Shared Consumer Needs across India and China: A Path to Global Advertising of Services?

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Abstract

Global advertising often uses cultural values to standardize globally advertised messages. However, this exploratory study investigates the possibility that rather than cultural values (and consumer wants), it is consumer needs that are strongly shared across countries. Therefore, it might be possible to replace cultural values with these shared consumer needs for the standardization of globally advertised messages. This study does not argue against the universality of the content or structure of values, but rather against the universality of the importance of values across countries. The means-end theory is used to link the relationships between consumer wants, needs, and values. Data collected from Indian and Chinese consumers of information technology education services were analyzed using the laddering technique to reveal hierarchical value maps for each of the two country samples. The results indicate that at the level of consumer wants, Indian consumers seek more tangible attributes while Chinese consumers seek more intangible ones. Also, at the level of cultural values, Chinese consumers associate more values with the service than their Indian counterparts. At the same time, within both groups of consumers the same set of consumer needs were strongly shared among consumers; these were the need for knowledge enhancement, the need for skill improvement, and the need for better employability. Therefore, the results suggest that if managers want to successfully standardize their global advertising, their message strategy could focus on consumer needs that are strongly shared across countries.

Keywords: consumer needs; global advertising; means-end theory; laddering; cross-cultural research.

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[1] The first and second authors have contributed equally to this study.

1 Introduction

When firms expand to new markets in foreign countries, it is often not sufficient to use the same advertising message that worked in the home country. Consumers in the new markets have different cultures and therefore they often give new meaning to the same advertising content (Akaka and Alden 2010). Culturally incongruent advertisements can lead to unfavorable responses from consumers of the new country (Zhou et al. 2015). This problem of how to advertise across cultures can be tackled in multiple ways (Khang et al. 2015), of which global advertising is one path. One of the most frequently used approaches to global advertising is to have a common message for consumers across all cultures – a standardization of the advertised message (Zou and Volz 2010).

What should be the focus of such a standardized message? There are three possibilities – cultural values, consumer needs, and consumer wants (Moriarty and Duncan 1991; Okazaki and Mueller 2007). In this case, cultural values are those values shared by consumers at the national level; consumer needs are a shortage of something that creates a driving force to fulfill it; and consumer wants are the manifestation of needs that are directed towards something specific. Existing literature and practice on global advertising often recommend the use of cultural values, which are shared by consumers across countries, as the focus of a standardized message (Garrett and Iyer 2013; Megginson 2015; Okazaki and Mueller 2007; Zhou et al. 2008). However, recent work has found that consumer needs are universal across countries in terms of their presence and their impact on subjective well-being (Deci and Ryan 2014; Gough 2016; Tay and Diener 2011). Therefore, this study explores the possibility that shared consumer needs form a better focus for the standardized message as they are likely to be more strongly shared across countries.

The means-end theory (Gutman 1982) is used as the underlying theoretical framework in this study. This framework paves the way for a clear understanding of the relationship between consumer needs, wants, and values because it allows for varying levels of abstraction that are linked to one another. The research technique associated with the means-end theory is termed as the laddering technique (Reynolds and Gutman 1988; Reynolds and Phillips 2008). This technique mixes qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain shared cognitive maps of the consumer base that link the various levels of abstraction (Reynolds and Phillips 2008). Therefore, using this technique, the authors are able to empirically uncover the commonalities across consumers from two different cultures in a services context. Although the laddering technique has been used in previous studies in the services context, most of these studies are concerned with a single service provided to consumers belonging to a single country (e.g., Bagozzi et al. 2003; Kuisma et al. 2007; van Rekom and Wierenga 2007; Walker and Olson 1991). A few studies did analyze consumers belonging to two different countries, but consumers in such studies were not limited to being recipients of a single service (e.g., Paul et al. 2009). Unlike these prior studies, this research contrasts consumers from two countries (India and China), but these consumers are recipients of a single service, namely information technology education services.

This study contributes to literature in three ways. First, it adds support to the standardization of global advertising (see Moriarty and Duncan 1991; Zou and Volz 2010) by providing evidence that consumer needs are the commonality that researchers and marketers could seek across different countries. In doing so, the authors hope to answer the call for a better understanding of how the standardization of advertising content should be done (Agrawal 1995). Second, by conducting this study among consumers from two emerging economies (i.e., Indian

and Chinese consumers), the authors also hope to add to the diversity of countries studied in this area (Khang et al. 2015). Third, this study prescribes the use of the laddering technique to find shared consumer needs across cultures, and thereby puts forward an approach that can aid marketing managers in the practice of standardizing advertising messages – a much sought after requirement in international advertising practice (Garrett and Iyer 2013). In sum, this research is positioned as the first step towards understanding the standardization of advertising messages built upon shared consumer needs.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: first, the authors examine cross-cultural advertising and the more specific area of global advertising, both of which help to understand the problems faced by firms seeking to advertise a single global message. Next, consumer wants, needs, and values are linked to each other using the means-end theory, thereby clarifying how shared consumer needs serve to solve the problem of advertising a single global message. Empirical support is provided for this claim by using the laddering technique. Finally, the implications for researchers and marketers are discussed.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Cross-cultural advertising

Differences in culture across countries are often responsible for the disparity that is found in various marketing phenomena. Advertising is no exception (Akaka and Alden 2010; Maheswaran and Shavitt 2014; Tai and Chan 2001). The consumer's perception of the advertised content plays a vital role in getting across the intended message. Since these consumer perceptions are influenced by culture (Maheswaran and Shavitt 2014; Okazaki et al. 2010; Tai

and Chan 2001), cross-cultural advertising has been inevitably linked to culture (Kaynak and Herbig 2014).

From the perspective of marketing, culture is said to be the "sum total of learned beliefs, values and customs that are shared by a society" (Darley and Luethge 2003, p. 142). Thus, to relate to their consumers, a firm needs to first understand the consumers' cultural lens. Research has shown that advertising success can be achieved by using the means-end theory to understand the cultural values that consumers associate with product attributes (Costa et al. 2003; Kara et al. 2015; Reynolds and Craddock 1988; Reynolds and Whitlark 1995). However, while advertising success *within* a cultural setting can be easily achieved, what of advertising *across* cultures?

The obvious problem in advertising across countries is that cultures are different. When cultures are different, consumer perceptions that are influenced by culture will also be different (Maheswaran and Shavitt 2014; Okazaki et al. 2010; Park and Rabolt 2009; Tai and Chan 2001). In such a scenario, using the same advertising content across all cultures can result in consumers from different cultures giving different meaning to the same advertising content (Akaka and Alden 2010). For firms that sell their goods or services across countries, this implies that advertising content might have to be localized completely, which in turn leads to higher content development costs. Localization of advertising content could also create an inconsistent brand image across the countries it is advertised. Such inconsistencies in the brand image would hinder the enhancement of global brand equity (Cateora and Graham 2004; Park and Rabolt 2009). Therefore, to achieve cross-cultural advertising success, firms might need to bring about some standardization in their advertised content (Harris 1994; Kaynak and Herbig 2014; Mueller 1992). The answer to *what* should be standardized, and thus be made the focus of the advertised message, is discussed under the banner of global advertising.

