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Research Dialogue

## Tightness–looseness: A new framework to understand consumer behavior

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## Introduction

In February of 2011, U.S. electronics and entertainment retailer Best Buy closed all nine of its branded stores in China after only five years in the market. Although analysts had believed that China held promise for large growth opportunities, Best Buy ultimately captured less than 1% of the market and struggled to compete against local rival companies Gome and Suning, each of which had more than 1000 branded stores in the country (Waldmeir, Strauss, & Birchall, 2011). According to research conducted by China Market Research Group, a strategic market intelligence firm based in Shanghai, Best Buy's failure ultimately resulted from a lack of understanding of Chinese consumer norms for smaller, conveniently located stores (Rein, 2011). Similarly, a Financial Times article explained that the company's store strategy of dividing up items by category rather than leading brands was "at odds with local habits" (Waldmeir et al., 2011).

Failures of this magnitude illustrate the critical need for cross-cultural research in consumer behavior (CB). Once primarily a Western enterprise, the field has begun to go global (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000; Torelli & Rodas, 2016). In just the last two decades, CB research has examined how culture influences brand loyalty (Kim, Forsythe, Gu, & Jae Moon, 2002; Lam, 2007; Luo, Zhang, & Liu, 2015; Ogba & Tan, 2009; Palumbo & Herbig, 2000; Subramaniam, Al Mamun, Permarupan, & Zainol, 2014; Yoo, 2009), brand extensions (Buil, de Chernatony, & Hem, 2009; Grønhaug, Hem, & Lines, 2002; Han & Schmitt, 1997; Monga & John, 2007; Ng, 2010;

Tang, Liou, & Peng, 2008), consumer decision-making (Aaker & Sengupta, 2000; Alden, Stayman, & Hoyer, 1994; Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014; Leo, Bennett, & Härtel, 2005; Nayeem & Casidy, 2015; Petersen, Kushwaha, & Kumar, 2015; Zhou, Arnold, Pereira, & Yu, 2010), consumer purchasing behaviors (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Chan & Lau, 2002; Gentina, Butori, Rose, & Bakir, 2014; Kacen & Lee, 2002; Kim et al., 2002; Legohérel, Daucé, Hsu, & Ranchhold, 2009), and advertising effectiveness (Cho & Cheon, 2005; Choi, Hwang, & McMillan, 2008; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Ju, 2013; Kim & Markus, 1999; Möller & Eisend, 2010; Taylor & Okazaki, 2015; Uskul, Sherman, & Fitzgibbon, 2009; Zhang & Neelankavil, 1997), among other topics. This work has been critical for not only extending consumer behavior theory and research beyond Western samples but also making the practice of consumer behavior more successful in a global context.

Yet at the same time, much of the cross-cultural research in consumer behavior has focused almost exclusively on one dimension of culture, individualism–collectivism (IC), to the neglect of other potential sources of culture that may be important drivers of consumer behavior. As an analogy, the exclusive focus on IC in CB research is akin to personality research only examining one personality dimension, such as extraversion, to the exclusion of neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. In this article, we expand this focus by integrating recent research on the strength of social norms—or what has been referred to as *tightness–looseness*—with CB research. Tightness–looseness (TL) has been shown to differentiate both traditional societies (Pelto, 1968) and modern nations and states (Gelfand et al., 2011; Harrington & Gelfand, 2014). TL has increasingly been shown to have implications for social and organizational processes including CEO discretion (Crossland & Hambrick, 2011),

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perceptions of leadership (Aktas, Gelfand, & Hanges, 2015), negotiation (Gunia, Brett, Nandkeolyar, & Kamdar, 2011), stigmatization (Kinias, Kim, Hafenbrack, & Lee, 2014), creativity (Chua, Roth, & Lemoine, 2015; Ozeren, Ozmen, & Appolloni, 2013), expatriate adjustment (Geeraert, Li, Ward, Gelfand & Demes, under review; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014), entrepreneurship (Lettau, 2016; Wit, 2013), and even stock price synchronicity (Eun, Wang, & Xiao, 2015). Yet to date, there has been no research on TL and CB, which we view as an exciting frontier for both basic cultural research on TL as well as CB research.

In the sections below, we begin by reviewing historical and contemporary research on TL. We then discuss promising avenues for research on TL and CB, including persuasion and advertising, brand loyalty and product diffusion, and consumer well-being, with a particular focus on health marketing and decision-making. Taken together, we seek to show that there is much to be gained in terms of theory, research, and practice by integrating TL into CB research.

### Historical and contemporary perspectives on tightness–looseness

TL refers to variation in the strength of norms and tolerance for norm deviance across different human groups (Gelfand et al., 2011). Norm strength refers to unwritten rules and social pressures that individuals feel they must follow in a given culture; tolerance refers to the severity of punishments that results when individuals violate norms. Whereas tight cultural entities have strong norms and low tolerance for deviance, loose cultural entities have weak norms and high tolerance for deviance. Below, we briefly trace the history of TL research, provide a broad overview of modern TL theory and its principles, and discuss research that sets the stage for how TL may impact CB research.

The notion that cultures vary with respect to norm strength and sanctioning originates in early anthropological research. Pelto (1968) was the first to quantify this distinction in his study of over 20 traditional societies. He observed, for example, that the Hutterites, Hanno, and Lubara were “tight” in that they had strong norms, were very formal, and had severe punishments for norm violations. By contrast, the Kung Bushman, Cubeo, and Skolt Lapps were “loose” in that they had weaker norms, were much more informal, and had greater tolerance of norm violations. Pelto speculated that variation in TL could be traced to societies’ ecological characteristics. In particular, he argued that societies with high population density and greater crop dependency were tighter given that strong social norms were needed to coordinate for survival in such contexts. On the other hand, societies with lower population density and less reliance on agriculture could afford more permissiveness because they did not require as much coordinated behavior. Later, researchers in many fields of social science—including anthropology, psychology, and sociology—corroborated these. In particular, traditional societies with primarily agricultural subsistence methods were shown to exhibit strict child-rearing practices, stringent roles and expectations for its members, and

greater incidence of conformity as compared to those that relied on fishing or hunting (Barry, Child, & Bacon, 1959; Berry, 1967; Boldt, 1978a, 1978b; Boldt & Roberts, 1979; Lomax & Berkowitz, 1972; Witkin & Berry, 1975). After a hiatus of research on TL, Triandis (1989) reintroduced the construct in his *Psychological Review* paper on culture and self, noting that the construct is different from IC and other constructs (see also Carpenter, 2000 for a confirmation of this in traditional societies).

