

A COMPARISON OF PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES IN A CROSS-CULTURAL/CROSS-NATIONAL CONTEXT

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The political environment is crucially important to successful non-domestic operations. However, little empirical attention has been paid to issues related to firm-level political behaviors among international/global firms. The purpose of this study is to begin understanding these issues from the perspectives of both firm-related and market-related characteristics associated with political behaviors on the part of the firm. The results show that foreign government power, political risk, and financial resources are all associated with high levels of importance being attached to political behaviors on the part of individual firms.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly the environment in which firms must develop and implement their marketing strategy is global in nature (Keillor and Hult 2000; Craig and Douglas 1997). As both competition and opportunities increase, firms are searching for growth opportunities by expanding into markets around the world. For companies the fundamental marketing objective is to create a global strategy which will allow for maximum use of existing product offerings and marketing activities through standardized operations while simultaneously "acting local" (Wills, Samli, and Jacobs 1991) in an effort to adjust to unique aspects of any given market.

The advantages of a global strategy, with the emphasis on standardizing marketing efforts, wherever and whenever possible, are numerous and include cost savings through standardized research and development, product design, packaging, etc.; economies of scale; consistency of product offering which facilitates quality control; and similar strategies which allow for consistent promotional efforts. However, a global approach to marketing

strategy is not without potential problems. Substantial differences, which have a substantial impact on consumers, persist across cultural and national boundaries. It is also frequently difficult and time consuming to ascertain where and when standardization is appropriate, resulting in firms implementing global marketing programs as a means of strategic compromise. This attempt to standardize in circumstances where a market would be better served by efforts which take into account the unique requirements of that market frequently results in high opportunity costs and increased levels of risk. (Kalyanaram and Krishnan 1997; Jain 1989)

The purpose of this study is to investigate global product strategy and the issue of identifying relevant areas where standardization may be possible, and to learn where the effort to "act local" may be necessary, in the context of product attributes. This study investigates potential differences along 16 "sought for" product attributes in two markets: France and the United States. The analysis explores how identified relevant attributes change across three distinct product categories (i.e., convenience, shopping, and specialty). The importance of "acting local", particularly in relation to the competitive competencies associated with a given firm's product offering, is of fundamental importance to successful

overseas operations (Wills, Samli, and Jacobs 1991; Jain 1989).

This paper contributes to the literature in three ways. First, while much discussion has taken place regarding product attributes in an international or global market context, little empirical research in this area has been conducted (Kalyanaram and Krishnan 1997). This paper addresses the lack of empirically based literature by providing an analysis of sought after product attributes in the U.S. and France. Second, investigating product attributes identified as particularly relevant to consumers in different markets provides theoretical insights into the frequently proposed, but rarely empirically tested, notion of the increasing similarity of consumers around the globe. Finally, the results will help managers determine which attributes are desirable across markets as well as those which may be less universal. Such findings will enable firms to more practically consider the implementation of a "think global, act local" marketing program in the context of the firm's distinctive product competencies.

PRODUCT STRATEGY

The existing published literature relevant to product attributes and product strategy falls into two broad topical categories: (1) general product strategy as an element of the marketing mix, and (2) product strategy within the more narrow perspective of international global marketing. There is a substantial body of work which addresses general product strategy issues such as product definition, product categorization, the demarcation of product attributes, the relationship between product offering and brand strategy, and the relationship between product attributes and price (cf. Aaker 1997; Keller 1993; Curry and Riesz 1988; Dickson and Ginter 1987; Cook 1983). The body of research which deals with product strategy from an international/global marketing perspective is much smaller.

McGuinness and Little (1981) provided an important foundation article which lays the groundwork for developing successful product strategies outside a firm's domestic market and explicates the characteristics of successful export firms (e.g., size,

level of technology, local vs. foreign ownership, etc.). It also describe the characteristics of successful export products (e.g., relative advantage, compatibility, risk, complexity, availability, etc.) in the industrial realm. These authors began to explore industrial product characteristics which may lend themselves to standardization across a variety of international markets. Their overall conclusion was that, for industrial products, technological innovations are universally sought out in global markets and that "new-ness" can be used as a product attribute which will successfully build greater international sales. In terms of addressing the product adaptation versus product standardization question, McGuinness and Little (1981) also provide support for the notion that desired product attributes can span different markets around the world, but that any given individual market environment can be a key influence on the likely success of a standardized non-domestic product offering in a given market.

