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## Using the Horizontal/Vertical Distinction to Advance Insights Into Consumer Psychology

Joan Meyers-Levy  
University of Minnesota

This commentary aims to build on Shivitt, Lalwani, Zhang, and Torelli's (2006) target article and extant work that demonstrates the value added by considering people's vertical or horizontal orientation. I suggest several ways by which one might attempt to advance literature concerning the horizontal/vertical distinction as well as our understanding of consumer psychology. In particular, I offer ideas about how pertinent methodological concerns might be addressed, how this stream of work may help predict certain consumer activities or interests, and some ways by which this body of literature can be applied to other domains of inquiry. Hopefully, such ideas and suggestions will prompt further inquiry into this fertile area of research.

The target article by Shivitt, Lalwani, Zhang, and Torelli (2006) is a highly welcomed piece. It discusses a provocative and important extension that is pertinent to a number of

frameworks that concern culture-related differences. The latter include well-established dichotomies that investigate national culture (e.g., Western versus Eastern cultures, like the United States vs. China), individual differences in cultural orientation (e.g., individualist vs. collectivist societies), and salient self-construals (e.g., adoption of an independent

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Correspondence should be addressed to Joan Meyers-Levy, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455. E-mail: jmeyerslevy@csom.umn.edu

vs. interdependent self-view). The expanded framework that Shavitt et al. relay explains and demonstrates how a richer and more nuanced understanding of such dichotomies can be obtained by further delineating them using a horizontal/vertical distinction. In brief, the horizontal versus vertical distinction captures variation in the value that societies or individuals place on hierarchical or status-conferring divisions, as opposed to the value they place on equality. By layering this horizontal/vertical divide on, for example, the individualism–collectivism (INDCOL) categories, four groupings result, each of which is distinct from the others in terms of people’s defining orientations.

Recapitulating the distinctions noted and described in detail in the article, people classified as vertical individualists (VI) are inclined to promote their own standing by competing with others, thereby generally agreeing with sentiments like “It’s important that I do my job better than others.” In contrast, horizontal individualists (HI) regard themselves as equal to others, but emphasize their uniqueness via the pride they take in being self-reliant. As such, they tend to agree with statements like “I want to do my own thing.” Vertical collectivists (VC), on the other hand, emphasize the integrity of their in-group(s) and support the group(s) vis-à-vis out-groups, even if this support is at the sake of personal concerns. Accordingly, they express agreement with statements like “It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want.” Finally, horizontal collectivists (HC), whose sentiments are captured by statements like “The well-being of my coworkers is important to me,” emphasize equality, interdependence, and sociability, but they do not submit easily to authority.

Shavitt and her collaborators are to be applauded for their article, which offers an extensive and insightful discussion of the framework, already investigated related applications, and a number of the challenges that must be addressed by researchers who pursue this line of inquiry. My goal in the present article is more limited. I offer some thoughts about what I feel are potentially fruitful ways of facilitating and expanding on this promising and stimulating avenue of work.

#### METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES FOR THE HORIZONTAL/VERTICAL DISTINCTION

Shavitt and her coworkers aptly identify as one of the challenges for this line of inquiry the question of how to operationalize the horizontal/vertical distinction, whether as an individual difference factor or when studying one or more groups of people who represent relevant (e.g., culture-related) population bases (e.g., individualists or collectivists; groups with an independent vs. interdependent self-construal). To date, national culture typically is used as an indicator of INDCOL differences, and both a 16-item scale and a choice scenario method have been developed to capture distinctions in people’s horizontal/vertical orientation (Singelis, Triandis,

Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). While the latter methods are extremely useful, it nevertheless would be beneficial to identify other viable and easily administered means of assessing or inducing such orientations. Shavitt et al. (2006) acknowledge this, yet express considerable skepticism about whether vertical and horizontal orientations could be induced via priming. The basis for their view is as follows. Although theory suggests and empirical data attest that people generally possess both independent and interdependent selves (e.g., Haberstroh, Oyserman, Schwarz, Kühnen, & Ji, 2002), individuals may lack vertical and horizontal “selves.” Instead, an individual’s orientation in relation to the horizontal/vertical distinction may represent a fairly stable value that has been acquired and is endorsed due, for example, to his/her national culture.

