Exploring the effectiveness of foreign brand communication: Consumer culture ad imagery and brand schema incongruity

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Drawing from international branding literature and schema incongruity research, the present study (*a*) assesses foreign brand communication effectiveness by juxtaposing three alternative advertising approaches based on local, foreign and global consumer culture imagery, and (*b*) investigates the mechanism underlying consumers' responses to foreign brand communication. In a 2 (*foreign brand schema* vs. *control*) × 3 (*local* vs. *foreign* vs. *global ad type*) full-factorial, between-subjects experiment with a consumer sample, we find that ads portraying global consumer culture imagery only moderately violate consumer perceptions of brand foreignness and lead to more favorable ad attitudes. Furthermore, moderated-mediation analysis shows that when the global ad imagery is meaningfully linked to the foreign brand, perceptions of credibility increase and positively influence ad attitude. However, if consumers cannot make sense of the ad, this effect is reversed and negatively influences subsequent responses. Theoretical and managerial implications of the findings are discussed and future research directions identified.

1. Introduction

International marketing literature identifies three basic consumer culture positioning strategies that brands may adopt in the international marketplace. These can be differentiated according to whether the brand is positioned as a symbol of the *global* consumer culture (GCC), the *local* consumer culture (LCC), or a specific *foreign* consumer culture (FCC) (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999). Extant research indicates that brands can gain potential advantages by being associated with all three consumer culture alternatives (Alden et al., 1999; Nijssen & Douglas, 2011). GCC benefits the brand via increased perceptions of quality, prestige, and credibility associated with the notion of globalness (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003), whereas LCC contributes to brand equity by linking brands to the local culture and strengthening consumer–brand identification (Özsomer, 2012; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). Finally, brands linked to FCC benefit from the associations consumers hold with a distinct and positively valued foreign culture (Alden et al., 1999; Brannen, 2004).

In line with this threefold conceptualization, recent research in international advertising has explored the potential benefits of employing local, foreign, or global consumer culture advertising imagery (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Cui, Yang, Wang, & Liu, 2012; Nijssen & Douglas, 2011; Okazaki, Mueller, & Taylor, 2010; Zhou, Poon, & Wang, 2015). However, extant literature has not taken into account whether or not the consumer culture conveyed by the ad conforms to pre-existing consumer perceptions about the nature of the brand (i.e., the *brand schema*, Halkias, 2015). Imagine, for example, that a foreign brand is about to launch a new advertising campaign and can choose among employing a FCC, LCC, or GCC theme. In the case of FCC, brand communication is consistent with the consumers' pre-existing schema of the brand, thus positively influencing brand identification and making the content of communication more relevant (Zhou et al., 2015). Alternatively, the company may choose to employ a GCC advertising theme, trying to capitalize on the symbolic value associated with the notion of globalness (Akaka & Alden, 2010), or a LCC advertising theme, in an attempt to leverage brand equity by connecting with the local market (Westjohn, Singh, & Magnusson, 2012). Both of these advertising options, however, represent instances of *brand schema incongruity* as the ad theme involved (local/global) does not match consumers' schema (foreign) of the brand. A key – and, as yet, unanswered – question is therefore: could the potential benefits of highlighting a different consumer culture in brand communications be undermined by the violation of consumers' existing brand perceptions?

Drawing from international branding literature and schema incongruity research, the present study empirically addresses the above

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question by directly comparing three different advertising approaches (i.e., FCC, GCC, and LCC ad types) for a brand with an explicit foreign brand schema. Specifically, we demonstrate that GCC ad imagery for a foreign brand only mildly violates consumers' brand perceptions and, subsequently, leads to more favorable responses than FCC and LCC ads. Importantly, we further show that if consumers (cannot) make sense of the ad message, GCC ads have a (negative) positive indirect effect on ad attitude by (decreasing) increasing the credibility of brand information provided in the ad.

Our findings contribute to international advertising by (*a*) explicitly taking into account different degrees of ad–brand schema incongruity (i.e., moderate and extreme incongruity), (*b*) directly juxtaposing three different advertising approaches and illustrating the differential impact of alternative consumer culture imagery on communication effectiveness for brands with a pre-existing (here, foreign) schema, and (*c*) demonstrating that the effectiveness of employing an alternative consumer culture in advertising is contingent upon the meaningfulness of the ad–brand schema relationship.

