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## Cross-Cultural Issues in Consumer Behavior

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One of the most difficult choices that multinational corporations face is deciding whether to run the same marketing campaign globally or to customize it to the local taste in different countries. In many cases, companies develop their marketing strategy in one country and then do “disaster checking” as they launch the same strategy in other countries instead of trying to discover what would work best in each market (Clegg, 2005). This often leads to ineffective marketing campaigns and damaged reputations. As new global markets emerge, and existing markets become increasingly segmented along ethnic or subcultural lines, the need to market effectively to consumers who have different cultural values has never been more important. Thus, it is no surprise that in the last decade or so, culture has rapidly emerged as a central focus of research in consumer behavior.

### *What Is Culture?*

Culture consists of shared elements that provide the standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting among those who share a language, a historical period, and a geographic location. As a psychological construct,

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culture can be studied in multiple ways—across nations, across ethnic groups within nations, across individuals within nations (focusing on cultural orientation), and even across situations within individuals through the priming of cultural values. As will be discussed presently, regardless of how culture is studied, cultural distinctions have been demonstrated to have important implications for advertising content, persuasiveness of appeals, consumer motivation, consumer judgment processes, and consumer response styles.

### *Coverage and Scope*

The present chapter reviews these topics. Our coverage is necessarily selective, focusing on findings specific to the consumer domain rather than a more general review of cultural differences (for excellent general reviews, see Chiu & Hong, 2006; Smith, Bond, & Kagitcibasi, 2006). Our content is organized around the theoretical implications of cultural differences in consumer judgments, choices, and brand representations. We focus our coverage on the areas of self-regulation, risk taking, and persuasion because these represent domains that have received particularly significant research attention, and because this research has uncovered underlying psychological processes connecting cultural variables to consumer behavior. For each of these areas, we review implications for information processing, brand evaluations and preferences, and choices.

In our coverage, the cultural constructs of individualism/collectivism and the independent/interdependent self-construals associated with them are given special attention because extensive research has demonstrated the implications of these distinctions for processes and outcomes relevant to consumer behavior. The most recent refinements to these constructs are briefly reviewed in an attempt to identify additional cultural variables likely to enhance the understanding of cross-cultural consumer behavior. We close with a discussion of the role of consumer brands as cultural symbols in the era of globalization and multiculturalism.

## KEY CONSTRUCTS AND DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

The constructs of *individualism* and *collectivism* represent the most broadly used dimensions of cultural variability for cross-cultural comparison (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). In individualistic cultures, people value independence from others and subordinate the goals of their in-groups to their own personal goals. In collectivistic cultures, in contrast, individuals value interdependent relationships to others and subordinate their personal goals to those of their in-groups (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Triandis, 1989). The key distinction involves the extent to which one defines the self in relation to others. In individualistic cultural contexts, people tend to have an independent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) whereby the self is defined as autonomous and unique. In collectivistic cultural contexts, people tend to have an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) whereby the self is seen as inextricably and fundamentally embedded within a larger social network of roles and relationships. This distinction has also been referred to as egocentric vs. sociocentric selves (Shweder & Bourne, 1982).

National cultures that celebrate the values of independence, as in the United States, Canada, Germany, and Denmark, are typically categorized as individualistic societies in which an independent self-construal is common. In contrast, cultures that nurture the values of fulfilling one's obligations and responsibilities over one's own personal wishes or desires, including most East Asian and Latin American countries, such as China, Korea, Japan, and Mexico, are categorized as collectivistic societies in which an interdependent self-construal is common (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

A very large body of research in psychology has demonstrated the many implications of individualism/collectivism and independent/interdependent self-construals for social perception and social behavior (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989, 1995). In general terms, these findings indicate consistently that individualists and people with an independent self-construal are oriented toward products and experiences that promote achievement and autonomy, offer personal benefits, and enable expression of one's distinctive qualities. They tend to be *promotion focused*, regulating their attitudes and behaviors in pursuit of positive outcomes and aspirations. Collectivists and people with an interdependent self-construal are oriented toward products and experiences that allow one to avoid negative outcomes, maintain harmony and strong social connections with others, and dutifully fulfill social roles. They tend to be *prevention focused*, regulating their attitudes and behaviors in pursuit of security and the avoidance of negative outcomes (Higgins, 1997).

Numerous studies have pointed to important differences between individualistic and collectivistic societies in the kind of information that is featured and seen as important or persuasive in consumer messages. Individualists and people with an independent self-construal are persuaded by information that addresses their promotion regulatory concerns, including messages about personal achievement, individuality, uniqueness, and self-improvement. Collectivists and people with an interdependent self-construal are persuaded by information that addresses their prevention regulatory concerns, including messages about harmony, group goals, conformity, and security. These types of differences emerge in the prevalence of different types of advertising appeals (e.g., Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993; S. M. Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005; Han & Shavitt, 1994; J. W. Hong, Muderrisoglu, & Zinkhan, 1987; Kim & Markus, 1999; Lin, 2001), the processing and persuasiveness of advertising messages (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Aaker & Williams, 1998; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Y. Zhang & Gelb, 1996), the perceived importance of product information (Aaker & Lee, 2001; A. Y. Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000), and the determinants of consumers' purchase intentions (C. Lee & Green, 1991), among other outcomes.

