When the Accessible Global Identity Leads to Unfavorable Evaluations of Global Products? the Roles of Consumers’ Lay Theory on Global and Local Cultures

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Through three studies, we showed that the accessible global identity lead to more favorable evaluations of global products when consumers viewed global and local cultures as compatible, but the accessible global identity lead to less favorable evaluations when consumers viewed the two cultures as conflicting with each other.

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When the Accessible Global Identity Leads to Unfavorable Evaluations of Global Products? The Roles of Consumers’ Lay Theory on Global and Local Cultures

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In today’s increasingly globalized world, many consumers tend to have both global and local identities (Arnett 2002; Benet-Martinez et al. 2002; Zhang and Khare 2009). A global identity refers to mental representations in which consumers are interested in global cultures and identifying with people around the world. A local identity refers to consumers’ mental associations of their faith in and respect for one’s local traditions and cultures as well as identifying with people in one’s local community (Arnett 2002; Zhang and Khare 2009).

How will consumers respond to marketing efforts targeted at their global and local identities? Recent research (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Hong et al., 2009) suggests that this may be dependent on consumers’ view of their two cultural identities; specifically their subjective perceptions of their two identities as compatible with or oppositional to each other. Consumers who believe that their two cultural identities are compatible with each other tend to show assimilative responses to the identity prime, while those who believe that their two cultural identities are opposite each other tend to show the contrastive response. Based on Hong and her colleagues (2009), this happens because consumers who believe that their two identities are compatible with each other tend to hold separate knowledge about these two identities, and activation of one identity via prime will not activate the other identity. Since consumers tend to rely only on the accessible identity to form their evaluations, they provide identity consistent evaluations (i.e., assimilative identity effect). Consumers who believe that their two identities are oppositional to each other will experience activation of both identities in response to a prime. These two identities are conceptually opposite each other and as a result, consumers provide identity inconsistent evaluations (i.e., contrastive identity effect).

Earlier studies have shown that consumers’ view on global and local cultures determines their global and local identities (Arnett 2002). As a result, their lay theory of the relationship between global and local cultures can have similar effects as their lay theory of the global and local identities on product evaluations. Applying this framework to the global-local context, the bi-cultural identity lay theory predicts that the global-local identity will lead to an assimilative identity effect for consumers who believe that global and local cultures are compatible with each other. For consumers who believe that the two cultures are oppositional to each other, a contrastive identity effect will be observed. We ran three studies to test this hypothesis as well as the underlying process.

Study 1 was an identity primed (local vs. global) x lay theory (compatible vs. oppositional) x product version (local vs. global) mixed design, in which we measured consumers’ lay theory on global and local cultures. A total of 134 undergraduate students from a large southwestern U.S. university took part in this study for extra course credit. In this study, we found that the identity prime lead to an assimilative identity effect when participants believed that global and local cultures could be compatible with each other, and that the identity prime lead to a contrastive identity effect when participants believed that global and local cultures were incompatible with each other.

Study 2 was a lay theory prime (compatible vs. oppositional) x identity measured (local vs. global) x product version (local vs. global) mixed design, in which consumers’ lay theory of global and local cultures was manipulated. A total of 164 undergraduate students from a large southwestern U.S. university took part in this study for extra course credit. In this study, through directly manipulating the lay theory, we showed that the measured global-local identity lead to an assimilative identity effect when participants believed that global and local cultures could be compatible with each other. Further, the measured global-local identity lead to a contrastive identity effect when participants believed that global and local cultures were oppositional or conflicting each other.

Study 3 was run to further test the possible process underlying this effect. A total of 152 undergraduate students from a large southwestern U.S. university took part in this globalization prime (positive vs. negative) x oppositional lay theory measured x product version (local vs. global) mixed design study for extra course credit. This study provided a test of the counter-arguing mindset, the explanation for the contrast effect observed in the first two studies. Because the oppositional lay theory prime tends to make people believe that the two cultures are conflicting, they seem to engage in a counter-arguing mindset when they process the global-local stimuli, and as a result they have the exact opposite associations in response to the stimuli.

Our results have several important theoretical implications. First, we provide boundary conditions for the identity accessibility effect in the context of global-local products. While earlier studies (Arnett 2002; Zhang and Khare 2009) tended to focus on the assimilative accessibility effect, we found that when the global or local identity is made accessible it does not always lead to the assimilative identity effect.

Second, our results have important implications for understanding the assimilation vs. contrast debate in the literature (Forsister & Liberman 2007; Reed 2004). While the earlier debate tended to focus on the diagnosticity of the accessible identity to determine if the evaluation is assimilative or contrastive (Zhang & Khare 2009), our results showed that the consumers’ view about the relationship between global and local cultures is another key to understanding the exact nature of product evaluation.

Third, we provide a theoretical explanation for the contrasting findings about differential preference for local and global products. While earlier studies (Arnett 2002; Zhang and Khare 2009) showed that it is important to specify consumers’ accessible global or local identity, we replicated the identity accessibility effect but also showed that it will happen only when consumers view their two identities as compatible with each other. Thus, our study provides a more comprehensive theoretical explanation for reconciling earlier reported divergent preference patterns for local and global products.

REFERENCES


