CROSS-CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

Galina TIMOKHINA
Ural State University of Economics
62 8th of March, Ekaterinburg 620219, Russia
galinatimokhina@yandex.ru

Ralf WAGNER
University of Kassel
1 Mönchebergstr, Kassel, Germany
rwagner@wirtschaft.uni-kassel.de

Taylan URKMEZ
University of Kassel
1 Mönchebergstr, Kassel, Germany
uerkmez@wirtschaft.uni-kassel.de

Abstract. Interest in foreign countries has stimulated cross-cultural research in various disciplines, including marketing. Despite numerous empirical studies, the progress of the discipline is limited, as researchers struggle to systematically compile earlier results. Consequently, they lack a common pool of previous results to support the interpretation of new empirical results. Additionally, the theoretical roots of research need to be systematized. We have assembled the results of 75 (65 empirical and 10 conceptual) studies of cross-cultural variations in consumer behaviour from 2000 to 2014. By categorizing the studies according to 19 features, this study provides evidence that technical topics, e.g., advertising, segmentation, or product variety management still remain undervalued in cross-cultural research. In addition to the dominant evidence on culture-related framing effects and sociological facets we disclose a disproportionate variety of theoretical explanations considering the limited familiarity of the researchers with the cultures under consideration. The classic concepts by Hall, Hofstede and Schwartz are still popular when assessing culture in contemporary studies. This literature review reveals the lack of a unified conceptual approach to define cross-cultural variations in consumer behaviour, as well as contradictions in the terminology used in cross-cultural research. Considering methodological criteria, we conclude that the majority of publications rely on Likert-type scales in self-administered questionnaires. However, adjustments are necessary in order to establish cross-cultural equivalence and the results of pre-testing the measurement instruments are documented in only one fifth of the studies. Multi-method approaches and qualified treatment of missing values are rare exceptions in cross-cultural research. Building upon these results, we conclude with a discussion of promising venues for further research. We call for a systematic approach of confronting competing theoretical explanations with empirical evidence and a well-structured sequence of pilot and replication studies. Scholars need to clarify the cross-cultural variation they are challenging in a more rigorous manner on both conceptual and methodological levels.

Keywords: Business-to-Consumer Markets; consumer behaviour; cross-cultural research; literature review marketing; variations.

Introduction

Rapidly growing attention to cross-cultural studies in consumer behavior is seen in both academia and business. Researchers have responded to this expanding interest with a remarkable number of studies challenging cross-cultural variations in consumer behavior from different cultures. Interest in foreign markets emerged in the 1950's, and subsequently shaped studies emphasizing cross-cultural differences in marketing journals. In the 1970's, marketing scholars adopted constructs related to consumer psychology, sociological facets of consumer behavior, and consumers' decision-making processes in consumer behaviour-related studies. Moreover, it became a discipline of its own by advancing the methodology of cross-cultural research. (Eshghi, 1985). Development of cultural theories, e.g., Values

Orientation Theory (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1973), Theory of Informational Context (Hall, 1976) or Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1980), in combination with large country samples, enabled researchers to detect correlations between variables on a cultural level rather than individual. This enhanced studies focusing on the culture phenomena and cultural variations in consumer behavior. However, scholars face a number of intricate connections in cross-cultural research including:

- Systematizing a broad range of theoretical and methodological knowledge of diverse disciplines concerning consumer behavior such as consumer psychology, social psychology, culture studies, anthropology, and marketing.
- Assessing adequacy and adapting established research designs and data collection procedures.
- Generalizing or comparing results from consumer behaviour research procedures refined within one country/culture to a cross-cultural analysis, which creates grounds for biases in methodology.
- Handling of non-static, unpredictable alternations of covariates both on individual (e.g., consumer system of values) and cultural value levels.

