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The meanings of branded products: A cross-national scale development and meaning assessment

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ABSTRACT

This research develops a scale to assess branded product meanings, including quality, values, personal identity, and traditions. Using data gathered in the U.S. and three emerging markets (Romania, Ukraine, and Russia), we demonstrate a valid and reliable measure that exhibits cross-national measurement invariance. Our findings document quality is the most important branded product meaning across countries; identity-related and traditions-related meanings are more important in the U.S. than the emerging markets. We discuss these findings, provide important managerial implications, and offer future research opportunities related to branding and measurement.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the importance of branded products has been well documented both by academics (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Fournier, 1998; Holt, 2004; Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004; Keller, 2003) and by practitioners (Gobé, 2001; Schmitt, 1999). The majority of the discourse related to brands has focused upon specific brands such as Nike, Marlboro, or Harley Davidson. Several authors (e.g., Coulter, Price, & Feick, 2003; Fournier, 1998), however, have discussed the more general concept of the involvement of consumers with branded products. Firms develop brands to differentiate their products, and brands serve as resources for consumers. Branded products, generally, and individual brands, specifically, are distinguished by “the sum total of consumers’ perceptions and feelings about the product’s attributes and how they perform, about the brand name and what it stands for, and about the company associated with the brand” (Keller, 2003, 4).

Branding was popularized in the U.S. in the mid to late 1800s by Procter and Gamble, H. J. Heinz, and Coca Cola. Since the early 1900s, U.S. consumers have been well acquainted with the concept of branded products. In contrast to U.S. consumers, consumers in transitioning economies with developing consumer cultures (e.g., Russia and the former Soviet bloc, China, and Africa) have only recently been exposed to a multitude of branded products (Batra, 1999; Coulter et al., 2003; Verdery, 1996). Consumers in transitioning economies such as these are just now beginning to learn about products and brands, to develop attitudes related to marketplace globalization, and, more generally, to learn about being consumers (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra,

2006; Ger, Belk, & Lascu, 1993; Kligman, 1996; Steenkamp & Burgess, 2002; Tavassoli, Block, Schmitt, & Holbrook, 1993; Zhou, Su, & Bao, 2002). Of particular interest to managers of multinational firms are the growing Web-savvy global youth culture and the global youth segment which numbers in the hundreds of millions (Hamm, 2007). These young, typically urban, consumers drive brand growth and expansion in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe and Russia (Eastern Europe: Europe’s advertising hotspots, 2007, July 13).

The overarching emphasis of our research has been to better understand branded product meanings cross-nationally. In order to identify meanings of branded products, this study took an adapted etic approach (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Douglas & Craig, 2006) that drew both from brand literature that was conducted in developed and emerging markets as well as from the depth interviews that are reported herein. A careful and systematic review of existing literature yielded three observations. First, researchers identified functional and symbolic branded product meanings (Biel, 1997). Our review revealed seven dominant meanings including: quality as associated with risk reduction (Erdem, Swait, & Louviere, 2002; Keller, 2003; Tsai, 2005), as well as brands as signals of social status (Bhat & Reddy, 1998; Coulter et al., 2003), as reflective of personality (Aaker, 1997, 1999; Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001; Supphellen & Gronhaug, 2003), as a mechanism for group identity and association with other brand users (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), as associated with personal values (Gelb & Sorescu, 2000; Klein, 2002; Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1996; Supphellen & Gronhaug, 2003), as linked to both family traditions (Fournier, 1998; Holbrook & Schindler, 1994; Moore, Wilkie, & Lutz, 2002) and national/ethnic heritage (Deshpande, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986; Donthu & Cherian, 1994; Kaynak & Kara, 1998). Second, a majority of studies have examined only one

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meaning (e.g., brand identity or brand community). Two recent exceptions include Holt et al. (2004), whose work included twelve countries, with a focus on explaining global brand preferences, and Tsai (2005) who offers a comprehensive model of brand value, including assessment of the symbolic, affective, and trade-off values associated with brands. Third, the majority of the brand work has been conducted in the U.S. and highly industrialized countries (for exceptions, see Aaker et al., 2001; Holt et al., 2004).

The key objectives of our research, therefore, are to examine relationships between the seven observed branded product meanings, to assess their interconnectedness, and to develop, systematically, a reliable and valid scale of branded product meanings. A second agenda of this work is to investigate these meanings for the young adult segment in both the developed U.S. market as well as in the emerging markets of Romania, Ukraine, and Russia. Our analyses indicate that the seven observed meanings are better conceptualized as four meanings: quality, personal identity (including self-identity, group-identity, and social status), values, and traditions (including family traditions and national traditions). As such, our scale exhibits cross-national configural, metric, and scalar measurement invariance (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998) for each of the four countries and for the pooled data. Thus, we are able to compare and contrast meanings across countries that have historically varied in their availability of branded products. Our research provides insight into the young adult market's branded product meanings and points to further opportunities to investigate branded product meanings in highly industrialized countries as well as in emerging markets (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006).

2. The meanings of branded products

As noted in the introduction, a careful review of the literature on brands indicates that researchers have examined a variety of branded product meanings, but have not considered the relational structure of the meanings or whether these individually conceptualized meanings were non-overlapping. Our efforts focused upon the seven dominant meanings that have been previously examined in the relevant literature, rather than upon a more exhaustive listing of meanings. Specifically, from past research, we reviewed branded product meanings as related to: quality, social status, self-identity, group-identity, values, family traditions, and national traditions. Table 1 provides a summary of the literature and gives real world examples that relate to each meaning.

Quality and dependability of branded products have been key selling features over time, and quality is a powerful signal to consumers (Holt et al., 2004). From the firm perspective, many companies have built successful brands on quality associations (Hellofs & Jacobson, 1999). For example, Toyota claims "rock solid quality and the edge in hybrid cars" and Dell focuses upon low prices and fast delivery that "leaves competitors in the dust" ("The 100 Top Brands," 2004). From the consumer perspective, numerous researchers, including Price and Dawar (2002), Jacoby, Olson, and Haddock (1971), Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden (2003), Tsai (2005), and Warlop, Ratneshwar, and van Osselaer (2005), have demonstrated that consumers in industrialized countries associate branded products with higher quality. Moreover, in the developing countries of India and Central Europe, quality is an important signal; consumers often prefer non-local (typically Western) brands because such brands are perceived as being of higher quality (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Feick, Coulter, & Price, 1995). Thus, across countries, quality appears to be an important component of the branded product meaning.

For firms, an important feature of brands is their ability to differentiate themselves among otherwise relatively homogeneous products; in short, brands create unique identities for a firm's products in the eyes of its consumers (Keller, 2003). Since Levy (1959) first advanced the idea that branded products are symbols of the self, researchers have discussed how consumers integrate and use the meanings associated with branded

products to communicate aspects of their identity (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Kleine, Schultz-Kleine, & Kernan, 1992; Richins, 1994). As symbols, brands add to and/or reinforce the attitudes of consumers toward themselves (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; McCracken, 1988; Reed, 2004). Aaker (1997), examining forty U.S. brands, introduced the concept of brand personality characteristics. She and her colleagues (Aaker et al., 2001) found that brand personalities are useful commercial icons that represent both culturally specific and culturally shared beliefs, thus underscoring complex relationships between individuals and cultures (the U.S., Spain, and Japan). In the developing economies of Hungary and Romania, Coulter et al. (2003) report that women are beginning to associate different brands with different meanings (e.g., Herbaria is natural, Dr. Juga is sophisticated).