More recently, expanding upon the early work on TL in traditional societies, Gelfand and colleagues developed a multilevel theory of TL in modern societies (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006; Gelfand et al., 2011). Grounded in an eco-cultural tradition (Berry, 1979; Triandis, 1972), modern TL theory is about adaptation—in particular, the adaptation of societies to the characteristics of their ecological environments and the adaptation of individuals to the characteristics of the resultant strength of social norms. As illustrated in Fig. 1, differences in TL are theorized to reflect varying degrees of historical and ecological threat. Societies with more natural disasters, higher disease prevalence, fewer natural resources, and greater threat from territorial invasions are theorized to develop stronger norms and sanctions in order to coordinate to survive such threats. By contrast, societies that lack exposure to serious ecological and human-made threats can afford to have weaker norms and tolerance for deviance given that they have less need for coordinated social action. As seen in Fig. 1 again, the strength of societal norms is further reflected and promoted through institutions that foster narrow versus strong socialization—including the media, schools, government, and police (Arnett, 1995) and everyday situations (Mischel, 1977), which dictate the range of acceptable behavior. In turn, at the individual level, people exposed to chronically higher situational strength have *higher felt accountability* (Frink & Klimoski, 1998)—that is, they feel compelled to obey and conform to normative expectations, lest they face punishment or other negative outcomes. As an adaptation to such heightened accountability, individuals in tighter cultures are expected to have greater self-monitoring, greater cautiousness, stronger self-regulation of behavior, higher need for structure, greater prevention-focus, greater conscientiousness, and lower openness (Gelfand et al., 2011; Harrington & Gelfand, 2014), all of which are adaptive to stronger situations and contexts of higher threat. In all, TL theory focuses on different constructs at multiple levels of analysis, all of which are qualitatively different but dynamically interrelated. TL theory avoids discussing “tight” and “loose” individuals, as these terms pertain to the multilevel system of the strength of social norms.

In the last decade, research using field, experimental, computational, and neuroscientific methods have provided support for this multilevel theory. At the national level, Gelfand et al. (2011) developed a measure of TL, which was administered to 6823 individuals across 33 nations who reported on the strength of social norms in their cultural contexts. Tight nations included Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Norway, China, Portugal, Turkey, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea. Loose nations included Ukraine, Estonia, Hungary, Brazil, New Zealand, the U.S., Israel, Venezuela, Australia, Greece,

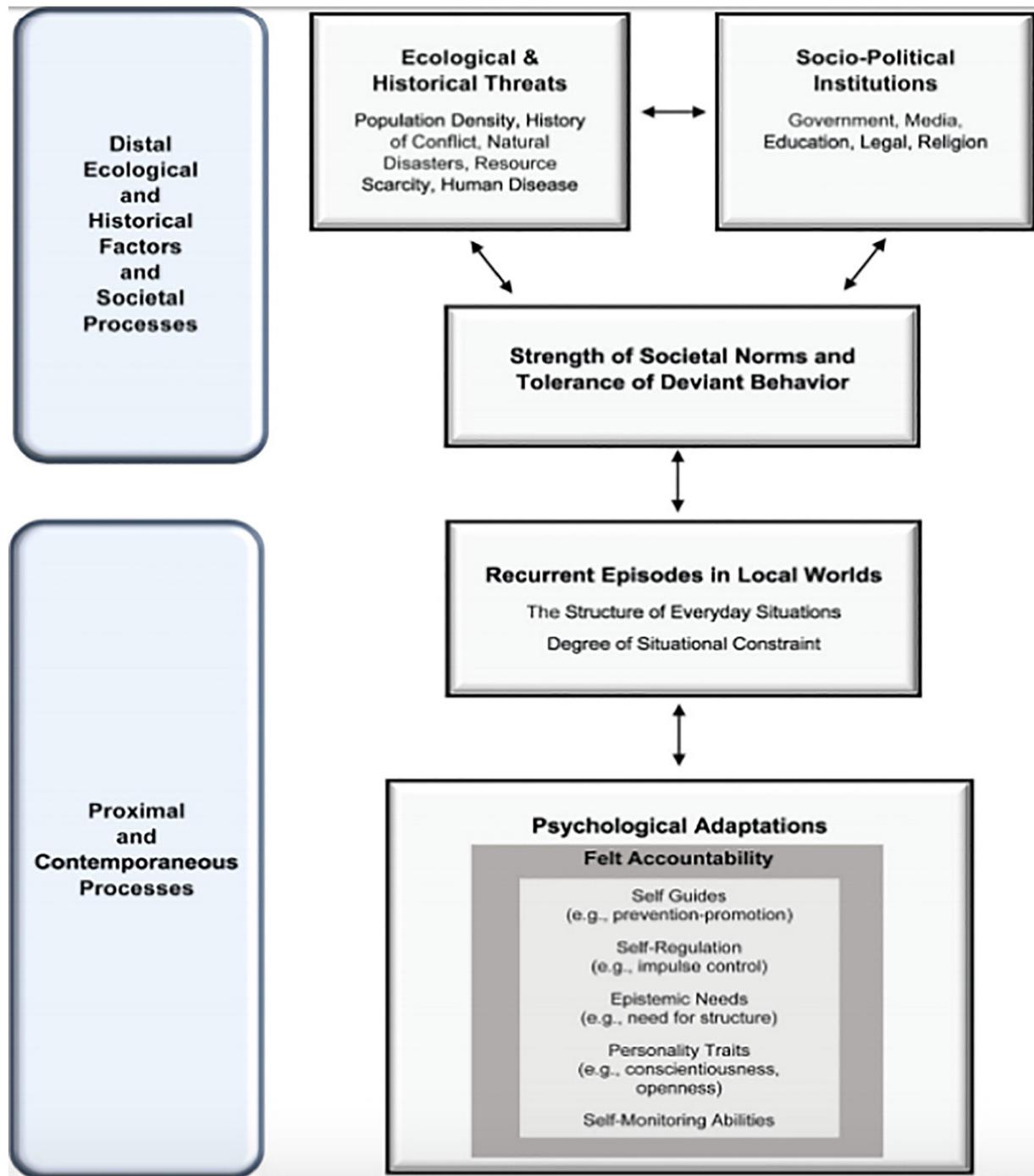


Fig. 1. Multilevel theory of tightness–looseness (Gelfand et al., 2011).

and the Netherlands. Consistent with the multilevel theory, they found that nations scoring high on tightness indeed faced greater ecological and historical threat. Compared to loose nations, tight nations had higher historic (1500 CE) and projected (2050) population density, greater historical pathogen prevalence, greater vulnerability to natural disasters, greater food scarcity and deprivation, less arable land, and more territorial threats between 1918 and 2001. Further, TL was related to societal institutions. Tight societies have higher levels of autocracy, lower openness of the media, less access to new

information and technology, more police per capita, and more social order (e.g., a lower incidence of murder, burglaries, and crime per capita). The data also showed that everyday social situations were much stronger in tight societies compared to loose societies. In other words, tight nations were shown to have a much narrower range of socially acceptable behaviors in everyday settings compared to loose nations. Finally, variation in the strength of situations was proven to have cross-level effects on individual differences in tight and loose societies. Generally speaking, individuals in tighter nations had a greater

prevention-focus, more self-regulation and impulse control, higher need for structure, and increased self-monitoring relative to individuals in looser nations. A multilevel structural equation analysis also provided support for the multilevel theoretical model.

Notably, Gelfand and colleagues showed that TL was related to but distinct from other cultural dimensions. For example, tightness–looseness was distinct from individualism–collectivism. Cultures can be collectivistic and tight (e.g., Japan, Singapore), collectivistic and loose (e.g., Brazil, Spain), individualistic and loose (e.g., the United States, New Zealand), or individualistic and tight (e.g., Germany, Austria) (see also Carpenter, 2000). Tightness–looseness was also distinct from power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance, among other cultural dimensions (see Gelfand et al., 2011, supplemental material). Moreover, it was distinct from economic wealth. Singapore and Germany, both tight, enjoy economic success, but Pakistan and India, also tight, do not. Likewise, the U.S. and Australia, both relatively loose, are wealthy, but Ukraine and Brazil, also relatively loose, have comparatively lower GDPs.