This study goes beyond Engelen and Brettel (2011), Salciuviene, Auruskeviciene and Lydeka (2005), and Zhang, Beautty and Walsh (2008); not only by updating recent with publications, but by accentuating the 'cross-cultural variations' in consumer behavior. Divergences are more likely to be reported than cross-cultural conformities in scholarly publications. Moreover, we cover major method biases in the studies and their impact on the interpretation of results, complementing conceptual and methodological issues with a set of criteria challenging the implications for marketing practice. This literature aims to provide both a relevant and rigorous contribution to the research domain.

The rest of this paper is as follows: The structure of this review, then the methodology behind our collection, an analysis, and an interpretation of the data. Then we categorize the studies according to 19 parameters (e.g. theoretical focus, model used, and type of interdisciplinary research). Building on this classification, we explore research methodologies, validity issues, and method biases. In the subsequent section we discuss findings and implications for practitioners. By exploring relevance and rigour related issues we conclude with a brief roadmap providing domains for further research in cross-cultural consumer behavior.

Methodology of this literature review

In order to meet our research objectives it is essential to conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing studies on cross-cultural consumer behavior variations, limiting the amount of studies with scientific criteria to refine search results and enhance relevance. The methodological approach to data search, selection and analysis is summarized in Figure 1.

The search procedure is defined by the scope of our study. Theoretical, empirical and methodological papers in the domain of cross cultural consumer behaviour in B2C markets are taken into consideration. We consider empirical contributions analysing at least two countries' cultures or subcultures. The main target domain has been marketing and publications, either in English or Russian, in scholarly journals from 2000 to 2014, covering 15 years of cross-cultural and consumer behavior research. We identified a limited number of Russian studies dealing with cross-cultural aspects in relation to consumer behaviour. Only two articles meeting the search criteria were included in this analysis. The search procedure demonstrated the predominant use of comparative analysis of decision-making criteria among consumers in the Russian publications. However, these studies examined behavioral constructs without embedding them in cross-cultural models. It is important to get articles in Russian through Yandex on the related topic because as suggested by Hult et al. (2008) the further the country where the study was conducted from the country where the constructs were established the lower the probability of equivalence the theoretical ground has.

The first obstacle in identifying relevant studies for this review is that cross-cultural differences (variations) have not been clearly defined in the domain of cross-cultural consumer behavior. In addition

to statistical testing issues, a widely accepted term for the scope of differences between cultures/countries has not yet been defined.

The next challenge is the loose interpretation of 'culture' (frequently not distinguished from country or national borders) and cross-cultural terms in consumer behavior studies. Additionally, consumer behavior encompasses a very wide range of constructs, including consumers' evaluations, perceptions, attitudes, etc. Thus, the search criteria needed to be adjusted and manually reviewed for each item. Sets of keywords that return the most accurate scope of data for the purposes of this research had to be defined, i.e. both cross-cultural and consumer behavior aspects had to be specified as the main focus of the reviewed studies.

