

# Cultural Differences in Brand Extension Evaluation: The Influence of Analytic versus Holistic Thinking

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Consumers evaluate brand extensions by judging how well they fit with the parent brand. We examine this process across cultures. We predict that consumers from Eastern cultures, characterized by holistic thinking, perceive higher brand extension fit and evaluate brand extensions more favorably than do Western consumers, characterized by analytic thinking. Study 1 supports the existence of these cultural differences, with study 2 providing support for styles of thinking (analytic vs. holistic) as the drivers of cultural differences in brand extension evaluations.

A number of factors influence whether consumers will evaluate brand extensions in a favorable manner. Key among them is the degree to which a brand extension fits with the parent brand. Fit can be judged in a variety of ways, including whether the extension is in a product class similar to those associated with the parent brand, whether an attribute associated with the parent brand could be beneficial in the extension product class, and whether prestige associated with the parent brand could transfer to the extension product category. Higher perceptions of brand extension fit result in more favorable extension evaluations (see Keller 2002).

Little attention has been focused on the issue of whether these findings apply to consumers around the globe. The vast majority of research has been conducted with U.S. consumers, although many brands operate in a global environment and launch brand extensions globally. Consumers from different cultures may vary in their evaluations of brand

extensions. Perhaps factors other than brand extension fit are more important in other cultures, as suggested by a recent secondary analysis of eight brand extension studies conducted in the United States and abroad (Bottomley and Holden 2001). Han and Schmitt (1997) suggest a similar scenario, finding that U.S. consumers place more emphasis on brand extension fit than do consumers from Hong Kong, who rely on corporate reputation. Alternatively, extension fit may be important across cultures, but there may be cross-cultural differences in the way extension fit is judged.

In this article, we explore whether cultural differences in brand extension response can arise due to cultural differences in judging brand extension fit. To do so, we rely on recent research from cross-cultural psychology describing cultural differences in styles of thinking, with East Asian societies characterized by *holistic thinking* and Western societies characterized by *analytic thinking* (Nisbett et al. 2001). Holistic thinking involves an orientation to the context or field as a whole, whereas analytic thinking involves a detachment of the object from its context and a focus on attributes of the object. We suggest that these styles of thinking influence the ways in which consumers from Eastern versus Western cultures judge brand extension fit, thereby influencing brand extension evaluations.

This line of thinking is tested in two studies. Study 1 examines cultural differences in brand extension fit and evaluation comparing Western (U.S.) and Eastern (Indian) consumers. We find that Easterners judge brand extension fit to be higher, and evaluate brand extensions more favorably, than do Westerners. Cultural differences emerge across a range of brand extensions, except for very high fit extensions. Study 2 provides support for styles of thinking as the factor responsible for cultural differences, showing that

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Western (Eastern) consumers primed to engage in holistic (analytic) thinking perceive higher (lower) brand extension fit and evaluate extensions more (less) favorably than would otherwise be the case.

## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

### Analytic and Holistic Processing

Nisbett et al. (2001) argue that there are cross-cultural differences in styles of thinking. Social differences between cultures are viewed as promoting certain cognitive processes more than others. Individuals in East Asian societies, embedded in many social relations, will have beliefs about focusing on the field and paying attention to relationships between objects. In contrast, individuals in Western societies, who have fewer social relations, will have beliefs that the world is discrete and discontinuous and that an object's behavior can be predicted using rules and properties. In this way, Eastern cultures promote holistic thinking, whereas Western societies promote analytic thinking. *Holistic thinking* is defined as "involving an orientation to the context or field as a whole, including attention to relationships between a focal object and the field, and a preference for explaining and predicting events on the basis of such relationships" (Nisbett et al. 2001, 293). *Analytic thinking* "involves a detachment of the object from its context, a tendency to focus on attributes of the object to assign it to categories, and a preference for using rules about the categories to explain and predict the object's behavior" (Nisbett et al. 2001, 293). In our research, we focus on the greater ability of holistic thinkers (compared to analytic thinkers) to draw relationships between objects.

