A categorization approach to analyzing the global consumer culture debate

Michael A. Merz and Yi He

Department of Marketing, Shidler College of Business, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i, USA, and

Dana L. Alden

Shidler College of Business, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i, USA

Abstract

Purpose – Given the ongoing globalization debate and lack of agreement about whether consumer cultures are predominantly globalizing, glocalizing, or localizing, the purpose of this paper is to propose a conceptual framework designed to help clarify discussion and facilitate theoretical progress.

Design/methodology/approach – By integrating Rosch's categorization theory into the discussion of whether consumer cultures globalize, glocalize, or localize, several propositions can be formulated that help structure this discussion systematically.

Findings – It is demonstrated that arguments for global consumer culture (GCC) are most easily made at the superordinate level. However, their strength (versus glocal and local consumer culture) at the basic and subordinate levels is moderated by whether meanings associated with the consumption factor are primarily functional or symbolic.

Research limitations/implications – Future research should empirically validate this initial effort. In addition, scholars should examine from a non-western centric perspective whether GCC is emerging across the different category levels and meaning systems. Furthermore, emic research is needed to examine the emic meanings of the categories herein.

Practical implications – This proposed framework is also designed for marketing managers as a new tool to facilitate their global strategic planning.

Originality/value – This paper moves the GCC culture debate forward by integrating, for the first time, categorization theory into the discussion. This is of value for both academics and practitioners.

Keywords Consumerism, Localization, Globalization, Consumer behaviour

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

At least since Levitt's (1983) frequently cited paper predicting the demise of local consumer markets, debate has continued over the viability of globally standardized marketing. Researchers have argued for various strategic positions along a continuum ranging from worldwide standardization to national customization with hybrid approaches in-between, e.g. "glocalization" (Ritzer, 2004). Advocates of the emergence of global consumer cultures (GCC) argue that trends in today's marketplace – the development of new technology, cross-border tourism, and labor mobility (Holt *et al.*, 2004) – lead to homogenization of consumer demands (Alden *et al.*, 1999; Jain, 1989). Proponents of local consumer cultures (LCC) argue that local consumption remains resilient against such global forces (Jackson, 2004; Watts, 1996). Still others have argued that GCC dominate through the interplay of the global and the local (Ger and Belk, 1996; Maynard and Tian, 2004).

The problem is that, the debate is endless. Each side marshals examples as support for its position, and theoretical advances as well as managerially relevant advice suffer. At some point, perhaps already reached, heuristics come to dominate and the field may be left with relatively simplistic summary propositions, such as think global, act local. What is needed is a new approach to analyzing the multifaceted evidence on behalf of the arguments for the standardization, localization, or glocalization of consumer cultures around the world. Fortunately, there is a well-established theoretical framework within our field that can be applied to this debate in order to enhance our analysis and subsequent understanding, namely, categorization theory (Rosch, 1975).

We believe that prior research has investigated the GCC debate without keeping the categorization level and meaning systems consistent. In particular, we hypothesize that scholars and practitioners have generally cited examples of the potential for standardization versus the necessity of localization versus the effectiveness of glocalization from different levels of the superordinate, basic, and subordinate consumption factor hierarchy. For example, arguing that even McDonald's localizes by offering "kimchee burgers" in Korea ignores the fact that at a higher level of categorization, the "burger" appears to be a globally understood and widely available food component of most urban consumer cultures around the world. Describing the "kimchee burger" as an example of glocalization represents an implicit step toward the use of categorization theory. However, simply noting the decided trend toward hybridization (Ritzer, 2004) does not provide a detailed framework for understanding when and how regular patterns of hybridization may occur. Moreover, we believe that the emergence of GCC also depends on whether the focus of the discussion is on the functional or symbolic meanings of the different categories in the categorization hierarchy.

By bringing Rosch's (1975) categorization theory into this discussion and by distinguishing between functional and symbolic meaning systems across the categorization hierarchy, we hope to provide international marketing scholars and practitioners with a useful theoretical tool that will allow more detailed analyses of the complexities of market and consumer culture globalization. In particular, we are interested in demonstrating that global, glocal, and LCC all exist but tend to be more or less evident at different levels of categorization (e.g. superordinate, basic, subordinate) and across the different category meaning systems (e.g. functional, symbolic). To initiate this discussion, we begin by clarifying what we mean by consumer culture.