The recent literature in entrepreneurial marketing provided evidence that the main discussion of this evolving topic is not reflected in journals covered by the Web-of-Science (Schuster, Falkenreck & Wagner, 2015). Undertanding this, we did not limit our scope to journals with a Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Rank. The search was conducted using eight online databases, namely *Emerald, Springerlink, Sciencedirect, Wiley, Taylor&Francis, DeGruyter, GoogleScholar* and *Yandex*.
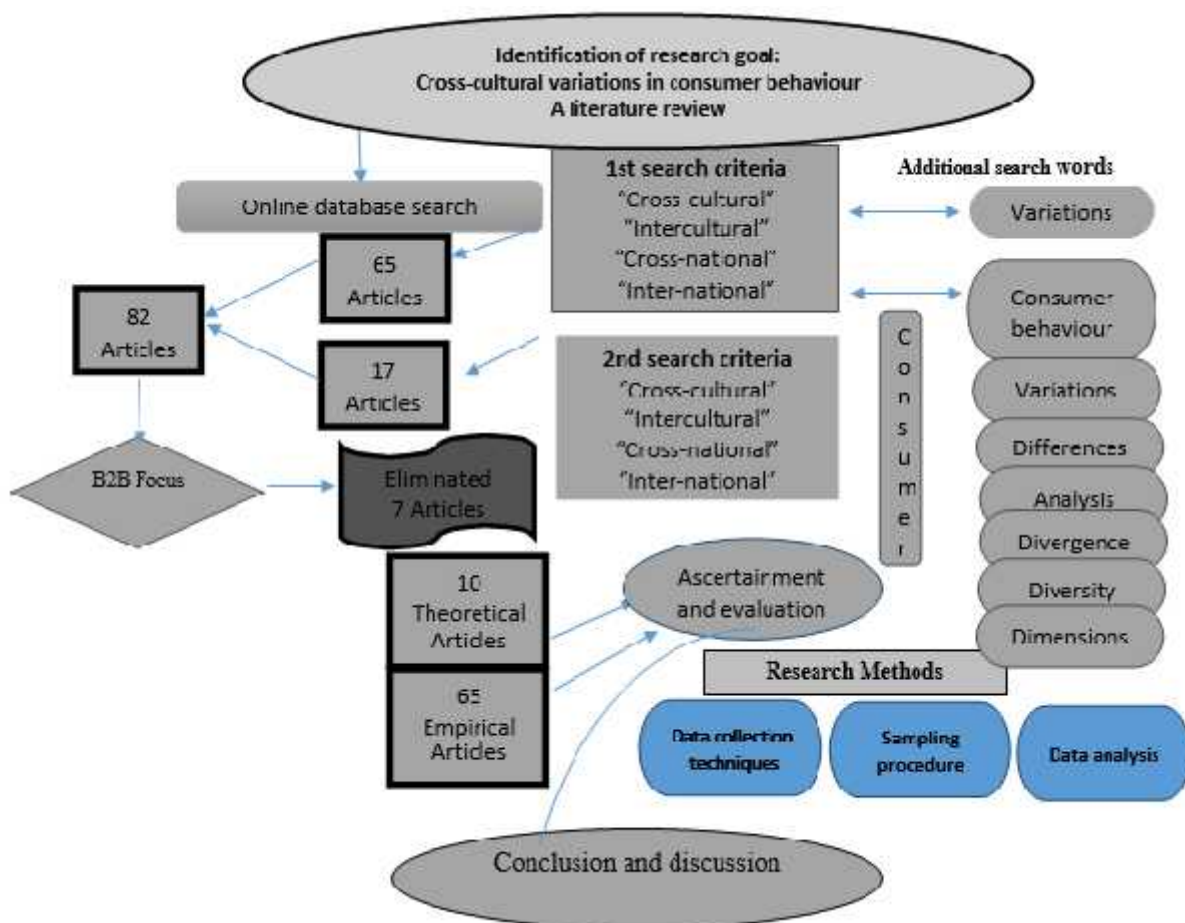

Figure 1. Research Framework

The resulting studies in our corpus have been published in 37 journals covering marketing, business, and industry: Leading are *International Marketing Review* (33%), *Journal of Consumer Marketing* (12%), *European Journal of Marketing* (8%) and *Journal of Business Research* (7%). Approximately one third of all authors are associated with North America (37%), 27% and 21% in Europe and Asia respectively, followed by the Middle East (7%), Australia and New Zealand (6% each). African (2%) and Latin American (less than 1%) are less active. There is a slightly higher percentage of multi-country teams of authors (54%) compared to single-country teams (46%).

Our analysis of the corpus and our interpretation builds on the following 19 criteria.

Figure 2. Corpus criteria structured in 3 groups

Incorporating suggestions and procedures from Whitelock and Fastoso (2007), Engelen and Brettel (2010) in our content analysis, we identify the conceptual (theoretical) focus, the research methodology and the practical implications.