A considerable body of research supports this view. Since East Asians focus on relationships between an object and its environment, they have been shown to be more field dependent than Westerners (Ji, Peng, and Nisbett 2000). Masuda and Nisbett (2001) found that when exposed to scenes of fish and other animated objects, Japanese respondents, compared to Americans, made more statements about background environment and relations between the fish and the environment. In another study, Chiu (1972) asked American and Chinese children to pick two objects that were most similar from a set of three objects and indicate why they went together. Americans adopted a style of thinking where objects were grouped based on category membership or attributes (e.g., a jeep and boat grouped together because both have motors). However, Chinese adopted a relational-contextual style of thinking, in which similarities were based on functional or thematic interdependence between objects (e.g., table and chair grouped together because you sit on the chair to eat at a table). As a result, Easterners often perceive stronger relationships between objects than Westerners, as illustrated in a study by Ji et al. (2000). When asked to judge the degree of association between pairs of arbitrary objects, Chinese students reported a higher degree of covariation than did Americans.

### Cultural Differences in Brand Extension Evaluation

Cultural differences in styles of thinking may influence the way brand extensions are interpreted across cultures. Consider first the analytic style of thinking characteristic of Western societies. Analytic thinkers focus on attributes and categories to draw inferences and make judgments. This style of thinking is consistent with research findings that (American) consumers often judge brand extension fit on the basis of product class similarity (e.g., is the extension in a product category similar to those associated with the parent brand?) and attribute transference (e.g., does the parent brand have an attribute that would be beneficial in the extension category?). Brand extensions that fail these tests, such as those in categories too far away from those associated with the parent brand, are typically deemed to be a poor fit.

Now, consider the holistic style of thinking characteristic of Eastern societies. Holistic thinkers focus on relationships between objects and the field as well as relationships between objects (Masuda and Nisbett 2001). Because Easterners pay attention to the field, they may be able to identify other relationships between the parent brand and the extension. For instance, Easterners often focus on the situation rather than the focal object (Choi, Nisbett, and Noranzayan 1999), suggesting a reliance on complementarity of use as a basis of fit between a brand extension and products sold by the parent brand. They might also consider relationships between the extension and parent brand in terms of the overall reputation or feeling they have for the parent brand. These types of relationships result in judgments of better brand extension fit than would ordinarily be the case if only product class similarity or attribute transference were employed as the basis of fit. This conclusion is further supported by research demonstrating that Easterners perceive a stronger magnitude of relationships among objects than do Westerners (Ji et al. 2000).

Thus, we propose that consumers from Eastern cultures will perceive a higher degree of brand extension fit than those from Western cultures, especially for extensions in product categories far from those associated with the parent brand. Brand extensions viewed as being far away from the domain of the parent brand could be viewed as a better fit if consumers were able to link them on a more holistic basis, which is a way of thinking more characteristic of Eastern consumers. As a consequence of cultural differences in perceptions of brand extension fit, we would expect to see concomitant differences in brand extension evaluations. We predict:

- H1:** Consumers from Eastern cultures will perceive a higher degree of brand extension fit than consumers from Western cultures.
- H2:** Consumers from Eastern cultures will evaluate brand extensions more favorably than consumers from Western cultures.

**TABLE 1**  
STUDY 1: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Measure	Very low fit			Low fit			Moderate fit			High fit		
	Stimulus	U.S.	India	Stimulus	U.S.	India	Stimulus	U.S.	India	Stimulus	U.S.	India
Kodak:												
Fit	Shoes	1.11 (.32)	2.62 (1.86)	Filing cabinet	2.89 (1.70)	3.95 (1.69)	Cards	5.20 (1.32)	6.15 (.88)			
Evaluation	Shoes	2.11 (1.08)	3.76 (1.22)	Filing cabinet	3.74 (1.48)	4.62 (1.20)	Cards	4.75 (1.29)	5.75 (1.02)			
McDonald's:												
Fit	Razor	1.10 (.31)	2.20 (1.91)	Chocolate	3.11 (1.84)	4.62 (1.63)	Omelet	5.42 (1.71)	6.10 (.91)	Onion rings	6.32 (.75)	6.38 (.80)
Evaluation	Razor	1.60 (.88)	2.75 (1.48)	Chocolate	2.83 (1.50)	4.29 (1.35)	Omelet	3.37 (1.64)	4.85 (1.04)	Onion rings	4.84 (1.50)	4.90 (1.87)

NOTE.—Standard deviations are in parentheses.