Consumer culture

Several definitions of culture have been proposed in anthropology, sociology, cross-cultural psychology, and marketing. However, a single, agreed-upon definition has yet to evolve. Hofstede (2001, p. 9) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another." Hannerz (1992) argues that culture consists of an "invisible" dimension – predominant and shared values or social norms. The "visible" dimension highlights "the different ways in which ideas and modes of thought are made public and accessible to the senses" (Hermans and Kempen, 1998, p. 1115, e.g. forms of art or media, interstate highways, particular kinds of food, speech, fashion, music, brands). Finally, Hermans and Kempen (1998, p. 1116) note that the degree of cultural knowledge shared varies by subgroups.

Incorporating these perspectives, we view culture as a mutually understood set of technologies, symbols, and norms that differentiate one group of people from another

and that individuals within a group share to varying degrees. Thus, rather than viewing culture as internally homogeneous, we acknowledge the complexity, heterogeneity, interconnectedness, and de-territorialization of culture (Hermans and Kempen, 1998). Finally, while technologies represent the "visible" dimension of culture, under which we subsume tangible tools for living (e.g. forms of fashion, media, art, food, music, brands), symbols and norms represent the more "invisible" dimension of culture.

Based on this understanding of culture with its visible and invisible dimensions, it seems pertinent to distinguish between the functional and the symbolic meaning systems when analyzing the GCC debate (Bagozzi, 1975; Fournier, 1991; Ligas, 2000). The functional meaning system relates to the visible dimension of culture. It refers to consumers' satisfaction of utilitarian needs. Thus, it is important to examine whether consumers across cultures partake in the consumption process for similar rational reasons (e.g. convenience or practicability) and/or whether they similarly perceive the utilitarian benefits of the product (category) in question. In contrast, the symbolic meaning system relates to the invisible dimension of culture. It refers to consumers' satisfaction of symbolic needs. Thus, it is also important to examine whether consumers across cultures partake in the consumption process for similar symbolic or normative reasons (e.g. to exhibit or represent one's self) and/or whether they similarly perceive the symbolic benefits of the product (category) in question.

As a subset of broader culture, consumer culture "frames consumers' horizons of conceivable action, feeling, and thought, making certain patterns of behavior and sense-making interpretations more likely than others" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869). Furthermore, like culture in general, consumer culture is not equally shared by all members of the cultural group. Rather, consumer culture is characterized by "the dynamics of fragmentation, plurality, fluidity, and the intermingling (or hybridization) of consumption traditions and ways of life" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869). With this working definition of consumer culture in mind, we now turn to brief reviews of the GCC debate and categorization theory.

Converging versus diverging consumer cultures around the world

On one side of the globalization debate can be found scholars who argue for an emerging GCC (Alden *et al.*, 1999). Proponents of this view note that nations are increasingly integrated into the world economy, which motivates cross-border tourism and labor mobility (Holt *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, the development and fast dissemination of new technology – especially via the internet – allows mass media to become universally available to consumers. It is argued that these trends lead to the uniformity of customer needs and wants and hence to the homogenization of global demand (Jain, 1989; Levitt, 1983), as consumers relate and compare themselves not only to their own culture but also to other cultures, for example to the "economic center" of North America, Europe, and Japan (Appadurai, 1990; Holt *et al.*, 2004). In support of this viewpoint, Robertson (1992) argues that globalization is a reflexive process with increased interaction between different orders of life and that it results in the world becoming a single place that serves as a frame of reference for everyone. In addition, global marketing standardization, intercultural collaboration and coordination, industry globalization, global competition, and global market participation help facilitate the emergence of a GCC (Levitt, 1983; Zou and Cavusgil, 2002; Yip, 1995, 2003).

On the other side of the debate are proponents of LCC. These scholars hypothesize that distinctive local consumption cultures are resilient against globalization (Jackson, 2004). In fact, it is argued that "globalization does not so much mark the erasure of place but in a curious way contributes to its revitalization" (Watts, 1996, p. 64). Wood and Grosvenor's (1997) exploration of Cadbury's expansion into China and the company's need to significantly modify its products, production processes, product names, etc. according to local needs and wants provides evidence for the resilience of LCC. Similarly, Williams and Windebank (2003) demonstrated the slow advance and uneven penetration of commodification and the many forms of resistance to its further spread, even in Western economies (Williams, 2003). Finally, Kotler (1986) argued that the success of McDonald's, Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, etc. is based on variation, that is, on not offering the same products everywhere. As a result, it is argued that consumption behavior remains local and diverging rather than converging. Jackson (2004), therefore, speaks of the domestication or localization of global forces in specific consumption contexts.

