

# Style Congruency and Persuasion: A Cross-cultural Study Into the Influence of Differences in Style Dimensions on the Persuasiveness of Business Newsletters in Great Britain and the Netherlands

## Research Article

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**Abstract—Research problem:** The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether style congruency on the dimensions succinct-elaborate and instrumental-affective influenced the persuasiveness of business newsletters in the Netherlands and Great Britain. **Research question:** Is a writing style more persuasive in a country with cultural preferences that are congruent with this writing style? **Literature review:** The purpose of the literature review was to present two theoretical frameworks for investigating cross-cultural differences in style preferences. Theories about cross-cultural differences in value orientations show that value orientations can be linked to cross-cultural differences in persuasion. Theories about cross-cultural differences in communication styles show that preferences for particular communication styles can be linked to cultural value orientations. **Methodology:** Two quantitative experimental studies were conducted among 344 business-to-business customers of a company in the Netherlands and Great Britain. Using seven-point scales, participants evaluated different versions of a newsletter on comprehensibility, attractiveness, and intention to order goods. Statistical analyses included general linear model (GLM) repeated measures and two-way ANOVAs. **Results and discussion:** Findings reveal limited differences between the Dutch and British participants in preferences for communication styles. Consequently, it may not be worthwhile for organizations to adjust the style of their documents to preferences in different cultures. A limitation of the current study was that it only investigated style preferences for one particular business genre (i.e., newsletters). Future research should investigate stylistic preferences in other business genres and in other cultures.

**Index Terms**—Persuasion, intercultural communication, communication style.

## INTRODUCTION

Due to increasing globalization, organizations (both profit and not for profit) are faced with the need to think about effective ways of addressing their international audiences. One issue that has occupied many (international) communication researchers is whether organizations should take a standardization or localization approach in their communication. (For a review, see [1].) Proponents of standardization [2], [3] argue that globalization will lead to converging needs and tastes of consumers and a gradual erosion of differences between cultures, which facilitates standardization of marketing communication. On the other hand, advocates of localization [4] argue that increasing

globalization will lead people to stress their local cultural identity and that companies would thus be well-advised to adapt their marketing communication to the needs and preferences of local target markets. Increasingly, researchers have called for a compromise approach in which standardization and adaptation are regarded as two ends of the same continuum and where the choice for standardization or adaptation is determined by situation-specific aspects, such as product type, company performance, or competition in the local target market [1], [5]. In other words, depending on such contextual factors, an organization may decide to standardize or localize its communication to a greater or lesser degree. If an organization decides to localize its communication strategy, the question is how messages should be adapted to appeal to audiences in different cultures.

Previous research has demonstrated that content, structure, and style are important factors in determining the persuasiveness of a message [6]–[8]. For documents designed to be used in an international context, the question is whether to adapt the content, structure, and style of documents to preferences of the different target countries. Studies in this research area have examined whether messages that are congruent

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with, in other words, adapted to, these preferences, are more effective than messages that are incongruent with, hence not adapted to such preferences. In recent decades, a growing body of research has been directed at investigating cross-cultural differences in structure, content, and style for a variety of documents, such as advertisements [9], [10]; user manuals [11], [12]; business letters [13], [14]; HIV/AIDS campaigns [15]; and fundraising letters [16]. For example, studies investigating cross-cultural variation in advertisements have pointed to the importance of value congruency in designing messages for audiences from different cultural backgrounds [17]–[20]. These studies found that adapting the values expressed in advertising messages to prevalent values in the target culture led to more persuasive advertising than messages that were not adapted to local cultural preferences.

Studies investigating cross-cultural variation in communication styles have demonstrated that style differences can be linked to cultural differences in value orientations. Several studies [21]–[23] have demonstrated that in individualist cultures (e.g., the US), in which honesty and openness are important values, communication tends to be straightforward and direct, whereas in collectivist cultures, which emphasize group harmony and conformity, communication tends to be more ambiguous and indirect. Although preferences for communication styles have been found to vary across cultures, little is known to date about whether style congruency (i.e., adapting the style of a message to the preferred communication style in a particular culture) may affect the persuasiveness of a message. Although there is a growing body of studies investigating the dimension direct-indirect, [24]–[27], to the best of our knowledge, only one study [28] has to date attempted to investigate the effect of style congruency for other style dimensions.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether style congruency on two of Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's [21] dimensions (succinct-elaborate and instrumental-affective) influenced the persuasiveness of business newsletters in the Netherlands and Great Britain. The research question for this study was therefore as follows: To what extent is a writing style more persuasive in a country with cultural preferences that are *congruent* with this writing style than in a country with cultural preferences that are not *congruent* with this writing style?

If style congruency influences the persuasiveness of messages, the implication for organizations might be that their messages may need to be adapted to the stylistic preferences of culturally diverse target markets. Theories suggest that a particular style may be more persuasive in one country than in another and that, as a result, organizations should not issue standardized, global messages, but should localize the style of their messages. This would then lead to a message with a congruent style being found more effective in terms of reader evaluation, and ultimately, readers' purchase intentions. On the other hand, if no empirical evidence is found for the theoretical benefits of style congruency, organizations do not need to spend time and effort localizing the style of their documentation and have good grounds for issuing standardized documents to reach customers in different countries. For organizations, therefore, knowledge about the effect of style congruency is essential in that this allows them to decide whether adjusting the style of their documents is worth the costs involved in producing different style-congruent documents for audiences with different cultural backgrounds.

This paper starts with a review of the relevant literature pertaining to cross-cultural differences in value preferences and communication styles. This is followed by a section setting out the methodology we used to answer the research question. Subsequently, the results of our experimental study into cross-cultural difference in style dimension in the Netherlands and the UK will be presented. In the final section, the conclusions following from the results of our study will be discussed, along with the limitations of the study. We will conclude this paper by giving suggestions for future research following from our study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to provide a theoretical background to our study and to identify any gaps in the current body of knowledge relating to empirical research on cross-cultural differences on style dimensions. This section discusses the theoretical framework, the selection of literature, cross-cultural differences in value orientations, cross-cultural variability in communication styles, empirical research into style dimensions, cross-cultural differences in Great Britain and the Netherlands, and the hypotheses emerging from the literature.

**Theoretical Framework** The current study is based on two main areas of research. The first

research area comprises theories relating to differences in value hierarchies between cultures and the way these different value orientations impact on the persuasiveness of messages. A seminal theory in this area is Hofstede's [32] work on cultural dimensions. In addition, important insights about the link between cultural dimensions and persuasion have been put forward by Schwartz [29], who has guided much empirical research on cross-cultural differences in persuasion. The second area of research comprised theories relating to differences in communication styles between cultures and how these may be related to differences in value orientations across cultures. The guiding framework linking communication styles to cultural dimensions is Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's [21] work on cross-cultural variability in preferences for communication styles. Although the Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21] framework has been the basis for some empirical research on cross-cultural differences in style preferences, it is, to date, an area of research that has received limited attention from empirical researchers. The empirical studies in this tradition are reviewed in order to isolate any gaps in knowledge that need to be investigated.

**Selection of Literature** Seminal works from the theoretical frameworks were selected for review. In addition, an extensive search was conducted of empirical studies in the field of cross-cultural differences in style dimensions. Search terms included "cross-cultural differences Great Britain the Netherlands," "communication styles," "value orientations," and "persuasion."

