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## Article

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# **Leveraging Luxury Brands Purchase Intention through Cultural Congruent Assertive Advertising: A Cross-Cultural Experimental Evidence from Malaysia and Pakistan**

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## **Abstract**

Recently, scholars suggested that brands can leverage their sales by developing advertisements through identifying the particular cultural orientation associated with consumer behavior in question. However, little effort has been made in understanding this phenomenon that how presentation and message manifested with cultural orientation in luxury brand advertisement can provide better action cues to consumers. Henceforth, this study presents a hypothetical model by integrating assertiveness appeals that have been frequently used in luxury brands to compare their effectiveness across cultures. To that end, the study underscores the fundamental query that whether the usage of culturally congruent assertiveness in the advertisement is an effective strategy for luxury brand promotion in emerging markets. The study has employed a quasi-experimental survey using luxury brand advertisement manifesting assertiveness appeal. Data was collected from 340 individuals of Pakistan and Malaysia after exposure to ad stimuli. The findings of structural equation modeling using AMOS 24 validate the effectiveness of the assertive advertising appeal usage across both nations. This implies that using assertive presentation and message in luxury brands advertisement could leverage the buying behavior in emerging markets.

**Keywords:** luxury brand, attitude towards luxury brands, assertive advertising, societal level assertiveness, assertive appeal.

## **1. Introduction**

The global luxury brands market has observed tremendous progress, with its market size prospective anticipated to grasp around USD 50 trillion by 2025 in contrast to USD 1 trillion in 2015 (Sanyal, et al., 2021; Ko et al., 2019). The number of luxury brands'

consumers quadruple multiple in the past couple of decades (Sanyal, et al., 2021). The main impetus of the worldwide progress of the luxury brands market has been the noteworthy upsurge in luxury brand consumption in various Asian emerging markets (Shahid, & Paul, 2021; Zakaria, et al., 2020). Hence, the intensified demand in these markets has delivered much of the progress of the global luxury brands market in recent decades (Sung, 2021; Bronner & de Hoog, 2019). For this reason, luxury brands are inflowing in emerging markets for growing their businesses and paints a picture of a flourishing industry (Le & Quy, 2020; Pino et al., 2019). In this scenario, many luxury brands striving to motivate the consumers from the Asian emerging markets. Keller (2009) described that luxury brands need to maintain a premium image by creating intangible brand connotations. For example, symbolic status cues and assertive appeals are commonly used to maintain such an image (Greenberg, 2020). Hence, corporations and business organizations often try to establish their brand, hoping that the brand reputation will leverage the increases in their luxury product sales (De Silva et al., 2020). In marketing communication, several tools have been developed to change consumption patterns to provide leverage to luxury brands (Lawry, 2021). However, in recent times luxury brand consumption patterns have progressed from modest to conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous spending is generally connected with the desire to buy luxury products (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Pino et al., 2019). To this end, whereby consumers usually have fewer concerns with the price, instead, they pick those particular products to gratify their symbolic, emotive, or social purposes.

Albeit marketing literature has shed light on consumption patterns of luxury branding (Zakaria, et al., 2020). For example, studies indicate that consumers choose luxury brands based on social adjustment (Shao et al., 2019), brand attachment (Shetty, & Fitzsimmons, 2021), distinct features (Shimul et al. 2019), and self-related perception (Sanyal, et al., 2021). Instead, limited attention has been paid to the communicative tools of the marketing that how do luxury brands can increase the sales in the Asian emerging economies where individuals' cultural symbolism can be a challenge (Lawry, 2021). Thus, it becomes imperative to examine the phenomenon of symbolic meanings and cues embedded in advertisement appeals that is how do they influence the consumers' personal need to gratify societal adjustments and compatibility of the luxury brand (Bailey et al., 2021; Shahid, & Paul, 2021). Largely, luxury brands are endeavoring standardized advertising and marketing practices (Bailey et al., 2021; Ko et al., 2019). The dynamics and cultural settings of these emerging nations have different dynamics contrasting the developed nations (Bahadir et al., 2015; Raza et al., 2020). The advertising practices of the luxury brands in the western context may be mismatched and there is a need to deliver a culturally driven holistic advertising practice model that can leverage the luxury brands' purchase in emerging markets (De Silva et al., 2020). Past research on luxury brand advertising has been carried out in Western contexts and there is paucity about the emerging market attributes (Jhamb et al., 2020; Hornikx & de Groot, 2017). Similarly, the indulgence of cultural insights toward luxury brands has been less explored area (Roy, et al., 2018; Pentina et al., 2018). Despite the growing importance of contextualizing advertising appeal and recent developments in how advertising should be defined and contextualized based

on the cultural context (Czarnecka et al., 2018; Raza & Zaman, 2021). There has been relatively limited research on how advertising appeal deciphers across cultures and even fewer about advertising from the perspective of a luxury brand (Kim & Hong, 2017). Therefore, a better comprehension of regarding advertising strategy of the luxury brands can support luxury marketers to position their brands more successfully in emerging markets. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to identify the adequate use of the advertising appeal that can influence the luxury brand-related purchasing decision of the consumers (Ganjoo, 2020).

Past psychology theories advocate that humans interpret communication content such as advertisement under the value of natural selection developed through a course of socialization (Brewer & Venaik, 2012; Raza et al., 2020). This process involves the ecological factors such as cultural values that humans learn from their surroundings. These ecological factors help them to decipher the behaviors in question (Lai & Prendergast, 2019). Hence, the psychological perspective recommends that the eventual description of human actions is influenced by inclusive suitability (Le & Quy, 2020). Ajzen (2011) argued that the individuals feel the social pressure (based on the response of peers to their actions) which predicts their intention and is represented in the model as the subjective norm. Conversely, scholars argued that this is not alone a social factor by which the influence of the social norms can be encompassed (Hassan, & Shiu, 2017). This does not happen in all cases as well, individuals also considered what others are doing in their surroundings. Alternatively, researchers (e.g., House et al., 2010; Hofstede, 2001) have devised several sets of dimensions, which can describe the effect of culture relates to certain behaviors (Brewer & Venaik, 2012; Nadeem & de Luque, 2020). For this reason, other cultural dimensions such as assertiveness are likely to influence consumer behavior intention but not considered in the notion of theory of planned behavior (hereafter TPB) defined norms (Barone & Jewell, 2012; Zhou et al., 2015). Furthermore, de Mooij (2017) also noted that a cross-cultural approach could help to explain the misunderstanding, such as perceiving religious similarities or standardization as the typical tool for advertising practices and make appropriate directions for marketers. To address the research lacunae, our study is based on the comparison of the two culturally diverse nations Malaysia and Pakistan on the luxury brand using directions provided in the theory of culture's influence.

