

# Consumer Behavior Across Cultures

**W**hen the Canadian media philosopher Marshall McLuhan<sup>1</sup> coined the concept of the global village, he was referring to Plato's definition of the proper size for a city—the number of people who could hear the voice of the public speaker. By the global village, McLuhan meant that the new electric media of his time, such as telephone and television, abolished the spatial dimension. By means of electricity, people everywhere could resume person-to-person relations, as if on the smallest village scale. Thus, McLuhan viewed the electronic media as extensions of human beings. They enhance people's activities; they do not make people the same. If you assume people are the same everywhere, global media extend homogeneity. If you realize that people are different, extensions reinforce the differences. McLuhan did not include cultural convergence in the concept of the global village. In fact, he said the opposite: that uniqueness and diversity could be fostered under electronic conditions as never before.

This is exactly what technological development has accomplished. Contrary to expectations, people have embraced the Internet and other new technology mostly to enhance their current activities. In the cold climates, where people used to preserve food in the snow, they have embraced deep-freeze technology most intensely. The colder the climate, the more deep freezers. In Korea, where people used to preserve the national dish *Kimchi* in pots in the ground, they developed a special refrigerator to be able to do this in the home. The mobile phone penetrated fastest in countries that already had advanced fixed telecommunications infrastructures. It was assumed that the Internet would undermine authoritarian regimes, but in fact it is used to strengthen them. The Internet has not changed people. It has reinforced existing habits that, instead of converging, tend to diverge. There is no evidence of converging consumer behavior across countries. This phenomenon is a core topic discussed in this book that provides evidence of consumer behavior differences that are too large and too stable to ignore.

Technology and national wealth have converged in the developed world to the extent that the majority of people can buy enough to eat and have additional income to invest in new technology and other durable goods. As a result, countries will become similar with respect to penetration of many of such goods, but what people do with their possessions does not converge. Much of consumer behavior varies across borders. As national wealth converges across countries, its explanatory power declines, and mainly cultural variables can explain cross-country differences. Cultural values are at the root of consumer behavior, so understanding culture's influence is necessary for those who want to succeed in the global marketplace. Culture is pervasive in all aspects of consumption and consumer behavior and should be integrated into all elements of consumer behavior theory. That is what this book attempts to do. This first chapter reviews the assumptions of homogenization and the underlying causes of these assumptions.

## GLOBAL CONSUMERS IN A GLOBAL VILLAGE?

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One of the greatest myths of global marketing is of global consumers living in a global village. In a sense, new communication technology has made the world into a global city or village in which we, in theory, can hear and see everything at any time in any place. The question is whether in practice we *do* hear and see everything at any time and in any place. And then, even if we do, the core question is whether this makes us similar to each other. Jeremy Bullmore says, "In many ways, consumers are growing more alike, and we all know why. Mass communications, travel, multinational companies, the whole apparatus of the global village."<sup>2</sup> Because we adopt some consumption symbols, such as jeans and trainers, from people in other parts of the world, the assumption has been that other aspects of our behavior will likewise change. In particular, Western international news journals have made us believe that a homogenization process would work toward universal (American) values. A single youth culture was expected to form across Europe, mimicking a kind of American model because teenagers listen to the same music, surf the net, and talk to each other on their mobile phones.<sup>3</sup>

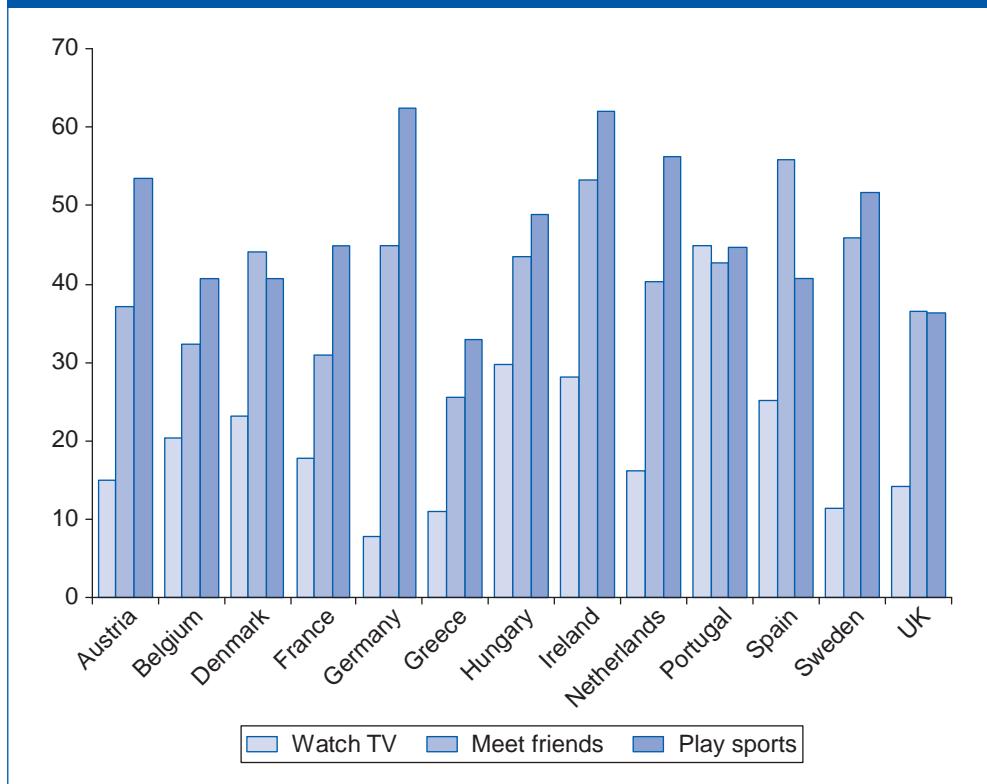
Also, in academia the belief is that convergence of technology, global media, increased trade, and travel act to bring people together. In textbooks of international marketing and consumer behavior, there are plenty of statements about convergence of lifestyles and values, but these statements are not accompanied by empirical evidence. Assael,<sup>4</sup> author of one of the leading textbooks on consumer behavior, states that world cultures are becoming closer in many respects, that tastes in music, fashion, and technology among the young are becoming more similar across the world. With more consumers craving American goods, consumption values abroad are Americanizing. In particular, teenagers across the world have become similar.

