Developing and Testing the Cultural Embeddedness of Products (Cep) Scale

Alexander Jakubanecs, Marketing Department, Stern School of Business at New York University
Magne Supphellen, Department of Strategy and Management, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration

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Alexander Jakubanecs, Department of Strategy and Management, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, currently at New York University
Magne Supphellen, Department of Strategy and Management, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration

Abstract

National culture is an important variable in explaining consumer behavior. Cultural meanings embedded in products affect the way consumers process information, form attitudes and make decisions about products. Previous research on the role cultural meanings in products has often adopted a qualitative anthropological approach. In this research, we develop a multidimensional measure of cultural embeddedness of products, the CEP-scale. The scale is tested on two Russian non-student samples and shown to have three dimensions and sound psychometric properties.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12332/volumes/v33/NA-33

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The present study considers the basic foundation of the SBT model within the context of the life course framework. It proposes that various unexpected and anticipated life events that older adults encounter require transitions to new and not well-defined roles. Resulting feelings of role loss or discontinuity will lead to a susceptibility to negative labeling (i.e., via media messages) that weakens one’s self-concept and results in the initiation or intensification of emotion-focused coping strategies (Folkman and Lazarus 1980). This progression may be moderated by one’s financial status, health, and education.

Method

The data used in this study was based on a national mail survey of 695 U.S. consumers who were part of a panel. Because SBT applies only to elderly individuals, this number was reduced to 314, by limiting analysis to only those respondents 60 years or older.

Regression analysis was utilized to test the relationships between role discontinuity events, declining self-concept, and emotion-focused coping strategies. The moderation effects of media, education, income, and health were also tested.

Major Findings

The hypothesis that the relationship between one’s self-concept and emotion-focused coping strategies was supported. The mass media measure did not emerge as a significant moderator of the relationship between role discontinuities and declining self-concept. A key finding of this study was the moderating effects of health and education as they relate to anticipated life discontinuities and one’s self-concept. Apparently, the impact these factors might have on the elderly’s stability of their self-concept due to role discontinuities in later life has important societal implications.

References

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Alexander Jakubanecs, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration
Magne Supphellen, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration

Extended abstract

Background

National culture seems to be an increasingly important variable in consumer behavior research. First, the variety of products from all over the world is growing in most Western markets. At the same time, there is now stronger political pressure to display the origin of products, especially within the European Union. Moreover, previous speculations about convergence of national cultures (e.g. Levitt 1983), are countered by recent evidence showing that many cultures are in fact diverging along several dimensions (de Mooij 2000; de Mooij 1998).

Research on cultural meaning of products has typically adopted a qualitative anthropological approach (Applbaum and Jordt 1996; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Past research has provided useful insights of how consumers ascribe cultural meanings to specific products. However, in order to study larger numbers of products and exploit the advantages of multivariate statistical analyses, we need quantitative measures of focal concepts. In this research we develop a scale for measuring the type- and extent of national cultural meaning embedded in products, the CEP-scale.

Defining the CEP construct

CEP is an individual level variable and refers to the degree to which a product category (e.g., pizza, meatballs, orange juice, TV, jeans, etc.) is perceived to be embedded in a given national or ethnic culture. The dimensionality of the construct was uncertain ex ante. Our research strategy was to develop a broad set of scale items and look for different dimensions by means of factor analysis.

We used three theoretical frameworks in developing the scale items: theories on transferal of cultural meaning to products (McCracken 1986), theories on symbolic interactionism (Solomon 1983), and social identity theory (Kleine et al. 1993). Furthermore, we consulted two experts on national culture and consumer behavior, one academic and a marketing director of a multinational consumer goods company. The items were developed to capture the interaction of meaning in consumer products with the culturally-constituted world and consumers’ self-concepts. The initial list included 17 items, such as “when consuming this product, I feel that I am part of the national tradition” and “this product is probably found in some folk tales, songs, or jokes (of this nation)”.

Method and major findings

The CEP Scale was tested on two non-student samples in Moscow, Russia (N= 201 and 238). Five products were included in both tests. Products were selected systematically to provide variation in the expected level of cultural embeddedness: ketchup (low), soft drink (low), vodka (high), mors (a special kind of juice based on berries; high CEP), and pelmeni (a special kind of meatball; high CEP).

