

Research Dialogue

Tightness–looseness: Implications for consumer and branding research

Carlos J. Torelli ^{a,*}, María A. Rodas ^b

^a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 308 Wohlers Hall, 1206 S. Sixth Street, Champaign, IL 61820, United States

^b University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management, 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455, United States

Received 5 March 2017; received in revised form 10 April 2017; accepted 29 April 2017

Available online 3 May 2017

Accepted by Sharon Shavitt, Editor

Abstract

This commentary highlights the importance of the tightness–looseness distinction to provide a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural consumer behavior (Li, Gordon & Gelfand, this issue). We provide guidelines to integrate the tightness–looseness distinction into existing cross-cultural models of consumer behavior, and suggest how doing so can help to refine predictions about the persuasiveness of message appeals. We also discuss how the tightness–looseness distinction can enrich branding research, by suggesting future research opportunities in the domains of brand extension research and brand protection.

© 2017 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Culture; Branding; Tightness; Looseness; Consumer Behavior

The majority of cross-cultural consumer behavior research has involved the individualism–collectivism cultural classification. Although this classification has deepened our understanding of consumer phenomena, its broadness and multi-dimensionality limits the insights that can be afforded for explaining consumer behavior (Bond, 2002; Briley & Wyer, 2001; Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Accordingly, research in the last 10 years has focused on other cultural distinctions to provide a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural consumer behavior. Special attention has been devoted to the vertical–horizontal distinction (e.g., Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006; Torelli, Ozsomer, Carvalho, Keh, & Maehle, 2012), and the related dimension of power distance (e.g., Winterich & Zhang, 2014; Zhang, Winterich, & Mittal, 2010). The Li, Gordon, and Gelfand (2017—in this issue) article proposes a further refinement of cross-cultural consumer behavior by focusing on the tightness–looseness distinction. The

authors provide a wealth of ideas for incorporating this distinction into models of consumer behavior.

To encourage further work in this area, we first discuss how the tightness–looseness framework can be used to refine past findings based on individualism–collectivism and vertical–horizontal cultural orientations. We do so by reviewing the relationships between these cultural constructs, and by discussing how the tightness–looseness framework can lead to novel insights not anticipated by existing cultural frameworks. Next, we identify and discuss areas of application for the tightness–looseness framework within the context of branding research and practice. Specifically, we focus on how the collective consensus about brand meanings (McCracken, 1988) might differ in tight and loose cultures, as well as on how this cultural distinction can impact the acceptance of brand extensions and consumers' reactions to negative publicity.

Cultural frameworks in consumer behavior research

Culture consists of shared elements that provide standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting among those who share a language, a geographic region, and a historical period. One common approach for studying

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ctorelli@illinois.edu (C.J. Torelli), rodas003@umn.edu (M.A. Rodas).

culture is to look for patterns in shared elements (e.g., values, beliefs, and ideals) that can be organized around a theme, or a cultural *syndrome* (Triandis, 1996). The goal of this approach is to identify a number of cultural syndromes that can reliably explain cultural differences in judgments and behaviors. Although several syndromes have been advanced across the social sciences, individualism (I) and collectivism (C) remain the most widely used syndromes to explain consumer behavior (Shavitt, Lee, & Torelli, 2008; Shavitt, Torelli, & Riemer, 2010).

Individualism–collectivism

In individualistic cultures, like those in the United States and Western Europe, people value independence from others and subordinate the goals of their in-groups to their own personal goals. In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures, such as those in East Asia, value interdependent relationships to others and subordinate their personal goals to those of their in-groups (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989). Individualists tend to have an independent view of the self, whereby the self is defined as autonomous and unique (Triandis, 1995), and their thinking style is more analytic. That is, they tend to pay attention primarily to focal objects (versus the context or field as a whole) and the categories to which they belong, and use rules, including formal logic, to understand the behavior of others (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). In contrast, collectivists tend to have an interdependent view of the self, whereby the self is seen as essentially embedded within a larger social network of roles and relationships (Triandis, 1995), and their thinking style is more holistic. That is, they tend to attend to the entire field and assign causality to it, making relatively little use of categories and formal logic, and relying on “dialectical” reasoning (Nisbett et al., 2001). Acknowledging the broadness of the I–C classification, Triandis (1995) suggested that vertical (V) and horizontal (H) syndromes offered the greatest potential to further delineate this broad classification.