2.2 Global advertising and its concomitant problems

Global advertising can be defined as the standardization of advertising content, coordination of the development and execution of advertising campaigns, and the integration of such campaigns across countries (Zou and Volz 2010). More than four decades ago, Keegan (1969) had noted that when a product satisfied the same consumer need across countries, the same communications strategy could perhaps be used across these countries. However, the highly cited article by Levitt (1983), asserting the homogenization of consumer demands, is often claimed to be the starting point for researchers' interest in global marketing strategies, including global advertising.

Research in global advertising has largely concentrated on cultural values (Khang et al. 2015; Okazaki and Mueller 2007). In their review of international advertising literature, Garrett and Iyer (2013) found that several studies suggest that advertisements should reflect the values of the culture they wish to reach. Even though there are several theoretical and methodological issues in using cultural values as the basis in global advertising (De Mooij 2015; Samiee and Jeong 1994), the reason cultural values are given so much attention in global advertising is that they are one of the most central determinants of consumer behavior (Chow and Amir 2006; Maheswaran and Shavitt 2014;). Some studies (e.g., Chow and Amir 2006; Zhang and Gelb 1996; Zhou et al. 2008) even hint at the beginnings of homogenization or convergence of cultural values across countries, which, if true, would make cultural values an ideal focus for a globally advertised message.

However, this idea of shared cultural values is contested by researchers who found little evidence of such convergence (De Mooij 2003; De Mooij and Hofstede 2002). For example, Shukla and colleagues (2015) found that consumers in India, China, and Indonesia valued luxury goods differently, even though these countries are often clubbed under the broad banner of having 'Asian' values; the effectiveness of online advertising was also found to vary significantly across countries that are expected to share cultural values (Brettel and Spilker-Attig 2010). The presence of distinct global and local identities among consumers within a country (Arnett 2002) adds further to this lack of convergence (Zhang and Khare 2009). Furthermore, Onkvisit and Shaw (1987), who reviewed several international advertising studies, found almost no similarities among consumers in cross-national comparative studies (cf. Agrawal 1995). Another reason against using cultural values in globally advertised messages is that the importance given to a particular cultural value might vary across countries (e.g., Laroche et al. 2014). This means that while a cultural value might be shared across two countries, it might be less important to one country and very important to the other. Accordingly, this would affect how that cultural value influences consumer behavior in each of those countries. Consider national cultural values within just a single country. The implicit assumption often made is that the importance given to cultural values within a national culture is the same across all consumers in that national culture. In other words, there is no allowance for sub-cultures with varying importance for the same cultural value to exist within the overarching national culture. Some researchers, however, have found evidence to the contrary. For example, Zhou and Belk (2004) found that some Chinese consumers were driven by the desire for global cosmopolitan goods as they placed greater importance on *mianzi* (prestige), whereas others who gave *mianzi* less importance were motivated by a nationalistic desire. Thus, there existed a varying level of

importance given to the cultural value of *mianzi* among Chinese consumers. Gong and colleagues (2004) reported on the rise of individualism and self-expression among the younger Chinese generation, which has resulted in advertising that targets younger Chinese consumers being more individualistic in nature than those targeting other age groups (Zhang and Shavitt 2003).

If the importance given to cultural values can vary *within* a national culture, then how much more this importance might vary when one looks at common cultural values *across* different national cultures. Therefore, using cultural values at the national level is problematic – different consumers may have different levels of importance for a particular cultural value in comparison to the national average. For example, it was found that young consumers in China have a higher level of individualism than the average Chinese (see Doctoroff 2005; Moore 2005), and that these young Chinese consumers also have a greater need for conspicuous accomplishment (Duangboudda 2015) and conspicuous consumption (Podoshen et al 2011). For all these reasons, this study looks to another construct that is shared across countries, namely consumer needs, which may help to standardize an advertising message across countries.

2.3 Consumer needs and the means-end theory

The literature on consumer needs and wants is sparse (Roberts et al. 2015; Sheth 1982), and clear definitions are hard to come by (Fennell 1978). Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, consumer needs are defined as a shortage of something that creates a driving force to fulfill it (Senyszyn 1995). This low level of specificity is a distinct characteristic of consumer needs (Arndt 1978). For example, consumer needs could include basic requirements like food, clothing,

or shelter, or even higher order requirements like recreation or learning new things (Kotler and Keller 2012; Tay and Diener 2011). A large number of these consumer needs, however, are latent (and not expressed). Understanding and satisfying consumers' latent needs is crucial to a market-oriented philosophy (Slater and Narver 1998).

While some earlier research framed needs as a social construction specific to a time in history or to a geographical location or to culture (e.g., Buttle 1989; Slater 1997; von Hippel 1992), more recent multi-country studies have found that needs tend to be universal and exist prior to socialization (e.g., Deci and Ryan 2014; Gough 2016; Tay and Diener 2011). Accordingly, in this paper, consumer needs are assumed to pre-exist marketers and lie beyond their sphere of influence.

Since consumer needs pre-exist marketers, it is the manifestations of consumer needs – that is, consumer wants – which marketers can influence through advertising. Consumer needs turn into wants when they are directed towards something specific, like products or services, that might satisfy the need (Roberts et al. 2015)[2]. For example, to satisfy their need for clothing, some consumers might buy pants and shirts, others might buy shorts and t-shirts, while still others might buy ethnic or traditional garments. Consumer needs drive consumer wants. Therefore, in order to successfully influence consumer wants through advertising, the marketer must know which need(s) the *want* can satisfy. For example, marketers trying to convince consumers to *want* tablets (like the Apple iPad) for satisfying their need for verbal

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[2] Consumer wants become consumer demands only when they are backed by the consumer's ability to pay. To maintain parsimony, this study does not focus on consumer demands because it is assumed that there are always some consumers with the ability to pay for any particular want. Consequently, most wants do indeed become demands.

communication would most likely be unsuccessful as mobile phones (like the Apple iPhone) already satisfy this need very well.

Consumer wants are equally problematic when one attempts to find a commonality across consumers from different countries for the purpose of developing a globally advertised message. Since different consumer wants can satisfy the same consumer need, it is no surprise that wants end up being shaped by society (Kotler and Keller 2012). With societal norms being different in different countries, it can only be expected that consumer wants also differ from one country to another (Kim et al. 2002). For example, to satisfy the basic need of thirst during meals, on average, consumers in one country might want beer, while consumers in another country might want wine. Or, to satisfy the need for education, on average, consumers in one country might want Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics (STEM) courses, while consumers in another country might want a broader range of courses that includes the Arts and Humanities. Accordingly, researchers have found divergence across countries in consumer wants (e.g., De Mooij 2010; Kim et al. 2002; Xu et al. 2014). This is perhaps why extant research and practice have never used consumer wants as a way to standardize the advertised message.

Cultural values (of consumers) also pre-exist marketers. They are "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach 1973, p. 5). Values act as guiding principles in consumers' lives (Schwartz 1994), and thus drive their needs (Bardi et al. 2008). Consequently, there exists a driving force linking values to needs, and needs to wants.

