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Chapter 1

Advancing Our Understanding of Cross-Cultural Issues in Consumer Science and Consumer Psychology

Hester van Herk and Carlos J. Torelli

With globalization, the world has become more multicultural and brands from every corner of the world are gaining access to global markets (Torelli, 2013). In this environment, there is a pressing need for researchers to better understand how cross-cultural issues impact consumer science and consumer psychology. In globalized markets, issues related to culture-based segmentation within countries and between countries, culture mixing in product offerings and brands, biculturalism, and multiculturalism are becoming increasingly important. The chapters in this book offer researchers a thorough review of the key cross-cultural frameworks and methods to advance research in consumer science and consumer psychology.

The book is divided in three parts: Part I reviews key issues in cross-cultural consumer science and consumer psychology. Chapters in this part of the book review basic cultural frameworks at the country and the individual level, and discuss how to integrate culture in frameworks of consumer science and consumer psychology. Part II of the book focuses on the impact of culture on business performance and decisions. This section reviews consumer favorable and unfavorable attitudes towards nations and products associated with specific nations, as well as the role of culture for branding decisions and the challenges marketers face in emerging markets. Finally, Part III of the book zooms in on methodological issues for conducting cross-cultural research, including measurement issues and methods to analyze cross-cultural data.

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Key Issues in Cross-Cultural Consumer Science and Consumer Psychology

Incorporating culture into frameworks of consumer science and consumer psychology requires a solid understanding of culture as a construct, as well as of its impact on people's judgments and behaviors. Culture is a multifaceted construct that is often analyzed at two different levels of analysis: at the level of countries or at the individual level.

In Chap. 2 of the book, Maseland and van Hoorn (2017) discuss the idea of measuring the culture of countries and the different views therein. The authors review the theoretical foundations for studying culture at the country level, highlight the use of countries as a unit of analysis, and pay special attention to the way in which a group-level construct such as culture impacts individuals' values and beliefs. This chapter introduces key frameworks of national culture such as those by Hofstede, GLOBE, Inglehart, and Schwartz. The authors emphasize debates concerning the extant frameworks conceptualizing and quantifying cultural differences between countries in different dimensions, which feed into open questions concerning culture at the country level.

Chapter 3 moves away from culture at the country level and focuses on culture as an aspect of the individual. In this chapter, Wong and Lee (2017) provide an overview on cultural theories to explain variations in individuals' values, attitudes, and behaviors. The authors review foundational models and provide a framework that integrates the multilevel influences (macro-, meso-, and micro-) on individuals within each culture. The chapter not only introduces the main individual level framework by Schwartz but also includes the tightness-looseness construct focusing on differences in strength of social norms within societies.

In Chap. 4, Torelli, Rodas, and Lahoud (2017) review academic research on how culture impacts consumer behavior and persuasion. This chapter focuses on findings related to the two most common approaches used to model the behavior of cross-cultural consumers: the cultural syndromes approach and the dynamic constructivist theory of culture.

Finally, Chap. 5 by van Herk and Poortinga (2017) highlights the importance of a pragmatic approach to cross-cultural analyses. The chapter is oriented primarily towards the prediction of differences between countries, and the emphasis is more on the proportion of variance that can be accounted for by a nation-level variable in empirical data than on culture's specific meaning or even its validity for a targeted construct.

Culture and Its Impact on Business Performance and Decisions

After introducing key cross-cultural frameworks and reviewing how culture impacts the judgment and decisions of consumers, the second part of the book focuses on the impact of culture on business performance and decisions. In Chap. 6, Riefler (2017)

reviews how consumers' culture-related characteristics affect their product attitudes. This chapter provides an overview of the most prominent consumer sentiments towards foreign countries and the home country, such as consumer ethnocentrism, consumer affinity, consumer animosity, or consumer cosmopolitanism. It highlights their relevance for companies with regard to consumer decision-making and target marketing.

Chapter 7 by Zeugner-Roth (2017) moves beyond consumer-level factors to the country-related signals in products and brands, and how they impact consumers' attitudes and behaviors. This chapter focuses on country-of-origin (COO) effects, and reviews the basic concepts and models used in COO research, but also challenges them, and provides an agenda for future research.

In Chap. 8, Gürhan-Canli, Hayran, and Sarial-Abi (2017) focus on the role of culture in branding decisions. They review academic research on the culture branding interface and present a structured analysis of the major findings on how the changing landscape of cultural influences affects brand perceptions. This chapter elaborates on how the cultural context and culturally sensitive consumer segments affect branding practices, and how consumer-brand relationships are shaped by culturally relevant values.

