Measuring consumer acculturation – discussion on a prospective approach

This paper discusses how globalization brings in cultural change among consumers and why this phenomenon can be studied under the aegis of consumer acculturation. The discussion is initiated with the explanation of what globalization is and what factors entailing it bring in specific changes in consumer culture. This is followed by a brief introduction to culture and how its components form the base for consumer acculturation. Subsequently, two comprehensive approaches to measure consumer acculturation – Acculturation to Global Consumer Culture (AGCC) approach and Acculturation of Consumer Culture (ACC) approach – are introduced. In comparison, contrast and critique of these approaches are presented. The final section of the paper discusses various propositions which could be incorporated to make the measurement of consumer acculturation more comprehensive and robust than what it is in its current form. It is proposed that both AGCC and ACC approaches should be simultaneously used to measure consumer acculturation. Also, the survey based process which both these approaches follow should be further supplemented with observational and in-depth interview mechanisms of data collection. Hence, an amalgamation of both quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection is expected to be the ideal manner of comprehensively measuring consumer acculturation.

Introduction

The increasing impact of globalization on consumer attitude and behavior has generated a lot of interest among the researchers world over. It has been ascertained that globalization enables diverse cultural groups to come into contact with one another leading to perceptual, attitudinal, or behavioral changes across almost all cultures around the world (Lee 1993). Quoting many prominent researchers, Cleveland et al. (2009), claim that capitalism, global transport, communications, marketing and advertising, and transnational cosmopolitanism are interacting to dissolve the boundaries across national cultures. According to them, these forces of globalization are leading to the emergence of a homogeneous global consumption culture, wherein consumers from various countries would be more global than local in their consumption orientation.

The above scenario is indicating towards the emergence of consumer acculturation, wherein consumers across the world are getting acculturated to follow a uniform consumer culture. If this is the case, then a pertinent question is how to measure the extent of consumer acculturation. What would be the pertinent factors which should be measured to ascertain the existence of consumer acculturation across various countries in the world? How should the identified factors of consumer acculturation be measured? How should a scale to measure consumer acculturation be designed so that it can be used among culturally different consumers without losing its reliability and validity? All these questions arise when an attempt is made to measure consumer acculturation. Extant literature also agrees that although many attempts have been made to create an all-encompassing construct for measuring consumer acculturation, like a scale developed by Cleveland and Laroche

(2007), called Acculturation to Global Consumer Culture (AGCC), there are still multiple short comings in the existing scales which need to be highlighted and addressed.

This paper is an attempt to address the concerns raised above. Since, globalization is the antecedent which has led to consumer acculturation, the paper starts with a detailed discussion on the various aspects of globalization and how they impact the prevalence of consumer acculturation. This is followed by discussion and critical assessment of two prominent extant measurements of consumer acculturation. It highlights the drawbacks present in them and attempts to address these drawbacks. Through this approach, the paper attempts to outlay a discussion on a proposed approach which could enable development of a comprehensive scale for measurement of consumer acculturation.

1 Understanding globalization and consumer acculturation

1.1 Globalization

The phenomenon of Globalization, as per the extant literature, is defined as bringing the people of the world closer to each other. Researchers like Appadurai (1990) see globalization as spread of five types of global flows, namely – mediascapes, which is flow of image and communication; ethnoscapes, considered as flows of tourists, migrants and foreign students; ideoscapes, defined as flows of political ideas and ideologies; technoscapes, which is flow of technology and know-how and finally finanscapes, which comprises of flows of capital and money. In his seminal article on globalization, Levitt (1984) argues that globalization is making consumers' world over 'homogenized', or similar in their needs and requirements. Hence, globalization seems to be changing the cultural fabric and patterns of a society as products, icons, lifestyles and rituals of one culture are being adopted by another (Craig and Douglas 2006).