Advocates of glocal consumer cultures (GLCC) argue that consumers often "draw from all available global and local, new and old sources as they use products to position themselves in the local age, gender, social class, religion and ethnic hierarchies" (Ger and Belk, 1996, p. 294). From this point of view, glocalization is a mixture of homogenization (convergence) and heterogenization (divergence) that dominates – a hybrid blend of invisible and visible consumer culture from multiple sources (Hermans and Kempen, 1998; Pieterse, 1995; Sandikci and Ger, 2002). As Ritzer (2003, p. 193) notes, glocalization is, "the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas" and potentially leading to multiple identities (Hermans and Kempen, 1998). Firat's (1997) globalization of fragmentation also advocates an emerging GLCC. Furthermore, Friedman (2000, p. 406, italicization in original) argues that:

> [...] globalization is everything and its opposite [...] While it is homogenizing culture, it is also enabling people to share their individuality farther and wider. It makes us want to chase after the Lexus more intensely than ever and cling to our olive trees more tightly than ever.

Other authors also argue for an emerging GLCC rather than for the two extremes on the globalization-localization continuum (Belk, 1995; Wilk, 1995).

Categorization theory

The fundamental premise underlying categorization theory is that "people naturally divide the world of objects around them into categories, enabling an efficient understanding and processing of the environment" (Sujan, 1985, p. 31; Rosch, 1975; Rosch and Mervis, 1975; Sujan and Dekleva, 1987). As such, like objects are grouped together into categories. Such categorization allows people to effectively and efficiently structure and understand their environment by predicting item attributes and reacting to new stimuli-based solely on knowledge of category membership (notion of the principle of cognitive economy). Over time, consumers develop category expectations, organized around very typical category members (Ozanne *et al.*, 1992; Sujan, 1985), which can take the form of exemplars or prototypes (Sujan, 1985).

It has been found that natural objects are organized hierarchically (Rosch *et al.*, 1976). At the highest level are superordinate categories (e.g. vehicle, tool, clothing, furniture). Members of such categories share relatively few features but can be

distinguished from each other on key attributes (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989). At the next level are basic categories (e.g. car, hammer, pants, table). People use basic-level exemplars and prototypes most frequently to categorize the complex environment with its natural and social objects (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989; Rosch *et al.*, 1976). Furthermore, Rosch *et al.* (1976) argue that basic-level attributes are common to all or most members and provide the greatest discrimination between categories. On the lowest level are subordinate categories (e.g. sports car, ball-peen hammer, double knit pants, office desk). Rosch *et al.* (1976) demonstrate that such a hierarchical structure exists for natural objects (e.g. vehicle, car, or sports car). Sujan and Dekleva (1987) extend Rosch *et al.* (1976) findings to product classes, product types, and brands. Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) provide evidence for a hierarchical structure of beverage categories.

Applying categorization theory to the global consumer culture debate

We now discuss ways that categorization theory can be applied to the debate over whether consumer cultures around the world are converging, diverging, or hybridizing. Wilk's (1995) "global systems of common difference" concept reiterates the possibility that the extent of an emerging global versus LCC may depend on the respective category level. Specifically, he believes that globalization leads to hegemony in form (higher-order) and to diversity in content (lower-order). This finding is interesting and highlights the importance of examining the globalization-localization debate from the categorization viewpoint (Rosch, 1975).

Again, our goal is not to resolve the debate but to provide an additional analytical tool for use by researchers and managers as they seek to better understand current trends in market globalization. To this end, we limit our category analysis to the superordinate, basic, and subordinate category-levels and three consumption-related examples: fast food (a product category that combines goods and services), shopping malls (a point of interaction between consumers and channels), and advertising (a marketing communications tool). We limit our category analysis to these exemplars of product, place (distribution), and promotion as all three are globally available and/or used, generally familiar to urban consumers, and frequently studied in other conceptual and research papers in the field. While, we recognize that such limitations may reduce the framework's external validity, this effort represents an initial illustration of the potential of this approach and, as such, awaits further validation.

Moreover, we limit our discussion to urban environments. Clammer (2003, p. 404) has noted the importance of examining the "triangular relationship between globalization, modernity, and urbanism" when it comes to the debate about the nature of globalization. This line of reasoning is in accordance with the fact that more than half of the world's population is now living in towns or cities – places, which have been argued to be most immediately and directly influenced by globalization (Clammer, 2003).

In the following, we will begin analyzing the GCC debate with the selected examples (fast food, shopping malls, advertising) at the three levels of categorization (superordinate, basic, subordinate). At each category level, we will first examine whether the functional meaning system and then in a second step, whether the symbolic meaning system of the selected examples produces support on behalf of the emergence of global, glocal, or LCC (Table I).

