs) are more inclined to engage in social comparisons, thereby exhibiting a heightened inclination towards owning exclusive products. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that an individual's personal sense of power can effectively regulate their desire for exclusivity; those perceiving themselves as powerful tend to exhibit a stronger inclination towards exclusivity compared to individuals lacking such perceived power [56].

By contrast, consumers with low power distance beliefs tend to perceive society as egalitarian; therefore, even if there exists a certain power disparity between individuals holding such beliefs and others, they do not attribute higher or lower social status to themselves. This pursuit of equality diminishes their inclination to demonstrate or assert their social standing and superiority through the acquisition of exclusive appeal products. Moreover, consumers with low power distance beliefs, who perceive equality among individuals, exhibit reduced motivation for social comparisons and thus lack a strong inclination to purchase exclusive products.

Based on the above theoretical conceptualization, we contend that advertising with an exclusive appeal can better cater to consumers with high power distance beliefs. This is because the acquisition of exclusive products enhances their sense of superiority and fulfills their status consumption and social comparison needs, thereby augmenting the preference for exclusive products among individuals holding high power distance beliefs. In other words, advertising with an exclusive appeal aligns more effectively with the requirements of consumers characterized by high power distance beliefs. However, for consumers espousing low power distance beliefs, there exists no discernible difference in preference between authentic appeal advertising and exclusive appeal advertising. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: *The interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal influences consumer purchase intention of the product.*

H1a: *High power distance beliefs lead to stronger purchase intentions and for products in exclusive appeal advertisements than in authentic ones.*

H1b: *Low power distance beliefs result in no significant purchase intention differences between products in authentic and exclusive appeal advertisements.*

2.4. The Mediating Role of Self-Identity

Self-identity encompasses an individual's perceived self, including their abilities, social status, and societal roles, and helps an individual maintain a consistent and enduring sense of identity [68,69]. On the other hand, self-concept refers to the consumers' subjective perception of themselves and plays a crucial role in determining the extent to which a product aligns with their self-image, identity, and values [70–72]. Sirgy [73] identified four dimensions for measuring self: realistic self, ideal self, social self, and ideal social self. Among these dimensions, realistic self and ideal self are the primary measures of one's sense of identity. Realistic self refers to how consumers perceive themselves in an authentic manner, while ideal self represents their desired image [74,75].

The self-consistency theory pertains to the individuals' inclination to align their behaviors with their perceived authentic selves. The research posits that the satisfaction of self-concept needs, namely self-consistency needs, self-esteem needs, social consistency needs, and social approval needs, is contingent upon achieving self-consistency across four dimensions: realistic self-consistency, ideal self-consistency, social self-consistency, and ideal social self-consistency. The four needs can be classified into two categories based on the meta-analysis conducted by Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. Enhancement types, which mainly include self-esteem and social approval, and consistency types, which mainly include self-conformity and social conformity.. Motivated consumers who exhibit consistency are more inclined to select products that align with their authentic or perceived social identity [76]. On the other hand, consumers driven by enhancement motivation tend to seek out products that can elevate their idealized social image. Furthermore, Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. also discovered that enhanced motivation exerts a stronger influence on consumer behavior compared to consistent motivation [76].

Under the influence of authenticity advertising, consumers are more inclined to engage in self-verification [77] as a means to validate and uphold their existing self-identity [78]. In essence, when confronted with authenticity appeal advertising, consumers tend to actively seek information feedback that aligns with their self-perception. In this scenario, the consistent motivation of consumers can be more effectively fulfilled. When confronted with exclusive advertising appeal, consumers exhibit a heightened desire for self-transformation and an enhanced sense of self-identity [79]. Consequently, their augmented motivation becomes easier to satisfy. Furthermore, the research also indicates that social success contributes to an individual's self-worth, and owning status products serves as a visible manifestation of such social success [60].

The cultural practice of high power distance beliefs perpetuates the significance of status concepts and differences among members. Consumers who hold high power distance beliefs are consistently reminded of their social standing. Kim and Zhang contend that the acknowledgment of social status renders consumers more susceptible to experiencing low self-esteem (or a lack of self-worth) compared to consumers with lower power distance beliefs [56]. Numerous studies have also demonstrated that one's perception of their status influences self-evaluation [80].

Consequently, we propose that consumers with high power distance beliefs may exhibit elevated levels of self-esteem and motivation for social approval (reinforcement motivation) relative to consumers with low power distance beliefs, and this in turn may augment their positive self-identity, which further influences their purchase intention towards products. Moreover, in contrast to material luxury consumption, individuals with a strong power distance beliefs exhibit a diminished inclination towards experiential consumption [56].

