



Advertising in Asia: Theories and Implications for Practice

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Ad spending in the Asia-Pacific region is estimated to have reached \$210.43 billion in 2018, or 33.5% of worldwide ad spending (McNair 2018). The importance of Asian markets and the uniqueness of cultures in Asia have attracted significant research attention. Even though this body of research thus far has contributed to our initial knowledge of advertising in Asia, the question of how advertising works in Asia remains relatively underexplored, such that many complex distinctions and unique elements have not been discovered or documented in a systematic and comprehensive manner. As most advertising theories have been developed in the West, scholars are often challenged to find strong support for them when they are applied to phenomena in Asia. Without a systematic effort to cultivate pertinent theories applicable to different sociocultural economic settings, we are left with only broad notions of how advertising works in Asia. It was with these notions in mind that we embarked on this special issue for the *Journal of Advertising*.

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The call for papers for this special issue generated a high number of responses, with a total of 73 papers submitted. This is quite encouraging. It suggests that there are indeed concerted efforts and vibrant research to understand advertising in Asia, from various perspectives. Unfortunately, given the short timeline for production of a special issue and space constraints, we were able to include only a limited number of articles. Of the eight articles included in the special issue, several have indeed tackled issues identified as needing more research attention with our comprehensive review of past research, which are presented later in this article, while others seek to elaborate on existing theoretical understanding for the cultural contexts in Asia.

Deng, Han, and Wang's (2019) article in this special issue deals with a culture-specific indigenous topic. With six well-executed experiments, it explores the effects of writing direction (horizontal versus vertical text) on persuasion, a topic with important implications for practitioners in Asian markets which largely has been ignored in prior literature. These authors show that vertical/horizontal writing direction is associated with distant/proximate time points (Studies 1a through 1c) and confirm their association with time-related attributes (modernity versus tradition) (Study 2a). Using these findings as foundations, they demonstrate congruency effects between products with traditional/contemporary associations and ad copy that uses vertical/horizontal writing styles (Study 2b). Finally, they establish "feeling right" as the psychological mechanism that accounts for these congruency effects (Study 3).

Addressing different cognitive styles between U.S. and South Korean consumers, Jang and Shin (2019) examine the implications for effective advertising creative in each country. Through three studies, these authors show that

U.S. consumers tend to think more analytically, focusing on an individual object independent of its context. This results in more favorable response to advertisements that feature product ingredients before the overall product. In contrast, South Korean consumers favor a more holistic thinking style that takes into consideration connections among various objects. They prefer ads that feature the overall product before describing its ingredients. The authors show that the differential responses to advertising content order as a result of cognitive style are due to variations in processing fluency.

The next four articles in this issue examine the social aspects of advertising in Asia. The research by Chu, Cao, Yang, and Mundel (2019) focuses on the role of *guanxi* (relationships) in agency performance in China. They carried out two surveys and conducted one study with dyadic interviews. Although *guanxi* is not an entirely new concept, this research elaborates it into three aspects: *ganqing* (affection), *renqing* (exchange of favors), and *xinren* (interpersonal trust). It is interesting to note that while both Chinese agencies and clients share similar views on the impact of *ganqing* (affection) on cooperation and performance, they have different perceptions regarding the influence of the other two aspects. This research helps deepen our understanding of *guanxi* and offers fresh ideas for future research to explore on the complex nature of relationships in Asia.

Errmann, Seo, Choi, and Yoon (2019) also examine social relationships, but in terms of friendship among individual consumers. Through two studies, these authors challenge the typical assumption that social recommendation helps advertisers. They argue that U.S. and South Korean consumers define friendship differently and therefore have different levels of tolerance for commercial intentions present in such relationships. While South Korean consumers respond positively to social media advertising messages featuring friend recommendations, U.S. consumers are put off by the intrusion of commercial intention in friendships. However, this difference is observed only if the social media advertisement is explicitly identified as a sponsored message. The authors attribute this finding to the activation of conceptual persuasion knowledge that further leads to negative attitudinal persuasion knowledge for U.S. consumers but not for Korean consumers. Taken together, Chu et al. (2019) and Errmann et al. (2019) demonstrate the need to consider the nature of social relationships when advertising in Asia.

Lou, Tse, and Lwin's (2019) article compares American and Singaporean consumers' responses to ads featuring thin and average-sized models. Study 1 finds that Americans express greater purchase intentions when the ads feature average-sized models, but Singaporeans'

intentions do not differ regardless of the model's size. To explain this difference, the authors argue that social norms might affect responses, such that Americans reject the social norm of being thin. Study 2 strengthens this argument by showing that, at the individual level, among Singaporeans with stronger beliefs that being thin is important, thin models generate greater purchase intentions, whereas among those who express weaker such beliefs, average-sized models generate greater purchase intentions. The article advances extant literature by showing that, beyond individualism–collectivism, social norms represent another important variable that can account for cultural differences in advertising effects.

Also examining social norms, the article by Youn, Park, and Eom (2019) compares Chinese and Japanese consumers' reactions to nonconformity imagery in luxury product ads. The authors argue that the "coolness" factor often associated with being nonconforming may not translate equally in Asian cultures. Between Japan and China, Japan is considered to have a tighter culture. The high cultural tightness at the societal level dominates Japanese consumers' reaction to nonconforming advertising imagery, resulting in less favorable attitudes regardless of their personal tightness/looseness beliefs. In contrast, Chinese consumers experience more looseness at the societal level, and their reaction to nonconforming advertising imagery depends more on their own personal beliefs of tightness. The authors attribute the findings to different perceptions of social status triggered by nonconformity. Their research highlights the nuances within even geographically close Asian cultures.

La Ferle, Muralidharan, and Kim (2019) explore the challenging issue of encouraging bystander intervention into domestic violence through public advertising messages in India. The authors focus on the relative effectiveness of guilt versus shame appeals in such ads and the role played by self-construal. Although both guilt and shame can be motivating in a moderately collectivistic culture such as India, the authors argue that self-construal variations among individuals in the same culture can cause individuals to respond differently to these two emotions. Their empirical study shows that the more externally oriented shame appeal is more effective for Indians with higher interdependent self-construal, whereas the more internally driven guilt appeal works better for Indians with higher independent self-construal. This research points to the need to consider important variations within each Asian culture when designing advertising messages.

The last article in this special issue, by Kato and Hoshino (2019), offers a rare investigation into the effectiveness of store flyer ads. This medium has often been neglected in advertising research. However, in population-

dense and highly competitive Asian markets such as Japan, store flyers are frequently used by small-scale retailers as a cost-effective way to reach their customers. Kato and Hoshino analyzed the effectiveness of store flyers in Japan by combining retail store marketing and sales data with mobile-enabled global positioning system (GPS) data. Their findings showed significant diversity in own-store and cross-store effects, depending on factors such as store pricing strategy, store market share, and customer demographics. This work highlights the need to consider the unique market landscape in addition to cultural factors when advertising in Asian countries.

Our goal for this special issue has been to fill the research gaps identified earlier in a meaningful way and encourage more research in the area. In the process, we felt that in addition to offering a collection of current research, we needed to provide a state-of-knowledge assessment of research focusing on advertising in Asia. Therefore, as part of this editorial, we include a foundational piece of work spearheaded by Chingching Chang where we systematically review research that has been published to date to document our understanding and organize it by a common framework. The following content analysis also enabled us to identify areas in need of future research.

