

The Role of Social Media in Accelerating the Process of Acculturation to the Global Consumer Culture: An Empirical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the role of social media in the context of global consumer culture by showing consumers' perceptions regarding social influence, social networks, cultural novelty and economic rewards. It focuses on the mediating role of social media in the acculturation to the global consumer culture (AGCC). This article develops and tests a conceptual model integrating new antecedents of AGCC. Based on the 322 answers to an online survey targeting international students and consumers, smart PLS software and structural equation modelling are applied to assess the causal relationships among the constructs. The findings show that (1) social network, social influence, cultural novelty and economic rewards significantly accelerate the process of acculturation and that (2) social media plays a mediating role on social networks, cultural novelty and trust. This article offers a substantial contribution to related theory by developing and testing a social media-based model that provides a more comprehensive view of the process of AGCC.

KEYWORDS

Acculturation to the Global Consumer Culture, Cultural Novelty, Social Media, Social Networks, Trust

INTRODUCTION

Studies of international marketing and consumer research have often focused on the impact of globalization on consumer behavior to explore double internationalization, i.e., the homogenization of trends, cultures and brands, in tandem with the reinforcement of individual cultures (Jimenez et al., 2013; Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Cleveland et al., 2016). These insights underscore the emergence of reactivated ethnic identities and a common global consumer culture (Carpenter et al., 2013; Ger, 1999).

In view of the growing popularity of social media, virtual communities have attracted heightened attention, with the Internet acting as a change agent that consolidates temporal communities (Baker and Ward, 2002; Krishnamurthy, 2003). Social media provide the most effective means for communicating the globalization of brands (Hutton and Fosdick, 2011) by supporting international and marketing relations via virtual communities (Popescu, 2014). These digital spaces have emerged as a facilitator for people to communicate with each other and obtain information or knowledge, interactively and in real time (Kim et al., 2003). A social ensemble of individual relationship networks is generated among people in virtual communities composed of large, loose, geographically widespread populations

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(Brown and Duguid, 2001). This enquiry responds to the call for further analysis into the use of social media in a cross-cultural context (Goodrich and de Mooij, 2014).

Various frameworks have been developed to explain the acculturation of consumers to a host country. Laroche et al. (1997) viewed acculturation as the dynamic aspect of ethnicity that is influenced largely by a person's willingness to interact with the other culture. Developing this notion further, Cleveland and Laroche (2007) presented the framework of acculturation to the global consumer culture (AGCC). Recent studies have highlighted the prominent influence of social media in interactions between firms and their consumers (Fulgoni, 2015; Xie and Lee, 2015) and in market research (Patino et al., 2012). However, none of these frameworks have attempted to link social media and AGCC.

The objectives of this research are twofold: first, to re-examine the works of Cleveland and Laroche (2007) and Carpenter et al. (2012, 2013) to further our understanding of the global consumer culture and to identify new factors that may act as an influence; and second, to highlight the influence of social media in a cross-cultural environment. Overall, the aim is to study the effect of social media on AGCC, from which managerial implications are drawn regarding the use of online tools for communication or sales strategies. To this end, the following research question is posed: What role is played by social media in the process of AGCC?

This article is structured as follows. The first part presents the AGCC framework and the social context of the research. The second part proposes a conceptual model, and the third part presents the results. The fourth part then discusses the results together with the academic and managerial implications. Finally, limitations and conclusions are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acculturation to the Global Consumer Culture

It is widely acknowledged in the international marketing literature that consumers in a specific country are less clearly defined based on their national behavior or attitudes owing to the globalization of products and services. Consequently, the marketplace is increasingly homogenized, as globalization has supplanted the heterogeneity of global markets (Carpenter et al., 2013; Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Furrer et al., 2000).

Supporting the notion of gradual global homogenization, multiple literature reports have noted that consumers are likely "...less willing to conform to expected norms..." (Carpenter et al., 2012: 412; De Mooij, 2004; Ger, 1999). Thus, the opposition between the anticipated homogenization of consumers and the development of a local consumer culture merits closer investigation of international marketing strategies.

Cleveland and Laroche (2007) reported the first attempt to develop an AGCC framework as an alternative means of segmenting global markets. They detailed seven components (or drivers) of AGCC: cosmopolitanism (COSM), exposure to marketing activities of multi-national companies (EXPO), English-language usage and exposure (ELU), social interactions (SIN), global mass media exposure (GMM), openness and desire to emulate a global consumer culture (OPEN) and self-identification with a global consumer culture (SELF).

More explicitly, COSM is defined as 'a specific set of qualities held by certain individuals, including a willingness to engage with other (i.e., different) cultures and a level of competence toward alien culture(s)' (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007, p. 252). EXPO reflects a consumer's familiarity with marketing efforts by companies operating beyond borders, whereas ELU indicates that a consumer is familiar with and uses the English language in everyday interactions. SIN refers to an individual's experience travelling outside their home country, migration experiences and contact with foreigners. GMM refers to a consumer's exposure to media generated outside his/her country of origin. An OPEN describes an individual's probability of seeking foreign products for personal reasons. Finally, SELF

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