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Impression management in survey responding: Easier for collectivists or individualists?

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Abstract

Three experiments indicate that collectivistic people (or those who come from Eastern cultures) have an easier time giving appropriate answers on surveys than do individualists (or those who come from Western cultures). This means that it is easier to disrupt the efforts of individualists to give appropriate responses. The research highlights how cultural factors influence survey response processes, and that individualists and collectivists engage in impression management through different psychological mechanisms. This has implications for marketing, advertising, and consumer choice. © 2010 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Individualism; Collectivism; Impression management; Socially desirable responding; Automatic processes; Effortful processes

“Would you be willing to pay more in order to save the earth?”

To what extent would people’s responses to such a question reflect normative considerations? Research suggests that impression management is effortful and requires cognitive resources (Gravdal & Sandal, 2006; Lalwani, 2009; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Mick, 1996; Paulhus, Graf, & Van Selst, 1989; Pauls & Crost, 2004; Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). Researchers assumed that such normative responding involves deliberate editing of one’s responses for social desirability considerations (Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988), and therefore, it can only take place when cognitive resources are available. When people are distracted, they are more likely to provide unfiltered responses.

Although this conclusion about the cognitive resources required for impression management has been well supported, previous research was primarily conducted in Western, individualistic cultural contexts. We propose that cultural variables will influence the process through which people

express socially normative responses. This is because there is a cross-cultural variation in the tendency to engage in impression management in the first place. As a result, people from collectivistic cultures acquire extensive experience in expressing normative responses, influencing the process by which they can do so.

Research on socially desirable responding suggests that the motivation to be normatively appropriate triggers the desire to impression manage (e.g., Gur & Sackeim, 1979; Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson, 2006; Paulhus, 1984, 1991, 1998; Sackeim & Gur, 1979). Thus, impression management in survey responding refers to the expression of normative responses that help to maintain a desired social image or identity (Paulhus, 1998; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Britt, 1999; Schlenker, Britt, & Pennington, 1996; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). These normative responses cater to a social consensus, whereby the definition of what is considered “good” is based on socially shared norms and expectations. However, there are cultural differences in the motivation and tendency to present a normative image.

People from collectivistic cultures (e.g., East Asians) are conformity-oriented, interdependent, and care about their ingroup and its norms. Thus, they are prone to engage in impression management. By comparison, people from

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individualistic cultures (e.g., North Americans) are uniqueness-oriented, independent, less focused on satisfying their ingroups, and thus are less prone to engage in impression management (e.g., Lalwani et al., 2006; Triandis & Suh, 2002; van Hemert, van de Vijver, Poortinga, & Georgas, 2002). Based on research on automaticity (Bargh, 1994, 1997; Smith & Lerner, 1986), we suggest that because collectivists acquire frequent practice in expressing normative positions, this process becomes relatively automated and fluent. Therefore, it does not require significant cognitive resources. Hence, we propose that whereas in individualists, impression management takes place through an effortful process, in collectivists it is relatively effortless and automatic.

This proposition highlights the conditions under which collectivists and individualists, when motivated to respond normatively, will actually be able to do so. The implication is that cultural differences in impression management, as might be reflected in self-reports to sensitive questions on surveys, may be more significant under conditions that constrain respondents' cognitive resources.

Despite extensive research on survey responding, the mechanisms through which people impression manage in their self-reports are the subject of ongoing discussion (Johnson & van de Vijver, 2002). Two main perspectives exist in the literature, one that views normatively desirable responding as a situational response style and another that views it as a stable individual disposition. According to Johnson and van de Vijver, "these two views, at times, seem compatible and refer to seemingly unrelated research traditions" (p. 193). Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001) maintain that both situational and dispositional factors interact to influence people's response styles. Our research adopts this perspective by examining the degree to which one's cultural orientation or background interacts with contextual conditions (cognitive load) to influence normatively desirable responding.

It is important to note that our analysis pertains to *chronic* differences in cultural orientation, and the attendant practice people build up in expressing normative positions through socialization experiences. Thus, we examine the role of culture via national group differences and via stable individual differences in cultural orientation, not through contextual salience (priming) of one's self-construal. Although both independent (individualistic) and interdependent (collectivistic) self-definitions can exist within each individual and vary by context (Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000; Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009; Mandel, 2003), our conceptualization focuses on differences in mechanisms that emerge through socialization experiences that vary across individuals.

Our hypothesis emerges from a broader conceptual framework that considers the attitude construct through a cross-cultural lens. The traditional view posits that an attitude is an enduring disposition toward an object that is stable, internally consistent, has self-expressive functions, and guides behavior (Fazio, 2000). We suggest that this perspective may not generalize across cultures. Specifically, because in collectivist societies one's personal views and preferences are less likely

to occupy a central role in the self-system, inconsistency and instability of personal attitudes may be more likely for collectivists than individualists. In addition, because in collectivist societies one's personal preferences are expected to be overridden in deference to normative considerations, attitudes toward specific objects may be less likely to be used to guide behavior/choices involving those objects (e.g., Kacen & Lee, 2002; Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008; Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998). In line with this, Trafimow and colleagues (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991; Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998) show that compared to people with independent self-construal, those with interdependent self-construal put more weight on subjective norms rather than on their own attitudes when forming their behavioral intentions. Triandis (1989) suggests that not only are collectivists more attentive to norms, they also internalize them such that conforming with the norms becomes enjoyable. Zhang and Shrum (2009) show that people with interdependent (versus independent) self-construal are more motivated to suppress impulsive tendencies, and thus are less prone to impulsive behaviors, which presumably reflect personal attitudes, particularly when peers are present (see also Kacen & Lee, 2002). Savani et al. (2008) showed that personal preference ratings are better predictors of choices for U.S. participants than for participants in India (see also Savani, Markus, Naidu, Kumar, & Berlia, 2010). Such possible cross-cultural variations in the construct, structure, and functions of attitude are further described in the *General Discussion*. The case of impression management in attitude self-reports, addressed in the current research, can be viewed as a specific example of these variations.

