Global Local Dialectical Relationship in a Mediterranean Context

Amina Djedidi, Université Paris-Est, IRG, France
Nacima Ourahmoune, Kedge Business School, France
Daniele Dalli, Università di Pisa, Italy

We study the sources of brand iconicity in a Southern Mediterranean Non-Western context where the leader is the local brand versus the giant Coca-Cola (epitome of a global brand). We reveal how local cultural macro-social and micro discourses are intertwined to sustain this situation of inversed brand leadership in Algeria.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1024549/volumes/v45/NA-45

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Global Local Dialectical Relationship in a Mediterranean Context

Amina Djedidi, Université Paris-Est, France
Nacima Ourahmoune, KEDGE Business School, France
Daniele Dalli, Università di Pisa, Italy

ABSTRACT

We study the sources of brand iconicity in a Southern Mediterranean Non-Western context where the leader is the local brand versus the giant Coca-Cola (epitome of a global brand). We reveal how local cultural macro-social and micro discourses are intertwined to sustain this situation of inverted brand leadership in Algeria.

INTRODUCTION

CCT Research and cultural branding approaches have often neglected Non-Western contexts (‘the invisible half’, Jafari et al. 2012). Although iconic brands like l’Occitane, Fiat, Camper, Prada, Dolce and Gabbana brands have been investigated through Mediterranean conceptualizations (Cova and Cova 2001; Rinallo 2007; Visconti 2010; Dalli and Romani 2012; Carù, Cova and Dalli 2014; Visconti and Di Giulì 2014) all these brands emerged from Northern Mediterranean contexts (France and Italy). The present research addresses the Southern Mediterranean side through the case study of Algerian number one soda, Hamoud Boualem (HB).

Previous research showed local or regional cultures can be leveraged by local brands to secure a distinctive and motivating positioning against global players (Ger 1999; Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden 2003; Özser 2012) and the ability of local brands to tap into cultural values and imaginaries shared in common with local consumers as a competitive advantage vs. global brands (Bhardwaj, Kumar, and Kim 2010; Dalli and Romani 2012; Riefler 2012). Indeed, Béji-Bécheur, Ourahmoune, and Özçağlar-Toulouse (2014) portray the way Mediterranean people are tied to their culinary inheritance, either real or collectively imagined.

We study the sources of brand iconicity in a Southern Mediterranean Non-Western context where the leader is the local brand versus the giant Coca-Cola (epitome of a global brand). We reveal how local cultural macro-social and micro discourses are intertwined to sustain this situation of inverted brand leadership in Algeria.

METHOD

The case study method adopted in this research allows to investigate the interplay between local and global dynamics and is relevant for studying cultural branding and marketing (Dalli and Romani 2012; Holt 2006). From 2013 to 2016, we used multiple data sources including: company interviews (4HB managers, 2stakeholders, and 2 firm owners’ family member); 29consumers with a varied sample in terms of gender, age (19 to 79), occupation, education and location (North, South, and Abroad). Verbal and visual data also included participant observation in the company and in consumption contexts (home, family events), archival documents, and company website in order to cross-validate the complex dimensions of the topic. The research team includes three Mediterranean researchers. The first author is Algerian and has collected the data providing a point of entry in the field and ability to speak Algerian. The two other researchers have experience investigating Mediterranean contexts including Algeria, and being French-Algerian and Italian provided analytical distance in terms of interpretation. The results are the negotiated understanding of the themes that emerged from the extensive varied data collected.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The name Hamoud Boualem (HB) comes from Youcef Hamoud, the founder, a flavorist who produced aroma in Algiers and started producing artisanal lemonade with lemon taste end of 19thcentury. We discovered that HB is not a “me too” sort of brand grown up in the shadow of a multinational brand as it has appeared in 1876 few years before Coca-Cola was invented. The brand won the golden medal at Paris Universal Exposition in 1889 (Algeria was a French colony at that time).

Currently HB is a beloved brand in Algeria: it was elected the best product/brand in 2010 Algerian Food National Fair and the most beloved brand to Algerian consumers compared to all brands in any product categories in 2011. HB developed partnerships at the national and international scale. It holds the leader position followed by Coca-Cola in many coastal towns.

Therefore, HB Managers present HB as a public property that belongs to all Algerians: it is not an Algerian firm, it is the Algerians’ firm.