In conclusion, we contend that, in comparison to authenticity appeal advertisements, exclusive appeal advertisements can effectively cater to the self-enhancement needs of

consumers with a high power distance belief system, thereby enhancing their perception of self-identity, which in turn mediates the relationship between advertising appeal and consumers' purchase intention towards products. Conversely, for authenticity appeal advertisements, consumers prioritize maintaining self-consistency. In this instance, we posit that the purchase of products featured in authenticity-driven advertisements by consumers with either high or low power distance beliefs will not impact on their self-cognition, specifically their perception of self-identity. Consequently, we put forth the subsequent hypothesis:

H2: *Self-identity mediates the relationship between power distance beliefs (high vs. low) and advertising appeal (authenticity vs. exclusivity), and further influences the consumers' purchase intention towards products.*

The theoretical model presented in this paper is illustrated in Figure 1.

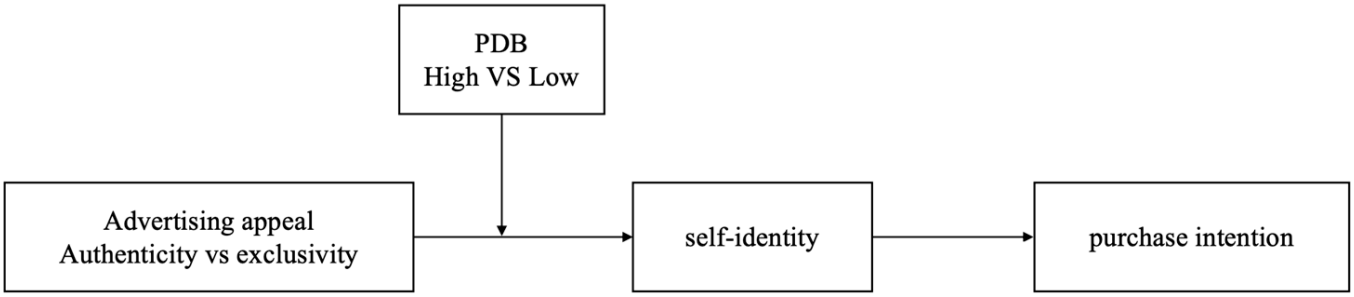


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

3. Study 1

The primary objective of experiment 1 is to examine hypothesis 1. Within Study 1, two separate studies were conducted. Study 1a provides preliminary evidence supporting the influence of the interaction between power distance beliefs and advertisement appeal on consumers' purchase intention towards the advertised products. Study 1b employs different product types to validate the impact of power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on purchase intention.

3.1. Study 1a

In this study, a two (power distance belief: high vs. low) × two (advertising appeal: exclusivity vs. authenticity) intergroup design was employed. A total of 166 participants (68% female, mean age = 27.74) were recruited online from the Credamo Data Market. The Credamo Data Market is a professional online survey platform that boasts rich and diverse sample resources. It can cover people with various characteristics, such as different ages, genders, regions, and occupations, ensuring the extensiveness and representativeness of data collection. It also has a highly efficient data collection capability.

3.1.1. Procedure

We randomly assigned the participants to an experimental condition and instructed them to complete two seemingly unrelated tasks. Firstly, they were asked to engage in the manipulation of power distance beliefs, which was designed based on the previous research [58]. In both experimental conditions, the participants were exposed to a cultural awareness activity. In the high power distance belief condition (compared to the low power distance belief condition), the participants were presented with written information on a topic rated for its hierarchical nature (as opposed to emphasizing equality), accompanied

by an image of a pyramid (instead of scales). Subsequently, the participants were instructed to position themselves within a societal hierarchy (rather than promoting equality) and endorse values such as "hierarchy is essential for maintaining social order" (in contrast to the notion that "all individuals are inherently equal", and the details are in Appendix A, on page 21).

The participants were randomly assigned to watch either authentic or exclusive advertisements for skin care products, after which they indicated their purchase intention. The manipulation of advertising appeals and the test of manipulation followed the procedures outlined in Septianto et al. The participants were informed about the upcoming market entry of White Dew skincare brand and its ongoing campaign promoting its mountain ginseng skincare line. The authenticity appeal slogan states, "Based on traditional herbal skin care, the authentic Changbai Mountain ginseng is specially incorporated". By contrast, the exclusive appeal emphasizes a "unique herbal skin care system with the special addition of rare Changbai Mountain ginseng" [17]. Subsequently, the participants' purchase intention was recorded using White and Dahl's scale [81]: "To what extent are you willing to purchase the modified product" (1 = very reluctant, 9 = very willing). Furthermore, in the manipulation test, the participants were asked to rate the advertisements they viewed based on their perception of product authenticity and uniqueness (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). To assess power distance belief manipulation validity [25], a three-item scale was employed.