In this study, the authors concur with prior literature (e.g., De Mooij 2010) that consumer wants are too diverse, but differ with those studies (e.g., Chow and Amir 2006; Hennigs et al. 2012; Zhang and Gelb 1996) that claim that there is sufficient commonality in cultural values across countries. In sum, it is argued that standardization of the advertised message at the level of national cultural values or weakly shared consumer wants might not be a viable option for global advertising, even though the former is often used in cross-cultural research and the latter has never been used thus far. By focusing on either wants or cultural values in global advertising messages, marketers will have to battle the diversity in consumer wants and cultural values that exist across countries. This can result in either no commonality or a weakly shared commonality. Given that recent research has uncovered the universality of needs across countries (Tay and Diener 2011), the better option might be to focus attention on consumer needs.

What creates confusion in the practice of global advertising is that marketers might be aware of the cultural values and consumer wants that exist in each country, but not of how they are linked to each other. If they do not know which cultural values drive which consumer wants, and through which consumer needs this occurs, then their global advertising message is likely to fail to have the same influence in different countries. For example, advertising the Toyota Camry as a car that helps a person attain the (Rokeach) value of social recognition and respect would be valid in India, where the Camry is a premium segment car. However, the same advertising might not be very successful in the US, where the Camry is generally considered a mass-market car.

In order to study the relationships between values, needs, and wants, it is essential to have a framework that can account for the relationships between these concepts, as well as for the increasing level of abstraction as one moves from consumer wants to cultural values. The means-end theory is one such a framework (Gutman 1982; Kim et al. 2014). The means-end theory

posits that consumers buy goods or services as a means to an end; the end being the attainment of particular values or beliefs that are embedded in the culture (Gutman 1982). According to the theory, consumers seek certain attributes of goods or services because these attributes lead to certain benefits or consequences, which in turn lead to other benefits or consequences that eventually lead to the attainment of the values or beliefs. However, the driving motivation runs in the opposite direction, that is, consumers' desire to attain certain values is what drives their desire to seek certain attributes (Gutman 1982; Reynolds and Gutman 1988).

This study uses the means-end theory to link values, needs, and wants, that is, it links the three constructs through a chain of relationships that comprise a means to an end. The attributes of goods/services are similar to consumer wants. Both have a low level of abstraction (i.e., they can be easily expressed by the consumer) and they are known to both the consumer and marketer. Thus, just like attributes in the means-end theory, wants form the lowest level of the chain in terms of abstraction and are the starting point for consumers' association with a good or service. The difference between attributes and wants is minimal – while attributes are features of a good/service, wants are the desire for these features. The consequence or benefit that consumers obtain from getting what they 'want' is the satisfaction of their needs. The difference between benefits (in the means-end theory) and consumer needs is that the former can be expressed or stated by the consumer while the latter is not. This makes 'benefits' merely the 'stated' needs of consumers and not their 'real' needs (Di Mascio 2010). For example, a consumer might *want* the latest smartphone in the market and he might state that the reason he wants such a phone is for the *benefit* of having the newest components (e.g., screen-type or camera) in a phone; but his real *need* might be to keep up with the Joneses. Consumer needs exist at a higher level of abstraction than consumer wants, which is similar to the difference in

abstraction between attributes and consequences in the means-end theory. Lastly, cultural values directly map onto the values that consumers seek to attain in the means-end model. In sum, consumer wants (i.e., the means) eventually lead to the attainment of cultural values (i.e., the ends). The driving force of motivation, however, runs in the opposite direction (i.e., seeking of values creates needs, which in turn, create wants). Figure 1 illustrates how these concepts fit into the means-end model.

It is should be noted that consumer goals are not included in this study's hierarchy of consumer wants, needs, and values. Consumer goals are often defined as pleasant consequences to be desired or unpleasant consequences to be avoided (Blythe 2008; Winell1987). They are ordered hierarchically in consumers' minds from concrete goals to abstract goals (Peterman 1997), and can influence information processing (Peterman 1997) and overall satisfaction judgments (Garbarino and Johnson 2001). While consumer goals might appear similar to values, as defined in this study, there is still a distinction – goals are what consumer seek and values are the reasons why consumers seek these goals (Gutman 1997). Extant research that examines consumer goals through the means-end theory also maintains this distinction (e.g., Bagozzi and Dabholkar 1994; Gutman 1997; Pieters et al. 1995). For these reasons, this study also maintains a distinction between goals and values.

Figure 1 Consumer values, needs and wants as a means-end model
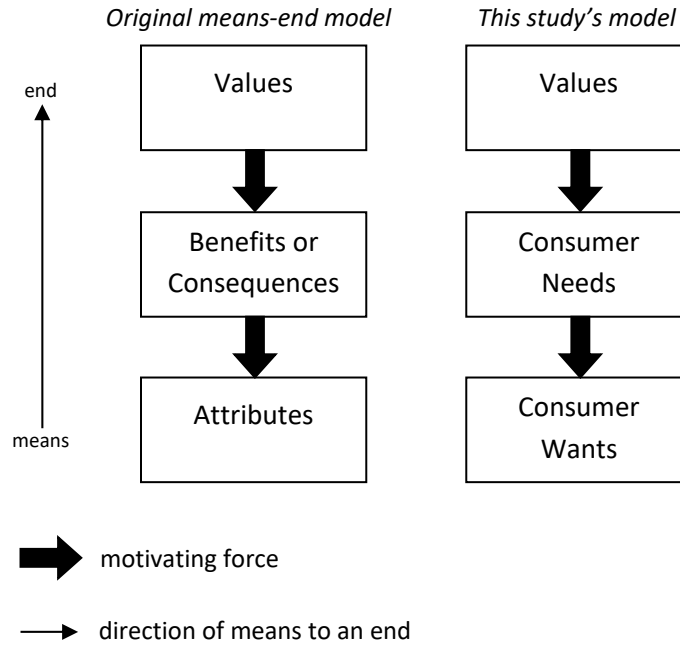
Reynolds and Gutman (1988) developed the laddering technique, which can empirically uncover these means-end relationships. Using the laddering technique, this study hopes to answer the following research questions:

a) Do consumers of the same product, but living in different countries, have commonalities in their wants, needs, and values associated with a product?

b) At which level of abstraction (i.e., wants, needs, or values) do consumers from different countries have the strongest commonality?

3 Methodology

In India and China, the information technology (IT) education services industry exists primarily to cater to the workforce needed for the large multi-billion-dollar IT industries in these countries (McFarlan et al. 2012; NASSCOM 2015). These IT education services help to satisfy the need for education and training, which enables consumers of the service to enter the workforce of the IT industry (Sadarangani et al. 2011). In the last decade, IT education service providers in India and China have expanded their course offerings from basic or general computing courses to hardware and software specialization courses, including globally recognized certification courses. They have not only moved into non-information-technology fields, but have also moved into new markets abroad (Sadarangani et al. 2011). Such internationalization has made it necessary to advertise in different countries, and has thus exposed these firms to consumers hailing from cultures that are different from those in their home countries. It is in this context that this study examines the existence of a commonality among consumer values, wants, and needs across countries.

