



Attitude toward cultural diversity: A test of identity-related antecedents and purchasing consequences



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to investigate how consumers' national and global identities relate to a reluctance to purchase foreign products, in favor of domestic alternatives. The authors assume that consumers' universal-diverse orientation (UDO), a three-dimensional conceptualization of attitude toward cultural diversity, functions as a mediator variable in these relationships. The results show that reluctance to purchase foreign products, as mediated by the three UDO dimensions, increases with national identity but does not decrease with global identity. The three UDO dimensions account for this asymmetry and can effectively explain the underlying psychological processes. The theoretically predicted relationships hold across four global consumer segments, suggesting that UDO functions as a robust predictor of behavior.

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1. Introduction

Advancing globalization means that consumers, more than ever before, can choose between domestic and foreign products or consumption practices. For example, L'Occitane en Provence is an international brand of personal care products that emphasizes its closeness to the traditions of the French Provence region and the Mediterranean origin of its products. Most consumers outside of France thus should perceive the brand and its products as foreign. Some consumers resist buying foreign products though, which creates an important non-tariff barrier to international trade (Nijssen & Douglas, 2004). A reluctance to purchase foreign products stems from consumers' national and global cultural identities (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 2006; Arnett, 2002; Cleveland, Erdoğan, Arıkan, & Poyraz, 2011; Cleveland, Papadopoulos, & Laroche, 2011; Tu, Khare, & Zhang, 2012; Westjohn, Singh, & Magnusson, 2012; Zhang & Khare, 2009). However, the psychological processes that explain relationships between these identities and behavior remain poorly understood.

For the present study, the authors draw on a tripartite conceptualization of attitude toward cultural diversity and social identity theories (Swann, 1983; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to study these relationships. The

empirical study, with 669 consumers from 21 countries, measures attitude toward cultural diversity in terms of consumers' universal-diverse orientation (UDO) (Fuertes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 2000; Miville et al., 1999). Three UDO dimensions capture positive and negative attitudes toward cultural diversity, as well as an unprejudiced disposition to think deliberately about cultural similarities and differences. In addition to presuming an existing cultural identity (e.g., being irritated by people from different cultures), UDO is associated with social behaviors (Kottke, 2011; Miville, Romans, Johnson, & Lone, 2004). The construct appears in human resource management, social psychology, and multicultural counseling research (Fuertes & Brobst, 2002; Miville et al., 2004; Sawyerr, Strauss, & Jun, 2005), yet marketing applications of UDO are rare, deserving of further investigation (Grier, Brumbaugh, & Thornton, 2006).

The study accordingly makes several contributions to literature on cultural identity as a driver of consumer behavior. First, instead of assuming that identity explains foreign versus domestic product preferences directly (Gammoh, Koh, & Okoroafo, 2011; Tu et al., 2012; Westjohn et al., 2012; Zhang & Khare, 2009), the authors use UDO as a mediator variable. The results show that a reluctance to purchase foreign products increases with a stronger national identity but does not decrease with a global identity. The three UDO dimensions account for this asymmetry and can effectively explain the underlying psychological processes. Second, the study findings lend further credence to bidirectional perspectives of global consumer acculturation (Alden et al., 2006; Cleveland, Erdoğan et al., 2011; Cleveland, Papadopoulos et al., 2011; Westjohn, Arnold, Magnusson, Zdravkovic, & Zhou, 2009),

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which suggest that combinations of a national culture-based identity with a globally oriented identity can provide effective global consumer segmentation (Cleveland, Papadopoulos et al., 2011). This study adds to international market segmentation literature by confirming that segmenting consumers on the basis of their national and global identities offers an effective representation of the increasingly “hybridizing,” “glocalizing,” or “creolizing” consumer culture (Alden et al., 2006; Arnett, 2002). The theoretically predicted relationships between UDO and a reluctance to purchase foreign products hold within the global consumer segments (Cleveland, Papadopoulos et al., 2011), suggesting that UDO functions as a robust predictor of behavior.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Attitude toward diversity

Miville et al. (1999, p. 291) define UDO as “a social attitude characterized by awareness and acceptance of both the similarities and differences that exist among people.” The measure of UDO relies on a three-dimensional scale (Fuertes & Brobst, 2002; Fuertes et al., 2000; Miville et al., 1999). The first dimension, *diversity of contact*, captures a positive disposition toward cultural diversity, reflecting an openness to and interest in foreign cultures. The second UDO dimension, *relativistic appreciation*, implies an unprejudiced disposition toward understanding cultural similarities and differences between the self and others. Finally, the third dimension, *discomfort with differences*, pertains to a negative disposition toward cultural diversity, reflected by the degree to which a person feels tension and discomfort in connections with culturally different others.

