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CONSUMER BEHAVIOR ACROSS BORDERS: ARE GLOBAL CONSUMERS REALLY CONVERGING?

Abstract. *This article investigates whether global consumers are genuinely converging in their behaviour or whether enduring cultural differences continue to shape consumption patterns across international markets. Drawing on a systematic review of theoretical and empirical literature within the convergence–divergence paradigm, the study argues that neither convergence nor divergence alone adequately explains contemporary consumer dynamics. While globalisation, digitalization, and the spread of multinational brands have produced measurable similarities in observable consumption patterns – particularly among younger, urban, and digitally connected populations – deeper cultural values, motivations, and decision-making processes remain persistently divergent. The analysis reveals a hybrid model of global consumer behaviour, characterised by surface-level convergence alongside deep-level cultural divergence. The findings carry significant implications for international marketing strategy, specifically supporting a “glocalisation” approach that combines global standardisation with culturally sensitive local adaptation.*

Keywords: *consumer behaviour; globalisation; convergence; divergence; cultural values; international marketing; glocalisation; cross-cultural consumption.*

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has greatly altered the environment of international markets. As countries have become increasingly interconnected, it has become common to find businesses, products, and consumption habits spreading across multiple borders. Media, technology, and multinational corporations have increased consumer exposure to similar goods and markets around the world, prompting a re-examination of the character of consumer behaviour in the contemporary era (Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Market Research, 2024).

In this regard, there is considerable debate in the international marketing literature about the extent to which consumer behaviour is converging versus the degree to which it continues to diverge in the face of cultural differences. Preliminary findings suggest that globalisation may induce the adoption of common forms of consumption as homogeneity of products and information becomes possible in the global economy. Nevertheless, some researchers argue that cultural sensitivities remain deeply rooted in perceptions and choices, resulting in behavioural variances between markets (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002).

Despite considerable scholarly interest, the convergence–divergence debate remains unresolved. Various studies have highlighted increasing similarities in consumer spending patterns and product adoption among countries; others argue for ongoing cultural differences that determine how and why consumers engage with products and brands differently across markets. This variability calls for a perspective that takes both global and local considerations into account simultaneously (Singh, 2017).

The central question this paper addresses is: Are global consumers converging, or do cultural differences continue to dictate global consumer behaviour? The findings suggest that although evidence of degree of convergence in measurable consumption patterns exists, deeper cultural underpinnings remain relevant drivers of divergence in consumer motivations, interpretations, and behavioural outcomes. Global consumer behaviour should therefore be conceptualized not as merely convergent or divergent, but as a dynamic interplay between international standardising forces and the persistence of enduring cultural values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The global consumer behaviour debate has been extensively addressed in international marketing literature, particularly within the convergence–divergence paradigm. One of the foundational contributions is that of De Mooij and Hofstede (2002), who argue that although economic globalisation and the spread of global brands continue, consumer behaviours remain considerably influenced by national cultural differences. They concluded that even when similar products are purchased by consumers across countries, cultural values – including individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance – play a decisive role in shaping brand perceptions and responses to advertising. This challenges the assumption that globalisation necessarily produces homogeneous consumer markets.

De Mooij (2003) further emphasises that convergence in consumer behaviour tends to be confined to observable patterns such as product ownership, while deeper psychological and cultural motivations remain divergent. The author argues that global advertising strategies that ignore cultural diversity are prone to failure, and that local adaptation is essential to effective international marketing. Conversely, Ozturk and Cavusgil (2019) provide evidence of convergence, observing that consumption patterns across countries – especially in technology, fashion, and branded goods – have become increasingly similar over time, driven by globalisation, technological advancement, and trade liberalisation, particularly among younger and urbanised consumer segments.

