Superordinate Regional Identities and the Salience of Intergroup Rivalry: Effects of Spontaneous Recategorization on Brand Attitudes

Carlos J. Torelli  
*University of Minnesota*  
Rohini Ahluwalia  
*University of Minnesota*  
Shirley Cheng  
*Hong Kong Baptist University*  
Jennifer Stoner  
*University of Minnesota*
Which team did Chinese root for?
Research Questions

- When do consumers support brands that symbolize culturally-related outgroups?
- What identity processes underlie this support?
- What is the role that cultural rivalries play in this context?
Social Identities and Consumer Behavior

- Favorable evaluations of identity-symbolic products (Reed 2004).
- Readiness to act in an identity-consistent manner (Oyserman 2009).
- Particularly strong effects when the social identity is salient (chronically or temporarily).
Hierarchy of Social Identities

Abstraction

North American

American

Upper Midwesterner

Minnesotan

Wisconsinite

Canadian

Personal Identity

Social Identities

North American

American

Upper Midwesterner

Minnesotan

Wisconsinite

Canadian
Hierarchy of Social Identities

Abstraction

Upper Midwesterner

Minnesotan

Wisconsinite

Rivalry (i.e., sports)

Texan

Carlos Torelli
Recategorization at a Superordinate Identity

- Members of different sub-groups can be induced to think of themselves as a single superordinate group → Evidence primarily comes from minimal group paradigm

- Recategorization triggers favorable attitudes toward former outgroup members (pro-ingroup bias) (Gaertner et al. 1993).

- However, when recategorization becomes a threat to positivity and distinctiveness, such recategorization processes can backfire and increase intergroup bias (Crisp, Stone, and Hall 2006).
Triggers of Recategorization

- Exposure to brands that symbolize a social group can make the associated social identity salient (Torelli 2013).

- Situational factors can also trigger a heightened need to connect with a social identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1981).
Hypotheses

- **H1**: We propose that exposure to brands that symbolize a subgroup nested within the same superordinate regional identity can induce recategorization, and its concomitant proingroup bias (i.e., favorable attitudes toward the brand).

- **H2**: This effect should be more likely to occur when social identity needs are heightened (chronically or temporarily).

- **H3**: The effect should be attenuated when rivalry between sub-groups is salient.
Study 1 – Chronic salience of superordinate identity

- **Participants**
  - 97 Minnesotan college students

- **Design**
  - 2 (brand associations: nested subgroup, non-nested subgroup) × 2 (rivalry salience: high, low) × 2 (superordinate identity salience: high, low) mixed design

- **Procedure**
  - Participants evaluated 8 brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salience of Potential Rivalry with Minnesotan Brands</th>
<th>Distinctiveness of Association with Upper Midwest vs. Other Regional Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Sierra Nevada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TJMaxx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Dallas Cowboys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Penn State Nittany Lions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Rated importance of Upper Midwestern identity
Results – Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salience of Potential Rivalry with Minnesotan Brands</th>
<th>High Upper Midwest Identification (+1 SD)</th>
<th>Low Upper Midwest Identification (-1 SD)</th>
<th>Distinctiveness of Association with Upper Midwest vs. Other Regional Groups</th>
<th>Distinctiveness of Association with Upper Midwest vs. Other Regional Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td><strong>4.42&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.87&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.17&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.24&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td><strong>3.67&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.59&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.74&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.16&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: cells not sharing the same subscript in the same row and level of Upper Midwest Identification differ significantly, $p < .05$ (using Bonferoni adjustment)
Study 2 – Temporarily & Chronically Salient Identity Needs

- **Participants**
  - 60 Minnesotan college students

- **Design**
  - 2 (temporary salience of identity needs: salient, neutral) × 2 (chronic salience of identity needs: high, low) between-subjects design

- **Procedure**
  - Salient identity needs task (Imagine a trip abroad and think about home or neutral video about insects)
  - Imagine a football game between Green Bay Packers (nested subgroup) and Dallas Cowboys (non-nested subgroup)
Study 2 – Temporarily & Chronically Salient Identity Needs

Measures

- Support for each time (12 items)
  - “At the game, which team will you cheer for?”
  - “How likely is it that you will wear clothing such as a T-shirt or hat that identifies you as a Dallas Cowboys (Packers) fan?”
  - “How likely are you to purchase a Dallas Cowboys (Packers) souvenir?”
  - “How excited will you be if the Dallas Cowboys (Packers) win the game?”