In managerial terms, our study offers valuable insights for practitioners wishing to optimize foreign brand communications by pointing out the relative benefits and pitfalls of alternative consumer culture advertising approaches. This is particularly relevant for brands that are, in principle, well-suited for adopting alternative communication approaches but lack empirical evidence as to which alternative is likely to yield the best results. According to our findings, managers of foreign brands must be wary of the fact that the benefits of incongruent consumer culture advertising can only be reaped if the ad message can be meaningfully linked to the brand's schema.

2. Theoretical development and research hypotheses

2.1. Consumer culture imagery and ad–brand incongruity

A significant portion of international marketing research has focused on how a brand's global, foreign or local nature influences consumer behavior (Steenkamp et al., 2003). Alden et al. (1999) identified three corresponding consumer culture alternatives and suggested that each one of them can be used to determine how a brand is communicated to the target audience (Alden et al., 1999; Nijssen & Douglas, 2011). First, brands associated with the global consumer culture (GCC) emphasize the notion of globalness, which is a rather abstract notion, free of implications connected to narrow cultural norms (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Brands portrayed as global signal worldwide recognition and acceptance accompanied with perceptions of superior quality and prestige (Dimofte, Johansson, & Bagozzi, 2010; Steenkamp et al., 2003). Second, by adopting a local consumer culture (LCC) imagery, brands establish a connection with the particular local context, endorse local elements (e.g., cultural values, traditions, icons, or resources) and create a sense of belonging to and identification with the local society (Ger, 1999; Özsomer, 2012; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Westjohn et al., 2012). Third, brands associated with a foreign consumer culture (FCC) are charged with distinct meanings that are attached to a specific, non-domestic consumer culture (Alden et al., 1999). Here, the symbols or attributes of a specific foreign culture can add value to consumers by generating a sense of uniqueness and exoticness often associated with foreignness (Alden et al., 1999; Brannen, 2004).

While in principle foreign brands can be well-suited for all three advertising alternatives (i.e., FCC, GCC, and LCC ads), ad messages that are *not* based on the foreign consumer culture will naturally involve some sort of discrepancy with existing consumers' brand perceptions. According to psychological theory, the phenomenon in which incoming stimulus information is not compatible with existing knowledge and expectations is known as *schema incongruity* (Mandler, 1982). In a marketing communication context, schema (in)congruity refers to ads that (do not) conform to consumers' expectations as specified by

existing brand knowledge (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014, 2017). Therefore, if an advertisement for a foreign brand is based on either local or global imagery, the ad will inevitably be incongruent with the consumers' brand schema to some extent.

In line with the above reasoning, our first hypothesis deals with the extent of perceived incongruity and suggests that for a brand with a foreign identity, a global ad theme is likely to be perceived as less incongruent than a local ad theme. This expectation is based on two key reasons. First, schematic brand perceptions already tied to a specific, non-domestic consumer culture, make it harder to establish additional associations with the – also very specific – local culture conveyed by a LCC ad. In contrast, the notion of globalness is more abstract, more open to interpretation, and not tied to narrow cultural norms as the notion of localness (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). It is exactly this difference in the level of specificity that makes it easier for a foreign brand to associate itself with the *broader* global culture (as conveyed by a GCC ad imagery) rather than with another *specific* local culture (as conveyed by a LCC ad). Second, local consumers are more likely to intuitively associate a new foreign brand with the notion of globalness, and hence with the GCC, due to increased inferences that the brand might also be available elsewhere. In simple words, it is reasonable for consumers to think that *"if this foreign brand is available in my country, it may also be available in other countries too."* World-wide availability, distribution, and foreign ownership are typical assumptions consumers make regarding the nature of global brands (Johansson & Ronkainen, 2005). Hence, the notions of foreignness and globalness (although distinct) may also intertwine from a consumer perception perspective. Recent experimental work by Winit, Gregory, Cleveland, and Verlegh (2014) corroborates this line of argument, showing that foreign/non-global brands are systematically rated higher on perceived brand globalness than local/non-global brands. Given that this pattern has been replicated across multiple product categories (Winit et al., 2014), there is considerable empirical evidence to suggest that perceptions of foreignness are closer to the notion of globalness as opposed to that of localness. Consequently, compared to LCC ads, advertising based on GCC should be less incongruent for foreign brands.

H₁. For a foreign brand, a GCC ad will be perceived to be more incongruent than a FCC ad but less incongruent than a LCC ad.

