CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON BRAND MEANING

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ABSTRACT

The literature provided evidence that people in different cultures do not process information in the same way. Since brand meaning is to a great extent the result of human interpretation it is thus predicted that brand meanings differ in different countries. The cross-cultural panel of interviews was gathered and analysed in order to investigate whether the prediction holds true. The results show that in the low context cultures individuals have narrower, functionally-oriented associations with the brands, whereas in the high context cultures individuals have broader situational and symbolic associations, but on the national level those associations are not shared. Practitioners are advised to be more prudent in cross-cultural research as well as to become aware of the cultural specifics in the target countries, so that their communication is better targeted.

Keywords: brand, brand meaning, cross-cultural, images
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INTRODUCTION

Literature increasingly suggests that the strength of a brand is not based on creating a difference in consumer perceptions, but due to the meaning that the brand creates, and therefore managing the brand meaning is a task essential to a successful “strong brand” strategy (Kay 2006). The meaning of a brand is not predetermined in some brand identity booklet. Brand meaning is constructed in consumers’ minds. Therefore, it depends on consumer knowledge base (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell 2008).

One of the most important reasons for the differences in knowledge base is the difference in culture. The literature provided evidence that people in different cultures do not process information in the same way (Nisbett et al. 2001). Specifically, scholars found that East Asians are more field dependent. They pay great attention to the context and focus on the relationship between objects and the field (Hall 1989). One of the first and most easily noticeable causes of different brand interpretation is language. Pictures are assumed to be somewhat more universal and easier to standardise (Moriarty and Duncan 1990). However, pictures cause more subtle and therefore potentially more serious problems. This is because it is even more difficult to understand how pictures are understood by consumers in different cultures. Especially in the light that consumers belonging to integrated cultures associate more associations that are wider in their meaning than consumers in specific cultures (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1996).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Brand Meaning

Brand meaning is not clearly defined in the literature. For example, Oakenfull et al. (2000) present the results of research devoted to developing a measurement tool for brand meaning, however the paper is devoid of a clear definition of what brand meaning is. Davis (2007, p.255) later interprets Oakenfull et al.’s (2000) understanding of brand meaning as “the most definitive or core attributes of the brand that the consumers perceive”.

In a study by Henderson et al. (2003), brand meaning is considered equal to a brand association. Moore and Homer (2008) also use the terms ‘brand associations’ and ‘brand meanings’ as synonyms, and Feldwick (2002) even defines brand meaning as the collective associations and beliefs that a consumer has about a brand. Keller (2003b) suggest that providing a brand with meaning actually implies explaining to consumers what a particular product can do for them and why it is special and different from the others in the category. Thus, he strongly relates meaning to brand benefits. Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003) stress that brands are not only fixed cognitive associations of meanings as implied by the strategic brand management models of Keller (2003a) and Aaker (1996), but also dynamic, expanding social universes composed of stories.

Finally, Franzen and Bouwman (2001) speak of mental links between brand names, images and cognitions in a consumer's memory that cause the brand to acquire meaning. They also differentiate between four layers of brand meaning, depending on the level of socialisation at which the meaning gets created - starting from the private meaning to the social one.

From the summarised definitions, it can be seen that the terms most often equated or related to brand meaning are brand associations and brand attributes. A detour into the field of
psychology and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) offers the following definition of meaning in general. Meaning is related to the intention or significance of a message or experience. It is the natural consequence of interpreting experience using inner representations or experiences that are associated with external cues and events. Therefore, the meanings that people construct and how these meanings are constructed are connected with the richness and flexibility of each person’s internal representations of the world. Fundamentally, meaning is a product of one’s values and beliefs (Dilts and DeLozier 2000, p.703).

