

# Cross-cultural consumer psychology

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Emails: shavitt@illinois.edu; ajbarne2@  
illinois.edu**Abstract**

Over the last 25 years, cross-cultural consumer psychology has developed into a well-researched domain, delivering important insights into how cultural differences influence consumer phenomena. This review synthesizes critical developments in the last decade of research related to the most commonly studied cultural dimensions. First, we describe how cultural differences in individualism and collectivism offer new insights on consumer goal pursuit and self-regulatory processes. Next, we highlight the role of holistic and analytic thinking in consumer phenomena ranging from pricing to branding. We then describe the horizontal and vertical refinement of individualism and collectivism, and the power distance belief dimension, both of which address cultural orientations toward hierarchy and power. As we describe, these distinctions have implications for important consumer outcomes such as impulse consumption and prosocial behavior. Finally, we look ahead to an emerging cultural distinction, normative tightness–looseness, and bring attention to significant shifts in the practice of cross-cultural consumer research.

**KEYWORDS**

culture, individualism, collectivism, horizontal, vertical, thinking style, power distance belief

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Marketing is an increasingly global phenomenon, and making wise marketing decisions requires an understanding of the cultural context of consumer behavior. As marketers can attest, promotional and branding efforts that work in one cultural context may fail in others. Fortunately, cross-cultural consumer research has much to contribute to understanding this domain (Lafevre, 2013).

Cross-cultural consumer psychology has been extensively researched for over 25 years. Significant knowledge has accumulated, and the breadth and depth of coverage have established cross-cultural consumer psychology as a mainstream topic of research. The role of culture in numerous domains including consumer cognition, motivation, information processing, and self-regulation is well established. As we will describe, cultural factors influence how consumers respond to ads, brands, products, prices, retail environments, service providers, and charities, among other things.

## 2 | OVERVIEW AND SCOPE

Given the volume of findings in this burgeoning literature, in this article, we focus attention on key developments in the last decade of research, synthesizing the contributions of work published from 2008 to 2018. Although we emphasize recent work, along the way we make note of foundational early findings to provide perspective on current research. Our coverage addresses the role of culture in consumption relevant phenomena, whether the findings were published in marketing journals or in other outlets.

## 3 | CONCEPTUALIZING AND CLASSIFYING CULTURES

Hofstede (1984) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or society from those of another” (p. 82). Triandis (2012) further specifies culture as “a shared meaning system found among those who speak a



particular language dialect, during a specific historical period, and in a definable geographical region" (p. 35). Together, these definitions highlight that shared standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting are key in defining culture and can reflect a variety of cultural classifications. The cultural classifications we focus on in this review relate to the distinct ways in which cultures view themselves, organizations, and objects. There are other cultural dimensions that relate to how people view more abstract concepts such as uncertainty or masculinity (Hofstede, 1980), but due to space constraints, we focus in this review on those dimensions that have generated the most research relevant to consumer psychology.

### 3.1 | Key cultural dimensions

The constructs of *individualism* and *collectivism* represent the most commonly used cultural classifications in consumer research (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000). These categories distinguish cultural groups by differences in how people view themselves in relation to others. People in individualistic cultures view themselves as independent of others and tend to prioritize personal goals over in-group goals (Hofstede, 1980). That is, they tend to have an *independent self-construal*. In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures tend to have an *interdependent self-construal*, viewing themselves as socially embedded with others and generally prioritizing in-group goals over personal goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A key distinction between the two cultural categories involves the degree to which one defines the self as distinct from or interconnected with others. Differences based on individualism–collectivism have been observed across countries (e.g., North America and Western Europe tend to have individualistic forms of culture, whereas Asia and Latin America tend to have collectivistic forms). Differences are also observed within countries at the level of ethnic group differences or measured individual-level cultural orientations. Similar patterns emerge from the contextual priming of independent and interdependent self-construals.

People who view the self as distinct from (or connected to) others can also differ in whether they view others as equals or as being ordered along a hierarchy. Thus, individualism and collectivism can be further refined into the distinction between two kinds of orientations—horizontal (valuing equality) and vertical (emphasizing hierarchy and status)—to create four cultural quadrants. In vertical individualist cultures, people seek to distinguish themselves from

others to gain individual status or recognition for achievements (e.g., the United States or the United Kingdom). In horizontal individualist cultures, on the other hand, people are more likely to distinguish themselves to satisfy uniqueness concerns without a focus on hierarchy (e.g., Sweden). Vertical collectivist cultures prioritize interdependence by fulfilling the roles and adhering to the norms respective to the hierarchical positions one occupies in society, the family, and ingroups (e.g., India and China). However, horizontal collectivist cultures prioritize interdependence by focusing on sociability and benevolence, within a framework of assumed equality (e.g., Brazil and the Israeli kibbutz). Table 1 summarizes these four cultural orientations.

A related cultural dimension, power distance, reflects the degree to which hierarchy is accepted and expected at the cultural level (Hofstede, 1984; Oyserman, 2006). Power distance belief represents the individual-level acceptance of power disparities (Gao, Winterich, & Zhang, 2016). The horizontal–vertical distinction and power distance belief predict a variety of outcomes, including the cultural values that brands and advertisements reflect, as well as consumer decisions relevant to status and power.

The remainder of this review is organized as follows. We begin with an in-depth consideration of the cultural distinction between individualism and collectivism, reviewing implications in a number of domains including goals and self-regulation as well as judgment and choice processes. We then turn to a consideration of fundamental differences in thinking styles, examining how culture affects basic cognitive processes, and review a sampling of substantive implications for consumer responses to prices, brands, and retail contexts. Next, we consider cultural distinctions that address the emphasis on hierarchy and power, including horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism as well as power distance belief. We then turn to coverage of an emerging theme, the distinction between tight and loose cultures, which is likely to stimulate more research in the coming years. Finally, we conclude with some reflections on recent trends in the cross-cultural literature.

## 4 | INDIVIDUALISM–COLLECTIVISM

### 4.1 | Views of the self and the marketplace

As noted, people differ in the extent to which they view themselves as distinct from or connected to others. People from individualistic cultures or who have an independent self-construal tend to derive

**TABLE 1** Motivational profiles of horizontal and vertical individualists and collectivists

	Horizontal <i>self as equal to others</i>	Vertical <i>self in a hierarchy relative to others</i>
Individualism <i>self as independent of others</i>	Distinguish themselves from others to satisfy uniqueness concerns (e.g., Sweden and Norway)	Distinguish themselves from others to gain individual status or recognition for achievements (e.g., the United States and the United Kingdom)
Collectivism <i>self as interdependent with others</i>	Maintain sociable and benevolent relationships (e.g., Brazil and the Israeli kibbutz)	Fulfill obligations and adhere to the norms respective to one's hierarchical positions (e.g., India and China)

self-worth from the ability to pursue autonomy and self-reliance, establishing a distinct identity. In contrast, people from collectivistic cultures or who have an interdependent self-construal tend to derive self-worth from the ability to maintain social relationships and interpersonal harmony (Triandis, 1995).