### STUDY 1A

Hypotheses regarding cultural differences in brand extension fit and evaluation were tested in a 2 (culture: Eastern, Western) × 3 (brand extension fit: very low fit, low fit, moderate fit) between-subjects design. Brand extension fit was defined by Western standards.

#### Sample

Fifty-seven U.S. (100% Caucasian; home language = 100% English) and 62 Indian (100% Indian; home language = 100% Indian languages) students were recruited from the University of Minnesota. Indian participants were required to be in the United States for less than 3 years ( $M = 1.86$  years) to ensure that acculturation had not occurred to a marked degree. Indian students residing in the United States were selected to minimize extraneous cultural differences with the U.S. sample, including differences in brand familiarity and advertising exposure. Research has shown that Indians have a holistic style of thinking (Miller 1984; Shweder 1991) and that Indian students residing in the United States and India are similar in terms of brand extension response (Monga and John 2004).

#### Stimuli

Several brands—Kodak, McDonald's, and Coke—were identified as being top brands in each country (A&M's India's Top Brands 2001; Business Week's Top 100 Brands 2001) with similar brand associations, familiarity, and attitudes for U.S. ( $n = 29$ ) and Indian ( $n = 35$ ) students. Kodak—associated with films and positive affect/quality/excellence—was chosen as the focal brand for this study. Hypothetical extensions for Kodak were selected using a pretest with 94 U.S. students. Kodak shoes ( $M = 1.06$ ), Kodak filing cabinet ( $M = 2.80$ ), and Kodak greeting cards ( $M = 5.65$ ) were identified as very low fit (rating < 2), low fit (rating between 2 and 4), and moderate fit (rating between 4 and 6) extensions as measured on a seven-point

scale (1 = inconsistent with Kodak; 7 = consistent with Kodak).

#### Procedure and Measures

Participants were first asked for their opinion of the Kodak brand on a scale from 1 (poor) to 7 (excellent). Next, respondents were shown one of the Kodak brand extensions and asked to evaluate it on a seven-point scale (1 = poor and 7 = excellent) and in an open-ended question: "Even though you have never tried this product, what went through your mind when you were deciding if it would be a good product or a bad product?" Respondents then evaluated brand extension fit on a scale from 1 ("inconsistent with Kodak") to 7 ("consistent with Kodak"), similar to scales used in prior brand extension research (e.g., Loken and John 1993).

Next, participants completed a measure of analytic-holistic thinking similar to a standard Embedded Figures Test (EFT). Participants were required to find objects embedded in a larger picture within a fixed time limit (Horn 1962). We anticipated that the U.S. sample would find more objects given that analytic processing is characterized by field independence, which makes finding embedded figures easier. Finally, respondents answered questions about their familiarity with Kodak, their nationality, years in the United States, language spoken at home, and the ethnicity of their mother and father.

#### Results

*Analytic-Holistic Styles of Thinking.* As anticipated, U.S. respondents found more embedded objects than did Indian participants ( $M_{US} = 14.39$  and  $M_{India} = 10.80$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating a greater orientation toward analytical processing for U.S. participants.

