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# Applying Hofstede's National Culture Measures in Tourism Research: Illuminating Issues of Divergence and Convergence

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## Abstract

Given the emerging evidence that national culture influences visitor behavior and that Hofstede's concept (1980, 2001) has become the most accepted means to quantify dominant national cultural values, the focus of this study was to test the underlying assumptions of how these measures are applied in research. Drawing from a sample of tourists from eight countries who completed Hofstede's original instruments, the results reveal little differences between Hofstede's 2001 national cultural measures with the current study's data. This finding provides strong support for Hofstede's dimensions as a measure of central tendencies of visitors from different nations. Second, graphically contrasting respondents' values along the five cultural dimensions reveals that the between-nation differences are relatively small when compared to the within-nation variability, indicating that subcultures do exist. This analysis also identifies international regions that cluster closely together, demonstrating that national cultural differences do not end at national borders.

## Keywords

Hofstede, national culture, convergence, divergence

The measure of national culture is the focus of this study. Its purpose is to explore issues of cultural divergence and convergence that underlie virtually all cross-cultural studies involving Hofstede's (1980, 2001) five dimensions of national culture. Culture, as collective thought and values, assumes more between-group differences than within-group differences. This study tests such assumptions, providing unique insights to researchers using national culture as an explanatory measure.

Hofstede's (1980, 2001) five cross-cultural dimensions have been broadly applied in the literature as key variables in tourism research (Crotts and Pizam 2003; Funk and Bruun 2007; Litvin, Crotts, and Hefner 2004; Kozak, Crotts, and Law 2007; Reisinger and Mavondo 2006; Reisinger and Turner 2003). These studies are aimed at understanding how culture explains patterns in tourists' preferences and behaviors, and their results provide guidance to marketers faced with the dilemma of whether it is appropriate to standardize or tailor the tourism product and its promotional mix (You et al. 2000).

The method these recent studies used generally grouped respondents based on their national citizenship or country of birth. Once grouped, respondents are assigned numeric values based on their citizenship involving one or more of Hofstede's cultural traits, and these quantified cultural values

are correlated with various aspects of consumer behavior (de Mooij and Hofstede 2002). However, the underlying assumption in such studies is that within-group (nationality) differences are minimal and between-group differences are significant in these mean national cultural scales. Given the rapid migration of rural populations to urban manufacturing centers in Southeast Asian nations, one might expect changes in these societies where the collectivist norms shift more toward the individualism norm generally associated with the West. In the mature economies of the West, one might also expect that the multiethnic immigration taking place could be increasing the variability in shared national norms. A small but growing body of literature suggests that cultures are changing (Cho 2005; Jenner et al. 2008; Li et al. 2007; Umit 2002), where convergence of norms and values can and do occur.

Given the emerging evidence that culture matters and that Hofstede's concept (1980, 2001) has become the most widely accepted means to quantify dominant national cultural values, we believe it is time to pause and test Hofstede's dimensions. The validity of Hofstede's approach will only become evident when it proves reliable over

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time. According to Girlando, Anderson, and Zerillo (2004), "Sound inquiry demands we strive to comprehend, test, and analyze Hofstede's paradigm. Either blind acceptance or premature dismissal of his work would serve no lasting purpose" (p. 34). It is this task this research was designed to investigate.

## Background

### *Cultural Convergence or Divergence?*

Although there are arguments that national culture is very stable over time (House et al. 2004), there are also questions as to just how stable culture is. What is meant by cultural stability? Should we accept Hofstede's (1980, 2001) cultural assumptions and national scores as representative of national cultural values today? The argument is that global economic and trade patterns, new ideas, thoughts, and realities are likely to affect cultures and shift cultural perspectives (Hofstede 2001). As a result, at some stage national culture would change and one would expect differences from the original findings of Hofstede (Kelley, MacNab, and Worthley 2006). The concept of culture convergence and divergence indirectly addresses the applicability of Hofstede's work, that is, whether national cultures are stable over time or national scores on his cultural dimensions change over time and circumstances.

The *convergence* theory claims that because of technological advancement, global communication, travel, and tourism, collaboration between organizations and nations, increasing immigration and cross-national and ethnic marriages, the world is under pressure to become global and more homogenized and as a result the world's cultures are converging to commonality. As more and more people from different regions and cultures cross national borders, trade goods and assets, communicate, and exchange ideas, they expose themselves to other cultures and export their own cultures. Consequently, they are becoming increasingly similar in their needs, tastes, lifestyles, values, and behavior patterns despite their countries of origin and national characteristics. Consumers increasingly demand and consume similar global products throughout the world; they eat the same food, wear the same brands of clothing, and watch the same TV programs (de Mooij 2004). In tourism, the demand for mass-produced products and services leads the producers to offer travel products and services that have a universal appeal, such as standardized mass-market package holidays, accommodation, attractions, or transportation. Tourists increasingly travel to the same destinations, stay in similar hotels, eat in similar restaurants, and visit similar attractions. Tourists around the world identify themselves with indistinguishable products offered by McDonald, Disney World, or hotel chains such as Holiday Inn, Hilton, or Marriott.

As consumers become more similar and embrace the same attitudes and behaviors, their cultures are changing by converging culturally (as well as economically and technologically). The globalization significantly accelerates cultural homogenization and convergence toward a common set of cultural traits and practices. According to McLeod (2004), the process of cultural convergence is strengthened by the rise of the Internet and information technology as well as Western values and, in particular, Western education and knowledge disseminated around the world.

The cultural convergence theory, however, may not hold. It was argued that societies could become similar if everyone were to adopt the ways of life and cultural values of others. This, according to Usunier and Lee (2005), is impossible. A direct adoption of others' ways of life and values might be very difficult to implement in other countries because of different tastes and preferences. Some countries might be resistant to a change and disapprove of others' cultural values and adaptation of norms and ideas as well as technological developments (e.g., China, Japan, and France often oppose U.S. ideas). In addition, although some people might share cultural values that transcend national borders (e.g., teenagers wear jeans or watch MTV), they often have to give up on these values and readopt nationally accepted values when joining a workforce or starting a family (Usunier and Lee 2005).

The concept of cultural *divergence* holds that societies are maintaining their unique set of national values, characteristics, and lifestyles across continents, countries, and regions. Very different people live in the different countries of the world. They have different cultures and consumer behavior patterns. For example, Asian or European consumers cannot be clustered into two distinct groups because Japanese differ from Thais, Thais differ from Indonesians, Indonesians differ from Chinese, and Chinese differ from Koreans in not only their attitudes but preferences as well. Similarly, there are differences among European consumers: German consumers differ from French, French differ from British, and British differ from Italian. According to de Mooij and Hofstede (2002), there are large consumption differences among countries that are stable over time. For example, clothing retailer C&A in Europe suffered substantial financial losses in the United Kingdom because the taste of British and Irish consumers differed from the taste of continental Europeans. The large differences among the value systems of consumers in different European countries appear to be rooted in history and are very resistant to change. In Europe, there is no evidence of consumer converging value systems. There is, however, evidence of consumer diverging behavior.