Although a given self-construal can be more chronically accessible in a particular culture, all cultures provide sufficient experiences with independent and interdependent views of the self to allow either self-construal to be primed (see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Oyserman & Lee, 2007). Indeed, people in general, and especially bicultural people, can readily switch back and forth between independent and interdependent cultural frames in response to their contexts (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005; Fu, Chiu, Morris, & Young, 2007;

Lau-Gesk, 2003). For instance, Lau-Gesk (2003) found that independent (interdependent) self-construals were temporarily activated when bicultural consumers were exposed to individually focused (interpersonally focused) appeals. When activated, these situationally accessible self-views appear to alter social perception and consumer judgments in ways that are highly consistent with cross-cultural findings (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Y.-y. Hong, Ip, Chiu, Morris, & Menon, 2001; A. Y. Lee et al., 2000; Mandel, 2003; Torelli, 2006; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991).

In sum, the distinctions between individualistic and collectivistic societies, and independent and interdependent self-construals, are crucial to the cross-cultural understanding of consumer behavior. Indeed, whereas the 1980s were labeled the decade of individualism/collectivism in cross-cultural psychology (Kagitcibasi, 1994), similar distinctions represent the dominant structural approach in cross-cultural consumer research in the 1990s and 2000s. As noted, the studies to be reviewed in this chapter offer a wealth of evidence that these cultural classifications have fundamental implications for consumption-related outcomes.

### *Emerging Cultural Dimensions*

The conceptualizations of individualism and collectivism, and independence and interdependence, have historically been broad and multidimensional, summarizing a host of differences in focus of attention, self-definitions, motivations, emotional connections to in-groups, and belief systems and behavioral patterns (Bond, 2002; Ho & Chiu, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985). Nevertheless, recent studies have proposed useful refinements to the broader individualism/collectivism or independent/interdependent cultural categories. For instance, Rhee, Uleman, and Lee (1996) distinguished between versions of individualism and collectivism referencing family (kin) and nonfamily (nonkin) in-groups, and showed that Asians and European Americans manifested distinct patterns of relations between kin and nonkin individualism. Gelfand, Bhawuk, Nishii, and Bechtold (2004) distinguished between institutional and in-group collectivism, and showed that there can be substantial differences in the degree to which a society encourages institutional collective action versus interpersonal interdependence (e.g., Scandinavian societies emphasize the former but not the latter).

More recently, Brewer and Chen (2007) have distinguished between a *relational* form of collectivism (dominant in East Asian cultures) that emphasizes relationships between the self and particular close others, and a *group-focused* form of collectivism (more common in Western cultures) that emphasizes relationships with others by virtue of common membership in a symbolic group (see also Gaines et al., 1997). This group/relational distinction in interdependence is congruent with gender differences in cultural orientations indicating that women are more relational but less group-oriented than men in their patterns of interdependent judgments and behaviors (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999; see also Kashima et al., 1995).

In sum, the nature and meaning of individualism and collectivism (or of independent and interdependent self-construals) appear to vary across cultural, institutional, gender, and ethnic lines. Although the breadth of the individualism/collectivism constructs lends integrative strengths, more recent research suggests that further refinements of these categories enhance the prediction of consumer behavior.

The Horizontal/Vertical Distinction Within the individualism/collectivism framework, Triandis and his colleagues (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) have recently introduced a further distinction between societies that are *horizontal* (valuing equality) and those that are *vertical* (emphasizing hierarchy). The horizontal/vertical distinction emerges from the observation that American or British individualism differs from, say, Norwegian or Danish individualism in much the same way that Japanese or Korean collectivism differs from the collectivism of the Israeli kibbutz. Specifically, in vertical individualist (VI) societies (e.g., the United States and Great Britain), people strive to become distinguished and acquire status via competition, whereas in horizontal individualist (HI) cultural contexts (e.g., Sweden and Norway), people value uniqueness but are not especially interested in becoming distinguished and achieving high status. In vertical collectivistic (VC) societies (e.g., Korea and Japan), people emphasize the subordination of their goals to those of their in-groups, submit to the will of authority, and support competitions between their in-groups and out-groups. Finally, in horizontal collectivist (HC) cultural contexts (e.g., exemplified historically by the Israeli kibbutz), people see themselves as similar to others and emphasize common goals with others, interdependence, and sociability, but they do not submit to authority.

When such distinctions are taken into account, it becomes apparent that the societies chosen to represent individualistic and collectivistic cultural syndromes in consumer research have almost exclusively been vertically oriented. Specifically, the modal comparisons are between the United States (VI) and any of a number of Pacific Rim countries (VC). It may be argued, therefore, that much of what is known about consumer behavior in individualistic and collectivistic societies reflects vertical forms of these syndromes and may not generalize, for example, to comparisons between Sweden (HI) and Israel (HC) or other sets of horizontal cultures. As an example, conformity in product choice, as examined by Kim and Markus (1999), may be a tendency specific to VC cultures, in which deference to authority and to in-group wishes is stressed. Much lower levels of conformity may be observed in HC cultures, which emphasize sociability but not deference (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Thus, it may be inappropriate to ascribe differences in consumers' conformity between Korea (VC) and the United States (VI) solely to the role of individualism/collectivism or independence/interdependence, because such conformity might not be prevalent in horizontal societies. In particular, levels of product conformity in an HC culture might not exceed those in an HI culture.