TL theory has also been applied to understand variation across the 50 states within the U.S. Harrington and Gelfand (2014) created an archival state-level TL measure with items related to the strength of punishments (e.g., percentage of students punished using corporal punishment, rate of executions, severity of punishments for violating marijuana laws), permissiveness and latitude (e.g., ratio of dry to total counties per state, legality of same-sex civil unions), the strength of religious institutions (i.e., reinforcement of moral order), and diversity (e.g., total foreign population). Their measure ultimately showed convergent validity with self-report measures of TL. The tightest states were Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The loosest states included California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Hawaii, New Hampshire, and Vermont. In terms of regional differences, the South was found to be the tightest, the West and the Northeast were the loosest, and the Midwest was in the middle. Moreover, similar to the national level of analysis, state-level tightness correlated with greater historical and ecological threat: Tight states had a higher incidence of natural disasters, greater disease prevalence and higher health vulnerabilities, greater environmental vulnerability, and fewer natural resources. The researchers also found higher rates of military recruitment and greater desire for national defense funding among tight states. Tightness at the state level was associated with trait-level conscientiousness (e.g., greater impulse control) but lower trait openness (e.g., less interest in foreign cultures). The state-level data also illustrated a similar TL trade-off to the national level data: Tight states had greater social organization (e.g., lower mobility, less divorce, more law enforcement) and greater self-control (e.g., less drug and alcohol abuse), but they also had more discrimination (i.e., higher rates of equal employment opportunity commission claims and fewer women and minority-owned businesses), and lower creativity (i.e., fewer utility patents and artists per capita) compared to loose states. The opposite was

true for loose states, such that although they may have less social organization and self-control, they are also more accepting of change, more innovative, and less xenophobic.

Subsequent experimental research has complemented this correlational research and demonstrated that manipulating ecological and historical threats elicits the psychological affordances of TL in the laboratory. Lun, Gelfand, and Mohr (2012), for example, found that individuals primed with threat in the form of a newspaper article about the overpopulation of a college campus, the threat of terrorism on campus, or a movie about the unstoppable, global spread of a deadly infectious disease, as compared to no threat, were significantly more likely to rate socially deviant behavior (e.g., taking drugs, having casual sex, littering, stealing, talking loudly) as less justifiable. Individuals primed with threat also exhibited stronger negative implicit attitudes towards marginalized groups and endorsed greater ethnocentric attitudes, including the notions that entry into the U.S. should be restricted and controlled, employers should give priority to American workers over immigrants, American culture is superior to others, and the American way of life needs to be protected from foreign influence. Thus, temporary exposure to threat provides the building blocks of a tight culture by leading individuals to adopt less tolerant attitudes towards social deviance and enhancing individual differences that are typically found in the constellation of characteristics associated with tighter cultures facing chronic threat. In addition to experimental research, evolutionary game theoretical models have recently shown support for a causal relationship between threat and tightness, illustrating that strong norms and punishments are needed in contexts of high societal threat (see Roos, Gelfand, Nau, & Lun, 2015).

Additionally, recent research has begun to examine the neurobiological underpinnings of the strength of social norms. Mu, Kitayama, Han, and Gelfand (2015) found that individuals in tight cultures have stronger neurobiological reactions to social norm violations compared to individuals in loose cultures. Using electroencephalography (EEG), they examined the N400 response (i.e., a negative-going deflection that peaks at approximately 400 ms and occurs with exposure to unexpected anomalous stimuli) among participants from tight and loose countries — China and the U.S. They found that only Chinese participants exhibited an N400 response to norm violations over the frontal regions, an area previously found to be associated with judgments of the appropriateness of a variety of human actions, theory of mind, and punishment (Bach, Gunter, Knoblich, Prinz, & Friederici, 2009; Gunter & Bach, 2004; Reid & Striano, 2008). In addition, culture-specific N400 responses mediated country-level differences in cultural superiority, self-control, and creativity.

Finally, research has shown how TL affects organizational phenomena that parallel findings at other levels of analysis. Research in management science, for instance, has demonstrated that CEOs in tight cultures have less discretion (i.e., latitude of managerial action), as compared to CEOs in loose cultures (Crossland & Hambrick, 2011). Employees in tight and loose cultures also have distinct preferences for leadership styles. In

tight cultures, leaders who are autonomous (i.e., those who are independent and do not rely on others) are perceived to be more effective, whereas in loose cultures, leaders that are team-oriented (i.e., those who share decision-making responsibilities) and charismatic (i.e., those who are visionary, innovative, and question the status quo) are perceived to be more effective (Aktas et al., 2015). Finally, there is a growing emphasis on understanding TL at the *cross-cultural interface*, or what happens when individuals and groups cross tight and loose cultures. For example, a study on cross-border acquisitions (CBAs) used multilevel modeling to analyze data from over 6000 CBAs in more than 30 countries between 1980 and 2013 and found that cross-country differences in TL negatively affected CBA performance (i.e., acquirer returns) and increased the length of CBA deal-making (Li, Gelfand, & Kabst, 2017). At the individual level, in a multilevel longitudinal study of sojourners, Geeraert et al. (2017) found that individuals who move to tighter cultures generally have lower psychological and socio-cultural adaptation and higher stress as compared to individuals who move to looser cultures. Taking an interactionist perspective, however, they showed that this effect was moderated by sojourners' personality. Individuals who were more agreeable and had higher honesty-humility adapted better in tight countries compared to individuals who were lower on these traits.

In sum, multiple methods across different disciplines have illustrated both factors that cause variation in the strength of social norms in human groups and their multilevel consequences. Neither tight nor loose groups are "better"; they each are adaptive to their own ecological and historical contexts and predictably involve trade-offs of order, self-regulation, and stability versus tolerance, creativity, and openness to change.

Although there is growing research on TL that has been applied to nations, states, and organizations, to our knowledge, there has been little research on the connection between TL and CB research. We see many ways to integrate TL theory with CB research and focus specifically on how TL shapes persuasion in advertising, branding and product adoption, and consumer behavioral change and well-being.

### Tightness–looseness and persuasion in advertising

The nature and effectiveness of advertising has long been a classic topic in CB research. This research is important not only for understanding the psychology of advertising but also for helping companies effectively communicate with consumers. Indeed, global advertising expenditure is growing at a rapid pace and is expected to reach \$539 billion by the end of this year (Zenithmedia, 2016). If successful, advertising campaigns can yield tremendous financial rewards for companies. But if unsuccessful, they can cost time, money, and reputational damage.

Below we discuss the implications of TL for persuasion in advertising. Based on the above discussion of the core features of tight and loose cultures, we predict that advertising themes in loose cultures will feature the promotion of ideals and risk-taking, uniqueness and diversity, a wide range of

permissible content, and many non-traditional roles and stigmatized identities. More generally, we expect a greater emphasis on norm deviation and more creative content. By contrast, advertising themes in tight cultures will emphasize prevention focus and fitting into societal standards, stability and uniformity, more restricted content, and fewer non-traditional roles and stigmatized identities. More generally, we expect a greater emphasis on norm abidance and less creative content.

