



Research Report

Regulatory goals in a globalized world☆

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Accepted by Amna Kirmani, Editor; Associate Editor, Manoj Thomas

Received 18 May 2015; received in revised form 19 August 2016; accepted 23 August 2016

Available online 29 August 2016

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**Abstract**

This research examines the impact of a salient global (or local) identity on individual's regulatory goals. Specifically, we show that when people's identity as a global citizen is salient, they are more likely to focus on promotion goals; whereas when their identity as a local citizen is salient, they are more likely to focus on prevention goals. We further show that this arises because people are likely to adopt a more abstract or higher level (vs. concrete or lower level) construal when their global (local) identity is salient. Evidence from three studies supports this central proposition.

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*Keywords:* Globalization; Self-identity; Regulatory goals; Construal level

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The recent “BREXIT” vote in the UK showed dramatically how individuals can vary in how they perceive the opportunities and perils from globalization. While prior research has documented how globalization is changing consumers' self-identities, we show here that it can also fundamentally alter the very ways in which they process information, construe events, and set goals. We show below that the twin forces of globalization and localization can lead to important shifts in mindset that can potentially alter preferences not only in the consumption domain but also in broader pro-social and political arenas.

Prior research has documented how globalization is changing consumers' self-identities, (Arnett, 2002; Yang et al., 2011;

Zhang & Khare, 2009). The development of one's self-identity is influenced by demographics (e.g., gender), upbringing (e.g., social class), contextual factors (e.g., football team membership), and societal changes. Globalization has been shown to lead to the development of a *global identity* (i.e., how strongly one associates with the global community) and the strengthening of one's *local identity* (i.e., one's association with the local community) (e.g., Arnett, 2002; Chiu, Gries, Torelli, & Cheng, 2011; Leung, Qiu, & Chiu, 2012). Though globalization and global identity are not synonymous, and the former does not always lead to the latter, more consumers now see themselves as members of a broader, global community (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003). Research shows that the co-development of these two identities has important implications for consumers' cognitions and brand choices (e.g., Zhang & Khare, 2009).

Specifically, we suggest here that a salient global (local) identity should make people construe phenomena more abstractly (concretely) and at a higher (lower) level, which in turn leads to stronger promotion (prevention) goals. Research shows that people possess two primary types of regulatory goals: promotion

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☆ The authors are indebted to the participants of a seminar at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for valuable comments on the project, and Nanyang Technological University for financial support.

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and prevention (Higgins, 1997). Though research has identified some important antecedents of these regulatory goals (e.g., parenting style: Higgins et al., 2001; self-construal: Aaker & Lee, 2001), the literature has not yet explored the intriguing possibility that differential salience of one's global versus local identity might itself be an important antecedent. This research aims to show that salience of global (local) identity will affect the type of regulatory goals evoked, and evidence from three studies supports this central proposition.

Findings from our research thus contribute to the construal level and regulatory focus literatures by identifying an important, yet unexplored, antecedent of both. Though prior research has shown that promotion (prevention)-focused people process information more abstractly (concretely) (Förster & Higgins, 2005; Lee, Keller, & Sternthal, 2010), it has not examined the role played by self-identity, in particular global versus local identity. Our findings go beyond the prior literature in showing that evoking different identities can trigger different construal levels and processing styles and, consequently, the regulatory goals pursued by consumers. Demonstrating these linkages also contributes to the self-identity literature as this consequence of identity has not previously been reported. Finally, by examining this consequential impact of globalization, we also contribute to the literatures on globalization and cosmopolitanism (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Sigauw, 2012; Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010) by identifying an important “downstream” consequence of globalization on the broad patterns of consumers' cognitions and motivations.

### Global identities and regulatory goals

Extant research in regulatory focus theory shows that promotion-focused individuals tend to focus on growth and advancement (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997), while prevention-focused individuals tend to focus on roles and responsibilities (Higgins et al., 1997). Whether a promotion or prevention goal drives one's behavior may be dependent on making choices for oneself versus others (Polman, 2012), the culture in which one grows up (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001), self-construal (Aaker & Lee, 2001), and the positivity of self-stereotypes (Seibt & Förster, 2004). Collectively, these findings suggest that how one views and defines oneself is an important contributor.