No doubt, the validity of the preceding position and resolution of the issue must rest on future investigation. However, I feel there is reason to believe that priming a horizontal or vertical orientation may well be possible. This follows because, by the time individuals reach adulthood, most are likely to have experienced and possess a fair amount of knowledge about a number of situations that are characterized by a horizontal and a vertical orientation. For example, the parent–child relationship in most families is likely to embody a significant if not strong vertical orientation, whereas most close friendships reliably exhibit a potent horizontal orientation. Thus, it would seem that, in the majority of cases, people are likely to appreciate that both horizontal and vertical distributions of power can provide benefits, with the strength of each depending on the particular circumstances.

If, in fact, people do possess knowledge of, some experience with, and a level of appreciation for each of these distributions, the potential would seem to exist to temporarily activate a horizontal or vertical orientation within an individual, even though overall the person may feel some degree of preference for one orientation over the other. Activation of these orientations might be accomplished by priming or exposing people to numerous words that are associated with one or the other of these orientations. Similar to the methods used to prime other constructs, the words could be presented in the context of stories, word puzzles, or even ad headlines (e.g., Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee 1999; Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2007, forthcoming). Hence, to prime a vertical orientation, people might be presented with words like *champion*, *domination*, *landowner*, and *tenant*, whereas a horizontal orientation might be primed by presenting words like *friend*, *sharing*, *equality*, and *cooperation*. Exploring the feasibility of such priming procedures would represent an important and much-needed type of inquiry.

#### THE PREDICTIVE POWERS OF THE HORIZONTAL/VERTICAL DISTINCTION

The more finely defined constructs that emerge from the joint consideration of INDCOL and the horizontal/vertical dis-

tion suggest that the resulting typology may be quite useful in predicting a variety of consumer behaviors as well as consumers' satisfaction with a number of activities. Several intriguing avenues of pursuit come to mind here.

One is the extent to which the four-quadrant typology might capture consumers' preferences for physical activities (e.g., sports or recreational behavior). In light of each group's profile described earlier, one might anticipate that VI individuals or societies would prefer decidedly competitive sports, where the efforts of specific individuals have the potential to stand out and generate widespread notice or acclaim among others. This suggests that VI individuals/societies may exhibit a preference for activities like soccer or hockey. On the other hand, HI people or societies might favor noncompetitive solitary or small-group activities where a person's performance depends quite exclusively on his/her own capabilities and skills. Because skiing and skating typically conform to these criteria, they might especially appeal to those in this category. Differences also would be expected between those with VC and HC orientations. VC individuals or societies should prefer small-group activities like dancing, or various sorts of physical training or fitness instruction (e.g., yoga, aerobics), where not only is conformity a goal, but one participant clearly follows the lead of the other. In contrast, people or societies categorized as HC might be drawn to noncompetitive activities that generally are group pursuits and are especially conducive to, and performed while, socializing with others. Examples of these sorts of physical activities include bicycling or swimming.

The profiles of individuals or peoples in the four-quadrant horizontal/vertical INDCOL typology also may facilitate prediction of the types of movies, plays, or books that consumers prefer. For example, those with a VI orientation may favor action films, theatre, or literature, where a focal hero performs captivating feats that allow him or her to elude, outsmart, or triumph over opposing forces (e.g., movies like *Ocean's Eleven* or *Run Lola Run*), whereas HI-oriented people may opt for fictitious or biographical portrayals of individuals who draw heavily on their own resources to overcome limitations or hardships and thereby achieve social acceptance or equality (e.g., movies like *Ray* or *My Left Foot*). On the other hand, VC people may prefer options that feature historical or military themes and portray the plight of those who comply with, yet outmaneuver or outlast, the prevailing powers of authority to benefit a group of others (e.g., movies like *Gandhi* or *Schindler's List*). Finally, those with an HC orientation may gravitate toward convivial, comedic, or family-oriented entertainment that centers on social situations and adventures (e.g., movies like *Pride and Prejudice* or *Love Actually*).

