

Comparative Study Effect of Culture from Hofstede Perspective on Purchasing Mobile Phone in Iran and Thailand Society

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Abstract

Problem statement: Different research shows that the culture effects on consumer buying behavior. The purpose of this research is studying national culture from Hofstede vision on mobile phone consumer buying behavior in Iran and Thailand.

Approach: A questionnaire of 24 questions to measure research variable was used. 70 from Iran and 70 from Thailand, who are mostly students, selected as sample. To test the hypothesis, Independent t-test and Pearson correlation tests were used.

Results: The results show that Thai consumer in the time of purchase mobile phone are most affected by advertising. Also, Iranian consumer at the time of purchase mobile phone more influenced by discussion with family and friends, while Thai consumer are most influenced by group thinking. **Conclusion/Recommendations:** Implications of the findings are valuable for marketing managers to get more innovative ideas of how to design and develop products and services to meet customer needs and expectations.

Key words: Power distance, mobile phone, consumer's buying behavior, individualism/collectivism

1. INTRODUCTION

The mobile phone market has become a key area for economic growth and development of industrialized nations over the last recent years. This is a result of intense competition and high technical progress in this sector. It can be seen that mobile phones have become an integral part of human daily life and personal communication across the globe (Karjaluoto et al., 2005). In order to retain customers and attract more potentials, it is very essential for the organizations to have a better understanding about purchasing behavior. There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration when investigating the mobile phone decision buying process with national culture identified as one of the most important determinants of choice when purchasing products or services (Ngai et al., 2007). Mobile phone market in Thailand and Iran are continuously increasing in number of penetration growth rate. At present, mobile phone becomes the important item in routine life for human and has shifted from 'technological object' to be a key 'social object' (Srivastava, 2005).

The communication with the other persons is the basic purpose of purchasing mobile phone. Nevertheless, facilitating family and friends coordination and intensifying social interaction are the important factors to use a mobile phone (Urry, 2007). Katz and Aakhus (2002) stated that mobile phone is the important tool to create embedded relationship and in order to communicate with others. The purchase of mobile phone becomes a less critical reason for modes of communication and rather about social and psychological needs as well as show the personal self-image (Ling, 2004). According to Castells et al. (2007), "obtaining a mobile phone is a milestone that indicates success, not only financially but also culturally in term of the integration within society". Culture is the one of important factors that can influence an individual's interaction with a product or service and purchasing behavior (Kotler and Armstrong, 1999).

Williams *et al.* (1998) has a point of views as managerial to suggest that the evaluation and understanding of consumer and culture are required for success and revenue growth in international business. Hence, the comparison of across cultural of mobile phone purchasing pattern are critical for marketer in order to satisfy customer needs and service expectation. Moreover, an understanding of difference culture can be providing an opportunity more effective to target customers. Regarding to our selection of two national cultures where are Iran and Thailand, there are the rapidly expansion of mobile phone industry. There are differently in cultural that provide an insight to the overview of East and West cultural. Moreover, there are the same increasing of mobile phone penetration growth rate. Thus, we are interesting in these countries to study about the different culture can be impact on the consumer behavior and purchasing mobile phone. The main purpose of this study is to explore the impact national culture has on mobile phone buyer behavior of Thai and Iranian consumers and more specifically, whether cultural differences can account for differences in consumers' appreciation of marketing factors.

2. Literature reviews

2.1. Cultural attribute: For related to our research questions about what are the key cultural attribute can be influence mobile phone purchasing between Iranian and Thai consumer's?, we found that how culture can impact to consumer behavior. The conceptual framework is mainly developed from the conceptualization presented from related researches.

The first literature, "Salmi and Sharafutdinova (2008), Topic: Culture and design in emerging markets: the case of mobile phones in Russia" The study shows that the general features (high power distance, femininity, high uncertainty avoidance and Individualism) characterizing culture affect preferred mobile phone design. Long-term values are seen, for example, in family orientation, which affects the use of mobile phones. Changing cultural and socio-economic features are seen in the strict division of consumers into distinct segments. Current aspects of society, such as high level of street crime, are apparent in the desired features of products. The emerging Russian markets seem to consist of very different consumer groups and simultaneously represent both old and new cultural features and norms (Salmi and Sharafutdinova, 2008). Hence, in our point of view we found that this literature can be support our paper that show the factor of culture of power distance and Individualism are the key attribute to compare consumer behavior in different culture.

