

Cultural equity: knowledge and outcomes aspects

Aspects of
cultural equity

Carlos J. Torelli and Hyewon Oh

*Department of Business Administration, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
Champaign, Illinois, USA, and*

Jennifer L. Stoner

University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota, USA

Received 20 December 2018

Revised 10 May 2019

26 September 2019

Accepted 26 September 2019

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to propose cultural equity as a construct to better understand the characteristics that define a culturally symbolic brand and the downstream consequences for consumer behavior and nation branding in the era of globalization.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is an empirical investigation of the knowledge and outcome aspects of cultural equity with a total of 1,771 consumers located in three different countries/continents, 77 different brands as stimuli, and using a variety of measures, surveys, lab experiments, procedures and consumer contexts.

Findings – Cultural equity is the facet of brand equity attributed to the brand's cultural symbolism or the favorable responses by consumers to the cultural symbolism of a brand. A brand has cultural equity if it has a distinctive cultural symbolism in consumers' minds (brand knowledge aspect of cultural equity: association with the central concept that defines the culture, embodiment of culturally relevant values and embeddedness in a cultural knowledge network), and such symbolism elicits a favorable consumer response to the marketing of the brand (outcome aspect of cultural equity: favorable evaluations and strong self-brand connections).

Practical implications – This paper offers a framework that allows marketers to develop cultural positioning strategies in hyper-competitive and globalized markets and identify ways for building and protecting their brands' cultural equity.

Originality/value – This paper advances our understanding of brands as cultural symbols by introducing cultural equity and integrates prior research on brand equity, cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior, country-of-origin effects and nation branding.

Keywords Brand equity, Culture, Globalization, Country of origin

Paper type Research paper

In the hyper-competitive and globalized markets of the twenty-first century, a wide range of brands brings diverse countries and cultures to a consumer population that is also growing more ethnically and culturally diverse (Torelli, 2013). In this environment, it is increasingly difficult for a brand to build a distinctive image that resonates with a diverse set of consumer markets. It is not enough for a brand to be competitive by means of delivering functional benefits (Park *et al.*, 1986), as brands across product categories are pushed to deliver emotional and symbolic benefits in an attempt to become *cultural icons*. To the extent that brands succeed at developing an iconic status in the global marketplace, they not only reap the benefits of strengthened consumer relationships (Holt, 2004), but also promote the brand of their country of origin. In some instances, brands explicitly leverage their country of origin as an asset (e.g. Volkswagen's slogan "That is the Power of German Engineering"), and their success reinforces the country's reputation for particular products and services (e.g. German engineering, Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). In turn, this contributes to building the country's whole image, or the country (or nation) brand (Fetscherin, 2010). In a globalized world in which not only companies, but also nations, compete for global supremacy (Torelli, 2013), it is increasingly important to understand how brands turn into cultural icons.



Past research has addressed this issue by analyzing consumers' responses to a brand's country of origin (Hong and Wyer, 1989; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008). This article proposes to go beyond these associations and focus more holistically on the cultural symbolism of brands or the consensus built around their status as cultural icons[1]. That is, on the extent to which brands are consensually perceived to symbolize the abstract characteristics (e.g. values, beliefs, myths and ideals) of a culture and are not only connected to a central cultural concept (e.g. American culture), but also embedded in a cultural knowledge network, including other cultural elements (e.g. beliefs, values, events and other cultural objects, Holt, 2004; Torelli *et al.*, 2010). In doing so, marketers can better understand the defining characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand, as well as assess the distinctive and favorable responses of consumers to such cultural symbolism. We refer to these favorable consumers' responses to a brand's cultural symbolism as the brand's *cultural equity* (Torelli, 2013; Torelli and Stoner, 2015). The term brand equity (Keller, 1993, 2008) was originally introduced to account for consumers' favorable responses to a brand's actions (e.g. pay more for the brand or systematically choose it above competitors) based on the distinctive brand knowledge in consumers' minds. Extending this notion, we define cultural equity as the facet of brand equity attributed to the brand's cultural symbolism, or the favorable responses by consumers to the cultural symbolism of a brand. Thus, a brand has cultural equity if it has a distinctive cultural symbolism in consumers' minds (brand knowledge aspect of cultural equity), and such symbolism elicits a favorable consumer response to the marketing of the brand (outcome aspect of cultural equity).

In the pages that follow, we first review the challenges that brand managers face in a globalized world and the extent to which past research on the country of origin helps (or not) to address these challenges. We then discuss the role of brands as cultural symbols and identify the defining characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand (the brand knowledge aspect of cultural equity): associations with a central cultural concept, embodiment of abstract cultural characteristics and linkages to diverse elements in a cultural knowledge network. Next, we analyze how appropriating the cultural symbolism of brands helps consumers fulfill cultural identity needs (the outcome aspect of cultural equity). This is followed by the results of a series of studies supporting our theoretical framework for defining cultural equity (Figure 1). The first set of studies (Studies 1a–1c) focuses on the brand knowledge aspect of cultural equity. These studies introduce a measure of

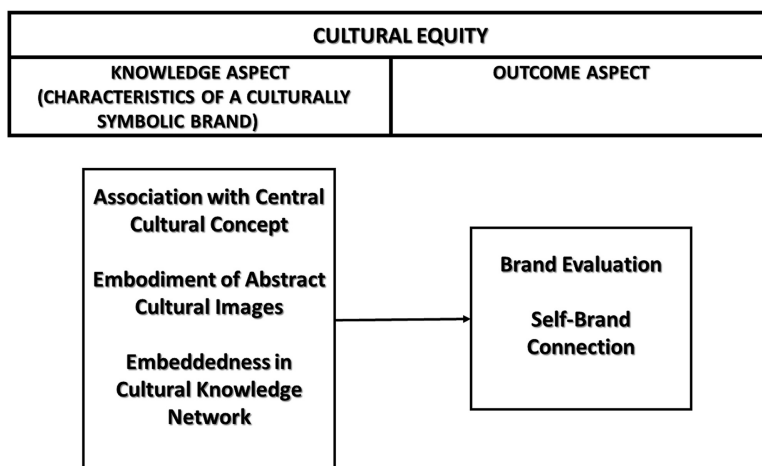


Figure 1.
Theoretical framework
for defining cultural
equity

cultural symbolism based on the defining characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand. The second set of studies (Studies 2a–2c) investigates the outcome aspect of cultural equity and illustrates the conditions under which consumers evaluate more favorably and establish stronger connections with culturally symbolic brands. We conclude with a discussion of how focusing on cultural equity broadens our understanding of the connections that consumers establish with brands, as well as the implications for branding research and practice.

Branding in a globalized world

With globalization, the world is becoming smaller and the consciousness of the world as a whole is intensifying rapidly, which is bringing dramatic changes in the marketplace (Robertson, 1992). On the demand side (i.e. consumer markets), there is a dramatic increase in the ethnic and cultural diversity of consumer markets fueled by rapid acceleration in social mobility at a global scale, as well as by the increased cultural curiosity of individuals from around the world (Arnett, 2002). On the supply side (i.e. brand offerings), there has been an explosion of growth in global competition from both developed and developing economies. Furthermore, this global competition is also blurring cultural boundaries of brand ownership, often resulting in the “mixing” of cultures in the marketplace (Torelli *et al.*, 2017).

Against this backdrop, it is increasingly difficult for companies to build unique and distinctive bonds with consumers solely on the basis of functional benefits. Brands across product categories are pushed to deliver emotional and symbolic benefits that can resonate with consumers (Park *et al.*, 1986). Brands that elicit a distinct consumer response are said to have equity. Brand equity is defined as the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumers’ response to the marketing of the brand (Keller, 2008). Brands develop equity because of their associations in consumers’ minds (i.e. brand knowledge aspect of brand equity), and consumers respond to these associations with favorable responses such as brand loyalty (i.e. outcome aspect of brand equity). Many experts suggest that the way to cope with the hyper-competition posed by globalization is to build *iconic* brands capable of establishing a special connection with consumers (e.g. Yu, 2018; Beverland, 2009). Iconic brands are those that carry consensus expressions of the values nurtured in a society (Holt, 2004; Torelli *et al.*, 2010) and hence are consensually perceived to embody the values, needs and aspirations of people in a particular culture (e.g. for American culture, see Cross, 2002).

Importantly, building such brands would not only have potential benefits for the brand (e.g. by facilitating differentiation and possibly strengthening consumer relationships), but also for the country associated with the brand. Successful brands that symbolize the culture of a country reinforce the country’s reputation for particular products and services (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). In turn, this contributes to building the country’s whole image or the country (or nation) brand (Fetscherin, 2010). Thus, one approach to understanding the cultural symbolism of brands is to focus on their country-of-origin connections. We turn to this issue next.

Country-of-origin effects

Research in country-of-origin (COO) effects has extensively documented how consumers respond to a brand’s associations with a foreign country (or culture). Consumers’ favorable (unfavorable) perceptions of a country can often serve as a basis for their favorable (unfavorable) evaluations of a product associated with that country (Hong and Wyer, 1989). Importantly, consumers often use COO associations to differentiate between national (in-group) and foreign (out-group) brands, which can ultimately affect their choices (Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000; Leclerc *et al.*, 1994). Choosing a brand associated with the home

country seems to reinforce consumers' nationalistic views by enhancing perceptions of connectedness with the national group (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007). For example, an American consumer may prefer a Ford pick-up truck over a Toyota pick-up truck as a way to reinforce an "ethnocentric" view of America as the center of the universe (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Devaluation of foreign brands are also evident among consumers of cultures with a history of hostile relations with another culture (e.g. reactions of consumers from the Chinese city of Nanjing toward Japanese brands, Klein *et al.*, 1998).

The above discussion suggests that, although consumers can use COO associations to differentiate between national and foreign brands, it may be more difficult to infer differences in symbolism for a national group among brands with the same COO associations (e.g. between "Nike" and "New Balance" for Americans). As the ownership of iconic brands moves across national boundaries at an increasing rate, many consumers have difficulty identifying the COO of consumer brands (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008). Furthermore, when a brand symbolizes a cultural group that is defined in more granular terms (e.g. gender-based groups or regional/ethnic groups), COO associations seem less relevant. To address these issues, we argue for a broadened view of a brand's cultural symbolism that extends beyond COO associations.