Vertical–horizontal

The V–H distinction emerges from differences in the importance of hierarchy in societies. In vertical cultures, hierarchy is important and people believe that individuals differ in status, and hence are arrayed along a social hierarchy in which some are above and some are below. In contrast, horizontal cultures are more egalitarian and people in these societies believe that individuals are more or less equal in terms of status (Triandis, 1995). Conceptually, the V–H distinction is nested within the I–C classification to result in four cultural orientations: horizontal collectivism, vertical collectivism, horizontal individualism, and vertical individualism. As when chemical elements (e.g., hydrogen and oxygen) bond to each other forming a compound (e.g., water) with distinctive properties, the original syndromes (e.g., individualism or verticality) combine (vertical individualism) to determine a distinctive pattern of values and beliefs.

Vertical individualism (VI) is characterized by a focus on improving individual status via competition (i.e., desire for power and status). In horizontal individualism (HI), the priority is on being distinct and self-reliant, without standing out. Vertical

collectivism (VC) prioritizes deference to authority and the protection of in-group status, whereas horizontal collectivism (HC) emphasizes social appropriateness and maintaining benevolent relationships with others (Shavitt et al., 2006). This more nuanced understanding of value priorities afforded by the V–H distinction nested within the I–C classification has led to unique predictions about self-presentation styles (e.g., impression management among horizontal collectivists, Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson, 2006), preference for advertising appeals (e.g., horizontal individualists prefer ads that embody excitement and freedom, Torelli et al., 2012), and information processing tendencies (e.g., stereotyping tendencies among vertical individualists, Torelli & Shavitt, 2011).

Incorporating tightness–looseness into existing cultural frameworks

To further describe the attributes of individualism and collectivism, beyond horizontal and vertical distinctions, Triandis (1995) highlighted the importance of the tightness–looseness distinction. *Tightness* (T) refers to cultures in which norms are clearly defined and there is little tolerance of deviant behavior, whereas *looseness* (L) relates to cultures in which norms are vague, and there is high tolerance of deviant behavior (Gelfand et al., 2011; Pelto, 1968; Triandis, 1995). In cultures characterized as tight, norms are clearly defined and strongly enforced. There is the shared belief that individuals must conform to group values, and tolerance for deviation is minimal. These cultures tend to be homogeneous with respect to certain attitudes and behaviors. In contrast, in “loose” cultures norms are not clearly defined and there is ample latitude in what is considered appropriate behavior. Heterogeneity is more typical in these loose cultures, and deviations from norms are more tolerated (for a more detailed review, see the Li, Gordon, & Gelfand article in this issue).

Tightness–looseness and individualism–collectivism

The T–L distinction partially overlaps with the I–C classification, but it is yet a distinct cultural construct ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$; Gelfand et al., 2011). In both collectivist cultures and tight cultures, corporations, religious organizations, and hereditary lineage should have powerful influences (Pelto, 1968). Acknowledging this overlap, Triandis (1995) conceptualized T–L, along with cultural complexity, as a key cultural syndrome influencing the level of I–C in a culture, that is, as an antecedent. Collectivism would be maximal in tight, simpler cultures (e.g., the kibbutz in Israel), whereas individualism would be maximal in loose, complex cultures (e.g., large Western cities).

Nevertheless, there are several differences between these two cultural distinctions. Specifically, the I–C classification focuses on the prevalence of norms and traditions, whereas T–L emphasizes the strength and clarity of the norms and the tolerance of deviant behavior. Furthermore, it is unclear whether T–L is truly an antecedent of individualism–collectivism. It seems more plausible that because the two cultural syndromes share some similar ecological and historical antecedents (e.g., population density and agricultural dependency), the two tend to co-occur.

However, because each syndrome also has unique antecedents, they can emerge separately and even possibly combine to determine distinctive patterns of behaviors. For instance, Triandis (1989) proposed that common fate and restricted resources are precursors of collectivism, whereas cultural homogeneity and isolation from external influences are antecedents of tightness (Triandis, 1989). Gelfand et al. (2011) further indicate that a history of conflict and human diseases promote tightness. It is then reasonable to expect an interaction between I–C and T–L to impact psychological phenomena.