In this paper, we look at situations in which both individualists and collectivists tend to impression manage, and examine whether they can do so equally easily. Instead of assessing how culture influences the goals that people spontaneously pursue (e.g., pursuit of social approval), a cultural difference that is already well established (e.g., Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Briley & Aaker, 2006; Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005; Craig & Douglas, 2000; Lalwani et al., 2006; Triandis & Suh, 2002; van Hemert et al., 2002), we look at the *ease* with which those goals are pursued. Addressing this process issue requires examining situations in which the same goal will be pursued regardless of culture. Thus, in three studies, we induce the motivation to respond in line with perceived social norms, and examine how readily participants of different cultures or cultural orientations are able to do so.

Experiment 1 shows that collectivists engage in impression management in reporting their attitudes just as much when they are cognitively busy, but individualistic participants are less able to do so when cognitively busy. Culture in this study was operationalized using a validated measure of cultural orientation. *Experiment 2* extends these findings using East Asian participants (collectivists) and U.S. participants (individualists). These first two experiments examine impression management in self-reports by adapting the Impression Management subscale of the Paulhus Deception Scales, a well established measure of socially desirable responding (Paulhus, 1984, 1988). *Experiment 3* shows that, when reporting the evaluations of a

product, collectivists are responsive to perceived social norms about the product regardless of cognitive constraints. Individualists are more responsive to perceived social norms when they are not cognitively constrained.

Impression management across cultures

Individualists, collectivists, and impression management

Individualists and collectivists differ in the way they view the self. Individualists view themselves as independent from others, whereas collectivists view themselves as interdependent with others. As a result, individualists value uniqueness and tend to present themselves as distinctive and self-reliant. Collectivists, on the other hand, seek to maintain good relationships with others and therefore tend to present themselves in socially normative ways (Cousins, 1989; Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

Extensive empirical evidence has established a greater tendency for collectivists (versus individualists) to attend to social expectations. Aaker and Maheswaran (1997), for example, showed greater reliance on consensus information in persuasion among collectivists compared to individualists. Specifically, collectivists (in contrast to previous research on individualists) processed consensus information carefully regardless of their processing motivation. More directly, research has established that, compared to individualists, collectivists score higher on a variety of survey measures of impression management (e.g., Lalwani et al., 2006).²

This greater tendency to impression manage among collectivists (versus individualists) may also be linked to distinct views about contradictions. According to Peng and Nisbett (1999), Western philosophy regards contradictions as unacceptable. Eastern philosophy, on the other hand, relates to contradictions in terms of compromise or tolerance, highlighting the notion that two conflicting propositions can both be true. Hence, Easterners (i.e., collectivists) are more comfortable with contradictions than are Westerners (i.e., individualists) (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Wong, Rindfleisch, & Burroughs, 2003). As a result, they may be more prone to expressing different evaluations of the same target across situations, and may feel more comfortable doing so. Similarly, they may be more prone to responding in ways that are consistent with the context in general, and to be responsive to normative expectations in particular.

By engaging in impression management, we do not mean to suggest that respondents have to consciously suppress their “true” beliefs or real selves. Similar attitudes may be valued by

the self and by the social groups whose approval one seeks. Thus, decades of research in social psychology have illustrated the difficulty of determining where impression management ends and internal belief change begins (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). For example, as Tetlock and Manstead (1985) pointed out, attitude moderation effects can be explained using either cognitive dissonance or impression management explanations (Schlenker, 1982; Tedeschi & Rosenfeld, 1981), and group polarization effect in attitudes can be due either to the persuasive power of the group or to the impression management for the sake of the group (Myers & Lamm, 1976). Thus, research cannot definitively distinguish between impression management and intrapsychic explanation. Rather, “it distinguishes only between artificially restricted versions of the impression management and intrapsychic positions” (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985, p. 62). All forms of identity enhancement efforts serve similar goals and indeed may be confluent mechanisms (Tesser, 2000). Our conceptualization emphasizes the fluidity of impression management, particularly for collectivists.

Automaticity of impression management

The previous review indicates that collectivists tend to impression manage more frequently than individualists do. Collectivists appear to be more attentive to social norms and more likely to express attitudes that are responsive to those norms (e.g., Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kim & Markus, 1999; Lalwani et al., 2006). However, research has not addressed the mechanisms by which such impression management takes place. Research on automaticity suggests that processes that are practiced frequently over time become automatic (Bargh, 1994, 1997; Smith & Lerner, 1986). Automaticity of frequently practiced processes will result in these processes becoming relatively effortless, in the sense that they do not require cognitive resources.

This suggests that individualists engage in impression management through a more effortful process, whereas collectivists can do so automatically without investing significant cognitive resources. Therefore, we hypothesize that, when motivated to impression manage, collectivists will do so regardless of their cognitive capacity, but individualists will be more likely to impression manage when they have (versus do not have) the cognitive capacity to do so.