In making the transition from industrial products to consumer products, Jain (1989) suggests, in a global marketing context, total standardization of a product offering and its attributes is unrealistic. While the type of product and product positioning are basic determinants of the degree to which any offering must be adapted, or alternatively can be standardized, the influence of cultural preferences, degree of product experience and knowledge, and level of economic resources can all contribute to the need to make adjustments to product strategy as a firm moves from one market around the world to another. Like McGuinness and Little (1981), Jain (1989) supports the proposition that industrial products are more suitable for standardization than consumer products. However, Jain (1989) also presents a series of future research propositions built around the supposition that as markets become more culturally and economically diverse, and consumer behavior and characteristics change, the potential for a given organization to standardize its product offering in these markets and still achieve substantial levels of success is greatly reduced. Further, Samiee and Roth (1992) argue that within the consumer product domain standardization is more viable for specialty products (e.g.,

automobiles) than convenience products (e.g., food) where taste/preference become highly culture driven.

Emphasis on different product attributes across markets may also be the result of either different levels of product familiarity or different levels of consumer involvement (Wills, Samli, and Jacobs 1991). This perspective highlights the importance of matching product features and attributes with market demands and characteristics. It seems clear that understanding relevant product attributes of non-domestic markets is particularly crucial for new products. This is true because these attributes have a direct impact on the rate of product diffusion (Takada and Jain 1991). Relative advantage of the product, complexity, trialability, observability, and compatibility with the needs of the potential adopters (Rogers 1983) all have a substantial impact on the ability of a product offering to be quickly assimilated in a non-domestic market environment.

The necessity of attuning product attributes and product differentiation strategies to the needs and characteristics of individual markets can be seen in differences in advertising. The fundamental purpose of an ad is to communicate relevant ideas and information to the target audience (Spreng, MacKenzie, and Olshavsky 1996). The notion that generalizable differences may exist across markets supports the case for product strategy research focused on these relevant product attributes across different markets as a mechanism for improving global advertising effectiveness. Lin (1993) provides evidence for this proposition in a comparative study of Japanese and American advertisements. This author (Lin 1993) concluded that Japanese advertisements tended to emphasize product attributes not directly related to the core product offering, such as product packaging and availability, while American advertisements focused on product attributes of the core product offering (e.g., price, product quality, and performance). Aaker and Maheswaran (1997) provide a strong theoretical position that differences in product attribute emphasis and communication processing may be attributable to societal/cultural influences and orientation (e.g., China/collective versus U.S./individualistic). This is further supported by Han and Shavitt (1994) who determined that

successful attribute appeals differ across cultures and Hofstede (1990) who emphasized the importance of culture as an influence on consumer behavior.

The existing published literature highlights the importance of matching product differentiation strategy, especially as it relates to product attributes, with the wants and needs of different markets. In particular, Feenstra and Levinsohn (1995) note that as markets and products change, so does the need to adjust and reconcile product differentiation strategies and the attributes which constitute a product offering. Ueno (1995) proposes that the most effective market approach is to develop functionally robust products and then make adjustments according to customer requirements.

Assuming an organization has a functionally sound product offering prior to entering a non-domestic market, the next step, as discussed above, is to identify specific relevant product attributes and subsequent adaptations for specific customer segments (MacMillan and McGrath 1996). Thus, the stage is set for the importance of systematically examining a variety of product attributes and their importance across diverse marketplaces (Klein, Ettenson and Morris 1998). Such an approach provides a means to reconcile the advantages of a global strategy while implementing a market orientation outside of the familiar domestic market. While previous research (e.g., McGuiness and Little 1981) has dealt with this issue in the realm of industrial products, little published research currently exists in the marketing literature which deals with this problem in the area of consumer products. By better understanding the product attributes which may remain stable across diverse markets, and those which differ, firms will be in a better position to match their product differentiation strategy to meet both the needs of the external market and the requirements of the firm's internal resource base.

METHODOLOGY

Investigating relevant product attributes across different markets and product classifications presents some substantial methodological

challenges. These include the sampling procedure for the individual respondents, measurement issues such as specification of the product attributes, and the reliability/validity of the measurement instruments as reflected in the collected data.