The superordinate level
We begin at the top of the hierarchy – the superordinate level. The superordinate level constitutes the most abstract level of categorization (Rosch *et al.*, 1976). The category labels of interest in this paper can be placed at this level. That is, fast food, shopping malls, and advertising are all fairly abstract category labels with a wide range of diverse exemplars that share relatively fewer attributes than exemplars at the next level below, the basic level.

The functional meanings of the subordinate categories in question seem to be fairly globalized. Take fast food for example. Around the world, there are many different types of fast food. These fast food items range from hamburgers and fried chicken to calzones and pizza to ramen and soba to pho noodle soup and summer rolls. Importantly, however, within the modern urban environment around the world, "fast food" with its broadest set of attributes (rapid delivery, lower prices, widespread availability, common forms/sizes, similar tastes at different locations, consistent quality, etc.) is a globally understood consumption alternative. Indeed, fast food (e.g. McDonald's in the USA or ramen shops in China) has been demonstrated to globally fulfill consumers' utilitarian needs of conveniently breakfasting, lunching, or dining when time matters (Watson, 1997). While promptness and convenience may not be the only reasons why consumers globally patronize fast food restaurants, such as McDonald's (Turner, 2003), they are two widely understood attributes of fast food that consumers in urban environments everywhere seem likely to recognize.

Consider urban shopping malls as another example. Ethnographic studies have documented that urban consumers in multiple-national markets patronize malls for similar utilitarian reasons, namely because they provide a wider range of choices in a centralized, comfortable location that maximizes shopping and/or socializing opportunities (Abaza, 2001; Bloch *et al.*, 1994; Salcedo, 2003). In addition, shopping malls provide patrons the advantage of climatic comfort and freedom from the noise and traffic, which characterizes other shopping venues (Bloch *et al.*, 1994; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Indeed, prior research has found that people shop for either functional product benefits or fun and social pleasure (Babin *et al.*, 1994; Tauber, 1972; Underhill, 1999). Thus, while people around the world may associate other functional meanings with shopping malls, it seems that comfort, great choice, and centralized location are attributes that are similarly understood across cultures.

Likewise, urban consumers appear to understand the functional meaning system of the superordinate category advertising similarly across the globe. This is due in large measure to advertising's penetration across national borders via newspapers, magazines, radios, TVs, or the internet (Tehranian, 1998). It is generally agreed that advertising fulfills a firm's desire to communicate product features, promote brand images, or address issues of public concern (Mazzarella, 2003). In a similar vein, consumers across cultures seem to similarly understand that paid-for advertising delivered primarily via electronic and print media is a source of information about product availability, quality, price, etc. This line of

	Functional meaning system	Symbolic meaning system
Superordinate category level	Global consumer culture	Global consumer culture
Basic category level	Global consumer culture	Glocal/local consumer culture
subordinate category level	Global/glocal consumer culture	Local consumer culture

Table I.
Proposed consumer cultures across category hierarchy and meaning system

reasoning is supported if one considers that media in general (and television in particular) is a truly global medium. Walker (1996), for example, notes that MTV alone reached 239 million viewers in 68 countries in 1996. Consequently, people are exposed to advertising across the globe and hence are likely to form similar functional meanings (e.g. promotion tool and source of information) about it. In sum, these examples suggest that the functional meanings of many superordinate consumption-related categories are generally understood across cultures. As a result, we propose that one of the most widespread and obvious components of GCC is the functional meaning of superordinate consumption-related categories.

The symbolic meanings of many superordinate categories also seem to be widely understood among urban consumers and thus to converge globally. For example, it has been demonstrated that young consumers in particular embrace fast food to get a taste of foreign culture, no matter whether the fast food restaurant is a McDonald's in Asia or a Korean BBQ in the USA (Ritzer, 2004; Turner, 2003). Whether taking-out hamburgers, sushi, or pizza, fast food symbolizes a fast-paced and modern urban lifestyle that people around the globe mutually understand, but do not necessarily value equally. Mutually understood symbolic meanings (representing modern, fast-paced, urban lifestyles) thus can be seen as part of GCC.

Similarly, Salcedo's (2003) and Abaza's (2001) findings suggest that shopping malls symbolize a modern lifestyle, capitalism, and freedom around the world – driven by the urbanization process. Their findings imply that consumers in the USA, Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa patronize malls not only because of their functional value, but also because of the symbolic value of being associated with a certain consumption behavior and reference group. In support of this view, Jenks (2003) describes how the Skytrain over Bangkok's streets is linked to the major shopping malls in the city. Both Skytrain and shopping malls are associated with modernity, capitalism, and freedom from everyday problems.

