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Journal of Business Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jbusres

Globalization, national identity, biculturalism and consumer behavior: A longitudinal study of Dutch consumers^{☆, ☆☆}

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Acculturation
Global Consumer Culture
Ethnic Identity
Globalization
Consumer Behavior
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Evidence for the presence of the global consumer culture (GCC) is substantial. The present paper contributes to this body of research by providing a longitudinal perspective emphasizing the presence, antecedents, and consequences of the GCC within the Netherlands, examining how the interplay between the local and global cultures evolves. While we found evidence that the Dutch are increasingly acculturating to the GCC, the global and local cultural forces seem to impact consumption behaviors consistently over time: NEID positively associates with the consumption of products traditionally bounded to local culture (e.g. local food and clothing), whereas the positive role of AGCC figures prominently with behaviors bound by global or foreign cultural conventions (e.g. electronics and luxuries). The expanded nomological network considers the relationships of AGCC and NEID to various demographic/cultural precursors and dispositional outcomes.

1. Introduction

Culture is crucial to consider when developing a marketing strategy. Cultural values, and the extent to which people adhere to values, profoundly influence how consumers evaluate and respond to marketing efforts (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999; Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007; Westjohn, Singh, & Magnusson, 2012). The diffusion of products and technology enabling social communications, the widespread migration of peoples across borders, and moreover, the global stretch of media coupled with the multinational marketing activities, are undeniably impacting cultures and consumers worldwide (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 2006; Arnett, 2002). Expressed as the “crystallization of the world as a single place” (Robertson, 1987, p. 38), globalization portrays an increasingly economically, socially and culturally interdependent world. The ensuing cultural shifts are rapidly transforming societies, and proving to be a critical challenge for contemporary marketing managers. For decades, marketing practitioners have grappled with determining the optimal level of marketing standardization when dealing with the world market, whether it be foreign or domestic.

Just how, where and when globalization affects behavior has spawned intense debate. The perspective portrayed in the popular press—that global integration hastens the worldwide convergence of cultures and consequent consumer behaviors—is shared by several academicians (Levitt, 1983; Wilk, 1998). Countermanding this homogenizing trend, some evidence points to a resurgence of communal identities and behavioral distinctions in response to globalization (Briley & Aaker, 2006). A third outcome suggests increasing homogeneity and heterogeneity occurring simultaneously, as global and local cultural entities combine to “fuel a hybridization of social life” (Ger, 1999, p. 65; Sobh, Belk, & Gressel, 2014). Whichever the aftermath, globalization and localization are inseparably linked (Askegaard, Arnould, & Kjeldgaard, 2005) and researchers must recognize the consequences arising from the interplay of global and local cultural forces on the lives of consumers (Merz, He, & Alden, 2008). Despite the obvious importance to marketers, empirical research on this topic is quite scarce, and save for a few very recent studies (Carpenter, Moore, Alexander, & Doherty, 2013; Cleveland, Laroche, & Hallab, 2013; Cleveland, Rojas-Méndez, Laroche, & Papadopoulos, 2016; Lysonski, 2014), most research on global consumer culture (hereafter, GCC) has

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.044>

Received 1 April 2015; Accepted 1 February 2016

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not explicitly measured the intensity and extent of the construct (e.g., Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003). Moreover, to our knowledge, there exists no longitudinal research assessing the evolving nature of GCC influences. It is therefore unclear whether GCC's presence in the world is amplifying over time and consequently affecting consumption practices—perhaps at the expense of local cultural influences—or whether GCC has already peaked and societies are slowly reverting back to their traditional ethnic identities.

In this longitudinal study, we examine how the interplay between the local and global cultures impact consumption among the mainstream Dutch consumers. A founding member of what is now the EU, the constant flow of people, products and media exposes the people of the Netherlands to cultures nearby and afar. Most Dutch are bilingual and the majority are trilingual. > 70% are fluent in English. Among the most modern, liberal, and diverse societies, the Dutch are current with trends in fashion, high-technology, and luxuries. The people are characterized by their eagerness to travel and particularly by their openness to new perspectives and receptiveness to different cultures (van der Horst, 1996). For these reasons, we anticipate that respondents will exhibit high levels of AGCC. A former colonial superpower, the Netherlands is now a small nation at the crossroads of three powerful countries (France, U.K., Germany). The Nazi occupation during WW2 has also long served as a reflexive basis of national identity. As such, we expect our sample to also report a strong sense of Dutch identity.