These differences in self-related processes appear to extend to views about brand characteristics. Some brands are perceived as being stronger than others in terms of their market position and desirability. However, independent (American) and interdependent (Chinese) consumers differ in the ways they conceptualize the characteristics that contribute to a brand's strength (Li, Li, Chiu, & Peng, 2018). U.S. consumers see a brand as stronger to the extent that it is associated with personal brand characteristics, whereas Chinese consumers evaluate a brand as stronger to the extent that it is associated with relational brand characteristics. These cultural differences are more pronounced when there is a stronger perceived connection between the self and the brand. Thus, views about brands appear to be patterned by culture in similar ways as views about the self.

The same could be said for views about one's personal possessions. For independents, who tend to link their personal possessions more strongly to the self, the value placed on their own possessions is higher than for interdependents (Maddux et al., 2010). Specifically, the price that Westerners or independents would charge to part with their possessions is higher than the price they would pay to buy the same item, a discrepancy known as the *endowment effect* (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990). However, for Easterners or interdependents, this endowment effect is smaller (Maddux et al., 2010). As expected, this pattern seems to be driven by cultural differences in the strength of self-object associations. Thus, Westerners or independents, compared to Easterners or interdependents, prioritize the independent self and personalize brands in the marketplace as well as their own possessions. In contrast, Easterners or interdependents prioritize social relationships and view strong brands as supporting these relationships.

## 4.2 | Goals and self-regulation

### 4.2.1 | Culture affects the broad goals people pursue

In general, people with different cultural self-construals tend to pursue distinct goals. For instance, self-construal plays a role in whether people seek to attain a goal target or to maintain a current state. Independent consumers are motivated by attainment goals such as achieving a particular savings amount, but interdependent consumers are motivated by maintenance goals such as keeping a consistent bank balance. Further, having a salient independent (interdependent) self-construal increases motivation through the ability to provide more relevant reasons for attainment (maintenance) goal completion (Yang, Stamatogiannakis, & Chattopadhyay, 2015).

Salient self-construal also plays a role in the types of self-presentation goals that people tend to pursue (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009). Independents are more motivated to present themselves as

being capable and self-reliant, and thus tend to engage in *self-deceptive enhancement* by inflating their abilities (Paulhus, 1991). In contrast, interdependent people are more motivated to present themselves as being normatively appropriate and benevolent toward others, and thus, they tend to engage in *impression management* by denying normative transgressions (Paulhus, 1991). Moreover, people raised in collectivistic cultures are better able to engage in impression management automatically than are people raised in individualistic cultures (Riemer & Shavitt, 2011). Taken together, these findings suggest that cultural self-construal can influence the goals consumers pursue.

### 4.2.2 | Culture affects self-regulatory processes in specific contexts

Culturally shared self-views also have a variety of implications for the self-regulation processes consumers use to attain their goals. Self-regulation refers to the process of overriding one's impulsive responses to attain beneficial, healthful, and virtuous outcomes such as avoiding overspending and following a nutritious diet (Baumeister, 2002; Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Schmeichel, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2003). For independents, who expect to act autonomously to pursue their personal goals, self-regulatory behavior tends to be driven by internal desires to achieve or gain positive outcomes for the self; that is, their behavior is driven by a *promotion focus*. In contrast, for interdependents, who are motivated to maintain harmony with close others, self-regulation tends to be driven by interpersonal desires and by the goal of protecting the outcomes of close others; that is, their behavior is driven by a *prevention focus* (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Wang & Lee, 2006). This fundamental difference in self-construal explains cross-cultural variation in a number of self-regulation contexts.

#### Buying on impulse

One specific area in which self-construal affects self-regulation is impulse consumption. Past work has suggested that impulse consumption is a function of affect and self-regulatory resource availability (Vohs & Faber, 2007), and research suggests that interdependents tend to be stronger self-regulators than are independents (Kacen & Lee, 2002). People with a chronic independent self-construal tend to emphasize and pursue personal preferences and, therefore, are more likely to yield to impulsive desires, whereas people with a chronic interdependent self-construal practice restraining their personal goals, opinions, and desires to fit in with others and achieve group harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Indeed, as mentioned earlier, people with a chronic interdependent self-construal seem to restrain themselves and engage in impression management more automatically than chronic independents do, perhaps because of greater practice and experience (Riemer & Shavitt, 2011).

In line with these findings, actual beer consumption, a proxy for impulsivity (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991), is higher in countries (42 countries) and U.S. states where an independent self-construal is



more prevalent (Zhang & Shrum, 2009). Furthermore, the presence of others moderates the effect of self-construal on attitudes toward immediate beer consumption, activating different self-regulatory motives. The presence of others triggers greater impulsivity for independents, which is consistent with the notion that independents place more emphasis on choosing what makes them personally happy. In contrast, the presence of others reduces impulsivity for interdependents, which reflects interdependents' emphasis on choosing what is most appropriate for the context to maintain harmony (Zhang & Shrum, 2009).

### Responding to promotions

Although independents versus interdependents are more likely to drink beer, they are less likely to redeem coupons, and both of these outcomes pertain to self-construal and self-regulation. Recent research suggests that the association between interdependence and successful self-regulation confers a relative advantage to persist through the steps required to redeem coupons (Lalwani & Wang, 2018). For example, to redeem a coupon, a consumer must successfully resist purchasing until they have a coupon. In support, Asian (vs. Caucasian) Americans, Indians (vs. Americans), and people primed with an interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal were more likely to use coupons because they were generally more persistent at tasks. For instance, they completed more anagram puzzles (Lalwani & Wang, 2018).

Cultural differences in self-regulation can also influence how consumers respond to promotional efforts that surprise customers with token gifts (Valenzuela, Mellers, & Strebels, 2010). For consumers from an independent culture (e.g., Caucasian Americans), receiving an unexpected (vs. expected) gift elicits greater surprise and pleasure because they feel greater freedom to respond without regard for maintaining harmony with others. In contrast, for consumers from an interdependent culture (e.g., East Asians), receiving an unexpected (vs. expected) gift only elicits greater surprise and pleasure when it is attributed to good luck. Unexpected (vs. expected) gifts attributable to human-made (i.e., tangible, effort-based) forces do not elicit greater surprise or pleasure because of East Asians' motivation to maintain harmony with others through emotional control.

