Comparative Thick Description: Articulating Similarities and Differences in Local Beer Consumption Experience

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Abstract International marketing decisions are the result of complex trade-offs between global standardization and local adaptation. Similarities are too substantial and differences go too deep to be ignored. This chapter tries to articulate similarities and differences in local consumer experience across multiple contexts. It shows how language can be used as a discovery tool, along with depth interviews and checks of researchers' interpretations by informants, to generate cognitive maps of consumption and taste experiences. Local words, used as *emic* signals, are combined into full profiles of the local experiences as narratives linking people to products and taste. Local profiles can then be merged to derive differences dealing with creolization patterns, local consumption experience, local preferences, perceptions and associations as well as commonalities emergent *from within* the contexts studied. The comparative thick description framework is applied to the beer consumption experience in ten countries (China, Croatia, France, Germany, Japan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, El Salvador, Mexico) and 9 languages.

1 Introduction

Because language is used daily in local contexts, it is reflective of *local knowledge* in the sense of Geertz (1983), more specifically of local consumer knowledge when people talk about individual and social consumption experiences, and explain product recipes, taste and pleasure related to food and drinks. While this may be important and meaningful to people as consumers, and therefore very useful for international marketing (IM), it is largely forgotten by the prevailing academic research system. Too often, a single conceptual framework is applied with the view that a general rule is appropriate, whatever the context. In this chapter, we outline and illustrate a method to search for local meanings in a qualitative, multi-*emic* perspective with similarities emerging *from within* contexts rather than *across*

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contexts. Our perspective is based on words and anecdotal knowledge, however central in the local worldview. Small sketches, using local texts, can be seen as a "*mise en réalité*", a staging of consumer views about products, tastes and food experiences (Usunier & Sbizzera, 2013).

It is important to embark on a comparative thick description (CTD) because CTD provides us with unique insights on how local informants experience consumption for a particular product or service. Language-related investigation facilitates the emergence of *emic* insights. Cognitive Mapping (CM) then enables us to put in perspective the diversity of national/cultural results and let differences and commonalities emerge. The main advantage of thick description (TD) is that it provides in-depth, *emic* accounts of reality. Ponterotto (2006, p. 542) cites the following aspects of TD: "Thick description involves accurately describing and interpreting social actions within the appropriate context in which the social action took place. Thick description captures the thoughts, emotions, and web of social interaction among observed participants in their operating context." CTD can help understand international consumer behaviour, especially if TD is followed by integration through CM across several national/cultural contexts.

There are, however, drawbacks to TD. It is exploratory in nature, interpretive, and seems at first to lead to unique, difficult to compare results. Cross-national/cultural integration of the within-context findings (possibly unfamiliar to the researcher, because of language and/or cultural differences) seems problematic. In the academic literature each of the three perspectives, TD (Geertz, 1983; Ponterotto, 2006), CM (e.g. Christensen & Olson, 2002; Brun, Durif, & Ricard, 2014) and language-based investigation (Usunier, 2011) has been developed separately. This chapter tries to develop a framework that integrates the three perspectives. The CTD approach is appropriate for the analysis of culture and its influence on cross-cultural consumer behavior, because it derives information from cultural insiders. It is language-related, and therefore susceptible to generate meaningful *emic* insights, even if only at an exploratory level. The first objective of our study is to show how the TD approach can be used in conjunction with language-enriched interviewing and then made comparable by representing the information gathered into an organized scheme where the main commonalities and idiosyncrasies appear in a synthetic cognitive map. By applying this approach to beer consumption cross-culturally, we also aim to practically demonstrate that language-enriched CTD followed by CM should be used as the first, exploratory, step in cross-national market research intending to derive globally applicable outcomes.

Food habits as well as taste are culturally constructed as central categories of the local lifestyle (Ger, Askegaard, & Christensen, 1999). People enjoy orality (in the Freudian sense) related to speaking the native language and eating familiar foods. The whole chain of meaning surrounding food extends from ingredients and recipes, the search for and purchase of food items, the preparation of meals (or the choice not to prepare) to the individual and social enjoyment of food moments. Language also specifically reflects a number of local food experiences related to ingredients, to cooking, to the enjoyment of meals in familiar settings, all this being

summed up in the German term *Esskultur*. Therefore, linguistic cues mostly based on semantics, etymology, and phonology provide insights into *emic* meanings that may represent key information for the end-customization of product and communication policies in local markets. A number of areas of cross-cultural equivalence (conceptual, functional, translation, experiential) can be investigated through the use of linguistic cues. This chapter shows how local words, used as *emic* signals, can be combined into full profiles of the local experiences in their uniqueness as narratives linking people to products and taste experiences, which can then be merged to derive commonalities emergent *from within* the contexts studied.

The first part of the chapter deals with how TD can be applied comparatively to first uncover differences, then proceeds to take the true measure of similarities derived from within local contexts. The second part applies this TD framework to the beer consumption experience within ten countries (China, Croatia, El Salvador, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey); in fact eleven countries, since The UK and the English language serve as a country baseline case and a language reference point. This chapter uses e*mic* concepts, along with depth interviews and checks of researchers' interpretations by informants, to generate CM of consumption and taste experiences. Local words, used as *emic* signals, are combined into full profiles of the local experiences as narratives linking people to products and taste. Local profiles can then be merged to derive commonalities emergent *from within* the contexts studied. We show how beer consumption experiences locally intermingle with history, socialization, gender and age, religion, and language to build "local beer knowledge". However, they can be related together in a common framework emphasizing how commonalities and idiosyncrasies can be discovered when later applied to other country/culture contexts. We conclude on the practical applicability and the managerial relevance of the CTD method.

2 Comparative Thick Description

To compare is to put side by side two objects or phenomena to study their similarities and differences. In IM we often implicitly compare cross-nationally or cross-culturally. The question seems to be "Is the phenomenon similar **or** different?", implicitly assuming that the object or phenomenon cannot be similar **and** different at the same time. However, what looks similar in the eyes of marketers (researchers) may actually be perceived as different by consumers (respondents, informants). This may result in marketing blunders, often treated as mere anecdotes that cannot be generalized, and are assumed inevitable. From a pragmatic perspective, the issue is whether overlooked differences will result in marketing policy failures. However, similarities can be self-fulfilling prophecies, the global solution being imposed on the local context without too many problems. Geertz (1983: 41) writes about differences and similarities (his emphasis on *do* and *are*) as follows:

> "The differences *do* go far deeper than an easy men-are-men humanism permits itself to see, and the similarities *are* far too substantial for an easy other-beasts, other-mores relativism to dissolve."