As teens across the world watch the same television shows and similar commercials, they begin to develop similar consumption patterns. . . . Teens in the United States, Europe, Latin America and the Far East find being with friends and watching TV to be the most enjoyable ways to spend time. . . . Greater travel, better global

communications, and increased access to the web have spurred the development of common norms and values among teens worldwide.<sup>5</sup>

In reality, few people watch international (English language) television programs regularly. The English language cross-border channel CNN has had to introduce national language versions. MTV has localized its content all over the world. The degree of exchange of people is limited, and there is no empirical evidence that global media make consumer behavior converge across countries. How young people spend their leisure time varies. Watching TV and meeting friends are activities of young people everywhere, but the degree to which they do this varies. Whereas 45% of Portuguese youngsters watch TV, only 8% of German youngsters do so. Also in some countries other activities like playing sports are preferred to watching TV or meeting friends. Figure 1.1 illustrates the differences for 13 European countries.

**Figure 1.1** Leisure Activities of Young People in Europe: Percentages Who Watch TV, Meet Friends, Play Sports



**SOURCE:** *Young Europeans: A survey among young people aged between 15–30 in the European Union*. Flash EB 202 (2007) (see Appendix B)

## GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL CONSUMER CULTURE

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Globalization is a recurrent theme in the newspapers, with particular focus on its negative effects. People feel dominated by large multinational corporations more than by their local and national governments. Global trade is supposed to result in a global consumer culture. What are *globalization* and *global consumer culture*?

### Globalization

According to Robertson,<sup>6</sup> *globalization* became a common term in intellectual, business, media, and other circles with a number of meanings and with varying degrees of precision. In 1990 he related the term *globalization* to modernity and postmodernity. The concept of globalization per se should be applied to a particular series of developments concerning the structuration of the world as a whole. These are the spread of capitalism, Western imperialism, and the development of a global media system. The notion of Western imperialism in particular has linked negative connotations to the term *globalization*. Critics of globalization tend to protest against an emerging global monoculture consisting of McDonald's, Nike, Levi's, Barbie dolls, and American television. Use of the term *cultural imperialism* suggests a passive consumer who has no free will to withstand the attractive propositions of effective marketing techniques applied by a few American brands.

Globalization is largely visualized as a few ubiquitous global brands such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Nike, and such brands are frequently targeted because of their symbolic function. This is partly caused by American marketing executives who would like us to believe that the global village means we drive the same cars, eat the same food, and watch the same television programs. This idea is reinforced by journalists and editors of international (mostly Anglo-American) newspapers who, whenever they discuss globalization, use pictures of Coca-Cola and McDonald's to illustrate the process, which is basically the spread of a small number of American brands across the world. These few global brands are neither representative of the total consumption package nor of transnational trade. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) constructs an "index of transnationality." It works out the ratios of companies' foreign assets to total assets, foreign sales to total sales, and foreign employment to total employment; the index is the average of these three numbers. By this measure, Nestlé, the Swiss food company, is the world's most foreign-oriented company: 87% of its assets, 98% of its sales, and 97% of its workers are outside its homeland. Several of the most transnational companies are from small, advanced economies with small home markets. America's Coca-Cola and McDonald's, makers of the best-known global brands, rank only 31st and 42nd respectively.<sup>7</sup> Yet these brands have become the symbols of globalization and "Western cultural imperialism."

Consumers have varying views on globalization. A majority of inhabitants of the European Union are of the opinion that globalization has a positive effect on scientific and technological progress, employment, health, and cultural exchanges, although the degree

of these positive responses varies across countries. Whereas 66% of the Irish view globalization as advantageous to themselves and their families, only 33% of the Greeks do so. Seventy-five percent of Europeans are of the opinion that the United States has too much influence on the globalization process. Whereas 45% trust their national governments, only 31% trust the multinationals and only 28% trust the United States. Although only 42% trust anti-globalist movements, 79% say that these movements raise points that deserve to be debated.<sup>8</sup>

In some non-Western countries, global culture is equated with new, modern, scientific, and results-oriented behavior. The global market is associated with scientific knowledge and technology.<sup>9</sup>

## Global Consumer Culture

Global communications are assumed to create a global, homogeneous consumer culture. Views on this homogenization process, however, are stronger in the United States than in other parts of the world. Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra,<sup>10</sup> who analyzed the representation of global consumer culture in advertising, view global consumer culture as shared sets of consumption-related symbols (product categories, brands, and consumption activities) that are meaningful to segment members. Mass media programming, flowing primarily from the United States, has played a major role in the creation, learning, and sharing of such consumption symbols. As a result, the symbols of global consumer culture are basically American symbols that in the United States are viewed as local. In the sample of advertisements that was analyzed, only 5.5% were viewed as including global culture symbols compared with 25.6% in the other countries. The spread of global symbols, however, does not necessarily include homogeneity of people's habits or values.<sup>11</sup>

In practice, notwithstanding the worldwide reach of television and the Internet, in many areas of people's lives, in consumption or entertainment habits, be it music or sports, the people of different nations continue to have different habits, tastes, and loyalties. Instead of causing homogenization, globalization is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world.<sup>12</sup>

Different nations play different sports: Cricket is the sport of Britain and its old dominions. Rugby is the sport of New Zealand. Cycling is an important sport of the Netherlands, France, and Spain. Badminton is strong in Malaysia. Maybe only football (soccer) can be considered to be a global sport, but it is by no means as popular in the United States as it is in Europe or Latin America. Even within Europe, interest in soccer varies from 49% in the United Kingdom to 65% in Portugal. Whereas 60% of Belgians are interested in tennis, only 15% of Norwegians share this interest. Interest in golf varies from 46% in Ireland to a meager 7% in Belgium. Of the Irish, 58% are interested in rugby, as compared to 2% of the Danes.<sup>13</sup>

Increasingly, music is local. Local music has gained market share throughout most of the world. In many European markets, demand for local films is increasing. In Germany, 26.6% of cinema attendants choose national films.<sup>14</sup> There are a limited number of global products and global brands, and there are no global consumers. This book presents evidence that in the foreseeable future economic development and technology will not lead to homogenization of consumption.

## CONVERGING AND DIVERGING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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In his famous article, “The Globalization of Markets,” Harvard professor Ted Levitt<sup>15</sup> argued that new technology would lead to homogenization of consumer wants and needs because consumers would prefer standard products of high quality and low price to more customized high-priced products. Levitt’s argument was based on the assumption that consumer behavior is rational and that consumers always want to maximize profit. The assumption of rationality is increasingly regarded as unrealistic and places consumers outside of a cultural context.<sup>16</sup> No empirical evidence has been brought to show homogenization of tastes or the appearance of universal price-minded consumer segments.<sup>17</sup>

Empirical evidence of convergence is usually based on macro-developmental data, such as the numbers of telephones, television sets, or passenger cars per 1,000 population. The U.S. sociologist Alex Inkeles<sup>18</sup> finds that such macro-level data often mask diversity at the micro level. Convergence at macro level (e.g., convergence of GNI [gross national income] per capita) does not necessarily imply convergence of consumer choice. As people around the globe become better educated and more affluent, their tastes diverge. With increased wealth, people increasingly accord greater relevance to their civilizational identity.

