Galloping Through the Global Brandscape: Consumers in a Branded Reality

Kaleel Rahman, American University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Helene Cherrier, American University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT
The idea that endless numbers of brands shape people’s day-to-day life is known as “brandscape” (Biel, 1993; Sherry, 1998; Soloman, 2003). When consumers live in another country for an extended period of time not only is it necessary to engage in various consumer behaviors in order to conduct everyday life but also brandscape becomes part of their life. The aim of this study was to explore consumer acculturation to an unfamiliar brandscape. A grounded theory analysis of case study type interviews resulted in three broader domains with seven themes: “sentiments” with experiential tension, nostalgia and patriotism; “brandscape” with global brands, missing brands, ethno-brands and beloved brands; and “consumer acculturation”. The paper discusses the findings of the study and the implications of the emergent themes.

INTRODUCTION
Jordan, a 34 year old Aussie bloke! Jordan woke up this morning at 6.40, jumped out of his IKEA bed, put on his weird Dunlop slippers, rushed into the bathroom, brushed his teeth using his Colgate toothpaste, had a clean shave with his Gillette Sensor razor and Old Spice shaving cream, and had a warm shower scented with his Herbal Essence. Having had a quick breakfast and a quick spray of Obsession by Calvin Klein, he jumped into his Toyota Camry, switched on to 2DayFM radio. On the way, he filled up at the Mobil petrol station next to the Microsoft head office. Jordan arrived at work, approached his hot desk, said “good morning” to his colleague who had her aromatic Starbucks coffee cup, and he sat on his chair and switched on the Dell desktop.

Although I have not described even two hours of Jordan’s life, you may have gained a reasonably good picture about what kind of a person he is. Flavoured by his likes and dislikes, the brands I have mentioned define who he is. The idea that endless numbers of brands shape people’s day-to-day life is known as “brandscape” (Biel, 1993; Sherry, 1998; Soloman, 2003). As you may notice, Jordan merely know some of these brands, others he uses frequently; He has strong feelings towards some but not towards some others.

Assume that suddenly you go to a new country to spend about three years. Would you take all of “your” brands with you? Would you expect your brands to be available in that country? Would you miss the brands that you leave at home? How would you react to the new brands that you encounter in the new country? What are some of the feelings, emotions and thoughts, both positive and negative, that you would experience with regard to brands when you are in the new country? As a consumer, how would you acculturate to your new brand-related environment? These questions motivate this research.

The study of global brands has become an important area of research in marketing. The special issue devoted to “branding in the global marketplace” in the Journal of International Marketing in 2008 with notable contributions from consumer researchers (Cayla and Arnould, 2008) who critique the currently prevalent technique-oriented scholarship in global branding, and practitioner-related books like “The Global Brand: How to Create and Develop Lasting Brand Value in the World Market” (Hollis, 2008), are some examples reflecting this importance. Although there is substantial research relating to consumers’ reactions to the globalization of brands, almost all this research generally focuses on consumers in the home country. For instance, Echhardt and Houston (2002) studied how McDonald’s is perceived by people in Shanghai, and Dimofte and his colleagues (2008) recently studied reactions of U.S. consumers to global brands. In a search of the existing literature the author found no research on how consumers react to their familiar and new brands when they are in a foreign land.