Prior research shows that an important dimension of how one defines oneself relates to the groups one associates with, e.g., being a professor, an avid sportsman, and an American (Vohs & Baumeister, 2012). Not surprisingly, as the world becomes more interconnected, the heightened recognition of the commonalities among people across the globe is leading to the growth of a shared “global identity” (Arnett, 2002; Appadurai, 1990; Hannerz, 1990). Consumers increasingly perceive and desire a shared “global consumer culture” (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 2006). Paradoxically, and simultaneously, globalization has also led to a strengthening of individuals' local identities—their felt closeness to local traditions and culture (Holton, 2000). Research shows that in the face of changes to societal values and behaviors resulting from exposure to foreign cultures (e.g., global music,

food trends), some consumers exhibit greater ethnocentrism (Chiu et al., 2011; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). These twin trends lead to a global identity developing on top of and co-existing with individuals' local identity (Arnett, 2002), consistent with prior research showing that multiple identities—varying in salience—can co-exist within an individual (Brewer, 1991; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000).

Building on prior research, this research proposes that a situationally more-salient global (local) identity should evoke higher-level construals and more abstract (concrete) thoughts; these should, in turn, lead to stronger promotion (prevention) goals.

### *From global identity to higher-level construals and more abstract thoughts*

According to construal level theory (CLT), individuals can construe events at either a “higher” level or “lower” level. Higher-level construals (vs. lower) are more general (vs. specific); abstract, indirectly experienced and decontextualized (vs. concrete, directly experienced and contextualized) (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Higher (lower)-order construal also uses broader (narrower) categories, is more integrative (exclusionary) of incoming stimuli (Förster, 2012) and tends to occur when an event is further away in distance or felt proximity to the self (Trope & Liberman, 2010). These relationships are bi-directional: events seen as more distant are construed at a higher-level, while higher-level construals make events seem more distant from an ego-centric perspective (Liberman & Förster, 2009).

Drawing on this literature, we argue that a consumer's global (vs. local) identity should be related to a higher (vs. lower) level construal, and more abstract (vs. concrete) processing. Since a global identity involves thoughts and feelings about the larger world (including distant countries, typically indirectly experienced and relatively less familiar), it necessarily involves perceptions about places and events further away rather than close by. This greater sense of psychological distance evoked by a global (vs. local) identity should, according to CLT, lead to higher-order construal. Liberman and Förster (2009, p203) say that “an event is psychologically distant whenever it is not part of one's direct experience... as it occurs in more remote locations, as it happens to people whose experience is less like ours.” Thus, when a person is prompted to think of his or her local identity, he or she should be more likely to retrieve concrete, specific experiences (e.g., growing up in the local community, local places and landmarks). In contrast, someone prompted to think of his or her global identity would typically think of more abstract concepts and values such as universality and humanity, of transcending geography or political borders. Since prior research shows that when an identity is cued, what comes to mind is “not simply content but also a general way of making sense of the world” (Oyserman, 2009, p. 256), global (local) identity should thus be more likely to evoke an abstract (concrete) processing style overall.

We also note here that many of the empirically shown antecedents or consequences of a higher-order construal and global processing style (Förster, 2012; Trope & Liberman, 2010) have analogous parallels in the global versus local

identity literature. For example, abstract-system processing leads to a focus on similarities rather than dissimilarities; a global (vs. local) identity is more open-minded, more accepting of foreign cultures and trends, and less ethnocentric (Riefler et al., 2012; Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010). Abstract processing has also been linked to greater thoughts about ideals; analogously, a global identity is also associated with higher levels of Schwartz' (1992) self-transcendence values, especially universalism (Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010). While these correlational analogies are not evidence of causality, they do support our conceptual linkages.