A REVIEW OF ADVERTISING RESEARCH IN ASIA: BEYOND STANDARDIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Early advertising research sought to determine whether standardization or globalization strategies were more effective for entering Asian markets. In answering this question, an earlier meta-analysis of the effects of culture on advertising indicates that adapted ad appeals are more effective in Asia-Pacific markets than in North American, European, and Central/South American markets (Hornikx and O'Keefe 2009). However, as Asian markets have grown rapidly, so too has the diversity of advertising research focusing on this region, expanding much beyond the earlier standardization versus globalization question. To date, an in-depth review of this body of research on advertising in Asia is missing. To address this gap and to move beyond specific countries to provide a more complete picture, the current review examines research published in top advertising journals to identify key research questions and findings that span all 50 Asian countries (United Nations 2011).

From this wide perspective, we identify two major approaches of research into advertising in Asia: a cultural comparisons approach and a single-country focus. From these two approaches, research studies consider a general set of topics, including ad practices, consumers' perceptions and beliefs, ad content, ad effects, and ad education.

Within each topic, the different approaches exhibit distinct emphases. For example, comparative studies often refer to Western countries to highlight the uniqueness of Asian markets and Asian consumers. Single-country studies instead vary more, covering indigenous phenomena, replications of Western research, or universal issues not limited to certain cultures. We therefore summarize major findings according to the research approaches adopted.

This review also seeks to integrate both qualitative and quantitative aspects and both top-down (big picture) and bottom-up (small picture) views. First, to provide a big picture, we address the theories adopted, countries attracting the most research attention, and topics being explored, along with the data that substantiate these insights. Second, we offer a close-up view by reporting on major research findings within each topic and research questions that can be answered by data obtained from a content analysis of four major advertising journals, *Journal of Advertising (JA)*, *International Journal of Advertising (IJA)*, *Journal of Advertising Research (JAR)*, and *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising (JCIRA)*.

Underlying Theoretical Themes

Theories of culture frequently provide foundations for explaining communication differences across cultures. Proposing that culture represents mental programming, Hofstede (1980) famously surveyed employees of IBM subsidiaries around the world and identified four cultural value dimensions: collectivism–individualism, power distance, masculinity–femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (2001) later added Confucian dynamism, or long-term orientation in life. In general, East Asian cultures are considered high in collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, femininity (cf. Japan), and long-term orientation, whereas Western cultures are high on individualism and masculinity (cf. northern Europe) and low on power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. These differences have important implications for communication and help explain which advertising content is likely to be most effective in distinct cultures.

Hall's (1976; Hall and Hall 1987) culture context theory instead seeks to explain how people relate (association) and communicate (interaction). In high-context cultures, relationships are stable and built on trust, and people see themselves as members of a group. In low-context cultures, the relationship cycle is short, and people see themselves as independent individuals. With regard to interactions, people in high-context cultures rely on non-verbal signals (e.g., gestures and facial expressions), use implicit verbal messages, and weigh contextual information as more important than words; whereas people in

low-context cultures rely on explicitly stated information, use direct verbal messages, and weigh words as more important.

In addition to these culture-related theories, Markus and Kitayama (1991) propose self-construal theory to explain differences in cognition and emotion. People in an individualistic society tend to develop independent self-construals, such that the self appears separate from others; but people in a collectivistic culture often develop interdependent self-construals, such that the self is connected to others. In turn, people with interdependent self-construals generally pay more attention to others, provide more social information in social contexts, and are more responsive to other-focused emotions (empathy) rather than ego-focused emotion (e.g., pride). This theory has also been applied to account for cultural variation in advertising effectiveness (Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000).

Each of these theories prompts distinct propositions and relies on different assumptions. Understanding which theories have been applied most often in advertising research in Asia may help illustrate the dominant thinking and the applicability of each theory in the Asian context. This formulates the first research question for our review:

RQ1: What theories have been most widely applied to explore advertising issues in Asia?

Topics Being Explored

Extant reviews of advertising research often focus on key research topics. Building on prior reviews of advertising research in general (e.g., Yale and Gilly 1988; West 2007), we explore the topics covered in Asian advertising studies with a seven-topic typology, comprising advertising practice, advertising content, advertising effects, consumers' perceptions and beliefs about advertising, topics tangential to advertising (e.g., media uses and consumer behaviors), advertising education, and other. All of these topics relate to the well-being of society or interests of advertisers. Thus, we consider the perspective adopted by a study (society's or advertisers') as a dimension, independent from the topics. We also add a new category, consumers' perceptions and beliefs of advertising, to distinguish them from those of practitioners, which mainly entail advertising practices. Other than scale invariance, most methodological issues are universal, and the applications are not limited to Asian countries. Therefore, we exclude methodology as a major topic type and instead relegate it to the "other" category.

According to Yale and Gilly (1988), the advertising practice topic includes advertising management issues, media topics, and agency concerns. West (2007) adds

planning and the use of different marketing communication tools to this topic. Furthermore, we note that agency–advertiser relationships, advertising expansion strategies, and perceptions of local markets represent important ad practice issues in Asia. Advertising content refers to ad appeals and ad content (e.g., image, information, creativity) (West 2007; Yale and Gilly 1988). For research in Asia, the values depicted in ads also fall under this topic. Ad effects pertain to attention, awareness, recall, recognition, attitudes, and persuasion (Yale and Gilly 1988) or information processing (West 2007). We define consumers' perceptions of and beliefs about advertising as their general beliefs and opinions regarding advertising in general, new types of advertising (e.g., banners, short message services, and social media), and different marketing communication activities (e.g., product placement and sponsorship). Topics tangential to advertising refers to media use, consumption, and sustainable behaviors, all of which relate indirectly to advertising or marketing communication. Advertising education features advertising curricula, creativity education in particular, and the gap between education and practices. Exploring the featured topics is the most commonly used method in reviews of advertising research; we follow this tradition and investigate the following:

RQ2: What topics are being explored in advertising research in Asia?

Countries That Attract Research Attention

Three possible factors might explain why research focuses on certain Asian countries (e.g., East Asia) but not others: economic, educational, and theoretical. First, the economic factor acknowledges that advertising is more important in societies with booming economies. Regions with more developed economies (e.g., East Asia) usually attract more research. Second, with regard to the educational factor, when more advertising scholars obtain advanced education in Western institutions, they may be more likely to publish in international journals. According to West's (2007) review of *IJA*, scholars in institutions located in East Asia, but not other areas of Asia, contribute significantly to that journal's publications. Third, the theoretical factor acknowledges that most culture-related theories address differences between East Asian countries and North America, because the well-established theories we discussed in the previous section facilitate such comparative studies. Due to these three factors, not all 50 Asian countries have attracted research attention; to date, we know very little about key advertising topics in some of these countries. Through our review, we would like to identify what countries have

been studied more and what countries need more research efforts, as expressed by the following research question:

RQ3: Which countries have been most commonly (a) compared and (b) explored in advertising research in Asia?

The preceding three research questions attempt to provide an overall picture of advertising research in Asia in terms of applied theories, covered topics, and approaches. The following qualitative review details what issues have been explored for each topic and introduces research questions to illustrate the general patterns of extant research for each topic in terms of its approaches (comparative versus single country) and findings (similar to or different from Western literature). Because over time the focus of advertising research in Asia has shifted from practices to advertising perceptions and content, and then to advertising effects, the review follows this order.

Advertising Practice

Cultural Comparisons

Comparative research explores advertising practices, taking advertisers' and agencies' perspectives, with different interests.

Advertisers. Understanding advertisers' professional activities in different cultures is important. For example, extant research compares the opinions of advertisers in Japan, the United States, and Chile, with regard to their budget setting, media planning, message testing, and criteria for approving advertisements produced by agencies (Griffin et al. 1998), as well as the activities they consider important (Griffin et al. 2000). Other contributions detail how advertisers in Japan, the United States, and Chile evaluate the performance of advertising agencies (Griffin et al. 1998) and how advertisers in Korea and New Zealand select advertising agencies (Na and Marshall 2001).