### TL and advertising themes

Advertising themes in loose cultures are expected to emphasize promoting gains and taking risks (i.e., throwing caution to the wind), whereas advertising themes in tight cultures are expected to emphasize adherence to societal standards and stability (i.e., sticking with what is known and trustworthy). Take, for example, American motorcycle manufacturer Harley-Davidson and Japanese motorcycle manufacturer Suzuki. Whereas the former is renowned for its distinct rebel image, with advertisements that often depict skulls, riders wearing dark sunglasses and leather jackets, and slogans such as "Screw it, let's ride" and "Don't worry, the rest of the world has normal covered", the latter is praised for its high reliability and stability, with slogans about the quality of their motorcycles and steadfast traditions such as "Performance above all" and "50 years of performance." Likewise, American Chase Bank recently released a promotion that read, "Get more from every moment: From innovative features to trusted service — Chase gives you the opportunity to do more." On the other hand, a common slogan found across many advertisements for Indian Corporation Bank is "Safe, secure, and fast, at Corporation Bank we do it exactly the way you want us to do."

Relatedly, advertisements in tight cultures are predicted to emphasize what one "should" do or generalized oughts from a regulatory focus perspective (Higgins, 1998), whereas ads in loose cultures would be more likely to emphasize "ideals" and freedom from constraint. Note that theorizing about collectivism focuses on oughts derived from one's close ingroups, whereas theorizing about tightness focuses on oughts related to the generalized public. For example, the Taiwanese supermarket company Pmart promotes its brand through a concept called economic aesthetics. The company designs a series of economical and chic shopping bags with slogans that tell people they should save money and maintain style. In the U.S., by contrast, an advertisement for Lakeland Bank emphasizes future aspirations by featuring a little boy dressed as a pilot playing with his toy airplane alongside the following slogan: "Everyone has a dream. Start saving for yours today!"

Advertisements in tight cultures should also be more likely to feature themes of uniformity, whereas advertisements in loose cultures should be more likely to emphasize themes of diversity and difference. For instance, a recent advertisement for customized shoes by NIKE features a female ballet dancer in sporty clothing as opposed to traditional ballet gear alongside a quote about how she can design her ballet shoes and dance with her own unique style. Likewise, a recent Dove commercial

shows eleven women with a variety of body types, skin colors, and poses in order to emphasize the notion that every woman is beautiful and unique in their own way. By contrast, a Korean Goo Goo Ice Cream commercial features five beautiful young women with slim body types wearing the same style white crop-top, shorts, and high heels holding ice cream. Similarly, a Japanese 7-Eleven advertisement depicts nine thin young models with pale skin wearing similar white tops and blue jean shorts standing in front of the convenience store. In support of this notion, Kim and Markus (1999) content analyzed themes in American and Korean magazine advertisements and found more uniqueness themes in the former and more conformity themes in the latter, which we would expect to be found in other loose and tight cultures as well.<sup>1</sup>

More generally, we expect that given the permissiveness that characterizes loose versus tight cultures, there will be a greater emphasis on liberal advertising themes in the former as compared to the latter. For example, Super Bowl commercials in the U.S. often depict promiscuity and sexual indulgence through women wearing little clothing. Similarly, Brazilian sandal brand Ipanema released an advertisement featuring fashion model Gisele Bündchen posing seductively in an animal-print outfit. In like manner, New Zealand ice cream company Tip Top produced a commercial featuring a young, attractive male in “togs” (skin-tight swim trunks) walking from the beach into the city. The commercial shows him strolling casually through city streets, shopping at a local supermarket, and riding a public bus in his revealing beachwear. By contrast, in 2012, China’s State TV Channel banned a lingerie commercial featuring a supermodel dancing in revealing clothing because the commercial was “too sexy.” Similarly, in Malaysia, advertising male and female underwear, condoms, and female contraceptives is prohibited, as is advertising female hygiene products before 10 pm (Waller, Fam, & Erdogan, 2002). Further, women in advertisements are required to have “good behavior acceptable to local culture” and must be “covered until the neckline, the length of the skirt worn should be below the knees, the arms may be exposed up to the edge of the shoulder but armpits cannot be exposed” according to Malaysia’s Ministry of Information and advertising code (Waller, Fam, & Erdogan, 2005).

Likewise, we predict a more frequent depiction of non-traditional roles in advertisements in loose cultures compared to tight cultures. Covergirl’s newest mascara campaign, for example, features a young American male wearing makeup. Similarly, a recent Tide detergent commercial shows a dad washing his daughter’s favorite princess dress. By contrast, research on advertisements in Germany, a relatively tight

culture, identified widespread gender stereotyping across commercials. Based on an analysis of 183 commercials, female figures are more likely than male figures to be younger, domestic, and dependent, whereas male figures are more likely than female figures to be older, authoritative, and independent (Knoll, Eisend, & Steinhagen, 2011).

Given their greater tolerance for deviance, we also expect that stigmatized groups will be featured more often in advertisements in loose as compared to tight cultures. For instance, Tiffany & Co.’s 2015 “Will You” campaign advertised their engagement rings with an image of a newly engaged gay couple. Similarly, in Israel, a popular commercial features a confident young woman in fashion brand MatimLi clothing who is walking through the streets and counting how many men look at her. Shortly after encountering one man who ignores her, she sees the man kissing another man, and the ad ends with her marching off with her MatimLi shopping bag and confidence still intact. Loose cultures are also expected to feature other stigmatized individuals in advertisements, such as people with disabilities. In Spain, for instance, financial services Provide Cofidis launched a TV campaign starring individuals with leg and arm amputations from the national para-cycling team. Likewise, a recent Nike commercial in Greece features several famous athletes, including runner Michalis Seitis, who lost his leg in a road accident in 2013 and now competes with an artificial limb. The notion that people react more positively to people who are stigmatized in loose cultures has indeed received empirical support. In a recent multinational study, we observed much more avoidance of individuals who deviated from cultural appearance norms in public settings in tight cultures compared to loose cultures. Upon sending out research assistants with fake tattoos or facial warts to ask for assistance in department stores and directions on city streets across 15 countries, we found that tight cultures offered much slower service and less help to stigmatized individuals compared to loose cultures (Gelfand, van Egmond, & Jackson, 2016). Accordingly, we expect that advertisements will feature far fewer stigmas in tight cultures relative to loose cultures.

#### *Norm-violating and norm abiding actors*

In addition to variation in advertising themes, we expect that advertisements featuring actors who violate norms—thereby creating a powerful shock value—will be more common in loose cultures. For example, Italian clothing company Diesel’s 2011 “Be Stupid” campaign features a series of norm violators to promote their brand. Their print advertisements depict a young woman flashing her breasts to a security camera, a man urinating in a public garden, and a woman wearing a traffic cone standing in the middle of the road at night. Advertisers in tight cultures, by contrast, are expected to emphasize actors who adhere to norms as a persuasion tactic. For instance, Japanese advertising company Dentsu Tokyo Burger launched an advertisement featuring a wrapper designed to help women eat hamburgers in a socially acceptable fashion. The wrapper serves as a mask with a picture of a woman maintaining

<sup>1</sup> Notably, this study, which compared the U.S. and Korea, captures important aspects of both collectivism and tightness. Collectivism relates to the primacy of one’s ingroup as a part of the self. Tightness refers to the strength of norms and punishments when people deviate from societal norms. Conformity themes that were assessed reflect both reference to the ingroup (e.g., collectivism) and the generalized other (e.g., following public trends; tightness). Accordingly, whereas collectivism focuses more on family orientation and conformity to one’s group, tightness involves conformity to public opinions of the “generalized other” and societal standards.

