

## **Global Consumer Culture Positioning: the use of Global Consumer Culture Positioning appeals across four European countries**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study proposes a framework of advertising appeals which could be used to express global consumer culture positioning (GCCP) strategy in advertising. The paper examined the use of such appeals in print advertising by comparing 847 advertisements for durable and non-durable goods from four European countries: Poland, Hungary, Ireland, and the UK. Results revealed that contrary to the expectations, GCCP appeals were more often used in advertisements for non-durable goods than durable goods. The study on the other hand confirmed the expectation that GCCP appeals would be more frequently used in advertising in less developed markets than in more developed markets. The proposed framework of GCCP appeals may be useful to practitioners wishing to use this positioning strategy.

**Key words:** global consumer culture, appeals, advertising

## **INTRODUCTION**

Globalisation of the marketplace has led to complex challenges for international brand managers (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor 2010). One of these challenges is the difficulty of advertising to consumers from different cultures. Advertising researchers have examined various ways of communicating with diverse international audiences. Most research in this area has been dominated by studies focusing on the differences and similarities between advertising from different countries, usually employing some cultural dimension frameworks. Such studies have often provided conflicting and inconclusive results and have been criticised for their 'simplistic' view

of cultures (Taylor 2010). Due to the radical changes in the global marketplace and the complex processes occurring when cultures 'collide', scholars have been calling for the inclusion of other theoretical frameworks such as global consumer culture positioning (GCCP) strategy (Taylor 2010, Akaka and Alden 2010, Gammoh, Koh, and Okoroafo 2011). This study, hence, draws on perspectives from global consumer culture and the concept of GCCP to propose and test a framework of advertising appeals which could be used to express the GCCP strategy. In the following section, the concept of global consumer culture and the GCCP strategy are discussed. A framework of GCCP advertising appeals is proposed and subsequently tested in content analysis of advertising from Poland, Hungary, Ireland and the UK. The results and implications are further discussed.

## **GLOBAL CONSUMER CULTURE**

The concept of global consumer culture has emerged from the wider concept of consumer culture. Consumer culture is defined as densely woven network of global connections and extensions through which local cultures are increasingly interpenetrated by the forces of international capital, the global information technology and global media (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Similarly, global consumer culture is a *"cultural entity not associated with a single country, but rather a larger group generally recognized as international and transcending individual national cultures"* (Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra 1999, 80). The concept is described as a collection of common signs and symbols (e.g. brands and values) that are understood by a substantial number of consumers around the world. Global culture of consumption is emerging as a result of the increasing interconnectedness of

varied local cultures as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory.

Ozsomer (2013) argues that the espoused values of the global culture are the ones that reflect the most important values of Western societies, such as freedom of choice; free market; and individual freedom and individual rights. Ozsomer (2013) also points out the fact that due to the constant changes and interactions, consumers add new meanings to global brands which are the drivers of global consumer culture.

Hence, grounded on the proposition that there is a global consumer culture emerging, a new positioning strategy, global consumer culture positioning (GCCP) has been proposed by Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra (1999).

### **GLOBAL CONSUMER CULTURE POSITIONING (GCCP)**

GCCP is a brand positioning strategy which associates the brand with a widely understood and recognised set of symbols and values believed to constitute global consumer culture. In GCCP, the brand, which is defined as a symbol of a global culture, may be purchased by consumers mainly because of reinforcing their membership in that segment. GCCP should resonate with increasingly global segments of consumers who associate similar meanings with certain places, people, and things, and who regard a product, service or brand in essentially the same way regardless of their culture or country (Cleveland and Laroche 2007).

Despite the extant literature describing or testing the concept of GCCP, there is a lack of research that provides very specific descriptions of the 'global symbols' or

'representations' of GCCP. For example, Westjohn, Singh, and Magnusson (2012) analysed the content of advertisements in search of GCCP symbols and values, but they did not describe how GCCP strategy was expressed (i.e., what images, appeals, or strategies were used). Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor (2010) investigated the use of soft-sell and hard-sell appeals in advertising from the USA and Japan in the context of GCCP strategy and concluded that soft-sell appeals were more effective amongst global consumers. However, their study focused on two countries and investigated only two types of appeals.