Branded products are also a source of group-identity, because they can provide an association with other users/owners of a particular brand. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, 412) have defined a brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." U.S. brand communities, such as ones affiliated with Ford Bronco, Macintosh, and Saab, have a shared consciousness, rituals, traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. In studying U.S. Jeep and Harley-Davidson brand communities, McAlexander et al. (2002) both highlighted the importance of treating geo-temporal contexts of communities as dynamic and demonstrated the role of marketers in enhancing consumer experiences in these communities. Recent research that investigated a Harley-Davidson community documented the importance of the group for multiple aspects of social identity (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). There is, however, little evidence to date of companies making concerted efforts to build these types of brand communities in developing countries.

Branded products have meanings (and prices) that connote status. On the one hand, companies link their brands to positions of higher status. For example, the Cadillac "break through" campaign opens the world of luxury to consumers (Guyer, 2006). On the other hand, consumers purchase high-status brands to enhance and communicate their own social status. Research on Western markets has examined conspicuous consumption as related to branded products as status symbols (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Furthermore, several studies indicate that consumers in developing countries prefer Western brands for the reason that such brands serve as status symbols (Batra et al., 2000; Coulter et al., 2003).

Many multinational companies attempt to tie their brands to the values, interests, and concerns of consumers. Avon, for example, is committed to numerous women's issues, including Avon Foundation Breast Cancer Crusade; McDonald's, similarly, supports The Ronald McDonald House Charities. Likewise, the "pro-green" trend has been reincarnated and refined in the past few years (Clow & Baack, 2007). In fact, corporate philanthropy and the values attached to the company's image have become an important competitive advantage (Barbaro, 2006). Gap, Apple, and Motorola are offering limited-edition red-colored products to promote awareness of AIDS through the AIDS charity (Product) RED. These companies believe charity work is no longer an option, but a requirement in the present-day marketplace. Strategic cause-related marketing campaigns have been linked to increased brand loyalty, purchase intentions, and more positive attitudes toward the company and the brand (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Nan & Heo, 2007; Van den Brink, Odekerken-Schroder, & Pauwels, 2006). Although Holt et al. (2004), in a multinational study, report the importance and expectation of a global brand to be socially responsible, this aspect of corporate identity has not been a focus of marketing communications in emerging markets.

Many companies promote brands in the context of the family; an example of this type of promotion is the "Choosey mothers choose Jif" campaign. Research of U.S. consumers documents that brands carry meanings related to family use and traditions (Childers & Rao, 1992; Fournier, 1998; Moore et al., 2002; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Some familial ties to brands result merely from exposure; others result from a family's strong attachments to particular brands. Research has

Table 1
Summary of branded product meanings literature and real-life illustrations

Branded product meaning	Academic research		Company-brand illustrations
	Citation	Country of investigation	
Quality	Batra et al. (2000) Feick et al. (1995) Hellofs and Jacobson (1999) Holt et al. (2004)	USA, India Hungary USA USA, UK, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Poland, South Africa, Turkey	<p>“Fast shedding its image as a cheap automaker. In the latest J.D. Power quality survey of new car owners, Hyundai was No.3, behind Porsche and Lexus.” (The top 100 brands, 2006)</p> <p>“In addition to building durable equipment, Caterpillar builds customer loyalty by making service calls no matter how tough or remote the terrain.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p> <p>“Having improved the quality and reliability of its cars, Hyundai is pushing to go upscale by introducing premium models.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p> <p>“Quality concerns have increased overall, but Toyota's reliability and its hybrid strategy are leaving auto rivals trailing.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p>
	Price and Dawar (2002) Steenkamp et al. (2003) Tsai (2005)	USA USA, Korea USA	
Self-Identity	Aaker (1997) Aaker et al. (2001) Belk (1988) Coulter et al. (2003) Escalas and Bettman (2005) Escalas and Bettman (2003) Reed (2004)	USA USA, Spain, Japan USA Hungary, Romania USA USA USA	<p>“Anti-Establishment Italian fashionista Miuccia Prada keeps testing the frontiers of taste: Edgy clothing design, edgier store architecture.” (The top 100 brands, 2006)</p> <p>“A preeminent financial-services brand among high-end customers, the company is recasting itself as hip to broaden its appeal to a younger set.” (American Express, The top 100 brands, 2006). “BMW continues to churn out hot models that buyers love to drive and Japanese automakers can't seem to replicate.” (The top 100 brands, 2006)</p> <p>“Can you say iPhone? From innovative products to memorable ads, few companies know how to tug the heartstrings of digital consumers the way Apple does.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p>
	Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003)	Russia	
Group-Identity	Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) McAlexander et al. (2002) Muniz and O'Guinn (2001)	USA USA USA	<p>Harley-Davidson, MacIntosh, Saab “Starbucks brings in customers with lifestyle marketing, pushing music, books, and lunch food to get them to stick around.” (The top 100 brands, 2006)</p> <p>“The “You & Us” brand campaign attracted high-net-worth individuals to its wealth-management business. But the departure of the CEO and subprime woes could hurt this year.” (UBS, The top 100 brands, 2007)</p>
Values	Gupta and Pirsch (2006) Holt et al. (2004)	USA USA, UK, Brazil, China, Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Poland, South Africa, Turkey	<p>Avon Foundation Breast Cancer Crusade; McDonald's House Charities; (Product)Red campaign by Gap, Apple, and Motorola to promote awareness of AIDS and relieve AIDS efforts in Africa. “The brand Edison built has extended its reach from ovens to credit cards, and the “Ecomagination” push is making GE look like a protector of the planet.” (The top 100 brands, 2006)</p> <p>“Small, fuel-efficient cars and big investments in hybrids, “clean” diesels, and other green technologies make Honda a darling of the environmentalists.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p> <p>“Having pledged not to market sugary foods to kids under 12, Kellogg is using its innovation machine to turn out more nutritious products.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p>
	Nan and Heo (2007) Van den Brink et al. (2006)	USA Western Europe	
Family traditions	Childers and Rao (1992) Fournier (1998) Moore et al. (2002) Olsen (1995) Wallendorf and Arnould (1991)	USA, Thailand USA USA USA USA	<p>“Long a brand-management model, Harley is looking to Generation X and Y before baby boomers get too old to mount up.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p> <p>“Kraft has something in the pantry of 199 out of every 200 homes in America. Problem is, many of these brands – think Jell-o or Velveeta – are old and tired.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p> <p>“The cereal maker is striking an effective balance between healthy products like Special K and sugary treats like Pop Tarts to attract both moms and kids.” (The top 100 brands, 2006)</p>
National traditions	Agrawal and Kamakura (1999) Askegaard et al. (2005) Deshpande et al. (1986) Donthu and Cherian (1994)	USA Denmark USA USA	<p>“Swedish for style, Ikea has made design affordable for the masses.” (IKEA, The top 100 brands, 2007)</p> <p>“Playing on its trendsetting image in Italian-chic bags, shoes, and clothing, Prada is pushing the frontier of brand extension with the LG Prada phone.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p> <p>“On its 40th anniversary, Ralph Lauren's iconic American fashion brand is looking to expand its reach in emerging markets.” (The top 100 brands, 2007)</p>
	Hirschman (1982) Kaynak and Kara (1998) Penaloza (1994)	USA Azerbaijan USA	

