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**Time will construe me: The fit effect of culture, temporal distance and  
construal level**

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**Time will construe me: The fit effect of culture, temporal distance and  
construal level**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Ms. Sung Hee Park, my father, Mr. Ki Suk Kim, my mother-in-law, Hyo Nam Ko, my son, KangHyun Kim, and finally, my wife Ms. Hye Jeong Kim.

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# **Time will construe me: The fit effect of culture, temporal distance and construal level**

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The present research examined how individuals' cultural orientations influenced the relationship between their construal level and temporal distance. There were two studies in this research. Study 1 was composed of two parts. In the first part, the relationship between culture and construal level was examined through the Behavioral Identification Form (BIF). In the second part, the influence of culture on temporal distance and individuals' construal level was investigated by analyzing participants' descriptions of their lives. In study 2, the three-way interaction between culture, temporal distance, and the construal-level frame of persuasive messages (desirability vs. feasibility focused message) was investigated. A total of 200 students from two different countries (Korea and the U.S.) participated in the study. A fictitious brand and advertisement were created to examine the interaction.

The findings revealed that individuals from an individualistic culture (U.S.) prefer abstract thinking to concrete thinking and focus more on the desirability than the feasibility of an event or object. And the reverse was true for individuals from a

collectivistic culture (Korea). When individuals are in a proximal temporal condition, those from a collectivistic culture have a more proximal temporal perspective, and they are more likely to represent the future event in low-level terms. In contrast, individuals from an individualistic culture have a more distal temporal perspective and tend to represent the future event in high-level terms. Consistent results were found in an advertising context. When individuals from a collectivistic culture were in a proximal temporal condition, they tended to show a more favorable attitude toward the advertisement emphasizing the feasibility features of the product. The reverse was true for individuals from an individualistic culture.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Imagine that you and your Korean friend are planning to travel around Tibet, a country you have never visited. When you have ample time before the departure, you may entertain a number of positive and pleasant core benefits of the trip such as the Himalayas' beautiful scenery and moments when you can refresh your life. Now imagine it is just one day before the trip. Are your perceptions of the trip still the same as when you had more time to think about it? Generally, as the departure time gets closer, unpleasant subsidiary matters such as language problems, unfamiliar cultures, and uncomfortable accommodations may weigh heavier on your mind than the positive and core benefits that you were initially interested in. In addition, you may find that your Korean friend is getting more nervous and worrying more about the trip than you as the departure time comes closer. What makes your friend more nervous? Can a different cultural background result in this difference? The current study mainly focuses on the relationship between temporal distance and cultures, and how these relationships have an impact on an individual's construal levels.

The influence of temporal perspective on consumers' decision making process has attracted the attention of many consumer psychologists. There have been a number of studies on how individuals predict and evaluate future events and what factors can have an impact on the predictions and evaluations (e.g., Ben Zur & Breznitz, 1981; Buehler & MacFarland, 2001; Griffin, Dunning, & Ross, 1990; Mogilner, Aaker, & Pennington, 2008). For example, Eyal, Liberman, Trope, and Walther (2004) suggest that individuals are more concerned with the positives when they think about the distant future, whereas

individuals are more concerned with the negatives when thinking about the near future. Furthermore, when consumers make an immediate purchasing decision, they tend to pay more for a product advertised as a means to prevent a negative outcome rather than a product promoting a positive outcome. The reverse is true when consumers have ample time before the purchasing decision (Mogilner et al., 2008). Since temporal distance from future events normally reduces the accuracy of prediction about the event (Nussbaum, Liberman, & Trope, 2006), individuals tend to expect better performance for distant future tasks compared to near future tasks (Gilovich, Kerr, & Medvec, 1993).

Construal Level Theory (CLT) presumes that individuals' predictions and evaluations of future events depend on their mental construals of those events. When individuals think of distant future events, they tend to be more influenced by the superordinate and core features of the event, whereas when they think of near future events, they are more likely to be concerned with the incidental and subordinate features of the events (Nussbaum, Liberman, & Trope, 2006). From this aspect, many studies have used CLT to examine the role of psychological distance in individuals' construing a future event. As such, CLT has become a leading theory on how individuals make and evaluate decisions based on perceived temporal distance (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Nussbaum, Liberman, & Trope, 2006; Trope & Liberman, 2003). However, the majority of studies have focused on only the relationship between psychological distance and construal levels and its influence on individuals' thinking and behaviors (e.g., Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004; Liberman, Trope, & Wakslak, 2007; Nussbaum, Liberman, & Trope, 2006; Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). Only limited research has examined

the antecedents of psychological distance. Most research has assumed that the effects of psychological distance on individuals' construal levels would not vary based on individuals' personal characteristics. But, the same future event can be perceived to be more distant by someone but quite proximal by another individual (Spassova & Lee, 2013). Also, depending on individuals' characteristics, the effects of temporal distance on their behaviors can be different. According to Nisan (1972), success-oriented individuals are more likely to reinforce expectations of success and risk-taking as temporal distance becomes greater than failure-oriented individuals. Spassova and Lee (2013) suggest that individuals' self-view (independent self-view vs. interdependent self-view) can play a moderating role in forming the temporal construal of a future event. Accordingly, individuals with an independent self-view are more likely to think of future events in terms of abstract and decontextualized features of the events whereas individuals with an interdependent self-view tend to think of future events in terms of more concrete and contextualized features of the events.

Given that individuals' self-view (independent self-view or interdependent self-view) is heavily influenced by culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), it can be postulated that culture also plays a moderating role in the temporal construal of future events. Cross-cultural comparisons have suggested that people from a collectivistic culture, compared to people from an individualistic culture, are concerned with a greater sensitivity to negative self-relevant information and have a preference for information focusing on avoiding negative outcomes (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). For example, results from a study by Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, and Sheldon

(2001) reveal that avoidance goals are negatively associated with subjective well-being (SWB) in an American sample, whereas in a Korean sample, the negative relationship is not found. Avoidance goals are associated with an undesired end state, and the goals can be achieved by minimizing the presence or maximizing the absence of negative outcomes (Aaker & Lee, 2001). Therefore, in order to achieve avoidance goals, vigilant strategies that prevent errors of commission need to be used (Lieberman, Molden, Idson, & Higgins, 2001). Since individuals in a collectivistic culture tend to try to avoid behaviors that might result in social disruptions or disappointing others (Heine et al., 1999), they favor vigilant strategies over eagerness strategies that emphasize the pursuit of gains and accomplishment. As temporal distance from an event becomes more proximal, there is more accurate and concrete information that individuals can use. From this aspect, individuals from a collectivistic culture may prefer and have more positive attitudes toward the proximally temporal distance due to the detailed and concrete information.

In contrast, since individuals from an individualistic culture tend to attempt to distinguish themselves positively from others, they are more likely to be concerned with positive outcomes and to use eagerness strategies pursuing the positive outcomes (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus they tend to be more interested in the desired end state of the outcomes compared to the detailed information. Pennington and Roese (2003) suggest that individuals generally tend to have greater confidence in their capability to be successful for temporally distant events than temporally near events. From this aspect, individualists who are more interested in positive and desired outcomes may be attracted more by temporally distant events compared to temporally near events.

The objective of this research is to investigate how individuals' cultural orientations influence the relationship between individuals' construal levels and temporal distances. In the current research, it is suggested that individuals from a collectivistic culture tend to perceive a future event as more proximal and construe the event at a more concrete level, whereas individuals from an individualistic culture tend to perceive a future event as more distant and construe the event at a more abstract level. A recent study conducted by Spassova and Lee (2013) reveals that individuals' self-construal (independent or interdependent self-construal) can play a moderating role in their perception of temporal distance. However, since they manipulate the participants' self-construal by priming them into either independent or interdependent self-construal, the ecological validity of the research is limited. By using individuals' cultural background, this study can increase the ecological validity of the previous research and provide a better understanding of how cultures can impact individuals construing temporally different information. In other words, the current research investigating these cultural roles on individuals' construal levels can extend construal level theory into the realm of cross-cultural study. Furthermore, the effects of this relationship can have critical implications for advertising message persuasiveness. When the temporal distance (distant-future vs. near-future) and the construal level frame of an advertising appeal (desirability vs. feasibility) match the salient cultural self-view of the recipient (independent vs. interdependent), the efficacy of the advertising message can be reinforced.



In the next sections, the relevant theoretical background will be provided, and the hypotheses will be justified. Then two studies will be presented to test the hypotheses.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, two theoretical frameworks of the current research are reviewed. A review of construal level theory is followed by an examination of self-construal and culture.

### **CONSTRUAL LEVEL THEORY**

Initially, construal level theory emerged from a question of “how temporal distance of an outcome affects judgment and choice with respect to that outcome” (Trope & Liberman, 2011, p. 119). Based on the relationship between temporal distance and individuals’ construal levels, other dimensions of distance such as spatial and social distance and hypotheticality have been investigated. Therefore, in order to understand construal level theory more fully, the development of the theory should be reviewed. In this section, temporal construal theory is introduced first and how construal level theory has been developed is explained.

#### **Temporal Construal Theory**

Liberman and Trope (1998) suggest that temporal distance, defined as the perceived proximity of an event in time, can have an impact on individuals’ mental construal of the event. More specifically, when individuals think of proximal compared to distal future situations, they tend to use lower level construals, which contain more subordinate, contextual, and incidental features of the situations. In contrast, individuals use higher level construals consisting of general, superordinate, and essential features of

events to conceptualize information about distant future events than information about near future events (Trope & Liberman, 2003).

This suggestion has been influenced by two phenomena that are the “planning fallacy” and temporal discounting (Trope & Liberman, 2011). The planning fallacy is concerned with the tendency that individuals have to become overconfident when they make plans for the future (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Buhler, Griffin, and Ross (1994) find that, in self-prediction, an optimistic bias may mislead people to think that they can complete their work much faster than they actually can. This optimistic bias leads people to make predictions based on abstract models that underestimate the impact of contextual factors representing reality. For example, students expect that they can complete preparations for their final exam earlier when the exam is distal compared to proximal. However, as the exam time gets closer, they realize that they underestimated the effect of the factors unrelated to the exam such as going to a friend’s party or experiencing poor health. Due to these unrelated factors, their initial estimated completion time can be prolonged more than they expected.

Temporal discounting is individuals’ tendency to regard immediate outcomes as more valuable than delayed outcomes (Ainslie & Haslam, 1992). Previous studies suggest that individuals often evaluate a proximal-future reward as more valuable than a distal-future reward, even when the distal-future reward is greater (Ainslie & Haslam, 1992; Elster & Loewenstein, 1992; Read & Loewenstein, 2000). For example, people tend to prefer a \$100 reward today to a \$200 reward in six weeks. Moreover, a number of studies suggest that temporal discounting in human behavior is best described by hyperbolic

functions; that is, as the temporal distance of an outcome increases, the value of the outcome initially declines steeply and then becomes moderate (Ainslie & Haslam, 1992; Green, Fristoe, & Meyerson, 1994; Green, Myerson, & McFadden; Loewenstein & Prelec, 1992; Roelofsma, 1996). In addition, there have been various studies investigating factors that determine the temporal discounting rate. According to affect-dependent time discounting research (Loewenstein, 1996; Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001), as temporal distance increases, the cognitive outcomes play more important roles in determining the value of an option than do the affective outcomes. Conflict theories (Lewin, 1951; Miller, 1944) propose that negative outcomes experience steeper temporal discounting compared to positive outcomes.

Even though these two phenomena provide important descriptive and prescriptive implications for researchers who investigate the effects of temporal distance, there still have been limitations to integrate the various hypotheses and research findings in this area. For instance, although hyperbolic functions have been supported by many psychological analyses of choice between delayed reinforcers (Ainslie, 1992; Green et al., 1994), economic theory predicts preference reversal, explained by hyperbolic functions, will not occur (Strotz, 1956), and economists have failed to reach a consensus on the resolution of this confliction (Loewenstein & Elster, 1992). In order to develop an overarching framework to integrate these diverse and sometimes opposing results, Trope and Liberman pay attention to schematic mental models that individuals depend on when they make judgments and decisions about their past and future (Griffin and Ross, 1994; Trope & Liberman, 2011). They believe that the integrated framework should take

account of how temporal distance from an event has an influence on individuals' mental conceptualization of the event (Trope & Liberman, 2011).