1.1.1 Cultural Change Being Brought by Globalization

Over the last two decades, globalization has fostered a seismic shift in marketing activities across the world, especially in developing countries (Lysonski et al. 2012). Many researchers (like Craig et al. 2009 and Yaprak 2008) have brought forth the consequent changes which globalization has brought on the extant local consumer culture. According to Venkatesh (1995), in the contemporary world, local cultures are changing quite rapidly because of the rising tide of consumerism brought by external (global) influences. Ger and Belk, (1996) assert that due to globalization, consumers in the developing countries are emulating the lifestyles and consumption patterns of consumers who live in economically developed countries. Hence, globalization seems to be leading to convergent customer needs and interests (Schuh 2007) and to the emergence of a global consumer culture (Nijssen and Douglas 2011).

Witkowski (2005), quoting Barber (1995) and other researchers, states that ideas, values, products (foreign brands) and lifestyles which forces of globalization bring from rich countries, influence the developing country's culture. Many other researchers like Douglas and Craig (1997) and Craig and Doulas (2006), also support this argument by observing that cultural influences from across borders, in the form of products (foreign brands), services, media, lifestyles and behavior patterns of the consumers in other countries are creating multicultural populations in domestic markets and exposing consumers to alternative behaviors and wants, leading to changes in the traditional patterns of consumer culture and behavior.

Similar arguments have been put forward by Baughn and Buchanan (2001). They state that negotiations surrounding important trade treaties include debates over cultural exceptions and exemptions, reflecting the recognition of the power of trade to shape the local culture. It is feared

that the imported cultural goods will displace the local culture (ibid). This observation is supported by Klien (1999), who pointed out that brand names (read foreign brand names), in the form of embedded logos on clothing and other consumer goods, or conveyed through carefully targeted advertising campaigns, manipulate personal tastes. Hence the extant literature overwhelmingly supports the assertion that globalization brings cultural changes among the consumers in the local markets.

1.2 Consumer Acculturation

Since consumer acculturation's base is culture, we have to first ascertain as to how is culture defined. An interesting observation pertaining to culture has been made by Adler (1983), she observes that in traditional anthropological studies as well as in comparative management research, the term culture has been defined in many ways and no single definition of culture is accepted by management researchers. However, Hofstede's (1997) definition of culture has come to be one of the most cited definitions in literature. According to him culture is – "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede 1997, p. 5). Though leading researchers differ on the definition of culture, they all agree on the components of culture, which includes religion, family, communication, rites of passage, language, dress, dietary habits, leisure activities, society, attitude, behavior, basic beliefs and basic values (Baligh 1994; Bhugra et al. 1999; Conway Dato-on 2000; Khairullah and Khairullah 1999; Khairullah et al. 1996; Pettys and Balgopal 1998).

To understand the phenomenon of changing consumer culture, its proponents have extensively borrowed from the extant body of literature dealing with acculturation. According to Trimble (2003), the measures of acculturation could be used to measure cultural change because acculturation is synonymous with sociocultural change.

Faber et al. (1987) defined acculturation as the adoption of the dominant culture's beliefs, attitudes, values, and behavior. Earlier for acculturation to occur, the contact aspect was limited to continuous first hand contact among individuals from different cultures (Redfield et al. 1936). Subsequent researchers (e.g. Andreasen 1990; Craig et al. 2009; Gentry et al. 1995 and Steenkamp 2001) broadened this definition and stated that even indirect exposure to foreign culture via media and commercial communication would transform the indigenous culture. Berry (1980), whose work on acculturation has been widely cited, also concurs with this view. He states that the contact between cultural groups can be either physical or symbolic and it can happen through "trade, invasion, enslavement, educational or missionary activity, or through telecommunications" (Berry 1980, p. 11).

Many researchers have studied acculturation from consumer behavior view-point and have brought forth interesting insights. For e.g., Chattaraman et al. (2010) observes that acculturation might lead to decrease in ethnic consumption and increase in mainstream culture's consumption. Such consumer behavior oriented approaches to acculturation have led to the development of the constructs like Consumer Acculturation.