Recent research has supported this pattern. For instance, interdependent self-concepts (a defining element of collectivism) are more likely to occur in tight and collectivist cultures, whereas independent self-concepts (a central aspect of individualism) tend to occur more in individualistic and loose cultures (Carpenter, 2000). Additionally, T–L has been shown to moderate the effects of cultural values at the national level, with I–C having significantly stronger effects on various outcomes (e.g., cooperation in the workplace, both attitude toward it and actual behavior) in culturally tighter than looser countries (Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). Although these findings illustrate how integrating the T–L distinction with the I–C classification can yield novel insights into cultural phenomena, there might be even greater potential to further refine frameworks of cross-cultural consumer behavior by incorporating T–L within the broader framework of four cultural orientations resulting from considering V–H distinctions nested within I–C.

Tightness–looseness and the four cultural orientations

As discussed earlier, considering V–H as “sub-species” of I–C explained differences between the form of individualism in Australia (HI), in which sticking out is frowned upon, and that in the U.S. (VI), where bragging about one’s accomplishments is considered appropriate. Similarly, this more comprehensive framework helped to understand the difference between the form of collectivism in Japan (VC), with its focus on deference to in-groups of a higher status, and that in the Israeli kibbutz, which emphasizes benevolence and equality. How can the T–L distinction add to these refinements? We believe that a focus on T–L can provide a more nuanced understanding of the differences between societies that are currently classified in terms of one of the four cultural orientations.

The T–L distinction seems particularly likely to shed light on the differences between societies that are high in VC. Vertical collectivism is a common cultural syndrome in societies spread throughout East Asia (e.g., Japan), South Asia (e.g., India), and some countries in South America (e.g., Argentina) (Chiou, 2001; Torelli, 2013; Triandis, 1995). Although there are similarities between societies in these disparate regions of the world (e.g., duties to in-groups should be particularly important), the casual observer can easily identify differences between East Asian cultures (e.g., Japan) and Latin American ones (e.g., Venezuela). Focusing on the T–L distinction might help to explain these differences. For instance, Japanese culture is relatively tight, whereas Venezuelan culture is relatively loose (Gelfand et al., 2011). In Japanese culture, it is common for people to

suppress the expression of ego-focused emotions such as anger or joy, as this can threaten interdependent relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, in Venezuelan culture, it is common to frequently express these emotions (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008). One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that in the tight Japanese culture there is more clarity about how de-emphasizing personal feelings fosters interdependent relationships, whereas in the loose Venezuelan culture the expression of such emotions is less connected with qualities of interdependence.

A focus on the T–L distinction could also help to further delineate the motivational concerns of individuals in HI cultures, such as those in Australia and Germany. Past research demonstrates that HI is positively correlated with openness values of stimulation and self-direction (Nelson & Shavitt, 2002; Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998; Torelli et al., 2012). Stimulation refers to the pursuit of excitement and novelty in life, whereas self-direction relates to independent thought and action-choosing (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). An emphasis on stimulation values seems less aligned with the prevention-orientation fostered in tight cultures, and more likely to match the priorities of individuals in loose cultures (Gelfand et al., 2011; Li et al., this issue). It is then possible that stimulation values are prioritized more in Australia, a loose culture, than in Germany, a tight culture, even though horizontal individualism might be a common orientation in both societies.

As noted earlier, past research demonstrates that there is a stronger relationship between cultural values and outcomes (e.g., the tendency to cooperate with others) in culturally tighter, rather than looser, societies (Taras et al., 2010). Tight societies are more homogeneous, which facilitates reaching consensus on what is appropriate in the culture (Gelfand et al., 2011). Although there is variability in the cultural orientations endorsed by different members of a culture, there should be less variability in tight societies. Furthermore, although people can shift in their cultural orientations according to the situation (e.g., VI at work and VC at home, Triandis, 1995), it is possible that individuals in tight societies behave according to the dominant cultural orientation across situations. That is, there may be less accessibility of other cultural orientations, and more consistency of accessibility of the dominant cultural orientation in different social settings (e.g., VC at home and at work). This would be consistent with the stronger link between culture and outcomes in tight societies (Taras et al., 2010).

Implications for advertising appeals

The above discussion can be used to further extend Li and colleagues’ (2017—this issue) predictions regarding the content of advertising in tight and loose cultures. Although prevention themes should be prevalent across tight cultures (e.g., emphasis on prevention focus), these themes should emerge in the context of the values prioritized in the culture. For instance, in Germany, a horizontal individualist (Eisler, Eisler, & Yoshida, 2003; Triandis, 1995) and tight (Gelfand et al., 2011) culture, prevention focused themes in ads should be embedded within values of independence and freedom. This is evident in a German ad for Audi called “Mechanics,” which

portrays a man driving his car through different towns where all of the mechanics start chasing after him by foot or in tow trucks. The chase, reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic zombie chase, ends once he safely makes it into what looks like a very modern fort, which turns out to be the Audi service center. The tag line is “Don’t let your Audi into the wrong hands. Audi Center.”