By distinguishing between high-level construal and low-level construal, Liberman and Trope (1998) developed an integrative framework. High-level construals are relatively schematic and decontextualized representations that extract the essence from the available information, and these construals are composed of general, superordinate and core features of events. By contrast, low-level construals are more likely to be concrete and contextualized representations containing subordinate and incidental features of events (Trope & Liberman, 1998; 2003). Also, whereas features in high-level construals can induce major changes in the meaning of the event, low-level construal features can produce minor changes in the meaning of the events (Trope & Liberman, 2003). These different levels of construals can be related to how individuals' behaviors and actions are identified. According to action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987), an individual's action can be denoted in terms of superordinate or subordinate goals. That means, the goal of the action is posited in the highest level in a hierarchy of mental representations of action, whereas subordinate levels play roles in subdividing the goal into more concrete representations until a level is reached that specifies the real action to be carried out. For instance, "eating" behavior can be conceptualized as "getting nutrition" on a high-level or, as "chewing and swallowing" on a low-level (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). Therefore high-level construals are more likely to include action identifications at the superordinate rather than subordinate level whereas low-level construals tend to include more action identifications at the subordinate

compared to superordinate level (Trope & Liberman, 2003). In addition, Vallacher and Wegner (1985) have examined the effect of temporal distance on action identification. For example, when their wedding is distant in time, individuals tend to represent their wedding with abstract terms (high-level) such as “expressing love,” while on the day of wedding, they are more likely to represent the wedding with concrete terms such as “having pictures taken.” (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985). Based on their findings, Vallacher and Wegner (1989) have designed a questionnaire to assess stable individual differences in action identification called Behavioral Identification Form (BIF). And BIF has been used to measure individuals’ construal levels in several studies (e.g., Liberman & Trope, 1998; Spassova & Lee, 2003).

Liberman and Trope (1998) propose that individuals form different representations of the same information depending on its temporal distance (near vs. distant future). Temporal construal theory suggests that individuals use higher-level construals to represent a distant future event. When high-level construals are used, incidental, peripheral, subordinate and contextual features of the event are omitted by more essential and abstract features creating more coherent representations of the event (Liberman & Trope, 1998). In contrast, in order to represent a near future event, individuals use lower-level construals including relatively unstructured, contextual, and incidental features of the event (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Suppose that students need to choose courses to register for the upcoming semester. When the registration date is distant in time, the event is represented as essential and abstract features such as an interesting topic of a class and value for a future career. However, when students actually

register for the course, concrete and incidental features such as class location and time convenience represent the registration. In sum, temporal construal theory proposes that distant-future events are conceptualized in terms of superordinate goals while near-future events are conceptualized in terms of subordinated goals of the events.

The role of feasibility and desirability considerations can be related to the hierarchy of the goal. Desirability concerns the value of the action's end state (i.e., the why aspect of the action), whereas feasibility refers to the ease or difficulty of achieving the end state (i.e., the how aspect of the action; Trope & Liberman, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003; 2011). Based on Vallacher and Wegner's (1987) suggestion, "why" aspects of the action tend to be abstract and more concerned with the meaning of the action than "how" aspects. As such, it can be postulated that desirability considerations are more associated with high-level construals of actions, while feasibility considerations are more associated with low-level construals of actions (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Consistent with this postulation, Trope and Liberman (1998) find that as temporal distance from an event increase, individuals prefer desirability considerations to feasibility considerations, whereas as the temporal distance decreases, they prefer feasibility considerations to desirability considerations.

### **Construal Level Theory (CLT)**

Since the effects of individuals' mental construal levels on temporal distance have been proven, it can be assumed that similar construal effects have an influence on other dimensions of distance such as spatial, probability and social distance. Based on the investigation of the relationship between temporal distance and construal levels, the CLT

has been developed as a special case of a general theory of psychological distance (Bar-Anan, Liberman, & Trope, 2006; Fiedler, 2007; Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Liberman, Trope, & Wakslak, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Psychological distance is defined as “a subjective experience that something is closer or far away from the self, here, and now” (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). In other words, psychological distance is an egocentric concept with a reference point that is the self, here and now. From this standpoint, psychologically distant things are regarded as something one cannot experience directly (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007). Considering there are many dimensions which influence individual’s direct experience, there can be multiple dimensions of psychological distance (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007).

In CLT, psychological distance is composed of four dimensions- time (e.g., one year later vs. tomorrow), space (e.g., hometown vs. foreign city), social distance (e.g., dissimilar other vs. similar other) and probability (e.g., highly likely vs. highly unlikely; Liberman, Trope, & Wakslak, 2007). Bar-Anan, Liberman, and Trope (2006) showed the automatic associations of construal level with the four psychological dimensions through an implicit associations test. In their research, participants more easily matched the words “year,” “there,” “others,” and “maybe” to the word “abstract” compared to the word “concrete,” and the reverse is true for the words “tomorrow,” “here,” “us,” and “sure.” More specifically, Liberman, Trope, and Liberman (2006) investigated how interpersonal similarities have an influence on the mental representation and judgment of others’ behaviors by using construal levels. They found that the behaviors exhibited by similar others are mentally conceptualized in terms of lower level construals (subordinate and



secondary features), whereas the actions of dissimilar others are represented in terms of higher level construals (superordinate and central features). Similar construal effects were empirically supported for spatial distance (Fujita, Henderson, Eng, Trope, & Liberman, 2006), temporal distance (Liberman, Sagristano, Trope, 2002), and probability (Wakslak, Trope, Liberman, & Alony, 2006). Therefore, the greater temporal, spatial, social distance, and probability from an event, the more abstractly the event would be represented in terms of general, superordinate, and decontextualized features. By contrast, as psychological distance from an event decreases, the event is more likely represented in terms of incidental, subordinate, and contextual features. Also, individuals construing the event at a high (vs. low) level put more weight on desirability (vs. feasibility) concerns (Liberman & Trope, 1988).

Previous research suggested that the reason individuals conceptualize psychologically distant entities in an abstract rather than in a concrete way is a result of the differences in the types of knowledge they can obtain (Bar-Anan, Liberman, & Trope, 2006; Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). Since concrete aspects of distal objects are ambiguous, individuals tend to depend on their abstract knowledge of the objects such as categorical characteristics (Bar-Anan, Liberman, & Trope, 2006). Generally, if individuals cannot experience an object directly, due to the lack of available and reliable information about the object, they are led to represent the event in a more abstract and schematic way (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). However when an event occurs in a “here and now” situation, individuals can easily obtain a great deal of information and they can represent the event in a concrete way using rich and contextualized details

(Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). From this aspect, CLT presumes that psychological distance is associated with abstraction, and that this association is overgeneralized, predisposing individuals to use high-level construals for a psychologically distal event and low-level construals for a psychologically proximal event even in a situation where the two events have identical information (Bar-Anan, Liberman, & Trope, 2006).

Given that the relationship between distance and construal is overgeneralized, it can be postulated that this relationship is bi-directional (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). In other words, manipulations of construal levels can impact psychological distance perception in the same way as the distance of an event does. Since high-level construals are abstract and general, the construals remind one of the more global aspects of objects. Therefore, when individuals use high-level construals, they are mentally beyond the currently experienced object in time and space, and their psychological distance from the object becomes greater (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

According to Trope and Liberman (2010), the four distance dimensions are cognitively related to each other and are influenced by a similar level of mental construals since these dimensions have the same egocentric reference point. For instance, far away locations are more likely to remind a person of the distant rather than near future, people other than oneself, and improbable rather than probable events (Trope & Liberman, 2011). In effect, Bar-Anan, Liberman, Trope, and Algom (2007) examine the interrelations between spatial distance and other distance dimensions by using a picture-word Stroop task (Stroop, 1935). Participants are provided landscape pictures containing

an arrow pointing to either a near or a distant point in the landscape. Each arrow includes a word indicating either psychological distance or proximity (e.g., tomorrow vs. year; we vs. others; sure vs. maybe). The results show that individuals react faster to distance-congruent stimuli (e.g., distantly pointing arrow including a word that indicates psychological distance) than to distance-incongruent stimuli (e.g., distantly pointing arrow including a word that denotes psychological proximity). In recent research conducted by Stephan, Liberman, and Trope (2011), the effect of temporal distance on familiarity, which is one factor of social distance, is investigated and the results showed that temporal distance from a target person induces an increase in social distance. More specifically, a target person who is scheduled to meet in the more distant future was regarded as less familiar and less similar to the self.

The different levels of construals have a significant influence on individuals' decision making and information processing. When consumers process and interpret information about a target object, they use two levels of mental construals: abstract (high-level) construal and concrete (low-level) construal (Yang et al., 2011). Consumers with abstract construals tend to focus on the superordinate goals (e.g., why they need to purchase the product) and desirability of an outcome (e.g., the end benefits of the product) whereas consumers with concrete construals are more likely to emphasize the subordinate goals and feasibility of the outcome such as the way to use a product to achieve the desired benefits (Kardes, Cronley, & Kim, 2006). Given that psychological distance can have a significant influence on consumer's construal levels, there have been a number of studies examining the relationship between psychological distance and

consumer behavior. For example, Trope and Liberman (2000) investigate how temporal distance influences preferences among events, activities, and objects. They suggest that when an individual makes a distant future decision, he pays more attention to the central meaning of the decision than the secondary features of it. Todorov, Goren, and Trope (2007) demonstrate that probability has a similar impact on the salience of desirability and feasibility. When probability is increased, psychological distance is decreased and feasibility becomes increasingly weighed over desirability in decision making. These studies have not been limited by a single dimension of psychological distance. The influence of the multiple dimensions of psychological distance has been also examined by several researchers (Chandran & Menon, 2004; Kim, Zhang, & Li, 2008). For instance, the results of the study conducted by Kim, Zhang, and Li (2008) suggest that when temporal and social distance are both proximal, consumers show more positive evaluation toward product values associated with low-level construals. However, when either or both dimensions are distal, consumers' evaluations are more influenced by the values concerned with high-level construals.

In the same vein, CLT can be applied to product evaluation. According to Canstãno et al. (2008), when consumers consider adopting a new product in the near future, they are more likely to focus on uncertainties associated with the drawbacks of adoption such as switching-cost. In contrast, in the distant future situation, they tend to focus more on uncertainties concerned with the benefits of adoption such as the performance of the product.

The implication of CLT can also be applied to the context of a person's perception. Others' behaviors can be mentally represented with different levels of generality and abstraction (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007). An individual's global traits, such as morality, prompt high-level construals of his or her behavior, while an individual's mental states, such as problem-solving strategies, prompt low-level construals of his or her behavior. Thus, when people make a prediction about others' behavior in the distant future, they focus more on global characteristics about the target person compared to local and situational mental states (Nussbaum, Trope, & Liberman, 2002). This global and local perception can be used to investigate the relationship between CLT and different self-activation. Since central self-concepts tend to reflect the core disposition of the person and generalized and decontextualized view of the self, central self-concept can be related to global perception. In the same vein, local perception can be related to peripheral self-concepts with situation dependent characteristic (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007). Previous research suggests that a self-system is malleable and different self-representation can be activated based on the situation individuals are in (Markus & Kunda, 1986). For example, Kivetz and Tyler (2007) investigate the relationship between temporal distance (distal vs. proximal) and two distinctive self-concepts (idealistic vs. pragmatic). They demonstrate that when the participants are primed into a distant time condition, the idealistic self is activated whereas, when the participants are primed into a proximal time condition, the pragmatic self is activated. Furthermore, the influence of an individual's self-view (independent self-view vs. interdependent self-view) on the temporal construals of a future event is examined by Spassova and Lee (2013).

According to them, an independent self-view is more concerned with distal temporal distance, whereas an interdependent self-view is more concerned with proximal temporal distance. The same effects have been found in a persuasion context. More specifically, participants primed into an independent self-view show a positive attitude toward the distal temporal framed advertising, while participants primed into an interdependent self-view show a positive attitude toward the proximal temporal framed advertising (Spassova & Lee, 2013).

## **SELF-CONSTRUAL AND CULTURES**

Self-concept is critical to an individual's perceptions and behaviors (Geertz, 1975; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989b) and many psychology studies suggest that the self is a powerful regulator of human behaviors (Cross & Madson, 1997). The basic definition of self-concept is "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). Self-concept is not an objective entity independent of the perceiver, but individuals' subjective thoughts toward themselves (Zinkhan & Hong, 1991). During the last several decades, there have been numerous studies focusing on the role of self-concept in human behavior and psychology. Cognitive psychologists have regarded self-concept as a set of self-schemas that are cognitive structures of the self and stem from past experiences (Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). Self-schemas have a systematic impact on how self-related information is structured and used (Markus, 1977; Markus et al., 1982; Rogers, 1977). Also, self-concept has been considered as a powerful regulator of many aspects of human behavior and a pivotal driver of how individuals perceive themselves and make inferences about

others (Cross & Madson, 1997). Self-concept not only influences individuals' social behaviors but also takes form through individuals' social relationships with others and the society they belong to (Cross & Madson, 1997; Damon & Hart, 1998).