There is no support for the argument that increased global mobility for business and vacations will cause people to homogenize. People do not travel to an extent that they are frequently confronted with other cultures. Even if all people were to have enough money to travel abroad, they would not all travel to the same extent. Across European countries, the degree to which people travel varies widely. Whereas in 2008 only 11% of Swedes and 14% of the Irish had not made any short business or private trips, 54% of Hungarians and 47% of Portuguese had not made a business or private trip.<sup>19</sup> Also, young people do not travel to an extent that induces them to adopt different habits and values. In 2001 in Europe, 44% of young people ages 15–24 had not visited another country in the previous 2 years. This was the same percentage as in 1997. Of those who have visited other European countries in the past 2 years, 86% went on vacation.<sup>20</sup> White<sup>21</sup> adds to this that people on vacation are not in a mood that has much to do with their domestic purchasing behavior, so the relevance of any advertising they see is limited. Annually, only 0.4% of Europeans (1.5 million) work in another European Union (EU) state, compared with 2.4% of Americans who work in a state other than where they grew up.<sup>22</sup>

In regions other than Europe, the trend is also toward divergence. Initially, with increased wealth, standards of living appear to converge, but a closer look makes clear that there are large differences. In Latin America, because of the large differences between rich and poor, the rich in each country have more in common with each other than with their poorer compatriots, but middle-income people differ from one country to another. They vary in the use of their discretionary income. All Latin Americans use toothpaste and shampoo each day, but there are varying brand preferences. Although 25% of Latin Americans eat cold cereal for breakfast, the national figures vary from 48% in Central America to 11% in the South.<sup>23</sup> Japan was the country that developed earliest and fastest of all Asian countries, and it was expected that development patterns of other countries in Asia would follow the pattern of Japan. This has not happened. The way other economies, like Malaysia and Indonesia, have developed is different. Even the values gap of American and European elites has widened, according to studies conducted in 2002.<sup>24</sup>

What convergence can be found is at macro level and follows economic development—household penetration of products like refrigerators, washing machines, and color television sets. Only at a certain level of economic development, when people's stomachs are filled, when most people can afford proper housing and durable products such as cars and television sets, do people reach a higher level of unsatisfied needs. That is the moment when cultural values become manifest and are reflected in the different choices of products and brands. The interesting question is what people do with their incremental income, the extra money they have after they have bought the necessary durables to live a comfortable life. At that level, countries tend to diverge. (This phenomenon is further discussed in Chapter 3.)

## POST-SCARCITY SOCIETIES AND THE CULTURE PARADIGM

A point of agreement among economists is that people will spend more as they become richer, so it would be surprising if there were no effect of increased national wealth on consumption. But the effect can take many different forms. One reason may be that consumption is a matter of habit. Much of consumer behavior is based on long-time habits.

An assumption by sociologists is that with increased wealth people's values will change. The idea is that with increased wealth, expenditures on education and media increase, resulting in more egalitarian values and democratic systems that in turn would lead to convergence of consumption. However, better education also makes people more aware of their value preferences. The expectations were that with increased openness and capitalism in China, the Chinese would turn to Western values. Instead, the Chinese are rediscovering the teachings of Confucius, which for centuries have been the moral guidance of the Chinese people. The Chinese want to become modern while retaining their core values.<sup>25</sup>

Instead of homogenizing, continents are becoming more heterogeneous. In 1945, Europe had 31 independent countries. Today there are 51. In Africa, the number of countries grew over the same period from 21 to 53. The European Union has not harmonized people's values or national feelings. Consumers tend to feel most comfortable with their "own" products or brands, the images and emotions they are used to.

The paradigm of economics is that consumers will maximize their own utility and will prefer low-priced, high-quality products to high-priced, added-value brands. This paradigm fits the old scarcity societies where people had to make either/or decisions, for example either a washing machine or holidays. In post-scarcity societies, people have more choices that make them less rational in their buying behavior. When comparing post-scarcity societies that have converged economically, one observes that national wealth is no longer a useful variable for explaining consumption differences. The new paradigm is culture, which becomes an increasingly important variable to explain consumption differences and brand preferences.

Chapter 3 presents data of longer time periods of consumption that demonstrate that people's habits do not converge and that with converging wealth some habits even diverge. For many new commodities, initially national income explains differences in ownership across countries. At some point in time, ownership across countries has reached maximum convergence. When that point is reached, ownership and usage start to diverge. The differences can be explained by culture. In Europe, around 1995, both ownership of television sets and cars per 1,000 inhabitants had converged. At the end of the century, countries had diverged with respect to the numbers of television sets owned per family, ownership of wide-screen TVs, viewing time, and numbers of cars owned per family. The patterns followed by "old" technology can be used to predict the pattern of "new" technology. New technology (e.g., computers) has not reached the point of convergence, so differences between countries are related to national wealth, but future development can be predicted.

Generally speaking, the older the product category, the stronger the influence of culture. This explains why consumption of food products is persistently culture bound. The wealthier countries become, the more manifest the influence of culture on consumption. When people possess more or less enough of everything, they will spend their incremental income on what most fits their value patterns. Americans will buy more cars, the Dutch will buy more luxurious caravans (holiday trailers), and the Spanish will eat out even more than they do now. So greater wealth will not make people spend more on the same products in all countries. With converging wealth, the influence of income on consumption decreases. Cultural values are the main variable to explain differences in consumer behavior. (The convergence-divergence process is a major topic of Chapter 3.)

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## GLOBAL COMMUNITIES?

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One of the preconditions of global advertising is the existence of homogeneous global segments across borders with similar values. Focus on similarities or marketing universals rather than the differences has led international marketers to search for market segments of people with similar lifestyles and values across countries that are called *global communities* or *global tribes*. The assumptions are that 18-year-olds in Paris have more in common with 18-year-olds in New York than with their own parents.<sup>26</sup> Business travelers and teenagers are most often cited as examples of such homogeneous groups. Samuel Huntington speaks of a “Davos culture,” referring to people who speak fluent English, hold university degrees, who travel frequently outside their own country and dress alike.<sup>27</sup> These people are only superficially alike; their ways of thinking and behavior in the home country are not necessarily the same.

The European youth market is considered to be homogeneous because these people were reared on the same movies and global brands, like Coca-Cola and Levi’s, and watch MTV, all of which have supposedly encouraged the development of a global teenager with common norms and values. However, several value studies show that between countries, young people vary as much as do grown-ups. General evidence is the fact that cross-cultural psychologists who measure value differences across cultures tend to use students as subjects. Youths from Stockholm to Seville may use the same type of mobile phone or computer, but they may have bought it for different reasons and they use it in different ways and places. Young people may buy and use the same technology worldwide, but to a different degree, for different purposes, and in different ways. Everywhere young people may play sports, listen to music, or play video games, but they do this to a different extent. These differences are related to culture.