Lastly, the participants were requested to provide their gender and age information.

3.1.2. Result

Manipulation check. Regarding the manipulation check for power distance beliefs, the experimental findings reveal significant disparities in the acceptance of hierarchy and inequality ($t = 9.851$, $p < 0.001$). The high power distance belief group ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.86$) significantly surpassed the low power distance belief group ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.28$), indicating successful manipulation of power distance beliefs.

The manipulation check for advertising appeal was conducted, and the experimental results revealed a significant difference in advertising appeal between the exclusive appeal advertisement ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.06$) and the authenticity appeal advertisement ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 0.96$) for subjects who viewed exclusive appeals ($t = 3.27$, $p = 0.001$). This indicates successful manipulation of exclusive advertising appeals. Similarly, for subjects exposed to authenticity appeals, there were significant differences observed between the exclusive appeal advertisement ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.53$) and the authenticity appeal advertisement ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 0.88$, $t = -2.14$, $p = 0.034$), demonstrating successful manipulation of authentic advertising appeals.

Purchase intention. Purchase intention was considered as the dependent variable, while power distance beliefs and advertising appeal were treated as independent variables, with the gender of the subjects included as a control variable. The results revealed that there was no significant effect of power distance beliefs on the consumers' purchase intention ($F(1,161) = 0.00$, $p = 0.991$, $\eta^2 = 0.00$). Similarly, the impact of advertising appeal on the consumers' purchase intention was not found to be significant ($F(1,161) = 0.83$, $p = 0.365$, $\eta^2 = 0.005$). However, an interaction effect between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal significantly influenced the consumers' purchase intention ($F(1,161) = 4.85$, $p = 0.029$, $\eta^2 = 0.029$). Thus confirming H1.

For further analysis, this study conducted a simple test to examine the impact of purchase intention on power distance beliefs and advertising appeal across all levels (refer to Figure 2). When the participants held high power distance beliefs, advertising appeal significantly influenced their purchase intention ($F(1,161) = 4.97$, $p = 0.027$, $\eta^2 = 0.030$). Specifi-

cally, exclusive appeal advertisements ($M_{exclusivity\text{-}high\ power\ distance\ belief}$ = 7.34, SD = 0.21) were more effective in inducing purchase intention compared to authenticity appeal advertisements ($M_{authenticity\text{-}high\ power\ distance\ belief}$ = 6.67, SD = 0.21). Conversely, when the participants had low power distance beliefs, advertising appeal did not have a significant effect on their purchase intention (F(1,161) = 0.81, p = 0.370, η^2 = 0.005). Thus confirming H1a and H1b.

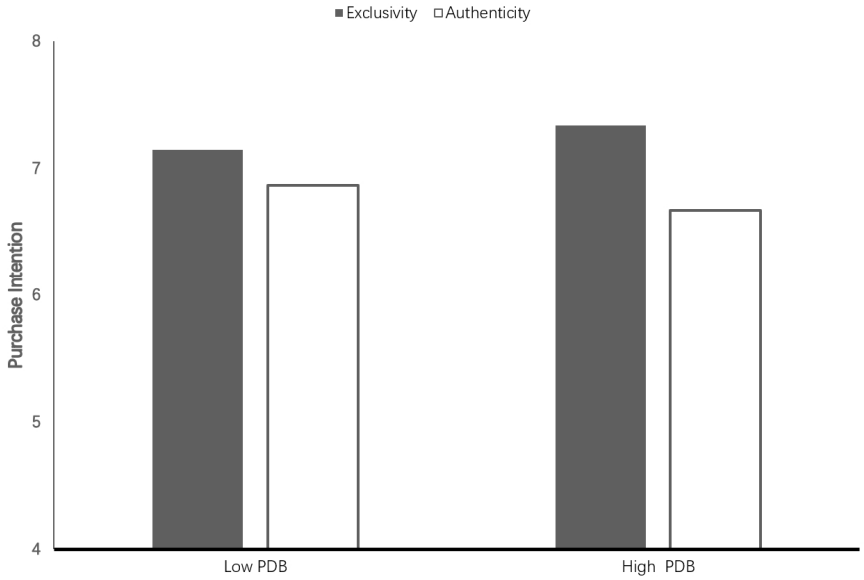


Figure 2. The impact of the interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on consumers' purchase intention (Study 1a).