Experiment 1

Method

Eighty-one students participated in a 2 (cognitive load: low versus high) × 2 (cultural orientation: collectivists versus individualists) between-subjects study. The high and low cognitive load conditions were based on a well established manipulation (e.g., Gilbert & Osborne, 1989). High load condition participants were asked to keep an eight-digit number in memory while answering the questionnaire. Low load condition participants were not given this instruction. Cultural

² Researchers distinguish between two types of socially desirable responding (SDR). Impression management (IM): expressing normative responses to maintain a desired social image (Lalwani et al., 2006; Paulhus, 1998; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Britt, 1999; Schlenker et al., 1996; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985) and Self-Deceptive Enhancement (SDE): providing inflated self-descriptions (Paulhus, 1991; Paulhus & Reid, 1991). Collectivists are more prone to IM, and individualists are more prone to SDE (Lalwani et al., 2006). We address normative responding, and therefore focus on IM only.

orientation was measured using the 16-item Triandis and Gelfand (1998) scale. The scale contains 8 items measuring forms of individualism (e.g., “I’d rather depend on myself than others”) and 8 measuring forms of collectivism, (e.g., “I feel good when I cooperate with others”) which respondents answered on 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree) ($\alpha_{\text{individualism}}=0.71$; $\alpha_{\text{collectivism}}=0.73$)³.

To measure impression management in attitude self-reports, we adapted the Impression Management subscale of the Paulhus Deception Scales (PDS; Paulhus, 1984, 1988). The 20 items of this validated scale were rephrased as attitudes (e.g., “I think it is bad to damage a library book...” instead of, “I have never damaged a library book...”). Participants rated their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 7-point scale, (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). The sum of their responses was their impression management score ($\alpha=0.81$).

Because our focus was on the processes through which people impression manage, it was important to make sure that all participants were indeed motivated to do so. To induce this motivation, all participants were told that after completing the questionnaire they may be invited to participate in a short discussion with others in the session regarding their attitudes on the issues in the questionnaire (see Wood, 2000; see also Wooten & Reed, 2000, for a discussion of the ways in which group discussion can activate impression motivation). This instruction was specific to the impression management scale. Following the motivation induction, participants in the high load condition were asked to write down the number they had been asked to memorize, and told they no longer had to remember it. Then, all participants completed Triandis and Gelfand’s (1998) cultural orientation scale.

Effectiveness of motivation induction

To assess whether telling participants that they might partake in a discussion with others was effective in inducing impression motivation, we collected two types of data. First, in a pretest, 40 U.S. students were either told that they might be invited to participate in a group discussion about the issues in the questionnaire (the impression motivation condition) or were not told this (control condition). Then, they completed four scales to assess impression management in attitudinal self-reports. The first scale measured attitude toward peers and family members. The second scale was an altruism scale, adapted from Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981). The third scale comprised the impression management items from the Paulhus Deception Scales (1984, 1988). After completing these measures, participants in the impression motivation conditions were asked whether they remembered seeing the comment about the possibility of being invited to a group discussion. They were also asked to list their thoughts and feelings about this comment.

The results of the pretest showed that, compared to the control condition, participants in the impression motivation condition expressed somewhat more favorable atti-

tudes toward peers and family members ($\text{Att-Peers}_{\text{control}}=5.80$, $\text{Att-Peers}_{\text{impression motivation}}=6.05$, $t(38)=1.419$; $p=0.08$; $\alpha=0.85$; because our predictions were directional, all p -values here are one-tailed), significantly more favorable attitudes toward altruism ($\text{Att-Altruism}_{\text{control}}=13.64$, $\text{Att-Altruism}_{\text{impression motivation}}=15.17$, $t(38)=1.709$, $p=0.05$), and somewhat higher scores on the impression management scale ($\text{IM}_{\text{control}}=3.27$, $\text{IM}_{\text{impression motivation}}=3.64$, $t(38)=1.446$, $p=0.08$; $\alpha=0.78$). Although some of these effects are not significant, they are all in the expected direction. In addition, of the 20 participants in the impression motivation condition, 18 remembered seeing the comment about the group discussion. Two independent coders assessed participants’ listed thoughts and feelings about this comment. Twelve of these eighteen participants (67%) expressed uncomfortable feelings or were reluctant to discuss the social issues with their peers. These participants expressed thoughts such as, “I was just worried that I would have to talk openly to a group of strangers”. These results suggest that the motivation induction was effective.

Second, we ran conditions with no motivation induction that directly paralleled the design of the main study. In these conditions, we expected a different pattern from the hypotheses presented earlier. When impression motivation was not induced, we expected that overall, collectivists would be significantly more likely to engage in impression management than individualists, and that this cultural main effect would not be moderated by cognitive load. In other words, collectivists should be likely to impression manage regardless of load (because they are both motivated and practiced at it), whereas individualists should be unlikely to impression manage regardless of load (because they are relatively unmotivated to do so).

The results supported these expectations. For the analysis, an index for cultural orientation was created by subtracting respondents’ individualist score from their collectivist score (Agrawal, Menon, & Aaker, 2007; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). Higher (lower) numbers on this index therefore signify a predominantly collectivistic (individualistic) orientation. A regression analysis was performed on impression management with the following predictors: (i) the cultural orientation index (ii) a dummy variable for cognitive load (0 = absent; 1 = present), and (iii) the interaction of orientation and load. The same approach was used for the main study hypothesis testing (see next section).

