Research Dialogue

Refining the tightness and looseness framework with a consumer lens

Lily Lin [a], Darren W. Dahl [b,*], Jennifer J. Argo [c]

[a] *Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, Canada*
[b] *University of British Columbia, 2053 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2, Canada*
[c] *University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2R6, Canada*

Abstract

In their paper, Li, Gordon and Gelfand (this issue) introduced the Tightness–Looseness (T–L) framework to the consumer domain, and offered several ideas on how this framework could be applied to consumer behavior. In this commentary, we examine the T–L framework through the consumer lens and discuss how the uniqueness of the consumption context can refine and broaden this psychological framework. We identify four questions that aim to enrich our discussion of this framework from the perspective of consumer research, and to motivate future research questions. Specifically, we consider 1) how the interplay between the tightness/looseness of a culture and its effect on consumer behavior can be a bi-directional relationship, 2) how variances in T–L in different consumption subcultures and aspects of society (e.g., economic, political) can impact consumer behavior, 3) how the examination of T–L at different stages in the consumption process is a relevant and important question to consider, and 4) how T–L may contribute to further investigation and understanding of punishment toward business and consumer norm violators.
Crown Copyright © 2017 Published by Elsevier Inc. on behalf of Society for Consumer Psychology. All rights reserved.

Consumption phenomena involving social norms have caught the attention of consumer researchers in recent years. For example, research has explored how social norms can influence food consumption and conservation behaviors (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008; McFerran, Dahl, Fitzsimons, & Morales, 2010a, 2010b), and how consumers can be punished by their fellow consumers for violating social norms (Lin, Dahl, & Argo, 2013). At the same time, understanding cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior has continued to garner interest in the field (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000). For instance, researchers have examined how cross-cultural differences can contribute to how consumers perceive gift-giving and receiving (e.g., Pusaksrikit & Kang, 2016; Valenzuela, Mellers, & Strebel, 2010), process information due to linguistic differences (e.g., Schmitt, Pan, & Tavassoli, 1994; Tavassoli, 1999), and make decisions related to brand-switching (e.g., Ng, Kim, & Rao, 2015). As social norms are culturally dependent, investigating the

convergence of these two areas of research has the potential to lead to fruitful avenues of future research.

In the paper by Li, Gordon, and Gelfand (2017–in this issue), the authors introduce the theoretical framework of Tightness–Looseness (T–L) of cultures. T–L refers to the strength of social norms and rules that exist within a culture, how norm violations are perceived cross-culturally, and the severity of punishment delivered to norm violators in various cultures. Beyond discussing the T–L framework the authors also propose a number of ways in which it can be applied to consumer behavior research (i.e., messages in advertising, branding, product diffusion/new product adoption, and health-related behavior among consumers). While the application of the T–L framework to consumer behavior is an interesting first step, we propose that the richness of consumption as a research context can assist in broadening and refining the T–L framework. In this commentary, we identify four questions for discussion specific to the interplay between norms and norm violations that exist within a larger society (i.e., a country), and specific consumption behaviors within that society.

First, we offer our thoughts on the interplay between the cultural T–L of the broader society and specific consumer behaviors inherent in the society. Specifically, we argue that rather than simply looking at how cross-cultural T–L differences may influence or be *applied* to consumer behavior, it would also

be interesting for researchers to consider reverse causality wherein consumer behavior can instead be the antecedent (rather than the outcome) of T–L differences observed across cultures. Second, we postulate how different consumption subcultures and key aspects of a society can vary in T–L and what this means for consumer behavior. Indeed, variance in T–L within a country's economic, political and social systems may have unique implications for consumers and consumption behaviors. Third, we discuss how the norms that influence consumers' behaviors likely change depending on where they are in the consumption process (e.g., pre-purchase vs. purchase vs. post-purchase). Stated differently, the level and impact of T–L is not likely to be uniform throughout one's consumption experience. Finally, we offer our insight on the outcomes of norm violations that can occur in the consumption context. To achieve this, we discuss previous research that has explored how businesses and consumers can be punished for committing norm violations and then elaborate on how these findings can contribute to the T–L framework.

Q1. What is the T–L framework's relationship with consumption? Is it bi-directional?

According to Li et al. (2017–in this issue), the T–L of a given culture is shaped by various environmental factors, including ecological and historical threats, and socio-political institutions that exist within the larger society. They also suggest that the T–L of a given society is likely to shape how consumers react to various marketing cues, including the types of messages used in advertising (e.g., prevention vs. promotion-oriented messages), and the way new products are adopted and introduced in the marketplace. In sum, the authors propose that the T–L of a society will have a direct impact on the consumption behavior of individuals within that society. Although we agree that the relationship between T–L of a larger society ➜ consumer behavior is an important one to establish, we also believe that it is equally important for researchers to consider how the specific consumption behaviors within a society can influence and impact the norms of the larger society, and in turn, the broader societal environmental factors that exist (i.e., consumer behavior ➜ the T–L of a larger society itself).