Theoretical focus

For the period of 2000-2014 an increase of research domains in cross-cultural differences in consumer behaviour was traced. In three five-year periods, the number of research in this domain has grown from 15 (2000-2004) to 24 (2005-2009) and 36 (2010-2014), based on 12 studies in 2012 alone (Figures 2, 3).
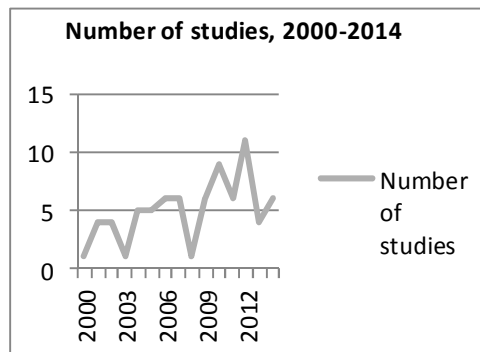
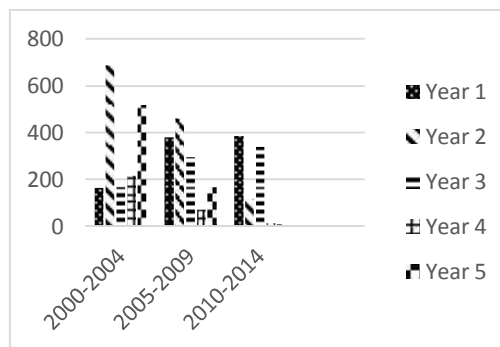*Figures 2. Dynamics of research of cross-cultural studies in consumer behaviour in 2000-2014*

Figure 3. Citation rates per year (according to Google Scholar, 2015)

Our corpus articles were cited by different scholars in later studies. The citation rates help indicate how effective cross-cultural studies have been. The papers in the first period (2000-2004) were cited 1752 times by studies in later years, the second period (2005-2009) were cited 1373 times, and the third period (2010-2014) 860 times. These dynamics indicate increasing research output that passed the journal review processes and were accepted by peer-reviewed journals. Since the number of citations decreases, we conclude that the efficiency of knowledge transfer decreases.

Table 1 provides an overview of the research streams in cross-cultural consumer studies.

Table 1. Research streams in cross-cultural consumer studies

Research streams in cross-cultural research of consumer behaviour		Number of relevant constructs applicable to research streams *		
		Theoretical	**Empirical**	**Total**
Cross-cultural research of consumer behavior	Consumer psychology	12	93	105
	Consumer behaviour	4	26	30
	Sociological issues	3	17	20
	Service	1	7	8
	Branding	-	5	5
	Advertising	-	5	5
	Segmentation	1	2	3
	Product variety	3	-	3
	Total			179

*Studies can use more than one construct applicable to different research streams
*Percentage points represent the share of certain constructs among all constructs used

Research in cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior focuses on the study of consumer psychology (60% of constructs are in consumer psychology research), followed by consumer behavior (16%) and sociology (11%). The remainder of studies are affiliated with marketing domains, e.g., service, market segmentation, advertising, product variety, and product quality.

Table 2.Theories in use

Research domain	Theory/Framing	Number of studies
Cross-cultural	Culture theory	1
	Hall's theory of informational context	18
	Cross-cultural development theory	1
	Cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede and Schwartz)	45
Sociology	Social comparison theory	1
	Distinctiveness theory	1
	Theory of conflicts and compatibilities	1
	Social adaptation theory	1
	Institutional (norms & cultural)	1
Behavior, Decision Making, & Psychology	Conspicuous consumption behaviour	1
	Fundamental cognitive theory	1
	Uses and gratifications	1
	Information processing theory	1
	Assimilation theory	1
	Theory of psychological reactance	1
	Expectancy theory – confirmation/disconfirmation	1
	Basic satisfaction theory	2
	Evaluation – apprehension theory	1
	Hedonic consumption theory	1
	Theory of reasoned actions	2
	Media system dependency theory	1
	Prospect theory	1
	Behavioural decision making theory	2
	Theory of planned behavior	1
	Attribution theory	1
	Means-end theory	2

	Variety awareness, re-enchantment, perception and seeking	3
Marketing-Management-related	Corporate branding	1
	Impression management	1
	Global marketing strategy	1
	Service quality theory	1
No theories mentioned		17

*Studies can use more than one theory; percentage points represent the share of articles mentioning a particular theory

As Table 2 suggests, the majority of cross-cultural research in consumer behavior domain (60%) is based on Cultural Dimension Theory.