Based on the first dataset we performed exploratory factor analyses in order to explore the dimensionality of the scale. Regardless of extraction- or rotation schemes, the analyses tended to converge in two factors, but with some sign of a third factor (explained variance, all factors: about 65%). The two major factors seemed to represent a descriptive CEP dimension (items such as: “This product could be..."
used by foreigners, e.g. in movies or stories about Russia, in order to describe something typical Russian”), and a personal CEP dimension (items such as: “as a Russian, I probably have other thoughts and feelings for this product than other people”). One or two items, though, tended to load on a third factor. These items referred to a public aspect of CEP (item: “If other Russian were to see me using this product, he or she would perceive me as a typical Russian”). This third factor was interesting from a theoretical viewpoint, because previous research has shown that the self-concept has a private and a public dimension (e.g. Richins 1994).

Hence, we developed three more items in order to cover a potential public aspect of CEP. In a new study of Russian consumers (N=238) involving the same five products (ketchup, soft drink, vodka, mors and pelmeni), the revised scale was tested for both a two-factor and three-factor structure via LISREL.

The results tended to support a three-dimensional structure for the CEP Scale. There was a better fit for the three-dimensional model, in particular for two product categories-vodka and mors. The fit indicators for the three-dimensional model were CMIN/df=2.445, NFI=0.859, CFI=0.910, RMSEA=0.078 for vodka and CMIN/df=1.747, NFI=0.876, CFI=0.942, RMSEA=0.092 for mors. Preliminary evidence of discriminant and nomological validity was found by correlating the three CEP dimensions with related constructs such as the CETSCALE (descriptive CEP: r=.044, p=.544; private CEP: r=.281, p<.01; public CEP: r=0.246, p<.01) and age (descriptive CEP: r=-.05, p=.488; private CEP: r=-1.68, p<.022; public CEP: r=-.106, p<.138).

Moreover, the three dimensions of the CEP-scale correlated differently with these other variables. This finding supports the validity of a multidimensional definition of the construct.

Implications

The CEP-scale may prove to be a very useful scale for cross-cultural consumer research. In addition to measuring the extent of cultural embeddedness of a given category, researchers may use the scale to identify the type of embeddedness involved: descriptive, personal or public. Future research should validate the scale on other samples in other countries and in other product categories. Most important, research is needed on the effects of the different CEP-dimensions on information search and processing, attitude formation and choice.

References


Self-Gifting vs. Gifting to Others: An Examination of Psychological Orientation Differences in the Domain of Gift Giving

Suri Weisfeld-Spolter, Baruch College

Stephen Gould, Baruch College

Maneesh Thakkar, Baruch College

Extended Abstract

In the past, gift giving theory and research had typically been dyadic or interpersonal in nature (e.g. Belk, 1979). Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that people may sometimes give gifts to themselves, and in 1990 the first empirical investigation on the topic of giving gifts to oneself was conducted and self-gifts were conceptualized as (1) personally symbolic self-communication through (2) special inducements that tend to be (3) premeditated and (4) highly context bound (Mick and DeMoss 1990b, p.328).

Since its inception into the marketing research domain, it has been suggested that the self-gift phenomenon may be widely occurring in American society (Mick and DeMoss 1990a, 1990b) and two predominant contexts of self-gift behavior have been identified: reward and therapy (Mick and DeMoss 1990a, 1990b, 1992). Other research has substantiated the notion that self-gifts are a fairly common and important phenomenon particularly in western consumer behavior. According to social researchers, Western individuals have become increasingly self-oriented in their purchases and consumption behavior (Mick et al. 1992). Similarly, McKeage et al. (1993) believe that people have been giving gifts to themselves since the early beginnings of self-indulgence. Mick et al. (1992) advise that if self-gifts are as prominent in American society as some past research has suggested, then it’s a phenomenon marketers cannot afford to ignore or misunderstand.

Specifically, McKeage et al. (1993) suggest that future research might examine affective responses to self-gifts versus gifts-to-others. Additionally, Mick and Faure (1998) suggest that therapeutic self-gifts may result from a different type of psychological process than reward self-gifts. Extending Gould and Weil’s (1991) study of gender differences in buying gifts for same sex friends versus opposite ones, (they found that males described themselves differently in terms of masculine and feminine traits when buying gifts for same sex friends

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