Likewise, advertising has become a symbol of material well-being (Lears, 1994). This argument becomes clear, if it is acknowledged that paid-for TV, radio, print, and web advertising penetrate social and geographic boundaries from low-income to high-income groups, and from undeveloped or underdeveloped to developed cultures (Tehranian, 1998). Furthermore, advertising cross-culturally creates desires for the advertised products or services – whether affordable or not – and, as such, becomes associated with the inherent symbolism of those offerings (McCracken, 1986). Alden *et al.* (1999) found further support for the notion that the symbolic meaning of advertising is globally understood. They demonstrate that a significant percentage of advertisements in Asia, North America, and Europe employs GCC positioning, that is, uses globally understood signs (e.g. language, aesthetic systems, story themes) to associate the advertised brands with GCC through a process of meaning transfer (McCracken, 1986). In sum, it seems that consumers around the globe assign similar symbolic meanings to such superordinate categories as fast food, shopping malls, and advertising. As such, the symbolic meanings of superordinate categories are likely to constitute another important component, along with the functional meanings, of GCC. The foregoing leads to our first proposition (Table I):

P1. Analysis of functional and symbolic consumption-related category meanings at the superordinate level of consumption is likely to produce support on behalf of the emergence of GCC.

The basic level
The basic level constitutes the intermediate level of categorization, upon which the greatest discrimination between categories takes place (Rosch *et al.*, 1976). Moving down to this basic category level for the consumption categories examined on the superordinate level, we propose that burgers, shopping mall architecture, and print advertising schema belong to this level of analysis. Again, the question arises whether exemplars at this level of categorization share functional and/or symbolic meaning across cultures.

The functional meaning for many basic consumption categories seems similar across national cultures. For example, burgers have become a global food category through McDonald's and Burger King's popularity around the world (Watson, 1997). It seems that people in many urban centers around the world eat burgers – just as they consume other forms of fast food, such as pizzas, ramen, or burritos – for similar utilitarian reasons, that is, to satisfy their need for a filling, simple, tasty, and quick meal and their hunger for something hearty. The functional meaning of burgers (e.g. filling, simple, tasty, quick, hearty), therefore, seems to be understood globally. As Turner (2003, p. 151) points out, "at the end of the day, *McDonald's* simply is a burger joint." Again, while filling, simplicity, tastiness, speed, and heartiness may not be the only utilitarian reasons that consumers eat burgers, they are attributes that seem to be similarly understood across cultures.

Similarly, it has been put forward that only a few transnational (western) firms design a high percentage of the shopping malls worldwide (Salcedo, 2003). It seems likely, therefore, that Western-imposed shopping mall architecture can be found across the globe. Indeed, it has been observed that shopping mall architecture is fairly homogeneous "on the surface" (Abaza, 2001, p. 107). The general architecture of shopping malls seems to fulfill similar utilitarian functions. For example, the design of shopping malls around the world generally allows for a few big retailers and several smaller stores, restaurant courtyards, movie theaters, parking and/or mass transit access, professional landscaping, and public rest areas with benches, restrooms, etc.

Finally, urban consumers everywhere seem to have similar functional print advertising schemas (Goodstein, 1993; McDaniel, 1999; Stoltman, 1991). This is because print advertising shares general conventions with respect to its structure, format, and content (Stoltman, 1991). Such print advertising conventions in turn are likely to be mutually understood across national cultures, especially for products of the same type. For example, although the content of Pepsi and Coca-Cola advertisements may differ cross-nationally, consumers everywhere are likely to expect their print ads to feature happy people consuming the brand, a bold headline, multiple colors and a brand name and/or logo. Along similar lines, sports products tend to be globally promoted through sponsorship of sports events (McDaniel, 1999), while cosmetic products tend to be cross-nationally promoted by celebrity endorsers. Halle Berry's endorsement for Revlon lipstick in the USA and Zhang Ziyi's endorsement for Dior in Asia are but two examples. As a result, consumers everywhere are likely to share the functional understanding that sports product manufacturers sponsor sporting events and cosmetic manufacturers use celebrity endorsers.

While we have argued that, the functional meanings of basic consumption categories are likely to be mutually understood across the globe, symbolic meanings at this level appear to be more glocalized – a hybridized mix of meanings that combine and/or

reinterpret the global and the local (Ritzer, 2004) – or even localized. This argument becomes more apparent, if one considers the anti-globalization movements (Johansson, 2004) that frequently take place against global brands and their symbolic meanings. Just as these anti-globalization movements take place against certain brands in certain locations, so may a burger in one national culture – whether in a western or eastern culture – be consumed (or rejected) because it symbolizes "western lifestyle," but in another culture because it symbolizes a simple meal for anyone at any time.