### **Individualistic culture vs. Collectivistic culture**

The self is heavily influenced by culture. Cross-cultural research of the self lends credence to Durkheim's (1968) suggestion that the category of the self is determined by social factors (Markus & Kitayam, 1991). A variety of cultural factors such as language, economic, political, and educational systems, religious and social structures (Triandis, 1989b) can influence the formation of the self. Individuals' self-views, emotions, and motivations are crystallized under the influence of cultural values and contexts (Cross & Madson, 1997). Specifically, Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggest that an individual's prevailing self-construal is mainly determined by the cultural contexts of individualism and collectivism. Individualism and collectivism have been considered as underlying variables in cross-cultural studies (Triandis, 1995) and various conceptions of these two cultural constructs have developed since Hofstede (1980) established that these two constructs are important dimensions to differentiate world cultures (Rhee, Uleman, & Lee, 1996). For example, previous research has suggested that the cultures of Africa, Asia, and Latin America are more likely to be collectivistic, whereas those of Western Europe, North America, and Australia are more likely to be individualistic (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989b).

The concept of in-group plays an important role in explaining the difference between individualism and collectivism. An in-group is a group of people who have

similar demographic attributes, attitudes and experience (Triandis, 1994; Hui, 1988) and influences its members' behavior with the norms, goals, and values the group has (Triandis, 1989a). According to Triandis (1986), in collectivistic cultures, the goals, needs, and views of the in-group are given priority over those of the individual. Social norms and shared beliefs of the in-group are also considered more important compared to individual pleasure and beliefs in collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 1986).

However, the concept of in-group can be different depending on cultures. For example, in a collectivistic culture, in-groups are considered to be ascribed (e.g., family, village, and country) and defined by the tradition of the culture. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, in-groups are considered to be formed through individuals' similarities such as similar beliefs, attitudes, and occupations (Triandis, 1994). Therefore, the relationship of collectivists to their in-group is considered as stable, and much of their behavior tends to be associated with the goals of their in-group. On the other hand, individualists are less likely to be influenced by the goals of their in-group and when there is a conflict between the personal goals and the in-group goals, individualists often disregard the goals of in-groups (Triandis et al., 1988). Prior studies suggest that the essential attribute of individualism is subordinating the goals of the in-group to personal goals, whereas collectivist cultures tend to give priority to the in-group goals over the personal goals in order to preserve in-group cohesion and harmonious relationships (Triandis et al., 1985; Triandis et al., 1988).

Previous research suggests that the distinction of in-groups and out-groups is critical in collectivistic cultures in which social behavior is heavily influenced by whether



the target is a member of the in-group or not (out-group; Rhee, Uleman, & Lee, 1996). For example, in collectivistic cultures, out-group members tend to be treated more individualistically compared to in-group members (Triandis et al., 1998). The difference between the interaction with in-groups and out-groups in collectivistic cultures is sharper than in individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1989). For example, research conducted by Gudykunst, Yoon, and Nishida (1987) showed that in collectivistic cultures, interacting with in-group members is more personalized (e.g., intimate, deep, broad, flexible, etc.), synchronized (effortless, well-coordinated), and less difficult compared to the interacting in individualist cultures. However, when the collectivists interact with out-group members, this smooth atmosphere can hardly be created. In collectivistic cultures, poor communication can occur among members of the same company who are not in-group members (Triandis, 1967), and when collectivists compete with out-group members, the competition tends to be more excessive compared to the competition of individualists (Espinoza & Garza, 1985).

Triandis (1986) suggests that the number of in-groups that one may have and the depth of influence from the group need to be considered in the investigation of individualism and collectivism. He proposes that the more in-groups the individual has, the less the depth of influence of the in-groups the person has (Triandis, 1986). As the culture becomes more complex, the larger number of in-groups one may have or join (Triandis, 1989). Given that individualistic cultures tend to be more complex compared to collectivistic cultures (Verma, 1985), individuals in individualistic cultures can have more in-groups and can be less influenced by their in-groups than people in collectivistic

cultures. In simple cultures, since both groups and individuals have fewer goals, the likelihood of overlap of the goals of groups and individuals becomes higher, and the influence of the group is enhanced. The reverse is true for a complex culture (Triandis, 1989).

Since the main principle of independent self-concept in an individualistic culture is to develop the self as an independent entity from others (Johnson, 1985; Marsella et al., 1985), individuals from individualistic cultures are relatively less influenced by their in-groups. Therefore individualism typically emphasizes individuals' traits of independence, autonomy, uniqueness, and competition (Green, Deschamps, & Paez, 2005; Triandis, 2001). In order to achieve the cultural goal of independence, individualists put more focus on their internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings and actions rather than the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In other words, individualists are autonomous and independent from their in-groups, and their behaviors are primarily influenced by their inner attributes rather than the norms of the groups (Triandis, 2001). For example, Americans (individualists) are more likely to regard helping a member of the in-group as a matter of their personal choice, whereas Indians (collectivists) tend to consider it as their responsibility to their in-group (Miller, 1997). In addition, individualists tend to be universalistic and apply the same value criteria to all whereas collectivists have different value criteria toward their in-group and out-group members (Gudykunst, Yoon, & Nishida, 1987). According to Leung (1997), when distributing resources to their in-group members, individualists tend to use equity as the norms for the distribution. However, collectivists tend to use equality or need as the

norms for the distribution (Yang, 1981). When individualists have a discrepancy between their personal goals and the goals of their in-groups, they take it for granted that their personal goals should be given priority over the group goals (Schwartz, 1990). By contrast, in collectivist cultures, emotional dependence, group harmony, unity, and cooperation are emphasized (Sung & Choi, 2013).

Collectivist cultures presume that individuals belong to one or more in-groups from which they cannot be separated (Hofstede, 1984). Since individuals in collectivist cultures regard themselves as part of the groups, it is important for them to maintain positive relationships with the groups. Even though the costs of maintaining the relationship exceed the benefits from the relationship, they tend to stay with the relationship (Singelis et. al., 1995). Therefore collectivists are concerned more about the context, the situation, and group disposition, prefer holistic thinking and behave primarily based on in-group norms (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999; Triandis, 2001). More specifically, when collectivists communicate with others, they pay more attention to the manner in which the content is presented such as voice level, eye contact and the gestures of their counterparts. However, for individualists, the content of the communication (i.e., what is said) is much more important than how it is communicated (Triandis, 2001). Also, collectivists either identify their personal goals with in-group goals, or if there is a discrepancy between personal and group goals, they strongly believe that the group goals should take precedence over the personal goals.

Lastly, there are many varieties of individualism and collectivism. Triandis (1995) suggests that distinguishing between vertical and horizontal individualism and

collectivism is important. Horizontal culture is associated with equality while vertical culture is related to hierarchy (Triandis, 1995). There are four types of cultures. Horizontal Collectivism is one of the cultural dimensions where individuals consider themselves as a part of their in-groups and Israeli kibbutz can be a good example of it. Horizontal Individualism is a cultural dimension where individuals see themselves as autonomous, but equal status with others is emphasized. Sweden and Australia are examples of it. Vertical Collectivism is a cultural dimension where individuals regard themselves as a part of their in-group, but hierarchic status exists among the members of the in-group. India and traditional Greece can be included in this dimension. Vertical Individualism is a cultural dimension where individuals regard themselves as autonomous and independent, but inequality is emphasized. Also, competition is important in this dimension. The United States and France are good examples of this dimension (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis, 1995; 2001).

### **Self-Construal (independent and interdependent self-construals)**

An individual's predominant self-construal is mainly determined by the cultural contexts of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995; Triandis et al., 1988). Individualism and collectivism are closely related to the major cultural values that individuals learn and how they attain their self-conceptions (Gudykunst et al., 1996). In other words, cultural norms, values, and beliefs in individualistic and collectivistic cultures can have strong impacts on the ways members of cultures conceptualize themselves (Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1989). A number of studies have investigated the relationship between culture and self-construals and suggested that

independent self-construals are highly associated with individualistic cultures, whereas interdependent self-construals are representative of collectivistic cultures (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kashima et al., 1995; Kim et al., 1996; Kim & Sharkey, 1995; Kim, Sharkey, & Singelis, 1994). For instance, Singelis and Brown (1985) demonstrate that Hawaiian participants who have an Asian background are more interdependent and less independent compared to those who have a European background. In research by Kim et al. (2001), U.S. participants show the highest independent orientations, followed by Hawaiian participants, and Koreans.

Self-construal refers to an individual's sense of self through the relationship with others, reflecting the extent to which the individual considers himself or herself either as an independent entity or in relation to others (Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005; Hardin, Leong, & Bhagwat, 2004). Independent self-construal contains the view that an individual's self is a unique and independent entity composed of each individual's configuration of internal attributes (Johnson, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Singelis defines independent self-construal as a "bounded, unitary, stable self that is separate from social context" (Singelis, 1994, p. 581). Since the main principle of independent self-construal is to develop the self as an independent entity separated from others, internal traits, skills, and attributes are regarded as the primary components of this self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The major goals for individuals with well-developed independent self-construal are to maintain their independent self-entity and "to be true to one's own internal structures of preferences, rights, convictions, and goals and, further, to be confident and to be efficacious" (Markus & Kitayama, 1994, p. 569). Individuals with

these goals are heavily concerned with their self-esteem. Individuals with independent self-construal may enhance their self-esteem through performing these goals such as expressing the self and validating the attributes (Cross & Madson, 1997; Singelis, 1994). For example, North Americans who largely have independent self-construal are known as the most concerned and committed people in the world (Bellah et al., 1985; Withnow, 1992). However, for the most part, such prosocial activities are closely related to their intention to be rewarded and be admired (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). The individuals with independent self-construal tend to achieve their goals of distinguishing themselves from others by expressing their inner attributes through these prosocial behaviors (M. Kim, Aune, Hunter, Kim, & Kim, 2001). In contrast, with regard to these behaviors that result from intentional goals of self-expression, the meaning of the same behaviors is different in collectivistic cultures such as Korea and Japan. In a collectivistic culture, such behaviors as a harmonious relationship with other members of the society are taken for granted (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). In sum, the individuals with independent-self construal use the relationship with others as a means for enhancing their self-esteem and evaluation (Cross & Madson, 1997). For them, the relationship is a means to display their superior abilities and attributes or demonstrate uniqueness (Maccoby, 1990; Markus & Cross, 1990; Wills, 1981).

Interdependent self-construal regards the self as an integral part of the collective (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; 1994). That means that the self can exist only through interactions with others (Kumagai & Kumagai, 1985). The self becomes complete when it is posited in the right social relationship (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Singelis defines

an interdependent self-construal as a “flexible, variable self that emphasizes (a) external, public features such as statuses, roles, and relationships, (b) belonging and fitting in, (c) occupying one’s proper place and engaging in appropriate action, and (d) being indirect in communication and reading others’ minds” (Singelis, 1994, p. 581). Unlike independent self-construal, the major principle directing the development of interdependent self-construal is a connection with others (Cross & Madson, 1997). The self needs to be “a single thread in a richly textured fabric of relationships” (Kondo, 1990, p. 33). The thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of others are crucially important because only in reference to them, one’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors can be meaningful (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Even though individuals with interdependent self-construal also possess and express their internal attributes such as opinions and personalities, these attributes cannot play a critical role in regulating their behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individuals with interdependent self-construal recognize themselves gradually through personal relations with others and the principles concerning behavior are shaped from the relations (Hamaguchi, 1985). Therefore the primary goals of individuals with well-developed interdependent self-construal are to define an appropriate relationship with others and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997; Singelis, 1994). Individuals with interdependent self-construal can enhance their self-esteem with harmonious interpersonal relationships and the ability to adjust to diverse situations (Singelis, 1994).