In tourism, cultural differences in behavior between international tourism markets are increasingly emphasized (Reisinger 2009). Cultural differences are what attract tourists to a particular destination. Tourism destinations search for local cultural roots and guard their heritage and language to preserve cultural identities and values.

The process of cultural convergence is limited. Global foreign brands, ideas, films, and television programs have different meanings and impacts across the world. For example, Western clothes, soft drinks, cigarettes, movies, and books are not always popular on the local Eastern and Central European markets as they significantly differ from the local ethnic products.

Cultural divergence occurs because individuals want to set themselves apart from members of other sociocultural groups (DiMaggio 1982; Simmel 1904/1957), which often are viewed negatively (Jackson et al., 1996). People want to be seen as unique and different from others who might initially appear very similar (Tajfel 1982; Turner 1978). As a result, cultural similarity drives cultural divergence (Berger and Heath 2008).

There are also arguments that the processes of cultural convergence and divergence occur simultaneously, albeit at different levels. The process of cultural convergence and homogenization of the consumption patterns occurs at the macro (international) level, whereas the process of cultural divergence and heterogenization of the consumption patterns and maintenance of cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness occurs more at the micro (regional and local) level (Usunier and Lee 2005).

Another theory, that of *crossvergence*, argues that neither of the above theories is adequate to explain the changes in national culture. The crossvergence theory provides an alternative view and holds that values can and do change. The changes in culture occur because of interactions with other cultures, resulting in new cultural characteristics that are distinct from those of the interacting cultures (Ralston et al. 1993). Although cultures can retain core elements and values, over time they can adapt elements of other cultures because of economic advancements that bring intercultural contact, competition, and interaction.

Meethan (2001) argues that increasing interconnections between people and places cause the partial convergence of cultures and leads to new forms of culture, called cultural hybridization, which implies the incorporation of cultural elements from a variety of sources within particular cultural practices. Cultural hybridization can develop through migration or cross-cultural marriages allowing for the combination of two identities, two languages, and two cultures.

## Method

A questionnaire was developed for data collection purposes first in English and then translated into eight Asian languages using the iterative process of back-translation (Brislin 1970) by eight independent bilingual individuals. The Asian-language questionnaires were translated back to English by separate individuals and compared to the original to ensure adequate correspondence in the two versions.

The questionnaire comprised scales to measure the constructs of respondents' cultural orientations by first asking them their country of citizenship followed by Hofstede's (1980) original Value Survey Module (VSM 80) as well as Hofstede and Bond's (1988) VSM 94 instrument. The instruments asked participants to indicate their agreement with 35 statements along a 5-point Likert-type scale in which Hofstede's measures of cultural orientation were derived. These five dimensions are Individualism–Collectivism (IDV), Uncertainty-Avoidance (UAI), Power Distance (PDI), Masculinity–Femininity (MAS), and Long-Term Orientation (LTO). Briefly, IDV measures the degree to which cultures encourage individual concerns as opposed to collectivist concerns; UAI measures the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations; PDI measures the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally; MAS measures the extent to which gender roles are clearly distinct—that is, in masculine societies men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, while in feminine societies social gender roles overlap; and LTO measures the value of long-term commitments, respect for the past and tradition, persistence, patience, and social stability of the national culture. These operationalized variables provide practical insights in the collective behaviors of international visitors.

Final versions of the questionnaires were administered to randomly selected visitors attending major visitor attractions and sporting events in and around Melbourne, Australia, during the months of November to December 2006 and January 2007. The questionnaires were personally administered by native speakers of English and each of the Asian languages. Only those respondents who stated that they were on vacation and were older than 18 years of age were asked to participate in the study. The questionnaires were collected as soon as they were completed.

The total sample for this study consisted of 608 visitors: the Western group, with 69% of the total respondents, had members from Western nations (139 from Australia, 124 from Greece, 75 from the United Kingdom, and 97 from the United States) and 31% of total respondents were from Asian nations (57 from Singapore, 48 from Indonesia, 42 from Malaysia, and 27 from China) (see Table 1). Though the subsamples from Asian nations were smaller than desired, Hofstede (1994) stated that a minimum of 20 respondents per country was sufficient for cross-national research using his instruments on carefully matched samples. Two ANOVA tests revealed no significant differences between the national subsamples involving age and education, with the exception of UK respondents. The 75 UK respondents reported greater age and lower level of educational attainment than the other groupings. We considered deleting older, less educated respondents from the UK subsample to the point where significant

**Table 1.** Country of Citizenship of Survey Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Australia	139	22
Greece	124	20
United Kingdom	75	12
United States	96	15
Western subtotals	434	69
China	27	4
Indonesia	48	7
Malaysia	42	6
Singapore	57	9
Southeast Asian subtotal	174	31
Total	608	100

differences no longer were evident but chose not to do so, given there was no randomized function for it. And as the reader will see in the results, these differences had no apparent effect on respondents' responses to Hofstede's VSM 80 and VSM 94 instruments.

## Results

Hofstede (2001) used his VSM 80 and VSM 94 instruments to update his rankings of each country along his five cultural dimensions. These dimensions were measured using multi-item constructs scored along a 5-point Likert-type scale and are the basis of his national rankings. This study used these two instruments in a survey of visitors. A comparison of Hofstede's (2001) measures of each country's cultural dimensions with the current study's application revealed strikingly similar mean values (see Table 2). Given the current study's small sample sizes, one would expect differences as normal sample variances. In the case of PDI, IDV, MAS, and LTO, the current study's estimates revealed either no or very little differences. Only UAI measures varied from Hofstede's estimates but not to the degree where their differences were statistically significant.

A series of boxplots were produced using a statistical program similar to Mini Tab, which revealed the means, medians, range, and 95% confidence intervals of the study data for visual inspection (Figures 1 to 5). Revealed are several results worthy of discussion. First, among each national group, a wide range of scores were revealed as evidenced by the range and 95% confidence intervals. Such findings give strong support for the existence of cultural divergence within each nationality. Second, comparisons of the means and medians of each nationality on the five cultural dimensions show strikingly similar measures between all the nations in question on three of the five dimensions (UAI, IDV, and MAS). In this data set, only PDI and LTO revealed moderately distinct clustering between Western and Asian nationalities.

Next, a series of ANOVA tests were conducted using Bartlett's test for equal variances. Bartlett's test (Snedecor and Cochran 1983) was used to determine if the eight subsamples had equal variances. Equal variances across samples are called homogeneity of variances, and the test is used to verify that assumption along repeated measures.