*Brand Extension Fit.* A 2 (culture) × 3 (brand extension fit) ANOVA, with brand attitude and familiarity as covariates, was performed (see table 1 for means and stan-

dard deviations). As expected, a significant main effect of culture ( $F(1, 111) = 26.32, p < .01$ ) and brand extension fit emerged ( $F(2, 111) = 75.24, p < .01$ ). Planned contrasts indicated cultural differences for Kodak shoes ( $F(1, 111) = 17.16, p < .01$ ), Kodak filing cabinet ( $F(1, 111) = 8.93, p < .01$ ), and Kodak greeting cards ( $F(1, 111) = 5.39, p < .01$ ). As hypothesized, Indians provided higher fit ratings for all extensions. Looking at thoughts respondents provided for each extension provides insight into why these differences emerged. For example, responding to the Kodak filing cabinet, Americans commented that "Kodak making a filing cabinet was odd," and "it had nothing to do with photography," consistent with analytic thinking based on product class similarity. Indians, in contrast, responded that a "filing cabinet could be used to store Kodak pictures" and "Kodak products are some of the best in the market, so filing cabinets would be the same," consistent with holistic thinking about how the extension could be related to Kodak's other products.

**Brand Extension Evaluation.** A 2 (culture)  $\times$  3 (brand extension fit) ANOVA, with brand attitude and familiarity as covariates, was performed (see table 1 for means and standard deviations). As expected, a significant main effect of culture ( $F(1, 111) = 35.21, p < .01$ ) and brand extension fit emerged ( $F(2, 111) = 37.81, p < .01$ ). Planned contrasts showed cultural differences for Kodak shoes ( $F(1, 111) = 27.63, p < .01$ ), Kodak filing cabinet ( $F(1, 111) = 8.86, p < .01$ ), and Kodak greeting cards ( $F(1, 111) = 7.20, p < .01$ ). As hypothesized, Indians provided more favorable evaluations than did Americans for every brand extension.

**Median Split Analyses.** To provide further evidence that cultural differences can be attributed to styles of thinking, we performed a median split on our measure of analytic-holistic processing to obtain a group of analytic thinkers and a group of holistic thinkers irrespective of culture. Comparing these groups on brand extension fit and evaluation should mirror the observed cultural differences between Easterners and Westerners.

A 2 (EFT score: low, high)  $\times$  3 (brand extension fit: very low, low, moderate) ANOVA showed a significant main effect of EFT scores for brand extension evaluation ( $F(1, 112) = 3.74, p = .05$ ), with higher evaluations for low EFT scorers (holistic thinkers) than high EFT scorers (analytic thinkers;  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.40$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.91$ ). A similar analysis of brand extension fit yielded a significant main effect of EFT scores ( $F(1, 112) = 3.45, p = .06$ ), with higher fit perceptions for low EFT scorers than high EFT scorers ( $M_{\text{low}} = 3.95$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.43$ ).

## Discussion

Our findings confirm the existence of cultural differences in brand extension response. Easterners (Indians) perceived higher fit and had more favorable evaluations than Westerners (Americans). Differences were expected to emerge as a result of cultural differences in styles of thinking, with

Easterners portrayed as holistic thinkers more likely to see relationships between brand extensions and parent brands. A median split analysis, comparing analytic and holistic thinkers irrespective of culture, produced the same pattern of results, lending further support for styles of thinking being associated with cultural differences in brand extension response.

## STUDY 1B

We extend our findings in two ways. First, we replicate our results with another brand, McDonald's, to rule out the possibility that something unique to the Kodak brand produced the cultural differences we observed. Second, we explore a boundary condition on cultural differences. We expect cultural differences to disappear for high fit extensions, which feature ample bases of fit with parent brands, including category similarity and attribute transference favored by analytic thinkers (consumers from Western cultures).

## Sample, Stimuli, and Procedure

Hypotheses regarding cultural differences in brand extension fit and evaluations were tested in a 2 (culture: Eastern, Western)  $\times$  4 (brand extension fit: very low, low, moderate, high) between-subjects design. The procedure and measures were identical to those used in study 1a, except an EFT measure was not included. Seventy-six American (100% Caucasian; home language = 100% English) and 82 Indian students (100% Indian; home language = 100% Indian languages) were recruited as before. McDonald's was selected as the parent brand name using the same methods previously described for Kodak. Hypothetical brand extensions were selected on the basis of a pretest with a sample of U.S. students ( $n = 88$ ), resulting in the selection of McDonald's razor ( $M = 1.24$ ), McDonald's chocolate bar ( $M = 3.67$ ), McDonald's omelet ( $M = 5.10$ ), and McDonald's onion rings ( $M = 6.13$ ) as very low, low, moderate, and high fit brand extensions, respectively.