## **Culture, psychological distance and construal level**

In the current study, the relationship between construal level, psychological distance, and their self-view is investigated. Recently, there have been numerous studies suggesting that two different self-construals seem to co-exist within every individual and that the different self-construals can be made temporarily salient by situational specifics and primes (e.g., Aaker & Lee, 2001; Hong et al., 2000; Mandel, 2003; Sung & Choi, 2011). For example, Aaker and Lee (2001) prime participants into the independent self-construal condition by making them read a scenario emphasizing the word “you.” In contrast, the interdependent self-construal condition is manipulated by a scenario emphasizing the phrase “your team”. Similarly, Sung and Choi (2011) prime their participants into either an independent or interdependent condition through showing them individual sports events (independent condition) or team sports events (interdependent condition). However, the chronic level of accessibility of the two self-construals is more likely to be affected by social and cultural surroundings (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001). Since culture has been formed by a variety of variables such as tradition, religion, philosophies, and the socialization process, an individual’s self-view cannot be separated from the culture to which the person belongs. Therefore the asymmetric development of the two different self-construals (independent vs. interdependent) is heavily influenced by cultural differences (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001).

In a western cultural context, individuals who show behavioral consistencies across situations receive a positive evaluation (Suh, 2002). Consistent expression of stable traits, attitudes, and other personal characteristics becomes the cornerstone for



conceptualizing the real self and individuals who have confidence in their real selves can behave autonomously and consistently (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003). From this aspect, individualistic attributes that are stable and not sensitive to external surroundings are critical for individuals with independent self-construal (overall characteristics of members of Western cultures). Therefore when they think of people, either the self or others, they tend to represent the people in an abstract and decontextualized way using the person's characteristic attributes such as competence and intelligence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Spassova & Lee, 2013). Conversely, in East Asian collectivistic cultures in which generally interdependent self-construal is dominant (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), consistency is not considered as important as in Western culture. Since individuals with interdependent self-construal try to fit into the norms, rules, and expectations of specific situations, flexibility and adaptation to social contexts are considered more important (Cross et al, 2003). Therefore, those with interdependent self-construal are more vigilant and sensitive to others and their social surroundings. They tend to describe the self and others in terms of reference to specific social situations using concrete and contextual information (Cousins, 1989; Kinagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Spassova & Lee, 2013). More specifically, Shweder and Bourne (1984) demonstrate that when people describe other people, 46% of American descriptions are of the decontextualized variety, while only 20% of Indian descriptions are associated with the decontextualized variety. A study comparing the self-descriptions of American students with those of Japanese students (Cousins, 1989) reveals similar results. For the question "Who am I?," Japanese students tend to provide concrete and role specific

answers such as “I am in the gymnastics club,” whereas American students referred more frequently to psychological traits or attributes such as “I am easygoing.” In sum, individuals in Western cultures tend to make attributions for behavior on the basis of abstract characteristics and general disposition, whereas individuals in East Asian cultures are more likely to make attribution for behavior based on concrete and contextual factors (Lee, Hallaha, & Herzog 1996; Spassova & Lee, 2013).

High-level construals of behavior are composed of global, superordinate and core features, whereas low-level construals consist of concrete, subordinate, and contextual features of the behavior (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Therefore, it can be postulated that the different ways of construing information of an individualistic (disposition oriented) and collectivistic (context oriented) culture are associated with high and low-level construals. Many previous studies have suggested that global dispositional traits comprise high-level construals of behavior, while mental states such as expectations and feelings constitute low-level construals of behavior (Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Mischel & Schoda, 1995; Trope, 1989).

Considering construal levels and psychological distance have a reciprocal relationship, it follows that self-construals are also related to psychological distance (Spassova & Lee, 2013). According to Nussbaum, Trope and Liberman (2003), when making a distant future prediction about others, individuals tend to depend more on global information such as their dispositional traits, whereas in a near future condition, they are more heavily influenced by local and contextual information such as the situational specifics. Also, global information processing has been found to be more

related to the perceived distant temporal distance than near temporal distance (Liberman & Förster, 2009). Considering individuals from collectivistic cultures prefer using the contextual and local information to decontextualized and global information, individuals from collectivistic cultures should be associated more with near temporal distance than distant temporal distance. A study conducted by S. Lee, Lee, and Kern (2011) show the relationship between self-construals and temporal distance. They suggest that when individuals are asked to imagine a future festival, East Asians deem the festival as temporally further away compared to European Americans. Similarly, Kivetz and Tyler (2007) suggest that the idealistic self, which includes one's true self-view (e.g., core self-conceptions), is activated by distal temporal distance, whereas the pragmatic self, which includes relatively more contextual aspects of the self, is activated by a proximal temporal distance.

Spassova and Lee (2013) demonstrate that temporal distance can be influenced by the way individuals view themselves. Through four experiments, they reveal that individuals with independent self-construal are likely to represent future events in more abstract and decontextualized terms, whereas individuals with interdependent self-construals are likely to represent future events in more detailed and context-specific terms. Furthermore, those of independent self-construals tend to think that the future events will occur in the more distant future, whereas those of interdependent self-construals tend to think the future event will more likely occur in the near future (Spassova & Lee, 2013). However, since the self-construals in the research are manipulated by using Brewer and Gardner's (1996) pronoun prime task, the influence of

culture on the construal levels and temporal distance is not investigated. Therefore investigating the cultural impact which can influence individuals' thoughts and behaviors will be meaningful. In order to expand Spassova and Lee's research framework to cultural self-views, the current research examines the interaction between cultures (individualism vs. collectivism), construal levels and temporal distance. Thus, the following hypotheses are put forth:

**H1.** Individuals from **individualistic cultures** tend to construe an event or object in a more **abstract way (high-level construal)** whereas individuals from **collectivistic cultures** tend to construe the events in a more **concrete way (low-level construal)**.

**H2.** Individuals from **individualistic cultures** are more likely to consider future events as **more distant and use higher-level** construals for the events whereas individuals from **collectivistic cultures** tend to consider future events as **closer and use lower-level** construals for the events.

Individuals prefer information that is consistent with their self-views and the compatible information is more easily and elaborately comprehended, encoded, and retained compared to incompatible information (Aaker and Lee, 2001; Markus, 1977). Consumer researchers have suggested that consumers prefer products and brands which have a compatible image with their self-image (e.g., Belch, 1978; Sirgy, 1982), and advertising appeals that are consistent with a consumer's self-view can be more persuasive (Wang & Mowen, 1997; Sung & Choi, 2011). Built on the notion that an independent self-construal puts more weight on the distant future events and behaviors, while an interdependent self-construal is interested more in the near future events and behaviors, Spassova and Lee (2013) suggest that individuals with an independent self-view are more persuaded by messages emphasizing distant-future than near-future

benefits, while individuals with an interdependent self-view are more persuaded by messages focusing on near-future compared to distant-future benefits.

According to CLT, individuals are more interested in desirability features for distant events, whereas they pay more attention to feasibility features for near future events (Trope & Liberman, 1998). In other words, when individuals are exposed to appeals emphasizing a distant future event, desirability focused appeals will be more persuasive. By contrast, when individuals are exposed to appeals emphasizing a near future event, feasibility focused appeals will be more effective. Considering the relationship between self-view and temporal distance, it can be postulated that when a distant future event is advertised, individuals from individualistic cultures will react more positively to the advertisement emphasizing the desirability features of the event compared to the advertisement focusing on the feasibility of the event. In contrast, when a near future event is advertised, individuals from collectivistic cultures will be more interested in the advertisement emphasizing the feasibility of the event than the desirability. More formally, the following hypothesis is created:

**H3:** Individuals from **individualistic cultures** will show more positive attitudes toward the advertisement of a **distant future event** when the advertisement emphasizes the **desirability of the event** than when the advertisement emphasizes the feasibility of the distant event.

**H4:** Individuals from **collectivistic cultures** will respond more favorably to the advertisement of a **near future event** focusing on the **feasibility of the event** rather than the advertisement focusing on the desirability of the event.

## **CHAPTER 3: STUDIES 1 AND 2**

To test the proposed hypotheses, two studies were conducted. Study 1 was composed of two parts. In the first part, the relationship between culture and construal levels was examined, and in the second part, the influence of culture on temporal distance was tested. Finally, in study 2, the three-way interaction between culture, temporal distance, and the construal-level frame of the advertising message (desirability vs. feasibility) was investigated.

### **STUDY 1–1: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND CONSTRUAL LEVEL**

The objective of study 1 was to test whether the two different cultures (individualism vs. collectivism) have an impact on individuals' construal levels. Participants were selected from two different cultures (Korea and the U.S.), and their construal level was measured using the Behavioral Identification Form (BIF; Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). Individuals from the collectivistic culture (Korea) were expected to be more concerned with low-level construal, whereas individuals from the individualistic culture (U.S.) were more likely to be concerned with high-level construal. In order to investigate different cultural orientations on individuals' construal levels, the data were collected in South Korea and the U.S. Since the two countries have significant cultural differences, Korea and the U.S. were a good pair for the current study. For example, Hofstede (1991) suggests that Korea is a highly collectivistic country with a low individualism rank (43<sup>rd</sup> out of the 53 countries), whereas the U.S. is the most individualistic and least collectivistic country among the 53 countries.

## **Method**

A total of 279 undergraduate students (180 female, 64.5%) from two different cultures (155 from the U.S.-55.6% and 124 from Korea-44.4%) participated in this study in exchange for extra credit. Korean participants representing a collectivistic culture were selected from undergraduate students from major universities in Korea (Sookmyung University and Gachon University), and the American undergraduate students representing an individualistic culture were recruited from the University of Texas at Austin in the U.S. In order to maximize the cultural effect, through a question asking participants' ethnicity, Asian students who were studying in the U.S. were eliminated from the individualistic culture group. Similarly, international students who were studying in Korea were excluded from the collectivistic culture group. Participants received an invitation email introducing them to the purpose of the study and were provided with a URL to access the survey website created for this study. Vallacher and Wegner's (1989) Behavioral Identification Form (BIF) was used to measure the participants' construal levels.

According to action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989), the identities for an action can be arranged in a cognitive hierarchy, from low-level to high-level. Low-level identities are associated with feasibility concerns of the action, whereas high-level identities are concerned with the desirability concerns of the action (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). The BIF is composed of 25 questions estimating the level of individuals' construal for certain activities. For each question, participants read a simple statement of an action (e.g., eating), followed by two options describing the action either

in terms of a high-level construal emphasizing the desirability of the action (e.g., getting nutrition) or a low-level construal focusing on the feasibility of the action (e.g., chewing and swallowing; for more details, see Appendix A). Participants were asked to select the option that best captures their view of the action. A high-level option was marked 1, while a low-level option was marked 0 automatically through the online survey. The total number of marked high-level statements constituted the individual’s BIF score. A higher BIF score indicated a greater tendency of individuals to identify the activity in a more abstract and high level (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989).

## Results

In hypothesis 1, it was expected that individuals from individualistic cultures would be more likely to have higher level construals than individuals from a collectivistic culture, whereas individuals from collectivistic cultures would tend to have lower level construals compared to individuals from an individualistic culture. In order to support the hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was conducted. As expected, there was a significant difference in means between American students’ BIF scores and Koreans’ scores. More specifically, American students’ BIF scores were higher than those of Korean students ( $M_{U.S.} = 14.99$  vs.  $M_{Korea} = 12.21$ ,  $t [277] = 4.92$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

	Countries	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
BIF Score	U.S.	155	14.99	4.95	3	25
	KOREA	124	12.21	4.33	3	23

Table 1: BIF score (the U.S. vs. Korea)



Since a higher BIF score indicates that the individual is more concerned with high-level construals than low-level construals, hypothesis 1 was supported. In other words, individuals from an individualistic culture (the U.S.) tended to construe an object or an event in a more abstract way and focus more on the desirability of the object or the event than individuals from a collectivistic culture (Korea).

## **Discussion**

In line with the prediction, the results of part 1 of study 1 showed that cultural orientations had an impact on individuals' construal levels. The significantly different BIF scores indicated that the U.S. students tended to be concerned more with high-level construals than Koreans students. That means individuals from an individualistic culture prefer abstract thinking to concrete thinking, and the reverse is true for individuals from a collectivistic culture.

Even though there have been many studies on CLT, the majority of CLT research has focused mainly on the relationship between several dimensions of psychological distance and individuals' construal levels (e.g., Chandran & Menon, 2004; Liberman & Trope, 2003; Trop & Liberman, 2003). Little research has investigated the influence of different cultures on construal levels. Therefore, the empirically supported results from the current study can be a cornerstone to apply CLT to a cross-cultural study. Considering the growing importance of global marketing, this study can offer an opportunity to reveal how different cultures can influence consumers' evaluations of a certain brand or a product by systematically changing the representation of the brand or product (high-level construals vs. low-level construals).