Understanding how consumers react to their brands in a foreign country is important for several reasons. When living in another country for an extended period of time it is necessary to engage in various consumer behaviors in order to conduct everyday life. Often, the marketplace brandscape is very different from that which was left behind, both in terms of the brands available and the way of conducting transactions. In addition, when consumers leave their country of birth their meaning of brands and possessions may change because most of their own possessions and brands are left behind (Belk, 1992). From a practical point of view, one aspect of globalization of brands is known as “glocalization” where certain product features, brand elements, and distribution systems of a brand are customized to local consumer tastes (Svensson, 2001). For example, Nestle has a very strong emphasis on meeting local tastes while preserving its global orientation. As consumers move across the nations, encountering their brands being glocalized may evoke certain feelings, and it is important to understand how they react to such glocalization of their brands. Next, there are large numbers of students who move to foreign countries for their higher education. For example, in the US alone there were 454,000 international students enrolled in colleges (Field, 1999), and in the UK overseas students made up 12.7% of the higher education population (Students in Higher Education Institutions, 2003), while in Australia 18.8% of all commencing tertiary students in 2000 were international fee-paying students (Michael et al., 2003) and the income from overseas students has become “bigger than wool, nearly as big as wheat” (King, 2002). In addition, developments in information technology and increases in the service-based economy have all resulted in a situation where a large number of short-term immigrants are moving across countries as expatriates (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). How do these people who move to a new country react to the unfamiliar brandscape in general?

The aim of this study was to explore consumers’ reactions to their brandscape in the context of consumer acculturation. To address this question, a phenomenological in-depth interview approach was undertaken. Interviews were analysed using “grounded theory” and “associative group analysis” approaches. The theoretical background of the study is presented here along with the research questions, followed by the findings of the study and a discussion of implications for researchers and practitioners.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Since branding has become an effective tool for marketers to package a whole range of meanings (Kapferer, 2008), consumers today are faced with a proliferation of brands in their daily life—a branded reality. The idea of branded reality has been advanced by several authors, with terms including Sherry’s “brandscape” (1998), Biel’s “brandscape” (1993), and Soloman’s “consumerspace” (2003). A brandscape is a “material and symbolic environment that consumers build with marketplace products, images, and messages, that they invest with local meaning, and whose totemic significance
largely shapes the adaptation consumers make to the modern world” (Sherry, 1998, p. 112). As Soloman (2003) suggests, people tend to rely upon brands to define their identities and make sense of the world around themselves. Thus, what a brand means is largely derived from associations emanating from the contexts where the brand is consumed (Biel, 1993). As McCracken’s meaning transfer model (1986) posits, meaning moves from aspects of the cultural world such as fashion, class systems and advertising to the brands, and then from these brands to the individual consumer. However, as Penaloza (1989) posits, a consumer enters the new culture with an abundance of consumption knowledge previously acquired in the consumer’s culture of origin. What would happen to the consumer (who has already been defined by his own consumption context) if he or she moves to a different culture where the fashions, social classes and advertising all are different? According to McCracken, the consumers must redefine themselves; as changes happen, they would be constantly constructing and reconstructing themselves by a way of new meaning or new ways of defining themselves as they react to the brands in a new cultural context.

This new way of defining themselves in a new culture may be understood by consumer acculturation (Penaloza, 1994; Askgaard et al., 2005; Ustuner and Holt, 2007) which refers to “the acquisition of skills and knowledge relevant to engaging in consumer behavior in one culture by members of another culture” (Penaloza, 1989, p. 110). Acculturation is a term typically used in reference to immigrants planning to stay permanently in their host country (Penaloza, 1994). Yet, it can also apply to other forms of movement (e.g., peasants into cities) even within the same country (Ustuner and Holt, 2007). Since the goal of this paper is to understand how consumers “feel” in response to their brandscape as part of their acculturation, a brief review of feelings warrants attention.

Prior research contends that certain feelings can be “evoked” in response to brands (Keller, 2001). Kahle and his colleagues (1998) point out six types of feelings that may be evoked in response to a brand: warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self-respect. According to the notion of “brand relationships”, consumers not only have feelings toward brands but also consider brands as relationship partners (Fourrier, 1998). She posits that consumers have feelings and possible forms of relationships with their brands, akin to arranged marriages, casual friendships, committed partnerships, enmities, and secret affairs. As the former CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi posits, future success of brands largely depends on their ability to evoke emotional responses such as joy, surprise, pride and love (Roberts, 2004).

