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«LOOSE AND TIGHT CULTURES» THEORY AS A NEW APPROACH FOR STUDYING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

ТЕОРІЯ «ВІЛЬНИХ ТА ЖОРСТКИХ КУЛЬТУР» ЯК НОВИЙ ПІДХІД ДО ВИВЧЕННЯ ПОВЕДІНКИ СПОЖИВАЧІВ

The article considers the difference between national cultures and contains a historical overview of the emergence of these differences. The analysis of several historical, natural, social and other factors influencing the behavior of people living in the territory of a certain geographical region has been carried out. A multilevel model of "tightness" and "looseness", which illustrates the connection between factors and parallel processes that arise in society is considered. The core features of each type of cultures are revealed. The relationship between theories of intercultural behavior is revealed, examples of differences among countries are given. An overview of the application of the theory in advertising is given, the perception of deviant behavior in the two types of cultures is explained. The influence of "tightness" and "looseness" on consumers' preferences is analyzed. The specific examples of advertisement of well-known brands are given. Based on the analyzed information, recommendations on the application of the theory in the process of creating advertising messages were developed.

Keywords: consumer behavior, intercultural communication, advertising, culture, tightness and looseness, deviant behavior.

У статті розглядається різниця між національними культурами та містить історичний огляд виникнення цих відмінностей. Неведене дослідження має високу практичну значущість в сучасних умовах. В ситуації, коли Україна дуже інтенсивно інтегрується до європейського економічного простору, дуже важливо розуміти як вплив «жорсткості» та «вільності» культур на особливості поведінки споживачів інших держав, які є потенційними ринками збуту українських товарів, так і перспективи відповідних змін вподобань українських споживачів під впливом цієї інтеграції. Під час дослідження використовувалися такі методи: історичний, узагальнення, аналізу та синтезу. Проведено аналіз кількох історичних, природних, соціальних та інших факторів, що впливають на поведінку людей, які проживають на території певного географічного регіону. Розглянуто багаторівневу модель «жорсткості» та «вільності», яка ілюструє зв'язок між чинниками та паралельними процесами, що виникають у суспільстві. Виявлено основні особливості кожного типу культур. Виявлено зв'язок між теоріями міжкультурної поведінки, наведені приклади відмінностей між країнами. Наведено огляд застосування теорії в рекламі, пояснено сприйняття девіантної поведінки у двох типах культур. Проаналізовано вплив «жорсткості» та «вільності» на купівельні переваги споживачів. Наведено конкретні приклади реклами відомих брендів. На підставі проаналізованої інформації були розроблені рекомендації щодо застосування теорії в процесі створення рекламних повідомлень. Таким чином, «жорсткість» та «вільність» безпосередньо впливають як на споживчу мотивацію і процес прийняття рішень, так і на позиціонування бренду, обслуговування споживачів і навіть ринкові тенденції, які з часом змінюються в певному напрямку. Незважаючи на те, що дослідження стосується лише національного рівня, його також можна застосовувати на державному та регіональному рівнях. В темі даного дослідження вбачаються великі перспективи щодо надання маркетологам інструментів розуміння особливостей споживчої поведінки притаманної представникам різних культур. Тому, на думку авторів, необхідні подальші дослідження, щоб допомогти повністю зрозуміти ефект «жорсткості» та «вільності» та його вплив на маркетинг.

Ключові слова: поведінка споживачів, міжкультурна комунікація, реклама, культура, жорсткість і вільність, девіантна поведінка.

Problem statement. Cultural specificity has always played an important role in understanding the consumers' perception of advertising messages and products in particular. Based on Hofstede's theory, the general features of each culture were revealed, such as, for example, individualism and collectivism, the distance of power, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, long-term and short-term orientation. These characteristics were considered from the intercultural communication point of view, while from the marketing point of view they were given less attention. Nevertheless, since understanding how and why societies perceive the world around us differently helps to look at the communication process from a different angle, research on this topic continued.

This question is extremely important, because in the era of globalization as well as the phase of adoption and encouragement deviant behavior by certain countries, it is necessary to clearly understand how to use advertising messages for particular regions – for which it would be an effective tool, and for which, on the contrary, could have negative consequences.

Analysis of recent research and publications. One of the largest research projects aimed at understanding the behavior of people based on their cultural background was the research of American sociologist Gelfand M.. This research was conducted in different countries in many stages and was reflected in a number of scientific publications [1; 2; 4–6].

In this paper, it was proposed to highlight two new types of societies that differ sharply in their perceptions of norms. Gelfand gave impetus to a deep study of this problem and created a new theory, called "tightness and looseness" theory.