Very few researchers exemplified specific descriptions of the GCCP global symbols or representations. For example, in their study, Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra (1999) gave an example of the use of GCCP in advertisements by positioning a shampoo as a 'time saver' in a busy world which draws on the appeal of 'saving time'. This could be acknowledged as an operational symbol of global consumer culture. The paper, however, took a very modest stand in describing what other symbols or values expressing the GCCP strategy in the studied advertisements were. Hence, the main question of how one could look for representations of GCCP strategy if they are not clearly defined and described has to be addressed by marketing researchers. Therefore, with the aim of filling a gap in the marketing literature, the first objective of the present study is to create a list of GCCP advertising appeals which are clearly and specifically defined and described.

In addition, the proposed framework of the GCCP advertising appeals is then tested with a sample of advertisements from four European countries (Poland, Hungary,

Ireland, and the UK) to investigate the use of GCCP appeals in print advertisements amongst two product categories (i.e., durables and non-durables) in these countries.

To meet the second objective, two hypotheses were tested. First, it has been demonstrated in previous research that the global brand effect (i.e., the acceptance of global brands) is stronger in less developed countries (Dimofte, Johansson, and Bagozzi 2011). Based on this assumption, and because this study focuses on two less developed countries (Poland and Hungary) and two developed countries (Ireland and the UK), the following is proposed :

**H1:** GCCP appeals will be used more frequently in advertising from Poland and Hungary, less developed countries, than in advertising from the UK and Ireland, more developed countries.

Secondly, this research investigated the use of GCCP appeals for two product categories: durables and non-durables. It has been suggested that the GCCP strategy should be more relevant to durable products than nondurable ones (Gammoh, Koh, and Okoroafo 2011). Such products like electronics, cars and furniture are more appropriate for global markets because these products are easier to standardise. By contrast, non-durable products such as food or clothes are embodied in the local cultures and are more difficult to standardise across cultures (Ozsomer, Bodur, and Cavusgil 1990) which suggests that:

**H2:** GCCP appeals will be used more frequently in advertising for durable than non-durable goods.

## **METHODS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

## Global Consumer Culture Positioning Appeals

The proposed framework is based on the list of 42 advertising appeals of Pollay (1983). The appeals are typically carried in the illustration and headlines of the advertisement and are supported and reinforced by the text (Pollay 1983).

The approach followed in this study was to select a number of value appeals which could describe and represent the GCCP strategy as broadly as possible. With this aim, three cross-cultural researchers who are from different three countries (Belgium, Poland, Turkey) and well-versed in the areas of cultural differences, global cultures, and globalisation were asked to rate these 42 appeals in terms of how well they reflect, in their opinion, global consumer culture. The researchers self-categorised themselves as consumers belonging to the global consumer culture category of 'cosmopolitans' described as people who identify themselves with cosmopolitan culture (Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra 1999). Each of the researchers, firstly, rated the appeals independently as either 'reflecting global consumer culture' or 'not reflecting global consumer culture'. In case of differences in opinions, this was resolved through discussion between the researchers till they agreed on the appeal category. The final list of the selected 12 GCCP appeals is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Proposed framework of advertising appeals representing Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP).

Appeal	Characteristics
EFFECTIVE	Feasible; workable; useful; pragmatic; appropriate; functional; consistent; efficient; helpful; comfortable (clothes); tasty (food)



DURABLE	Long-lasting; permanent; stable; enduring; strong; powerful; hearty; tough
CONVENIENT	Handy; time-saving; quick; easy; suitable; accessible; versatile
TECHNOLOGICAL	Engineered; fabricated; formulated; manufactured; constructed; processed; resulting from science; invention; discovery; research; containing secret ingredients
MODERN	Contemporary; modern; new; improved; progressive; advanced; introducing; announcing
PRODUCTIVITY	References to achievement; accomplishment; ambition; success; careers; self-development; being skilled; accomplished; proficient; pulling your weight; contributing; doing your share
INDEPENDENCE	Self-sufficiency; self-reliance; autonomy; unattached; to do-it-yourself; to do our own thing; original; unconventional; singular; nonconformist
ENJOYMENT	To have fun; laugh; be happy; celebrate; to enjoy games; parties; feasts and festivities; to participate
HEALTHY	Fitness; vim; vigour; vitality; strength; heartiness; to be active; athletic; robust; peppy; free from disease; illness; infection; or addiction
DISTINCTIVE	Rare; unique; unusual; scarce; infrequent; exclusive; tasteful; elegant; subtle; esoteric; hand-crafted
WISDOM	Knowledge; education; awareness; intelligence; curiosity; satisfaction; comprehension; sagacity; expertise;

	judgement; experience
ADVENTURE	Boldness; daring; bravery; courage; seeking adventure; thrill; or excitement