demonstrated that intergenerational influence has a significant effect both on product and brand level choices (Moore et al., 2002) and on brand loyalty (Langer, 1997). Olsen (1995), exploring intergenerational influences and feelings of nostalgia in families with a recent history of immigration, reported that family brands from home countries helped new immigrants cope with homesickness and overcome insecurity at critical moments in their lives. Brands, however, only become a part of family traditions if they are passed through generations. Consequently, in emerging consumer cultures, where brands have been introduced quite recently, consumers have not had the opportunity to develop (long-term) family traditions with branded products. Nevertheless, some former communist-block countries, such as Hungary and East Germany, have recently experienced a revival of “old” brands from the 1970s that provided valuable connections to local history and family traditions (Schweizer, 2006).

Firms and consumers also link brands to ethnic and national traditions (Askegaard, Arnould, & Kjeldgaard, 2005; Hirschman, 1982; Penalzoa, 1994). Research has identified strength of ethnic identification as a key predictor of Hispanic-Americans' use of Spanish-speaking media, brand loyalty, and preferences for ethnic brands (Deshpande et al., 1986). Strength of ethnic identification has also been shown to affect Hispanic-American's preference for Hispanic vendors and loyalty to brands that emphasize Hispanic heritage (Donthu & Cherian, 1994). Other researchers (Askegaard et al., 2005; Penalzoa, 1994) have noted the challenges of acculturation that face consumers as they assimilate and integrate their “home” with a new culture and its products and brands. Thus, it is important to consider possible connections between an individual's national heritage and a brand's country-of-origin. Research in the U.S. and in developing economies has shown that consumers tend to use both country-of-origin and brand names in making judgments about the quality of various products and brands (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). Coulter et al. (2003) have discussed the complexities of identity related to new global brands, domestic brands, and unbranded goods in Central Europe, noting the tensions between a duality of capitalist and communist economic models. Similarly, Weiss (2003) has acknowledged the nationalist identification struggles of Central Europeans as their countries are transitioning to democracy; the anti-capitalist views are strongly associated with nationalism and ethnic intolerance. Consumers in emerging consumer cultures, similar to consumers coming from the perspectives of their familial traditions, have not had the opportunity to develop (long-term) national traditions with branded products. In fact, the novelty of a branded product concept may symbolize a break away from traditions.

3. Development of the branded product meanings scale

3.1. Study participants: the global youth segment

Multinational firms are increasingly interested in the global youth market (Hamm, 2007), which is also an appropriate cohort for our research. We defined our unit of analysis as the young adult segment, representative of global youth. Douglas and Craig (1997) argue that

the global youth “culti-unit” exhibits a high degree of homogeneity, because of their high exposure to global telecommunications and technologies which can be studied and compared with minimal extraneous biases across multiple cultural sites. In addition, this market segment is more likely to share common interests, identify with certain symbols, and establish similar relationships with brands than their older countrymen, who are not as exposed to or influenced by the global culture (Gidley, 2002; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006).

All of our study participants (from the U.S., Ukraine, Romania, and Russia) ranged in age from 18 to 29 and were college educated. Research suggests that young consumers in the developing countries of Ukraine, Romania, and Russia are familiar with the concept of branded products within their local contexts, as current market growth in these countries is largely attributed to increasing consumption patterns by young urban dwellers, who respond well to brands and their image appeals (Eastern Europe: Europe's advertising hotspots, 2007, July 13). Moreover, because global youth, across developed and developing countries, have limited financial resources, the possibility of this study's results being impacted by an income bias is minimized (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Coulter et al., 2003; Coulter, Price, Feick, & Micu, 2005).

3.2. Item generation and refinement

An initial set of fifty-six items was generated both from a review of the related literature on branded product meanings and through exploratory interviews conducted in the U.S., Ukraine, and Romania. The exploratory interviews included twenty-four informants. Four male and four female informants, ages twenty to twenty-nine were selected from each of the three countries. Our objective was both to better understand the nature and range of meanings of branded products across countries and to identify words and phrases that could be used to develop equivalent measures of each brand meaning (Steenkamp & Hofstede, 2002). Four researchers (two from the U.S., and one from Ukraine and one from Romania) developed a protocol that ensured that the translation of the questions and prompts were consistent across the English, Russian (the language of Russia and Eastern Ukraine), and Romanian languages. The protocol began with a warm-up in which informants talked about their favorite brand(s) in seven different product categories (i.e., soft drinks, beer, clothing, electronic products, cosmetics/personal care product, chocolate, and automobiles). The warm-up questions allowed various meanings to emerge unprompted and also served to help informants, particularly in the developing countries, to distinguish between the terms “product” and “brand.” We then provided an opportunity for the informants to discuss brand meanings. Subsequently, we explored specific meanings related to quality, status, self-identity, group-identity, values, family traditions, and national traditions. The in-depth interview format enabled us to uncover the nuanced character of meanings rather than imposing an existing array of brand meanings. The interviews were conducted in the homes of informants and lasted between 45 and 70 min; they were audio-taped, translated, and transcribed.

On the basis of the twenty-four in-depth interviews, extant literature, and our initial brainstorming on issues of content and

Table 2
U.S. pre-test results for seven meanings of branded products

Branded product meaning	Number of items	Outcome of initial PCA on items	Minimum factor loading for inclusion in 5-item PCA	Percent of variance explained in PCA – 1 factor solution with 5 items	Cronbach's α for 5-item scale
Quality	6	2 factors	.77	69%	.89
Self-identity	9	1 factor	.82	77%	.92
Group-identity	10	1 factor	.85	78%	.93
Status	7	1 factor	.80	79%	.93
Personal values	9	2 factors	.75	72%	.90
Family traditions	9	2 factors	.65	68%	.88
National traditions	6	2 factors	.58	59%	.82

Note: $n = 120$.

translation, we developed items (56) to assess branded products as signals of quality (6), self-identity (9), group-identity (10), status (7), personal values (9), family traditions (9), and national traditions (6). Our items focused on branded products, rather than on specific brand names. We pre-tested the items in the U.S. at one northeastern and at one mid-western university. The items were randomly ordered in a survey format, with undergraduate consumer behavior students ($n=120$) assessing each item on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree).