Advertising communication is traditionally developed on the premise of the match-up hypothesis, suggesting that the ad content should be consistent with consumers' brand perceptions in order to be relevant, comprehensible, and persuasive (Keller, 1993). Congruity or correspondence between the stimulus and the schema has been shown to facilitate brand identification, increase processing fluency, and induce more favorable consumer attitudes (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Batra, Lenk, & Wedel, 2010; Brannon & Brock, 2006; Mazodier & Merunka, 2012). For instance, Dahlén, Lange, Sjödin, and Törn (2005) showed that advertising congruity (as opposed to incongruity) with the brand schema increases the credibility of the ad and leads to a more positive ad attitude. In an international marketing context, Zhou et al. (2015) found that attitude toward the ad is (less) more favorable when culturally (mis)matching elements (e.g., a model's ethnicity and the culture attached to the particular product category) are used in advertisements. From a different perspective, Spielmann (2016) recently showed that a match between the origin-typicality of a product and the origin-typicality of the brand cues employed in advertising is more effective than a mismatch in improving subsequent attitudes.

In contrast to the above findings, however, other research on schema incongruity suggests that deviations from established brand beliefs can sometimes positively influence consumer responses (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014, 2017). More specifically, based on Mandler's (1982) three-level conceptualization of schema incongruity, Halkias and Kokkinaki (2014) conducted a series of experiments and found that when ad–brand incongruity is moderate, consumers' responses are significantly more favorable as compared to both congruity

and extreme incongruity conditions. The underlying rationale is that although congruent ads are easily processed and generate a positively valued sense of familiarity, they are at the same time predictable and not exciting (Lee & Mason, 1999). In contrast, incongruent ads attract attention and stimulate cognitive arousal as consumers attempt to resolve the discrepancies involved (Lee & Schumann, 2004). When ad–brand incongruity is moderate, inconsistencies are resolvable leading to more favorable evaluations by successfully interpreting the ad and restoring comprehension (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014). However, if the degree of ad–brand incongruity is perceived to be extreme, discrepancies become difficult to resolve and generate negative feelings of frustration and confusion (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2017).

Applying the above insights to the current context, we argue that moderate (and, thus, resolvable) deviations from the foreign schema of the brand will eventually lead to more positive consumer responses. As noted previously under H1, a LCC ad for a foreign brand is expected to correspond to a relatively higher degree of perceived incongruity, whereas a GCC ad is likely to be only moderately incongruent with the (foreign) brand schema. Therefore, consumers should be able to successfully link the foreign schema of the brand with the – not so distant – notion of globalness conveyed by the GCC ad theme. Resolving ad–brand incongruity by developing linkages between the GCC ad imagery and the foreignness of the brand schema, will render the communication meaningful and enable the positive signaling value of globalness (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Özsomer & Altaras, 2008), thereby leading to more favorable attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}).

H₂. For a foreign brand, a GCC ad leads to more favorable A_{ad} than either LCC or FCC ads.

2.2. Meaningful credibility: A conditional mediating mechanism

According to international branding literature, perceived brand globalness carries the notion of superior product performance and reliability that, subsequently, increases the credibility of brand information and makes the brand more trustworthy (Özsomer, 2012; Özsomer & Altaras, 2008). Drawing an analogy to this proposition, we argue that an ad based on global consumer culture imagery should altogether increase the perceived credibility of brand claims conveyed by the ad. As MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) argue, the extent to which the consumer perceives claims made about the brand in the ad to be truthful and believable will determine responses to advertising. Therefore, the enhanced perceptions of credibility induced by the GCC ad should lead to more positive ad attitudes.

However, if consumers already have a foreign brand schema in mind (i.e., predefined beliefs regarding the brand's foreignness), such a positive influence cannot be activated by mere exposure to a global ad imagery. Consistent with research on incongruity (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014), only if consumers manage to meaningfully reconcile the ad content with the foreign brand schema can the favorable signaling value of globalness be beneficial. If the discrepancy between the brand schema (foreign) and the ad imagery (GCC) cannot be satisfactorily accommodated, consumer responses may backfire. In the latter case, the interpretation of the ad may become problematic, or even illogical, raising skepticism and, in turn, reducing perceptions of credibility (Arias-Bolzmann, Chakraborty, & Mowen, 2000; Goodstein, 1993; Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2017). In other words, the positive mediating role of credibility will be contingent on the extent to which consumers manage to make sense of the GCC ad. More specifically, for high levels of ad comprehension, the GCC ad is expected to have a positive effect on ad attitude by increasing the credibility of brand claims, whereas for low levels of ad comprehension this relationship will be reversed.