As a second step, magazine advertisements from four European countries, Poland, Hungary, UK, and Ireland, were content analysed. Weekly TV listings with the highest readership figures in each country were used as sample magazines. Such publications were selected due to their comparability across the four countries in terms of the target segment, format and editorial content as general appeal magazines. In total, 847 full-page advertisements were included in the sample: 180 from Poland, 178 from Hungary, 206 from Ireland and 283 from the UK. Two coders from each country coded the advertisements using a coding schedule in their own languages. Inter-coder reliability measured using Kappa had high and acceptable values: .92 in Poland, .91 in Hungary, .82 in Ireland, and .86 in the UK (Neuendorf 2002).

## RESULTS

Table 2 presents the use of GCCP appeals by country. As expected, there were similarities and differences between the four countries under study in terms of what??? in terms of the use of the GCCP appeals. For example, the most used appeal was 'distinctive' in Poland (32.8%), 'convenient' in Hungary (55.1%), and 'wisdom' in both the UK (37.5%) and Ireland (39.6%). More GCCP appeals were found in advertisements from Poland and Hungary than in the UK and Ireland.

In order to test Hypothesis one (H1), to see the association between the country's development level and the use of GCCP appeals, chi-square test was used for each

appeal between pairs of countries in terms of less developed vs. developed countries combination?: Poland–Ireland, Poland–UK, Hungary–Ireland, and Hungary–UK. In total, out of the 48 pairs, 29 pairs supported the use of more GCCP appeals in advertising from less developed countries; with 8 additional pairs providing directional, but not statistically significant support (for significance levels, please see Table A1 in Appendix). It is therefore reasonable to propose that H1 is partially supported in the present study. GCCP appeals were more commonly used in advertising from less developed countries (Poland and Hungary) than developed countries (the UK and Ireland).

Table 2: Proportions of value appeals present in print advertising in Poland, Hungary, Ireland and the UK (in %).

<b>Appeal</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Ireland</b>
Effective	15	37.1	14.1	5.8
Durable	6.7	7.3	1.8	4.3
Convenient	23.3	55.1	14.5	9.2
Distinctive	32.8	18	10.6	15.5
Modern	31.1	20.2	13.4	29
Technological	16.1	30.3	4.2	15.9
Wisdom	25	13.5	37.5	39.6
Productivity	6.7	15.7	2.1	4.9
Enjoyment	13.9	34.8	7.4	26.1
Adventure	8.9	21.3	3.5	4.8
Independence	5	9	2.5	2.4

Healthy	5	7.9	8.1	24.2
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In order to test Hypothesis two (H2), the sample was divided into two product groups: durables (i.e., electronics, automobiles and parts, furniture, and home appliances) and non-durables (i.e., services, food and beverages, clothing, and footwear). Table 3 presents the proportions of advertisements displaying the appeals by the product category. The most used appeals in advertisements for durable goods were 'wisdom' (34.3%) and 'modern' (21.9%). On the other hand, the most used appeals in advertisement for non-durable goods were 'convenient' (29.3%) and 'wisdom' (26.5%).

Table 3: Proportions of advertisements for durable and non-durable goods featuring the GCCP appeals (in %).

<b>Appeal</b>	<b>Durables</b>	<b>Non-durables</b>
Effective**	13.8	20.4
Durable	4	5.2
Convenient*	17.6	29.3
Distinctive	16.4	19.7
Modern	21.9	22.7
Technological**	11.4	18.7
Wisdom***	34.3	26.5
Productivity	5	8
Enjoyment**	15.2	22.7
Adventure***	6.7	10.8
Independence	3.1	5.6

Healthy	10	12.6
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\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .05$

When the overall sample (all four countries) is considered, in half of the cases (six appeals), the proportion of advertisements with the use of GCCP appeals is higher for non-durable goods than durable ones. For the remaining six appeals, there is a directional support. This is contrary to our expectation that GCCP appeals should have been more frequently used in advertisements for durable goods than for non-durable goods. H2, hence, was not supported in the present study.

## **DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study as an attempt at responding to the calls made by several researchers (Taylor 2010, Akaka and Alden 2010) to include more theoretical frameworks to study cultural influences in advertising. With this aim in mind, we proposed a theoretical framework of advertising appeals used to express the GCCP strategy and empirically tested this across four countries.