Shopping mall architecture constitutes an example of how symbolic meaning is likely to be glocalized on the basic level. While the general architecture of malls serves similar utilitarian functions across cultures, it appears to represent a hybrid symbolic meaning system of both global and local tastes, modernism and the local way of life. This becomes clear if one takes into consideration that local design and aesthetics often mingle with the Western-imposed general architecture. For example, Abaza (2001, p. 109) finds that, the architecture in Egypt shopping malls is a fusion of Western architecture and Islamic, Asian, or oriental design and aesthetics. In his words (italicization in original), the Khan Azzam Mall in Cairo is constructed "in the style of a Western covered market, with wooden *mashrabiyyah* (Islamic style wooden carved windows) and Islamic style columns."

Finally, the symbolic meaning of print advertising schema seems likely to be localized. While it can be argued that consumers across cultures expect similar general conventions of print advertising concerning structure, format, and content (functional meaning), such general conventions may symbolize "cultural imperialism" in one culture, "global modernity" in another, and "the price of a free media" in a third. In sum, these examples demonstrate that the symbolic meaning system on the basic level of categorization is likely to be more glocalized or localized rather than globalized. This leads to our next two propositions (Table I):

P2a. Analysis of functional consumption-related category meanings at the basic level of consumption is likely to produce support on behalf of the emergence of GCC

P2b. Analysis of symbolic consumption-related category meanings at the basic level of consumption is likely to produce support on behalf of the emergence of GLCC or LCC.

Subordinate level

The subordinate level constitutes the most specific level of categorization (Rosch *et al.*, 1976). On this level of analysis, we propose burger varieties, shopping mall atmosphere, and print advertising elements as the respective subordinate categories. The question of interest is again whether the functional and symbolic meanings of these identified categories are similarly understood across national cultures.

Interestingly, functional meanings of subordinate categories seem to be similarly understood globally even though consumption-related factors are typically adapted to local religion, traditions, values, and overall market environment. For example, McDonald's uses local beef for its hamburgers in Russia (Barber, 1996) and Germany; serves a much spicier hamburger in Turkey than in the USA; and adds garlic and chili sauces to its hamburgers in India (Jackson, 2004). While such adaptations undeniably take place, a large portion of the functional meaning of the local burger variety served

remains understood across cultures. That is, a burger, whether a "kimchee burger," "teriyaki burger," or "lamb burger" (i.e. the subordinate variety of the basic level category "burger"), constitutes a fast food product that features a circular, raised wheat bun with a hot meat or vegetable patty in the middle, and accompanying vegetables and sauces. It is consumed because it offers high levels of utility for a relatively low price for most urban consumers around the world. These functional meanings of burger varieties seem fairly consistent globally even though there are likely to be many local and/or regional variations in the actual product.

In a similar vein, many of the functional meanings of shopping mall atmosphere are likely to be similar even though variations in the execution of mall atmospherics are also probable. Thus, Abaza (2001) observes that the shopping mall atmosphere in Egypt is quite different from what is found in the USA. For example, Egyptian shopping malls feature Egyptian-style coffee shops, loud Egyptian music, places to smoke the shisha (water pipe), belly dancers, and tent restaurants. Thus, subordinate category level mall spaces and activities are frequently localized. Nevertheless, much of the functional meanings of these spaces and activities are likely to be similarly understood across cultures. Specifically, it seems likely that the shopping mall atmosphere globally has contributed to the mall becoming a place to hang out, meet people, socialize, entertain or be entertained (Feinberg *et al.*, 1989). Indeed, it has been demonstrated that shopping malls are "habitats" that people patronize to easily and comfortably engage not only in shopping but also in socializing activities (Abaza, 2001; Bloch *et al.*, 1994). As such, the shopping mall atmosphere globally seems to satisfy consumers' utilitarian need for social interaction and fun. This becomes even more apparent if it is taken into account that – in the modern urban environment – shopping malls with their distinct atmospheres are replacing traditional town markets, shopping districts, and parks.