H₃. The impact of GCC ads on A_{ad} is mediated by credibility but this relationship is moderated by degree of comprehension, such that (*a*) when ad comprehension is high, the GCC ad has a positive effect on

credibility that then transfers to A_{ad} and (*b*) when ad comprehension is low, the GCC ad has a negative effect on credibility that then transfers to A_{ad}.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

The hypotheses described above were investigated in an experimental study using a 2 (brand schema) × 3 (ad type) between-subjects, full-factorial design. Brand schema was operationalized with two levels (*foreign* vs. *control*) and was manipulated through the product description of a fictitious brand of coffee, while ad type was analyzed in three levels (*LCC*, *FCC*, and *GCC*) and was manipulated through the pictorial component of a print ad. In total, 185 consumers (70% female, M_{age} = 31.56, SD = 13.14) participated in the study, forming cell sizes of 29 to 36 across conditions. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested through analysis of variance (ANOVA) with simple effect analysis. The moderated mediation relationship stated in H3 was tested with PROCESS (Hayes, 2013), employing bootstrap analysis to estimate conditional indirect effects.

The study was conducted in Austria, a country whose GDP and demographic composition closely correspond to other countries used in global branding research (e.g., the Netherlands, Denmark). Partly due to its location at the very center of Europe, consumers in Austria are exposed to a wide variety of cultural and market influences. Overall, the country scores very high on economic, social, and political aspects of globalization, being ranked fourth in the world according to the KOF globalization index (ETH, 2016).

3.2. Stimulus material

We selected a product category (coffee) which is relevant and familiar to the research population and in which all three (LCC, FCC, and GCC) approaches are adopted in actual advertising practice.[1] To ensure internal validity, a fictitious brand of coffee was developed ("Rondo Espresso"). The chosen brand name, was tested in order to make sure that it was not associated with a specific language, country, or particular region. Specifically, in a pretest study (n_1 = 49), respondents were shown the "Rondo Espresso" logo and asked if they could associate the brand with a particular origin in an open-ended question. In addition, they were asked to provide responses on a two-item, seven-point scale (α = 0.83) assessing their confidence in brand origin (CBO) (Zhou et al., 2010). Almost two thirds of the respondents (63%) could not indicate any brand origin, while those who could do so demonstrated a low level of CBO (M_{CBO} = 3.39, SD = 1.12), significantly lower than the scale midpoint (t(18) = −2.35, p < 0.05). Importantly, respondents who indicated some origin not only were not confident about the stated origin but also did not indicate the same brand origin. In fact, eight different brand origins were reported, including individual countries (e.g., Italy, Germany), specific regions within countries (e.g., Eastern Austria), and entire continents (e.g., Africa). Overall, the fictitious brand was free of predefined origin associations and, thus, suitable to be used as stimulus material for the development of the experimental conditions.

To develop the final ad stimuli, we assessed the suitability of three print ads intended to communicate a different consumer culture imagery. First, a new pretest was conducted (n_2 = 37) in order to eliminate the possibility that differences in aesthetic preference be-

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[1] Coffee is among the most popular hot beverages in Austria, with nationwide monthly per capita consumption placing Austria fifth in the world (Euromonitor, 2013). In addition, a content analysis of magazines sold in Austria revealed several print ads of real brands using different consumer culture ad imagery (e.g., *Tschibo*/LCC, *Segafredo*/FCC, and *Nespresso*/GCC).

tween the pictures used in the ads confound with any effects observed in the main study. Pretest respondents were exposed to all three print ads (presented in a random order to avoid carry-over effects) and were asked to indicate the extent to which they found the pictures used in the ads to be attractive (1 = not attractive/7 = attractive). Repeated-measures ANOVA produced a non-significant main effect ($F < 1$) with all pairwise comparisons also being non-significant (M_{LCC} = 4.10, SD = 1.39, M_{FCC} = 3.86, SD = 1.65, M_{GCC} = 3.97, SD = 1.61), indicating that the pictures in the ads were equally attractive.

Finally, to confirm that the stimulus ads did indeed convey the intended consumer culture imagery, a third pretest study (n_3 = 40) was carried out. As in the previous pretest, respondents were exposed to all three stimulus ads (presented in random order) and were asked to rate the extent to which each ad conveyed a local, foreign, or global consumer culture imagery. The scales used to capture the different ad types were developed based on Alden et al.'s (1999) original concep-tualization and consisted of four (LCC) and five (FCC and GCC), seven-point items (LCC: α = 0.94, FCC: α = 0.96, and GCC: α = 0.95) (see Web Appendix). The aim of this pretest was to confirm that for each ad, a given consumer culture is dominant, both in comparison to the other ad versions and in comparison to the other consumer culture imageries. For example, the ad intended to convey a foreign consumer culture should score higher on FCC compared to the other two ads, while its FCC mean rating should also be significantly higher than its mean rating for LCC and GCC. In line with expectations, all pairwise comparisons between different consumer culture imageries within the same ad and between the same consumer culture across different ads were significant at 0.05 level (see Web Appendix A3). This pattern of results was further replicated in the corresponding manipulation check of the main study (see Table 1). Consequently, these three ads were used in the main study as the final stimuli for the LCC, FCC, and GCC ad types (see Web Appendix A4).