Also, since individuals with high-level construals are more interested in why they act compared to how they act, they tend to preconceive their behavior in terms of distant future outcomes and implications (Wallacher & Wegner, 1989). From this aspect, the relationship between temporal distance and individuals' cultural orientation can provide further evidence of the relationship between culture and construal levels. In part 2, the relationship between temporal distance and culture was investigated.

### **STUDY 1-2: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND TEMPORAL DISTANCE**

To examine the relationship between cultures and an individual's conception of temporal distance, a content analysis method was used in part 2. A total of 279 participants were asked to describe their lives after their graduation. By analyzing the descriptions of the participants, the relationship between culture and temporal distance was investigated. Temporal distance was controlled by the years the participants had left until their university graduation.

#### **Method**

The undergraduate students who participated in study 1 were asked to describe their lives after they graduate from their universities with two or three sentences. Based on the number of years they had left to graduate, participants were divided into two groups. A participant who had less than one year to graduate was assigned to a near future condition, and participants who had more than three years to graduate were grouped into a distant future condition. Gender was also controlled. Since Korean male students are required to fulfill a two-year military service during or after college, their

perceived temporal distance to the time when they search for jobs and start their careers may be different from those of female students. Furthermore, most of the Korean participants came from a woman's university, so female students were used for the study.

To measure how participants construe their future events, a coding scheme consisting of mainly two dimensions was developed. The first dimension was related to participants' future jobs and was composed of five specific topics such as job areas, job positions, and salary range, which generally were associated with their short term life goals just after their graduation. The other was associated with their long-term life goals and aspirations such as what they want to achieve in their lives and the life they imagine 10 years from now. And it consisted of four topics such as their long-term family plans and roles as parents. For undergraduate students, career goals were something they need to achieve in a few years. Therefore it can be assumed that the career goals are temporally closer than long-term life goals. The more the description was matched with the topics, the more the description was considered as concrete. For example, if a participant provided a specific job position (e.g., media planner, account planner) and company name (e.g., JWT, Google) he or she wanted to have and described his or her family plan (e.g., happily married with two children), the description satisfied three of the nine topics. And this description was regarded as more concrete than a description that addressed only one or two topics.

In addition, the perceived temporal distance to participants' future lives was coded by questions asking the coders to indicate what aspect of their lives participants focused on more frequently in their descriptions. If a participant provided a more detailed

description of his or her career life in the immediate future (e.g., I plan to be working at an AD/PR firm as a copy writer, I want to work in the public affairs department) than his or her long-term life aspirations (e.g., I will have two kids, and I will live with my family happily), it can be postulated that the person paid more attention to the close future compared to the distant future. Since career plans are mainly associated with the time when participants have just graduated and are starting to look for their jobs, the descriptions of their career lives can be considered as relatively near future rather than the descriptions of their long-term life goals and aspirations. The individuals' long-term life goals and aspiration are generally related to more distant lives such as married lives or lives as parents and focus on the ultimate goals they want to achieve throughout their entire lives (for more details, see Appendix B).

Three coders who speak both English and Korean analyzed the descriptions. They first reviewed the coding scheme and practiced with it, and unclear and arguable items were clarified. The coders analyzed 30 descriptions (10.7% of the entire descriptions) as a pilot test. Intercoder reliability, computed as the percentage of agreement, was 91.59% on average overall, and it ranged from 81.11% to 100%. The question measuring the temporal distance (overall, I think the description focuses more on the person's career life than his or her long-term life goals) had the lowest reliability with 81.11%. The questions about specific company name and desirable salary range had the highest reliability with 100.00%. The coding process resumed following the pilot test.

The 30 descriptions used in the pilot study and six incomplete descriptions were excluded from the actual content analysis. In order to control gender effect, only the

descriptions written by females (153; 63%) were analyzed. In addition, to maximize the temporal effect on individuals' construing future events, only the near future group (one year left to graduation group) and distant group (more than three years left to graduation group) were used. In other words, participants who were in the middle of the temporal condition (about two years left to graduation, 63; 41.2%) were excluded from the analysis. In sum, a total of 90 descriptions were selected (the U.S. near future condition – 26, the U.S. distant future condition – 13, Korean near future condition – 28, and Korean distant future condition – 23) and each coder analyzed 30 descriptions.

## **Results**

Independent sample t-tests were performed to address the hypothesized relationship between cultures and temporal distance. The results suggested that in a near future condition, the descriptions written by the U.S. and Korean participants were significantly different from each other ( $M_{U.S.} = 1.58$  vs.  $M_{Korea} = 2.21$ ,  $t [52] = -2.41$ ,  $p = .02$ ). When students had less than one year to graduate from their universities (in the near future condition), Korean students tended to describe their lives after their graduation more concretely than the U.S. students. However, in a distant future condition, a significant difference between the two cultures was not found ( $M_{U.S.} = 1.15$  vs.  $M_{Korea} = 1.22$ ,  $t [34] = -.15$ ,  $p = .88$ ). Even though Korean students described their distant future lives (more than 3 years) in more concrete ways compared to the U.S. students, the difference was not statistically different.

Temporal distance	Countries	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Near	U.S.	26	1.58	.95	0	3
	KOREA	28	2.21	1.00	0	4
Distant	U.S.	13	1.15	1.41	0	3
	KOREA	23	1.22	1.09	0	3

Table 2: Means of concreteness of descriptions (the U.S. vs. Korea)

To examine the effect of cultures on individuals' perceived temporal distance to their future events, the coders were asked to answer the two questions that were, "overall, I think the description focuses more on the person's career life than his or her long-term life goals and aspirations" and "overall, I think the description focuses more on the person's long-term life goals and aspirations than his or her career life." For the first question, the coders mainly disagreed that the descriptions written by the U.S. students were more associated with their career life than their long-term life goals (disagree-59%, neutral-5%, and agree-36%). By contrast, the coders mostly agreed that Korean descriptions showed that the Korean participants were concerned more with their career lives than their long-term life goals (disagree-29%, neutral-14%, and agree-57%;  $\chi^2 = 8.24, p = .02$ ). For the second question, the coders mainly agreed on the U.S. descriptions (disagree-38%, neutral-3%, and agree-59%) while they disagreed on the Korean descriptions (disagree-57%, neutral-14%, and agree-29%;  $\chi^2 = 9.20, p = .01$ ).

		U.S		KOREA		TOTAL			
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	$X^2$	<i>p</i>
<i>Q1</i>	Overall, I think the description focuses more on the person's career life than his or her long-term life goals.								
Disagree		23	59%	15	29%	38	42%		
Neutral		2	5%	7	14%	9	10%	8.24	.02
Agree		14	36%	29	57%	43	48%		
<i>Q2</i>	Overall, I think the description focuses more on the person's long term life goals than his or her career life								
Disagree		15	38%	29	57%	44	49%		
Neutral		1	3%	7	14%	8	9%	9.2	.01
Agree		23	59%	15	29%	38	42%		

Table 3: Relationship between culture and temporal distance

## Discussion

The results of part 2 of study 1 provided evidence supporting the second hypothesis. Consistent with the prediction, individuals from a collectivistic culture (Korean students) tended to represent their lives after their university graduation more specifically and concretely compared to individuals from an individualistic culture (the U.S. students) in a near future condition. Furthermore, Korean students were more likely to perceive life after graduation as a closer future event. In contrast to the U.S. students who were more interested in their long-term and entire lives, when Korean students were asked to describe their lives after graduation, they tended to focus more on their career lives. Since career life is closely related to their job searching activities such as their preferred companies and job positions, the description can be limited to the period right after their graduation. In sum, individuals from a collectivistic culture are more likely to

perceive their future lives as temporally closer and construe their lives at lower levels than individuals from an individualistic culture. These results provided not only further evidence for the hypothesized relationship between culture and construal levels, which was suggested in part 1, but it also supported the influence of culture on individuals' perceived temporal distance to future events.

These results are supported by previous research examining the relationship between self-view and construal level and temporal distance (S. Lee et al., 2011; Spassova & Lee, 2013). According to Spassova and Lee (2013), independent-primed participants represent information more abstractly than interdependent-primed participants, and the independent participants consider that planned behaviors will happen in the more distant future than the interdependent participants. Also, S. Lee et al. (2011) suggest that East Asians tend to perceive a future event as more a proximal future event than European Americans. However, in the previous research, participants' self-views are primed into either interdependent or independent (Spassova & Lee, 2013), and the temporal distance is intentionally manipulated using a scenario designed by researchers (S. Lee et al., 2011). In the current study, since participants from two different cultures are used and the temporal distance is manipulated by a real future event the participants are interested in (the years remaining that the participants have to their graduation), the ecological validity of the study is enhanced.

Furthermore, the relationship between culture, temporal distance and construal-levels can have critical implications for persuasion. To investigate the influence of the relationship on persuasion, in study 2, an advertising context was used.



## **STUDY 2: THE THREE-WAY INTERACTION BETWEEN CULTURE, TEMPORAL DISTANCE AND CONSTRUAL LEVEL**

The objective of study 2 was to explore the implications of the relationship between culture, temporal distance, and construal level for advertising persuasiveness. For this purpose, the effect of a match between these three variables was examined in an experimental condition. A 2 (culture: Korea vs. the U.S.)  $\times$  2 (temporal distance: distant vs. near future)  $\times$  2 (Construal level: desirability focused vs. feasibility focused message) between-subjects design was employed. Similar to study 1, the temporal distance was manipulated by the years the participants had left until their graduation. The messages were manipulated through the headline and the body copy emphasizing the desirability or feasibility of the advertised product.

### **Method**

A total of 224 undergraduate students (70.1% female) participated in this study. Extra credit or an e-gift card valued at \$5 was provided as an incentive for completing the study. Similar to study 1, 125 Korean students (55.8%) were recruited from major universities in Korea (Chung-Ang University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul Women's University, etc.) and 99 American students (44.2%) were recruited from the University of Texas at Austin in the U.S. Similar to study 1, Asian international students in the U.S. were excluded from the individualistic culture group and international students in Korea were eliminated from the collectivistic culture group. This study was also conducted online.

Since all participants were undergraduate students, a future job search would be one of the most important future events for them, and it would capture their interest. Therefore, the number of years that participants had left to their graduation, which is the time they start their career, was used to manipulate the temporal distance. Instead of priming participants into either a distant or near future condition artificially as has been done in many previous studies, in the current study, the actual perceived temporal distance was used. More specifically, to manipulate the temporal distance, participants were grouped into two groups that were a temporally distant group and temporally proximal group. Participants who had more than one year to graduate were assigned to the temporally distant group (N=123, 54.9%) whereas participants who had less than one year to graduate belonged to the temporally proximal group (N=101, 45.1%).

Construal levels were manipulated by an advertising message for a fictitious job searching service brand. To minimize the confounding effects of the real brands that may induce biases such as brand loyalty and preference, a fictitious brand (Job Recruiter. com) was created. Construal levels were varied by differently framed headline and body copy. For example, in the high-level construal condition, superordinate goals for using the service such as finding a desirable job were emphasized in the headline, and in the body copy, the core benefits of the service were provided abstractly (e.g., our service is reliable and fast). In contrast, in the low-level construal condition, subordinate goals of the service such as ease and convenience were emphasized in the headline, and specific and concrete service features were indicated in body copy (e.g., 1 week guarantee to find your job). This manipulation was based on previous research. In Lee, Keller, and Sternthal's

research (2010), they manipulated the construal level of the flash drive advertising message through the headline and the body copy. More specifically, “having your data in your pocket is music to your ears” was used as the headline to focus on the high-level benefits of owning the flash drive, whereas “2-in-1 feature: a data storage device + an MP3 player” was used as the headline to emphasize the low-level features of the flash drive.