Our objective was to identify a parsimonious set of items to assess each branded product meaning. For each set of branded meaning items, we: 1) conducted a principal component analysis (PCA) of the items in order to determine the number of factors and the factor loadings for each item, 2) conducted a PCA on the five items with the highest loadings from the initial PCA, and 3) conducted a reliability analysis to determine the internal consistency of the five items retained for each meaning. We illustrate our procedures using the quality items: 1) the PCA of the original six items resulted in a two-factor solution, with five items loading on the first factor and factor loadings of at least .77, 2) the PCA on the five items resulted in a one-factor solution, explaining 69.2 percent of variance, and 3) the Cronbach's α for the five quality items was .89. The results for each branded product meaning are reported in Table 2. The Cronbach's α for the branded product meanings ranged from .82 for national traditions to .93 for group-identity and status. The five items retained for each dimension are included in Appendix A.

3.3. Survey administration and procedures in U.S., Romania, Ukraine, and Russia

In order to develop a cross-nationally valid scale that would also enable us to examine branded product meanings between countries, we engaged in data collections in the U.S., Romania, Ukraine, and Russia. The five items for each of the seven branded product meanings that we retained from the pre-test were first translated into Romanian and Russian (the language spoken in Eastern Ukraine and Russia) by native speakers and then back-translated by different native speakers. The initial translators and the two American co-authors reviewed the wording of the items and made minor modifications to match the meanings in English, Romanian, and Russian. Within the questionnaire, the thirty-five items were presented in five sets, with one item from each of the seven possible meanings (i.e., quality, status, self-identity, group-identity, personal values, family traditions, and national traditions). The questionnaire also included both questions of awareness and use of specific brand name products as well as demographic questions. The order and structure of the questionnaire were identical in the four countries.

Prior to beginning the survey, participants were presented with an information sheet about the study that guaranteed their anonymity and explained the goals of the study. The information sheet provided participants with a definition of brands and gave two examples of what was meant by the terms "product" and "brand." One example was employed in each of the four countries and related to a high-end product (cars) and foreign brand (Volkswagen); the second example used a less expensive product (chocolate) and provided examples of domestic brands in the four countries. By defining the term "brand" and providing examples, clarification of the product-brand distinction was ensured, which might have otherwise been an issue for some of the Romanian, Ukrainian, or Russian participants. By providing examples of both high- and low-end products as well as both foreign and domestic brands, we primed participants' memory references to a variety of product categories and brands. Participants were recruited from universities in the northeastern and mid-western U.S. ($n=218$; $M_{\text{age}}=21.01$, $SD_{\text{age}}=1.74$), Timisoara, Romania ($n=287$; $M_{\text{age}}=19.93$, $SD_{\text{age}}=1.25$), Kharkiv, Ukraine ($n=464$; $M_{\text{age}}=18.56$, $SD_{\text{age}}=1.10$), and Vladivostok, Russia ($n=292$; $M_{\text{age}}=19.64$, $SD_{\text{age}}=2.62$). Participants in

the U.S. had easy access to the Internet and completed the survey online; participants in Romania, Ukraine, and Russia completed pencil-and-paper questionnaires. Recent research documents that the difference in using online questionnaires and pencil-and-paper questionnaires does not result in differences in response styles (de Jong, Steenkamp, Fox, & Baumgartner, 2008).

3.4. Confirmatory factor analysis and cross-national measurement invariance

The goal of the present study was to test and to refine existing perspectives on the meanings of branded products. Specifically, using an adapted etic approach (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Douglas & Craig, 2006), we observed seven uniquely identifiable branded product meanings and developed scale items from the literature and our depth interviews. In order to examine the structure of these meanings, we considered exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analyses (CFA), both of which are used to represent the structure of correlations among measured variables using a small set of latent variables. Research in several domains indicates that CFA is to be preferred when there is a sufficient theoretical and empirical basis for data specification (DiStefano & Hess, 2005; Fabrigar, Wegener, McCallum, & Strahan, 1999; Floyd & Widaman, 1995; Gerbing & Hamilton, 1996). Moreover, CFA, specifically multi-group CFA, is particularly appropriate given our need to develop a measure that would be tested and compared across multiple countries. Furthermore CFA provided us with necessary measures of invariance to test such comparability (Kline, 1998; Sharma & Weathers, 2003; Singh, 1995; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998, 2000). Thus, we relied on confirmatory factor analyses in our subsequent scale development.¹

3.5. Assessing the structure of branded product meanings

We used AMOS 7.0 to conduct multi-group CFA with seven derived latent factors, i.e., quality, self-identity, group-identity, status, values, family traditions, and national traditions. The fit of the model (χ^2/df ratio=3.14, CFI=.84, TLI=.83, RMSEA<.03, Hoelter=843 at $p=.05$) was acceptable for large-sample complex models involving multi-country samples (Cote, Netemeyer, & Bentler, 2001).² Others, however, might argue that the CFI and TLI are below acceptable standards (Kline, 1998). In addition, correlations between self-identity, group-identity, and status were in the .82–.93 range and correlations between family traditions and national traditions were in the .72–.98 range across samples, calling into question the discriminant validity of these concepts (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Relatively high correlations between self-identity, group-identity, and status were evident across countries indicating that these three meanings represent a broader construct of personal identity. Indeed, personality characteristics, socio-cultural

¹ An EFA, using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation on the pooled sample, resulted in seven factors, explaining 57% of variance. PCA's on individual country samples yielded between five and seven factors and explained between 61% and 68% of variance. An examination of the factor loadings showed that items measuring family and national traditions either loaded together or had high primary loadings and yielded secondary loadings greater than .4 on the corresponding factor. Items measuring status, self-identity, and group-identity yielded similar cross-loadings. These analyses portend that the conceptualization of seven meanings was problematic.

² Because of our large sample ($n=1261$), we report the Hoelter Critical N index as an additional measure of model fit for each of our analyses. The Hoelter index is computed when χ^2 is statistically significant, and indicates the sample size at which χ^2 would correspond to $p=.05$. In our case, the Hoelter index means that the χ^2 for our model would be non-significant (at $p=.05$) with a sample size of 843. This indicates that, given our sample size of 1261, we have a well fitting model. The recommended value is 200 or above; values of less than 75 indicate poor-fitting models (Kenny, 2008).

Table 3
Four-factor model: correlations between factors by country

	Quality	Personal identity	Values	Traditions
<i>USA (n=218)</i>				
Quality	.86			
Personal identity	.39	.94		
Values	.38	.47	.78	
Traditions	.10	.48	.61	.86
<i>Romania (n=287)</i>				
Quality	.80			
Personal identity	.51	.92		
Values	.67	.56	.78	
Traditions	.22	.54	.29	.87
<i>Ukraine (n=464)</i>				
Quality	.74			
Personal identity	.33	.89		
Values	.53	.57	.65	
Traditions	-.02	.55	.28	.82
<i>Russia (n=292)</i>				
Quality	.72			
Personal identity	.31	.91		
Values	.45	.67	.66	
Traditions	-.03	.55	.56	.85
<i>Pooled data (n=1261)</i>				
Quality	.76			
Personal identity	.39	.91		
Values	.57	.53	.72	
Traditions	.05	.56	.36	.86

NOTE: Numbers italicized on the diagonal are Cronbach α estimates of internal consistency for the scale. Quality was assessed using five indicators; values was assessed using three indicators, and traditions was assessed using nine indicators; personal identity is a second-order construct, including self-identity, group-identity, and status each of which has five indicators.

groups, and social status are diverse dimensions of an individual's identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). A more careful examination of traditions items revealed that correlations between family traditions and national traditions were especially high in the developing countries. Several factors may account for this, including the novelty of the branded product concept (i.e., consumers in the developing markets may not have had sufficient time to form separate family and national brand preferences) and the generally more homogenized populations in these markets (as contrasted to the U.S.), where family and nation may stand for a more unified entity.

