Beyond Hofstede
Culture Frameworks for Global Marketing and Management

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Dedication

This book is the result of the collective efforts of many, beginning with the contributing authors: Wendi L. Adair, Eric J. Arnould, Søren Askegaard, Mary Yoko Brannen, Donnel A. Briley, Nancy R. Buchanan, Xiaoying Chen, C. Samuel Craig, Claudia Dale, Susan P. Douglas, P. Christopher Earley, Elif Izberk-Bilgin, Dannie Kjeldgaard, Leigh Anne Liu, Fiona Moore, Piers Steel, Vas Taras. These leading management and marketing scholars from universities around the world were broached in October 2007 to write a research monograph on new frameworks and perspectives on culture, going beyond the dominant Hofstede paradigm. In the following springs, they generously provided chapters distilling their expertise and latest research.

To share and discuss these ideas, a symposium was held in Chicago on May 23–25, 2008 at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). The authors, along with UIC faculty and students, came together in rich exchanges about culture and its implications for global marketing and management. Dean Stefanie Lenway, Associate Dean Abagail McWilliams, Department Head Mark Shanley, and Professor Thomas Mortha of UIC’s College of Business Administration graciously supported the symposium. Professor Elif Izberk-Bilgin, Co-Chair of the symposium, as well as doctoral students Kelly Weidner and Esi Abram Eliot, helped to organize and make the event a success. Faculty members Joseph Cherian, Benet Delborey-Spence, and Jelena Spanjol facilitated the discussions.

Finally but no less important were friends, family, and supporters who cheered the book project from start to finish, including Adele, Angela, Barbara, Cindy, Estelle, Jim, Linda, Maisie, Pat, Phil, and Tami. To all authors, UIC faculty and students, and family and friends, the book is gratefully dedicated.
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Reflexive Culture’s Consequences

Søren Askegaard, Dannie Kløffgaard, and Eric J. Arnould

Investigations of marketing relations across cultures have traditionally focused on culture as a background variable, a collection of essential character traits, habits, practices, categorizations, and so forth within a given domain that would explain the approach to and degree of acceptance of various marketing practices from abroad. Most often, such discussions are based on a Hofstedean tradition (for a review of the use of particular culture theories in literature and the dominance of Hofstede-based approaches, see Nakata and Izbicki-Bilgen this volume). The role of cultural understanding in this perspective aims to predict the problems or potential misunderstandings arising from different cultural backgrounds in a marketing exchange relation or in cross-cultural managerial interactions (see, for example, Douglas and Craig’s work in this volume). Moreover, the basic question in the relation between marketing and culture is the standardization/adaptation debate, that is, the degree to which certain established marketing strategies or tactics would be applicable in a different cultural context. The unit of analysis is almost inevitably the nation-state, albeit with occasional references to subcultures, such as different ethnic groups. However, the inherent weaknesses of this approach, focusing on the comparison of cultural similarities and differences between nations, occasionally even turning to measuring the “cultural distances” between them, are becoming more and more evident in today’s globalizing environment—hence the need for a different look at relations between culture and marketing.

The culture construct has only been considered seriously within marketing and consumer research for a little over two decades. With the possible exception of certain relatively marginalized consumer research environments, culture has mainly played the role of an externally given antecedent variable that explains similarity and difference among
national markets and, hence, provides the foundation for the differentiation or generalization of various marketing activities. In this respect, the culture concept in marketing has always been an essentialist one. Culture, to recycle a popular metaphor used to illustrate the concept to “laypeople” in business schools, is like the water fish swim in; it represents the taken-for-granted physical and ideological environment. One outcome of this essentialism is the way marketers and marketing scholars generally conceive of their relation to culture (in this volume, Brannen provides a paradigmatic discussion of approaches to culture, and Nakata offers a philosophy of science discussion). Here we can identify two major legacies, both originating in the first half of the 1980s. Levitt (1983) argued that though cultural differences exist, they can be overcome and to some extent ignored by marketing strategy, because what he conceives of as non-cultural product attributes, such as low prices and high product quality, always overwhelm differences in cultural tastes and preferences. Hofstede (1983), on the contrary, argued that culture does indeed have consequences that cannot be overlooked by business practitioners and developed a highly influential conceptual apparatus and measurement instrument for breaking down culture into operational dimensions.

The aim of this chapter, in exploring different relations between marketing and culture, is twofold. First, we review the legacies of both Levitt and Hofstede in relation to bringing the concepts of both globalization and culture into marketing literature. This is followed by a deconstruction of some of the assumptions about the nature of globalization and cross-cultural differences that underlie these two positions, in the light of recent globalization theory. The aim is to demonstrate how culture changes as a consequence of globalization processes. Second, because culture from these perspectives is seen as an antecedent and static background variable that determines the scope of variation in marketing and consumption practices, the impact of marketing on culture is normally not taken into consideration in international marketing (Bouchet, 1995). This impact, if addressed at all, mainly appears as an issue in the cases of directly negative or harmful effects of advertisements, for instance, when oriented toward children. In contrast, the aim here is to show how the relations between marketing and culture in conditions of globalization lead to a change in useful ideas about culture itself. This chapter offers some theoretical guidance for understanding the growing importance of marketing for the creation of what we call reflexive culture.