The brand knowledge aspect of cultural equity: brands as cultural symbols

One approach for brands to cope with the challenges of globalization is to become icons of the local cultures in which they operate (Stenkamp *et al.*, 2003). That is, to build cultural symbolism by introducing culturally valued and authentic product offerings (Ger, 1999) and by imbuing the brand with the values and ideals nurtured by members of a culture (Holt, 2004). To the extent that brands succeed at distinguishing themselves by acquiring cultural symbolism, they would create brand equity (Keller, 1993). We refer to this distinctive knowledge of a brand as a cultural symbol as the *knowledge aspect of cultural equity* (Torelli, 2013; Torelli *et al.*, 2017; Torelli and Stoner, 2015). How do brands acquire cultural symbolism? What are the distinctive characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand in consumers' minds? To answer these questions, let us first define what culture is and what it means for a brand to be a cultural symbol (or a cultural icon).

Culture, brand's cultural symbolism and characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand

There are multiple approaches for understanding how culture impacts psychological phenomena, and their usefulness depends on the problem under study (Markus and Hamedani, 2007). In a globalized world characterized by multi-culturalism, there is an emerging consensus that the dynamic constructivist approach to culture is particularly useful for explaining consumer behavior (Briley and Aaker, 2006; Oyserman and Lee, 2007; Oyserman, 2009). Under this approach, culture is defined as a loose network of knowledge structures, mental constructs and representations that are widely shared by individuals who share a language, a historical period and a geographic location, and that drive behavior when brought to the fore of the mind (Hong *et al.*, 2000; Torelli and Ahluwalia, 2012; Chiu and Hong, 2006). Thus, the key defining aspects of culture under this approach are the following: culture is conceived in terms of a central concept (i.e., American culture or African American culture); this central concept is connected to a network of mental constructs, such as values, beliefs, ideals, cognitive processes and identities; as well as to a variety of representations, such as events, places, social institutions and objects (e.g. monuments, products and brands). The name of the geographic location of a culture is often used as the central concept that defines the culture. Such geographic location often overlaps with a country (e.g. Chinese or American cultures), but can also encompass a broader region, including multiple countries (e.g. East

Asian or pan-German cultures), or be circumscribed to sub-regions or sub-groups within a country (e.g. Southern or Hispanic cultures in the USA).

Groups of individuals who share the same standards form a cultural category or group, with similar understanding of the rules and meanings that define the cultural boundaries. Research in anthropology and sociology shows that each culture has certain objects, also known as cultural icons, that connect many diverse elements of cultural knowledge (Betsky, 1997). More formally, cultural icons are images with the power to spread activation in a network of cultural constructs and to bring these constructs to the forefront of the mind (Hong *et al.*, 2000). By definition, anything can be a cultural icon or a vehicle for cultural meaning (Betsky, 1997). Brands, in particular, become cultural icons, thanks to their ability to give abstract cultural images a concreteness and visibility for the individual that they would not otherwise have (McCracken, 1986). Grounded on the key defining aspects of culture outlined earlier, we define a brand's cultural symbolism as the degree to which the brand symbolizes the abstract image of a certain cultural group and is connected in a network of cultural elements, including values, beliefs, ideals and identities, as well as other cultural objects. This definition allows us to identify three specific characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand in consumers' minds: association with the central concept that defines the culture; embodiment of culturally relevant values, needs, identities and aspirations; and embeddedness in a network of diverse elements of cultural knowledge (including values, beliefs and other cultural objects). Next, we discuss these characteristics in detail and explain their similarities and differences with past conceptualizations of cultural symbolism.

Association with the central cultural concept. A culture is commonly defined by the categorical label used by its members for purposes of group identification. Past conceptualizations of a brand as an icon of a local culture have focused on this type of cultural knowledge (e.g. "the brand represents or is a good symbol of the culture," Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003). Categorical definitions of culture are often related to the name of the geographic region in which cultural members reside (e.g. American culture, Triandis, 1996) or by other names consensually adopted to identify the group based on gender or ethnic distinctions (e.g. Hispanics, Oyserman, 2009). In the special case in which a culture is defined in terms of the national boundaries of a country, a brand's status as a cultural icon reflects the extent to which the brand is associated with, represents or symbolizes a national culture (Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007). We further argue that such connections will bring the brand into the cultural knowledge network, and hence support the view of the brand as a cultural icon. However, brands that are strongly associated with a national culture do not automatically enjoy high levels of cultural symbolism (Torelli, 2013; Torelli and Ahluwalia, 2012). For instance, as will be shown in Study 1, although the strong association between *McDonald's* and the USA undoubtedly helped *McDonald's* to become an icon of American culture, *Subway*, which enjoys equally strong associations with the USA, is not regarded by Americans as a brand with a high level of cultural symbolism.

Furthermore, because cultures and countries do not always overlap, COO associations are less relevant for assessing the symbolism of brands for sub-cultural or supra-national groups. In the context of sub-national or sub-cultural groups, the term place image is used sometimes to refer to consumers' affinity to products associated with a sub-national or ethnic group (Papadopoulos, 2011). For example, *Lone Star* beer is promoted as the "National Beer of Texas," and its identity includes images of the Wild West and a slogan that leverages Texas regionalism ("Secede from the Rest of the Beer World"). *Lone Star* aims to be a cultural symbol of Texas – a state in the USA with a strongly rooted cultural identity (Fehrenbach, 2000). In this case, region-of-origin associations would be more relevant than COO ones. Other brands may appeal to supra-national cultures. For instance, the Singaporean *Tiger* beer attempts to build cultural symbolism at the pan-Asian level using the imaginary of a multicultural, modern Asia (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008). In this case, associations with a

pan-national region are more relevant for driving cultural symbolism. A more complex situation emerges when cultures are defined in terms of ethnic categories that are less bound to a geographic region. For instance, Goya is a brand of packaged foods that has cultural symbolism for the ethnic group of Hispanics residing in the USA and in some Latin American countries (Carlyle, 2013). The structure of associations between regional/ethnic and brand images in consumers' minds is complex and intricate (Papadopoulos, 2011). The two other characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand in our conceptualization address this issue by focusing on more specific attributes such as the extent to which brands embody abstract cultural images (e.g. values and identities), as well as embed themselves in a cultural knowledge network.

Embodiment of abstract cultural images. Beyond COO associations, the embodiment of abstract cultural images also characterizes a culturally symbolic brand. This refers to abstract values, beliefs, ideals and identities nurtured by the culture, and that constitutes an essential part of the brand image (Torelli et al., 2010). In the previous example distinguishing between *McDonald's* and *Subway*, it might be argued that one driver of *McDonald's* American symbolism is its hedonic image of savory, high-calorie foods, which aligns well with hedonistic self-enhancement values nurtured in the American culture (Torelli et al., 2012). Because *Subway's* leaner and healthier image aligns less with such hedonistic cultural values, American consumers might not perceive *Subway* as culturally symbolic as *McDonald's*.

Embeddedness in the cultural knowledge network. As stated earlier, culture is internalized as a loose network of domain-specific structures, such as values, beliefs, implicit theories, mental processes and objects (such as brands), linked to a central concept (Hong et al., 2000; Torelli and Ahluwalia, 2012). Thus, inclusion of a brand in the cultural knowledge network (i.e. embeddedness of the brand in the network through connections with multiple other cultural elements, Chiu and Hong, 2006) should be another characteristic of a culturally symbolic brand. In the *McDonald's* versus *Subway* example, one could argue that *McDonald's* should be more strongly embedded in the American culture network, in view of its iconic hamburgers and apple pie desserts – quintessential American foods at the core of the cultural knowledge network. This might be less the case for *Subway*, which in turn should contribute to *McDonald's* higher level of cultural symbolism for Americans.

An iconic brand's embeddedness in a cultural network would be evident in its associations to other elements in the network (e.g. McDonald's connection to apple pie and hamburgers), as well as in the brand's ability to act as a cultural cue that activates the entire cultural network upon brand exposure. This should occur because exposure to a cultural icon triggers retrieval from memory of the cognitive representation of the culture. For instance, among Americans, subsequent to viewing an American cultural symbol, their awareness of American values (e.g. freedom, individuality) is enhanced (Fu et al., 2007; Hong et al., 2000). By extension, for iconic brands loaded with cultural meanings, incidental exposure to these brands should spontaneously evoke its attendant cultural symbolism (e.g. Marlboro would activate the value of rugged individualism in the US culture).

The outcome aspect of cultural equity: iconic brands and the fulfillment of consumers' identity needs

Culture is a key determinant of the tendency for using social (instead of personal) identities for making sense of reality, as well as of the social identity likely to be salient in a given context (Oyserman, 2009). For instance, in collectivistic cultures that foster interdependence and the prioritization of collective (over personal) goals, people are more likely to define the self in terms of social (vs personal) identities than people in individualistic cultures (i.e. cultures that foster independence and the prioritization of personal goals, Triandis, 1995). The identity-based motivation model (Oyserman, 2007) proposes that social identities are

powerful drivers of judgments and behaviors. Social identities not only include knowledge about group membership and a positive sense of ingroup connections, but also the readiness to act and make sense of the world in identity-congruent ways.

Making salient a cultural identity triggers favorable attitudes toward objects that are identity-congruent. For instance, when making an ethnic identity salient (e.g. Asian), consumers evaluate more favorably advertisements that are targeted to the ethnic ingroup (e.g. as depicted in copy and ad images, [Forehand et al., 2002](#)) or that include a spokesperson from the ethnic ingroup ([Forehand and Deshpandé, 2001](#)) than when the identity is not made salient. Because culturally symbolic brands symbolize the beliefs, ideas and values of a cultural group, consumers with a heightened need to symbolize a cultural identity will judge culturally symbolic brands as highly instrumental for fulfilling such needs. This is demonstrated in a study with Minnesotan consumers who were willing to pay more for a set of poker chips that carried the *Target* (a Minnesota iconic retailer) logo when their Minnesotan identity was made salient than when it was not ([Amaral and Torelli, 2018](#)). By being a patron of a culturally symbolic brand, one can distinctively emphasize the possession of the cultural identity and the alignment with and adherence to the culture. We refer to this distinctive and favorable response to a brand's cultural symbolism as the outcome aspect of a brand's cultural equity. This refers to consumers' distinctive responses to the marketing of a culturally symbolic brand for symbolizing a self-relevant cultural identity. Our framework suggests that marketers can build cultural equity into their brands by associating their brands to the characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand described earlier. For example, *Ford's* status as an American icon can not only be strengthened by explicitly promoting its American origin, but also by further embedding the brand in the American culture network (e.g. via ads that depict American icons like the American flag), as well as by conveying the American values of power and toughness.