Do IM researchers favor the search for differences or similarities? Personal interests and beliefs may be a source of bias, "colonial" designs favoring the emergence of similarities. A common mindset, shared knowledge, recognized scientific approaches, anonymous reviewing, and academic journals tend to favor the similarity view, or at least to favor the discovery of differences in *degree* rather than in *nature*. An identical research design may not be appropriate for the discovery of both similarities and differences across national/cultural contexts. Qualitative research designs favor the discovery of differences because they emphasize local meaning and interpretation. On the other hand, quantitative or *etic* research designs favor similarities because they assume shared concepts, and use directive research instruments that channel the informants' insights into the researchers' pre-established frames. We have to take into account not only actual versus perceived similarities/differences but also differences in *nature* (incommensurable) versus differences in *degree* (commensurable). Incidentally, qualitative research may work as a magnifying glass and lead to overestimate differences in nature, because similarities as explained by Geertz in the citation above are "far too substantial" to be ignored.

Globalization is proceeding at a fast pace. One may wonder how long IM research findings emphasizing differences will hold if these differences wane over time and finally become outdated. Convergence is taking place at three interconnected levels: actual convergence (we are more "the same"), perceptual convergence (we feel that **it** is similar even though **it** may later appear different), and creolization (we 'reconstruct' global items into localized ones, rebuilding differential meaning into these apparently similar items; cf. Ger et al., 1999; Kragh & Djursaa, 2001). Creolization is the outcome of a search for (lost?) identity in a globalizing world combined with the search for utility, which remains a universal consumption motive. To take the true measure of convergence (in consumer behavior, distribution systems, etc.), we would need to regularly replicate studies to assess the stability of findings over time. However, since replication studies are not favored by journals, the only way to assess convergence is to look at the deeper sources of cross-national differences, to try to qualitatively assess whether they are mere 'vestiges of the past' or long-lasting phenomena. Among the key sources of sustained differences are religion, cultural values (such as individualism and collectivism), and language and the associated mindset.

Should researchers start with the search for differences or for similarities? Searching first for similarities is likely to tone down differences, most of which will remain unnoticed. Most differences are unimportant in the sense that late discovery does not impair the success of a locally implemented marketing policy because *ex post* adjustment is feasible. Searching first for differences is likely to unveil key differences, sometimes with a magnifying glass effect. The next step is to take the true measure of such differences and to progressively discover that much is in fact

shared. Researchers should start with the search for differences if they want to later assess meaningful similarities. This can be done through *thick description*, which Geertz explains as follows in his 1973 paper:

> … the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them. (1973, p. 24)

Generalizing (i.e. largely "forgetting" about differences in favor of emergent similarities) *from within cases* rather than *across* cases is related to TD. TD is explicitly borrowed by Geertz from the English language philosopher Ryle (1968). The notion of thickness deals with fine-grained accounts, contextualisation, the combination of multiple perspectives, and reflexivity. Language is an instrument to put cultural experience in comparative perspective. To take a geometrical metaphor: TD, rather than describing phenomena in a two-dimensional surface, tries to offer a description in a three-dimensional space or, even better, in a multi-dimensional hyperspace. For Geertz, the notion of "found in translation", rather than "lost in translation" is part of TD. When he entitles Chapter 2 of *Local Knowledge* "Found in translation: On the social history of moral imagination", he comments that, despite the Balinese language having no word for art and artist, art is pervasive in Bali. Another component of TD, that is, moral imagination (as illustrated in Geertz (1983) by the TD of the cremation of three living Hindu widows by a Danish traveler in 1840) translates quite well into the universe of products, consumption and marketing. For instance beer, because it is an alcoholic beverage, is sensitive to moral imagination related to religious taboos, gender stereotypes, as well as behavioral codes. Minor "eating incidents" such as making noise when chewing are neutrally or positively viewed in many cultures, however negatively by the Germans who use a verb (*schmatzen*) to express their disgust of eating noisily. In this chapter, we use language as a multi-*emic* research instrument. Lexical equivalence typically hides meaning differences. This is particularly true for replications of psychometric scales performed with 'blind' back-translation. However, overlap of semantic fields implies that concepts may be partly similar and partly different between different linguistic/cultural contexts. Back-translation is most often presented as a mechanical task. Following established back-translation processes (Brislin et al., 1986), the survey instrument was first drafted in English by a bilingual researcher fluent in both English and Chinese, then translated into Chinese by another bilingual researcher fluent in both languages.

In contrast to this instrumental view of language, translation and back-translation can be used as an instrument for investigating cross-cultural equivalence (Usunier, 2011). *Emic* concepts can be kept in their original language to highlight differences. Researchers are somewhat obsessed with the need to reach full cross-cultural invariance. However, they should feel more relaxed: discovering non invariant aspects across cultures is not a sin.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Scope of the Study: Similarities and Differences in Local "Beer Universes": A Cross-National Investigation

As the citation of Clifford Geertz above magnificently explains, similarities are too substantial to be ignored, and differences go too deep for uniformity to be declared. The CTD paradigm tries to articulate similarities and differences, rather than declare them "vestiges of the past" in a simplistic view of consumers as being exclusively concerned by value for money (Levitt, 1983). Even though apparently small in magnitude, differences may be highly meaningful for assessing the degree to which a product has to be locally adapted and the nature of customization for successfully localizing marketing strategies, in terms of advertising copy, slogans, branding and/or packaging. In essence, differences are highly qualitative, dealing with creolization patterns, local consumption experiences, preferences, perceptions, and associations, cultural taste, as well as history. Individuals invest meaning in their consumption experiences. Even if figures seem to demonstrate broad convergence, quantitative convergence hides in fact huge qualitative divergence as far as local experiences, contexts, perceptions and interpretations are concerned. To highlight the local beer experience, informants were asked to cite relevant *emic* terms related to the beer universe and elaborate on their meaning in context related to shared situations, habits, and stories around beer. They were invited to comment on how the product is reincorporated in a universe of locally shared meanings which may surface in details, for instance the shape and size of beer glasses. The Bavarian *Krug* (a one-liter large glass mug) does not give the same 'taste' to beer as the French *demi* (a quarter-liter stemmed glass) or the English pint.

CM has been used in IM for international market selection (Andersen & Strandskov, 1998), for consumer behaviour to investigate consumers' mental models by first eliciting then mapping their knowledge structures (Christensen & Olson, 2002) as well as for investigating E-relationship marketing in the banking sector (Brun et al., 2014). A review covering ten years of CM applications for business in general (Papageorgiou & Salmeron, 2013) shows that CM is used in business for planning, decision making, decision support, modelling, and prediction. Cognitive maps based on CTD can be elaborated for product categories, and/or target a particular taste experience, distribution channels, or competing global, regional, and local brands, etc., to investigate perceptions and experiences within and across local contexts. CTD applies to B2C as well as to B2B markets in as much as key aspects of business relationships can also be thickly described. Finally, an important point is that the English language, the *lingua franca* of international trade, and therefore of IM, serves as a baseline case, a common reference point without which CTD is not feasible.

3.2 The Cognitive Mapping Technique

The steps leading to cognitive maps in the beer universe are detailed below.

