Cultural Values and Purchasing Reasons in Four Latin American Countries. an Exploratory Study.

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Latin America has been often characterized as a homogeneous cultural block. Mass consumer goods companies undertake global strategies in the region, based on this homogeneous statement. Assuming that Latin American consumers share similar values, motivation, reasons to purchase and use, regardless their country of origin. This study explores the cultural specificities present in 4 Latin American nations (Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela) by identifying value priorities at a cultural level using the Schwartz Value Inventory (1994, 2006). Some implications of country cultural specificities in the usage and consumption of tech products (cell phones, computers, and music players) were assessed.

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To answer this question, we analyzed more deeply these youths’ perceptions regarding the risks associated with obesity. Three major risks appeared through the manual and automatic analysis we conducted: physical risk (e.g. doing sports), health (disease associated to obesity) and social risk.

All of the participants were more sensitive to the social consequences of obesity as compared to the other risks (health and physical). The social consequences mentioned by the participants involved difference, discrimination, rejection, mockery for all ages and the oldest (15 to 17) brought up elements linked to love life and getting a job. All the respondents seemed to be conscious of the existence of a physical standard and mentioned that the over-weight person is different and therefore rejected.

In fact, our results seem to confirm the hypothesis that an argument based on the social consequences of obesity will be more efficient because it is closer to the present concerns of young people. Current research also reinforces the importance of adapting the preventive communication, especially when adolescents are the target. Furthermore, in order to develop messages that are compatible and accessible to the target, it is essential to adapt the vocabulary which is used. Due to the qualitative nature of the conducted study, we were able to collect expressions and terms used by the targets which are associated with obesity and can consequently help in the development process.

These results will help us determine how to design more effective obesity prevention campaigns and our proposals will be tested in upcoming experiments which will take place in French secondary schools focusing on underprivileged children, since this group is at greater risk in terms of obesity. Our conclusions are intended to provide concrete recommendations to public policymakers, companies, and health-related institutions in charge of obesity prevention campaigns.

References

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Despite the importance of globalization of technological consumer goods companies and their standardization strategies, little effort has been made to understand the assumption behind this: the convergence of cultural value systems, which means the notion that consumers share similar values, preferences and motivations regardless their country of origin (Levitt, 1983; Ritzer, 1993; Belk, 1996). As stated by De Mooij (2004) and Woods et al (1985), a major problem that intervenes in the prospects for global success is that values and product usage purposes may differ from culture to culture, even in closely contiguous markets. While one might easily believe that industrial and tech products are typically culture-free, this view is mistaken because the context in which they are used, as well as sought functionalities, depend on culture (Usunier & Lee, 2005).
People, as buyers and consumers, make decisions upon the conglomerate of values, ideas and symbols that form the culture with which they identify themselves (De Mooij, 2004; Engel et al., 1995; Usunier & Lee, 2005). Culture works as a benchmark allowing people to understand and give significance to the surrounding items or objects (McCracken, 1991; Usunier, 2000). Culture thus ends up by affecting the consumer’s behavior (Solomon, 2004). Therefore, we maintain that differences between LA consumers do exist and a lack of recognition of this can unnecessarily expose companies to risks that could be avoided, even in countries like Latin-American, usually viewed as culturally homogeneous.

Stemming from the review of cross-cultural-consumer-behavior-related literature and upon the fact of the scarce number of studies focused on LA region, we have sketched the following empirical research. This represents an attempt to enhance our understanding how culture influences the purchasing reasons among youth LA consumers.

This research paper’s is relevant due to the stress placed on understanding cultural influence rather than culture itself. Therefore, when exploring how similar the young from the 4 nations are in terms of cultural priorities, we are mainly interested in identifying what cultural-level tendencies may affect their tech item consumption and purchasing behavior (typically seen, as culture-free products, as Dawar & Parker, 1994 and Peterson et al, 1985, do consider). We suspect that if there are considerable differences among motivations for usage/purchase that young consumers from each country expressed regarding items such as cell phones, PC’s and music players, these differences should remain closely related to each country’s characteristic cultural profile.

Matched samples were used in order to minimizing sociodemographic influence when comparing at a cultural level, because this research focused on young consumers (18-29 years old, men & women, university students), residents in the main two cities of each of the studied countries. Data was gathered between June 2004 and October 2005. The survey was conducted by a web site application, through a self-applied questionnaire especially designed to fulfill all the research objectives. A total of 915 questionnaires were collected.

For each country sample, the cultural profiles were examined identifying value priorities at cultural level, using the Schwartz Value Inventory (SVI) (1994, 2006). This SVI consists of a list of 46 values that allows measuring 7 cultural values orientations: Hierarchy, Conservation, Mastery, Harmony, Egalitarian Commitment, Intellectual Individualism and Affective Individualism. Within the context of consumer behavior, Schwartz cultural approach have been used mainly to explain differences in attitudes about products use and advertising among nations (Bech-Larsen et al 1999; Beerli y Martín, 2004; Watson et al 2002; Schröder & McKinnon, 2006, 2007).

According to Schwartz’s theory, 7 indexes were calculated by country, then a Value Profile for each national sample were obtained. Based on this, cross-cultural comparisons were conducted in order to assessing the relative importance of each Value Type across countries, and determine if significant differences or similarities emerged.

In all LA samples, EGALITARIAN COMMITMENT and MASTERY rated as the most important Value types. Differences for each Value Type emerged when a Fisher test was performed (ANOVA). Significant differences were obtained for 6 out of 7 Value Types. Only Harmony was rated equally low, in all the researched countries.

Also significant cross-national differences emerged in terms of cultural value priorities, using “Value Profile” during country characterization with SPAD program. Countries appear to have characteristic Value Profile when compared among them: Argentina, EGALITARIAN COMMITMENT; Colombia, AFFECTIVE INDIVIDUALISM, and HIERARCHY; Mexico, AFFECTIVE INDIVIDUALISM and MASTERY; Venezuela, CONSERVATION and MASTERY.

From a list of 15 usage reasons, consumers were asked to select the most important one for each tech product evaluated (computer, music player and cell phone). Among the types of needs identified to be satisfied by each product, we found three kinds: experiential, social and functional needs. A Chi square test was performed to determine whether significant differences in the kinds of reasons for usage / consumption between national samples do exists.

By means of a descriptive analysis (using DEMOD procedure with SPAD), we found out the kinds of motive (functional, social or experiential, following Kim et al, 2002 and Woods et al, 1985 style) that most characterize how young consumers from each country use cell phones, PC’s and music players. Among Colombian and Mexican young consumers, the functional motives stood out as most characterizing their consumption profile for each of the tech items into question. Regarding the same products, social-type motives best identify Argentines. Contrariwise, among Venezuelans, experience motives are the most distinctive, even though social motives are also relevant when it comes to certain products–mainly cell phones.

Although many similarities usually recognized among Latin-American countries, particularly among this region’s youth, like a group that has “developed” along with the globalization as a process in progress and has as well been exposed to global market strategies led off by several technological companies, in our study significant cross-national differences emerged in terms of cultural value priorities and usage reasons. Additionally, cultural value orientations were helpful to understand the differences founded in the usage reason of tech product among Latin youth.

These results suggest the theoretical framework proposed by Schwartz (1994, 2006) can help marketers to explain how similarities or different are, at cultural level, the LA nations, and most importantly, also can be used to gain insight into how products use and motivations are related to cultural facts, like values.

References