The present paper, specifically in the context of the consumers being in a new country, examines the emerging concepts relating to the emotions they feel towards the brands they had back home and the brands they encounter in the host country. Keeping the background of brandscape, consumer acculturation, brand feelings and brand relationships in mind, the following research question is put forward: How do consumers coming into a new country acculturate to an unfamiliar brandscape?

**METHODOLOGY**

In keeping with the exploratory and theory-developing objectives of the study, in-depth interviews were used to reveal consumers’ reaction to a new brandscape, permitting an understanding of the subjective meaning of consumers’ experiences with brands in a new country. This method also provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon from the consumer’s perspective (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

Because of the small sample size permitted by the context of the study, purposive sampling was employed. Participants were selected on the basis of specific criteria so that they shared broad similarities (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). While maintaining these similarities, participants from different parts of the world were recruited. Thus in-depth case study interviews were conducted in Australia with seven selected participants: (1) Zhao, a 24-year-old doctoral student in Finance coming from Vietnam (Ms V); (2) Shelly, a 23-year-old Masters student in Marketing coming from England (Ms E); (3) Gordon, a 26-year-old Masters student in Sociology coming from Canada (Mr C); (4) Heidi, a 25-year-old doctoral student in Sociology coming from France (Ms F); (5) Shaima, a 32-year-old doctoral student in Economics coming from Bangladesh (Ms B); (6) Rachel, a 24 year old Masters student in Public Health coming from Canada (Ms C); (7) Ali, 41 year old doctoral student in Organizational Behavior coming from Saudi Arabia (Mr S).

These participants had been in Australia for an average of six months and each had a student visa. They were recruited through collegial networks and no compensation was provided for their participation. The interviews lasted an average of 65 minutes (range 40–85 minutes). Each interview was conducted on a one-to-one basis, with the participant being assured of anonymity and the freedom to withdraw at any stage. An interview guide which consisted of direct questions in terms of his/her interactions with brands was used. Although an interview guide was used, the questions were adapted in the course of the interview and the flow was largely determined by the informants. In order to maintain a holistic perspective, as employed by Fournier (1998), all interviews and analyses were conducted by the author. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim into pages of text. In addition, the interviewer noted comments relating to each participant’s behaviour, verbal expression, and other nonverbal circumstances.

Furthermore, a member check phase (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989) was conducted whereby participants were each given a draft report of their case study and asked to critique it, comment on it, or request amendments. The purpose of this process was to confirm that the report had captured the information as delivered by the participants or, if not, for them to correct, amend or extend it. As a result of this procedure, some minor modifications were made to the transcripts.

The transcripts were coded based on Straus and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory method, including open, axial and selective coding, and theoretical sampling techniques. Accordingly, the first interview was coded and analysed before conducting the second interview. Based on this approach, an attempt was made to identify emerging themes, and to map relationships between these themes from the interviews. The data collection process was extended until no new themes emerged from the interview data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Straus and Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory method was supplemented by associative group analysis (Szalay and Bryson, 1974) in which any particular “domain” consists of several “themes” and a theme consists of several individual concepts. For example, in a study by Szalay and Deese (1978), the domain of “education” consisted of the themes politeness, school features, knowledge, educated, and educators. The theme “politeness” in turn consisted of a range of concepts including polite, decent, respect, manners, social, good, and agreeable. In addition to transcripts, the data examined in the analysis also included details observed (e.g., facial expression) during the interviews.

**FINDINGS**

In this section, an overview of findings is presented along with an emerging conceptual framework followed by details of emergent themes. The grounded theory analysis of the interviews based
on concepts, properties and dimensions (Straus and Corbin, 1998) along with themes and domains of associative group analysis (Szalay and Bryson, 1974) can be postulated in a meaningful framework as presented in Figure I. The framework comprises three broader domains of themes. The “sentiments” domain emerged as participants expressed their emotions in terms of experiential tension of being in a new culture, feelings of patriotism and nostalgic reactions. The “brandscape” domain emerged as they narrated their brand stories referring to global brands, brands with which they had had close relationships, brands available and unavailable in the host country, and brands that they were unable to find in the host country. The “consumer acculturation” domain emerged as they reported the way they adjusted to their new environment, in terms both of their life in general and of brands in particular. Despite the presence of arrows leading to subsequent domains in Figure I, there was no attempt in this study to establish causal relations between these domains, since its purpose was exploratory in nature. In the following section the emergent themes are discussed in detail.