1. Generate categories that are significant for the beer experience: product, places, times, taboos, product attributes, product functions for the individual (e.g. age, gender, and social (socialization, religious prohibition, etc.));
2. Do secondary research on beer consumption as homework before interviews to generate a list of themes for the in-depth interviews;
3. Investigate local *emic* terms (labels) that are reflective of local consumption in some of the target countries to generate local cognitive maps in the beer universe;
4. In-depth, non directive discussion with informants on the beer consumption experience in their native country to derive first insights on *etic* and *emic* aspects of the beer consumption experience;
5. Discuss the cognitive map between the researchers and prepare a first version (several sub-steps, including successive drafts of cognitive maps);
6. Check the individual insights (per country) with informants based on feedback on text and cognitive maps with instructions to deal with their own national/linguistic context.
7. Finalize the general cognitive map of the beer universe and the accompanying text.

3.3 Research Instrument and Data Collection

Interview themes were discussed in a relaxed, conversational, in-depth interview format, typically one and half hour long. During the in-depth interviews, conversations were recorded. A written transcript was prepared for further qualitative analysis and sent to informants for feedback and possible revision. Informants were insiders of the country/language concerned, as nationals of the target country and native speakers of its language. If several languages were spoken, including minority languages, informants were instructed to consider the dominant local language (e.g. China/Mandarin, Tunisia/Arabic, etc.). Interviewees were recruited by the researcher and assistants from their own network of acquaintances. They had to be born in the country, national, fluent (native) in the (dominant) local language, strongly related to the cultural context, although they were mostly interviewed in the researcher's country (Switzerland). However, the area around Lake Geneva is highly cosmopolitan and has a wealth of cultural insiders. Informants were not required to be experts in beer and beer consumption. Rather, they were told that they did not need to be regular beer drinkers themselves and that they were supposed to have insider rather than expert knowledge about local beer consumption. Although instructed and encouraged not to answer whenever they thought they did

not have enough information, they always proved knowledgeable. Out of 20 informants (2 per country/language), 10 were male and 10 female. Some female informants (China, Thailand, and Tunisia) were at first a bit reluctant to participate, their view being that beer was typically a male beverage. They considered themselves, as women, to be somewhat less knowledgeable on the local beer universe. However, it was later clear that they were perfectly familiar with the beer consumption experience in their country.

3.4 Interview Themes

Informants were invited by the interviewer, as is usual in depth interviews (Jones, 1985), to elaborate on the history of beer in their country, especially mentioning when beer was introduced and how. The degree of foreignness was investigated: Was beer at first considered a foreign item? Was beer still considered a foreign item? We also asked interviewees whether some sort of creolization process[1] had taken place so that a previously foreign item had become a national beverage.

The local product universe in terms of manufacturing and branding was discussed with the interviewee, in particular: Does beer relate to local fermented beverages (e.g. based on local cereals rather than barley or wheat)? To what kind of category is beer associated (e.g. local carbonated drinks, local fermented drinks)? Are there local brands and to what extent do they compete with foreign brands? What are the typical denominations used such as "*Pils*", or "*Lager*"? What are the typical product functions in the country context? Is beer a standard beverage to be taken with most meals or mostly outside home in social settings, or a refresher when it is warm, or a way of getting more or less inebriated, if not drunk? Interviewees were asked to state to what extent people, and which people, in terms of age and gender, drink beer as a means of getting inebriated/intoxicated.

We also investigated the local consumption context with individual versus social cues: Is beer associated with socialization? Is beer also drunk individually, when not with others? Issues related to alcohol consumption were examined, especially whether there are social taboos or religious prohibition and to what extent they impact beer consumption? Sharing a happy moment with friends and/or relatives is associated with consumption places and circumstances beer being drunk at home and/or outside in pubs, cafés, bars. Interviewees were asked to identify the typical

[1]The creolization process takes place when foreign items are assigned new meanings and uses by local cultural and linguistic contexts, even when being transferred without apparent change. In the creolization paradigm, the researcher's attention focuses on the reception and domestication process of global goods in local contexts (i.e. differences within similarities), as opposed to the Coca-colonization paradigm, where emphasis is on uniformity (Howes, 1996). A good example of such localization of consumption is Disneyland Tokyo, a perfect replica of the American model which is, however, completely Japanized, that is, fully reinvested by local cultural codes (Brannen, 1992).

local names for places where beer is drunk such as a *pub* for Britain or a *Biergarten* for Germany. The significance of gender and age on consumption patterns was examined, namely, the extent to which beer drinking is associated with gender (e.g. males rather than females drink beer, or males drink beer in larger recipients, or in some countries beer consumption is traditionally associated with breast-feeding etc.), as well as with age, and/or social class (if locally relevant).

Finally, the consumption experience in context was investigated with interviewees: What kind of physical and sensory attributes do people like in beer: alcoholic content, beer color, suds, bubbles, bitterness, sweetness, etc.? Is beer consumption associated with seasons (e.g. more beer consumed in summer or when it is hot), days of the week (e.g. weekend rather than working days), with meals and events such as lunch, dinner, parties, ceremonies, as well as with other beverages (e.g. spirits) or food (e.g. snacks, nuts, sandwiches, cold rather than hot meals, foreign rather than local food, etc.).

In addition to depth interviews, we gathered secondary data on local beer scenes (e.g. per capita consumption per year, beer industry history) and visited web sites from local beer brands, chats and forums, as they feature products and experiences in context. This was intended to derive a general framework in line with the first part of this chapter dealing with similarities and differences across contexts. The idea was to generate joint (similar) categories across countries (e.g. beer and gender, home versus outside beer consumption) as well as purely *emic* categories (locally specific, e.g. beer and Islam) and later let cross-national differences emerge in the way beer consumption is locally experienced (i.e. different ways of creolizing beer). Based on both the interview transcripts and the secondary data, the researchers generated the *etic* and *emic* categories, and later discussed key illustrations of differences *within* similarities. *Emic* labels (e.g. places, glasses, beer types, brands becoming generic, etc.) were also derived and assembled within cognitive maps (Eden, 1992), as shown in the next section for four countries/languages. Cognitive maps (see Figs. 1 and 2) were independently generated by the researcher and his assistants, then compared, discussed and merged.

We analyzed differences and similarities of local beer universes across ten countries: China, Croatia, El Salvador, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Thailand, Tunisia, and Turkey. These countries were chosen because they represent different continents, religions (i.e. five predominantly Christian countries (among them, one country with a minority Muslim population: Croatia), three Buddhist countries (among them, two countries with a minority Muslim population: China and Thailand), and two Muslim countries) and important world languages with three countries using writing systems not based on the Roman alphabet.

4 Research Findings

4.1 Local Cognitive Maps

This method, based on organized semantics, is illustrated by the case of beer in three European countries, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, and Turkey in Fig. 1. We use words and narratives to describe *Emic* product universes for what they mean in context, especially salient product attributes which provide consumers with key benefits and also how beer is consumed in specific situations and corresponds to the fabric of local life.