There is another area in which integrating the T–L distinction within existing cultural frameworks can help to further refine predictions about permissible content in advertisements. Although ads in tight cultures are likely to be less liberal than in loose cultures (because of the lack of permissiveness in tight cultures), this tendency should be attenuated in horizontal individualist cultures that foster independence and freedom to express ones’ desires. Accordingly, a casual review of German ads suggests that there is more permissiveness in Germany than in other tight nations like Japan. For example, an ad for rail line Deutsche Bahn, which went viral, shows two men traveling around Germany to see a soccer star at various matches, often finding themselves surrounded by rival fans. At the end of the video, we see that the two are in fact boyfriends. They share a warm embrace and hold hands at a train station as they walk off into the distance.

Implications for branding research

Brands are the most valuable intangible assets many companies possess. Products and services with strong brands enjoy many advantages, such as loyalty and price premiums (Keller, 2003). Not surprisingly, branding—the process of endowing products and services with the advantages of strong brands—has become a management priority. In the hypercompetitive markets of the 21st century, branding has evolved from communicating functional attributes to creating more abstract and symbolic brand images (Keller, 2001). The goal is to differentiate brands by establishing distinctive brand meanings that resonate in the minds of consumers (Keller, 2007).

Brand meanings

Brands are sources of meaning used by consumers to construct, clarify, and/or project their identity or self-concept (Ball & Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). For example, a consumer might purchase a pair of Nike shoes not only for its quality, but also because Nike symbolizes athleticism and superior performance. By appropriating these symbolic meanings, the consumer can signal to herself and/or others an important aspect of her identity. Thus, symbolic brand meanings refer to abstract ideas, opinions, and experiences in consumers’ minds that are associated with the brand, and that extend beyond the brand name and the inherent function that defines its associated products (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986).

Brands acquire meanings through a dynamic process of social consensus building involving mass advertising, the fashion system, and reference groups (McCracken, 1986). The T–L framework’s main proposition is that cultures vary in the strength of the cultural norms and tolerance for deviations from said

norms (Gelfand et al., 2011). In other words, in tight cultures there is stronger social consensus about what individuals ought to do than in loose cultures. In order to reach a strong social consensus, it is necessary for members of that culture to pay more attention to cues regarding norms in their surroundings. In fact, past research has shown that situation strength varies across tight and loose cultures, particularly in public settings. Specifically, the influence of the situation on individual’s attitudes and behaviors is stronger in tight (versus loose) cultures (Realo, Linnamägi, & Gelfand, 2015). It is then reasonable to expect that it should be easier to build consensus in tight (versus loose) cultures, which should in turn result in clearer brand meanings in tight (versus loose) cultures.

Clearer or stronger brand meanings would promote the prevalence and strength of symbolic brands (e.g., Marlboro as a symbol of masculinity and Americana) in tight cultures. However, this might be moderated by the level of collectivism in the culture. Past research has shown that in collectivist China brand meaning is dynamic, malleable, and less consistent (Eckhardt & Houston, 2008). This is attributed to the interdependent, malleable, and holistic self that is fostered by collectivist Chinese culture. Thus, T–L might interact with I–C to impact the strength and clarity of symbolic brand meanings. Although the interdependent and holistic nature of the self in collectivist cultures can lead to the attribution of different meanings to a brand, depending on the consumption situation, it is possible that in tight cultures there is consensus about each situational meaning. For instance, in Japan, a tight and collectivistic culture, there is consensus about the malleable meaning of Kentucky Fried Chicken. When eaten at the restaurant, it is all about convenient fast food. However, when taken out, it tends to be for parties and other special occasions. And in December, the brand adopts a different and more traditional meaning, with almost 4 million Japanese families eating KFC to celebrate Christmas (Lui, 2016). Future research should explore these issues to shed light on how brands acquire symbolic meanings in tight (versus loose) cultures.