Indeed, several recent studies of this horizontal/vertical cultural distinction have provided evidence for its value as a predictor of new consumer psychology phenomena and as a basis for refining the understanding of known phenomena (Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006). For instance, Lalwani, Shavitt, and

Johnson (Shavitt, Lalwani, et al., 2006) showed that differences in the self-presentational responses observed for individualists and collectivists are mediated at the individual level by the horizontal but not the vertical versions of these cultural orientations. This suggests that culturally linked self-presentational efforts reflect distinct goals of being seen as self-reliant and capable (valued in HI contexts) versus sociable and benevolent (valued in HC contexts).

In a study about country-of-origin effects, Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2000) demonstrated that the tendency to favor products from one's own country over foreign products emerged more strongly in Japan (a VC culture) than in the United States (a VI culture). This fits well with a conceptualization of collectivists as being oriented toward their in-groups. However, mediational analyses using individual consumers' self-rated cultural values indicated that only the vertical aspect of individualism and collectivism accounted for the country-of-origin effects in Japan. In other words, the collectivistic tendency to favor one's own country's products appeared to be driven by cultural values that stress hierarchy, competition, and deference to in-group wishes, not by values that stress interdependence more generally.

In line with this, research suggests that advertising messages with themes that emphasize status, prestige, hierarchy, and distinction may be more prevalent and persuasive in vertical cultural contexts (Shavitt, Lalwani et al., 2006). Such advertisements also appear to be generally more persuasive for those with a vertical cultural orientation, and may be inappropriate for those with a horizontal one. Shavitt, Zhang, and Johnson (2006) asked U.S. respondents to write advertisements that they personally would find persuasive. The extent to which the ad appeals that they wrote emphasized status themes was positively correlated with respondents' vertical cultural orientation and negatively correlated with their horizontal cultural orientation. Moreover, content analyses of magazine advertisements in several countries suggested that status-oriented themes of hierarchy, luxury, prominence, and distinction were generally more prevalent in societies presumed to have vertical cultural profiles (e.g., Korea, Russia) than a horizontal cultural profile (Denmark).

**Additional Dimensions** Numerous other cultural distinctions deserve further attention in consumer research. A focus upon these relatively under-researched constructs as antecedents may allow for broadening the range of cultural differences beyond those currently investigated. For instance, Schwartz's (1992) circumplex structure of values, which has emerged as highly robust cross-nationally, appears largely consistent with the HI/VI/HC/VC typology and offers a particularly detailed and comprehensive basis for classification. In his large-scale studies of work values, Hofstede (Hofstede, 1980, 2001) derived three other dimensions of cultural variation in addition to individualism: *power distance* (acceptance of power inequality in organizations, a construct conceptually relevant to the vertical/horizontal distinction), *uncertainty avoidance* (the degree of tolerance for ambiguity or uncertainty about the future), and *masculinity/femininity* (preference for achievement and assertiveness versus modesty and nurturing relationships). Indeed, individualism was the second dimension identified by Hofstede (1980), whereas power distance emerged as the first dimension. Oyserman (2006) suggests that a separate power dimension (high vs. low power) may help to advance our understanding

of the effects of (not) having power in different cultures. A few marketing-oriented studies have employed Hofstede's nation-level classifications (e.g., Blodgett, Lu, Rose, & Vitell, 2001; Dwyer, Mesak, & Hsu, 2005; Earley, 1999; Johnson, Kulesa, Cho, & Shavitt, 2005; Nelson, Brunel, Supphellen, & Manchanda, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 1997), but more potential remains for identifying consequences for consumer judgments and behaviors. For instance, uncertainty avoidance has been conceptualized as a syndrome related to anxiety, rule orientation, need for security, and deference to experts (Hofstede, 1980). As such, one might speculate that the level of uncertainty avoidance in a culture will predict the tendency for advertisements to use fear appeals or appeals to safety and security, and the tendency for advertisements to employ expert spokespersons. Differences along this cultural dimension may also predict patterns in the diffusion of product innovations, particularly innovations whose purchase entails a degree of risk.

### CULTURE AND SELF-REGULATORY GOALS

Closely linked to the individualism/collectivism distinction is the independent goal of distinguishing oneself from others through success and achievement and the interdependent goal of maintaining harmony with respect to others through the fulfillment of obligations and responsibilities. These two goals serve as important self-regulatory guides that direct consumers' attention, attitudes, and behaviors (Higgins, 1997; see also Lee & Higgins, this volume).

The independent goal of being positively distinct, with its emphasis on achievement and autonomy, is more consistent with a promotion focus, whereas the interdependent goal of harmoniously fitting in with others, with its emphasis on fulfilling social roles and maintaining connections with others, is more consistent with a prevention focus. Thus, people from Western individualistic cultures (whose independent self-construal is more accessible) tend to be promotion focused, whereas people from Eastern collectivistic cultures (whose interdependent self-construal is more accessible) tend to be prevention focused. People with a promotion focus regulate their attitudes and behaviors toward the pursuit of growth and the achievement of hopes and aspirations to satisfy their needs for nurturance. They pursue their goals with eagerness and are sensitive to the presence and absence of positive outcomes. In contrast, those with a prevention focus regulate their attitudes and behaviors toward the pursuit of safety and the fulfillment of duties and obligations to satisfy their needs for security. They pursue their goals with vigilance and are sensitive to the presence and absence of negative outcomes.