A total of six sets of headlines and body copy (three for high-level and three for low-level) were developed with the assistance of advertising students at the University of Texas at Austin. In a pretest, 23 undergraduate students were asked a series of questions to rate the extent to which the copy was considered desirability focused and an abstract message (high-level condition) or feasibility focused and a concrete message (low-level condition) on a 7-point Likert scale (1-strongly agree; 7-strongly disagree). Through the pretest, two headlines were selected for study 2. For the high-level condition, “Do what you do best and we’ll do the same for you” was selected for the headline, while “Custom algorithms to help pair your specific skill set with the relevant opportunity” was selected for the low-level condition. The results of a paired sample t-test indicated that the two headlines were different in terms of their construal levels (1<sup>st</sup> copy -  $M_{\text{high}} = 2.96$  vs.  $M_{\text{low}} = 3.89$ ,  $t = -2.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ; 2<sup>nd</sup> Copy -  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.83$  vs.  $M_{\text{low}} = 2.79$ ,  $t = 3.95$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, the headlines were translated to Korean, and the same pretest was conducted for Korean students. A total of 50 Korean undergraduate students participated in the pretest. The results also showed that the two headlines were significantly different in terms of their construal levels (1<sup>st</sup> copy -  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.83$ ,  $t = -8.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ;

2<sup>nd</sup> Copy -  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.52$  vs.  $M_{\text{low}} = 3.02$ ,  $t = 2.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ). To support the manipulation, abstractly framed body copy was added to the high-level condition advertisement, whereas concretely framed body copy was added to the low-level condition advertisement. Except for the headline and body copy, other factors composing the advertisement were the same for each condition. Appendix 3 provides the advertisements that were used in this study.

Two dependent variables were used to assess the efficiency of message persuasion: attitude toward the brand (1 = *bad, negative, unfavorable*; 7 = *good, positive, favorable*;  $\alpha = .94$ ) and attitude toward the advertisement (1 = *bad, negative, not believable, not credible*; 7 = *good, positive, believable, credible*;  $\alpha = .91$ )

## **Results**

### ***Manipulation check***

To assess the efficacy of the construal level of the message embodied in the advertisements, participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale whether the advertisement was associated with desirability or feasibility. As expected, participants who were exposed to the desirability focused messages indicated that the advertisement illustrated more about the desirability ( $M = 4.89$ ) than the feasibility of the product ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $t = 6.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ). By contrast, participants who were exposed to the feasibility focused messages indicated that the advertisement illustrated more about the feasibility ( $M = 4.30$ ) than the desirability of the product ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $t = -2.40$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The results showed that the manipulation of the advertisement messages was successful.

### *Hypothesis testing*

To test the hypotheses, 2 (culture: Korea vs. the U.S.)  $\times$  2 (temporal distance: distant vs. near future)  $\times$  2 (construal level: desirability focused vs. feasibility focused message) analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted on each of the two dependent variable measures – attitude toward the advertisement and attitude toward the brand. Product involvement was used as covariate.

### *Attitude toward the brand*

In this research, it was hypothesized that a match between individuals' cultural orientation, their perceived temporal distance, and construal level message framing would increase the persuasiveness of the advertising message. To examine the hypotheses, an ANOVA was performed for the dependent variable measuring attitude toward the brand.

The results of the three-way ANOVA revealed that there was a significant three-way interaction effect among the three independent variables on attitude toward the brand ( $F[1, 216] = 6.97, p < .05, \omega^2 = .03$ ). Two main effects (culture: CUT and construal level: CL) were not significant ( $F_{\text{CUT}}[1, 216] = .18, p = .67, \omega^2 = .00$ ;  $F_{\text{CL}}[1, 216] = .12, p = .73, \omega^2 = .00$ ), but a main effect of temporal distance (TD) was significant ( $F_{\text{TD}}[1, 216] = 4.93, p < .05, \omega^2 = .02$ ). A significant two-way interaction between culture and construal level was also found ( $F_{\text{CUT*CL}}[1, 216] = 3.99, p < .05, \omega^2 = .02$ ). To investigate the three-way interaction further directly, additional analyses were performed. As expected, in the distant condition, the U.S. participants evaluated the brand more favorably when it was advertised with the desirability focused messages than with the feasibility focused messages ( $M_{\text{H}} = 5.00$  vs.  $M_{\text{L}} = 4.08, F[1, 119] = 7.62, p < .05, \omega^2 = .06$ ).

In contrast, the Korean participants showed more a favorable attitude toward the brand advertised with the feasibility focused messages compared to the desirability focused messages ( $M_H = 4.12$  vs.  $M_L = 4.63$ ,  $F [1,119] = 6.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\omega^2 = .05$ ). However, when they were in a near temporal distance condition, there were no significant differences between the two cultural groups (U.S.:  $M_H = 3.76$  vs.  $M_L = 4.17$   $F [1, 97] = 2.12$ ,  $p = .15$ ,  $\omega^2 = .02$ ; Korea:  $M_H = 4.16$  vs.  $M_L = 4.37$   $F [1, 97] = .29$ ,  $p = .59$ ,  $\omega^2 = .00$ ). Therefore the results partially supported the hypotheses.

	Distant condition		Near condition	
	U.S.	Korea	U.S.	Korea
Desirability-focused message	5.00 (.98) <i>n</i> = 15	4.12 (.74) <i>n</i> = 39	3.76 (1.18) <i>n</i> = 32	4.16(.63) <i>n</i> = 15
Feasibility-focused message	4.08 (1.43) <i>n</i> = 17	4.63 (.83) <i>n</i> = 52	4.17 (1.35) <i>n</i> = 35	4.37 (1.02) <i>n</i> = 19

Table 4: Attitude toward the brand

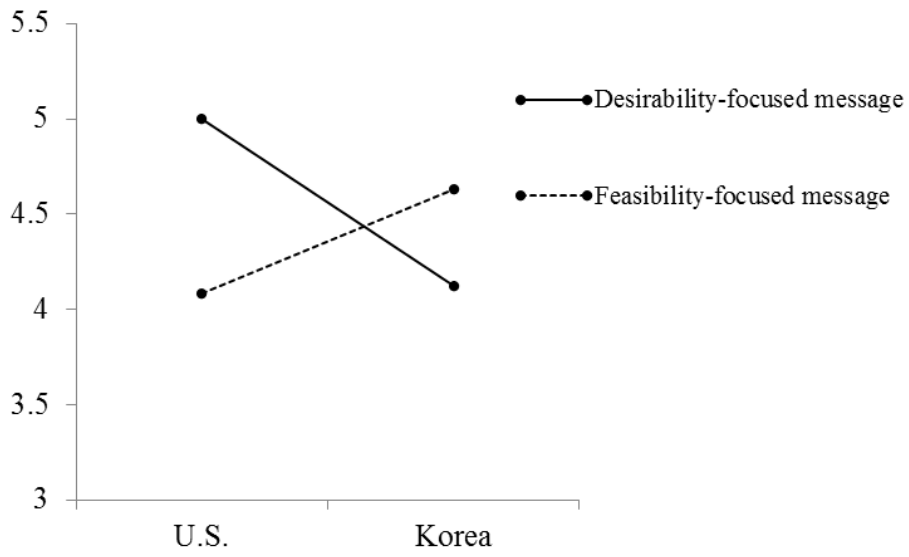


Figure 1: Attitude toward the brand (distant temporal distance)

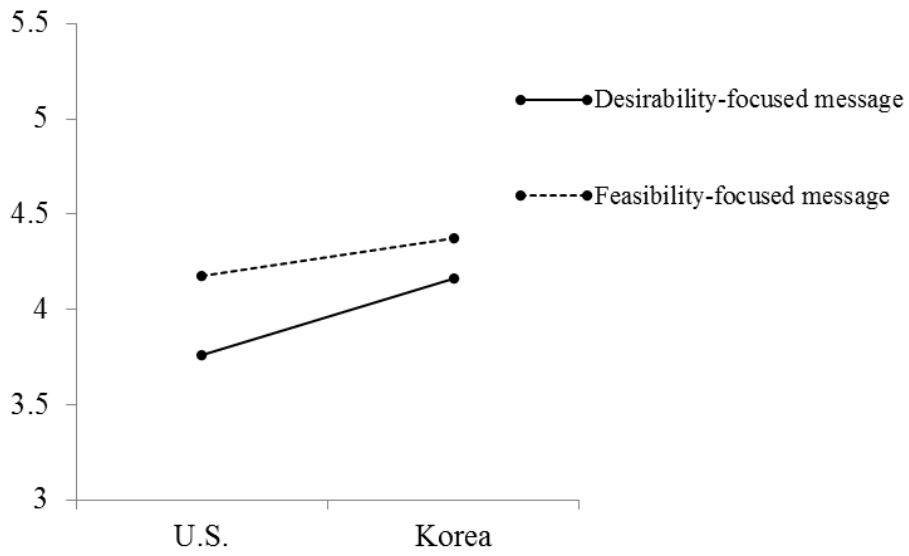


Figure 2: Attitude toward the brand (near temporal distance)

### *Attitude toward the advertisement*

Next, the matching effect on the attitude toward the advertisement was examined by a three-way ANOVA. The results showed that there was a significant three-way interaction effect ( $F [1, 216] = 4.20, p < .05, \omega^2 = .02$ ). Similar to attitude toward the brand, a significant main effect of temporal distance was confirmed ( $F_{TD} [1, 216] = 7.98, p < .05, \omega^2 = .04$ ). However, significant main effects of culture and construal level were not found ( $F_{CL} [1, 216] = .02, p = .88, \omega^2 = .00$ ;  $F_{CUT} [1, 216] = .02, p = .88, \omega^2 = .00$ ). There was a significant two-way interaction of culture and construal level ( $F_{CUT*CL} [1, 216] = 6.77, p < .05, \omega^2 = .03$ ). Subsequent contrasts analyses were conducted for examining the three-way interaction. The results revealed that in a distant condition, the U.S. participants showed a more favorable attitude toward the advertisement emphasizing the desirability of the product compared to the advertisement emphasizing the feasibility of the product ( $M_H = 4.37$  vs.  $M_L = 3.42, F [1, 119] = 8.01, p < .05, \omega^2 = .06$ ). In contrast, the Korean participants evaluated the advertisement framed in low-level terms (feasibility) more positively in comparison to the advertisement framed in high-level terms (desirability:  $M_H = 3.57$  vs.  $M_L = 4.09, F [1, 119] = 6.86, p < .05, \omega^2 = .05$ ). However, in a near condition, no significant effects were found in both cultures. Therefore these results partially confirmed the hypotheses.



	Distant condition		Near condition	
	U.S.	Korea	U.S.	Korea
Desirability-focused message	4.37 (1.15) <i>n</i> = 15	3.57 (.93) <i>n</i> = 39	3.28 (1.35) <i>n</i> = 32	3.30(.98) <i>n</i> = 15
Feasibility-focused message	3.42 (1.31) <i>n</i> = 17	4.09 (.66) <i>n</i> = 52	3.45 (1.30) <i>n</i> = 35	3.65(.88) <i>n</i> = 19

Table 5: Attitude toward the advertisement

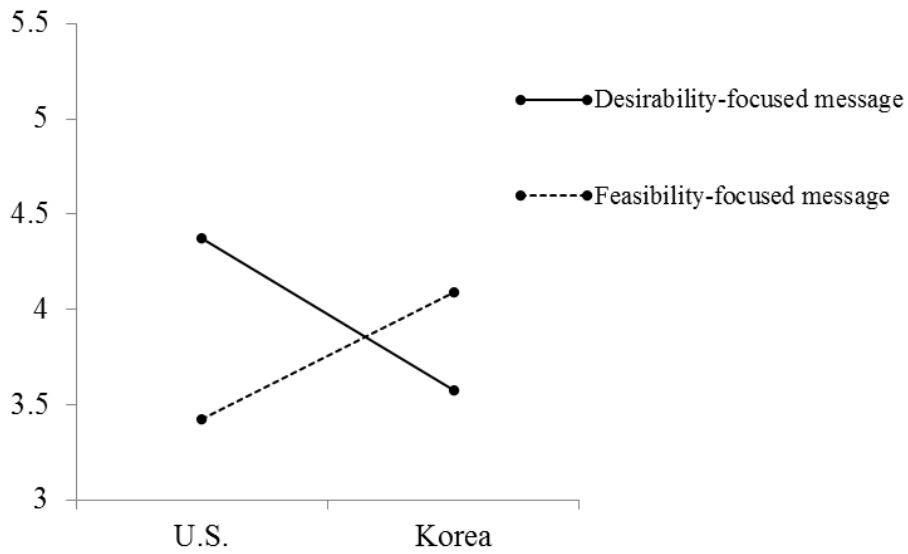


Figure 3: Attitude toward the advertisement (distant temporal distance)

