Building Competitiveness Through Globalization:
the Impact of Consumption Convergence

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Abstract

Being a consumer is a learned behavior. As much as consumption patterns are transferred through the process of socialization, especially at younger age, through the dominant influence of the nuclear family, differences in consumer culture are apparent. Attitudes, values and preferences change in early adulthood, stressing the intergenerational gap. We aim to investigate the differences in consumption patterns between members of the same family that belong to different generations, specifically parents-children. We will access their preferences towards different groups of products, with the intention of stressing the impact of democratization of information access and globalization as a vehicle of market integrations. The research will cover the product/service groups identified by literature as "cultural product categories". The impact of globalization will be measured by implementing basic tests of differences on two generational cohorts, searching for preferences towards global versus local products. We will investigate, more closely, the presence of consumer ethnocentrism in different economical conditions (developed vs. developing economy) and between different generations (parents vs. children). Research will be conducted in Serbia and Austria, aiming to discover the behavioral patterns in consumption and their change. Managerial implications are related to creating marketing strategies that respond the best to consumer preferences in different industries, age groups or geographies, especially uncovering consumption convergence, that can exploit economies of scales in production and/or marketing. Interestingly, debate about existence of global culture does not lose its significance and the opinions are polarized regarding the processes that shape the contemporary societies and markets.

Keywords

Globalization, consumer behavior, consumption patterns, ethnocentrism, convergence.

Introduction

Almost every day, customers come across a few hundred products on store shelves. On a daily basis, they make a number of buying decisions. For every company out there it is of the outmost importance to understand the purchasing patterns of the customers, their needs and desires, but nonetheless motives and a complex web of influences on their decision making process. Globalization seems to be a dominant force that shapes the world today (Veiga & Floyd, 2001; Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 2006; Tu, Khare, & Zhang, 2012; Westjohn, Singh, & Magnusson, 2012), and in this ever changing dynamic landscape of the contemporary markets, information and knowledge are the most valuable assets. Targeting different geographies with their marketing effort, companies are nowadays, more than ever, interested in understanding how the customers perceive their value proposition, especially customers belonging to different cultures. What are the similarities and differences between nations in making purchasing decisions? How do the consumption

patterns evolve and change over time? Should companies standardize their marketing mix or adopt it to fit preferences of the target market? These are just a few questions in an ongoing debate that certainly can make or break a business. Answering these questions calls on, as Pankaj (2006) advises, deep understanding of differences (and similarities) in culture, administration, geography and economy. For a great many companies today, the decision to target diverse geographies is the question of survival, and in these circumstances consumers can't be observed through characteristics, behavior, and cultural habits, practices and the environment of one specific nation market anymore, because the global market is regarded as a major business playground where all countries are connected on a large-scale through resources, business strategies and goals.

Creation of the world where the "global citizen" is an increasingly present paradigm suggests that, for marketers, some new market opportunities and circumstances have just emerged, and that marketing and business approaches should be more resilient, open-minded and imbued with multiculturalism, in accordance with their target market.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to further understanding of consumer behavior and consumption patterns in the global marketplace. Conceptually, one part of the research will be following research on the differences between developed and developing countries related to acculturation to global consumer culture (AGCC) and ethnocentrism (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002; Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2008; Guo, 2013), as well as attitudes towards global (AGP) and attitudes towards local products (ALP) (Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010). Taking into account the dynamic nature of markets, in constant flux, the quasi longitudinal component will be introduced by measuring differences in consumption patterns between different generational cohorts, by administering the same research instrument to two generations of the same family (parents/children). The starting premise being that consumption is a learned behavior (Ward, 1974; John, 1999; Shankar, Whittaker, & Fitchett, 2006; Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, & Saunders, 2008) and that family represents one of the most influential social groups in shaping behavior (Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Palan & Wilkes, 1997; Moore, Wilkie, & Lutz, 2002; Cotte & Wood, 2004).

