

**GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR:
AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF DUTCH CONSUMERS**

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Abstract

Globalization, driven by worldwide flows of media, migration and technologies, is shaping people's lives and modifying behaviors. Increasingly, people live in a global ecumene, which describes a process of cultural synchronization resulting in the emergence of a global consumer culture (GCC). Drawing from a sample of Dutch consumers, this study considers the presence and consequences of the interplay of global and local cultural forces on a variety of consumption behaviors. The Dutch population was shown to be highly acculturated to GCC. The findings reveal that GCC is positively associated with the consumption of culture-free products (i.e. consumer electronics, luxuries), while Dutch ethnic identity (DEID) has a positive relationship with the consumption of culture-bound products (i.e. food, clothing). Nomological validity is further established by linking the acculturation to GCC and DEID constructs to key demographic antecedents, as well as to the dispositional constructs of materialism and consumer ethnocentrism.

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Extended Abstract

Up until recently, the sharing and transmission of culture occurred primarily among individuals within close geographic proximity. Today, with the unprecedented scope, frequency, and intensity of intercultural exchanges, culture is seen as a moving concept that permeates national borders (Appadurai, 1990) and blurs traditional boundaries. A global consumer culture (GCC) is emerging whereby people are simultaneously living in a single system and in a fragmented world (Alden et al., 1999; Cowen, 2002). Exposure to global flows, and the extent to which people identify themselves with the world as a whole, varies considerably within and across nation-states (Witkowski, 2005). Under globalization, a growing proportion of people across the world form bicultural identities, with one part rooted in their traditional local cultures and the other emanating from the GCC. The phenomenon of globalization is of paramount importance for today's marketing practitioners who are faced with the decision of standardizing, localizing or using a hybrid strategy when promoting their products and services in foreign markets as well as their home countries. The literature provides little insight to help resolve this dilemma. Yaprak (2008) presents a comprehensive review of the present state of cultural studies in the context of international business and accentuates on the paucity of research pertaining to how culture evolves in response to environmental changes, how local and global cultures influence consumer behavior, and how these events manifest themselves in a non-US context. The present research addresses these issues by identifying the emergence of a global consumer culture and providing a comprehensive depiction of how global and local cultural influences combine to shape consumer behavior, as manifested among Dutch consumers.

At the global level, acculturation to GCC (AGCC) relates to “how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviors that are characteristic of a nascent and deterritorialized GCC”

(Cleveland, 2007: 32). Cleveland and Laroche (2007) developed and validated (across eight countries) a multidimensional scale for measuring AGCC at the individual level, consisting of seven dimensions: exposure to global and foreign mass media (GMM); exposure to and use of the English language (ELU); exposure to marketing activities of multinational corporations (EXM); social interactions through traveling (TRAV); cosmopolitanism (COS); openness and desire to participate in the GCC (OPE); and self-identification with the GCC (IDT). At the local level Dutch ethnic identity (DEID) is defined as an individual's strength of identification with and commitment towards his/her Dutch cultural heritage, and takes in the adherence to the traditional Dutch values and customs which serve as guidelines for appropriate behaviors (Phinney and Ong, 2007). Drawing from the extant literature, Cleveland and Laroche (2007) operationalized a multidimensional structure for EID, which in the present research has been adapted to reflect DEID: native language use (DLANG); local media consumption (MED); local interpersonal relationships (DINTER); self-identification with the local culture (ID); desire to maintain one's own culture (MDC); family structure and sex roles (FAM) and participate in local customs (DCUS).

Research Context and Hypotheses

As part of the European Union, there is a constant flow of people, products and media moving freely across the Netherlands, thereby exposing its citizens to myriad cultures, including the GCC. It is therefore expected that the Dutch are highly acculturated to GCC. Furthermore, it is expected that the AGCC and DEID constructs are negatively correlated (Cleveland, 2007), implying that individuals holding a strong sense of ethnic identity will be less acculturated to GCC than individuals with a weaker desire to maintain their Dutch identity.