In each cultural dimension, the Bartlett test revealed that the assumption of equal variances is not valid at the probability level of .01 or less. This should be interpreted as a rejection of the null hypotheses that sample variance for each cultural dimension for all national groupings are equal.

Graphing the pooled standard deviations of each cultural dimension revealed which national groupings differed in this data set. The graphs depict both the upper and lower confidence limits at the 95% confidence level as well as the mean.

Figure 6 reveals respondents from Western nationalities clustered closely together on the PDI while respondents from Asian societies clustered together as well but with larger pooled variances. The Indonesian sample was statistically different from all others on the PDI dimension ( $df = 7, F = 6.28, p < .0000$ ).

Figure 7 results were remarkably similar regardless of nationalities on the UAI. In this data set, the United States, Malaysian, Singapore, and Chinese samples roughly overlapped with one another. The UK sample was statistically different from all others ( $df = 7, F = 4.30, p < .0001$ ).

### Individualism–Collectivism

Similarly, Figure 8 reveals similarities regardless of nationalities on the IDV. The UK sample was statistically different from all others ( $df = 7, F = 2.55, p < .01$ ).

### Masculinity–Femininity

Figure 9 revealed more variability between the nations on the MAS. The Chinese sample was statistically different from all others ( $df = 7, F = 4.73, p < .0001$ ).

### Long-Term Orientation

Figure 10 reveals that Western nationalities differ from Asian nationalities on the LTO. In this data set, the four Western nation groups clustered uniquely together, while at least three of the four Asian nation groups clustered differently ( $df = 7, F = 17.93, p < .0000$ ). Only the Singapore group overlapped with both Western and Asian groups.

## Summary of Results

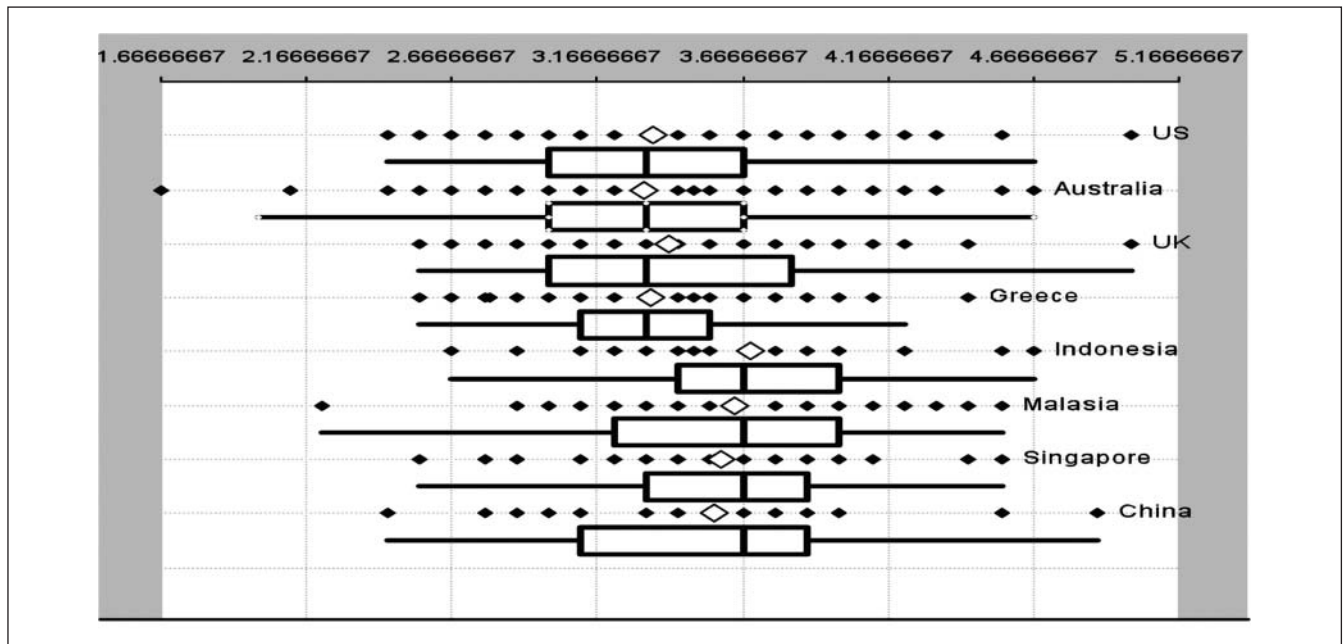
Before summarizing the contributions of this study, it is important to remind ourselves that a nation's position along each of Hofstede's dimensions will not perfectly predict how a citizen of that country will behave or what he or she will



**Table 2.** Evaluations of Eight Countries on Hofstede’s (2001) Five Value Dimensions (on a 5-Point Scale)

Country	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism–Collectivism	Masculinity–Femininity	Long-Term Orientation
Australia	3.35 (3.33)	3.37 (3.23)	3.66 (3.68)	3.83 (3.68)	2.06 (2.07)
Greece	3.36 (3.35)	3.43 (3.29)	3.67 (3.72)	4.00 (3.81)	2.15 (2.15)
United Kingdom	3.40 (3.41)	3.20 (3.09)	3.86 (3.91)	3.90 (3.76)	2.20 (2.19)
United States	3.36 (3.36)	3.59 (3.39)	3.71 (3.72)	3.72 (3.59)	2.12 (2.12)
China	3.61 (3.57)	3.58 (3.40)	3.67 (3.64)	3.64 (3.51)	2.85 (2.80)
Indonesia	3.75 (3.70)	3.31 (3.28)	3.75 (3.69)	3.76 (3.69)	3.15 (3.05)
Malaysia	3.60 (3.67)	3.52 (3.40)	3.69 (3.65)	3.81 (3.70)	2.79 (2.79)
Singapore	3.59 (3.59)	3.45 (3.37)	3.65 (3.65)	3.85 (3.86)	2.50 (2.44)

Note: values without parentheses = Hofstede’s (2001) estimates; values in parentheses = current study’s estimates.

