Effects of Belief in Global Citizenship on Branding Discourse in the U.S. and Russia

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Our research focuses on belief in global citizenship, an individual’s perception that use of global brands substantiates a global identity. Drawing on research on branded products, globalization, and consumer culture in developed and emerging markets, we posit and test relationships among belief in global citizenship, the symbolic use of branded products as a means of identity, and the importance of branded products. We further consider the effects of cultural openness and consumer ethnocentrism on belief in global citizenship. Our work focuses on the global youth market in the U.S. and Russia, and contributes to understanding consumers’ associations with branded products in a global marketplace.


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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Global brands appeal to managers because of their ability to provide economies of scale and secure high brand equity. Their appeal for consumers is more widely debated, especially in emerging markets where global brands are frequently blamed for disruptions of local value systems. Past research (Appadurai 1990) suggests that the potential of global brands to transform cultural meanings depends on whether consumers believe that global brands can provide them with the means of participation in the global consumer culture and expression of their identity. Holt, Quelch, and Taylor (2004) posit: global brands create an imagined global identity that [the consumer] shares with like-minded people (p. 71); they report that approximately 12% of consumers across 12 countries prefer global brands for this reason.

Drawing on research on branded products, globalization, and consumer culture as related to developed and emerging markets, we attempt to further explicate the concept of belief in global brands as a passport to global citizenship. Specifically, we posit and test relationships between several concepts, including: belief in global citizenship, the symbolic use of branded products as a means of identity, and the importance of branded products. We further consider the effects of cultural openness and consumer ethnocentrism on belief in global citizenship. The overarching goal of our research is to move beyond preference prediction for global brands and to assess effects of belief in global citizenship on a symbolic system of meanings consumers associate with branded products in developing and developed cultures. We consider belief in global citizenship as an antecedent to the symbolic meaning of personal identity that branded products project and to importance that consumers assign to branded products. Effects of consumer ethnocentrism and cultural openness on belief in global citizenship are also examined.

Our research takes an adapted etic approach (Douglas and Craig 2006) and focuses on the global youth segment in one developed (U.S., n=218) and one developing (Russia; n=292) market. College students in the two countries were asked to complete a questionnaire that presented them with shortened measures of consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma 1987) and cultural openness (Sharma et al. 1995). Based on past research (Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra 1999; Holt et al. 2004; Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden 2003), we developed three items to measure belief in global citizenship. We also developed fifteen items to measure the meaning of personal identity of branded products (five items each to reflect the meanings of self-identity, group-identity, and status). Because of past challenges with self-reported general measures of consumer involvement with branded products in emerging markets (e.g., Coulter, Price and Feick 2003), we developed an index measure of branded product importance for each individual based upon his/her expressed importance for branded products in ten product categories (i.e., mineral water, soda, beer, coffee, cigarettes, chocolates, personal care/cosmetics, clothing, automobiles, and televisions).

We used structural equation modeling (AMOS, 7.0) to address our goals and hypotheses. The models exhibited configural and metric invariance (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998), which allowed us to make model comparisons between the two countries. Both pan- and intra-country analyses were performed. As predicted, belief in global citizenship was a strong positive predictor of the brand meaning of personal identity, and this effect was stronger in Russia. The meaning of identity increased importance of branded products to an equal degree across countries. Both cultural openness and consumer ethnocentrism had positive effects on belief in global citizenship, but, contrary to our prediction, the effect of cultural openness was stronger in the U.S. and the effects of ethnocentrism were not different across the two countries. Consistent with past research, there was a moderate negative correlation between consumer ethnocentrism and cultural openness in the U.S. (Sharma et al. 1995; Shimp and Sharma 1987), but we found no relationship between these two concepts in Russia.

Our work draws attention to belief in global citizenship and importance of branded products, and examines relationships between these concepts, as well as their relationship to symbolic meanings associated with antecedents of ethnocentrism and cultural openness. Our research identifies several important opportunities for future research. First, we show that young consumers in the U.S. and Russia vary in the extent to which they believe in belongingness to the global world and view global brands as symbols of identity meanings. Global brands empower branded product discourse by enriching meanings of brands and facilitating consumer involvement with branded products. Second, we find that individuals in the U.S. and Russia who are culturally open and those who are patriotic about their locally-made products are likely to believe in global citizenship. The latter finding speaks to the notion of emerging “glocal” identities of young consumers, especially in developing markets where global brands signal a path for national empowerment and value sharing. Future research should examine potentially different, possibly curvilinear relationships between ethnocentrism and belief in global citizenship in samples of more ethnocentric consumers and over time. Finally, the relative novelty of brands and branding in Russia makes the constructs of culture and consumer culture rather distinct. Multinational corporations and local firms need to be aware of consumer’s limited understanding of branding and determine appropriate local mechanisms to further develop consumer culture.