### Maintaining health

The focus on autonomy versus harmony also manifests in the self-regulation of health-related behavior. It is well known that experiencing a fit between one's regulatory focus and goal strategy can improve self-regulation (Hong & Lee, 2008). Moreover, when thinking about health challenges, recent work suggests that cultural self-construal influences which frames are most functional to adopt in increasing one's optimism about overcoming those challenges, as well as in increasing the likelihood of choosing options that can fuel recovery (Briley, Rudd, & Aaker, 2018). In cultures or contexts where the independent self is highly accessible (e.g., the United States), individuals adopting an initiator frame (how will I act, regardless of the situations I encounter?) were more optimistic than those adopting a responder frame (how will I react to the situations I encounter?).

The converse occurred for cultures or contexts where the interdependent self is highly accessible (e.g., China). This effect on optimism was also manifested in intentions to undertake a physically strenuous vacation, stick to a recommended diet, get vaccinated, and other health-relevant consumer decisions (Briley et al., 2018).

A similar pattern is observed when consumers think about maintaining a healthy diet (Levine et al., 2016). In the United States, healthy eating depends on having a salient independent self-construal, and perceived autonomy mediates the relationship between independent self-construal and healthy eating. On the other hand, healthy eating in Japan depends on having a salient interdependent self-construal, and perceived positive relations with others mediate the relationship between interdependent self-construal and healthy eating. Taken together, these studies demonstrate how cultural differences in self-construal lead to distinct ways in which people regulate their behavior.

## 4.3 | Judgment and choice

Consumers often make judgments and choices in ways that are consistent with salient cultural values. This insight has implications for both broad and specific differences in consumer choice.

### 4.3.1 | Culture predicts broad differences in the processes driving judgment and choice

Cultural differences in choice can be attributed to consumers' reliance on different inputs in their decision making. Consumers with a salient independent self-construal tend to think decisions are a personal matter, and more likely to view their feelings and personal preferences as legitimate inputs to their autonomous decisions, whereas those with a salient interdependent self-construal are more likely to be concerned about fitting in with others' views and normative expectations (Riemer, Shavitt, Koo, & Markus, 2014).

The core insight is that independents may feel more comfortable, or justified, in making decisions based on their own subjective affective reactions. In contrast, interdependents feel the need to take others into account when making decisions. Hong and Chang (2015) reasoned that, as a result, interdependents will rely more on reasons to justify their choices, so that they can better account for the decisions that they make. For example, when participants were primed with an independent self-construal, they were more likely to choose an apartment with affectively (vs. cognitively) superior attributes (i.e., nice view, amount of sunlight, and interior décor). However, when an interdependent self-construal was primed, participants were more likely to choose the cognitively superior apartment (i.e., more square footage, access to public transportation, and larger closet; Hong & Chang, 2015).

### 4.3.2 | Culture predicts judgment and choice processes in specific contexts

#### Being prosocial

Self-construal guides how a consumer responds to prosocial requests. Intuitively, it may seem that, because interdependents

derive self-worth from their ability to maintain harmony, they should be more likely than independents to help others. However, recent research suggests that this is not the case (Duclos & Barasch, 2014). Instead, because interdependents define themselves contextually and relative to the people with whom they feel psychologically close, their generosity depends on whether those who need help are members of an important in-group. For example, participants primed with an interdependent self-construal believed that donating to an in-group (vs. out-group) would promote their personal happiness and subsequently indicated higher donation amounts. For interdependents, beliefs about happiness mediated the relationship between victim group status and donation amount. In contrast, because independents define themselves as separate from others, victim group status did not affect their beliefs about happiness or their donation amounts (Duclos & Barasch, 2014).

Self-construal also guides how contextual factors motivate donation behavior. Specifically, self-construal moderates the impact that public recognition has on charitable donation (Simpson, White, & Laran, 2017). As we have described, independents define themselves as separate and autonomous from others, and viewing oneself as separate from others engenders a desire to appear uninfluenced by them. Thus, organizations that publicly recognize donors may make donors with an independent self-construal worry that their donation could appear to have been influenced by the promise of recognition, not by their own personal motives. Indeed, consumers primed with an independent self-construal indicated higher levels of threat to their personal agency and actually donated less when they learned that their donation would be shared on a charitable campaign website (vs. kept anonymous and confidential). In contrast, consumers primed with an interdependent self-construal tended to donate more in public versus private settings (Simpson et al., 2017).

### Judging prices

Self-construal also impacts consumer judgment of different pricing strategies. One common practice in firms is to increase prices when firms' costs rise, but maintain prices when their costs decrease (Kahneman et al., 1990). This *asymmetric pricing* strategy can increase profits for the firm, but customers' responses to it may depend on self-construal. Independents might perceive asymmetric pricing to be fair because exchange norms are more likely to govern the relationship between firms and consumers. In contrast, interdependents may not share that perception because communal norms that mandate benevolence are more likely to govern the firm-consumer relationship (Aggarwal, 2004).

In support of this reasoning, a multicountry meta-analysis of academic articles about asymmetric pricing suggests that the prevalence of asymmetric pricing is positively correlated with countries' level of individualism (Chen, Bolton, Ng, Lee, & Wang, 2018). Further, consumers primed with interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal only judged asymmetric pricing as more fair when the firm was framed as benevolent (e.g., donating extra money to needy families in the neighborhood). In contrast, interdependents

(vs. independents) judged asymmetric pricing as less fair when the firm was framed as customer-interested (e.g., using the extra money from the price increase to provide better services) because concern for customers is a routine part of a firm's business operation (Chen et al., 2018).

### Judging new products

New products can be distinguished into really new products that create a new product category or subcategory (Moreau, Markman, & Lehmann, 2001) or incrementally new products that refine established products used by the majority (Min, Kalwani, & Robinson, 2006). Given that independents define themselves as separate from others, they are likely to prefer new products that are also separate from others, such as really new products. In contrast, because interdependents define themselves contextually and relationally, they are likely to prefer new products that are more related to previous products (Ma, Yang, & Murali, 2014). In one study that primed self-construal with different ad appeals, those in the independent condition tended to report that owning a really new pen (i.e., revolutionary ergonomic design) would make them "desirably different" and tended to choose the pen over \$2 cash. In contrast, those in the interdependent condition tended to report that owning an incrementally new pen (i.e., improved Precise Needle Point technology) would make them optimally distinct and tended to choose the pen over money (Ma et al., 2014).