This aforementioned four-quadrant typology also may enhance prediction of far more consequential or serious endeavors. Along such lines, the framework would seem to predict that individuals' job satisfaction and performance should be enhanced to the extent that one's supervisor's management style and/or the firm's organizational climate matches

the employee's horizontal/vertical INDCOL orientation. If this is so, it suggests that VI employees should fare better when the training and guidance they receive are a bit distant (i.e., as opposed to hovering or micromanaging), yet peer competition and kudos for winners are high. On the other hand, HI employees should exhibit greater satisfaction and job performance when supervisors are relatively hands-off and treat all parties as equals, but employees are left to figure out their own way to success. Optimal tactics for VC and HC employees should differ, as well. Individuals with a VC orientation should respond more favorably when both close training and supervision are offered, and either new or less-skilled performers are paired with more highly skilled employees for the former to emulate. Finally, for employees with an HC orientation, a successful supervisory style is likely to be one that treats all individuals equally and fairly, invites employee input and cooperation, and fosters a welcoming and hospitable atmosphere.

#### APPLYING THE PROPOSED TYPOLOGY TO OTHER BODIES OF THEORY

The theorizing presented by Shavitt et al. (2006) is important, as it suggests that researchers' suppositions about, or evidence of, phenomena in a variety of wide-ranging domains may in fact be dependent upon the prevailing horizontal or vertical orientation of the subject population that the researcher examines. To clarify, suppose that, based on extant data, a researcher posits and tests the ostensibly plausible thesis that the type of processing employed by those with an independent self-construal (often called *analytic*; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001) closely parallels item-specific processing. The latter has been identified in entirely separate literature as a frequently employed mode of processing that has been researched as part of another dichotomous model of processing types (i.e., item-specific vs. relational elaboration; Einstein and Hunt, 1980; Meyers-Levy, 1991). Assume further that the researcher hypothesizes about the interface between such types of processing and possible context effects, and then proceeds to test his/her predictions in a situation where context effects (i.e., the emergence of an assimilation or a contrast effect) have the potential to materialize.

Extant theory would seem to suggest that both people with an independent orientation and those who rely on item-specific processing should especially attend to, and mentally segregate or isolate, each specific element of a whole (e.g., an object) from all others. From this, the researcher might hypothesize that, unlike those who process data in, say, a more holistic manner (e.g., either those with an interdependent self-construal or relational processors, who generally connect or integrate items and thus are likely to assimilate elements), each of the earlier identified types of processors is not likely to exhibit context effects. Consistent with this hypothesis, independent-oriented and item-specific processors

might well display the anticipated no-context-effect outcome if the sample consists of individuals with a horizontal orientation (e.g., a sample of Danish individuals), who tend to treat all pieces of data equally and separately. However, if the sample population possesses a vertical, and thereby rather competitive, orientation (e.g., a sample of American individuals), it might well be that both independent-oriented and item-specific processors not only segregate, but also compare and (in a competitive manner) contrast the specific elements of an object with others. If so, the responses of both independent-oriented and item-specific processors in this sample should exhibit contrast effects.