The Concept of Culture

With the growing opportunities for intercultural interaction since the fifties, the world has seen a proliferation of modern studies on culture. There are two connected but different views on what is the culture. Hofstede (2001) considers ideas and especially their attached values to be the core of culture, while Trompenaars (1994), positions meaning and human interpretation at its core. According to him, the different interpretations of (even possibly equal) norms and values distinguish cultures. The latter is a more contemporary view. Some more simple definitions consider culture to be the way a group of people lives (Romani 2004) and makes decisions (Leo, Bennett, and Härtel 2005).

Culture is a multilayered phenomenon that consists of artefacts, values and underlying assumptions. Artefacts are the most easily observed manifestation of culture, whereas underlying assumptions are the most hidden and often the most taken for granted manifestation of culture (Schein 1988). In this light, culture is often described as an iceberg. About 10% of the iceberg (behaviour) is observable and easy to spot. The remaining 90% of the iceberg (values and norms) is hidden below the surface, and is the more troublesome part.

Table 1. An Overview of Societal Dilemmas and Cultural Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Nature of the individual</th>
<th>Relationship with other beings</th>
<th>Relationship to nature</th>
<th>Time perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hofstede 2001</td>
<td>Individualism vs. collectivism Masculinity vs. Femininity</td>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>Long-term vs. short-term orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trompenaars 1994</td>
<td>Universalism vs. particularism Individualism vs. communitarism Analysed specifics vs. integrated wholes Achievement vs. ascription</td>
<td>Equality vs. hierarchy</td>
<td>Inner vs. outer direction</td>
<td>Sequential time vs. synchronised time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwartz 1999</td>
<td>Conservatism vs. autonomy</td>
<td>Hierarchy vs. egalitarianism</td>
<td>Mastery vs. harmony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House et al. 2004</td>
<td>Assertiveness Performance orientation In group collectivism Institutional collectivism</td>
<td>Power distance Gender egalitarianism</td>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance Humane orientation</td>
<td>Future orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Brannen et al. 2004.

Most social scientists (e.g. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Schwartz 1999; Hofstede 2001; Trompenaars 1994) have long recognised the complexity and multidimensionality of the concept of culture and hence opted to describe them. Each cross-cultural researcher depicts cultural difference by using different cultural dimensions. Despite the differences, all of the above-mentioned studies started their search for the dimensions by identifying and focussing on more or less equal societal dilemmas. Table 1 presents the key societal dilemmas and cultural dimensions that various researchers have identified. The identified cultural
dimensions serve as a key to understand how various cultures react when faced with societal dilemmas.

Some research (cf. Pankhania, Lee and Hooley 2007) suggests that marketers should take into account cultural diversity within countries as well as between them, because culture has many boundaries. Nevertheless, nationality remains the most viable proxy for culture because the members of a nation share an understanding of its institutional systems, a bond of identity, and an experiential understanding of the world (Hofstede 2001; Brannen et al. 2004). Furthermore, it has a tendency to stay stable over the time, because of its mechanism to resist change across many generations (Hofstede 2001).

The Role of Culture on Brand Meaning

In general, research in cross-cultural marketing has discovered that culture might motivate corporate decision makers to deliberately choose a different brand positioning in different countries. However, even if identical positioning is applied across nations, the same brand might be perceived differently in different cultures (Foscht et al. 2008). The difference may be caused due to: the adaptation of advertising to better adjust to cultural traditions and norms; and different understandings of applied communication. This research focuses on the latter.

A number of researchers have argued that national cultural differences are in fact engraved in consumers’ perceptions (Watson et al. 2002). Therefore, although metaphors are used by advertising creators to convey brand meaning and enhance brand information processing, little is understood about consumers' comprehension of intended meaning (Morgan and Reichert 1999), and even less about consumers’ comprehension in different cultural settings. For consumers from different socioeconomic backgrounds, it is likely that the same stimuli do not necessarily build equivalent symbolic associations (Khalid and Helander 2004), but rather very different sets of metaphors, personal meanings, and cultural traditions of meanings (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994).