Agencies. Insights gathered from advertising agencies reveal differences in practices across markets. Large transnational advertising agencies often are headquartered in the United States, Japan, or Europe. Kim (1995) details their dominance in Europe, Latin America, and Asia and the consolidation processes underlying their expansions over from 1960 to 1990. The ways that agency practitioners in different countries apply integrated marketing communications (IMC) also is a prominent topic in cultural comparisons (e.g., Kliatchko and Schultz 2014). Due to differences in their social norms, agencies in different cultures also vary in their ethical concerns; for example, Moon and Franke (2000) find that

practitioners in Korea are more sensitive to ethical advertising issues than are those in the United States.

Regardless of whether the research focus is advertisers or agencies, though, practices in some Asian countries have drawn more research attention. The United States serves as the most common reference country for cross-cultural comparisons:

RQ4a: Which country dyads have attracted the most research attention in advertising practice research in Asia?

Single Countries

Similarly, single-country studies focus on advertisers' or agencies' perspectives. We also note that some single-country studies particularly address the practices of multinational advertisers or mega-agencies. We devote separate subsections to them hereafter.

Advertisers in general. Single-country studies in Asia often examine advertisers' perceptions of advertising, advertising media, and marketing communication activities. Early research describes local managers' beliefs about what advertising can do for their business (Semenik, Zhou, and Moore 1986). Advertisers in Asia became aware of the importance of advertising in the 1990s, acknowledging its important strategic functions (Luk and Yip 1996). Advertisers also find opportunities in new practices, including implementing IMC (Schultz, Chu, and Zhao 2016) and launching corporate Web sites (Lee and Park 2004). Yet advertisers also face challenges, such as strict government regulations in China (Weber 2000).

In turn, researchers have investigated how advertisers in East Asia develop agency selection and relationship strategies. A unique practice in Japan, the split account, involves acquiring services from multiple agencies according to the product lines or media, which has also attracted some research interest (Moeran 2000). A gap exists between Chinese advertisers' expectations of agencies and the services they receive (So 2005). Surveying advertisers in Shanghai, Prendergast, Shi, and West (2001) find that if decision processes for campaign strategies are bottom-up, rather than top-down, the relationship with agencies is closer, and advertisers perceive that they have more influence over the process.

Multinational advertisers. The question of whether multinational advertisers adopt standardization and localization strategies is a frequent research focus. Yin's (1999) survey of international advertisers in China reveals that combined strategies are more popular than localization or standardization strategies; localizing language is regarded as important. Among managers of U.S.

multinational companies in India, Chandra, Griffith, and Ryans (2002) find that when these companies are not highly committed to local markets and the target markets exhibit similar consumer behaviors, they tend to adopt standardization strategies. Multinational advertisers also differ from local advertisers in their practices; the former use more sophisticated budgeting methods (Prendergast, West, and Shi 2006).

Agencies in general. Single-country studies have examined advertising practitioners' perceptions of advertising in general and the perceived benefits of different media, marketing communication activities, or advertising appeals. Agency professionals in Asian countries tend to hold positive opinions about IMC (Kitchen and Tao 2005). Regarding perceptions of the effectiveness of different ad appeals or creativity, a survey of advertising agency directors in Taiwan indicates that product merit appeals are considered the most effective (Shao, Raymond, and Taylor 1999). Even though agency professionals in China believe creativity can persuade and will be central to future advertising, they also face tension, because clients regard creativity as more decorative than strategic (Bilby, Reid, and Brennan 2016).

Multinational agencies. To describe how international advertising agencies operate in local markets, Jeong, Tharp, and Choi (2002) survey 100 managers from nine subsidiaries of global agencies in Korea and describe their attitudes toward standardization. Interviews with senior managers of 32 joint venture agencies operating in China by Cheung, Mirza, and Leung (2008) identify client following as the motive that drove these agencies to enter China; they also note that multinational agencies can identify important strategic advantages to their presence in China.

These studies often involve surveys or interviews with ad practitioners. Essays, secondary data analyses, and case studies also can be insightful with regard to advertising practices. For example, using real cases in Japan, Ferris (2007) demonstrates the utility of mobile campaigns. Analyzing stock market data, Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2018) show that campaign events involving celebrity endorsers result in more positive stock market returns.

As this review suggests, advertising practices in China draw the most research attention. China, as a super economic power, appears important for researchers to explore in terms of how advertising works, so research question 4b explores this point:

RQ4b: Which Asian countries have attracted the most research attention with regard to advertising practices?

Consumers' Perceptions and Beliefs of Advertising

Understanding consumers' perceptions and beliefs has always been a focus of advertising research, because this understanding can help practitioners in important ways. These perceptions might entail advertising in general or particular forms and either positive (e.g., "informative") or negative (e.g., "irritating") responses. Regardless of their content or valence, they still can be divided by their comparative or single-country approach.

Cultural Comparisons

Advertising. Early research focuses on how people in different cultures vary in their attitudes toward advertising in general. Using free-elicitation techniques, Andrews, Lysonski, and Durvasula (1991) compare college students' top-of-mind thoughts about advertising across five countries (the United States, New Zealand, Denmark, Greece, and India); U.S. students listed more thoughts and more positive thoughts than their counterparts from India. However, these findings become mixed for comparisons with other Asian countries. For example, U.S. consumers believe that advertising is less intrusive and more entertaining and support less regulation than Chinese consumers, but they also find it less informative (Gao, Zhang, and Li 2014). Comparing mothers of young children in the United States and Japan, Rose, Bush, and Kahle (1998) show that U.S. mothers hold more negative views of advertising in general and advertising targeting children; they are also more likely to discuss television advertising with their children than Japanese mothers.

Although most comparisons pit Western against Eastern cultures, a notable exception comes from Fam (2008), who asks consumers in five Asian cities—Shanghai and Hong Kong (China), Jakarta (Indonesia), Bangkok (Thailand), and Mumbai (India)—to nominate three commercials that they like and dislike. After coding the content of the commercials, they identify appealing attributes that are popular in the West (i.e., entertaining, self-relevancy) and in Asian markets (i.e., soft sell).

New forms of advertising. The development of new media has made new forms of advertising possible, so research also compares consumers across cultures with regard to their perceptions of online advertising or mobile advertising. For example, Wang and Sun (2010) find that U.S. consumers perceive online advertising as more informative and credible but less economically valuable than do Chinese consumers. For mobile advertising, U.S. consumers hold less favorable attitudes than Korean consumers (Muk 2007).

Marketing communication activities. Extant research seeks to understand perceptions and beliefs of varied marketing activities. Much of this attention centers on product placement. Karrh, Frith, and Callison (2001) argue that Americans, compared with Singaporeans, exhibit high self-monitoring, and product information in movies provides social information for those who are concerned about self-presentation. Furthermore, Americans express fewer ethical concerns about product placements and support reduced government restrictions. McKechnie and Zhou (2003) report similar findings, but an investigation of product placement attitudes in terms of realism and ethical concerns by Lee, Sung, and Choi (2011) reveals no significant differences between U.S. and Korean consumers.

Regardless of the research focus, this review suggests that practices in China draw the most research attention; the United States again often serves as the reference country for cross-cultural comparisons. We thus explore this insight:

RQ5a: Which country dyads have attracted the most research attention with regard to consumers' perceptions and beliefs?