### Responding to threats and regrets

Sometimes bad things happen that are out of a consumer's control. For instance, in general, receiving negative information regarding a social group (e.g., men) can harm judgments of products linked to that group identity (e.g., Old Spice body wash; White & Argo, 2009). However, cross-cultural research suggests that the opposite may hold for collectivists, who define themselves in terms of their group memberships. They may be motivated to restore a sense of belonging to a threatened social identity by responding more positively to products linked to the threatened group identity (White, Argo, & Sengupta, 2012). Indeed, Canadian undergraduates avoided university-branded products when they learned that their university performed worse than comparable universities. In contrast, Hong Kong undergraduates preferred university-branded products after receiving the same social identity threat (White et al., 2012).

In other domains, negative events can occur that are within consumers' control, leading to regret and changes in brand choice. For instance, making a poor service choice (e.g., selecting an inferior cell phone service) might spur the intention to switch providers. Cultural differences in self-construal help to clarify the conditions that elicit greater regret and lead to brand switching (Ng, Kim, & Rao, 2014). Independents, who focus on personal autonomy, feel more regret when they do not enact enough individual agency. In contrast, interdependents, who focus on group harmony, feel more regret when their group does not enact enough collective agency. For example, when primed with an independent self-construal, participants were more likely to switch financial consultants when their group (vs. they



personally) changed their investment portfolio for the worse. When primed with an interdependent self-construal, participants were more likely to switch consultants when they personally (vs. their group) changed their investment portfolio for the worse (Ng et al., 2014).

### Interacting in digital marketplaces

Understanding cultural differences in self-construal can also yield multiple insights regarding how consumers interact in digital spaces. As we have described, interdependents emphasize being in harmony with others, and digital platform designs can differ in the degree to which they help consumers to build trusting relations and achieve harmony with others. For example, e-commerce platforms such as eBay succeed because they facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers. However, eBay withdrew from the Chinese market within two years of entering it because its domestic competitor, Taobao, was better equipped to facilitate buyer–seller interactions through instant messaging. This unique feature of Taobao’s platform both reflected and appealed to Chinese consumers’ desire for interpersonal connections as a way to build trust (Lafevre, 2013).

Consistent with the eBay case, prior research suggests that corporate websites in Japan and Korea are more likely to emphasize consumer-to-consumer interactivity than are websites in the United States and the United Kingdom (Cho & Cheon, 2005). Eastern Asian websites incorporate more functions that stress interactions between consumers such as online communities and user groups. In contrast, Western websites incorporate more functions that stress interactions between the consumer and corporate representatives.

The effects of cultural self-construal are also reflected in digital platform behavior such as word of mouth. The greater emphasis on conformity in interdependent cultures (e.g., China) and the greater emphasis on self-expression in independent cultures (e.g., the United States; Kim & Sherman, 2007) can be observed in systematic differences in word of mouth content. In China, user-generated content is more likely to seek information and advice from peers about their preferences, which is consistent with the desire to gauge norms and fit in harmoniously. In contrast, in the United States, user-generated content is more likely to provide information to others (Fong & Burton, 2008). Likewise, Amazon customer reviews in the United States (vs. China) are more likely to express one’s personal opinions and offer recommendations to others (Lai, He, Chou, & Zhou, 2013), which is consistent with the greater value placed on self-expression in independent cultures.

Cultural differences also emerge in the persuasiveness of word of mouth. The research described earlier suggests that independents are more likely to provide peer endorsements, but which group is more likely to rely on them? An examination of e-commerce platform behavior suggests that interdependents are more sensitive to peer endorsements. Accordingly, students in Hong Kong (vs. Australia) who were shopping on a university bookstore website were more trusting and purchased more when they were shown (vs. not shown) short endorsements from students at their university (Sia et al., 2009).

## 5 | HOLISTIC-ANALYTIC THINKING STYLES

Just as individuals can view themselves as distinct from or connected to others, people in different cultures also adopt fundamentally different ways of viewing objects in their environment—seeing them either as separate from or as interconnected with other objects in the field. In other words, people raised in individualistic and collectivistic contexts tend to adopt distinct *thinking styles* (Nisbett, 2003; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001).

### 5.1 | Culture affects basic cognitive processes

Research on thinking styles has highlighted the ways that basic cognitive processes vary by culture, with a range of implications for consumer psychology. Whereas the constructs of individualism and collectivism primarily deal with self-definitions, motivations, and values, the distinction between *analytic* and *holistic* thinking styles describes differences in the way people perceive, categorize, and reason about their world. Individualistic cultural contexts give rise to an analytic thinking style (Nisbett et al., 2001), which involves perceiving objects as independent of others and categorizing them based on formal features. Analytic thinkers separate and distinguish objects from other objects or their contexts (Oyserman & Lee, 2007). They tend to use decision rules that separate attributes or arguments in an either-or fashion, identifying attributes as important or unimportant, or identifying information as either correct or incorrect (Aaker & Sengupta, 2000). In contrast, collectivistic cultural contexts give rise to a holistic thinking style, which emphasizes the interrelations between elements in the environment (Nisbett et al., 2001). Holistic thinkers integrate and connect objects with their contexts (Oyserman & Lee, 2007). They also tend to use compromise decision processes that construe multiple attributes as being important or multiple propositions as being true at the same time. These fundamental differences in ways of perceiving, categorizing, and reasoning offer a range of insights for understanding the role of culture in consumer psychology, and we cover a sampling of these in this section.

#### 5.1.1 | Effect of thinking styles in specific contexts

##### Judging prices

One implication of cultural differences in thinking styles involves the perceived connections between fundamental product attributes, such as price and quality (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2013). For example, consumers in India (holistic thinkers) are more likely than those in the United States to believe that “you get what you pay for.” Additionally, people with ethnic backgrounds that emphasize holistic thinking (Asian Americans or Hispanic Americans) are more likely than analytic thinkers (European Americans) to spontaneously use the price of a product to evaluate its quality. These differences are driven by holistic thinking. For instance, when Lalwani and Shavitt (2013) primed the tendency to think

holistically, consumers regardless of ethnicity used a product's price to judge its quality. However, when they primed the tendency to think analytically, price did not significantly influence quality judgments.

Research also suggests that the impact of reference prices is influenced by thinking style (Chen, 2009). Reference prices may derive from an internal or an external standard of comparison. An external standard of comparison refers to the marketplace context (e.g., prices of competing brands on the market). An internal standard of comparison refers to inherent characteristics of the product (e.g., its workmanship). For consumers with a salient independent self-construal, price evaluations are more influenced by internal than external reference prices. The reverse is the case for consumers with a salient interdependent self-construal. This finding is interpreted in line with the tendency for analytic thinkers to attribute the reasons for events to internal dispositions, whereas holistic thinkers tend to attribute causality to contextual factors (Chen, 2009).