In their paper, Li et al. (2017–in this issue) discuss how looser cultures are more likely to present images of diversity, whereas tighter cultures are more likely to stick to uniformity. This frames consumers as a passive audience to the influences of the larger society. However, at a time in which consumerism is playing a significant role in shaping the culture of the larger society, helped to a large extent by the presence of social media, it seems quite probable that consumer behavior may influence the T–L of a given society. In other words, we argue that it is just as likely that the strategies and messages being used in marketing campaigns and the activities of consumers themselves are shaping the cultural norms of the larger society. In fact, recent work by Twenge and Kasser (2013) finds that generations who grew up during a time in which higher national advertising spending was observed (e.g., Millennials/

GenMe), valued materialism more than generations that grew up with less advertising expenditures (e.g., Baby Boomers). As another example, the rise of major global technology and social media brands such as Apple, Facebook, and Google have also shifted the way people communicate and interact with one another throughout the globe. In doing so, one can also conjecture that the consumption behavior that surrounds these brands has narrowed some of the differences that the T–L framework has sought to identify.

As a final example, there has been a trend to include heavier models in advertising and fashion. In addition to Dove's Real Beauty campaign, major publications such as Vogue and Sports Illustrated have featured "plus-size" actresses and models on their covers in recent years (e.g., Conniff, 2014; Schlossberg, 2016). Even toy brands, such as Mattel, have followed suit, with the recent launch of Barbie dolls with curvier body shapes (Pearson, 2016). Whereas some may argue that these marketing strategies are simply a reflection of the changing trends in society (i.e., people in various Western countries are getting heavier, so marketers are revising their marketing cues accordingly), others have suggested that marketers can use these messages and images to change the beauty norms that exist within a society (e.g., Lin & McFerran, 2016). Admittedly, such causality questions are not always easy to answer, but we believe the potential bi-directionality between T–L in the larger society and specific consumer behavior should, at the very least, be acknowledged and examined further in future work.

Q2. How does T–L vary across consumption subcultures and different aspects of society, and what are the implications for the consumer?

As Li et al. (2017–in this issue) indicate, geographical regions within the U.S. vary in T–L. We suggest that this type of differentiation can extend to a host of different consumption subcultures that often underlie consumer behavior. Indeed, we believe that consumption subcultures within a society are likely to be a fertile ground for T–L research to provide unique insights and understanding. An example of a consumption subculture can be found among consumers of health and fitness products and services. Although consumers purchase these products and services with a goal of healthier living, subcultures that can form from the consumption of this product category can vary greatly in their level of T–L. CrossFit, for instance, has strong norms of community, competition, and performance (Dawson, 2015) — it has a tight culture. Indeed, participants of CrossFit oftentimes expand their norm conformity in physical exercise to other behaviors, such as food consumption (e.g., Paleo diet). In contrast, membership at a regular gym may be looser culturally and place less emphasis on the norms of community, as most gym patrons exercise alone. With this example in mind, it would be interesting for researchers to examine how the T–L of these consumption subcultures influences the health and fitness norms of the larger society. Further, examination of the influences of the consumption subculture's T–L on the larger society may also provide insight into why tighter cultures have been found to be healthier than looser cultures.

The T–L of societies may also depend on the aspect of society (e.g., political, economic) to which one is referring. One relevant example arises in the context of emerging markets, such as China, India, Brazil and Russia. Based on T–L research, China, India, and Russia would likely be classified as tight nations whereas Brazil would be a loose nation (Gelfand et al., 2011). However, we propose that whereas China may have a politically and socially tight culture, their economic policies have become looser over the years (Fannin, 2010; Zhu & Hong, 2014). Economic policies have a direct impact on consumerism and consumer behavior. Thus, one could argue that China's increasing openness to foreign brands and products has altered the behaviors and beliefs of its citizens. This may in turn influence other aspects of their society (e.g., political, social), which may have remained tighter in comparison due to long-standing traditions and norms. It would be interesting for consumer researchers to examine how changes in T–L for one aspect of society may have downstream implications on the T–L of other areas of a country's overall culture. Indeed, rather than paint the larger society with a broad brush as a "tight" or "loose" culture, researchers should 1) consider T–L differences that may exist in various aspects within a society, 2) decipher why these differences occur, and 3) examine whether these differences have implications for people's reactions toward norm violations and conformity.

Q3. How does the influence of T–L vary throughout the consumption process?

In addition to considering how T–L is important and is likely to vary across a variety of consumption subcultures, another question worth pursuing relates to the influence of T–L at different stages of the consumption process. In their paper, Li et al. (2017–in this issue), discuss how T–L may influence consumer behavior in the domains of persuasion (e.g., advertising message and spokespersons) and new product adoption. Although these are viable examples, they only represent a partial picture of the full consumption cycle. Specifically, these domains are most relevant in the earlier (i.e., pre-purchase) stages of the consumer buying process. However, as well-documented in previous work (e.g., Argo, Dahl, & Manchanda, 2005; Joireman, Gregoire, Devezer, & Tripp, 2013; Kim & Wansink, 2012; Xu, Shen, & Wyer, 2012), it is also essential to consider the purchase and post-purchase stages of consumption in order to provide a more complete picture of how consumers behave, and why they behave in certain ways.