The laddering technique is used in this study (Reynolds and Gutman 1988). Briefly, the laddering technique is unique to the extent that it mixes both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to obtain the final result in the form of shared cognitive maps of the consumer base (Reynolds and Phillips 2008). The data are collected through open-ended questions that are specifically designed to elicit a relationship or link between the various levels of abstraction. The questions (whether in interview- or survey-based format) make the respondent think about the reason for why they provided a previous answer. Such a line of questioning results in later answers being reasons for earlier answers (see Appendix). This in turn creates links from the later answers to the earlier ones. These open-ended responses necessarily require the data to be

coded into categories. Thereafter, the linkages between the various categories are documented.
At this point, the qualitative analysis ceases and the quantitative part takes over. This is also the
point at which individual level data gets aggregated with data from other individuals in the
sample. The way in which the data is aggregated aids in removing outlier information and
random responses. The linkages that remain part of the shared cognitive maps are determined
through methods that involve a trade-off between the volume of information used and model
parsimony (further details are provided in the data analysis section).

The benefits of using the laddering technique are that it mixes the richness of qualitative data
together with the reliability of quantitative methods (Reynolds and Gutman 1988; Reynolds and
Phillips 2008). It has been noted that the laddering technique is well suited to uncovering
consumers' rationale for their choices (Gengler et al. 1999), and this is indeed what this study
seeks to understand – which values drive which needs, and which needs drive which wants. By
comparing (across countries) the categories involved at each level of abstraction, one can draw
inferences on the extent of commonality at each level. It would not have been possible to achieve
these results by using a purely qualitative line of analysis or a purely quantitative one.
Furthermore, since consumer needs can be latent, the laddering technique helps to bring out these
latent needs through its unique form of questioning (e.g., Day 2002; Langerak et al. 1999; Ward
and Lasen 2009).

In this study, the respondents are from two countries – India and China. While it is ideal if
international marketing studies have more than two countries in their sample (Cadogan 2010),
exceptions are made for studies using a culture-free background (Cadogan 2010). This study
does just that by moving away from cultural values and focusing on consumer needs, thereby
providing a culture-free background for the analysis. Both these countries have consistently

appeared together in different studies that attempted to cluster countries based on various characteristics like culture, economic levels, language, religion, and so on (e.g., Furnham et al. 1994; Gupta et al. 2002). Therefore, some might argue that since these two countries are constantly clustered together, their cultures might be similar and have more in common than the cultures of two countries that are not clustered together so often. However, such an argument only strengthens the validity of this study's claim because, if consumer needs are indeed more strongly shared than cultural values even across two countries that have similar cultures, then this study's claim can be expected to hold in countries that do not have similar cultures. It was also essential to ensure that the lack of similarity in service attributes across countries did not prevent consumer wants from being strongly shared (and thus falsely boost this study's claim). It was possible to avoid this issue because the same companies are operating in the information technology education services space in both India and China.

3.1 Sample

When interviews are used to collect laddering data, the minimum sample size is often quite small (25-30 respondents; Reynolds and Phillips 2008). This is due to a structured form of interviewing, which quickly generates redundant responses such that incremental learning from additional interviews is low, that is, saturation is reached (Glaser and Strauss 1967). However, when self-administered questionnaires are used to collect laddering data, the samples size is expected to be larger (Bagozzi et al. 2003) to achieve the same objective of saturation.

Data were collected from 300 Indian respondents (67% male) and 140 Chinese respondents (49% male), all of whom were consumers of information technology education services (Table

1). Although all these consumers were not university students *per se*, they can still be considered students as they were availing education services. For 56% of the Indian sample and 33% of the Chinese sample, it was the first time they were utilizing such a service. Since information technology education services is a relatively new industry in both India and China, the consumers of such services are equally young. As a result, a large number of respondents (62% in India and 55% in China) were below twenty-three years of age, and almost all were below the age of forty. It is possible that since a large number of respondents are young, they might fall into the category of global cosmopolitan consumers for whom cosmopolitanism is expected to drive consumer wants, tastes, and values (Riefler et al. 2011). Even so, it is unlikely that this possibility could confound the results of this study. Consumer cosmopolitanism is a socialization process that results in consumers having certain attitudes (like open-mindedness and appreciation of diversity) and behaviors (like consumption transcending borders; Riefler et al. 2011). Since only consumer wants (and not needs) are shaped by consumers' socialization, consumer cosmopolitanism is likely to only determine what cosmopolitan consumers want, but not their needs. In other words, the impact of consumer cosmopolitanism is at the level of consumer wants and not at the level of consumer needs, and it is therefore unlikely to affect the conclusions of this study.

Table 1 Demographics of the sample

	INDIA	CHINA
N	300	140
Gender		
Male	67%	49%
Female	33%	51%
Age		
Under 18	8%	1%
19 – 23	54%	54%
24 – 40	36%	42%
Over 40	1%	1%
Type of course		
Software	89%	95%
Hardware	9%	5%
Both	2%	0%
No. of courses attended (including current course)		
1	56%	33%
2	24%	38%
3	15%	19%
4 or more	5%	10%

3.2 Data collection

To obtain responses from individuals, the paper-and-pencil version (i.e., self-administered

questionnaires) of the laddering technique was adopted. This method was first used by Walker

and Olson (1991). Although interviews are usually the method of collecting laddering data

(Barrena and Sánchez 2009; Reynolds and Gutman 1988), many researchers have successfully

used a paper-and-pencil version to obtain the same data (e.g., Bagozzi et al. 2003; Pieters et al.

1995; Walker and Olson 1991). Indeed, this approach is sometimes considered better than the

interview approach (Phillips and Reynolds 2009). The primary advantage of using a paper-and-

pencil version is that responses from many more individuals can be effortlessly collected as it is

not limited to the number of interviews that can be conducted within a given time-period. This study also employed translation-back-translation procedures (Brislin 1986) to translate the questionnaire from English into Chinese.

The self-administered questionnaire contained a matrix of 15 cells (see Appendix). First, the respondents had to provide up to five attributes or features of the educational course/program that were important to them. Next, for the first attribute mentioned, they had to provide a reason why that attribute was important to them, followed by another reason as to why the previous reason was important. This process was then repeated for the remaining attributes that the respondent had provided. The purpose of this form of questioning is to elicit 'ladders' between the service's attributes and the respondent's cultural values (Reynolds and Phillips 2008).

The responses from consumers in China were in Chinese and the responses from the Indian respondents were in English. Consequently, the Chinese data were translated into English by a research assistant, who was fluent in both languages, to facilitate content analysis of the data.

3.3 Data analysis

The analysis of laddering data across respondents of each subgroup involves (i) coding responses into categories using standard content-analysis procedures, while bearing in mind the levels of abstraction in the data; (ii) classification of the categories into attributes, consequences and values; (iii) development of the implication matrix, which is a square matrix that contains the number of times each category leads to every other category; and finally, (iv) graphical representation of the relationships in a tree diagram referred to as a hierarchical value map (Reynolds and Gutman 1988).