### **Cross-cultural Differences in Value Orientations**

As individuals are raised in a culture, they learn the most important values of their culture. These values act as guiding principles for individual members of the culture in determining how they should judge "behavior, people and events" [29]. Values have been found to have an important influence on individuals' decision processes and on consumer behavior [4], [30], [31]. Individuals use values to evaluate products and to decide on purchases, but they also use values to evaluate messages, such as advertisements or newsletters. For example, members of a culture where security is an important value may be more inclined to look more favorably upon an advertisement highlighting a car's safety features than on an advertisement emphasizing a car's speed.

Although values have been found to be universal [29], cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that

cultures differ in the relative importance attached to particular values over others [32]. Consequently, cultures may have different value orientations, which may have implications for how messages are evaluated across cultures. Research has provided some, but by no means conclusive, evidence for the importance of value congruency in appealing to audiences from different cultural backgrounds in, for example, advertisements [17], [19], [33]–[35] or fundraising letters [18], [36]. To date, little is known about the genre dependency of value congruency.

**Cross-cultural Variability in Communication Styles** More important for the present study, value orientations have also been linked to cross-cultural differences in preferred communication styles [21]–[23], [37]. A culture's value orientation determines what is regarded as acceptable (verbal) behavior in the culture and, consequently, has an important influence on how members of a culture communicate. Cultural variations in value orientation are thus reflected in different preferences for communication styles across cultures. A key study in this respect is that of Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21], who provide a detailed account of the relationship between cultural dimensions and communication styles. In their review of research into communication styles, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey distinguish four dimensions of communication styles, which they link to variations on cultural dimensions as distinguished by Hofstede [32]. The cultural dimension that has figured most prominently in explanations of cross-cultural differences in communication styles is the dimension of individualism-collectivism, which is linked to directness of communication [24], [26], [37]. Members of individualist cultures, where openness and honesty are highly valued principles, tend to prefer a straightforward and direct style of communication where a speaker's goals are formulated explicitly. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, where group harmony and conformity are guiding principles, communication tends to be more ambiguous and indirect and speakers formulate their goals more implicitly and, hence, indirectly.

A second style dimension that Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21] distinguish is the personal versus contextual communication style, which is also linked to individualism-collectivism, and, in addition, to Hofstede's power distance:

the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a nationality expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. [32, p. 98]

In a personal communication style, the emphasis is on the sender's identity, whereas in a contextual style, the role relationships within a group are more important. In individualist cultures with low scores on Hofstede's power distance dimension (e.g., the US), members tend to prefer a personal communication style in which the emphasis is on the expression of the sender's identity. Conversely, members of collectivist cultures with high power distance scores (e.g., Japan) tend to prefer a contextual style of verbal interaction, where the emphasis is on role identity rather than sender identity.

Along similar lines, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21] argue that variations in individualism versus collectivism can be used to explain differences between cultures on a third dimension, instrumental versus affective communication style. An instrumental style is goal oriented and sender oriented, whereas an affective style is more process oriented and relationship oriented. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey argue that an instrumental style is more characteristic of individualist cultures, where the needs of an individual are more important than the needs of the group and achievement of goals is a primary concern. Hence, in individualist cultures, communication tends to be more typically goal oriented and sender oriented. In line with this, an instrumental style is characterized by more references to successes and achievements and first person pronouns [46].

At the other end of this dimension, an affective style is more characteristic of collectivist cultures, where mutual-face maintenance and interpersonal processes rather than concern for individual needs are highly valued. In collectivist cultures communication tends to be more process oriented and receiver oriented. In line with this, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21] argue that an affective style is characterized by, for example, fewer references to achievements, successes, and more second person pronouns.

Although cultural individualism-collectivism has proven to be a robust construct, cross-cultural research has shown that not all individualist cultures (and not all collectivist cultures) necessarily share the same value orientation. Notably, research has revealed differences across individualist cultures with respect to achievement orientations and perception of the self [24], [38]. Although achievement is valued in all individualist cultures, it is more highly valued in some than in others. For example, the US has consistently

emerged as a culture in which achievement is more highly valued than in other individualist cultures such as, for example, Australia [31] or Denmark [38]. To account for differences in value orientations across individualist or across collectivist cultures, several studies have introduced cultural orientations on horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism [39]–[41]. In horizontal cultures, there is a tradition of equality and of regarding the self as having the same status as others. In individualist cultures with a horizontal orientation, such as Denmark or the Netherlands [42], the self is important, but equal to others, and although success and achievement are appreciated, conspicuous success and showing off are frowned upon [30]. In individualist cultures with a vertical orientation on the other hand, success and achievement are highly valued, encouraged and rewarded, and hierarchical status differences are acceptable [40]. Vertical orientations have been found to be associated with endorsement of self-enhancement values [29], such as achievement and power, whereas horizontal orientations have been found to be associated with endorsement of self-transcendence [29], which includes values relating to benevolence and universalism [38].

The distinction between horizontal and vertical cultural orientations bears a strong resemblance to Hofstede's [32] cultural dimension of masculinity-femininity. In masculine cultures, gender roles are clearly divided, and values such as assertiveness, ambition, and achievement are regarded as important. Members of feminine cultures, which are characterized by overlapping gender roles, endorse values aimed at enhancing relationships, such as understanding, modesty and concern for others [32]. In the present study, the assumption is that in cultures with a horizontal individualist orientation (or low masculinity scores), where the emphasis is on self-transcendence values, members will display a preference for an affective communication style, which can be characterized as receiver and process oriented. In cultures with a vertical individualist orientation (or high masculinity scores), where self-enhancement values are endorsed, the preference will be for a sender oriented, goal oriented and, thus, instrumental style of communication.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This may seem to be in contrast with the common recommendation in western business communication handbooks to use the so-called 'you-attitude' in business writing. However, it may be that this type of recommendation is given to counter a fundamental preference in western cultures for sender-oriented communication.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey distinguish a fourth style dimension, elaborate-succinct, which is related to: “the quantity of talk that is valued in different cultures” [21, p. 105] and which they link to Hofstede’s [32] uncertainty avoidance index. They review a number of studies supporting evidence that an elaborate communication style has been found to be characteristic of cultures with moderate scores on uncertainty avoidance (e.g., Middle Eastern cultures such as Egypt and Iran), whereas speakers from cultures with high-uncertainty avoidance scores (e.g., Asian cultures) prefer a more succinct communication style. Speakers from cultures with low scores on Hofstede’s uncertainty avoidance index (US and Northern European cultures) have been found to prefer an exacting communication style, which is the midpoint position on the succinct-elaborate dimension.

#### **Empirical Research Into Style Dimensions**

The majority of empirical studies investigating cross-cultural differences in communication styles have focused on the style dimension direct-indirect [27], [43]–[45] and have found that cultural differences on this style dimension may give rise to misunderstandings. However, few studies have focused on cross-cultural differences with respect to other style dimensions, and fewer still have investigated whether style congruency in documents (i.e., adjusting the style to the preferred style in a particular culture) has an effect on the persuasiveness of documents.

One of the few studies to date to include all four style dimensions was Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons [46], who investigated differences in language use between men and women for the style dimensions put forward by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21]. Mulac et al. made an inventory of what other studies have revealed about “typical” male/female language use and concluded that men more often use imperatives, elliptical sentences and evaluative adjectives, while women more often make use of adverbs of intensity, longer sentences, and hedges. They subsequently report on three experiments in which they found that the linguistic characteristics typically used by men were regarded as more direct, succinct, personal and instrumental, whereas the linguistic characteristics typically used by women were regarded as more indirect, elaborate, and affective. By linking specific linguistic characteristics to particular communication styles, they provided a useful tool for operationalizing communicative styles linguistically.