Research has shown that although the pre-purchase stage of the consumption process can influence the choices consumers make, the experiences and cues that consumers encounter in the consumption environment during the purchasing stage can also be critical. Indeed, research has shown that the presence and the (perceived or real) actions of other consumers can often have an influence on consumers and their overall evaluation of their purchase experience (e.g., Argo et al., 2005; Dahl, Argo, & Morales, 2012; Martin, 2012; Pozharliev, Verbeke, Van Strien, & Bagozzi, 2015; Xu, Zhou, Ye, & Zhou, 2015; Xu et al., 2012).

For instance, consumers tend to use social information (e.g., other shoppers) in the consumption environment as sources of social comparison. As a result, consumers with low body esteem evaluated a shirt they were asked to try on more negatively than consumers with high body esteem when they observed an attractive referent other (a fellow consumer who was attractive) wearing the same shirt. This effect was mitigated when the salesperson, rather than a fellow consumer was wearing the target product, as the salesperson's social identity was not aligned with the consumer's own identity (Dahl et al., 2012). As another example, interesting work examining the effects of accidental interpersonal touch (AIT) on consumer behavior found that consumers provided more negative brand evaluations, expressed a lower willingness to pay, and left the store sooner when they were accidently touched by a stranger (i.e., light touch on the shoulder blade) in a shopping environment (Martin, 2012). As these examples illustrate, various factors and cues that are present within the consumption environment during the purchasing stage can become important determinants for whether a consumption experience will be positive or negative.

If the purchase stage was considered in the context of T–L, we propose that the strength of the norms that exist within a consumption environment would influence the extent to which consumers, 1) follow these norms, and 2) react when these norms are not followed by other consumers or by the business. Specifically, we predict that although consumption environments such as fine dining establishments and luxury stores would be culturally tighter (i.e., have more established norms and would be more mindful of those who violate those norms; e.g., Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014), environments such as self-serve dining or large department stores would be culturally looser. Based on these differences, consumers may adjust their behaviors during the purchasing stage, and in some circumstances, conform to the norms of the business establishment. The extent to which consumers conform to the norms of the business establishment may also depend on the perceived cultural tightness and looseness of the establishment itself, as the costs of non-conformity may be higher in a culturally tighter establishment. Expectations for norm conformity by the businesses are also likely to vary. Hence, one's overall consumption experience is likely to suffer when faced with businesses that violate established norms (e.g., Luo, 2007; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran, 1998). That is, when businesses fail to deliver on expected performance and service, this can damage their perceived reliability and the trust they had established with the consumer (Tax et al., 1998). These types of business norm violations can mitigate consumer loyalty and ultimately result in negative long term consequences, such as a decrease in stock returns (Luo, 2007).

Therefore, when considering the role T–L might play in consumption we believe it is also important for researchers to consider the norms that are present in the post-purchase stage of consumption. As previous work suggests (e.g., Blodgett, Hill, & Tax, 1997; Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011; Wang, Liang, & Peracchio, 2011), consumers' experiences after a purchase has been made can be just as important as the purchasing stage itself. Specifically, businesses that are poor at

dealing with consumer dissatisfaction and post-purchase regret run the risk of losing these consumers in the future (e.g., Choi & Mattila, 2008; Chu, Song, & Choi, 2013; Kim & Wansink, 2012). One could speculate that the strength of the norms related to how consumers are treated during the post-purchase stage may be heavily dependent on the type of organization or business in which the purchase took place. For instance, service and hospitality industries tend to place a heavy emphasis on managing the post-purchase experience; strong organizational norms are likely to be present when following up with consumers such that post-purchase experience can be effectively assessed and dissatisfaction can be addressed when possible (e.g., Bonifield & Cole, 2007; Joireman et al., 2013; Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011). Indeed, consumers' consumption experience may also be influenced by their treatment after the purchase. It would be interesting to assess how variance in T–L through the stages of the consumption process varies both across and within organizations.

Q4. Dealing with culprits in consumption: are businesses and consumers punished for their violations?

Our final question relates to the consequences of norm violations that can occur during consumption. As mentioned by Li et al. (2017–in this issue), a culture's T–L can determine the extent to which individuals are punished for their violations. Although not fully discussed by the authors, we believe this serves as another rich area of research for consumer behavior, when considering the different types of violations and punishment that can take place in the consumption environment. Specifically, violations and punishment in this context can involve relationships between businesses (i.e., B2B), businesses and consumers (i.e., B2C) and consumers (i.e., C2C). Previous work has shown that violations that occur in B2B relationships (e.g., violations of contracts) can result in punishment behaviors such as lawsuits (Antia & Frazier, 2001; Samaha, Palmatier, & Dant, 2011). A wealth of work has also examined violations that can occur in B2C relationships, such as product and service failures by businesses (Holloway & Beatty, 2003; Luo, 2007; Tax et al., 1998). Work in this domain has shown that consumers can retaliate in various ways, such as spreading negative word of mouth (Luo, 2007), and complaining (Dunn & Dahl, 2012; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003). Dunn and Dahl (2012) found that giving consumers the opportunity to complain after they experienced a product failure (e.g., food processor that failed to blend properly) only improved product evaluations when the product failure was perceived as the product's fault (e.g., problem with the food processor). When consumers perceived themselves to be at fault for the product failure (e.g., not being able to use the food processor properly), giving them the opportunity to complain actually hurt product evaluations. Recently, work by Lin et al. (2013) showed that punishment can also be observed in C2C relationships, as consumers have the tendency to punish their fellow consumers for violating norms that can occur in consumption contexts. Here, the authors found that consumers who observed a norm violation by a fellow consumer (e.g.,