3.3. Procedure and measures

Participants in the main study were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions (see Section 3.1) and completed a self-administered questionnaire. Initially, they were provided with a cover story about a new brand of coffee that is about to enter the Austrian market and were also given a brief product description. The description in the foreign brand schema condition explicitly stated the foreign (Latin American) identity of the brand, whereas the one in the control condition had all relevant information removed. Next, participants were exposed to one of the three stimulus ads (i.e., LCC, FCC, and GCC ad) and, subsequently, provided answers to the dependent measures and the manipulation checks.

Perceived ad–brand incongruity was measured with two items anchored at *expected/unexpected* and *predictable/unpredictable* (α = 0.71) (Fleck & Quester, 2007). Attitude toward the ad (A$_{ad}$) was assessed with four items anchored at *bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavorable/favor-

able, and *negative/positive* (α = 0.88) (Okazaki et al., 2010). To capture brand information credibility, three items adapted from Van Rompay and Pruyn (2011) were used, asking participants to indicate the extent to which they *disagree/agree* with the statements "The ad provides a *sincere/ credible/trustworthy* impression of the brand" (α = 0.94). A single-item scale anchored at *makes no sense/makes sense* was employed to measure ad comprehension (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014).

To check whether our manipulation in generating a foreign brand schema was effective, we asked participants in the corresponding condition to rate their impression of the brand in terms of perceived brand localness (PBL; adapted from Steenkamp et al. (2003) and Swoboda, Pennemann, and Taube (2012)), perceived brand foreignness (PBF; adapted from Batra et al. (2000) and Zhou et al. (2010)), as well as perceived brand globalness (PBG; adapted from Steenkamp et al. (2003)). The reliability coefficients for PBL, PBF, and PBG were 0.95, 0.88, and 0.81, respectively. Finally, the manipulation of the ad type was assessed using the same scales as those employed in the develop-ment of the stimulus material (LCC: α = 0.96, FCC: α = 0.97, and GCC: α = 0.96). Further details about the items and measurement properties of the scales can be found in the Web Appendix.

4. Results

4.1. Manipulation checks

To ensure that the manipulations in the main study worked as intended, a series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with pairwise comparisons was conducted. First, mean ratings of PBL, PBF, and PBG were compared for participants in the foreign brand schema condition. The results produced a significant main effect ($F(2,85)$ = 291.31, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the experimental brand was rated signifi-cantly higher in terms of perceived foreignness (M_{PBF} = 5.80, SD = 1.25) than localness (*mean difference* = 4.32, $p < 0.001$) and globalness (*mean difference* = 1.38, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the manipula-tion of the foreign brand schema was supported.

To determine whether the manipulation of ad type was effective, we conducted a series of between- and within-subjects ANOVAs with multiple pairwise comparisons in order to confirm that each ad type (local, foreign, and global) conveyed the intended consumer culture (LCC, FCC, and GCC). Table 1 shows that (*a*) *within* each ad, the intended consumer culture scored significantly higher than the other consumer cultures, and (*b*) *across* ads, the intended consumer culture scored significantly higher than the corresponding consumer culture.

4.2. Hypothesis testing

Two-way ANOVA on perceived ad–brand incongruity produced an overall main effect for ad type ($F(2,179)$ = 9.79, $p < 0.05$) as well as a marginally significant interaction between ad type and brand schema ($F(2,179)$ = 2.62, $p = 0.07$). Consistent with H1, simple effect analysis in

Table 1
Manipulation check results for ad type.