Sentiments domain

Experiential tension. The first theme that emerged was consumer experiential tension. Experiential tension is a milder form of cultural shock, usually resulting from differences in culture, consumption situation and product unavailability. Experiential tension is characterized by feelings of conflict and ambivalence, such as “emotional work involved in establishing new social networks, the stresses of learning how to be a consumer in the new locale, and small pleasures of established routines as well as familiar surrounding and products” (Thompson and Thambyah, 1999 p. 221). All seven participants expressed some form of experiential tension relating to their own experiences. One aspect of this tension is very similar to cultural shock (Winkelman, 1994):

“I think there is too much emphasis here on independence... like people respect privacy too much–it makes you isolated–when I came here first there was a neighbour next room and that person did not want to know about me! That upset me” (Ms V).

“I lived all my life in Saudi, I was born there, all my friends are there, my social network is there, by coming here I lose all of that, I lose the social network, I come into a place where I know no one, I have no friends, I have no family!” (Mr. S).

Another aspect of experiential tension was directly related to the consumption of goods and services. Some of the concepts emerged where the participants found that the same brands were offered but had a different taste, an identification of some glocalization (Svensson, 2001): “cheese is another category I miss, they have the same brands here but taste different” (Mr C); “Cadbury’s dairy milk, but we got them here in Australia but the ones from the UK taste completely different–that’s the ones I am used to. Australian ones are sweeter.” (Ms E).

The participants also complained that package sizes or quantities were also different from their previous experience: “Every product is bigger here... I was really surprised to see when people buy huge popcorn in the cinemas! None will buy that in France!” (Ms F); “Everything you can buy in bulk in Canada. I remember some girls complaining in my class about when they buy razor blades in the US they buy a big bag of razors but here they buy 2 or 3, very expensive” (Mr. C).

Although complaints regarding smaller packaging are related to the cost factor, participants also made direct comments about prices and charges where products and services in Australia were perceived as being relatively more expensive than in their home country: “The (bank) charges are terrible, like the amounts they charge for using an ATM is absolutely terrible. They charge you for everything. Every little thing you can think of they charge you.” (Ms E).

Nostalgia. As one would expect, the next emergent theme was nostalgic in nature. Nostalgia is usually characterized by “things used to be better in the good old days” (Rindfleisch and Sprott,
Research in consumer behaviour suggests that products and brands are likely to evoke memories of past times and to inspire nostalgic reflection (Holbrook, 1993). Nostalgic reflection was strongly evident amongst most of the participants regarding to brands that they used back home:

“Not the shampoo, not the toothpaste, but the bags (Mountain Equipment) yes. Every time I go out I carry the bag, and it reminds me of my old bags” (Mr. C).

“We got Foxtel recently and we got UK TV, that reminds me of back home, all UK programs, you watch it just for nostalgia you watch it and I go you know, oh God, that’s England, that noise, that sound the look of drizzle, rain, and the settings!” (Ms E).

“Recently, a friend of mine took me to Home Bush Bay outlet mall and I found a D&G t-shirt there. You know what? I got the same thing, same color! That day I was thinking about my bedroom, my friends and smoking shisha with them” (Mr. S).

**Patriotism.** The third theme emerging in the “sentiments” domain was patriotic sentiment in general. Three of the participants specifically commented on various aspects of patriotic sentiment. At times, their body language was also obvious in such reactions. The first aspect of patriotic feeling identified was directly expressed patriotism (Gelb, 2002) towards the home country.

“Out here we are English, that link. England is doing really well. I really wanted to buy an England t-shirt, I probably wouldn’t have done if I were in England, because I am here I wanted to identify with my country” (Ms E).