Paying tribute to the work of the cited scientists aimed at understanding the behavior of people based on their cultural background, despite the fact that research was conducted in 33 countries of the world, this topic needs to be studied more deeply, since it is not known exactly how "tightness" and "looseness" affect consumer behavior in every country.

Formulating the purposes of the article. The aim of the research is to analyze the meaning of the "tightness and looseness" theory, study its impact on advertising in different geographic regions and provide recommendations for creating promotional messages based on the mentioned theory.

Presentation of the main research material. Over the past decades, scientists have moved from a simple description to the empirical assessment of how national cultures differ. So, in the "Differences Between Tight and Loose Cultures: A 33-Nation Study" [1], published in one of the most respected journals "Science" in 2011, scientists have considered new prerequisites for cultural differences that are even more important than geopolitical landscape and may be the main cause of cultural conflicts: the distinction between countries that are "tight", i.e. have strict norms and low tolerance toward deviant behavior (behavior that violates social norms), and the countries which are "loose", i.e. have minor influence of norms and high tolerance toward deviant behavior.

Early anthropological studies have shown only the origins of these differences. In his study of 21 traditional societies, Pelto [1] documented broad differences in the expression and observance of social norms. The Hutterites were among the "tightest" societies, with rigorous rules

and serious punishment for norms violation, while Skolts were among the "loosest" societies, with not too harsh norms and greater permissiveness concerning norm violation. Pelto suggested that these societies had different ecology. In addition, "tight" societies had a higher population density and greater dependence on crops than "loose" societies. Later, research has indeed shown that agricultural societies, which required strict standards for growing crops in order to survive, had very strict practices in raising children and high standards for them. In its turn, hunting and fishing communities had a mild practice of raising children and not that high standards. Thus, the modern TL theory is directly related to adaptation, and in particular, the adaptation of society to the characteristics of their environment and to the characteristics of their social norms.

In order to study "tight" and "loose" societies, it is assumed [1] that they are part of an integrated system that includes processes at several levels of analysis. Thus, power of social norms and tolerance to deviant behavior – the main difference between "tight" and "loose" cultures – are based on a number of environmental and anthropogenic social threats, as well as on the impact of social institutions that get more power through psychological processes when a person adapts to the environment. Environmental and anthropogenic threats increase the need for strict rules and punishments for deviant behavior in order to survive, and to reduce chaos in countries where there are a high population, lack of resources, natural disasters, territorial threats and deadly diseases. When it comes to reducing such threats, countries cannot create mild social norms and cannot have low tolerance toward deviant behavior. And on the contrary, regions that do not have such global problems do not need such practices as well. The same applies to social institutions. For example, "tight" countries are likely to have an autocratic regime that suppresses dissent, strongly controls the media, has a large list of laws and strong control over their implementation, more severe punishment (eg, the death penalty) and greater control over crimes. "Tight" cultures will also be more religious, thereby strengthening the commitment to moral rules that contribute to the establishment of a certain social order. The challenges to public institutions (such as demonstrations, boycotts, strikes) will be much less common than in "loose" cultures.

"Tightness" and "looseness" are manifested not only in the ecological, historical and institutional context, but also in everyday situations (at home, in restaurants, in educational institutions, parks, libraries, workplaces). "Tight" cultures have a more limited range of proper behavior, high potential for conviction, and do not leave room for personal opinion, vice versa. Thus, the psychological processes naturally support situational requirements in the cultural system. People who are constantly exposed to "tight" situations (cultures) in their daily lives have a long-term idea that all their behavioral options are limited, their actions is a subject of the evaluation, and there is potential punishment based on this evaluation. Accordingly, people in countries with high situational constraints will have a high level of self-control and, therefore, will be more cautious (regarding mistakes) and obedient (focused on the "right" behavior), will have a high level of self-organization (higher control over impulsive behavior), a stronger need for structuring and a higher ability for self-control.

In other words, the higher (or lower) the degree of social regulation, the higher (or lower) the degree of self-control at the individual level in the "tight" and "loose" countries, respectively. Such psychological processes simultaneously reflect and support social norms and tolerance toward deviance in a broader cultural context (Fig. 1).

Thus, the power of social norms is reflected and promoted by social institutions that influence "tight" or "loose" socialization – including media, schools, government, law, and daily situations that dictate acceptable behavior. In its turn, on an individual level, people who are constantly exposed to "tight" situations, feel more responsible – i.e., they feel compelled to obey and comply with social expectations, to not be punished or experience another negative outcome. As a result of adaptation to such a high responsibility, people in "tight" cultures will have greater self-control, high cautiousness, greater self-regulation, higher need for structuring, greater conscientiousness and lower level of openness.