In a previous study on the effects of style congruency [28], Mulac *et al.*’s [46] linguistic operationalizations of the succinct-elaborate dimension were used to investigate whether style congruency in fundraising letters had an effect on the persuasiveness of fundraising letters in five European cultures: Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Spain. In an experimental study, the linguistic characteristics of the succinct-elaborate dimension as described in Mulac et al.’s [46] study were manipulated, which resulted in a succinct and an elaborate version of a fundraising letter. These fundraising letters were (back)-translated from Dutch to German, French, and Spanish and were evaluated by participants in the countries under study. Findings showed that although style differences between the letters were recognized, variations in style did not affect the persuasiveness of the letters. However, since empirical evidence so far is inconclusive and because only one style dimension has been investigated for one particular genre, more studies are needed to (a) (further) develop linguistic operationalizations of the different style dimensions and (b) investigate the effect of style congruency for other documents.

**Cross-cultural Differences Great Britain—The Netherlands** The majority of studies investigating style differences discussed before have focused on cultural variability for the dimension individualism-collectivism in relation to directness of communication style and have done so for widely differing cultures, such as the US versus Asian or Arab cultures. Western European cultures, however, are relatively homogeneous in terms of individualism-collectivism, but vary more significantly on Hofstede’s [32] dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and masculinity-femininity. It is on these two dimensions that we will focus in the present study in our investigation of readers’ reactions to newsletters in the Netherlands and Great Britain.

As is shown in Table I, differences between the Netherlands and Great Britain on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions of power distance and individualism-collectivism are relatively minor, but more substantial differences between the two countries can be found on the dimensions of masculinity-femininity and uncertainty-avoidance. Dutch culture can be characterized as relatively feminine and high-uncertainty avoidant compared to the relatively masculine and low-uncertainty avoidant British culture. Both cultures are positioned at the individualist extreme of the

TABLE I  
SCORES FOR THE NETHERLANDS AND GREAT BRITAIN FOR  
FOUR DIMENSIONS OF HOFSTEDE

Dimensions	the Netherlands	Great Britain
Power distance	38	35
Individualism – Collectivism	80	89
Masculinity – Femininity	14	66
Uncertainty Avoidance	53	35

Notes: [32, pp. 87, 151, 215, 286]. Power distance: 0 = low power distance; 100 = high power distance; Individualism – Collectivism: 0 = collectivistic; 100 = individualistic; Masculinity – Femininity: 0 = feminine; 100 = masculine; Uncertainty Avoidance: 0 = low uncertainty avoidance; 100 = high uncertainty avoidance

individualism-collectivism dimension, although they have been found to differ along dimensions of horizontal and vertical orientations of individualism [40]. The Netherlands can be characterized as a relatively horizontal individualist culture [42], [47] in the sense that although self-actualization and competition are important, equality among individuals is valued highly. Although success and ambition are important, blatant financial gain is not. Great Britain is also an individualist culture, but can be characterized as more vertically-oriented on the individualism dimension in which ambition, success and “standing out” are regarded as highly valued and inequality in status is accepted as a fact of life [48].

### Hypotheses Emerging From the Literature

The focus of the present study was on two of the style dimensions distinguished by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21]: the dimension elaborate-succinct and the dimension instrumental-affective for two reasons. The first reason is that these dimensions have been the topic of very few studies to date (but see [28]). The second reason can be found in the predictions that Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey make about the relation between these two communication styles and cultural dimensions as distinguished by Hofstede [32]. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey argue that preferences on the dimension instrumental-affective can be linked to individualism-collectivism, and that preferences for succinct or elaborate communication styles can be linked to Hofstede’s dimension of uncertainty avoidance.

In the present study, we will argue that the dimension instrumental-affective can also be linked to Hofstede’s dimension of masculinity-femininity. The assumption is that in masculine cultures, where the self is important and achievement and success are appreciated and encouraged, the preference will be for an instrumental communication style, which can be characterized as sender-oriented and goal-oriented. Conversely, the assumption is that an affective communication style, which

is process-oriented and receiver-oriented, will be the preferred style in feminine cultures where maintenance of personal relationships and concern for others are important. In the present study, the assumption was that in Great Britain, a masculine culture (and a more vertically oriented individualist culture), the preferred communication style would be more instrumental, whereas in the Netherlands, which is a feminine culture (and a more horizontally oriented individualist culture), the preferred communication style would be more affective. The overarching hypothesis in the present study was that style congruency is more persuasive than style incongruency. Two experimental studies (See the Methodology section for details.) were carried out in which we investigated Dutch and British participants’ reactions to different communication styles in business newsletters. We formulated the following subhypotheses for the first style dimension under investigation: affective-instrumental (Study I):

**H1a.** In the Netherlands, a business newsletter with an affective style is more persuasive than in Great Britain.

**H1b.** In Great Britain a business newsletter with an instrumental style is more persuasive than in the Netherlands.

For the second style dimension under investigation, succinct-elaborate, the assumption was that in Great Britain, which can be characterized as a relatively low-uncertainty avoidance culture, a more elaborate communication style would be preferred, whereas in the Netherlands, a high-uncertainty avoidance culture, a more succinct communication style would be preferred. Thus, the following two subhypotheses were formulated (Study II):

**H2a.** In the Netherlands, a business newsletter with a succinct style is more persuasive than in Great Britain.

**H2b.** In Great Britain, a business newsletter with an elaborate style is more persuasive than in the Netherlands.

Previous research has demonstrated that cross-cultural variation in value orientations applies to differences at a global and cultural level, but that differences in value orientations may apply to individual members of a culture [34]. In masculine cultures, for example, some individuals may have less masculine value orientations than others. Consequently, previous research has pointed to the importance of measuring individual value hierarchies in cross-cultural experimental

studies [49]. Accordingly, it has been shown that while differences in document evaluation were not found between countries, such differences were found between individuals from these countries with different value orientations [17]. In the present study, the following subhypotheses were formulated to address the effects of style congruency in relation to differences in individual value orientations.

**H3a.** A business newsletter with an affective style is more persuasive for individuals with a feminine value orientation than for individuals with a masculine value orientation.

**H3b.** A business newsletter with an instrumental style is more persuasive for individuals with a masculine value orientation than for individuals with a feminine value orientation.

**H4a.** A business newsletter with a succinct style is more persuasive for individuals with a high-uncertainty avoidance value orientation than for individuals with a low-uncertainty avoidance orientation.

**H4b.** A business newsletter with an elaborate style is more persuasive for individuals with a low-uncertainty avoidance value orientation than for individuals with a high-uncertainty avoidance value orientation.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this section is to explain the methodology employed in this study to test the hypotheses, in order to allow readers to evaluate the basis of our findings and to allow other researchers to replicate our study. This section includes a description of the study's choice of research methodology, participants, design, materials used in study I, materials used in study II, instrument (dependent variables), data analysis, as well as validity and generalizability of the data.

**Choice of Research Methodology** The research method chosen in this study was an experiment. In an experimental design, participants react to different versions of a controlled treatment, in which an independent variable has been systematically manipulated. In the current study, participants were asked to react to versions of the same text with different style characteristics. The main reason why an experimental design was chosen was that it allows for a strict manipulation of style as an independent variable and it simultaneously eliminates the effects of possible

confounding influences on the dependent variables. Since style was the only variable manipulated, our design allowed us to attribute any effects of this manipulation to the difference in style alone. Alternative research strategies would not have allowed us to do this. A case study, in which, for instance, the style of a particular newsletter was analyzed, would have enabled us to observe what writers do and not what effect their stylistic choices have on the reader. A survey would have yielded insight into people's opinions about preferred styles in their culture, but would not have allowed us to measure their reactions to actual stylistic features.