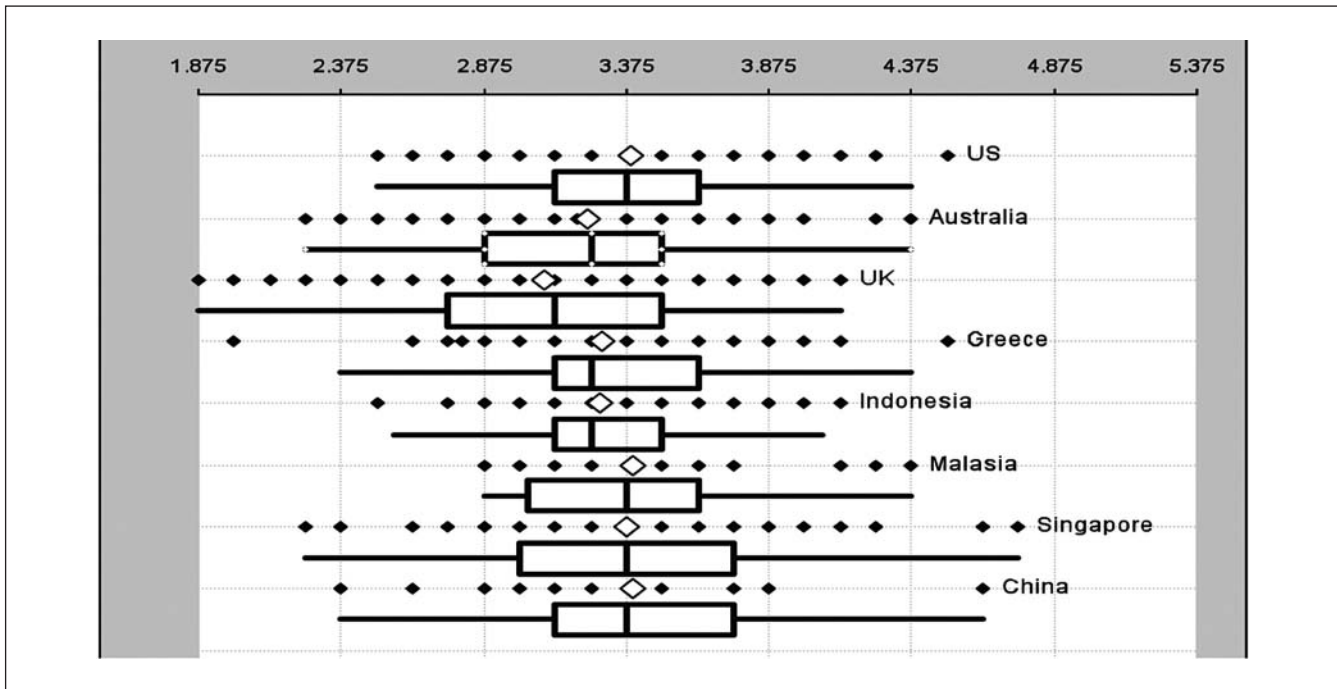


**Figure 1.** Box Plots of Power-Distance Measures by Nationality  
 ◇ denotes mean values

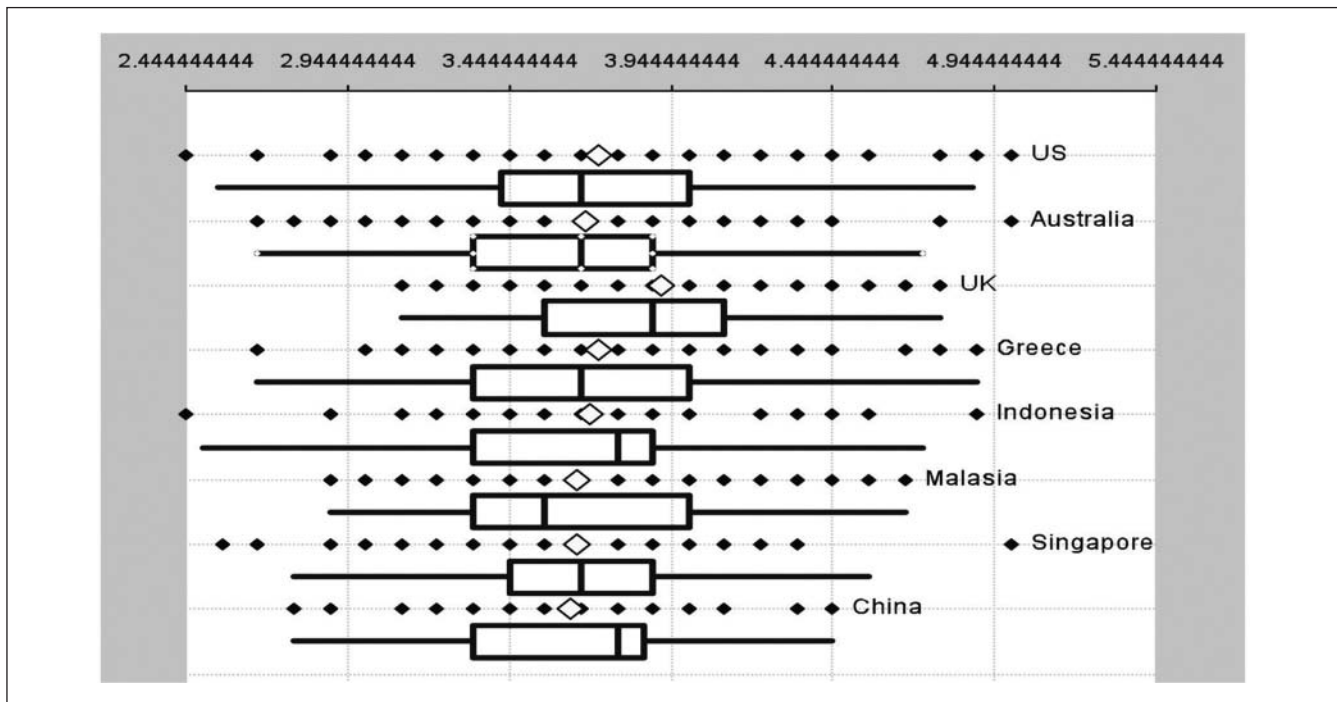
buy. According to Gladwell (2008), each individual “has his or her distinct personality. But overlaid on top of that are tendencies and assumptions and reflexes handed down to each of us by the history of the community we grew up in, and those differences are extraordinarily specific” (p. 204). As with any social-psychological variables, national cultural measures will explain some but not all of individual behavior (Cialdini 2008). Nevertheless, cultural differences still produce significant measurable effects. To illustrate, Hofstede’s PDI, according to studies commissioned by the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, explained one of the central reasons for airline accidents that are caused by human error. International airline crews from cultures with a high respect for hierarchy tend not to challenge those in positions of authority (e.g., pilots, ground control officials) even when the plane safety is in jeopardy. This has prompted training of

crews to renorm the airline cockpit as a place where subordinates are taught to be more assertive regarding safety (Gladwell 2008). This poignant application of Hofstede’s work in a human resource management setting has also resonated in tourism marketing research and practice.