## Results

**Brand Extension Fit.** A 2 (culture)  $\times$  4 (brand extension fit) ANOVA, with brand attitude and familiarity as covariates, was conducted (see table 1 for means and standard deviations). As expected, a significant main effect of culture ( $F(1, 149) = 14.71, p < .01$ ) and brand extension fit emerged ( $F(3, 149) = 97.37, p < .01$ ). A marginal culture  $\times$  fit interaction also emerged ( $F(3, 149) = 2.20, p = .09$ ). Planned contrasts showed cultural differences for McDonald's razor ( $F(1, 149) = 6.54, p < .01$ ), McDonald's chocolate bar ( $F(1, 149) = 11.90, p < .01$ ), and McDonald's omelet ( $F(1, 149) = 2.42, p = .06$ ), but not for McDonald's onion rings ( $p > .10$ ). Indians provided higher fit ratings for all brand extensions, except for the high fit extension. These differences were mirrored in thoughts respondents provided about each brand extension. For ex-

ample, for McDonald's chocolate bar, Americans disparaged the product, saying "McDonald's is into fast food, not candy" and "Greasy, grimy chocolate!" In contrast, Indians noted that it "would be liked by children" and "makes sense because chocolate would be an inexpensive addition to their dessert menu."

*Brand Extension Evaluation.* A 2 (culture)  $\times$  4 (brand extension fit) ANOVA was performed (see table 1 for means and standard deviations). Brand attitude and familiarity were included as covariates. As expected, a significant main effect of culture ( $F(1, 149) = 28.34, p < .01$ ) and brand extension fit emerged ( $F(3, 149) = 30.72, p < .01$ ). A marginal culture  $\times$  brand extension fit interaction also emerged ( $F(3, 149) = 2.28, p = .08$ ). Planned contrasts revealed significant cultural differences for McDonald's razor ( $F(1, 149) = 7.26, p < .01$ ), McDonald's chocolate bar ( $F(1, 149) = 11.23, p < .01$ ), and McDonald's omelet ( $F(1, 149) = 11.74, p < .01$ ), but not for McDonald's onion rings ( $p > .10$ ). As anticipated, Indians provided more favorable evaluations than did Americans for all brand extensions, except for the high fit extension.

## Discussion

Our results replicate findings of cultural differences in brand extension response and identify a boundary condition for this effect (high fit extensions). Next, we shift our attention to providing stronger evidence for the mechanism responsible for these cultural differences. Our findings indicate that Easterners, characterized as holistic thinkers, evaluate brand extensions in a more favorable light than Westerners, characterized by analytic thinking. Although our data confirm that these styles of thinking characterize Eastern and Western consumers, other differences between these two cultures could provide alternative explanations for our findings. For example, it is possible that cultural differences in brand knowledge, product class knowledge, or brand extension experience may have encouraged more scrutiny and less favorable evaluations from Western consumers. Or, it is possible that an acquiescence bias often found in Eastern cultures may have encouraged more positive evaluations from these consumers.

In study 2, we use a priming methodology to encourage different styles of thinking among Eastern and Western consumers as they evaluate brand extensions. Priming methodologies have been used in cross-cultural research with respondents from a Western culture (Aaker 2000), Eastern culture (Aaker and Lee 2001), as well as biculturals (Hong et al. 2000). For example, Aaker (2000) primed an American sample to elaborate on certain aspects of a persuasive appeal, making this information as accessible as it was for an Asian sample. Demonstrating that elaboration diminished cultural differences in preferences, Aaker (2000) provided compelling evidence that information accessibility was the driver for cultural differences, as opposed to other factors varying between cultures.