Culturally symbolic brands

Culturally symbolic brands, or iconic brands, are brands that enjoy leadership positions thanks to their symbolic cultural meaning. For example, Coca-Cola is the leader of soft drinks in both the U.S. and global markets thanks in part to its status as an American symbol and as an icon of global culture. A brand’s cultural symbolism is defined as perceived consensus of the degree to which the brand symbolizes the abstract image of a certain cultural group (Torelli, Keh, & Chiu, 2010). Because members of a cultural group typically agree on what is widely shared in the culture (Wan, Torelli, & Chiu, 2010; Zou, Tam, Morris, Lee, Lau, & Chiu, 2009), cultural symbolism is measured by tapping collective perceptions about the cultural significance of a brand (using items such as: “the brand embodies [target culture] values,” “the brand is an icon of [target culture],” or “the brand is a good example of what it means being a member of [target culture]” Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012; Torelli et al., 2010; Wan et al., 2010).

Notice that cultural symbolism should be distinguished from strong country-of-origin connections (e.g., Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). A country-of-origin connection refers to concrete knowledge about the country in which the headquarters of the brand's parent firm is located (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Johansson, Douglas, & Nonaka, 1985), regardless of the extent to which the brand in question symbolizes an abstract cultural image. In contrast, cultural symbolism emerges, at least in part, from associations with abstract group meanings such as values (Allen, 2002; Holt, 2004). When using nationality as the defining cultural criterion, we are likely to find that iconic brands have strong country-of-origin connections. However, this would not be a sufficient condition to grant a brand for an iconic status. For instance, although most Americans undoubtedly recognize Special K and Victoria's Secret as American brands (i.e., strong country-of-origin connection), these brands are rated relatively low in terms of their symbolism of American culture (Torelli, Chiu, Keh, & Amaral, 2009). That is because these brands symbolize feminine values that do not consensually characterize American culture.

The T–L framework states that tight cultures have stronger, and thus more salient, norms. Norms refer to the unwritten social rules that members of a given culture feel they ought to follow (Li et al., 2017). Because norms form part of the cultural network in memory (Chiu & Hong, 2006), and given the salience of norms in tight cultures, it is possible that people in tight cultures are constantly reminded of their cultural identity via the process of spreading activation (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). In turn, this should result in a higher likelihood to associate brands with cultural meanings and to prefer culturally symbolic brands that embody the culture (Torelli et al., 2009). Thus, based on the notion that a brand acquires cultural meanings through the process of consensus-building, and given that consensus-building might be clearer in tight versus loose cultures, it is reasonable to predict that tight versus loose cultures might have a greater number of culturally symbolic brands, and that culturally symbolic brands in those cultures will be particularly favored by consumers.

Brand dilution

Although brands can be valuable assets to a company, there are many situations that can threaten this value. Chipotle, a fast-casual restaurant, saw its sales decline by more than 30% in 2015 after a series of foodborne illnesses, and it took more than a year for its sales to start recovering. The Ivanka Trump clothing line saw big declines in sales in 2017 after consumers boycotted the brand, which prompted many retailers to stop carrying the brand. These are just a few examples of the external forces that can harm a brand. Although extant research has investigated the factors that foster the dilution of a brand image in the face of negative information (see Loken & John, 2010 for a review), the T–L distinction could lead to novel predictions about the cultural factors that contribute to such harmful effects.

One of the defining characteristics of the T–L framework is the variance across cultures in tolerance for norm deviation (Gelfand et al., 2011). This tolerance is reflected by the severity

of the punishment that members of the culture believe should be inflicted on someone who has violated a social norm. As discussed earlier, in tight cultures not only are the norms stronger than in loose cultures, but also the tolerance for norm violations is lower. That is, the severity of punishments is greater. This notion has been confirmed using societal-level indicators (e.g., tighter cultures have harsher punishments for crimes in tight U.S. states, Harrington & Gelfand, 2014), survey research (Gelfand et al., 2011), and experimental designs (e.g., priming with tightness leads to stronger punishments, Lun, Gelfand, & Mohr, 2012). We could then anticipate that brand dilution would be more likely to occur in tight cultures, given the lower tolerance for norm violations.

