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Short Article

Cultural influences on preference consistency: Consistency at the individual and collective levels

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that there are cultural differences in self-concept consistency across situations. However, little is known about cultural differences in preference consistency over time. The present research examined whether Americans are more consistent in their preferences over time than are Japanese. As hypothesized, there were cultural differences in self-reported (Studies 1 and 2) and actual (Studies 2 and 3) preference consistency over time. Further, cultural differences in preference consistency at the individual level (Study 1) were found to aggregate into collective level differences (Studies 2 and 3) in the consistency of preference trends, such as the popularity of baby names. Implications and future directions are discussed.
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Keywords: Culture; Preferences; Consistency; Expression; Trends

Over the years, research has shown that individuals differ in how consistent they are in their self-concepts across cultures (e.g., Cousins, 1989). However, do these cultural differences in self-concept consistency manifest in how consistent individuals are in their preferences over time? By comparing Westerners and Easterners, the present research examined self-reported and actual differences in preference consistency over time. Through such an investigation, this undertaking aimed to expand the understanding of cultural influences on preference consistency in two ways: by examining preference consistency over time and by examining it not only at the individual level but also at the collective level.

Culture and self-concept consistency

Culture has a powerful influence on many aspects of how a person thinks, feels, and behaves in different contexts. Perhaps most importantly, one's culture shapes the very fundamental definition of what the "self" is that is doing the thinking, feeling, and acting (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). That is, the self in Western cultures is considered to be more "independent," representing a stable entity whose goal is to express inner attributes to others. In Eastern cultures, however, the self is considered to be more "interdependent," signifying a more malleable entity whose goal is to harmoniously fit into the demands of the surrounding context. Such differences in self-concepts might mean that individuals with more stable, independent selves may be more consistent in how they view and describe themselves across situations than individuals with more malleable, interdependent selves.

Researchers have repeatedly shown that this is, in fact, the case (Cousins, 1989; Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003; English & Chen, 2007; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Suh, 2002). Easterners are relatively less consistent than Westerners are in terms of their self-concepts. For example, when asked for self-descriptions, Westerners are more likely than Easterners to describe themselves using personality traits that transcend situations (e.g., "I am an extraverted type of person"), whereas Easterners are more likely than Westerners to use personality

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traits that are bound to specific contexts (e.g., "I am extraverted at home, but introverted at school"; Suh, 2002).

Furthermore, English and Chen (2007) have shown that self-concept consistency across situations differs in important ways from self-concept consistency over time. Their cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that Asian Americans are less consistent than European Americans when comparing their self-concepts from one situation with their self-concepts from another situation. Yet when examining consistency within the same specific context *over time*, Asian Americans actually prove to be as consistent as European Americans are.

Even though European and Asian Americans have shown similar self-concept consistency within *specific* contexts over time (English & Chen, 2007), researchers have not yet examined if there are cultural differences in consistency over time when no context has been specified. For example, while European and Asian Americans may both view themselves as consistent for similar lengths of time in how extraverted or introverted they are *at home*, they may differ in how consistently extraverted or introverted they view themselves as being *in general* across time. Without being given a specific context in which to anchor themselves, Easterners' self-concepts may be less consistent over time than Westerners'. In fact, cross-cultural studies on cognitive dissonance have shown that Easterners are less likely than Westerners to try to reduce inconsistencies within themselves, unless they are placed in an interpersonal context (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004). These findings suggest the possibility that, without being given a specific context, Westerners may be more consistent than Easterners over time.

Culture and preference consistency

These differences in self-concept consistency across cultures may be reflected in how consistent people are in their preferences. However, to-date, no studies have examined cultural influences on preference consistency, neither across situations nor over time. At the same time, cross-cultural researchers have suggested that values associated with choices and preferences differ across cultures. Specifically, it has been found that there are cultural differences in the value people place on expressing themselves through their choices and preferences (Kim & Sherman, 2007). In Western societies, people report that they value expression more than those in Eastern societies do. Such a tendency to value self-expression may lead Westerners to base their attitudes more on the expressive value of items. For instance, a preference for a Mac computer in the West may be partly based on information about how it expresses a certain identity (e.g., an "academic" or "alternative" identity). On the other hand, Easterners may base their attitudes less on the expressive value of items but more on other types of input, such as experiential information or societal preference shifts.