To uncover the sources of brand iconicity of HB as a Non-Western, Southern Mediterranean brand we articulate our findings around three prominent themes that emerged from data analysis: food, embeddedness and myth.

Food

HB as a milestone for local food-drink know-how

Through HB consumption, Algerian consumers emphasize the way they become specialists of taste. Consumers highlight skills and know-how regarding proper combinations to adopt for health sake, gustative pleasure, and social conformity to normative taste. Ever young generations extensively mention the importance of Social taste constellation of food and drinks “When you eat something greasy and heavy, like M’hajeb –coastal tomato and onion stuffed crepe-, I ask my family to purchase white HB, it helps digesting, it tastes lemon, and I like lemon. ... For other kind of dishes, it goes with Selecto, the black HB” (Farah, F, Coast, 27y). These constellations of food-drink combinations can also be related to special occasion meals versus ordinary meals “During Eid el Edha -Islamic celebration involving a sheep sacrifice-, white HB goes with barbecue, and for other (dishes), it is Selecto” (Zohra, F, Desert_Coast, 65y).

HB is lived as an incorporated culinary heritage, having M’hajeb with HB is natural even when living abroad: “Now that you are here, I’d like to prepare M’hajeb; I need to go downtown to buy Selecto” (Kahina, F, Coast_Luxembourg, 34y).

For multi-domestic industries, demand is heterogeneous across countries and regions and it is difficult to standardize products and market offerings in general. In these conditions, local firms can build their competitiveness at home as they are considered as more authentic as food and drink are culture-bound categories for which it is easier to establish local and cultural associations (Özsomer 2012). Then, through rituals and hedonic attitudes toward food consumers integrate local brands in their self-representations, often in terms of know-how. Béji-Bécheur et al. (2014) demonstrate the way a typical South Mediterranean food (couscous) helps in building such self-representations. This latter goes through all the social codes that either translate personal preferences or local culinary know-how.
HB as celebration drink

Till the 1990’s, soda consumption habits were different and linked to special occasions. Now that soda is consumed on a daily basis. Yet HB still is an icon of Algerian feasting décor which paradoxically reinforces its status as a high-end product despite being present on a daily basis. As alcoholic beverage is a minor practice, HB’s meaning is displaced like Champagne in other contexts: « HB is served also in marriage ceremonies, when you celebrate your middle school graduation, your baccalaureate. You would not serve Coca or Juice, you would serve Hamoud in the yellow crates (for glass bottles), and so we share joy through HB. ....” (Soumia, F, Coast, 30y). Then, categorizing is not only horizontal and cognitive, it is vertically connected and associated with particular socio-cultural practices (Delmestri and Greenwood 2016). These reflects status games and habits that forms specific local taste regimes (Bourdieu 1979; Ourahmoune and Özçağlar-Toulouse 2012). When global iconic brands might sound fascinating or like ‘a luxury’ in emerging markets, our data suggest consumers’ tastes may consider the global brands as a less relevant alternative in satisfying social, cultural, and traditional needs as well as gustative, hedonistic motives.

Embeddedness

Company rootedness in Algeria’s modern history

HB history is strongly intertwined with Algerian modern history. It is the oldest Algerian company that is still active and it has been through good and bad times, just like Algeria did. During Algerian war for independence (1954-1962), HB was the first contributor of the Front of National Liberation. Consequently, two of HB’s managers were imprisoned. Consuming HB drinks at that time was a form of support for the “firm bravery” (HB family member, M, 94y). Algerian economy became increasingly dependent on oil, leading to hardship when the price collapsed during the 1980’s oil glut. HB, then, faced budget deficit for years. The Algerians’ riot in 1988 led Government to open the market and gave a new impetus to HB.

Product category as Mediterranean rooted drink

Tracing the culture of citrus and of lemonade shows that it is widespread across the Mediterranean. Algeria had witnessed the birth of citrus fruits, like Clementine. The now global citrus based soda Orangina has also started close to Algiers in 1930’s. Other citrus derived products like lemonade are well known and widespread across the Mediterranean cultures just as olive oil and bread: they are called Cherbet in Algeria. Algerian citrus based sorbet, Creponné, is a close version of Italian Liemoncello alcohol free ice cream. This engrained citrus based consumption is reinforced by the absence of culturally accepted consumption of alcoholic beverages. Then, consumers are socialized in a Mediterranean culture of lemonade and sparkling nonalcoholic beverages. Their expectations, knowledge, and specific tastes are imbued by HB recipes. Eckhardt (2005) highlighted that a product category foreignness overshadows the perception of brand localness. Through unfolding elements of the history of citrus and citrus based drinks, sodas are less likely to be the American way of life, but a deeply rooted Mediterranean product and life style. In this sense, the story of sodas and the role of HB in Algeria are not antagonist or dependent on the positioning of multinational, usually US brands: these seems to be two parallel stories in which the local and the global lived together in the same market without ruling out the other.