The literature on luxury branding indicated that there had been no previous research addressing how consumers understand the cultural cues embedded by advertisements and can engage them in purchasing luxury products. This appears to be a considerable research gap. Therefore, there is paucity prevailed in the literature about advertising practices in diverse cultures. This experimental study has been designed to clarify how consumers decipher the cultural cues embedded by advertisements and how their cultural perspective might affect that deciphering. By doing so, this study may improve the understanding that how cultural differences based on the assertiveness dimension of the GLOBE framework interact with the perceived value of luxury brand advertising appeal (hereafter PLA) to direct the Attitude towards luxury brand (hereafter ALB) effects on the purchase intention (hereafter PI). In essence, scholars have questioned the validity of advertisement strategies developed in Western countries to other cultures that may have reached their projected

brand image, especially in non-Western countries like Pakistan (Teng et al., 2014). This is a line of research to address Ajzen's (2011), call for the extension of the TPB and call by (De Silva et al., 2020) to examine more research on the advertising of luxury brands in emerging markets by recognizing the influence of cultural beliefs and values. In this regard, the persuasive nature of the advertising appeal may have a positive effect on the ALB and in turn improve the prediction of the PI. Studies suggested that there is a need to explain how similarity in terms of levels of societal values (norms congruence) manifested in advertised features can affect consumer behavior (Kubat & Swaminathan, 2015).

Therefore, ALB is the one possible variable that may mediate the relationship between PLA and PI. However, mediating implications of this variable may culture to culture vary and depends on the degree to which PLA is consistent with the cultural norms of the individuals (Bailey et al., 2021; Hassan, & Shiu, 2017). This line of research, thus, represents a direct response to researchers such as Kim and Hong (2017) who call to study the underlying process variables connecting the relations between advertising and PI. Muk and Chung (2015), also noted that individual attitudes based on individual cultural norms might be the underlying mechanism that links the relationship between PLA and PI, suggesting that ALB is the mediating factor.

This study directly contributes to advertising and consumer behavior literature in numerous ways. Firstly, our results advance the model of advertising cultural influence model (House, et al., 2010) and help to re-conceptualize the fundamental implications of ALB in predicting PI. Secondly, consideration of the norm's congruence notion based on assertiveness (cultural dimensions), this study improves conceptual understanding of the interpretation of the advertising appeal to predict the intention. Thirdly, this research is conducted to compare the two culturally diverse nations; slight is known about the cultural differences between Malaysia and Pakistan (emerging markets) and extends the literature in the cross-cultural communication domains of consumer behavior through validating the notion of cultural variability.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

### *2.1. Redefining Cultural Influence and Advertising Theory*

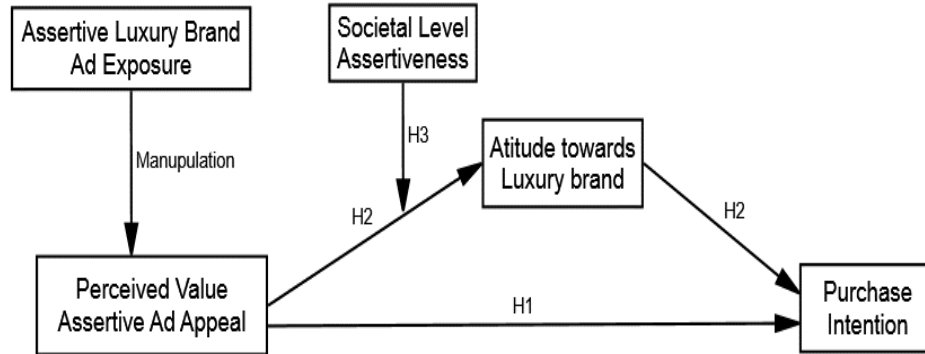
Rimal and Lapinski (2015) noted that subjective norms in the TPB are a kind of injunctive norm; they relate to one's inspiration to conform with the beliefs of others. Thus, subjective norms are the measure of perceptions of the importance of others' expectations and behaviors, - what GLOBE calls societal values. On the other hand, descriptive norm refers to beliefs about what others do in one's society which GLOBE identifies as practices. Consequently, norms dictate what we believe and how we behave. The crucial factor at this juncture is to clarify 'others'. The term subjective norm in TPB refers to the certainty that an imperative person or group of persons will agree and approve a specific behavior. Thus, this operationalization does not involve culture (Sniehotta et al., 2014). In their perspectives, GLOBE scholars measured participants' perceptions of the societies in which they live in terms of conceptual abstractions of society as it is and as it should be. They call this value (de Mooij, 2013). People view cultural norms as a guiding principle (desirable),

or what one ought to view as the right behavior. As mentioned earlier, Rimal and Lapinski (2015) view descriptive norms as involving perceptions of what others do (As-is). GLOBE, in their parlance, calls these practices. Smith et al. (2012) explained that there are two kinds of cultural norms namely injunctive and descriptive norms. Ajzen (2015) nonetheless identifies subjective norm and posits that its role can be fully determined by the entire set of available injunctive and descriptive normative beliefs. House et al. (2004) measures can tap such interactive effects of norms (values and practices) and individual perception of certain behaviors. Thus, in this study, we conceptualize GLOBE dimensions as cultural norms construct to provide a thorough cultural explanation to TPB.

House et al. (2010) also explained that these GLOBE dimensions provide the opportunity to understand cultural influences to determine the behavioral pattern of individuals in a society. Brewer and Venaik (2012) have also recommended that the culture dimensions could be used where societal level variables are used to explain individual behavior. Precisely, the strength of each normative belief associated with a given social referent is weighed by intention to comply with the referent in question (Ajzen, 2015). GLOBE framework has re-operationalized the *ecological assumption* and verified the *onion assumption*. It advances existing frameworks regarding the conceptualization of cultural dimensions in terms of exhaustive measurements of these dimensions. Besides, it provides comprehensive constructs such as assertiveness to measure an individual's behavioral patterns in their societies. Therefore, better behavioral validity can be expected by using the GLOBE framework (House et al., 2010). Consequently, the GLOBE dimensions have lesser generalizability issues than previous frameworks like the Hofstede model. Based on this, GLOBE dimensions are used to understand how cultural norms interact with the specific individual's perception of advertising appeals to drive intentions (Quanily et al., 2012). We argue that the use of GLOBE's dimension of assertiveness may result in a detailed insight into the role of particular normative beliefs of individuals that is how the culture influences consumer behavior. It will give a further cultural explanation of the PLA-PI in the context of luxury brands; and re-examination of the influence of the subjective norm in the TPB. This line of research is in response to the call made by Sniehotta et al. (2014) to re-operationalize the notion of the subjective norm by considering inclusive construct to fully understand the prediction of intention outcome in the TPB.