There were 2256 and 1373 useable responses that had to be coded from India and China respectively. The coding of these responses was performed by two independent coders in the following manner: similar to procedures in Bagozzi et al. (2003), the attributes, consequences, and values categories were identified by the coders, who analyzed the responses of seventy respondents chosen randomly across both datasets. Discussions between the coders on the responses of these seventy random respondents yielded the labels for the attributes, consequences, and values. Thereafter, the remaining responses were coded by them as per the mutually agreed labels. For example, an Indian male between 19-23 years of age mentioned "placement service at the end of the course" as an attribute of the service that was important to him; this was coded as the attribute "Job placement services". He then mentioned that the reason why this particular attribute was important was because "(he) can get a job easily"; this was coded as the consumer need "Increases (or better) employability". Lastly, he followed up on this particular reason being important because then "(he) can have a tension free life"; this was coded as the value "Comfortable life".

Using procedures recommended by Cooper and Hedges (1994), the inter-coder reliability was determined using several methods: the simple coefficient of agreement between coders was .89; the inter-coder reliability, as assessed by Cohen's (1960) kappa coefficient, was .82; and the Perreault and Leigh (1989) measure of reliability was .92, with a confidence interval of .90 to .93. All disagreements were resolved through discussion with the authors. The responses in the Indian data revealed 8 attributes, 12 consequences, and 7 values, and the responses in the Chinese data revealed 9 attributes, 13 consequences, and 9 values (Table 2).

Table 2 Attributes, consequences and values revealed through content analysis

Category	INDIA	CHINA
Attributes or consumer wants	Course offerings Job placement services Certification/Degree conferred Faculty Brand name Infrastructure Low cost *Free course material/equipment*	Course offerings Job placement services Certification/Degree conferred Faculty Brand name Infrastructure Low cost *Personal appeal* *Matches work*
Consequences or consumer needs	Become qualified Increases employability Skill improvement Knowledge enhancement Increases work experience Increases task efficiency Increases income Increases future education opportunities Lower expenses Increases the value of the education Global recognition *Rarity of course offering*	Become qualified Increases employability Skill improvement Knowledge enhancement Increases work experience Increases task efficiency Increases income Increases future education opportunities Lower expenses Increases the value of the education Global recognition *Expands social network* *Challenging*
Values or (higher-order) consumer needs	Comfortable life Ambitious Self esteem Pleasure Social recognition *Friendship* *Independent*	Comfortable life Ambitious Self esteem Pleasure Social recognition *Freedom* *Happiness* *Family security* *Wisdom*

Note: the dissimilar categories across the two cultures are in italics

Content analysis was originally devised to quantify qualitative data through the capture of the frequency of a word or an object (Lerman and Callow 2003). The laddering technique uses the frequencies of the attributes, consequences, and values categories to help cross over into a quantitative analysis of the laddering data. The implication matrix for each country was obtained

using all categories as both the rows and columns of a matrix. Consequently, the implication matrix for India was a 27 element square matrix and for China it was a 31 element square matrix. The cells in the implication matrices indicate the number of times each row element leads to each column element (see Reynolds and Gutman 1988, for more details on constructing an implication matrix).

In order to reflect the relative importance between the different elements and the ladders they form, the repetition of ladders by the same respondent was allowed. In the implication matrix, the term 'linkage' is used to define the occasion when one element leads to another element. It is possible to have both direct and indirect linkages (Reynolds and Gutman 1988; Reynolds and Phillips 2008). Whereas a direct linkage represents the connection of one element directly with another, an indirect linkage represents the connection of one element to another through one or more other elements. There were totally 2221 and 1109 linkages, for an average of about 7 and 8 linkages per person, in the India and China data respectively. Since the direct linkages accounted for the majority of all linkages in both India (71%) and China (74%), the indirect linkages were not used in further analysis.

The implication matrix aggregates individual consumers' frequency of linkages between any two categories. It is difficult to determine the entire means-end model from just the implication matrix. Therefore, the linkages are represented in an aggregated form in a hierarchical value map – a sort of shared cognitive mapping of the entire consumer sample and not just of an individual consumer. However, representing all possible linkages on a hierarchical value map is not only cumbersome but also lacks parsimony. The objective then is to represent the dominant linkages of the consumer sample (Reynolds and Phillips 2008). Therefore, only those linkages whose frequency is above some cut-off level are considered. Several heuristics have been proposed for

choosing this cut-off level. In this study, the authors chose a heuristic developed by Pieters and colleagues (1995) that balances parsimony while still using the maximum amount of available information. This heuristic accounts for a large percentage of all linkages, even while it uses the fewest number of non-zero cells in the implication matrix. This allows the extraction of large amounts of information while being succinct at the same time.

The implication matrices contained 107 (India) and 133 (China) non-zero cells. If all these linkages were used, there would have been 107 and 133 linkages between 27 and 31 elements, respectively, in the hierarchical maps. Such an approach would make the maps cluttered and difficult to interpret. The purpose instead is to represent and interpret the dominant linkages that are shared across the consumer sample. This is why a cut-off level is used. Those linkages below the cut-off are considered idiosyncratic and therefore dropped from further analyses (Pieters et al. 1995). Table 3 shows the cut-off levels and their corresponding percentages of non-zero cells used and all linkages accounted for, separately for India and China, as well as for each gender within both countries.

Table 3 Cut-off frequencies

Country	Cut-off	% of non-zero cells used	% of all linkages accounted for
INDIA			
all	10	19	88
only men	10	18	86
only women	5	26	84
CHINA			
all	12	13	63
only men	6	23	66
only women	7	13	61

The final step in the analysis is the diagrammatic representation of the linkages whose frequency is above the cut-off level. The goal of mapping these hierarchical relations is to interconnect all the meaningful linkages across the consumer sample as a whole (Reynolds and Gutman 1988).

4 Results

The content analysis of the data found differences in the categories across the two countries, the largest difference being in the values associated with the service (see Table 2). This is not surprising since, although the consumers are evaluating the same service, they still hail from different countries. Instead, what is interesting is that both the Indian and Chinese consumers have several commonalities in the attributes and consequences that they associate with information technology education services. In other words, for the same service, the consumers from both countries seem to have common wants and needs. This preliminary result shows that these commonalities could serve as the basis for standardization of advertising content across India and China.

However, content analysis alone is insufficient to provide empirical support towards the commonality of consumer needs (over wants and values) across countries. It is for this reason that the implication matrices and the subsequent hierarchical value maps are created. Having plotted the linkages in the hierarchical value maps, it is desirable to look at all elements in the map in terms of the number of linkages they have with other elements, both in terms of other elements leading into them and in terms of their connections to higher order elements. From Figure 2 and Figure 3 it is observed that when the linkages are aggregated across consumers

(within a country), the commonalities that existed between the Indian and Chinese consumers disappear at the level of service attributes (i.e., the consumer wants) and at the level of values. Instead, the largest commonality between both sets of consumers lies in consumer needs, the most significant needs being the need for knowledge enhancement, the need for skill improvement, and the need for increased (or better) employability. These three consumer needs also have the most number of linkages leading both to and from them, implying that they are the most strongly shared needs[3].