That distinct self-construals are associated with distinct types of self-regulatory focus has important implications for consumer research. First, consumers consider information that is compatible with the dominant self-view to be more important (A. Y. Lee et al., 2000). Specifically, promotion-focused information that addresses the concerns of growth and achievement is more relevant and hence deemed more important to those individuals with a dominant independent (compared to interdependent) self-construal. On the other hand, prevention-focused information that addresses the concerns of safety and security is more relevant and hence deemed

more important to those individuals with a dominant interdependent (compared to independent) self-construal (Aaker & Lee, 2001; A. Y. Lee et al., 2000).

Using different operationalizations of self-construal that include cultural orientation (North American vs. East Asian), individual disposition (Singelis, 1994), and situational prime, Lee and her colleagues (A. Y. Lee et al., 2000) demonstrate that individuals with a more accessible independent self-view perceive a scenario that emphasizes gains or nongains to be more important than one that emphasizes losses or nonlosses. They also experience more intense promotion-focused emotions such as cheerfulness and dejection. In contrast, those with a more dominant interdependent self-view perceive a scenario that emphasizes losses or nonlosses to be more important than one that emphasizes gains or nongains. They also experience more intense prevention-focused emotions such as peacefulness and agitation. Thus, consumers with distinct self-construals are more persuaded by information that addresses their regulatory concerns when argument quality is strong (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005; J. Wang & Lee, 2006), but less persuaded when argument quality is weak, as compared to when the information does not address their regulatory concerns.

Chen, Ng, and Rao (2005) also find that consumers with a dominant independent self-construal are more willing to pay for expedited delivery when presented with a promotion framed message (i.e., to enjoy a product early), whereas those with a dominant interdependent self-construal are more willing to pay for expedited delivery when presented with a prevention framed message (i.e., avoid delay in receiving a product). These matching effects between self-construal and regulatory focus are observed regardless of whether self-construal is situationally made more accessible or culturally nurtured (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005; Chen et al., 2005).

Interestingly, brand commitment (defined as consumers' public attachment or pledging to the brand) seems to moderate the effectiveness of the chronic versus situational regulatory relevance effects (Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005). In particular, Agrawal and Maheswaran (2005) find that appeals consistent with the chronic self-construal are more persuasive under high brand commitment, whereas appeals consistent with the primed (independent or interdependent) self-construal are more effective under low brand commitment. According to the authors, consumers who are committed to the brand have a readily accessible knowledge structure related to the brand. To these consumers, not only is brand information highly accessible, it is also linked to other chronically accessible knowledge in memory. Exposure to brand information that is highly relevant to the self is likely to activate consumers' chronic self-construal. Thus, their attention and attitudes will tend to be guided more by their chronic self-construal than by the primed self-construal. However, for low commitment consumers, exposure to brand information is less likely to activate any chronic self knowledge. Thus, their preferences will tend to be guided more by their currently accessible self-construal (i.e., the primed self-construal) than by their chronic self-construal.

More recent research suggests that regulatory relevance effects may be moderated by involvement such that people are more likely to rely on their regulatory focus as a filter to selectively process information when they are not expending

cognitive resources to process information (Briley & Aaker, 2006; J. Wang & Lee, 2006). For example, Briley and Aaker (2006) demonstrate that participants who are culturally inclined to have a promotion or prevention focus hold more favorable attitudes toward those products that address their regulatory concerns—but only when they are asked to provide their initial reactions or when their evaluation is made under cognitive load or under time pressure. The culturally induced regulatory relevance effects disappear when participants are asked to make deliberated evaluations or when they are able to expend cognitive resources on the task. For a more detailed discussion on effects of regulatory focus on persuasion, please see the chapter on regulatory fit by Lee and Higgins in this volume.

Distinct self-construals with their corresponding regulatory goals also appear to be the basis of different temporal perspectives across members of different cultures such that those with a dominant independent self-construal are more likely to construe events at a more distant future than those with a dominant interdependent self-construal (S. Lee & Lee, 2007). For the independents, their regulatory goal that emphasizes growth and achievement takes time to attain. Further, their sensitivity to gains and nongains prompts them to focus on positives (vs. negatives) that are more salient in the distant future (Eyal, Liberman, Trope, & Walther, 2004). In contrast, for the interdependents, their regulatory orientation that emphasizes safety and security necessitates their keeping a close watch on their surrounding environment and on the immediate future. Further, their sensitivity to losses and nonlosses prompts them to focus on negatives (vs. positives) that are more salient in the near future. Interdependents' close attention to the self in relationship with others also requires their construing the self and others in contexts that are concrete and specific (vs. abstract and general; I. Choi, Dalal, Kim-Prieto, & Park, 2003), which are more characteristic of near versus far temporal distance. Indeed, Lee and Lee (2007) observe that those with a dominant interdependent self-construal (e.g., Koreans) are likely to construe a future event to be temporally more proximal than those with a dominant independent self-construal (e.g., Americans); interdependents also respond more positively to events scheduled in the near future than do independents. The implication is that persuasive appeals that make salient the temporal distance that corresponds with consumers' self-view would be more persuasive than appeals that make salient a mismatched temporal distance. For example, a political campaign that focuses on the future long-term outlook should be more persuasive among those with an independent self-construal, whereas a campaign message that draws people's attention to the current situation should be more persuasive among those with an interdependent self-construal.