Based on globalization theory, we argue that reflexive culture is an idiom for the expression of new types of potential consumer practice, a cultural response in a time in which national and transnational political-economic entities no longer enjoy the legitimacy and power to socialize through the provision of integrating values with which citizens willingly or unconsciously affiliate (Beck and Sznaider, 2006).

The current accelerated phase of globalization refers to a period with changing and increasingly rapid global flows, in which boundaries across national cultures are dissolving and the landscapes they demarcate are transgressed by evolving real and/or virtual “culturescapes” of technology, media, finance, mixed ethnicities, and ideas (Appadurai, 1990). Cultural encounters proliferate, which has led to an increasing interest in identity-constructive processes in the globalizing world, not least through processes of consumption (Friedman, 1994a). Numerous studies have addressed specific marketing and consumption issues in this multicultural world, and the term “consumptionscapes” has been proposed to foreground the role of consumption as a global flow overlapping those proposed by Appadurai (Ger and Belk, 1996). These and related studies have pushed theoretical debates beyond the discussions of globalization centered on themes of static cultural similarities and differences or strategic choices between standardization or adaptation so prevalent in marketing literature. Consequently, simplistic dichotomous explanations must be eschewed and classificatory systems, such as global–local, Eastern–Western, individualistic–collectivistic, vertical–horizontal, masculine–feminine, and foreign–domestic, must be used with some caution. As Fiske (2002, p. 8) puts it, these binaries are “abstraction[s] that formalize our ideological representation of the antithetical other, a cultural vision of the rest of the world characterized in terms of what we imagine we are not.” This clearly has methodological implications for consumer and marketing research in relation to globalization.

Such criticism evidently does not imply the irrelevance of culture—quite the contrary. In this respect, we agree with Hofstede so far as to conclude that culture cannot and should not be ignored. Hence, we start our deconstruction with Levitt’s reflections on the irrelevance of cultural differences in a global market economy.

How Levitt was completely wrong . . .

The term “globalization” has become one of the most used and abused buzzwords of the last couple of decades. This has given rise to much public debate and confusion about the causes and nature of, and benefits to and risks from, the globalization of markets. Within the field of marketing, the globalization concept is more sedate, since it was used by
one of the discipline’s grand old scholars in a seminal article 25 years ago. We are, of course, referring to Theodore Levitt’s 1983 *Harvard Business Review* piece, “The Globalization of Markets.” This article contains one of the most disputed marketing hypotheses of recent decades. Most of the discussion has centered on the validity of his central idea, namely, that the most successful global business strategy would be a totally standardized approach that ignores what he deemed “superficial” differences in world markets.

Levitt refers to technology as the single most important driving device in the process of the globalization of markets. This can be contrasted with Appadurai’s (1990) argument proposing five different “scapes”—ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes—as the structuring forces of globalization. Each of them contributes to diminishing the importance of the traditional geographical landscapes and their distances, proximities, and obstacles as decisive for the global social infrastructures. Even if it can be argued that technological development, or the technoscape, is a precondition for the other scapes, this is by no means self-evident. Such a linear explanation misses the complex interrelatedness of global change processes. For example, global financial markets necessitate and encourage further development of information technology, and technological development is fostered by an Ideoscape idealizing 24-hour markets, global arbitrage, market heroism, and so forth.

Although there is evident truth in the argument that technology drives technological commonality in marketing and consumption platforms, and even the demand for participation in the modern consumer world, the argument becomes problematic the moment that Levitt jumps to the conclusion that this desire for modernity as an ideoscape, in Appadurai’s terms, leads to demand for standardized products. Levitt draws on historian Daniel Boorstin and his concept of the “Republic of Technology” as support for his argument. However, another of Boorstin’s (1962) works on “the image” could have been used to illustrate a contrasting feature of globalizing markets. This feature is the spread of commercial hype that constantly nurtures and nourishes itself on symbolic distinction (see Baudrillard, 1970, for an elaboration of this idea). We will return to this argument subsequently.

Levitt’s argument pursues the idea that companies can gain competitive advantage by exploiting various economies of scale and thus “declimate competitors that still live in the disabling grip of old assumptions about how the world works” (Levitt, 1983, p. 92). On the one hand, it is true that the globalizing market conditions are instituting new market rules that make it impossible for companies to ignore international market developments, even if they operate only in domestic markets. On the other hand, Ger (1999) has pointed out how through the use of various strategies, local companies may “outlocal” their global competitors and support and/or create domestic consumptionscapes that offer alternatives to the global standard (Ger and Belk, 1996), a twist ignored by Levitt.