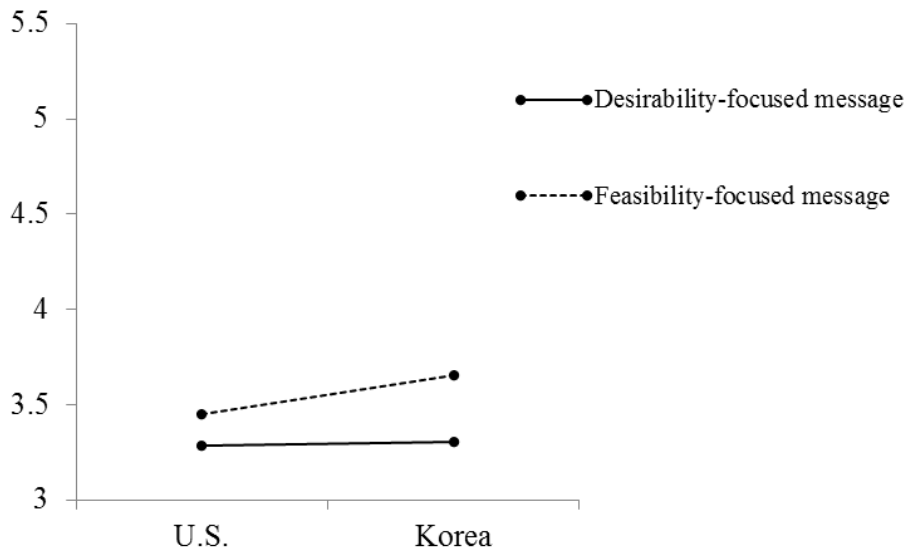


Figure 4: Attitude toward the advertisement (near temporal distance)

## Discussion

The results of study 2 shed light on how CLT can be used to increase the effectiveness of advertising messages. The results of the study showed that temporal distance and cultures were associated with each other, and when the association matched the construal level, the persuasiveness of the message was enhanced. For instance, when individuals perceived that the temporal distance from a future event or object was distant, individuals from an individualistic culture preferred the messages framed in high-level construal terms rather than low-level terms. In contrast, individuals from a collectivistic culture responded to the messages framed in low-level terms more favorably than high-level framed messages. However, in a near temporal distance condition, the two distinct cultural groups did not show significantly different reactions toward the brand and advertisements framed in either high or low-level terms.

The two distinct cultural groups showed different patterns of evaluating the brand and advertisement. As shown in Figures 1 and 3, the U.S. students were more likely to be influenced by temporal distance than their culture, whereas the Korean students tended to be more influenced by their culture than temporal distance. More specifically, in a distant condition, the Korean students reacted more positively toward the messages emphasizing the feasibility of the brand. If temporal distance had more impact on the Korean students' construal levels than their culture, they should have shown more a positive attitude toward the advertisement framed in high-level terms (desirability). However, the Korean students preferred the feasibility focused advertisement to the desirability focused advertisement in the distant condition. The U.S. students seemed to be more influenced by the temporal distance than their culture. In the distant condition, as expected, they preferred the desirability focused advertisement to the feasibility focused advertisement. However, in the near condition, they were inclined to prefer the advertisement focusing on feasibility of the brand rather than the advertisement concerned with desirability of the brand. Even though there was no statistically different preference between the desirability focused and feasibility focused advertisement among the U.S. students in the near condition, the mean difference ( $M_H = 3.28$  vs.  $M_L = 3.45$ ) might suggest that the U.S. students showed a more positive attitude toward the advertisement framed in low-level terms. If their cultural orientation mainly had influenced how the U.S. students construed the advertisement, regardless of the temporal distance, they should have evaluated more favorably the advertisement emphasizing the desirability than the feasibility of the brand.

These different cognitive patterns may explain the reasons why significant effects were not found in the near condition. In the distant condition, the U.S. students who were influenced by temporal distance tended to prefer the desirability focused advertisement (distant future & high-level construals). In contrast, the Korean students influenced by their culture responded more positively toward the feasibility focused advertisement (collectivistic culture & low-level construals). Therefore, the two-way interaction was found. However, in the near condition, the two groups preferred the same advertisement. The U.S. students evaluated the low-level construal advertisement more favorably because in the near future, individuals tend to represent an event in low-level construal terms. Also, the Korean students showed a more favorable attitude toward the advertisement framed in low-level terms, which was consistent with their culture (collectivism). Since the two groups preferred the same advertisement, an interaction was not found.

The U.S. students and Korean students might have different perceptions of time periods. For example, the U.S. students might consider the two or three years they have left to their graduation as a distant future event. However, the Korean students might not regard the years as distant as the U.S. students. Given that most Korean students have severe stress about getting a job from their freshman year, the graduation might not seem like a distant future event for the Korean students even when it is two or three years away. This could be another possible explanation for the insignificant temporal distance effect on the Korean students' reaction to the advertisement and brand. Investigation of

the difference in time period perceptions between two cultures could provide more accurate interaction effect among the three variables.

## **CHAPTER 4: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this chapter, the findings from the current study are discussed, and the implications are explained. Also, the limitations of the study are identified, and directions for future research are suggested.

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the current study was to investigate how individuals' cultural orientations affected the relationship between their construal levels and their perceived temporal distance. CLT suggests that temporal distance, the perceived distance of an event or object in time, can have an impact on an individual's mental representation of the event or object (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003). The events and objects in the distant future are represented in more abstract, superordinate, and high-level terms, whereas those in the near future are represented in more concrete, subordinate, and low-level terms (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Based on the findings from previous CLT studies, this research assumed that individuals from different cultures (individualistic culture vs. collectivistic culture) would construe an event or object at different levels (high vs. low). In addition, it was postulated that the cultures also would influence how individuals perceive the temporal distance. More specifically, individuals from an individualistic culture were expected to perceive a future event as occurring in the more distant future, whereas individuals from a collectivistic culture were expected to perceive a future event as occurring in the nearer future.

Study 1 demonstrated the robust relationship between culture, construal level, and temporal distance. In part 1 of study 1, the U.S. students indicated higher BIF scores

compared to the Korean students. Considering a higher BIF score relates to high-level construal, these results suggested that the U.S. students preferred abstract thinking to concrete thinking and focused more on the desirability than the feasibility of an event or object. The reverse was true for Korean students. In part 2 of study 1, when students who were in a near future condition were asked to describe their lives after their graduation, Korean students tended to focus more on their career lives and provided more detailed and specific topics concerned with their careers. In contrast, the U.S. students tended to describe more about their long-term life goals and aspirations and related fewer specific topics about their lives. This means individuals from a collectivistic culture have a more proximal temporal perspective, and they are more likely to represent the future event in low-level terms. By contrast, individuals from an individualistic culture have a more distal temporal perspective and tend to represent the future event in high-level terms.

These findings were extended to the persuasive message context of an advertisement, and the results of study 2 showed that a match between culture, perceived temporal distance, and the construal level frame of an advertising message induced a more favorable attitude toward the brand and advertisement. Individuals construe information on different levels depending on the cultures they belong to and the time frames they encounter. For example, the results of study 2 demonstrated that when individuals were in a distant future condition, the U.S. students responded more favorably to the messages focusing on desirability, while Korean students preferred the messages focusing on feasibility. Interestingly, the two distinct cultural groups showed different patterns when they construed future information. Individuals from an individualistic

culture tended to depend more on the temporal distance they were in when they evaluated and made a decision about the future event. However, individuals from a collectivistic culture were more likely to depend on their culture when they construed information. Previous cross-cultural studies suggest that individuals from collectivistic cultures seem to be highly attentive to negative information related to themselves (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). Therefore they tend to focus on preventing mistakes and concentrate on potentially risky situations where they may get in trouble. In order to avoid the negative outcomes, they prefer vigilant strategies, and they are inclined to use accurate and detailed information. This tendency to select concrete information may influence individuals from collectivistic cultures be less sensitive to temporal distance.

## **THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The current research contributes to advertising and consumer psychology literature on several fronts. First, this research extends the self-literature by showing cultural orientation is associated with individuals' construal levels. The relationship between self-view and construal level has been examined in prior studies. For example, recently, Spassova and Lee (2013) demonstrated that individuals with an independent self-view are concerned with high-level construal, while individuals with an interdependent self-view are concerned with low-level construals. However, since they intentionally primed individuals either into an independent or interdependent self-view, the influence of culture on the relation between self-views and construal levels could not be examined. By measuring how individuals from two distinct cultures (the U.S. vs. Korea) perceive their behavior differently (BIF), this research provides empirical



evidence that culture can have an impact on individuals' construal levels. This finding is important given that it can shed light on the role of self-view on individuals' construal levels from a cross-cultural perspective.

Second, building on prior studies investigating temporal distance and construal level (e.g., Bar-Anan et al., 2006; Liberman et al., 2002; Liberman et al., 2007), the current research demonstrates that culture not only has an impact on individuals' temporal distance perception but also influences how they construe a future event either in low or high-level terms. S. Lee et al. (2011) suggest that East Asians are more likely to be associated with a more distant temporal distance, whereas European Americans are more likely to be associated with a more proximal temporal distance. The findings from the current research are consistent with this suggested link between culture and temporal perspective. In addition, this research extends prior findings by providing evidence that Korean students construe a future event in more concrete ways than U.S. students. Furthermore, in contrast to previous studies of temporal construal that primed different time perspectives, the current research used an actual temporal distance situation (graduation for university students). Therefore, the generalizability of the temporal distance effect was enhanced. With this aspect, this research provides an opportunity to better understand the interaction between temporal distance, construal level, and culture.

Third, this research contributes to the extension of CLT. Most CLT researchers have been interested in the relationship between psychological distance and construal level. For instance, Liberman et al. (2002) reveal that the relation of construal level and psychological distance is not uni-directional but bi-directional, and Bar-Anan et al.

(2006) suggest that people relate words associated with a high-level of construal (e.g., abstract, superordinate) to a distant temporal distance more easily than a near temporal distance. The current study provides a new approach to understanding CLT by focusing on an antecedent of temporal distance rather than the consequences of it. The results from this study show that temporal distance and construal level are influenced by the cultural background people have. The self-concept, which is influenced by culture, can play a role in forming individuals' construal levels and perceptions of temporal distance.

Finally, the current research reveals how temporal distance and construal level can increase the efficiency of an advertising message from a cross-cultural perspective. Increasing the effectiveness of advertising has been a major interest of advertising researchers (e.g., Aaker & Lee, 2001; Kim, Rao, & Lee, 2009; Kivetz & Tyler, 2007; Sung & Choi, 2011). The results of study 2 demonstrate that there is a three-way interaction between culture, individuals' perceived temporal distance, and the construal level frame of the message. For example, individuals from an individualistic culture tend to have a more favorable attitude toward the brand when they perceive a distant temporal distance to the brand and the brand is advertised with high-level terms.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

As world markets have globalized, the importance of having a global marketing strategy has increased. Many marketing researchers suggest that a global marketing strategy plays a pivotal role in determining a firm's competitiveness in the global market (Levitt, 1983; Zou & Cavusgil, 2002). In the same vein, many communication researchers and practitioners have been interested in global and international advertising

as a part of global marketing. Since some corporations have had negative experiences such as declining profitability when they disregard culture's influence, understanding culture has become critical (Mooij, 2003). Cultural differences and their influences have been investigated in a number of cross-cultural advertising studies (e.g., Agrawal, 1993; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Hetsroni, 2000; Nelson & Paek, 2007). For example, Han and Shavitt (1994) suggest that advertisements emphasizing individualistic benefits are more effective for U.S. students than Korean students, whereas advertisements focusing on in-group benefits are more persuasive for Korean students compared to U.S. students.

According to CLT, consumers' prediction and evaluation of a future purchase can depend upon their mental construals of their purchase. The current research demonstrates that individuals from a collectivistic culture (Korea) are more associated with low-level construals, whereas individuals from an individualistic culture (the U.S.) are more associated with high-level construals. These findings have important implications for global advertising strategies. For example, when advertising practitioners build a global advertising campaign, they can use the differences in culture and construal levels. If advertising practitioners can create an advertising message framed by matching their consumers' cultural background and their construal levels, the effectiveness of the advertising campaign will be enhanced.

Understanding the differences in culture and temporal distance perceptions may also help to create a successful global advertising campaign. Given that Koreans are more likely to be influenced by their cultural orientation, concretely framed, feasibility focused messages will be more effective than abstractly framed, desirability focused messages.