The results of the present study demonstrated that GCCP appeals were used more frequently in advertising from less developed markets of Poland and Hungary than in more developed markets of the UK and Ireland. This is in line with the past research which showed that consumers in less developed countries have more positive attitudes to global brands than consumers in developed countries and advertisers also make more use of such appeals in less developed countries (Dimofte, Johansson, and Bagozzi 2011; Guo 2013). Consumers in less developed countries may perceive global brands as offering higher quality as compared to local brands.

In addition, global brands may be perceived superior by local consumers due to less competitive environment in the less developed markets. Moreover, advertisers may also push more 'global' rather than 'local' image of the brand in less developed markets as they may have less knowledge about effective, local marketing communications in those markets. Also, consumers in developed countries may be more resistant to branding and marketing communications and may therefore see global brands as less attractive.

In addition, this study demonstrated that GCCP appeals were more often used in advertisements for non-durable goods than for durable goods. This is contrary to the view that durable products are easier to standardise. For example, Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999) in their seminal paper on the use of GCCP empirically supported their proposition which suggested that GCCP should be used most frequently for durable goods, and least frequently for such non-durable goods like foods, with the other goods categories in between. However, the difference between the present study and their study is the operationalization of GCCP appeals which may lead to the differences in the results or contradictory findings. This indeed, is a surprising finding worthy of further investigation.

This study should be viewed within its own limitations. The proposed framework was tested by content analysing advertisements from a small number of countries. However, in the future studies the proposed framework should be tested with consumers themselves, for example, by using an online survey targeted at global consumers and asking them to rate the appeals on how much they reflect global consumer culture.

Moreover, the set of appeals which are assigned to GCCP strategy may be also portrayed as local values in some of the countries examined. This would then pose a question: When using the proposed appeals, does the brand position itself as a global or local brand? The 'globalness' of appeals may differ by countries.

Future research should focus on establishing a wider, more comprehensive framework of GCCP symbols, values, appeals, and executions as the present study had only focused on appeals. It could potentially include interviews with consumers on how they understand and perceive advertisements which feature GCCP appeals. Moreover, the use of such appeals does not imply effectiveness and it would be important to investigate the effectiveness of these GCCP appeals across different segments in the international market. For example, 'distinctive' appeal is frequently used in Poland but it is unknown how effective it is. In addition, further content analysis of GCCP advertisements will provide more insight into how the appeals are executed.

There were also some methodological limitations in this study. The sample sizes of the magazine advertisements varied across countries. The number of countries included in the study was limited to four, two eastern European and two western European ones. Future research should investigate the use of GCCP strategy in advertising from a larger number of countries covering various cultures including non-European ones. Other advertising media, such as TV or newspapers, should also be investigated.

In addition, the concept and meaning of global consumer culture itself poses problems. Some appeals may be global and local at the same time. For example, being individualistic has been considered a global appeal in this study, but also a local cultural appeal in the UK context. Moreover, the appeals may be 'global' but their execution may be 'local' resulting in 'glocal' consumer culture positioning strategy (Merz, He, and Alden 2008). Some argue that consumers in this global market draw from all available global, local, new and old sources as they use products and services to position themselves with regards to the local age, gender, social class, religion, and ethnic structures (Merz, He, and Alden 2008). Then, it is reasonable to assume that advertisers would also draw from both global and local contexts or that they would combine global and local symbols, values or execution strategies. For example, the appeal 'convenient' may be linked to GCCP but its execution (for example, using local celebrities) may be drawn from local culture thus representing glocal positioning.

The next step of our research is to test the perceived 'globalness' of the appeals amongst segments of global consumers and examine their effectiveness across various country markets and consumer segments also through including brand in the research design.



## APPENDIX

Table A1: Significance levels for country pairs.

<i>Country pair</i>	<i>Appeals with significantly different usage</i>		
	*	**	***
Poland/UK	Distinctive; modern; technological	Durable; convenient; wisdom; productivity; adventure	Enjoyment
Poland/Ireland	Convenient; distinctive; healthy	Effective	Adventure
Hungary/UK	Effective; convenient; technological; wisdom; productivity; enjoyment; adventure	Durable; independence	Distinctive; modern
Hungary/Ireland	Effective; convenient; technological; productivity; healthy; adventure	Independence	Modern; enjoyment

\* significant at .001 level, \*\* significant at .01 level, \*\*\* significant at .05 level

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