Young people use computers in different ways. A survey by the advertising agency Euro RSCG in 2001 showed that attitudes toward technology vary enormously among youth in the large European cities. For example, 16% of respondents in Amsterdam said entertainment was their primary reason for using technology, compared with 9% in Helsinki and London, and only 4% in Milan.<sup>28</sup>

Western magazines suggest that Asian teens, in the way they behave and dress and express themselves, increasingly resemble American and European teens and mistake it for Western individualistic behavior, but this behavior is not driven by individualistic values. Moreover, there is not one teenage culture in Asia; there is enormous diversity among Asian teenage lifestyles.<sup>29</sup> Young Asians may be typically Western on the surface, but traditional values like hard work remain next to aspiration toward money and display of success via branded goods.<sup>30</sup> If you take a typical Indian teenager in Mumbai, Delhi, or Kolkata, he’d be wearing a Lacoste shirt or Nike shoes, but he is very much an Indian in his values. He respects his parents, lives together in a family, and removes his Nike shoes before entering a place of religion.<sup>31</sup> Many Westerners make a mistake when they think Japanese are

changing because students between 18 and 25 years old act in an extreme and revolutionary way. Westerners have to realize that these years are the only free years a Japanese has in his entire life. As soon as he gets a job, he conforms to typical Japanese behavior.<sup>32</sup> A study by ACNielsen found that, increasingly, Indonesian youth like to use traditional Indonesian products, prefer advertisements that use Indonesian models, and when sick would rather use Indonesian medicine than Western medicine.<sup>33</sup> In India, family and religion remain solid blocks of society, even as teens experiment with Western music, fashion, and brands. Because of the low penetration of global media, teens may copy a look from pictures but have trouble understanding the attitudinal context for that look. In India, pride in Indianness has increased hand in hand with globalization. Increasingly teens in Asia turn to Japan, not to the West, for their music, books, comics, and television programs.<sup>34</sup> Global media have understood the consequences of diversity. The music channel MTV, originally meant to be a global music channel for the young, has localized its content.

Global homogeneous markets exist only in the minds of international marketing managers and advertising people. Even people with similar lifestyles do not behave as a consistent group of purchasers because they do not share the same values. Yes, there are young people and yuppies (young urban professionals), rich people and graying populations who have economic and demographic aspects in common, but marketing communications cannot use similar motives and arguments because their targets do not have the same values. This is demonstrated by ownership of luxury products as measured by the European Media and Marketing Survey. The high-income European target, consisting of people who read international media, is not one homogeneous, cross-border target group for high-touch and high-tech luxury articles. Expenditures on expensive luxury articles by this high-income group in Europe vary strongly. The differences can only be explained by cultural variables. (More about this is discussed in Chapter 8 of this book.)

Within cultures, lifestyle segmentation is useful, as it adds value to economic and demographic segmentation. For cross-national marketing, the concept is less applicable because value differences of national culture are overriding. It may be that only very small groups of people, such as the NYLON,<sup>35</sup> jet setters who live between New York and London, have some common habits with respect to restaurants and theaters visited. This is relevant only for a limited number of products and services. Even if across countries certain groups of people can be defined by common ownership of some products, the motives for buying these products vary so strongly that for developing effective marketing programs across countries these lifestyle distinctions are not useful. (Differences in buying motives and their relationship with culture are discussed in Chapters 5 and 8 of this book.)

Business people are generally considered to be a “culture-free group” because of assumed rational decision making as compared with consumer decision making, but decision making by business people, like many business habits, is also culture bound. Whereas the French and the Belgians will prefer meeting in a restaurant for lunch, the Dutch will prefer meeting in the office with some sandwiches.

## NEW MEDIA

The new media have facilitated doing business and intensified existing behavior. Satellites, mobile phones, and the Internet are helping people in developing countries to better their lives. Faster information by satellite (as in Figure 1.2) about prices for buying and selling has helped farmers in India, but it hasn't made them dress as farmers do in the United States.

Expectations of the Internet were that it would homogenize people's values. In the year 2000, Nicholas Negroponte of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology declared that "thanks to the Internet the children of the future are not going to know what nationalism is."<sup>56</sup>

**Figure 1.2** Information by Satellite in India. Photograph Gerard Foekema



Bill Clinton was quoted as saying "the Internet, with foreign involvement, would eventually bring democracy to the Middle Kingdom," but as yet, that hasn't happened. Indeed, Internet diffusion has been correlated with democracy, but positive democratic effects of the Internet have primarily been observed in countries that were already developed and at least partially democratic. The Internet amplifies and modifies existing patterns of governmental conflict and cooperation. In many developing and nondemocratic countries, access to the Internet is limited by filtration software, state laws, self-censorship, cost, speed, and other factors.<sup>57</sup>

Whereas in the Western world, the adoption of the Internet is bottom-up, in Asian countries it is pushed and controlled by governments. In 1999 the government of Taiwan wanted 50,000 companies to be online by 2001, and in Thailand a law was passed requiring all export and import documents to go online before 2000.<sup>38</sup> In Korea, the government saw to it that all Korean households have a broadband connection.

The Internet is not a homogenizing factor. Instead, there is growing demand for the ability to adapt language and advertising and to apply local laws based on the geographic locations of individual Internet users. The expectation of convergence has caused many to ignore that the basic principles of effective communication also apply to the new media.<sup>39</sup>

The Internet does not change people's habits or values. It confirms and enhances existing values, habits, and practices. An Asian example of adoption of the Internet for a culture-specific activity was the Bandai i-service in Japan. In Japan, cartoon magazines have always been very popular. One of the first, most popular services to the subscribers of NTT DoCoMo's i-service (Internet by mobile phone) was by Bandai, allowing subscribers to download cartoon characters to their mobile phones.<sup>40</sup>

Online sellers are not changing people's preferences. They are selling things that people already buy. Online selling is mainly a new retail method. Across cultures similar differences in product buying via the Internet are found as via conventional retail channels.<sup>41</sup>

People will use the new media for the interests and habits they acquired in the country where they grew up. These interests and habits have existed for a long time, and the Internet is not going to change them. The new media may even lead to divergence in Europe and probably more so worldwide. Oliver Cleaver, media director at Kimberly Clark Europe, subscribes to this point of view. He states:

The new media belong to global business and to a minority of consumers who are affluent, smart and wired enough to be able to use its potential to make themselves more affluent, smarter and better wired. . . . The new media are not creating a global village, they are helping to destroy it.<sup>42</sup>

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## UNIVERSALISM

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At the root of many assumptions about convergence is universalistic thinking. By the term *convergence*, people often mean Westernization, whereby "Western" usually is American. Trends spotted in the United States are indiscriminately extended to other areas where different circumstances and habits will prevent their materializing. An example is a statement like, "In Western society 15% of meals eaten outside the home are in the car."<sup>43</sup> Dashboard dining is a typical American habit that is alien to most people of Europe and is unlikely to become a European habit.