The second literature "Impact of culture on Mobile Phone purchasing: A comparison between Thai and British consumers" written by Collins (2009). This literature show the content of cultural different can be impact to the different decision on purchasing mobile phone. Moreover we can know that the different in culture can lead to consumers concern different in factor of buying decision. The theoretical that we found in this research is about Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. This theory is the best way that can compare the different behavior between 2 countries. Another theory is Warshaw's Purchase Intention Model theory, they point out that culture can be effect to consumer behavior.

2.2. Buying decision factors

There are two literatures on buying decision factors which has been used in this study. The first literature, "Consumer's Decision Making" written by Veneeva (2006). Verena stated that an individual desire and need are determined by culture which could act as the most fundamental factor. Culture can be understood as the group of intangible concepts (belief, attitudes and behavior pattern) and tangible item (tools, products, price, promotion) participated by people of society and transmitted over generations. Moreover, in passive view suggests that consumers are irrational and impulsive as they are submissive to self-centered interests of marketers and got influenced by marketing tools such as product, price, promotion, service, brand image and social acceptance (Veneeva, 2006). The second literature, "The Role of Cultural Differences in the Product and Promotion Adaptation Strategy: A L'Oreal Paris Case Study" written by LauranneFina, Tytti Luc, EmillieVenezia. This literature is to investigate for adaptation strategy different in Asia and Europe for product and promotion considering the influence of culture on the consumer behavior. The result of study show that culture is important part of marketing because it influences the consumers' wants and needs. As the study the we know that the Hofstede theory can be main factor for evaluate the culture different for sociocultural Environment and buying decision factor such as promotion, price, product quality can help marketer for firm's marketing efforts in their customers.

2.3. Culture and consumer behavior

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (1997), culture has more powerful to influence consumer behavior, lifestyle, motivation and purchase decision. Winsted (1997) indicated that the way to use of consumer and evaluate to product or service are influenced by culture. Therefore, the different of consumer needs determine that lead to market to focus on influence of culture. Suh and Kwon (2002) stated that research of culture in consumer behavior can be impact and provide the efficient lead to target consumer, originate new product and service, process channel and advertisement. The culture is reflecting in consumers purchase a range of product and services (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001). Hofstede's cultural dimension are famous to use by management group and also in the academic that about cross cultural in order to understand in different national culture. Most of studies such as global brand strategies, ethical decision making and advertising, there are also have been applied Hofstede's frame work. Hofstede (1980) developed a model of national culture based on a survey of IBM middle management over fifty countries around the world.

After a research about employee's preferences in term of management style and the way employees behave in the work situation, Hofstede (1980) identified five key cultural dimensions namely; Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity and Long Term/Short Term orientation.

Power distance: The power distance is the extent to which the less powerful member of company and institutional acceptable. This will represent the inequality of power in each country that define from below not from above. In the societies, the level of inequalities is endorsed by follower than leader (Hofstede, 2011).

Individualism/Collectivism: The individualism is opposite side of collectivism that is about the degree to which individual are integrated among group. On the collectivist side, its determined about societies that people are integrated into strong, cohesive in-group and extend family. Individualism refers to society where the ties between individual are very loose. People in this group concern in themselves and only family primary. In a culture that is high on individualism, they would emphasize on individual initiative and achievement. Hence, an individual's uniqueness and distinction from others might be dominant within society (Hofstede, 2011).

In this research, the power distance and individualism dimensions are going to be considered. According to Hofstede (2001), these two cultural dimensions are identified as the interest variable. In terms of individualisms and collectivisms we can know that high degrees of individualism probably believe in the value of independence and self-actualization. Additionally, Muk (2007) research about consumer's adoption acceptance of SMS advertising via mobile phone and found that consumers in an individualist culture are exclusively based on individual considerations. Meanwhile, collectivist consumer's intentions are affected by social norms and attitudinal factors.

Figure .1 will explain the conceptual framework which could answer the following:

- Does the key cultural attribute by Hofstede's theory can be influence mobile phone purchasing between Thai and Iranian consumers?
- What are the most important buying decision factors for Thai and Iranian consumer to purchasing mobile phone?