1. Literature background

In the origins of globalization was the outreach towards access to resources (labor and raw materials), but mass production and the ability to produce vast numbers of products (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Shankar et al., 2006) pushed globalization juggernauts towards conquering new geographical markets. In either case, efficiency and competitiveness were the underlying motives. Whereas access to inputs was more on the manufacturing side, interest in foreign customers brought marketing to the forefront of contemporary globalization. The debate on the level of integration of world markets is still ongoing, controversies even further fueled by different outlooks onto globalization benefits, from the business perspective (Levitt, 1983; Yip 1989; Craig & Douglas, 2000; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Steenkamp & Jong, 2010), and the society perspective (Appadurai, 1990; Fýrat & Vicdan, 2008; Riefler, 2012; Laroche & Park, 2013).

1.1. Globalization

Changing and challenging landscapes of the contemporary world are neatly described by a National Geographic journalist Zwigle at the end of the 20th century "Goods move. People move. Ideas move. And cultures change." Plethora of authors today engage in meticulous research trying to explain multiple facets of the globalization process and its impact on humanity, ranging from mundane economic and business questions, to a more profound impact on culture. Pankaj (2006, p. 32) calls globalization discourse "apocalypse", in, as he states, both meanings of the word "…revelation to a privileged few of something hidden from the masses…" and "…abrupt transition from present age to future age, accompanied by great, upheaval and extreme outcomes". According to him, in real life, practical aspects of globalization were far less dramatic (see Figure 1.), concluding that the internationalization process is of slower pace and more limited than expected.
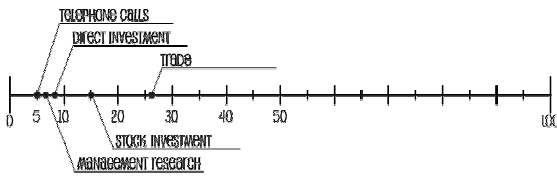
Telephone calls = international revenues / total global telecom service revenues; management research = percentage of management research published from 1996 to 2000 with cross border component; direct investment = foreign direct investment flow / gross global fixed capital formation; stock investment = percentage of US investors' stock holdings that has an international component; trade (to GDP) = global exports / global GDP.

Figure 1   Measures of cross-border economic and business activity
Source: adapted from Pankaj, 2006

As much as the body of literature on globalization is vast, famed Levitt's article from 1983, and Yip's 1989 drivers of globalization are in the forefront. However, as far back as in 1968, Buzzel had mentioned the flow of communication across national boundaries using radio, television, magazines and newspapers, with one major aim - reaching international audiences and operating on a multinational scale. According to the author, "…social and economic trends are working in favor of standardization in marketing policy. Tourism, international communication, an increased number of multinational consumers is tending toward greater unification of multinational markets." (Buzzel, 1968, p. 107). In order "to achieve the benefits of globalization" (Yip, 1989) companies need to recognize conditions favorable to developing a global strategy, and Yip classifies them in four categories: market, cost, governmental and competitive drivers. A more contemporary adaptation of these drivers can be found at Kotabe and Helsen (2010).

The authors minutely pointed out specific aspects of each one, suggesting that, through the cost driver perspective, companies exploiting economies of scale and scope, technology innovations, transportation advances and low cost of labor in emerging industrializing countries, encourage further enlargement and acceleration of the globalization potential. Additionally, the government policies stimulate favorable and convenient conditions for business and market integrations, where the subsistence of companies is determined by the level of global competitiveness. The logical consequence of this process is tailoring a global trade network and tight interdependency of countries (different economies).

Looking more closely to antecedents of globalization, and without venturing to detailed elaboration of various factors, the purpose of this paper and the forthcoming research dictates necessity to look, a bit more closely, at market drivers. Ac-

cording to aforementioned Kotabe and Helsen (2010, p. 255), market forces refer directly to the nature of consumer behavior, and include "convergence of lifestyle and tastes, revolution in information and communication technologies, emergence of rich consumers in emerging markets, growth of global and regional channels, establishment of world brands, spread of global and regional media and increase of international travel creating global consumers more knowledgeable of products from many countries." The common denominator seems to be what Buzzel (1968) and Levit (1983) already stressed as origins of globalization.