A search of the literature using the database Business Source Primer reveals that since 2000, 109 academic research studies have been published containing the keyword *Hofstede* along with marketing, consumer behavior, consumer preferences, brand choice, and tourism. For example, Jackson (2001) found that members of the highly individualistic societies tend to choose culturally similar destinations, while members of the highly collectivist countries tend to choose culturally dissimilar destinations. This is because people from highly individualistic countries are less interdependent with their in-groups and have greater need for affiliation



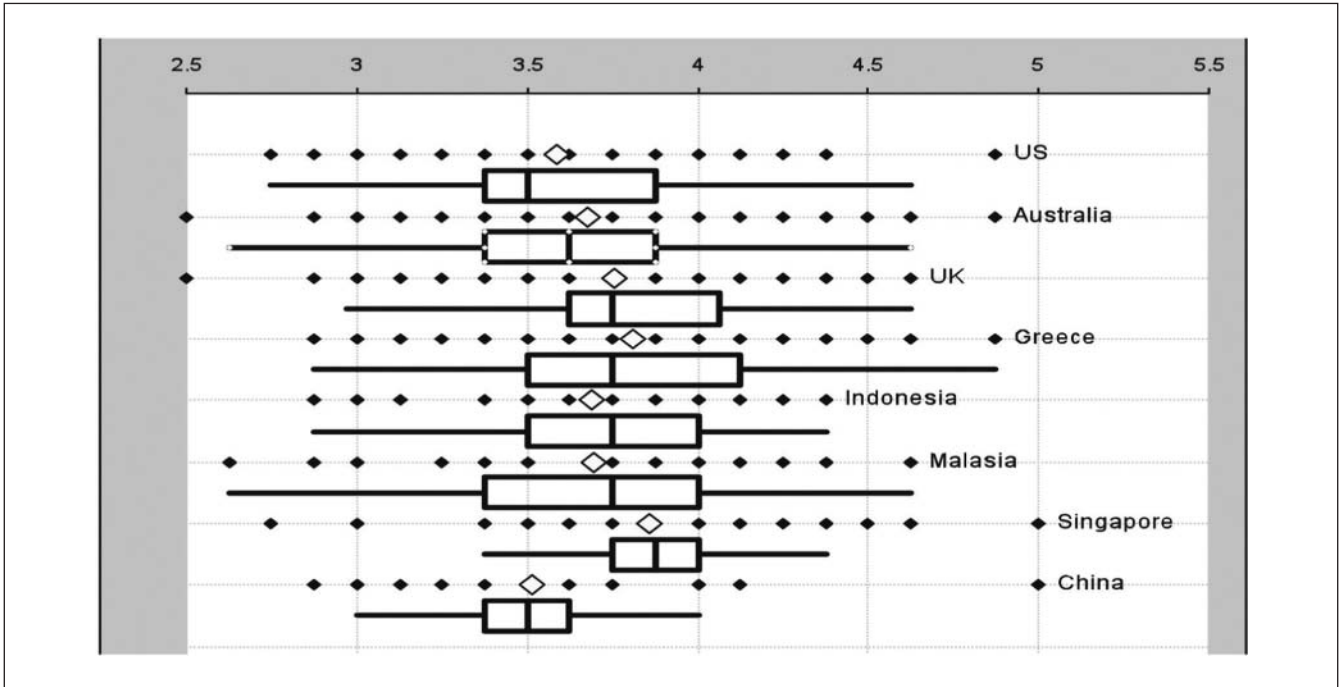
**Figure 2.** Box Plots of Uncertainty-Avoidance Measures by Nationality  
 ◇ denotes mean values



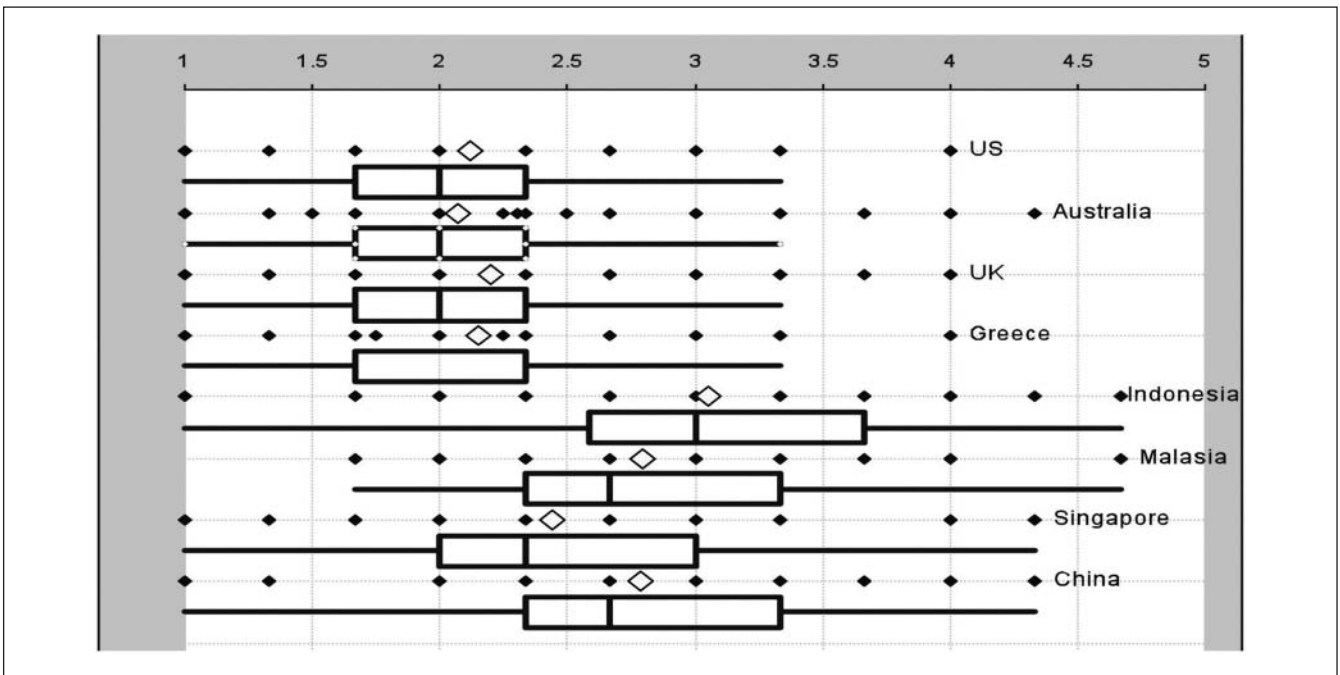
**Figure 3.** Box Plots of Individualism-Collectivism Measures by Nationality  
 ◇ denotes mean values

(Franzoi 1996). In regards to uncertainty avoidance, Money and Crofts (2003) found visitors from high uncertainty-avoidance cultures (e.g., Japanese) engage in significantly more risk- or uncertainty-reducing behaviors such as purchasing

more often prepaid tour packages, travel in larger groups, stay for shorter periods, and visit fewer destinations than their low uncertainty-avoidance German counterparts when traveling internationally. Regarding the MAS index, Crofts



**Figure 4.** Box Plots of Masculinity-Femininity Measures by Nationality  
 ◇ denotes mean values



**Figure 5.** Box Plots of Long-Term Orientation Measures by Nationality  
 ◇ denotes mean values

and Erdmann (2000) found visitors from less masculine cultures to be less critical and forgiving when evaluating travel services compared with visitors from more masculine cultures, who are more assertive and judgmental and evaluate

airline service quality less positively and are less loyal to airlines.