Coast-bound local food-drink constellation

HB is rooted in the coastal area of Algeria rooted in the 1600km Mediterranean coastal area.

Moving south, i.e. getting farther from the sea, regional dishes are still related to HB for those who were in touch with the coast culture. Mastering codes of social know-how can also be illustrated through regional dish-drink combinations for Rachid who spent his childhood in the desert, then moved for 20 years to Algiers, and then established again in desert: “(about food and drink) You have great and big Matabig -southern tomato and onion stuffed crepe- or Boutout -typical southern dish made of local bread mixed with tomato and pepper- then you sip a glass of HB” (Rachid, M, Desert, 57y). The same combination (regional dish-HB) was noticed with Zohra who was raised in the south, then moved to Algiers in the 1970’.

For southerners who have always lived in desert with no connection with the coast, more laxity is tolerated towards global brands consumption that happens to intrude regional traditional dish-drink combinations. HB and Coca-Cola can be substitutable options to accompany occasion related dishes: “In Eid el Edha, barbecue can only be enjoyed with HB or Coca-Cola, with barbecue it is white or black HB, a very fresh one, yes, and we add pressed citrus to it, whether it is black or white, and we drink it a lot in Eid el Edha” (Seif, M, Desert, 48y).

Food-drink constellations can also show boundaries between personal and collective tastes and, then, creating legitimacy regarding being a connoisseur with culinary know-how, like illustrated in the discussion between household informants: “We only purchase Coca-Cola when we cook Matabig or Pizza or Coca -Stuffed turn-over- (Amira, F, Desert, 42y) or Seffa –typical southern couscous-” (Lamia, F, Desert, 50y). Then Amira interrupts: “No, Seffa goes with milk, my son only eats it with milk.” Researcher: “who, amongst you, would purchase Coca-Cola when cooking Matabig, Pizza or Seffa?” (In chorus) “Yes Coca-Cola!” Researcher: and who, amongst you, would purchase HB when cooking them? “Yes, we also purchase HB (in a less convincing way) yes, we consume Coca-Cola and N’gaoues -inland local brand- (Amira) and we consume N’gaoues for Ramadan (Samira, F, Desert, 60y)”.

Myth

HB and sodas as a curative “magic potion”

Sodas being one of the targeted categories for health related awareness campaigns, some informants highlighted the fact that their occasional consumption of sodas is a way of enhancing their well-being. Surprisingly, the same objective, i.e., well-being, has been related by other informants using different arguments. Indeed, soda becomes a “magic potion” to enhance traditional dishes digestion of, to reduce belly located fat and to fight throat infection.

HB as blessed firm

HB tries to be authentically close to the Algerian consumer by donating to the Ministry of Solidarity, providing free meals, offering free air conditioner to Sahara people. HB managers and stakeholders strongly believe that HB owners are noble people who have their ancestors’ benediction, hence HB success. Their nobleness is translated, according to local culture, in their actions of donating and spreading joy amongst disadvantaged people.

Their benediction is partially explained through being true to principles “(interests), they never use them and they give them to poor people. HB formally rejects bribery and bank interest. These are educated people who have value and who do not change their principles whatever the circumstances are” (TM, M, Retired HB banker). Sticking to local values tends also to explain how circumstances helped “blessed” HB to overcome difficulties that turned to be beneficial because. For instance, in the 1980’, Government set a
unique controlled system for imported ingredients. Some HB competitors used lobbying to have the best ingredients and leave the worst for HB. Since HB priority is quality, it had to reduce product outcome to maintain quality. As HB drinks became rare on the market, it was associated with luxury: “When you go at someone’s place and HB was served, that was ‘La Classe!’” (TM, M). Later on, HB won the trial at court and all these constraints disappeared.