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[3] Using the same procedures, hierarchical value maps were obtained separately for Indian men, Indian women, Chinese men, and Chinese women. Although there were minor variations in these maps, the main findings remained the same. Therefore, the authors have not included these extra maps in this article.

Figure 2 Hierarchical value map for Indian consumers
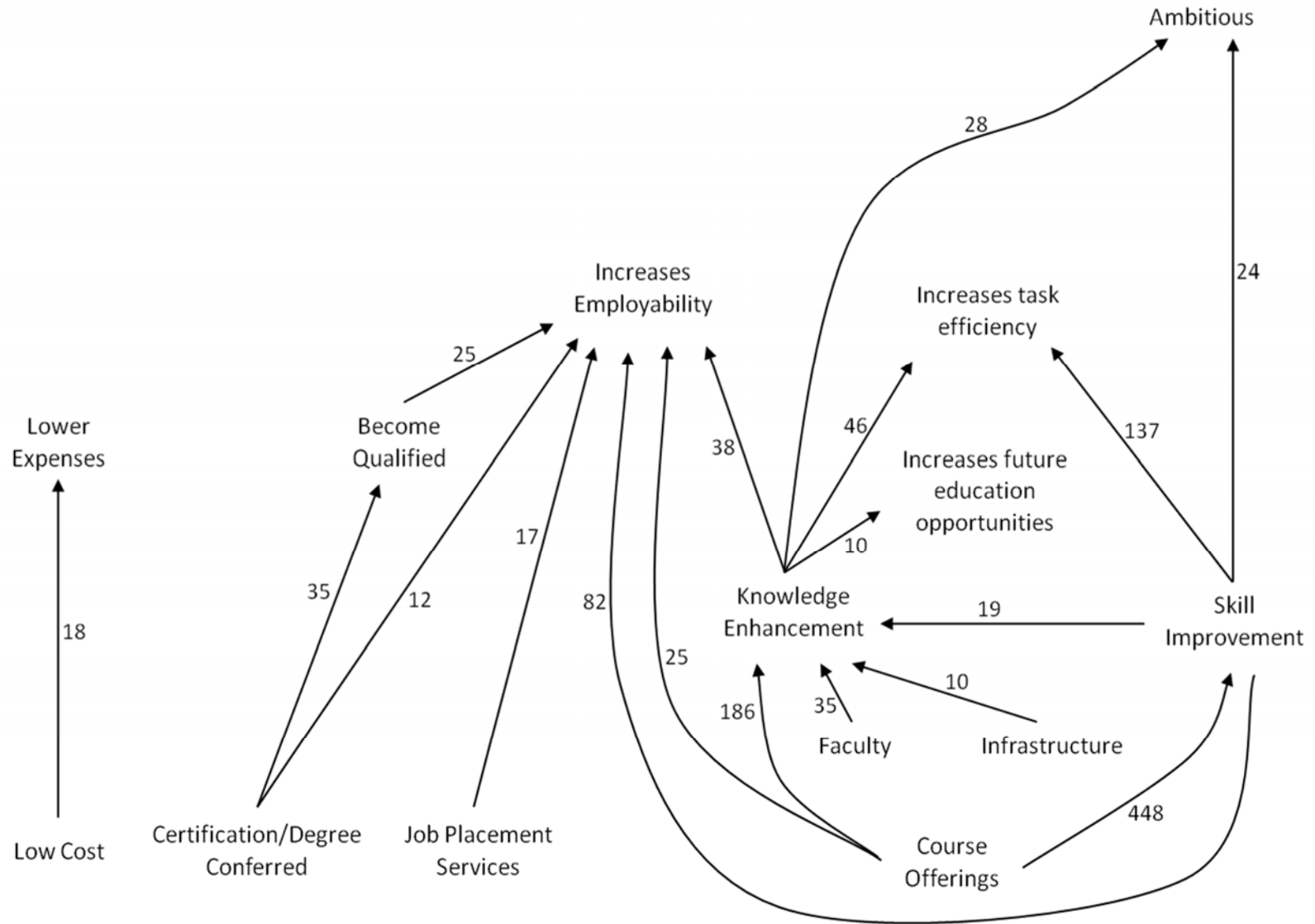
Figure 3 Hierarchical value map for Chinese consumers
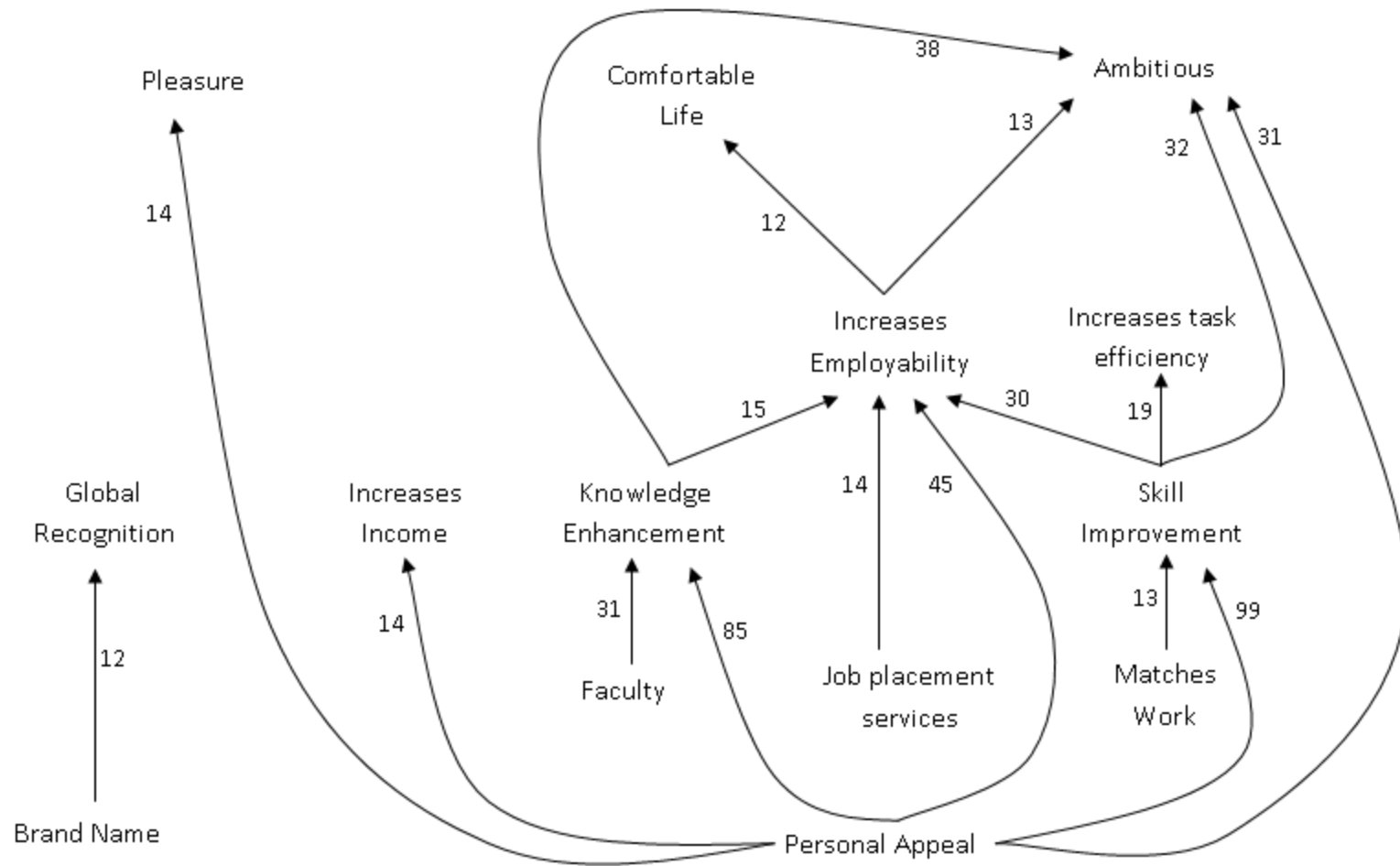
From Figures 2 and 3, it can also be seen that, at the level of consumer wants, the Indian and Chinese consumers differ tremendously – while the Indian consumers mostly want tangible attributes (like courses offered), the Chinese consumers want intangible attributes (like finding the program personally appealing). Again, at the level of cultural values, the Chinese consumers associate more values with the service than their Indian counterparts.

