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## ABSTRACT

Using normative messages in social campaigns has become increasingly commonplace. Prior research has shown that messages using descriptive norms can lead to greater conformity than messages without such norms. Present research investigates how culture affects persuasion when individuals are presented with different descriptive norms. Based on extant literatures on culture as well as norms, we theorize that the degree of conformity to descriptive norms differs for Easterners versus Westerners. In laboratory and field experiments, we document cultural variation in conformity and persuasion as a function of the type of descriptive norm across different domains.

### □ Hypotheses

- For Westerners, provincial norms of a group in the immediately surrounding context will lead to greater persuasion than global norms
- For Easterners, global norms of a meaningful reference group will lead to greater persuasion than provincial norms

## LAB EXPERIMENT

### Cultural differences exist in the persuasive appeal of different types of descriptive norms

Sample: 239 American & 119 Korean undergrads

IV: 2 (Culture:) x 3 (Messages)

- Culture: independent, interdependent
- Messages: control (standard environmental), global (citizen), provincial (same room guest)

DV: Willingness to reuse towels during a hotel stay

Results:

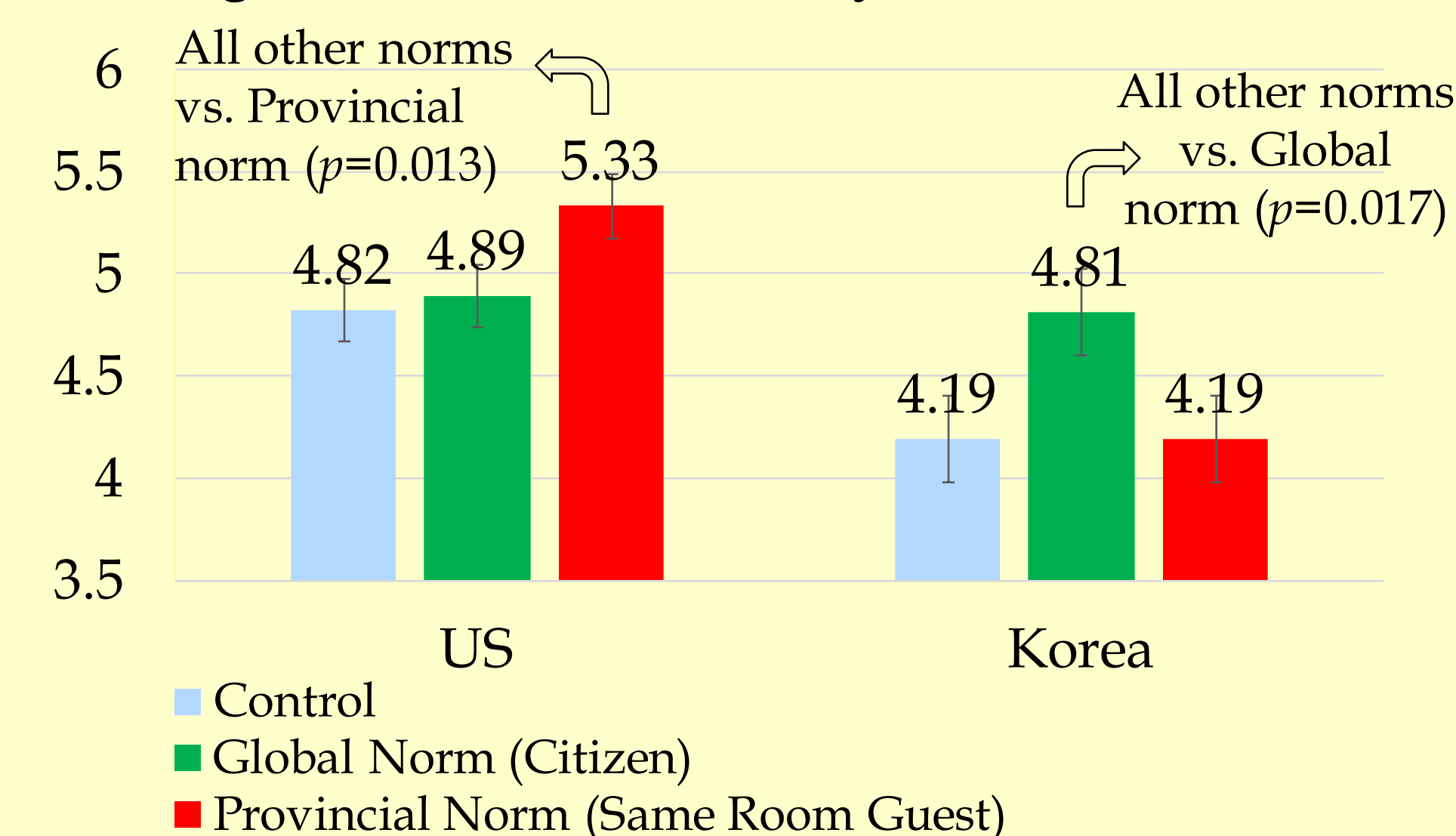
### ► Importance of identities

- Both Americans and Koreans view the same room hotel guests identity as less important than the citizen identity

### ► Cultural differences in conformity (i.e., willingness to reuse towels)

- Americans: Provincial norms were more persuasive than global norms
- Koreans: Provincial norms were less persuasive than global norms

Willingness to Reuse Towels by Culture and Norms



## FIELD EXPERIMENT

### For Easterners, provincial norms lead to lower persuasion than global norms

Sample: 513 respondents from room rentals in 11 motels in Seoul, South Korea

Context description: In Seoul, it is common practice for motels to rent out rooms during the day for a few hours at a time, and for a condom to be provided in the room

IV: 5 Normative messages (no norm, citizen global norm, motel guest global norm, gender global norm, same room guest provincial norm)

- Example: No norm general safe sex message  
"PRACTICE SAFE SEX. You can reduce the risk of transmitting sexual diseases and avoid unwanted pregnancy by using condoms during sex."