Single Countries

Advertising. Early advertising research in China explores consumers' attitudes toward advertising (Zhao and Shen 1995). Using these findings as reference points, Zhou, Zhang, and Vertinsky (2002) identify increases in the percentage of consumers who express favorable attitudes. Children's attitudes toward advertising also draw attention. Interviewing children in China, Chan and McNeal (2004) find that as children age, their belief that advertising is trustworthy weakens. Because many East Asian cities are heavily populated, handbills are popular marketing communications. A telephone survey in Hong Kong demonstrates that consumers who accept handbills have stronger beliefs that they provide product information and that women and young people are more likely to accept them (Prendergast and Man 2005).

A parallel to advertising attitudes is advertising avoidance, a critical issue for advertisers (Prendergast, Cheung, and West 2010). Chinese consumers' unfavorable attitudes toward advertising lead to advertising avoidance. Another question relates to how people react to offensive advertising. Distinguishing offensive execution (e.g., indecent language, sexual connotations) from offensive content (e.g., drugs, personal hygiene), researchers show that offensive execution contributes more to the perception that advertising is offensive than does offensive content (Prendergast, Cheung, and West 2008). In an Internet advertising context, Prendergast and Hwa (2003) find that Chinese consumers express less tolerance for offensive content than in other media.

New forms of advertising. People's responses to Internet, mobile, and social media advertising are highly relevant. Surveying child-parent dyads in Korea, research shows that family communication about consumption harms attitudes toward online advertising (Shin, Huh, and Faber 2012), in line with the notion that family serves as an important buffer for children in East Asian countries. Research in Taiwan explores the factors that motivate e-mail ad forwarding behaviors (Chiu et al. 2007). Digital ads in general raise research concerns (Okazaki, Li, and Hirose 2009). Other research in Taiwan compares different forms of digital advertising, including Web-based (Internet, e-mail advertising) and mobile-device-based (SMS, multimedia message advertising) ads, in terms of how informative, entertaining, and irritating they appear (Cheng et al. 2009).

Marketing communication activities. Consumers' attitudes toward product placement are notable in India, which has a very active movie industry (Bollywood). People who admire Western lifestyles express more favorable attitudes toward foreign-branded products placed in movies, whereas those who are more ethnocentric express more favorable attitudes toward local brands (Nelson and Deshpande 2013).

Similar to the ad practice studies, this review suggests that Chinese consumers' perceptions and beliefs draw more research attention than those of consumers in other Asian countries, so the next research question explores this prediction:

RQ5b: Which Asian countries have attracted the most research attention with regard to consumers' perceptions and beliefs?

Advertising Content

An effective way to understand ad practices is to analyze what is being depicted in the advertisements. Such analyses often can reveal which cultural values are embraced by target audiences.

Cultural Comparisons

Two foci for ad content research emerge from the cultural comparison studies. The first refers to how ad content in Asia reflects cultural value differences. The second illustrates unique practices in Asian markets.

Comparisons to show cultural value differences. This line of research draws on Hofstede's (1980, 2001) cultural dimensions and Hall's (1976) cultural contexts to describe the representation of cultural values in advertising. For

example, advertisements in East Asian countries are more likely to portray collectivistic values, in different forms, such as presenting product users in a family setting (Choi, Lee, and Kim 2005), depicting group consensus (Lin 2001), or featuring narratives with relationship benefits and other-focused emotions (e.g., empathy or harmony) (Chang 2012). They are less likely to feature individualistic values, appeals to being unique (Cho et al. 1999) and popular (Choi, Lee, and Kim 2005), benefits of the product to the self (Cho et al. 1999), or adventures (Ji and McNeal 2001). Moreover, advertisers in East Asia often present content that reflects a higher uncertainty-avoidance tendency (e.g., products in use) (Ji and McNeal 2001) or greater power distance (e.g., less consumer–marketer interaction on corporate Web sites) (Cho and Cheon 2005) than in Western cultures.

As culture context theory suggests, in high-context cultures, information can be conveyed by the context without being explicitly stated. Advertising in East Asian countries accordingly tends to focus on contexts (e.g., associating product use with lifestyles) (Cho et al. 1999), feature less product information (Choi, Lee, and Kim 2005), introduce brands later in the ads (Taylor and Okazaki 2015), and mention brands less frequently (Taylor and Okazaki 2015). It also uses less direct comparative appeals (An 2007), more metaphors (Cho et al. 1999), more symbolic visuals (cf. literal ones) (An 2007), and less structured narratives (Chang 2012) than counterparts in the West.

Comparisons to show Asian uniqueness. An important but less adopted approach seeks to demonstrate cultural uniqueness through comparisons. The focus is not to show differences but to highlight forms of uniqueness that could not be readily observed if not presented in reference to Western cultures. For example, female characters in Japanese magazine ads are more likely to be smiling and girlish in image than those in U.S. magazine ads (Maynard and Taylor 1999). Women in Chinese commercials also wear demure clothing, whereas women in U.S. commercials often wear seductive clothing (Cheng 1997).

Although comparative ad effect research usually attempts to show differences, this review indicates inconsistent patterns of findings. Therefore, it is important to explore systematically whether ad content across cultures shares similarities or demonstrates differences.

RQ6a: When ad content studies compare countries in the West and East, do they find more differences than similarities?

Single Countries

Ad content research that involves single countries also exhibits two main streams. Some research identifies and

presents content that is unique to Asian advertising; other research examines issues similar to those investigated in the West (i.e., replications).

Indigenous phenomena. Unique elements in Asia are the focus in this research stream. For example, many Chinese people believe in feng shui and have superstitious perceptions of numbers (e.g., eight to represents fortune; four threatens fatality). Simmons and Schindler (2003) demonstrate that when ads refer to prices, the ending number is more likely to be a lucky eight rather than a fatal four. Zhou, Yau, and Lin (1997) explore marriage ads, common in some Asian societies, and find that in China, they tend to specify suitors' and prospective partners' height, education, and appearance. Overrepresentations of foreign advertising models or brand names in foreign languages also are unique to Asian markets (Taiwan, Chang 2008; Japan, Morimoto and Chang 2009; South Korea, Nelson and Paek 2005), and this tactic spans a broad range of product categories (Cutler, Javalgi, and White 1995) and decades (Martin 2012).

Replications. By applying common Western advertising appeals or content in Asian countries, researchers explore whether ads in East Asia apply information cues (Rice and Lu 1988). They also detail changes to advertising appeals over time as Asian countries have modernized, including the use of more modernity and social status appeals in Chinese magazine ads between 1982 and 1992 (Cheng 1994), as well as a greater variety of executional styles and layouts in major Chinese newspapers between 1949 and 1993 (Swanson 1996).

Ad content research involving a single country thus explores indigenous content unique to the local market or replicates prior research by testing similar content typologies. It is not clear which focus is more prevalent, leading to the next question:

RQ6b: When ad content studies are conducted in single countries, do they explore more indigenous topics or test more replicative topics?

Advertising Effects

Content or appeals that are most frequently depicted in advertisements are not necessarily most effective. Later research examines what content or appeals are effective in Asia.

Cultural Comparisons

A primary assumption of cultural comparison studies is that what is effective in the West is not necessarily

effective in Asia. Three common effects emerge from cross-cultural comparisons: value congruency, cognitive style congruency, and relevancy.

Value congruency effects. The question of whether appeals featuring culture-congruent values are more effective than those featuring culture-incongruent values has been widely explored. In socialization processes, people adopt the values that dominate the cultures in which they are situated. Consequently, they prefer messages that reflect their values, which are more accessible and can facilitate their ability to process such messages (Aaker 2000). For example, individualistic appeals (e.g., self-expression, pleasure) are more effective for people in individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States), whereas collectivistic appeals (e.g., a sense of belonging, consensus) are more effective for people in collectivistic cultures (e.g., China) (Zhang and Gelb 1996).