The assertion “gone are accustomed differences in national or regional preference” (Levitt 1983, p. 92) is as grossly overstated as the outcry that a global rather than multinational strategy is not a matter of opinion but of necessity. Indeed, it is easy to identify emergent regional consumer preferences, such as the resurgence of artisanal and militantly British cheese culture (see http://www.thecheeseweb.com). The ubiquitous and frequently doggedly managerial discussions about the various degrees of optimal standardization versus adaptation (Wind and Douglas, 1988) in fact may conceal the observation that standardized branding and marketing strategies may say a lot more about marketers’ powerful and persistent globalizing ideoscape than about the alleged homogeneity of consumer preferences (Applbaum, 2000; Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991).

The standard globalization argument maintains that brands and products are containers of meanings that are transferred to the consumer when he or she is exposed to these products or brands. But as Miller (1998) so aptly demonstrates, the meaning universe of Coca-Cola, the king of global brands, is subject to local interpretations that do more than slightly alter the meanings of the global brand. Indeed, as the title of Miller’s work indicates, Coke is viewed by some local consumers as a local product. In international markets, brand meaning is not absorbed passively but rather in divergent and culturally determined ways. Miller (1998) shows that in Trinidad, the meaning of Coca-Cola is defined by its categorization as a “black” as opposed to a “red” sweet drink (indeed, as the exemplar of that category) and by its associations with non-Asian Trinidadians, with rum and coke, with traditional conceptions of Trinidadian modernity, and with consumer support for a long-standing indigenous bottler. And even the CEO of Coca-Cola has stated that it is a multi-local rather than a global product (Askegaard and Csaba, 2000). Furthermore, that Coca-Cola is “welcomed by everyone” (Levitt, 1983, p. 93) is a sort of monocultural (marketing) myopia, contradicted not merely by the existence of the term “coca-colonization,” a term coined to express the fact that Coca-Cola, and the American/Western lifestyle it represents, is not welcomed by everyone, but also by the emergence of anti-Coke brands. Doppelganger brands (Thompson et al., 2006) such as
Mecca Cola or Qibla Cola are explicitly positioned as anti-global brands, even if the global diffusion of bottling and distribution technologies and brands as an ideoscope fosters their success.

In general, the anecdotal presence of Western goods and companies is taken as diagnostic of the globalization of preferences. However, Western goods and services may serve a multitude of purposes, be imbued with very different meanings, and reflect different kinds of preferences (e.g., Belk and Zhou, 2004; Eckhardt and Houston, 2002; Friedman, 1994b). For example, the contributors to the collection edited by Watson (1997) show diverse appropriations of McDonald's in several Asian cultures. Consequently, the presence of McDonald's, Sony, Coca-Cola, and other Western brands in consumer markets everywhere in no way proves global preferences, as Levitt would have it when he states that "everywhere everything gets more and more like everything else as the world's preference structure is relentlessly homogenized" (1983, p. 93). This claim is a classic and reductionist empiricism.

The major problem with Levitt's argument is, then, that the globalization process is seen as basically demand-driven—perhaps not surprising for the man whose claim to fame is based on pointing out the widespread disease of "marketing myopia." This idea is summed up in the following line: "The commonality of preference leads inescapably to the standardization of products, manufacturing, and the institutions of trade and commerce" (Levitt, 1983, p. 93). Such claims open his argument to critiques from a variety of scholars pointing to Levitt's lack of understanding of the notion of culture and his lack of respect for persistent and resurgent cultural differences in the globalizing world. Many of these criticisms have been directed against Hofstede, either theoretically and/or empirically, in order to demonstrate that culture indeed has consequences. In the following, we attempt to add nuance to this established critique by discussing whether a reference to cross-cultural differences in the Hofstede paradigm might suffer from certain weaknesses, similar to those of Levitt's argument, in that neither side captures the cultural changes brought about by the globalization process or provides appropriate guidance to scholars and managers wrestling with them.

... Even when he was right

The standard definition of culture provided by Hofstede in his writings is that culture is "the collective programming of the mind" (e.g., Hofstede, 1980) that can be used to distinguish categories of people. Although Hofstede acknowledges that such categories may reflect different types of cultural differentiations (e.g., regional cultures, organizational cultures, gender cultures), the prime focus of his research has been putatively national cultural differences. Indeed, his whole project sprang from the discovery that an allegedly strong organization culture in a large multinational corporation was unable to override national cultural differences among employees. Hofstede (1983) argues that there are three reasons national culture is crucial for understanding managerial practices. Nationality is important first for its political importance: Nations organize formal and informal institutional and legal systems. Second, nations are important sociologically, as symbols that serve as points of identification for its citizens. Third, and most important for Hofstede, national culture is important psychologically because it is imprinted in our brains through the aforementioned "collective programming," and conditions us to interpret situations and find solutions to problems according to inherited cultural schemes.