From a different angle, this would also provide an answer to the question raised by House et al. (2010) and Mueller et al. (2015) about the influence of dimensions of culture on advertising effectiveness. Certainly, this would be a step forward in research as it will provide empirical evidence of the interaction of the PLA and cultural expectations (norms) concerning advertising as the important predictor of intention. Thus, we propose the model presented in figure 1. This is the first study that has contributed to the development of a more general theory of culture's influence on advertising presented by Quanily et al. (2012). Further, drawing a construct from a cultural norm perspective such as the assertiveness dimension will also provide the interaction of the norm congruence and PLA in determining the intention of using luxury brands. The theoretical justification for the investigation of cultural norms across cultures is that all members of the society use similar learned norms while interpreting advertising appeals (Quanily et al., 2012; Terlutter et al.,

2010). Norms outline individuals' behavior in culture. Individuals of that culture share many norms- relevant experiences and are socialized to acclimatize to these shared cultural norms. Given that advertising often appeals to consumer's aspirations, it is important to consider the norms associated with societal culture dimensions in advertising communication.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

Shavitt et al. (2011) studied the interaction effect of two of Hofstede's dimensions on advertising and recommended that the interaction effect may also exist amongst other dimensions that remain largely unknown. Saleem and Larimo (2017) reviewed more than a hundred studies and concluded that none has yet studied the interaction effect of cultural norms on advertising with a more exhaustive measure such as GLOBE. Drawing assumptions on the GLOBE cultural framework the study evaluated the interaction of cultural norms and PLA to drive intention to use a luxury brand among Pakistanis. For example, a cultural norm-driven behavioral pattern determines a response to any stimuli such as advertising appeals and guides the individual's perception. This research develops a conceptual model that enlightens the role of societal cultural attributes as the defining element of luxury advertising perceptions in the intensification of PI. The model also explains the mediating influence of ALB; however, it has been postulated that this societal value of assertiveness would moderate this influence (see Figure 1).

*2.2. Perceived Value of Luxury Brand Advertising Appeal (PLA) and Purchase Intention (PI)*

Advertising appeals are the precise tactics sellers use to communicate how their products will indulge consumer necessities by embedding several features in message and presentation (Zhou, et al., 2015). The appeals are typically carried in the illustrations and headlines of the ads and are supported and reinforced by the ad's copy. Researchers (e.g., Czarnecka, et. al., 2018; Raza et al., 2020) have argued that cultural values are the core of advertising appeals and typical advertisements approve, glamorize, and certainly underpin cultural values, which in turn improve consumer's intentions. According to Rani and Suradi (2017), the purchase intention of the individual is related to the extent of the consumer's concerns on how others think about them or how others react to their usage

and choices of the product. Thus, the intention to use the luxury brand in response to advertising appeals may rely on the individual's cultural deciphering of appeals (Bailey et al., 2021). Behavior and contents in advertisements both express values (Roy, et al., 2018). If advertising appeals do not conform to the cultural norm, advertising appeals may in turn be misinterpreted. Hence, the present study is intended for measuring normative influence on intention to apprehend the direct effects of PLA on the PI.

Evidence indicates that different cultures seem to underline different advertising appeals to positively affect the individual's perception of advertising appeals. For example, in Pakistan, advertisements have been found to contain more emotional and fewer comparative appeals than western ads (Majid, 2013). Ads in Pakistan have been found to include more appeals that focus on the promise of a better future. Despite having the persuasive nature of the appeals, such cultural context may affect the advertising effectiveness in Pakistan (Raza et al., 2019). In the context of this study, the construct of advertising presented by Ducoffe (1995) can measure the overall individual's perception of advertising appeals based on the features of the advertising.

From the theoretical perspective, consumers in a decision-making situation highly rely on the advertising cues and information provided in the communication content (Bailey et al., 2021). Consumers interpret these cues by employing their rationalization and an effective mechanism that can induce them to appraise the product in question (Sung, 2021). Past literature affirmed that this functional mechanism is dependent on the perceived value of the advertisement (Raza & Zaman, 2021). In this scenario, attributes of the product provided in the advertisement are the main contributory factors that can result in aggregating or subsiding the overall value of the advertisement (Herbes et al., 2020). Thus, the slighter perceived value can paralyze the purchase decisions (Sung, 2021). For instance, a consumer may evade purchasing luxury brands if they remain indecisive about the premium value or status symbolism of the product. To this point, luxury brand advertisements embedded with superior cues in terms of delivering the better value of a brand can embrace decisive behavior and minimize hesitancy (Bailey et al., 2021). For example, underpinned cultural values such as assertiveness in advertising can help to provide action-related cues to the consumers by conveying the source of decoding the product's meaning as a valuable product (Herbes et al., 2020). The PLA of the advertisement can contribute towards reducing self-doubts precisely through (1) dipping indecision, which interferes with a purchase decision, and (2) promoting the premium value of the luxury product over other alternative brands. Furthermore, assertive advertising as a communicative phenomenon seeks to moderately sustain their positive evaluations about the product (Bailey et al., 2021). Previous literature also affirmed that Pakistanis respond positively to luxury brands (Ashraf, et al., 2017). Studies conducted to determine the advertising effectiveness of Pakistani nationals provide evidence of their positive perception towards luxury brands. For instance, Tabassi et al. (2013) found that Pakistanis prefer products from luxury brands. Ling et al. (2010) also indicated that Pakistanis positively perceived luxury brand advertising. Thus, based on the literature, we hypothesize that:

- **H<sub>1</sub>:** The PLA will positively influence the PI among Malaysians and Pakistanis.



### 2.3. *The Mediating Role of Attitude towards Luxury Brands*

Scholars have defined attitude toward the brand as “attitude toward the brand is a relatively enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behavior.” (Spears & Singh, 2004). Attitude towards brand is a prevalent investigation theme in advertisement research and theoretically distinct in forecasting consumers’ behavioral outcomes (Fam et al., 2013; Ganjoo, 2020) Literature affirmed that individual who has more favorable beliefs toward advertising are more likely to have favorable attitude and likely be persuaded by advertising (Ganjoo, 2020; Mpinganjira & Maduku, 2019). Thus, consumers’ favorable attitude toward brand is likely to influence their positive evaluation of the advertising. However, research has identified that semantic decision of an advertisement message attributes appear to be dealt by individuals as instantaneous measure of appraisal (Raza et al., 2020). Previous research therefore, has provided some negative causes of brand evaluation like cultural incongruence (Tsai et al. 2011), advertising avoidance (Baek & Morimoto, 2012) or perceived intrusiveness (Boateng, & Okoe, 2015) of the attitude towards the brand which consequences in negative predispositions. Likewise, Hornikx and de Groot (2017) also suggested that other factors such as cultural incongruence may decrease the efficacy of the advertising. The norm congruence level may determine the attitude towards the brand and perhaps affect the efficacy of an advertising campaign. For consumers, advertisement is sometimes considered inevitable, inquisitive, and morally questionable and these factors are supposed to contribute to the undesirable attitudes found towards advertisement (Boateng & Okoe, 2015). Some recent studies have indicated that cultural factors also play a role in determining the attitude towards advertising (Valaei, et al., 2016). In particular, the cultural context of the individuals drives their beliefs about the advertising practices including the advertising contents (Islam, 2017; Jhamb et al., 2020). In this standard, when the advertisement content is besieged to individual needs or interests or value-expressive positive attitude may be triggered that leads towards the positive purchase intention (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Hornikx & de Groot, 2017). Thus study hypothesized that:

- **H<sub>2</sub>:** ALB will mediate the relationship between the PLA and PI among Malaysians and Pakistanis.