	Ad type			
	Local mean (SD)	Foreign mean (SD)	Global mean (SD)	Between-subjects ANOVA (*same consumer culture across different ads*)
Manipulation check scales				
LCC	**5.03 (1.49)**	1.45 (0.75)	1.63 (0.89)	$F(2,182)$ = 210.72*
FCC	2.21 (1.48)	**5.80 (1.35)**	4.80 (1.72)	$F(2,182)$ = 89.46*
GCC	2.45 (1.41)	4.34 (1.49)	**5.83 (1.33)**	$F(2,182)$ = 80.19*
Within-subjects ANOVA (*different consumer culture within same ad*)	$F(2,114)$ = 58.73*	$F(2,130)$ = 212.82*	$F(2,120)$ = 155.37*	

Note. Mean values on the diagonal are significantly different than the corresponding means below and above the diagonal ($p < 0.01$).

* $p < 0.001$.

the foreign brand condition revealed a significant effect of ad type on perceived ad–brand incongruity ($F(2, 84) = 11.83$, $p < 0.001$) with the GCC ad ($M_{GCC} = 3.76$, $SD = 1.46$) being perceived as more incongruent than the FCC ad ($M_{GCC} = 3.76$, $SD = 1.46$ vs. $M_{FCC} = 3.13$, $SD = 1.40$, $p = 0.08$) but less incongruent that the LCC ad ($M_{GCC} = 3.76$, $SD = 1.46$ vs. $M_{LCC} = 4.85$, $SD = 1.22$, $p < 0.01$). Conducting the same analysis in the control condition produced non-significant results ($F(2,95) = 1.20$, *ns*), indicating that when consumers do not have a predefined schema about the foreignness of the stimulus brand, perceptions of incongruity are equal across all ad types.

Results for A_{ad} revealed a significant overall main effect for ad type ($F(2,179) = 3.42$, $p < 0.05$) and no interaction ($F(2,179) = 1.45$, *ns*), indicating that there is an overall preference for the GCC ad type. Further analysis, however, revealed that these results were mainly driven by the foreign brand schema condition. More specifically, simple effect analysis in the foreign brand condition produced a significant effect of ad type on A_{ad} ($F(2, 84) = 4.37$, $p = 0.01$) and showed that the GCC ad ($M_{GCC} = 5.04$, $SD = 1.15$) has a more favorable impact on A_{ad} than both other ad versions ($M_{GCC} = 5.04$, $SD = 1.15$ vs. $M_{FCC} = 4.33$, $SD = 1.12$, $p < 0.05$ and vs. $M_{LCC} = 4.16$, $SD = 1.28$, $p < 0.05$), therefore supporting H2. Importantly, analysis in the control condition produced non-significant results for ad attitude ($F(2,95) < 1$, *ns*), thus further confirming that the effect observed is attributed to the different ad–brand combinations and not just to mere liking of a specific consumer culture ad imagery.

Finally, we investigated the mechanism underlying the superiority of the GCC ad as outlined in H3. To this end, we excluded the LCC ad condition from the analysis – which had an unfavorable impact on A_{ad} – and focused on the positive effects generated by employing a GCC (*dummy coded as 1*) versus a FCC ad type (*dummy coded as 0*) (Fig. 1).

The moderated-mediation model in Fig. 1 was tested with PROCESS (Model 7; 5000 bootstrap samples), using percentile conditioning for the indirect effects (Hayes, 2013). The analysis produced a significant moderated-mediation index with a coefficient estimate of 0.134 and bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals of 0.0473 to 0.2727, showing that the mediating effect of credibility in the relationship between ad type and A_{ad} differs depending on the level of ad comprehension. To analyze the nature of the moderated-mediation, we probed the conditional indirect effects at the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles of the moderator. As Fig. 2 shows, and consistent with H3a and H3b, at low levels of comprehension the indirect path *Ad*

Type → Credibility → A_{ad} is negative, whereas at high levels of comprehension, the opposite holds true. This indicates that only when the global ad imagery is meaningfully linked to the foreign brand schema, credibility of brand information increases leading, in turn, to more favorable ad attitude. Otherwise, the GCC ad damages credibility and negatively influences subsequent attitudes toward the ad.
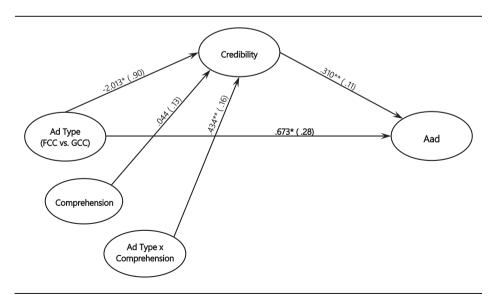
5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical implications

