The young adult cohort in emerging markets: Assessing their glocal cultural identity in a global marketplace

Yuliya Strizhakova [a,*], Robin A. Coulter [b,1], Linda L. Price [c,2]

[a] School of Business, Rutgers University — Camden, 227 Penn Street, Camden, NJ 08102, USA
[b] School of Business, University of Connecticut, 2100 Hillside Road, Storrs, CT 06269-1041, USA
[c] Eller College of Management, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA

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ABSTRACT

Multinational firms perceive the young adult cohort in emerging markets as a relatively homogeneous segment that welcomes global brands and facilitates the entrance of these brands into emerging markets. Research suggests, however, that young adults are a more heterogeneous cohort in which individuals develop a glocal cultural identity that reflects their beliefs about both global phenomena and local culture. Our goal is to evaluate the glocal cultural identity of the young adult cohort based on three global–local identity beliefs (belief in global citizenship through global brands, nationalism, and consumer ethnocentrism) in the emerging markets of Russia (Studies 1 and 2) and Brazil (Study 2). We further assess the consumption practices of the glocal cultural identity segments in relation to global and local brands. Results across the two studies indicate three distinct segments, two of which, the Glocally-engaged and the Nationally-engaged, are consistent across countries. A third idiosyncratic segment emerged in each country, the Unengaged in Russia and the Globally-engaged in Brazil. The most viable segments for multinational firms are the Globally-engaged and the Glocally-engaged; these segments have an identity that is grounded in both global *and* local cultures and respond favorably to both global and local brands. Nationally-engaged consumers have a more localized identity; they are a more challenging target for firms offering only global brands. The Unengaged segment has weak global–local identity beliefs and low involvement with both global and local consumption practices.

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1. Introduction

The burgeoning young adult cohort is an attractive segment for multinational firms across the globe, particularly in emerging markets (Douglas & Craig, 1997, 2006; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). This cohort has been characterized as innovative, open to trying new brands, and conscious of their identity (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010) as well as having greater exposure to global media (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004; Zhou, Yang, & Hui, 2010). Some researchers have argued that young adults are "global" in their identities and are at the forefront of globalization (Schlegel, 2001). Indeed, this global orientation is particularly attractive to multinational firms and global brands that frequently treat this cohort as homogenized and globally-oriented (Askegaard, 2006; Hannerz, 2000). Consumer culture research, however, documents that, although consumers look to, integrate, and react to global consumer culture symbols and signs, they do so in relation to their local cultural discourses (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Ger & Belk, 1996; Hung, Li, & Belk, 2007; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006); that is, consumers "embrace both the Lexus and the olive tree" (van Ittersum & Wong, 2010, p. 107).

In this research, we draw upon work in cultural identity theory to further explore *glocal cultural identity*. Cultural identity is defined as "a broad range of beliefs and behaviors that one shares with members of one's community" (Jensen, 2003, p.190; Berry, 2001). As globalization has evolved, we now consider community in relation to one's global and local cultural milieu. Thus, we define *glocal cultural identity* as the coexistence of a broad range of beliefs and behaviors embedded to varying degrees in both local and global discourses. Because global and local orientations can conflict, an individual's glocal cultural identity may "account for the different and even opposing demands resulting from the processes of globalization and localization" (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007, p. 32).

As we seek to understand *glocal cultural identity*, we recognize three forces at play: (1) globalization and localization coexist and fuel each other (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Robertson, 1995); (2) individuals reflexively combine traditional (local) and global identity markers in constructing their glocal cultural identity (Dong & Tian, 2009; Mazzarella, 2004; Varman & Belk, 2009; Zhao & Belk, 2008); and (3) brands constitute a key part of

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 856 225 6920; fax: +1 856 225 6231.
E-mail addresses: ystrizha@camden.rutgers.edu (Y. Strizhakova), robin.coulter@business.uconn.edu (R.A. Coulter), llprice@eller.arizona.edu (L.L. Price).
[1] Tel.: +1 860 486 2889; fax: +1 860 486 5246.
[2] Tel.: +1 520 626 3061; fax: +1 520 621 7483.

cultural identity (Askegaard, 2006; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Kjeldgaard & Ostberg, 2007). Specifically in contextualizing *glocal cultural identity*, we focus on one belief that reflects the influence of *globalization*, i.e., the belief in global citizenship through global brands (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003; Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2008a). This belief embodies the embracing of both global culture and global brands as symbols of the global consumer culture. We also examine two beliefs that reflect dialogical influences of *localization*: nationalism (Dong & Tian, 2009; Douglas & Craig, 2011; Varman & Belk, 2009) and consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Consistent with how national identity has been conceptualized in past research (Keillor, Hult, Erffmeyer, & Babakus, 1996), nationalism reflects the salience of one's nation and local culture, and ethnocentrism reflects preferences for locally-produced brands and products.

Our work focuses on the young adult cohort within which the *glocal cultural identity* is particularly prominent. This cohort is less settled in their identity and more open to sharing varied beliefs and behavioral practices with certain global and local cultural communities (Jensen, 2003; 2011; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006; Mazzarella, 2003). Specifically, we use cluster analysis to profile individuals on their *glocal cultural identity* as an integration of their beliefs about global citizenship through global brands, nationalism, and consumer ethnocentrism. Next, in relation to these profiles, we assess the following specific consumer branding practices: 1) consumer involvement with global and local brands, 2) use of global and local brands as quality and self-identity signals, and 3) purchases of global and local brands. We focus on the emerging markets of Russia and Brazil (Study 1 in Russia in 2009; Study 2 in Russia and Brazil in 2010).