creating a mess at the display table, lateness) punished the consumer for their transgressions by refusing to assist the norm violator, or by giving them a more difficult physical task to complete. This work also found that a number of factors influenced the likelihood of C2C punishment, such as actions from a third party in the consumption environment (e.g., store employee), and whether the norm violator had faced an unjustified adversity (e.g., computer failure at a check-in counter) prior to the norm violation.

Given the different dynamics that can occur in B2B, B2C and C2C relationships, we believe the consideration of T–L is highly relevant here, as different forms of punishment and behavioral outcomes may emerge depending on the extent to which a consumption context is "tight" or "loose". One the one hand, perhaps contexts with tighter norms that project images of exclusivity and privacy (e.g., luxury retailers, private clubs) would be more prone to engage in private forms of punishment (e.g., removal of membership) because public displays of punishment (e.g., calling the violator out) may be perceived as a form of norm violation itself. Because products and services can be strongly tied to consumers' sense of identity (Amaral & Loken, 2016; Berger & Ward, 2010), individuals who fail to conform to established norms in such contexts may also be categorized as outgroup members by the ingroup; thus, only private actions need to be taken to dissociate these members from the group. Public forms of punishment are less necessary in these contexts as the restoration of order can be accomplished within the ingroup.

On the other hand, consumption contexts that feature looser cultural norms (e.g., casual dining establishments, malls) still need to manage violations and punishment carefully. In such contexts, inaction on the part of businesses that witness violations by consumers may run the risk of losing patrons in the future and, as such, public forms of punishment may be more effective as consumers may want to witness the actions of the businesses or their fellow consumers against the norm violator. Recent work by Lin, Dahl, and Argo (2017) showed that although consumers rated their consumption experience more negatively when they were in the presence of a C2C violation (e.g., line-cutting), their evaluations of their consumption experience improved when the store employee punished the norm violating consumer (e.g., scolded the norm violator). This work also found that consumption experience suffered the most when the consumer (either as a witness or a direct victim of the C2C norm violation) had to take on the role of the punisher.

Another research area that would benefit from the integration of the T–L framework is work exploring punishment against global brands. In their paper, Li et al. (2017–in this issue) note that T–L can dictate the likelihood that consumers will accept and adopt foreign products. We believe this can also be extended to examining consumer reactions toward brands that have had product or service failures. It would be particularly interesting to consider whether consumers in tight (vs. loose) cultures would punish brands differently depending on whether the brands are based in their own country versus a foreign country. A number of major global brands have had

heavily publicized failures and norm violations in recent years. Samsung, Toyota, and General Motors, for example, have all had well-documented product failures that have hurt their brand name and reputation (Korosec, 2015; Mozur & Lee, 2016; Vlasic & Bunkley, 2009). An even more extreme example is Volkswagen, as their emission scandal was not simply due to a faulty product, but involved fraud at the highest level of management (Hotten, 2015). Although it makes sense to speculate that consumers in tighter cultures would want to see more severe punishment against brands and companies that make such mistakes, the question remains whether the accorded punishment would depend on the country-of-origin of the brand in question. If norms are generally stronger in tighter cultures, it then follows that people's identity may also be more strongly tied to brands that represent the country with which they identify. Indeed, it was reported that South Koreans felt a strong sense of shame and embarrassment when Asiana Airlines was involved in a 2013 plane crash that resulted in multiple injuries and fatalities (Fisher, 2013). The same negative feelings have also been identified in light of the recent failures of the Samsung Note 7 smartphone, as the Samsung brand has provided strong national pride given its successes in recent years (Sang-Hun, 2016). In these cases, perhaps consumers would feel conflict between the desire to deliver punishment to brands that behaved poorly, and the desire to protect brands that are important to their society and self-identities. We believe it would be quite interesting to explore this domain further in future work.

In our commentary, we identify four unique areas in which further investigation would benefit both consumer behavior research and the T–L framework. In particular, we suggest that researchers could consider the bi-directional relationship between T–L and consumer behavior, the role of consumption subcultures and different aspects of the larger society, the importance of all focal stages in the consumption process, and the impact of T–L on consumer punishment. We hope that this commentary serves as a springboard for researchers to consider merging the T–L framework and questions that surround consumer behavior.

References

Amaral, N. B., & Loken, B. (2016). Viewing usage of counterfeit luxury goods: Social identity and social hierarchy effects on dilution and enhancement of genuine luxury brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *26*(4), 483–495.

Antia, K. D., & Frazier, G. L. (2001). The severity of contract enforcement in interfirm channel relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, *65*(October), 67–81.