Findings of this study make several unique contributions to our understanding of national culture measures and their

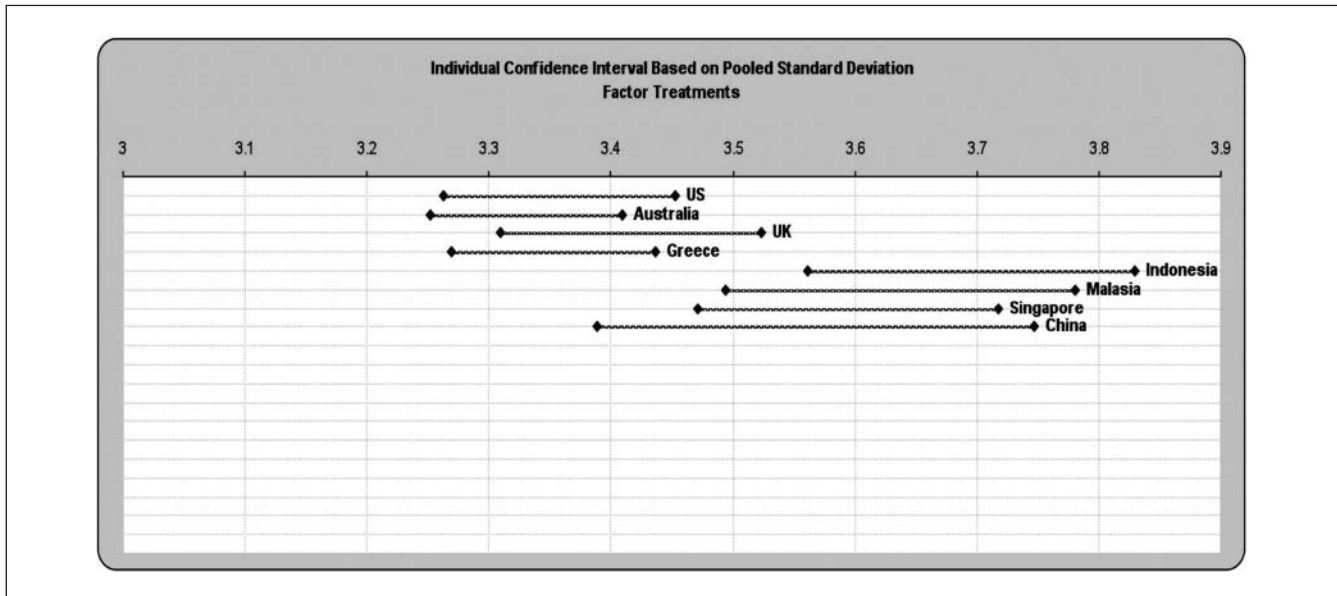


Figure 6. Individual Confidence Interval on Power-Distance Measures Based on Pool Standard Deviations

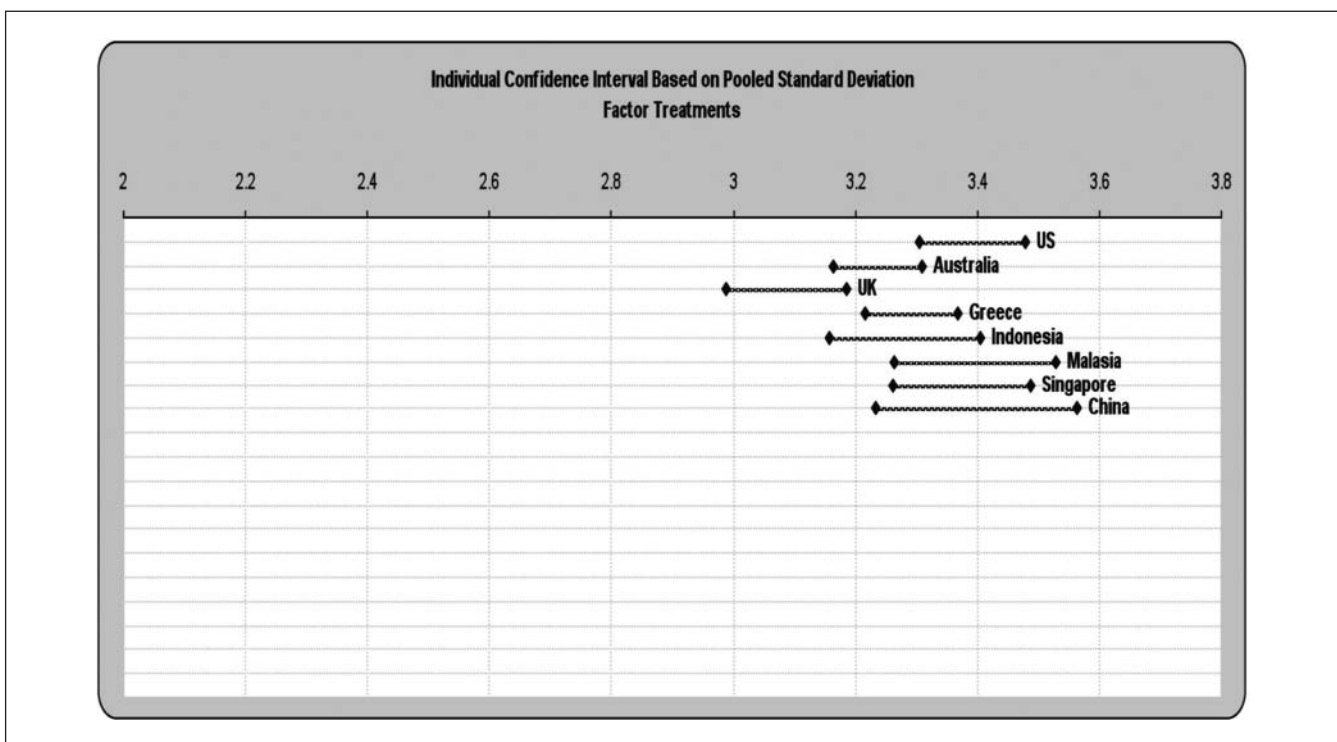


Figure 7. Individual Confidence Interval on Uncertainty-Avoidance Measures Based on Pool Standard Deviations

implications to tourism marketing. First, it supports the reliability and validity of Hofstede’s (2001) measures of national culture as a market segmentation tool. Data derived from a survey of visitors from eight countries who completed both the VSM 80 and VSM 94 instruments produced strikingly

similar mean values as Hofstede (2001) on all five dimensions. This study supports the use of Hofstede’s national cultural constructs as a measure of central tendencies of visitors from specific nations, useful in tailoring the tourism product and its promotional mix (Crotts and Pizam 2003; Funk and