We adopt a similar approach in this study, using priming

manipulations for analytic and holistic thinking. If styles of thinking are responsible for cultural differences in brand extension response, priming holistic thinking in Western consumers should increase perceptions of brand extension fit and extension evaluations, whereas priming analytic thinking in Eastern consumers should decrease perceptions of brand extension fit and extension evaluations. We predict:

**H3:** Priming holistic thinking among Westerners will increase perceptions of brand extension fit and extension evaluations. Priming analytic thinking among Easterners will decrease perceptions of brand extension fit and extension evaluations.

In addition, priming the same style of thinking for Easterners and Westerners should eliminate cultural differences in brand extension response. Thus:

**H4:** Without priming, Easterners will have more favorable brand extension responses than Westerners. Priming the same style of thinking (analytic or holistic) in both groups will eliminate cultural differences.

## STUDY 2

### Sample, Stimuli, and Procedure

Our hypotheses were tested in a 2 (culture: Caucasian American, Indian American)  $\times$  3 (prime: no prime, analytic prime, holistic prime) between-subjects design with 58 Caucasian Americans (100% Caucasian; home language = 100% English) and 68 Indian Americans (100% Indian; home language = 100% Indian languages) recruited from the University of Texas, San Antonio. Both groups were born and raised in the United States, ruling out extraneous cultural differences such as brand knowledge and marketing environment. We selected Kodak filing cabinet, a low fit extension, as our stimulus given prior findings of cultural differences for this extension (study 1a). The procedure was identical to that of study 1, with the addition of the priming manipulation, administered prior to the brand extension evaluation. Style of thinking was measured with a 10-item measure of holistic thinking (Choi et al. 2003) rather than an embedded figures test.

### Priming Manipulations

Thinking style was manipulated by asking participants to read a paragraph about a trip to a city and circle pronouns in the text (Kühnen, Hannover, and Schubert 2001). Participants in the analytic prime condition circled pronouns representing the independent self (e.g., I, me), while participants in the holistic prime condition circled pronouns representing the interdependent self (e.g., we, us). Kühnen et al. (2001) have proposed that acquiring the independent self (e.g., traits) involves developing a context-independent (analytic) mode of thinking, whereas acquiring the interdependent self (e.g., relations) involves developing a context-dependent

FIGURE 1

STUDY 2: CULTURE × PRIME INTERACTION FOR EXTENSION FIT

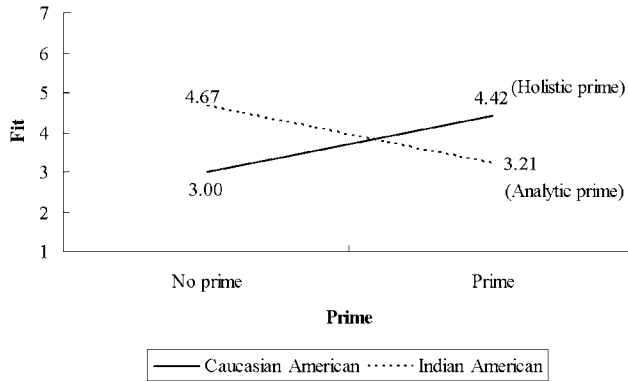
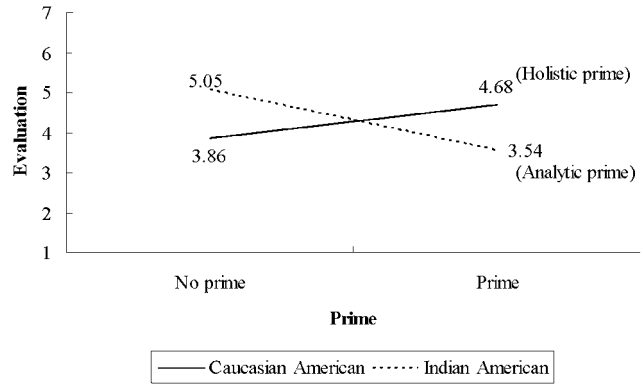


FIGURE 2

STUDY 2: CULTURE × PRIME INTERACTION FOR EXTENSION EVALUATION



(holistic) mode of thinking. Thus, priming a particular aspect of the self also activates the associated style of thinking. To ensure that the circling task manipulated styles of thinking, we asked U.S. students ( $n = 30$ ) who had been primed with the pronoun task to complete the embedded figures test used in study 1a. As expected, analytic-primed participants found more embedded figures than did holistic-primed participants ( $M_{analytic} = 15.00$ ,  $M_{holistic} = 13.86$ ;  $F(1, 29) = 6.16$ ,  $p = .02$ ).