Two experimental studies were carried out in which participants were asked to evaluate differently styled newsletters.

**Participants** For both studies, participants were recruited who were business-to-business customers of the company Time/system, based in Great Britain and the Netherlands. These customers were on the mailing list of the company and, thus, received the company's newsletters. For study I, an online questionnaire was mailed to 6861 Dutch and 8936 British customers. Participants were invited to click on a link if they felt like participating in the study. For study II, paper questionnaires were mailed to 100 Dutch and 100 British randomly selected customers inviting them to take part. In addition, the questionnaires were personally handed to 35 Dutch and 35 British customers attending a course organized by the company. Customers were invited to participate in the study.

Approval from an internal review board (IRB) and explicit written consent from the participants was not sought for this study, since this is not required nor common practice in this research area in the Netherlands.

**Design** Both studies used a mixed-model design with *nationality* as between-subject factor and *style* as within-subject factor (instrumental-affective for Study I; succinct-elaborate for Study II). In both studies, participants evaluated two different styles in a newsletter text by means of a questionnaire. For both studies, two versions of a questionnaire were developed in which the order of the texts was counterbalanced to prevent order effects.

**Materials for Study I:** The texts for the business newsletters were taken from the English websites of companies producing diaries and time-management systems. The texts were subsequently manipulated to display linguistic characteristics of the

instrumental and affective ends of the style dimension and then translated into Dutch.

Two newsletters were developed in English and in Dutch, which differed on a number of linguistic characteristics derived from Mulac et al. [46] and Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21]. The instrumental newsletter included more characteristics of an instrumental style, such as more references to achievements, successes, and quantities, locatives, and first person pronouns. The affective newsletter included fewer references to achievements, successes and quantities, locatives and more second person pronouns. The English texts of the newsletters are included in Appendix A.

*Materials for Study II:* The texts for the business newsletters were taken from English websites of companies producing diaries and time management systems. The texts were subsequently manipulated to display linguistic characteristics of the elaborate and succinct end of the style dimension and then translated into Dutch.

Two newsletters were developed in English and in Dutch, which differed on a number of linguistic characteristics derived from Mulac et al. [46] and Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21]. The elaborate newsletter was characterized by a more wordy style: longer sentences, more adverbs of intensity, adjectives, and dependent clauses. The succinct letter had a more concise and business-like style and included short and elliptical sentences, fewer adverbs of intensity, adjectives, and dependent clauses. The English texts of the newsletters are included in Appendix B.

*Instrument (Dependent Variables):* For both studies, questionnaires were constructed with 7-point scales to measure the persuasiveness of the business newsletters and participants' attitudes toward the newsletter (attractiveness and intelligibility) and to measure participants' perception of the style differences manipulated in the letters. For all scales, balanced scale techniques were used. Internal consistency of scales was calculated in terms of Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Qualifications of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were determined using the criteria in [52]. Composite means were calculated if the reliability of scales was found to be adequate or above ( $\alpha > 0.70$ ).

The questionnaires for the two studies were identical except for the questions constructed to measure participants' perception of style differences. In Study I (instrumental-affective), the questionnaire included two questions to check

whether the manipulation of communication style (instrumental versus affective) had been successful. Participants' evaluation of the style of the newsletter was measured using two 7-point Likert scales where participants were asked to judge the following characteristics: sender-orientation and receiver-orientation. In Study II (succinct-elaborate), the questionnaire included two questions to check whether the manipulation of communication style (succinct versus elaborate) had been successful. Participants' evaluation of the style of the newsletter was measured using two 7-point semantic differentials: concise-verbose, succinct-elaborate. The reliability of the items was good (both versions  $\alpha > 0.80$ ). The remaining questions of the questionnaire were the same for both studies. The persuasiveness of the newsletters was measured on the basis of intention to order and participants' attitude toward the newsletters (attractiveness and comprehensibility). Identical sets of 7-point scales were used in both studies.

Intention to order was measured with a 7-point Likert scale for the question: "After reading this text I would order products from Time/system." For attitude toward the newsletter, participants completed the statement "I think this text is" followed by eight 7-point semantic differentials (varied-monotonous, engaging-boring, irritating-pleasant, interesting-uninteresting, strange-unexceptional, appealing-distant, not enjoyable to read—enjoyable to read, natural-unnatural; based on [53]). The reliability of the eight items was good (both versions  $\alpha > 0.84$ ). The comprehensibility of the newsletter was measured with the statement "I think this text is" followed by four 7-point semantic differentials: incoherent-coherent, clear-unclear, easy-difficult, logically structured-illogically structured (based on [53]). The reliability of the four items was adequate (both versions  $\alpha > 0.70$ ).

Cross-cultural variation in value orientations applies to differences at a global, cultural level, but individual members of a culture may vary in what they consider important values. In masculine cultures, for example, some individuals may have less masculine value orientations than others. Consequently, previous research has pointed to the importance of measuring individual value hierarchies in cross-cultural experimental studies [49]. For both experimental studies, participants filled in an abridged version of the Schwartz value list included at the end of the questionnaire. The original Schwartz value list consists of 56



values clustered into ten value constructs: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security [29], [37], [54]. In Study I, the questionnaire included the constructs from the Schwartz list measuring masculinity-femininity: power (authority, wealth), achievement (success, capability, ambition), benevolence (helpfulness, honesty, forgivingness, loyalty) and universalism (broadminded, equality). Reliability for items was adequate ( $\alpha > 0.76$ ). In Study II, the questionnaire included the constructs from the Schwartz list measuring uncertainty avoidance: security (national security, neatness, balanced society and safety) and stimulation (varied life, daring and exciting life). Reliability of the items was adequate ( $\alpha > 0.75$ ). The original instructions from Schwartz were used. Participants were instructed to rate the importance of each value as a guiding principle in their life. The rating scale ranged from  $-1$  ("this value opposes the principles that guide you") to  $7$  ("this value is of supreme importance").

**Data Analysis** Both studies used a mixed-model design with *nationality* as a between-subject factor and *style* as a within-subject factor. For both studies, paired sample *t*-tests were used to analyze differences in value hierarchies between Dutch and British participants. In study I, a median split was used to categorize participants into a masculine and a feminine group, based on mean difference scores for masculine and feminine values. In study II, a median split was used to categorize participants into a low-uncertainty avoidance group and a high-uncertainty avoidance group based on the mean difference scores for stimulation values and security values. Paired sample *t*-tests were used to analyze differences between the masculine group and the feminine group and between the low-uncertainty avoidance group and the high-uncertainty avoidance group.

To test whether the manipulation of communication style had been successful, repeated measures analyses general linear model (GLM) were carried out with *nationality* as the between-subject factor and *style* as the within-subject factor and with manipulation check questions as the dependent variables in both studies. A repeated measures analysis was chosen because participants evaluated two texts consecutively, each characterized by a different style dimension.

To test the hypotheses, two-way ANOVAs with *nationality* and *value orientation* as factors were used to determine significant differences between

groups in both studies. A two-way ANOVAs was chosen because this is the appropriate test for determining differences between groups if there are two independent variables, as was the case in our studies. The two-way ANOVAs also measured interaction between the independent variables, *style* and *nationality*, to determine if participants in the two countries under investigation reacted differently to the two style dimensions in the studies.