This is because the messages, events and experiences that consumers find the most meaningful are those which are the most connected to their core values (Dilts and DeLozier 2000). Due to differences in culturally based traditions, religions, and histories, individuals in distinct cultures tend to hold different sets of values and preferences (Aaker 2000). Hence, altering beliefs and values can immediately change the meaning of transmitted messages, events and experiences (Dilts and DeLozier 2000). The same experience or incident takes on different meanings to different individuals depending on their internal mind maps and embedded previous knowledge (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell 2008).

In their study of the variations in consumer interpretation of visually complex advertising, Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2006) explain that the interpretation of visual stimuli in advertising is linked to literary and cultural traditions that differ from cultural group to cultural group. Monga and John (2007) conducted a study in which they hypothesise and then confirm through empirical research that consumers from Eastern cultures, who tend to be holistic thinkers, perceive a higher brand extension fit and evaluate brand extensions more favourably than their more analytical Western counterparts do.

In another study, Costa and Pavia (1992) speak of numbers and their meanings, and confirm with an experiment that brands consisting of numbers have an extra meaning that is understood only by some societies (in their study American), due to the “excess meaning” of certain numbers in those cultures. Bjerke and Polegato (2006), in a cross country investigation of beauty and health visual representations, confirmed that different cultures do not interpret beauty and health symbols equally. The same authors in another research
(Polegato and Bjerke 2006) studied the understanding and appeal of controversial Benetton advertisements across cultures and again revealed inconsistencies. To summarise, culture acts as a “stringent screener” (Jun and Lee 2007) that greatly influences the meaning of advertising messages.

Based on the three exposed theoretical pillars, three propositions can be constructed. Firstly, meaning is a product of personal values and beliefs; secondly, personal values and believes are different in different cultures and consequently; thirdly, brand meaning is different in different cultures. These propositions directed the empirical part of the research in which it was the aim to discover to which extent are the meanings of global brands associated to symbolic or functional meanings in the culturally different countries.

**METHODOLOGY**

Given the purpose of this paper and the nature of the research question, a mainly theory-free inductive approach was employed (Yin 1998). 19 in-depth interviews were conducted in the period between January and October 2008, all in an online communicator setting. In this study each interviewee was asked to collect and submit images to the interviewer that indicate what the brand means or does not mean to him or her. The interviewee was then asked to describe those images and why they represented a brand. This research procedure was inspired by the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique – ZMET (Coulter and Zaltman 1994), however only the initial stages of the technique were applied. Coulter, Zaltman, and Coulter (2001) claim that the ZMET method, because it is a consumer supplied images technique, can provide up to 90% of the information available from a larger set of classical interviews in just four to five in-depth interviews. It is hence considered particularly appropriate for this across countries allocated qualitative research.

In order to ensure the external validity of the findings (Eisenhardt 1989), this research was conducted on five global brands (Coca-Cola, Nokia, Toyota, Google, and Nike). As for the countries, The United States, India, Austria and Finland were chosen. The main reason for choosing the surveyed countries was that they belong to different cultural clusters (according to the study by House et al. 2004) and different continents and that the average young graduates’ English in those countries was good.

Since the objective of the study was to research the relationship among variables, rather than generalise results to the population at large, the technique considered most appropriate was the matched samples (Hofstede 1991; Verhage, Yavas, and Green 1991). For the above reasons, young business-related graduates younger than 33 and not highly internationally exposed were chosen.

To get an initial idea of the findings, data was analysed for whether the images are primarily direct meanings i.e. either a product or a logo or less direct meanings i.e. symbolic or experiential associations. Deeper insight was gained by categorising images (and more precisely their descriptions) along 10 types of brand meanings proposed by Franzen and Bouwman (2001). Those are: brand signs, sub-brands, provenance, product-related brand meanings, situational meanings, symbolic meanings, perceived quality, perceived price, presentation and advertising, and other communications means.
RESULTS

Analysis of the images

Altogether about 200 images were collected. For Coca-Cola, most of the interviewees submitted items depicting the Coca-Cola logo, Christmas associations, sugar and ice. In the case of Google, most of the images frequently depicted the Google logo, followed by the symbols representing ideas and searching activity. The vast majority of Nike’s images represented sport or activity in general. Nokia’s and Toyota’s images were dominated by phones and cars respectively.