Singh (2017) argues that convergence and divergence are not mutually exclusive. Rather, global consumer behaviour represents a combination of both processes, in which consumers adopt global products while maintaining culturally driven consumption motivations – a pattern the author describes as hybrid consumer behaviour. More recent empirical work by Rodríguez et al. (2024) confirms through econometric analysis that cultural identity remains the predominant factor influencing consumers' buying behaviour, brand perception, and loyalty, even in an increasingly globalised world. Research published in the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Market Research* (2024) further documents how digitalisation and social media accelerate convergence trends by exposing consumers worldwide to shared products, lifestyles, and marketing messages, while simultaneously enabling the expression of local identities and deepening

divergence. Broader theoretical discussions on the globalisation and convergence–divergence debate similarly conclude that globalisation engenders both homogenising and differentiating forces, resulting in hybrid consumer behaviour (SciSpace, n.d.).

METHODS

This research is based on a qualitative research design employing a structured literature review and a comparative analysis of existing academic studies exploring consumer behaviour in international markets. A qualitative approach was adopted to enable critical analysis and incorporation of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from existing research (Singh, 2017).

The analysis draws on a range of peer-reviewed academic studies of global consumer behaviour, cultural forces, and convergence and divergence. Key sources comprise foundational publications on cultural dimensions and consumer behaviour, as well as more recent empirical and econometric studies exploring global consumption patterns (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002). Further insights are drawn from broader theoretical discussions on globalisation and market integration (Ozturk & Cavusgil, 2019; Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Market Research, 2024).

To maintain consistency, the study employs a comparative approach separating two contrasting dimensions of analysis: economic convergence and cultural divergence. Economic convergence is evaluated through patterns of consumer spending, product adoption, and market engagement across countries; cultural divergence is assessed through value-driven differences in perceptions and behavioural motivations as key determinants of consumer decision-making (Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Market Research, 2024; Ozturk & Cavusgil, 2019). Thematic analysis methods are used to categorise evidence under convergence, divergence, and hybrid findings, thereby enabling scrutiny of the degree to which globalisation generates uniformity versus continued heterogeneity in consumer behaviour.

This study carries certain limitations. Because the analysis relies exclusively on secondary literature, the findings are contingent upon the scope, methodology, and context of those sources. The absence of primary empirical data limits the capacity to test hypotheses directly, meaning that conclusions are interpretative rather than statistically validated.

RESULTS

Convergence evidence in consumer behaviour. The reviewed literature presents significant evidence that consumer behaviour has converged in global markets. A key indicator is the rising uniformity of consumer expenditure patterns worldwide. Empirical findings demonstrate increasing convergence between consumption patterns, particularly for technology-related products, fashion, and branded goods, attributable to globalisation, trade liberalisation, and technological advancement (Ozturk & Cavusgil, 2019). The proliferation of multinational organisations and global brands has further homogenised goods and consumption experiences. Moreover, the ubiquitous use of social media and digital channels has expedited this process by spreading global consumer trends and shaping standardised consumer preferences. Younger generations, in particular, exhibit relatively higher levels of behavioural convergence due to heightened exposure to global culture and digital connectivity (Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Market Research, 2024).

Divergence evidence in consumer behaviour. Yet the literature simultaneously reveals significant divergence across markets. Despite clear evidence of convergence, consumer behaviour continues to be strongly driven by cultural factors. Consumers use products, respond to advertising, and make purchasing decisions in ways that are deeply influenced by cultural values, norms, and belief systems (De Mooij, 2003). Research demonstrates that the reasons behind similar purchasing decisions – and the manner in which choices are made – frequently differ markedly across cultures. For example, orientations toward individualism versus collectivism, attitudes toward risk, and uncertainty avoidance shape consumer responses to brand loyalty and innovation in divergent ways. Consequently, standardised marketing schemes may yield markedly different results across cultural contexts (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002). Recent econometric evidence further supports these enduring cultural divergences, showing that cultural factors are statistically significant predictors of consumer behaviour across countries, and that international economic convergence does not eliminate cultural differences but coexists with them (Rodríguez et al., 2024).