The attitude literature suggests that individuals should show consistent attitudes over time when the input on which the attitudes are based is consistent across different time points (Lord & Lepper, 1999; Schwarz & Bohner, 2001). To the extent that Westerners' attitudes are based on the expressive value of items, their preferences should be more stable across time because the expressive value of an item does not change much over time. In contrast, to the extent that Easterners' attitudes are based on sources that fluctuate (e.g., experiential information, societal preference shifts), their preferences should be less stable over time. In this sense, Westerners' preferences should be more consistent than Easterners', because the expressive value of items may serve to "weigh down" their preferences.

Therefore, in combination with the self-concept consistency literature, the attitude literature also seems to suggest that Westerners may retain their preferences for a longer period of time than Easterners do. Supporting the possibility that preference consistency over time is particularly important for Westerners, in a study conducted by Wells and Iyengar (2005), it was found that Americans who perceive themselves as consistent in their preferences for a longer period of time have higher well-being than do Americans who perceive themselves as less consistent in their preferences over time. Yet while the importance of preference consistency in the West has been emphasized, no one has yet examined if Easterners are similarly consistent in their preferences. Thus, the present research investigated if Americans will show more preference consistency over time than will Japanese (H1). To specify, preference consistency over time is operationalized here as the length of preference for a certain item—how long an individual likes an item. To test our first hypothesis, participants from both Japan and the U.S. are asked to report how long they have liked a variety of items in Study 1.

Manifestation of individual preference consistency at the collective level

Compared to the amount of evidence showing how culture shapes psychological processes, there is less evidence showing how psychological processes at the individual level constitute and shape collective processes at the cultural level (for exceptions, see Heath, Bell, & Sternberg, 2001; Kashima, 2008; Schaller & Crandall, 2004). Assuming that Americans are more consistent in their preferences than Japanese are at the individual level, how does this translate into consistency of collective level preferences, or trends? Here, we define collective level preference consistency as the length of popularity (i.e., the trend) of a certain item—how long an item is popular in each society. On one hand, individuals' values or behaviors can compose a large part of a collective's trends (Turner & Killian, 1987), and hence it can be predicted that individual preference consistency will manifest in more collective consistency of preference trends. Specifically, in a society where an item is preferred based on its expressive value, the amount of people who choose and prefer the item may not rapidly fluctuate over time, because the item's expressive value is relatively stable over time across individuals within a society. On the other hand, in a society where an item is preferred based on other factors, such as experiential information or societal

preference shifts, the amount of people who choose and prefer the item may rapidly fluctuate over time, because those factors tend to be less stable than the expressive value of an item is. Therefore, in the U.S., where items are chosen and preferred based on stable factors more than they are in Japan (Kim & Sherman, 2007), items may remain popular for longer than they do in Japan, thus leading to more collective level preference consistency in the U.S. than in Japan (H2).

At the same time, it is known that problems can arise when inferences about group-level characteristics are drawn from individual-level characteristics (or vice versa), a phenomenon termed the ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950). Characteristics found for individuals do not always aggregate into group-level characteristics due to the presence of a third factor. It is possible that cultural differences in preference consistency found at the individual level may not be observed at the collective level, potentially due to societal factors such as marketing strategies, or individual factors such as the need to be unique. It is known that Americans value uniqueness (Kim & Markus, 1999). Given that the need to distinguish the self from dissimilar others can facilitate the abandonment of preferences (Berger & Heath, 2008), the U.S. cultural emphasis on uniqueness may lead to less collective level preference consistency, in opposition to the preference consistency among Americans at the individual level.

Therefore, two additional studies were conducted to determine if there are also cultural differences in the consistency of collective level preferences. As opposed to Study 1, the second study examines *actual*, rather than *recalled*, consistency of collective level preferences. Specifically, two samples from each culture in Study 2 report the popularity of trends for a variety of actual products over the space of a year. Study 3 uses archival data—ranking charts—to demonstrate differences in collective level preference consistency within Americans' and Japanese' real cultural environments. Specifically, declines in collective preference trends are tracked in both America and Japan on national hit music, book, and baby names charts.

Study 1

In Study 1, in order to examine if Americans are more consistent in their preferences than Japanese, both European Americans and Japanese were asked to report their consistency for several different items.