Results

*Analytic-Holistic Styles of Thinking.* As anticipated, responses to the holistic thinking scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ) showed that the Caucasian Americans were significantly less holistic than the Indian Americans ( $M_{Caucasian American} = 5.40$ ,  $M_{Indian American} = 5.90$ ;  $F(1, 121) = 9.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

*Brand Extension Fit.* A 2 (culture) × 3 (prime) ANOVA with brand attitude as a covariate revealed a significant culture × prime interaction ( $F(2, 120) = 3.09$ ;  $p = .05$ ; see table 2 for means and standard deviations). As predicted, the holistic prime produced more favorable responses among Westerners, whereas the analytic prime produced less favorable responses among Easterners. Planned contrasts indicated that extension fit was higher in the ho-

listic prime than in the no prime condition for Caucasian Americans ( $F(1, 119) = 4.81$ ,  $p = .01$ ); extension fit was lower in the analytic prime than in the no prime condition for Indian Americans ( $F(1, 119) = 7.55$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see fig. 1). As hypothesized, the significant difference in fit perceptions between Caucasian Americans and Indian Americans in the no prime condition ( $F(1, 119) = 7.38$ ;  $p < .01$ ) disappeared when these groups were primed to think alike in the analytic prime ( $p > .10$ ) or holistic prime condition ( $p > .10$ ).

*Brand Extension Evaluation.* A 2 (culture) × 3 (prime) ANOVA revealed a significant culture × prime interaction ( $F(2, 120) = 3.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see table 2 for means and standard deviations). As predicted, the holistic (analytic) prime produced more (less) favorable responses among Westerners (Easterners). Planned contrasts indicated that extension evaluations were higher in the holistic prime relative to the no prime condition for Caucasian Americans ( $F(1, 119) = 2.84$ ,  $p < .05$ ); extension evaluations were lower in the analytic prime relative to the no prime condition for Indian Americans ( $F(1, 119) = 13.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see fig. 2). As hypothesized, the significant difference in evaluations between Caucasian Americans and Indian Americans in the no prime condition ( $F(1, 119) = 6.14$ ;  $p < .01$ ) disappeared when these groups were primed to think alike in the analytic prime ( $p > .10$ ) or holistic prime condition ( $p > .10$ ).

TABLE 2

STUDY 2: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Measure	Caucasian American			Indian American		
	No prime	Analytic prime	Holistic prime	No prime	Analytic prime	Holistic prime
Fit	3.00 (1.66)	3.28 (2.13)	4.42 (1.50)	4.67 (1.43)	3.21 (1.84)	4.35 (1.80)
Evaluation	3.86 (1.35)	3.92 (1.12)	4.68 (1.38)	5.05 (1.43)	3.54 (1.53)	4.57 (1.50)

NOTE.—Standard deviations are in parentheses.

## Discussion

Our results provide support for style of thinking as the driver of cultural differences in brand extension response. Priming holistic thinking increased perceptions of brand extension fit and resulted in more favorable extension evaluations for Westerners. In contrast, priming analytic thinking decreased extension fit perceptions and extension evaluations for Easterners. Further evidence was obtained by comparing consumers from Eastern and Western cultures when the same style of thinking was primed. When holistic (analytic) thinking was primed in both groups, no differences in brand extension response were noted. This pattern is consistent with our theorizing that styles of thinking cause cultural differences, as opposed to extraneous factors such as differences in brand knowledge or acquiescence. Otherwise, differences between Easterners and Westerners would not have disappeared when they were primed to think alike.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our research finds cultural differences in consumer response to brand extensions. Consumers from Eastern cultures perceive higher levels of brand extension fit and evaluate brand extensions more favorably than do consumers from Western cultures. These differences are robust for extensions that range from very low to moderate fits with the parent brand.