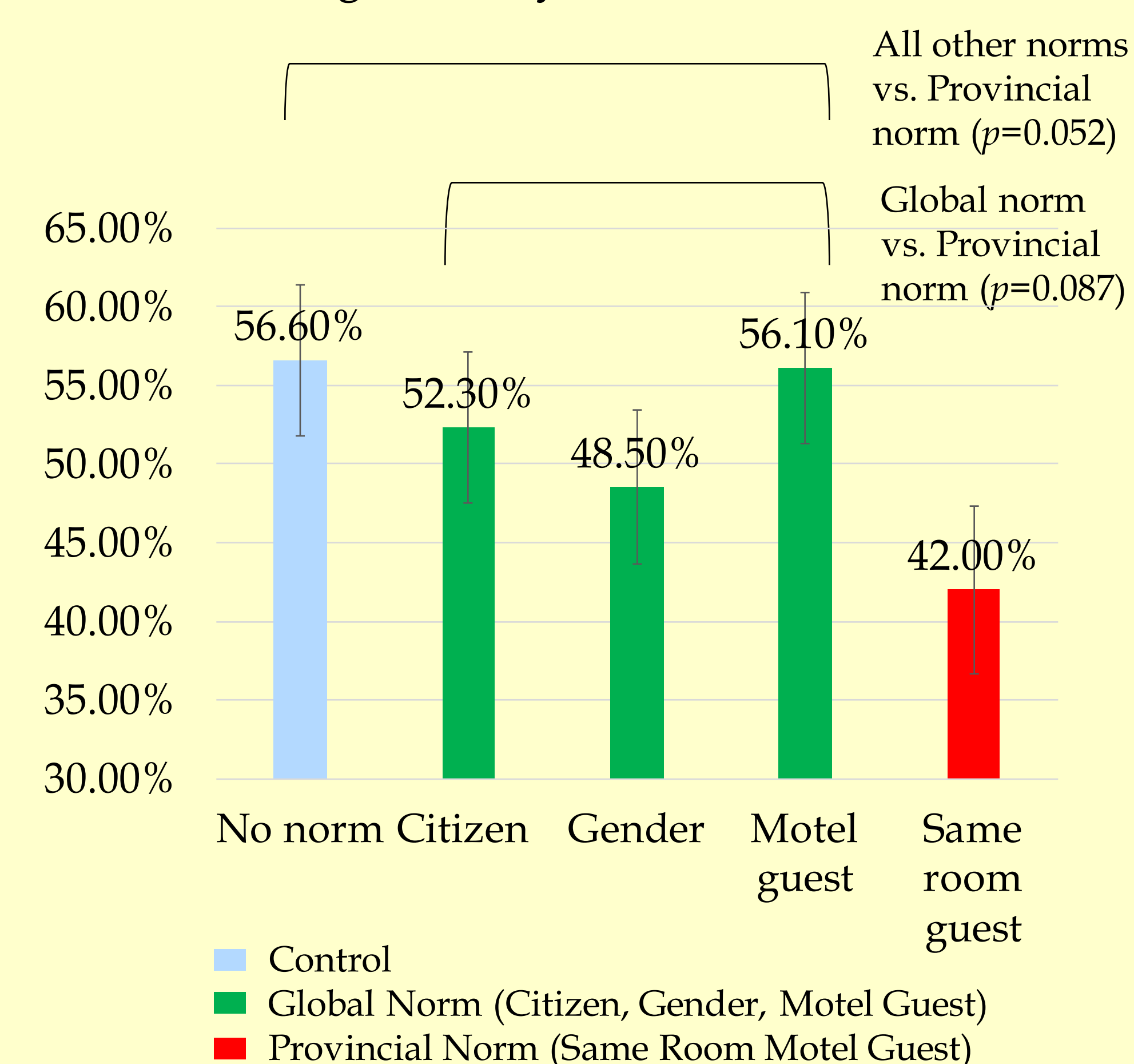
DVs: Condom use during room rentals (Used/Not used)

Results:

### ► Replication of lab experiment findings on Easterners

- Koreans were least likely to use condoms after reading a message with a provincial norm
- A control without any message condition was run separately and revealed condom usage rates of 45.1% (n=102)

Condom Usage Rates by Norms at Korean Motels



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- Culture moderates the persuasiveness of messages with different descriptive norms
- Cultural differences in conformity to descriptive norms are found in different contexts (hotel towel reuse and condom usage)
- In contrast to prior findings with U.S. samples that provincial norms are more effective than global norms, we find that global norms are more effective than provincial norms in persuading Easterners

### □ Implications:

- Contributes to theory by identifying boundary conditions to findings by Goldstein et al. (2008)
- Suggests the need to match appropriate norms for different cultures

### □ Follow-up studies:

- Cross-cultural experiment to replicate findings in the context of donation
- Examination of the role decision setting (public vs. private)
- Exploration of different underlying psychological processes driving cultural differences in conformity to norms

## INTRODUCTION

□ Previous research has shown that people (in the U.S.) tend to conform to provincial norms more than to global norms (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius 2008)

- **Descriptive norms:** How most people behave in a given situation (Reno et al. 1993; Goldstein et al. 2008)
- **Provincial norms:** Norms of one's local settings and circumstances
- **Global norms:** Norms that apply more generally, beyond one's local settings and circumstances

### □ Theoretical background

#### 1. Culture and self-construal

- Easterners (e.g., Asians) have an interdependent self-construal, whereas Westerners (e.g., U.S.) have an independent self-construal (Markus and Kitayama 1991)

#### 2. Sensitivity to reference groups among Easterners

- Contexts are highly influential in determining the extent to which Easterners conform to norms (Markus and Kitayama 1991)
- The degree of conformity can vary depending on the type of in-groups; in-groups that reflect closer relationships are more meaningful have greater influence (Triandis et al. 1988)

## SELECTED REFERENCES

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