

## GLOBAL PRODUCT STRATEGY: A LONGITUDINAL MULTI-COUNTRY PRODUCT ATTRIBUTE STUDY

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*For many companies a fundamental marketing challenge is to create a global strategy which will allow for maximum use of existing product offerings and marketing activities through standardization while simultaneously “acting local” in order to effectively adjust to unique aspects of any given market. The purpose of this study is to investigate global product strategy and the issue of identifying relevant areas where standardization may be possible, and where the need to “act local” may be necessary, in the context of product offering attributes using a longitudinal approach. This study will investigate potential differences along 16 “sought for” product attributes over approximately a ten year period across three distinct international markets, explore how those identified relevant attributes change across three different product categories, The results show that in developing a long-term global product strategy it is important to begin product positioning, differentiation, and promotional activities with the fundamental product attributes of quality, price, appearance, and availability.*

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### INTRODUCTION

At the end of the twentieth century the growth imperative and the prevalence of mature domestic markets resulted in many firms worldwide to look beyond their local market boundaries. This movement into international markets presented a new set of challenges for these organizations unfamiliar with the various nuances of a marketplace characterized by cultural, economic, political, and competitive differences (Fellman 1998). For many of these companies, the fundamental marketing objective was to create a global strategy which would allow for maximum use of existing product offerings and market activities through standardized operations while simultaneously “acting local” (Wills, Samli, and Jacobs 1991) in an effort to adjust to unique aspects of any given market.

The advantages of such a global strategy, with the emphasis on standardizing marketing efforts

wherever and whenever possible were then, and continue to be, many. These include: 1) increased cost savings through standardized research and development, packaging, product design, etc., 2) economies of scale, 3) consistency of product offering which facilitates quality control, and 4) similar segmentation strategies which allow for similar promotional efforts. Ten years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century this fundamental goal for international market operations has not changed. However, what has changed over the preceding decade is the nature and characteristics of the global marketplace. No longer characterized by unprecedented growth, global markets now are experiencing almost equally unprecedented economic pressures which have been accompanied by cultural, political, and competitive pressures. The growth imperative has not diminished, but the need to improve effectiveness and efficiencies in non-domestic markets has become more and more acute.

Clearly this changed market environment means a static global approach to marketing strategy is not without potential problems. It is

frequently difficult, and time consuming, to ascertain where and when standardization is appropriate over time. The purpose of this study is to investigate global product strategy and the issue of identifying relevant areas where standardization may be possible, and where the need to “act local” may be necessary, in the context of product offering attributes using a longitudinal approach. This study will investigate potential differences along 16 “sought for” product attributes over approximately a ten year period across three distinct international markets, explore how those identified relevant attributes change across three different product categories, and consider the consistency of these relevant product attributes within each market across the three product categories by replicating and comparing the results of Keillor, Hausknecht, and Parker’s (2001) study. The importance of “acting local”, particularly in relation to a given firm’s product offering, is of fundamental importance to successful overseas operations but little research exists which deals with product attributes in an international or global marketing context (Kalyanaram and Krishnan 1997) particularly when potential market changes over time are taken into account.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant to this study is a substantial body of work which addresses general product strategy issues such as product definition, product categorization, the demarcation of product attributes, the relationship between product offering and brand strategy, and the relationship between product attributes and price. Unfortunately, although such studies are growing in number, there is a lack of product attribute/product strategy research using an international or global perspective. In order to fully understand product strategy, consideration of dimensions beyond the formal product or tangible good is necessary. Both the study of product strategy, and the practice of product planning, require attention be given to all of the features from which consumers might derive value. Although clearly not comprehensive, the review here highlights important studies

specifically relevant to this research of the product literature going back several decades which identified sixteen different attributes which consistently feature in consumers’ product choice decisions (Table 1).

In the international/global product strategy literature the earliest studies begin by building on the most fundamental difference in product type; that is, industrial versus consumer products. In their 1981 article, McGuinness and Little (1981) provided the foundation for developing successful product strategies in a non-domestic market. These authors identify the characteristics of successful export firms - size, level of technology, local vs. foreign ownership - as well as characteristics of successful export products - relative advantage, compatibility, risk, complexity, availability - in the industrial realm. They then (McGuinness and Little 1981) began to explore industrial product characteristics which may make a product more amenable to standardization in the context of several non-domestic markets. Their conclusion was that, for industrial products, technological innovations were universally sought out in global markets and that this “new-ness” can be used as a product attribute which will successfully build greater international sales. The results of this research (McGuinness and Little 1981) as it pertains to this study is support for the notion that specific product attributes can span different markets around the world and that the overall market environment can be a key influence on the likely success of a non-domestic product offering in any given market.