3.1.3. Discussion

The findings from Study 1a provide empirical evidence for the impact of the interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on the consumers' purchase intentions. Specifically, when consumers hold stronger power distance beliefs, they exhibit a higher intention to purchase products featured in exclusive appeal advertisements compared to those in authentic appeal advertisements. However, when consumers have weaker power distance beliefs, there is no significant difference in their purchase intentions towards products promoted through different types of advertisements. Thus, H1a and H1b are supported by the results obtained from Study 1a. Building upon these findings, Study 1b will further investigate whether the interplay between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal influences consumers' purchase intentions towards products while also exploring different product categories to ensure the robustness of our conclusions.

3.2. Study 1b

The experimental design of Study 1b employed a two (power distance belief: high vs. low) × two (advertising appeal: exclusivity vs. authenticity) intergroup design. A total of 190 participants (65% female, mean age = 29.75) were recruited online from the Credamo Data Market.

3.2.1. Procedure

Similar to Study 1a, the participants' power distance beliefs were initially manipulated and subsequently randomly assigned to different groups based on advertising appeal. For details regarding the manipulation of advertising appeals and their assessment, please refer to Septianto et al. The participants were informed that CASMR, a cashmere sweater brand, was preparing to enter the market and had launched a campaign for one of its

sweaters. The authenticity appeal slogan emphasized the "century-old classic" aspect, highlighting the genuine and pure cashmere sourced from Alxa in Inner Mongolia. By contrast, the exclusive appeal focused on the uniqueness of the product as "rare and unique pure cashmere from Alxa in Inner Mongolia" [17], and the details are in Appendix A, on page 21. Subsequently, the participants were shown both versions of the advertisement separately. Their willingness to purchase the product was assessed using a scale identical to that employed in experiment 1a (with 1 indicating strong reluctance and 9 indicating high willingness).

Subsequently, the participants were requested to evaluate the advertisements they were exposed to based on their perceptions of the product's authenticity and uniqueness using a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). To assess the effectiveness of power distance belief manipulation, a three-item scale was employed as per Zhang et al.'s methodology [25].

Lastly, the participants were requested to provide their gender and age information.

3.2.2. Result

Manipulation check. Regarding the manipulation test on power distance beliefs, the experimental findings revealed significant disparities in the acceptance of hierarchy and inequality ($t = -10.665$, $p < 0.001$). High power distance beliefs ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 2.06$) significantly surpassed low power distance beliefs ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.37$), indicating successful manipulation of power distance beliefs.

The manipulation check for advertising appeal was conducted, and the experimental results revealed a significant difference in advertising appeal between subjects exposed to the exclusive appeal advertisement ($M = 5.936$, $SD = 1.29$) and those exposed to the authenticity appeal advertisement ($M = 5.037$, $SD = 1.67$, $t = -4.13$, $p < 0.0001$), indicating successful manipulation of exclusive advertising appeal. Furthermore, the subjects who viewed the authenticity appeal advertisement exhibited significant differences in advertising appeal between the exclusive appeal advertisement ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.82$) and the authenticity appeal advertisement ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 0.94$, $t = 6.22$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating successful manipulation of authentic advertising appeals.

Purchase intention. The gender of the subjects was included as a control variable, while the consumers' purchase intention served as the dependent variable. Power distance beliefs and advertising appeal were considered independent variables. The findings indicate that power distance beliefs do not exert a significant influence on the consumers' purchase intention ($F(1,185) = 0.28$, $p = 0.867$). Similarly, the impact of advertising appeal on the consumers' purchase intention was found to be non-significant ($F(1,185) = 0.44$, $p = 0.508$). However, there is a significant interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal in relation to the consumers' purchase intention ($F(1,185) = 6.08$, $p = 0.015$, $\eta^2 = 0.032$). Thus confirming Hypothesis H1.

To further analyze the impact of purchase intention on power distance beliefs and advertising appeal, this study conducted a simple test (see Figure 3). Results indicate that, when subjects hold high power distance beliefs, advertising appeal significantly influences their purchase intention ($F(1,185) = 4.84$, $p = 0.029$, $\eta^2 = 0.026$), with exclusive appeal advertisements ($M_{\text{exclusivity-high power distance belief}} = 7.49$, $SD = 0.22$) being more effective in inducing purchase intention than authenticity appeal advertisements ($M_{\text{authenticity-high power distance belief}} = 6.82$, $SD = 0.21$). However, when subjects have low power distance beliefs, the impact of advertising appeals on purchase intention is not significant ($F(1,185) = 1.64$, $p = 0.20$). Thus confirming H1a and H1b.