Levitt (1983, p. 92) sees technology as the main driving force of the world, that lead to globalization of the markets through "proletarianized communication, transport, and travel". Bold predictions about "one world" did not entirely become a new reality three decades later (Pankaj, 2006; Hollis, 2009), nevertheless Mitchell (2003, p. 26) argues that criticism of Levitt's idea comes from not understanding the fact that Levitt does not necessarily speak about global brands but "on how technologies connect with human needs, and how this affects organizations and markets". Akaka & Alden (2010, p. 37) argue that "…while deep-seated cultural traditions and values do not appear to be converging, demand for global brands among certain segments remains strong." Information and communication technology being in the forefront of global diffusion are great example of this idea. The same communicational need, as a share need for humanity, is satisfied with the use of different technologies, i.e. tablet computers – being very close to the idea of a global product, however content accessed via technology will be more "ethnic" than the need or device itself. Not to leave unmentioned, with younger generations there is also substantial convergence related to the content itself (i.e. popular music, movies or video games).

Further substantiation can be found in the work of Zwick and Dholakia (2008, p. 318) who coined the phrase "infotransformation" defined as "dramatic changes in nature, availability and use of information and communication technologies". This is considered to be one of the major forces that drive transition from local to global markets. A similar discourse is expressed by Kale and De (2013, p. 286) who claim that advances in information and communication technology are leading to "deterritorialization" - the relocation of cultural and social practices to the territory that is not

considered as a place of origin of that cultural and social practices.

It can be concluded that marketing played a major role in fueling globalization from two perspectives, through shaping business strategies that are far more internationally oriented, and through impact on consumer consumption behavior/patterns (Pantelic, Davcik, Zehetner, & Gillpatrick, 2013) worldwide, creating a unique push-and-pull globalization spiral. In perpetual motion, following similar logic of Lewis and Harris (1992) globalization drivers reinforce themselves over long periods, while customers (or citizens!) across the world are becoming increasingly aware of life improvements, enhancing possibilities and liberty that modernity brings. According to that – consumer culture is changing.

1.2. Impact of globalization on consumption patterns: birth of the global consumer

Marketing has always been interested in understanding consumer behavior. Consumption patterns and consumer behavior are influenced by a complex web of factors. Staying on the surface of general phenomenon, the most widely utilized model of consumer behavior is depicted in every marketing textbook (i.e. see Kotler, Keller, Brady, & Goodman, 2012, p. 259).

Culture represents one of the most important drivers of human behavior in social environments, and hence, it is considered to be one of the most important drivers of consumer behavior. Our focus shifts towards a more specific impact of globalization on consumption patterns, and formation of the global consumer. Appadurai (1990, p. 295) frames the problem of globalization of culture between two poles "cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization." In addressing dynamic and complex nature Appadurai (1990, p. 297) created a framework for research of the cultural dynamics consisting of:

- Ethnoscapes. The world is witnessing increased movement of people, resulting in "cultural interpenetration" (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p. 323) – An amalgam of interaction of different cultures, that is more than ever exposed to foreign influence.
- Technoscapes. Technology has unprecedented influence on the world today, and more precisely on the globalization process. Technology is intertwined in multiple aspects of Yip's (1989) globalization drivers, both on the supply and demand side.

- Finanscapes. According to the author, the world experiences complex movement of capital in contemporary economy, especially stressing out relationship between finanscapes and two previous constructs and their mutual interdependency.
- Mediascapes. 25 years earlier, the power of the media and information was already visible, in the world before the Internet, as we know it today. Today, world reality is to a great extant "constructed" reality, based on creating and manipulating information, with multiple channels of its dissemination. Access to media is considered to be one of the key elements that shape global culture (Buzzel, 1968; Zwick & Dholakia, 2008; Kale & De, 2013). The massive impact of the Internet in forming a global "mediascape" is visible in Internet World Statistics from the second quarter of 2012, 44.8 percent of the Internet users come from Asia, followed by 21.5% and 11.4% from Europe and North America, respectively. Middle East and Africa account for only 10.7% of Internet users, these two regions rank top two in their usage growth between 2000 and 2012 (Internet World Stats, 2014).
- Ideoscapes. The meaning of ideoscape ventures is understanding ideologies or values of one culture, as well as how these constructs (i.e. "freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation, democracy" Appadurai, 1990, p. 299) tend to change and have different meaning in different cultures, which will further have direct influence on the effectiveness of communication with target audiences.