Hybrid models: Convergence and divergence coexist. An increasing body of literature suggests that neither convergence nor divergence alone sufficiently describes global consumer behaviour. Rather, the evidence points to a hybrid model in which

aspects of both processes coexist simultaneously. Although consumers across countries may adopt similar products and consumption habits, the meanings attributed to these products and the motivations behind their decisions remain culturally bound (Singh, 2017). This dual nature reflects a distinction between “surface-level convergence” and “deep-level divergence.” Globalisation may facilitate similarity in what consumers buy, while cultural contexts continue to dictate why and how they buy. This is consistent with broader theoretical discussions on globalisation that argue global integration produces not cultural homogenisation but rather an interplay between global and local forces (SciSpace, n.d.). The implication is that global consumer behaviour should be understood as a multidimensional process in which convergence and divergence are not contradictory but interdependent.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that no single theoretical perspective adequately explains global consumer behaviour. The coexistence of convergence and divergence points to a more complex and stratified reality. While globalisation may have contributed to increasing similarities in consumption behaviours, these similarities remain superficial and do not necessarily indicate a deeper convergence in consumer values or decision-making processes. This affirms the argument of cultural scholars that consumer behaviour is fundamentally rooted in cultural context. Consumers in different countries may purchase similar products, but the symbolic meanings, motivations, and patterns of usage surrounding those products differ considerably (De Mooij, 2003).

The findings also undercut excessively deterministic conceptions of globalisation that treat markets as inevitably homogeneously integrated. Although economic interdependence and technological convergence facilitate access to similar goods, they do not eliminate deep-rooted cultural differences. Cultural variables remain quantifiable and powerful determinants of consumer behaviour, as confirmed by recent empirical work (Rodríguez et al., 2024). This means that globalisation proceeds alongside, not in lieu of, cultural diversity.

From a managerial perspective, these results have significant implications for international marketing strategy. The persistence of culture-based variances suggests that fully standardised marketing approaches may be less effective overall, while total

localisation can be inefficient and unnecessarily costly (Rodríguez et al., 2024). Firms therefore need to strike a balance through the strategic concept of “glocalisation,” in which a global brand maintains a coherent core identity while adapting specific elements of its marketing strategy to align with local cultural contexts (De Mooij, 2003). This approach allows firms to realise economies of scale while remaining responsive to cultural specificities in consumer behaviour.

Looking ahead, the interplay between globalisation and digitalisation is likely to deepen this complexity. Digital platforms and social media act simultaneously as accelerators of convergence – by disseminating global norms and consumption trends more rapidly – and as channels for the expression and reproduction of local identities, thereby sustaining or exacerbating divergence. Consequently, the future trajectory of consumer behaviour is anticipated to reflect an increasingly complex nexus of global standardisation and cultural differentiation.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to investigate whether global consumers are genuinely converging or whether cultural differences continue to play a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour across countries. Drawing on theoretical and empirical literature, the analysis demonstrates that neither convergence nor divergence alone sufficiently explains contemporary consumer dynamics. While globalisation has produced a discernible convergence in patterns of consumption, product selection, and exposure to global brands, these similarities remain largely superficial (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002).

At a deeper level, values, cultures, norms, and belief systems continue to shape consumer motivations, perceptions, and decision-making processes in ways that differ markedly across markets. Consumers may appear similar in their purchasing habits, yet the reasons for and manner of their purchases, and the ways in which they interact with products and brands, diverge significantly (Singh, 2017).

Global consumer behaviour is therefore properly understood as hybrid – a dynamic mixture of convergence and divergence. This underscores the need for a holistic view that attends to both global economic forces and persistent cultural differences in the development of international marketing strategy. The principle of glocalisation emerges

as a particularly fitting conceptual framework, supporting firms in operating efficiently across a global economy while maintaining sensitivity to local consumer contexts (De Mooij, 2003). Ultimately, global consumers are not fully converging. Rather, their behaviour reflects an active and ongoing interplay of global influences and cultural specificity – a complexity that is crucial for both researchers and practitioners navigating the dynamic developments of international markets.

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