Our work makes several important contributions to research on cultural identity and consumption beliefs and practices, with implications for branding, global and local brands, and brand management. First, we contribute to current theory on glocal cultural identity (Ger & Belk, 1996; Jensen, 2003, 2011; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006, Varman & Belk, 2009) by considering the theory's grounding in three global–local identity beliefs, including one *global* cultural belief (belief in global citizenship through global brands) and two *local* cultural beliefs (nationalism and consumer ethnocentrism). Therefore, we extend the previous research that developed measures of either global or national identity dimensions (Der-Karabetian & Ruiz, 1997; Keillor et al., 1996; Zhang & Khare, 2009) to incorporate a profiling approach as an alternative strategy to understanding glocal cultural identity. Second, we further examine glocal cultural identity profiles in relation to branding practices. Specifically, we extend prior research on consumer attitudes toward global and local products (Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010) to examine involvement with brands, consumers' use of brands as signals of quality and self-identity, and purchases of global and local brands. Third, our focus is on the young adult cohort in the emerging markets of post-socialist Russia and post-colonial Brazil; these young adults are an attractive target for multinational firms and global brands but have received little research attention (Douglas & Craig, 2011). Our research draws upon work on globalization and cultural identity in consumer culture theory and in quantitative marketing paradigms and consequently helps integrate and bridge these two perspectives. Collectively, our findings suggest that multinational and local companies need to be cognizant of the complex and changing nature of young adults' glocal cultural identity in emerging markets, as they offer promising opportunities for potential growth (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003).

In the following section, we discuss our conceptual framework, focusing on the cultural identity formation among young adults in the age of globalization, conceptualizing glocal cultural identity, and linking this identity to branding practices. Next, we provide an overview of our research in Russia and Brazil, including a brief discussion of the socio-historical differences and similarities in these two countries that are pertinent to the formation of the glocal cultural identity. We then describe our two studies and findings in detail and conclude with a discussion, the managerial implications, and future research opportunities.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Glocal cultural identity formation in the age of globalization

A challenge faced by young adults in the age of globalization is making decisions about how their worldview beliefs and behavioral practices relate to global and local cultures—that is, their glocal cultural identity (Berry, 2001; Jensen, 2003, 2011). We recognize and discuss three forces at play in how young adults in the modern world form their *glocal cultural identity*: (1) the co-dependency of globalization and localization, (2) dialogical use of global and local identity markers, and (3) brands as key components of glocal cultural identity.

First, the interplay between globalization and localization is at the core of glocal cultural identity formation. Cultural identity is often framed as a tension or a competing choice between global and local identity, but there is increasing recognition that both identities are intertwined in mediated, complex, nuanced conversations with each other (Dong & Tian, 2009; Mazzarella, 2004; Varman & Belk, 2009; Zhao & Belk, 2008). Paradoxically, rather than having a homogenizing effect, globalization has fueled a boom in localization (Hung et al., 2007), implying that globalization and localization are unintelligible except in reference to each other. Hence, the concept of "glocalization" emerges where "both coexist and fuel each other in dialectical ways" (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; p. 33; Robertson, 1995). In other words, that which is defined as global in a given culture is contingent upon what is defined as local, and vice versa (Akaka & Alden, 2010).

Second, there is an evolving discussion about cultural identity formation in the context of globalization. Arnett (2002) posited that young people create a bicultural, or hybrid, identity successfully combining elements of global and local culture. Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) extended this thinking, positing a dialogical perspective where globalization challenges young adults to extend their cultural identity beyond the reach of traditional structures. This extension precipitates uncertainty and motivates the young adults to maintain, and even expand, their local values in pursuit of a stable identity. The authors further contend that globalization, as a key element of cultural identity, can also fuel nationalism, because it is an institutionalized identity marker in times of rapid change and uncertain futures. Hence, young adults may embrace globalization fearlessly (much as other generations abandoned home and family and sought out new frontiers), or successfully combine traditional identity markers such as nationalism with a global identity (balancing extension with security and familiarity), or may engage in defensive localization fueled by the fear of the encroaching others (Kinnvall, 2004). In the latter case, defensive localization can take the relatively mild marketplace form of ethnocentrism or can escalate into more extreme forms such as terrorism.

Third, branded products, because of their communicative, symbolic, and social functions (Kjeldgaard & Ostberg, 2007; Merz, He, & Alden, 2008; Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2008b), are embedded in cultural production systems and mediated through national and global technologies. Branded products constitute a key part of cultural identity (Askegaard, 2006). Hence, changes in brandscapes occurring as a result of globalization are likely to influence the cultural identity developments of young adults (Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Jensen, 2011; Manning, 2010). Specifically, "brands can align themselves with respect to social imaginaries such as the nation by situating themselves within local or global trajectories of circulation…or they can gesture to diasporic, aspirational, or exotic elsewheres on the horizons of imaginative geographies of alterity" (Manning, 2010, p. 39; Mazzarella, 2003; Özkan & Foster, 2005). For example, many