The distinction between holistic and analytic thinking styles has implications for the way people perceive the stability of objects and trends. Holistic thinkers focus on interrelations between objects. Because contexts and background can change, the perceived properties of objects can change as they move between contexts. Thus, holistic thinkers are less likely than analytic thinkers to expect stability of objects and more likely to expect fluctuations in trends (Nisbett, 2003). This difference leads to fundamental cultural differences in how people evaluate attitude objects and forecast future trends (Riemer et al., 2014). For instance, analytic thinkers tend to expect linear trends wherein past changes should predict future changes. Thus, analytic thinkers (Canadians) are more likely than holistic thinkers (Chinese) to expect that if a stock price has gone up, it will continue to go up and are thus more likely to buy stocks in this situation (Ji, Zhang, & Guo, 2008). In contrast, holistic thinkers expect fluctuations and are thus more willing than analytic thinkers to buy stocks after a decreasing trend in the stock value.

### Responding to retail cues

Because holistic thinkers integrate and see connections among elements in their environment, they are less likely than analytic thinkers to expect objects to be stable across contexts. Instead, their perception of an object is likely to be infused with its context (Riemer et al., 2014). In contrast, analytic thinkers are more likely to view an object and its context to be separate and distinct. Thus, there is a fundamental difference in how attitude objects are likely to be construed as a function of thinking style.

Zhu and Meyers-Levy (2009) investigated the implication of this insight for how display conditions affect product judgments. For participants primed with an interdependent self-construal, who were presumably thinking holistically, a mug placed on a marble table was seen as more modern than when it was placed on a wooden table. That is, properties of the context were infused into the representation of the object. However, those primed with an independent self-construal, who were presumably thinking analytically, contrasted the mug with its display context, evaluating a mug as more trendy

when displayed on a wooden table, but more natural when displayed on a glass table (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2009).

For those in cultural contexts that stimulate holistic thinking, the reputation of the retailer who sells a product can also influence the way a product is evaluated. Specifically, Lee and Shavitt (2006) showed that when participants were primed with an interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal, a retail store's reputation could shape inferences about a product's quality. Specifically, interdependent participants evaluated the same GE microwave more favorably when it was presented as being sold at the high-end retailer Marshall-Fields than when it was described as being sold at Kmart (Lee & Shavitt, 2006). Similarly, evidence suggests that the impact of shelf-placement on product judgments is greater for those with an interdependent versus independent self-construal (Jain, Desai, & Mao, 2007).

### Responding to brand extensions

The ability of holistic thinkers to integrate and see connections among elements in the environment can have a number of favorable effects on brand evaluations. For instance, it can make consumers more likely to see connections between their existing brand attitudes and new brand extensions. Brand extensions comprise a substantial component of branding. Conventional wisdom says that the fit between the parent brand (e.g., toothpaste) and the extension category (e.g., dental floss) is the primary driver of brand extension success (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991). Consumers may reject an extension that does not seem to fit well with its parent brand, even when the parent brand's equity (e.g., Coca-Cola) is strong and positive. For instance, would Coca-Cola popcorn be a successful brand extension?

The answer to this question depends in part on culture, as parent-extension fit perceptions differ as a function of thinking style. Because analytic thinkers categorize items based on abstracting shared features and formulating decision rules (Ji, Zhang, & Nisbett, 2004), they are likely to implicitly assume that Coca-Cola snacks will share a key feature with the parent brand—their flavor. Thus, extending Coke into the salty snack category may seem distasteful. However, holistic thinkers categorize objects based on relationships to other objects or to the context (Ji et al., 2004). As a result, they may be more likely to think about shared symbolic characteristics (Coke and popcorn symbolize America) or usage occasions (Coke and popcorn are enjoyed together at the movies, Monga & John, 2009) when evaluating the extension.

Thus, when consumers from India and the United States were asked to evaluate a variety of fictional brand extensions that were perceived to have low fit with their parent brand (e.g., Kodak filing cabinets), holistic thinkers perceived a higher fit between the parent and extension brands than analytic thinkers did and thus were more accepting of those brand extensions (Monga & John, 2007). For instance, holistic thinkers reasoned "I can keep my Kodak pictures in my Kodak filing cabinet." Similar findings were obtained when holistic versus analytic thinking was situationally primed—holistic thinkers became more favorable toward the brand extensions.



Related research shows a similar pattern as a function of salient independent and interdependent self-construal (Ahluwalia, 2008), and gives insight as to why these broad cultural differences can emerge: Consumers with a salient interdependent self-construal are better equipped to identify relationships between the parent brand and its extensions. This *relational processing advantage* leads to enhanced extension evaluations and behavioral intentions among interdependents but not independents (Ahluwalia, 2008).

More complex interactions can emerge when other variables are considered, such as psychological distance and regulatory focus (Kim & Park, 2018) or product type (Monga & John, 2010). For instance, the effects of thinking style just described emerge for brands in utilitarian or functional product categories, but they do not extend to brands in prestige categories (Monga & John, 2010). For prestige brands (e.g., Vera Wang), consumers already tend to have a relatively symbolic and abstract brand concept. Such brand concepts facilitate finding connections between a parent brand and its extensions, even for analytic thinkers. Thus, it is relatively easy to perceive a strong relationship when extending a prestige brand into a distant product category (e.g., Vera Wang bedding). Such parent–extension pairs (e.g., wedding gowns and bed linens) can feel symbolically coherent for both analytic and holistic thinkers, even though they represent distinct product categories.

Finally, cultural fit is also an important component of brand extension success. As brands become larger and more global, they become symbolic icons of their culture of origin (Torelli, Keh, & Chiu, 2009). Indeed, as cultural symbols, brands often benefit from country-of-origin effects (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). Yet, a brand's status as a cultural symbol can also constrain its ability to extend into certain product categories, making brand extensions into product categories associated with different cultural schemas feel disfluent. For example, Coors and Budweiser are both American brands, but Budweiser is a stronger symbol of American culture. If both brands were to launch a tequila extension, the culturally symbolic brand (i.e., Budweiser) would likely perform worse than the nonculturally symbolic brand (Coors) because of the mismatch with its cultural schema (Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012).

### Responding to negative information

Beyond parent–extension fit perceptions, another positive effect of holistic thinking on brand evaluations is in insulating the brand from negative publicity. When exposed to bad press about a brand, holistic and analytic thinkers tend to have distinct views of causality. Holistic thinkers are more likely than analytic thinkers to attribute the causes of events to situational factors as opposed to internal characteristics (Nisbett et al., 2001). Thus, when consumers were exposed to negative information about a new Mercedes-Benz car model failing to meet production targets, priming a holistic thinking style increased the breadth of reasons considered for the negative information, increasing the degree to which that information was attributed to external factors, and leading to no change in brand evaluations (Monga & John, 2008). In contrast, priming an analytic thinking style increased attribution

of the negative information to the brand itself, resulting in less favorable brand evaluations. Underscoring the attributional processes linked to thinking styles, analytic thinkers could be equally forgiving as holistic thinkers if they were provided with contextual explanations for negative information. Holistic thinkers could be equally critical as analytic thinkers when they were under cognitive load and unable to generate contextual explanations (Monga & John, 2008).