However, much of the patriotic feeling was expressed through “ethnocentrism” (Shimp and Sharma, 1987) and “country of origin effect” led by emotions (Maheswaran and Chen, 2006). From an ethnocentric point of view, the respondent from England made reference to Richard Branson as a successful Englishman and took pride in expressing her “Englishness”. This sentiment was also evident in her reference to the Mini Cooper as a “very British” car. On the contrary, from a country-of-origin point of view, the respondent from Vietnam was delighted to see some global brands that were made in Vietnam, as the following quote illustrates:

“When I bought Nescafe I found that was made in Vietnam. You know I use Colgate toothpaste, my favourite one, once I found that was made in Vietnam too. See, I am in Australia and they are selling these products from my country! These brands go with my feelings, but not Visa or Coke since I cannot really relate them to my country” (Ms V).

Similarly, the participants also commented about patriotic activities in Australia. Specifically, all of the participants’ comments indicated that they had noticed the “Buy Australian Made” campaign (Acharya and Elliott, 2003), and surprisingly it annoyed them in some cases. For example, the informant from England sarcastically hinted “obviously the big thing they have over here is Australian Holden!” The informant from Canada was annoyed about the strong emphasis on domestic goods:

“I find that there is more emphasis on domestic goods here…. even though GM is American, the Aussies think it (Holden) as an Australian icon. Australians are proud of that–Canadians don’t have that…. Here on TV, they go–here the three reasons to buy this products, reason 1, reason 2, reason 3, buy Australian!” (Mr C).

**Brandscape domain**

**Global brands.** In terms of the brandscape domain, one of the most obvious themes was centered around some references and reactions to global brands (Holt, 2002). With their multinational presence, global brands are usually quite familiar to the global audience. Accordingly, the participants were very familiar with the global brands.

One obvious comment about global brands were related to ‘convenience’ which means saving time and effort. Although convenience generally refers to certain convenient product categories such as ‘fast food’ or ‘frozen vegetables’, the importance of convenience as a construct applicable to brands in general has been noted (Berry et. al., 2002). The participant from Bangladesh said encountering Western global brands did not evoke any feelings but they were still “convenient” as she knew these brands would be available in a “Western country”. She further commented “I used Dove soap in Bangladesh and I use it here too, I didn’t have to look for any other brand… no I didn’t bother if it would be available in Australia, it is just a soap you know”. When asked her reaction to specific global brand like Coca Cola, Kodak, and Pantene, the participant from Vietnam said “these brands make my life easier since I already know these brands”.

A somewhat related to convenience was ‘global brands as objects’. That is, encountering objects such as pencil, a toothbrush or shoes should evoke no surprise from anyone from any part of the globe as people generally expect them to be present everywhere. Similarly, as the participants hinted, encountering brands such as Visa, Coca Cola and McDonald’s in a new country should surprise none. The following quotes illustrate this premise:

“These brands you pretty much expect anywhere you go in the world. It’s not something that you are surprised about” (Ms E).

“Because everyone has Coke, it may be a bit insulting to ask this question” (Ms F).

“They are everywhere! I saw Kodak store,…Coca Cola signs and all that around me in Vancouver in the downtown area–all those signs. So used to having them everywhere” (Mr C).

Although global brands in general do not surprise anyone, it seems to come as a surprise when consumers find such brands positioned differently, again some reference to ‘glocalization’ (Svensson, 2001). To illustrate, the participants from Vietnam and Bangladesh reported that McDonald’s is a prestige and upper class brand in their countries but they find that McDonald’s is the cheapest food in Australia. They also reported that ANZ Bank and Pizza Hut seem to have a similar gap in brand image between the countries. Although one might attribute this phenomenon to the level of development of the countries involved, the brand image disparity was evident in other respondents’ comments as well:

“Esprit, a French one originally, I thought it’s too expensive and upper class, never went even inside in the UK. For some reason it seems to be a lower class here in Australian and I actually go into Esprit here” (Ms E).