As expected, when impression motivation was not induced, such that collectivists and individualists could pursue whatever goals are spontaneously salient, collectivists compared to individualists exhibited higher impression motivation scores [$\beta=0.268$, $t(77)=2.440$, $p<0.01$]. This result replicates a large literature showing that collectivists are generally more motivated to impression manage than are individualists (see Lalwani et al., 2006). Neither cognitive load nor the interaction between cognitive load and impression management had a significant effect on impression motivation. These results are consistent with the expectation that collectivists are spontaneously motivated to impression manage regardless of load, whereas individualists are not motivated to impression manage, regardless of load. The fact that this pattern, in the absence of a motivation induction, contrasts with the pattern obtained in

³ Although internal reliability fell short of recommended levels, we maintained the original scale structure for analysis in order to maintain comparability with the sizeable literature employing this scale.

the main study (with a motivation induction), as described next, suggests that the motivation induction was believable and effective.

Results

We have hypothesized that, when impression motivation is induced, collectivists would be able to impression manage regardless of cognitive load, whereas individualists would be less able to impression manage when under high (versus low) cognitive load. Indeed, the regression analysis revealed a significant interaction between cultural orientation and cognitive load [$\beta=0.304$, $t(79)=2.833$, $p<0.01$]. No other coefficients were significant. To explore the interaction, we performed spotlight analyses based on recommended procedures (Aiken & West, 1991; Fitzsimons, 2008), spotlighting the results of those scoring above zero on the cultural orientation index (reflecting a relatively collectivistic orientation) and those scoring below zero (reflecting a relatively individualistic orientation). The analyses revealed that for those with a relatively collectivistic orientation, as expected, cognitive load did not play a role in impression management [$\beta=0.092$, $t(54)=0.677$, $p=0.501$]. In contrast, for those with a relatively individualistic orientation, as cognitive load increased, they engaged in impression management somewhat less [$\beta=-0.363$, $t(23)=-1.869$, $p=0.074$]. These results are in line with our prediction. To explore the interaction further, we examined the slopes for cultural orientation at each of the cognitive load conditions. Only under high load was the slope significant [$\beta=0.405$, $t(40)=2.8$, $p<0.01$], indicating that under high load, the more collectivistic the participant, the greater was the tendency for impression management. The insignificant slope under low load [$\beta=0.026$, $t(37)=0.159$, $p=0.875$] indicates that cultural orientation did not play a role in impression management in this condition. Altogether, this pattern is in line with our prediction (see Fig. 1).

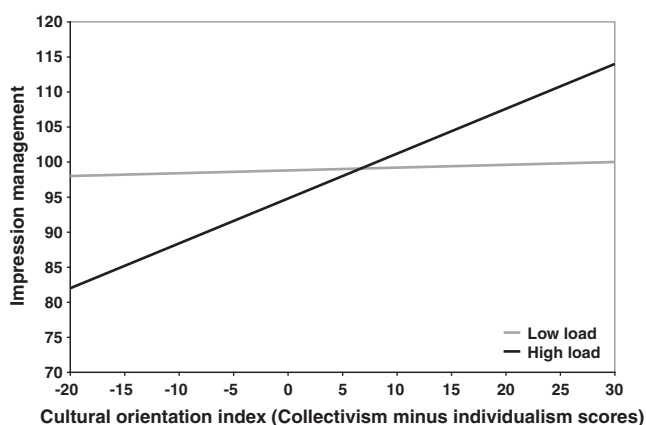


Fig. 1. Scores on impression management subscale of Paulhus Deception Scales, as a function of cultural orientation index and cognitive load: Experiment 1. Higher scores on cultural orientation index signify greater relative level of collectivism.

Discussion

As expected, collectivist participants were able to impression manage regardless of their cognitive load. In contrast, individualists were less able to do so under high compared to low cognitive load. This pattern supports our proposition that individualists' impression management takes place through a more effortful process, whereas in collectivists this process is relatively automatic. The fact that a motivation to impression manage was induced for all participants in this study adds support to our assertion that variation in impression management between collectivists and individualists was due to the fluency with which they could express normative responses, and not due to the differences in their motivation to do so. In the next experiment, we extend these results to a cross-national comparison. Rather than examining cultural orientation, we compare participants in individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Experiment 2

Method

The study was of a 2 (national culture: individualist versus collectivist) \times 2 (cognitive load: low versus high) between-subjects design. Participants from the individualistic culture were 42 U.S. students (mean age=20.8 years, SD=1.30, 64.1% were female). Participants from collectivistic cultures were 34 Hong Kong students (mean age=33.4 years, SD=6.0, 63.3% were female), and 16 Singapore students (mean age=34.1 years, SD=7.5, 57.1% were female). Impression management motivation was induced, cognitive load was manipulated, and impression management was measured as in Experiment 1 ($\alpha=0.85$).

Results

Care was taken to ensure that participants were native to their countries/cultures. All participants in Hong Kong and Singapore were of Chinese ethnicity. Of the U.S. sample, the data from 3 participants who had lived in the U.S. for less than 3 years were excluded from the analyses. The data from 1 Hong Kong participant who failed to memorize the number in the high cognitive load condition were also excluded. Thus, the data from 88 participants were retained, 49 from collectivist cultures and 39 from an individualistic culture.