Beer differs according to bitterness, foam, bubbles, sweetness, and alcoholic content. Many British beers are high-fermentation with lower alcoholic content than beers on the continent. Beer consumption in Germany has a different meaning from that in the United Kingdom or in France. In Germany, beer is consumed in a *Bierstub* (i.e. a sort of German Pub) or *Kneipe (*i.e. a tavern), or enjoyed in a *Biergarten* (i.e. a garden where beer is served with food) during the summer. For home consumption, it is generally bought from a *Getränkeshop* (a side-store to a supermarket entirely dedicated to beverages, a nice combination of German and English). Local beers (including *Weissbier*, wheat-based beer) play a dominant role in the German beer universe. In the Cologne region, for instance, the *Kölsch* beers, some ten high-fermentation beer brands, are consumed as a reference to the place, somewhat similar to wines in France. German half-litre returnable bottles fit in with a densely populated landscape, where people are concerned with recycling glass. German beers will always refer to the beer purity law (*Deutsches Reinheitsgebot*) of 1516, which states that beer should be made only with malt, hops, and spring water.

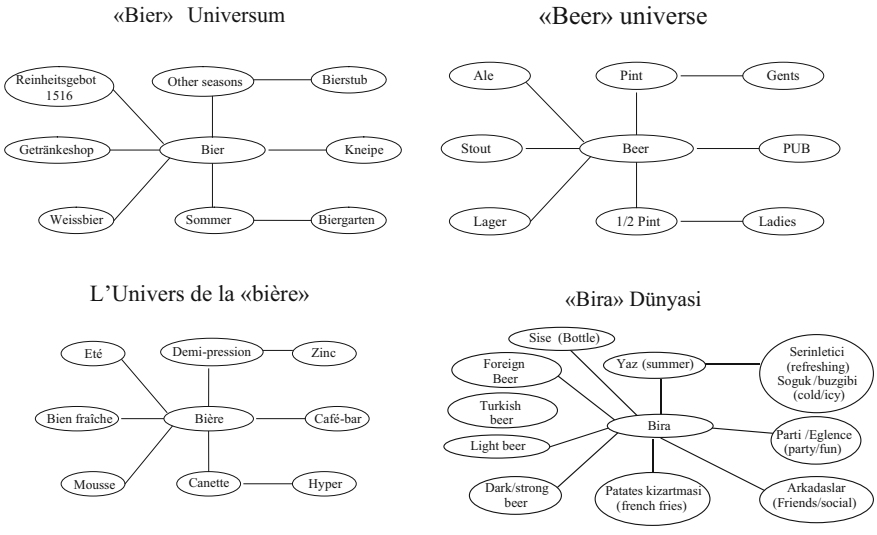

Fig. 1 Local Beer Universes (Germany, UK, France, and Turkey)

In a pub, in the British Isles, drinking a pint (0.57 L) or half pint of beer is a different experience; the pub is a comfortable place which invites people to imagine they were at home. If people are to resist drinking more than one simple pint of beer, it must be low in alcohol. Much beer can be drunk without 'getting plastered', especially if staying at the pub for quite a long period of time. Keywords are ale, stout, and lager for products, while the code is quite clear as concerns glass size, the full pint (larger than most continental European glass sizes) is for 'gentlemen', while the half-pint is generally in the hands of 'ladies'.

A pub is a totally different universe from the French *café-bar*, with its tiled floor and its rather cold interior design; in France regular customers see the place with their own sense of comfort and human warmth and do not really need to have comfort materially demonstrated in the place. They often drink beer ar the bar (*Zinc*, originally a bar covered with a mix of tin and lead, now mostly in wood or stainless steel), But irregular customers will never find in a *café-bar* the immediate comfort which they find in most British pubs. *Bière* is not a traditional French drink although there is some tradition for it in the very northern and eastern part of France. The *demi-pression* (shortly 'demi') is a small size draught beer (0.25 L); many people drink *bière* seasonally, that is in summer (*été*) as a refreshment (*bien fraîche,* chilly). More than in Germany and England, people are fascinated by beer foam (*mousse*) to the point that *bière* is colloquially termed *une mousse* ('a foam'). When drunk at home, beer is most often bought from the *Hyper* (i.e. *Hypermarché*, a very large supermarket) in packs of small (25 and 33 centiliters) beer bottles called *Canettes.*

Although alcohol consumption is a sensitive issue in Muslim-populated Turkey, beer consumption is perceived as part of social activities (*Arkadaslar*) which is central in the Turkish beer universe (*Bira Dünyasi*). Turkish people drink *bira* with friends, family, and/or colleagues during special occasions such as celebrations and parties (*Parti/Eglence*), dinners, sports events, outings, etc. Beer is generally not consumed during the day. Turkish people prefer to drink alcohol in the evening or at night. Beer consumption is strongly associated with *Yaz* (Summer). During hot summer days and summer holidays, people drink beer in *Sise* (bottle) during the day as well. Summer temperatures are high in Turkey in many regions. Therefore beer is served very cold as a refresher (*Serinletici*) or even *Soguk/buz gibi* (very cold/icy) and often with *Patates kizartmasi* (French fries). *Efes Pilsen* is the most consumed, preferred, and known local beer brand in Turkey. Although, there are more and more foreign beer brands entering the country, Turkish consumers mainly associate beer with their *Efes Pilsen*, named after the town of Ephesus in South Turkey. This brand is also popular among young people as the company organizes events and music festivals in Turkey.

4.2 A General Cognitive Map of Beer Universes

In the general cognitive map of beer universes (Fig. 2), we have grouped the findings in general categories which are common to countries, and in some cases to all countries examined adding also what is country-specific.