However, past research has shown that an accessible interdependent self-construal, nurtured in collectivist cultures, can help to shield a brand from negative brand information (Swaminathan, Page, & Gürhan-Canli, 2007). In this research, American participants were exposed to negative information (or no information) about an iconic American brand (Dell) after being primed with either an interdependent or independent self-construal. Participants in the interdependent-prime condition showed no changes in their attitudes toward the brand upon reading (versus not) about the negative brand information, presumably because the American identity made accessible by the prime led them to challenge the negative information. In contrast, in the independent-prime condition, in which the collective American identity was presumably less salient, participants exhibited a drop in brand evaluation after reading (versus not) about the negative brand information. Integrating the T–L distinction with the I–C classification would result in more nuanced predictions. It is plausible that low tolerance for brand failures might emerge more strongly among cultures that are tight and individualistic, whereas cultures that are tight and collectivistic might be more likely to integrate the negative information into the brand schema, given their greater comfort with seemingly contradictory information (i.e., positive and negative image, Peng & Nisbett, 1999).

These predictions are consistent with the impact of two recent brand failures. The first is Volkswagen, a German car manufacturer which was embroiled in a scandal after it was uncovered that the company cheated in their report of diesel engine emissions. The brand suffered a sales decline across the globe, but particularly in its home country, Germany, a country characterized as tight and individualistic (McGee, 2016). The second is Samsung, a South Korean company that had serious manufacturing issues, resulting in smartphones exploding. After a massive recall, its sales in its home country, a tight collectivistic nation, increased (Atlas Research & Consulting). Further investigating the effect of T–L on brand dilution seems a worthy area of future research.

Brand extensions

Brand extension is a widely used strategy by firms to leverage the equity built into their brands. Every year, companies spend billions of dollars introducing new products under their brand name to enter a new category. Examples of brand extensions are the Apple iPhone, Arm and Hammer toothpaste, Jeep shoes, and

the Food Network Kitchen Restaurant, just to name a few. Despite the heavy spending behind brand extensions, most of them fail. Past research has determined that the fit between the parent brand and the extension is a key determinant of brand extension success. Consumers evaluate more favorably brand extensions that have a stronger fit with their associations with the parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

Many factors of the brand and the consumer market affect the extent to which firms are able to successfully extend their brands to new and different product categories (see Loken, Joiner, & Houston, 2010, for a review). Relevant to the current discussion, consumers with a holistic thinking style nurtured in collectivist cultures have been found to be more accepting of brand extensions, even when such extensions are distant from the parent brand's existing product lines (Ahluwalia, 2008; Monga & John, 2010). How does the ability of brands to extend into different categories vary across tight and loose cultures? There seems to be a greater prevalence of broad brands that extend across diverse categories in tight cultures. For instance, Tata Group in India has products in several categories, including cars, airlines, consumer goods, and chemicals, just to name a few. Samsung Group in South Korea has products in electronics, apparel, and financial services, among others. Because India and Korea are not only tight cultures, but also collectivist cultures, it is difficult to assert whether the stretchability of brands in these countries is due to tightness or collectivism. To further complicate predictions, past research also suggests that a prevention focus, nurtured in tight cultures, promotes preferences for extensions that are similar to the parent brand—something that is absent or even reversed by a promotion focus (Yeo & Park 2006). It is then unclear how the T–L distinction interacts with the I–C classification to predict brand extension success. Research in this area may yield novel patterns.

Conclusion

Li, Gordon, and Gelfand (this issue) made a compelling case for why consumer behavior research should focus on T–L for furthering our understanding of consumer behavior. They also provided a wealth of ideas regarding how to integrate it with consumer behavior research, particularly in the areas of advertising, brand loyalty, product adoption, and consumer well-being. In this article, we emphasized the importance of considering the T–L distinction within a broader cultural framework. Echoing Triandis's (1996) hope for identifying a score of syndromes that “will account for most of the interesting, reliable cultural differences” (p. 409), we suggested here ways to integrate T–L research with that on I–C and V–H distinctions. Several examples illustrate how this integration can help to refine our predictions about cross-cultural consumer behavior. We also discussed areas of application for the T–L framework within the context of branding research and practice. Specifically, we highlighted how T–L can have consequences for the formation of symbolic brand meanings, and commented on how this cultural distinction can impact the acceptance of brand extensions and consumers' reactions to negative brand publicity.