An ANOVA yielded a significant two-way interaction between cognitive load and national culture on impression management scores ($F(1, 84)=5.497$, $p<0.05$). As expected, there was no significant effect of cognitive load for collectivists ($M_{\text{high load}}=108.6$, $M_{\text{low load}}=104.4$, $F(1, 84)=1.42$, $p=0.23$), and a significant effect of cognitive load for individualists ($M_{\text{high load}}=90.4$, $M_{\text{low load}}=98.6$, $F(1, 84)=4.32$, $p<0.05$; see Fig. 2). Further, under high load there was a significant difference between individualists and collectivists in their tendency to impression manage ($M_{\text{collectivists}}=108.6$, $M_{\text{individualists}}=90.4$, $F(1, 84)=25.52$, $p<0.001$); under low load this difference was insignificant ($M_{\text{collectivists}}=104.4$, $M_{\text{individualists}}=98.6$, $F(1, 84)=2.365$, $p=0.13$).

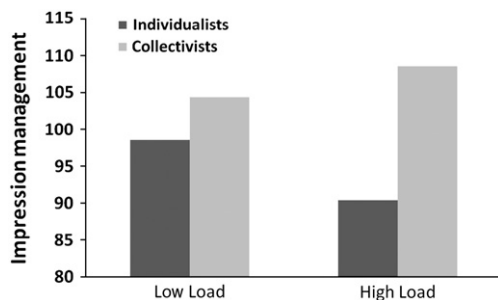


Fig. 2. Scores on impression management subscale of Paulhus Deception Scales, as a function of cognitive load and culture: Experiment 2.

The same pattern of results also emerged when analyzing each of the collectivist samples separately. For the Hong Kong sample ($N=34$) the interaction between cognitive load and cultural orientation was significant ($F(1, 68)=4.543, p<0.05$), and for the smaller Singapore sample ($N=16$), it was marginally significant ($F(1, 51)=3.125, p=0.083$).

Discussion

Using a cross-national sample, the results of Experiment 2 extend those of Experiment 1. Cognitive load affected the ability of individualists, but not collectivists, to impression manage. Moreover, when they were not cognitively constrained, individualists impression managed as much as collectivists did, but when cognitively constrained individualists impression managed less than collectivists did. These results support our hypotheses that individualists' impression management takes place through a more effortful process, whereas for collectivists the process is relatively automatic.

Experiment 3

The findings of the previous experiments suggest that when motivated to impression manage on a survey, individualists will be more influenced than collectivists by the cognitive demands in the context. As a result, individualists' survey responses will be less consistent with social norms when they are (versus are not) cognitively constrained. Experiment 3 addressed this implication in a more realistic marketing survey context. The study involved the following modifications: (1) cognitive constraint was manipulated with a time pressure manipulation (instead of via a memorization task), and (2) impression management was determined using a measure of participants' attitudes toward a hybrid car to assess the extent to which the expressed attitudes were consistent with perceived societal opinions toward the car.

Method

Participants and design

Seventy-six business students received course credit for participation in a 2 (time pressure: present versus absent) \times 2 (cultural orientation: collectivists versus individualists) between-subjects experiment. Motivation to impression manage was induced as

in Experiments 1 and 2. Cultural orientation was measured as in Experiment 1 ($\alpha_{\text{individualism}}=0.56$; $\alpha_{\text{collectivism}}=0.60$).

Time pressure manipulation

Participants in the high time pressure condition were told that although we usually devoted 4–5 min to completion of the questionnaires, this time we were behind schedule, and thus they had only 1–2 min for this task. They were asked to work as fast as possible, and try to complete the entire questionnaire. Participants in the no time pressure condition were told that we usually devoted the 4–5 min to the completion of the questionnaires, but we were ahead of schedule, and thus they had 10–15 min for this task and could take their time when completing the questionnaire (e.g., Knowles, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 2001; Kruglanski & Webster, 1991; Lee & Shavitt, 2009). Pretests confirmed that the completion of the questionnaires without time pressure required approximately 4 min. Previous research has shown that similar procedures are effective in inducing cognitive constraints (e.g., Knowles et al., 2001; Kruglanski & Webster, 1991; Lee & Shavitt, 2009).

Procedure

The different time pressure conditions were run in separate sessions. Participants received three booklets containing experimental materials. Booklet 1 contained "marketing related material" in which participants read about a fictitious model of hybrid car. The car was presented as fuel efficient, attractively designed, upscale, expensive, comfortable, and suitable for families and young people. The fact that the car was a hybrid and environmentally friendly was emphasized. Next, participants viewed two filler ads for ice cream and for a national chain of convenience stores. Then, they read information from a fictitious survey of consumer opinions. On the last page of booklet 1, all participants were told that their next task will be to complete questions about several issues, and that they might be invited to a group discussion about these issues (the motivation induction). Next, the time pressure manipulation was administered. Participants then reported their attitude toward the target hybrid car. To enhance the realism of the study as a marketing research survey, this was followed by filler attitude measures about the ice cream ad and ice cream flavors, and attitudes toward the convenience store ad and brand. After completing booklet 2, all participants were told that they have plenty of time to complete the next task, removing any time pressure. Booklet 3 contained the cultural orientation scale, time pressure manipulation check, a measure of perceived societal attitudes toward the hybrid car, and demographics.

Measures

Impression management on the survey was assessed via expressed personal attitude toward the car. We expected that the growing focus on environmental issues would lead people to perceive the societal attitude toward a hybrid car to be favorable. Thus, impression management should be reflected in the expression of more favorable personal attitudes. Participants' attitudes were measured using five semantic differential items rated on 7-point scales (like–dislike, good–

bad, good choice–bad choice, worthy–unworthy, wise purchase–not wise purchase; $\alpha=0.78$). To test our assumption regarding the social norm, perceived societal attitudes toward the car were measured by asking people to indicate what, in their opinion, most people would think about the car, using a seven-point scale (negative–positive). To check the time pressure manipulation, participants were asked the extent to which they tried to complete the attitude questions as fast as possible (on a seven-point scale anchored by not at all–very much).

