Special Session Summary  the Influence of Cultural Thinking Style on Evaluative Processes

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The Influence of Cultural Thinking Style on Evaluative Processes

SESSIO N OVERVIEW
Many current theoretical frameworks pertaining to consumer evaluation have been validated only within the U.S. culture. Maheswaran and Shavitt (2000) proposed that the lack of robust frameworks across cultures has severely limited the development of theory-based empirical work. The three papers in this session suggest that culturally linked thinking styles are important mechanisms underlying consumers’ evaluative processes for a variety of products and services.

Although cultural thinking styles have been studied intensively in social psychology, they are only starting to attract attention in consumer research. Social psychologists have characterized the reasoning of Western cultures such as the U.S. as analytic, context-independent, and characterized by formal logic, whereas that of Eastern cultures is characterized as holistic, context-dependent, and dialectical (Nisbett et al. 2001). In the first paper, Priester, Park, Petty, Wang, and Lee examine whether members of different cultures have different cognitive tendencies toward acceptance of the feelings of conflict toward a target, which pertains to the tendency of dialectical thinking, and further different levels of evaluative tension. Specifically, from the standpoint of Western cultural reasoning, the coexistence of positive and negative feelings about the same target is viewed as a contradiction. Hence, those in Western cultures perceive such feelings of “intrapersonal” conflict as less acceptable—accordingly, evaluative tension increases. East Asian dialectical reasoning, however, is more tolerant of such “intrapersonal” conflicts, accepting contradiction and the need for multiple perspectives.

In the second paper, Lee and Shavitt investigate the role of context-dependent thinking styles and salient self-construal in pre-purchase quality evaluation. Previous research has concluded that the effect of store name on quality evaluation of a product is minimal compared to price and brand name. They suggest that consumers with salient interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal use store name more, because they are more concerned about the social image implied by store name.

In the third paper, Fedorikhin and Cole suggest that members of different cultures may appraise a service failure differently. Accordingly, a wait for 20 minutes at a McDonald’s could evoke more anger in a person from one culture than another. Such difference in appraisal of service failure and subsequent emotional response may stem from different expectations of consistency of service quality based on cultural cognition. For example, members of holistic cultures are more likely to tolerate an environment that is less controlled and more contradictory to their expectations than are those in analytic cultures (Peng and Nisbett 1999). Notably, the authors found that consumers high in vertical individualism are the most susceptible (i.e., generate more anger) to service failures such as long wait times, which subsequently affects their purchase intentions. It implies that in analytic cultures involving more vertical individualism, people have lower thresholds of tolerance when their expectations conflict with perceived service failure.

SESSION SUMMARY
Intra- versus Inter-Personal Conflict Leads to Feelings of Evaluative Tension

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In both marketing and psychology, there has recently been a surge of interest in better understanding the construct of ambivalence (e.g., Larson, McGraw, and Cacioppo 2001; Newby-Clark, McGregor, and Zanna 2002; Nowlis, Kahn, and Dhar 2002; Sengupta and Johar 2002). Attitudes are typically conceptualized as lying along a bipolar continuum, ranging from negative/unfavorable/dislike on one end of the continuum to positive/favorable/like on the other end. Such a conceptualization obscures the possibility that certain attitudes may contain both positive and negative reactions. For example, O’nes, Lowrey, and Shrum (1997) found that individuals, rather than feeling differing degrees of positivity, often felt both positive and negative reactions to wedding planning.

Recent research by Priester and Petty (2001) has demonstrated that feelings of evaluative tension (i.e., ambivalence) can be the result of not only an individual’s own positive and negative feelings (intrapersonal conflict), but can also be the result of holding an attitude that is inconsistent with an important other, such as a best friend or a parent (i.e., interpersonal conflict). Of particular interest with the Priester and Petty (2001) findings was that intrapersonal conflict influenced feelings of evaluative tension approximately three times greater than interpersonal conflict. That is, an individual’s own feelings were more influential in causing feelings of evaluative tension than interpersonal attitudinal conflict. It should be noted that these findings were based upon individuals from an independent (i.e., USA) culture, in which the self is largely construed as an individual’s own traits, abilities, thoughts, and feelings (Markus and Kitayama 1991). This finding for individuals from an independent culture raises the intriguing question of whether the antecedent of ambivalence varies as a function of culture. Such is the question that drives this research program.