The current studies

To support the theoretical framework proposed in this research ([Figure 1](#)), we conducted two studies including a total of 1,771 consumers located in three different countries/continents and using 77 different brands as stimuli. The first set of studies (Studies 1a–1c) focused on the brand knowledge aspect of cultural equity (i.e. brand's cultural symbolism or the characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand). In this study, we developed a scale to measure a brand's cultural symbolism based on its association with the central cultural concept, its embodiment of abstract values and ideals and its embeddedness in the cultural knowledge network (the three characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand). This study demonstrated the reliability and validity of the cultural symbolism scale. The second set of studies (Studies 2a–2c) focused on some of the outcomes of cultural equity for expressing cultural identity needs (i.e. outcome aspect of cultural equity). This set of studies investigated consumers' more favorable evaluations of brands high (vs low) in cultural symbolism when cultural identity needs are temporarily or chronically salient. This was done by demonstrating that a chronic commitment to a cultural identity is associated with more favorable evaluations of (Study 2a) and stronger connections (Study 2b) with brands high in cultural symbolism, as well as by demonstrating favorable responses to culturally symbolic brands when making salient the positive aspects of a cultural identity and by threatening an unrelated social identity (Study 2c).

Study 1: Measuring cultural symbolism (knowledge aspect of cultural equity)

Study 1 was designed to test the reliability and validity of a cultural symbolism scale (CSS, knowledge aspect of cultural equity) based on the conceptualization of the characteristics of a

culturally symbolic brand advanced in this research. We used a variety of cultural groups, including entire nations from different cultures, as well as sub-cultures within a nation (gender-based sub-cultures, [Oyserman, 2009](#)). For each cultural group, we studied the degree of cultural symbolism for a variety of brands. Because cultural icons have symbolic meanings that are widely and durably distributed in the culture ([Sperber, 1996](#)), and iconic brands carry consensus expressions of the values and ideals nurtured in a society, we tapped into the brand meanings shared by group members by asking them to rate the fellow group members' beliefs about the brand.

Study 1a: Item generation

We generated a pool of 15 items to measure the degree to which brands symbolize a cultural group. These items emerged from a series of pretests conducted using established practices in marketing research in which academic experts and consumers generated and evaluated a larger set of items that capture the characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand identified in this research, and then following up with consumer focus groups and experts ratings to weed out confusing or repetitive items and assure content validity (e.g. [Sweeney and Soutar, 2001](#); [Babin and Burns, 1998](#)). On the basis of expert ratings (intraclass correlation = 0.71, [Shrout and Fleiss, 1979](#)), items were eliminated if at least one expert believed that it was ambiguous, repetitive or a poor representation of the construct[2]. The 15 remaining items reflected the three key characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand in our framework, including overall associations with the central cultural concept (e.g. "The brand is associated with American culture"), symbolism of abstract group meanings such as values and identities (e.g. "the brand embodies American values") and connection with other cultural objects (e.g. "A picture of the brand with the American flag makes a lot of sense"). The cultural group used was "Americans." We recruited 113 introductory business students in a large public, midwestern university to rate three brands from the perspective of an average American, or to indicate the opinion about the brands they believed is shared by Americans in general. The use of student samples in this research is justified by the fact that cultural symbolism is conceptualized as shared knowledge widely distributed and equally accessible to all individuals in the culture, which is operationalized by asking the participants to tap into the knowledge shared by others (e.g. answer from the perspective of an average member of the culture) ([Chiu et al., 2010](#); [Wan et al., 2010, 2007](#)). The three brands were randomly selected from a larger group of 13 brands ([Table I](#)). These brands were generated based on a separate pretest on familiar brands

| Brand | Product category | Category type* |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|
| American Express | Credit card | U/S |
| Budweiser | Beer | S |
| Chicken of the Sea | Canned tuna | U |
| Cheerios | Breakfast cereal | U |
| Coke | Soda | U/S |
| Dasani | Bottled water | U |
| Ford | Cars | U/S |
| Hallmark | Greeting cards | S |
| Kodak | Camera film | U |
| Miller | Beer | S |
| New Balance | Tennis shoes | U/S |
| Nike | Tennis shoes | U/S |
| Tombstone | Frozen pizza | U |

Table I.
Brands used in
Study 1a

Notes: *U: Utilitarian, S: Symbolic

from a large set of categories, according to the following criteria: the brand was listed by at least half of the participants; the brands were balanced in terms of their membership in utilitarian, symbolic or utilitarian-symbolic categories (similar procedure in Aaker, 1997); the brand scored above the mid-point of the seven-point COO connection scale (1 = definitely not an American brand, 7 = definitely an American brand, to include brands likely to be symbolic of America); and there were no more than two brands from the same category.

The participants rated, on seven-point scales, the extent to which an average American would agree with each of the 15 items (one brand at a time). Because each of the three characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand outlined in our conceptualization is equally central to our definition, our theorizing suggests a unidimensional measure of cultural symbolism (Bagozzi, 1984). Following established procedures (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988), we first conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the 15-item scale, using maximum likelihood with direct oblimin rotation. The results showed a clear single-factor solution that accounted for 47.3 percent of the variance. We then eliminated items on the basis of parameter estimates (lower than 0.6, Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), leading to a reduced seven-item scale, including items with the highest factor loadings (above 0.76). The reliability of the seven-item CSS was very high, $\alpha = 0.95$ (see retained items in the Appendix).

Study 1b: Discriminant validity of the cultural symbolism scale (CSS)

This study aimed to further demonstrate the unidimensionality of the CSS with a different sample using confirmatory factor analysis (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988) while distinguishing cultural symbolism from other constructs with which it may be partially correlated. As discussed earlier, when considering national groups, cultural symbolism should partially overlap with COO connections. However, because cultural symbolism is further driven by the embodiment of abstract cultural values and the embeddedness in a cultural knowledge network, the correlation with COO connections should be modest.

Culturally symbolic brands may reach the upper levels of brand equity (i.e. brand resonance, Keller, 2008), as consumers connect with them to manage their social identities. Thus, cultural symbolism may be correlated with the level of self-brand connection. While all the members of a cultural group may recognize the cultural symbolism of a brand, some may have a higher need to reinforce the group identity than others, which may affect the level of self-brand connection. Furthermore, culturally symbolic brands are highly familiar and may elicit greater levels of involvement. We should then expect cultural symbolism to correlate with the level of self-brand connection, familiarity and involvement.

We assessed the discriminant validity of the CSS using confirmatory factor analysis with samples of consumers from American and Venezuelan cultures. These two cultures were chosen as they vary significantly along the individualism–collectivism dimensions; American culture is more individualistic, whereas Venezuelan culture is more collectivistic (Triandis, 1995). A total of 849 individuals, 259 in the USA (49 percent male, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.9$ years) and 590 in Venezuela (42 percent male, $M_{\text{age}} = 32.5$ years) participated in this study. The US subjects were introductory business students in a large, public midwestern university who participated in the study for course credit. The Venezuelan participants were a random sample representative of the population in the eight largest cities and were paid the equivalent of US\$5 for their involvement.

Participants in the two countries rated, in their native language (surveys translated using standard back-translation procedures), four different brands, randomly selected from larger groups of 36 and 20 brands in the USA and Venezuela, respectively, in terms of their symbolism of American or Venezuelan culture. They did this by indicating the degree to which an average American (or Venezuelan) would agree with the items in the CSS (for the Venezuelan sample, “American” was replaced by “Venezuelan” in all the items). Brands were

selected from a separate pretest with similar participants and followed the same procedure used in study 1a (see Table II for the list of brands and mean scores). After completing the CSS, the participants indicated their personal opinions (on seven-point scales) about the following brand-related dimensions: involvement (INV, four-items, 1 = not fun/not appealing/uninteresting/tells me nothing about user, 7 = fun/appealing/interesting/tells me a lot about user, Higie and Feick, 1989), self-brand connection (SBC, three-items, 1 = nothing in common/does not remind me of who I am/is not a part of me, 7 = a lot in common/reminds me of who I am/is a part of me, Fournier, 1994; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007), COO connection (COC, two items, 1 = definitely not an American brand/not made in America, 7 = definitely an American brand/made in America) and familiarity (FAM, one item, 1 = not familiar at all, 7 = very familiar). Finally, they answered demographic questions and were debriefed and dismissed.

All scale reliabilities were satisfactory (USA: 0.81–0.93; Venezuela: 0.85–0.96). For each of the country samples, we conducted separate confirmatory factor analysis with cultural symbolism, involvement, self-brand connection, COO connection and familiarity as separate, yet correlated latent variables. The model was estimated with EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 1995) using maximum likelihood. Path coefficients from the latent variables to the manifest indicators were all positive and large. All standardized coefficients were in excess of 0.61 (USA) and 0.69 (Venezuela). We assessed the overall model fit using Hu and Bentler's (1999) two-indices recommendations, whereby values close to below 0.09 for the Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) and close to or above 0.95 for the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) suggest a very good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data. The overall fit indices indicated a good fit for models of this size, SRMR = 0.043 (USA) and 0.035 (Venezuela), CFI = 0.93 (USA) and 0.95 (Venezuela). In addition, we conducted chi-square tests to evaluate changes in fit between this model and four separate models combining in a single factor cultural symbolism with each of the other four variables. The results showed that, in the two samples, models with Cultural Symbolism (CS), INV, SBC, COC and FAM as separate, yet correlated, latent variables offered a better fit to the data than models combining cultural symbolism with any of the four other variables, $\chi^2_{diff.} = 319\text{--}3,310$ (USA) and $517\text{--}4,492$ (Venezuela), $df = 4$, all $p < 0.001$.