CONCLUDING CONTRIBUTIONS
Our research contributes an understanding of the drivers of brand iconicity - a prominent research topic (Holt 2004) - displaced in a Southern Mediterranean non-Western context. We address recent calls for more diverse and inclusive research and more meta-regional approaches to add depth to cultural branding and consumer behavior constructs (Jafari et al. 2012, Carú et al. 2014).

Specifically, systematically locating the discourses at the micro-level of analysis (e.g. the lived experiences of the brand from various actors) in the macro-socio-historical context (secondary data analysis) allows to shed light on the sources of brand legitimacy that secure HB an iconic position in Algeria despite global competition marked by Coca-Cola as the epitome of the modern global brand.

In this process, we offer a captivating account on how consumers actively work at reversing the narrative of the giant global Coca-Cola as first. The hegemonic local brand Hamoud is fueled with consumers’ energy to safeguard space for their specific status games, pleasures and traditions reflecting their habits. Furthermore, we show Hamoud’s osmosis with key moments of the national Algerian narrative to weave a unique relationship with consumers coupled with a mystique of magic and blessing. Yet, our findings suggest Hamoud is given central role of a positive catalyst in the scripts related to food in Algeria rather than acts of explicit ideological resistance toward Coca-Cola that coexists and is consumed with other foods.

Moreover, results advocate that these consumption dynamics are explained by: 1/ the long historical expertise of the Mediterranean context as per the category of product and 2/ the history of Hamoud as it appeared a few years before Coca-Cola - which reflects Mediterranean expertise, 3/ The expertise of consumers socialized in drinking soda and their invaluable ability to reconfigure and elevate HB status as a mediator of refined local norms of good taste when it comes to food protecting the brand iconicity despite Coca-Cola’s impressive marketing and communication resources.

Table 1: Results Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Food as a category products that mediates consumers cultures and traditions emerges at a site where consumers express complex meanings associated with HB | • HB as central to experiences of specific foods  
• Consumers work on setting subtle boundaries of good taste (some foods are more suitable for Hamoud other for Coca, some foods will be accompanied by white lemonade versus black one)  
• Food/beverage associations: Dos and Don’ts to secure position of connoisseurship.  
• Extensive and lively conversations witnessed during ethnography around the topic and the interviews signal the pleasure of speaking about food and demonstrate knowledge, skills, refinement or creativity  
• Habitus: incorporated norms of socialization as per local food constantly reworked and validated through self-pleasure and social validation  
• As celebration drink: festive versus ordinary foods, festive versus ordinary occasions: the brand adapts consumers’ routines and events (weddings, family events, Muslim celebration like Eid el Edha and Ramadhan, A-level celebration).  
• As a sparkling drink in a context where alcohol is not a major social practice, HB is elevated to the status of a special drink and even a status symbol –glass bottles for weddings consider as chic (informant use the French word – classe’). |
| Embeddedness characterized the very intimate relationship the history of Hamoud with modern Algerian history as well as the intricate link of the product category with the long Mediterranean history of soda | • Brand rootedness in Algeria’s modern history  
• Brand as a reflection of ruptures and national narrative drama increases consumer intimacy and passion toward the brand  
• Product category as Mediterranean rooted drink: old skill regional competence, presence of various products of similar inspirations across the Mediterranean space (lemonades and ice creams based on citrus)  
• Innovations in the Algerian context related to lemonade, citrus and shared recipes with other locations in the Mediterranean space  
• Coast-bound local food-drink constellation extensively expressed by consumers.  
• Differences emerge among consumer preferences and practices as per location within Algeria (North-Mediterranean/ South-Desert).  
• Results reinforce the legitimacy of the category of product as a Mediterranean cultural heritage when one thinks of soda as a marker of American way of life |
| Myth. The brand builds it iconicity beyond expertise, time and space on spiritual elements. | • HB and sodas as a curative “magic potion”. HB as pourvoyeur of well-being for consumers.  
• Blessed firm as described by the management as rhetoric of key factor success of the brand  
• Brand imbued with a mystique, an aura from a consumer perspective  
• Brand shows attention to ethics (not corrupted in a country where political and economic elites are subject to suspicion of corruption and nepotism)  
• Solidarity and social responsibility actions toward vulnerable populations expressed as conformed to dogma of Islamic inspiration and of caritas |
REFERENCES