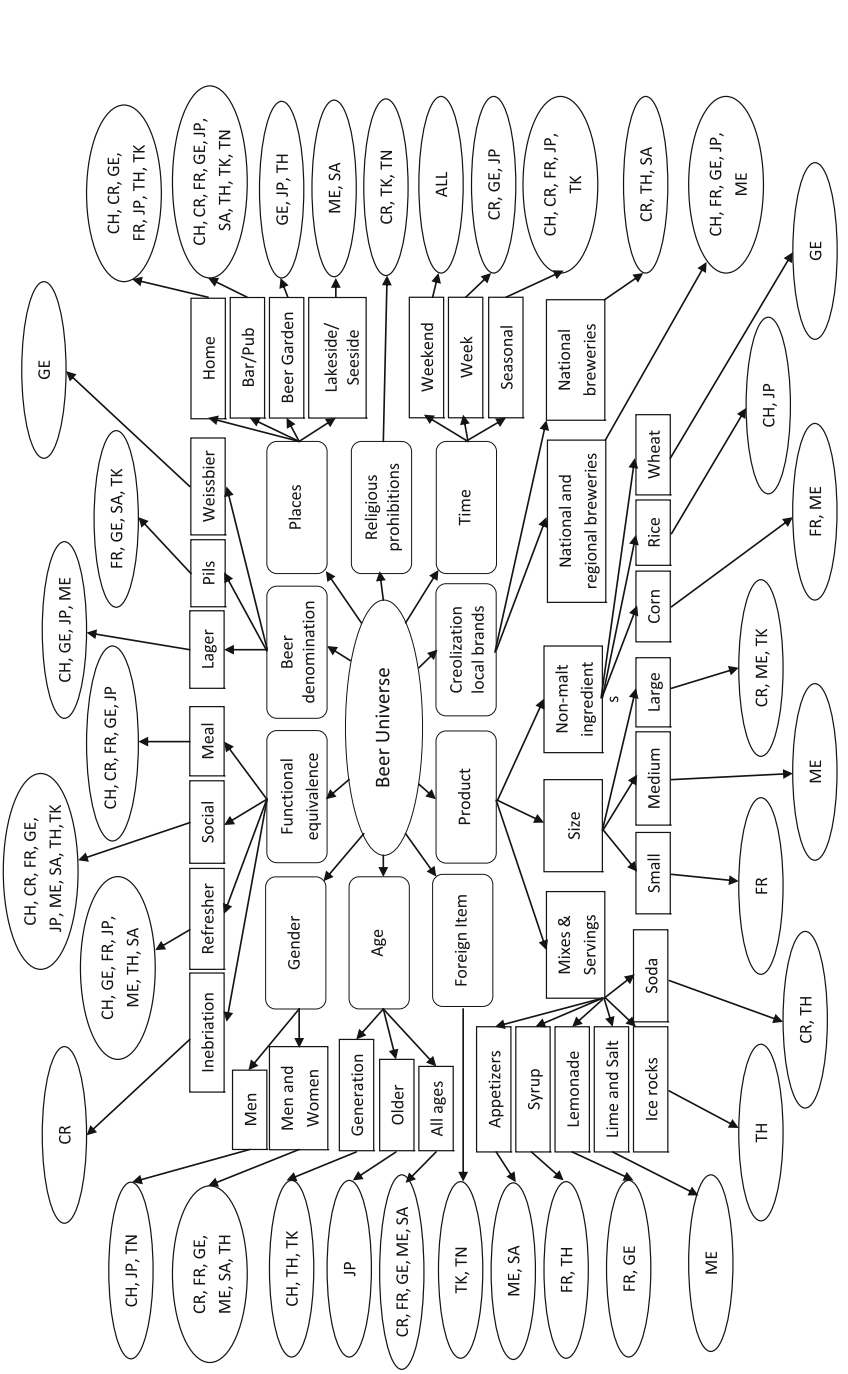

Fig. 2 Cognitive map of beer consumption experiences. *Legend: CH* China; *CR* Croatia; *FR* France; *GE* Germany; *JP* Japan; *ME* Mexico; *SA* Salvador; *TH* Thailand; *TK* Turkey; *TN* Tunisia

4.3 Beer Histories

Many cross-national similarities and differences have emerged in the historical context of beer. The first element explaining similarities and differences across local contexts is how beer, including beer manufacturing technology, has been historically developed and how consumption may be impacted by macro-political phenomena such as the almost 50 year Chinese Communist period attitude to a typically Western and European beverage. The very principle of fermented beverages is known all over the world since millenaries. What makes beer original vis-à-vis other fermented beverages (e.g. sake or mil-based beer in Africa) is that it is based on a northern European cereal, barley. There are strong beer traditions from northern and eastern France up to northern (Scandinavia) to eastern (e.g. The Czech Republic) and western (e.g. Great Britain and Ireland) Europe. The strongest written tradition for beer comes from Germany with the *anno 1516* Beer purity law (*Reinheitsgebot*) which, as explained above, requests that only barley, malt (roasted barley), hops, and pure source water be used in beer manufacturing. Some countries in our sample partly use other cereals to manufacture beer (corn/maize in France and more generally Southern Europe) or rice (in Asian countries for lower quality, cheaper beers), which is a clear infringement of the *Reinheitsgebot.* Since the 19th century, Germany has been the prominent exporter of beer manufacturing technology in most non European Countries. As a consequence, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Turkish, Mexican, and Salvadoran beers are originally German and sometimes even based on German brands. However, changing ownership in breweries, the two world wars, and the creolization of beer in some countries (especially China, Japan, Thailand, and Turkey) accounted for a decrease in the local association of beer with Germany and an increasing feeling that beer was a local beverage. For instance, a Thai informant insists that Thais are very proud of their Thai beer.

4.4 Religion and Foreignness in Muslim Contexts

Tunisia and Turkey are Muslim countries and subject to the religious prohibition of alcoholic drinks. Hence, this category can be considered as purely *emic* since it is locally specific. In Tunisia, 91.9% of women and 80.5 percent of males do not drink at all (i.e. they are life time abstainers), with 91.4% of males and 97.1 of females being abstainers over the last 12 months (WHO, 2017). In addition, according to our informants men over sixty years old do not drink alcohol at all because they become more religious. In Turkey, religious prohibitions exist but they are less binding. For instance, although 99% of the Turkish population is Muslim, 65.9 percent of male and 92.4 percent of female Turks do not drink alcohol for religious or health reasons (WHO, 2017). Additionally, due to religious prohibitions, in Turkey, drinking beer in pubs is tolerated whereas drinking beer in the streets is not.

Interestingly, in Thailand (a predominantly Buddhist context with Muslims in the South), although social or religious taboos are inexistent, alcohol sales are banned during major events such as public holidays, elections, royal birthdays and religious holidays.[2]

In Tunisia and Turkey, beer is still considered a foreign item. Indeed, beer is not perceived as a national beverage. Tunisian beer is produced exclusively by the only national beer producer named *Celtia*. *Celtia* serves the very small fraction of the Tunisian beer drinking population but essentially addresses tourists.[3] *Celtia* beer is distributed through hotels, certain restaurants but mostly in tourist locations. The Turkish beer market is dominated by *Efes Pilsen*, the major national beer producer with 80% of the market. In fact, *rakı*, an unsweetened, anise-flavored hard alcoholic drink is considered the national alcoholic beverage and is consumed more frequently than beer.[4]

4.5 *Differences Within Differences: Age, Gender, Religion, and Diaspora. Tunisia Versus Turkey*

In Tunisia, gender and age interact in the following way: Men usually drink until they are 55–60 years of age. Then they start thinking about the next world, become concerned with God and religion and stop drinking alcoholic beverages including beer. The influence of the Tunisian Diaspora is noted by our informants. A very small percentage of the Tunisian population is secular (possibly not even 5%). However, about 30% drink beer during the summer because many Tunisians come from abroad for marriages. One of our Tunisian informants adds that when he was a child (he is now about 55), people brought vans full of beer to marriages. Musicians had to be provided with beer or spirits for them to heat up the party. Nowadays, there is much less beer drunk in marriages. Some musicians and singers are abstinent. Drinking is considered a sin. Women are virtually all abstinent with the rare exception of intellectual women with foreign higher education who most often live abroad. Most other Tunisian women would not dare to touch a beer bottle, even for disposal, because, for religious people who follow the principles of Islam, it is the same sin as sitting with a beer drinker. Beer can be bought in special shops at fixed times. Bottles and cans are always hidden in the back shop, and secretly sold by the shop owner because alcohol is forbidden by law. If a policeman finds beer or spirits in a car, the driver can go to jail.

