Roundtable  New Approaches and Theoretical Synergies in Cross-Cultural Consumer Psychology

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A growing body of consumer research has pointed to fundamental culture-based differences in consumer cognition, motivation, and emotion. Research has examined culture at a variety of levels of analysis, operationalizing culture via national, ethnic, and individual differences. More recently, within-person differences have been a focus of study, as attention has turned to the situations and products that activate particular cultural selves or culturally linked goals, particularly among bi-cultural individuals. Generally speaking, research in cross-cultural consumer behavior has closely tracked theoretical developments in social psychological approaches to culture. Thus, there is strong concordance in the issues and findings addressed by these literatures.

This roundtable session provided an opportunity to talk about current issues with researchers differing in their areas of expertise and focus. Our panel included marketing scholars (Briley, Gürhan-Canli, A. Lee, K. Lee, Maheswaran, Shavitt, and C. Yoon) as well as basic social psychologists (C. Chiu, Y. Hong, and Wyer), many of whom are top contributors to the cross-cultural field. In terms of expertise, some approach culture through the lens of social cognition and apply similar paradigms to the study of culture (e.g., Wyer, A. Lee). Others approach cultural influences on consumers’ judgments and choice through the lens of behavioral decision-making (Briley). Some focus on the situational forces that influence the dynamic cultural-self (e.g., Hong, Chiu), whereas others focus more on dispositional aspects and/or chronic and stable cultural differences (e.g., Maheswaran, Gürhan-Canli).

The substantive areas represented by the roundtable discussion therefore varied broadly, touching upon issues regarding persuasion, motivation, self-concept, choice, affect, globalization issues, etc. Among the questions discussed:

**How can cultural knowledge be classified as declarative or procedural?**

**What are the implications of this classification?**

**Are the study of culture and the study of measurement separable?**

**What do global cultural changes (e.g., individualism among younger generations in cultures considered to be collectivistic) imply for how we do cross-cultural research?**

**How can cultural research create generative knowledge about human nature?**

When examining cultural knowledge from a general framework of information processing, cultural knowledge may be classified as declarative or procedural. When cultural knowledge is viewed as declarative, this implicates the role of accessibility, diagnosticity, and accessibility experiences (or metacognition). When cultural knowledge is viewed as procedural, individuals’ perceptions and spontaneous behaviors are focal subjects to consider. Tacit measures can capture such procedural knowledge and shed light on the role of culture in perception and behavior. It is suggested that when certain preconditions are met, procedural cultural knowledge comes to the fore as spontaneous reactions evidenced in everyday behaviors (e.g., interpersonal skills such as eye contact), which individuals have acquired and practiced initially at the conscious level but subsequently become spontaneous reactions. In other words, consciousness of content may not be the criterion for deciding whether something is procedural or declarative.

So far, cultural research has predominantly focused on declarative (or semantic) knowledge such as individuals’ beliefs or values (i.e., what culture is). A more careful assessment of the role of procedural knowledge is thus called for. Moreover, culture should also be viewed as a tool that an individual employs to achieve certain goals (i.e., what culture is for). Therefore, more attention should also be given to motivational factors in cultural research.