For the purpose of this study it was considered important to examine whether images of studied countries depict more direct meanings i.e. either a product or a logo or less direct meanings i.e. symbolic or experiential associations. Table 2 presents per country percentages of images that were closely related to the brand as opposed to those more figurative and symbolic in meaning.

Table 2. The Percentages of Symbolic Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Austria</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nokia</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, across the brands most of the Indian respondents submitted images that depicted neither the logo nor the name of the brand, but were rather more symbolic in meaning. This is in line with the India’s high-context culture (Hall 1989). In such cultures people create close connections over a long period of time and many details are not made explicit because most members share a broad common knowledge base. In such cultures, things carry many situational meanings. On the contrary, in the low-context cultures, like the United States and Austria, people tend to have connections of shorter duration or for a specific reason. In these societies, most things need to be spelled out explicitly. Therefore, the Austrian and the American images, as anticipated, were more closely related to the physical and visible manifestation of a particular brand.

Finish associations were the most versatile in terms of how much they emphasised the visible elements of the brands. Being a Finnish brand, Nokia evoked very deep and varied meanings for the Finnish respondents, none of whom submitted an image of Nokia’s logo or a cell phone. On the other hand, Nokia occupies a very marginal role in the United States market, so all of the American images depicted a non-symbolic image of a cell phone. A more detailed explanation of the images as well as the other meanings associated to the studied brands follows in a separate subchapter for each brand.

Analysis of meanings

Further analysis was conducted in terms of discovering the most often mention meanings. These meanings were captured in the interview process that initiated with describing the pictures interviewees submitted and continued with a set of auxiliary questions.
From 93 meanings for Coca-Cola, the most often mentioned (8 or more mentions) were refreshing, not healthy, cold, Christmas and sweet. As the table 3 shows, in different countries, different meanings were mentioned the most. Although refreshing was a very strong association in Finland, India, and Austria, it was much weaker in the United States. Similarly, the Austrians were very preoccupied with Coca-Cola not being healthy, while the other nations and especially the Finnish respondents did not seem to be worried about it. Table 3 shows the most often mentioned meaning per country as well as the type of meaning identified by Franzen and Bowman (2001). Across the countries the first two most often mentioned meaning were product related, whereas only the third was situational. The difference among countries can be read out from the low-context United States’ focus almost exclusively on product related meanings.

Table 3. The Primary Meanings for Coca-Cola per Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Meaning 1</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 2</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 3</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 4</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Not healthy</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Refreshing</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Provenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Refreshing</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Not healthy</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Situational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Refreshing</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Bonding with friends</td>
<td>Situational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the analysis of the responses for Google, among 59 meanings, gives answers and fast were the most often mentioned ones (14 and 12 times). Table 4 shows that Google has a less developed association networks in consumer minds in India and the United States than in Finland and Austria, where Finnish respondents report the most versatile types of meanings, whereas Austrian focus on the product related meanings. Across the countries again product related meanings were the two primary meanings.

Table 4. The Primary Meanings for Google per Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Meaning 1</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 2</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 3</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 4</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Gives answers</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Not old</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>No privacy</td>
<td>Life saver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Gives answers</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Provenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Gives answers</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Powerful</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Provenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nike is the brand to which 84 meanings were elicited. Across all the countries, the most strongly associated meaning was by far product related sports (15 mentions). The other most often mentioned meanings varied per country, as table 5 presents, and were reported by much fewer respondents than sports.