As in Fig. 1 displays two possible parts which can effect mobile phone purchasing decision. First part shows the purchasing decision factor toward mobile phone that has various factors to influence consumer decision. The second part has shows the Hofstede's Cultural Dimension which are the key cultural attribute. The first and second parts are related and will be influence toward purchasing decision of mobile phone but in different culture will be get the result in the differentiate. As the above which are the key cultural attribute and buying decision factors, we would like to determine both in Thailand and Iran. The hypothesis examined on the study of the Hofstede's dimensions and buying decision factors. The hypothesis can be stated as following.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference between Thai and Iranian consumers when purchasing a mobile phone.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference between Thai and Iranian consumers in term of Hofstede's cultural dimension (Individualism/Collectivism and power distance).

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between culture element (Hofstede's cultural dimension) and mobile phone buying decision factor.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Sample and data collection

In this research, due to the limit of time we select the sample size at 140 respondents from at 70 Thais and 70 Iranian respondents. The sampling units are both male and female who have mobile phone. In this research will be emphasize on student because they are the group who use mobile phone and easy to find.

3.2. Questionnaire design: The first part is about the demographic and screening section which is to gather the demographic data such as nationality, age, gender and the mobile phone purchasing experience of respondent. The second part focus on individualism/ collectivism and power distance dimensions. There aims to identify whether significant different in culture effect on the purchasing mobile phone between Thai and Iranian consumers. This part use the five-point Likert type of scale to measured on this part. The five point Likert scale are Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree = 1. For the individualism/collectivism measurement, score of less than 3 can be signify that respondent can be a high individualist. On the other hand, score more than 3 can be signify that respondent can be high collectivist and score at 3 can be neutrality. For the power distance measurement, score of less than 3 may indicate a high power distance association. Nevertheless, score more than 3 can indicate low power distance society and score at 3 present as neutrality. The three part is about mobile phone buying decision factor. The five Likert of scale is used which ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The index was used in this part indicate the important quality for select the mobile phone This research choose a total of eight choices that is more appropriate to be use as evident.

3.3. Reliability and validity

According to Ghauriet *al.* (1995), reliability is the degree to which measure are the free from error. The reliability of research measures using the Crobach alpha coefficient which shows the level of inters-item consistency. Pallant (2007) stated that the scale can be consider reliable when the Cronbach Alpha's value is above 0.7. Hence, the study scales can be implied to use for this research as reliable that shows in Table. 1.

Sullivan and Gilbert (2001) stated that proposed the validity will be occurred when the measurement is reliable. Therefore, the reliability and validity should be a positive relationship in order to indicate perfect validity and reliability.

4. Analysis

4.1. Descriptive analysis

As mentioned in the methodology part, the response rate of this study should be at least 140 respondents in order for the study to be reliable. The questionnaire was distributed to 140 respondents which consisted of 70 Thai and 70 Iranian. The main respondents are students male, age between 26-35 years old, education level on both bachelor and Master degree.(Table. 2).

Table.3 indicates the mobile phone brand preference for Thai and Iranian Respondents, That Nokia is the most used mobile phone by both Thai and Iranian by 40.71%. Subsequently, the Respondents of another 2 main brand usage were Sony Ericsson (16.42%), BlackBerry (12.14%). Hence, it can be seen that Nokia is the dominant brand of mobile phone between Thai and Iranian respondents in this study.

Hypothesis 1:

- Ho (null): There is no difference between Thai and Iranian consumers when purchasing a mobile phone.
 - H1 (alternative): There is a difference between Thai and Iranian consumers when purchasing a mobile phone.
- The result of Table 4. is "There is a difference between Thai and Iranian consumers when purchasing a mobile phone". Promotion is the only one factor that indicates different between Thai and Iranian consumers which the Sig. 2-tailed is less than 0.05. Therefore, Thai consumers can be influence to make a decision to purchase mobile phone by promotion while Iranian consumers will not concerned in promotion same as Thai consumers.

Hypothesis 2:

- Ho (null): There is no difference between Thai and Iranian consumers in term of Hofstede's cultural dimension (Individualism/ Collectivism and power distance).
- H1 (alternative): There is a difference between Thai and Iranian consumers in term of Hofstede's cultural dimension (Individualism/ Collectivism and power distance).