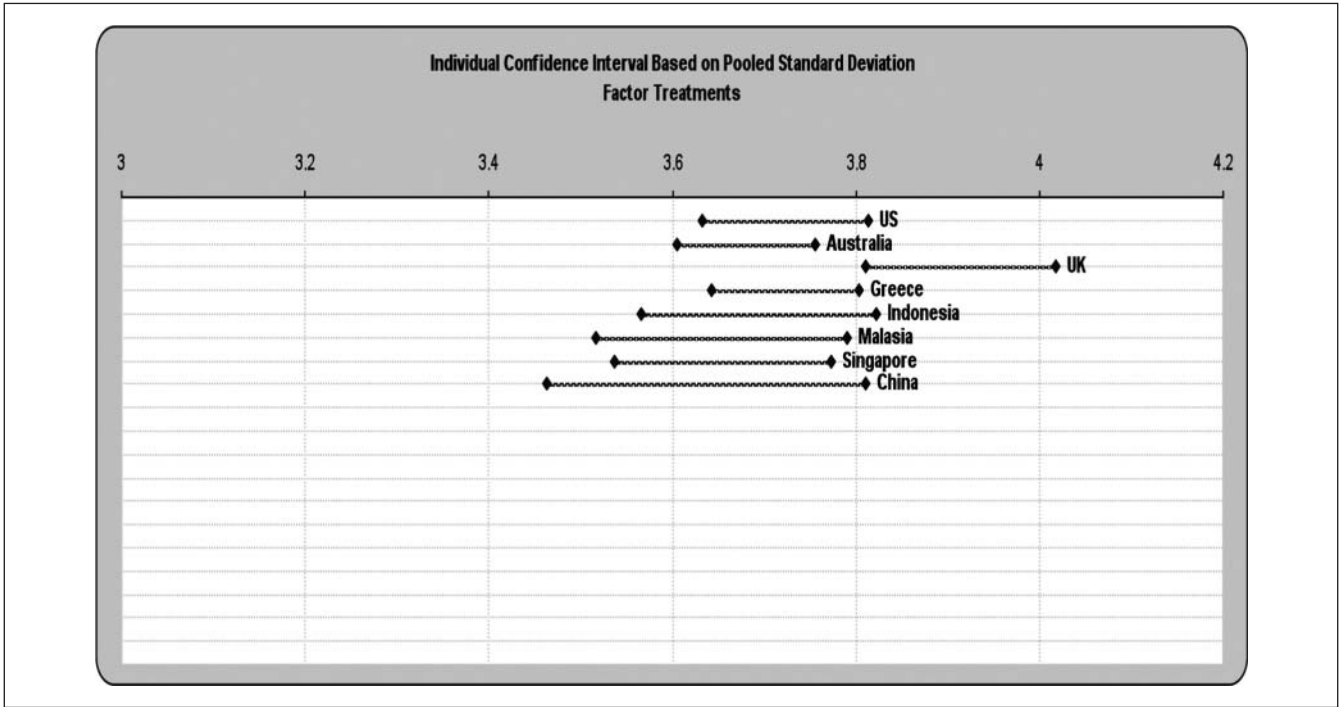


Figure 8. Individual Confidence Interval on Individualism–Collectivism Measures Based on Pool Standard Deviations

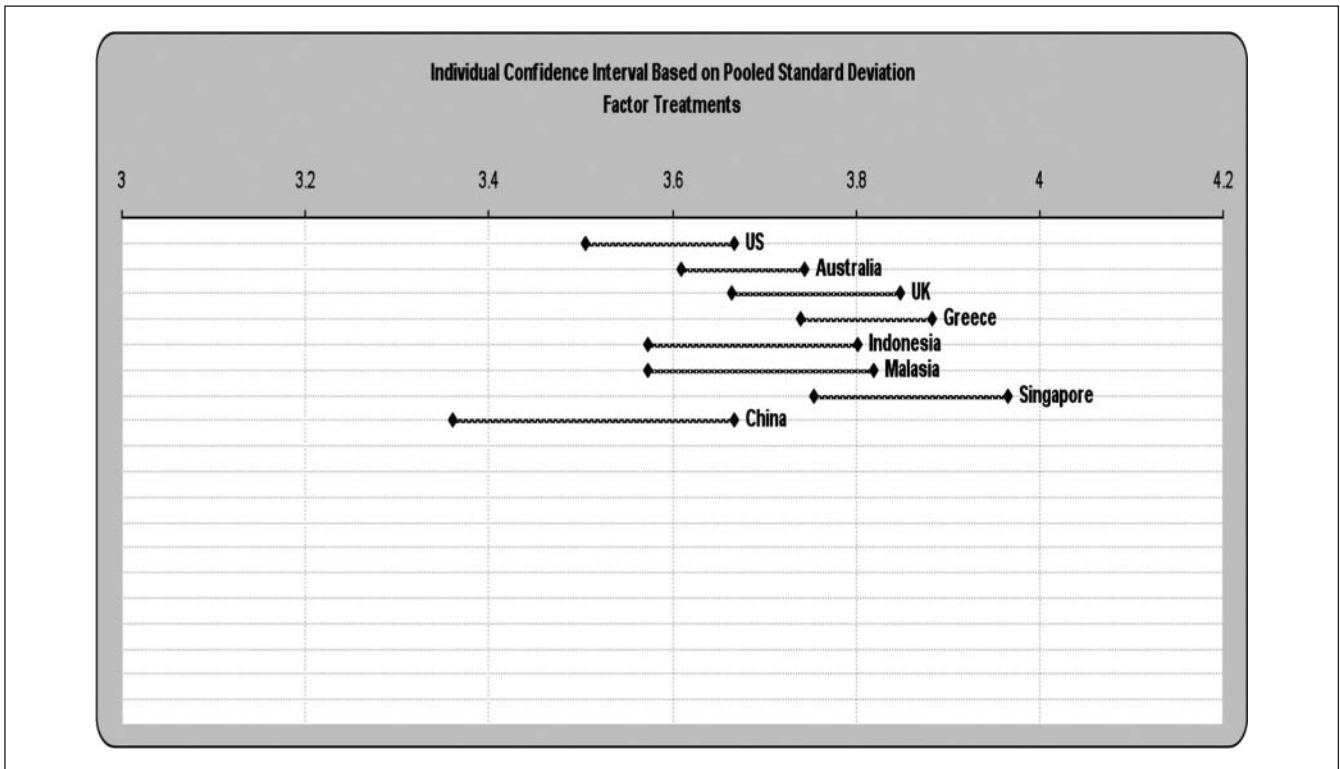
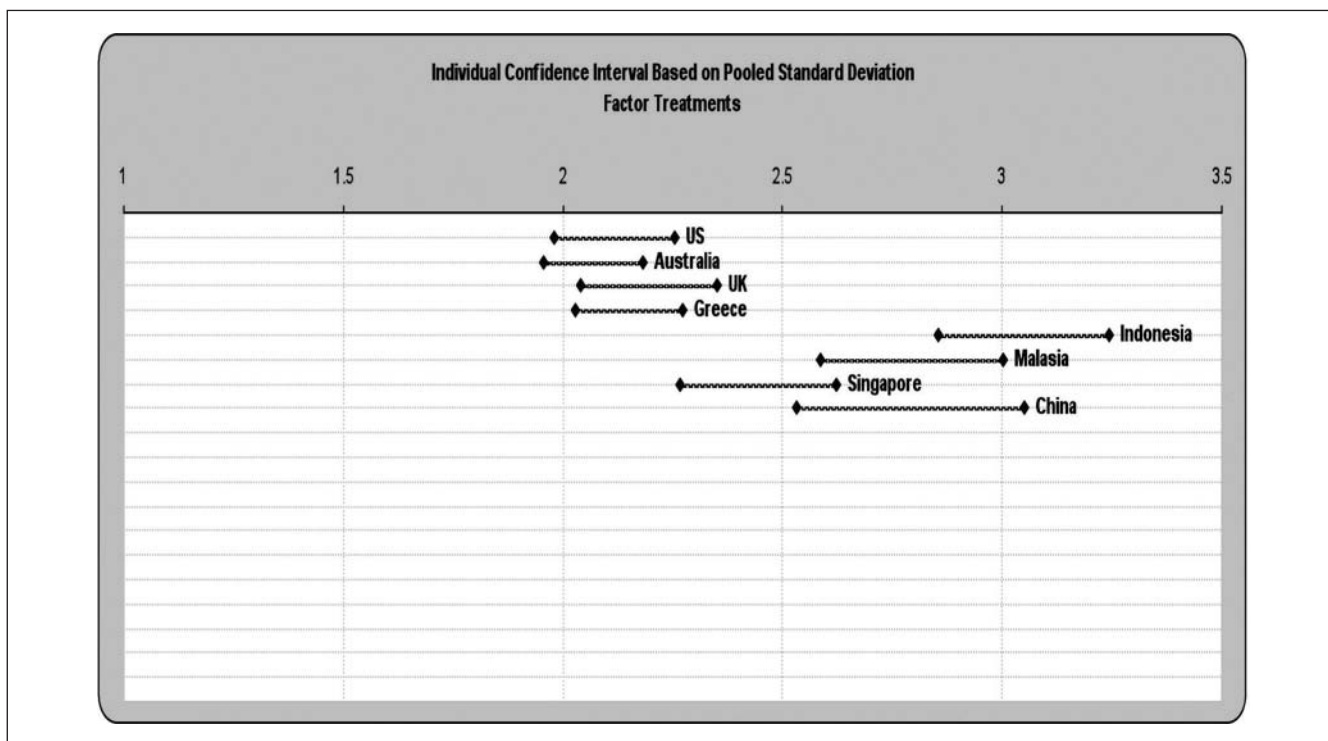