The above findings attest to the unidimensional structure of the CSS as well as to its discriminant validity as a separate construct that is partially correlated with involvement, 0.35 (USA) and 0.16 (Venezuela); self-brand connection, 0.35 (USA) and 0.59 (Venezuela); COO connection, 0.60 (USA) and 0.42 (Venezuela); and familiarity, 0.33 (USA) and 0.43 (Venezuela). Some examples can be used to illustrate the discriminant validity of the CSS. Take for instance *Subway* and *McDonald's*. Although US participants, on average, were equally familiar with the two brands, easily recognized both brands as US brands and were equally involved with and connected to the two brands, they perceived *McDonald's* to be more culturally symbolic for Americans than *Subway* (6.0 and 4.6, respectively). Similarly, for *Pan* (corn flour) and *Mavesa* (margarine), although Venezuelan participants, on average, were equally familiar with the two brands, easily recognized both brands as Venezuelan brands and were equally involved with and connected to the two brands, they perceived *Pan* to be more culturally symbolic for Venezuelans than *Mavesa* (6.1 and 4.3, respectively).

The Venezuelan data also offered another useful insight. Although the brands in the top-quartile of the cultural symbolism distribution are all Venezuelan brands, the brand with the second highest cultural symbolism score (*Savoy*) is a subsidiary of *Nestlé* (a Swiss company) and the *Nestlé* name is displayed prominently on the products. Similarly, several well-known multinational brands made it into our list. In particular, *Heinz* (ketchup) scored higher in cultural symbolism than one of the oldest Venezuelan brands, *Mavesa* (margarine) while being perceived as equally connected to Venezuela as a country. Remember that only brands that scored above the middle of the COO connection scale were included in the analysis. The findings

| Brand | Product category | Category type* | CS | INV | SBC | COC | FAM |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <i>US brands</i> | | | | | | | |
| Ford | Cars | U/S | 6.3 | 3.9 | 5.8 | 6.4 | 5.8 |
| Coke | Soda | U/S | 6.1 | 4.7 | 6.4 | 6.1 | 6.4 |
| McDonald's | Restaurant | U/S | 6.0 | 4.3 | 6.4 | 6.5 | 6.4 |
| Starbucks | Coffee shop | U/S | 5.7 | 4.7 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| Chevrolet | Cars | U/S | 5.7 | 3.7 | 5.5 | 6.2 | 5.5 |
| CNN | News | U/S | 5.6 | 3.9 | 5.8 | 6.2 | 5.8 |
| Apple | Electronics | U/S | 5.6 | 5.2 | 5.8 | 5.7 | 5.8 |
| Budweiser | Beer | S | 5.6 | 4.4 | 5.4 | 5.8 | 5.4 |
| American Express | Financial services | U/S | 5.6 | 3.5 | 5.0 | 6.0 | 5.0 |
| Nike | Tennis shoes | U/S | 5.4 | 4.8 | 6.1 | 5.0 | 6.1 |
| American Eagle | Apparel-retail | U/S | 5.1 | 3.9 | 4.9 | 5.4 | 4.9 |
| Cheerios | Breakfast cereal | U | 5.1 | 3.9 | 6.0 | 5.9 | 6.0 |
| Miller | Beer | S | 5.0 | 4.3 | 5.3 | 6.0 | 5.3 |
| Abercrombie & Fitch | Apparel retail | U/S | 5.0 | 3.7 | 4.1 | 4.9 | 4.1 |
| Oscar Mayer | Packaged food | U | 5.0 | 4.3 | 4.9 | 5.5 | 4.9 |
| Dunkin donuts | Baked goods retail | U/S | 4.9 | 4.2 | 4.9 | 5.6 | 4.9 |
| Hummer | SUV | U/S | 4.6 | 3.1 | 4.1 | 4.7 | 4.1 |
| Subway | Restaurants | U/S | 4.6 | 4.0 | 6.0 | 6.1 | 6.0 |
| Aunt Jemima | Pancake syrup | U | 4.5 | 3.5 | 5.0 | 5.1 | 5.0 |
| Good Year | Tires | U | 4.4 | 3.0 | 4.2 | 4.7 | 4.2 |
| Tylenol | Pain killer | U | 4.4 | 3.1 | 5.1 | 4.4 | 5.1 |
| Hallmark | Greeting cards | S | 4.4 | 3.9 | 5.1 | 5.3 | 5.1 |
| Citibank | Financial services | U/S | 4.4 | 3.1 | 4.4 | 5.1 | 4.4 |
| Tommy Hilfiger | Apparel | U/S | 4.4 | 3.3 | 4.0 | 4.2 | 4.1 |
| Hot Wheels | Toys | U/S | 4.3 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 4.7 | 4.1 |
| Kenmore | Appliances | U | 4.2 | 3.1 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 4.1 |
| Kellogg's | Breakfast cereal | U | 4.1 | 3.9 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| Caribou Coffee | Coffee shop | U/S | 4.0 | 4.6 | 5.6 | 5.9 | 5.6 |
| Sketchers | Shoes | U/S | 3.9 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.3 |
| Kodak | Camera film | U | 3.9 | 4.3 | 5.4 | 5.0 | 5.4 |
| T-Mobile | Telecommunications | U/S | 3.8 | 3.5 | 4.8 | 4.1 | 4.8 |
| Dasani | Bottled water | U | 3.8 | 3.5 | 4.7 | 4.5 | 4.7 |
| Tombstone | Frozen pizza | U | 3.8 | 3.7 | 4.8 | 4.3 | 4.8 |
| New Balance | Tennis shoes | U/S | 3.7 | 3.9 | 4.4 | 4.6 | 4.4 |
| Chicken of the Sea | Canned tuna | U | 3.3 | 3.4 | 3.9 | 4.1 | 4.6 |
| McGraw-Hill | Publishing | U | 2.9 | 3.4 | 4.0 | 4.2 | 4.1 |
| <i>Venezuelan brands</i> | | | | | | | |
| Pan | Corn flour | U | 6.1 | 4.7 | 5.9 | 5.7 | 5.6 |
| Savoy | Chocolate | U/S | 6.0 | 4.3 | 5.8 | 5.7 | 5.5 |
| Cantv | Telecommunications | U/S | 5.9 | 4.5 | 5.4 | 5.7 | 5.2 |
| Mazeite | Cooking oil | U | 5.9 | 4.5 | 6.2 | 5.7 | 5.4 |
| Las Llaves | Bar soap | U/S | 5.3 | 3.4 | 5.6 | 5.4 | 5.5 |
| Frica | Beverages | U/S | 5.1 | 4.7 | 5.3 | 5.3 | 5.1 |
| Farmatodo | Retail | U/S | 4.9 | 3.9 | 5.5 | 5.1 | 5.3 |
| Movilnet | Telecommunications | U/S | 4.9 | 4.6 | 5.0 | 5.4 | 5.1 |
| Heinz | Ketchup | U | 4.8 | 4.3 | 5.6 | 4.3 | 5.3 |
| Ace | Laundry detergent | U | 4.8 | 3.0 | 5.1 | 4.7 | 5.0 |
| Toddy | Beverages | U/S | 4.5 | 3.9 | 5.1 | 4.8 | 4.9 |
| Kraft | Mayonnaise | U | 4.4 | 4.4 | 5.6 | 4.2 | 5.4 |
| Polar | Beer | S | 4.3 | 4.0 | 4.1 | 5.6 | 4.8 |
| Mavesa | Margarine | U | 4.2 | 3.2 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 5.3 |
| Pampero | Rum | S | 3.9 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 5.1 | 4.3 |
| Maggi | Condiments | U | 3.9 | 2.9 | 4.5 | 4.8 | 4.7 |
| Palmolive | Bar soap | U/S | 3.8 | 3.5 | 4.7 | 4.2 | 4.8 |
| Belmont | Cigarettes | S | 3.6 | 4.6 | 3.8 | 4.7 | 4.5 |
| Cada | Retail | U/S | 3.5 | 2.6 | 4.0 | 4.7 | 4.5 |
| Mercantil | Financial services | U/S | 3.5 | 2.6 | 4.1 | 4.6 | 4.4 |

Aspects of cultural equity

Table II.
Brands and mean scores – Study 1b

Notes: *U: Utilitarian, S: Symbolic

here suggest that, at least in a developing collectivistic culture, foreign brands can enjoy moderate to high levels of cultural symbolism, thus reinforcing the notion that cultural symbolism goes beyond COO connections. Finally, attesting to the robustness of the structural properties of the CSS, the findings in this study were consistent for the two samples that differed not only in their cultural characteristics, but also in some demographic variables (e.g. age).

Study 1c: Generalizability to sub-cultural groups

Two different samples of consumers, belonging to an equal number of sub-cultural groups, were used here. As the culturally prescribed meaning of the genders in American society has been well documented (Bem, 1974), we used gender as the criterion to define the sub-cultural groups. A total of 180 American participants took part in the study (37.2 percent male, $M_{\text{age}} = 22.3$ years). All were undergraduate business students in a public midwestern university and participated for course credit. American male (female) participants were presented with four brands randomly selected from a larger group of 10 (9) brands. As in the previous studies, the participants rated the brands (one at a time) in terms of their symbolism for the corresponding sub-culture (American men or American women). They did this by indicating the degree to which an average group member (e.g. an average American woman) would agree with the items in the CSS. Brands were selected from a separate pretest with participants from the same subject pools and followed the same procedure used in previous studies. However, in this case, we asked participants to indicate, on a seven-point scale, the extent to which they believed the brands were masculine or feminine (1 = not at all masculine/feminine, 7 = extremely masculine/feminine, Golden *et al.*, 1979). Only brands that scored above the mid-point of the corresponding scales (e.g. masculinity for American men or femininity for American women) were included in the study (see Table III for a list of brands and cultural symbolism scores). After rating the brands in terms of cultural symbolism, the participants indicated their personal opinions about the following brand-

| Brand | Product category | Category type* | CS |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|-----|
| <i>American men</i> | | | |
| Harley Davidson | Motorcycles | U/S | 6.1 |
| Budweiser | Beer | S | 6.0 |
| Ford | Cars | U/S | 5.9 |
| Craftsman | Tools | U | 5.7 |
| Axe | Deodorant | U/S | 4.7 |
| REI | Outdoor gear | U/S | 4.6 |
| BMW | Luxury cars | S | 3.3 |
| American Express | Credit cards | U/S | 2.8 |
| Jansport | Backpacks | U | 2.7 |
| Kodak | Camera film | U | 2.2 |
| <i>American women</i> | | | |
| Special K | Breakfast cereal | U | 5.2 |
| Aveda | Haircare | U/S | 5.1 |
| Victoria's Secret | Lingerie | S | 5.0 |
| MAC | Cosmetics | S | 5.0 |
| Activa | Yogurt | U | 4.5 |
| Manolo Blahnik | Designer shoes | S | 4.1 |
| Kashi | Breakfast cereal | U | 3.5 |
| American Express | Credit cards | U/S | 3.3 |
| Jansport | Backpacks | U | 2.5 |

Table III. Brands and cultural symbolism scores – Study 1c

Notes: *U: Utilitarian, S: Symbolic

related dimensions: self-brand connection, COO connection, masculinity or femininity and familiarity. The same scales used in previous studies were used here.