Consumer acculturation has been further divided into behavioral and attitudinal dimensions (Gentry et al. 1995; Gupta 2013), with former dimension covering behavioral changes (e.g. changes in (language usage, dietary habits, dress, communication, leisure activities etc.) in the acculturating consumer and the latter dimension covering attitudinal changes (e.g. changes in basic beliefs, values, identity etc.). Many studies (Anderson 2012; Gentry et al. 1995; Gupta 2013; Kim et al. 1999) concur with the view that attitudinal acculturation would occur more slowly than behavioral acculturation as individuals acquire behaviors of the dominant group more rapidly than acquiring the dominant group's values/attitudes.

2 Measuring consumer acculturation

In this section we discuss two approaches which measure consumer acculturation. The focus is restricted to these two approaches only as they encompass two of the prominent means of measuring acculturation in the contemporary literature. The first approach to measure consumer acculturation was developed by Cleveland and Laroche (2007). Their construct termed as Acculturation to Global Consumer Culture (AGCC) provides a holistic view on how consumer acculturation occurs among consumer. The second approach to measure consumer acculturation has been adopted by Gupta (2012, 2013). This measurement is called Acculturation of Consumer Culture (ACC), which measures the progress that a consumer makes from local consumer culture to global consumer culture due to the impact of globalization (Gupta 2012).

2.1 Comparison of consumer acculturation measurement approaches

Cleveland and Laroche's (2007) AGCC "considers how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviors that are characteristic of a nascent and deterritorialized global consumer culture" (Cleveland and Laroche 2007, p. 252). They claim that an exhaustive review of the relevant social sciences literatures made them identify seven distinct drivers which lead to AGCC. These seven distinct drivers were:
• Cosmopolitanism (COS) – willingness to engage with other cultures and having necessary skills to do so.
• Exposure to marketing activities of MNC's (EXM)
• Exposure to/use of the English language (ELU)
• Social interactions, including travel, migration, and contacts with foreigners (SIN)
• Global/foreign mass media exposure (GMM)
• Openness to and desire to emulate global consumer culture (OPE)
• Self-identification with global consumer culture (IDT)

In contrast to Cleveland and Laroche's (2007) approach to study "how" consumer acculturation occur, Gupta's (2012, 2013) ACC approach to study consumer acculturation "deals with progress of consumer from local to global culture" (Gupta 2013, p. 26) on various components of culture, which he claims have been identified after exhaustive literature review. He further divides ACC into behavioral and attitudinal dimensions. The cultural components used by him are:
• For behavioral dimension, cultural components used are:
o Language preferred
o Language actually spoken
o Music preference
o Movies/TV program preference
o Food preference at home
o Food preference outside
o Attire preference
o Reading language preference
o Writing language preference
o Behavior with respect to celebration of festivals

• For attitudinal dimension, cultural components used are:
o Self-identity
o Personal value

The following table (Table 1) compares and contrasts both these approaches on 21 parameters identified by the author:

S. No.	Parameter	AGCC	ACC
1	What the Scale Measures?	How individuals acquire global consumer culture	To what extent has progress been made from local to global consumer culture
2	Data Collection Approach	Survey-based	Survey-based
3	Items in the Scale	64	13
4	Multiple Items Measure Same Aspect	Yes	No
5	Response Elicited on	7-point Likert scale	5-point Likert 'Type' scale
6	Scale Development Process	Literature review + empirical analysis	Literature review + empirical analysis
7	Communication Preference	Measured (But restricted to usage of English only)	Measured (In terms of native vs. foreign language)
8	Music Preference	Measured (But restricted to English only)	Measured (In terms of native vs. foreign music)
9	Movie Preference	Measured (But restricted to English only)	Measured (In terms of native vs. foreign movies)
10	TV Program Preference	Measured (But restricted to English only)	Not Measured
11	Reading Preference	Measured (But restricted to English only)	Measured (In terms of native vs. foreign language)
12	Writing Preference	Not Measured	Measured (In terms of native vs. foreign language)
13	Dressing Preference	Measured (But restricted to American way of dressing only)	Measured (In terms of native vs. foreign attire)
14	Preference for Foreign Travel	Measured	Not Measured
15	Exposure to Foreign Brands and Ads	Measured	Not Measured