Globalization challenges Hofstede's assumption on all three levels. First, institutional and legal arrangements are increasingly subject to international regulation, whether from the IMF, EU, NAFTA, WTO, ICC, or other organizations. Second, the current political scene demonstrates that, in many cases, the monopoly of the nation-state, sanctioned by its membership in the UN and other types of international recognition in terms of consumer identification, is challenged by regional and local identities, as well as by increased global mobility. Bauman's (1998) "tourists" and "vagabonds"—those who are free and those who are forced to move in the global space—are caught in contemporary identity political systems in which new post-assimilationist ethnic identities (Askegaard et al., 2005) coexist with cosmopolitanism (Thompson and Tambiah, 1999). Furthermore, we witness the dramatic emergence of regional identities and separatist tendencies in "old Europe"—Belgium, Catalonia, Brittany, Scotland, Kosovo, Euskal Herria (Basque country)—all associated with the invention of consumer traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) and a growing interest in searching for local cultural roots and identity systems (Bray, 2006; Rigo and Rahola, 2007; Sahlin, 1993). Third, the search for cultural roots engenders a challenge for Hofstede's psychological argument about the importance of nationality, but in a paradoxical way, because at first glance, it confirms its importance. However, a change from an unconscious "programming of the mind" to a more strategic "choice of cultural profile," as discussed subsequently, makes the use of survey measurement instruments such as Hofstede's much more problematic, because strategically chosen cultural identities invite respondents to answer questions strategically.
The immediate consequences can be summarized in the argument that in a context of increasing cultural interpenetration, migration, and multiculturalism, using the nation as a proxy for culture becomes problematic (Douglas and Craig, 1997). The inability of social theory, broadly defined, to explain transnational phenomena has rendered existing frameworks based on nation-states increasingly problematic (Robinson, 1998). As Robinson (1998, p. 564) argues, “nations are no longer linked externally to a broader system but internally to a singular global social formation.” Furthermore, as Beck and Sznaider (2006, p. 6) argue, the decisive point is “that national organization as a structuring principle of societal and political action can no longer serve as the orienting reference point for the social scientific observer.” Consequently, scholars from anthropology (Schiller, 2005), political science (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002), sociology (Beck, 2000; Robinson, 1998), and geography (Taylor, 1996) label the use of national framing in research “methodological nationalism” and call for a paradigmatic reorientation to explain transnational phenomena such as migration, global multiculturalism (i.e., multiculturalism that crosses national boundaries; Cohen, 1997; Pieterse, 2007), and cultural hybridity, including hybrid consumer preferences and behaviors (Archer et al., 2007; Çağlar, 2004). Kjeldgaard and colleagues (2006) offer a discussion of the implications of such a paradigm shift for qualitative research in marketing.

It is thus our point that globalization simultaneously challenges the assumption of distinct national differences and the methodological foundation of Hofstede’s survey instrument. Obviously, proponents of Hofstede and similar comparative instruments may argue that this criticism fails to acknowledge that cultural changes in the direction of greater cultural similarity will just show up as changes in positions in the different scales, as for example when the level of gross domestic product (GDP) in a country is correlated with the degree of individualism, as measured by Hofstede’s (1983) cultural index. Eventually, according to this logic, globalization will lead to decreasing differences in at least some of the indexed value profiles of the different countries. But it will not diminish the value of the index as such. This counterargument, however, builds on the assumption that what is engendered by globalization is, first and foremost, a process of global homogenization in the “programming processes of the minds” but not an alteration of the programming process itself. Cultures change, but “culture” remains the same. We would like to argue that there is growing evidence that this may not be the case.

Various attempts have been made to home in on the concept of globalization. We sketch the overall development in theories of globalization next, but first must make two points about globalization: (1) Globalization, as we see it, is a process that problematizes the relationship between geographical and social relations (Waters, 1995) and (2) globalization encompasses a wide range of social and cultural spheres (the notion of Appadurai’s [1990] “scapes”). The outcomes and manifestations of globalization have been much debated. Some have argued that globalization can be characterized as a universalizing and homogenizing process that creates a new social situation, in which small local cultures erode and become Westernized—in essence, arguing along the same lines as Levitt, though with a distinctly pessimistic outlook about the consequences of such a development (Waters, 1995). Others insist on the autonomy and uniqueness of local cultures that are able to resist the influx of Western culture or at least use it merely as superficial entertainment.