Despite considerable research on the potential benefits brands can enjoy by being associated with the local, foreign, or global consumer culture (Alden et al., 1999; Gammoh, Koh, & Okoroafo, 2011; Nijssen & Douglas, 2011; Westjohn et al., 2012), there is lack of empirical evidence regarding how alternative consumer culture ad imagery may influence responses to advertising when they deviate from consumers' pre-existing beliefs about the nature of the brand (cf., Cui et al., 2012; Spielmann, 2016; Zhou et al., 2015). However, this issue is of particular importance for the development of effective brand communication, since brands can either employ brand-consistent advertising tactics, which build upon the brand's true cultural origins, or depart from the brand's schema, trying to capitalize on the positive values associated with different consumer cultures.
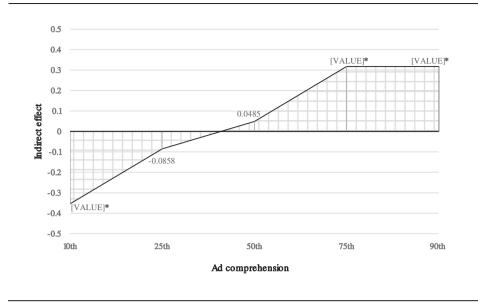
Drawing from research on global branding and schema incongruity, the present study addresses this issue by demonstrating the consequences of employing a consumer culture ad imagery that contradicts consumers' schema for a foreign brand. Our findings show that a GCC ad theme only moderately violates schematic perceptions of brand foreignness and is not necessarily detrimental. In fact, GCC ads seem to generally lead to more favorable attitude toward the ad. In contrast, a LCC ad theme for a foreign brand is perceived by consumers as a more severe violation of brand beliefs that can hardly lead to favorable advertising responses.

Importantly, and consistent with schema incongruity research (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014, 2017), our findings show that it is not the mere perception of incongruity, but its resolution that increases the favorability of responses. More precisely, given a foreign brand schema, mere exposure to a GCC ad does not automatically activate positive evaluations, since the latter depends on the extent to which the ad–brand discrepancy can be satisfactorily accommodated. If consumers manage to

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Fig. 1. Statistical model for moderated-mediation analysis.

* Significant at .05 level based on bias corrected bootstrap confidence intervals.

Fig. 2. The indirect effect of *Ad Type → Credibility → A_{ad}* as a function of *Ad Comprehension*.

comprehend the ad by meaningfully integrating the global ad imagery with the foreign brand, the positive signaling value of globalness becomes activated increasing perceptions of credibility (Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004; Özsomer & Altaras, 2008) and subsequently enhancing the effectiveness of communication. If, however, GCCP ad imagery cannot be meaningfully linked to the foreign brand, communication backfires. In line with the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), difficulty in establishing a meaningful ad–brand linkage hinders ad message comprehension and might draw suspicion about marketers' motives and goals. This, seems to make the ad claims appear pretentious and eventually decrease credibility, leading to detrimental effects (Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005).

A broader theoretical insight for international marketing literature that emerges from the present study is that, although distinct, the notions of "foreignness" and "globalness" seem to – at some point – intersect each other. While perceptions of foreignness do not fully parallel those of globalness (Swoboda et al., 2012), the two notions appear to be conceptually close (Winit et al., 2014). In line with this reasoning, findings from H1 show that for foreign brands, the use of local ad imagery is significantly more incongruent than the use of global ad imagery. Corroborating these findings, results relating to the manipulation of the brand schema reveal that, under the foreign brand schema condition, participants' PBG ratings (M_{PBG} = 4.42, SD = 1.38) were significantly higher than those for PBL (M_{PBL} = 1.48, SD = 0.96, t (86) = 16.64, p < 0.001). Taken together, these patterns suggest that the foreign and the global consumer culture somehow converge and might be used in a synergistic manner in brand communications.

5.2. Managerial implications

Although research in advertising has traditionally advocated for the positive effects of matching consumers' perceptions with the content of the message (Keller, 1993), pressure on marketers to rise above the cluttered communication environment has steered efforts toward unorthodox advertising approaches (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014). To this end, our study shows that contradicting consumers' perceptions should not be necessarily be avoided. Moderate deviation from existing brand beliefs can generate additional benefits to foreign brand communication by establishing positive associations with the notion of globalness.

For instance, managers of foreign brands from emerging countries and/ or cultural origins that are generally associated with unfavorable stereotypical perceptions (Halkias, Davvetas, & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Leclerc, Schmitt, & Dubé, 1994), can increase persuasion effectiveness by employing advertising tactics based on global consumer culture imagery. This suggestion is consistent with prior results showing that marketers should intentionally dissociate the brand from its actual, yet unfavorable, origin and instead link it to more auspicious cultural referents (Leclerc et al., 1994; Melnyk, Klein, & Völckner, 2012).