*Ochobo*, which refers to the Japanese cultural norm of modestly and politely covering one's mouth when eating in public.

The notion that individuals will react more positively to norm violators in loose cultures than in tight cultures has also received empirical support. In a study in the Netherlands, Van Kleef, Van Doorn, Heerdink, and Koning (2011) found that individuals who stole coffee from another person, violated bookkeeping rules, dropped ashes on the ground, or put their feet on a table appeared more powerful to observers relative to people who did not engage in such behaviors. Similarly, Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan (2014) found that participants in the U.S. granted more status to individuals who engaged in norm-violating behaviors such as entering a luxury store in gym clothing, teaching a class as an unshaven male in a T-shirt, wearing a red bow tie to a fancy black-tie party, and creating an original PowerPoint presentation as opposed to using a university official layout. Recently, however, in a study of reactions to norm violators across 19 countries, Stamkou et al. (2016) showed that participants in tight cultures were less willing to support individuals who were described in scenarios as violating norms (e.g., arriving late to a meeting, causing commotion while grabbing coffee, interrupting colleagues, and expressing a desire to get rid of rules) as compared to participants in loose cultures. Because people in tight cultures feel more scrutiny of their actions and expect norm violations to be met with disapproval, advertisers may appeal more successfully to consumers by featuring norm abidance. By contrast, people in loose cultures are less likely to associate deviant behavior with severe consequences, and they may even attribute more power to norm violators. Thus, advertisers in these cultures may be better able to draw the attention of consumers and generate persuasive power through featuring norm-violating actors.

### *The creative advertising context*

Finally, beyond the norm abidance of actors, we predict that the overall creative context of advertisements will vary in tight and loose cultures. In recent years, many companies have developed creative advertisements in order to better grab the attention of their consumers and ultimately sell their products and services. Geico, for instance, is renowned for conveying the importance of saving on car insurance through innovative subplots that involve Sleeping Beauty, Tarzan, or even talking animals eating through bags of trash. Similarly, airlines such as American, United, and Air New Zealand have begun incorporating a wide range of creative oddities into their safety videos. Passengers waiting for takeoff may learn how to properly fasten their seatbelts from crewmembers on beaches, celebrities at Olympic stadiums, or hobbits in the mountains. While companies are now prioritizing creativity more than ever before, academic scholars have long been interested in the role that creativity plays in advertising. In the 1980s, researchers measured creativity effectiveness by relying on the judgment of advertising professionals (Amabile, 1982). Later in the 1990s and early 21st century, researchers took a more empirical approach by looking at the effectiveness of creative advertising

through an assessment of consumer attitudes, such as likeability of creative commercials and intent to purchase products advertised in these commercials (Ang & Low, 2000; Kover, Goldberg, & James, 1995; Stone, Besser, & Lewis, 2000). Nevertheless, only a small number of studies have examined creative advertising to date, and the question of whether creativity enhances advertising effectiveness across different cultures has yet to be addressed.

We predict that reactions to creative advertising content are likely to vary considerably across tight and loose cultures. Because creativity involves thinking outside of the box and departing from the status quo, loose cultures should feature much more creative advertisements as compared to tight cultures. Indeed, recent research by Chua et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between TL and creativity with data from a global crowdsourcing website that features competitions for solving creative business problems. Client companies who use this platform usually seek assistance with generating ideas for new product designs, marketing strategy, and advertising campaigns. Business problems are posted online as global contests where people around the world can submit their creative solutions and compete for monetary prizes as high as 15,000 euros. Upon examining 99 of these business problems from over 10,000 contest participants across 32 countries, Chua and colleagues found that people from tighter countries were much less likely to enter these competitions relative to people from looser countries. Further, those who did enter in tight countries were less likely to win an award when submitting proposals to nations outside of their own. Interestingly, people who were trying to innovate in contests that came from tight cultures were more successful the closer they were to them in terms of cultural distance, suggesting that creativity in tight cultures needs to be done by those who understand the norms and constraints within the cultural context.

In all, we predict a greater percentage of advertisements with creative themes in loose cultures compared to tight cultures. For instance, in loose cultures, we might expect more airline safety videos that juxtapose people on beaches fastening their seatbelts or feature mythical creatures. Loose cultures may also have more creative advertisements with seemingly irrelevant details, such as Ogilvy & Mather's famous Hathaway ad campaign, which features a man with an eye patch wearing a Hathaway shirt. Tight cultures, by contrast, with their preferences for order, may be more likely to produce somber airline safety videos that focus on conveying safety features with less fan-fair.

Consumers in tight cultures might also have lower recall for advertisements with highly creative strategies. The non-normative information found in creative advertising might be distracting to consumers in tight cultures who may ultimately fail to encode other important details about the product or service being advertised (cf. Strick, Holland, Van Baaren, & Van Knippenberg, 2009 for how distractions in advertisements can lead to reduced encoding and impaired brand recognition). Because they may be less accustomed to creative advertising content, consumers in tight cultures might also show less positive attitudes towards creative commercials and a lower inclination to purchase the advertised products as compared to those in loose cultures. Moreover, based on Chua and colleagues' findings, we

would expect that if companies are trying to innovate in advertisements targeted to tight cultures, they should consult the local context for what is acceptable in order to understand the type of creative content that might work well. Drawing on different dimensions of creativity (Amabile, 1996), it might be that advertisements that feature *appropriateness* are more successful in tight cultures, but advertisements that feature *novelty* are more successful in loose cultures. More specifically, in tight cultures, appropriate creative elements may better appeal to consumers. In other words, advertisers might want to direct their attention to factors such as product worth (i.e., demonstrating the products' aesthetic value) or functionality (i.e., showing how the product is useful; Besemer & O'Quinn, 1986; Besemer & Treffinger, 1981; Haberland & Dacin, 1992; Sobel & Rothenberg, 1980; Thorson & Zhao, 1997; Wells, 1989). In loose cultures, by contrast, consumers may receive novel creative elements more positively, so advertisers would likely benefit from emphasizing elements that are used infrequently or are new, imaginative, or different from what most advertisers use (Duke, 2000; Duke & Sutherland, 2001; Jackson & Messick, 1965; Sobel & Rothenberg, 1980; Tellis, 1998).

### Tightness–looseness influences branding and product trends

We next turn to the implications of TL for issues of branding and product diffusion and preferences. In recent years, brands have become more than just a logo or a product. Indeed, by allowing managers to infuse products and services with distinct values that make them appealing to consumers, brands are currently one of the most important assets that companies possess (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Brands not only reflect consumers' experiences with products but also determine the effectiveness of marketing strategies in advertising and product channeling (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Indeed, academic research has been identifying critical processes in branding for more than four decades (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Extensive research, for example, has examined the relationship between a brand and its consumers, showing that consumers with a committed relationship to a brand are more likely to pay more for the brand because they perceive unique value that no alternative can provide (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Pessemier, 1959; Reichheld, 1996). Research has also explored the process of building and growing brands (Ghodeswar, 2008; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The success of brand extensions and acceptance of new products, for example, depends to a large extent on consumers' perceptions of the fit between the original and extended brand/product (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Klink & Smith, 2001; Van Osselaer & Alba, 2003). Moreover, with the advent of globalization, it is critical for marketers to understand how consumers and markets vary across cultures in order to effectively develop branding strategies in an expanding international market.