All scale reliabilities were satisfactory (men: 0.84–0.97; women: 0.89–0.95). For each sub-cultural group, we conducted separate confirmatory factor analysis with cultural symbolism, self-brand connection, COO connection, masculinity or femininity (depending on the group) and familiarity as separate, yet correlated latent variables, measured by their corresponding scales. For the two models, standardized coefficients were in excess of 0.80. In addition, overall fit indices suggested a very good fit for models of this size, SRMR = 0.032 (American men) and 0.028 (American women), CFI = 0.97 (both American men and women). We also conducted chi-square tests to evaluate changes in fit between these models and separate models combining in a single factor cultural symbolism with each of the other four latent variables. The results showed that, for the two sub-cultural groups, models with a unidimensional measure of cultural symbolism and the other latent variables as separate, yet correlated, factors offered a better fit to the data than models combining cultural symbolism with any of the other variables, $\chi^2_{diff.} = 16.2-1,868$, all $p < 0.005$.

Taken together, the results in Study 1 show that cultural symbolism is a unidimensional construct that measures the knowledge aspect of cultural equity. CSS has sound psychometric properties as evidenced by its high internal reliability and cross-cultural generality, both across cultures and sub-cultures. The scale also has high face validity. As shown in Table II, the American brands with the highest cultural symbolism scores were brands widely regarded as American icons (e.g. *Ford* or *Coke*), as was also the case for the Venezuelan brands (e.g. *Pan* or *Savoy*, as indicated by market studies in Venezuela). Similarly, the brands that received the highest cultural symbolism scores among sub-cultural groups were easily recognizable as icons of these sub-cultural groups (e.g. *Harley Davidson* for American men and *Special K* for American women). The internal reliability and structure of the scale suggest that the three key characteristics of a culturally symbolic brand in our framework define the construct of cultural symbolism.

Study 2: Outcome aspect of cultural equity

Study 2 investigates the outcomes of cultural equity in the attitudes and relationships of consumers with brands high (vs low) in cultural symbolism as a way of expressing cultural identity goals. We used a variety of cultural and sub-cultural groups to illustrate how consumers favor brands high in cultural symbolism to fulfill important self-defining goals. Cultural identity needs were made temporarily salient through different types of manipulations, and we also measured the chronic tendency to fulfill these needs. We measured the effects on brand evaluations and self-brand connections, both widely used outcomes of brand equity (Keller, 2008).

Study 2a: Chronic cultural identification and brand evaluations

Study 2a investigated the effect of a chronic tendency to define the self in terms of cultural identity on the evaluation of brands high (vs low) in cultural symbolism. Because chronic identification with a cultural identity heightens the need for symbolizing such identity (Turner et al., 1987; Ashmore et al., 2004), consumers high (vs low) in cultural identification should more easily perceive culturally symbolic brands in terms of their abstract cultural meanings. In turn, this would lead these consumers to evaluate more favorably brands high in cultural symbolism, because of their value for emphasizing a central aspect of the self. This effect should be absent for brands low in cultural symbolism that are not instrumental for fulfilling chronic identity goals. We used four different cultural groups, defined at various levels of abstraction, to investigate the liking for brands with varying levels of cultural

symbolism. We sampled from the same gender-based sub-cultural groups from the individualistic American society investigated in Study 1c (American men, $n = 56$, and American women, $n = 50$) and also from another gender-based sub-cultural group from the collectivistic Chinese society (Chinese women, $n = 51$). Finally, we included an additional non-gender-based sample from the more abstractly defined American culture ($n = 57$, 50.9 percent male). This latter sample would allow us to generalize the findings across cultural groups defined at different levels of abstraction.

Sample and procedures. A total of 214 consumers participated in the study. These consumers were undergraduates enrolled in academic courses in a public midwestern university in the USA or in a public Chinese university, who participated in exchange for course credit. The average age of participants was 21.5 years. The participants indicated their favorability toward two pairs of brands on a three-item, seven-point scale (1 = poor/unfavorable, bad, 7 = excellent/favorable/good). The brands were chosen based on the results from Study 1 and an additional pretest with Chinese participants, to be either high (top quartile) or low (bottom quartile) in cultural symbolism for the corresponding cultural groups. In the case of American men and women, we used the same two brands that were at the bottom of the distribution for comparison purposes (see Table IV for a list of brands). The participants also rated their familiarity with the brands. After this, they completed a scale aimed at measuring their identification with the corresponding cultural group. American men and women completed the masculine or feminine items, respectively, in the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI, Bem, 1974) that measures identification with the masculine and feminine roles in American culture. Similarly, Chinese women completed the feminine items of the Chinese Sex-Role Inventory (Zhang *et al.*, 2001). American participants in the non-gender-based “American” group condition completed a five-item, seven-point American identification scale that measures the centrality of this identity for self-definition (Wan *et al.*, 2007). Finally, the participants answered demographic questions and were debriefed and dismissed.

Manipulation check. In a separate pretest, 102 Chinese women from the same subject pool rated the four brands used in the main study in terms of cultural symbolism using the CSS (items reworded to “Chinese women”). The two brands in the high-CS condition showed higher ratings than those in the low-CS condition ($M_{\text{Gege Qipao}} = 5.0$ and $M_{\text{Yuesai}} = 4.6$, significantly above the mid-point of the scale, $p < 0.001$, $M_{\text{Swatch}} = 2.2$ and $M_{\text{Jeanswest}} = 2.0$, significantly below the mid-point of the scale, $p < 0.001$).

Analysis on brand evaluations. To examine the relationship between brand evaluation and cultural group identification for brands high vs low in cultural symbolism, we estimated a multi-level linear model in which evaluations of each type of brand (high or low in cultural symbolism, Level 1) are nested within participants (Level 2), which are in turn nested within the four different cultural groups (Level 3). This allows us to collapse the linear relationships between evaluation and cultural group identification for each type of brand across the four

| Cultural group | Brands | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | High CS | Low CS |
| American men | Budweiser Harley Davidson | Jansport American express |
| American women | Special K Aveda | Jansport American Express |
| Chinese women | Yuesai Gege qipao | Swatch Jeanswest |
| Americans in general | Budweiser Coke | Kodak New Balance |

Table IV.
Brands used as stimuli
in Study 2a

cultural groups. More specifically, the model can be described by the following equation: $Evaluation = (\gamma_{000} + r_{00} + u_0) + (\gamma_{100})Identification + (\gamma_{200})CS + (\gamma_{300})Identification \times CS + (\gamma_{400})Familiarity + e$, where *Evaluation* is the average evaluation score of brand *i* ($i = 1-4$) for participant *j* ($j = 1-n_k$) in cultural group *k* ($k = 1-4$), *Identification* is the average identification of participant *j* in cultural group *k* evaluating brand *i*, CS is a dummy variable for the level of cultural symbolism (0 = low CS, 1 = high CS) of brand *i* evaluated by participant *j* in cultural group *k*, *Identification* \times CS is the interaction between the previous two variables, *Familiarity* is the familiarity with brand *i* of participant *j* in cultural group *k* and *e* is the Level-1 residual. The term $(\gamma_{000} + r_{00} + u_0)$ is the intercept for cultural group *k* and is composed of a mean intercept (γ_{00}), a random component that captures participant *j*'s deviation from the mean (r_{00}) and another random component (u_0) that captures group *k*'s deviation from the mean. The coefficients γ_{100} , γ_{200} , γ_{300} and γ_{400} represent the slope of the linear relationship, at Level 1, between the brand evaluation measure and the predictors.

Substantively, our interest lies in the slope coefficient γ_{300} that measures the degree to which the linear relationships between brand evaluation and cultural group identification vary as a function of the cultural symbolism of the brand. All the parameters were estimated using the software package provided by Raudenbush and Bryk (2002). As predicted, the slope coefficient γ_{300} was positive and significant, $t(825) = 14.327, p < 0.001$, as were also the slope coefficients γ_{200} and γ_{400} , $t(825) = -2.579, p < 0.01$ and $t(825) = 9.086, p < 0.001$. To further interpret these effects, we conducted a simple slope analysis (Preacher et al., 2006). The slope coefficient of the linear relationship between brand evaluation and cultural group identification was positive and significant for brands high in cultural symbolism, slope = 0.49, $t(825) = 5.958, p < 0.001$, and non-significantly different from zero for brands low in cultural symbolism ($p > 0.16$). As depicted in Figure 2, for all cultural groups, individuals having high (vs low) identification with the cultural group exhibited more favorable evaluations of brands that are high in symbolism of abstract group characteristics. By contrast, evaluation of brands low in cultural symbolism is unrelated with cultural group identification.

Study 2b: Chronic cultural identification and self-brand connections

Study 2b extended the effects beyond evaluations to self-brand connections. The participants rated their favorite brand (as chosen by the participants) in terms of cultural symbolism for the cultural group they belonged to. We then studied the effect of the interplay between participants' level of identification with the group and their own perceptions of cultural symbolism on their self-reported levels of self-brand connection. Over time, consumers' continued reliance on culturally symbolic brands for fulfilling social identity goals should result in the development of strong bonds with these brands. The ability of culturally symbolic brands to represent and anchor an important cultural group identity could lead to the highest level of identification that a consumer has with the brand or brand resonance (Keller, 2008). The more important a particular cultural group identity is to a consumer's self-definition, the more likely he or she will develop strong bonds with brands that are high in cultural symbolism for the group. We anticipated that, among the participants highly identified with their groups, the level of self-brand connection would increase with the perception of the brand as a cultural symbol. No such relationship would exist among the participants low in identification with the cultural group.