This section highlights the importance of understanding the regulatory orientation of the two distinct self-views. However, efforts to generalize this relationship should proceed with caution. As discussed earlier, cultures differ not only in their levels of individualism and collectivism, but also in the extent to which they are vertical (emphasizing hierarchy) or horizontal (emphasizing equality or openness; Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). It is possible that construal-induced shifts in regulatory focus are limited to cultures that are vertical in structure. For instance, to the extent that competing to distinguish oneself positively is more prevalent in vertical than horizontal individualist cultures, an independent

promotion focus is more likely among members of a vertical individualist culture (e.g., United States) than among a horizontal individualist culture (e.g., Norway, Sweden). And to the extent that conformity and obedience are more normative in a vertical collectivist culture with its emphasis on fulfilling duties than in a horizontal collectivist culture, an interdependent prevention focus should be more prevalent among members of a vertical collectivist culture (e.g., Japan, Korea) than among a horizontal collectivist culture (e.g., an Israeli kibbutz). More research is needed to investigate whether the relationship between self-construal and regulatory focus may be generalized across both horizontal and vertical types of individualism and collectivism.

### CULTURE, RISK TAKING, AND IMPULSIVITY

Another area of interest related to goals and self-regulation is how culture influences people's attitudes toward risk and the way they make risky choices. Based on the literature reviewed in the previous section, one would expect that members of collectivist cultures, who tend to be prevention-focused, would be more risk averse than members of individualist cultures, who tend to be promotion-focused (A. Y. Lee et al., 2000). In particular, individuals who are promotion-focused are inclined to adopt an eagerness strategy, which translates into greater openness to risk, whereas those who are prevention-focused are inclined to adopt a vigilant strategy, which usually translates into more conservative behaviors (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Consider an array of options: Options that have greater potential upsides are likely to also come with greater potential downsides, whereas options with smaller potential downsides are often those with smaller potential upsides. Thus, when choosing between a risky alternative with greater upsides and downsides and a conservative alternative with smaller downsides and upsides, individuals who pay more attention to positive outcomes (i.e., the promotion-focused) would favor the risky option, whereas those who focus more on negative outcomes (i.e., the prevention-focused) would favor the conservative option. These different attitudes toward risk are consistent with findings that promotion-focused participants emphasize speed at the expense of accuracy in different drawing and proofreading tasks and that the reverse is true for those with a prevention focus (Förster, Higgins, & Bianco, 2003).

However, empirical investigations examining how people with distinct cultural self-construals make decisions involving risks have produced mixed results. For instance, Mandel (2003) observed that participants primed with an interdependent versus independent self-construal were more likely to choose a safe versus a risky option when choosing a shirt to wear to a family gathering or when playing truth or dare. However, these same participants were more likely to choose the risky option when making a decision regarding a lottery ticket or a parking ticket. Along similar lines, Hsee and Weber (1999) presented Chinese and Americans with safe versus risky options in three decision domains—financial (to invest money in a savings account or in stocks), academic (to write a term paper on a conservative topic so that the grade would be predictable or to write the paper on a provocative topic so the grade could vary), and medical (to take a pain reliever with a moderate but sure

effectiveness or one with a high variance of effectiveness). They found that Chinese were more risk-seeking in the financial domain than their American counterparts, but not in the academic and medical domains. Taken together, these results suggest that while individuals with a dominant interdependent self-construal are more risk averse than those with a dominant independent self-construal in general, they are less risk averse when their decision involves financial risks.

To account for the findings that Chinese were more risk-seeking in the financial domain, Weber and Hsee (Weber & Hsee, 1998, 2000) proposed that members of collectivist cultures can afford to take greater financial risks because their social network buffers them from financial downfalls. That is, individuals' social networks serve as a cushion that could protect them should they take risks and fall; and the wider their social network, the larger the cushion. Because people in collectivist cultures have larger social networks to fall back on relative to those in individualist cultures, they are more likely to choose seemingly riskier options because their perceived risks for those options are smaller than the perceived risks for people in individualist cultures. In one study, Weber and Hsee (1998) surveyed American, German, Polish, and Chinese respondents about their perception of the riskiness of a set of financial investment options and their willingness to pay for these options. They found that their Chinese respondents perceived the risks to be the lowest and paid the highest prices for the investments, whereas American respondents perceived the investments to be most risky and paid the lowest prices for them. Once risk perception was accounted for, the cross-cultural difference in risk aversion disappeared. Consistent with this cushion hypothesis, Mandel (2003) showed that the difference between independent and interdependent participants' risky financial choices is mediated by the size of their social network—the larger their social network, the more risk-taking participants were.

Hamilton and Biehal (2005) suggest that this social network cushioning effect among the interdependents may be offset by their self-regulatory goals. They find that those primed with an independent self-construal tend to prefer mutual funds that are more risky (i.e., more volatile) than do those primed with an interdependent self-construal; and this difference is mediated by the strength of their regulatory goal in that risky preferences are fostered by promotion goals and discouraged by prevention goals.

It is worth noting that both Mandel (2003) and Hamilton and Biehal (2005) manipulated self-construal but found opposite effects of self-construal on risky financial decisions. Whereas an interdependent self-construal may bring to mind a larger social network that serves as a safety net and hence changes risk perceptions, the associated prevention focus also prompts people to be more vigilant and hence lowers the threshold for risk tolerance.