Under globalization, while individuals are generally freer in selecting and incorporating cultural elements from various origins into their identities and belief systems (Ogden et al., 2004), we advocate that certain individual-level factors predispose people to certain choices. The hypotheses of the present study pertain to the dispositional and behavioral outcomes of the global and local cultures. Materialism

(MAT) is characteristic of the consumption-based orientation of Western societies (Belk, 1996) and it is expected that MAT is positively related to AGCC and negatively related to DEID. Consumer ethnocentrism (CET) describes individuals who strongly prefer purchasing products which originate from their own culture (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) and it is predicted that CET is positively related to DEID and negatively linked to AGCC. Consumer behaviors are conceptualized in terms of the consumption frequency (and alternatively, the importance of ownership) of a wide variety of products grouped according to eight product categories: global and local foods (9 and 3 items, respectively), global and local clothing (4 and 1 items, respectively), personal care (3 items), appliances (5 items), consumer electronics (9 items), and luxuries (6 items). It is hypothesized that the consumption of culture-bound products (i.e., local foods and clothing) are more strongly influenced by DEID than by AGCC, while the consumption of culture-free products (i.e., global foods and clothing, consumer electronics and luxuries) are more strongly influenced by AGCC than by DEID. Behaviors associated with personal care products and household appliances (i.e., culture-irrelevant) are not expected to be dominated by either DEID or AGCC. The study's hypotheses provide a basis for our conceptual model (figure 1), which will be empirically tested among the Dutch population. Age, income and education are included as control variables.

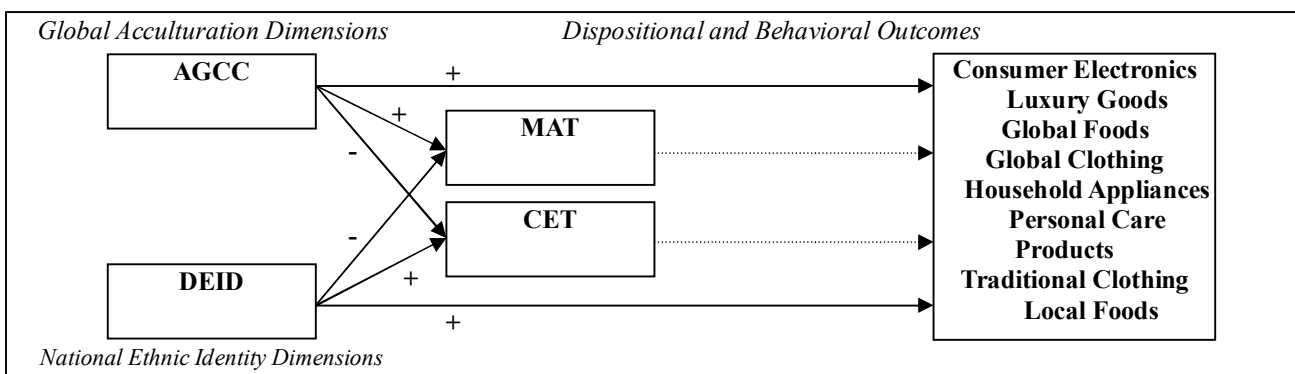


Figure 1: Conceptual model depicting the dynamic influences of AGCC and DEID on consumer behavior

Methodology

Data was collected by intercepting consumers along busy streets during the months of July and August of 2007. A survey was distributed to 740 Dutch individuals living in the four largest cities in the

Netherlands, namely Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht, of which 265 were returned, representing a 36 % response rate. 18 surveys were discarded due to incompleteness or because the respondents did not abide by the qualifying criterion of being native Dutch or living in the Netherlands for at least 20 years. A total of 247 data sets were employed for the analyses.

Analysis and Results

A series of exploratory factor analyses were conducted on the measures predicted to compose the two main constructs under study, namely AGCC and DEID. Items exhibiting poor psychometric properties were dropped from further analysis and all retained factors had eigenvalues >1 and reliabilities (α) exceeding 0.70. The final EFA solution for AGCC items accounted for 60% of the cumulative variance and contained six factors, namely COS, IDT, ELU, EXM, GMM_{USA} (i.e., exposure to American mass media), and TRAV. The final EFA solution for DEID items accounted for 62% of the total variance and consisted of four factors, namely IDMDC (i.e. ID-MDC combined), DLANG, DMEDIA and DINTER.

To establish the extent to which the Dutch society has acculturated to GCC, a composite AGCC score was established for the Dutch respondents and compared to the composite AGCC scores retrieved from eight countries investigated by Cleveland (2007). The mean score for the Dutch sample ($M_D=4.68$, $sd=0.62$) surpasses that of the aggregate mean AGCC score of all countries ($M_{AVG}=4.31$, $sd=0.63$), supporting the premise that the Dutch population is relatively highly acculturated to GCC. The composite DEID score for the Dutch sample was also compared to the pooled average ethnic identity scores for the eight countries investigated by Cleveland (2007). The mean Dutch identity score ($M_D=5.35$, $sd=0.70$) is lower than the pooled average of the eight countries ($M_{AVG}=5.29$, $sd=0.74$). Furthermore, as predicted, the AGCC and DEID constructs are negatively correlated ($r=-0.22$, $p=0.01$).