Temporal distance, such as when a campaign is launched, will be less important for consumers from collectivistic cultures than consumers from individualistic cultures. In contrast, since consumers from individualistic cultures are sensitive to the temporal distance, matching temporal distance (distant future vs. near future) and message framing (concrete vs. abstract or desirability focused vs. feasibility focused) will be important to create more effective advertising strategies. For instance, when a global brand plans to launch a new product in collectivistic cultures such as Korea and China, providing as much as concrete, specific, feasibility-focused information about the product may induce more favorable reactions from the collectivistic consumers irrespective of when the launch date is because the primary influence is cultural rather than temporal distance. In contrast, for individualistic cultures, abstract information, desirability-focused information should be emphasized when the launch date is in the distant future and more concrete, specific, feasibility-focused information should be emphasized when the launch date is in the near future because the primary influence is temporal distance.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

As with all research studies, this study has a few limitations. First, since only one product category (a job searching service) and a specific population (students) were used in the current research, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Even though a job searching service is relevant to students and they are interested in the service, a study with only one product category lacks cross-category validation. Products with varying levels of involvement and different purchase cycles should be investigated in future studies. Since product involvement can be associated with psychological distance (high

involvement-proximal vs. low involvement-distant), it could contribute to explaining the relationship between culture, temporal distance and construal level. Purchase cycle could also influence perceptions of temporal distance. Given that consumers tend to consume a short-term purchase cycle product such as bottled water more frequently than a long-term purchase cycle product such as a computer, purchase cycle should be used as covariate in future research. In part 2 of study 1, only female participants' future life descriptions were analyzed. To increase the generalizability of the research, gender effects need to be investigated. For example, gender could be used as a covariate in study 2. Also, only two countries (Korea and the U.S.) were used to represent the cultural differences (collectivistic and individualistic culture) in this research. In prior cross-cultural studies, Korea and the U.S. were used as a good pair for investigating the difference between collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 1991) but there are still limitations related to how those two countries generalize to the two types of cultures they represent. For example, even if the U.S. and Australia are both included in the individualistic cultures, the cultures are different in horizontal and vertical dimensions. In Australian culture, equal status with others is considered important, whereas in the U.S. culture, inequality and competition are regarded as important (Triandis, 1995). In addition, in order to minimize the confounding effects of the real brand, the current research used a fictitious brand. Due to the use of a fictitious brand, the ecological validity of the study may not be as strong as desired. Therefore, future research should include additional product categories, include other countries such as China, Great Britain, Canada, and India, and use real brands.

The coding scheme for analyzing the description of subjects' lives needs to be improved. Asking about individuals' lives related to nine topics may not be enough to evaluate whether they represent their lives either in low-level or high-level construals. A wider variety of topics related to subjects' future lives should be included. Using qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews can also be a good alternative for future research.

Even though there have been many CLT studies investigating the relationship between psychological distance and individuals' construal levels, few studies have examined the antecedents of the relationship. Through the current study, a significant effect of culture on the relationship between psychological distance and construal levels was found, but there may be other antecedents that influence the relationship as well. For example, Pennington and Roese (2003) suggest that temporal distance and regulatory focus are related to each other. They assert that a promotion focus is more associated with temporally distant goals, while temporally near goals are more associated with a balanced consideration of both promotion and prevention foci. Given that cultures and regulatory focus are also related to each other (individualistic culture- promotion vs. collectivistic culture- prevention focus; Ayse, Uskul, & Sherman, 2009), how the relation between culture and regulatory focus influence individuals' construal level is a topic for future research.

Finally, the results of the current research demonstrated that individuals from two different cultures (collectivistic vs. individualistic) were influenced by different variables such as temporal distance and culture when they construed information. However, the

factors that were responsible for the differences were not investigated in this research. Previous cross-cultural studies have revealed that collectivistic cultures are more likely to be concerned with pessimism, an avoidance goal, and a preference for loss-framed information (Elliot et al, 2001; Lee et al., 2000). From this aspect, it can be postulated that individuals from collectivistic culture have a tendency to be sensitive to negative information and focus on eliminating a negative outcome and that tendency leads them to construe information in low-level terms regardless the temporal distance they are in. They may prefer concrete and detailed information in any situation because the information is more appropriate for avoiding negative outcomes than abstract and general information. What makes collectivists more influenced by their culture and individualists more impacted by temporal distance awaits future research.

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of the study was to investigate how individuals' cultural orientations have impact on the relationship between individuals' construal level and temporal distance. By revealing the moderating role of the cultures on this relationship, the current research can provide an opportunity to better understand how individuals predict and evaluate of future events based on their mental construals of those events. For example, the results of the study demonstrated that individuals from an individualistic culture preferred abstract thinking to concrete thinking whereas individuals from a collectivistic culture were inclined to prefer concrete thinking to abstract thinking. In addition, it was also suggested that the individuals from the two cultures had different patterns to construe future information. Individuals from an individualistic culture were more likely to depend

on the temporal distance to the future event while individuals from a collectivistic culture tend to depend on their culture (concrete thinking) when they construe the information.

The current research suggests ways of extending construal level theory into cross-cultural perspective and provides advertising practitioners with opportunity to develop a successful global advertising campaign. Understanding the differences in cultures and temporal distance perception can be a good tip for planning the global advertising strategies.



**APPENDIX A: The Behavior Identification Form (BIF)**

No.	Item	No.	Item
1	Making a list a. Getting organized (High) b. Writing things down (Low)	14	Climbing a tree a. Getting a good view (High) b. Holding on to branches (Low)
2	Reading a. Following lines of print (Low) b. Gaining knowledge (High)	15	Filling out a personality test a. Answering questions (Low) b. Revealing what you're like (High)
3	Joining the Army a. Helping the Nation's defense (High) b. Singing up (Low)	16	Toothbrushing a. Preventing tooth decay (high) b. Moving a brush around in one's mouth
4	Washing clothes a. Removing odors from clothes (High) b. Putting clothes into the machines	17	Taking a test a. Answering questions (Low) b. Showing one's knowledge (High)
5	Picking an apple a. Getting something to eat (High) b. Pulling an apple off a branch	18	Greeting someone a. Saying hello (Low) b. Showing friendliness (High)
6	Chopping down a tree a. Wielding an axe (Low) b. Getting firewood (High)	19	Resisting temptation a. Saying "No" (Low) b. Showing moral courage (High)
7	Measuring a room for carpeting a. Getting ready to remodel (High) b. Using a yardstick (Low)	20	Eating a. Getting nutrition (High) b. Chewing and swallowing (Low)
8	Cleaning the house a. Showing one's cleanliness (High) b. Vacuuming the floor	21	Growing a garden a. Planting seeds (Low) b. Getting fresh vegetables (High)
9	Painting a room a. Applying brush strokes (Low) b. Making the room look fresh (High)	22	Traveling by car a. Following a map (Low) b. Seeing countryside (High)
10	Paying the rent a. Maintaining a place to live (High) b. Writing a check (Low)	23	Having a cavity filled a. Protecting your teeth (High) b. Going to the dentist (Low)
11	Caring for houseplants a. Watering plants (Low) b. Making the room look nice (High)	24	Talking to a child a. Teaching a child something (High) b. Using simple words (Low)
12	Locking a door a. Putting a key in the lock (Low) b. Securing the house (High)	25	Pushing a doorbell a. Moving a finger (Low) b. Seeing if someone's home (High)
13	Voting a. Influencing the election (High) b. Marking a ballot (Low)		

**APPENDIX B: Coding Sheet**

**Life description coding sheet**

**1. Topics of essay- Job related**

1	Job areas or Future study plan (e.g., AD agency, graduate school, etc.)	(1) Yes	(2) No
2	Specific job positions or study areas (e.g., AE, editor, copy writer, etc.)	(1) Yes	(2) No
3	Specific company or university name (e.g., Starcom, Cheil, etc.)	(1) Yes	(2) No
4	Desirable salary range (it should be specific, not just much money)	(1) Yes	(2) No
5	Job related specific plans (e.g., Relationship with co-worker, etc.)	(1) Yes	(2) No

**2. Topics of essay- Life related**

1	Family plan (e.g., marry in 2 years, two kids, etc.)	(1) Yes	(2) No
2	Specific avocation or hobby (e.g., foodie.)	(1) Yes	(2) No
3	Accommodation (e.g., Apartment, house, etc)	(1) Yes	(2) No
4	Specific lifestyle (e.g. take a walk with husband or dogs, )	(1) Yes	(2) No

**3. Temporal distance**

1) Overall, I think the description focuses more on the person's career life than his or her long-term life goals and aspiration

Disagree
  Neutral
  Agree

2) Overall, I think the description focuses more on the person's long-term life goals and aspiration than his or her career life.

Disagree
  Neutral
  Agree

APPENDIX C: Stimuli-the U.S.

High- level construal



The advertisement features the word "Jobs" in large, 3D red letters on a blue background. The letter "o" is replaced by a target symbol, and a red arrow is shown hitting the bullseye. Below the graphic, the text reads: "Do what you do best and We'll do the same for you". Underneath, it says "Our service is" followed by three bullet points: "RELIABLE" (with a calendar icon), "FAST" (with a speedometer icon), and "CONVENIENT" (with a scissors icon). The "JOB Recruiter.com" logo is in the bottom right corner.

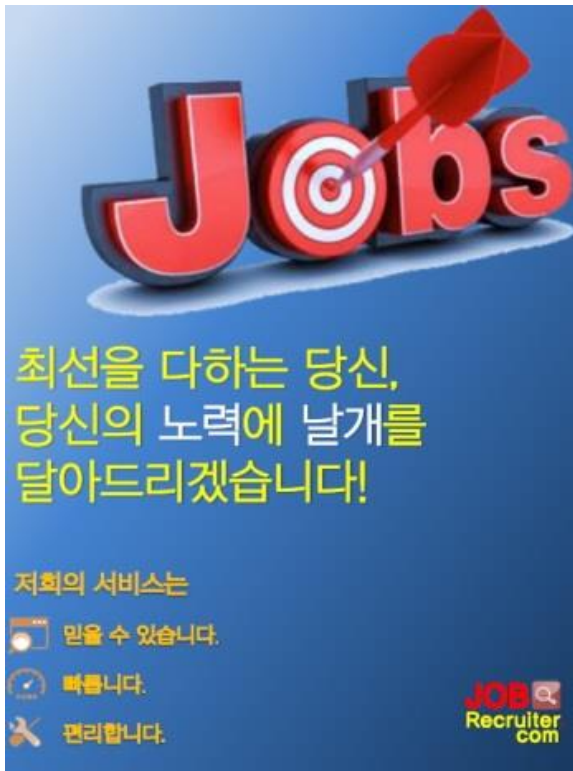
Low-level construal



The advertisement features the word "Jobs" in large, 3D red letters on a blue background. The letter "o" is replaced by a target symbol, and a red arrow is shown hitting the bullseye. Below the graphic, the text reads: "Our custom algorithms to help pair your skill set with a relevant opportunity faster and more conveniently". Underneath, it says "We provide" followed by three bullet points: "Matching your skills with jobs counseling" (with a calendar icon), "1 week guarantee to find your job" (with a speedometer icon), and "Exclusive recruiter service" (with a scissors icon). The "JOB Recruiter.com" logo is in the bottom right corner.

APPENDIX D: Stimuli-KOREA

High- level construal



The advertisement features the word "Jobs" in large, 3D red letters. The letter "o" is replaced by a target symbol, and a red arrow is shown hitting the bullseye. Below the graphic, the text reads: "최선을 다하는 당신, 당신의 노력에 날개를 달아드리겠습니다!" (We will give wings to your best efforts!). Underneath, it lists services: "저희의 서비스는" (Our services are) followed by three items: "믿을 수 있습니다." (We are trustworthy), "빠릅니다." (We are fast), and "편리합니다." (We are convenient). The JOB Recruiter.com logo is in the bottom right corner.

Low-level construal



The advertisement features the word "Jobs" in large, 3D red letters. The letter "o" is replaced by a target symbol, and a red arrow is shown hitting the bullseye. Below the graphic, the text reads: "본사만의 맞춤 알고리즘 기능으로 당신의 능력에 안성맞춤인 커리어를 더욱 빠르고 편리하게 찾으세요!" (Find your career more quickly and conveniently with our company's custom algorithm function, tailored to your abilities!). Underneath, it lists services: "제공 서비스:" (Provided services:) followed by three items: "직업 적합도 카운셀링 서비스" (Career suitability counseling service), "잡 서칭 완료까지 1주일 보장 서비스" (1-week guarantee service until job search completion), and "전담 카운셀링 서비스" (Dedicated counseling service). The JOB Recruiter.com logo is in the bottom right corner.

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