Americans, but also northern Europeans, tend to be universalistic in their perception and assumptions. They genuinely think that their values are valid for the whole world and

should be shared by all.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, most Asians are particularistic and focus more on the differences than on the similarities. They think their own culture to be so unique that no outsider can understand it. The way the Japanese try to demonstrate their cultural uniqueness in the world is called *nihonjinron*, a body of discourse that demonstrates Japan's cultural identity. A survey by Kazufumi Manabe,<sup>45</sup> a Japanese professor of sociology, shows that 82% of the Japanese are interested in the subject and read about it in the media, and 63% think foreigners are incapable of completely understanding Japanese culture.

From the Western point of view, democracy and human rights should be universal, and these are the regular topics that pop up in many articles by American journalists. This selective focus annoys many Chinese. The reaction by the Chinese is that they are depicted as slaves with no freedom.

In an interview, *Newsweek's* George Wehrfritz asked a journalist for the official Xinhua News Agency which stories upset Chinese young people. The answer was

The Western press is always talking about human rights. To you in the United States, human rights mean the right to be elected president, change your government or establish a political party. But to 1.3 billion Chinese people, human rights means the right to be with family and friends, the opportunity to make money and go to school and have access to good health care.<sup>46</sup>

Many international marketing managers are convinced that their own ideas or practices represent universal wisdom and try to impose them on everybody. Most global advertising agencies and many multinational companies have Anglo-American management. Their universalism makes them focus on the similarities and ignore the differences. These similarities are often pseudo-similarities.

In advertising, American values are viewed as universally valid, whereas the values of other cultures are not acceptable for advertising in the United States. Although Americans easily export their marketing and advertising concepts abroad, they rarely take an ad campaign from abroad into the United States.

Universalism can also be the cause of mistaking habits or values of one European country for all of them, for example, taking the United Kingdom as representative of Europe or categorizing all European countries as hierarchical societies,<sup>47</sup> whereas the differences between European countries with respect to hierarchical thinking and acting are large. Another mistake is grouping Europe into Nordic and Latin, or Mediterranean, groups or grouping the countries of the Benelux. There are important cultural differences between countries in Europe that influence consumer behavior, also between the Mediterranean cultures, for example, Italy and Spain. In Europe no two countries are more different than Belgium and the Netherlands, although they share a language and a border. Yet companies

tend to take the countries together, present them as the Benelux, and extend research findings for Belgium to the Netherlands or vice versa.

A problem that reinforces universalistic thinking is lack of knowledge of other countries and cultures. A previous boss of Coca-Cola, Doug Ivester, after a contamination incident in Belgium, was said to have dismissed the problem with the comment: “Where the fuck is Belgium?”<sup>48</sup> CEOs, when traveling, hardly meet the average consumer. It is easy to pretend everybody is the same when you are at the top of a company and business partners are inclined to agree with you to avoid conflicts.

Lack of knowledge of separate countries makes people also see more similarities than there actually are. In international marketing, Americans tend to view all Europeans as similar; Europeans tend to view all Asians as similar; and Asians, when referring to Western culture, usually mean American culture.

Language is a related cause of misunderstanding. Some 380 million people speak English as their first language and perhaps two thirds as many as their second. Yet, understanding of English as a second language tends to be overestimated. In 2001 nearly half of all EU citizens spoke no language other than their own,<sup>49</sup> and 31% of young Europeans ages 15–24 spontaneously claimed not to know any foreign languages.<sup>50</sup> Some expect that the advance of English as a global language will damage or destroy local culture. However, just adding English to one’s native language doesn’t change one’s culture. The problem is actually the native English speakers who think that use of English by others elsewhere makes them also think like native English speakers. Although the English language is widely spoken in many countries, it often is not spoken well enough to understand a native English or American speaker, which can cause misunderstanding in international advertising.

An example of difficult to interpret use of the English language was a U.K. commercial for Bacardi Breezer in spring 2002 that was also aired in the Netherlands, referring to a “tomcat.” The word for tomcat (*kater*) in the Netherlands is used for what is a “hangover” in the English language. This was probably not intended to be the effect of the alcoholic beverage advertised. In addition, the tomcat is asked whether he has been “chasing birds” (which means chasing women in English), the sort of word play that is beyond the understanding of most inhabitants of the Netherlands.

(Language as one of the mental processes related to culture is a topic discussed in Chapter 6 of this book.)

Finally, universalism has led to the application of Anglo-American marketing theories worldwide. This is not due to American imperialism but to the fact that advanced marketing and advertising practice and theory originated in the United States. Not only have these theories been exported to other cultures, practitioners and academics elsewhere have

enthusiastically copied practices and theories from the United States without realizing that not all these concepts and theories are equally valid in their own countries. This has happened in all regions of the world, both in Europe and in Asia. In developing countries in particular, because Western concepts are regarded as “proven,” Western ideas are readily acceptable to clients of advertising agencies.<sup>51</sup> With increased marketing literacy, people in business have slowly started to understand that not all American concepts and theories can be applied to their own cultures.

## SENSE OF HISTORY

Another cause of mistakes is lack of a sense of history. Many recent phenomena are perceived as new, whereas they are often only a new format of the past. Knowledge of history helps to understand phenomena that seem to be new but are not. Those who hadn’t known people’s behavior in the former European Eastern bloc prior to the Soviet occupation thought new behavior resulted from Western capitalism or globalization after the Communists had left, whereas, in reality, people just resumed their old ways.

The following is a reader’s reaction to an article in *Newsweek* about patterns of Hungarian behavior that were seen to be the result of globalization:

In your insightful article, you write of the Hungarian executive who “thinks nothing of popping over to Vienna to hear U2 or Whitney Houston.” This may not be as much a sign of globalization as a return to the way things were. In their day, our great-grandparents thought nothing of heading to Vienna for a night at the opera. They took the train, not their Alfa Romeo, and listened to Verdi, not Whitney. The difference is that back then not only the elite were able to afford this kind of entertainment.<sup>52</sup>

Mate Hegedus, Budapest, Hungary

Austrians and Hungarians have much in common because Austria and Hungary have belonged to one empire (the Habsburg Empire), which makes it understandable that people easily and frequently travel through each other’s countries. Only the Communist occupation prevented that temporarily.

Behavior that is understandable in the context of history is often interpreted as new by the historically ignorant. Many differences between countries can be traced to history. What most people mean by globalization is increasing flows of trade and investment between parts of the world and between countries, but many nations have been global from their origin.