Correlational analyses were employed to pinpoint the demographic antecedents and dispositional outcomes corresponding to the global and local cultural influences. Significant findings included the negative correlation between age and AGCC ($r=-0.29$, $p<0.01$), and the negative associations of both

income ($r=-0.14$, $p<0.05$) and education ($r=-0.20$, $p<0.01$) to DEID. Moreover, MAT is positively correlated with AGCC ($r=0.31$, $p<0.01$), while CET is positively correlated with DEID ($r=0.34$, $p<0.01$) and negatively associated with AGCC ($r=-0.18$, $p<0.01$).

The final set of analyses focused on the differential relationships of global and local cultural influences on consumption behavior, by way of a series of nested multiple linear regression analyses (stepwise method). As space limitations preclude a detailed review of all results, we will focus on a subset of the most important significant findings. As hypothesized, only DEID is significantly related to the consumption of traditional Dutch food ($b=0.320$, $p<0.01$) and Dutch fashion ($b=0.329$, $p<0.01$), that is, the culture-bound products. On the other hand, AGCC is significantly associated with the consumption of global foods ($b=0.191$, $p<0.01$), global fashion ($b=0.135$, $p<0.05$), consumer electronics ($b=0.262$, $p<0.01$) and luxuries ($b=0.174$, $p<0.01$), corresponding to culture-free products. The DEID*AGCC interaction is positively associated with the consumption of personal care products ($b=0.228$, $p<0.01$) and household appliances ($b=0.287$, $p<0.01$), while the main effects were insignificant, providing evidence that neither culture has a predominant influence on these particular consumption behaviors. The present study's findings provide evidence that the global culture has a predominant influence on the consumption of culture-free products, while the local culture has a significant effect on the consumption of culture-bound products. Moreover, it is worth observing that materialism, as would be expected, has an impact on the consumption of consumer electronics ($b=0.182$, $p<0.01$) and luxuries ($b=0.231$, $p<0.01$), whereas ethnocentrism influences the consumption of traditional Dutch foods ($b=0.191$, $p<0.01$).

Conclusion

The present study provides compelling evidence of the emergence of a GCC, which impacts consumption behavior in a distinct fashion than does an individual's ethnic culture, contingent on the consumption context (ie. product category). Our main findings reveal that AGCC and DEID are negatively correlated, meaning that the process of acculturation to the GCC is more likely among

consumers with a weaker desire to maintain their ethnic identity. Moreover, AGCC is negatively related to ethnocentrism and age, and positively related to materialism and education, implying that the young generations with high levels of education, valuing material wealth and desiring foreign and global brands are more susceptible to acquire elements of the GCC. On the other hand, DEID is negatively related to education, and positively related to ethnocentrism and age, suggesting that the older generations with ethnocentric tendencies and lower education are more prone to maintain their Dutch ethnic identity. Furthermore, the study's results imply that the consumption of culture-bound products, such as traditional food and clothing, is considerably influenced by people's traditions, customs and local cultures. Conversely, the consumption of culture-free products, such as global brands, luxury items and consumer electronics, is significantly affected by people's exposure to global trends and mass-mediated news, reflecting the values of the emerging GCC.

The globalization of the world market and the acculturation to the GCC by diverse societies carry important implications for marketing researchers and practitioners alike. To these ends, the present study makes several important contributions. Most existing cultural research has focused on the acculturation process of immigrants and ethnic minorities coexisting within the broader mainstream culture, while scant empirical research has investigated cultural and the consequent behavioral changes as a function of globalization and the emergence of a global consumer culture. We showed that this global culture has an influence on Dutch consumers' consumption patterns, and that it differentiates from local cultural influences to impact behavior across various product categories. International researchers and practitioners alike have long segmented consumers at the level of the nation-state. In today's global world, there exists ample theoretical justification – and a small but growing body of empirical evidence – that many consumers worldwide are simultaneously global *and* local, and that the way that these cultural influences combine to impact consumption is context-dependent. By applying this understanding of how culture drives behavior in the global era, firms can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their marketing strategies both within and across national markets.

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