#### *From construal level and processing style, to regulatory focus*

We further propose that these different abstract versus concrete processing styles will then map into different regulatory goals. Prior research has already documented relationships between higher versus lower construal levels or abstract versus concrete processing styles, and regulatory fit orientations. Pennington and Roese (2003) showed that a distant-future time perspective (which evokes higher-level construal) increases concern with promotion goals, while a near-future time perspective (lower-level construal) increases concern with prevention. Eyal, Liberman, Trope, and Walther (2004) show that people are more likely to focus on the “pros” of actions (associated with promotion: see Roese, Hur, & Pennington, 1999) when processing abstractly, but on the “cons” of actions (associated with prevention) when processing concretely. Studying the reverse causality, Förster and Higgins (2005) showed that a promotion focus is linked to abstract processing, whereas a prevention focus is linked to concrete processing. Semin, Higgins, de Montes, Estourget, and Valencia (2005) found that promotion (prevention) focused individuals tend to use abstract (concrete) linguistic structure. More recently, Lee et al. (2010) showed in a seminal piece that consumers primed with a promotion focus conceptualize information at a higher construal level (e.g., use more abstract classification categories) than those with a prevention focus. In sum, approached from both directions, considerable prior research shows a consistent relationship between higher versus lower construal levels or abstract versus concrete processing styles, and regulatory fit orientations (prevention vs. promotion).

Putting these two relationships together, we hypothesize that salient global (local) identities, which lead to higher (lower)-level construal and abstract (concrete) processing, should evoke stronger promotion (prevention) goals (see Fig. 1). We tested this hypothesis across three studies.

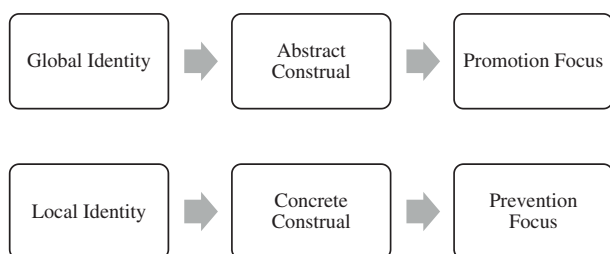


Fig. 1. Summary of hypothesis.

## Study 1

### *Method*

#### *Objective and participants*

We tested the link between global/local identity and regulatory goals among 80 students from a Singapore university. Saliency of local versus global identity was primed. To provide a rigorous test, two different priming techniques were used. A 2(identity prime: global vs. local) × 2(priming method: citizenship meaning vs. sentence completion) between-subjects design was adopted, with around 20 participants in each condition.

#### *Identity prime 1*

For the first prime, in the global identity condition, participants read a paragraph discussing globalization and asking them “what being a global citizen means to you.” In the local identity prime, participants read an analogous paragraph about Singapore citizenship that asked them “what being a Singapore citizen means to you.” (see MDA for details.) After reading the instructions, participants wrote down their thoughts.

#### *Identity prime 2*

To ensure that convergent evidence was obtained, a second, more subtle, sentence-completion identity priming task was also used. Following Zhang and Khare (2009), participants were shown 25 sets of scrambled words (e.g., “events know I local” or “events know I global”) and asked to put the sentences in the right order. Prior research shows that exposure to the relevant words (i.e., local or global) should increase the relative accessibility of the related concepts in one’s mind (Srull & Wyer, 1980).

### *Procedure*

Upon entering the lab, participants were told that they would be required to complete two separate studies. For the “first study,” they were shown one of the identity primes. For the purported second study, participants responded to a list of questions meant to assess the saliency of the two identities and their consequent regulatory goals. Debriefing showed that no participants suspected our hypotheses.

### *Results*

#### *Manipulation check*

Participants indicated their responses to three questions from Zhang and Khare (2009) about global versus local identity/citizenship (see MDA:  $\alpha = .86$ ) ANOVA showed that both identity primes were successful. For both primes, more participants in the local identity condition identified with their local identity than those in the global identity condition (citizenship prime— $M_{\text{local}} = 5.07$ ,  $M_{\text{global}} = 4.23$ ,  $F(1,38) = 16.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ; sentence completion prime— $M_{\text{local}} = 4.90$ ,  $M_{\text{global}} = 4.05$ ,  $F(1,38) = 21.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

#### *Consequent regulatory focus*

To measure participants’ resultant regulatory foci, we used four questions relating to their current academic goals, modified