Argo, J. J., Dahl, D. W., & Manchanda, R. V. (2005). The influence of a mere social presence in a retail context. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*(2), 207–212.

Bellezza, S., Gino, F., & Keinan, A. (2014). The red sneakers effect: Inferring status and competence from signals of nonconformity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *41*(1), 35–54.

Berger, J., & Ward, M. (2010). Subtle signals of inconspicuous consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *37*(4), 555–569.

Blodgett, J. G., Hill, D. J., & Tax, S. S. (1997). The effects of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on postcomplaint behavior. *Journal of Retailing*, *73*(2), 185–210.

Bonifield, C., & Cole, C. (2007). Affective responses to service failure: Anger, regret, and retaliatory versus conciliatory responses. *Marketing Letters*, *18*(1), 85–99.

Choi, S., & Mattila, A. S. (2008). Perceived controllability and service expectations: Influences on customer reactions following service failure. *Journal of Business Research*, *61*(1), 24–30.

Chu, W., Song, M. R., & Choi, B. (2013). Post-purchase disadvantages of a less preferred brand and how they can be overcome: An examination of regret and attribution. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *43*(4), 887–898.

Conniff, K. (2014). What Mindy Kaling told Vogue about her body. (accessed January 18, 2017) *Time Magazine* (Retrieved from: http://time.com/42059/mindy-kaling-vogue-weight/).

Dahl, D. W., Argo, J. J., & Morales, A. C. (2012). Social information in the retail environment: The importance of consumption alignment, referent identity, and self-esteem. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *38*(5), 860–871.

Dawson, M. C. (2015). CrossFit: Fitness cult or reinventive institution? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 1–19 (June 30, 2015,).

Dunn, L., & Dahl, D. W. (2012). Self-threat and product failure: How internal attributions of blame affect consumer complaining behavior. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *49*(5), 670–681.

Fannin, R. (2010). Why Google is quitting China. (accessed January 19, 2017) *Forbes* (https://www.forbes.com/2010/01/15/baidu-china-search-intelligent-technology-google.html).

Fisher, M. (2013). Asiana Airlines president bows in apology for crash, a show of Korea's very different corporate culture. *The Washington Post* ((accessed January 20, 2017). [Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/07/08/asiana-airlines-president-bows-in-apology-for-crash-a-show-of-koreas-very-different-corporate-culture/?utm_term=.88434fa1cbf6]).

Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L., Leslie, L. M., Lun, J., Lim, B. C., et al. (2011). Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33-nation study. *Science*, *332*(6033), 1100–1104.

Goldstein, N. J., Cialdini, R. B., & Griskevicius, V. (2008). A room with a viewpoint: Using social norms to motivate environmental conservation in hotels. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *35*(3), 472–482.

Holloway, B. B., & Beatty, S. E. (2003). Service failure in online retailing a recovery opportunity. *Journal of Service Research*, *6*(1), 92–105.

Hotten, R. (2015). Volkswagen: The scandal explained. *BBC news* ((accessed January 20, 2017). [Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/business-34324772]).

Joireman, J., Gregoire, Y., Devezer, B., & Tripp, T. M. (2013). When do customers offer firms a 'second chance' following a double deviation? The impact of inferred firm motives on customer revenge and reconciliation. *Journal of Retailing*, *89*(3), 315–337.

Kim, J., & Wansink, B. (2012). How retailers' recommendation and return policies alter product evaluations. *Journal of Retailing*, *88*(4), 528–541.

Korosec, K. (2015). Ten times more deaths linked to faulty switch than GM first reported. *Fortune Magazine* ((Accessed January 19, 2017). [Retrieved from: http://fortune.com/2015/08/24/feinberg-gm-faulty-ignition-switch/]).

Li, R., Gordon, S., & Gelfand, M. J. (2017). Tightness-looseness: A new framework to understand consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *27*, 376–390 (in this issue).

Lin, L., Dahl, D. W., & Argo, J. J. (2013). Do the crime, always do the time? Insights into consumer-to-consumer punishment decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *40*(1), 64–77.

Lin, L., Dahl, D. W., & Argo, J. J. (2017). Consequences of rotten consumers: Effects of consumer-to-consumer norm violations and punishment decisions on consumption experience. *Working paper*.

Lin, L., & McFerran, B. (2016). The (ironic) dove effect: Use of acceptance cues for larger body types increases unhealthy behaviors. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *35*(1), 76–90.

Luo, X. (2007). Consumer negative voice and firm-idiosyncratic stock returns. *Journal of Marketing*, *71*(July), 75–88.

Maheswaran, D., & Shavitt, S. (2000). Issues and new directions in global consumer psychology. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *9*(2), 59–66.

Martin, B. A. S. (2012). A stranger's touch: Effects of accidental interpersonal touch on consumer evaluations and shopping time. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *39*(1), 174–184.

Maxham, J. G., III, & Netemeyer, R. G. (2003). Firms reap what they sow: The effects of shared values and perceived organizational justice on customers' evaluations of complaint handling. *Journal of Marketing*, *67*(1), 46–62.

McFerran, B., Dahl, D. W., Fitzsimons, G. J., & Morales, A. C. (2010a). I'll have what she's having: Effects of social influence and body type on the food choices of others. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *36*(6), 915–929.