### 2.4. *Moderation of Assertiveness*

“Assertiveness reflects beliefs as to whether people are or should be encouraged to be assertive, aggressive, and tough, or nonassertive, nonaggressive, and tender in social relationships.” (Hartog, 2004). For example, the approach of the competition and calculated trust affiliated to the high assertiveness whereas cooperation, harmony, and save face are attached to the low assertiveness (Nadeem & de Luque, 2020). The assertiveness increases the sense of self-respect and will to control but the level of this difference in both low and high assertiveness societies (Terlutter et. al., 2010). Although as an advertising appeal assertiveness is used frequently one of the examples is Nike’s former ‘Just do it’ slogan. Such slogans of giving stress are generally related to assertiveness (Herrera et al.,

2011; House et al., 2010; Okazaki et al., 2010).; de Mooij, 2015). Additionally, in the advertising assertiveness is employed as the plea to shadow the individuals like the use of slogans “fix it” and “can make it” (Herrera et al., 2011). But, empirical evidence that whether the ads with assertive appeals correspond positively to both low and high assertiveness societies remains largely unknown in the literature. However, directions have been provided in the adaptation-level theory that implicit towards the interactional between the stimuli and cultural factors. Helson (1964) mentioned that the effect of the stimuli cannot be measured without considering the other contextual factors (culture) which influence the ones’ experiences.

In advertising research, Terlutter et al. (2010) was the first study that proposed a model based on this dimension to test whether assertiveness is perceived and assessed differently in several cultures. Before this study Terlutter et al. (2012) also found assertiveness value correspond with practices adversely, individuals from countries with low assertiveness level evaluate the assertiveness appeals positively. These findings are consistent with the GLOBE project findings of a negative correlation ( $r = -0.26$ ) between values and practices for assertiveness (Hartog, 2004). But these findings remain minimal to the evaluation of the advertising. Further, no previous study has been conducted stemming from the notion that the assertiveness dimension may have an interactional effect on the outcome of intention. Moreover, House et al. (2004) found that assertiveness practices are significantly higher ( $r = .33$ ) in the Southern Asia Cluster. Consistent with the literature we assume that Malaysia low scored on assertiveness practices (3.87).

**Table 1: Assertiveness societal cultural practices and values: Pakistan versus Malaysia**

Assertiveness Dimension	Malaysia	Pakistan
Assertiveness practice	3.87	3.20
Assertiveness value	4.81	4.09

Source: Nadeem & Sully de Luque, 2020.

Regardless of the low score on the assertiveness scale, Malaysians as the part of GLOBE South Asia Cluster tend to have a positive individual’s perception of advertising appeals and result in a positive intention towards the ads of luxury brands reflecting a high level of assertiveness (see Table 1). For instance, as an advertising appeal assertiveness is considered positive in both low and high assertiveness societies but, the level may differ as indicated in the previous studies. However, this relation would be moderated by the assertiveness held in their values. This will extend the model proposed by the Terlutter et al., (2010) and test for the moderating effect of assertiveness: The consideration of cultural factors such as assertiveness will whether ads stimuli will be perceived as less strong if the surrounding stimuli are strong. Further, as people in dissimilar cultures hold dissimilar assertiveness value as salient, and thus one would expect different responses across countries. Notably, Terlutter et al. (2006) study used the assertiveness dimension concluded that advertisements congruent to the assertiveness level of the consumer result in positive perception.

Recent studies (e.g., Ali et al., 2019; Jhamb et al., 2020; Sung et al., 2020) tapping cultural effects on advertising efficacy have reported disparities amongst collectivistic and individualistic societies when customers from these societies appraise luxury brands. These studies also proclaimed that people belonging to collectivistic cultures such as Asian nations are more motivated in buying luxury brands (Zakaria et al., 2020). This prevalent purchasing pattern among collectivistic societies is existent owing to cultural orientation (Jhamb et al., 2020; Walters & Carr, 2019). Moreover, literature identified that collectivistic culture indulges into the luxury brands purchasing because of the desire to purchase luxurious and renowned status quo products for getting acknowledgment from their societies (Sung et al., 2020). To put it simply, the consumers from the Collectivistic societies use luxury consumption to assert their luxury lifestyle on their fellow community members. In this regard, consumers' adhesive their sense of attachment as well as maintain their status by saving self-face (Sanyal et al., 2021; Herbes et al., 2020). Subsequently, consumers from the collectivistic cultural background are an additional preference towards the luxury brands compared to the others, such cultural orientation impacts their purchasing behavior, and they are more attentive to conspicuous appeals like assertive advertising (Ali et al., 2019). Pakistan and Malaysia are collectivistic societies (De Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Raza et al., 2021) and their individuals hugely rely on norm conformation, societal status and emphasized more on social belongings (Zakaria et al., 2020). Past research has suggested that such cultural orientation can impact more for luxury products in contrast to the informational attributes provided to the consumers through advertisements (Bailey et al., 2021; Kim and Jang, 2014;). This entails to the Malaysian and Pakistani consumers probably apprehensive with purchasing luxury products, however, it would be contingent on the societal level inclination towards assertiveness. Therefore, based on the higher inclination of societal assertiveness among Malaysian consumers compared to Pakistanis their purchase decisions would be influenced more strongly by assertive advertising. Hence, it is expected that Malaysian consumers would involve more in luxury product purchasing and the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

- **H<sub>3</sub>:** The influence of the PLA on the ALB will be moderated by assertiveness societal value stronger among Malaysian because of the higher societal value of assertiveness (more importance to assertiveness) compared to Pakistan.

### 3. Method

The study employed the quasi-experimental survey and collected data from 340 respondents from two countries (Pakistan: 170 and Malaysia: 170) through a non-probability sampling method. This method allows the investigators data collection from the prospective respondents based on their availability and this method is commonly implemented in experimental designs (Hornikx & de Groot, 2017). Cross-cultural literature suggests that the measurement equivalence could be reached through the equivalent size of the sample selection while employing the experimental design in the cross-cultural study (Boer et al., 2018). Therefore, equal size n=170 was considered equitably across both samples to avoid sample biases and measurement invariance. To implement this study, one

advertising for a popular luxury fashion brand was selected. The respondents (who agreed to participate) were requested to watch an advertisement containing a high level of assertive appeals. Afterward, they were asked to fill a structured questionnaire based on the items extracted from the previous literature. The respondents were reached out in public places (market, parking, etc.) with the help of the volunteers and members of the research team. The informed consent was made sure to avoid any research ethical issue and only those respondents were added in the study who agreed. They were briefed with the study purpose is designed to tap the luxury brand's advertising effectiveness. The demographic attributes of the sample are presented in Table 2.

### *3.1. Measurement*

#### *3.1.1. Ad Stimuli*

A print advertisement of a luxury car brand has been adopted for this study. The selected advertisement contained a high level of assertive appeal. The advertisement pictorial display, as well as the message, was based on the assertive appeal. To control the brand's recognition and familiarity issue name of the brand was not shown in the ad stimuli. The slogan of the advertisement was "Just Get, don't think". Drawing from the past studies (e.g., Terlutter et al. 2010) using assertive advertising appeal, the current study selected the ad-stimuli. The manipulation was conducted after giving the advertisement exposure. For that reason, 3-items were used on a seven-point scale, to test the null hypothesis of variance between respondents of both countries. The items for the manipulation check were: The advertisements seem to me (1) assertive (2) direct and (3) confident (1= low to 7 = high). The between subject's test on AT differences between both countries was significant (Mean difference of luxury brand advertisement exposure = .271;  $p < .000$  with 95% CI). While Levene's test for equality of variances between subjects after the exposure of luxury brand advertisement indicated significance as  $F(358) = 7.02$ ,  $p < .37$ ;  $t = 11.71$ ;  $p < .000$ . The results found no significant difference in comprehending luxury brand advertisement.