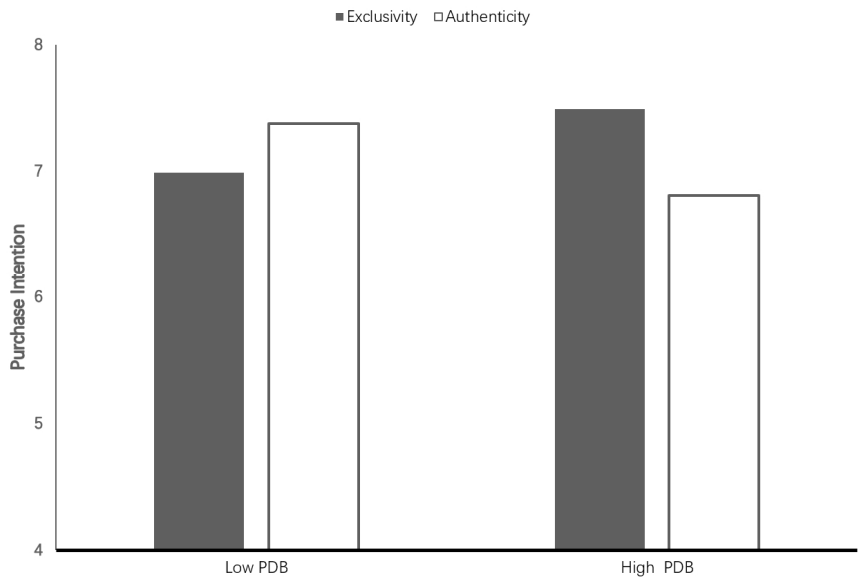


Figure 3. The impact of the interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on consumers' purchase intention (Study 1b).

3.2.3. Discussion

Based on the findings from Study 1a, Study 1b introduced a change in the advertising category by replacing it with an advertisement featuring cashmere sweaters. Once again, the results confirm the interaction effect of power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on purchase intention. Specifically, when consumers hold stronger power distance beliefs, their purchase intention towards products promoted through exclusive appeal advertisements is more favorable compared to those featured in authentic appeal advertisements. However, when consumers have lower power distance belief levels, there is no significant difference in their purchase intention towards products advertised using these two different appeals. Thus, H1c and H1d are supported. In Study 2, we further investigate whether power distance beliefs and advertising appeal impact on the consumers' self-identity as well as subsequently influence their purchase intention using TOM FORD as a real perfume brand.

4. Study 2

An intergroup design was employed in Study 2, examining the effects of power distance beliefs (high vs. low) and advertising appeal (exclusivity vs. authenticity). A total of 193 participants (65% female, mean age = 30.55) were recruited online from the Credamo Data Market.

4.1. Procedure

To manipulate the participants' power distance beliefs [58], the participants in the high/low power distance belief condition were instructed to envision themselves in a hierarchical (vs. egalitarian) society and endorse the corresponding social values. Subsequently, they were exposed to TOM FORD perfume brand advertisements consisting of modified visuals and slogans, based on previous research [17]. Among them, the authenticity of the slogan lies in drawing inspiration from TOM FORD's 1930 perfume works, which embody the eternal classic essence and showcase TOM FORD's genuine expertise in perfumery. The gift box is adorned with a traditional wood grain design, evoking allusions to an elegant and robust giant tree. By contrast, the exclusive appeal lies in the combination of phoenix tree shadow and a rare, pure, and fresh water bottle, which highlights TOM FORD's unique perfume and brand technology. The limited edition box is adorned

with wood grain decoration that can be customized to create unique lines according to individual preferences.

Similar to Study 1b, the participants will subsequently assess their purchase intention. Following this, a seven-point self-identity scale was administered [68]. The scale comprised four measurement items, including statements such as 'I perceive myself as possessing adequate skills and knowledge to recognize the genuine value of Wutong Shadow wood perfume' and 'I view myself as someone who understands Wutong Shadow wood perfume' (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Subsequently, the participants were instructed to evaluate the advertisements they were exposed to based on their perceptions of the product's "authenticity", "traditional and historical value", as well as its "uniqueness" and "distinctiveness" (rated on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). To assess the effectiveness of manipulating power distance beliefs, a three-item scale was employed for validation purposes [25].

Finally, the participants were requested to provide their demographic information including gender and age.

4.2. Result

Manipulation check. The manipulation test of power distance beliefs yielded significant differences in the acceptance degree of hierarchy and inequality among the subjects ($t = -7.49$, $p < 0.0001$). High power distance beliefs ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 2.12$) were found to be significantly higher than low power distance beliefs ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.60$), indicating successful manipulation of power distance beliefs.

The experimental results demonstrate a significant disparity in the advertising appeal between subjects exposed to exclusive appeals ($M = 6.27$, $SD = 0.77$) and authenticity appeals ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.60$), indicating successful manipulation of exclusive advertising demands ($t = 7.54$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, for the participants who viewed advertisements with authenticity appeals, there was a notable distinction between exclusivity appeals ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.633$) and authenticity appeals ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 0.75$, $t = 4.47$, $p < 0.001$), thus confirming the effective manipulation of authenticity advertising appeal.