This is not to say that holistic thinking always buffers the impact of negative information on brand evaluation. In the domain of brand extensions, the situation appears more complex. Consider the situation when a brand extension of a popular parent brand fails to catch on. Consumers have to consider whether the fate of the failed extension dilutes their positive image of the parent brand, a scenario in which they need to reconcile inconsistent information. In this scenario, the typicality of the extension and the level of consumer motivation to process information about it jointly determine whether holistic thinking protects a brand from bad press. When consumers are highly motivated (vs. not) to process information about a typical extension that fails, such as a failed Sony personal digital assistant launched in their local region (vs. a distant region), holistic thinkers give closer scrutiny to the negative information, resulting in lower evaluations of the parent brand's characteristics. In contrast, when holistic thinkers process an atypical extension, such as a Nokia video phone, high (vs. low) motivation helps holistic thinkers realize that the extension failure is not diagnostic of the parent brand, resulting in more favorable evaluations of the parent brand (Ng, 2010).

## 6 | HIERARCHY AND POWER

### 6.1 | Horizontal–vertical cultural differences

Individualism–collectivism broadly categorizes individuals into those who view themselves as distinct from others or as interconnected with others. However, cross-cultural theorists have further refined the broad individualism–collectivism constructs to identify distinctions in the importance of hierarchy and power in organizing one's view of "others" (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Individuals with a vertical orientation emphasize status enhancement and hierarchy, whereas individuals with a horizontal orientation focus on interpersonal support and common goals in a framework that emphasizes equality. When the horizontal–vertical distinction is applied to individualism–collectivism, four distinct cultural orientations emerge: vertical individualism, horizontal individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism. These can be studied on an individual level by measuring cultural orientation (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), as well as studied based on classifications of countries (Triandis, 1995). Research has built on this horizontal and vertical distinction to test more nuanced predictions than those afforded by the broader individualism–collectivism classification (Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006). These studies identify a number novel implications for consumer behavior (Lalwani, Shavitt,



& Johnson, 2006; Shavitt, Johnson, & Zhang, 2011; Torelli & Shavitt, 2010, 2011; Torelli et al., 2015).

### 6.1.1 | Ads and brands reflect horizontal-vertical values

It is well established that advertising content reflects the cultural values of its society (Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993; Choi & Miracle, 2004; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kim & Markus, 1999). Accordingly, Shavitt et al. (2011) showed that vertical and horizontal cultural values are also represented in advertising content, in ways that are distinct from patterns associated with individualism–collectivism. Analyzing over 1,200 magazine ads in five countries (Denmark, South Korea, Poland, Russia, and the United States) revealed that ads put more emphasis on status, luxury, and prestige in countries such as the United States and South Korea (which differ in individualism–collectivism but which are classified as vertical cultures; Triandis, 1995) than they do in a horizontal culture (Denmark; Shavitt et al., 2011). For example, in vertical cultures, ads are more likely to highlight prestige by featuring endorsers that are identified as Ivy League graduates and by labeling brands as “award-winning.” In contrast, personal uniqueness benefits, highlighting how a product can reflect “your personality” or distinctness from others, are more prevalent in ads in a horizontal individualist culture (Denmark) than in countries that fall into more vertical cultural categories. These patterns would not be predicted by an analysis based solely on an individualism–collectivism classification.

Evaluations of brands themselves similarly reflect consumers’ horizontal and vertical cultural values (Torelli, Özsoy, Carvalho, Keh, & Maehle, 2012). Within collectivism, consumers with a horizontal collectivistic cultural orientation showed greater liking toward brands that convey self-transcendence values in advertisements (e.g., “Supporting humanitarian programs in developing countries because we care about building a better world”). However, vertical collectivistic consumers showed greater liking toward brands that convey conservatism values (e.g., “The status quo in luxury watches. A tradition of classic designs and impeccable workmanship for 115 years”). Within individualism, having a vertical individualistic cultural orientation is associated with liking a brand that conveys self-enhancement (e.g., “An exceptional piece of adornment that conveys your status and signifies your exquisite taste”). In contrast, having a horizontal individualistic cultural orientation predicts liking a brand that conveys openness (e.g., “A travel companion to help you live an exciting life full of adventures waiting around every corner”; Torelli et al., 2012).

### 6.1.2 | Power concepts differ across horizontal-vertical cultures

Horizontal and vertical cultures emphasize different values, and they can also have different conceptualizations of the same values. Consider the concept of power. For some, it is valued for the status it affords. For others, it is a means to help other people. Torelli

and Shavitt (2010) found that horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism influence which power concept one holds. Having a mostly vertical individualistic cultural orientation predicts a personalized power concept wherein power is seen as a tool to advance one’s personal status. In contrast, having a relatively horizontal collectivistic orientation predicts a socialized power concept wherein power is seen as a tool to benefit and help others. One consumer implication is that people may gravitate to brands that symbolize their culturally patterned power conceptualizations. In line with Torelli et al. (2012), Torelli and Shavitt (2010, Study 3) found that, at the individual level, a vertical individualistic cultural orientation predicts the liking of brands that symbolize personalized power values, whereas a horizontal collectivistic orientation predicts liking for brands that embody socialized power values. These patterns also emerge across cultural groups. For example, Brazilians, who score relatively high on measured horizontal collectivism (compared to European Americans, Canadians, and East Asians), tend to prefer brands that symbolize prosocial values more than do the other cultural groups. In contrast, Norwegians, who score relatively low in measured vertical individualism, like brands that symbolize personalized power values less than do all the other groups.

Culturally patterned differences in power conceptualizations also generate culturally patterned differences in power norms. Injunctive norms often emerge within cultures to mitigate the misuse of power, and these norms appear to differ as a function of horizontal versus vertical orientation. People high in vertical individualism, who conceptualize power in personalized terms, are more likely to endorse the misuse of power (e.g., “Sometimes it’s okay to take credit for one’s staff members’ ideas, because later they’ll do the same thing”; Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). By extension, European Americans (i.e., people high in vertical individualism) are likely to cultivate the injunctive norm to exercise power with justice and equity. In contrast, U.S. Hispanics (who tend to be higher in horizontal collectivism; Torelli & Shavitt, 2010), who tend to conceptualize power in socialized terms, are likely to cultivate norms among power holders for attending to others’ well-being.