One of the most important themes in the history of world economy is the balance between nationalism and internationalism, not in the ideological sense but in organization.

The historian George Holmes<sup>55</sup> states that the economic relationship of the modern world existed in embryo within late medieval Europe. The city-states of the fourteenth century, such as Venice, Florence, and Genoa, were republics, where state and commercialism were integrated. Venice provided its trading nobility with a state-controlled shipping service. There were Italian trading communities in every city from London to Alexandria. Marco Polo, who at the end of the thirteenth century described China for Westerners, was one of a family of Venetian merchants. At that time journeys by Italian merchants across Asia from the Black Sea to China were commonplace. Venice, a city without much industry, came to control an empire through trading enterprise. The most famous commercial family of the fifteenth century, the Medici, established a network of branches at Rome, Geneva, Bruges, London, Lyons, Naples, and Milan. They were experts in the international exchange business, transferring money by letters of exchange from one part of Europe to another.

Increased worldwide interconnectedness has intensified global trade, money exchange, and flow of information. Individuals like Bill Gates or Richard Branson, or families like the Wallenbergs or Guccis, can span the globe with their trade like the Medici did in their times on a smaller scale. What has changed is that modern branding and media have made the phenomena of globalization more visual. Family names have become brands.

Technological advances have always played a role in altering the economic importance of certain areas. Advanced technology came from the Silicon Valley in the twentieth century, and it came from China in the fifteenth century, where it may come from again in the twenty-first century. The degree to which some nations or areas have embraced new technology has changed their structural role in the world economy. During the Middle Ages, a reasonable trade balance existed between Christian Europe and the Arabian world. Gold and silver flowed eastward, and spices and precious stones went westward. However, a shortage of gold caused problems for Florence and Genoa, which needed gold to produce coins for their trade activities. Gold had to be obtained elsewhere. The Portuguese were the only people interested in traveling further afield than the usual kind of discovery voyages. Due to its geographical position, Portugal could only expand via the sea. Financed by Genoa, the Portuguese set out on their voyages of discovery. Europeans traveled the world in order to obtain exotic commerce and to trade. Looking at China during that same period, it seems that Europe and China had similar population levels between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. From the second century to the fifteenth century, China had a technological advantage. It was only around 1450 that Europe began to increase its technological development. One reason was political: Europe could not afford to lag behind in the development of its arms industry because of many wars between the different states. In China, on the other hand, the government decided to restrict the development of the arms industry in order to improve internal peace.

The Portuguese and the Chinese went on their voyages of discovery in the same period. After 18 years, however, the Chinese stopped abruptly with the death of eunuch-admiral Cheng Ho in 1434. The main reason lay in an important cultural difference: the Chinese did

not travel to *obtain* something but to *bring* something. By bringing gifts of high quality to faraway countries, they wanted to assure those countries of their superiority. They were not interested in colonizing because they believed that they were already the whole world. When their treasuries were depleted due to the escapades of Cheng Ho, the discovery voyages were stopped and China cut itself off.<sup>54</sup>

Historical, political, and cultural factors explain the economic development of nations that have played an integrated role in global trade. That has not changed. Despite the existence of a World Trade Organization, there still are trade wars between nations. What has changed is that there are no more military wars between commercial communities. The armies of the government do not support the cola wars.

Many current global developments can be better understood by knowing the history of global trade and the varying national contexts in which global trade has developed. Habits of inhabitants of India can be explained by the former British colonial influence. How China in the far past dealt with technological development can explain how that country deals with new developments in the present. The Chinese people are, as in the past, eager to embrace new technology, but a historically strongly centralized government wishes to guide (control in Western eyes) the people in the way they adopt it.

When entering new markets with new products or brands, a sense of history can help. In a country like the Czech Republic, where people have been drinking fruit juice and herbal teas for centuries, it will not be easy to change their habits to drinking cola. Perceptions of brands are often formed by their history in the market place. In 1996 in China, Panasonic was seen as the leading electronics brand in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu, according to a survey by advertising agency Grey, but ironically, Panasonic was introduced to Chinese consumers when the manufacturer shipped a load of what were actually outdated cassette players to the country in the early 1980s. For many Chinese households, Panasonic was their first foreign brand.<sup>55</sup>

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## BRANDING AND ADVERTISING: FROM GLOBAL TO MULTI-LOCAL

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The discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of standardizing advertising across countries has been a long one. One of the most frequently heard advantages is cost reduction because of economies of scale. Other reasons are quality control and consistency in an era when many media reach various countries at the same time. It is good international business practice to want to control one's communications, but standardization of global branding and marketing communications is wrong in principle and impossible in practice. Global advertising can only be effective if there are global consumers with universal values. As consumers' values and behavior vary across cultures, global standardized advertising is not equally effective in all markets. Much of it is wasted in markets where consumer values are different from the values of the advertising campaign. Because of this, even

Saatchi & Saatchi, the advertising agency that was first to embrace the concept of global advertising, changed their opinion. Kevin Roberts, CEO worldwide of Saatchi & Saatchi, stated in 2002, “Anyone who wants to go global has to understand the local—their own local and the locals of all their customers. People live in the local. I’ve never met a global consumer. I never expect to. We define ourselves by our differences. It’s called identity—self, family, nation.”<sup>56</sup> In an interview in *BusinessWeek*, Martin Sorrell, CEO of WPP group, says that the idea that globalization would lead consumers to buy goods and services the same ways everywhere now looks to be flawed. According to Sorrell, truly global products and services such as soft drinks or computers only account for 15% of WPP’s revenues. What has been going on may not have been globalization but the Americanization of markets.<sup>57</sup>

The old marketing paradigm says that markets are people. There may be global products, but there are no global people. There may be global brands, but there are no global motives for buying these brands. There may be global markets, but most consumption patterns are local. Douglas Daft, Coca-Cola’s CEO, stated in 2000, “People don’t buy drinks globally.”<sup>58</sup> Coca-Cola is one of the brands that are frequently used as examples of longtime successful global advertising. Probably the most important success factor of Coca-Cola, however, has been its efficient distribution system, not its global advertising. For a long time Coca-Cola’s main goal was “to be within an arm’s reach of desire,”<sup>59</sup> and its longtime slogan was “Always, everywhere Coca-Cola.” In the year 2000 the Coca-Cola Company, which had until then been the prototype of a global advertiser, decided to get closer to local markets because of declining profitability. CEO Douglas Daft was quoted in the *Financial Times*, “We kept standardizing our practices, while local sensitivity had become absolutely essential to success.”<sup>60</sup> According to Daft, the general direction is away from global advertising. “We need to make our advertising as relevant as possible to the local market.”<sup>61</sup> This approach is a better way to control the marketing process than exporting universal brand values to global publics without knowing what the takeout will be. As the sociologist-anthropologist David Howes says, “The assumption that goods like Coca-Cola, on entering a culture, will retain and communicate the values they are accorded by their culture of origin must be questioned. Often these goods are transformed in accordance with the values of the receiving culture.”<sup>62</sup> This results in loss of control instead of control, which is the purpose of global standardized marketing and communications.