Participants

Fifty-five European American undergraduates from the University of Wisconsin-Madison participated in a "Marketing Study" in exchange for one extra credit class point. Forty-seven undergraduate students from Kyoto and Hosei Universities in Japan also participated in exchange for monetary compensation.

Procedure

In both America and Japan, participants arrived at the lab in small groups consisting of one to five individuals. First they were asked to write down their "favorite" for each of the six preferences (e.g., "What is your favorite *music artist/TV show/restaurant/hair style/shampoo/actor or actress*?").[1] To examine the generalizability of cultural differences across a wide range of products, six items were included that represented three different degrees of expression based on previous research (Berger & Heath, 2007): the High Identity-Signaling domain consisted of music artist and hairstyle, the Mid Identity-Signaling domain consisted of TV show and restaurant, and the Low Identity-Signaling domain consisted of shampoo and actor/actress. After writing down each favorite preference, participants received 9-point Likert scale questions inquiring about the expressiveness of each of those preferences (e.g., "This *music artist* allows me to express myself"; 1 = "Not At All," 9 = "Very Much") to confirm the distinction between the three different degrees of expression. As expected, there was a linear trend of domain, $F(1, 100)=171.85$, $p<.001$; as the level of Identity-Signaling increased, so did the expressiveness ratings, regardless of culture. Finally, participants received the open-ended measure of preference consistency (e.g., "How many months/years have you liked this *music artist*?").

Results

Responses that did not indicate any clear numerical value were dropped from analyses. These did not differ in number across cultures, $p>.2$. Additionally, one Japanese participant who responded to the expression ratings chose not to respond to the consistency items. To correct for the skew of all six preference distributions, a square root transformation was performed on each prior to analyses. However, reported means are based on the original data.

A 2 (culture: American and Japanese)×3 (domain: High, Mid, and Low Identity-Signaling) mixed ANOVA was conducted to test the hypotheses regarding preference consistency. In support of the first hypothesis (H1), culture had a significant impact on preference consistency, $F(1, 99)=4.44$, $p<.05$. As predicted, Americans ($M=4.15$ years, $SE=0.21$) reported significantly more consistent preferences over time than Japanese ($M=3.59$ years, $SE=0.23$) did overall. Additionally, there was a main effect of domain, $F(2, 198)=5.00$, $p<.01$, in the form of a linear trend, $F(1, 99)=7.58$, $p<.01$, indicating that consistency increased as items became more self-expressive. There was no culture x domain interaction, $F(2, 198)=0.26$, $p>.10$, indicating that the cultural main effect was observed across domains. (See Table 1 for a summary of these results.)

[1] In a pilot test, 10 items were given to a sample of 42 European American and 37 Japanese undergraduates to find which of them would not elicit more "general" preferences in one culture and more "specific" preferences in the other (e.g., favorite drink: "*soda*," or, "*Coca-Cola*"), since this could be potentially confounded with preference consistency in Study 1. Results indicated that the two cultures showed less than an 80% agreement of general vs. specific preferences on four of the 10 items (i.e., drink, snack, stationary, and clothing), and hence these items were dropped. The remaining preference items (i.e. music artist, hairstyle, actor/actress, shampoo, TV show, and restaurant) were retained for Study 1.

Table 1
Individual level preference consistency: Mean number of years participants maintained their preferences by culture and preference domain.

Culture	Identity-Signaling Preference domains					
	High		Mid		Low	
	Music artist	Hairstyle	TV show	Restaurant	Actor/actress	Shampoo
American	6.97 (1.53)	6.76 (1.79)	5.55 (1.89)	5.58 (1.86)	4.79 (2.25)	4.22 (2.09)
Japanese	6.32 (1.66)	5.58 (2.51)	5.32 (2.36)	4.73 (2.05)	3.93 (2.29)	4.20 (2.46)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Discussion

The results for Study 1 provide initial evidence for cultural differences in preference consistency over time. While previous studies have shown cultural differences in the consistency of individuals' self-concepts across situations (e.g., English & Chen, 2007; Suh, 2002), this study may be the first evidence that Americans maintain their preferences across time for longer than do Japanese. Such results were found by examining reports of how consistent individuals are in general in their preferences for a variety of items over time.