Although the first and the third UDO dimension (diversity of contact and discomfort with differences) differ in valence, they are not bipolar opposites. Similar to Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, in which the opposite of work satisfaction is not dissatisfaction but non-satisfaction, these two dimensions constitute different facets of the same construct. For example, people with high diversity of contact scores may feel discomfort or anxiety about cultural differences, because such contacts feel emotionally or intellectually foreign or simply unknown and therefore embarrassing (cf. Fuertes et al., 2000). In addition, relativistic appreciation measures some type of self-comparative behavior and thus deserves particular attention, related to the asymmetric relations between national/global identity and reluctance to purchase foreign products. This dimension captures the tendency to process information that improves understanding of cultural similarities and differences between the self and foreign others, presumably including foreign products and brands. In contrast with the other two UDO dimensions, relativistic appreciation captures no positive or negative attitude but instead refers to an unprejudiced disposition to understand what differentiates the self from others. This disposition is an important enabler of personal growth and self-enhancement (Fuertes et al., 2000). Finally, conceptual relatedness marks the distinction of the diversity of contact dimension of UDO from consumer cosmopolitanism (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Cleveland, Laroche, & Papadopoulos, 2009; Cleveland, Laroche, Takahashi, & Erdoğan, in press; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Sigauw, 2012). Cosmopolitans adopt a positive stance toward cultural diversity, eschew a parochial culture, and consume foreign products (Cleveland, Papadopoulos et al., 2011; Holt, 1997; Riefler et al., 2012), such that both cosmopolitanism and the diversity of contact dimension capture consumers' positive attitudes toward cultural diversity. However, whereas cosmopolitanism generally relates to consumers' appreciation of cultural differences for their own sake, diversity of contact implies utilitarian motives (e.g., Fuertes & Brobst, 2002), such as those stemming from the functional need to interact with culturally diverse people after moving into a new neighborhood or taking a new job.

2.2. National and global identities

Social identity refers to a person's “knowledge that (s)he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of his membership” (Tajfel, 1974, p. 72). The present study conceptualizes national identity as an individual's self-categorization into a national group (for most, the country of birth). People with a high national identity feel proud of their country and culture and display positive biases toward manifestations of it (Carvalho & Luna, 2014; Westjohn et al., 2012). National identity relates conceptually to the more complex construct of ethnic identity, which is a person's identification with an ethnicity (Cleveland, Papadopoulos et al., 2011; Phinney & Ong, 2007), as well as to the concept of local or regional affiliation, which means an identification with people in the local community (Thelen, Ford, & Honeycutt, 2006; Zhang & Khare, 2009). On balance, national identity offers a suitable conceptual counterpart to global identity (Westjohn et al., 2012), which is the individual's self-categorization to a global culture, characterized by globally shared information, symbols, practices, and meanings (Alden et al., 2006; Arnett, 2002). Consumers with a high global identity tend to respond positively to globalization and are open to people from other cultures (Westjohn et al., 2009; Zhang & Khare, 2009). This study also considers the possibility that consumers embrace multiple cultural identities simultaneously (e.g., Chattaraman, Rudd, & Lennon, 2009; Cleveland, Erdoğan et al., 2011).

3. Hypothesis development

The conceptual model that guides the subsequent theoretical developments appears in Fig. 1, building on the idea that identification with national and global cultures informs attitude or behavior in relation to foreign cultures and products (Alden et al., 2006; Zhang & Khare, 2009).

Self-verification theory asserts that people are eager for others to see them in accordance with their own positive view of themselves (Swann, 1983). People therefore engage in self-enhancing processes, such as obtaining positive social feedback from others and avoiding feedback that disconfirms a desired self-view (Swann, 1983; Westjohn et al., 2012). A related and widely observed phenomenon in intergroup behavior is in-group favoritism, such that feelings of belonging to a group lead to attitudes and behaviors that favor the in-group at the expense of any out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In-group favoritism depends on the extent to which people internalize group membership as an aspect of their self-concept. Higher levels of national identity thus should produce lower levels of diversity of contact, because consumers with strong national identities may not expect to obtain adequate self-enhancing information from people who are culturally or ethnically different from themselves. In contrast, consumers with global identities should be particularly eager to interact with culturally different people.

H1a. National identity relates negatively to diversity of contact.

H1b. Global identity relates positively to diversity of contact.

Social self-identity only acquires meaning in relation to or comparison with others (Tajfel, 1974). Thus the need to construct and maintain self-identity (Shrum et al., 2013) motivates people to “compare themselves with others and assess their relative similarity or dissimilarity” (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001, p. 337). To capture this type of behavior, UDO relies on the relativistic appreciation dimension, which measures an unprejudiced disposition to understand cultural similarities and differences in comparison with others (Fuertes et al., 2000). A strong identity can produce a stable, enduring sensitivity to identity-related information and the tendency to actively monitor or verify this identity (Deshpande, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004; Reed, 2004; Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012). A greater identification with a national and/or global identity thus should lead to greater relativistic appreciation.

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