**Validity and Generalizability of the Data** The newsletters used for materials in both studies were based on authentic newsletters, thus contributing to the ecological validity of the experiments. The internal validity was guaranteed by the manipulation of the style dimension in the newsletters, which was checked in two ways. Two independent linguists evaluated the letters in a pretest. In the actual experiments, the questionnaire contained a manipulation check, a question designed to check the success of the treatment. For the constructs in the test instrument, the questions were taken from previous studies. With regard to reliability, in the actual experiment, the reliability of all constructs ranged from adequate to good, as evidenced by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which is a measure of the extent to which items measure the same underlying construct.

As for the generalizability or the external validity in terms of the selection of participants, they were all professional business-to-business customers of an organization selling time-management systems and, hence, representative of the actual target group of the newsletters in this study. In addition, there was a large number of participants in the experiments, which enabled us to achieve a reasonable power and effect size (see [50] and [51]), certainly for the instrumental-affective style dimension in Study I. This means that it is quite likely that prominent existing differences in the dependent variables between text versions for the participants from the Netherlands and Great Britain are detected by the statistical tests used.

## RESULTS

The purpose of this section is to present the results of the two experimental studies that were carried out to answer the research question. This section presents a description of who participated in the study, value hierarchies, results of study I instrumental-affective style dimension, manipulation check-communication style of the newsletter, hypothesis testing

results—persuasiveness of the newsletters, results study II succinct-elaborate style dimension, manipulation check-communication style of the newsletter, and hypothesis testing results—persuasiveness of the newsletter.

**Who Participated in the Study** For Study I, 242 participants filled in the questionnaire: 142 Dutch participants and 100 British participants. With this number, assuming a medium effect size and an alpha of 0.05, a power of 0.97 was achieved (cf. [50], [51]). There were 159 (74%) male participants and 65 (25.6%) female participants. Most participants fell in the age category of 31–50.

For Study II, paper questionnaires were filled in by 102 participants: 50 Dutch participants and 52 British participants (achieving a power of .71 assuming a medium effect size and a power of 0.98 assuming a large effect size). There were 58 (56.8%) male participants and 44 (43.2%) female participants. Most participants fell in the age category of 31–50.

**Value Hierarchies** In Study I, Dutch participants were expected to have relatively feminine value orientations and to attach more importance to the feminine values in the Schwartz value list. Conversely, British participants were expected to attach more importance to masculine values than to feminine values. Average scores were calculated for both sets of values for all participants. Consistent with expectations, paired samples *t*-tests indicated that the Dutch participants attached more importance to feminine values ( $M = 5.58, SD = 0.10$ ) than to masculine values ( $M = 4.67, SD = -0.78; t(136) = 10.61, p < 0.001$ ), but that, contrary to expectations, the British participants also attached more importance to feminine values ( $M = 5.53, SD = 0.87$ ) than to masculine values ( $M = 5.04, SD = 1.06; t(89) = 4.50, p < 0.001$ ).

Since individual members of a culture may vary in value orientation, we examined whether, regardless of nationality, participants with feminine value orientations reacted differently to the two versions of the newsletter than participants with a masculine value orientation. A median split was used to categorize participants into a masculine and a feminine group, based on mean difference scores for masculine and feminine values. The resulting mean composite value scores were significantly different between the masculine and feminine groups ( $t(225) = 17.99, p < 0.001$ ).

In Study II, the expectation was that Dutch participants would value security values over stimulation values but that British participants would value stimulation values over security values. Average scores were calculated for both sets of values for all participants. Paired samples *t*-tests indicated that, contrary to predictions, for the Dutch participants there was no significant difference in the importance attached to security values ( $M = 4.86, SD = 1.02$ ) over stimulation values ( $M = 4.58, SD = 1.15; t(49) = 1.19, p = 0.24$ ). In line with predictions, the British participants, however, attached significantly more importance to stimulation values ( $M = 5.21, SD = 1.03$ ) than to security values ( $M = 3.94, SD = 1.03; t(51) = 5.44, p < 0.001$ ) and, thus, could be characterized as relatively low uncertainty avoidant.

Although a culture may be classified as low uncertainty avoidant in general, individual members may have their own value orientations. Therefore, we examined whether, regardless of nationality, individual participants with security-value orientations reacted differently to the two versions of the newsletter than participants with stimulation-value orientations. A median split was used to categorize participants into a low-uncertainty avoidance group and a high-uncertainty avoidance group based on the mean difference scores for stimulation values and security values. The resulting mean composite value scores were significantly different between the low-uncertainty avoidance group and the high-uncertainty avoidance group ( $t(95) = 16.21, p < 0.001$ ).

**Results of Study I (Instrumental-Affective Style Dimension)** In the first experimental study, participants from Great Britain and the Netherlands evaluated an instrumental version and an affective version of a newsletter.

*Manipulation Check (Communication Style of the Letter):* To test whether the manipulation of communication style had been successful, repeated measures analyses (GLM) were carried out with *nationality* as between-subject factor and *style* as within-subject factor and sender-orientation and receiver-orientation as dependent variables. Means and standard deviations are displayed in Table II. The instrumental newsletter was regarded as significantly more sender-oriented than the affective newsletter (Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.95, F(1,226) = 9.98, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.04$ ), whereas the affective-style newsletter was

TABLE II  
MEAN SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR SENDER ORIENTATION AND RECEIVER ORIENTATION

	Sender orientation of the newsletter <i>M (SD)</i>	Receiver orientation of the newsletter <i>M (SD)</i>
the Netherlands ( <i>n</i> = 134)		
Instrumental newsletter	2.24 (1.40)	3.73 (1.81)
Affective newsletter	2.63 (1.40)	3.07 (1.62)
Great Britain ( <i>n</i> = 93)		
Instrumental newsletter	2.21 (1.21)	3.54 (1.53)
Affective newsletter	2.45 (1.28)	3.26 (1.36)

Notes: for Dutch and British newsletters, sender-orientation of the newsletter (1 = sender oriented, 7 = not sender-oriented) and receiver-orientation of the newsletter (1 = receiver-oriented, 7 = not receiver-oriented)

TABLE III  
MEAN SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR INTENTION TO ORDER, ATTRACTIVENESS, AND COMPREHENSIBILITY

	Intention to order <i>M (SD) n</i>	Attractiveness <i>M (SD) n</i>	Comprehensibility <i>M (SD) n</i>
Instrumental newsletter			
the Netherlands	4.60 (1.31) 140	4.56 (1.15) 138	5.05 (1.13) 137
Great Britain	4.99 (1.41) 100	4.61 (1.00) 95	5.29 (1.04) 94
Masculine value orientation	5.03 (1.21) 113	4.75 (0.95) 111	5.24 (0.96) 110
Feminine value orientation	4.63 (1.40) 112	4.49 (1.18) 108	5.10 (1.19) 107
Affective newsletter			
the Netherlands	4.71 (1.38) 141	4.60 (1.04) 137	5.03 (1.18) 134
Great Britain	4.78 (1.41) 99	4.41 (0.81) 94	5.29 (1.00) 93
Masculine value orientation	4.67 (1.43) 114	4.41 (0.98) 110	5.07 (1.11) 108
Feminine value orientation	4.90 (1.27) 111	4.67 (0.89) 107	5.22 (1.12) 105

Notes: for intention to order goods (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree); attractiveness of the newsletter (1 = negative; 7 = positive); comprehensibility of the newsletter (1 = negative; 7 = positive) as a function of style (instrumental, affective) and nationality (the Netherlands, Great Britain) and value hierarchy (Masculine, Feminine)

regarded as significantly more receiver-oriented than the instrumental-style newsletter (Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.95, F(1,226) = 12.85, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.05$ ). Interaction between style and nationality was not significant for either sender-orientation or receiver-orientation (all  $p$ 's  $> 0.05$ ).