To explore the dominance of constructs pertinent to the consumer behavior domain, we have ranked them according to their frequency of use in certain time periods. The decision-making process-consumption and evaluation (27%), decision-making criteria (17%), and purchase behavior (17%) rank as the top constructs; the object of increasing research focus in the last five-year period (2010-2014). Analysis in cultures of the examined studies highlights correspondence of these constructs to main stages of the consumer decision-making process.

Table 3. Constructs pertinent to research stream - consumer behavior in cross-cultural research of variations in consumer behavior (timeframe of focus of studies)

Constructs pertinent to consumer behavior (research stream)	Number of relevant constructs pertinent to consumer behavior*			Total
	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	
Decision-making process: consumption and evaluation	1	3	4	8
Decision-making criteria	-	2	3	5
Purchase behaviour	1	-	4	5
Complaint behaviour	1	1	1	3
Conspicuous consumption	1	-	2	3
Variety seeking	1	1	1	3
Possessions	1	-	1	2
Time orientation	-	-	1	1
Total	6	7	17	30

*Studies can use more than one construct pertinent to research streams
*Percentage points represent the share of certain constructs among all constructs used

In line with the results of the previous research (Zhang et al., 2008, Engelen & Brettel, 2011) our analysis confirms that researchers predominantly use Hofstede cultural dimensions, of which the individualism/collectivism scales are the most widely used in examined studies (70%), followed by uncertainty avoidance (50%), power distance (44%), masculinity/femininity (38%) and long/short-term orientation (21%). All five Hofstede dimensions were used in 24% of the studies in which researchers conduct a full cross-cultural analysis.

In the field of cross-cultural research, the use of Hofstede's cultural model is both criticised and supported. Scholars criticize the relevance of survey method in measuring cross-cultural differences, representativeness of selected samples, choice of country as a unit of cross-cultural research, and insufficiency of Hofstede's dimensions for the study of cultural differences and obsolesence of the search data (Dorfman & Howell, 1988; Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002). Moreover, Hofstede model has been widely used in cross-cultural and international research with over 1,000 citations (Sondergaard, 1994). In line with the study by Engelen and Brettel (2010), we conclude that researchers can use more recent cultural models, which expand and supplement Hofstede's dimensions, to reflect the culture dynamics in the last two decades, grounded in a comprehensive database.

Cross-cultural studies predominantly account for cultural (75%), social (55%), economic (20%) factors and the effect of marketing activity (20%) on consumer behaviour. Recently, researchers have considered explanatory factors beyond those traditional ones, such as political factors – especially market regulation of business environment and social media impacts. For instance, Diehl, Terlutter,

Chan and Mueller (2007) discuss consumer expectations of stronger governmental regulation in pharmaceutical advertising and Popova, Frewer, De Jonge, Fischer and Van Kleef (2010) investigate consumer perception of government regulation in food safety. Moreover, Bellman, Johnson, Kobrin and Lohse (2004) reveal the divergences of national information privacy regulations on consumers' privacy concerns.

Data collection techniques: qualitative and quantitative methods

The majority of cross-cultural studies of consumer behavior variations (93%) are conclusive, enabling researchers to draw inductive evaluations of research hypotheses. Only 7% of studies are explanatory, aiming to specify a gap in the research domain. Literary analysis (81%) prevails among desk research methods in examined studies.

Surveys are widely used as a quantitative field data collection method (79%). Structured (self-administrated) questionnaires and Likert type scales are predominantly implemented. The majority of surveys used traditional data collection methods (80% of empirical studies): hand-delivered in public places (hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, etc.); hand-delivered in class, personal interview, face-to-face at respondents' home, door-to-door approach, drop-and-pickup, etc. Online surveys and surveys by mail account for 15% and 5% of empirical studies covered in this study.