These culturally contingent power norms can influence consumer judgments in a variety of business and service settings. For example, when power was made salient (vs. baseline), actual customer satisfaction with a physician was more dependent on the patient’s perceptions that the doctor treated them justly (e.g., appropriate resource allocation) for European Americans. In contrast, when power was made salient (vs. baseline) for Hispanics, patient–physician satisfaction was more dependent on perceptions that the doctor treated them with compassion (e.g., emotional reassurance; Torelli et al., 2015).

## 6.2 | Power distance belief

Power distance reflects the degree to which differences in power are accepted and expected (Hofstede, 1984, 2001; Oyserman, 2006). This dimension is conceptualized and studied at the country or cultural group level. Power distance belief represents the



individual-level acceptance of power disparities (Gao et al., 2016). Despite the similarities between power distance and the horizontal-vertical distinction, there are differences (Shavitt, Lalwani, et al., 2006; Shavitt, Zhang, Torelli, & Lalwani, 2006). Both power distance and power distance belief vary along a single dimension (high to low), whereas the horizontal-vertical distinction reflects distinct categories of individualism and collectivism and allows for distinct concepts of power across these categories.

### 6.2.1 | Accepting inequality predicts broad differences in judgment and choice

As noted, people with high power distance belief are more likely to expect and accept power disparities. These individuals may therefore be more comfortable with, and even desire, structure in their daily lives regardless of the presence of actual power disparities. They may also be more accustomed to restraining their behavior in order to behave suitably with those higher or lower in power hierarchies (Zhang, Winterich, & Mittal, 2010). Thus, recent research has pointed to multiple implications of power distance belief for consumer judgment processes and for the choices one makes.

#### Responding to endorsers

For example, a student with high versus low power distance belief may be more likely to yield to authority and accept the norm that students should show restraint by not speaking out to teachers. By extension, consumers with high versus low power distance belief tend to be more persuaded by celebrity endorsers, who may represent trustworthy and powerful sources (Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2018). In one study (Study 3, Winterich et al., 2018), participants from 65 countries recalled an advertisement featuring a celebrity endorser and completed an individual-level measure of power distance belief (Yoo, Donthu, & Lenartowicz, 2011). Consumers with high (vs. low) power distance belief reported more favorable ad and brand evaluations because they were more trusting of celebrity endorsers.

#### Judging prices

If accepting power disparity increases the influence of heuristic cues (e.g., celebrity endorsements) on judgments, could it also predict whether consumers judge quality from price cues? As described earlier, consumers often use price to infer product quality, but power distance belief affects the strength of these price-quality judgments (Lalwani & Forcum, 2016). When forming product judgments, one consequence of the need for structure that characterizes people who are high in power distance belief is the tendency to categorize products by price and ascribe higher quality to the high-priced products and lower quality to the low-priced products. Lalwani and Forcum (2016; Study 2) measured the tendency to make price-quality judgments, need for structure, and power distance belief at the individual-level among American and Indian participants. As expected, serial mediation revealed that nationality affected price-quality judgments through power distance belief and need for

structure. Indians (vs. Americans) had higher power distance belief and a higher need for structure, and both of these explained their stronger price-quality judgments.

#### Buying on impulse

Imagine a consumer at a grocery checkout register. Could the consumer's level of power distance belief predict their likelihood to buy an indulgent snack on impulse? Research suggests that people who expect and accept power disparities are less likely to buy on impulse because they are more familiar with self-restraint (Zhang et al., 2010). In one demonstration, participants were randomly assigned to conditions that primed power distance belief with a sentence completion task and were presented vice (e.g., Snickers bar) and virtue (e.g., granola bar) snack items to buy. Those who completed sentences about social hierarchy (high power distance belief condition) bought fewer vice items and spent less on virtue items than those who completed sentences about equality (low power distance belief condition; Zhang et al., 2010). However, the effects were attenuated for virtue items because healthful consumption is less likely than indulgent consumption to activate self-control associations (Vohs & Faber, 2007).

#### Being prosocial

High power distance belief also has implications for prosocial behavior (Winterich & Zhang, 2014). As we have described, individuals with high power distance belief are more likely to accept inequality and desire structure. The implication for prosocial behavior is that people with high power distance belief are also more prone to infer that charity recipients occupy their appropriate social position. Therefore, exposure to those in need may not invoke a sense of responsibility to help, thus lowering prosocial behavior. For example, consumers who were primed with high (vs. low) power distance belief donated less of their reward to UNICEF because they perceived less responsibility to help those in need (Study 3b, Winterich & Zhang, 2014). More complex patterns of charitable giving emerge when one considers how power distance belief interacts with one's own sense of power (Han, Lalwani, & Duhachek, 2017).

## 7 | NEW DIRECTIONS

Although the last decade has seen an impressive accumulation of knowledge about the role of culture in consumer psychology, a relatively new cultural distinction is likely to attract greater research attention in the coming years.

### 7.1 | Normative tightness-looseness

The development of the cultural dimension of *tightness-looseness* by Michelle Gelfand and her colleagues (Gelfand et al., 2011; Gelfand, 2018; Harrington & Gelfand, 2014; Mu, Kitayama, Han, & Gelfand, 2015; see Pelto, 1968; and Triandis, 1989 for early formulations of this dimension) represents an especially promising new research

direction. In loose cultures or contexts, norms are weak and are not strictly enforced. People in such cultures (e.g., Hungary, Brazil, New Zealand, the United States, and Israel) have some leeway to behave as they please. However, in tight cultures (e.g., Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, and China), there are strong norms and adherence to them is expected and strictly enforced. In these cultures or contexts, norms are clear and there are multiple societal institutions for tracking and punishing norm violations.

Importantly, this dimension is distinct from individualism–collectivism and other cultural dimensions (Gelfand et al., 2011). Thus, cultures can be individualistic and tight (e.g., Germany), individualistic and loose (e.g., the United States), collectivistic and tight (e.g., Japan), or collectivistic and loose (e.g., Brazil).

Differences in normative processes in cultures characterized by tightness–looseness are reinforced by processes that are observable at the individual, contextual, and societal levels. For instance, societies and contexts that differ in tightness–looseness manifest individual differences in conscientiousness versus openness to change (Gelfand et al., 2011; Harrington & Gelfand, 2014), differ in their

promotion–prevention focus in self-regulation and also in impulse control (Gelfand et al., 2011), and even differ in neural responses to norm violations (Mu et al., 2015). Tight–loose patterns are also clearly manifested in societal differences in political, judicial, and media institutions that enforce moral order (e.g., number of police per capita and marijuana legislation), reflect responses to diversity (e.g., total foreign population or number of minority-owned businesses per capita), and foster creativity (e.g., number of patents or artists per capita; Gelfand et al., 2011; Harrington & Gelfand, 2014).