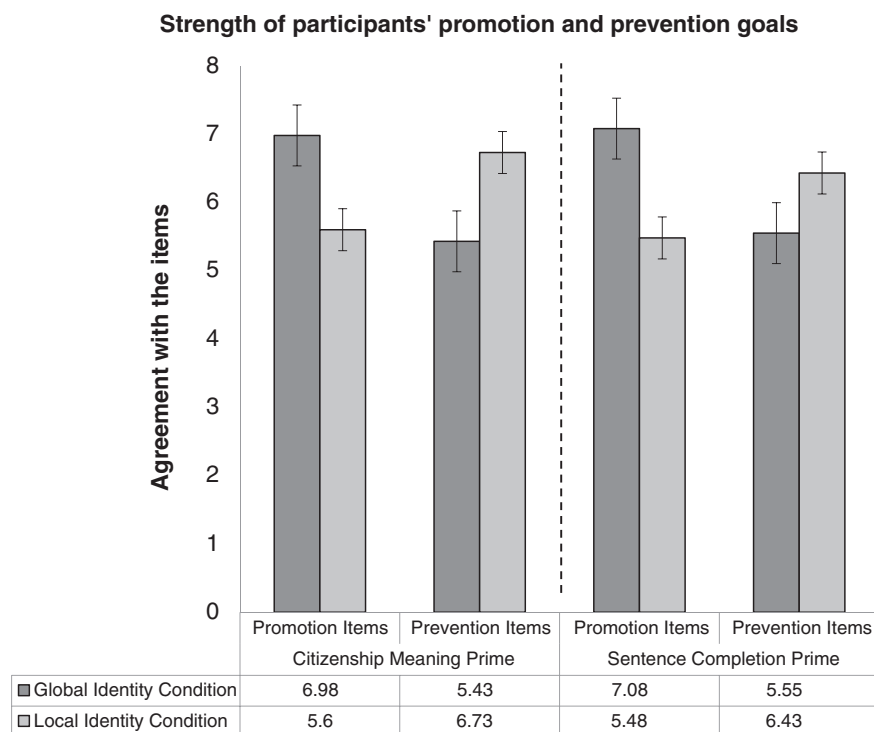


Fig. 2. Ratings on regulatory items across conditions in study 1.

from a widely used regulatory focus scale (Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002). Two items (see MDA) measured the strength of the promotion goals ( $r = .87$ ), and two others measured the strength of the prevention goals ( $r = .83$ ).

Repeated-measures analyses showed a significant interaction between identity prime and strength of the different regulatory goals for both priming methods (citizenship meaning prime— $F(1,38) = 15.33, p < .001, \eta^2 = .287$ ; sentence completion prime— $F(1,38) = 9.18, p < .01, \eta^2 = .194$ ). Specifically, participants in the local identity condition focused more on prevention (vs. promotion) goals (“local-citizenship meaning” prime— $M_{prev} = 6.73, M_{prom} = 5.60, F(1,19) = 5.73, p < .05$ ; sentence completion prime— $M_{prev} = 6.43, M_{prom} = 5.48, F(1,19) = 2.89, p = .105$ ). Conversely, those in the global identity condition focused more on promotion (vs. prevention) goals (“global-citizenship meaning” prime— $M_{prev} = 5.43, M_{prom} = 6.98, F(1,19) = 9.77, p < .01$ ; sentence completion prime— $M_{prev} = 5.55, M_{prom} = 7.08, F(1,19) = 6.54, p < .05$ ) (see Fig. 2). Thus, both sets of results supported our hypothesis.

### Thoughts Listing

Participants' thought listings for the citizenship-meaning prime were also coded by two independent judges blind to the hypotheses on the abstractness of their thoughts. Judges were told to rate whether the individuals' thoughts refer to an abstract or a concrete concept. Drawing from Trope and Liberman (2010), judges were told that abstract representations typically focus on core ideas and omit incidental features. Concrete thoughts, on the other hand, include more contextual details (see examples in the MDA). Both judges evaluated the thoughts independently (88% agreement); any

disagreement was resolved through discussion. Analysis showed a significant main effect of identity prime on the number of abstract thoughts listed ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.47, p < .05$ ): the global identity prime condition yielded significantly more abstract ( $N = 13$ ) versus concrete thoughts ( $N = 7$ ), whereas the local identity prime condition yielded more concrete ( $N = 15$ ) than abstract thoughts ( $N = 5$ ). This result provided support for our theorizing about the process underlying the effect on regulatory focus effects.<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion

Results supported our proposition that global (local) identity activates promotion (prevention) goals, accompanied by more abstract (vs. concrete) thoughts. However, since regulatory goals were measured in this study using a self-report four-item scale, study 2 aimed to go beyond such self-reports to see if priming global/local identity would lead participants to actually behave in, and form preferences in, a manner consistent with their regulatory goals.