Sample and procedures. In total, 276 Chinese students enrolled in a large public university in China (46 percent male, average age = 22.2 years) were compensated with ¥20 (about US\$3) for their participation. They were asked to think about brands that they liked and to write down their favorite brand. They were then asked to rate their favorite brand in terms of cultural symbolism for Chinese using the seven-item CSS and to indicate the level of

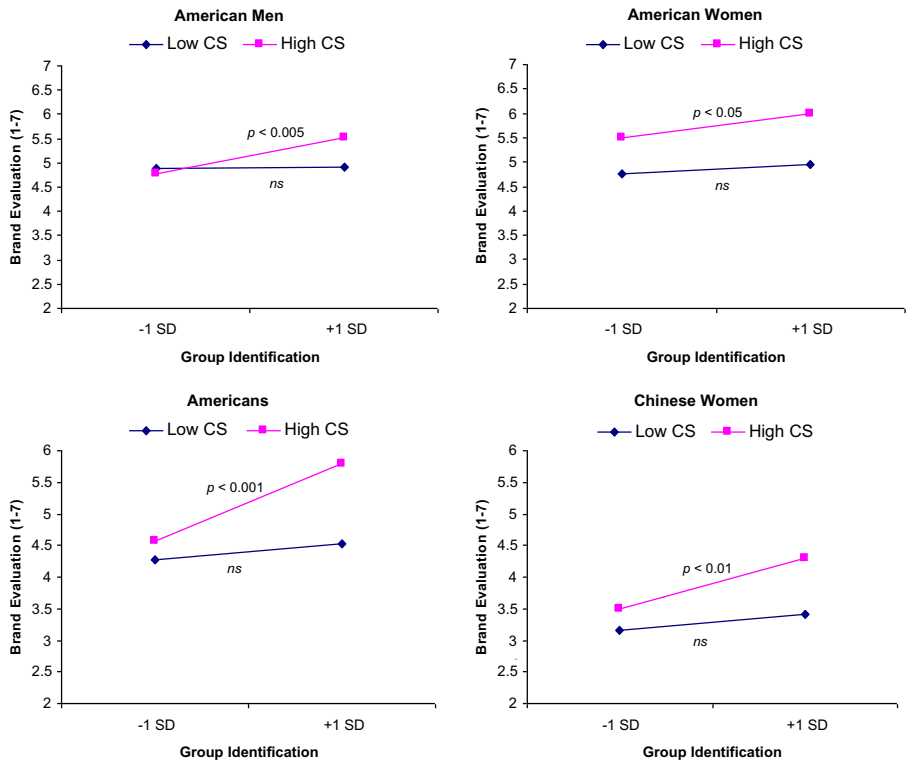


Figure 2. Brand evaluation as a function of cultural identification, brand's cultural symbolism and cultural group – Study 2a

self-brand connection (SBC) on the scale used in Study 1b. After working on some unrelated tasks, the participants completed a Chinese version of the group identification scale used in Study 2a (with “American” replaced by “Chinese”). Finally, they answered demographic questions and were debriefed and dismissed.

Self-brand connection, cultural symbolism and group identification. To analyze the extent to which the participants establish strong self-brand connections with brands that symbolize important group identities, we conducted a regression analysis, using the PROCESS macro, of the mean SBC scores ($\alpha = 0.80$) on mean cultural symbolism (CS) ($\alpha = 0.95$), cultural group identification (CGI) ($\alpha = 0.85$) and their two-way interactions. This analysis yielded only a significant interaction, $\beta = 1.02$, $t(272) = 2.17$, $p < 0.05$. None of the other coefficients reached significance (all $p > 0.1$). As predicted, simple slope analyses revealed that the slope of the linear relationship between SBC and CS scores was positive and significant for participants high in cultural group identification (+1 SD), slope = 0.28, $t(272) = 5.11$, $p < 0.001$. By contrast, the slope was non-significantly different from zero for the participants low in cultural group identification (-1 SD), $t = 1.31$, ns.

Study 2c: Temporary accessibility of a cultural identity and brand evaluations

Although Studies 2a and 2b demonstrated that chronic identification with cultural identity is positively associated with consumers' attitudes toward and self-brand connections with brands high in cultural symbolism, Study 2c focused on the effect of making cultural identity needs salient on evaluations of culturally symbolic brands. We did so using two different

samples of American business students and following two different methods for making cultural identity needs salient. With a first sample, we made cultural identity needs salient (or not) by highlighting the positive qualities of their American identity (Turner *et al.*, 1987), whereas with a second sample, cultural identity needs were heightened (or not) by means of threatening an unrelated social identity (their college student identity, Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1981). For both samples, we subsequently measured attitudes toward brands high (vs low) in American culture symbolism. We predicted that, when making cultural identity needs salient (either by reminding about the positive qualities of the American identity or by heightening cultural identity needs upon threatening an unrelated social identity), consumers would exhibit more favorable attitudes toward brands high in cultural symbolism. This effect will be absent for brands low in cultural symbolism that are not instrumental for fulfilling cultural identity needs.

Sample 1 – procedures. In total, 49 undergraduate students enrolled in a public midwestern university (43 percent male, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.8$ years) participated in the study in exchange for course credit. The participants first read a story and answered some general questions about it (e.g. “key arguments” and “what got your attention”). Half of the participants (in the “American identity salient” condition) read a story highlighting positive accomplishments by Americans and American society (e.g. “fight the tyranny of Adolf Hitler” and “fighting poverty and injustice around the world”), whereas the other half (in the control condition) read an identity-neutral story about grasshoppers (results from a separate pretest assessing the effectiveness of the manipulation for making the American identity salient are available from the authors). After this task, in an unrelated study about brand evaluations, the participants were presented with two pairs of brands and evaluated them on the same scale used in Study 2a. The brands were chosen based on the results from Study 1, and an additional pretest with participants from the same pool, to be either moderately high (second to the top quartile) or low (bottom quartile) in cultural symbolism for Americans. The brands were chosen from product categories of a similar nature (i.e. utilitarian categories commonly found in grocery stores), within a similar price range (US\$1 to US\$7) and matched in terms of level of involvement (ranging between 3.4 and 3.9). The brands in the moderately high cultural symbolism condition were *Cheerios* (breakfast cereal) and *Campbell’s* (canned soup), and those in the low cultural symbolism condition were *Chicken of the Sea* (canned tuna) and *Tombstone* (frozen pizza). After rating the brands, the participants answered demographic questions and were debriefed and dismissed.

Analysis on brand evaluations. The results from a repeated measures ANOVA with the level of cultural symbolism (moderately high vs low) as a within-subjects factor and salience of American identity (salient or not) as a between-subjects factor yielded a significant cultural symbolism \times salience interaction, $F(1, 47) = 4.18, p < 0.05$, as well as significant main effects of cultural symbolism, $F(1, 47) = 23.26, p < 0.001$, and salience condition, $F(1, 47) = 5.02, p < 0.05$. As predicted, simple contrasts for the moderately high and low cultural symbolism conditions showed that participants in the “American identity salient” condition evaluated more positively brands that were moderately high in cultural symbolism than their counterparts in the control condition did, $M = 5.71$ and 4.81 , respectively, $F(1, 47) = 8.21, p < 0.01$. By contrast, there were no differences in evaluation of brands low in cultural symbolism between the two groups, $M = 4.34$ and 4.26 , respectively, $p > 0.7$.

Sample 2 – procedures. In total, 90 introductory business students from a public university in the Midwest participated in the study for course credit (40 percent male, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.6$ years). The participants were first introduced to an opinions’ study on varied issues; half of the participants were reminded of the ban on the university mascot (*identity threat* condition), whereas the remaining half were not (*non-threat* condition). More specifically, the participants in the identity threat condition read about a recent decision from their university’s board of trustees to ban the appearance of the 80-year-old university mascot in

future sports or public events, whereas those in the non-threat condition read a story about grasshoppers. In both conditions, the participants were asked to write on the importance of the issue and its implications on their personal lives. As the university's mascot is a unique symbol of the participants' student identity (a social identity), thinking about the ban would constitute an identity threat and would lead to perceptions of incompleteness on an important dimension of their self-definition (Braun and Wicklund, 1989). In this context, becoming a patron of brands high (vs low) in cultural symbolism would provide a compensating mechanism for substituting an alternative symbol of completeness (i.e. a brand symbolic of their American identity) for the tarnished one (i.e. student identity).

Following the identity threat manipulation, the participants completed the PANAS scale to measure positive and negative affect. The main dependent variables were introduced in a subsequent task, disguised as an unrelated study about brand preferences, in which the participants indicated their liking (using the same three-item scale in previous studies) for a set of 10 familiar brands with varying degrees of cultural symbolism for Americans. After that, the participants indicated their familiarity and involvement with the brands using the corresponding one- and four-item scales used in Study 1. Finally, they answered demographic questions and were debriefed and dismissed.

Brands chosen as stimuli. The brands participants evaluated were chosen to vary along the cultural symbolism continuum based on the results from Study 1 and an additional pretest. The brands were *Budweiser* (beer, CS score = 5.6), *Nike* (tennis shoes, CS score = 5.4), *Miller* (beer, CS score = 5.0), *New Balance* (tennis shoes, CS score = 3.7), *DiGiorno* (frozen pizza, CS score = 3.7), *Jansport* (backpacks, CS score = 3.6), *Gucci* (designer clothing, CS score = 2.3), *Nokia* (mobile phones, CS score = 2.3), *Corona* (beer, CS score = 2.1) and *Heineken* (beer, CS score = 2.0).