#### *3.1.2. Purchase Intention*

The PI was measured through 3-items adapted from Spears and Singh (2004) with some alteration required due to the nature of the topic. The 7-point scale (1= "strongly disagree", 7= "strongly Agree") was used to the feelings developed as a result of the luxury advertisement viewing. The three items read as (1) "I will intend to buy luxury brand presented in the ad", (2) "I have high purchase interest towards luxury brand presented in the ad", and (3) "I will intend to buy owing to its acceptance in my culture".

#### *3.1.3. Attitude towards Luxury Brand*

The ALB was measured through 4-items of "semantic differential scale" adopted from Spears and Singh (2004) the statement read as: "Please describe your overall feelings about the luxury brand described in the ad you just read" and respondents were asked to record their responses on the 7-point response sets for 4-items were: (7 = extremely good, 1 = extremely bad), (7 = extremely likable, 5 = extremely unlikable), (7 = extremely appealing, 1 = extremely unappealing), and (7 = extremely pleasant, 1 = extremely unpleasant).

3.1.4. Perceived Value of Assertive Luxury Brand Advertisement

The 3 items were adopted from the Ducoffe (1995) scale to measure PLA on a seven-point scale. The items were like “(1) This advertising is valuable; (2) Advertising is useful; and (3) Advertising is important”.

3.1.5. Assertiveness Societal Value

The 3 items to measure assertiveness are taken from the work of Gupta, Hanges, and Dorfman, (2002) on a seven-point scale based on the original work of the GLOBE project. The semantic scale was followed by a statement read as “In country x, people should be encouraged to be (1) assertive/non-assertive; (2) tough/tender; (3) dominant/non-dominant”

**Table 2: Demographic Attributes**

Attributes	Pakistan		Malaysia	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender				
Male	107	62.9	93	54.7
Female	63	37.1	77	45.3
Educational levels				
High School	52	30.6	26	15.3
Undergraduate	75	44.1	82	48.2
Masters or more	43	25.3	62	36.5
Age range				
18-25	79	46.5	86	50.6
26-40	62	36.4	47	27.6
41-above	29	17.1	37	21.8

**4. Results**

Contingent with the experimental nature of the study, we used the Structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) multigroup approach to validate the hypotheses. However, before proceeding to the inferential statistics, primary analysis of normality checks and bivariate analysis has been carried out. To do so, the study used the SPSS software for data screening including the missing data assessment, outliers evaluations (bivariate and multivariate) in the data. After basic screenings, the study also computed the Variance inflation among the linear relationship between the variables.

**Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation**

Variables	M		SD		PLA	ALB	PI	ASV	PLA	ALB	PI	ASV
	Mal	Pak	Mal	Pak	Mal	Mal	Mal	Mal	Pak	Pak	Pak	Pak
<b>PLA</b>	5.13	4.82	.98	.83	1				1			
<b>ALB</b>	5.47	4.22	.67	.94	.39*	1			.27*	1		
<b>PI</b>	4.90	4.31	.74	.96	.24*	.44*	1		.21*	.31**	1	
<b>ASV</b>	4.89	4.07	.62	.90	.42*	.41*	.33*	1	.37*	.28*	.19*	1

\*\**p* < 0.01. Pak =Pakistan Mal =Malaysia. PLA =Perceived value of assertive luxury ad, ALB =Attitude towards luxury brand, ASV = Assertiveness Societal value and PI = Purchase Intention.

The VIF suggested that there is no serious issue of collinearity existed as well as the data was found normal to proceed with the bivariate correlation test using Pearson’s statistics (see Table 3). The results of the Pearson.s correlation statistics suggested that there is a significant relationship that exists amongst the variables (PLA, ALB, PI, and ASV) across both groups. Exploratory factor analysis was carried out to evaluate the sample adequacy using the segregated data of 200 (100 for each group). The results revealed a satisfactory factor structure as well as significant Bartlett’s test numeric. The KMO values of each construct (PLA, ALB, PI, and ASV) in both groups suggested high values(>.60) of KMO for all variables of this study.

*4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

After conducting the primary examinations on the data, the study proceeded for the confirmatory factor analysis (henceforth CFA). The CFA was performed to evaluate the Convergent and discriminant validity, multi-group measurement models goodness, and later for structural model assessment along with hypotheses testing. Initially, a multi-group model was computed using the AMOS. 24 software to assess the measurement model of goodness. For this purpose, both groups were identified as separate groups in AMOS; (Group 1) Malaysian sample of 170 (Group 2) Pakistani sample of 170. The measurement models ran using multi-group feature revealed fitness indices for both models as: Malaysian sample  $\chi^2/df = 1.85$ ; CFI =.97; IFI = .95; TLI =.96; SRMSR =.047; and RMSEA =.038 and Pakistani sample  $\chi^2/df = 2.38$ ; CFI =.93; IFI = .95; TLI =.94; SRMSR =.059; and RMSEA =.041. The evaluation of the variables (PLA, ALB, PI, and ASV) validity was found satisfactory based on the loadings of the items on their parent construct (see Table 4, 5, and Figure 2).