[2]Thai Pulse. Thai Beer and other Alcohol. 2009. http://www.thaipulse.com/essentials/thai-beer-alcohol/, accessed February 4, 2017.

[3]http://www.scoopergen.co.uk/scoopingabroadtunisia.htm, accessed February 4, 2017.

[4]Fethiye Days.Turkish Raki. http://www.fethiyedays.com/eng/turkish-raki/, accessed February 4, 2017.

Turkey stands in rather sharp contrast. A Turkish informant mentions "The thing is that we do not have much vocabulary and many types of beer. We just have beer, in Turkish, *Bira*. Turkish people are almost all Muslim and for them, drinking alcohol is against their religion. However, people drink beer throughout the year, mostly during the summer when it is hot. Drinking beer is not a problem if you are in a bar, a restaurant, a café, even if you are sitting outside. However, you do not walk with a beer in your hands in the street." There is little gender difference and our informant explains "It is quite equal for both men and women. For example, *Raki* is more associated with men but beer is for both genders." Contrary to Tunisia, there is no influence from Germany and the Turkish Diaspora in Germany on the beer *bira Dünyasi.* Despite a strong historical linkage between Germany and Turkey and the fact that beer is considered an ethnically German product, the Turkish Diaspora has virtually no influence on beer consumption in Turkey in terms of introducing German brands, or knowledge about beer types.

4.6 Product Ethnicity, Creolization, and Beer Business Models

In virtually all countries except Germany, that is, China, Croatia, El Salvador, France, Japan, Mexico, Thailand, Tunisia, and Turkey, a creolization process has taken place in which beer has been assigned new meanings and has been reinvested with local cultural codes. In China, local beer is preferred because the quality of local sources of water and local beer is considered fresher since they are not transported from remote locations. In Mexico, local beer is traditionally associated with a local fermented beverage called *pulque* and is clearly preferred over foreign brands. In countries where creolization has taken place, beer is perceived as a foreign product but is also considered a national beverage, beer being marketed through local symbols, brands and having a specific local taste. Local beers can be found for instance in El Salvador, where beer offers a very light, fresh and dry taste and in Thailand, where Thai beers are known to be sweeter and more bitter than foreign beers.[5] Branding is strongly related to creolization: In a country deeply attached to its king, the logo of the Thai beer brand *Chang* represents an elephant, a symbol of superiority and royalty.[6]

Beer business models differ according to countries where creolization has taken place in terms of its being regional and/or national. The beer industry in China, Mexico, Japan and Germany has large beer producers but also a multitude of smaller breweries spread across regions, each having its specialties and offering particular tastes and quality. Japanese beer is produced by 4 large national

[5]Beers Brewed in Thailand. EZ in Articles. March 2011. http://ezinearticles.com/?Beers-Brewed-in-Thailand&id=6271404, accessed February 4, 2017..

[6]iFood TV. Chang Beer. http://www.ifood.tv/network/chang_beer, accessed February 4, 2017.

breweries and by over two hundred local microbreweries[7] In Japan, locally brewed beers are called *ji-biru*.[8] As in China, Japanese people prefer to drink local beer. In Germany, local breweries comply to the *Reinheitsgebot* traditional quality code. These German breweries have a strong local presence and notoriety. Conversely in Thailand and El Salvador, the beer industry comprises large national beer producers with no extensive network of local breweries. Besides, in El Salvador, beer is considered a German beverage but beer is also perceived as a national product. For instance, beer is sold by local brands and has a distinctive local taste and quality. However, El Salvador lacks a real beer culture and deep knowledge about beer. Indeed, Salvadorans do not clearly distinguish in which circumstances beer should be drunk, in what quantity and with what dishes.

4.7 Cross-Cultural Functional Equivalence Issues

Four main functions emerge from our data: socialization, beverage with meal, refresher, and inebriation. A major commonality is the social function of beer across all contexts. Regardless of country, beer is a social beverage, consumed in social settings to facilitate bonding. However, different "drinking etiquettes" exist across countries. While in China, the quantity a person drinks depends on the closeness of relationship with others,[9] in El Salvador, people follow the principle "you drink whenever you can". A Turkish informant phrases it in the following way: "It is more a social drink, when people come together, when there is a party, a social event or a football game". It is also used as a refresher in most contexts, however with differences in seasonality, beer being more consumed as a summer drink as temperature averages differ widely between summer and winter time. Beer is taken with meals and on a daily basis only in Germany. Another commonality is that informants from all countries—irrespective of religion—agree that beer is not used to become inebriated, not only from a normative standpoint (people should not do it) but also from a positive perspective (people do not get intoxicated with beer, at least not with beer only) with the exception of Croatia. Because of the availability of cheap local beer, young Croatian males tend to drink beer in groups, mixing it sometimes with local brandy (*Medenica*) to become intoxicated. Rather, the low alcoholic content of beer is used to reduce shyness in social settings, to become relaxed and comfortable with others as mentioned by a Thai informant. With minor differences which appear in the cognitive map of beer universes, there is much functional equivalence in the beer consumption experience across countries.

[7]Microbreweries in Japan. Central Japan. http://www.centraljapan.jp/eating_details.php?id=9, accessed February 4, 2017.

[8]Japanese beer. Lars Blog. http://www.garshol.priv.no/blog/107.html, accessed February 4, 2017.

[9]China's Fresh Beer Code. Semionaut. September 2010. http://www.semionaut.net/chinas-fresh-beer-code/, accessed February 4, 2017.

However, there are significant differences in respect to other functions of beer. In China, beer is taken with meals, is consumed in social settings with friends, is a refresher when it is warm and is also a way of getting inebriated. In France and Germany, where beer has been present for centuries, beer functions differ from countries where it was later introduced, with beer being taken with meals, in social settings and as a refresher, however not as a way of becoming inebriated. Similarly, in Japan, beer is taken with many typical dishes and is consumed in social settings. Particularly, Japanese men enjoy drinking in a relaxed atmosphere after work with colleagues or friends, especially in large cities. In El Salvador and Thailand, beer is taken with local meals and all food types but the seasonal refreshing function of beer is not pertinent due to the warm climate throughout the year. In Mexico, beer is not taken with traditional meals but is definitely a refresher and consumed in social settings, for example during a football game. However, if Mexicans strive for inebriation, they will rather drink tequila or rum. In Turkey and Tunisia, beer is not taken with meals, but essentially consumed in social settings. In fact, *rakö* and wine are preferred to accompany meals.[10]

4.8 Beer as a Social Drink: Age, Gender, and Social Class as Local Determinants of Beer Consumption

Meaningful discrepancies exist between countries in respect to age. For example, in China, people between 23 and 29 years old are the most frequent beer consumers.[11] Because of the communist period, older people in China did not have the opportunity to buy beer and are consequently not used to beer. Similarly, in Thailand, beer consumption depends on generation. In France, El Salvador, Mexico and Germany, beer consumption does not depend on age. In Mexico, people start to drink at the age of 15 and they will continue to drink beer during their lifetime. Furthermore, in Turkey, beer is consumed essentially by young people whereas in Japan, beer is essentially consumed by men between 30 and 60 years of age. Young Japanese people do not drink alcohol because of their studies and discipline.