“A car like Honda Civic is very common, very average in Saudi, but here in Australia it seems like a cool car” (Mr S).

**Missing (absent) brands.** The next emergent theme was “missing brands”, which involves (non-global) brands one normally used at home but is unable to find in the host country. Although they do not seem to have strong feelings towards these brands, they still had trusted these brands from their prior experience with them, and in someway expected them to be present in a host country. As is
evident, missing brands often result in some form of experiential tension. For example, one respondent tried to apply for a Visa Debit card:

“In the UK you can use your debit card like a credit card (Barkly Visa debit), like you can buy things online, they don’t do that over here, it’s very annoying when you can’t buy things online even though you got money” (Ms E).

Although consumers may not have strong feelings toward certain brands and may use them only occasionally, the brands may still be important, as the following quote indicates:

“There is this eye-drop I used in Vancouver called Gentel, very common in Canada, my optometrist had recommended that too, and I went into a chemist shop and asked for a Gentel eye drop, and they go “what?” they don’t have that here. Okay, “can I buy something similar to that?” and then, “well, what’s in it?” then I said, “I don’t know what’s in it, I buy it all the time”, now I have to find what I usually use and find what is the ingredient it’s got. But I don’t know what’s in it–how do I find what’s in it? I was really surprised about that” (Mr C).

Beloved brands. Beloved brands refer to brands towards which consumers have developed strong feelings, but which are not usually found in the host country. ‘Beloved brands’ theme is different from ‘missing brands’ theme because beloved brand theme is associated to strong feelings. Since these brands were not accessible to the participants in Australia, the brand stories of the informants generally resulted in nostalgic reactions, as the following quotes illustrate:

“My school bag, the best backpack in Canada is Mountain Equipment Corp. Very well known very high quality backpacks. I have three bags and they are Mountain Equipments. The reason that the Mountain Equipment is hanging around with me is because I really like the brand, it’s really good quality, it’s not cheap. The first bag I got was when I was 13, so I still have that bag, but I tried other brands in the meantime, but they are bad” (Mr C).

“I miss Marks and Spencers sooo much and their sandwiches are absolutely amazing, they are the number one sandwich maker, it’s got such good choice, I miss that a lot” (Ms E).

“I miss my Ispahani tea brand a lot, we wanted to bring some when went last time but unfortunately forgot, so we got some from our friend’s” (Ms B).

At times, consumers can develop strong feelings towards certain brands even though they are not the leading brands in a category. Despite its being a low profile brand, the Canadian informant had strong feelings toward Washburn guitars, as the following quote illustrates:

“This means lot to me because that’s the first guitar I ever bought–it is called Washburn, never forget the name. It’s not available in Australia. … It was the first thing I bought from my own money. Very memorable … Over a year of savings, $60-70 a month work.” (Mr C).

Ethno-brands. Another emergent theme regarding brandscape was “ethno brands”. Ethno brands refer to brands for which consumers have strongly developed feelings from their home country, and the brand is also available in the host country. The participants expressed their strong feelings towards such brands both verbally and nonverbally while narrating their stories. There were some cases where the participants expressed strong feelings when they found brands which were unique to their home country. For example:

“I also found L’€citante from my country, it’s like the Body Shop, I was really surprised to see that in Queen Victoria Building, I bought a lot of things there. (Ms F)

“We have a very popular noodle called PhoQuoc and I found that even in Australian supermarkets …” (Ms V).

“Marmite, yes, I found it in British Lolly Shop, I was happy to see it here. Otherwise I have to get my friends to bring it here” (Ms E).

Participants also reported that they found their favourite brands, not necessarily unique to their home country, in Australia. They become close to these brands from their home country:

“My Fender Strata Castor, the electric one. It’s considered to be the best guitar in the world, it’s available in Australia. I love to play guitar in my room on my own. It’s the same guitar Jimmy Henry used, top guitar in the world. I would have been surprised if I didn’t find that in Australia” (Mr C).