This hypothesis indicates that there is a significant difference between Thai and Iranian consumers in terms of Collectivism/Individualism and Power distance. From a Collectivism perspective, Thai consumers' aspect found that Group opinion is the important factor to influence purchasing mobile phone. While, Iranian consumers can be influenced to make a decision to purchase mobile phone by Family/Friend discussion. From a Power distance perspective, the result shows the only Present argument is found as the important variable for Iranian consumers. (Table. 5)

Hypothesis 3:

- Ho (null): There is no relationship between culture element (Hofstede's cultural dimension) and mobile phone buying decision factor.
- H1 (alternative): There is a relationship between culture element (Hofstede's cultural dimension) and mobile phone buying decision factor.

The third hypothesis is used Pearson correlation to calculate the relationship between the significant variable of Mobile Phone Buying Decision Factors which is "Promotion" and the significant variable of Hofstede's cultural dimension which are "Group opinion, Family/Friend discussion and Present argument". Authors present the correlation in each significant different variable that get the result from the previous hypothesis in order to present in each national as indicated in Table 7 and 8. According to the result of Hypothesis 2, 'Promotion' is only one factor that indicates significant difference between Thai and Iranian consumers. Therefore, Table 6 indicates the correlation of the significant different variable between culture element (Hofstede's cultural dimension) and mobile phone buying decision factor for Iranian respondents.

The result of Table 6 indicates 'Promotion' and the culture element of Power distance 'Present Argument' have a positive correlation with the low level at 0.17. In terms of correlation between 'Promotion' and 'Group opinion' indicate negative relationship at the low score of -0.024. The last variable, 'Promotion' and 'Family/Friend discussion' have a positive relation in the weak level of relationship however it is the highest in this group at 0.228. In order to study from Iranian respondents to find out the result of which one can influence Swedish consumers to purchase mobile phone between 'Group opinion' and 'Family/ Friend discussion', we found that 'Family/Friend discussion' can influence Iranian consumers as well.

The result of Table 7 indicates all of the significant variables have a positive correlation between culture element (Hofstede's cultural dimension) and mobile phone buying decision factor in terms of Thai respondents. While the score in each variable is low level, thus 'Group opinion' at 0.024, 'Family/Friend Discussion' at 0.168 and 'Present Argument' at 0.040. It can be implied that cultural dimensions both in Individualism/Collectivism and Power distance affect Thai consumers when purchasing a mobile phone at a not high level. As the study result can be assumed that 'Promotion' can influence toward 'Group opinion' and 'Family/ Friend Discussion', thus they can influence Thai consumers who are willing to purchase a mobile phone. From a Power distance aspect, Thai consumers have their own ability to make a decision to purchase while the other relevant variable can be an additional factor to drive Thai consumers persuaded to think the same.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary purpose of this research was to determine and evaluate whether differences in national culture impact on the buyer behavior of Thai and Iranian consumers when purchasing a mobile phone. The results of the study have indicated that there is significant difference between Thai and Iranian consumers when they select and purchase a mobile phone. Moreover, the findings show that differences in national culture do matter when it comes to consumers' purchasing decisions where mobile phones are concerned. There is evidence from this study that Hofstede's framework to influence consumer's evaluation of mobile phones. Culture plays a fundamental role in consumer behavior. It is extremely important for mobile phone companies, especially the companies that would like to succeed in the international market, to take this into account and that standardized strategies may not suit all cultures and nationalities. According to our purpose of study is interesting in the different culture that can impact on the consumer behavior and purchasing decision of mobile phone in the different or same. The results of the study have indicated that there is significant difference between Thai and Iranian consumers in both culture and it can be effect to buying decision factor also. Further, the promotion are the one factor that different, Thai consumers will concern this factor more than Iranian consumers. Moreover from the result we can know about the key cultural attribute can influence mobile phone purchasing between Thai and Iranian consumers are Group opinion, Family/Friend discussion and Present argument.