### Study 2

#### Method

#### Objectives

Prior research shows that when promotion-focused individuals work on a signal detection task, their inclination is to ensure more hits, rather than reduce their misses (i.e., their error

<sup>1</sup> Because of the binary nature of our thought codings, a formal test of mediation cannot be performed here. However, we report such a test in Study 3 below.

rate), whereas the reverse is true for prevention-focused individuals (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). This study tests if priming global/local identity would yield the same behavioral (error rate) effects. In addition, drawing from prior findings that promotion (prevention) focused individuals are more favorable towards promotion (prevention)-related messages (see Aaker & Lee, 2001; Werth & Foerster, 2007), we test if a salient global (local) identity also leads one to prefer a promotion (prevention)-framed message.

#### Participants and procedure

Eighty-one students from a Singapore university took part in this study. A 2(identity prime: global vs. local) × 2(ad frame: promotion vs. prevention) between-subjects design was adopted. Participants first completed the sentence-completion identity prime. Next, following Crowe and Higgins (1997), they were given 20 s to remember a list of 20 unrelated words (e.g., ball, truck, clown, vomit). On the next screen, participants were told to indicate if a word shown was included in the list by clicking “yes” or “no”. Ten words from the list and 10 new words were shown. We expect promotion-focused (i.e., global identity primed) individuals to click more on “yes,” as they try to ensure more hits than misses. Lastly, as per Cesario, Grant, and Higgins (2004), participants were shown an advertisement about a fruit juice. The headline focused on either how fruit juice can increase energy and improve well-being (promotion condition), or protect against harmful daily elements (prevention condition) (see Fig. 3). Next, participants rated their attitude towards the drink.

#### Results

##### Manipulation checks

Participants indicated the extent they felt like a global citizen (0 = local citizen, 100 = global citizen). ANOVA showed that

those in the global (vs. local) identity prime condition identified more with their global identity ( $M_{\text{local}} = 43.12$ ,  $M_{\text{global}} = 55.08$ ,  $F(1,79) = 7.66$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .088$ ).

##### Hits and misses

Analyses on the number of “yes” clicks showed that those in the global (vs. local) identity prime condition clicked on more “yes” ( $N_{\text{global}} = 10.45$ ,  $M_{\text{local}} = 9.02$ ,  $F(1,79) = 9.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .112$ ). Error rates (the extent to which participants mis-identified a new word as one shown earlier) revealed similar patterns of results ( $N_{\text{global}} = 2.68$ ,  $M_{\text{local}} = 1.85$ ,  $F(1,79) = 4.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .052$ ), supporting our hypothesis.

##### Persuasion

Attitude towards the advertised fruit juice (items: purchase intention, favorability, positive;  $\alpha = .78$ ) showed the expected ad-frame by identity interaction ( $F(1,77) = 8.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .102$ ). No other effect was significant. Contrasts showed that participants in the global identity-primed condition were more favorable towards the promotion (vs. prevention)-framed message ( $M_{\text{prom}} = 4.49$ ,  $M_{\text{prev}} = 3.62$ ,  $F(1,77) = 4.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ), whereas the converse was true in the local identity-primed condition ( $M_{\text{prom}} = 3.55$ ,  $M_{\text{prev}} = 4.32$ ,  $F(1,77) = 3.69$ ,  $p = .06$ ).