Given both our adapted etic approach to the study and the above considerations, we proceeded to refine the model of branded product meanings. Specifically, using our thirty-five items, we re-specified a four-factor model comprised of the following latent meanings: quality, values, traditions (including items from family and national traditions) and personal identity, with personal identity being a second-order construct comprised of the latent meanings of self-identity, group-identity, and status. The model fit was similar to the previous model (χ^2/df ratio=3.05, CFI=.84, TLI=.83, RMSEA<.03, Hoelter=845 at $p=.05$). Next, we examined the modification indices and reviewed the items in order to identify both problems related to translations and items with possible sources of covariation, including common item wording and item sequencing. As a consequence of these assessments, we dropped three items (see footnote a in Appendix A for items dropped) and imposed five correlated errors across the four samples - for which similar wording, item meaning, or item sequencing in the questionnaire explained the covariation. Although correlating errors in structural equation modeling is controversial (Bagozzi, 1984), Cote et al. (2001) have argued that doing so is justified as a means of cross-validation in cases that, like ours, concern large-sample studies, multiple group samples, and multiple constructs.

The re-specified four-factor model with thirty-two items had an acceptable fit (χ^2/df ratio=2.56, CFI=.90, TLI=.89, RMSEA<.03, Hoelter=1036 at $p=.05$). Next, we employed multi-group CFA to assess cross-national configural, metric, and scalar invariance across our measures (Kline, 1998; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Configural invariance implies that items in the measurement scales exhibit the same pattern of factor loadings across the four country samples. This is established when both the CFA yields a measurement model with an acceptable fit in which all factor loadings are significantly different from zero in each country and the constructs exhibit discriminant validity. We found that all loadings of the latent variables were statistically significant in the four country samples and exhibited a similar pattern of loadings (see Appendix A). Table 3 presents the correlations between four latent factors in the four-factor model, as well as the Cronbach's α for the factors for each country. As shown in Table 3, correlations between the four latent constructs for each country and the pooled data exhibit discriminant validity – the correlations range from .10 to .61 in the U.S., .22 to .67 in Romania, -.02 to .57 in Ukraine, -.03 to .67 in Russia, and .05 to .57 in the pooled data. These results indicate that the four-factor model exhibits configural invariance.

Because our objective was to examine relationships between constructs in a cross-national setting, we assessed metric invariance (i.e., equivalence of subject scores) and scalar invariance (i.e., whether mean differences in cross-national samples are due to differences in means of the underlying latent constructs). When undertaking a multi-group CFA approach in the cross-cultural setting, the former is essential for construct comparisons, and the latter is necessary for mean comparisons (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Although full metric and scalar invariance are rarely evident in cross-national studies, partial metric invariance (established when at least one of the scale items measuring the latent construct in addition to the marker variable, which should also have invariant loadings, is invariant) is desired (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Our analyses indicate that twenty-nine of the thirty-two loadings were metrically invariant, including the four marker variables that were initially determined as invariant. Full metric invariance was achieved both for personal identity and values and partial metric invariance was achieved for quality and traditions. Additionally, twenty-two of the twenty-nine metrically invariant loadings exhibited scalar invariance. (Procedures and tests of metric and scalar invariance are reported in Appendix B.) Consequently, we were able to examine the cross-national similarities and differences among developing and developed countries related to the meanings of branded products.

4. Cross-national assessment and discussion of the meanings of branded products

In developing a dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding, Holt (2002) tracks the historical evolution of branding, arguing that the meanings consumers associate with branded products are, at least to some extent, driven by the presence of a consumer culture and by the types of campaigns marketers employ. In the earlier stages of a consumer culture, marketing campaigns strive both to position brands around their product's benefits, and to highlight the functional attributes of the product, such as quality. As quality distinctions become more marginal, other, more symbolic, benefits emerge, with both firms and consumers attributing desirable personal characteristics to brands, building and leveraging brand communities, and linking brands to specific personal values. Similarly, Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003) have argued that the symbolic benefits of a brand tend to grow in importance in societies as they are evolving from lower to higher socio-economic levels.

Given this speculation, it is both interesting and useful to examine the importance of branded product meanings across our four countries. To do this, we assessed values of latent means by setting

factor loadings to be equal for all metrically invariant items and fixing intercepts of marker variables at 0 (Arbuckle, 2006). Next, we proceeded to compare the means using procedures recommended by Arbuckle (2006) and Kline (1998). Specifically, we set all intercepts for scalarly invariant items to be equal and all factor loadings for all metrically invariant items to be equal; factor means were fixed at 0 for one country at a time and z-tests indicated if latent factor means in other samples were significantly different from 0 (i.e., the factor mean for a fixed sample). In these comparison analyses, latent factor means were expressed as centralized scores that changed depending on the country that had means fixed at 0. Non-centralized latent means and results of their comparisons are presented in Table 4. We use our qualitative research (conducted in the U.S., Romania, and Ukraine) to offer additional insights concerning the multi-country comparisons.

Our findings are consistent with past research (Holt et al., 2004) and indicate that quality is the most important branded product meaning in both developed and developing markets. The means for quality ($M_{US}=5.54$; $M_{UA}=4.96$; $M_{RO}=5.60$; $M_{RU}=4.84$) and z-tests demonstrate that quality is significantly ($p<.001$) more salient than each of the other three meanings in each country (see Appendix C, Table B for z-scores). Our survey data indicate that quality was significantly ($p<.001$) more important to U.S. and Romanian participants than to Russian and Ukrainian participants (see Appendix C, Table C for z-scores). Our qualitative data in the U.S., Romania and Ukraine indicate that branded products connote quality. However, quality was particularly important for informants in the developing countries, who discussed concerns related to unbranded and counterfeit products with explicit references to imports from China and Turkey. Further, the salience for Romanians is likely a consequence of informants' perception that most domestic and unbranded products are both low in quality and/or counterfeits.