Interestingly, Briley and Wyer (2002) found that both Chinese and American participants whose cultural identity was made salient (vs. not) were more likely to choose a compromise alternative (i.e., an option with moderate values on two different attributes) over more extreme options (i.e., options with a high value on one attribute and a low value along a second attribute) when choosing between such products as cameras, stereo sets, or computers. When presented with the task of picking two pieces of candy, cultural identity-primed participants were also

more likely to pick two different candies than two pieces of the same candy. To the extent that choosing the compromise alternative or picking one of each candy reduces the risk of social embarrassment and postchoice regret, the authors presented the results as evidence that individuals who think of themselves as part of a larger collective (i.e., those with an interdependent mindset) are more risk averse, independent of national culture. More systematic investigations of how culture and self-construal affect consumers' risky decision making await future research.

Besides having an influence on the individual's attitude toward risks, culture also plays an important role in the individual's self-regulation of emotions and behaviors. Because the maintenance of harmony within the group often relies on members' ability to manage their emotions and behaviors, collectivist cultures tend to emphasize the control and moderation of one's feelings and actions more so than do individualistic cultures (Potter, 1988; Russell & Yik, 1996; Tsai & Levenson, 1997). Indeed, it has been reported that members of collectivist cultures often control their negative emotions and display positive emotions only to acquaintances (Gudykunst, 1993). Children in these societies are also socialized to control their impulses at an early age (Ho, 1994).

It follows that culture would play an important role in consumers' purchase behavior by imposing norms on the appropriateness of impulse-buying activities (Kacen & Lee, 2002). When consumers believe that impulse buying is socially unacceptable, they are more likely to refrain from acting on their impulsive tendencies (Rook & Fisher, 1995). Whereas members of individualist cultures are more motivated by their own preferences and personal goals, members of collectivist cultures are often motivated by norms and duties imposed by society. Thus, people with a dominant interdependent self-construal who tend to focus on relationship harmony and group preferences should be better at monitoring and adjusting their behavior based on "what is right" rather than on "what I want." Along these lines, Chen, Ng, and Rao (2005) found that consumers with a dominant independent self-construal are less patient in that they are willing to pay more to expedite the delivery of an online book purchase than those with a dominant interdependent self-construal.

Kacen and Lee (2002) surveyed respondents from Australia, the United States, Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong and found that the relationship between trait buying impulsiveness and actual impulsive buying behavior is stronger for individualists (respondents from Australia, the United States) than for collectivists (respondents from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore). Further, they reported a positive relationship between respondents' independent self-construal and impulsivity among the individualists, but not among the collectivists. These results suggest that impulsivity in buying behavior in individualistic societies is more a function of personality than normative constraints, and are consistent with findings that attitude-behavior correlations are stronger in individualistic than collectivistic cultures (Bagozzi, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2000; Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992; J. A. Lee, 2000).

## CULTURE AND PERSUASIVE APPEALS

Most research on cultural influences on judgment and persuasion has examined the implications of individualism/collectivism or independent/interdependent self-construals. In general, the findings suggest that the prevalence or the persuasiveness of a given type of appeal matches the cultural value orientation of the society. For instance, appeals to individuality, personal benefits, and achievement tend to be more prevalent and persuasive in individualistic compared to collectivistic cultures, whereas appeals to group benefits, harmony, and conformity tend to be more prevalent and persuasive in collectivistic compared to individualistic cultures. Such evidence for “cultural matching” in the nature of appeals has since been followed by studies examining the distinct psychological processes driving persuasion across cultures. These studies suggest that culture can affect how people process and organize in memory product-related information. It can determine the type of information that is weighed more heavily for making judgments (e.g., product attributes versus other consumers’ opinions). It can also influence thinking styles and the mental representations of brand information.

### *Cultural Differences in the Content of Message Appeals*

Cross-cultural content analyses of advertisements can yield valuable evidence about distinctions in cultural values. For instance, American advertisers are often exhorted to focus on the advertised brand’s attributes and advantages (e.g., Ogilvy, 1985), based on the assumption that consumer learning about the brand precedes other marketing effects, such as liking and buying the brand (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), at least under high-involvement conditions (Vaughn, 1980). Thus, advertisements that attempt to “teach” the consumer about the advertised brand are typical in the United States, although other types of advertisements are also used.

In contrast, as Miracle (1987) has suggested, the typical goal of advertisements in Japan appears very different. There, advertisements tend to focus on “making friends” with the audience and showing that the company understands their feelings (Javalgi, Cutler, & Malhotra, 1995). The assumption is that consumers will buy once they feel familiar with and have a sense of trust in the company. Because Japan, Korea, and other Pacific Rim countries are collectivist, “high context” cultures that tend toward implicit and indirect communication practices (Hall, 1976), Miracle suggested that the mood and tone of commercials in these countries will be particularly important in establishing good feelings about the advertiser (see also Taylor, Miracle, & Wilson, 1997). Indeed, studies have shown that advertisements in Japan and Korea rely more on symbolism, mood, and aesthetics and less on direct approaches such as brand comparisons than do advertisements in the United States (B. Cho, Kwon, Gentry, Jun, & Kropp, 1999; di Benedetto, Tamate, & Chandran, 1992; J. W. Hong et al., 1987; Javalgi et al., 1995).