- Rated importance of Upper Midwestern identity
## Results – Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporary Salience of Identity Needs</th>
<th>Chronic Salience of Identity Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low (-1 SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salient</strong></td>
<td>5.32&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral</strong></td>
<td>3.60&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: cells not sharing the same subscript in the same row or column differ significantly, $p < .05$. 
Study 3 – The Role of Rivalry Salience (Sochi Winter Olympics)

Participants
- 130 Americans recruited via MTurk

Design
- 2 (temporary salience of identity needs: salient, neutral) × 2 (chronic salience of identity needs: high, low) × 2 (rivalry salience: high, low) between-subjects design

Procedure
- Same salient identity needs task (Imagine a trip abroad and think about home or neutral video about insects)
- Curling women finals scheduled the next day facing Canada (nested subgroup) against Sweden (non-nested subgroup)
Study 3 – The Role of Rivalry Salience (Sochi Winter Olympics)

Measures

- Support for each time (similar 12 items)
- Awareness of the ongoing rivalry between Canada and the U.S. in the 2014 Winter Olympics
  - “How closely have you been following the Sochi Winter Olympics?”
  - “How aware are you of the US medal count at the Sochi Winter Olympics?”
- Rated importance of North American identity
# Study 3 - Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity Salience Condition</td>
<td>-.638</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivalry Salience</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Identification with North America</td>
<td>.325</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Salience Condition × Rivalry salience</td>
<td>-.337</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivalry Salience × Identification with North America</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Salience Condition × Identification with North America</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Salience Condition × Rivalry Salience × Identification with North America</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.893</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study 3 - Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Salience Condition</th>
<th>Low Identification with North America</th>
<th>High Identification with North America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low Rivalry Salience</td>
<td>High Rivalry Salience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salient</td>
<td>5.23&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.32&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>5.17&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5.54&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: cells not sharing the same subscript in the same column or row (same rivalry salience level) differ significantly, $p < .05$.

$r = .29$  $p = .07$

$r = .36$  $p < .005$
Conclusions

- Chronically or temporarily salient social identity needs can trigger recategorization at a superordinate regional identity and lead to more favorable attitudes toward former outgroup brands (i.e., pro-ingroup bias).

- However, this effect only emerges under low levels of rivalry salience.

- Pro-ingroup bias effects are specific to the brand’s ability to fulfill the salient social identity needs (absent for brands that symbolize non-nested subgroups).
Conclusions

- Rivalry salience is in itself a context-dependent notion, as even rival sport brands associated with a nested subgroup can be favorably evaluated under the recategorization triggered by heightened social identity needs.

- However, when intergroup competition is highly salient, social identity reminders can cause a contrast effect and hinder recategorization processes.
Future Research

What is the role of identification with one’s own subgroup?

- Past research shows that strong identification with one’s subgroup can lead to perceive explicit recategorization as a threat (due to lost distinctiveness), triggering intergroup bias (Crisp et al. 2006).

- However, because regional identities may not be often salient, those identified with a subgroup may be the ones more likely to implicitly represent the superordinate identity (i.e., more aware of the boundaries and overlap between subgroups).
Future Research

- Do the effects emerge outside the U.S. (i.e., East Asian regional identity)?
- Provide evidence for the mediating process (recategorization)
- The role of product categories in driving the effects
Thank you!