##### Discussion

This study showed that a salient global (local) identity leads to behavioral tendencies and preferences that reflect logical consequences of the different regulatory foci. However, throughout studies 1 and 2, the identity prime stimuli used the words “global” and “local,” which may themselves have led participants to process information more abstractly and concretely, respectively (i.e., via a behavioral priming effect), independent of their identity inclinations. Study 3 thus modified the citizenship-meaning prime used

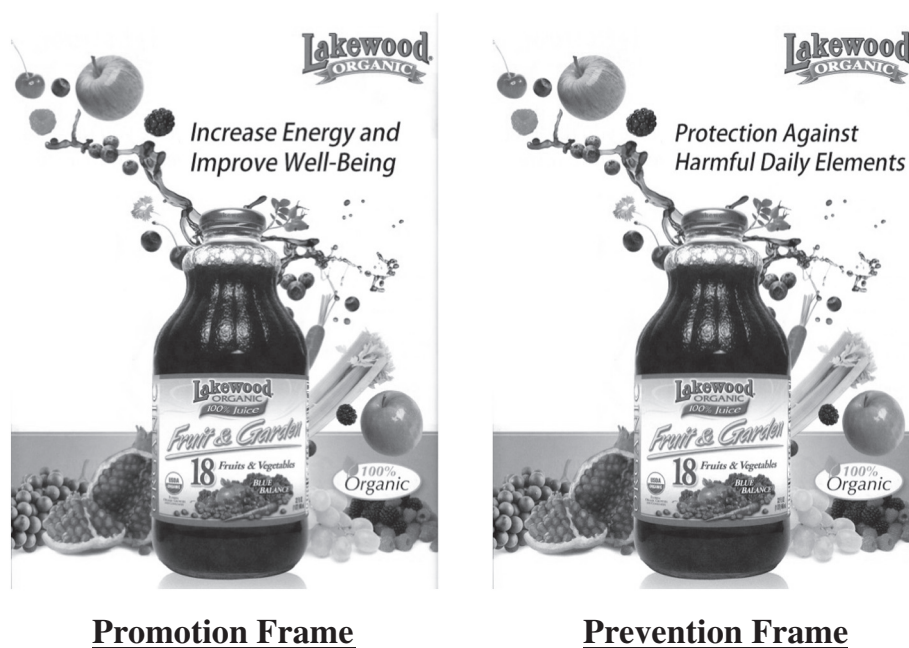


Fig. 3. Message frame of advertisement for study 2.

in study 1 to avoid using the words “global” and “local”. We also aim to show that identity influences individuals’ regulatory focus through its impact on one’s construal level.

### Study 3

#### Method

##### Participants and procedure

One hundred and ninety-seven participants from a Singapore university took part in the study. For the identity prime, we modified the citizenship meaning prime to avoid the words “global” and “local” (see MDA). Participants then wrote down two things that embodied their identity as a member of the world or country and completed the four-item regulatory focus scale from study 1.

Next, they were given an items-grouping task frequently used to assess construal level. Since abstract categories are more inclusive, people processing information abstractly (vs. concretely) would be expected to use fewer categories to group the items (Lee et al., 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Participants were thus given a list of 20 items such as “apple”, “thermometer”, and “bag” (see MDA for a complete list) and told to group them into categories.

#### Results

##### Manipulation check

To test if the identity prime was successful, participants were given a sliding scale of 1 (citizen of your country) to 7 (citizen of the world) and told to indicate how they see themselves. ANOVA showed that participants in the local identity prime condition identified more with their local identity than those in the global identity prime condition ( $M_{\text{local}} = 3.89$ ,  $M_{\text{global}} = 4.88$ ,  $F(1,195) = 10.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .051$ ).

##### Consequent regulatory focus

As in study 1, a mean was taken of the 2 promotion items ( $r = .92$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and 2 prevention items ( $r = .81$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Repeated-measure analysis, with promotion versus prevention as within-subject factor and identity prime as between-subject factor, showed a significant interaction ( $F(1,195) = 36.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .158$ ). As expected, local identity prime participants focused more on prevention than promotion goals ( $M_{\text{prom}} = 4.75$ ,  $M_{\text{prev}} = 5.64$ ,  $F(1,93) = 12.38$ ,  $p < .01$ ), whereas those in the global identity prime condition focused more on promotion than prevention ( $M_{\text{prom}} = 5.79$ ,  $M_{\text{prev}} = 4.59$ ,  $F(1,102) = 26.00$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

##### Measure of construal level

To measure if differential saliency of global versus local identities led people to process information more abstractly or concretely, we analyzed the number of groups participants used to categorize the 20 items given. ANOVA showed that participants used fewer groups when global identity was salient ( $M = 5.84$ ) than when local identity was salient ( $M = 6.64$ ,  $F(1,195) = 13.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\eta^2 = .063$ ). Taking the rating of promotion items minus prevention items as the dependent

variable, mediation analysis using Hayes process model 4 shows that the groupings mediate the effect of identity saliency on regulatory goals (95% CI =  $-0.53$ ,  $-.02$ ). Study 3 thus provides evidence that salient global versus local identity affects people’s regulatory goals through its influence on the nature of their mental construal.