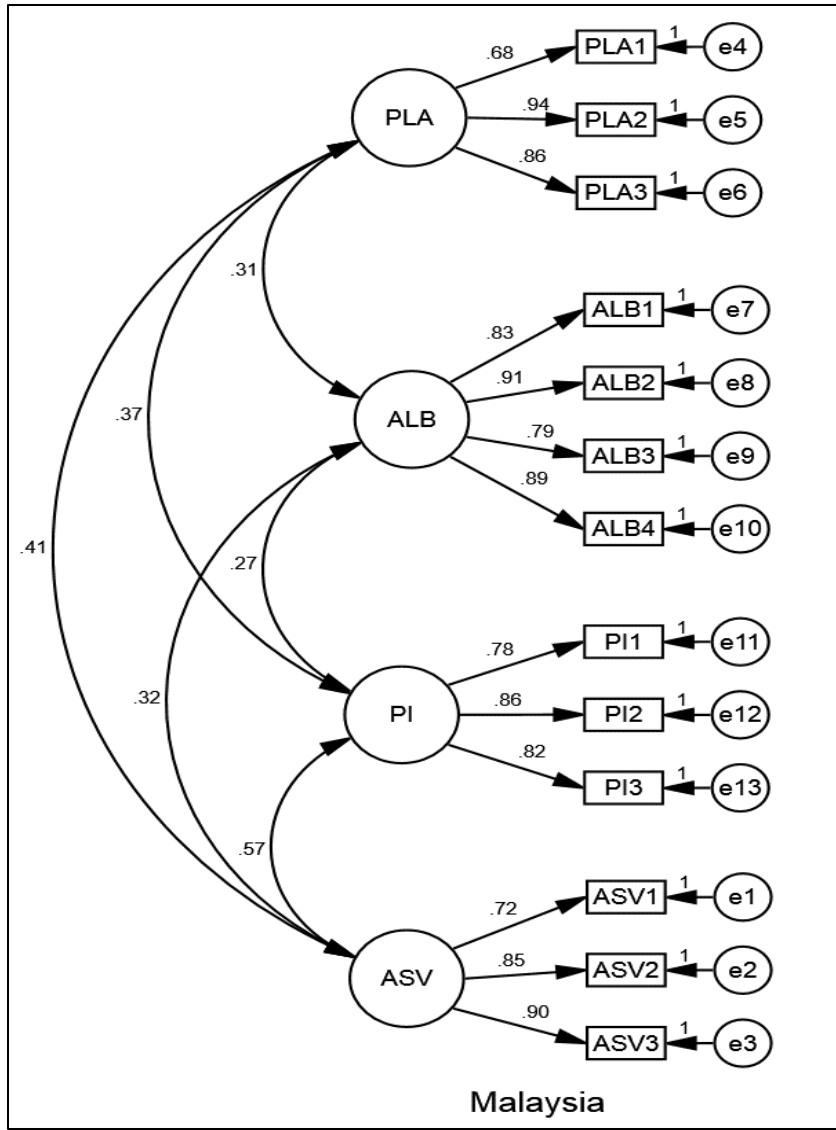


Figure 2: Measurement Model (Malaysia)

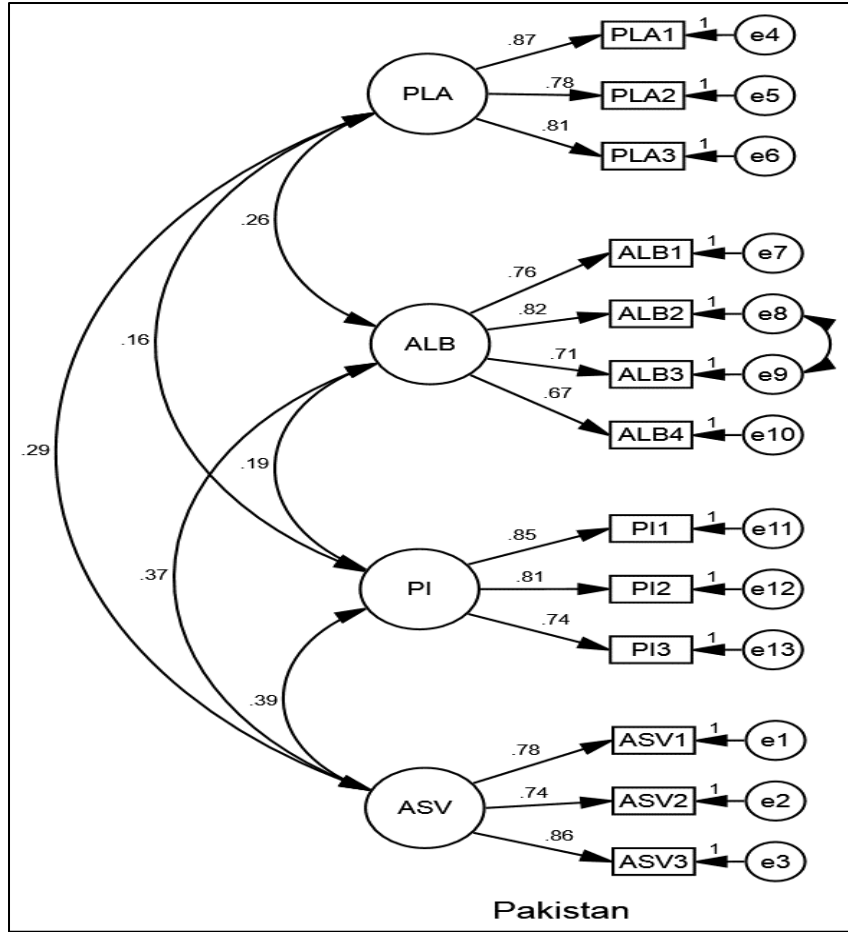


Figure 2: Measurement Model (Pakistan)

Table 4: Discriminant and Convergent Validity

Malaysia	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	PLA	ALB	PI	ASV
PLA	.89	.92	.69	(.83)			
ALB	.93	.93	.73	.31	(.85)		
PI	.87	.88	.67	.37	.27	(.81)	
ASV	.84	.89	.68	.41	.32	.57	(.82)
Pakistan	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	PLA	ALB	PI	ASV
PLA	.81	.84	.67	(.81)			
ALB	.79	.84	.55	.26*	(.74)		
PI	.76	.87	.65	.16*	.19*	(.80)	
ASV	.81	.83	.63	.29	.37	.39	(.79)



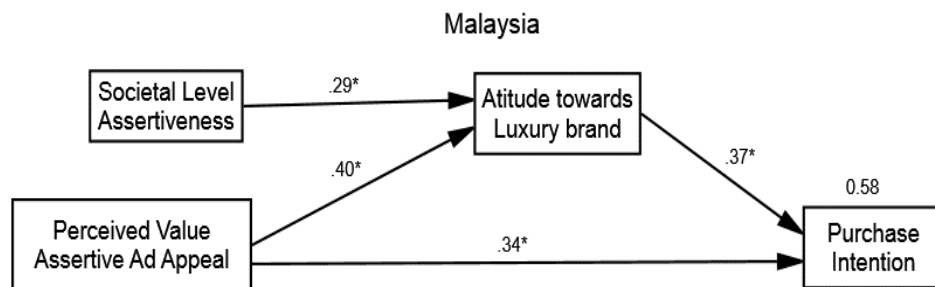
**Table 5: Standardized Loadings**

	Malaysia	Pakistan
Items	Loadings	Loadings
PLA1	0.68	0.87
PLA2	0.94	0.78
PLA3	0.86	0.81
ALB1	0.83	0.76
ALB2	0.91	0.82
ALB3	0.79	0.71
ALB4	0.89	0.67
PI1	0.78	0.85
PI2	0.86	0.81
PI3	0.82	0.74
ASV1	0.72	0.78
ASV2	0.85	0.74
ASV3	0.90	0.86

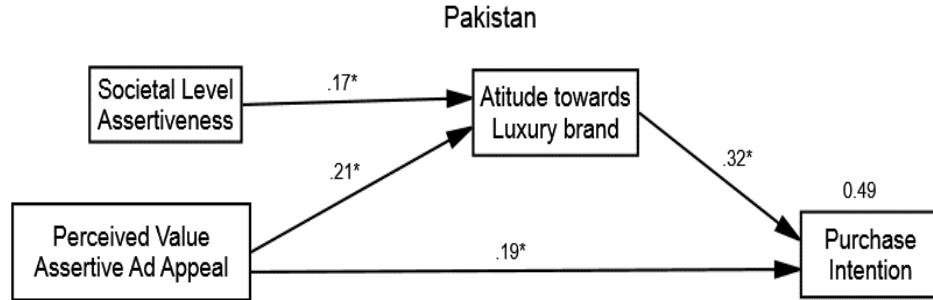
PLA =Perceived value of the assertive luxury ad, ALB =Attitude towards a luxury brand, ASV = Assertiveness Societal value and PI = Purchase Intention, and \* = removed items

**4.2. Hypothesis Testing**

The multi-group analysis approach has been adopted using CB-SEM on AMOS by adding a structural model based on the data computed for 2 groups (Pakistan and Malaysia). The multi-group invariance analysis was performed to compute the difference variance between two groups of the sample. The results showed that there is no significant difference exists for constrained paths as  $\chi^2$  difference=1.49, df difference= 2, with significant at  $p=.001$  and for the unconstrained paths as  $\chi^2$  difference=1.67, df difference= 2, with significant at  $p=.001$  and the difference was significant for both constrained and unconstrained (all paths). To examine the mediating hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> that postulated the mediating influence of the ALB between PLA and PI across both nations the research used the hierarchal linear modeling (from now HLM) procedure along with bootstrapping. Using the multi-group approach, the HLM was utilized for the assessment of the mediating influence of the ALB in both nations’ data.