*Hypothesis Testing Results (Persuasiveness of the Newsletters):* The persuasiveness of the newsletters was measured by means of three variables: intention to order goods, attractiveness of the newsletter, and comprehensibility of the newsletter. Table III shows the participants' scores on these variables. In order to test the hypotheses for study I, two-way Anovas with *nationality* and *value orientation* as factors were carried out for all dependent variables. These tests addressed hypotheses H1a-b that an affective newsletter

would be more persuasive in the Netherlands and an instrumental letter would be more persuasive in Great Britain. In addition, these tests addressed hypotheses H3a-b that individuals with a feminine value orientation would regard the affective newsletter as more persuasive and that individuals with a masculine orientation would regard the instrumental letter as more persuasive.

For intention to order goods, the analysis revealed that the instrumental version of the newsletter was more persuasive in the UK than in the Netherlands ( $F(1,221) = 6.53; p = 0.011$ ). The instrumental version also resulted in a higher intention to order goods for respondents who had a more masculine value orientation than for respondents who had a more feminine value orientation ( $F(1,221) = 4.14; p = 0.043$ ). The interaction

between nationality and value orientation was not significant ( $F(1,221) < 1$ ). For the affective version, the analysis revealed no differences (all  $p$ 's  $> .05$ ).

For the other two dependent variables, attractiveness of the newsletter and comprehensibility, the analysis revealed no main effects of nationality or value orientation or significant interactions for either the instrumental or the affective version (all  $p$ 's  $> .05$ ).

In summary, findings suggest that participants recognized the style differences between the affective style and the instrumental style, but that these style differences had a limited effect on persuasiveness at the level of nationality or at the level of individual value orientation.

Hypothesis 1a was as follows.

**H1a.** In the Netherlands, a business newsletter with an affective style is more persuasive than in Great Britain.

Based on the results of the analysis, no support was found for Hypothesis 1a.

Hypothesis 1b was as follows.

**H1b.** In Great Britain, a business newsletter with an instrumental style is more persuasive than in the Netherlands.

The analysis of the data provided limited support for Hypothesis 1b, in that a business newsletter with an instrumental style was more persuasive in the UK, but only for one of the three variables: intention to order goods.

Hypothesis 3a was as follows.

**H3a.** A business newsletter with an affective style is more persuasive for individuals with a feminine value orientation than for individuals with a masculine value orientation.

As for the effect of individual value orientations, our results provided no support for Hypothesis 3a.

Hypothesis 3b was as follows.

**H3b.** A business newsletter with an instrumental style is more persuasive for individuals with a masculine value orientation than for individuals with a feminine value orientation.

Our findings provided only partial support for Hypothesis 3b, in the sense that an instrumental newsletter was more persuasive for individuals with a more masculine value orientation than for

individuals with a feminine value orientation, but only for the variable intention to order goods.

**Results Study II (Succinct-Elaborate Style Dimension)** In a second experimental study, participants from Great Britain and the Netherlands evaluated a succinct version and an elaborate version of a newsletter.

*Manipulation Check (Communication Style of the Newsletter):* To test whether the manipulation of communication style had been successful, two repeated measures analyses (GLM) were carried out with nationality as a between-subject factor, style as a within-subject factor, and verbosity and succinctness as dependent variables. Table IV shows the participant scores on these variables. The analysis for verbosity revealed a main effect for style of the newsletter (Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.49$ ,  $F(1, 99) = 104.00$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.51$ ), a main effect for nationality ( $F(1, 99) = 4.58$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ), but also a significant interaction (Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.96$ ,  $F(1, 99) = 4.04$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ). An inspection of the means revealed that in both countries, the succinct version of the newsletter was evaluated as less verbose than the elaborate version of the newsletter. In the UK, the difference between the two versions was slightly more marked than in the Netherlands. Second, the analysis for succinctness revealed a main effect for style of the newsletter (Wilks'  $\Lambda = 0.54$ ,  $F(1, 99) = 83.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.46$ ). The succinct version of the newsletter was evaluated as significantly more succinct than the elaborate version in both countries. Overall, it can be concluded that the differences in communication style between the letters were recognized as such by the Dutch and the British participants.

*Hypothesis Testing Results (Persuasiveness of the Newsletters):* The persuasiveness of the newsletters was measured by means of three variables: intention to order goods, attractiveness of the newsletter, and comprehensibility of the newsletter. Table V shows the participant scores on these variables. In order to test the hypotheses for study II, two-way Anovas with nationality and value orientation as factors were carried out for all dependent variables. These tests addressed hypotheses H2a-b that a succinct newsletter would be more persuasive in the Netherlands and an elaborate letter would be more persuasive in Great Britain. In addition, these tests addressed hypotheses H4a-b that individuals with a high-uncertainty avoidant value orientation would

TABLE IV  
MEAN SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR VERBOSITY AND SUCCINCTNESS

	Verbosity <i>M (SD) n</i>	Succinctness <i>M (SD) n</i>
the Netherlands ( <i>n</i> = 50)		
succinct newsletter	3.20 (1.57)	5.42 (1.30)
elaborate newsletter	4.66 (1.52)	3.64 (1.37)
Great Britain ( <i>n</i> = 51)		
succinct newsletter	2.33 (1.38)	5.43 (1.39)
elaborate newsletter	4.51 (1.50)	3.80 (1.33)

Notes: for Dutch and British newsletters, verbosity of the newsletter (1 = concise, 7 = verbose) and succinctness of the newsletter (1 = wordy 7 = succinct)

TABLE V  
MEAN SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR INTENTION TO ORDER, ATTRACTIVENESS, AND COMPREHENSIBILITY

	Intention to order <i>M (SD) n</i>	Attractiveness <i>M (SD) n</i>	Comprehensibility <i>M (SD) n</i>
Succinct newsletter			
the Netherlands	4.14 (1.41) 49	4.94 (1.06) 50	5.05 (1.08) 50
Great Britain	3.96 (1.25) 52	4.09 (1.04) 51	4.49 (0.99) 51
low uncertainty avoidance	4.10 (1.24) 48	4.31 (0.96) 48	4.65 (0.97) 48
high uncertainty avoidance	3.98 (1.42) 49	4.73 (1.22) 48	4.89 (1.15) 48
Elaborate newsletter			
the Netherlands	4.30 (1.71) 50	4.46 (1.09) 50	4.97 (0.93) 50
Great Britain	3.94 (1.20) 52	3.93 (1.14) 52	3.97 (1.25) 52
low uncertainty avoidance	4.02 (1.30) 48	3.96 (1.16) 48	4.02 (1.32) 48
high uncertainty avoidance	4.16 (1.66) 49	4.34 (1.11) 49	4.82 (0.93) 49

Notes: intention to order goods after reading the newsletter (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree); attractiveness of the newsletter (1 = negative; 7 = positive); comprehensibility of the newsletter (1 = negative; 7 = positive) and value orientation (stimulation, security)

regard the succinct newsletter as more persuasive and that individuals with a low-uncertainty value orientation would regard the elaborate letter as more persuasive.