In order to address this question, 1) measures of individuals’ own positive and negative reactions to attitudes (i.e., intrapersonal conflict), 2) measures of the extent to which individuals’ attitudes were consistent or in conflict with important others (i.e., interpersonal conflict), and 3) indicators of the extent of feelings of evaluative tension were collected. From these measures we could examine the relative influence of intra- versus inter-personal conflict on feelings of evaluative tension.

We adopted two approaches to addressing the conceptual issue of culture. First, measures of individual differences in independence and interdependence were collected. Second, individuals were recruited from either interdependent (Korea, Taiwan) or independent (USA) cultures. As such, we were able to ask whether 1) individual differences, regardless of the country of the participant, and 2) whether country of the participant, influenced the relationship of the source of conflict (inter- versus intra-) on feeling of evaluative tension. That is, we were able to assess how cultural differences potentially moderate the antecedent of ambivalence.
using two different operationalizations of interdependence and independence.

The results are consistent with the hypotheses. Specifically, for individuals who are high in interdependence and low in independence (as assessed by individual differences) interpersonal conflict has a greater influence of feelings on evaluative tension than intrapersonal conflict, whereas for individuals who are high in independence and low in interdependence, intrapersonal conflict has a greater influence on feelings of evaluative tension than interpersonal conflict. Similarly, for individuals from interdependent countries, interpersonal conflict has a greater influence of feelings on evaluative tension than intrapersonal conflict, whereas for individuals from independent countries, intrapersonal conflict has a greater influence on feelings of evaluative tension than interpersonal conflict.

The value of this research has to do with broadening the conceptualization of ambivalence from a definition of conflicting positive and negative reactions to one of understanding ambivalence as the result of conflict with beliefs and norms consistent with cultural differences.

“The Role of Cultural Cognition in the Use of Contextual Cues in Product Quality Judgments”

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Quality evaluation drawn from extrinsic cues such as price, brand name, and store name play an important role in consumers’ purchase evaluations of a product. Generally speaking, high price, good brand name, or positive store name connote better quality products to consumers. When consumers consider all three cues together, however, the findings of previous research suggest that the effect of store name on a product’s perceived quality is statistically insignificant, whereas those of price and brand name are substantial (Rao and Monroe 1989).

These findings must be disappointing for retailers who have grappled with the task of maintaining a positive store name and image in a highly competitive retail environment. Still, the findings suggesting a minimal impact of store name have been verified only within Western cultures. We suggest that the impact of store name on product evaluation actually depends on consumers’ self-construal.

For example, in an interdependent cultural context, people might be more prone to using cues such as store name to make their decisions. One reason might be that when an interdependent self-construal is salient, people tend to use contextual cues (Kuehnen, Hannover and Schubert 2001). Another might be that, to the extent that one’s relations with others are salient due to an interdependent self-construal, consumers tend to be interested in socially visible information that will reflect favorably on their public image. Our research was not designed to distinguish these possibilities, only to assess the role of store cues in product evaluation in independent vs. interdependent cultural contexts.

In Study 1, we examined the effect of a store cue on product evaluation by choosing two cultures in which independent and interdependent self-construal are dominant. Specifically, we measured consumers' evaluations of running shoes using a 2 X 2 X 2 (i.e., high-low price, brand name, and store name) between-subjects design in both the U.S. and Korea. Supporting the hypotheses, the results revealed that the favorability of a store’s name affected quality evaluation in the Korean sample but not the US sample. Further an interaction showed that when store image is low, even a good brand name could not enhance quality perceptions in the Korean sample. This is contrary to previous findings suggesting that the effect of brand name is the strongest among the three cues and does not diminish under various cue conditions (Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal 1991). Our results suggest that previous findings regarding the insignificant effect of store name on brand perceptions may actually be culturally bounded.

In Study 2, we sought to replicate these effects by priming independent and interdependent self-construals among U.S. participants. Microwaves were the stimulus product and participants were presented with price and brand name along with either store name or a Consumer Reports type rating along a 5-star quality scale. Both price and brand name were fixed at a middling point, whereas the valence of store name and consumer 5-star-scale rating were varied. A statistically significant 2-way interaction emerged between self-construal prime and the use of store name (F (1, 59)=3.11, p<.05). That is, participants in the interdependent prime condition were more influenced by store name (M=-13 vs. .47) than were those in the independent prime condition (M=-.73 vs. .60). However, as expected, there was no significant difference in the use of 5-star quality ratings information (F(1,59)=.02, n.s.) between independent (M=.31 vs. .82) and interdependent (M=.27 vs. .60) prime conditions. Thus, participants in the interdependent-priming condition were influenced by store name more than were those in the independent-priming condition, but this was not a general tendency to give greater consideration to any information.