“I actually use the same shampoo Herbal Essence I used back home. Don’t know if it’s made in France, but I love it” (Ms F).

“I use Finesse typically, I tried other ones, I tried Head and Shoulders, and others, say 5 or 6, I didn’t like them, but when I tried this I liked it” (Mr S).

Consumer Acculturation domain

The last theme (and domain) that emerged was consumer acculturation. The present study found evidence of consumer acculturation where participants found ways to adjust their feelings regarding their life in general and brands in particular. While finding alternative brands in place of their regular brands, the participants eventually fell in love with some Australian brands. The participant from Canada, extremely conscious of his spending, reported that he was addicted to a new apple juice called “Australian Fresh” although it was almost double the price of other brands of fresh apple juice. The participants from France and England were delighted to report not only that they regularly bought Australian Tim Tam biscuits but also that they would take a lot of them home. Coming from a very basic consumption culture where most of the grocery purchases are made by counter-feeding, the participant from Bangladesh had to adjust to her new consumption context: She was surprised to see that Nivea moisturizer was available in different flavours and versions while she had known only a single Nivea Moisturiser back home; she found her new Nivea Moisturiser by experimenting a few of them. She had never tasted a pizza but she got almost addicted to Dominos in Sydney. She was surprised to see the number of Kellogg’s cereal options available to her and she noted “sometime I spend even half an hour browsing and choosing the right cereal!” On the other hand, the participant from Saudi Arabia, coming from a very upscale family brought up in an ultra luxury setting changed his style in a dramatic way: he learned to mingle with everyone in the hostel “because I had no choice”, he said, “I ate what they ate, I bought what they bought” and “this was the first time I ever travelled in a Hyundai car, and I liked it”.

The following quote captures this theme succinctly:

“It kind of gets confused because I have now become familiar with Australian brands and I will miss some of these when I go to the UK. Sometimes you actually forget what was available
back home, what wasn’t available here, and vice versa, and you go, “you sure we have that in England or Australia?” My boyfriend’s the same. You know he says something and goes, “we could get that in England” and I go, “no you couldn’t!”. We sort of forget what was available in the UK and you become familiar with Australian ones. I found that funny when I went to the UK I actually missed some of the things from Australia. Some of the silly things like Twisties, Tim Tams. They have Vegemite here, I don’t know why they don’t sell Marmite here. Boundaries between countries have become a lot less. Brands should become available in all the different countries” (Ms E).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This paper has presented the findings of a study of consumer acculturation to an unfamiliar brandscape. The study illustrates the way consumers feel about their brands when they move to a new country for an extended but limited period of time. While living in the new country for some time they go through a range of sentiments including experiential tension, patriotic reactions and nostalgic excitement. They also manifest none to very close feelings towards their brandscape, some of which relate to brands not available to them in the host country. Their brandscapes were identified as comprising global brands, missing brands, ethno brands and beloved brands. Finally, largely influenced by the presence of alternative and new brands in the host country, their brandscape becomes acculturated to the point where they adjust their life both in terms of their brands and their sentiments.

This study provides strong support for the notion of brandscape (Biel, 1993; Sherry, 1988; Soloman, 2003), where consumers are bombarded with a large number of brands that shape their identity both knowingly and unknowingly. The following quote illustrates this notion: “brands not only furnish the environment in which I live, but they also enrobe me, and by doing so, help define who I am” (Biel, 1993, p. 68). This study showed that consumers continue to engage with their brand environment—they comment on the global brands, the brands unique to their home country, the brands with which they have strong feelings towards, the brands they wanted to use but unable find, the brands they used in the past and left at home. More specifically, the study showed that consumers are well aware of the image differences of brands, which implies that they use them to express their identity. The participants easily recognized some differently positioned brands in different countries. Thus, the present study extends the notion of brandscape to a context in which consumers face a challenging situation where they have, in many cases, no access to the brands they used back home, are presented with alternative brands for their routine consumption, and are faced with new brands they never heard of. Consequently, as McCracken’s (1986) meaning transfer model hinted, the participants voluntarily adjusted their brand usage by becoming acculturated to the new environment. For example, Shaima, the participant from Bangladesh was redefined to some extent by her new usage of Domino’s Pizza, new Nivea Moisturiser, and the effort spent browsing a large number Kellogg’s cereal varieties available to her. The participant from England, by acculturated to her new brandscape, eventually got confused whether some brands belonged to Australia or England.

