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Research Report

## Regulatory goals in a globalized world ☆

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**Abstract**

This research examines the impact of a salient global (or local) identity on individual's regulatory goals. Specifically, we show that when people's identity as a global citizen is salient, they are more likely to focus on promotion goals; whereas when their identity as a local citizen is salient, they are more likely to focus on prevention goals. We further show that this arises because people are likely to adopt a more abstract or higher level (vs. concrete or lower level) construal when their global (local) identity is salient. Evidence from three studies supports this central proposition.

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The recent “BREXIT” vote in the UK showed dramatically how individuals can vary in how they perceive the opportunities and perils from globalization. While prior research has documented how globalization is changing consumers' self-identities, we show here that it can also fundamentally alter the very ways in which they process information, construe events, and set goals. We show below that the twin forces of globalization and localization can lead to important shifts in mindset that can potentially alter preferences not only in the consumption domain but also in broader pro-social and political arenas.

Prior research has documented how globalization is changing consumers' self-identities, (Arnett, 2002; Yang et al., 2011;

Zhang & Khare, 2009). The development of one's self-identity is influenced by demographics (e.g., gender), upbringing (e.g., social class), contextual factors (e.g., football team membership), and societal changes. Globalization has been shown to lead to the development of a *global identity* (i.e., how strongly one associates with the global community) and the strengthening of one's *local identity* (i.e., one's association with the local community) (e.g., Arnett, 2002; Chiu, Gries, Torelli, & Cheng, 2011; Leung, Qiu, & Chiu, 2012). Though globalization and global identity are not synonymous, and the former does not always lead to the latter, more consumers now see themselves as members of a broader, global community (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003). Research shows that the co-development of these two identities has important implications for consumers' cognitions and brand choices (e.g., Zhang & Khare, 2009).

Specifically, we suggest here that a salient global (local) identity should make people construe phenomena more abstractly (concretely) and at a higher (lower) level, which in turn leads to stronger promotion (prevention) goals. Research shows that people possess two primary types of regulatory goals: promotion

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and prevention (Higgins, 1997). Though research has identified some important antecedents of these regulatory goals (e.g., parenting style: Higgins et al., 2001; self-construal: Aaker & Lee, 2001), the literature has not yet explored the intriguing possibility that differential salience of one's global versus local identity might itself be an important antecedent. This research aims to show that salience of global (local) identity will affect the type of regulatory goals evoked, and evidence from three studies supports this central proposition.

Findings from our research thus contribute to the construal level and regulatory focus literatures by identifying an important, yet unexplored, antecedent of both. Though prior research has shown that promotion (prevention)-focused people process information more abstractly (concretely) (Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lee, Keller, & Sternthal, 2010), it has not examined the role played by self-identity, in particular global versus local identity. Our findings go beyond the prior literature in showing that evoking different identities can trigger different construal levels and processing styles and, consequently, the regulatory goals pursued by consumers. Demonstrating these linkages also contributes to the self-identity literature as this consequence of identity has not previously been reported. Finally, by examining this consequential impact of globalization, we also contribute to the literatures on globalization and cosmopolitanism (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Sigauw, 2012; Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010) by identifying an important “downstream” consequence of globalization on the broad patterns of consumers' cognitions and motivations.

### Global identities and regulatory goals

Extant research in regulatory focus theory shows that promotion-focused individuals tend to focus on growth and advancement (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997), while prevention-focused individuals tend to focus on roles and responsibilities (Higgins et al., 1997). Whether a promotion or prevention goal drives one's behavior may be dependent on making choices for oneself versus others (Polman, 2012), the culture in which one grows up (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001), self-construal (Aaker & Lee, 2001), and the positivity of self-stereotypes (Seibt & Förster, 2004). Collectively, these findings suggest that how one views and defines oneself is an important contributor.

Prior research shows that an important dimension of how one defines oneself relates to the groups one associates with, e.g., being a professor, an avid sportsman, and an American (Vohs & Baumeister, 2012). Not surprisingly, as the world becomes more interconnected, the heightened recognition of the commonalities among people across the globe is leading to the growth of a shared “global identity” (Arnett, 2002; Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1990). Consumers increasingly perceive and desire a shared “global consumer culture” (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 2006). Paradoxically, and simultaneously, globalization has also led to a strengthening of individuals' local identities—their felt closeness to local traditions and culture (Holton, 2000). Research shows that in the face of changes to societal values and behaviors resulting from exposure to foreign cultures (e.g., global music,

food trends), some consumers exhibit greater ethnocentrism (Chiu et al., 2011; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). These twin trends lead to a global identity developing on top of and co-existing with individuals' local identity (Arnett, 2002), consistent with prior research showing that multiple identities—varying in salience—can co-exist within an individual (Brewer, 1991; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000).

Building on prior research, this research proposes that a situationally more-salient global (local) identity should evoke higher-level construals and more abstract (concrete) thoughts; these should, in turn, lead to stronger promotion (prevention) goals.

### *From global identity to higher-level construals and more abstract thoughts*

According to construal level theory (CLT), individuals can construe events at either a “higher” level or “lower” level. Higher-level construals (vs. lower) are more general (vs. specific); abstract, indirectly experienced and decontextualized (vs. concrete, directly experienced and contextualized) (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Higher (lower)-order construal also uses broader (narrower) categories, is more integrative (exclusionary) of incoming stimuli (Förster, 2012) and tends to occur when an event is further away in distance or felt proximity to the self (Trope & Liberman, 2010). These relationships are bi-directional: events seen as more distant are construed at a higher-level, while higher-level construals make events seem more distant from an ego-centric perspective (Liberman & Förster, 2009).

Drawing on this literature, we argue that a consumer's global (vs. local) identity should be related to a higher (vs. lower) level construal, and more abstract (vs. concrete) processing. Since a global identity involves thoughts and feelings about the larger world (including distant countries, typically indirectly experienced and relatively less familiar), it necessarily involves perceptions about places and events further away rather than close by. This greater sense of psychological distance evoked by a global (vs. local) identity should, according to CLT, lead to higher-order construal. Liberman and Förster (2009, p203) say that “an event is psychologically distant whenever it is not part of one's direct experience... as it occurs in more remote locations, as it happens to people whose experience is less like ours.” Thus, when a person is prompted to think of his or her local identity, he or she should be more likely to retrieve concrete, specific experiences (e.g., growing up in the local community, local places and landmarks). In contrast, someone prompted to think of his or her global identity would typically think of more abstract concepts and values such as universality and humanity, of transcending geography or political borders. Since prior research shows that when an identity is cued, what comes to mind is “not simply content but also a general way of making sense of the world” (Oyserman, 2009, p. 256), global (local) identity should thus be more likely to evoke an abstract (concrete) processing style overall.

We also note here that many of the empirically shown antecedents or consequences of a higher-order construal and global processing style (Förster, 2012; Trope & Liberman, 2010) have analogous parallels in the global versus local

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