Finally, print advertising elements also vary across cultures in terms of specific creative elements (e.g. picture, color), message arguments (e.g. comparative versus non-comparative), celebrity endorsers, mix, and delivery. For example, prior research has found that the specific values displayed in print or any other kind of advertising are a mix of the local and the global (Zhang and Harwood, 2004). Based on their literature review, Zhang and Harwood (2004) argue that modernity (rooted in Western materialism and capitalism) is a universal value in (print) advertising, but that additional values (e.g. family, hard work, saving, tradition) remain important in non-Western cultures. Consequently, modern and traditional values seem to coexist in non-Western (print) advertising, thereby offering consumers hybrid rationales for their purchase decisions. Similarly, advertising themes in tobacco advertising have been shown to adapt to local peculiarities. Marlboro, Camel, and Pall Mall print advertising in Central and Eastern Europe motivates consumers to "fire the night," "taste the freedom," or "taste the West" and are often associated with fashion, sexuality, and showing-off. In contrast, the increased health concern in the USA and Western Europe have forced tobacco companies to take a more defensive tone when advertising their products (Frith and Mueller, 2003).

However, even in these examples, a meaningful portion of mutually understood functional meaning is likely to remain as urban consumers everywhere are exposed to print advertising elements. Thus, whether comparative (predominant in Western cultures) or non-comparative advertising (predominant in Southeast Asian cultures; Polyorat and Alden, 2005) is used or whether traditional or modern values are highlighted in the respective print advertising (Zhang and Harwood, 2004), the print

advertising elements used generally constitute a means to get customers' attention. Conversely, such elements constitute reasons for customers to pay attention to the messages. Thus, although specific execution may again vary, the functional meanings of advertising elements appear to be generally understood in urban environments around the world. In sum, the functional meanings of consumption-related factors at the subordinate level are likely to be fairly globalized.

At the same time, the execution-related differences noted in all three subordinate categories just discussed appear critical to creating and maintaining important localized connections with consumers' symbolic meaning sets. For example, spicier hamburgers in Turkey not only exist to better match local tastes but also to allow Turkish consumers to more easily assimilate the product within traditional culture schema. Thus, McDonald's offers beefless nuggets in India, kosher food in Israel, and halal food in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the localized shopping mall atmosphere in Egypt with water pipes, belly dancing, and traditional food, facilitates symbolic connections between the distribution outlet and the local self. Finally, several scholars have argued that adapting print advertising elements to match symbolic expectations is crucial to success (Mazzarella, 2003). McDonald's in France uses localized cultural images to convey a feeling of belongingness and closeness (Martin, 2005). Similarly, IBM features names and faces of local employees in their European advertisements to convey its sensitivity to the local job market (Martin, 2005). Furthermore, Hyundai highlights its great investments in the US market to convey the image that it is now part of the American dream. Finally, the Vietnamese Government requires advertising elements to be in line with public morals and customs (Frith and Mueller, 2003). In sum, the symbolic meaning system on the subordinate category level seems to be more localized than globalized. These observations lead to our next two propositions (Table I):

P3a. Analysis of functional consumption-related category meanings at the subordinate level of consumption is likely to produce support on behalf of the emergence of global or GLCC.

P3b. Analysis of symbolic consumption-related category meanings at the subordinate level of consumption is likely to produce support on behalf of the persistence of LCC.

The previous discussion reveals that the functional meanings are likely to be more globally consistent across consumption factor category structures than symbolic meanings. This leads to our two final propositions:

P4. The more functional (symbolic) a consumption factor's meaning, the more globally standardized (locally adapted) the hierarchical category structure.

P5. The more standardized the hierarchical category structure, the more likely the consumption factor will provide evidence on behalf of GCC.

Table II provides a summary for our three consumption-related examples across the different category levels and meaning systems.

Conclusion

By applying Rosch's (1975) categorization theory, we hope to have demonstrated that the strength of one's argument for or against GCC depends to a meaningful degree on the

Category level	Example	Functional meaning system	Symbolic meaning system
Superordinate	Fast food	Satisfies the need for a convenient way to have breakfast, lunch, or dinner when time matters (GCC)	Symbolizes fast-paced and modern urban lifestyle (GCC)
Basic	Burger	Satisfies the need for a filling, simple, quick, tasty, and hearty meal (GCC)	May symbolize Western lifestyle in one culture vs simple meal for everybody at any time in another (GLCC/LCC)
Subordinate	Burger varieties	Satisfies the need for good value at a reasonable price (GCC)	Adapted to traditional cultural schema to more easily assimilate product (LCC)
Superordinate	Shopping mall	Satisfies the need for a wide range of choices in a centralized, comfortable location (GCC)	Symbolizes modern lifestyle, freedom, capitalism (GCC)
Basic	Shopping mall architecture	Satisfies the need for practicability; space for shops, restaurants, etc. (GCC)	Hybrid symbolic meaning of both global and local tastes and of modern and traditional way of life (GLCC)
Subordinate	Shopping mall atmosphere	Satisfies the need for feeling comfortable and for making the mall a place to hang out, socialize, and have fun (GCC)	Adapted to traditional cultural schema to facilitated symbolic connection between the distribution outlet and one's self (LCC)
Superordinate	Advertising	Used as a source of information and as a promotion tool (GCC)	Symbolizes material well-being (GCC)
Basic	Print advertising schema	Used to satisfy consumers' general expectations in terms of general conventions, such as headline, content, structure, and format (GCC)	May symbolize Western imperialism in one culture vs advertiser freedom in another (GLCC/LCC)
Subordinate	Print advertising elements	Used to make consumers pay attention to the general advertising claim (GCC)	Adapted to traditional cultural schema to match symbolic expectations (LCC)