Several researchers have pointed out the importance of emotions in understanding consumer behaviour (Richins, 1997). This study supports the premise that consumers have emotional relationships with (Fournier, 1998) or feelings towards (Keller, 2001) brands and circumstances involving brands can evoke different types of feelings (Kahle, 1998). According to Roberts (2004), there are two types of emotions: people feel primary emotions such as joy and surprise when they are alone; they feel secondary emotions such as love and pride when they relate to someone else. This study found that consumers exhibit a range of primary and secondary emotions when they interact with brands when they are in new country. Experiential tension was related to irritation and uneasy feelings, nostalgia was like pleasant excitement, and patriotic sentiments were related to joy, excitement and happy. Missing brands evoked some frustration, beloved brands evoked some sadness, and ethno-brands evoked some excitement. This observation is also consistent with much previous research where brands are anthropomorphized, consumers are reported to accord even sacred status to brands (Belk et al., 1989), and brands are perceived as having personalities (Aaker, 1997).

Several implications can also be drawn from the findings. As a larger number of people than ever before travel to other countries to study and work, it is important to understand how these people feel about their brands in the new country. The findings of this study suggest that, if marketed successfully across countries, brands can offer convenience as a “time and effort-saving heuristic” (Berry et al., 2002 p.9). The findings also suggest that brands can achieve the status of objects where they may become some standard of international comparison. For example, the presence or absence of McDonald’s in a country may provide two different images of that country. When asked about Coca Cola, it was warned that it may be a bit insulting to ask if they have Coke in their country since brands like that considered as objects or even symbols. This is in line with the contention that buying global brands make consumers feel like the citizens of the world (Strizkova, Coulter and Price, 2008). The study also suggests that consumers take special pride in identifying with brands specific to their own country or brands made in their country, and brands serve as a form of national pride. The respondent from England was excited to refer to Richard Branson as a successful “Englishman” and Mini Cooper as a “very British” brand. These findings are consistent with brands as “citizen-artists”, contributing as a cultural resource (Holt, 2002) and global brands as a cultural form (Cayla and Arnould, 2008) such as folk tales. The study also implies that relationships with and feelings towards brands left at home become even stronger and enduring as consumers recollect such brands with nostalgia.

Another important implication refers to glocalization—adapting features and branding to local tastes. Accordingly, certain brands are forced to be positioned differently in different countries. This difference seemed to cause some surprise to the participants as the brands they had known had changed in some ways. For example, the respondent from England found Espirit to be something lower class leading her to feel more comfortable in shopping at Esprit in Australia. However, because her Dairy Milk chocolates in Australia tasted sweeter, she had to order her originals from England. The Canadian participant was annoyed as he could not buy his shampoo in bigger bottles.

In sum, this paper contributes to the literature concerning brands by (a) showing how consumers feel about “their” brands in a new country; (b) providing a framework of domains of themes incorporating sentiments, brandscape and consumer acculturation in terms of possible antecedents and consequences of brandscape in a host country; and (c) describing and interpreting the specific themes that emerged.

Ultimately, although the study provides grounded empirical evidence of the way some individuals feel about their brands in a foreign country, further research would enrich the findings and would reveal whether the themes uncovered in this study have relevance and potential application. Future research efforts could be directed towards increasing the sample size in order to strengthen the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, quantitative research also needs to be undertaken to test the frameworks that emerged in
this research. Finally, the study should be replicated in different geographical locations employing informants from other parts of the world.

REFERENCES