Some have tried to get past this dichotomous debate by considering homogenizing (globalizing) and heterogenizing (localizing) processes as part and parcel of globalization. Such an insight is encompassed in the notion of “glocalization” (Robertson, 1995), which widens the notion of globalization because the local (and localization) is seen as constitutive of globalization rather than contradictory to it. Central to this line of thought is that global flows are not just one-way, center-to-periphery but also periphery-to-center flows (Appadurai, 1990), as in the flow of “authentic” products from the periphery to the center along the channels of distribution established by Fair Trade organizations. Furthermore, local cultures reinterpret the meaning of the imported symbols (as in the case of Coca-Cola evoked previously). Some of the manifestations of glocalization have been conceptualized as instances of “creolization” or “hybridization,” which are essentially new cultural forms that emerge as the global is incorporated within the local (Pieterse, 1995). The new cultural forms are seen as mixes of often seemingly incompatible cultural symbols and practices that nevertheless become local in meaning in the conduct of everyday life (e.g., Bray, 2006).

These mixes of the global and the local are at play in James’s (1996) study of food discourses in Great Britain. The study provides an illustrative example of the multifaceted nature of the articulation of globalization processes at the local level. James organizes her findings around four discourses—globalism, exoticism (qualified as the “expatriate” discourse by James), creolization, and nostalgia—each of which is constructed around perceptions of local and global, self and other.
As has been argued elsewhere (e.g., Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2007), these discourses of the global and the local can be organized around two dimensions: scope and compatibility. Scope basically is a geographical dimension, such as whether the food culture is logically available on a global scale or whether it is logically tied to a specific geographical locality. Compatibility refers to the "fit" that certain food types have with other food cultures, that is, which foods can and cannot be changed, added to, fused, and so on. The decisive difference is the dependence of the food discourses on a preexisting script describing the essentially culturally correct way of preparing and eating a particular kind of food. This script can be in the form of either exotic or foreign authenticity, characterized by authentic otherness (e.g., a "real" Italian, Thai, Indian meal). This is the expatriate discourse. Or it can be characterized as the expression of authentic culinary authority, often perceived to be under threat from the invasion of global fast food and foreign, authentic, or creolized cuisines, which must be maintained in purified form (hence, incompatible with other food cultures)—the nostalgic discourse. Using these two dimensions, the discourses can be organized in a two-by-two matrix, as shown in Figure 6.1.

A given cultural manifestation, such as a meal, can be placed within one of these discourses. However, this placement is determined by perceptions about scope and compatibility, rather than some intrinsic attribute of the meal. The discourses emerge as perceptions of what is considered to be local and global in particular contexts. These perceptions, however, are dynamic rather than static, because they are continuously (re)articulated and reconstructed in a negotiation of cultural identity—negotiation intensifies as consumers are increasingly confronted with images of the Other through the globalization process.

So where does Levitt have a point? Levitt's falsity rested in his assumption of a convergence of culture—that is, a convergence of meaning of content. However, as we discussed previously, in considering homogenizing processes, we cannot ignore the influence of the supply side in shaping globally accessible images of "the good life" and thus generating similarities in consumer desires across cultures (Belk et al., 2003). Nevertheless, there are homogenizing tendencies on the demand side, to stay within the market terminology, which would support Levitt's argument, except on other premises. These premises first and foremost have to do with the globalization of fragmentation and, in a broader context, with the reflexive consumption of culture.

There are consumption objects and practices that are available on a global scale, but this presence does not originate from a one-way flow from center to periphery. Rather, in order to survive as distinct cultural identities, each culture must adopt the logic of the market and commodify its culture so that it is available and present for both direct and mediated tourist consumption (Firat, 1997). The implication of this is that there is a plethora of consumption objects of diverse cultural origin in the global marketplace, including marketed ethnic enclaves such as Chinatowns, American theme restaurants like Planet Hollywood, Arabian-language satellite channels, Oriental inspiration in fashion themes, and so on. So obviously, Levitt was right insofar as American and Western products are sellable on a worldwide scale—together with products from many other parts of the world. Firat (1997) describes this availability as a "Globalization of Fragmentation," such that what is available in one place is also available in any other place. There is thus a multilayeredness of commercialized elements of cultures existing side by side, a kind of selective cultural mosaic. The simultaneous multilayeredness of commercialized cultural elements enables the consumer to switch between consuming the cosmopolitan and the creolized, the exotic and the nostalgic.

New consumption opportunities pose new existential choices for a major part of the world's population. As noted by Bauman (1998), even vagabonds have access to at least the images of the good life in consumer society. The presence of both global and exotic cultural symbols, alongside local ones in any given locality, expands the resources available—if only as a basis for desire, for day dreaming—for hedonic

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![Figure 6.1 A matrix of cultural glocalization discourses](image-url)
consumption and identity-play. There is therefore a demand for new
sensations and experiences in the market, which enables and brings
forth cultural differences in the marketplace. As such, there is in one
sense, as Levitt claimed, a homogenization of demand, yet this demand
is for differences that fuel social distinctions, rather than for uniform,
standardized products only.