Sampling Procedure

The data in this study were collected through personal intercept interviews over a three month period of time, using a quota sampling method. The personal interview method of data collection has several strengths which make it particularly well suited for conducting research in multiple countries. Personal interviews allow the individual gathering the data to clarify and explain ambiguous or potentially confusing questions (Nowell and Stanley 1991; Bush and Hair 1985), an issue of especial import when collecting data in markets where language barriers may exist (Kishii 1994). For this study, the ability to explain the selected terminology used to describe the various product attributes was an important concern and a key reason for employing personal intercept interviews. Beyond clarification and comprehension difficulties, researchers collecting multicultural/multinational data frequently encounter a number of bias-related problems, particularly social desirability and haloing biases. Methodologically, personal interviews have been shown to be less susceptible to social desirability and haloing biases than other popular forms of data collection (Han, Lee, and Ro 1994; Bush and Hair 1985).

The use of a quota sampling technique also has advantages which help to overcome problems associated with cross-cultural/cross-national data collection. One of the underlying objectives in most research is to obtain data which can reasonably be determined to be generalizable. Therefore, study data should be as representative as possible. In collecting international data, random sampling techniques used in a researcher's home market are often either impossible to implement or inappropriate to apply, thereby causing some researchers to rely on convenience samples. On the other hand, quota sampling allows the researcher to obtain a data base which is representative of the population along

predetermined criteria such as age and gender. In comparing quota sampling to random sampling, Marsh and Scarbrough (1990) found no significant differences between respondents which would represent substantial data biases. Further, these authors found no significant non-response biases existed when quota samples were compared to random samples. Sudman (1980) suggests using quota sampling based on age and gender to reduce potential biases in intercept-based data collection. Following Sudman (1980) the quota sample constructed for this study was gathered so that it was representative of the French and U.S. population based on age and gender distribution. To further ensure a sufficiently high level of data reliability and validity the survey instrument was translated into French by native speakers and then backtranslated (Douglas and Craig 1983) as means of identifying potential terminology problems.

Measurement

As discussed above, a number of previously published studies have identified a wide range of product attributes relevant to individual consumers. One of the challenges in conducting this study was synthesizing these attributes so that a reasonably comprehensive list could be developed, while simultaneously being concise enough to facilitate respondent cooperation and data analysis. Using these studies as an initial starting point, sixteen relevant product attributes were specified which were deemed to be well grounded in existing literature, concise, comprehensive, and reasonably generalizable across product classification categories (i.e., convenience, shopping and specialty). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each of the attributes were important in their purchase of a convenience product (e.g., grocery products), a shopping product (e.g., clothing), and a specialty product (e.g., an automobile) based on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1=not important to 6=very important. While it may be argued that attempting to identify relevant and generalizable product attributes through the use of a list-based approach is problematic, Srinivasan and Park (1997) support the efficacy of such a self-explicated approach for identifying customer

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preferences for product attributes. The product attributes used in this study are drawn from existing research (Table 1).

Table 1
Identified Product Attributes

Attribute	Supporting Literature
Product Quality	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990) Anderson, Fornell and Rust (1997) Zeithaml (1988) Phillips, Chang and Buzzell (1983)
Product Appearance	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Product Composition	Osterhus (1997) Chandler and Drucker (1993) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991)
Service Availability	Aaker and Keller (1990)
Packaging Appearance	Smith (1992) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Product Availability	Smith (1992)
Warranty/Guarantee	Biel (1992) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990) Bloch and Richins (1983)
Product Price	Smith (1992) Bloch and Richins (1983)
Product Features	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Recyclability/Environmentally Friendly	Osterhus (1997) Chandler and Drucker (1993) Yi (1990) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991)
Package Functionality	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Product Safety	Bloch and Richins (1983)
Brand Image	Smith (1992) Biel (1992) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Yi (1990)
Store Image/Retailer Image	Biel (1992)
Financing/Credit Availability	Smith (1992) Bloch and Richins (1983)
Country-of- Origin	Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998) Wall, Liefeld and Heslop (1991) Han (1989)

Factor analysis was employed to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument. It was important for comparative purposes that there be a high level of consistency between product classifications and the factors under which each product attribute was associated. Therefore, 48 items (16 specified product attributes across the three identified product classifications) were entered into the factor analysis. A Varimax rotation was utilized and factors established based on a minimum scale item loading of .40 (Rummel 1967). No items produced factor loadings below the .40 cut-off. A reliability analysis was also conducted utilizing coefficient alpha (Cronbach 1951). Table 2 shows the resulting alpha statistics.