Another body of work that may be fertile ground for exploring a horizontal/vertical connection is that which examines people's political ideologies or attitudes. A fascinating article by Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) presents a wide array of evidence that people's political ideologies are multiply determined, affected by a range of motivational, personal, situational, and cognitive factors. This work focuses in particular on political conservatism and holds that two core factors underlie such an ideology, thereby distinguishing political conservatism from a more left-leaning, liberal view. The first factor is fear or resistance, versus acceptance, of change, whereas the second and especially pertinent factor is a preference for inequality versus equality. The latter factor clearly relates to the horizontal/vertical distinction, and the authors contend that while those with a leftist ideology favor equality, the conservative right regards society as inevitably hierarchical and upholds such a configuration. It seems possible that it is because conservatives presumably possess a fear of change that they support a hierarchical distribution of power. In any event, this research suggests two inviting paths of inquiry. One would entail examining whether conservatives and liberals in fact reveal the anticipated pattern of alignment on the horizontal/vertical divide when they are assessed using the earlier noted scale items and choice scenario methods that have been developed to investigate the horizontal/vertical distinction (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). The second stream of inquiry would involve exploring whether the empirical findings that Shavitt et al. (2006) review would replicate when—used in conjunction with, for example, the INDCOL factor—people's conservative or liberal political attitudes are used as a surrogate indicator of their preference for horizontal versus vertical values.

A final literature that seems to provide an interesting connection with the horizontal/vertical distinction is research concerning terror management theory (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004). The basic premise of this theory is that people experience existential anxiety when the salience of mortality is heightened. Yet, importantly, to allay their fears about the inevitability of their own death, they embrace and invest in a variety of socially constructed worldviews, which symbolically protect them from death (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997). These worldviews are attrac-

tive because they heighten people's self-esteem by instilling their lives with a sense of permanence, meaning, and order, and by offering standards of value. Extant research implies that one such worldview may be the notion that there is a natural hierarchy among people based on factors like social status or race (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1990), whereas another worldview involves the idea that fitting in and connecting with others or recognizing the fellowship and common fate of all (wo)men imbues one's life with meaning and order (Simon et al., 1997). Clearly these two opposing worldviews echo the sentiments of the horizontal/vertical divide. Interestingly, this observation suggests that under mortality salience conditions, people with a horizontal versus vertical orientation might make very different judgments about the culpability of, and appropriate sentence for, a person accused of perpetrating a questionable wrongdoing—for example, assisting in a terminally ill person's suicide. If the accused happened to be a minority or out-group in race, religion, or sexual preference, or if he/she was known to have engaged previously in what may be regarded as morally questionable behavior (e.g., he/she was a prostitute, unfaithful spouse, or rape victim), heightened mortality salience may prompt judges with alternative horizontal/vertical orientations to arrive at decidedly different conclusions. When mortality is salient, vertically oriented judges might be expected to find the accused guilty and judge him/her very harshly, whereas horizontally oriented judges might fully exonerate the accused. In addition, these different dispositions and verdicts are likely to be more pronounced or evident only when mortality is, versus is not, salient. Research that explores such possibilities could help merge the two bodies of literature.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This commentary has sought to underscore the potential importance of the horizontal/vertical distinction in cross-cultural and other areas of research. The observations and suggestions I have outlined provide merely a flavor of the promise that this line of inquiry may afford consumer researchers. While the foregoing discussion focused on the joint consideration of people's horizontal/vertical orientation and INDCOL categories, it is also the case that the former orientation alone suggests many promising avenues of inquiry. For example, might individuals with a vertical orientation be especially persuaded by ads that compare a target good, say, a synthetically insulated winter jacket, to ones in a luxury image category, like natural down-filled jackets? Yet, might horizontally oriented individuals be no more persuaded by the former hierarchical comparison than by one made to an alternative yet similar benefit-providing category, such as woolly, fleece-lined jackets? Along rather different lines, might individuals with a vertical orientation respond more favorably to in-store shelving displays that arrange brands hierarchically by prestige and/or price (e.g., more ex-

pensive, prestigious brands appear on higher store shelves), while those with a horizontal orientation exhibit a preference for shelf plans that simply make it easier to locate brands with the particular benefit(s) that one might seek (e.g., combination shampoo and conditioner formulations on one shelf, therapeutic shampoos for conditions like dandruff, color-treated, or damaged hair on another shelf, and natural ingredient shampoos on yet a different shelf)? Like the many other propositions outlined in this article, these questions await future investigation.

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