With regard to personal identity (including status, self-identity, and group-identity) and branded products, Holt speculates that identity-related meanings will be stronger in developed countries than they are in developing consumer cultures. Consistent with his speculation, participants in the U.S. ($M_{US}=3.60$) reported significantly greater salience for personal identity ($p<.001$) than Romania ($M_{RO}=3.13$), Ukraine ($M_{UA}=3.22$), and Russia ($M_{RU}=3.15$). There were no significant differences between the three developing countries in relation to the meaning of personal identity (see Appendix C, Table B). Our qualitative data are supportive of these findings. Branding as a signal of self-identity received more mentions among U.S. informants than among Ukrainian and Romanian informants. U.S. informants related brands in a variety of product categories (e.g., clothing, cars, food) as communicating their status, self-image and personality; they offered descriptions of various identities or characteristics, including: "bargain shopper," "reliable and dependable," "sexy," "sophisticated," and "educated." Most Romanian and Ukrainian informants had difficulty associating brands with the meaning of self-identity; some, however, related certain brands of cosmetics, clothing, food products, and perfumes to their status, style, and self-image. U.S. informants

commented on brands that helped communicate their own self-image and served both as a means of identification with one group and as a means of differentiation from another group. In contrast to their U.S. peers, Romanian and Ukrainian informants had more difficulty relating to the meaning of group-identity, but some were able to offer examples of their affiliation with companies such as Avon and "the Siemens" club.

Third, and related to branded product meaning of "values," Holt et al. (2004) reported that only 8% of consumers in twelve studied markets preferred certain global brands because such brands presented themselves as advocates of socially responsible actions. Somewhat counter to these findings, our study found that the meaning "values" is second only to the meaning category "quality" in its importance across countries. Additionally, our survey results indicate that "values" is a particularly salient meaning category in Romania ($M_{RO}=4.47$), significantly greater ($p<.001$) than it is in Ukraine ($M_{UA}=4.11$), the U.S. ($M_{US}=3.86$), and Russia ($M_{RU}=3.71$). In addition to this, we found that "values" is more salient in Ukraine than it is in either the U.S. or Russia, but there were no differences in the salience of "values" between the U.S. and Russia (see Appendix C, Table B). Our scale development and qualitative data provide some insights related to our findings. In particular, the "values" scale (as compared to the other three scales) had the lowest reliability in each of the four countries. A review of our qualitative data suggests that U.S. participants were able to discuss the idea of companies and the values they ascribe to and/or promote. Romanian and Ukrainian informants, however, found it difficult to relate to the idea of brands projecting their personal values, with some acknowledging that they lacked knowledge of the companies and of their value profiles. One possible interpretation is that participants in developing countries believe branded products have greater value (because of their dependability, convenience, and customer care) for the reason that the manufacturers of branded products use exclusive distribution systems, provide warranties, and offer customer service support that are not associated with unbranded competitors or counterfeit products. A second possible interpretation is that participants may have been substituting the meaning of "values" with the meaning "financial value;" that is, participants were associating branded products as being a good value for the money. A third possible interpretation, evident in the Romanian and Ukrainian informants because they had limited information about companies and brands, is that they associated values with product categories (e.g., more favorable values with vitamins and vegetarian food, and less favorable values with alcoholic beverages). In general, our results suggest a diversity of interpretations of the questions by participants related to values, and a need to be cautious in interpreting the cross-national results.

Finally, our results show that branded products as traditions have the least prominent meaning across all four samples. The means for the meaning category "traditions" ($M_{US}=3.08$; $M_{UA}=2.66$; $M_{RO}=2.48$; $M_{RU}=2.23$) and z-tests indicate that the importance of the meaning category "traditions" was significantly lower ($p<.001$) than it was for any other meaning categories for each country. Comparisons between countries, however, indicate that there were significant ($p<.001$) differences between all countries – with it being the most salient in the U.S., followed by Ukraine, Romania, and Russia (see Appendix C, Tables B and C). The generally low level of importance assigned to the meaning category "traditions" may be a reflection of our sample, the global youth market, which may generally prefer to break traditions rather than to follow them. U.S. participants attributed greater importance to traditions than participants in the other countries, possibly because of the longer history that brands have in this developed market or because of a greater consumer familiarity with the concept of branded products. Our qualitative data suggest that brands represent a change from the past and symbolize new trends in the developing markets. We speculate that differences in the salience of the meaning among the three developing countries can be attributed

Table 4
Comparison of latent factor means for branded product meanings by country

Branded product meaning	USA (<i>n</i> =218)	Romania (<i>n</i> =287)	Ukraine (<i>n</i> =464)	Russia (<i>n</i> =292)	Pooled (<i>n</i> =1261)
Quality	5.54 ^{ab}	5.60 ^{cd}	4.96 ^{ac}	4.84 ^{bd}	5.17
Personal identity	3.60 ^{abc}	3.13 ^a	3.22 ^b	3.15 ^c	3.25
Values	3.86 ^{ad}	4.47 ^{abc}	4.11 ^{bde}	3.71 ^{ce}	4.06
Traditions	3.08 ^a	2.48 ^a	2.66 ^a	2.23 ^a	2.59

Note: The means are reported on a seven-point scale, in which 1 = lesser importance and 7 = more importance of the branded product meaning. The same superscripts between the two countries on a given brand meaning indicate significant difference based on z-tests ($p<.05$).

to the volatility of their markets, average longevity of brands, government policies and actions imposed to support and promote local brands, and the general conservatism of a given country.

5. Conclusions, managerial implications, and future research opportunities

Our treatment of branded products has assumed both that consumers co-create brand meanings and that a brand becomes powerful for a consumer through and because of its multiple meanings. Thus, although most work in the area of brand strategy has emphasized that marketing communications should convey a strong, consistent core value proposition to the customer, recent research suggests the potential power of brands that connect to consumers through multiple meanings (Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2005). Our findings are noteworthy for the reason that they demonstrate both that consumers attribute importance to many meanings of branded products and that the importance of those meanings varies relative to one another, both across developed and developing countries and within developing countries. Given the complexity of our multi-national data, we relied on an adapted etic approach that emphasized consistencies in conceptualizations and constructs across countries. Our cross-national analyses provided evidence that personal identity related to branded products encompasses self-identity, group-identity, and social status. Our findings also indicated that the meaning category of traditions is based not only upon single-family histories, but also on national heritages. Our results reaffirm that branded products provide quality signals to consumers, and are associated with specific values and socially responsible actions. Some variations in findings may have been observed if an emic approach had been applied that assessed branded product meanings in each individual country. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the managerial implications as well as opportunities for future research.

First, many brands target global audiences, with developing markets offering lucrative prospects for global brands. In many developing countries, global companies possess the advantages of having an iconic brand (Holt, 2004), less intense competition, and less jaded consumers. Application of our scale to other countries (both developed and developing) or in longitudinal data collections could provide more information about the evolution of branded product meanings within evolving consumer cultures. Additionally, companies interested in launching branded products in new markets can use the scale both to assess the salience of these branded product meanings and to evaluate their positioning strategies and marketing communication messages to better channel their efforts to enable the co-creation of brand meanings. Our extensive research efforts – qualitative data collections across three countries (one developed and two developing) involving researchers familiar with and conversant in each of the cultural contexts under study – enabled the achievement of measurement invariance for our scale development. The application of the scale to more diverse samples, however, may yield differences in invariance and in the nature of underlying constructs. Thus, scale replication is warranted across multiple markets, product categories, and over time. Recently developed statistical approaches to cross-national scale development, including a hierarchical item–response theory (IRT) model (de Jong, Steenkamp, & Fox, 2007), a model for short-form marketing scales (de Jong, Steenkamp, & Veldkamp, *in press*), and alternate procedures for eliminating item response biases (de Jong et al., 2008; Scholderer, Grunert, & Brunso, 2005) are likely to be useful in future scale refinement. These approaches are particularly advantageous for shortened scales, scales involving interval data, studies involving a large number of countries, or in other instances when measurement invariance via CFA is not satisfied.