Consumption patterns are learned, our behavior in the roles of customers is learned behavior through the process of socialization (acculturation). Exposure to a certain environment (society) induces adaptation of norms, customs and values, shared by a particular group. "Deterritorialization" brought by globalization enabled the forming of the global consumer culture, Craig and Douglas (2006, p. 322) conclude that globalization has "…altered traditionally static territorially based notions of culture". Authors Cannon and Yaprak (2002, p. 30) used the concept of "cosmopolitan" and the phrase "world citizen" together referring to "…a consumer whose orientation transcends any particular culture or setting."

Whereas, Guo (2013) emphasizes change in cultural horizons of customers, that have an increased sense of mutual interdependency and a broadening of communication channels. Finally, preconditions and the direction of this process might be summarized in Kale and De's (2013, p. 287) conclusions that "globalization has blurred the links between people, places, rituals, and events". According to that, global consumer culture can be defined as a set of symbols and behavior related to consumption, commonly understood, but not necessarily shared, by various groups, transcending national borders. (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Akaka & Alden, 2010). Nowadays, cultural interpenetration makes segregating national culture from global influences difficult.

Marketing literature findings and market reality suggest that "the role of culture in the consumer decision-making process is still an important area of research in light of the trends toward global markets and the global consumer culture." (Laroche 2011, p. 931). Research in this field can be tracked in several directions, most dominantly in the country of origin and its influence on preferences and buying decisions (i.e. Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Alden et al., 2013), and on a massive scale, on attitudes towards globalization, as well as a choice between global and local brands (Alden et al., 2006; Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2008; Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010; Özsomer, 2012; Guo, 2013).

Global brands are the episteme of the globalization process. Özsomer & Altaras (2008) consider them vehicles of identity and aspirations for the members of the new global consumer culture. Ascendance of the global culture doesn't import the rule that each consumer shares the same patterns, values and consumption propensity at all (Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004), nor that they will necessarily adopt all the foreign products of global brands that are available worldwide. Global brands are rather observed "like entertainment stars and sport celebrities" who had become "a lingua franca" for people all across the world, and they can't be ignored (Kotabe & Helsen, 2010, p. 70).

Dimofte, Johansson and Bagozzi (2010) argues that global brands have more significance for consumers from the developing economies, while on the other hand Strizhakova et al. (2008) provides evidence that global brands have importance for both developing and developed countries. Very often, global brands carry profound symbolic meanings of innovativeness, a technology era, market novelties, trends and modernity (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Dimofte, Johansson, & Ronkainen, 2008; Özsomer, 2012), while local brands possess their own relevance and strength, such as cultural symbolism, authenticity and the local pride and community (Dimofte, et al. 2008).

The second stream of the researchers follow this idea in identifying different consumer groups, with more dominant orientation towards local or global products. A number of authors (Dinnie, 2003; Strizhakova et al. 2008; Cayla & Arnould, 2008) found out that teenagers and younger adults are more attracted to global brands. Ethnocentric orientation was explicitly expressed by Sharma, Shimp and Jeongshin (1995) with older, female, lower social class, lower income and education consumers. People that are open-minded are considered by Westjohn et al. (2012) to be more likely to purchase global products, Steenkamp and de Jong (2010) found out that favorable attitudes towards global products are typical for people that have strong materialism and innovativeness, whereas attitudes towards local products go hand-in-hand with ethnocentric and nostalgic customers. It is worth mentioning that aforementioned authors identified groups with adverse attitude towards both local and global products, seeing them as conduits of superficial consumer culture.

The third line of research relates differences in preferences towards local and global products to a specific product category (i.e. see Figure 2), which can be related to a number of authors and their conclusions regarding dominance of global consumer culture versus ethnocentrism in buying/consumption. According to Schuh (2007) and Hollis (2009) food and beverages have a stronger cultural grounding. Holt (1998, p. 7) in his research on cultural capital identified several categories as "cultural product categories": food, clothing, home furnishings, entertainment (music, TV, movies) and lifestyle (vacations, hobbies, sports).

