

Why Global Marketing Must Move Beyond Cultural Stereotypes

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Global marketers have long faced the challenge of finding the right balance between global brand platforms and evolving local marketing and cultural environments. This important business practice is now entering a new phase again—driven by the combination of the digital technology revolution, the growing marketplace complexity within countries around the world, and the increasing importance of getting local relevance right given the re-energization of local pride movements around the world.

Global and local influences are in a continuous rebalancing, as we've seen in popular culture with regard both to movies and music. Despite the assumption that most popular culture is shipped out from the West to the rest of the world, the local component has become increasingly influential. For instance, between 2009 and 2013 the percentage of top-grossing locally produced movies and television programs grew within a number of countries. This trend is even more pronounced with music. Perhaps due to today's ease in sharing music digitally, American music is not quite as dominant as it once was. We see a range of artists—from Norwegians to Australians to Koreans—topping the charts of the global music scene.

To better understand these trends, our McCann Truth Central global intelligence unit late last year launched our "Truth About Global Brands" research, which entailed interviews with 30,000 people in 29 countries, supplemented with extensive qualitative research. The study confirmed how much even many of the best marketing approaches need to be rethought in this era of national pride. As we heard around the world, even the term "globalization" resonated negatively when it was seen as a marketing practice driven from the center at the expense of local cultures.

But the global landscape is nuanced. The vast majority of people—88%—were positive about globalization, describing the ability to access cultures different from one's own as its No. 1 benefit, while 85% even believed that global brands have the power to make the world a better place. However, at the same time that people want exposure to other cultures, 85% told us they feel proud of their country's identity.

Based on our research, we believe that brands must be prepared to "go deep," to move into what we're calling Deep Globality. This requires thoughtfully spreading a brand, idea or movement across multiple markets while actively enriching the receiving culture. It involves understanding that global brand marketing is about clues, not rules, requiring a careful honing of pattern-recognition skills. It means moving beyond cultural stereotypes, and being aware of surprising connections (or dissonance) between countries. For instance, we observe an incredible variance in attitudes and values among countries in Asia Pacific, a traditional geographic region for marketers. However, we find cultural similarities between Japan and the U.K., particularly when it comes to attitudes and behaviors towards pragmatism and security.

Since over half the globe fears loss of culture as a direct result of globalization, brands need to earn their way in by playing an additive role to local culture. As many as 92% of people believe that it is important or extremely important that brands respect local culture, suggesting that perhaps marketers should shift the conversation from "Will this work in Peru?" to "Will this work for Peru?"

Framing the debate only as global vs. local is also out of date in the digital age. Today we find communities of people who are transcending borders but wouldn't necessarily be described as global. The largest cross-cultural segment of consumers we found were **Armchair Globalists**, representing 35% of the people around the world. These are digital savvy people, and skew heavily towards those in countries such as Brazil, Nigeria, India and the Philippines. Even though they do not travel internationally with any great frequency, they love global brands and global content and see the Internet as their window to the outside world.

The new era of Deep Globality may not change many of the core principles of brand marketing. Whether global, regional or local, brands need to connect with consumers by demonstrating a meaningful contribution to their lives.

Great brand ideas can come from anywhere, and go anywhere, and companies need to put systems in place to capture this, recognizing that the practice of global marketing needs to move more toward dialogue and interaction. As we were told by a Japanese native, "The entering culture should not overtake the existing values. There needs to be a way to co-exist, while being able to learn the interesting parts from each other."