Significant differences appear across countries in respect to beer consumption across genders. In Tunisia, China, and Japan, beer is mostly consumed by men. In China, approximately 90% of beer consumers are men. Chinese women drink solely when they are attending a particular meeting, event or social setting. However, the number of Chinese female beer consumers is actually increasing. In El Salvador, the impact of gender on beer depends on social class. In the lower class

[10]Drinking in Turkey. Instanbul eats. http://istanbuleats.com/tag/turkish-beer/, accessed February 4, 2017.

[11]China Is Now The Beer Kingdom, But Are Chinese Consumers Happy With Their Brew? http://www.chinapolling.com/insights/china-is-now-the-beer-kingdom-but-are-chinese-consumers-happy-with-their-brew.html, accessed February 4, 2017.

and lower middle class, beer is perceived as a virile and masculine beverage and is therefore consumed essentially by men. In the middle and upper classes, beer is seen as a superior good and is consumed by men and women in roughly the same proportions. Social class has an impact on beer consumption frequency as higher social classes in El Salvador tend to consume beer more regularly than lower social classes. Surprisingly, even though social differences are significant, Mexicans drink the same beer brands regardless of their social class. Beer gathers people and therefore appears as a truly social beverage. In Thailand, Turkey, Mexico, Germany and France, beer is generally consumed by men and differences are minor. In Germany, the impact of gender on beer consumption is less notable than in France as French women are somehow reluctant to drink beer in public.

4.9 *The Beer Consumption Experience: Places, Times, and Mélanges*

Places where beer is consumed strongly vary across countries. In China, Japan, Thailand, France, Germany and in El Salvador, beer is commonly consumed in restaurants, in bars, at home and in nightclubs. Beer is often consumed and particularly during summer, in Germany in a *Biergarten* and in Thailand, in the so-called *lan beer*, which is the Thai equivalent of a *Biergarten*. Likewise, in Japan, beer is often consumed in "beer gardens" and also in karaoke bars. In Japan, most of the beer produced is sold through stores and vending machines whereas beer sold through bars and pubs account only for one fourth of total sales (Kissmeyer, 2011). This indicates that beer is generally more consumed at home and with friends. In El Salvador and Mexico, beer is regularly consumed on beaches and by lakes with friends. Mexicans tend to prefer high alcohol content beverages when going to nightclubs. In Tunisia, beer is consumed mostly in bars. Beer in Turkey is generally consumed at home and mostly during dinner, parties and social events such as football games.

Regardless of country, beer is usually consumed starting from noon, and especially during evenings and weekends. Nonetheless, Japan is in some way an exception as beer is on average more generally consumed during the week, specifically after dinner. One particular aspect of beer consumption in Japan is that the quality of beer can be effortlessly inferred from its price. In fact, many Japanese consumers tend to buy poor quality beer during the week and high quality beer during the weekend.[12] Beer is consumed more frequently in Germany than in all other countries [around 110 L yearly per capita versus 20 L in Tunisia]. In China, beer is a seasonal beverage as wine is consumed during winter and beer during summer. In addition, the Chinese tend to consume larger volumes of beer over a

[12]Japanese beer. Lars Blog. http://www.garshol.priv.no/blog/107.html, accessed February 4, 2017.

short period of time more easily.[13] In France, Japan, and Turkey, beer is usually drunk during summer. National Japanese brewers offer seasonal beer with alcohol content and beer packaging varying according to season.

There are notable differences in respect to preferences across countries. For example, Thailand is the only country where beer is consumed on the rocks. In Germany, beer is often mixed with lemonade whereas in France beer is mixed mostly with syrup, such as a *perroquet* (a parrot, beer with mint syrup). In Thailand, beer is mixed with sodas such as Sprite but also with syrup. In Germany, beer was originally often mixed with *Schnaps* (hard liquor). However, it appears that lemonade began to progressively be mixed with beer over the years (*Alsterwasser*). In Mexico, beer is consumed with lime juice and salt. A *michelada* is a Mexican cocktail made with beer, lime juice, and assorted sauces, spices, and peppers and served in a chilled, salt-rimmed glass. In El Salvador and Mexico, people truly enjoy drinking beer when eating appetizers such as tortilla chips or nuts, whereas in Japan beer is generally consumed with hot dinner dishes.

In Thailand, color, freshness and bitterness of beer are appreciated. In El Salvador and China, bitterness is not usually appreciated as dryness and freshness are the most important preferred attributes of beer. The Chinese do not appreciate dark beer since it reminds them of the bitterness of Chinese medicine.[14] Chinese consumers tend to buy healthier alcoholic beverages, with a lower alcohol content. Chinese manufacturers such as Gold Jiu and Han Fang Nuan Pi have developed new products that are health oriented.

4.10 Beer Attributes, Beer Denominations, and Brands, Local and Global

Despite the normative content of the German *Reinheitsgebot* (i.e. barley, malt, hops, and spring water as only ingredients), differences exist regarding the local ingredients used to brew beer. Corn is used to produce beer in Mexico and France (and in fact many other countries). In China and Japan, malt and rice are usually jointly used to brew beer. Frequent beer denominations, *Pils* (West Czech origin from the city of Plzen not far from Germany) and *Lager*, correspond to high fermentation beers. In France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, China and Tunisia, the denomination of *Lager* is used whereas in El Salvador and Turkey the denomination *Pils* is used more. In El Salvador, the largest beer producer is called *Pilsener*, while in Thailand, neither *Lager* nor *Pils* are used. The difference between low and high-fermentation is unknown to our informants. People know that beer can be dark or light but they have little sense of beer ingredients and recipes. *Weißbier* (a low-fermentation beer

[13]Premium beers reach dizzying heights'. China Daily USA. April 2012. http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2012-04/04/content_14976454.htm, accessed February 4,2017.

[14]If You Have a Beer in China, Thank a Pole. eChinaCities. July 2011. http://www.echinacities.com/expat-corner/if-you-have-a-beer-in-china-thank-a-pole.html, accessed Fevruary 4, 2017.

made with wheat, popular in Germany and Belgium as *bière blanche*) is an appreciated exception to the *Reinheitsgebot*. However, none of our informants has expert knowledge about beer ingredients, or beer type (e.g. in England pale and stout). There is little knowledge of different varieties of beer, so that beer attributes and beer denominations appear relatively unimportant for consumers with the probable exception of countries with a strong beer culture (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Ireland, and the UK).