Study 1 assessed preference consistency at the individual level. However, from the existing literature and from the results of Study 1 alone, it is unclear as to whether or not Americans and Japanese differ in preference consistency at the collective level. Therefore, Studies 2 and 3 sought to extend the individual preference consistency findings from Study 1 in another important way: by examining if they manifest in collective level preference trends. Because items are more likely to be chosen and preferred based on their expressive value (which is stable over time across individuals within a society) in the U.S. than they are in Japan, items may remain popular for longer in the U.S. than they do in Japan. This leads to our second hypothesis, which predicts that Americans in Studies 2 and 3 will also be more consistent than Japanese in their collective level preferences.

Additionally, however, the preference consistency measures used in Study 1 are based on retrospective memories, which can reflect one's beliefs rather than actual experiences (Robinson & Clore, 2002; Ross, 1989). In fact, cultural differences are often smaller when based on online report than on retrospective memory (Oishi, 2002). To examine whether there are cultural differences in *actual*, rather than *recalled*, consistency, Studies 2 and 3 tracked the popularity of items over time. Since the speed of decline corresponds to the speed of adaptation and has been considered to be a measure of persistence (Berger & Le Mens, 2009), Studies 2 and 3 measured the decline of popularity—how quickly items lose their popularity—as an indicator of actual consistency. How quickly items lose their popularity in each culture was measured by asking respondents to report the popularity of various items in a prospective design (Study 2) and using archival data of various charts (Study 3).

Study 2

Study 2 asked respondents in both cultures to report the popularity of various items twice over time: in 2007 and one year later in 2008. We hypothesized that items would lose their popularity more quickly in Japan than in the U.S. In addition, for exploratory purposes, we also asked participants in 2007 to predict the popularity of the items one year later. We explored how accurate people are in their predictions and whether there are cultural differences in predictions of decline as well as in the actual decline of item popularity over time.

Participants

In 2007, 29 European American undergraduates from the University of Wisconsin, Madison and 38 Japanese undergraduates from Kyoto University participated either in exchange for an extra class credit (U.S.) or for a 500 yen coupon book (Japan). In 2008, a new sample of 55 European Americans and 49 Japanese from the same universities participated for the same credit or payment.

Procedure

Participants in both countries filled out the survey in groups consisting of 1–5 individuals. One survey was handed out in 2007 and another was handed out to a new sample in 2008. In both surveys, participants were asked how up-to-date (or out-of-date) they considered certain collective preferences to be on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., "To what extent do you think the *iPod* is up-to-date or out-of-date?" 1 = "Out-of-date," 5 = "Up-to-date"). They were asked this for six items that were deemed popular in each culture by discussions with undergraduates at their respective universities in 2007. Specific items differed by country based on the trends in each culture but were the same across two time points within each culture (i.e., *singer: Justin Timberlake/Kumi Koda; movie: Dream Girls/Charlie & the Chocolate Factory; music player: iPod/iPod; game player: Wii/DS Lite; cell phone: Razor/Camera phone; book: Harry Potter/DaVinci Code*). Aside from these questions, the 2007 survey differed in that it asked participants to rate each item on one additional 5-point Likert scale measure: "A year later, to what extent do you think the *iPod* will be up-to-date or out-of-date?" Overall collective preference scores were computed by averaging the six items together.

Results

Actual preference consistency

Using the questions on current trends for "up-to-date/out-of-date" preferences from the two time points, a 2 (culture: American and Japanese) × 2 (time: 2007 and 2008) between

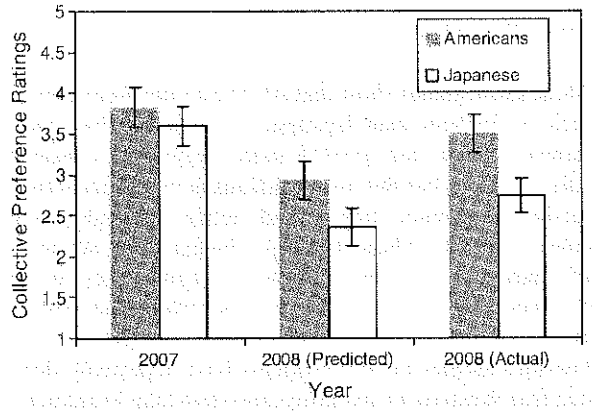

Fig. 1. Mean of predicted and actual collective preference ratings as a function of culture and time.