In addition, Gelfand and colleagues showed that TL is not connected with other cultural theories. For example, "tightness" and "looseness" differ from collectivism and individualism. Cultures can be collectivist and tight (Japan, Singapore), collectivist and loose (Brazil, Spain), individualistic and loose (USA, New Zealand), individualistic and tight (Germany, Austria). TL also differs from power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and other cultural aspects. In addition, the theory is also not related to economic welfare. Singapore and Germany, "tight" cultures, show economic well-being, but Pakistan and India, also "tight", do not show economic prosperity. Similarly, the United States and Australia, both "loose" cultures are considered to be high-welfare countries, but Ukraine and Brazil, which are also "loose", do not fall into this category.

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It should be mentioned that the recent research has begun studying the neurobiological basis of the power of social norms. Mu, Kitayama, Han and Gelfand [2] found that people in "tight" cultures have stronger neurobiological responses to violations of social norms in comparison to people in "loose" cultures.

Turning to the influence of the "tightness and looseness" theory on marketing, it is necessary to highlight the main features of each type. The content of ads in "loose" cultures is based on risk and, as a result, getting the higher profit, whereas in "tight" cultures are focused on respect for social standards and stability. For example, we will compare the American manufacturer of motorcycles "Harley-Davidson" and Japanese manufacturer "Suzuki". While the first company is known for its expressive rebellious ads, which often comprise of images of skulls, drivers wearing sunglasses and leather jackets, as well as slogans "Screw it, let's ride" and "Do not worry, the rest of the world is normal covered", "Suzuki" can boast of its high stability and reliability, with slogans about the quality of its motorcycles and consistent traditions – "Performance above all" and "50 years of performance".

Accordingly, ads in "tight" cultures portrait the list of things that people must do, as well as generalize behavior, whereas in the "loose" countries emphasis will be placed on ideals and on freedom from restrictions. For example, Taiwanese chain of supermarkets "Pxxmart" promotes its brand through the concept of so-called economical aesthetics. The company has created a number of economical shopping bags. In the United States, "Lakeland Bank" advertising highlights future aspirations by showing a young boy dressed in an airplane pilot's uniform, while the slogan states: "Everyone has a dream. Start saving for yours today!".

Ads in "tight" cultures will contain consistency, and in the "loose" ones will focus on diversity. For example, "Nike" customized shoes ad features a dancer in sportswear as opposed to traditional clothing, with a slogan that emphasizes that she can design her own ballet shoes and

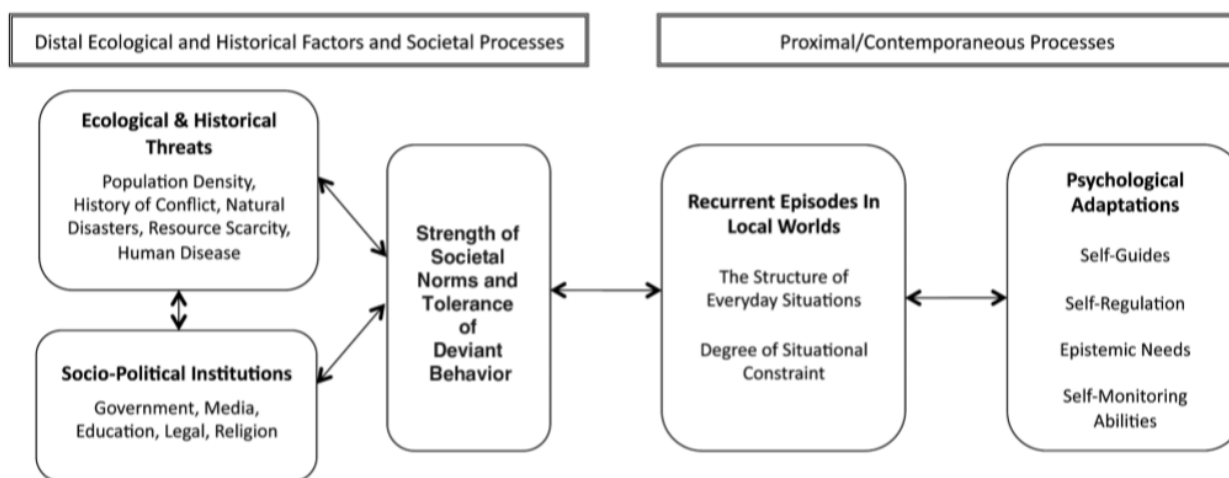


Figure 1. A systems model of tightness-looseness

Source: [1]

dance in her own unique style. In addition, in its ad "Dove" shows eleven women with different types of body and skin color in order to highlight the fact that each woman is beautiful and unique in her own way. A completely different situation with the Korean company "Goo Goo Ice Cream", which portrays five young, beautiful, skinny girls dressed identically. The same thing with Japanese store "7-Eleven" – their ad shows nine skinny young models with pale skin wearing identical tops and jeans standing at the entrance of the store.