**Figure 3: Structural Model (Malaysia)**



**Figure 3: Structural Model (Pakistan)**

The results of SEM showed that ALB mediates the relationship between the PLA and PI across both nations (see Table 6 and Figure 3). However, the indirect impact of the ALB had different intensity: (1) Pakistan ( $\beta = .29, p=.01$ ), and (2) Malaysia ( $\beta = .41, p=.01$ ). The findings revealed that the direct influence of the PLA on PI was also significant across both nations: (1) Pakistan ( $\beta = .19, p=.01$ ), and (2) Malaysia ( $\beta = .34, p=.01$ ). Hence results revealed that  $H_1$  was acknowledged. While interpreting the mediating results using HLM guidelines the  $H_2$  was acknowledged and suggested partial mediation of ALB in both data sets. These results have endorsed the previous literature that supports to underlying mechanism role of the ALB of the consumers affecting their PI (Pentina et al., 2018; Roy, et al., 2018; Sung, 2021). Therefore, it suggests that if the ALB (Pak:  $\beta = .29$ , Mal:  $\beta = .41$ ) is positively altered by the marketing communication content the consumption of the luxury brands gets positive alteration correspondingly. Although  $H_1$  verified that PLA has a direct and positive influence on PI across cultures (Pak:  $\beta = .19$ , Mal:  $\beta = .34$ ) when luxury brands are in question, however, consumers ALB is directly connected to their PI.

**Table 6: Mediation of ALB Results**

Mediation Models	Direct Effect $\beta$	Indirect Effect $\beta$	Mediation
Pakistan	.19	.29	Partial
Malaysia	.34	.41	Partial

$\beta =$  Standardized Regression Weight

For testing the moderation of ASV among Pakistani and Malaysian data, two models were examined by using steps recommended by Hayes, et al., (2017). Model 1 examined the main effect of PLA and ASV on ALB. For the sample of Pakistan, the addition of PLA and ASV model explained 39% of the variance for ALB, whereas a variance of 43% among the Malaysian model. The main effect of PLA was ( $\beta = .21, p<.001$ ) and ASV was ( $\beta = .17, p<.001$ ) for Pakistan. The main effect of PLA for Malaysia was ( $\beta = .40, p<.001$ ) and ASV was ( $\beta = .29, p<.001$ ). Next, the second model was entered after introducing the interactional term for determining the moderating effect of ASV across both nations independently (see Table 7).

The moderating model for Pakistani sample exhibited acceptable fitness as;  $\chi^2 = 1983.38$ ,  $df = 968$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.04$ ; CFI = .90; IFI = .89; TLI = .91; SRMSR = .061; and RMSEA = .040. The moderating model for Malaysian sample also revealed adequate fitness as; an adequate model fitness:  $\chi^2 = 2778.42$ ,  $df = 2159$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.28$ ; CFI = .97; IFI = .99; TLI = .94; SRMSR = .05; and RMSEA = .034. The interactional influence of the PLA x ASV was ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p < .030$ ) and with  $R^2 = .40$  among the Pakistani sample. While for Malaysians was ( $\beta = .36$ ,  $p < .030$ ) with  $R^2 = .65$ . It supported the H<sub>3</sub> thus, it can be concluded that in the case of advertising appeal with assertiveness, Malaysians would have a positive impact, in contrast to the Pakistanis as it has less effect on the PLA and ALB link among them. These results are consistent with the GLOBE model statistics on assertiveness scores of both nations. These results validate the advertising cultural influence theory that suggests that there is key role culture in developing the consumer behavioral pattern. The moderation results are in line with the Malaysian and Pakistani country societal inclination towards the assertiveness described in the GLOBE model. The inferences have been reported in the next section. Furthermore, a slope analysis was also performed to visualize the moderating implications.

**Table 7: Moderation of Cultural Norms Results**

	Pakistan		Malaysia	
Dependent Variables: ALB	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Step 1: Independent Variables: PLA	.21*	.21*	.40*	.40*
ASV	.17*	.17*	.29*	.29*
R <sup>2</sup>	.39		.43	
Step 2: Moderator PLA X ASV		.12*		.36*
R <sup>2</sup>		.46		.52
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.07		.09

Note. R<sup>2</sup> = proportion of variance explained by antecedent in both models and \*= $p < 0.001$ .

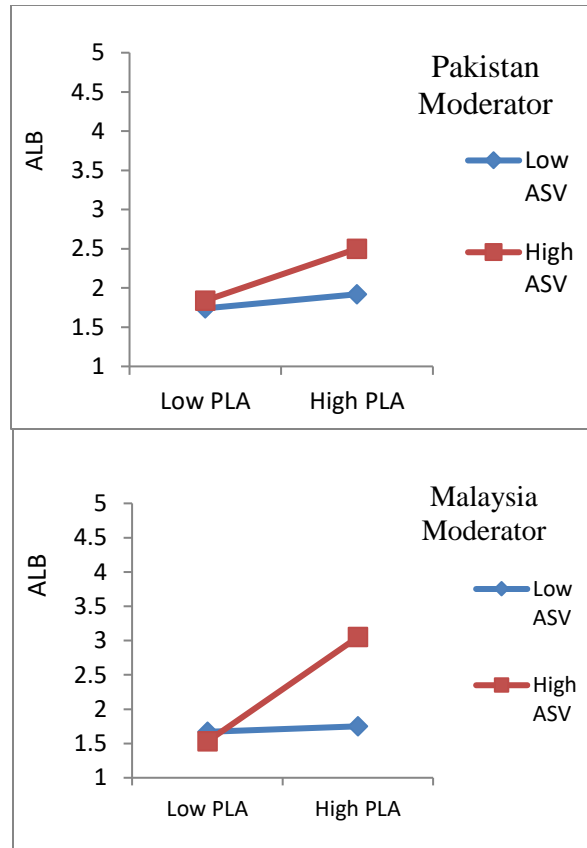
### 5. Discussion

There is a lack of consensus about the role of the national culture on luxury brand consumption which raised a relevant question that does cultural factors really matter to luxury brands' consumption (Ganjoo, 2020; Lawry, 2021; Zhou, et al., 2015). Subsequently, recent calls for research have been made due to the international expansion of luxury brands in emerging markets (Boer, 2018). For instance, Ko et al. (2019) noted that cross-cultural studies are required to tap understanding of the cultural influences on the consumption patterns of luxury brands. Drawing on this knowledge gap, this study provided evidence on the localized approach is an effective marketing communication strategy for luxury brands to enter emerging markets (Bailey et al., 2021). The results of our study validated the prior theories such as GLOBE and advertising culture influence