References

- Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), 27–41.
- Ahluwalia, R. (2008). How far can a brand stretch? Understanding the role of self-construal. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 45(3), 337–350.
- Allen, M. W. (2002). Human values and product symbolism: Do consumers form product preference by comparing the human values symbolized by a product to the human values that they endorse? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32, 2475–2501.
- Balabanis, G., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2008). Brand Origin Identification by Consumers: A Classification Perspective. *Journal of International Marketing*, 16, 39–71.
- Ball, A. D., & Tasaki, L. H. (1992). The role and measurement of attachment in consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 1(2), 155–172.
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139–168.
- Bond, M. H. (2002). Reclaiming the individual from Hofstede's ecological analysis—A 20-year odyssey: Comment on Oyserman et al. (2002). *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 73–77.
- Briley, D. A., & Wyer, R. S., Jr (2001). Transitory determinants of values and decisions: The utility (or nonutility) of individualism and collectivism in understanding cultural differences. *Social Cognition*, 19(3: Special issue), 197–227.
- Carpenter, S. (2000). Effects of cultural tightness and collectivism on self-concept and causal attributions. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 34(1), 38–56.
- Chiou, J. -S. (2001). Horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism among college students in the United States, Taiwan, and Argentina. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 141(5), 667–678.
- Chiu, C. -Y., & Hong, Y. -Y. (2006). *Social Psychology of Culture*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Eckhardt, G. M., & Houston, M. J. (2008). On the malleable nature of product meaning in China. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 7(6), 484–495.
- Eisler, A. D., Eisler, H., & Yoshida, M. (2003). Perception of human ecology: cross-cultural and gender comparisons. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23(1), 89–101.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), 378–389.
- Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L., Leslie, L. M., Lun, J., Lim, B. C., ... Yamaguchi, S. (2011). Differences between tight and loose cultures: a 33-nation study. *Science*, 332(6033), 1100–1104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1197754>.
- Gürhan-Canli, Z., & Maheswaran, D. (2000). Cultural Variations in Country of Origin Effects. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37, 309–317.
- Harrington, J. R., & Gelfand, M. J. (2014). Tightness–looseness across the 50 United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(22), 7990–7995.
- Hofstede, G. H. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Holt, D. B. (2004). *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hong, Y. -Y., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C. -Y., & Benet-Martinez, V. (2000). Multicultural minds: a dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 55(7), 709–720.
- Johansson, J. K., Douglas, S. P., & Nonaka, I. (1985). Assessing the Impact of Country of Origin on Product Evaluations: A New Methodological Perspective. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 22, 388–396.
- Keller, K. L. (2001). Building Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Marketing Management*, 10, 14–19.
- Keller, K. L. (2003). Brand synthesis: The multidimensionality of brand knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 595–600.
- Keller, K. L. (2007). *Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity* (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Kuppens, P., Realo, A., & Diener, E. (2008). The role of positive and negative emotions in life satisfaction judgment across nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(1), 66–75.