Analysis on brand evaluations. Average brand evaluation and involvement scores were first computed by averaging the responses to the corresponding three- and four item-scales for each brand ($\alpha = 0.84$ to 0.93 and 0.70 to 0.86 , respectively). We also computed participants' average positive and negative affect scores ($\alpha = 0.77$ and 0.72 , respectively). To assess the extent to which the participants based their brand evaluation on cultural symbolism, we estimated the slope coefficient of the brand evaluation–cultural symbolism relation in the threat and non-threat conditions using a linear mixed model with random effects. The greater the slope, the more the participants based brand evaluation on cultural symbolism. The model considered the 10 repeated evaluation-cultural symbolism observations nested within individuals, who were in turn assigned to the two threat conditions. The model can be described by the following equation: $Brand\ Evaluation = (\gamma_{00} + r_0 + u_{00}) + (\gamma_{01} + u_{01})\ Negative\ Mood + (\gamma_{10} + r_1 + u_{10})\ Cultural\ Symbolism + (\gamma_{20} + r_2 + u_{20})\ Involvement + (\gamma_{30} + r_3 + u_{30})\ Familiarity + e$, in which the dependent variable is the mean evaluation for brand i ($i = 1-10$) reported by participant j ($j = 1, n_k$) in threat condition k ($k = 1, 2$). *Negative Affect* is the mean score for participant j ($j = 1, n_k$) in threat condition k ($k = 1, 2$), *Cultural Symbolism* is the average CS score for brand i ($i = 1-10$, from Study 1 and the pretest) and *Involvement* and *Familiarity* are the mean scores for brand i ($i = 1-10$) reported by participant j ($j = 1, n_k$) in threat condition k ($k = 1, 2$). There is one intercept term and four independent variables with slope terms on the right-hand side. The slope terms consist of a constant (γ 's), a random component (r 's) that varies across brand observations within subjects and a random component (u 's) that varies across subjects in the two threat conditions. Substantively, our interest lies in the variation of the brand evaluation–cultural symbolism slope coefficient between the threat and non-threat conditions. These parameters were estimated using the software package provided by Raudenbush and Bryk (2002). As predicted, the slope coefficient of the brand evaluation–cultural symbolism relation was higher in the threat (slope = 0.16 , $t(46) = 2.65$, $p < 0.01$) than the non-threat condition (slope = -0.007 , $t < 0.1$, *ns*), (slope diff. = 0.17 , $t(88) = 2.75$, $p < 0.01$). Consistent with the

symbolic self-completion theory, which posits that a threat to an important identity can instigate compensation on a related or unrelated identity (e.g. [Brown and Smart, 1991](#); [Steele, 1988](#)), our result shows that a ban on the symbolic marker of an important group identity increased the tendency to base brand preferences on cultural symbolism. This result confirms our argument that elevating liking for culturally symbolic versus non-symbolic brands can be used to compensate for heightened identity needs.

Overall, the results from Study 2 illustrate some of the outcomes of cultural equity for brand evaluations and self-brand connections. Consumers evaluate more favorably and connect more strongly with brands high in cultural symbolism for expressing salient cultural identity needs. This effect is absent for brands low in cultural symbolism that are not instrumental for these salient needs. An important strength of this study is that we demonstrated the outcomes of cultural equity using: both chronic and temporary accessibility of a cultural identity, a variety of cultural groups defined at different levels of abstraction (i.e. entire cultures and sub-cultures), a diverse number of brands with varying levels of cultural symbolism scores and after controlling for a variety of personal and situational factors (e.g. brand familiarity and involvement or scores on the negative affect scale). This provides evidence for the generalizability and internal validity of cultural equity as a construct that predicts consumer behavior in a globalized world.

General discussion

As marketing efforts become increasingly globalized, branding activities aimed at establishing deep self-brand connections will require a thorough understanding of the cultural symbolism of brands and the responses they elicit among multi-cultural consumers. We demonstrate that a focus on a brand's cultural equity can deepen our understanding of such responses. We define cultural equity as the facet of brand equity attributed to the brand's cultural symbolism or the favorable responses by consumers to the cultural symbolism of a brand. Thus, cultural equity consists of two aspects: a knowledge aspect rooted in consumers' perceptions about a brand's cultural symbolism and an outcome aspect referring to favorable consumers' responses to the cultural symbolism of the brand (e.g. more favorable evaluations or stronger self-brand connections). Our findings demonstrate that brand cultural symbolism can be reliably measured using the CSS.

Furthermore, extending past research that has solely focused on overall associations with a central cultural concept for assessing the brand's status as a local icon (i.e. a local icon is a brand that symbolizes the local culture, [Steenkamp et al., 2003](#); [Swaminathan et al., 2007](#)), we uncover distinctive characteristics of culturally symbolic brands. Specifically, cultural symbolism is characterized by the brand's embodiment of abstract cultural values and its embeddedness in the cultural knowledge network. These important findings illuminate on ways by which marketers can build iconic brands. One approach to building cultural equity is to develop communication campaigns to embody the abstract values nurtured in a culture. *Toyota* has adopted this approach in their marketing communication in the USA to imbue the *Tundra* (pick-up truck category) with the ruggedness, power and independence that characterizes American culture. Another way to increase cultural objects is to embed the brand in a cultural network by means of associating it with other cultural symbols. *Toyota* has also followed this approach for building cultural equity for the *Tundra* via commercials featuring American icons such as the Space Shuttle and American football. Importantly, as demonstrated by the results in Study 1, foreign brands that follow these approaches can aspire to build equity for local cultures in which they operate and even surpass local brands in their levels of cultural symbolism (see also [Torelli, 2013](#)). It is important to note that, although the studies in this research focused on measuring cultural equity from the perspective of members of the same culture, cultural symbolism can also be assessed for a foreign culture, as

long as consumers have a mental representation of such foreign culture (e.g. [Torelli and Ahluwalia, 2012](#))[3].

In addition, we uncover some of the psychological mechanisms underlying consumers' favorable responses to the cultural symbolism of brands (i.e. outcomes of cultural equity). Existing models of brand equity emphasize that the ultimate level of brand-building activity is frequently characterized by a deep psychological bond between the customer and the brand ([Keller, 2008](#)). The findings in this research highlight the outcomes of cultural equity in terms of favorable brand evaluations and stronger self-brand connections as expressions of cultural identity needs. The robustness of the findings is established using cultural groups from three different continents (i.e. North and South America and East Asia) and defined at various levels of abstraction (i.e. entire nations and sub-groups within a society).

Our findings also contribute to the nation branding literature. To the extent that brands successfully build cultural equity at a global scale, they will promote the culture associated with their COO. Some brands do this explicitly when adopting slogans and imagery that remind consumers of their associated country (e.g. *Volkswagen's* slogan "That is The Power of German Engineering" or *Fiat's* commercials in the USA emphasizing Italian towns from the Amalfi Coast). This would not only reinforce the country's reputation for the brand's products and services (i.e. product image, [Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002](#)), but also strengthen associations with abstract cultural values and beliefs that would contribute to affective aspects of the country image ([Wang et al., 2012](#)). This might be particularly impactful for nations in the developing world, which generally lack strong nation brands ([Deshpandé, 2010](#)). As brands from these countries expand their global presence, and build cultural equity in foreign markets, consumers from these foreign markets would develop more favorable attitudes toward the associated nation brand (e.g. think about potential changes in attitudes toward Colombia as a nation brand upon successful entrance of Colombian brands of coffee in the US market). These are important issues that deserve future research.

The findings in this research have additional practical consequences for managing the cultural equity of brands in a globalized world. For marketers, the stronger self-brand connections uncovered in this research suggest that a brand's cultural symbolism can be an asset to protect the brand from negative publicity and avoid brand dilution ([Cheng et al., 2012](#)). In addition, because of the connections with different elements in a cultural knowledge network in our conceptualization (e.g. products), abstract cultural images brought to mind by brands high in cultural symbolism can facilitate successful brand extensions into new products that are also rich in cultural symbolism, even if these products fall outside the brand's perceived area of expertise (e.g. [Torelli and Ahluwalia, 2012](#)). Brands high in cultural equity should also find it easier to penetrate culturally compatible new markets. However, a brand's cultural symbolism could also be a liability and elicit unfavorable consumer reactions. This can be the case when personal experiences (e.g. past history of animosity toward the culture, [Klein et al., 1998](#)) or situational factors (e.g. motivation to defend the cultural worldview, [Torelli et al., 2011](#)) heighten perceptions of the brand as a cultural intruder. The cultural equity built into brands could also hinder the attempts to add culturally relevant images for penetrating less culturally compatible markets (e.g. [John and Torelli, 2017](#)).

The framework provided in this research would help marketers develop cultural positioning strategies and implement supporting marketing actions. For managers of culturally symbolic brands, the framework should be helpful for assessing how growth strategies fit with the brand's cultural equity and for identifying ways for protecting cultural equity. For example, when attempting a globalization strategy, the marketer should first attempt growing the brand in markets that share similar cultural values and representations.

Furthermore, using ads that convey these cultural values and include shared cultural representations should be effective for promoting the brand in the new market. This might explain how the Venezuelan *Harina P.A.N.* succeeded when penetrating the Colombian market by using ads emphasizing the same traditional values and using the same common cultural elements (e.g. music) used in their Venezuelan ads (facebook.com/HarinaPANColombia/). Reaching the status of a cultural icon turns a brand into a role model that should live up to consumers' expectations about the brand's cultural authority. When managers of iconic brands fail to think in cultural terms, the brand can deviate from its cultural trajectory and its cultural equity can suffer a blow. This article offers marketers a tool to think in cultural terms and to acquire the cultural expertise for building and protecting their brands' cultural equity.

Notes

1. In this manuscript, we use the terms iconic brands and culturally symbolic brands interchangeably to refer to brands that are distinctively perceived to be compelling symbols of a culture.
2. Detailed results from these pretests are available from the authors.
3. In this context, some of the items need to be modified (e.g. "The brand reminds me of the [foreign culture] identity").

References

- Aaker, J.L. (1997), "Dimensions of brand personality", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 347-356.
- Amaral, N.B. and Torelli, C.J. (2018), "Salient cultural identities and consumers' valuation of identity congruent brands: consequences for building and leveraging brand equity", *Journal of Management and Training for Industries*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 13-30.
- Arnett, J.J. (2002), "The psychology of globalization", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 57 No. 10, pp. 774-783.
- Ashmore, R.D., Deaux, K. and McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004), "An organizing framework for collective identity: articulation and significance of multidimensionality", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 130 No. 1, pp. 80-114.
- Babin, L.A. and Burns, A.C. (1998), "A modified scale for the measurement of communication-evoked mental imagery", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 261-278.
- Bagozzi, R.P. (1984), "A prospectus for theory construction in marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 11-29.
- Bagozzi, R.P. and Yi, Y. (1988), "On the evaluation of structural equation models", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 74-94.
- Balabanis, G. and Diamantopoulos, A. (2008), "Brand origin identification by consumers: a classification perspective", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 39-71.
- Bem, S.L. (1974), "The measurement of psychological androgyny", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 42 No. 2, pp. 155-162.
- Bentler, P.M. (1995), *EQS Structural Equations Program Manual*, Multivariate Software, Encino, California, CA.
- Betsky, A. (1997), *Icons: Magnets of Meaning*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco.
- Beverland, M.B. (2009), *Building Brand Authenticity: 7 Habits of Iconic Brands*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Braun, O.L. and Wicklund, R.A. (1989), "Psychological antecedents of conspicuous consumption", *Journal of Economic Psychology*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 161-187.