### General discussion

Recent research shows that as the world becomes more globalized, consumers’ sense of self-identity is undergoing change, with both local and global identities becoming situationally more salient (e.g., Arnett, 2002; Zhang & Khare, 2009). Advancing prior literature, we argue here that variations in the strength of global–local identity affect the level of construal and the style of processing, and consequently, the regulatory goals consumers pursue. Three studies show that a salient global identity leads to higher-level construals, more abstract thinking, and stronger promotion goals, whereas a salient local identity leads to lower-level construals, more concrete thinking, and stronger prevention goals. These important findings were replicated across different measures (self-reported measures and behavioral outcomes) and priming methods.

However, as our data was collected mainly in the small city-state of Singapore where the concept of global citizenship may be especially appealing, one may ask if the findings are generalizable to other countries. To answer this question, we turned to an externally conducted survey—the World Values Survey (2014), which collected data from (approximately) 100 countries. Part of the survey asked participants to rate the extent they feel like a world citizen, and a citizen of the local community. We regressed these ratings on other survey items that paralleled promotion goals (e.g., importance of being successful, risk taking) and prevention goals (e.g., doing something good for society, avoid doing inappropriate things). Corroborating our experimental findings, we found a significant positive (negative) effect of a relatively stronger global identity on the importance placed on promotion (prevention) goals (see MDA for more details on this analysis).

As stated earlier, findings from this research contribute to the self-identity, construal level, and regulatory fit literatures. Our studies highlight an important new antecedent of regulatory goals—global/local identity. Though Förster and Higgins (2005), Lee et al. (2010), and some other cited papers have previously documented the relationship between construal level and regulatory goals, this novel effect of self-identity on regulatory goals, mediated by construal level, is new to the literature. Naturally, our work also contributes to the important and burgeoning literature on the consequences of globalization for consumers and consumption (e.g., Steenkamp et al., 2003).

#### Future research

Our findings suggest several directions for future research. First, while we showed experimentally that global (local) identity leads to more abstract (concrete) processing, it is possible that the relationship might even occur in the opposite

direction (processing style making an identity more salient), just as the relationship between construal level and regulatory focus occurs in both directions (Förster & Higgins, 2005; Liberman & Förster, 2009). Future research should explore this possible reverse relationship.

Second, as mentioned in the Introduction, citizens of the UK have just voted to exit the European Union. At the societal level, future research could also study how the differences shown here might have broader social equivalents: the pro-globalization mindset of national elites might differ from the nativist mindset of common citizens, fueling the backlash against globalization often seen today.

Third, in a theory-building direction, if a more salient global identity leads one to process information more abstractly, does that mean people with a stronger global identity are more able to empathize with dissimilar others, since abstract processing has been shown to result in greater perceived similarity among people and objects (Förster, 2012)? And does such greater empathy with the population of the larger planet facilitate greater likelihood to engage in larger-scope pro-social behaviors, such as on pro-environmental issues? Strizhakova and Coulter (2013) already show that global cultural identity moderates the relationship between materialism/consumption and environmentally friendly tendencies. More such work is needed.

Finally, from a marketing point of view, it is important to explore downstream consumption consequences. Since salient global (local) identity makes people more promotion (prevention) focused, do consumers who possess a stronger global identity also exhibit stronger preferences for luxury, hedonic, and experiential products and services, over utilitarian and problem-solving ones? Will consumers with a stronger global identity put more weight on possible gains rather than losses, in making choices, and thus display relatively more risk taking? And will a stronger global identity, with its accompanying higher-level construal, increase the decision weight of central product features, relative to peripheral features, since such central features are more goal-relevant and thus more compatible with a higher-level construal? Some of these possibilities are similar to those raised earlier by Trope and Liberman (2010) and Förster and Higgins (2005), and all deserve empirical follow-up.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2016.08.003>.

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