Many of the large multinationals that have standardized their operations and brands since the 1990s have seen their profits decline because centralized control lacks local sensitivity. In the mid-1990s, Ford centralized global management. “That move, Ford execs now say, took Ford of Europe’s focus off local strategy. As a result it lacks competitive offerings in segments that make up 35 percent of the European market.”<sup>63</sup> The continental European clothing retailer C&A standardized buying and advertising in Europe in 1997. In June 2000 the company decided to close all 109 shops in the United Kingdom and Ireland because of substantial losses. The taste of the British and Irish consumers is different from that of continental Europeans.<sup>64</sup> Also, tastes vary across continental Europe. Casual clothing, for example, sells better in the Netherlands than in Germany. At the end of the year 2000, C&A had relocated

both buying and advertising. The British retail chain Marks & Spencer, which until then had made different advertising campaigns for each country where it operated, changed to uniform advertising for the whole of Europe. At the end of 2001, Marks & Spencer withdrew from the European continent. Differences in local tastes not only prevent selling standard products; they also affect the way retailers sell their goods. In 1996 the American retailer Wal-Mart set up efficient, clean supercenters in Indonesia, only to find that Indonesians preferred Matahari, the shabbier shop next door, which reminded shoppers of a street market where they could haggle.<sup>65</sup> Many international companies underestimate the strength of local products in the markets they enter. And they overestimate the value of their reputations.

Perhaps one of the causes of success of McDonald's in foreign markets is the fact that, in addition to maintaining a strong brand image and consistent service standards around the world, its product offer has a local touch and its advertising until 2003 has been local. Examples are the Kiwi burger in New Zealand; the Maharaja Mac in India; the Prosperity burger in Malaysia; the Teriyaki burger in Japan; the McKrokot in the Netherlands; McLaks, a grilled salmon burger, in Norway; and the Croque McDo in France that refers to the popular French "Croque Monsieur," a hot ham and cheese sandwich. Advertising by McDonald's tied into local habits, values, and symbols. In 2001, for example, advertising for McDonald's in France tied into "Asterix and Obelisk," the most famous historical cartoon of the nation. Figure 1.3 shows a few pictures from this commercial.

Figure 1.3 McDonald's Advertising in France, 2001



In Asia, McDonald's follows cultural habits and uses celebrities. Figure 1.4 shows pictures from a Japanese commercial that is hardly understandable to outsiders. We see a young woman putting on all sorts of different hats and in the end eating a hamburger. What is special is that her name is Yuri Ebihara. McDonald's Japan annually has a special filet-o-fish with shrimp inside, which is called *ebi filet-o*. *Ebi* means shrimp in Japanese. Since Ebihara is such a famous model, and her name is actually a bit strange, including the word *ebi*, anybody in Japan can easily relate Ebihara to *ebi filet-o*, even without saying anything about the hamburger.

Instead of consistency, flexibility will become increasingly important in global marketing. The strength of many national or multilocal brands is demonstrated by the

**Figure 1.4** McDonald's Advertising in Japan, 2009

Reader's Digest surveys, "European Trusted Brands,"<sup>66</sup> conducted annually since 2000 and asking respondents which brands they trusted most for several product categories. There are several national brands that have remained strong in the face of the power of the large multinationals. These are national brands that are either old or include important national values in their advertising, or both. In France, the French car brand Renault is most trusted; in Germany and Austria it is the German brand Volkswagen; and in the Czech Republic, it is Skoda, an originally Czech car brand. The most trusted car brand in India is the Indian brand Maruti.

The trend from global to local is reinforced by localization of media. Many originally global or pan-regional television channels have localized, that is, adapted to local languages and offered local ad windows to advertisers. CNN International programming regionalized in September 1997 and now comprises five separately scheduled international television channels: Asia Pacific; South Asia; Europe/the Middle East/Africa; Latin America; and North America. CNN is available on television in Spanish on CNN+, Spain; in Turkish on CNN Turk, Turkey; and in German on n-tv, Germany. On the Web it is available in Japanese on CNN.co.jp, and Arabic on CNNArabic.com. A CNN headline news service is also available in Korean at CNN.com/Korean. Nearly 90% of programs on CNN International are exclusively produced for the international feeds. Only about 10% are derived from CNN/U.S.<sup>67</sup>

Localization makes it increasingly important for marketing and advertising people to understand the influence of culture. Cultural effects are often less obvious and more difficult to research than economic consequences, but they can be more pervasive and serious in the long run.

## CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

*Consumer behavior* can be defined<sup>68</sup> as the study of the processes involved when people select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires. In this definition, consumer behavior is viewed as a process that includes the issues that influence the consumer before, during, and after a purchase. In some models of consumer behavior, the elements of consumer behavior are classified according to the academic disciplines psychology and

sociology, from which consumer behavior theory borrows. Whereas psychology studies human behavior at the individual level, sociology studies human behavior at group level. But culture operates at each level. Personality and culture are inextricably bound together. How people learn is studied at the individual level, but what and how human beings learn varies with the society in which they live. Culture is more than a social or environmental influence. Instead of viewing culture as the environment of people's behavior, nowadays anthropologists view culture as "interiorized." People used to be imagined *in* a culture. Now, culture is in their *heads*.<sup>69</sup>

To understand culture's consequences for consumer behavior, culture must be integrated in the various aspects of consumer behavior theory. Ideally, theories of consumer behavior are developed within cultures, studying people's behavior within each nation. For comparing cultures, variables and constructs must be found that allow discovering how these cultures or groups of cultures are different from or similar to each other. Following this "etic" approach (see also Chapter 2) includes the risk of overlooking some unique aspects of unique cultures, but it is the most practical approach and is common to current research in cross-cultural psychology and other comparative social sciences.<sup>70</sup> This book approaches consumer behavior across cultures by reviewing various existing theories and integrating culture in these theories. Instead of categorizing behavior aspects according to the separate disciplines, we need an integrated view of the individual, culture, and society. This approach is reflected in the model that structures the various components of consumer behavior process described in this book.