It is only at the level of consumer needs that one finds sufficient commonality that can serve as the foundation of standardizing advertising content across these two countries. Thus, marketers in information technology education service firms can now advertise a single global message across India and China of how their company will help the consumer to satisfy the need for knowledge enhancement, the need for skill improvement, and the need for increased (or better) employability. A single message such as this could not only reduce development costs and maintain brand image consistency, but also ensure that the message is appealing to consumers from both countries.

5 Discussion

When advertising across countries, it is often debated whether firms should localize their advertising message for each country or use a single global message for all countries. Literature on global advertising favors the latter as a strategy and the former as a tactic because this reduces content development costs and maintains consistency in the brand image (Mueller and Taylor 2013). Yet, the difficulty arises in choosing the focus of this single global message. While researchers have thus far favored shared cultural values across countries, this study shows that both cultural values and consumer wants are likely to have the least amount of commonality

across consumers from different countries. This research used the concept of means-end relationships and its associated laddering technique to show that it is not cultural values or consumer wants that are strongly shared across countries. Instead, it is consumer needs.

Focusing on consumer needs in globally advertised messages has some advantages. Firstly, it communicates a standardized message for consumers irrespective of their country. This allows the development of a globally consistent brand image, thereby aiding in the building of global brands (Okazaki et al 2013; Park and Rabolt 2009). Second, it can help to overcome obstacles to implementing value-based pricing strategies by making the message more salient to consumers (Hinterhuber 2008).

The analysis of laddering data from both Indian and Chinese consumers provides some empirical support for the claim that standardization in global advertising can perhaps be achieved by focusing on shared consumer needs that are associated with a product or service. With increasing globalization, it is possible that consumers could have more shared experiences than before, which in turn, would contribute to the development of shared needs (Moran et al. 2014). Therefore, the next step forward is to test this idea (i.e., needs vs. values and wants) using actual ads across different countries and product categories.

5.1 Information technology education services in India and China

In the particular case of information technology education services in India and China, it is possible that the strong commonality in consumer needs arises out of the similarity in the growth of the information technology (IT) industry in both these emerging markets. The IT industry growth in India and China can be attributed to several reasons. These include favorable national

economic policies, foreign investments, the expansion of personal computer ownership, the increased use of the Internet (Yahya 2003), and the return of transnational entrepreneurs to their home countries (Saxenian 2002, 2005). Equally important is the fact that both these countries have English-speaking skilled workers who are willing to work for lower wages (Patni 1999). Furthermore, both countries belong to the BRIC group of nations, which implies that a degree of commonality might exist across their socio-economic environments, which might also lead to similar consumer needs. It would therefore be interesting for future research to compare countries that differ on these aspects and see if the findings still hold.

5.2 Impact on the universality of values: structure vs. importance

Most existing research in global advertising has placed an emphasis on cultural values and in obtaining standardization through values that are shared across countries, although there are some exceptions (e.g., Domzal and Kernan 1993). While this is certainly a possible avenue for research, it is also fraught with problems. Due to their own unique histories, each culture has its own cultural values; even so, it may still be possible that some values are shared across the countries of interest (Chow and Amir 2006; Hennigs et al. 2012; Schwartz 1994). This study is not arguing against the universality of the content or structure of values, but rather the universality of importance of values across countries. The *existence* of a particular value among people of two countries does not automatically imply equal *importance* of this value across the two countries (cf. Hennigs et al. 2012). Hofstede's (1984) work is a well-known example of this – countries vary in the importance given to the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long term orientation. For example, while

individualism might exist in both China and India, it is more important for Indians than it is for the Chinese (Hofstede 1984). At the same time, however, both countries give almost the same importance to power distance. Therefore, individualism would be a 'weakly' shared cultural value between China and India, while power distance would be 'strongly' shared. Similar comparisons can be made for the remaining dimensions or other values. Thus, while China and India might share the content and structure of cultural values, the importance of these values varies. Even Schwartz (1994), when discussing the application of his universal value index, notes that future research can use his value index to compare priorities given to values by people from different nations.

Furthermore, the *importance* given to common values can vary not only across countries (e.g., Hofstede 1984), but within countries as well (Bergstrom 2012; Zhou and Belk 2004). For this reason, it is suggested that if comparisons across countries are needed, they should be made at the product category level (and not at the national cultural level). Then, the observed similarities, if any, become *cross-subcultural* rather than *cross-cultural* (cf. Samiee and Jeong 1994). A subculture can be defined as "a unique combination of cultural dimensions that goes beyond geographic boundaries of countries" (Donthu and Yoo 1998, p.183). The existence of similar subcultures across different countries is not unusual and evidence of this fact has started surfacing from research in various areas of marketing (e.g., Krishnamurthy and Kumar 2015; Okazaki et al 2015; Sudbury-Riley et al. 2015; Taylor and Okazaki 2015). Similarly, in this study too, it was found that consumers of information technology education services in India and China form similar subcultures within their respective national cultures; and therefore, at the subcultural level, consumer needs were strongly shared across both countries.

5.3 Managerial implications

While the ideas and findings of this work are relevant to the business-to-consumer (B2C) space, it might help marketers in the global business-to-business (B2B) space as well because they too face similar issues such as meeting the needs of different customers across the globe (Pernu 2015). The idea of standardizing the message strategy while localizing the message tactic is not new (Moriarty and Duncan 1991; Mueller and Taylor 2013). In fact, it has been used by a majority of firms that operate in the global arena (Hite and Fraser 1988). However, research on this topic has not developed beyond providing normative directions to managers (Garrett and Iyer 2013). This study is an attempt to go beyond the normative by providing managers with more concrete directions, and with the procedures to go about accomplishing it (e.g., using the laddering technique). This study supports demand-side strategies, wherein managers are interested in finding unmet consumer needs and then creating solutions that serve those needs (Siqueira et al. 2015). Such strategies are important because consumers' unmet needs are strong motivators (Pincus 2004). If managers use the laddering technique in their own marketing research, it might help them understand their consumers' needs. They can then be proactive in their market orientation by satisfying these needs through product innovation (Chuang et al. 2015; Narver et al. 2004; Slater and Narver 1998), and communicate these needs through advertising and/or promotions. At the same time, managers need to be aware that needs that may be strongly shared by consumers today, might not be the same needs strongly shared at another point in time (Szu-Chi et a. 2015). It is also possible that firms might have greater impact when the shared needs are more social than functional (Homburg et al. 2015).