Table 2
Reliability Statistics

Grocery Products:	
Combined Samples	.8179
U.S. Sample	.8209
French Sample	.8465
Clothing:	
Combined Samples	.8414
U.S. Sample	.8419
French Sample	.8597
Automobile:	
Combined Samples	.7851
U.S. Sample	.7652
French Sample	.7984

The resulting alpha statistics were first computed for each product category combining both U.S. and French samples. Scores for each individual sample were also obtained for each product category. All of the coefficient alpha scores obtained from the data exceeded the recommended .70 criterion suggested by Nunnally (1978).

DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 241 completed and usable questionnaires were obtained (129 from the United States and 112 from France). Prior to subjecting the data to statistical analysis, frequency distributions were tabulated for each item to ascertain possible response biases, or other data anomalies. None

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were detected and the sample was determined to be of sufficient quality to be subjected to statistical analysis.

Table 3
Product Attribute Comparisons -
Grocery Products

Product Attribute	Mean Score (U.S.)	Mean Score (France)	F-statistic	Significance
Product Quality	5.00	5.32	2.495	.085
Product Appearance	5.11	5.58	7.465	.001*
Product Composition	3.23	4.24	14.659	.000*
Service Availability	4.12	3.52	5.711	.004*
Packaging Appearance	3.36	2.97	2.910	.056
Product Availability	4.95	4.11	15.426	.000*
Warranty/Guarantee	3.33	4.32	12.280	.000*
Product Price	5.26	3.85	39.317	.000*
Product Features	3.79	3.24	4.526	.012*
Recyclability/Environmentally Friendly	2.88	3.50	5.818	.003*
Package Functionality	3.05	3.84	9.675	.000*
Product Safety	4.31	4.42	.169	.845
Brand Image	3.89	3.27	5.892	.003*
Store Image/Retailer Image	3.44	3.23	.729	.483
Financing/Credit Availability	2.56	2.77	.550	.578
Country-of-Origin	2.10	3.95	50.025	.000*

* sig. $p < .05$

As discussed above, the product attribute comparisons were performed across three product classifications (i.e., convenience, shopping, and speciality products). In the case of convenience products, significant differences were obtained for 11 of the 16 specified attributes. Both samples reported relatively high levels of importance being attached to product quality. When evaluating grocery products, French respondents tended to place significantly higher levels of emphasis on tangible product attributes while American respondents seem to be more oriented toward intangible product attributes. In their evaluation of grocery products French consumers reported significantly higher emphasis on

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product appearance, product composition, some type of warranty or return policy, package functionality, and the country-of-origin of the product than did American respondents. French consumers also reported significantly higher levels of importance on the recyclability/environmental-friendliness of their grocery products. On the other hand, American consumers placed significantly higher levels of importance on service, product availability, price, product features, and brand image than did French respondents. Neither group reported placing any substantial levels of importance on packaging appearance, store image, or credit in evaluating grocery products.

Table 4
Product Attribute Comparisons - Clothing

Product Attribute	Mean Score (U.S.)	Mean Score (France)	F-statistic	Significance
Product Quality	5.55	5.29	2.819	.062
Product Appearance	4.61	4.48	.690	.503
Product Composition	2.60	3.12	3.033	.050
Service Availability	3.97	3.43	3.834	.023*
Packaging Appearance	3.38	2.43	11.527	.000*
Product Availability	4.63	3.89	7.432	.001*
Warranty/Guarantee	3.75	4.29	3.611	.029*
Product Price	5.28	3.82	36.002	.000*
Product Features	3.50	3.02	2.666	.072
Recyclability/Environmentally Friendly	2.09	2.72	4.890	.008*
Package Functionality	2.15	2.27	.490	.613
Product Safety	2.98	3.49	2.811	.062
Brand Image	4.84	3.60	25.019	.000*
Store Image/Retailer Image	4.44	3.53	11.159	.000*
Financing/Credit Availability	2.79	2.64	.236	.790
Country-of-Origin	1.59	2.90	24.915	.000*

* sig. $p < .05$

In the case of clothing products, there were significant differences obtained for 9 of the 16 product attributes. As might be expected, given the nature and role of clothing in the consumptive

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experience, product quality and product appearance were both reported to be relatively important by respondents in both samples. However, of the 10 significant differences, 6 were of significantly greater importance to U.S. respondents in their selection of clothing products. These included: service availability, packaging appearance, product availability, product price, brand image, and store/retailer image. French consumers reported placing a higher emphasis than did American respondents on product composition, warranty/guarantees attached to clothing, the recyclability/environmental-friendliness of clothing, and the country from which the clothing product originated. Interestingly, neither group seemed overly interested in the composition of their clothing, nor was either category of consumer generally concerned with credit availability when evaluating a potential clothing purchase. As might be expected, given the nature of clothing and the means by which it is typically presented to consumers in major markets around the world, package functionality was not of much concern to either group.