## A MODEL OF CROSS-CULTURAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The components of human behavior can be summarized as *what people are* ("Who am I?"), the *self* and *personality*, defined by people's attributes and traits ("What sort of person am I?"), *how people feel, how people think and learn*, and *what people do*. The terms of the social sciences for feeling, learning, and doing are *affect*, *cognition*, and *behavior*. These elements are included in the definition of consumer behavior of the American Marketing Association as "the dynamic interaction of affect and cognition, behavior, and the environment by which human beings conduct exchange aspects of their lives."<sup>71</sup>

For understanding the influence of culture on consumer behavior, marketers must integrate culture in the various components of human behavior. U.S. marketing scholars Manrai and Manrai<sup>72</sup> point out that in the definitions, culture is a complex concept. Many items defined as consequences of culture are also included in the definition of culture, either as artifacts (e.g., food, dress) or as abstract elements (e.g., values and norms). These must be separated, so that consumer behavior consequences of culture can be specified beyond other types of behavior that are implicitly included in the definition of culture itself. Cultural values should be included as an integrated part of the consumer and not as an environmental factor. In this book also *national income* is not viewed as an environmental factor as in so many textbooks, so I do not use the term *economic environment*. Income interacts with the consumer's values and culture, in particular in post-scarcity societies. In this I follow Sürdem,<sup>73</sup> who defines economic rationality as a "value system" appropriate for a certain social system.

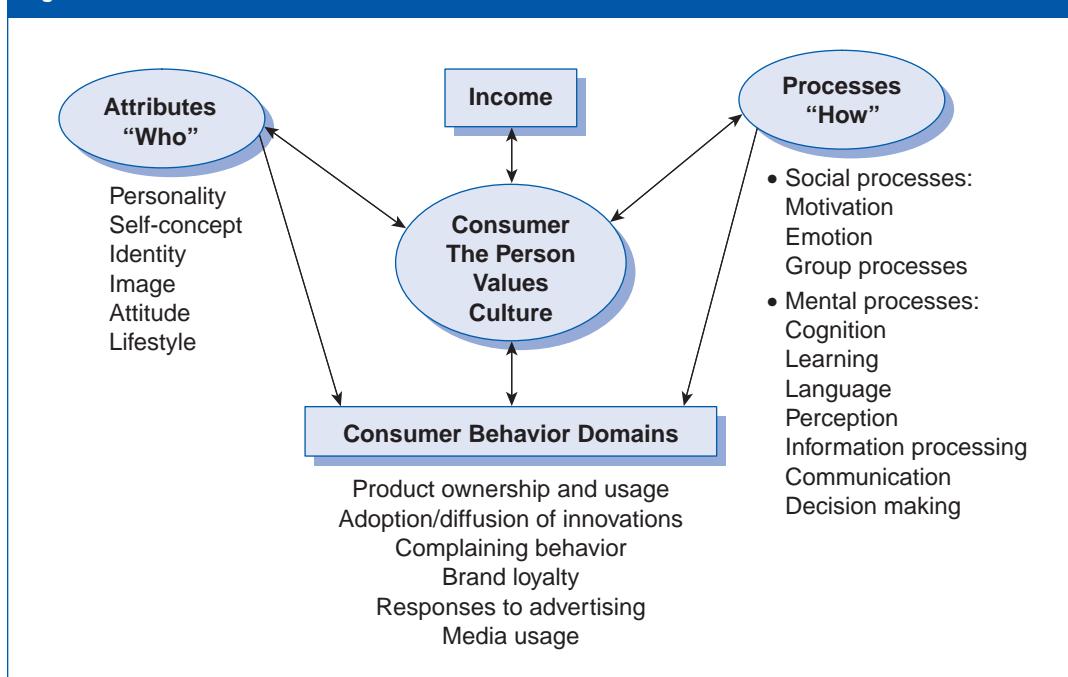
The model presented in Figure 1.5 structures the cultural components of the *person* in terms of consumer *attributes* and *processes*, and the cultural components of *behavior* in *consumer behavior domains*. Wealth is influenced by culture, but in turn it influences culture, so *income* is placed in a separate box, shown as interacting with the culture of the consumer.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is organized according to the framework shown in Figure 1.5. It discusses topics found in American consumer behavior textbooks, but it is structured in a different way.

Core differences in the approach of this book are with respect to the influence of culture on the self and information processing. In U.S.-based textbooks, the self and information processing are described from the perspective of an individualistic culture only. The group is viewed as an external factor and not as part of the self. Information is described as an instrument that empowers consumers with the ability to make informed decisions.<sup>75</sup> Culture is usually viewed as merely an environmental influence on consumer behavior instead of interiorized in the person. Another major difference is that most textbooks start with the decision-making process, whereas this book views decision making as a mental

**Figure 1.5** A Framework of Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior



SOURCE: Adapted from Manrai and Manrai (1996, 2001)<sup>74</sup>

process, and influences on decision making are found all through the book. Consumer behavior textbooks of U.S. origin—apart from an introductory chapter that includes varying topics in different textbooks—generally consist of the following major parts: (1) consumer decision making; (2) the consumer as an individual; (3) group and cultural influences. Table 1.1 shows how these topics are covered in this book.

**Table 1.1** Comparison of Organization of Topics in U.S. Consumer Behavior Textbooks and in *Consumer Behavior and Culture*

General Consumer Behavior Textbooks	Topics	Consumer Behavior and Culture (Chapter Number)
Consumer decision making	Buying, consumption Brand loyalty Individual decision making High-, low-involvement decision making/processing Situational influences on decision making Dissatisfaction Shopping behavior	(8) Consumer behavior domains (8) Consumer behavior domains (6) Mental processes (6) Mental processes (5) Social processes (8) Consumer behavior domains (8) Consumer behavior domains
Consumer as individuals	Motivations and values The self, personality, image, lifestyle Attitude Perception, learning, memory Categorization Information processing Demographics	(5) Social processes (4) The consumer: Attributes (4) The consumer: Attributes (6) Mental processes (6) Mental processes (6) Mental processes (3) Convergence/divergence in consumer behavior
Group and cultural influences	Cultural values Group influence, roles of group members, reference groups Influentials, opinion leaders Household decision making Group communication Link values-behavior Diffusion of innovations Opinion leaders	(2) Values and culture (5) Social processes (5) Social processes (5) Social processes (7) Culture and communication (7) Culture and communication (7) Culture and communication (7) Culture and communication

## CONCLUSION

The topics reviewed in this chapter illustrate assumptions generally found in academic literature and in practice. The assumptions are that there are global consumers or global communities with universal values who can be reached by global advertising. Reality is different, and examples are given of companies that have standardized their products and communications with bad results. Global advertising was conceived from the assumption that consumer behavior across countries would converge with converging media, technology, and national wealth. There is little evidence to support this thesis. Instead, with converging wealth, when people increasingly live in post-scarcity societies, the differences become more pronounced. At the root of misunderstanding are universalism, the spread of the English language, and lack of a sense of history. For comparing post-scarcity societies, income can no longer serve as an explaining variable, and culture becomes the new paradigm.

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