McFerran, B., Dahl, D. W., Fitzsimons, G. J., & Morales, A. C. (2010b). Might an overweight waitress make you eat more? How the body type of others is sufficient to alter our food consumption. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *20*(2), 146–151.

Mozur, P., & Lee, S. -H. (2016). Samsung to recall 2.5 million galaxy note 7s over battery fires. *The New York Times* ((accessed January 20, 2017) [Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/03/business/samsung-galaxy-note-battery.html?_r=0]).

Ng, S., Kim, H., & Rao, A. R. (2015). Sins of omission versus commission: Cross-cultural differences in brand-switching due to dissatisfaction induced by individual versus group action and inaction. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *25*(1), 89–100.

Pearson, M. (2016). Barbie's new body: Curvy, tall and petite. *CNN* ((accessed January 18, 2017). [Retrieved from: http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/28/living/barbie-new-body-feat/]).

Pozharliev, R., Verbeke, W. J. M. I., Van Strien, J. W., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2015). Merely being with you increases my attention to luxury products: Using EEG to understand consumers' emotional experience with luxury branded products. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *52*(4), 546–558.

Pusaksrikit, T., & Kang, J. (2016). The impact of self-construal and ethnicity on self-gifting behaviors. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *26*(4), 524–534.

Samaha, S., Palmatier, R. W., & Dant, R. P. (2011). Poisoning relationships: Perceived unfairness in channels of distribution. *Journal of Marketing*, *75*(May), 99–117.

Sánchez-García, I., & Currás-Pérez, R. (2011). Effects of dissatisfaction in tourist services: The role of anger and regret. *Tourism Management*, *32*(6), 1397–1406.

Sang-Hun, C. (2016). Galaxy note 7 recall dismays South Korea, the 'Republic of Samsung'. *The New York Times* ((accessed January 21, 2017). [Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/23/world/asia/galaxy-note-7-recall-south-korea-samsung.html]).

Schlossberg, M. (2016). There's an ugly backlash against the plus-size model Sports Illustrated put on its cover. *Business Insider* ((accessed January 18, 2017). [Retrieved from: http://www.businessinsider.com/ashley-graham-sports-illustrated-backlash-2016-2]).

Schmitt, B. H., Pan, Y., & Tavassoli, N. T. (1994). Language and consumer memory: The impact of linguistic differences between Chinese and English. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*(3), 419–431.

Tavassoli, N. T. (1999). Temporal and associative memory in Chinese and English. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *26*(2), 170–181.

Tax, S. S., Brown, S. W., & Chandrashekaran, M. (1998). Customer evaluations of service complaint experiences: Implications for relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, *62*(April), 60–76.

Twenge, J. M., & Kasser, T. (2013). Generational changes in materialism and work centrality, 1976–2007: Associations with temporal changes in societal insecurity and materialistic role-modeling. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *39*(7), 883–897.

Valenzuela, A., Mellers, B., & Strebel, J. (2010). Pleasurable surprises: A cross-cultural study of consumer responses to unexpected incentives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *36*(5), 792–805.

Vlasic, B., & Bunkley, N. (2009). Toyota will fix or replace 4 million gas pedals. *The New York Times* ((accessed January 20, 2017). [Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/business/26toyota.html]).

Wang, K. Y., Liang, M. L., & Peracchio, L. A. (2011). Strategies to offset dissatisfactory product performance: The role of post-purchase marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, *64*(8), 809–815.

Xu, J., Shen, H., & Wyer, R. S., Jr. (2012). Does the distance between us matter? Influences of physical proximity to other on consumer choice. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *22*(3), 418–423.

Xu, Q., Zhou, Y., Ye, M., & Zhou, X. (2015). Perceived social support reduces the pain of spending money. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *25*(2), 219–230.

Zhu, X., & Hong, R. (2014). How some of America's biggest tech companies are expanding into China. *Business Insider* ((accessed March 8, 2017). [Retrieved from: http://www.businessinsider.com/us-tech-companies-expanding-into-china-2014-6]).

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

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 Perspective* (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 Preconference 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. *Trans-action*, *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-Construal 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. -l., 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.

Research Dialogue

Tightness-looseness and consumer behavior: The road ahead

Michele J. Gelfand *, Ren Li, Sarah Gordon

University of Maryland

Accepted by Sharon Shavitt, Area Editor

We were delighted to see such insightful and constructive responses to our target article and the fascinating new research directions the commentators proposed for tightness-looseness (TL) within consumer behavior (CB). Torelli & Rodas (2017) invited us to consider how to integrate the TL framework with other cultural values. They also nominated new and promising applications for TL and CB, including the psychology of brand meanings and brand dilution. Lin, Dahl, & Argo (2017) advanced an exciting perspective on the bi-directional relationship between TL and CB, and on how TL influences different stages of consumption. Together, the commentaries illustrate great potential for TL to expand the science and practice of CB. Here, we continue the dialogue on integrating TL into CB research and discuss the importance of understanding subcultures and domains of TL, examining interactions between TL and other values, and further exploring the bi-directional relationship between TL and CB.