Figure 2 Influence of global consumer culture and ethnocentrism on various categories of consumer products
Source: adapted from Cleveland & Laroche, 2007, p. 256

Consumer behavior has been in the focus of marketing's interest for a long time. Complexity of influences, a so called "consumer black box" and dominance of behavioral research confirm that the learning process is ambiguous, even on the home field. Reaching out to markets outside own cultures brings additional dimensions of complexity. We might argue that, in a certain perspective, convergence of desires is a more precise perspective, instead of taking a much more encompassing claim about convergence of cultures. A question that hunts marketers today is the nature and intensity of globalization, and its impact on consumer behavior in different geographies. Driven to the focus of decisions makers, target markets call for diligence in understanding consumers from various (distant) cultures. Following discourse we are eager to investigate differences in perceptions, preferences and consumption patterns between a highly developed nation (Austria) and a developing one (Serbia), and search for justification of hypothesis that differences are also relevant in the intergenerational framework.

2. Methodology and empirical research design

Major research questions are related to preferences, opinions and consumption patterns of customers from different cultures and different generations. The main research questions are the following:

RQ1. Are there statistically significant differences in consumption patterns between citizens of two countries with greatly different economical conditions?

RQ2. Are there statistically significant differences in perception of local and global brands/products between citizens of two countries with greatly different economical conditions?

RQ3 Do differences in perception and consumption patterns exist in two different generational cohorts in the same culture?

RQ4. Are there more similarities in consumer behavior in generational cohorts or inside one culture?

Data collection will be conducted at two universities: the Upper Austrian University of Applied Sciences, Steyr, Austria, and the Faculty of Economics Subotica of the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. A stratified sample will be used in order to capture different demographics, which will allow us necessary comparisons between groups. The planned size of the sample is 100 respondents from each stratum. Demographic profiles of our respondents should fall in the following four categories:

- student at Upper Austrian University of Applied Science, between 18 and 25 years, native Austrian,
- parent, has child that studies at University of Applied Sciences, native Austrian,
- student at University of Novi Sad, between 18 and 25 years, native Serbian,
- parent, has child that studies at University of Novi Sad, native Serbian.

Students will have the responsibility to interview their parents using the same questionnaire. In order to conduct the research the questionnaire was developed based on ample previous research, with substantial theoretical support.

The questionnaire consists of the three following sections:

- Introduction consists of the short description of the survey, sponsors of the survey and an anonymity clause. The introduction also has screening questions related to selection of respondents (since we would want to capture native Austrians and Serbians, as well as respondents from the same family belonging to two subsequent generations).
- The main part consists of lifestyle/opinion constructs:
  a) related to feelings towards globalization, and
  b) related to preferences for local/global products in different product categories. Constructs were measured by 7-point Likert scale, through series of statements. Theoretical substantiation was found in works of Alden et al. (2006), Cleveland and Laroche (2007), Steenkamp and de Jong (2010), Manrai and Manrai (2011), Riefler (2012), Tu et al. (2012), and finally Westjohn et al. (2012), Guo (2013).
- Classification and sociodemographic questions (age, gender, education, social status).

Scale items related to acculturation to local or global culture are well substantiated in available literature. Additional perspective is introduced by consulting KOF Index of Globalization (KOF, 2014) which represent exogenous measure of globalization for two cultures in our focus. Aus-

tria is ranked (out of 207 countries) fourth on the overall globalization index, and third related to the index of social globalization, whereas Serbia takes the sixty-third place, and the sixtieth place respectively. Statistically Austria belongs to top of the first quartile, while Serbia belongs to second quartile of the list of countries according to globalization. Indicators of actual flows related to economic globalization, i.e. exports/imports, inward and outward FDI, as well as income payments to non-residents, indirectly show the extent to which national economy is immersed into the global economy. On the other hand indicators of social globalization directly correspond with some of the measures used by various authors to measure acculturation to the global consumer culture (AGCC). KOF Globalization index i.e. encompasses international voice traffic, internet users, foreign population, sum of gross inflows and outflows of goods, services and income, as well as a number of international tourists, and all the way to mundane indicators as a number of McDonald's restaurants and IKEA stores. These indicators represent levels of exposure of domestic culture to international influences.