For intention to order goods, the analysis revealed no effects of nationality for either the succinct newsletter ( $F(1,93) < 1$ ) or the elaborate newsletter ( $F(1,93) = 1.11, p = 0.29$ ). The analysis revealed no effects for the influence of value orientation on respondents' intention to order goods either (both  $F$ 's ( $1,93) < 1$ ). The interaction between nationality and value orientation was not significant for either version of the newsletter (all  $p$ 's  $> 0.05$ ).

In line with predictions, the succinct newsletter was evaluated as more attractive ( $F(1,92) = 9.26, p = 0.002$ ) in the Netherlands than in the UK. For the elaborate newsletter no effect of nationality was found ( $F(1,93) = 3.01, p = 0.083$ ). Value orientation did not affect participants' evaluation of the attractiveness of the two versions of the newsletter (both  $F$ 's  $< 1$ ). There was

no interaction between nationality and value orientation (both  $p$ 's  $> 0.05$ ).

Unexpectedly, Dutch participants considered the elaborate newsletter to be more comprehensible than participants in the UK ( $F(1,93) = 10.71, p = 0.001$ ). The effect of value orientation was not significant ( $F(1,93) = 2.18, p = 0.143$ ). However, interaction between nationality and value orientation was significant ( $F(1, 93) = 10.22, p = 0.002$ ). In the Dutch group, the low-uncertainty and high-uncertainty avoidant group found the elaborate letter equally comprehensible, but in the UK group, the participants with a low-uncertainty avoidant orientation evaluated the elaborate newsletter as less comprehensible than the high-uncertainty avoidant group. For the succinct version, the effect of nationality was not significant ( $F(1,92) = 3.86, p = 0.053$ ). The effect of value orientation on participants' evaluation of comprehensibility and the interaction between value orientation and nationality were not significant (both  $F$ 's ( $1,92) < 1$ ).

In summary, although participants clearly recognized the style differences between the different versions of the newsletters, reactions to these style differences only partially confirmed our hypotheses either at the level of nationality or at the level of individual value orientation.

Hypothesis H2a was as follows:

**H2a.** In the Netherlands, a business newsletter with a succinct style is more persuasive than in Great Britain.

Our findings partially supported H2a, in that the Dutch participants felt that the succinct version was more persuasive in terms of attractiveness than did the British participants.

Hypothesis H2b was as follows:

**H2b.** In Great Britain, a business newsletter with an elaborate style is more persuasive than in the Netherlands.

Our findings did not support H2b, in that the British participants did not feel the elaborate version was more persuasive than did the Dutch participants.

Hypothesis 4a was as follows:

**H4a.** A business newsletter with a succinct style is more persuasive for individuals with a high-uncertainty avoidance value orientation than for individuals with a low-uncertainty avoidance orientation.

Our findings provided no support for H4a, in that a succinct newsletter was not more persuasive for high-uncertainty avoidant individuals than for low-uncertainty avoidant individuals.

Hypothesis 4b was as follows:

**H4b.** A business newsletter with an elaborate style is more persuasive for individuals with a low-uncertainty avoidance value orientation than for individuals with a high-uncertainty avoidance value orientation.

Our findings did not support H4b, in that an elaborate letter was not more persuasive for low-uncertainty avoidant individuals than for high-uncertainty avoidant individuals.

### **Overall Assessment of Hypotheses for Studies I and II**

Previous research has demonstrated that cross-cultural variation in communication styles can be linked to cross-cultural variation in value orientations [37], [54] and that a culture's

preference for a particular communication style can be explained by a culture's orientation on cultural dimensions as proposed by, for example, Hofstede [32]. In the framework proposed by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, differences on Hofstede's dimension of uncertainty avoidance are reflected in preferences for a succinct versus an elaborate style of communication, whereas differences on the masculinity-femininity dimension are reflected in different preferences on the style dimension instrumental-affective. Since studies investigating advertising appeals have found that cross-cultural value congruency is an important determinant of persuasiveness of messages, the question is whether style congruency (i.e., adapting the style of a text to the preferred communication style in a culture) also impacts the persuasiveness of texts. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of style congruency on the persuasiveness of business newsletters in the Netherlands and Great Britain for two style dimensions: succinct-elaborate and instrumental-affective.

Findings indicate, first of all, that the style differences between the versions of the newsletters were recognized. In Study I, the instrumental version of the newsletter was evaluated as relatively sender-oriented and the affective version of the letter as relatively receiver-oriented. In Study II, the succinct version of the newsletter was evaluated as more succinct and less verbose than the elaborate newsletter. It can, therefore, be concluded that the experimental variation in both studies was validated.

For both experimental studies, the style-congruent version of the newsletters was hypothesized to be more persuasive than the style-incongruent versions in the cultures under investigation. Table VI shows to what extent the specific hypotheses for the two studies were supported.

Contrary to our overarching hypothesis, which predicted that style congruency would be more persuasive than style incongruency, the style differences in the newsletters only marginally affected the persuasiveness of the documents. In both studies, style congruency had no or only a limited effect on readers' motivation to order goods. Style congruency only positively affected motivation to order goods in Study I, where the instrumental version motivated British respondents to order goods more than Dutch respondents (in line with Hypothesis 1b), and motivated participants with a masculine value orientation to order goods more

TABLE VI  
OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS REGARDING HYPOTHESES FOR STUDIES I AND II

Hypothesis	Study		
Hypothesis 1a	Study I	Affective style more persuasive in NL than in GB	No support
Hypothesis 1b	Study I	Instrumental style more persuasive in GB than in NL	Partial support
Hypothesis 2a	Study II	Succinct style more persuasive in NL than in GB	Partial support
Hypothesis 2b	Study II	Elaborate style more persuasive in GB than in NL	No support
Hypothesis 3a	Study I	Affective style more persuasive for feminine than for masculine individuals	No support
Hypothesis 3b	Study I	Instrumental style more persuasive for masculine than for feminine individuals	Partial support
Hypothesis 4a	Study II	Succinct style more persuasive for high-uncertainty avoidant than for low-uncertainty avoidant individuals	No support
Hypothesis 4b	Study II	Elaborate style more persuasive for low-uncertainty avoidant than for high-uncertainty avoidant individuals	No support

than participants with a feminine value orientation (in line with Hypothesis 3b).

In both studies, style congruency had no or a limited effect on evaluations of attractiveness and comprehensibility. In Study I, no effects were found for either attractiveness or comprehensibility. In Study II, the succinct version of the newsletter was regarded as more attractive in the Netherlands than in the UK, which provides partial support for Hypothesis 2a. However, some findings went against the style congruency hypothesis. Contrary to Hypothesis 2b, the elaborate newsletter was also rated as more comprehensible by the Dutch participants than by the British participants, but this was only the case for British participants with a low-uncertainty avoidant value orientation. We found no support for Hypothesis 4a, which predicted that an elaborate newsletter would be more persuasive for high-uncertainty avoidant individuals. Our findings partially contradict Hypothesis 4b, in that, unexpectedly, British participants with a low-uncertainty avoidant value orientation rated the elaborate newsletter as less comprehensible than British participants with a high-uncertainty avoidant value orientation.

## CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this section is to discuss the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of our two experimental studies, the limitations of our experimental studies and, following from these, some suggestions for future research in the area of style congruency and persuasion. The section starts with conclusions, continues with limitations, and ends with suggestions for future research.