Results and discussion

Manipulation check

Responses to the time pressure manipulation check differed significantly between participants in the time pressure and no time pressure conditions, $M_{\text{no pressure}}=3.03$, $M_{\text{with pressure}}=5.76$, $t(74)=-8.3$, $p<0.001$. Thus, those in the time pressure (versus no pressure) condition did indeed try harder to complete the questionnaire quickly.

Perceived societal attitude

The mean perceived societal attitudes toward the hybrid car was $M=5.77$ ($SD=1.067$) on a 7-point scale, indicating that the societal attitude was perceived to be favorable. This perception did not vary as a function of time pressure, $F(1,70)=0.018$, $p=0.893$, cultural orientation, $F(1,70)=0.279$, $p=0.599$, or the interaction of the two, $F(1,70)=0.003$, $p=0.960$. This indicates that people reported their perception on the societal attitude on this question, rather than their own attitude (which was expected to depend on the interaction between time pressure and cultural orientation). It also implies that any observed differences in personal attitudes by condition do not stem from differences in the perceived favorability of the societal norm.

Test of predictions

Similarly to Experiment 1, a regression was performed on attitude toward the car with the following predictors: (i) the cultural orientation index, (ii) a dummy variable for time pressure (0 = no pressure; 1 = with pressure) and, (iii) their interaction. A significant interaction emerged between cultural orientation and time pressure [$\beta=0.294$, $t(73)=2.181$, $p<0.01$]. To explore the interaction, we examined the slopes of cultural orientation at each of the time pressure conditions. Under high time pressure the slope was marginally significant [$\beta=0.310$, $t(35)=1.927$, $p=0.06$], suggesting that under high load, the more collectivistic the participant the greater the tendency for impression management. Under no time pressure the slope was insignificant [$\beta=-0.140$, $t(37)=-0.859$, $p=0.396$] indicating that cultural orientation did not play a role in impression management in this condition. These results are in line with our prediction. Further, consistent with the procedure employed in Experiment 1, spotlight analyses compared the results for participants with relatively collectivistic versus individualistic cultural orientations. Analyses revealed that for those who are relatively collectivistic, cognitive load did not play a role in

impression management [$\beta=0.064$, $t(54)=0.470$, $p=0.640$]. In contrast, for those who are relatively individualistic, cognitive load significantly reduced impression management [$\beta=-0.538$, $t(16)=-2.553$, $p=0.021$]. This pattern supports our prediction (see Fig. 3).

To explore further the role of perceived societal norms in these self-reports, we computed the correlations in each condition between each participant's perceived societal attitude and their own expressed personal attitude toward the car. It should be noted that the cell sizes on which these correlations were computed ranged from just 8 to 29. Thus, the tests of significance suffered from very low power. Nevertheless, the pattern of correlations was in line with expectations. For collectivists, under no time pressure as well as under time pressure, expressed personal attitudes and perceived societal attitudes were positively correlated ($r=0.302$, $p=0.056$; and $r=0.240$, $p=0.114$; respectively). A correlation of similar magnitude also appeared to emerge for individualists when there was no time pressure ($r=0.337$, $p=0.170$). These correlations suggest that the personal attitudes expressed by these participants were influenced by their perceptions of the societal normative attitude, as expected. However, for individualists under time pressure, there was no positive correlation between their attitudes and perceptions of the societal attitude ($r=-0.089$; $p=0.835$). This is consistent with the notion that individualists had difficulty expressing a societally normative attitude when they were cognitively constrained.

Finally, we examined the effects of time pressure and cultural orientation on the filler questions regarding the ice cream and convenience store ads. No significant effects emerged from a MANOVA analysis, indicating that the pattern of expressed attitudes toward the target car was not a reflection of any generalized response styles elicited by time pressure or culture.

General discussion

The results of the three studies support the contention that, when motivated to do so, collectivists impression manage with

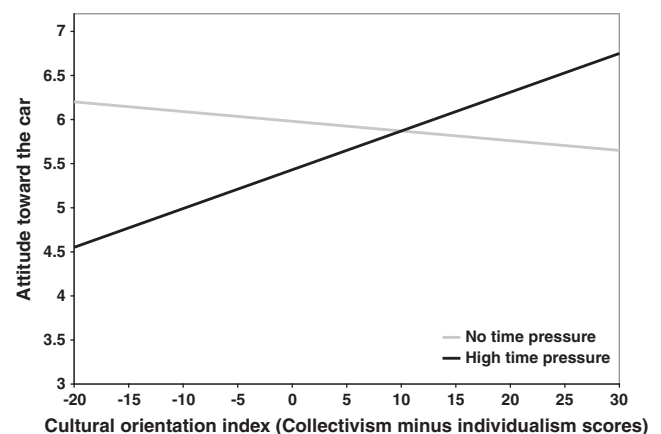


Fig. 3. Attitude toward the hybrid car, as a function of cultural orientation index and time pressure: Experiment 3. Higher scores on cultural orientation index signify greater relative level of collectivism.

relatively little effort, and thus report normative attitudes even when cognitively taxed. By contrast, individualists' impression management is relatively controlled and effortful, whereas collectivists' impression management takes place relatively automatically.