People rely much more on brands than on beer type, although it is likely that there is a strong relationship between beer brands and beer types (e.g. Guinness stout, Beck Pils, etc.) Some beer-drinking countries have creolized beer though the development of strong local brands. Striking examples of this process are China, Japan, Turkey, and Thailand. The four famous Thai beers share brand names of powerful, quick, male, and wild animals such as a dragon (*Singha*), an elephant (*Chan*), a leopard (*Leo*), and a stallion (*Archa*), which are symbolically meaningful.

4.11 Packaging and Serving Sizes

Different local traditions exist regarding the packaging of beer, whether in terms of size or material (i.e. glass bottle, aluminum can, or draught beer from tap). There is a wide variety in this respect, glass and draught beer being more popular than aluminum cans in most countries. While Germans generally drink 50 cl beer bottles, in Turkey, beer can be drunk in 75 cl bottles called "*sise*". In Mexico, beer can be bought in 325 ml bottles called "medias" but certain brands, such as Corona and Victoria sell beer in bottles of 925 ml. French beer can also be found in small cans or bottles called "*canettes*", which include 25 cl. For serving sizes, the rule is to adjust to local customs.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical Implications

A classic distinction, *emic* versus *etic* cross-cultural research, was originated by Sapir and further developed by Pike. The *emic* approach holds that attitudinal or behavioural phenomena are expressed in a unique way in each culture. Taken to its extreme, this approach states that no comparisons are possible. The *etic* approach, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with identifying universals. The difference arises from linguistics where phonetic is universal and depicts universal sounds which are common to several languages, and phonemic stresses unique sound patterns in languages. In general, research approaches and instruments adapted to each national culture (the *emic* approach of which TD is clearly part) provide data with greater internal validity than tests applicable to several cultures (the *etic*

approach, or 'culture-free tests'). But it is at the expense of cross-national comparability and external validity: results are not transposable to other cultural contexts. This is why many researchers try to establish cross-national or cross-cultural equivalence in a way which is inspired by the *etic* rather than the *emic* perspective.

The *emic/etic* divide is, however, a simplified perspective. Most *etic*-oriented researchers still look for differences, but these differences are in degree, while *emic* researchers look for differences in nature. Typical questions for *etic*-oriented researchers are: Is it scalable? Can the constructs be operationalised? Are the differences across countries/cultures measurable on common conceptual dimensions? Over time, there is a distinct call in favour of adopting "Hybrid" *emic-etic* approaches to cross-national/cultural comparisons (He & van de Vijver, 2015). However, the ordering of approaches is important. The precedence of *etic* makes it almost impossible to later develop an *emic* approach and tends to hide meaningful differences. The right ordering is to start with an *emic* followed by an *etic* approach when CTD is facilitated by CM. Exploratory qualitative findings can be validated by methods adapted to the validation of qualitative research findings in a cross-national/cultural setting (Polsa, 2007) and/or by more traditional methods including questionnaire and survey research. As emphasized above researchers should start with the search for differences if they want to later assess meaningful similarities.

This chapter, in line with Usunier and Sbizzera (2013), shows that there are a lot of commonalities across language/country contexts as well as many significant differences. This approach is in no way in contradiction with either a global marketing strategy or a quantitative research approach.

5.2 *Managerial Applications*

Going back to Jain (1989), international marketing experts have predominantly suggested that local marketing decisions should take into account necessary local adaptation. However, international marketing managerial actions can be just the opposite and are too often made on a dichotomous basis: they are either standardized or fully adapted. A frequent managerial choice is *ex ante* standardization and *ex post* adaptation when faced with marketing policy failures in local environments. A great managerial advantage of the CTD is that it circumvents the risk of *ex post* blunders and enables companies to design *ex ante* pragmatic trade-offs between standardization and adaptation. The major strength of this framework is its capacity to provide simple and concise insights by using language to analyze cross-national/cultural differences and associate experiences with people, objects, senses, feelings and local products/brands.

Cognitive maps allow the identification of meaningful similarities but also meaningful differences associated with particular consumption experiences and product categories. Although qualitative differences and associations may be the combination of different factors such as psychographics, demographics, beliefs and

attitudes, they have a clear influence on customer behavior and more specifically on purchase decisions. Hence, cognitive maps can be used as an input for local marketing actions to unveil consumption motivations and hindrances. *CTD* insights can be used to determine the do's and don'ts in local marketing implementation.

Elaborating such instruments and the accompanying text is not a huge investment in terms of market research. It is in the best interest of companies marketing globally to gain a sense of how particular consumption experiences are understood in a variety of contexts. Local experiences in several different languages and countries in different areas of the world can be surveyed, compared, and organized into cognitive maps. These maps can serve as a basis for evaluating cross-national/linguistic differences in other local markets not yet covered, and which are similar in some way to some of the language/country areas already covered. This allows quicker insights into new local marketplaces as well as a progressive enrichment of cognitive maps.

As cognitive maps can be regularly updated, the CTD approach allows the identification of possible trends and patterns across and within countries, since local preferences, experiences, cultural tastes and perceptions are not static and since they significantly evolve over time in a globalizing world.

The CTD framework allows a fair degree of flexibility in terms of market research studies as many differences can be simultaneously studied across countries and market knowledge can be transferred horizontally rather than vertically within the global marketing organization. CTD can also exclusively emphasize differences. For example, when studying local cues, stories and culture-bound local etiquettes related to a shared consumption experience, which can serve as a basis for advertising and branding.

5.3 Limitations

For CTD to be a valid methodology there should be sufficient built-in validity checks so that analysts' interpretations do not vary considerably in the face of data/information gathered. Requiring feedback from informants is a first validity check. In this study, there are only two informants per country/culture, which is certainly not enough, even if it is comparable with other studies using CM for consumer behaviour (e.g. 15 informants for Christensen & Olson, 2002). Five to ten informants per country would seem to be a more satisfactory number. However, due do the objective of the study (i.e. to explain and illustrate the process by which TD can be combined with CM) and its exploratory nature, interpretive activity is acceptable, especially if it is followed by more traditional data collection methods (e.g. questionnaire survey) that serve as confirmation and a validity check.

We have three arguments in favor of engaging in CTD interpretation. First, it is based on translation/semantic activities and on expert feedback information by, and later checked with, native informants. Second, cognitive maps and their surrounding textual material are not static. They can be constantly improved when new

languages and countries are introduced, discussed and updated. Third, significant insights derived from this method can be tested in a more traditional and applied manner, by testing ad copy or brand names, etc., before deciding to launch a costly marketing action. The CTD framework is designed to provide insights into local consumer experience and thinking strategically across local markets rather than as a direct input into marketing decisions.

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