Cognitive style congruency effects. A second stream of research suggests that people in different cultures develop different cognitive styles and prefer messages that meet these needs, because such messages are diagnostic (Chang 2010). Culture context theory suggests that people in high-context cultures prefer indirect communications, whereas those in low-context cultures avoid ambiguity and favor explicit statements (Hall 1976; Hall and Hall 1987). Compared with those in low-context cultures, people in high-context cultures (e.g., Korea) prefer advertising that presents less information (Taylor, Miracle, and Wilson 1997) and express less favorable attitudes toward comparative ads (Choi and Miracle 2004). East Asians often exhibit a holistic cognitive style, oriented toward the context and the relationships between objects and the field. Westerners instead tend to adopt analytical thinking styles, which are less context dependent and focus instead on objects and their attributes and properties (Nisbett et al. 2001). If cultures have a higher tendency toward holistic processing (e.g., Japan), people express more favorable attitudes toward soft-sell rather than hard-sell appeals; such differences do not emerge among people in cultures oriented toward analytical thinking (e.g., the United States) (Okazaki, Mueller, and Diehl 2013). In addition, masculinity represents “an instrumental orientation, a cognitive focus on getting the job done or the problem solved,” whereas femininity implies “an ‘expressive’ orientation, an affective concern for the welfare of others and the harmony of the group” (Bem, Martyna, and Watson 1976, p. 1016). Consumers from the United States (i.e., a masculine culture) find ads with utilitarian appeals more believable than those with image appeals, but consumers from Taiwan (i.e., an androgynous culture) do not show such differences (Chang 2006a).

Self-regulatory focus theory also postulates that people who regulate their behaviors in accordance with their ideal self have a promotion focus; those who regulate their behaviors to be congruent with their ought self have a prevention focus (Higgins 1996). Aaker and Lee (2001) show that people with interdependent self-construals tend to adopt a prevention focus, whereas those with independent self-construals have a promotion focus. Chang (2010) documents that people in interdependent/independent cultures find prevention-/promotion-focused ads more diagnostic and generate more favorable brand evaluations, but only if they are highly involved with the product, such that they elaborate on the messages.

Relevancy effects. A less explored topic pertains to whether certain information is relevant and diagnostic for people in Asian countries but irrelevant for those in non-Asian countries. Female adolescent models are more likely to be portrayed as girlish in Japan than in the United States (Maynard and Taylor 1999), seemingly because this childlike portrayal positively signals the brand’s friendliness to Asian consumers. In contrast, U.S. consumers find friendliness a less relevant criterion and do not consider it in their ad or brand evaluations (Chang and Li 2010).

Even though these three types of effects are well documented, other research suggests a blurring of cultural boundaries. For example, Laroche et al. (2001) find no difference in the effectiveness of social threats delivered in anti-smoking advertisements between Chinese and Canadian participants. Due to increasing rates of imported broadcast content and the accessibility of the Internet, which facilitates contact with people and information from other cultures, people in local cultures gradually appear to be adopting global values. To understand the complete picture, we ask:

RQ7a: When ad effect studies compare countries in the West and East, do they find more differences than similarities?

Single Countries

Single-country studies demonstrate more variety, such as exploring the effects of indigenous appeals, replicating prior research, or focusing on human universality in message processing.

Culture-specific indigenous topics. Uses of Western languages or Caucasian models attract perhaps the most research attention in this domain. Both brands and ad copy can be presented in local or Western languages. Ahn and La Ferle (2008) demonstrate that English brand names are distinct and attract attention, such that they

are better recalled and recognized than Korean brand names. In contrast, body copy written in Korean, which is easier for Korean consumers to understand, is better recalled and recognized than body copy written in English. Chang (2008) shows that Taiwanese consumers express in-group bias, rating brand names in Chinese higher on friendliness, trust, and liking than English names. Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) reveal that, for multinational brands, bilingual consumers in India prefer ads in local languages for necessities but ads in English for luxury products; for local brands, they express no preferences for different languages. When ads use foreign models, Chang (2008) finds that even though Taiwanese consumers perceive ads with Caucasian models as more global and representative of developed countries, they do not like them more than ads featuring Asian models. Seeking to solve the puzzle of the incongruence between practice (overrepresentation of Caucasians in advertising) and these research findings (no superior effects of Caucasian models), Chang (2014b) proposes a cue-triggered value-expressive framework, in which Asian consumers with high-independent, but not interdependent, self-construals express more favorable attitudes toward ads featuring Western models as a means to express their value orientation.

Replications. Replications of prior research or tests of theories developed in the West seek to determine whether the effects or theories are robust across cultural settings. For example, Mukherjee (2002) replicates Unnava and Burnkrant's (1991) research in India and confirms that when verbal content in an ad does not provoke imagery, the inclusion of a picture can significantly improve ad recall. In a real movie setting in Hong Kong, Prendergast and Wah (2005) replicate findings by Ewing, Du Plessis, and Foster (2001): They also conclude that women and young moviegoers in Hong Kong remember cinema advertising more. Observing the widespread use of celebrity appeals in South Korea, La Ferle and Choi (2005) confirm that source credibility in South Korea comprises three components (perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness), as initially proposed by Ohanian (1990).

Non-culture-specific topics. This line of research focuses on effects or processes that appear to be universal; research conducted by scholars who solicit participation from Asian respondents falls into this category. The objective of this stream, similar to research conducted in the West, is to identify gaps and extend existing insights by testing important moderators or underlying mechanisms, including comparative appeals (Chang 2007; Hwang 2002), guilt appeals (Chang 2014a), and before-after appeals (Chang 2016). The ad models and types of

endorsers also are notable research considerations (Wei and Yu 2012; Te'eni-Harari, Lehman-Wilzig, and Lampert 2009).

The effects of creative strategies and media contexts also have been examined. For example, a consistent ad series (with the same theme but different ad execution styles) is more effective than an inconsistent one (with different themes and execution styles) (Yoo, Bang, and Kim 2009). Featuring the same plot in narrative ad series is more effective than using different plots (e.g., character sets are altered or kept constant) or continuous plots (Chang 2009b). The best placement of ads in programs or editorial contexts has also drawn some research attention (Chang 2009a; Cho and Yoo 2014).

RQ7b: When ad effect studies are conducted in single countries, do they explore more non-culture-specific topics, perform replications, or study indigenous topics?

Quantitative Analysis Methodology

Samples for Content Analysis

Our content analysis covers research published in four leading advertising research outlets that primarily aim to advance advertising knowledge: *JA*, *IJA*, *JAR*, and *JCIRA*. A research assistant conducted keyword searches on the EBSCOhost journal archive, with two main criteria. First, the articles appeared in one of the four target advertising journals. Second, the articles' titles, abstracts, or keywords contained references to the target geographic region (i.e., Asia, Asian, country names [50 Asian countries and Hong Kong] from the United Nations, and names of their residents [e.g., Korean and Chinese]). Because the review includes all articles published since the inception of the four journals, Hong Kong is included as a separate culture; it has been formally governed by China only since 1997. Russia spans both Europe and Asia and is categorized in different ways (e.g., European by the United Nations in 2011, but Asian by UNESCO in 2017); we include it in our review for comprehensiveness.