subjects ANOVA yielded a main effect of both culture, $F(1, 167)=40.50$, $p<.001$, and time, $F(1, 167)=62.31$, $p<.001$, as well as the predicted interaction, $F(1, 167)=13.51$, $p<.001$. That is, Americans ($M=3.66$, $SE=0.06$) reported their collective preferences as being significantly more up-to-date than did Japanese ($M=3.17$, $SE=0.05$) in general, and individuals in 2007 ($M=3.72$, $SE=0.06$) reported their collective preferences as being significantly more up-to-date than did individuals in 2008 ($M=3.12$, $SE=0.05$). Follow-up t-tests on the interaction demonstrated that while Americans ($M=3.82$, $SD=0.48$) reported collective preferences as being similarly up-to-date/out-of-date to Japanese ($M=3.61$, $SD=0.55$) in 2007, $t(65)=1.58$, $p>.10$, in 2008, Americans ($M=3.50$, $SD=0.48$) reported their collective preferences as being more up-to-date than did Japanese ($M=2.73$, $SD=0.42$), $t(102)=8.56$, $p<.001$ (see leftmost and rightmost time points in Fig. 1). In support of the second hypothesis (H2), American collective preference trends were rated as similar to Japanese collective preference trends in 2007, but rated as significantly more up-to-date than Japanese collective preference trends in 2008.[2] This indicates that Americans have more consistent collective level preferences than Japanese.

Predicted preference consistency

When a 2 (culture: American and Japanese)×2 (time: current and predicted) mixed ANOVA was conducted using the average "up-to-date/out-of-date" for all six items in the 2007 sample, significant main effects of culture, $F(1, 65)=11.52$, $p<.001$, and time, $F(1, 65)=11.52$, $p<.001$, as well as a significant interaction between culture and time, $F(1, 65)=11.52$, $p<.001$, emerged. In general, Americans ($M=3.37$, $SE=0.09$) reported and predicted their collective preferences to be more up-to-date than did Japanese ($M=2.99$, $SE=0.08$), and across cultures, individuals reported preferences to be more up-to-date ($M=3.72$, $SE=0.06$) than they predicted them to be a year later ($M=2.64$, $SE=0.06$). Most importantly, the significant interaction showed that Americans($M=3.82$, $SD=0.48$) and Japanese ($M=3.61$, $SD=0.55$) in the 2007 sample reported preferences as "up-to-date/out-of-date" to a similar extent, $t(65)=1.58$, $p>.10$, yet the same Americans ($M=2.92$, $SD=0.57$) predicted these collective preference trends would decline less one year later than did Japanese ($M=2.36$, $SD=0.47$), $t(65)=4.40$, $p<.001$ (see left two time points in Fig. 1). This suggests that Americans and Japanese are fairly accurate in their predictions of the actual consistency of their collective level preferences.

Discussion

In Study 2, the data from two separate samples over time confirms the second hypothesis. That is, Americans not only report that they are more consistent in their collective preferences than Japanese, but this is also the actual cultural reality reflected by trend reports from a new sample one year later. Yet even with some evidence for cultural differences in preference consistency both at the individual and collective levels, it has still not been determined if these differences are reflected in actual cultural products. Therefore, to add to the findings of Studies 1 and 2, in Study 3, collective preference consistency will be tested longitudinally by measuring the actual consistency of collective preference trends on national music, book, and baby name charts.

Study 3

Procedure

To determine if there are differences in the consistency of collective preference trends for cultural products over time, the rankings of music artists, book titles, and baby names in both America and Japan were compared. For music rankings, the American Billboard Top 100 and the Japanese Oricon Singles music charts were chosen, since they are both the most well-known for their rankings in each culture.[3] Likewise, U.S.A. Today and Tohan book charts were chosen, since they are among two of the most well-known charts for book rankings in their respective countries. Data on the most popular baby names between 1989 and 2008 (i.e., across 18 time points) was obtained from the United States Social Security Administration and the Meiji Yasuda Insurance Company in Japan. Preference tracking for both music and book charts began in June of 2006 and continued for 21 weeks (i.e., across 20 time points).