Digging Deep: Contextualizing Subcultures and Domains of Tightness-Looseness

The TL framework, as we have noted, applies to multiple levels of analysis, including nations, states, organizations, communities, and social classes, among others. In this respect, we can think of TL as an important metric of human groups that spans across many levels. At a high level of abstraction, we can see variation at the national level. But zooming into nations, we also see subcultural variation in TL. For example, industries that face serious threats and require more coordination such as

hospitals, the military, and airlines have stronger norms and punishments. By contrast, graphic design and technology firms face much less threat and evolve to have greater permissiveness. Subcultures can also evolve *within* industries. Take, for example, Zappos and Amazon. Both have prominent standing in the e-commerce industry, but the former boasts a "holacracy", a system of self-management that abolishes traditional business hierarchy and allows for much discretion, whereas the latter is known for its management-led focus and highly standardized rules. TL subcultures can also be found across demographic and generational lines. For example, whereas the relatively tight baby boomers grew up during a period of increased threat, the looser millennials were exposed to less threat and tremendous technological innovation. And as Lin et al. (2017) remind us, varying levels of TL are also present in different purchasing contexts, from highly formal and tight contexts (e.g., fine dining) to more informal and loose contexts (e.g., cafeterias). CB research should examine these different subcultures of TL that exist within nations. We note, however, that the strength of norms (or lack thereof) should show similar consequences for subcultures as they do for nations (Gelfand, Harrington, and Jackson, 2017).

Relatedly, we have argued that all nations have both tight and loose *domains* (Gelfand et al., 2017), and identifying such domains will be important for future CB research. Japanese culture, though generally tight, for example, allows its straight-laced businessmen to take a designated break from the intense pressure of their daily routine to engage in excessive drinking—a haven of looseness. In a similar vein, we can find evidence of personal expression and structured looseness in Saudi Arabia, where some women, despite having to abide by a very strict dress code, wear their abayas in vivid colors and fabrics, matched with stylish shoes and accessories (S.B, 2015). Meanwhile, loose nations also have their designated domains of

---

E-mail address: mjgelfand@gmail.com (M.J. Gelfand).

tightness. Values that are important in any society likely evolve to be tight, from privacy in the U.S., to tolerance in the Netherlands, to egalitarianism and the avoidance of being a "tall Poppy" in Australia (Gelfand et al., 2017). Thus, although nations generally vary on TL, understanding the constellation of tight and loose domains within cultures will be useful in CB research.

Broadening Out: Tightness-Looseness and Other Cultural Values

Torelli & Rodas (2017) made the important point that future CB research should examine the interaction of TL with other values. We completely agree. To date, CB research has largely confounded individualism-collectivism (IC) and TL, comparing collectivistic and tight cultures (e.g., Japan, India) with individualistic and loose cultures (e.g., the U.S). We would expect unique CB dynamics, for example, in loose cultures that are collectivistic. Persuasive appeals might focus on family obligations but in the context of emotional expressivity and tolerance. Nissan Israel, for instance, recently released a commercial that stresses the importance of putting family first, and it features a young girl who asks, "Who's to say what a family is? Why not two mommies? Or two daddies?" while showing families with same-sex and interracial couples. Likewise, tight individualistic cultures (e.g., Germany and Austria) might vary from tight collectivistic cultures in that there may be an emphasis on individuality and prevention focus in the former but a focus on close relationships and prevention focus in the latter. A commercial for the Bank of India shows a grandfather telling his grandson to protect his piggy bank from thieves and ends with the slogan, "Bank of India. Relationships beyond banking." Loose individualistic cultures, on the other hand, may emphasize more individuality and promotion focus. We further concur with Torelli and Rodas that integrating the vertical-horizontal dimension with IC and TL will help to broaden CB research.[1]

An examination of the interaction of norms and values can also provide novel insights into how consumers react to norm violations in the consumption context (Lin et al., 2017). Although consumers in tight cultures are expected to find norm violations more disturbing compared to consumers in loose cultures, their responses may vary depending on the cultural values prevalent in the context. Because collectivistic cultures tend to be less direct in their communication compared to individualistic cultures, consumers in tight collectivistic

cultures may be more likely to engage in indirect forms of punishment (e.g., spreading negative word of mouth in business-to-consumer relationships); consumers in tight individualistic cultures, by contrast, may be more likely to engage in direct forms of punishment (e.g., complaining). The same prediction might apply to punishing norm violators in consumer-to-consumer relationships: In tight collectivistic cultures, consumers may refuse to help norm violators, but in tight individualistic cultures, consumers may confront norm violators. It would be equally interesting to examine companies' responses to their own wrongdoings across cultures. For instance, employees in tight collectivistic (but not individualistic) cultures might actually avoid reporting errors, particularly those that are severe, given the strong expectation of punishment and emphasis on group harmony. Finally, building on the commentaries, research should examine whether punishment effects of global brands are moderated by the degree to which the brand in question is a national symbol. Because tight cultures are more nationalistic (Gelfand et al., 2011), consumers might be more willing to defend these symbolic brands than in loose cultures, though this would also likely depend on the severity of the violation and attribution for wrongdoing.