Purchase intention. The gender of the participants was included as a control variable, while the consumers' purchase intention served as the dependent variable. Power distance beliefs and advertising appeal were considered as independent variables. The findings indicate that power distance beliefs do not exert a significant impact on the consumers' purchase intention ($F(1,188) = 0.74$, $p = 0.189$). Similarly, the influence of advertising appeal on the consumers' purchase intention was found to be non-significant ($F(1,188) = 0.20$, $p = 0.888$). However, there is a significant interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal in relation to the consumers' purchase intention ($F(1,188) = 7.79$, $p = 0.006$, $\eta^2 = 0.040$).

For further analysis, this study conducted a simple test to examine the impact of purchase intention on all levels of power distance beliefs and advertising appeal (refer to Figure 4). When the participants held high power distance beliefs, advertising appeal significantly influenced their purchase intention ($F(1,188) = 4.39$, $p = 0.037$, $\eta^2 = 0.023$). Specifically, an exclusive appeal advertisement ($M_{\text{exclusivity-high power distance belief}} = 7.91$, $SD = 0.144$) was more effective in inducing purchase intention compared to an authenticity appeal advertisement ($M_{\text{authenticity-high power distance belief}} = 7.483$, $SD = 0.14$). Conversely, when the participants had low power distance beliefs, the influence of advertising appeals on purchase intention was not significant ($F(1,188) = 3.57$, $p = 0.06$). H1a and H1b were retested.

Investigating the mediating role of self-identity. The mediation effect was tested using Model 7 of Process. Power distance beliefs and advertising appeal were treated as

independent variables, self-identity as the mediating variable, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The sample size was 5000. Results from the mediation test at a 95% confidence interval indicated that the effects were significant (95% CI: LLCI = 0.007, ULCI = 0.632), suggesting that self-identity mediated the relationship between power distance beliefs, advertising appeal, and purchase intention. Specifically, for the consumers exposed to exclusive advertisements, there was a significant mediating effect of self-identity with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (95% CI: LLCI = 0.029, ULCI = 0.466). However, for those consumers exposed to authenticity advertisements, the 95% confidence interval contained zero (95% CI: LLCI = −0.277, ULCI = 0.124), indicating no significant mediating effect of self-identification in this group. The findings revealed that self-identity played a mediating role solely among consumers who were exposed to exclusive advertisements, thereby confirming H2a and H2b.

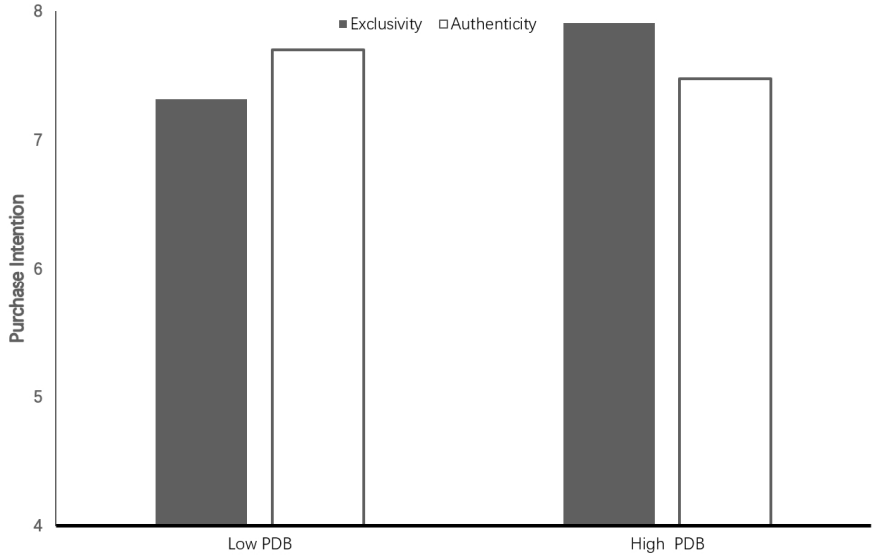


Figure 4. The impact of the interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on consumers' purchase intention (Study 2).

4.3. Discussion

In Study 2, real brands were substituted for virtual brands based on the manipulation of advertising appeals conducted in Study 1. The findings once again validate the impact of the interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on purchase intention. Additionally, the mediating role of self-identity is confirmed. Specifically, when consumers possess a high (low) power distance belief, their perceived self-identity from exclusive (authenticity) advertisements is heightened, leading to increased purchase intention.