In the following sections, we examine issues related to brand-consumer relationships, including brand loyalty, product diffusion, and product preferences, and discuss how they may vary across tight and loose cultures.

### Brand loyalty

The relationship between a brand and its consumers is a central aspect of branding research. One of the most important indicators of a successful brand is not the number of consumers who purchase the brand once, but rather the number of consumers who purchase the brand regularly (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). Indeed, research has shown that brand loyalty, or dedication to a brand and repeated purchases, reduces market costs of conducting business with committed consumers (Aaker, 1992; Reichheld, 1996) and leads to higher return on investment through increases in market share (Buzzell & Gale, 1987).

Since the brand loyalty construct was developed nearly a century ago (Copeland, 1923), marketing researchers have made major progress in understanding the processes underlying brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is a multidimensional construct that comprises three dimensions: attitudinal, normative, and behavioral (Cunningham, 1956; Ha, 1998; Kuehn & Day, 1962). The *attitudinal* dimension refers to a positive emotional attachment to the brand, the *normative* dimension refers to pressures from one's social environment related to the brand, and the *behavioral* dimension refers to repeated purchases of the same brand over time. Based on these dimensions, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) identified four types of brand loyalty: no loyalty, inertia loyalty, covetous loyalty, and premium loyalty. *No loyalty*, as it implies, refers to consumers who show no attachment to the brand and do not make any purchases. *Inertia loyalty* describes consumers who do not hold favorable attitudes towards the brand, but they engage in repeated purchasing behaviors for the sake of convenience. For example, consumers may frequently shop at a CVS store that is in walking distance from their house, but if they move to a new neighborhood, they may start shopping at a nearby Walgreens instead. Consumers who have *covetous loyalty* grow emotionally attached to the brand through social influences, but they may not actually purchase the brand. For instance, a college student might really like the Chanel brand after seeing photos of people with Chanel bags on Facebook, but she may not actually purchase a bag because it is expensive. However, although these consumers do not make repeated purchases, their strong attachment and "word of mouth" communication about the product or service can influence the choices of consumers around them (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). Finally, *premium loyalty* refers to consumers who repeatedly purchase a brand to which they are emotionally attached, and their purchases are also significantly influenced by social pressures. For example, even after the recent incidents involving Samsung phone explosions, consumers who demonstrate premium loyalty may still be committed to purchasing the company's products because they are surrounded by many people who do so and are convinced that the brand is superior to others.

To date, there has been a dearth of research on brand loyalty across cultures, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Lam, 2007). We expect that the normative dimension of branding will be more important in predicting the success of branding

strategies in tight cultures, whereas the attitudinal dimension will be more important in predicting branding strategies in loose cultures. For example, covetous loyalty and premium loyalty should be prevalent in tight cultures given that they reflect stronger normative pressures and emphasize stability of preferences. Indeed, increased normative pressure is likely to result in consumer purchases in tight cultures even when individuals may hold unfavorable attitudes towards a brand, simply as a means of avoiding looking different from others. On the other hand, consumers in loose cultures, with their greater mobility and openness (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014), may be more likely to demonstrate no loyalty or inertia loyalty. Greater mobility might translate to lower levels of commitment to particular brands, which could lead consumers to make purchase decisions for reasons related more to convenience than to attachment. Likewise, an open mindset could encourage consumers to explore a wide variety of brands, both domestic and foreign. As such, consumers in loose cultures may be less inclined to stick with one brand over others.

Furthermore, the types of strategies companies use to develop brand loyalty are expected to vary across cultures. For example, companies in tight cultures are likely to cultivate word of mouth communication strategies and social media platforms to convey normative pressures around purchasing their brand (i.e., those who do not purchase it will be left out). By contrast, because consumers in loose cultures face fewer normative pressures to behave as others do, companies are likely to emphasize customization and dissimilarity from other brands (i.e., those who purchase it can have their own unique style). More generally, social learning strategies (Laland, 2004) that reflect conformist pressures (e.g., copy the majority, or copy what other people in one's network are doing) would be utilized and more successful in tight cultures, whereas social learning strategies that reflect individual choice and diversity (e.g., copy if rare, copy if better, and copy successful individuals) would be more emphasized and successful in loose cultures.

Finally, previous research has shown that culture-brand fit can foster strong relationships between brands and consumers (Henry, 1976; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). The precise branding themes that fit the culture, however, should vary in tight and loose cultures. Whereas tight cultures may benefit from emphasizing branding themes that reinforce uniformity, stability, and order, loose cultures should emphasize themes that revolve around general permissiveness and deviance. For example, whereas Austrian fashion design company Swarovski is famous for its branding strategy that emphasizes quality crystal jewelry, Spanish clothing and accessories retailer ZARA is known for its branding strategy that emphasizes creative designs and store layouts. Additionally, because tight cultures are characterized by greater constraint and uniformity, we predict there will be a narrower range of branding strategies cultivated in tight relative to loose cultures. In other words, whereas brands in loose cultures may strive to differ from surrounding brands, brands in tight cultures should be more uniform or more isomorphic (Gelfand et al., 2006).

### Product diffusion

Since the 1980s, consumer behavior researchers have sought to understand how to develop marketing strategies that help introduce new products into existing markets (Kalish, Mahajan, & Muller, 1995; Subramaniam & Venkatraman, 2001; Tellis, Stremersch, & Yin, 2003). In today's expanding international marketplace, global market share is a key indicator of a company's competitiveness, and accordingly, top management at multinational companies is directing its attention to how to best introduce new products into foreign markets. Introducing new brands or products to a new culture, however, can be a risky business. For example, after several years of trying to introduce its service, and more than \$2 billion in cash losses, American ride-sharing company Uber gave up on its ambition to conquer the Chinese market. Without recognizing different diffusion patterns across cultures, the risk of unsuccessfully introducing a new product is considerably high.

Integrating TL theory with existing theories of product diffusion will help with strategic planning for global-minded marketers who are seeking to introduce new products into new cultures. Most researchers who study how product diffusion varies have used the Bass innovation diffusion model (Bass, 1969; Mahajan, Muller, & Bass, 1990; Stremersch & Tellis, 2004). The model estimates the number of adopters of a new product and suggests that these adopters are either influenced by mass media (i.e., advertising) or word-of-mouth (i.e., social contagion) communication. In the model, adopters who are the first to buy new products and are influenced by mass media are referred to as "innovators"; by contrast, adopters who are influenced by their peers and word-of-mouth communication are referred to as "imitators." Accordingly, the model's two essential parameters include  $p$  (i.e., coefficient of innovation) and  $q$  (i.e., coefficient of imitation). Products that diffuse relatively quickly in cultures have a steep S curve (i.e., a higher  $p/q$  ratio) whereas products that diffuse more slowly have an S curve with a more gradual slope (i.e., a lower  $p/q$  ratio).