-
- Briley, D.A. and Aaker, J.L. (2006), "When does culture matter? Effects of personal knowledge on the correction of culture-based judgments", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 43 No. 3, pp. 395-408.
- Brown, J.D. and Smart, S. (1991), "The self and social conduct: linking self-representations to prosocial behavior", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 60 No. 3, pp. 368-375.
- Carlyle, E. (2013), *How Goya Became One of America's Fastest-Growing Food Companies*, Forbes.com, downloaded on May 16, 2015, available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erincarlyle/2013/05/08/how-goya-became-one-of-americas-fastest-growing-food-companies/>.
- Cayla, J. and Eckhardt, G.M. (2008), "Asian brands and the shaping of a transnational imagined community", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 216-230.
- Cheng, S.Y.Y., White, T.B. and Chaplin, L.N. (2012), "The effects of self-brand connections on responses to brand failure: a new look at the consumer-brand relationship", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 280-288.
- Chiu, C.Y., Gelfand, M.J., Yamagishi, T., Shteynberg, G. and Wan, C. (2010), "Intersubjective culture: the role of intersubjective perceptions in cross-cultural research", *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 482-493.
- Chiu, C.Y. and Hong, Y.Y. (2006), *Social Psychology of Culture*, Psychology Press, New York, NY.
- Cross, M. (2002), *A Century of American Icons*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, CT.
- Deshpandé, R. (2010), "Why you aren't buying Venezuelan chocolate", *Harvard Business Review*, December, 25-27.
- Fehrenbach, T.R. (2000), *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*, Da Capo Press, Open Road Integrated Media, New York.
- Fetscherin, M. (2010), "The determinants and measurement of a country brand: the country brand strength index", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 466-479.
- Forehand, M.R. and Deshpandé, R. (2001), "What we see makes us who we are: priming ethnic self-awareness and advertising response", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 336-348.
- Forehand, M.R., Deshpandé, R. and Reed, A. (2002), "Identity salience and the influence of differential activation of the social self-schema on advertising response", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 6, pp. 1086-1099.
- Fournier, S. (1994), *A Consumer-Brand Relationship Framework for Strategic Brand Management*, unpublished dissertation, Graduate School, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, FL, 32611.
- Fu, H.Y., Chiu, C.Y., Morris, M.W. and Young, M. (2007), "Spontaneous inferences from cultural cues: varying responses of cultural insiders and outsiders", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 38, pp. 58-75.
- Ger, G. (1999), "Localizing in the global village: local firms competing in global markets", *California Management Review*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 64-83.
- Gerbing, D.W. and Anderson, J.C. (1988), "An updated paradigm for scale development incorporating unidimensionality and its assessment", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 186-192.
- Golden, L.L., Allison, N. and Clee, M. (1979), "The role of Sex role self-concept in masculine and feminine product perceptions", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 599-605.
- Gürhan-Canli, Z. and Maheswaran, D. (2000), "Cultural variations in country of origin effects", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 309-317.
- Higie, R.A. and Feick, L.F. (1989), "Enduring involvement: conceptual and measurement issues", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 690-696.
- Holt, D.B. (2004), *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*, Harvard Business School Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MA.
- Hong, S.T. and Wyer, R.S. (1989), "Effects of country-of-origin and product-attribute information on product evaluation: an information processing perspective", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 175-187.

-
- Hong, Y.Y., Morris, M.W., Chiu, C.Y. and Benet-Martinez, V. (2000), "Multicultural minds: a dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 55 No. 7, pp. 709-720.
- Hu, L.T. and Bentler, P.M. (1999), "Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: conventional criteria versus new alternatives", *Structural Equation Modeling*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 1-55.
- John, D.R. and Torelli, C.J. (2017), *Strategic Brand Management: Lessons for Winning Brands in Globalized Markets*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Keller, K.L. (1993), "Conceptualizing, measuring, managing customer-based brand equity", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 57 No. 1, pp. 1-22.
- Keller, K.L. (2008), *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity*, Pearson/Prentice Hall, New Jersey, NJ.
- Klein, J.G., Ettenson, R. and Morris, M.D. (1998), "The animosity model of foreign product purchase: an empirical test in the people's Republic of China", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 62 No. 1, pp. 89-100.
- Leclerc, F., Schmitt, B.H. and Dubé, L. (1994), "Foreign branding and its effects on product perceptions and attitudes", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 263-270.
- Markus, H.R. and Hamedani, M.G. (2007), "Sociocultural psychology: the dynamic interdependence among self systems and social systems" in Kitayama, S. and Cohen, D. (Eds), *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*, Guilford Press, New York, NY, pp. 3-39.
- McCracken, G. (1986), "Culture and consumption: a theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 71-84.
- Oyserman, D. (2007), "Social identity and self-regulation", in Kruglanski, A.W. and Higgins, E.T. (Eds), *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*, Guilford Press, New York, NY, pp. 432-453.
- Oyserman, D. (2009), "Identity-based motivation: implications for action-readiness, procedural-readiness, and consumer behavior", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 250-260.
- Oyserman, D. and Lee, S.W.S. (2007), "Priming 'culture': culture as situated cognition", in Kitayama, S. and Cohen, D. (Eds), *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*, Guilford Press, New York, NY, pp. 255-279.
- Papadopoulos, N. (2011), "Of places and brands", in Pike, A. (Ed), *Brands and Branding Geographies*, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, Northampton, Massachusetts, MA, pp. 25-43.
- Papadopoulos, N. and Heslop, L. (2002), "Country equity and country branding: problems and prospects", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 294-314.
- Park, C.W., Jaworski, B.J. and MacInnis, D.J. (1986), "Strategic brand concept-image management", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 50 No. 4, pp. 135-145.
- Preacher, K.J., Curran, P.J. and Bauer, D.J. (2006), "Computational tools for probing interaction effects in multiple linear regression, multilevel modeling, and latent curve analysis", *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*, Vol. 31, pp. 437-448.
- Raudenbush, S.W. and Bryk, A.S. (2002), *Hierarchical Linear Model*, Sages, Thousand Oaks, California, CA.
- Robertson, R. (1992), *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage, London.
- Shimp, T.A. and Sharma, S. (1987), "Consumer ethnocentrism: construction and validation of the CETSCALE", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 280-289.
- Shrout, P.E. and Fleiss, J.L. (1979), "Intraclass correlations: uses in assessing rater reliability", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 86 No. 2, pp. 420-428.

-
- Sperber, D. (1996), *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach*, Blackwell, Massachusetts, MA.
- Steele, C.M. (1988), "The psychology of self-affirmation: sustaining the integrity of the self", in Berkowitz, L. (Ed), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Academic Press, San Diego, pp. 261-302.
- Steenkamp, J.B., Batra, R. and Alden, D.L. (2003), "How perceived brand globalness creates brand value", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 53-65.
- Swaminathan, V., Page, K.L. and Gürhan-Canli, Z. (2007), "'My' brand or 'our' brand: the effects of brand relationship dimensions and self-construal on brand evaluations", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 248-259.
- Sweeney, J.C. and Soutar, G.N. (2001), "Consumer perceived value: the development of a multiple item scale", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 77 No. 2, pp. 203-220.
- Torelli, C.J. (2013), *Globalization, Culture, and Branding: How to Leverage Cultural Equity for Building Iconic Brands in the Era of Globalization*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY.
- Torelli, C.J. and Ahluwalia, R. (2012), "Extending culturally symbolic brands: a blessing or a curse?", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 38 No. 5, pp. 933-947.
- Torelli, C.J., Chiu, C.Y., Tam, K.P., Au, A.K.C. and Keh, H.T. (2011), "Exclusionary reactions to foreign cultures: effects of simultaneous exposure to cultures in globalized Space", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 67 No. 4, pp. 716-742.
- Torelli, C.J., Keh, H.T. and Chiu, C.Y. (2010), "Cultural symbolism of brands", in Loken, B., Ahluwalia, R. and Houston, M.J. (Eds), *Brands and Brand Management: Contemporary Research Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 113-132.
- Torelli, C.J., Ozsomer, A., Carvalho, S., Keh, H.T. and Mæhle, N. (2012), "Brand concepts as representations of human values: do cultural congruity and compatibility between values matter?", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 76 July, pp. 92-108.
- Torelli, C.J., Rodas, M.A. and Stoner, J.L. (2017), "The cultural meaning of brands", *Foundations and Trends® in Marketing*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 153-214.
- Torelli, C.J. and Stoner, J.L. (2015), "Managing cultural equity: a theoretical framework for building iconic brands in globalized markets", *Review of Marketing Research (Brand Meaning Management)*, Vol. 12, pp. 83-120.
- Triandis, H.C. (1995), *Individualism & Collectivism*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, CO.
- Triandis, H.C. (1996), "The psychological measurement of cultural syndromes", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 51 No. 4, pp. 407-415.
- Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D. and Wetherell, M.S. (1987), *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*, Blackwell, Oxford, OF.
- Wan, C., Chiu, C.Y., Tam, K.P., Lee, S.L., Lau, I.Y.M. and Peng, S. (2007), "Perceived cultural importance and actual self-importance of values in cultural identification", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 92, pp. 337-354.
- Wan, C., Torelli, C.J. and Chiu, C.Y. (2010), "Intersubjective consensus and the maintenance of normative shared reality", *Social Cognition*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 422-446.
- Wang, C.L., Li, D., Barnes, B.R. and Ahn, J. (2012), "Country image, product image and consumer purchase intention: evidence from an emerging economy", *International Business Review*, Vol. 21 No. 6, pp. 1041-1051.
- Wicklund, R.A. and Gollwitzer, P.M. (1981), "Symbolic self-completion, attempted influence, and self-deprecation", *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 89-114.
- Yu, S. (2018), *Iconic Advantage*, Savio Republic, New York, NY.
- Zhang, J., Norvilitis, J.M. and Jin, S. (2001), "Measuring gender orientation with the Bem Sex role inventory in Chinese culture", *Sex Roles*, Vol. 44 Nos 3-4, pp. 237-251.

AppendixAspects of
cultural equity

Items

The brand is associated with _____ culture
The brand is an icon of _____ culture
The brand embodies _____ values
The brand reminds me of my _____ identity
The brand is a good example of what it means being _____
A picture of the brand with a _____ flag makes a lot of sense
The brand is a symbol of _____ culture

Table AI.
Seven-item cultural
symbolism scale

Corresponding author

Carlos Torelli can be contacted at: ctorelli@illinois.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com