Comparing the last product category, automobiles, 9 of the 16 attributes were perceived to be significantly different across the two samples. With the exception of only one of these nine attributes, country-of-origin, U.S. respondents reported significantly higher emphasis than did French respondents. These included: product quality, service availability, packaging appearance, product price, product features, package functionality, brand image, and credit availability. Both groups reported relatively high levels of importance attached to product safety and warranty/guarantee in evaluating an automobile and relatively low levels of importance placed on product composition and recyclability/environmental-friendliness.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of the data analyzed in this study provide some interesting insights. Overall, with the possible exception of product quality, there appear to be no product attributes which can be universally employed, across product categories in multiple markets, to gain competitive advantage. In addition, within product categories, there are many more differences than similarities in terms of the attributes consumers from different cultures and nationalities employ in evaluating products. This would seem to suggest that the need to "think local" in non-domestic operations is extremely important if market opportunities are to be maximized. Further, the ability to effectively employ a global strategy is both difficult, as well as fraught with potential opportunity costs, suggesting the notion of a rapidly converging global consumer market may be more theoretical than actually existent. This becomes more clear when the implications of the results are considered within the context of each product category.

In marketing grocery products to the two different consumer groups, the most striking result is the need to make an extra effort to emphasize direct product attributes in the French market and the need to look beyond the product in question when operating in the U.S. market. French consumers are significantly more attuned to the appearance of the grocery product (i.e., the product itself, such as fresh

Table 5
Product Attribute Comparisons - Automobiles

Product Attribute	Mean Score (U.S.)	Mean Score (France)	F-statistic	Significance
Product Quality	5.85	5.59	4.865	.008*
Product Appearance	3.40	3.30	.120	.887
Product Composition	2.04	2.10	.245	.783
Service Availability	5.31	4.44	11.980	.000*
Packaging Appearance	4.07	2.28	25.874	.000*
Product Availability	4.43	4.22	.771	.464
Warranty/ Guarantee	5.78	5.58	1.763	.174
Product Price	5.74	4.71	23.661	.000*
Product Features	5.63	4.54	23.330	.000*
Recyclability/ Environmentally Friendly	2.32	2.62	1.250	.289
Package Functionality	2.34	1.49	9.403	.000*
Product Safety	5.39	5.43	.210	.811
Brand Image	5.07	4.08	14.471	.000*
Store Image/ Retailer Image	3.46	3.95	2.927	.055
Financing/ Credit Availability	5.12	4.59	3.658	.027*
Country-of-Origin	2.12	3.09	9.696	.000*

* sig. $p < .05$

produce, not the appearance of the package), the ingredients, the ability to return unacceptable products, the functionality of the package, and the origin of the product. Therefore, a grocery product strategy targeted at French consumers would be more effective by attempting to gain competitive advantage through the emphasis of these attributes by making the product attractive to look at, emphasizing the quality of the ingredients, not the characteristics of the ingredients (i.e., "fat-free"), the functionality of the package, and, if possible, the origin of the product provided it has some local association. Alternatively, if the product is clearly non-domestic, some local associations through branding might be considered. Regardless, if the product is completely non-domestic, country-of-origin may be a product attribute to avoid in the overall marketing strategy.

In the case of marketing grocery or other products to American consumers, the attributes which are emphasized from the consumer's perspective, are quite different from the French. American consumers place more emphasis on product attributes which may be considered to be oriented toward convenience of consumption. For example, while U.S. consumers place reasonably high levels of importance on product quality and appearance, it is the ease of obtaining a grocery product (i.e., product availability), the price of the product, the features associated with the product (e.g., "Diet"; etc.), and the image of the brand which are of primary importance to American consumers when evaluating grocery products. Thus, while in the French grocery market tangible product attributes become crucial for gaining competitive advantage, consumer perception and convenience of consumption appear to be fundamentally important in the U.S. grocery market.

Moving to the next level up in the product involvement schema, the tendency to emphasize product attributes more closely related to the actual product core appears to hold when the comparisons are considered for clothing. Again, both product quality and product appearance received relatively high emphasis scores from both respondent samples. However, among the 10 attributes where significant differences were identified, four typically identified with core product components (i.e., product

composition, warranty/guarantee, recyclability/environmental-friendliness, and country-of-origin) were reported to be significantly more important by French respondents. This would seem to indicate that the frequently employed promotional tactics (such as image appeals) utilized by U.S. firms in marketing clothing products, might be less effective in the French market. Rather, important selling points in France appear to be more cognitive in nature, and include fewer emotional criteria, or criteria which do not necessarily appeal to the personal image of the target audience.