In implementing a foreign-brand/global-ad communication approach, however, caution needs to be exercised since ad executions that cannot be meaningfully linked to the brand's schema may have detrimental effects on communication effectiveness. A GCC ad with thematic elements that are completely irrelevant to the brand's nature will prevent sense-making, nullify the positive signaling value of globalness, and in fact reduce the credibility of communication. Against this background, marketers are advised to carefully consider the design and execution process of their ads in order to ensure that the creative content employed (e.g., signs and symbols) allow the development of meaningful ad–brand linkages and thus enable consumers' comprehension.

Our findings also suggest that, for foreign brands, advertising approaches that are exclusively based on local consumer culture imagery might raise skepticism and lead to unfavorable consequences. Arguably, ads that try to establish connections with the local community and local values make the communication more accessible and relevant to a given local audience. However, the present study shows that this not the case when consumers already have distinct perceptions of the brand's foreignness. For consumers with a pre-existing foreign brand schema, LCC ads tend to be perceived as excessively incongruent and thus hindering advertising effectiveness. As such, marketers are advised against adopting this approach when considering alternative advertising tactics.

5.3. Limitations and future research

While our study offers important insights on the effect of LCC, FCC, and GCC ad imagery for foreign brands, it is also characterized by a number of limitations that represent avenues for further research.

First, the generalizability of the present findings is limited by the focus on a single fictitious brand and product category. Using a fictitious product and experimentally manipulating the brand schema allowed us to avoid potential confounding influences due to participants' real-life experience with an existing real brand, thereby increasing the internal validity of the experiment. However, tight experimental settings inevitably limit external validity and, consequently, additional research looking into multiple product categories and/or real brands is necessary to establish the generalizability of our findings.

In addition, the role of socio-psychological consumer characteristics – such as consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) or consumer cosmopolitanism (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Siguaw, 2012), to name but a few – were not considered in our investigation although they have been suggested to impact consumer responses (e.g., Bartsch, Riefler, & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Zeugner-Roth, Zabkar, & Diamantopoulos, 2015). For example, highly ethnocentric consumers are likely to be more favorably disposed toward local brands and business activities that generally favor the local society (Cleveland, Laroche, & Papadopoulos, 2009). Such predispositions might have a significant impact on consumer preferences for alternative advertising approaches. In fact, previous research reveals that consumer ethnocentrism has a positive influence on attitudes toward LCC and negatively impacts attitudes toward FCC and GCC (Nijssen & Douglas, 2011). Accordingly, researchers should explore whether consumer ethnocentrism can reverse the positive effects of GCC-based ads observed in this study in favor of the local ad imagery. In general, future studies should elaborate on the potential moderating role of relevant consumer characteristics and dispositions on the effectiveness of different ad imageries.

Moreover, the present study explored three distinct advertising approaches by drawing a direct analogy with Alden et al.'s (1999) original conceptualization of local, foreign, and global consumer culture positioning. Yet, there are many other types of cultural profiling than can be used credibly by marketers in order to leverage a particular cultural capital (Kjeldgaard, Askegaard, & Eckhardt, 2015). Therefore, further research should also take into consideration alternative typologies and ways of using culture as an element that can legitimately guide the development of advertising tactics.

Another limitation of our findings relates to the fact that our experimental design only allowed for the investigation of "pure" CCP ad types, that is, study participants were exposed to either a purely LCC, FCC, or GCC ad. However, in real life, there is often a mixing of different consumer cultures. For example, a foreign brand can develop its advertising campaign on the basis of FCC but also strategically integrate elements of the local or global consumer culture in the ad execution. It might be the case that a mixed advertising approach facilitates the meaningful interpretation of the ad content and leads to even more favorable results. Future researchers are thus strongly encouraged to investigate how elements of different consumer cultures within an ad may interact and influence ad responses.

Finally, the present study only focused on foreign brands and, therefore, whether similar findings would be produced for brands with a distinct local or global schema remains to be explored. On the one hand, for a local brand, both GCC and FCC ad types might be perceived as extremely incongruent with the brand's schema. On the other hand, a brand with a distinct global schema might have less to gain from reaching out to an alternative consumer culture than from following a brand consistent communication strategy. Addressing such questions will offer a more comprehensive understanding of how different consumer cultures can be used to effectively communicate brands in the global market.

Web Appendix. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.04.018.

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