

# Book reviews

## **Cross-Cultural Issues in Consumer Science and Consumer Psychology**

*By Van Herck, H. Ed., and Torelli Ch. J.*  
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**T**he book provides insights into contemporary cross-cultural frameworks and specific methods for marketing strategies that build on consumer psychology. The topic is very relevant in the light of the increasingly multicultural environment in which both international and local firms act. Knowledge of cultural diversity is also becoming more important because of patterns of immigration into regions, such as Europe – a trend that is likely to persist.

Ever since the topic moved up the priority list of top management, scholars and practitioners have been looking for ways to make sense of cultural differences among nations to succeed in entering new markets. The main focus rested on the search for a more quantifiable approach which would make a concept, such as culture, more tangible. Against this background, the book sets out to offer researchers a guideline to state-of-the-art cross-cultural research.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of cultural analyses on individual and national levels, discusses the most commonly used theories in consumer attitudes towards both local and foreign products and thematises cross-cultural research methodology. Chapter 2 (by Maseland and van Hoorn) explores the concept of culture at a macro-level – as a country's characteristics. The initial understanding of culture at the level of a country holds that individual nations (i.e. aggregated communities of people) have a certain set of

beliefs, traditions and values. After the two world wars, which were caused by the ideologies of nationalists, the concept that one culture is present throughout an entire nation became obsolete. From the 1950s onwards, interest in cultural analyses has been on the rise, but well-established empirical work, such as van Hofstede's (1980), still ranks among the most popular approaches. The authors discuss research issues and raise questions around cultural change and the meaning of national culture in a globalised world.

The authors of the Chapter 3, Wong and Lee, see culture as a very personal attribute. Their focus rests on values, beliefs and attitudes of individuals. The core of a personal culture is still defined by the society in which the individual lives and is driven by a local mind-set. To define the delicate processes which weave a net between personal and national components of culture, the authors suggest applying both qualitative and quantitative methods of research and to work in international teams. In Chapter 4, Torelli, Rodas and Lahoud continue with this line of thought and model the behaviour of consumers as dependent on culture through the Individualism–Collectivism paradigm. People living in a particular society develop a personal culture based on the norms of their local community but adapt to new conditions easily – the Dynamic Constructivist Theory of Culture. Chapter 5 discusses, in a pragmatic approach to consumer behaviour, the relationship between soft drinks and internet retailing and microwave ovens. The quantitative analysis

provides interesting ideas and hints, but few findings with which to work.

The next part of the book is devoted to the impact of culture on business decisions. Chapter 6 discusses consumer preferences in different countries. Consumer preferences are driven by consumer ethnocentrism, consumer affinity, consumer animosity, consumer cosmopolitanism and consumer xenocentrism. Especially Chapter 7 (by Zeugner-Roth) focuses on the country-of-origin effect, claiming that the country in which a product has been manufactured can be vital for its economic success. (For a study on cross-cultural aspects of producers see, for instance, Thurner *et al.*, 2015).

In Chapter 8, by Gürhan-Canli, Hayran and Sarial-Abi, the authors continue with an evaluation of the importance of specific marketing strategies when entering new markets and the need to explore the culture of emerging economies. The text discusses the culture-branding interface with respect to the traditions of the new consumer markets. In Chapter 9, by Viswanathan, research into emerging market entries takes centre stage. Most of the cross-cultural research thus far had been conducted both in and for the developed world. The emerging countries, often characterised by high population growth with low income and poor literacy, follow very different cultural beliefs and attitudes which exert a great influence on consumer behaviour in these countries (even when reading advertisements and choosing a store in which to buy a product).

The final part of the book thematises the methodological issues in cross-cultural analysis. Chapter 10, by Baumgartner and Weijters, introduces techniques to enhance cross-cultural research. These methods are divided into two groups: *a priori* to ensure the comparability of data in cross-cultural surveys and the post hoc methods to

produce comparable results. Chapter 11, by Van Herk and Fischer, draws the reader's attention to the necessity of a multi-level approach in the cross-cultural analysis.

Hence, cultural issues in consumer psychology and cross-cultural analysis warrant the merit and are enriched with viewpoints from scholars and international marketing experts. The book also discusses the issue of consumer data that need to be comparable, the right choice of variables to study and stresses the importance of interpreting the results against different cultural backgrounds.

The book provides an interesting introduction to the field and offers a critical review of the growing literature on consumer psychology. In some chapters, the text comes across as somewhat overly hesitant with regard to some of the major concepts, such as when authors stress that they do not wish to elaborate on culture but rather account for variances. The book's strength rests mainly with the large stream of literature it reviews and the methodological analysis that it provides rather than with presenting new insights. As such, the book indeed fulfils its initial promise and is a valuable help for any researcher in the field.

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#### **References**

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