**Conclusions** Our findings provide mixed and limited evidence for the link between masculinity-femininity/high-low-uncertainty avoidance and variations on the style dimensions instrumental-affective/succinct-elaborate as proposed by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21] in that for most measures of persuasiveness, style congruency had no effect. For three measures, the effect of style congruency was in line with Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's [21] proposed links, most notably for the link between Hofstede's masculinity dimension and the instrumental-affective style dimension. However, for two measures, our findings contradicted Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey [21]'s proposed link between Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance and the succinct-elaborate style dimension.

Since our findings show limited or no effect of style congruency either at the level of nationality or individual value orientations, our study does not corroborate the suggestion that the effect of style congruency on persuasiveness may be more pervasive at the level of individual value orientations than at the level of nationality as reported by both theorists [39], [55] and other empirical studies [17], [32], [37]. These studies have pointed out that cultural tendencies exist but that individual members are not necessarily representatives of the predominant cultural pattern due to individual level factors that mediate the influence of cultural tendencies.

Unlike other empirical studies into cultural differences in preferences for communication styles [27], [56], [57], the present study revealed only limited differences between national cultures in preferences for communication styles. A possible explanation may be that the studies mentioned before investigated cultures that differed more

extremely from each other on one or several of Hofstede's [32] cultural dimensions than the two cultures that were the focus of the present study. In contrast to Hofstede's findings, studies have indicated that Western European cultures are relatively homogeneous [58] and that value appeals, for example, may be less culturally sensitive in Western European markets [17]. In the current study too, cultural differences between Great Britain and the Netherlands were not very substantial. The British participants, unexpectedly, attached more value to feminine values than to masculine values, as did the Dutch participants, and although the British participants were found to be relatively low uncertainty avoidant, no differences in uncertainty avoidance were found for the Dutch participants.

Yet another possible explanation for the lack of clear effects of style differences on persuasiveness might be that the manipulation of style differences in the two newsletters may not have been extreme enough. Although style differences between the letters were recognized for both dimensions, they may not have been salient enough to have a profound effect on the persuasiveness of the newsletters. Other studies, too, have found that for style differences to have a clear effect, manipulation of linguistic characteristics may need to be overtly clear (e.g., [28]). Future studies should therefore be aimed at the development of stimulus materials in which the style dimensions are manipulated more clearly and extremely.

**Practical Implications** The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether and how style congruency influences the persuasiveness of messages across two different cultures. For organizations, a possible implication of cross-cultural differences in the effects of style congruency would be that messages may best be adapted to the needs of culturally diverse target markets. The findings of the present study indeed indicate that in some respects audience reactions to differently styled messages seem to vary cross-culturally. More specifically, the findings of our first study show that an instrumental style of a newsletter led to a higher purchase intention in Great Britain than in the Netherlands. This would suggest that organizations should localize the style used in their documents, at least for this particular stylistic dimension, this genre, and these two countries. At the same time, organizations should consider whether the benefits of such localizations indeed outweigh the costs involved in producing different documents for different

markets. Likewise, the findings from our second study show that the use of a succinct style in the newsletter was considered more attractive in the Netherlands than in Great Britain. However, for organizations, a difference in attractiveness of the newsletter may not be enough to justify the costs involved in localizing a document.

If organizations find the benefits of style localization sufficiently important, they may be well-advised to investigate if and how the style of their international documents needs to be adjusted to suit reader preferences in different cultures. For organizations, one way of investigating whether documents should be localized in terms of style would be to form multicultural teams of professional writers to examine their international documents. Such teams consisting of writers from different cultural backgrounds can also be deployed to draft differently styled documents for different countries. In a meta-analysis, multicultural teams were found to be more successful than national teams in designing culturally adapted texts [64].

While the current study found benefits from adjusting stylistic features on the instrumental and succinct dimension, the effects only related to some of the variables investigated. Moreover, for the affective and elaborate dimension, no differences in persuasiveness were found between the two countries investigated. This suggests that localization is not necessary for these style dimensions. In this case, the globalization strategy (i.e., the use of the same styled documents for different target markets) would seem to be recommendable. The use of the same styled documents in different countries is more cost-effective than developing localized versions, and does not seem to affect reader evaluations.

**Limitations** A limitation of the current study was that it only investigated style preferences for one particular business genre (i.e., newsletters). It may well be the case that writers of business documents adhere to genre-specific style conventions that overrule more general cultural style preferences (e.g., [59], [60]). At the same time, there may also be cross-cultural differences in genre characteristics that writers need to take into account when drafting business documents (e.g., [14], [61]–[63]).

**Suggestions for Future Research** In view of the limitation just discussed (i.e., that the current study only investigated the genre of business newsletters), more research is required into style preferences in other business genres. This will



provide more insights into the interplay between genre-specific style conventions and cultural and individual preferences for communication styles. To determine the relative importance of style in readers' evaluations of business documents, an insightful angle for future research would be to add a qualitative design component to studies in which participants are asked more open questions about what they pay attention to when reading newsletters. In addition, research is required in cultures that differ more extremely from each other on one or several of Hofstede's [32] cultural dimensions than the two cultures in the current study, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Such studies may shed more light on the importance of style dimensions and on the complexity of adapting the communication style of messages to suit the needs of culturally diverse target audiences.

## APPENDIX A

English texts Study I Instrumental-affective

*Instrumental:* The Time/system story is a success story. Because if more than one million managers throughout the world rely on Time/system every day, then this proves the success of our time planners as an important management tool.

Time/system is an international company with 35 offices in 32 countries and every year trains over 100,000 managers around the world in effectiveness, leadership and productivity programmes.

Time/system has been represented in United Kingdom since 1983 and serves 84,000 customers. Thirty-five percent of our customers are managers in business, politics or administration. Thirty-three percent work in "Sales and Marketing", then comes IT, finance and all other organisational areas.

At Time/system we combine the most recent information from the fields of business administration, neurology and psychology with a scientifically founded methodology. The crucial difference from other time planners (including electronic organisers) is that our Time Management system permanently urges the user to establish priorities in order to achieve his or her personal and business goals.

The remarkable popularity of Time/system over the past 20 years has turned the Time/system time planner into a worldwide management solution.

*Affective:* Since 1980 many people have daily put their trust in Time/system. Time/system is designed to help you make the most of the thing that you probably have least of ... time.

The Time/system time planner helps you to make an overview of your priorities, to determine your goals, and to separate what is important from what is urgent. Each day it helps you decide what must be done, what should be done and what could be done.

Time/system is designed to meet your life's demands.

## APPENDIX B

English texts Study II succinct-elaborate

*Succinct:* What are your priorities? A job plus car? A trip around the world? Your own home? Good health? Time for yourself? However rare, fortunately, quality time is attainable. As long as you remember your most important date; the date you have with yourself. Quality time means to save time for free time. To free time means to organise your time, starting with a good overview of your activities. Time/system helps you!

*Elaborate:* There are many lectures, training courses, workshops, magazines and books on how those plagued by a shortage of time can get their planning under control. But these are often of little use, because what is lacking is the implementation of the good intentions and rules. Old habits can never be completely changed by attending a workshop or reading a book.

Satisfactory changes in behaviour can be obtained by means of the Time/system management system as a very useful instrument for implementation of the time management principles.

The crucial difference other time planners (including electronic organisers) is that the Time/system management system permanently urges the user to establish priorities in order to achieve his or her personal and business goals.

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