[2] A follow-up culture×time MANOVA was performed to examine if the same pattern held across each of the six individual items. As expected, the overall interaction was significant, $F(1, 162)=7.09$, $p<.001$. Additionally, four of the six items showed the predicted culture x time interaction, three of which were significant. Interestingly, in both cultures, the iPod increased in popularity over time, possibly due to the release of a new model. Only one item (i.e., the Razor phone in the U.S. and a cell phone with a camera in Japan) showed a pattern slightly opposite to the prediction, though this was not significant, $F(1, 162)=2.32$, $p>.1$. This is likely due to the fact that the Razor phone is a more specific category than a cell phone with a camera is. It is noteworthy that despite having this item, there were still overall cultural differences in preference consistency across the two samples.

[3] Billboard's Top 100 chart is based off of both sales and airplay, whereas Oricon's Singles chart is based entirely off of sales. However, we conducted an additional analysis using Yusen, a Japanese hit chart based solely on airplay, and results were essentially the same.

Table 2
Collective level preference consistency: Mean number of items that dropped out of the top ten in the music, book, and name charts by culture.

Culture	Preference		
	Music	Books	Names
American	1.90 (0.97)	3.60 (1.60)	.89 (0.61)
Japanese	5.84 (1.83)	4.35 (1.18)	4.08 (1.60)

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. The number of turnovers is based on weekly charts for music and books and yearly charts for names.

However, since the Japanese music chart did not publish their results for one of those 21 weeks, data from the same week in the American music chart was also excluded, leaving data for only 20 weeks (i.e., across 19 time points).

Given comparable availability of the data across cultures, a turnover analysis was conducted for the top 10 most popular music artists, book titles, and baby names. Beginning with a comparison between the first and second time points of tracking and continuing on from there, a turnover score was computed by calculating how many artists/titles/names dropped out of the top 10.

Results

As expected, an independent samples t test demonstrated that fewer male (M=.89, SD=0.66) and female (M=.89, SD=0.57) baby names in America dropped out of the top 10 between years than did male (M=3.68, SD=1.38) or female (M=4.47, SD=1.74) baby names in Japan, $t(36)=7.97$, $p<.001$ and $t(36)=8.50$, $p<.001$, respectively. Likewise, significantly fewer American songs (M=1.90, SD=0.97) dropped out of the top 10 between weeks than did Japanese songs (M=5.84, SD=1.83), $t(37)=8.46$, $p<.001$. Book preferences showed the same effect as name and music preferences. Fewer American titles (M=3.60, SD=1.60) dropped out of the top 10 between weeks than did Japanese titles (M=4.35, SD=1.18), although this effect was marginal, $t(38)=1.68$, $p=.10$.[4] Combined, all four analyses show that at the collective level, actual cultural product trends in America decline at a slower rate than do preference trends in Japan.[5] Therefore, these findings provide additional support for the assertion that Americans are more consistent in their collective preferences over time. (See Table 2 for a summary of these results.)

[4] In addition to the turnover analysis, we also examined if there were cultural differences in rank changes in general by computing the average change in rank for each of the items between time points. As expected, Japanese music artists and baby names changed ranks significantly more between time points than did American music artists or baby names, $ps<.001$. The difference between Japanese and American book titles, however, did not reach significance.

[5] To rule out the possibility that population size, rather than cultural factors, was driving consistency differences, identical analyses were also conducted on top-rated music titles within the UK, a country whose population is closer to that of Japan's than that of America's. Results confirmed that titles on the Official UK Singles Charts (M=2.90, SD=1.21) were also significantly more consistent than Japanese titles (M=5.84, SD=1.83), $t(37)=5.94$, $p<.001$. Therefore, it is unlikely that population size was the factor driving cultural differences in preference consistency.

General discussion

These three studies show that Americans are more consistent in their preferences than Japanese, as predicted. Not only do Americans report and predict more preference consistency (Studies 1 and 2), but this also manifests in more consistency of collective preference trends and actual cultural products (Studies 2 and 3). These findings illustrate that Westerners' consistency can be observed in the consistency of their preferences over time at both the individual and collective levels.