Consumer Behavior and Tightness-Looseness: A Bi-Directional Relationship

Lin and colleagues make the fascinating point that consumption behaviors within a society may impact the norms of the larger society. Although our target article focused predominantly on the influence of TL on consumers, consistent with Lin and colleagues' prediction, TL theory suggests that social institutions and practices affect the strength of norms. Integrating their ideas and our discussion on TL domains, we argue that CB initiatives can be developed to loosen domains that are becoming too tight and tighten domains that are becoming too loose in any culture. Indeed, we have found that both extreme tightness and looseness are problematic for human groups (Harrington, Boski, and Gelfand, 2015), and CB interventions could be a driver of norm change to promote *moderation.* For example, in the generally loose country of Israel, there are very tight norms around having large families, yet this is becoming increasingly problematic given the ecology of the country. In his book, *The Land is Full: Addressing Overpopulation in Israel,* Israeli environmental activist Alon Tal (2016) explains that the country's birthrate, which is currently the highest in the developed world, and its rapidly increasing population density, will soon lead to housing shortages, rising prices, and grave overpopulation—with the country becoming more crowded than countries like Japan in the coming decades. In this respect, persuasive campaigns can be designed to loosen the tight domain of family size to the extent that it is threatening Israel's sustainability. Likewise, CB interventions may be useful for tightening up domains in societies that are becoming too loose. For instance, according to the 2015 Community Health Survey, an average of one in six New Yorkers drinks in excess (New York City Department of

---

[1] There are many fruitful ways to investigate the interaction of TL and values, and it is important to be clear on construct definitions going forward. Indeed, a perusal of the literature suggests that IC and TL are sometimes confounded, as elements of tightness (i.e., concern with the opinions of the generalized public and deviance from societal rules) can be mistakenly referred to as echoes of collectivism (i.e., concern with the opinions of close in-groups). For instance, in their study on advertising appeals, Zhang & Gelb (1996) manipulated headlines to reflect collectivistic values (e.g., "Everybody likes the brand name Flexbrush" and "Share the moments of happiness with your friends and family."). Whereas the latter reflects collectivism, the former reflects societal tightness.

Health and Mental Hygiene, 2016), suggesting a need to tighten the norms around drinking. Taken together, future CB research should address the question of how to best tighten or loosen domains when needed.

Although CB should be a driver of change in TL, we expect that this process will show considerable variation across cultures. For instance, given the strong emphasis on norm abidance in tight cultures, along with more restricted mass media (Gelfand et al., 2011), changing norms should be more difficult in tight compared to loose cultures. Take, for example, an initiative that took place in Jordan last year in an effort to prevent radicalization among the youth (Hadid, 2016). Textbooks were modified to promote tolerance by incorporating images of women without headscarves and men without beards and showing men engaging in non-traditional behaviors like vacuuming. After the new curriculum was released, many Jordanians across the country vehemently protested the changes, seeing them as them a threat to Islamic values. As our own computational models show (De, Nau, and Gelfand, 2017), change occurs much more slowly in tight than in loose cultures. This points to a fascinating question, namely, what are the mechanisms through which CB interventions can change norms in tight and loose cultures?

Conclusion

We thank the commentators for advancing many interesting and novel ideas on ways to incorporate TL into CB. We hope that this dialogue will stimulate much research on TL and CB, which will simultaneously expand both basic culture research as well as CB.

References

De, S., Nau, D., & Gelfand, M. (2017). Understanding norm change: An evolutionary game theoretic approach. *Paper published in the Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Conference on Autonomous Agents and Multiagent Systems (AAMAS). Sao Paulo, Brazil.*

Gelfand, M. J., Harrington, J., & Jackson, J. C. (2017). The strength of social norms across human groups: Insights from cultural psychology. *Perspectives in Psychological Science.*

Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L., Leslie, L. M., Lun, J., ... Aycan, Z. (2011). Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33-nation study. *Science, 332*(6033), 1100–1104.

Hadid, D. (2016, October 14). Jordan tones down textbooks' Islamic content and tempers rise. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/15/world/middleeast/jordan-tones-down-textbooksislamic-content-and-tempers-rise.html?_r=0.

Harrington, J. R., Boski, P., & Gelfand, M. J. (2015). Culture and national well-being: Should societies emphasize freedom or constraint? *PloS One, 10*(6).

Lin, L., Dahl, D. W., & Argo, J. J. (2017). *Refining the tightness and looseness framework with a consumer lens.* Journal of Consumer Psychology.

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (2016). Epi Data Brief. Retrieved from https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/databrief77.pdf.

S.B (2015). The Economist explains Saudi Arabia's dress code for women. http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/01/economist-explains-20.

Tal, A. (2016). *The land is full: Addressing overpopulation in Israel.* New Haven, CT: Yale.

Torelli, C. J., & Rodas, M. A. (2017). Tightness–Looseness: Implications for consumer and branding research. *Journal of Consumer Psychology.*

Zhang, Y., & Gelb, B. D. (1996). Matching advertising appeals to culture: The influence of products' use conditions. *Journal of Advertising, 25*(3), 29–46.