This pattern held when culture was determined via measured cultural orientation (Experiments 1 and 3) and when it was determined based on nationality (Experiment 2), when cognitive demands were induced using a cognitive busyness task (Experiments 1 and 2) or time pressure (Experiment 3), and when impression management was assessed via a well-established impression management scale (Experiments 1 and 2) or by assessing the degree to which self-reported product attitudes were consistent with perceived societal opinions (Experiment 3).

This research adds to a variety of studies assessing the cross-cultural generalizability of consumer behavior frameworks (e.g., Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). Although the tendency for cultural differences in the content of consumer judgments has been well established, cultural effects on judgment processes are just beginning to be understood (e.g., Aaker & Sengupta, 2000; Oyserman, 2009). Such effects on general judgment processes are important to examine (Lynn, Shavitt, & Ostrom, 1985; Wyer et al., 1991). Our studies shed light on such process differences, qualifying our understanding of how impression management occurs. Thus, they enhance the understanding of cross-cultural effects in survey responding (e.g., Craig & Douglas, 2000; De Jong, Steenkamp, Fox, & Hans, 2008; Johnson, Kulesa, Cho, & Shavitt, 2005; Schwarz, 2003). According to survey response models, generating a self-reported judgment involves a series of discrete information processing stages, and responding to normative considerations takes place in a final output-editing stage (Sudman, Bradburn, & Schwarz, 1996; Tourangeau & Rasinski, 1988) that requires sufficient cognitive resources to be enacted (Kahneman, 2003). However, our findings suggest that this may not adequately describe the process of impression management across cultures. Instead, for collectivists it appears either that the output editing process is relatively automated due to extensive practice with impression management, or that the process is fluidly integrated with prior steps in formulating a judgment. In other words, as opposed to individualists, for collectivists, normative responding may not require conscious adjustment of one's responses, and may come into play at earlier stages of attitude formation.

The nature of impression management

Indeed, current conceptualizations of impression management stress its fluid nature and the difficulty of determining whether shifts in self-reports reflect editing versus internalized beliefs. Thus, we did not attempt to distinguish whether our findings reflect impression management versus changes in actual beliefs. A long history of research in social psychology (e.g., Myers & Lamm, 1976) suggests that such an effort is likely to be unsuccessful. In a review of decades of research efforts that failed to convincingly distinguish impression

management from intrapsychic changes (such as persuasion), Tetlock and Manstead (1985) wrote:

“[W]e propose that the dichotomy between impression management and intrapsychic explanations is arbitrary... The search for crucial experiments should be abandoned in favor of the more modest, but realistic, goal of describing the types of private and public identities that constrain and guide our social behavior... Good judgment, honesty, autonomy, and fairness are not only characteristics that we value in judging ourselves; they are valued by the social groups to which we belong. ...No neat, nonarbitrary line divides the intrapsychic from the social (pp. 60, 67).”

More recent work also supports this view, highlighting the pan-contextual nature of impression management (e.g., Bassili, 2003; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Paulhus, 2002; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Shah, 2003; Wood, 2000). Schlenker and Pontari (2000) suggest that self-presentations can be conscious or unconscious, effortful or less effortful, automatic or controlled. Consistent with this premise, Czellar (2006) showed that implicit attitudes measured using the Implicit Association Test are sensitive to self-presentation concerns under some conditions. Moreover, self-presentations can be internalized and thus influence beliefs (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000; see also Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). Tesser (2000) suggests that various self-maintenance mechanisms (e.g., dissonance reduction via attitude change and self-presentation) are substitutable because they may serve the same goal. Finally, Wood (2000) proposes that attitude change can be driven in part by normative consideration or impression motives (e.g., Chen, Schechter, & Chaiken, 1996; Lundgren & Prislin, 1998), and that these motives influence public as well as private expressions of attitude. In other words, it is not obvious where impression management ends and internal belief change begins. Indeed, all forms of identity enhancement efforts serve similar goals and may be confluent mechanisms (see Tesser, 2000).

Our research focused on the responsiveness of self-reports to socially shared norms. Yet, other forms of responsiveness that are not geared to consensus norms may also be of interest (e.g., efforts geared to others' idiosyncratic preferences). Although these cases fall outside the scope of impression management, it would be interesting to examine whether the processes we investigate also predict responsiveness to specific others' tastes or preferences.

Cultural differences in the characteristics of attitudes

Our research findings raise the possibility that attitudes have different characteristics and functions across cultures. Contrary to the traditional approach that views attitudes as stable dispositions (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Smith & Swinyard, 1983), our results demonstrate that collectivists are fluent in expressing attitudes that are responsive to the context. This raises the possibility that collectivists' personal attitudes will generally show less stability over time. There are a number of reasons to expect this. First, collectivists' attitudes may be more ambivalent compared to individualists' attitudes (e.g., Aaker &