Support for styles of thinking as the mechanism responsible for cultural differences was also obtained. In study 1a, splitting the sample into analytic and holistic thinkers, irrespective of culture, yielded the same pattern of results obtained for Eastern versus Western consumers. In study 2, priming holistic thinking in Westerners resulted in higher perceptions of brand extension fit and more favorable extension evaluations; priming analytic thinking in Easterners had just the opposite effect. Further, cultural differences in extension fit perceptions and extension evaluation disappeared when Easterners and Westerners were primed to think in the same way (holistically or analytically).

These findings also rule out alternative explanations for cultural differences. The main effect of culture reported in study 1 is subject to criticism that cultural differences other than those associated with analytic and holistic thinking styles may have contributed to the effects. However, findings from study 2, where priming holistic (analytic) thinking increases (decreases) brand extension fit and evaluations, render alternative explanations less likely. Also helpful in this regard is the finding that priming the same type of thinking across cultures makes cultural differences in extension responses disappear, which would be very unlikely if extraneous cultural differences such as brand knowledge or acquiescence bias were at play.

Our results contribute to the set of growing findings in cross-cultural psychology and cross-cultural consumer behavior. In cross-cultural psychology, where the analytic-holistic thinking framework was developed, we add to the growing body of research suggesting that culture is dynamic

and that aspects of culture can be situationally primed (Hong et al. 2000). We primed analytic thinking in Easterners and holistic thinking in Westerners, resulting in significant reversals in the way these cultures evaluated brand extensions. These findings are consistent with the dynamic constructivist approach to culture, which proposes that culture is internalized in the form of domain-specific knowledge structures and that individuals can acquire more than one such cultural meaning system, even if they are conflicting (Hong et al. 2000). Thus, individuals can shift between different cultural styles of thinking depending on cues embedded in the environment. For example, Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999) found that Americans primed on interdependence endorsed more collective values than those exposed to an independence prime or no prime; Asians primed on independence endorsed more individualistic values than those exposed to an interdependence prime or no prime. Complete shifts in styles of thinking due to situational primes are quite possible and highlight the importance of accessibility of cultural constructs in shaping attitudes and behavior.

These findings also add to the consumer behavior literature reporting cultural differences across many contexts (e.g., Aaker 2000; Aaker and Lee 2001; Briley, Morris, and Simonson 2000; Maheswaran and Shavitt 2000). Most of the existing research focuses on independent and interdependent self-construal as the source of cultural differences (Markus and Kitayama 1991). More recently, researchers have suggested that the analytic-holistic framework and the self-construal framework are not as disparate as one might perceive. For instance, Kühnen et al. (2001) have suggested that self-construal can affect human behavior via two separate routes, semantic and procedural. In the semantic route, the semantic knowledge of the self is applied to judging the self or others. In the procedural route, different procedural modes of thinking (analytic vs. holistic) are applied to cognitive tasks. This possibility presents opportunities for building connections between cultural differences based on self-construal and styles of thinking.

Finally, our results extend our current knowledge of cultural differences in brand extension response. Prior studies have suggested that consumers from different cultures may emphasize different factors when evaluating brand extensions (Bottomley and Holden 2001). For example, Easterners may rely on corporate reputation instead of brand extension fit (Han and Schmitt 1997). Our findings suggest that brand extension fit is important across cultures but that certain factors (such as corporate reputation) may be used by Easterners as a basis of judging fit on a more frequent basis. We also find that styles of thinking associated with different cultures, and different ways of judging brand extension fit, can be made more accessible by situational primes. By doing so, we can raise or lower brand extension evaluations, as well as making some brand strategies more or less effective as a result. Extending our theorizing to other branding issues may uncover a host of interesting cultural differences in the way consumers around the globe respond to brands.

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