The theory of tightness–looseness in modern societies (Gelfand et al., 2011) is grounded in an eco-cultural tradition that emphasizes the antecedents of tightness–looseness as an adaptive response to ecological and historical threats, such as disease prevalence, population density, or crop dependency. As noted, nations differ in TL (Gelfand et al., 2011; Mu et al., 2015), as do the 50 United States (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014), in ways that reflect their unique histories. Thus, the southern United States is the tightest region, and the western and northeastern United States are the loosest. Organizational cultures also vary in tightness–looseness (Aktas,

**TABLE 2** Sampling of insights from cross-cultural consumer psychology

Cultural dimension	Theoretical insight	Sample finding
Individualism–collectivism Independent–interdependent self-construal	Individualists/independents tend to think analytically (separate and distinguish). Collectivists/interdependents tend to think holistically (integrate and connect)	Analytic thinkers see an object and its background as separate and distinct. Holistic thinkers infuse an object with properties of its context. In a retail display setting, people primed with independent self-construal contrast a product from its surroundings. People primed with interdependent self-construal infuse contextual information (i.e., the modernity of the product display) into their representation of the product (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2009)
	Individualists (vs. collectivists) desire to appear uninfluenced by others	Public recognition for behavior can have distinct effects across cultures. Independents (interdependents) donate less (more) when their gift is made public (vs. kept private; Simpson et al., 2017)
	Collectivists (vs. individualists) are stronger self-regulators	Collectivists have a relative advantage to persist through the steps to redeem coupons (Lalwani & Wang, 2018)
Horizontal–vertical distinction	Vertical individualists conceptualize power in personal terms: Power is a tool for advancing personal status. Horizontal collectivists conceptualize power in socialized terms: Power is a tool for benefiting others	People are attracted to the brands that embody their culturally patterned power beliefs (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). Vertical individualists (horizontal collectivists) cultivate justice and equity norms (compassion norms) to mitigate the misuse of power. When power is made salient (vs. not), these norms have greater impact in judging satisfaction with powerful service providers (Torelli et al., 2015)
Power distance belief	People with high (vs. low) power distance belief expect and accept differences in power and hierarchy	People high (vs. low) in power distance belief perceive less responsibility to help those in need and are less likely to donate to charity (Winterich & Zhang, 2014) People high (vs. low) in power distance belief are more trusting of and persuaded by celebrity endorsers (Winterich et al., 2018)



Gelfand, & Hanges, 2016), with some organizations enforcing tighter norms and sanctioning violations more readily.

These findings, and the theory of tightness–looseness that they support, offer a rich set of insights into consumer behavior that are yet to be studied. How might tightness–looseness differences be reflected in consumer phenomena? Li, Gordon, and Gelfand (2017) propose that tightness–looseness may predict a variety of outcomes, ranging from levels of permissiveness and deviance in advertising themes, to self-regulation and impulsive spending, to brand loyalty. The normative elements of branding, such as highlighting social consensus, may be more crucial to the success of branding strategies in tighter cultures compared to looser cultures, whereas in looser cultures, nurturing personal emotional attachment to brands may be more important. Thus, the types of tactics that companies use to develop brand loyalty may vary, with more attention to word of mouth in tight cultures to invoke normative pressures, and more emphasis on customization and uniqueness in loose cultures. These interesting implications await future research.

## 8 | FINAL THOUGHTS

The burgeoning literature on cross-cultural consumer psychology has delivered significant insights into how cultural differences influence consumer phenomena. A sampling of these insights is provided in Table 2. Seminal early research emphasized broad differences between individualists and collectivists (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Han & Shavitt, 1994). However, the last decade or so of research has been marked by a number of shifts.

One recent and necessary development is the exploration of a more diverse set of culture classifications, expanding beyond the fundamental classifications of individualism and collectivism (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000). An important new direction is the focus on how hierarchy and power values pattern consumption. This research arena includes the horizontal–vertical refinement of individualism–collectivism (Shavitt, Lalwani et al., 2006; Singelis et al., 1995). Torelli and Shavitt (2010), for instance, showed that power has different meanings across horizontal–vertical forms of individualism–collectivism. Understanding these distinctions can help to predict cultural differences in brand evaluations and in the values reflected in advertisements. Relatedly, research has shown how individual differences in power distance belief—or the tendency to accept and expect inequality in society—can predict a range of outcomes including impulse consumption (Zhang et al., 2010) and charitable donations (Winterich & Zhang, 2014). The development of the tightness–looseness distinction promises further insights into culture and consumer behavior (Li et al., 2017).

Another shift is the greater attention to the mechanisms of cultural influence. Early research proved that culture was a meaningful lens through which to observe differences in consumer behavior. Recent research has gone beyond describing differences to explicating in detail the processes through which culture operated. For instance, Briley, Wyer, and Li (2014) detail the processes by which

cultural factors affect information processing. Lalwani and Shavitt (2013) explain how salient interdependent self-construal increases price–quality judgment through enhanced holistic thinking. And Hong and Chang (2015) address how salient self-construal affects the role of affective and metacognitive experiences in consumer choice.

At least two types of mediating processes have been examined in recent years: One reflects the positive consequences of a match between the consumer's culture and marketing stimuli (e.g., congruent power concepts leading to greater attraction to a brand [Torelli & Shavitt, 2010; Torelli et al., 2012] or congruent frames increasing the ease of imagining a positive outcome, Briley et al., 2018). The second type of process reflects a relative “advantage” that one cultural group or orientation generally has over the other (e.g., relational processing, Ahluwalia, 2008; or self-control, Lalwani & Wang, 2018; Zhang & Shrum, 2009; Zhang et al., 2010). Both types of research have yielded key insights about the mechanisms that drive consumer judgments and decisions across cultures.

Recent research has also seen advances in the types of data used to test hypotheses. Increasingly, the analysis of secondary datasets is enriching experimental research with findings that highlight real consumption patterns across cultural boundaries. For instance, Zhang and Shrum (2009) used beer consumption data in numerous countries and U.S. states to show that impulsive buying varied as a function of self-construal in each location. Lalwani and Wang (2018) used Nielsen panel data to show that consumers with more interdependent (vs. independent) ethnicities were likely to be more coupon prone. Winterich and Zhang (2014) used the World Giving Index to assess national differences in donations per capita. These and other examples enhance the value of cross-cultural research in offering conceptual as well as substantive insights about consumer behavior.

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**How to cite this article:** Shavitt S, Barnes A. J. Cross-cultural consumer psychology. *Consum Psychol Rev*. 2019;2:70-84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/arcp.1047>