Sengupta, 2000; Bagozzi, Wong, & Yi, 1999; Choi & Choi, 2002; Williams & Aaker, 2002). This is supported by research suggesting that, whereas Westerners regard contradictions as unacceptable, Easterners regard contradictions as acceptable (Choi & Choi, 2002; Choi, Koo, & Choi, 2007; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Wong et al., 2003). Consequently, collectivists (i.e., Easterners) may form or retain more evaluatively-ambivalent attitudes compared to individualists (i.e., Westerners; Bagozzi et al., 1999; Williams & Aaker, 2002). If this is the case, it is also possible that across evaluation occasions, collectivists may retrieve different facets of their attitudes (positive versus negative facets). This in turn would result in the expression of different evaluations over time. Second, if, as just suggested, contradictions are perceived as more acceptable in Eastern cultures, then Easterners may feel little pressure to express similar evaluations across times or situations, whereas Westerners may feel more pressure to adhere to their previously expressed opinions. Third, the greater attention to context manifested by collectivists compared to individualists may lead to a greater weighting for situational factors when evaluating targets of judgment (see Ji, Peng, & Nisbett, 2000; Knowles et al., 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Masuda & Nisbett, 2001; Masuda et al., 2008; Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994; Norenzayan, Choi, & Nisbett, 2002; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995; Triandis, 1989). All of these factors should lead collectivists (Easterners) to be less likely than individualists (Westerners) to express the same attitudes across occasions.

Further, if personal attitudes are less stable for collectivists compared to individualists, one may expect that attitudes will serve different functions for these groups. The traditional conceptualization of attitudes holds that attitudes serve as a behavioral guide (e.g., Ajzen, 1985; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and as a means of self-expression (Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Yet, as noted earlier, current research in collectivistic cultures casts doubt on the link between self-reported attitudes and the intentions or behaviors of these consumers (Craig & Douglas, 2000; Savani et al., 2008). Moreover, the self-expressive value of attitudes may be limited in cultural contexts in which one is expected to be responsive to normative constraints. Future research should examine this possibility and its implications for measuring meaningful and predictive evaluations.

Psychological mechanisms of related cultural phenomena

Our findings are consistent with studies that suggest that the consideration of situational factors in judgments occurs not only more commonly, but also more easily for collectivists versus individualists. Morris and Peng (1994) showed that, when making causal attributions for explaining behaviors and events, Easterners are more likely to consider the situational context (compared to Westerners, who tend to consider the personality dispositions of actors). The authors claimed that these cross-cultural variations in attribution stem from different implicit theories that people hold with regard to social behavior. Whereas Westerners regard social behavior as stable, Easterners

regard it as shaped by relationships and situations. This suggests that Easterners should gain more experience incorporating situational factors into their attribution judgments. In line with this, Knowles et al. (2001) found that among collectivists, but not among individualists, attributions take into account situational factors automatically without requiring cognitive resources. This is consistent with our impression management results, suggesting that collectivists are more fluent in incorporating situational (e.g., normative) factors into their judgments.

In fact, it is reasonable to expect similar cultural differences in the effect of cognitive load for a number of culturally mismatched or nondominant tendencies. Our research suggests that impression management is a dominant tendency for collectivists, whereas it is nondominant for individualists. Similarly, any process that is more likely to manifest in a certain cultural group might be considered as culturally dominant for that group. In general terms, engaging in any process that mismatches (versus matches) a culturally dominant tendency should require more cognitive resources (Koo, Shavitt, Lalwani, Dai, & Chinchanchokchai, 2011). As a result, cognitive load should be more likely to impede such processes. Specific examples of other culturally dominant tendencies include prevention goal pursuit (dominant for collectivists) versus promotion goal pursuit (dominant for individualists; Lee et al., 2000) and holistic versus analytic thinking styles (dominant for collectivists versus individualists, respectively; Nisbett et al., 2001).

Briley and Aaker's (2006) research is also in line with these broad implications, as it highlights situations in which cultural differences should be magnified. Briley and Aaker's results suggest that when people engage in more automatic/spontaneous processing, they adhere to their culturally congruent patterns of evaluation, but less so when investing more cognitive resources in information processing. Like Briley and Aaker, we share the perspective that certain elements of culture and cultural goals are automatic and fluid, and that cultural differences may be more apparent under conditions of greater automaticity.

However, there are studies suggesting that cognitive busyness influences impression management for those with a collectivist self-construal, and our findings may appear inconsistent with those. For instance, Briley et al. (2005) conducted studies with bicultural students. Participants who performed the studies in Chinese exhibited a higher tendency for impression management compared to those who performed the study in English. This effect was attributed to the impact of language on salient cultural self-construal. However, when participants were cognitively busy, this effect of language on impression management disappeared. A key difference between our research and the Briley et al. (2005) studies should be noted. Our research examined the role of chronic individualism/collectivism, determined by cultural orientation or by national culture. In contrast, Briley et al. manipulated the accessibility of cultural self-construal. In their situation, it is not clear which part of the process was impeded by cognitive load — the effect of language on self-construal, or the effect of self-construal on impression management. Another recent study by Lalwani

(2009) also showed that cognitive load reduced the tendency for impression management in those whose interdependent (i.e., collectivist) self-construal was primed. Here too, cognitive load may have interfered with the activation of self-construal. Consistent with our previous discussion on the effect of cognitive load on culturally congruent or incongruent tendencies, it is reasonable to expect that cognitive load will have no influence on processes that are congruent with one's chronic cultural orientation. The automaticity of cognitive processes emerges from the practice that is obtained through socialization. Therefore, we expect it is the chronic cultural orientation rather than the temporary cultural self-construal that will determine whether or not a process is moderated by cognitive load.

Another important difference between those studies and ours should be noted. In our research, impression management motivation was induced among all participants. This enabled separating the effect of culture on impression management goals from the effect of culture on the ease of pursuing those goals, and focused the investigation on the latter process. The influence of cognitive busyness on individualists but not collectivists supports our argument that the process by which impression management motivation influences self-reports differs between cultures.

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