Previous studies on self-concepts have repeatedly demonstrated that Westerners are more consistent than Easterners are across different situations (e.g., English & Chen, 2007; Suh, 2002). However, little is known about the universality of preference consistency over time. The present research showed that Americans are more consistent than Japanese in their preferences over time. Further, it was found that Americans' preference consistency at the individual level can aggregate into consistency of collective preferences in the form of societal trends. To our knowledge, this is the first evidence of cultural differences in both individual and collective level preferences.

It is noteworthy that the cultural differences in Study 3 were found even with the popularity of baby names. Unlike music artists, which depend on both preferences of individuals and strategies of advertisers and producers, baby names are based mainly on individuals' choices (Berger & Le Mens, 2009). The fact that we also observed cultural differences with baby names suggests that collective preference consistency reflects individual preference consistency rather than commercial strategies. At the same time, it is still possible that other factors, such as the number of items that exist in a given society, may be underlying cultural differences in the speed of turnover. Future research could examine these other factors to disentangle the processes underlying collective level differences.

While we examined if cultural differences in individual preference consistency can aggregate into collective preference consistency, individual and collective level phenomena may *mutually* influence each other. That is, collective level phenomena may not simply be the aggregate of individual level phenomena, but at times may also influence individual level phenomena (Granovetter, 1978; Gureckis & Goldstone, 2006; Lieberson, 2000; Salganik, Dodds, & Watts, 2006). Cultural psychological studies have suggested that collectively constructed cultural environments afford patterns of behavior embodied in such environments (e.g., Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Miyamoto, Nisbett, & Masuda, 2006). By showing cultural differences in collective preference consistency, the present research thus sheds light on a potential mechanism underlying cultural influences on individual preference consistency.

The present findings are in line with findings on cultural differences in views of change as well (e.g., Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001). For instance, as Choi, Koo, and Choi (2007) have stated, East Asians tend to possess a more "cyclical view" of change, one that assumes constant fluctuations (p. 694). Contrary to the

Western perspective, reality is philosophized to be a process which is in constant flux (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Such dialectical thinking among East Asians may in fact influence how consistent individuals are in their preferences, and provides strong support for the present findings of preference consistency across time.

While these findings are not surprising given cultural differences in dialecticism, one question that they do raise is how exactly they may fit in with findings involving variety-seeking across cultures. At first glance, this literature may seem at odds with the present findings. That is, Kim and Drolet (2003) found that Westerners vary their choice strategies across choice sets more than Easterners do when asked to make consecutive choices. Further, this effect was found to be based on cultural differences in the value for expression. However, it is likely that there are multiple ways through which the value of expression influences choice and preference. One way through which expression influences choice, as shown by Kim and Drolet (2003), is to be unique by varying choice strategies across choice sets. Another way through which individuals can be influenced by the value of expression is to base their preference on the expressive value of an item, which leads to stable preferences over time. These two effects of expression do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. One may be able to maintain an underlying, consistent preference while varying one's specific choice strategies across different contexts. Thus, the present research is not necessarily at odds with the literature on variety-seeking across cultures; in fact, these studies help to provide a more complete picture of how culture and expression operate on our preferences and choice behavior.

Together, the present studies found that Americans are more consistent than Japanese in general, but one may wonder whether Japanese ever become more consistent than Americans. Given divergent views of the self cross-culturally (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), it is possible that preference consistency may depend on the type of preference. For example, for personal preferences, such as the "marketing" preferences examined in the present research, Americans show more preference consistency than Japanese do, presumably because Americans' preferences are based on how items express their independent self-concepts, which do not change much over time. In contrast, for more relational preferences, or preferences for social groups or affiliations, perhaps Japanese are more likely than Americans to base their preferences on how the item expresses interdependent self-concepts, leading to more preference consistency. Separating the effects witnessed here into personal and relational preferences could provide valuable insight into how culture may influence consistency.

Preferences underlie a wide range of choice behavior in everyday life: what food we eat, what music we listen to, and what clothes we wear. Importantly, the present research contributes to our understanding of what factors affect how these preferences are maintained. By showing cultural differences in how consistent preferences are over time at both the micro- and macro-levels, these studies not only demonstrate how self-reported, individual factors help to shape actual collective level practices, but also underscore the pervasive influence of culture on fundamental psychological processes.

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