The searches identified 365 articles. Coders removed 19 articles because they represented editorials ($N=9$), book reviews ($N=7$), rejoinders ($N=1$), erratum ($N=1$), or book abstracts ($N=1$). The sample for content coding thus featured 346 articles, but the coding process revealed misidentifications of 14 articles that briefly mentioned the countries or people but did not actually examine Asian consumers. A subsequent coding step further identified 19 articles that explored people of Asian ethnicities living in the West, which we excluded as well. Thus, the final sample features 316 articles: 60 from *JA* (18.99%), 163 from *IJA* (51.58%), 71 from *JAR* (22.47%), and 22 from *JCIRA* (6.96%). The 316 articles report on 357 studies.

Hereafter, we use *articles* to refer to publications in the journals and *studies* to indicate studies reported within those articles.

Coding Procedures

A full-time research assistant with a master's degree in marketing and a graduate student in advertising coded the articles following Krippendorff's (2004) procedures. After some preliminary practice, they coded 20% of the sample to establish intercoder reliabilities, which were acceptable; the Krippendorff's alphas values ranged from .82 to 1. Next, the coders split up the work and each coded 40% of the sample.

Coding Categories

The coders recorded basic information (authors, title, and year published) about each article. Then they coded each study in terms of its methodology, using Chang's (2017) typology and definitions of content analyses, experiments, surveys, secondary data analyses, journal studies, text analyses, observations, in-depth interviews, netnography, case studies, and essays. This step was followed by coding each study in accordance with the following classification scheme.

Theories. Coders listed all the theories on which a study builds.

Topics. To code the studies for topic, the coders used a seven-category typology: advertising practice, advertising content, advertising effects, perceptions and beliefs about advertising, advertising-related issues (e.g., media use behaviors and consumer behaviors), advertising education, and other topics (e.g., development of measurements and scales). For this effort, *advertising* refers broadly to all forms of advertising (e.g., Internet, social media) and marketing communications (e.g., product placement).

Perspectives. Each study was coded in terms of the perspectives it adopts, namely, of practitioners or society. Among the former, studies might explore advertisers' concerns, such as how to make ads more persuasive, which budgeting methods are effective, and whether globalization or localization works better. The latter studies examine societal concerns, such as stereotypical gender portrayals, the relationship between advertising and smoking, sustainable behaviors, and whether advertising increases materialism.

Countries. Coders indicated whether the study involves Asian countries. If so, they determined whether

it is a comparison or single-country study. If the former, they listed all the countries being compared. If the latter, they specified the single country.

Types of single-country studies. If the study involves only one country, the coders assigned it to categories: indigenous, replications, or not culture specific. Indigenous studies develop indigenous theory or focus on an indigenous phenomenon; replication studies re-create previous studies conducted in the West and test whether the same results appear in the local country; and non-culture-specific studies address universal human trends and explore advertising issues without considering cultural differences.

Similarities and differences in predictions. The coders determined whether each study's predictions expect cross-cultural differences, similarities, or a mixture of both similarities and differences. An exploratory category was also included for studies that do not specify the directions of their predictions. Among single-country studies, this measure refers to whether the study predicts differences or similarities with extant findings reported in the West, or both.

Similarities and differences in findings. Coders categorized the study findings into three groups: differences, similarities, or both. The definitions of these categories are similar to those found in the previous paragraph on predictions, but with one key difference: They are based on actual findings rather than predictions.

RESULTS

Overall Research Landscape

Table 1 summarizes the explored topics and applied methods; among the 357 studies, the most common methods are surveys (31.37%), followed by experiments (19.33%) and content analyses (18.21%). The distributions of comparative and single-country studies vary across topics ($\chi^2(12) = 30.31, p < .01$), and ad content is the only topic that is more likely to feature cultural comparisons (67.69%) than single-country studies (Table 2).

Among comparative studies, the distributions of prediction types (similar, different, mixed, exploratory) differ across topics ($\chi^2(18) = 65.08, p < .01$); ad content (59.09%) and ad effect (60.00%) studies are more likely to predict differences, whereas ad practice studies tend to be exploratory (81.82%; Table 2). In comparison, the distributions of findings types (similar, different, mixed) do not vary across topics ($\chi^2(12) = 5.54, p = .85$), such that all topics report mostly mixed findings (Table 3).

TABLE 1
Distributions of Research Methods across Topics

Method	Practice	Consumers' Perceptions	Content	Effects	Tangential Issues	Education	Other	Total
Quantitative								
Content analysis	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	63 96.92%	0 0.00%	2 6.25%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	65 18.21%
Experiment	0 0.00%	1 1.82%	0 0.00%	65 87.84%	1 3.13%	1 25.00%	1 4.35%	69 19.33%
Survey	33 31.73%	46 83.64%	0 0.00%	7 9.46%	18 56.25%	1 25.00%	7 30.43%	112 31.37%
Secondary data	9 8.65%	4 7.27%	1 1.54%	2 2.70%	7 21.88%	0 0.00%	1 4.35%	24 6.72%
Journal study	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	3 13.04%	3 0.84%
Qualitative								
Text analysis	4 3.85%	1 1.82%	1 1.54%	0 0.00%	1 3.13%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	7 1.96%
Observation	1 0.96%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 0.28%
Focus group	0 0.00%	1 1.82%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 0.28%
In-depth interview	14 13.46%	2 3.64%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 3.13%	0 0.00%	3 13.04%	20 5.60%
Netnography	1 0.96%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 0.28%
Case study	3 2.88%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	3 0.84%
Essay								
Essay	39 37.50%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	2 6.25%	2 50.00%	8 34.78%	51 14.29%
Total	104 100.0%	55 100.0%	65 100.0%	74 100.0%	32 100.0%	4 100.0%	23 100.0%	357 100.0%
Percentage by total	29.13%	15.41%	18.21%	20.73%	8.96%	1.12%	6.44%	100.00%

Note. Essays include essays, commentaries, viewpoints, and critiques. Bold indicates the most applied method for that designated topic.

Among single-country studies, the distributions of research types (indigenous, replication, non-culture-specific) differ significantly across topics ($\chi^2(18) = 39.02, p < .01$). Ad content (57.14%) and ad practice (61.70%) are more likely to feature indigenous approaches than other approaches (Table 4).

Underlying Theories (RQ1)

Hofstede's culture dimension theory ($N = 44, 12.32\%$) is the most widely employed option, followed by Hall's culture theory ($N = 23, 6.44\%$), uses and gratification theory ($N = 9, 2.52\%$), cultivation theory ($N = 7, 1.96\%$), the theory of reasoned action ($N = 6, 1.68\%$), and diffusion theory ($N = 6, 1.68\%$), spanning all topics (see online supplementary Table 1). The first two theories are culture

specific, whereas the latter are generic and culture neutral. Among the 44 studies that build on Hofstede's (2001) culture dimension theory, almost all address individualism–collectivism ($N = 43$), whereas fewer consider power distance ($N = 8$), femininity–masculinity ($N = 7$), uncertainty avoidance ($N = 6$), or Confucian dynamism ($N = 4$). Four studies address all five dimensions. However, it is also important to note that in 200 studies (56.02%), the theoretical bases were not explicitly described and therefore the coders were not able to identify them.