Finally, in Chap. 9, Viswanathan (2017) zooms in on issues related to emerging markets. Specifically, this chapter situates at the confluence of culture, low income, and low literacy, and introduces the bottom-up approach adopted in the stream of work on subsistence marketplaces. This chapter highlights the importance of considering the continuum of marketplace exposure and access ranging from isolated tribal communities, to rural communities, and urban communities. It identifies the cognitive characteristics of consumers in subsistence marketplaces and elaborates on the consequences for understanding consumer behavior.

Methodological Issues for Conducting Cross-Cultural Research

The last part of the book focuses on methodological issues for conducting cross-cultural research on consumer science and consumer psychology. Specifically, Chap. 10 by Baumgartner and Weijters (2017) describes two major strategies for enhancing cross-cultural comparability: (1) a priori methods to ensure the comparability of data in cross-cultural surveys and (2) post hoc methods to ascertain data comparability and enable comparisons in the presence of threats to equivalence.

Finally, in Chap. 11, Van Herk and Fischer (2017) describe what multilevel analysis is and introduce major methods when dealing with multiple levels of analysis (e.g., individual and country). The chapter elaborates on the key issues in multilevel analysis being aggregation and isomorphism, and finalizes with a discussion on the conventional top-down approach in which higher levels affect individuals and the recent bottom-up approach in which individuals via their attitudes and behaviors affect societal norms.

Conclusion and Look into the Future

Research attention on the role of culture in consumer psychology and consumer science is expected to increase over the next decade. Not only is there an increasing diversity of societies due to immigration patterns by different cultural groups (e.g., Hispanics and Chinese in the USA), but there is also an increasing awareness of regional differences within nations (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014; van Herk & Poortinga, 2012). Consumers in the same region share a similar context (history, climate) making them different from consumers from other regions.

Culture is important, but a main question we still need to ask and which becomes more important in the current globalizing world is how best to measure culture. National-cultural frameworks (e.g., Hofstede) are widely used in many fields, including consumer science and consumer psychology, to explain phenomena. However, we should be aware that there are still many open questions regarding the operationalization of culture. How stable is culture over time? Are we using the right variables to measure it? Beugelsdijk, Maseland, and van Hoorn (2015) investigated the stability of Hofstede's scores and found that, at the nation level, change is absolute between countries, rather than relative. In the last decades, countries have become more individualistic. However, this pattern was less consistent for the United States, the nation being most prominent in consumer psychology. Other interesting questions pertain to the conceptualization and quantification of national culture (Chap. 2 this book). Van Herk and Poortinga (Chap. 5 this book) even challenge the use of culture by using both economic and national-level culture data to peel of variance of product sales data. Studying cultures at the national level is still a developing field that requires further research.

Consumer research has long focused on consumers in developed nations, and the United States in particular; this despite the fact that the emerging and developing countries are far larger in numbers of people. Burgess and Steenkamp (2006) created an awareness of the importance and the challenges of doing consumer research in developing nations. Since that time, several studies have been published including consumers from emerging markets (Kravets & Sandikci, 2014; Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013) as well as studies on how to do research in subsistence markets (Ingenbleek, Tessema, & van Trijp, 2013). However, given the challenges involved in conducting research in emerging markets, and particularly so in subsistence markets, research in such developing markets remains underrepresented in consumer science. Viswanathan (2017) describes the importance of subsistence marketplaces in consumer research to gain a better understanding of consumer psychology in general.

Consumers in every nation are confronted with certain social norms. For instance, consumers also face norms about how one should look at products from foreign countries. There is an increasing trend to promote "buying local" products, and for countries to impose (or talk about imposing) trade-barriers and tariffs on imported products. It would be an interesting avenue for future research to investigate the effects of such a context on ethnocentric attitudes of consumers. When multi-country

data are available, a new development in consumer sentiments and country-of-origin effects may thus be in combining the national and individual level, also by performing (quasi-)experimental research (chapter Riefler).

A last development we want to emphasize can be the dynamic relationship between national culture and individual culture. Individuals change due to their experiences in the context they are in (e.g., environmental pollution, violence); such changes may affect opinions of the groups they are in and also the national norms. This bottom-up approach to culture underscores the interest on how national culture may change over time due to bottom-up processes, and on the factors that may accelerate or inhibit the process of cultural change. In addition to the traditional top-down approach, new developments in multilevel theory (see Chap. 11 this book) introducing a bottom-up approach can be an important tool for investigating these interesting questions.

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