Considering high permissiveness inherent to "loose" cultures, another crucial feature is their high liberality. For example, every year on American "Super Bowl" there are a lot of ads with sexual subtext. In the same way in New Zealand, "Tip Top" company, which produces ice cream, shows a young attractive boy walking in tight swim trunks around the city. By contrast, in 2012, China Central Television banned an advertisement of underwear that portrayed dancing girls who were taking off their clothes, because the ads were "very provocative" and "increased crime". Malaysia is forbidden to advertise women's hygiene products until 10 o'clock in the evening, while lingerie advertising is completely forbidden. In addition, in Malaysia, in advertisement women should have "the right behavior appropriate for the local culture," wear a top covering the chest and armpits, as well as a below the knee skirt.

Similarly, in "loose" cultures advertising also represents non-traditional patterns of behavior. For example, in 2017 a 17-year-old male beauty blogger was the face of a "Covergirl" mascara. Also, "Tide" has launched an advertisement in which a father, and not a mother, wash clothes of his daughter. In Germany, for example, studies have shown that there is a large number of gender stereotypes in advertising. Based on an analysis of 183 commercials, women are more likely to look younger than men, "domestic" and "dependent", while men are usually older, authoritative and independent [3].

Considering high tolerance for deviant behavior, stigmatized groups (stigmatization is disapproval of a person based on socially characteristic grounds that are perceived) will be more often represented in advertisement of "loose" cultures. For example, recent "Tiffany & Co" advertising campaign featured a gay couple wearing wedding rings. It is expected that people with disabilities are often shown in "loose" cultures as well. In Greece, "Nike" advertisement featured several well-known athletes, including Michailis Seitis who lost his leg in an accident in 2013 and is now competing with a prosthesis. The notion that people react more positively to stigmatized groups in "loose" cultures is also confirmed empirically [4].

Brand loyalty will be more inherent in the "tight" cultures, since stable preferences are important for them. The increase of social pressure leads to the purchase of a particular brand of goods in order to not stand out and be like the rest. People of "loose" cultures are more open, so they switch to new brands freely. In the case of "loose" cultures, it is necessary to personalize products and emphasize the difference of the brand from others.

Since people in "tight" cultures are not risk-takers and resist changes, there is a tendency to follow others. Therefore, if a new product is released to the market, they are waiting to see how others will react to it.

Studies have shown [5] that in "tight" cultures, if changes come, they occur relatively quickly. Representatives of "loose" cultures say that if changes come, they occur gradually. Accordingly, interest in a new product in "tight" countries will spread slowly, but it will be significantly accelerated when consumers accept the product. In "loose" cultures, consumers can accept the product quickly right from the beginning, but later this process will abruptly slow down. Thus, in "tight" countries companies can focus on their marketing efforts when they enter the market, so that their product is accepted faster. In "loose" cultures, it is better to invest in marketing efforts later in order to ensure acceptance of the product after its "take-off". In the context of open consumption (for example, choosing a picture for the office), when a public evaluation is present, consumers are likely to change their preferences towards popular rather than unique products.

Another study [6] shows that if consumers in "tight" cultures are threatened by foreign goods, they are more likely to reject them. In particular, in "tight" cultures, a negative reaction can spread very quickly if foreign brands threaten national identity. For example, at the end of 2006, "Danon" was about to acquire a controlling interest in the Chinese company "Wahaha", which caused a long trial between the two parties. Chinese nationalism quickly broke out against "Danon", which was seen as a hostile foreign enterprise that wanted to acquire their national brand. With higher acceptance of other cultures this situation, most likely, would not become a problem in the "loose" countries.

Conclusions. Thus, "tightness" and "looseness" directly affect both consumer motivation and decision-making process, as well as brand positioning, customer service and even market trends that change in a particular direction over time. Despite the fact that the survey applies only to the national level, it can also be applied to the state and regional levels. Therefore, further research is needed to help fully understand the effect of "tightness" – "looseness" and its influence on marketing.

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