Second, our research explicitly recognizes the youth market as a particularly relevant segment for global companies seeking to create

or enhance their brand power in transitional economies. This segment is sensitized to global brands and has access to a global flow of communications and values, yet they may differ from their counterparts in developed economies in the ways they make meanings with brands (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Although within an acceptable range, scale dimensions in the developing markets yielded lower reliabilities than they did in the U.S. market. Such inconsistencies in response may be attributed to the novelty of the branded product concept in the developing markets or to participants' unfamiliarity and inexperience with survey procedures. We anticipate that surveying an older cohort (e.g., who lived during the Soviet era) would result in less reliable scales for the reason that the older segment understood, for example, that assigning symbolic meanings to brands and products was perceived as ideologically wrong (Hanson, 1974). Certainly, it would be desirable for future research to sample across age cohorts within countries and to evaluate further the reliability and validity of the scale dimensions. Researchers, however, need to recognize that some branded product meanings may be completely foreign to older and less educated segments in developing markets, yielding not only greater discrepancies in the salience of brand meanings, but potentially jeopardizing measurement validation and reliability measures.

Third, our goal was to explore and to measure meanings that consumers have for branded, as compared to unbranded, products. Before we began our focus on branded (but not necessarily global) products, we primed our in-depth interview informants and survey participants to think about a diverse set of global and local brands in a variety of high- and low-end product categories. Additional work comparing the importance of brand meanings for global and local brands, in relation to specific product categories, or as predictors of purchase satisfaction, brand involvement, and loyalty would be interesting. By making a more comprehensive assessment of brand meanings, marketers will be able to foresee the extent to which different meanings or different collections of meanings lead to different outcomes, both desired and undesired.

Our research focused on a cross-national assessment of brand meanings and their salience in developed and developing markets. A fruitful area for future research would be to examine the meanings of branded products and their relation to demographic and psychological variables. Specifically, research could focus on the association between branded product meanings and individual difference variables, such as consumer ethnocentrism and cultural openness, as well as on behavioral measures related to, for example, media use and international travel (e.g., Alden et al., 2006). We would expect both that consumer ethnocentrism would increase the salience of the meaning of traditions cross-nationally and that cultural openness and international travel would lead to a greater salience of personal identity meanings for consumers in developing countries.

Overall, our research synthesizes and tests conceptualizations of the current brand research in relation to the multiple meanings that branded products convey to young consumers in both developed and developing markets. Although marketers facilitate the creation of a brand personality and its meanings, ultimately it is the consumer who perceives and interprets meanings of brands and their characteristics. Biel (1997) predicts that brands will become even more important for one very good reason – they are important to consumers. Therefore, it is imperative to assess consumer perceptions related to the meanings of branded products in order to ensure success of marketing communication campaigns and other branding efforts undertaken by marketers.

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Appendix A. Measurement appendix

A.1. Items used to assess branded product meanings^a

Quality

1. A brand name is an important source of information about the durability and reliability of the product.
2. I can tell a lot about a product's quality from the brand name.
3. I use brand names as a sign of quality for purchasing products.
4. I choose brands because of the quality they represent.
5. A brand name tells me a great deal about the quality of a product.

Self-identity

1. I choose brands that help to express my identity to others.
2. The brands I use communicate important information about the type of person I am as a person.
3. I use different brands to express different aspects of my personality.
4. I choose brands that bring out my personality.
5. My choice of brand says something about me as a person.

Group-identity

1. Using brands can help me connect with other people and social groups.
2. I buy brands to be able to associate with specific people and groups.
3. I feel a bond with people who use the same brands as I do.
4. By choosing certain brands, I choose who I want to associate with.
5. My choice of a brand says something about the people I like to associate with.

Status

1. I avoid choosing brands that do not reflect my social status.
2. I use brands to communicate my social status.
3. I choose brands that are associated with the social class I belong to.
4. The brands I use reflect my social status.
5. I communicate my achievements through the brands I own and use.

Values

1. I choose brands because I support the values they stand for.
2. I buy brands that are consistent with my values.
3. My choice of brand is based on the company's values.
4. I use brands because I agree with the company's values.
5. I avoid brands because I do not support the values they stand for.

Family traditions

1. I buy brands because they are an important tradition in my household.
2. I use brands that my family uses or have used.
3. I use brands that remind me of my family.
4. I buy brands in order to continue family traditions.
5. I buy brands that my parents buy/have bought.

National traditions

1. I use brands that reflect my national heritage.
2. I prefer brands associated with my national heritage.
3. I avoid brands because they do not fit with my national heritage.
4. I choose brands because they are part of national traditions.
5. My national heritage is not important in my brand decisions.

^aParticipants evaluated each item using a seven-point Likert scale with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7) as anchors. Items dropped subsequent to the seven-factor confirmatory factor analysis include: value items #4 and #5, and national heritage item #5.

Appendix B. Metric and scalar invariance tests

Consistent with recommended procedures (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998), we assessed measurement metric invariance for our four country data sets by constraining each factor loading to be equal across countries and examined whether the fit of the equal-factors model differed significantly from the fit of the base model with all factor loadings set free. Analyses indicated that 29 of the 32 loadings were invariant, including the four marker variables that were initially determined as invariant. Full metric invariance was achieved for personal identity and values, and partial metric invariance for quality and traditions. The CFA for the measurement model with 29 metrically invariant loadings showed a good fit (χ^2/df ratio=2.53, CFI=.90, TLI=.89, RMSEA<.03, Hoelter=1047 at $p=.05$).

A χ^2 -difference test between the base and the constrained models assesses whether factor loadings are invariant in the country samples; a non-significant result is indicative of invariance. The χ^2 -difference test [χ^2 -difference (92)=168.44, $p<.001$] was significant, suggesting that the factor loadings vary across the country samples. However, in large-sample models where a χ^2 -difference test is usually biased, Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) recommend assessment of any changes (deterioration or improvement) in other fit parameters (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, χ^2/df ratio and Hoelter index). A comparison of these indices indicated that they were virtually identical to those for the configural model. Thus, we conclude that the model exhibits partial measurement metric invariance.

We then tested structural metric invariance. In addition to 29 metrically-invariant loadings, we fixed loadings of latent factors of self-identity, group-identity, and status on the second-order factor of personal identity to be equal among our samples. The CFA yielded a good fitting model (χ^2/df ratio=2.58, CFI=.89, TLI=.89, RMSEA<.03, Hoelter=1027 at $p=.05$) that did not deteriorate significantly from the configural model [χ^2 -difference (112)=335.75, CFI-difference=-.01, TLI and RMSEA remained the same].