Only 21% of examined empirical studies report results or adjustments due to pre-tests conducted both with qualitative and quantitative methods. Multi-method approaches are employed in 12% of the studies considered. Importantly, the usage of multi-method approaches is equally distributed across traditional and online samples. Jahandideh, Golmohammadi, Meng, O'Gorman and Taheri (2014) use a combination of observation, panel discussion, Delphi method, expert pilot interviews, and initial face-to-face consumer interviews and semi-structured interviews of staff in a study of consumer complaint behavior in hotels. In their study of consumption divergences between Koreans and Australians, Sutton-Brady, Davis and Jung (2010) combine questionnaire, consumption diary and phenomenological interviews. This design approach enables researchers to both highlight constructs essential for analysis, and evaluate against large samples. Application of multi-method data collection enhances validity and reliability. Wind, Rao and Green (1991) identified a trend in consumer research to focus on integrated sets of research methods. However, the adoption of the cross-cultural studies of consumer behaviour variations appears to be gradual and is still ongoing.

Establishing cross-cultural equivalence (Diamantopoulos & Papadopoulos, 2010; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Wagner, Wetzels & Winklhofer, 2005) in studies of consumer behavior variations presents a number of challenges for researchers. A minimum necessity at the data collection stage and research design development is to account for translation equivalence by using re-translation techniques. These techniques are reported in 43% of examined empirical studies, while 57% provided no information on the methods of establishing equivalence used in their studies. Ko, Kim, Taylor, Kim and Kang (2007) pinpoint the crucial importance of sophisticated re-translation techniques in studies with broad multi-cultural samples.

Data collection techniques: dependent variables

Researchers in our sample worked with 158 dependent variables related to cross-cultural research variations in consumer behaviour. These variables are largely related to consumer psychology, consumer behavior, sociological issues and cultural dimensions. The most frequently were purchase intentions (7% of all dependent variables), attitudes to brand, advertising etc. (5%), perception of quality, brands etc. (5%), service satisfaction and similar (4%), importance of product or service attributes, country of origin, etc. (3%), and symbolic and hedonic meanings, etc. (3%).

Regional focus and related reasoning

Our results suggest that geographic sampling units are shaped on an inter-regional level in the majority of empirical studies (73%). Countries within same region (according to the United Nations) are selected as geographic sampling units in 18% of the studies. Comparative analysis of subcultures/ethnic and racial groups within one country is conducted in 9% of the studies. Cross-cultural analysis of differences in consumer behavior predominantly involves 2 cultures (54%) and from 3 to 10 cultures (29%). Studies with a large range of geographical coverage, which analyse data from more than 10 cultures, account for 11% of empirical studies: 11 cultures (Schumann et al., 2010; Schumann, Nijssen, & Lentz, 2014); 27 cultures (Deschepper et al., 2008); 38 cultures (Bellman et al., 2004); 48 cultures (Budeva, 2010); 56 cultures (Yeniyurt & Townsend, 2003); 58 cultures (Litvin, Crotts & Hefner, 2004). The cross-cultural studies covered 7 regions and 81 nations. Asia and Asia-Pacific attract the most intensive research interest in cross-cultural studies of consumer behavior (66% of studies), corresponding with the dynamic economic development of the region. China and South Korea account for 42% and 30% of studies focusing on this region respectively, followed by India and Japan (21% each). North America and Europe account for 56% and 51% of studies respectively, with the most frequently studied countries in respective regions being the US (82%), Germany (35%) and France (32%). Interest in cross-cultural studies of consumer behavior variations is also seen in Australia and New Zealand (18%). Although these countries are included in Asia-Pacific region, western cultural and political attributes dominate there.