Subsequent to validating multidimensional construct measures for acculturation to GCC (hereafter, AGCC), and national ethnic identity (hereafter, NEID), distinctive patterns of culture change are identified, corresponding to the interrelationships of global and local cultural forces applied to a range of consumer behaviors. By comparing data collected at two points in time (2008 and 2015) this research advances the literature by being the first to quantitatively examine how this global-local interplay evolves. These constructs were also examined within a broader nomological framework of demographics, cultural dimensions, and two dispositions especially pertinent to globalization: materialism and consumer ethnocentrism.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Ethnic identity and acculturation

Research examining cultural influences on consumption has been on the upswing (Bardhi, Ostberg, & Bengtsson, 2010; Carpenter et al., 2013; Cleveland, Laroche, & Takahashi, 2015; Kipnis, Broderick, & Demangeot, 2014; Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2012). Consisting of implicit and explicit elements, culture is complex and abstract. Culture is learned through social interactions, shared by societal members, transmitted across generations, and can be acquired by virtually anyone. Culture exerts a very substantial influence on people's preferences, needs, attitudes and behaviors (Steenkamp et al., 2003), helps people develop their identities by attributing meaning to their possessions (Lysonski, 2014; McCracken, 1986; Strizhakova et al., 2012), and promotes a set of values that guide people's daily activities (Kipnis et al., 2014; Strizhakova & Coulter, 2013). Yet since culture is so “entwined with all facets of human existence ... it is often difficult to determine how and in what ways its impact is manifested” (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p. 322).

Ethnicity is a relative term distinguishing people of one ethnic/cultural group from others. Not heritable, ethnic identity (EID) is acquired through the processes of exploration and commitment to a particular ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The stronger the sense of affiliation with the group, the greater is the adherence to that group's values, norms, and traditions, and thus the influence that these traits have on the individual's behavior (Hirschman, 1981). Inherently multidimensional and subjective (Bouchet, 1995), the facets of EID are variably adhered to and practiced across individuals and situations, as well as over time (Oswald, 1999). Objective and absolute measures like race, nationality, and religion therefore do not effectively capture EID.

Acculturation is likewise multidimensional, often operationalized with measures similar to those for EID. The key distinction is that EID considers the maintenance of original culture, whereas measures for acculturation focus on acquiring an alternate culture. Current researchers embrace bidirectional models of cultural change (Kipnis et al., 2014). These are comprised of two distinct continua reflecting the maintenance of original traits and values and the acquisition of alternative traits and values, whereby the absorption of the latter does not necessarily entail assimilation (Askegaard et al., 2005; Berry, 2008; Peñaloza, 1994). People can identify with multiple cultures and are capable of alternating between several identities (Cleveland et al., 2015; Strizhakova et al., 2012). EID is viewed as a voluntary choice that individuals make (Gans, 1979), and a reflexive reassertion of EID has recently emerged among many populations aiming to counter cultural imperialism (Briley & Aaker, 2006). Consuming local, familiar goods evokes a comforting “sense of home” (Bardhi et al., 2010, p.133), further intensifying the desire to maintain EID.

2.2. Acculturation to the global consumer culture

Ample evidence corroborates various commonalities of lifestyles, attitudes and behaviors across international segments (Askegaard et al., 2005; Cleveland, Papadopoulos, & Laroche, 2011). Strizhakova and Coulter (2013) identified a strong materialism-orientation among individuals who identify with the global culture in the emerging BRIC markets. Bolton and Myers (2003) revealed a homogeneous market segment in the service industry across different continents. Global segments have also been identified with respect to global advertising appeals (Zhou & Belk, 2004) and fashion consumption (Carpenter et al., 2013). The sharing and transmission of culture hitherto occurred primarily among individuals within close geographic proximity. Culture now readily permeates national borders through what Appadurai (1990) labeled as five global flows, with mediascapes (images and communication) and ethnoscapas (migrants, tourists, etc., carrying with them their cultural heritage) being described as the most far-reaching global forces (Craig & Douglas, 2006). A global consumer culture is emerging and provides world citizens the opportunity to build global identities by selecting cultural elements that fit their perceived self-concept and incorporating them into their daily lives (Ger, 1999; Oswald, 1999; Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983).

Operationalized by Cleveland and Laroche (2007) as a seven-fold construct, acculturation to GCC (AGCC) represents “how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviors that are characteristic of a nascent and deterritorialized global consumer culture” (p. 252):

- (1) *Exposure to global and foreign mass media (GMM)*. Satellite television, the Internet, and the privatization of mass media allow people from around the world to watch the same television shows and movies, listen to similar music, and read the same news. The world audience is increasingly exposed to a repertoire of similar ideologies, messages and brands, subtly disseminating cultural ideals and customs (Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999).
- (2) *Exposure to and use of the English language (ELU)*. Beyond its preponderance on the Internet and in other media forms, English—symbolizing modernism and internationalism—is the preeminent linguistic medium for science, business, tourism and diplomacy (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999).
- (3) *Exposure to marketing activities of multinational corporations (EXM)*. The transmission of cultural images and symbols is largely a production of the marketplace (Firat, 1995). Many contemporary brands are more about meaning transfer, and less about product attributes. The marketing activities of multinational corporations collectively bear much responsibility for propagating GCC (McCracken, 1986; Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999).
- (4) *Social interactions through travelling (TRAV)*. Mobility is the product of business and leisure travel, international studies, and other forms

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