From the results it is logical to conclude that there is a significant difference between Thai and Iranian consumers in terms of Individualism/Collectivism and Power Distance dimensions. Moreover Hofstede (2001) identified these two dimensions as the interesting variables because of the correlations between the two dimensions. In hypotheses 2 The Independent Sample T-test results also showed that there is a significant difference between the Thai and Iranian where these dimension were concerned. As the result of Hypothesis 2 indicates there is difference between Thai and Iranian consumers in Hofstede's cultural dimension. The important factors that can be influence Thai consumers make decision to buy mobile phone is Group opinion while Iranian consumers is Family/Friend discuss as in term of Collectivism/Individualism. Power distance aspect found that the important variable for Thai consumers is Present argument. As mention in the theoretical part, the collectivism will be influence by the social values and reference group. In term of marketer can be using Group opinion to lead Thai consumers interest in the product and will be purchase following the group opinion. For Iranian consumers, marketer will be served their consumer to create word of mouth in existing consumer to recommend to their friend or family to use the same mobile phone. The result of Pearson's correlation test indicates the relationship between cultural attribute of Individualism/Collectivism, Power distance and mobile phone buying decision factors is important for mobile phone marketing managers to recognize. Thai and Iranian consumers are different in some variable of cultural attribute and mobile phone buying decision factor. In our opinion, different variable can be affect to consumers in different culture perceive and make a decision to purchase in different way. Moreover, cultural attribute and mobile phone decision factor are influence to each other to consumer make a decision purchasing a mobile phone. Additional, there are not strong correlation to influence in each other too much as show in the result of Hypothesis 3.

6. Managerial implication

In order to retain customers as well as attract potential ones, it is advised that mobile phone marketing managers should give attention to Hofstede's dimensions. In this research, a better understanding of the cultural difference between the Thai and Iranian markets has been determined. In addition, implications of the findings are valuable for marketing managers to get more innovative ideas of how to design and develop products and services to meet customers needs and expectations. Moreover, to understanding of the different buying behavior will provide managers with more innovative ideas which will assist them in adjusting their existing and future marketing strategies to sustain market share, increase growth and profitability of mobile phone sales. The promotion factors is only one factor that Thai and Iranian consumer concern in differently, thus marketers should be adapting in some elements of its promotion. As mentioned in the beginning of paper that mobile phone is the global product, they should to keep the main promotion and products aspects are standardized. Thus, promotion adaptation strategy in the Thailand is a mix between standardization and adaptation. In its adaptation strategy, the firm considers some elements of the consumer behavior therefore of the culture. To conclude, the cultural differences may influence the mobile phone products and promotion adaptation strategy (Veneeva, 2006). Thailand aspect, referring to our finding it can be implied that Thai consumers can be influence by their group opinion however they make decision by themselves as the same time. Iranian aspect can be implied that they can be influence by their family or friend discuss to suggest them to purchasing a mobile phone and they also consider to this decision by themselves at the same time. The framework (Fig. 1) is developed to assist marketing manager in the market to mobile phone in Thailand and Iran. Referring to the result of Hypothesis 3 indicates the relationship between each significant variables, the cultural dimension can be affect to the consumer behavior in different variable of Thai and Iranian. The marketer study their culture target consumers and develop strategies encourage in buying decision factor to gain more benefit and keep relationship with consumers as much as they can.

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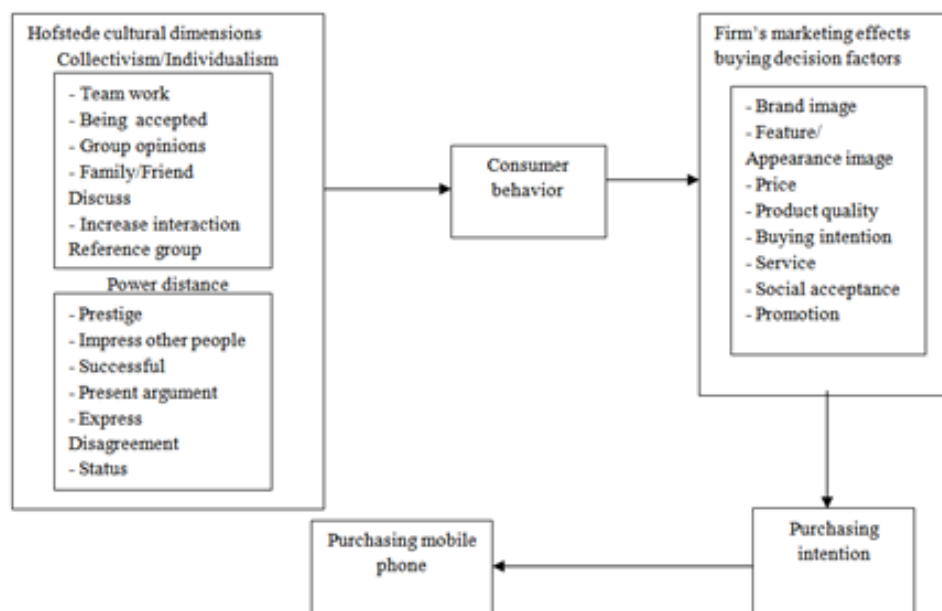
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APPENDIX