Notes: GCC – global consumer culture; GLCC – glocal consumer culture; LCC – local consumer culture

Table II.
Proposed meaning system for three consumption-related examples across the category hierarchy

level of the consumption factor hierarchy and whether the emphasis is on functional or symbolic meanings. Specifically, we have attempted to show that functional meanings are more likely to globalize across the categorization hierarchy. On the other hand, the degree to which the symbolic meanings globalize appears to depend far more on the respective level of categorization with globalization being more likely at the superordinate level, glocalization at the basic, and localization at the subordinate.

The proposed framework is also designed for marketing managers as a new tool to facilitate their global strategic planning. Based on our analysis of three consumption-related examples, it appears that managers would benefit from taking the respective category level and the meaning system into consideration when positioning their market offerings globally (Table I). First, it seems to matter whether a market offering is positioned on a superordinate (e.g. BMW 335i . . . a truly powerful automobile), basic (e.g. BMW 335i . . . a remarkable sports car), or subordinate (e.g. BMW 335i . . . the indescribable 3 series) category level. The categorization literature supports this reasoning (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989; Sujan and Dekleva, 1987). Standardized positioning strategies across cultures seem most (least) appropriate at the superordinate (subordinate) category level because GCC is more likely to prove influential on this (versus subordinate or basic) category level.

Second, it seems to matter whether a market offering is positioned in terms of functional meanings (e.g. BMW 335i . . . the all new 3.0 liter, twin turbo, six-cylinder and 300 horsepower engine starting at $38,900) or symbolic meanings (e.g. BMW 335i . . . live to drive). Standardized positioning strategies across cultures seem more appropriate when functional (versus symbolic) meanings are promoted because GCC influences are more likely to exist for functional (versus symbolic) meaning systems.

Third, the combination of category level and meaning system seems to matter when it comes to positioning a firm's market offerings across cultures. To illustrate, if managers aim at standardizing their positioning strategies across cultures, promoting functional meanings of the market offering on a superordinate category level appears to be most appropriate. In contrast, if managers want to promote their market offerings on a more specific, subordinate category level and promote the symbolic meaning of their market offering, then localizing the market offering's positioning across cultures may prove optimal.

Overall, our proposed framework appears promising for both researchers and managers. However, future research needs to empirically validate our conceptual framework before explicit recommendations can be made. In addition to empirically validate this initial effort, scholars should examine from a non-western centric perspective whether GCC is emerging across the different category levels and meaning systems. Unfortunately, the extant literature tends to confound the GCC debate with brands and products from the west. Consequently, although we included several examples from Asian countries, such as Japan and Korea, our arguments across the three selected consumption-related examples (and, in fact, the examples themselves) are western dominated. As such, it can be argued that our analysis employs western consumer culture as a proxy for GCC. Therefore, more research is needed to examine the framework proposed herein from a less western-centric perspective.

Future research should also develop a globally validated measurement that empirically establishes consumers' perceptions of the degree of globalization, glocalization, or localization of various marketing mix elements (the 4P's) at different levels of categorization.

In addition, ethnographic work is necessary to examine the emic meanings of our categories. Also, future research should empirically measure the extent to which our consumption-related examples at different levels of categorization are mutually understood – but not necessarily shared – across cultures with respect to their functional and symbolic meanings. Finally, experiments should be conducted with different category and meaning system manipulations to identify, under controlled conditions, potential pathways through which consumer cultures globalize, glocalize, or localize across cultures. It is imperative, however, that the categorical level of analysis be kept constant – something that has been missing in prior research and, therefore, stimulated this conceptual paper.

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182

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Corresponding author
Michael A. Merz can be contacted at: mmerz@hawaii.edu