Topics Being Explored (RQ2)

As Table 1 reveals, in terms of topics being explored, most research focuses on ad practice (29.13%), followed

TABLE 2
Distributions of Prediction Types

Prediction Type	Practices	Consumers' Perceptions	Content	Effects	Tangential Issues	Education	Other	Total
All								
Differences	13 12.50%	10 18.18%	28 43.08%	24 32.43%	8 25.00%	0 0.00%	2 10.00%	85 24.01%
Similarities	10 9.62%	12 21.82%	4 6.15%	34 45.95%	11 34.38%	0 0.00%	2 10.00%	73 20.62%
Mixed	3 2.88%	7 12.73%	7 10.77%	6 8.11%	2 6.25%	0 0.00%	1 5.00%	26 7.34%
Exploratory	78 75.00%	26 47.27%	26 40.00%	10 13.51%	11 34.38%	4 100.00%	15 75.00%	170 48.02%
Total	104 100.0%	55 100.0%	65 100.0%	74 100.0%	32 100.0%	4 100.0%	20 100.0%	354 100.0%
Comparative studies								
Differences	4 9.09%	7 43.75%	26 59.09%	15 60.00%	5 38.46%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	57 39.04%
Similarities	2 4.55%	2 12.50%	2 4.55%	4 16.00%	3 23.08%	0 0.00%	1 25.00%	14 9.59%
Mixed	2 4.55%	3 18.75%	6 13.64%	5 20.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	16 10.96%
Exploratory	36 81.82%	4 25.00%	10 22.73%	1 4.00%	5 38.46%	0 0.00%	3 75.00%	59 40.41%
Total % by topic	44 42.31%	16 29.09%	44 67.69%	25 33.78%	13 40.63%	0 0.0%	4 20.0%	146 41.24%
Single-country studies								
Differences	9 15.00%	3 7.69%	2 9.52%	9 18.37%	3 15.79%	0 0.00%	2 12.50%	28 13.46%
Similarities	8 13.33%	10 25.64%	2 9.52%	30 61.22%	8 42.11%	0 0.00%	1 6.25%	59 28.37%
Mixed	1 1.67%	4 10.26%	1 4.76%	1 2.04%	2 10.53%	0 0.00%	1 6.25%	10 4.81%
Exploratory	42 70.00%	22 56.41%	16 76.19%	9 18.37%	6 31.58%	4 100.00%	12 75.00%	111 53.37%
Total % by topic	60 57.69%	39 70.91%	21 32.31%	49 66.22%	19 59.38%	4 100.0%	16 80.0%	208 58.76%

Note. Journal studies, one of which involves studies in multiple countries and two which refer to single countries, were not coded for prediction type.

by advertising effects (20.73%), advertising content (18.21%), and consumers' perceptions and beliefs (15.41%). As for shifts in topics over time, we show in Table 5 that research in Asia has increased, from 6 (1.68%) studies before 1980 to 31 studies in the 1980s, 95 studies in 1990s, and a peak at 150 studies in the 2000s. In the 1980s, ad practice studies dominated; in the 1990s, the focus expanded to include both ad practice and ad content. In the 2000s, the number of ad effects studies increased and remained dominant after 2011. Thus, research topics change and differ significantly across the years ($\chi^2(24) = 73.17, p < .01$).

Furthermore, we analyzed social versus advertiser perspectives as an independent dimension, separate from topics. The findings suggest that most studies take the advertisers' perspectives instead of society's perspectives. Only 9.89% (35/354) of the studies adopt a societal perspective (see online supplementary Table 2).

Countries That Attract Most Research Attention (RQ3)

Regarding country dyads featured in comparative studies, most of them involve cultures in the East compared with those in the West. The top five comparison

TABLE 3
Distribution of Finding Types

Finding Type	Practices	Consumers' Perceptions	Content	Effects	Tangential Issues	Education	Other	Total
All								
Similar	28 43.08%	19 34.55%	22 33.85%	18 24.32%	7 23.33%	2 100.00%	6 50.00%	102 33.66%
Different	3 4.62%	5 9.09%	2 3.08%	14 18.92%	5 16.67%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	29 9.57%
Mixed	34 52.31%	31 56.36%	41 63.08%	42 56.76%	18 60.00%	0 0.00%	6 50.00%	172 56.77%
Total	65 100.0%	55 100.0%	65 100.0%	74 100.0%	30 100.0%	2 100.0%	12 100.0%	303 ¹ 100.0%
Comparative studies								
Similar	3 16.67%	4 25.00%	7 15.91%	8 32.00%	4 30.77%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	26 22.22%
Different	1 5.56%	0 0.00%	2 4.55%	2 8.00%	1 7.69%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	6 5.13%
Mixed	14 77.78%	12 75.00%	35 79.55%	15 60.00%	8 61.54%	0 0.00%	1 100.00%	85 72.65%
Total % by topic	18 27.69%	16 29.09%	44 67.69%	25 33.78%	13 43.11%	0 0.0%	0 8.33.0%	117 38.61%
Single-country studies								
Similar	25 53.19%	15 38.46%	15 71.43%	10 20.41%	3 17.65%	2 100.00%	6 54.55%	76 40.86%
Different	2 4.26%	5 12.82%	0 0.00%	12 24.49%	4 23.53%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	23 12.37%
Mixed	20 42.55%	19 48.72%	6 28.57%	27 55.10%	10 58.82%	0 0.00%	5 45.45%	87 46.77%
Total % by topic	47 72.31%	39 70.91%	21 32.31%	49 66.22%	17 56.67%	2 100.0%	11 91.67%	186 61.39%

Note. Three journal studies and 51 essays were not coded for finding type.

TABLE 4
Study Type Distributions for Single-Country Studies

	Practices	Consumers' Perceptions	Content	Effects	Tangential Issues	Education	Other	Total
Indigenous	29 61.70%	15 38.46%	12 57.14%	10 20.41%	4 23.53%	2 100.00%	7 63.64%	79 42.47%
Replication	6 12.77%	12 30.77%	7 33.33%	9 18.37%	4 23.53%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	38 20.43%
Non-culture-specific	12 25.53%	12 30.77%	2 9.52%	30 61.22%	9 52.94%	0 0.00%	4 36.36%	69 37.10%
Total	47 100.0%	39 100.0%	21 100.0%	49 100.0%	17 100.0%	2 100.0%	11 100.0%	186 100.0%

Note. Single studies ($N=210$) that are essays ($N=24$) were not coded for study type, so the final $N=186$.

dyads consist of Japan versus the United States ($N=48$, or 32.65% of the 147 comparative studies), Korea versus the United States ($N=30$, 20.41%), China versus the United States ($N=25$, 17.01%), Japan versus European Union countries ($N=11$, 7.48%), and Japan versus Germany ($N=10$, 6.80%) (see online [supplementary Table 3](#)). Thus, the United States is the most commonly used reference country. Considering dyads with only Asian countries, the most common comparisons are China versus Korea ($N=9$, 6.12%), China versus Hong Kong ($N=8$, 5.44%), and China versus Japan ($N=8$, 5.44%); so China is the most often used reference country.

In the single-country studies, the most commonly explored nations are China (if excluding Hong Kong, $N=81$, or 38.57% of 210 single-country studies), South Korea ($N=30$, 14.29%), Japan ($N=21$, 10.00%), Hong Kong ($N=17$, 8.10%), and Taiwan ($N=17$, 8.10%). These five East Asian cultures account for 79.05% of single-country research. Thus, knowledge about consumers and advertising practices in the Asia-Pacific area appears more advanced. However, some countries have not received any research attention (e.g., Laos and North Korea).

Ad Practice Research (RQ4)

Ad practice studies mainly adopt a single-country approach (57.69%) rather than a culturally comparative approach (42.31%) (see [Table 2](#)).

Cultural Comparisons

In research question 4a, we question which countries get compared in ad practice research. Within this topic area ($N=44$), most cultural comparison studies focus on an East versus West comparison, and the top three

compared dyads are Japan versus the United States (52.27%), Japan versus European countries (20.45%), and Japan versus France (15.91%). Limiting the pool to dyads of Asian countries, the most common are China versus Singapore (15.91%), China versus Hong Kong (13.64%), and India versus Singapore (13.64%). China thus is the most often used reference point within Asia.