5. Research Conclusions and Prospects

5.1. Conclusions

Through three studies, this study validated the influence of the interaction between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on consumer preferences, while also uncovering the mediating role of self-identity. Specifically, this study yielded the following conclusions: firstly, interactions between power distance beliefs and advertising appeal significantly affect the consumers' purchase intentions. Consumers with varying power distance beliefs exhibit distinct purchase intentions towards products featured in advertisements. When consumers possess a high power distance belief (vs. low), their purchase intention for the products featured in advertisements with authenticity appeals is higher

compared to the products showcased in advertisements with exclusivity appeals. Secondly, self-identity mediates the effects of power distance beliefs and advertising appeal on consumer purchase intentions. In instances where consumers hold strong entitlement beliefs regarding power distance beliefs (vs. low), exposure to advertising can enhance their level of self-identification, thereby improving their purchase intentions towards advertised products.

5.2. Theoretical Contribution

The present research advances our understanding of consumer response to advertising appeal in the digital economy and thus makes important contributions to cross-cultural marketing communications [82]. Specifically, the theoretical contribution of this paper primarily lies in the following aspects. Firstly, this study extends the existing research on authenticity and exclusive advertising. Previous studies have mainly focused on defining authenticity and exclusivity [19,46,47], or have predominantly concentrated on specific products or product categories. For instance, Ewing examined the impact of indexing and iconic cues on consumers' identification of "real" green products [83], while Xie and Muralidharan primarily discussed the exclusivity of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) [7]. However, there remains a gap in understanding the mechanism through which this advertising strategy influences different contexts. This paper introduces power distance beliefs as a moderating variable in advertising appeals to elucidate which type of power distance belief is more effective in authentic or exclusive advertising. Secondly, this study contributes to the literature on right distance beliefs by identifying that right distance beliefs affect consumer preferences for promotional advertisements with different appeals. In the related research of power distance beliefs, scholars have found that power distance beliefs affect consumers' identity consumption [58], charity behavior [84], price sensitivity [33], attitude toward celebrity endorsement [54], for educational products [85], and for user-designed products [30,86]. The results of this paper show that power distance beliefs affect consumer preferences for exclusivity (vs. authenticity) appeal advertising, thus enriching the theoretical research on power distance beliefs. Thirdly, this study uncovers the mediating mechanism of self-identity in power distance beliefs and advertising appeal matching effect, thereby enhancing the research on self-identity theory [87]. The findings of this paper demonstrate that consumers are inclined to engage in self-verification when exposed to authenticity appeal advertisements, seeking information feedback that aligns with their self-concept. Conversely, when confronted with exclusive advertising appeals, consumers exhibit a stronger desire for self-transformation as a means to reinforce their sense of identity. These results align with prior studies emphasizing the significant influence of both self-validation and self-promotion on brand consumption, thus expanding our understanding of the relevant research on self-identity and enriching our knowledge regarding the intermediary mechanisms underlying consumer purchase preferences across different contexts.

5.3. Practical Contribution

According to the research findings of this paper, the following insights can be derived. Firstly, enterprises should acknowledge the significance of power distance beliefs and adjust their marketing information accordingly. Companies believe that highlighting the uniqueness or exclusivity of a product in promotional campaigns is a wise decision. However, our research indicates that, while this strategy proves effective for consumers with high power distance beliefs, it falls short of expectations for those with low power distance beliefs. Therefore, enterprises need to develop differentiated publicity and promotional methods tailored to consumers with varying degrees of power distance beliefs. Specifically,

in cultures characterized by high power distance or where consumers hold strong power distance beliefs (such as China and Japan), marketing messages emphasizing exclusivity are more likely to resonate with potential customers. This is particularly important in the digital economy, where consumers actively interact with advertising appeal, as the power distance appeal tends to increase consumer digital engagement [88]. Conversely, in cultures characterized by low power distance or where consumers have weak power distance beliefs, the advantages of such a strategy are not evident. Secondly, if an enterprise aims to target regions with a culture rooted in high power distance beliefs (e.g., China and Japan), it should establish a connection between identity and exclusive consumption demands. For instance, when advertising products in areas influenced by high power distance cultural norms, incorporating exclusive products into self-promotion scenarios—such as showcasing scenes depicting success or achievement—can enhance consumer self-identity and subsequently increase purchase intention [89].

5.4. Limitation and Future Research Direction

This study has certain limitations that warrant future research attention.