- Lalwani, A. K., Shavitt, S., & Johnson, T. (2006). What is the relation between cultural orientation and socially desirable responding? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(1), 165–178.
- Loken, B., & John, D. R. (2010). When do bad things happen to good brands? Understanding internal and external sources of brand dilution. In B. Loken, R. Ahluwalia, & M. J. Houston (Eds.), *Brands and Brand Management: Contemporary Research Perspectives* (pp. 233–270).
- Loken, B., Joiner, C., & Houston, M. J. (2010). Leveraging a brand through brand extension: a review of two decades of research. In B. Loken, R. Ahluwalia, & M. J. Houston (Eds.), *Brands and Brand Management: Contemporary Research Perspectives* (pp. 11–41).
- Lui, K. (2016). Christmas without KFC? For many Japanese, that's unthinkable. *Fortune* (Retrieved from <http://www.fortune.com>).
- Lun, J., Gelfand, M., & Mohr, R. (2012). Attitudes toward deviance in tight and loose cultures. *Paper Presented at the Poster presented at the Culture Preference at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP)*.
- Maheswaran, D., & Shavitt, S. (2000). Issues and new directions in global consumer psychology. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 9, 59–66.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224–253.
- McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: a theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(1), 71–84.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- McGee, P. (2016). VW sales stumble, particularly in Germany. *Financial Times* (Retrieved from <http://www.ft.com>).
- Monga, A. B., & John, D. R. (2010). What makes brands elastic? The influence of brand concept and styles of thinking on brand extension evaluation. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(3), 80–92.
- Nelson, M. R., & Shavitt, S. (2002). Horizontal and vertical individualism and achievement values: a multimethod examination of Denmark and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 33(5), 439–458.
- Nisbett, R. E., Peng, K., Choi, I., & Norenzayan, A. (2001). Culture and systems of thought: holistic versus analytic cognition. *Psychological Review*, 108(2), 291–310.
- Oishi, S., Schimmack, U., Diener, E., & Suh, E. M. (1998). The measurement of values and individualism–collectivism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24(11), 1177–1189.
- Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 3–72.
- Park, C. W., Jaworski, B. J., & MacInnis, D. J. (1986). Strategic brand concept-image management. *Journal of Marketing*, 50(4), 135–145.
- Pelto, P. J. (1968). The differences between “tight” and “loose” societies. *Transaction*, 5(5), 37–40.
- Peng, K., & Nisbett, R. E. (1999). Culture, dialectics, and reasoning about contradiction. *American Psychologist*, 54(9), 741–754.
- Realo, A., Linnamägi, K., & Gelfand, M. J. (2015). The cultural dimension of tightness–looseness: An analysis of situational constraint in Estonia and Greece. *International Journal of Psychology*, 50(3), 193–204.
- Schwartz, S. H., & Boehnke, K. (2004). Evaluating the structure of human values with confirmatory factor analysis. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 38(3), 230–255.
- Shavitt, S., Lalwani, A. K., Zhang, J., & Torelli, C. J. (2006). The horizontal/vertical distinction in cross-cultural consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16(4), 325–356.
- Shavitt, S., Lee, A. Y., & Torelli, C. J. (2008). Cross-cultural issues in consumer behavior. In M. Wanke (Ed.), *Social Psychology of consumer behavior* (pp. 227–250). NY: Psychology Press.
- Shavitt, S., Torelli, C. J., & Riemer, H. (2010). Horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism: implications for understanding psychological processes. In M. J. Gelfand, C. -Y. Chiu, & Y. -Y. Hong (Eds.), *Advances in culture and Psychology*, Vol. 1. Oxford University Press.
- Swaminathan, V., Page, K. L., & Gürhan-Canli, Z. (2007). “My” Brand or “Our” Brand: The Effects of Brand Relationship Dimensions and Self-Constraint on Brand Evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34, 248–259.
- Taras, V., Kirkman, B. L., & Steel, P. (2010). Examining the impact of Culture's consequences: a three-decade, multilevel, meta-analytic review of Hofstede's cultural value dimensions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(3), 405–439.
- Torelli, C. J. (2013). *Globalization, Culture, and Branding: How to Leverage Cultural Equity for Building Iconic Brands in the Era of Globalization*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Torelli, C. J., & Ahluwalia, R. (2012). Extending culturally symbolic brands: a blessing or a curse? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(5), 933–947.
- Torelli, C. J., Keh, H. T., & Chiu, C. Y. (2010). Cultural Symbolism of Brands. In B. Loken, R. Ahluwalia, & M. J. Houston (Eds.), *Brands and brand management: Contemporary research perspectives* (pp. 113–132). New York: Routledge.
- Torelli, C. J., Chiu, C. -Y., Keh, H. T., & Amaral, N. (2009). Brand iconicity: a shared reality perspective. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 36, 108–111.
- Torelli, C. J., Ozsomer, A., Carvalho, S., Keh, H. T., & Maehle, N. (2012). Brand concepts as representations of human values: do cultural congruity and compatibility between values matter? *Journal of Marketing*, 76(July), 92–108.
- Torelli, C. J., & Shavitt, S. (2011). The impact of power on information processing depends on cultural orientation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(5), 959–967. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.04.003>.
- Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*, 96(3), 506–520.
- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism & Collectivism*. CO: Westview Press.
- Triandis, H. C. (1996). The psychological measurement of cultural syndromes. *American Psychologist*, 51(4), 407–415.
- Wan, C., Torelli, C. J., & Chiu, C. -Y. (2010). Intersubjective consensus and the maintenance of normative shared reality. *Social Cognition*, 28(3), 422–446.
- Winterich, K. P., & Zhang, Y. (2014). Accepting inequality deters responsibility: how power distance decreases charitable behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(2), 274–293.
- Yeo, J., & Park, J. (2006). Effects of parent-extension similarity and self regulatory focus on evaluations of brand extensions. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16(3), 272–282.
- Zhang, Y., Winterich, K. P., & Mittal, V. (2010). Power distance belief and impulsive buying. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(5), 945–954.
- Zou, X., Tam, K. -P., Morris, M. W., Lee, S. -I., Lau, I. Y. -M., & Chiu, C. -Y. (2009). Culture as common sense: Perceived consensus versus personal beliefs as mechanisms of cultural influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97, 579–597.