Fig. 1: Conceptual frameworks



Source:Siraporn and Panjaporn (2011)

Table. 1: Cronbach’s Alpha

Variable	N of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Individualism/ Collectivism	6	0.78
Power Distance	6	0.83
Purchase Decision Factor	8	0.86

Table.2 : Demographics of respondents

Demographics	N=140		Demographics	N=140	
	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Nationality			Education Level		
Iranian	70	50.0	Certificate/Diploma	5	3.57
Thai	70	50.0	Bachelor’s Degree	49	35.0
			Master’s Degree or Higher	86	61.43
Gender					
Male	96	68.57			
Female	44	31.42	Occupation		
			Student	78	55.71
Age			Private Business Employee	34	24.28
16 – 25 years old	55	39.28	Own Business/ Entrepreneur	2	1.42
26 - 35 years old	72	51.42	Government office	26	18.57
36- 45 years old	9	6.42	Unemployed	0	0.0
above 45 years old	4	2.85			

Table.3 : Brand of Mobile Phone usage of respondents

Which brand of mobile phone your currently use?	N=140	
	Frequency	%
Nokia	57	40.71
Sony Ericsson	23	16.42
Blackberry	17	12.14
Samsung	15	10.71
Apple iPhone	8	5.71
HTC	7	5.0
Motorola	7	5.0
LG	4	2.85
Other	2	1.42

Table. 4: Independent Sample t-test of Hypothesis 1

Mobile Phone Buying Decision Factors	Mean (Iranian)	Mean (Thai)	Sig. 2-tailed
Intention to buy	4.3	4.0	0.39
Social acceptance	3.1	3.3	1.114
Services	3.7	4.1	2.134
Brand image	3.6	3.9	3.458
Price	4.2	4.1	0.123
Feature	3.7	4.3	4.963
Promotion	3.3	3.8	0.008
Product Quality	4.3	4.6	0.23

Table. 5: Independent Sample t-test of Hypothesis 2

		Mean(Iranian)	Mean(Thai)	Sig. 2-tailed
Hofstede Cultural Dimension	Collectivism / Individualism			
	Team Work	2.6	4.0	2.917
	Being Accepted	2.9	3.1	1.103
	Reference Group Influence	2.7	3.0	0.246
	Group Opinion	3.1	3.3	0.018
	Family / Friend Discuss	3.7	3.4	0.009
	Increase Interaction	4.1	4.0	0.196
	Power Distance			
	Prestige	2.5	3.5	0.891
	Impress Other People	2.8	3.2	2.416
	Successful	2.9	3.2	0.329
	Present Argument	3.6	3.4	0.006
	Express Disagreement	3.8	4.0	0.174
	Status	3.4	3.6	3.183

Table.6: Pearson correlation for Iranian Respondents

		Promotion	Prestige	Impress other people	Successful	Present argument	Express Disagreement	Status	Team work	Being Accepted	Reference group influence	Group opinion	Family/ friend Discuss	Increase Intraction
Promotion	Pearson Correlation	1.0	-0.214	-0.211	-0.058	0.17	0.086	0.08	0.184	0.128	-0.142	-0.024	0.228	-0.028
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.029	0.076	0.412	0.242	0.71	0.172	0.112	0.452	0.111	0.186	0.078	0.146
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70

Table.7: Pearson correlation for Thai Respondents

		Promotion	Prestige	Impress other people	Successful	Present argument	Express Disagreement	Status	Team work	Being Accepted	Reference group influence	Group opinion	Family/ friend Discuss	Increase Intraction
Promotion	Pearson Correlation	1.0	0.09	0.075	-0.014	0.04	-0.178	-0.024	0.052	0.091	-0.009	0.026	0.168	0.021
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.46	0.529	0.906	0.742	0.140	0.844	0.66	0.455	0.942	0.824	0.162	0.866
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70