Single Countries

With research question 4b, we consider which countries are explored in single-country ad practice studies ($N=60$). The most common are China (without Hong Kong, 46.67%), Russia (11.67%), Japan (8.33%), South Korea (8.33%), and India (6.67%). These five East Asian countries account for 81.67% of single-country studies in this topic area.

Consumers' Ad Perceptions and Beliefs (RQ5)

Within this topic area, more studies adopt a single-country approach (70.81%) than a cultural comparison approach (29.09%) ([Table 2](#)).

Cultural Comparisons

To answer research question 5a, regarding which countries are compared, we find that among the cultural comparison studies of consumers' perceptions and beliefs about advertising ($N=16$), most compare cultures in the East with those in the West. The top three compared dyads are Korea versus the United States (25.00%), China versus the United States (18.75%), and Japan versus the United States (12.50%). Few studies make comparisons within Asia.

TABLE 5
Distribution of Research Topics across Decades

	Practice	Consumers' Perceptions	Content	Effects	Tangential Issues	Education	Other	Total
Before 1981	1 0.96%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	4 5.41%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 4.35%	6 1.68%
1981–1990	15 14.42%	2 3.64%	6 9.23%	0 0.00%	4 12.50%	2 50.00%	2 8.70%	31 8.68%
1991–2000	39 37.50%	11 20.00%	27 41.54%	9 12.16%	5 15.63%	1 25.00%	3 13.04%	95 26.61%
2001–2010	34 32.69%	28 50.91%	22 33.85%	34 45.95%	18 56.25%	0 0.00%	14 60.87%	150 42.02%
2011–2018	15 14.42%	14 25.45%	10 15.38%	27 36.49%	5 15.63%	1 25.00%	3 13.04%	75 21.01%
Total	104 100.0%	55 100.0%	65 100.0%	74 100.0%	32 100.0%	4 100.0%	23 100.0%	357 100.0%

Single countries

Research question 5b concerns which countries appear most in single-country studies of consumers' perceptions and beliefs ($N=39$). They are China (without Hong Kong, 35.90%), Hong Kong (17.95%), Japan (12.82%), Taiwan (12.82%), and South Korea (7.69%). Thus, these five markets account for 79.45% of the single-country studies.

Advertising Content (RQ6)

Cultural Comparisons

For research question 6a, as Table 2 indicates, these studies ($N=44$) make more predictions of differences (59.09%) than similarities (4.55%), mixed results (13.6%), or exploratory efforts (22.73%). Table 3 further reveals that they report more mixed findings (79.55%) than totally different (4.55%) or similar (15.91%) results.

Single Countries

In relation to research question 6b, Table 4 shows that single-country studies ($N=21$) feature more exploration of indigenous issues (57.14%) than replicative (33.33%) or non-culture-specific (9.52%) considerations.

Advertising Effects (RQ7)

Cultural Comparisons

In answer to research question 7a, the results in Table 2 indicate that comparative studies ($N=25$) are

more likely to predict different (60.00%) than similar (16.00%), mixed (20.0%), or exploratory (4.00%) findings. Nevertheless, they report more mixed (60.00%) than totally different (8.00%) or similar (32.00%) findings.

Single Countries

For RQ7b, regarding whether ad effect studies that involve single countries ($N=49$) explore more indigenous topics, non-culture-specific topics, or replications, we find a notable contrast with ad content studies (see Table 4). That is, ad effect studies explore more non-culture-specific issues (61.22%) than indigenous issues (20.41%) or replications (18.31%).

DISCUSSION

This review covers research in Asia published in four major advertising journals since their inception and offers a big picture of extant research, in terms of theories, explored and compared countries, topics, approaches (comparative or single country), perspectives (social or political), predictions (similar, different, or exploratory), and findings (similar, different, or mixed). For each topic, we also delve into details about what specific issues have been explored and what the general findings indicate.

Overall, Hofstede's (1980, 2001) and Hall's (1976) theories have had the greatest impact on advertising research in Asia. Hornikx and O'Keefe (2009) show, in a meta-analysis, that ad appeals adapted to reflect individualistic or collectivistic values are more effective than those adapted to reflect other dimensions of culture. Similarly, our review indicates that the most widely explored Hofstedeian culture dimension is collectivism–individualism.

Reflecting the research goal of specifying cultural variations, comparative research accounts for 41.18% (147/357) of the analyzed studies. The most compared country dyads are Japan and the United States, followed by Korea and the United States, then China and the United States. That is, the United States frequently serves as the reference country for comparisons. Although 40.41% of comparative studies are exploratory, among those with explicit predictions (59.59%), more studies predict differences than similarities between West and East. Yet the findings of these comparative studies are not unanimous, and most studies report mixed results (79.55%).

In terms of single-country studies focused on East Asia, China is the most explored country, far outnumbering any other nation even before we include Hong Kong. If we add in Hong Kong, because its sovereignty was transferred to China in 1997, the number of studies increases to 98, or 46.67% of single-country studies. These studies are of three types: indigenous (42.47%), non-culture-specific (37.10%), and replications (20.43%). Yet these types of content also depend on the focal topics. For example, ad practice and ad content studies, which seek to explore real-world activities in local markets, tend to adopt an indigenous approach.

The focus of research topics has shifted from advertising practices, to advertising content and consumers' perceptions and beliefs, and then ad effects. Yet practitioners can gain insights from these studies, regardless of their topics. Interviews and surveys of ad professionals reveal common activities, management strategies, and opinions about different forms of advertising or marketing communications. Essays tend to address current states or developments in the advertising practices conducted in Asian countries. Analyses of ad content also help by identifying cultural value shifts and shedding light on differences in practice. Ad effect studies can benefit practitioners by revealing important information about what tactics are most effective in Asian markets.

Most of the reviewed studies report mixed findings, which may suggest that factors other than cultural variations need to be taken into account. Recent research cites the importance of individual variations when examining cultural differences, because value variations at both individual and cultural levels can account for advertising effects (Wang et al. 2000). Some research prioritizes individual-level effects; for example, Chang (2006b) compares value congruency effects at national (United States versus Taiwan) and individual levels and finds significant effects only at the individual level. A blanket categorization of all people within a culture as individualistic or collectivistic clearly can be problematic.

Finally, this review reveals key gaps in prior literature and directions for further research. First, many studies

are exploratory (48.02%) or do not build on or develop specific theories (56.02%). Even if many of these studies present important, interesting issues and deepen our understanding of local phenomena and practical challenges, without a clear theoretical framework their utility for advancing advertising research is constrained. Building a coherent theoretical framework that can make sense of advertising research in Asia is important and can help facilitate more exploration. Second, most research focuses on certain Asian markets (e.g., China) or areas; a full 79.05% of the studies explore Asia-Pacific regions. Some Asian countries have not been subject to any research attention ($N=21$, 42.00%). Accordingly, our understanding of these markets is limited, and we call explicitly for more research in these regions of Asia. Third, advertising research in Asia tends to take the perspectives of advertisers, rather than of society. The latter perspective, at just 9.89% of Asian ad studies, is lower than the 17% reported in West's (2007) analysis of advertising research in general. Questions of advertising's implications for Asian societies deserve more research attention.

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Three supplemental tables (Table 1: Most Applied Theories in Studies; Table 2: Explored or Compared Countries; Table 3: Distributions of Perspectives) are available online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2019.1675103>.

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