Scalar invariance is tested for metrically invariant items by a similar procedure used to test metric invariance. Specifically, the intercepts are set to be equal across samples and χ^2 -difference tests and changes in other fit indices are used as signals of invariance. Analyses indicated that 22 of the 29 metrically invariant loadings exhibited scalar invariance, including the initial marker variables. Intercepts of the latent factors of self-identity, group-identity, and status were set at 0. We found partial scalar invariance for each of the four latent factors (see Table A). CFA results for the model with 22 items and 29 items that exhibit scalar and metric invariance, respectively, and three latent factors that exhibit metric and scalar invariance showed a good fit (χ^2/df ratio=2.58, CFI=.89, TLI=.89, RMSEA<.03, Hoelter=1025 at $p=.05$). Moreover, there was only a slight deterioration in fit parameters from the configural model [χ^2 -difference (200)=567.03; CFI-difference=-.01, TLI and RMSEA did not vary]. Table A presents the standardized factor loadings for the indicators by country and for the pooled data, as well as the results of the tests of metric and scalar invariance.

Table A
Construct indicators and confirmatory factor analysis and measurement of invariance results

Branded product meanings	Standardized factor loadings					Test of invariance	
	US	RO	UA	RU	Pooled	Metric	Scalar
Quality						Partial	Partial
1. A brand name is an important source of information about the durability and reliability of the product.	.63	.53	.41	.43	.46	Marker	Marker

Table A (continued)

Branded product meanings	Standardized factor loadings					Test of invariance	
	US	RO	UA	RU	Pooled	Metric	Scalar
<i>Quality</i>							
2. I can tell a lot about a product's quality from the brand name.	.70	.57	.33	.40	.49	Invariant	Invariant
3. I use brand names as a sign of quality for purchasing products.	.75	.77	.95	.70	.75		
4. I choose brands because of the quality they represent.	.74	.67	.40	.84	.59	Invariant	
5. A brand name tells me a great deal about the quality of a product.	.87	.75	.97	.61	.83		
<i>Values</i>							
1. I choose brands because I support the values they stand for	.65	.58	.53	.59	.56	Full Marker	Partial Marker
2. I buy brands that are consistent with my values.	.93	.81	.73	.63	.76	Invariant	Invariant
3. My choice of brand is based on the company's values.	.76	.84	.65	.60	.71	Invariant	
<i>Traditions</i>							
1. I buy brands because they are an important tradition in my household.	.60	.63	.57	.64	.60	Partial Marker	Partial Marker
2. I use brands that my family uses or have used.	.78	.73	.68	.58	.70	Invariant	Invariant
3. I use brands that remind me of my family.	.91	.79	.76	.80	.81	Invariant	Invariant
4. I buy brands in order to continue family traditions.	.52	.62	.51	.50	.57	Invariant	
5. I buy brands that my parents buy/have bought.	.47	.58	.48	.53	.54	Invariant	
6. I use brands that reflect my national heritage.	.66	.70	.74	.65	.69	Invariant	Invariant
7. I prefer brands associated with my national heritage.	.60	.41	.46	.49	.47	Invariant	Invariant
8. I avoid brands because they do not fit with my national heritage.	.55	.67	.58	.63	.59		
9. I choose brands because they are part of national traditions.	.56	.62	.58	.68	.60	Invariant	Invariant
Correlated errors of Traditions 4 and Traditions 5	.78	.44	.47	.42	.52		
Correlated errors of Traditions 6 and Traditions 7	.65	.52	.50	.43	.53		
<i>Self-identity</i>							
1. I choose brands that help to express my identity to others.	.64	.55	.46	.53	.52	Full Marker	Partial Marker
2. The brands I use communicate important information about the type of person I am as a person.	.76	.72	.65	.74	.70		
3. I use different brands to express different aspects of my personality.	.68	.76	.60	.55	.64	Invariant	Invariant
4. I choose brands that bring out my personality.	.60	.77	.70	.73	.72	Invariant	
5. My choice of brand says something about me as a person.	.88	.83	.61	.55	.67	Invariant	Invariant
<i>Group-identity</i>							
1. Using brands can help me connect with other people and social groups.	.67	.59	.57	.57	.58	Full Marker	Partial Marker
2. I buy brands to be able to associate with specific people and groups.	.73	.61	.69	.65	.65	Invariant	
3. I feel a bond with people who use the same brands as I do.	.70	.69	.56	.58	.61	Invariant	Invariant
4. By choosing certain brands, I choose who I want to associate with.	.78	.80	.60	.70	.71	Invariant	Invariant
5. My choice of a brand says something about the people I like to associate with.	.84	.70	.65	.71	.71	Invariant	Invariant
Correlated errors of Status2 and Group-Identity2	.49	.34	.36	.34	.39		

Table A (continued)

Branded product meanings	Standardized factor loadings					Test of invariance	
	US	RO	UA	RU	Pooled	Metric	Scalar
<i>Group-identity</i>							
Correlated errors of Status5 and Group-Identity5	.32	.29	.30	.14	.26		
Correlated errors of Self-Identity1 and Group-Identity1	.24	.40	.34	.28	.35		
<i>Status</i>							
1. I avoid choosing brands that do not reflect my social status.	.71	.55	.56	.56	.57	Full Marker	Partial Marker
2. I use brands to communicate my social status.	.83	.68	.67	.70	.71	Invariant	
3. I choose brands that are associated with the social class I belong to.	.83	.68	.72	.73	.72	Invariant	Invariant
4. The brands I use reflect my social status.	.87	.76	.75	.81	.79	Invariant	Invariant
5. I communicate my achievements through the brands I own and use.	.72	.65	.58	.67	.65	Invariant	Invariant

Appendix C. Mean comparisons and z-scores

Table B

Mean comparisons within countries: z-scores and p-values

Comparison	USA	Romania	Ukraine	Russia
Quality/identity	16.89***	29.41***	25.67***	19.37***
Quality/values	16.36***	16.39***	15.93***	16.72***
Quality/traditions	18.98***	32.34***	25.99***	25.36***
Identity/values	.02	-15.59***	-11.02***	-3.20**
Identity/traditions	5.10***	7.82***	5.39***	10.90***
Values/traditions	5.74***	18.29***	13.79***	12.84***

Note: The direction of the z-score is determined by the mean of the first brand meaning. *** = p < .001, ** = p < .01.

Table C

Mean comparisons between countries: z-scores and p-values

Comparison	Quality	Personal Identity	Values	Traditions
RO/UA	7.23***	-1.18	3.69***	-2.13*
RO/RU	7.87***	-.21	6.90***	2.69**
RO/US	.75	-5.44***	5.66***	-5.86***
UA/RU	1.33	.95	4.02***	5.08***
UA/US	-6.64***	-4.87***	2.56**	-4.44***
RU/US	-7.33***	-5.25***	-1.43	-8.26***

Note: The direction of the z-score is determined by the mean of the first country. *** = p < .001, ** = p < .01, * = p < .05.

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