Applying TL to the parameters of the Bass model can help to predict diffusion patterns across cultures. Specifically, because people in tight cultures are risk averse and more resistant to change, there will be a greater tendency to imitate others. In contrast, because people in loose cultures have greater mobility and are more open to change, they will be more likely to innovate and try new products for the first time. As such, we predict that the rate of diffusion when a product is first introduced will be much slower in tight cultures than in loose cultures. Indeed, computational modeling studies have shown some support for this notion. We (De, Nau, & Gelfand, 2017) developed a model wherein we operationalized TL through whether agents were playing a coordination game much of the time (akin to tight societies) or were playing a game where they were less affected by other agents' actions (akin to loose societies). Using extensive simulations and mathematical analyses, we showed that when a new norm is introduced into the society that is better for the population (e.g., has higher payoffs than the existing norm), loose groups readily adapt to the new norm while the tight groups take much longer to do so,

if at all. Further, in other simulations, we found that loose groups tend to be much more open to exploring new random behaviors than tight groups, which makes them adapt more easily and quickly to new norms. We are also exploring the possibility that the rate of change in tight cultures is highly *non-linear*, wherein change may be slower in tight cultures, but once a critical mass in the population has adopted the new norm, change occurs even more quickly in tight than loose cultures (i.e., the slope becomes much steeper in tight cultures than in loose cultures) (De, Gelfand & Nau, in preparation). Theoretically, this suggests that when a new product is introduced, consumers in tight cultures are more likely to wait and see how others react to it. Thus, the product ultimately takes off more slowly compared to loose cultures. Later on, however, because people in tight cultures abide by clear and widely-shared norms, the transfer of ideas occurs faster once a new product takes off. Survey results from the World Values Survey (WVS) also support this prediction (De, Gelfand & Nau, in preparation). WVS asked participants a variety of questions about change, including how change takes place in their societies, and in particular, whether it occurs radically or incrementally. In tight cultures, people report that if change is going to happen, it will be radical. People from loose cultures, by contrast, say that if change happens, it occurs gradually. Accordingly, we hypothesize that product diffusion in tight cultures will take longer initially but may speed up significantly if and when consumers decide to adopt the product. By contrast, consumers in loose cultures may adopt products more quickly from the start, but later, the diffusion process may slow down. In all, companies seeking entry in international markets should pay attention to different diffusion patterns that stem from variation in reactions to new products across tight and loose cultures. Because consumers in tight cultures are likely more resistant to change initially, companies may want to invest more in their earlier marketing efforts to help expedite product adoption and also understand that the process will be elongated. In loose cultures, by contrast, companies may benefit from investing more in later marketing efforts in order to help ensure continued adoption post product takeoff.

It is worth noting that the content of product appeals might also affect product diffusion in tight and loose cultures. As with our discussion of advertising above, products that deviate from norms and are highly unique are likely to fare worse in tight cultures as compared to loose cultures. However, it is possible that there are some contexts where uniqueness strategies would be effective in tight cultures. In particular, consumers in tight cultures may be more likely to purchase unique products for private use (e.g., a toothbrush). In such private consumption contexts where potential public scrutiny is absent, consumers in tight cultures are able to avoid risking social penalties for deviating. On the other hand, in public consumption contexts (e.g., choosing a painting for a public conference room) where potential public scrutiny is present, consumers in tight cultures are likely to shift their preferences to conforming products instead of unique products (Wang, Zhu, & Shiv, 2012). Indeed, Yamagishi, Hashimoto, and Schug (2008) found that Japanese participants were more likely to choose a “unique” pen over a

“majority” pen when no one was watching them compared to when they were being observed by an experimenter. They were also more likely to select the “majority” pen when they could be monitored by fellow participants. These findings suggest that in tight cultures, emphasizing uniqueness may be effective only in private consumption contexts, but emphasizing uniformity would be effective in public consumption contexts.

#### *Introducing foreign products into new markets*

Companies seeking to introduce foreign products into new markets also need to be mindful of the type of resistance they may encounter depending on the level of TL in the market. Relative to loose cultures, consumers in tight cultures, generally speaking, may be more resistant to foreign products over national products given the potential of foreign products to threaten the social order and challenge feelings of cultural superiority (Gelfand et al., 2011; Mu et al., 2015). Research shows that exposure to one’s heritage culture mixed with a foreign culture can lead people to feel threatened, and this is expected to be even more pronounced in tight cultures. For example, research conducted by Cheng et al. (2011) supports this notion that when consumers in tight cultures encounter threat, they respond more negatively to foreign brands. In their study, they asked mainland Chinese participants to evaluate brands that were symbolic of Chinese (e.g., LiNing) and American culture (e.g., Nike) immediately before and after the Beijing Olympics. They also measured participants’ identification with Chinese culture. Before the Olympics, only respondents who identified strongly with Chinese culture preferred Chinese brands over American brands. However, as the Olympics progressed and the perceived threat from the U.S. Olympics teams became more salient, participants who were both high and low on Chinese culture identification exhibited favoritism of Chinese symbolic brands and rejection of American brands. Therefore, we suggest that when consumers in tight cultures perceive threat from foreign products, they are more likely to show resistance.

Indeed, in tight cultures, highly negative reactions can become contagious in the population when foreign brands threaten national identity. This kind of response to a perceived threat emerged when French food product corporation Danone and Chinese beverage company Wahaha entered into a joint venture. In late 2006, Danone sought to acquire a majority stake in non-joint venture subsidiaries of Wahaha, which triggered a long legal battle between the two parties. Chinese nationalism quickly grew in opposition to Danone, which was seen as a hostile foreign enterprise that wanted to take over the country’s well-known Wahaha brand. The conflict escalated into a political dispute between President Nicholas Sarkozy of France and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao. Eventually, the two parties reached an amicable settlement with the support of both the Chinese and French governments, but only after a two-year legal battle. Given greater exposure to and acceptance of foreign influence in loose cultures, we would not expect such identity conflicts to become contagious across consumers in these contexts. More generally, companies need to be mindful

of how the image of a brand might challenge and threaten consumers, which is more likely in tight cultures.

### **Tightness–looseness and promoting health through marketing communications**

In this final section, we discuss the implications of TL for one of the most important aspects of consumer behavior: Consumer well-being. With nearly 2 billion overweight adults worldwide (600 million of whom are obese) and approximately 9.3 million smoking or alcohol abuse-related deaths each year (World Health Organization, 2014a, 2014b), health professionals and policymakers have grown increasingly concerned about consumers' health-related decisions. Likewise, marketers have begun to address food, diet, fitness, and nutrition in their advertising and marketing campaigns in order to help promote healthy lifestyle choices. Although such issues have drawn global attention, there is a lack of research on health-related decision-making across cultures.

First, it is useful to identify the kinds of health-related challenges that different cultures face. Our research has shown that loose cultures, with their greater permissiveness and latitude, have numerous self-regulation challenges. Using 2010 World Health Organization (WHO) data, we found that people in loose cultures (e.g., U.S., New Zealand, Australia, and Greece) have higher average BMIs as compared to people in tight countries (e.g., India, Japan, Pakistan, and Singapore), even controlling for GDP. Likewise, correlations with national tightness scores and 2014 WHO data show that people in loose cultures such as Estonia, Ukraine, and Brazil have significantly more alcohol-related deaths (as measured by death rates per 100,000 population) compared to their tighter counterparts such as Singapore, Pakistan, and Turkey (Gelfand, in preparation). Indeed, individuals in tight cultures report having greater impulse control and self-monitoring ability (Gelfand et al., 2011), which likely enables them to have higher self-control.