Where do these reflections take us in terms of our juxtaposition
of Levitt and Hofstede as proponents of global homogenization and
the importance of cultural differences, respectively? Both Levitt's
and Hofstede's works have been instrumental in bringing academic
attention to globalization and cultural difference within marketing.
However, we have to go beyond these "truths" in order to establish a
framework for understanding the relationship between marketing and
culture in an age of globalization. Levitt was right in pointing out the
strong disciplining and structuring dynamics of the market economy in
enforcing globalization. Hofstede was right in insisting that culture has
consequences, though in a way that the Hofstede cultural index cannot
take into consideration.

Levitt's and Hofstede's major fallacy, and that of the marketing field
in general, has been to rely on an essentialist understanding of culture;
these theories rely on a perception of closed cultures. In the following,
we will argue that culture is not reducible to an essentialist category
that operates like an independent background variable. Rather, it is an
organized network of systematic diversity of principles of action and
understanding. A culture is reflexively negotiated on a continuous basis,
exactly as a result of globalized scaping processes and the increasing
multilayeredness of commercialized cultural contents.

Marketing and the notion of cultural reflexivity

In this section, we will argue that marketing further strengthens certain
processes of cultural change that potentially may alter fundamentally
the way we look at culture from a marketing perspective. We will
buttress our arguments by relating them to some of the more recent
reflections on culture from the field of cultural theory.

To study the fields of globalization and consumer behavior, as well as
how the two influence each other, two approaches appear: (1) providing
knowledge about globalization by studying consumer lives, or (2) providing
knowledge on consumer lives by studying the processes of globalization.
The implication of the first approach would be to study the everyday
lives of consumers in order to observe processes of globalization at
work—an approach termed "mundane experience of deterritorialization"
by Tomlinson (1999, p. 113 ff). The implication of the second, more
institutional approach would be to study the structures and institutions
that enable and fuel the process of globalization and hence have an
influence on the everyday life of consumers. There is little doubt, as we
saw in the discussion of Levitt's text and the review of many cultural
studies, that more and more products and brands are present on a
global or quasi-global scale. However, as we noted in relation to Levitt,
this presence is not necessarily or primarily due to a homogenization
of preferences but rather to the structures and institutions of global
markets.

In other words, the question becomes: Should we analyze changes
in consumer culture, indeed, the increased consumption of culture, in
order to understand the increasing commodification of culture(s) tied
to the globalization processes? Or should we investigate the strong
institutional force of market institutions, such as advertising and mar-
ket, that enforce commodification and globalization processes? This
problem of a phenomenological versus an institutional approach con-
stitutes something akin to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and practice.
For Bourdieu (1979), habitus is a structuring system of consumption
sifications in which the individual agent is both influenced by and
recontextualizes the overall system. The way this habitus is enacted in everyday
life is through systems of practices, which include both what we intention-
ally choose to do and the tacit normative schemes that compel us
to do things in certain ways and not others, and interpret the world
according to certain schema and not others (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde,
2005). According to practice theory, then, it makes little sense to distin-
guish too sharply between the intentional and the norm-driven aspects
of our behavior. Reflexive culture, from a practice theory perspective,
becomes a reflection of both culture consumed and the role of identity
politics in the ideological constitution of the cultural, consuming self.

If we draw together the institutional structuring forces of, say, eth-
nicity and the market and the actual and intentional consumption
patterns of the world's consumers, we see the interplay between the
local and the global in this context. We witness the power of global
and homogenizing structures, which enable particular articulations of local
culture, meaning that there is a global system that promotes difference at
the local level, such as the food system we described previously. This is
the point made by Wilk (1996) in his critical discussion of the tendency
to regard the global fragmentation of markets and consumer choices as
a liberatory movement, providing more freedom for consumer choices.
He suggests the idea of “global structures of common difference” to describe the global institutional framework within which the shaping of consumer choices takes place. Such structures include McDonaldized retailing forms, Disneyfied leisure forms, brands, cosmopolitan cuisine, and many others.

A logical outcome of both these examples of how globalization and marketing processes together structure the living conditions of and identity formation processes for consumers is that this structuration is increasingly reflexive, in particular as it pertains to the concept of culture. That is, culture becomes reflexive. By reflexivity, we mean that individual actors (consumers, marketers) are aware of dynamic social structures; engage in constant self-monitoring of action (consumers’ choices, marketers’ strategic use of culture); and attempt to engage in correction of individual action, all of which in turn affect social structures (Giddens, 1991). A reflexive culture is hence one in which marketers and consumers are aware of cultures and cultural symbolism, and monitor and modify their actions accordingly (marketing strategies, or consumers’ strategies of identity with regard to social differentiation), which consequently feeds into the dynamic change process of culture and globalization. In such a cultural context, discourses of cultural membership and difference become a mode of being. Consumption, as Douglas and Isherwood (1979) pointed out long ago, substantiates otherwise rather fluid, discursive cultural categories. This leads to a new situation for cross-cultural studies. For culturally sensitive marketing scholars, culture usually appears as the independent variable through which variations in behavior could and should be explained. But when culture becomes reflexive, it becomes in itself part of what should be explained.