Cleveland and Laroche (2007, p. 252) constructed their research around seven factors relevant for acculturation to the global consumer culture (AGCC):

1. cosmopolitism,
2. exposure to marketing activities of multinational/global companies,
3. exposure to the use of the English language,
4. social interactions (travel, migration, contact with foreigners),
5. global/foreign media exposure,
6. openness (or desire) to emulate global consumer culture,
7. self-identification with global consumer culture.

Further refinement of measuring instruments was done by referring to Guo (2013) who measured global identity and ethnocentrism. Local-global identity scale can be found in works of Tu et al. (2012, p. 41) than concluded in their research that "…participants scoring high on global identity…found global products to be more attractive than local products, whereas participants scoring high on local scale found local products to be more attractive than global products."

The development of scale items related to preferences for local/global products is based on

aforementioned Holt's (1998) identification of product categories that are considered to be strongly influenced by culture. These categories were consequently used by a number of researchers. Alden et al. (2006) researched global consumption orientation (GCO), testing "…consumer preference for globalized, localized and hybridized within given consumption domain", putting in focus lifestyle, entertainment, furnishings, clothing choices of their respondents. Stenkamp and Jong (2010) measured attitudes towards local products (ALP) and attitudes towards global products (AGP), following on Slater and Miller (2007, p. 5) view that "…consumption *is* the study of our contemporary material culture." Scale items by Stenkamp and de Jong (2010), on the top of previously mentioned, included food as a specific product category, as well as an attitude toward brands and their origin. Attitudes towards brands were used as an indicator of global consumption orientation by Riefler (2012).

Validity of measures related to global/local acculturation, as well as preferences for global/local products, is confirmed by significant theoretical substantiation, thus allowing use of proven measures to test global/local acculturation of Austrian and Serbian respondents by utilizing difference tests. Similarly, the research will test significance of difference between two samples related to different product categories identified as product choices significantly influenced by culture. Lastly, differences will be tested among age groups in search for confirmation of homogeneity/heterogeneity.

3. Preliminary discussion

Answers on the research questions should help marketers tailor a marketing strategy. Success in preliminary research may lead to a decision to extend the scope of the research to several other countries which would help in building statistically more sound generalizations. Theoretical substantiation offers different predictions of possible results, from the perspective of global companies' most valuable revelation would be in convergence of consumption patterns of younger generations, i.e. proving that differences among generational cohorts are more salient than differences between different cultures. That would be confirmation of slow movement towards more homogeneous markets.

As much as the research is based on substantial past research in the field, originality comes from bringing a quasi longitudinal component.

Some of the research, i.e. Guo (2013) already explored differences related to countries` levels of development, on the developed/undeveloped continuum. By the authors' best knowledge, and extensive literature overview, it is not known to us, that someone cross-referenced findings in these studies with different generational cohorts. Results might shed light, give additional perspective, to a contemporary question – do we live in a world in which consumer cultures are gradually converging or has globalization reached the point at which people are turning back to core local cultural values. Differences in between different product categories and different demographics should be beneficial to marketing strategy/tactic creators. If the initial hypothesis proves true – that globalization has its impact in increasingly homogenized markets, it can further confirm possibilities for utilizing economies of scale through an entire specter of marketing mix tools.

The paper rounds up contemporary research in the field and presents a strong methodological and conceptual base for devising a research instrument and progressing in the next phase of empirical research. Consumer culture is changing, and organizations have the daunting task to understand consumers better, across different geographies and cultures in a very intertwined world. Marketing strategies have to be finely tuned to reflect superb understanding of consumers, their needs and desires, consumption and communication patterns. Competitiveness still needs to be won, regardless of distances, exploiting benefits of acting globally and still beating competitors on the local level and winning shares of mind and wallets of customers. As much as it has been heard too many times, the "think globally act locally" formula still seems to have some merit. **SM**

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