American respondents found the six remaining clothing attributes to be significantly more important than did French consumers. These attributes have less direct association with the physical characteristics of the product than do the other attributes, are less associated directly with physical characteristics of the product itself and its use (i.e., service availability, packaging appearance, product availability, product price, brand image, and store/retailer image). While an appeal emphasizing individual image may be ineffective in France, it may be appropriate in the U.S. For Americans, the findings suggest that if products are equivalent in terms of quality and appearance and are acceptably priced, consumers move on to image and appearance-related evaluative criteria. Where the French consumer seems to be won over by products which demonstrate other direct product-related advantages beyond quality and appearance, American consumers focus on elements related to the product outside the traditional product core (e.g., brand/store image, packaging appearance, product availability, etc.).

Finally, in terms of evaluating automobiles based on the specified product attributes, American consumers seem to place more importance on the purchase of an automobile than do French consumers. It may be that these results are due to the significance of the automobile in 20th century American culture (Halberstam 1986). Unfortunately, there is insufficient information in this study to effectively address the underlying cause of this finding. However, the results show that 9 of the 16 product attributes show significant

differences between the two consumer groups, 8 of which indicate that American consumers place higher levels of emphasis on the attributes than do the French. Americans appear to be very concerned with product quality, service availability, packaging appearance, product price, product features, package functionality, brand image, and financing/credit availability when considering the purchase of a new automobile. On the other hand, French consumers were more concerned than American respondents as to the country-of-origin of the automobile in question. While both groups were relatively interested in product quality, warranty/guarantee, and product safety, the French sample seemed much less "involved" when automobiles were being evaluated as a product than were the American consumers. This might suggest the traditional means by which low and high involvement products are classified (e.g., financial risk, purchase frequency, etc.) may not hold across cultures and countries.

Overall, the findings in the study provide some support, albeit limited, for the notion that, while consumer wants and needs may be converging around the globe, the means by which consumers evaluate products continues to differ substantially across cultures and countries. Apart from the most basic means by which firms can attempt to gain competitive advantage for their products (i.e., product quality and appearance), substantial differences exist across the three product categories explored in this study. French consumers showed a tendency toward core product attributes in their evaluation of grocery products and clothing, while Americans indicated an emphasis on image and service related attributes. These findings are somewhat at odds with previous research (Lin 1993) which proposed that Americans found more appeal in advertisements focused on core product elements. When the product in question was a typically accepted "high involvement" product (i.e., automobile), American consumers reported emphasizing evaluative criteria consistent with traditional high involvement consumer behavior, while French consumers appeared less involved generally. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings is the consistently significant emphasis placed on price across all three product

classifications by American consumers who are arguably the most economically advantaged in the world.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The results of this study show that the ability to implement a global marketing strategy is very much predicated upon the extent to which the firm is able to implement the "think local" aspect of global (i.e., "Think global, act local") operations. The data indicate a substantial variation in the different product attributes emphasized by American and French consumers in their evaluations of a variety of product types. As discussed, with a few possible exceptions, there appear to be no universally accepted evaluative criteria across products and markets. Therefore, it seems to be crucial that, in order to maximize opportunities in marketing products to consumers around the globe, each market must be investigated so as to fully understand the best means of employing product attributes for gaining competitive advantage. Certainly, a two-country study cannot be construed to hold universally applicable findings. However, there appears to be sufficient support to suggest that the conclusion that a fully integrated global consumer market exists may be somewhat exaggerated.

In closing, it is important to note some of the key limitations of this study. These limitations suggest future research opportunities in the area of global product strategy. While substantial effort was expended to obtain data it could be argued that additional national samples might be necessary before any definitive conclusions can be drawn regarding globally universal product attributes. Similarly, although the sixteen specified product attributes were anchored in a comprehensive synthesis of existing published literature, it may be argued that a more comprehensive listing of product attributes would provide better insights. Along the same lines, explication of each attribute (e.g., aspects of product quality) in a global context would represent an area of future research suggested by, but not addressed, in this study. Finally, another potentially fruitful area of future research implicit in

this study would be the stability of the identified product attributes in each product category given a change in the risk/commitment (e.g., a substantial price change) faced by individual consumers.

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