Let us elaborate a little on this curious corollary of globalization, the apparent explosion of both claims to ethnicity and expressions of subculture through consumption. Many of the world’s most brutal conflicts are waged in terms of culture, from the Turkic-speaking Uighurs in China to the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, the Maya in Guatemala and Mexico, and so on. Transnational ethnic dress enjoys renewed popularity among African-Americans in the United States. Wearing the Islamic veil becomes a politicized act. Ethnic cuisine, such as “Mexican” and even the creolized “Tex-Mex” version is hot transnationally. Ethnic arts and experiences commercialized to appeal to cosmopolitan tastes figure in treasured touristic excursions to New Guinea, the Pacific, Latin America, Africa, and the American Southwest. Culture itself is marketed across ethnic boundaries, as in the attempts to appropriate Native American spirituality by some New Agers or to popularize Islamic sacred music (Shannon, 2003). And commercially reinvented, culturally or subculturally affiliated holidays that enliven the calendar, such as Halloween, Carnival, or Cinco de Mayo, are marketed across borders. This consciousness of the consumption of culture is due not least to the constant confrontation with “other” cultures, whether through immigration, global businesses and expatriate positions, tourism, or mass media.

In these examples, commodified culture becomes part of a global structuring framework used to mark new sources of differentiation between consumers and people (Bouchet, 1995). However, one is inclined to ask, with Firat (1995, p. 120), whether a culture so marketized [is] true to its original identity? Is a culture that ensures its livelihood through commodifying its qualities preserving what it originally was, or is it preserving something different from the original although resembling it in some respects?

These questions reveal the problematic issue of the authenticity of a culture that depends on a script of authenticity for its own persistence. This issue is evident in another study (Wilk, 1999) in which as part of a search for national cultural identity, Belizeans construct a “true” Belizean food culture. Wilk shows that Belizeans see this “authentic” food culture as an element in the global scheme of what constitutes a national culture; thus, they enter into an intense articulation of the local within a global structure. Other examples emerge in the domain of popular music (Bilby, 1999; Marlin-Curiel, 2001).

This is what we define as cultural reflexivity: a simulation, where cultural tradition increasingly exists mainly as a reflexive and conscious practical realization of some idea of culture. Culture, then, could be said to increasingly take the shape of hype, a simulation of a possibly imaginary or purified version of that particular culture. The problem boils down to the essentialism and the uncertainty about what constitutes the essentials of a culture. A similar problem of what we could call divergent or fragmented essentialism haunts Douglas and Craig’s (1997) otherwise elaborate attempt to search for a new unit of analysis in cross-cultural consumer research.

Given the weaknesses recognized in the essentialist cultural position, researchers sometimes take recourse in the idea of hybridity (e.g., Pieterse, 1995). Hybridity alludes to the idea that any culture must be seen as an amalgamation of various inputs from other cultures locally adopted and changed to form a new constellation. But to indicate that
present cultures are hybrid in the sense that they have all adopted cultural forms, consumption patterns, ideas, media, and technology from other cultures does not solve the problem. The idea of hybridity is itself too dependent on essentialism, because the hybrid puzzle, albeit implicitly, is made up of “pure” cultural traits brought from a “pure” origin somewhere (see Geertz, 1973). Wouldn’t the reference to hybrid cultures as an ever more valid portrayal of postmodern mosaics of original and authentic elements spin into an infinite regress, where it becomes hybridity all the way down? The essential and “authentic” culture, slippery as an eel, perpetually slides out of our hands until it is lost in the mysterious depths of the Bermuda Triangle in the Sargasso Sea.

Not only is the notion of hybrid cultures subject to the same essentialist problem as the culture construct, as employed in marketing theory in general. The process of cultural reflexivity also robs hybridization of its seeming naturalness. As Thompson and Troester (2002) demonstrate, hybridity may in itself become an ideology expressed in various kinds of New Age holisms. “The best of different worlds” discourse in Thompson and Troester’s analysis of national health consumption or, indeed, the dissolution of differences in what Hamner (1996) has called a “global ecumene” (e.g., religious movements of the type “there-is-only-one-God,-we-just-call-him[sic]-different-names”) provide examples of reflexive cultural hybridity.

A more fruitful approach to the understanding of culture than hybridization would be to understand culture and cultural difference as globalizing aspects of modernity (Hannerz, 1996), a “universalization of the particular” (Robertson, 1995), or a globalization of the idea of the concept of culture. Culture in such a perspective itself becomes a “global structure of common differences.” With self-consciousness about culture (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008; Davila, 2001), people are trying not to become just like us but more like themselves (Sahlins, 1993) and hence fuelling further cultural reflexivity.