Figure 9. Individual Confidence Interval on Masculinity–Femininity Measures Based on Pool Standard Deviations

Bruun 2007; Litvin, Crotts, and Hefner 2004; Kozak, Crotts, and Law 2007; Reisinger and Mavondo 2006; Reisinger and Turner 2003).

Second, graphically contrasting these differences revealed that on four of the five cultural dimensions, the between-nation differences were relatively small, especially when compared



**Figure 10.** Individual Confidence Interval on Long-Term Orientation Measures Based on Pool Standard Deviations

to the within-nation variability. Although the study contributes little to the argument that convergence of national cultural values is occurring, it does highlight the high variability within each nationality. Although the means and medians produced by the Hofstede survey instruments reveal a relatively normal distribution on all cultural dimensions, the within-country deviations from these central tendencies reveal large diversity in all countries. Hence it would be unwise to conclude that all visitors from Indonesia, for example, will be risk averse. de Mooij and Hofstede (2002) and Kahle (1986) have shown that subcultures within nations do exist, each with their unique preferences and behaviors that may differ from their nations' dominant cultural norms. Tourism marketing is all about market segmentation, positioning, and targeting, and relatively small market segments in heavily populated countries can represent enormous opportunities to tourism destinations.

Lastly, the study highlights those nationalities that differ from all others on specific cultural dimensions that beg for further investigation. Respondents from Southeast Asian nations clustered away from their Western counterparts on the cultural dimension of LTO and, to a limited extent, PDI. The exceptions to this norm were respondents from Singapore, whose range extended between Western and Asian groups on LTO, and respondents from China and Singapore on PDI. Comparisons of the pooled sample variances revealed similar patterns on the UAI and IDV dimensions regardless of

nationality. Only respondents from the United Kingdom differed, characterized as being more individualistic and less risk-averse than all other national groupings. Perhaps these findings were influenced by the older age and lower educational attainment of the UK subsample. More variability was revealed on the MAS dimension, where respondents from Australia, Indonesia, and Malaysia clustered together; respondents from China differing from all others, trending toward less aggressive or competitive societies (MAS).

### Future Research

A number of research questions are derived from this and other closely related research that calls for further investigation. First, the data clearly reveal the wide variance within each national culture indicating the presence of subcultures. The VSM 80 and VSM 94 instruments are but one way to identify them and determine their unique consumer habits and buying behaviors. Other value scales are available such as the List of Values (Kahle 1986) used to conclude the existence of nine national cultures of North America. However, we believe other socioeconomic variables should be included as well since culture has no causal influence on consumer behavior and is influenced itself by gender, age, education, income, etc.

This analysis also identifies international regions that cluster closely together on Hofstede's dimensions, suggesting

that studies of national cultural differences do not always have to be at the national level. In the practice of tourism marketing, it is hard to imagine destination managers will be receptive to a 44-nation marketing segmentation strategy. The results of this analysis suggests a strategy derived from the VSM 80 and VSM 94 instruments at times can be standardized, and in its most complicated form warrants separate Southeast Asian and Western approaches, with a few national outliers. Obviously these results need to be replicated, drawing from other sample frames before such a conclusion can be made, but even Hofstede (2001) concludes that culture does not begin and end at national borders and cross-border cultural patterns do exist. More research is needed to determine what aspects of divergence within nations are being influenced by immigration and the degree of acculturation, as well as what aspects of convergence within multinational regions are brought about by a region's geopolitical history and which aspects are the result of convergence of the economic, media, and technology of the region (Assael 1998). Moreover, Hofstede (2001) suggested that the wealthier a country (or a subcultural region) becomes, the more noticeable or discernible is the influence of culture on consumption. Girlando, Anderson, and Zerillo (2004) and de Mooij and Hofstede (2002) provide evidence of this proposition.

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