Firstly, it is important to note that life encompasses various types of advertising appeals, including mixed appeal and other forms. However, this study specifically focuses on authenticity and exclusivity, thereby acknowledging the potential for diverse perceptions and attitudes towards mixed appeals or other advertising strategies among consumers with different power distance beliefs. Future research could explore whether individuals with varying power distance beliefs exhibit distinct preferences for mixed appeals or single advertising appeals.

Secondly, this study examines the mediating role of self-identity in power distance beliefs and advertising appeal within their relationship. However, further investigation is needed to determine whether externally enhanced/diminished self-identity can weaken/enhance the preference of consumers with high power distance beliefs for exclusive products. Previous studies have indicated that individuals with high power distance beliefs demonstrate a higher purchase intention for status goods than those with low power distance beliefs under self-threat situations (Cui et al., 2019). Therefore, future research could examine whether self-threat increases the preference of individuals with high power distance beliefs for exclusive products, thus revealing the boundary conditions of this effect.

Finally, as power distance index is an important dimension of Geert Hofstede's cultural values and varies across different cultures/countries, it would be beneficial to conduct cross-cultural studies on its impact in the future. This study has utilized manipulation methods to test its influence, which is a valid approach. However, expanding the research to different cultural contexts could provide more comprehensive insights. Future research could compare the power distance values and their effects on advertising and consumer behavior in multiple countries, taking into account cultural, social, and economic factors. This would help to identify similarities and differences and contribute to the development of more effective marketing strategies in a globalized market.

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Appendix A

(1) ADVERTISEMENT APPEAL MANIPULATIONS

Advertisement Appeal Manipulation (Septianto et al., 2020 [19])

Study 1a: Skincare product advertisement



Advertisement with authenticity appeal: "On the basis of traditional herbal skincare, genuine Changbai Mountain ginseng is specially added".

Advertisement with exclusivity appeal: "On the basis of unique herbal skincare, rare Changbai Mountain ginseng is specially added".

Study 1b: Cashmere Sweater Advertisement



Advertisement with authenticity appeal: "A century-old classic—made from pure cashmere that is traditional and genuine from Alxa, Inner Mongolia".

Advertisement with exclusivity appeal: "An unrivaled masterpiece—made from pure cashmere that is rare and unique from Alxa, Inner Mongolia".

Study 2: Perfume Advertisement

Advertisement with authenticity appeal:

"The Ombré Leather perfume draws inspiration from the perfume works created by TOM FORD in 1930.

The eternal and classic fragrance showcases the authentic craftsmanship of TOM FORD perfumes and the brand.

The gift box is decorated with traditional wood grain, which reminds people of the elegant and vigorous giant trees in the allusions".

Advertisement with exclusivity appeal:

"The Ombré Leather perfume is presented in a rare and fresh bottle, demonstrating the unique craftsmanship of TOM FORD perfumes and the brand.

The limited-edition gift box is decorated with wood grain and can be customized with unique patterns according to personal needs".

Advertisement Appeal Manipulation Check

Do you think the product is authentic? (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Do you think the product is traditional and historical? (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Do you think the product is distinctive? (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Do you think the product is unique? (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

(2) POWER DISTANCE BELIEF MANIPULATIONS

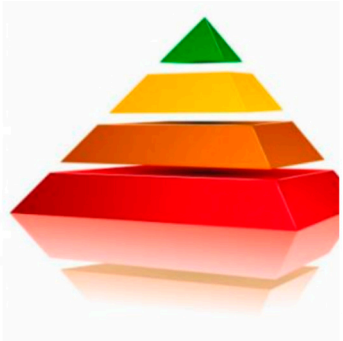
PDB Manipulation (Gao, Winterich, and Zhang 2016)

- High-PDB Condition

This month is Cultural Awareness Month with the main goal to encourage people's mutual understanding of different cultures. One of this month's topics is the appreciation of values in a hierarchical society.

Now, put yourself in a hierarchical society, and identify with the following values:

- Hierarchy is necessary for our social order.
- Everyone should have a defined high or low place.
- Maintaining a hierarchical order is important in society.
- Everyone has a high or low place, even in an organization.
- Power differences are necessary to maintain order.



- Low-PDB Condition

This month is the Cultural Awareness Month with the main goal to encourage people's mutual understanding of different cultures. One of this month's topics is the appreciation of values in an equal society.

Now put yourself in an equality society and identify with the following values:

- Hierarchy is unnecessary for our social order.
- Everyone is created equal.
- To maintain a hierarchical order is unimportant in society.
- Everyone has an equal place in an organization.
- Equality is necessary in society.



PDB Manipulation Check (Zhang, Winterich, and Mittal 2010)

- For the time being, I mainly think:
- At this moment, I feel that:
- On top of my mind right now are thoughts in agreement with saying that:

1 = social equality is important, 7 = social hierarchy is important

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