Table 1: Comparison of AGCC vis-a-vis ACC
Source: author

2.2 Proposed holistic approach to measure consumer acculturation

It may be concluded from table 1 that both these approaches assess two different dimensions related to consumer acculturation, while the former attempts to assess how it occurs, the latter assesses to what extent is it prevalent. For a multidimensional and complex phenomenon like consumer acculturation, understanding of both these dimensions are equally important. Hence, to assess consumer acculturation comprehensively, it is proposed that both these approaches should be used simultaneously to assess this phenomenon. However, care has to be taken to prevent repetition of certain dimensions which are present in both the approaches, e.g. dietary preference (please refer to table 1 for details), to avoid presence of redundant aspects in this proposed cumulative approach. Also, some pertinent shortcomings of each of the two approaches, e.g. length of AGCC scale due to presence of many repetitive and redundant items, and very limited number of components measured in the attitudinal dimension of ACC scale needs to be addressed. Researches can explore the usage of truncated version of AGCC scale as proposed by Durvasula and Lysonski (2015). However, care has to be taken as this truncated version has been criticized too. Few components like ethnocentric tendencies and assertion of ethnic identity can be included in the attitudinal dimension of ACC scale. A major critiques for both these approaches is that they are both exclusively survey based approach and hence are prone to shortcomings which any survey based approach faces like incorrect responses, biased responses, lack of clear understanding of what is being asked etc. Though every scale developed to measure anything is prone to this critique, in case of consumer acculturation, it can be mitigated by adding observational and in-depth interview related dimensions to the aforementioned approaches.
Observational dimension would entail that besides eliciting responses from the consumers, their brand consumption and generic overall behavior is also observed and noted by the researcher. This has to be supplemented by a short in-depth interview round wherein the surveyor would ask few open-ended questions which are designed to capture the reason for the respondent's survey response as well as the observed behavior. Hence an amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative approach to comprehensively measure consumer acculturation is recommended.
A major limitation of this approach is that it would be a time consuming exercise for each respondent and it requires personal interaction between the researcher and the respondent.

However, to generate a holistic understanding of such a complex phenomenon like consumer acculturation, such approach is the only way out. Any mitigation to the proposed approach will produce lop-sided results.

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M31

Résumé

Meranie spotrebiteľskej akulturácie – diskusia o potenciálnom prístupe

Tento článok popisuje, ako globalizácia prináša kultúrne zmeny medzi spotrebiteľmi a prečo tento jav možno študovať pod záštitou spotrebiteľskej akulturácie. Diskusia začína vysvetlením pojmu globalizácia a špecifických faktorov vyvolávajúcich zmeny v konzumnej kultúre. Nasleduje krátky úvod ku kultúre a spôsobu ako jeho komponenty tvoria základňu pre spotrebiteľskú akulturáciu. Následne sú predstavené dva komplexné prístupy merania spotrebiteľskej akulturácie – prístup Acculturation to Global Consumer Culture (AGCC) a prístup Acculturation of Consumer Culture (ACC). V porovnaní s tým je prezentovaný kontrast a kritika týchto prístupov. Záverečná časť tejto práce sa zaoberá rôznymi návrhmi, ktoré by mohli byť začlenené, aby sa meranie spotrebiteľskej akulturácie stalo obsiahlejšie a robustnejšie než aké je vo svojej súčasnej podobe. Navrhuje sa, aby sa oba prístupy AGCC a ACC používali súčasne na meranie spotrebiteľskej akulturácie. Taktiež proces založený na prieskume, ktorý oba tieto prístupy nasledujú, by mal byť ďalej doplnený o pozorovanie a mechanizmy hĺbkových rozhovorov. Z tohto dôvodu sa očakáva, že zlúčenie oboch kvantitatívnych a kvalitatívnych prístupov zberu dát bude predstavovať ideálny spôsob komplexného merania spotrebiteľskej akulturácie.

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