In order to evaluate inter-regional focus of research interest and variations in consumer behavior across geographic settings, we integrated results showing that 23% of studies focus on cross-cultural variations within one region or country, predominantly in Europe and Asia. However, the majority of researchers select inter-regional settings for their studies (74%), focusing largely comparing North America and Asia (20%), and Europe, Asia, North America (14%). Choice of these regions is not only due to differences in cultural backgrounds and the contrast between the East and the West, but trade partnership, and potential growth of target segments, improving economic indicators and level of market development.

Discussion and conclusion

This review reveals conceptual, methodological and practical issues and suggests considerable potential for future research given the range of issues outlined below. Reducing common method biases and ensuring measurement equivalence are the main challenges in cross-cultural research, therefore the majority of recommendations concern these key methodological concepts.

Comparability is ensured when researchers participate in a study embedded in the cultures under consideration and, thus, are familiar with the culture's influence. However, the procedure suggested by Malhotra, Agarwal and Peterson (1996) is not understood in contemporary research designs. Considering the rate (46%) of single country teams of authors in studies covered here, we call for more cross-cultural author teams to ensure the validity of cross-cultural comparisons. The authors of the studies focussed on consumer behaviour, consumer psychology, social issues and a number of marketing topics. This builds a niche for developing up-to-date topics in holistic marketing, especially relationship marketing. Cross-cultural studies in consumer behavior lack a unified approach to the use of terminology and definitions related to cross-cultural variations. Moreover, the studies report divergent impacts due to the high variety of dependents considered. This suggests a promising path for additional research; answering the questions:
- Is it appropriate to consider "cross-cultural variations" as a construct in a consumer behavior domain? Or might it be more profitable to pinpoint similarities instead of variations?
- Is it appropriate to define "cross-cultural variations" only by culture? What about the variation within regions or nations? We did not find any evidence on "inter-cultural variations" that might serve as a benchmark for assessing the "cross cultural variations".

The majority of cross-cultural studies in consumer behavior are based on the Hofstede culture model, it is crucial for future researchers to use more recent cultural models, which expand and supplement Hofstede's dimensions, reflect the culture dynamics in the last two decades and are also grounded in a comprehensive database.

Researchers are advised continue to develop a topology of external factors influencing consumer behaviour. It is necessary to go beyond the practice of fishing for significant differences. Methodologically, there are a number of issues to be addressed in the upcoming research. We agree with other reviews pointing out the lack of qualitative research and multi-methods in this domain. When preparing for data collection, more than half of the researchers fail to use or indicate translation techniques for establishing translation equivalence. However, the translation is not efficient when establishing cross-cultural inequivalence. We posit that it is essential to detail conceptual equivalence, scale equivalence and data collection equivalence. For quantitative studies we can rely on qualified guidance (Diamantoulos & Papadopoulos, 2010; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Wagner, Weztels & Winklhofer, 2005) and translation procedures in the future. However, for qualitative studies suitable procedures need to be developed, evaluated and applied.

There are overlooked opportunities to establish equivalence and sample comparability at the sampling procedure stage (Reynolds, Simintiras & Diamantopoulos, 2003). In addition to the problems of the selection of countries/cultures and theoretical justification, sample sizes and sampling methods challenges such as common method bias need to be addressed (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). The use of non-probability and probability samples is widely discussed in cross-cultural research, with researchers recommending the use of probability samples despite difficulties obtaining them. Current studies, however, mainly use non-probability sampling techniques. For a systematic assessment of the impact of these procedures we recommend a systematic comparison of results in a meta-analytic method.

As for data analysis methods, researchers use few descriptive types of analysis but employ a broad range and variety of sophisticated statistical tools and methods. However, the results of studies are likely to be biased due to fallacies at the earlier stages of research design (such as conceptual equivalence and handling of data analysis. Although discarding missing data could lead to a selection bias and loss of important data, the majority of studies do not account for this. In terms of practical marketing implications, it can be concluded that without quality-related entries concerning cross-cultural research, academic research should be used cautiously.

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