This is not to argue that advertisements in collectivist societies use more of a “soft sell” approach in contrast to a “hard sell,” information-driven approach in the West. Information content in the advertisements of collectivist cultures can be very high (Tse, Belk, & Zhou, 1989), sometimes even higher than in the United States

(J. W. Hong et al., 1987; Rice & Lu, 1988; for a review see Taylor et al., 1997). It is generally more an issue of the type of appeal that the information is supporting.

For instance, a content analysis of magazine advertisements revealed that in Korea, compared to the United States, advertisements are more focused on family well-being, interdependence, group goals, and harmony, whereas they are less focused on self-improvement, ambition, personal goals, independence, and individuality (Han & Shavitt, 1994). However, as one might expect, the nature of the advertised product moderated these effects. Cultural differences emerged strongly only for products that tend to be purchased and used along with other persons (e.g., groceries, cars). Products that do not tend to be shared (e.g., health and beauty aids, clothing) are promoted more in terms of personal, individualistic benefits in both countries.

Paralleling the overall cross-national differences, a content analysis by Kim and Markus (1999) indicated that Korean advertisements, compared to U.S. advertisements, were characterized by more conformity themes (e.g., respect for collective values and beliefs) and fewer uniqueness themes (e.g., rebelling against collective values and beliefs). (For other ad comparisons relevant to individualism/collectivism, see B. Cho et al., 1999; S. M. Choi et al., 2005; Javalgi et al., 1995; Tak, Kaid, & Lee, 1997).

Recently, studies have extended these cultural conclusions into analyses of Web site content (C.-H. Cho & Cheon, 2005; Singh & Matsuo, 2004). For instance, Cho and Cheon (2005) found that corporate Web sites in the United States and United Kingdom tend to emphasize consumer-message and consumer-marketer interactivity. In contrast, those in Japan and Korea tended to emphasize consumer-consumer interactivity, a pattern consistent with cultural values stressing collectivistic activities that foster interdependence and sociability.

Finally, in studying humorous appeals, Alden, Hoyer, and Lee (1993) found that advertisements from both Korea and Thailand contain more group-oriented situations than those from Germany and the United States. However, it is worth noting that in these studies, evidence also emerged for the value of the vertical/horizontal distinction previously discussed. Specifically, relationships between the central characters in advertisements that used humor were more often unequal in cultures characterized as having higher power distance (i.e., relatively vertical cultures, such as Korea) than in those labeled as lower in power distance (such as Germany), in which these relationships were more often equal. Such unequal relationships portrayed in the advertisements may reflect the hierarchical interpersonal relationships that are more likely to exist in vertical societies.

### *Cultural Differences in Judgment and Persuasion*

The persuasiveness of appeals appears to mirror the cultural differences in their prevalence. An experiment by Han and Shavitt (1994) showed that appeals to individualistic values (e.g., "Solo cleans with a softness that you will love") are more persuasive in the United States and appeals to collectivistic values (e.g., "Solo cleans with a softness that your family will love") are more persuasive in Korea. Again, however, this effect was much more evident for products that are shared

(laundry detergent, clothes iron) than for those that are not (chewing gum, running shoes).

Zhang and Gelb (1996) found a similar pattern in the persuasiveness of individualistic versus collectivistic appeals in an experiment conducted in the United States and China. Moreover, this effect appeared to be moderated by whether the advertised product is socially visible (camera) versus privately used (toothbrush). Finally, Wang and Mowen (1997) showed in a U.S. sample that individual differences in separateness/connectedness self-schema (i.e., the degree to which one views the self as independent of or interconnected with important others) predicts attitudes toward individualistic versus collectivistic ad appeals for a credit card. Thus, cultural orientation and national culture have implications for the effectiveness of appeals. However, such cultural differences are anticipated only for those products or uses that are relevant to both personal and group goals.

Wang, Bristol, Mowen, and Chakraborty (2000) further demonstrated that individual differences in separateness/connectedness self-schema mediate both the effects of culture and of gender on the persuasiveness of individualistic versus collectivistic appeals. Their analysis demonstrated that this mediating role is played by distinct dimensions of separateness/connectedness self-schema for cultural as opposed to gender-based effects.

Cultural differences in persuasion are also revealed in the diagnosticity of certain types of information. For instance, Aaker and Maheswaran (1997) showed that consensus information regarding other consumers' opinions is not treated as a heuristic cue by Hong Kong Chinese (as it is in the United States, Maheswaran & Chaiken, 1991) but is instead perceived and processed as diagnostic information. Thus, collectivists resolve incongruity in favor of consensus information, not brand attributes. This would be expected in a culture that stresses conformity and responsiveness to others' views. However, cues whose (low) diagnosticity is not expected to vary cross-culturally (e.g., number of attributes presented) elicit similar heuristic processing in the United States and Hong Kong.

Further research indicates that, whereas members of both U.S. and Chinese cultures resolve incongruities in the product information they receive, they tend to do so in different ways (Aaker & Sengupta, 2000). Specifically, U.S. consumers tend to resolve incongruity with an attenuation strategy in which one piece of information is favored over another, inconsistent piece of information. In contrast, Hong Kong Chinese consumers tend to follow an additive strategy in which both pieces of information are combined to influence judgments. This is consistent with the view that East Asians think holistically and take more information into account when making judgments (I. Choi et al., 2003; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001).