Recent neuroscience results also suggest that people from tight cultures have greater self-control even while resting (Mu, Kitayama, Han & Gelfand, in preparation). In one study, we asked Chinese and American participants to close their eyes and relax in a comfortable chair in a dimly lit, quiet room for 5 minutes. As they rested, we collected continuous (EEG) signals to assess their alpha band activity, which has been linked to self-control. Chinese participants showed higher resting-state alpha spectral power in the parietal area, and this increased power was associated with greater self-regulation of eating habits, a lower frequency of inhibiting temptations, less difficulty resisting such temptations, and better performance on the Stroop task relative to American participants.

In all, self-regulation is more of a challenge in loose than tight cultures. In tight cultures, however, people may be at a disadvantage when it comes to trying new health initiatives, as they are less open and more risk-averse than their looser counterparts. Further, they may find it more difficult to kick unhealthy habits that are normative in their culture. For instance, according to the WHO (2013) report on the global

tobacco epidemic, 44% of adults smoke daily in Austria, a relatively tight country.

Research is needed to understand how health-related messages should be targeted to consumers when trying to enact change. Two common strategies that marketers use to foster healthy habits among consumers include descriptive and injunctive norm appeals (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Nolan, Schultz, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2008; Reno, Cialdini, & Kallgren, 1993; Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2007). Descriptive norm appeals provide information regarding the frequency of certain behaviors in a situation. For example, the University of Arizona's social norms media campaign used descriptive norm messages to help reduce heavy drinking on campus (Johannessen & Glider, 2003). They placed advertisements in their campus newsletter with messages such as, "Most UA students have 0, 1, 2, 3, or at the most 4 drinks when they party" and "64% of UA students have 4 or fewer drinks when they party". On the other hand, injunctive norm appeals serve more as a form of social coercion to tell people what ought to be done. For instance, the University of Kentucky's "Why You Should Quit Smoking" campaign featured an ad that included a long list of reasons why smokers should quit.

Research shows that both descriptive and injunctive normative messages can effectively persuade consumers to make healthy decisions (e.g., Mahler, Kulik, Butler, Gerrard, & Gibbons, 2008). However, although descriptive norm messages may be effective in persuading consumers to make healthy lifestyle choices in both tight and loose cultures, injunctive norm messages are likely to be more successful in tight cultures and met with resistance in loose cultures. Indeed, several studies in the context of the U.S., a relatively loose culture, support the effectiveness of descriptive norms and backlash against injunctive norms. Stok, De Ridder, De Vet, and De Wit (2012), for instance, gave 96 adolescents a booklet containing readings and questions to promote intended and actual fruit consumption. One third of participants received booklets with descriptive norm statements (i.e., the majority of high school students try to eat sufficient fruit themselves), one third received booklets with injunctive norm statements (i.e., the majority of high school students think other high school students should eat sufficient fruit), and the last third received booklets with control statements (i.e., standard information about healthy eating). They found that injunctive norm messages not only had no positive influence on encouraging healthy eating behaviors but also had a negative influence on healthy eating intentions.

Other researchers have drawn similar conclusions that descriptive norms are more effective for improving consumers' health behaviors compared to injunctive norms. In a study by Robinson, Fleming, and Higgs (2014), female college students were randomly selected to view one of three posters containing images of fruits and vegetables and a social norm message. In the descriptive norm condition, the message read, "A lot of people aren't aware that the typical student eats their five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Students eat more fruit and vegetables than you'd expect." In the injunctive norm condition, the message read, "A lot of people aren't aware that

the typical student thinks their peers should eat five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Students think you should eat more fruit and vegetables than you'd expect." The researchers found that participants who were exposed to a descriptive social norm message consumed significantly more fruits and vegetables and fewer high energy-dense snacks relative to the control condition. However, there was no effect of exposure to the injunctive norm message. In a similar vein, other research has found that injunctive norms may make consumers feel as though they are being coerced into making certain decisions (Jacobson, Mortenson, & Cialdini, 2011; Melnyk, Herpen, Fischer, & van Trijp, 2011). This perceived coercion, however, would likely be attenuated in tight cultures.

Beyond normative appeals that can persuade consumers to make healthy decisions, messages also need to be framed to fit consumers' self-guides in order to be effective marketing communications (Harmon-Kizer, Kumar, Ortinau, & Stock, 2013). As noted previously, in tight cultures, which have greater ecological and historical threat, people have a chronic accessibility of normative ought self-guides and adopt a prevention regulatory focus (i.e., focus on avoiding negative outcomes). By contrast, in loose cultures, people who face less ecological and historical threat have a chronic accessibility of ideal self-guides and adopt a promotion regulatory focus (i.e., focus on achieving positive outcomes) (Gelfand et al., 2011). Accordingly, health appeals framed in terms of avoiding negative consequences and losses may be more effective in tight cultures. Health appeals framed in terms of achieving good outcomes and gains, by contrast, are more likely to be persuasive in loose cultures. For example, in order to encourage consumers to quit smoking in tight cultures, marketers may benefit from emphasizing that smoking is the number one cause of lung cancer. Marketers in loose cultures, by contrast, may want to emphasize that people's longevity will improve after quitting smoking. As another example, consumers in loose cultures might be more drawn to health-oriented marketing communications that promote gains in health through increased exercise. People in tight cultures, by contrast, might be more drawn to marketing communications that emphasize decreased consumption of unhealthy foods. More generally, in order to promote healthy lifestyle choices in different cultures, we suggest that health marketers frame their advertising messages through different appeals (descriptive versus injunctive norms, promotion versus prevention focus), as the effectiveness may vary depending on the cultural context.

## Conclusion

In this article, we reviewed extant research on tightness–looseness and discussed its implications for numerous consumer behavior processes including persuasion and advertising, branding and product diffusion, and health-related marketing. We believe integrating TL with CB research promises to expand the global scope of research on both TL and CB in new directions. TL also has the potential to make applied contributions by helping CB professionals and advertisers better tailor their marketing strategies to different cultural contexts.

For purposes of space, we were not able to discuss other exciting directions for TL and CB research. For example, TL has implications for consumer motivation, decision-making, brand positioning and extensions, customer service and complaints, product and company failures, and even the tendency of markets to move over time and in which direction. Further, our discussion has focused predominantly on the national level, but variation in tightness–looseness has also been found at the state and regional levels. Thus, it would be interesting to examine the predictions we have outlined at the state level within countries as well. For instance, consumer decisions among people in Kansas and Texas, relatively tight states, are expected to vary considerably from consumer decisions among people in Washington and California, relatively loose states, according to the predictions advanced in this article. Likewise, there are tight and loose domains within all societies that may have additional implications for CB. For example, although Israel is generally loose, there are certain tight domains with strong normative pressures, such as having large families. This suggests CB research issues regarding parenting and children in this context would need to take this normative strength into account. Finally, in this age of globalization, it will be critical to study biculturals, who are exposed to both tight and loose norms, in CB domains. For example, priming bicultural individuals with strong or weak norms might influence product preferences, reactions to advertisements, and level of commitment to different brands.

In conclusion, the integration of TL and CB research constitutes an important frontier for theory, research, and practice. We hope the initial discussion of this intellectual marriage stimulates research in the coming decades.

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