5.3.1 Standardizing the message strategy

Message strategies are most often standardized by communicating the benefits of a product or service (Batra et al. 2009). Usually, this involves determining the most important attributes that provide a particular benefit, and then informing consumers that the firm's product or service does indeed have these attributes (and therefore the product does indeed provide the associated benefit). Within a single country or for new or technical products, this is normally an effective message strategy, and therefore research has developed several ways of determining these important attributes – conjoint analysis (e.g., Silayoi and Speece 2007), means-end relationships (Reynolds and Gutman 1988), the repertory grid (e.g., Frost and Braine 1967), and so on. However, this paper illustrates that such a strategy might not work in a multiple-country scenario, where consumers from different countries deem different attributes (of the same product of service) to be important to them; that is, a single message across countries that focuses on attributes might not be effective. This study found that more than attributes (i.e., consumer wants), consumer needs are shared strongly across countries. That is why this research recommends the approach of focusing on common consumer needs rather than on product or service attributes.

5.3.2 Advantages of using strongly shared consumer needs

Building a message strategy around strongly shared consumer needs has several advantages. Since these needs are common across the countries they are advertised, the consumers from these countries will be able to understand and relate to the message. Focusing on needs motivates consumers to process the ad information because these needs are something they are constantly seeking to satisfy. Further, by focusing on the need(s) that can be satisfied, the message automatically avoids technical or non-familiar attribute information. This results in consumers with any level of ability and cognitive capacity to process the ad information. Motivation and

ability to process ad information are not only important in their own right, but they are also the ingredients of the central route to persuasion and its associated benefits (Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

The results of this study support the contention that it is possible to standardize the message strategy across countries, and that the framework of means-end relationships can be used to develop standardized strategies. Yet, the execution of such strategies might well require a local touch when advertising across countries (Cheong et al. 2011; Mueller and Taylor 2013; Swoboda et al. 2012). In other words, while the message strategy may be standardized (by focusing on common consumer needs), the execution of the message tactics (advertising media, actors and so forth) might have to be localized (cf. Moriarty and Duncan 1991; Mueller and Taylor 2013). The chief advantage of using a standard message across different countries is that the firm creates a strong consistent brand image across different countries and this enhances its global brand equity (Cateora and Graham 2004; Winit et al. 2014).

5.4 Limitations and further research

The laddering technique (Reynolds and Gutman 1988) used in this study encompasses both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and thus has the advantages of both these forms of analysis. However, the converse also holds – it has some of the disadvantages as well. First, since the laddering technique does not use pretested scales from literature, one might wonder about the reliability of the study's results. This concern has been addressed in this study because it is primarily investigating the extent of commonality at each level of abstraction in the means-end linkages. Therefore, while a future study might find different categories at each level of

abstraction, it is most likely that it would still find greater commonality at the level of consumer needs than at any other level. Second, although the laddering questionnaire records open-ended responses, unlike several qualitative techniques, it is still quite structured. It is possible that this might reduce the degree of richness (or depth) in the collected data. This concern is addressed by the fact that saturation (or the lack of incremental learning) occurs in laddering data fairly easily due to the unique form of questioning (Mostovicz and Kakabadse 2009), unless the context is highly complex (e.g., Bagozzi et al. 2003).

In this study, there were 300 Indian respondents and 140 Chinese respondents. Such unbalanced samples have the potential for misinterpretation. However, the chances of misinterpretation are likely to be low in this study due to several reasons. First, during the data analysis, saturation (i.e., no new information or theme was observed in the data; Glaser 1978) was reached fairly quickly in both samples. In the Chinese sample, saturation was reached by the 62nd respondent, and in the Indian sample, saturation was reached by the 100th respondent. Therefore, even though the Indian sample had 160 respondents more than the Chinese sample, it did not matter since no new themes emerged from the extra respondents' data. Second, the analysis did not compare the strengths of the linkages (between the different elements) *across* the two samples; it only compared the strengths of linkages with other linkages *within* a sample. Hence again, it is unlikely that the sample size affected our interpretation of the results. Lastly, two random samples of 140 respondents from the 300 Indian respondents were drawn, and implications matrices for these samples were created. These new matrices were then compared with the original implication matrix (of the 300 sample). No difference was found in the main findings between the two random samples and the original sample. For all these reasons, it is believed that the unbalanced samples in this study were unlikely to cause any misinterpretation.

At the same time, however, since the sample sizes in this study are small in comparison to the populations of the countries under investigation, extending this study's findings to other types of services in these countries should be done with caution until future research can provide empirical evidence for those contexts.

Another limitation of this study is the number of categories chosen. Although data were collected from both Chinese and Indian consumers, it was done so for only one category – information technology education services. Further, this research was in the area of services and not products. All this might affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, in order to enhance the scope and the generalizability of the findings, it would be worthwhile for future researchers to compare the results to other services and products. At the same time, however, this limitation should not necessarily affect how managers can utilize the essence of the findings in other categories. This is because every product category satisfies a different set of consumer needs. Therefore, to determine the strongly shared needs in a particular category, managers can use the laddering technique among consumers of the category. In doing so, they can then determine the level of abstraction at which strong commonality exists for their particular category.

Going forward, future research can use the findings of this study as the basis for experimentally testing the differences in ad-persuasion and brand attitudes of consumers when they are presented with different advertising messages that focus only on wants, or only on needs, or only on values. The ad content for the experimental manipulations can be developed based on the findings here. The results of such an experiment will determine if the implementation of this study's findings affects the consumer-firm relationship in a positive way. Ideally, instead of a laboratory experiment, a field experiment involving a participating

multinational firm would be more useful to practicing managers. In such a case, the financial

impact of varying combinations of advertising message foci across a pair of countries can be

observed to determine the best way to achieve cross-cultural advertising.

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APPENDIX

The part of the questionnaire that was used to collect the laddering data is shown below.

Please fill up the boxes in serial order (i.e. starting from Box 1 and ending with Box 15). You may provide your answer in a single word, a phrase or a sentence.

Column A	**Column B**	**Column C**
Attribute #1 of the course/program I attended	…this attribute is important to me because…	…and this is important to me because then…
1	6	7
Attribute #2 of the course/program I attended	…this attribute is important to me because…	…and this is important to me because then…
2	8	9
Attribute #3 of the course/program I attended	…this attribute is important to me because…	…and this is important to me because then…
3	10	11
Attribute #4 of the course/program I attended	…this attribute is important to me because…	…and this is important to me because then…
4	12	13
Attribute #5 of the course/program I attended	…this attribute is important to me because…	…and this is important to me because then…
5	14	15