### *Cultural Differences in Brand Representations*

Recent research points to cultural differences in the mental representation of brand information. Ng and Houston (2006) found that an interdependent view of the self facilitates the accessibility of brand exemplars (i.e., specific products or subcategories), whereas an independent view of the self facilitates the retrieval of brand beliefs (i.e., general descriptive or evaluative thoughts). The authors argue

that these results are driven by a tendency by independent consumers to focus on “global beliefs” abstracted from prior product experiences and a tendency by interdependent consumers to focus on contextual and incidental details about the product. The focus of interdependent consumers on contextual variables also led to more favorable evaluations (compared to those of independent consumers) of brand extensions perceived to be used in the same usage occasion as an existing product mix.

Monga and John (2007) provide further insights into the cognitive processes underlying cross-cultural differences in the representation of brand information. They found that priming an interdependent (vs. an independent) self-construal led consumers to perceive a higher degree of fit between a brand extension and the parent brand and to evaluate more positively the brand extension. These findings are attributed to the more holistic thinking style, which is oriented toward the object-field relationships and is associated with an interdependent view of the self (see Kühnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001).

### BRANDS AS SYMBOLS OF SELF AND OF CULTURE

Consumers use certain products or brands to express to others their personal values (Richins, 1994). Although the self-expressive function of products may reflect a universal goal, recent research suggests that certain cultures value self-expression more than others do. Moreover, brands and products vary in their likelihood of playing a self-expressive role (see Shavitt, 1990)—that is, some brands are more iconic than others. As a result, such brands may be more likely to carry and activate cultural meanings.

One important aspect of individualism is the expression of inner thoughts and feelings in order to realize one’s individuality (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). In contrast, in collectivistic cultures expression of one’s thoughts is not particularly encouraged. Accordingly, Kim and Sherman (2007) showed that culturally shared assumptions about the function and importance of self-expression impact consumers’ judgments. In their studies, European Americans instructed (vs. not) to express their choice of a pen evaluated an unchosen pen more negatively, indicating that they became more attached to the pen they chose. These effects were absent among East Asian Americans. In sum, cultural differences in how people self-expressed through their preferences apparently led to differences in how people felt about their preferences once they were expressed.

Certain brands become consensus expressions of a set of ideas or values held dear by individuals in a given society (Holt, 2004). Consumers associate these brands with the values that are characteristic of the culture (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001). For example, some brands in the United States are associated with ruggedness (e.g., the Marlboro man) and some brands in Japan are associated with peacefulness, and ruggedness and peacefulness are dimensions characteristic of American and East Asian cultures, respectively. To the extent that these brands are associated with knowledge about the culture, they can reach an iconic status and act as cultural reminders (see Betsky, 1997; Ortner, 1973). Encountering such iconic brands can serve as subtle cultural primes that can lead to culturally

congruent judgments and behaviors. In line with this reasoning, in a study about the effects of the exposure to American icons on consumers' judgments, Torelli, Chiu, & Keh (2007) found that exposure to iconic brands (e.g., Kellogg's Corn Flakes) led American participants to organize material in memory around cultural themes and to evaluate foreign competitors more negatively.

To the extent that iconic brands can be used to communicate their associated values, consumers can rely on these brands for fulfilling important identity goals. With the advancement of globalization, the marketplace is suffused with images of various iconic brands and products. Continued exposure to iconic products and brands can serve as a cognitive socialization process whereby different cultural values and beliefs are repeatedly activated in consumers' working memory. As Lau-Gesk (2003) points out, as the world becomes more culturally diverse and mobile, it is more common for consumers to possess knowledge about the symbols and values of multiple cultures. Thus, J. Zhang (2007) shows that the responses to persuasive appeals by young Chinese consumers resemble those found among bicultural individuals (e.g., East Asians born and raised in the United States). This state of affairs may help to explain why, in rapidly transitioning economies, Westernized appeals are increasingly common. For example, appeals to youth/modernity, individuality/independence, and technology are rather salient in Chinese advertisements (J. Zhang & Shavitt, 2003) as well as frequently employed by current Taiwanese advertising agencies (Shao, Raymond, & Taylor, 1999).

In addition, consumers in developing countries tend to respond favorably to markedly Western products. For instance, in one study of Indian consumers (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000), brands perceived as having a nonlocal (Western) country of origin were favored over brands perceived to be local. This effect was stronger for consumers with a greater admiration for the lifestyle in economically developed countries. These cultural-incongruity findings are meaningful because they suggest the important role that advertising can play in reshaping cultural values in countries experiencing rapid economic growth (J. Zhang & Shavitt, 2003). Rather than reflecting existing cultural values, advertising content in those countries promotes new aspirational values, such as individuality and modernity, hence these new values become acceptable and desirable among consumers. Understanding the cognitive implications of multicultural environments for consumers is likely to be a key research topic in cross-cultural consumer psychology for years to come.

## CONCLUSIONS

As marketing efforts become increasingly globalized, understanding cross-cultural consumer behavior has become a mainstream goal of consumer research. In recent years, research in consumer behavior has addressed a broadening set of cross-cultural issues and dimensions. However, the need for a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying cross-cultural differences continues to grow. Significant progress has come on several fronts, including an enhanced understanding of the relations between culture and self-construal, motivation, self-regulation, and consumer persuasion. As societies become more globalized,

cultural boundaries will become more blurred and new hybrids of cultural values will emerge, along with an increased need to understand these phenomena better.

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