Table 5. The Primary Meanings for Nike per Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Meaning 1</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 2</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 3</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Sweat</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Sweet shops</td>
<td>Provenance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Perceived price</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes to Nokia, the meanings were the most dispersed within and among countries. Although reliability was the most often mentioned generally, it got only eight mentions. Some of the elicited meanings for Nokia (like in the case for Coca-Cola and Google) are very country-specific. These are: sturdiness and durability in India, innovation in Austria, and ordinariness and Finnish origin in Finland. Nevertheless most of the meanings as table 6 shows were still product related.
Table 6. The Primary Meanings for Nokia per Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Meaning 1</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 2</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 3</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Product related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Provenance</td>
<td>Not exciting</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Product related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Perceived quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>Hi-tech</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Smooth keypads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last brand studied was Toyota. Out of 82 meanings, similarly to Nokia, the reliability meaning was evoked the most often (9 mentions); however, not in India (table 7). On the other hand, the Indians associated Toyota with class, grace and luxury, which the other countries’ respondents did not. The meaning reliable however needs to be given an additional explanation. From the responses it could be read out that reliable Toyota in the United States signified a good quality, well-respected car, in Austria, a good, safe choice, positive car, whereas in Finland a reliable, but not highly appreciated car. Like in the case of Coca-Cola, although product related meanings lead, there are also a number of symbolic meanings.

Table 7. The Primary Meanings for Toyota per Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Meaning 1</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 2</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
<th>Meaning 3</th>
<th>Meaning type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Not luxury</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Not exciting</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
<td>Perceived price</td>
<td>High quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Product related</td>
<td>Perceived quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

The exposed results show that although submitted images differed greatly among countries, the primary meanings captured from the interviews were more alike. More interestingly, when it comes to the type of images they were rather symbolic in certain countries while in others not, which was in line with the differences in the culture. On the other hand, when it comes to types of meaning, in almost all the countries and across all the brands the first two meanings were not symbolic, but functional, product related.

Several conclusions might be drawn. Firstly, in low context cultures individuals have narrower, functionally-oriented associations with the brands. Secondly, in high context cultures individuals have broader and situational or symbolic associations, but on the national level those associations are not shared, and therefore again the most basic functional associations dominate the collective national brand association. Thirdly, even the same rational associations, might cause different emotional associations, as shown for the meaning reliable for Toyota.

In light of the findings, practitioners are advised to become aware of the cultural specifics in the target countries, so that their communication is better targeted on functional, symbolic or experiential benefits, depending on the type of association most prevalent in a given culture. Secondly, practitioners are advised to direct their creative energy in creating as many experiences for their consumers and potential consumers, as possible, so that in turn consumers can expand their brand associations’ networks and so become more related to the brand and use it more often with great passion. Thirdly, in their marketing research practitioners should focus on investigating not only rational, but also emotional associations as those although more difficult to discover might be more influential in forming brand attitude. Finally, they are advised to analyze the results of their marketing research in a more
analytic manner so that the responses be analyzed based on more criteria. This is because in this research it was shown that when only images (representing the first association) are analyzed they yield different results that when the whole answers are added to the analysis.

There were several limitations of this study. The study was adjusted to an online setting, so some of the association elicitation techniques such as images grouping and mind mapping could not have been conducted. Such techniques might have provided some additional relevant data on brand meanings. Furthermore, interview transcripts interpretations are heavily dependent on “personal history and cultural background” (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994), hence although the coding of the responses was done with maximum diligence, validity of the procedure could have been increased by employing more than one coder, as was the case, and preferably even from the four studied countries. Finally, data was gathered qualitatively (with a lot of data on a small number of cases), while the reported results are rather quantitative. This is not to say that the entirety of the data was not evaluated, but because this is the early stage of the research, author is focused on identifying the differences in meanings before including the complexity of qualitative data in the report.

To further strengthen the results repeating the study with more brands and in more cultures would be useful. It would also be interesting to conduct the study in native languages of the respondents and analyse whether it causes a difference in results. In addition, it might prove beneficial to perform the coding of the responses of this research by a multicultural team. Finally, more qualitative type of analysis will have to be performed in order to understand the full scope of the differences in brand meanings among cultures.

REFERENCES