We argue that an interdependent self-construal leads consumers to use store name as a cue because it enhances interest in socially visible information that will reflect favorably on one’s public image. If this is correct, then one would expect store name also to be used as a cue under other circumstances that enhance interest in socially visible information. For products that convey symbolic information, for instance, store name may be used as a cue even when an independent self-construal is salient. In Study 3, therefore, we compared the use of store name with utilitarian vs. symbolic products. Between-subject factors were self-construal priming (independent vs. interdependent) and product types (utilitarian vs. symbolic). Microwaves and running shoes were determined as utilitarian and symbolic products respectively based on pretests. High versus low store name was a within-subject factor. For microwaves, a significant difference emerged across prime conditions in the use of store name (F(1, 38)=2.9, p<.05). Specifically, replicating Study 2, participants with interdependent priming were more influenced by store name (M= -.05 vs. .58) than those with independent priming (M=.33 vs. .53). For running shoes, however, the effect of store name did not depend on prime condition (F=1, 35)<1, n.s.); i.e., there was no difference in the effect of store name between interdependent (M=.00 vs. .42) and independent-primed participants (M=-.22 vs. .50). In short, when store name was considered relevant to consumers with an independent self-construal because the product carries symbolic meaning, differences across priming condition disappeared and consumers overall used store name in their product evaluation. Therefore, it appears that store name is used as a significant cue in product evaluation for consumers with salient interdependent self-construal because of their increased concern about social image.

“Service Encounters and Emotions across Individuals and across Cultures”

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The US economy has not only become more service oriented, but increasingly dependent on exporting these services. According to Starbucks’ Chief Executive Orin Smith, the company’s overseas outlets will eventually outnumber domestic stores. A company like Starbucks sells more than just a cup of coffee; it also sells a friendly
ambiance and positive emotional experience. However, just like many other CEO’s nowadays, Mr. Smith realizes that what constitutes friendly ambience and positive experiences varies from country to country because consumers are not the same in other countries, even if they speak the same language. Managers therefore recognize that it is important to study how cultural differences influence consumer emotional reactions to service experiences.

There also appears to be an increase in academics’ interest in studying international differences in consumer behavior recently including recent calls for researchers to “break out of the North American box” (Gorn 1997). One area that has not received much attention of marketing academics is cross-cultural differences in consumer emotional experiences.

This research project is the first one to investigate the interactions of consumer emotions with cultural orientation variables in their impact on behavioral intentions variables, such as intentions to spread word of mouth, purchase intentions, and willingness to complain, all crucial variables in consumer behavior from both theoretical and managerial perspective.

**Background**

Individualism/collectivism, perhaps the most central dimension of cultural variables, has been used in marketing to understand how cultural differences affect various aspects of consumer behavior. Several recent analyses report that these constructs can be further differentiated in terms of horizontal (emphasizing equality) or vertical (emphasizing hierarchy) dimensions (Singelis et al. 1995, Triandis and Gelfand 1998). Literature in this area indicates that a person can score high or low on all four dimensions (Triandis and Gelfand 1998).

**Methodology**

To conduct our research, we constructed 8 scenarios about a trip to a local cafe, varying length of wait (longer or shorter than expected), responsibility for wait (service provider versus client), and equality of treatment (equal versus unequal treatment). We then randomly distributed the scenarios and written translated questionnaires to consumers in the US, Russia, and Argentina. The countries were selected because they vary widely on the collectivism/individualism dimensions.

**Results**

We predicted and found that the effects of length of wait on negative emotions (anger and guilt) and positive emotions (joviality) are moderated by consumers’ cultural orientation. For example, the length of wait had a stronger effect on those who scored high on the vertical individualism dimension than those who scored low (more anger and less joviality). Most importantly, as hypothesized, we found that the effect of emotions on behavioral intentions is moderated by cultural orientation variables. For example, the collectivism dimensions moderated the negative effect of anger on the intention to keep patronizing the service provider, such that those who scored high on the collectivism dimensions were less likely to stop patronizing the service provider even when they were angry compared to those low on collectivism.

**References**