The process of cultural reflexivity necessitates a new vernacular for talking about culture, the relations between culture and consumption, and the relations between culture and marketing. It does not necessarily mean that all traits we would call “cultural” in standard language use become reflexive or that tacit knowledge no longer exists in society. But in contexts in which culture is considered as a project rather than as a set of given, existential conditions, arguably some of the connections that are most typical and descriptive for cultural self-consciousness, it becomes obvious how culture not only determines consumption but also how consumption is applied as a determinant of culture. And it becomes evident that culture not only provides the framework for unfolding marketing activities but that marketing increasingly constitutes the framework for how culture unfolds as in commercialized and marketer-constructed holidays and celebration and market-place orchestration of ethnicity (Bouget, 1995).

Given the proposed inversion of culture, from an independent variable to a malleable set of institutional elements and a marketable set of symbols, it becomes apparent that in spite of homogenization processes due to globalization, culture does not lose relevance. This point is where Levitt was completely wrong even as he was right. At the same time, culture’s consequences can no longer be defined in the universalistic and essentializing terms that are the foundation of Hofstede’s project. As we have seen, what seems to differentiate cultures can often conceal profound similarities. The existence of transnational cultural communities, such as environmentalists or investment bankers, testifies to how global ideoscapes and local (e.g., French; British) contexts interact to generate cultural formats (“environmentalism” and “investment banking”) that are glocal in the profoundest sense: always tied to global imagery of environmental issues or finance capital, and always lived and experienced in a local political and commercial setting. The glocal is incorporated into the local according to its standard practices, and, so far, Hofstede might have been helpful for understanding the encounter of environmentalism or investment banking with high power distance versus low power distance contexts. But the reactivity of the local members of the global community of environmentalists or investment bankers leads to a relativization of the local, understood through the lens of the global, and the global, understood through the lens of the local. Henceforth, French or British culture is no longer what it used to be, and its universalistic and essentializing measurements start to conceal more than they reveal.

Conclusion

The approaches to culture adopted within marketing are, perhaps not unsurprisingly, deeply embedded in the tendencies of Western modernism of “transforming difference into essence” (Friedman, 1995, p. 80). This tendency explains the allure of Appadurai’s (1990) scapes in terms of describing sets of globalizing practices without falling into the trap of “culturalizing” these practices. The ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes remind us that culture is practiced and constituted out of practice (Bourdieu, 1979; Friedman, 1995).
And they remind us about the role of marketing as one of the most important commercial global systems of practice that has “a propensity to produce the kinds of identity spaces that we refer to as ‘modernities’” (Friedman, 1995, p. 88). Ethnicity, culture, subculture, hybridization, and creolization are all examples of such modernities, constructed and constituted in part by marketing practices, basically essentializing themselves either in material culture or in more ephemeral spheres of cultural essence. Most often, though, as demonstrated by the example of Belizean food culture (Wilk, 1999), we deal not with one or the other but with both. Marketed goods in this light become material manifestations of the “cultural ideoscapes.” But this should not lead us to confuse essentializations with essence. Marketing scholars have hitherto tended to neglect the complexities at stake in the production of culture. In light of our arguments, comparative analysis is no longer the most obvious goal for research activities, but rather a starting point. Culture, rather than an explanatory framework of essential traits, becomes a paradigm based on which the praxis and practices of marketers and consumers become meaningful to researchers. Culture is not an object of study but a necessary approach for obtaining insights into the ongoing constitution of human societies.

Strategies for understanding ethnically or geographically located consumer culture should move away from modernist efforts to describe (presumably) temporally or spatially stable cultural identities or even lifestyles fixed within the boundaries of nation-states. Instead, we should move toward a strategy more appropriate to the emergent globalized situation, one focused on analyzing strategies and processes whereby meaningful, but inherently malleable and unmanageable, consumer identities are created, legitimated, contested, and resisted. In some cases, it may appear meaningful to classify these processes as creolization, hybridization, or even domestication when goods are recontextualized by consumers and institutions. But this classification must be done with great caution, because in itself it requires an authoritative performance, by which temporary adherence to a limited set of cultural conventions is effected.

If culture is no longer what it used to be, one possible solution in terms of methodology is to have recourse to the seemingly stable unit of analysis, the individual. Within consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), this recourse may be witnessed by the proliferation of phenomenological approaches to consumer behavior, such as in Journal of Consumer Research, the leading journal in the field. As interesting as they are, such studies provide a very microcultural perspective on consumption patterns and generally lack a broader cultural framework for the understanding and structuration of these issues. Hence, we note the continued importance of balancing approaches that focus on consumers’ phenomenological worlds of self-construction and identity formation with a more institutionally based approach that enables us to understand those processes in marketing, organization, finance, politics, and economics, which provide the plethora of consumption opportunities or, in other words, shape the universe in which consumer choices can unfold.

References


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**Part IV Extensions of and Advances in Culture Frameworks**