theory that adoption of the national culture can make a difference in motivating the consumer towards the luxury brands. Theoretically, this study has unfolded the interaction pattern attributed to the advertisement feature congruence with cultural norm meanings and hypothesized that this congruence may impact PI. This is consistent with literature that has indicated that an individual's perceptions towards the advertisement shape the perceptions of the advertisement (Sung et al., 2020; Terlutter, et al., 2010; Zhou, et al., 2015). The results of Hypothesis 1 confirmed that individuals' perceptions about the luxury brand advertisement messages/appeal influence PI across two nations. Thereby results reinforced the past studies that also supported consumers are inclined towards using luxury brands (Shaikh, et al. 2017; Zakaria, et al., 2020). For instance, Salman and Warraich (2016) found that Pakistanis have a harmonious response to luxury products. However, the Malaysians reported more inclination towards a luxury brand and based on literature that was anticipated in this research in hypothesis and supported by empirical findings.

The current research argued that norm centered approach would clarify the implication of this mediating effect in both nations. The cultural dimension of assertiveness is used to tap the societal differences that how individuals evaluate the advertising appeal to determine their attitude towards the luxury brand. It's also in line with the TPB assumption by considering the belief of the individuals to understand the attitudinal effects and supports the context of our study. For instance, developing an attitude based on the understanding of the social role of the advertisement of the Malaysians and Pakistanis advertisement may be different. Hypothesis 2 and 3 allow us to evaluate how individuals from different countries assess luxury brand advertising by using their cultural interpretations. The results of H<sub>2</sub> validated the mediating role of ALB across two nations. These results are contingent on the prior studies that highlighted the attitude role as the underlying mechanism in affecting the effect of the communication content (Lawry, 2021; Raza & Umer, 2021; Shahid & Paul, 2021). The results suggest that there are differences across the two nations, Malaysians showed a strong consumption pattern towards the luxury brands in contrast to the Pakistanis (see figure 4).

On the other hand, the results of hypothesis 3 have validated the GLOBE model results. For example, it was expected that Pakistanis and Malaysians being a part of Asian Culture have the attribute of valuing cultural norms. GLOBE did not measure Pakistan, but, other nations in the South Asian Cluster such as Malaysia was being ranked high on uncertainty avoidance. Our results also validated the past studies (see Fransen et al., 2015; Jhamb et al., 2020; Sung et al., 2020; Zhou, et al., 2015) that recommended considering the societal and cultural elements alongside the information or entertainment feature to measure attitude towards the advertising. Thus, it was hypothesized (H<sub>3</sub>) that a high tendency of norm conformation exists among Pakistanis and Malaysians but the intensity of the assertiveness would be more strong. It was expected that Malaysians may get a strong influence from the cultural orientation of assertiveness as norm conformation may play its part specifically, in the case of a luxury brand. The results validated this notion (see Figure 4) and confirmed that assertiveness as a societal value has a critical role to play in the promotion of luxury brands in emerging markets.



**Figure 4. Cross-Cultural Differences in Moderation of Assertiveness**

*5.1. Theoretical and Managerial Contributions*

Fischer and Poortinga, (2012) explained that the use of cultural dimension or norm for understanding consumer behavior. The particular dimension (norm) orientation of individuals can be associated with some particular behavior. Thus, it is the link between certain norms and the advertised attribute of the product that, to a certain extent, supports predicted consumer behavior. To that end, norms are linked with advertised product characteristics (Bailey et al., 2021; Quanyly et al., 2012). Therefore, ample literature called to link a particular product advertisement message with a specific norm to find out the possible association of this phenomenon with purchasing intention and consumer behavior. Consequently, this study is underpinned to address the paucity in the literature that does individuals associate their cultural orientation with advertisement presentation while making judgments about luxury brands. In other words, what are the intervening factors that must be acknowledged to link consumption choice to underlying norms?

Past studies used the Minkov and Blagoev (2012) proposition that measuring the individual's value is a rigorous way to measure cultural influences that are deeply rooted in conventional wisdom. They argued that collective culture can be measured by considering the individual's value. This is known as the *ecological value assumption*, which suggests that knowing the individuals' cultural values is an adequate method of knowing any culture. However, House et al. (2010) seem to disagree with this conventional approach. They argued that measuring culture by only knowing about the individuals' preferences and then aggregating the outcomes at the cultural level, only knows their values. Further, Sivakumar and Nakata, (2001) have criticized Hofstede's dimensions for dipping multidimensional constructs culture into five simple dimensions. They contended that this may not tap into cultural malleability, and may also overlook cultural heterogeneity within a culture. Saleem et al., (2015) also concluded that deliberation on the differences between values and practices can enable an improved clarification of the association between society and its advertising. The current study followed the recommendation of past literature (e.g., Bailey et al., 2021; Lawry, 2021; Saleem et al., 2015; Sung, 2021) and assumed that the evaluation of the advertisement features leads toward the development of a positive attitude towards the brand. Moreover, the study addressed the call of research by scholars that have argued that individuals use their cultural interpretations to understand the meanings of these appeals. Therefore, the study assumed that in the case of congruence with their norms, the advertisement effects can be positive. The cultural dynamics of Malaysia and Pakistan are entirely different. Malaysia is considered a moderate Muslim country, whereas Pakistan is a sensitive society (Taras, et al., 2010). The current study affirmed that the attitude towards the luxury brand, it is important to consider the construct of attitude with an explanation of several societal factors.

This study validated the notion of the GLOBE assertiveness dimensions as a determinant of an individual's ALB and provided valuable information to marketers about the interaction of the PLA with assertiveness. Furthermore, current research offers novel information by clarifying the national culture and advances the advertising cultural influence theory in the area of luxury brands. The results provide evidence that the cultural orientations have a key role to play, the convergence of marketing communication messages with the cultural orientation of the consumer. These cultural orientations embedded in the advertising cues have been experimented in this study that largely validates the prior cultural models such as GLOBE and suggested that luxury brands could be successful in emerging markets by adopting the localized advertising approach. The results provided practical suggestions for marketers working in emerging markets for the promotion of luxury brands. The results suggested that individuals of two different cultures Pakistan and Malaysia interpret the advertising meanings in their cultural context. Therefore, marketers while planning advertising campaigns may consider several factors including (1) identify the particular norm/ cultural orientation associated with the behavior in question, (2) develop advertisements presentation and message in line with the identified cultural norm/ cultural orientation, and (3) advertised features such as action cues must be directive (assertive) in case of luxury brands.

### 5.2. Limitations and Future Recommendations

Firstly, the study employed the quasi-experimental design, albeit it has internal validity but lacks generalizability due to the limited number of the sample included in the study. Future studies may consider conducting a survey based on a large sample. Secondly, the current study considered one type of cultural orientation future studies may identify more norms associated with multiple product categories to validate the application of the norm-driven advertising campaigns. Lastly, the future study also considers measuring the brand-related associations such as the brand image to verify any possible association of cultural beliefs with them.

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