Moving from the marketing of industrial products in a non-domestic market to the marketing of consumer products in similar non-domestic environments, Jain (1989) argues total standardization of a product offering, as reflected by its attributes, is unrealistic. While the type of product and its composite attributes are basic determinants of the degree to which any offering must be adapted, or, alternatively, can be standardized, the environmental influence of cultural preferences, varied product experience and knowledge, and varied

**TABLE 1**  
**Identified Product Attributes**

Attribute	Supporting Literature
Product Quality	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991); Aaker and Keller (1990) Zeithaml (1998); Phillips, Chang and Buzzell (1983) Aliman and Othman (2007); Wang and Chen (2004)
Hygiene/Clean Appearance	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Chemical Free/Organic Components	Chandler and Drucker (1993) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991)
Service Availability/Return Policy	Aaker and Keller (1990) Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001)
Attractive Packaging/Attractive Appearance	Smith (1992) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Product Availability	Smith (1992)
Warranty/Guarantee	Biel (1992) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990) Bloch and Richins (1983); Yi and Jeon (2003)
Value/Price	Yeo and Donthu (2002); Smith (1992) Bloch and Richins (1983) Jacoby, Olson and Haddock (1971)
Number of Features/Product Flexibility	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Recyclability/Environmentally Friendly	Chandler and Drucker (1993) Yi (1990) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991)
Usable Packaging/Functional Features	Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991) Aaker and Keller (1990)
Safety/Personal Risk	Bloch and Richins (1983)
Brand Image	Aliman and Othman (2007); Yeo and Donthu (2002) Aaker, Martinez and Garsiera (2001) Smith (1992); Biel (1992) Valette-Florence and Rapacchi (1991); Yi (1990)
Store Image/Retailer Image	Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003) Semiga, Riel and Ambrosini (2003) Biel (1992); Meyer-Waarden (2006); Rittippant, et al. (2009)
Financing/Credit	Smith (1992) Bloch and Richins (1983)
Locally Produced/Product Origin	Aliman and Othman (2007) Wang and Chen (2004) Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998)

economic ability can all contribute to the need to make adjustments to product strategy as a firm moves from one market around the world to another. Like McGuiness and Little (1981), Jain (1989) supports the proposition that industrial products are more suitable for standardization than consumer products. However, Jain (1989) also presents a series of future research propositions built around the supposition that as markets become more culturally and economically diverse, and consumer behavior and characteristics change, the potential for a given organization to standardize its product offering in these markets and still achieve substantial levels of success is greatly reduced. Further, Samiee and Roth (1992) argue that consumer products are more likely to require higher levels of customization with firms emphasizing specialty products being better able to introduce elements of standardization in their products than those dealing in convenience products (e.g., food) where tastes and preferences may be determined by culture.

Emphasis on different product attributes across markets may also be the result of different levels of product familiarity and levels of consumer involvement (Wills, Samli, and Jacobs 1991). This approach points out the importance of matching product features and attributes with consumer demands and market characteristics. Thus, the knowledge of relevant product attributes in any given non-domestic market is crucial for the successful diffusion of product offerings new to a market as these attributes have a direct impact on the speed of that diffusion of process (Takada and Jain 1991). Relative advantage of the product, compatibility with the needs of the potential adopters, complexity, trialability, and observability (Rogers 1983) all have the potential to substantially impact the ability of a product offering to be more rapidly accepted in a non-domestic market environment.

An example of the need to match product, and product differentiation, strategies to the needs and characteristics of individual markets can be seen in the differences in advertising content

across markets. The fundamental purpose of an ad is to communicate relevant ideas and information to the target audience (Spreng, MacKenzie, and Olshavsky 1996). The notion that generalizable differences may exist across markets provides support for the case for attribute-based product strategy research in international/global marketing. In the case of advertising such research would focus on determining relevant product attributes across different markets as a mechanism for improving global advertising effectiveness. Lin (1993) provides evidence for this proposition in a comparative study of Japanese and American advertisements. In the study the author (Lin 1993) concluded Japanese advertisements tended to emphasize product attributes not directly related to the core product offering such as product packaging and availability. American advertisements, on the other hand, focused on product attributes more directly associated with the core product offering (e.g., price, product quality, and performance). Aaker and Maheswaran (1997) also provide a strong theoretical position that differences in product attribute emphasis and communication processing may be attributable to societal/cultural influences and orientation (e.g., China/collective versus U.S./individualistic). This is further supported by Han and Shavitt (1994) who concluded successful attribute appeals differ across cultures.

The theme that is established throughout the product strategy literature is the importance of matching product differentiation strategy, especially as it relates to product attributes, with the needs of different markets. From the perspective of a changing environment, which has been a marked characteristic of the global marketplace, Feenstra and Levinsohn (1995) note that, as markets and products change, so does the need to adjust and reconcile product differentiation strategies and the attributes which constitute a product offering. Assuming an organization has a functionally sound product offering prior to entering a non-domestic market, the next step, as discussed above, is to identify specific relevant product attributes (MacMillan and McGrath 1996).

Thus, the stage is set for the need to investigate the generally accepted product attributes (see Table 1) and their importance across several diverse marketplaces (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998) over time. By doing so, this study begins to lay the groundwork for dealing with the problem of how to effectively develop a successful global product strategy and how that strategy needs to be flexible as market conditions change. Such an approach provides a means to reconcile the advantages of a global strategy while implementing a market orientation outside of the familiar domestic market taking into account the fact that the market environment, domestic or non-domestic, is not static. Posten (1996) argues that a key to building a successful international/global product strategy is investigating the relevance of more, rather than fewer, product attributes. While previous research (e.g., McGuiness and Little 1981) has dealt with this issue in the realm of industrial products, little published research exists which deals with this problem in the area of consumer products on a large scale (i.e., beyond a limited number of product attributes) particularly in the context of a longitudinal study. By better understanding the product attributes which have the potential to remain stable across diverse markets over time, and those which may change, firms will be in a better position to match their product differentiation strategy to meet both the needs of the external market and the requirements of the firm's internal resource base thereby achieving long-term global success.

## METHODOLOGY

Any investigation of the relevance of product attributes across different markets and product classifications represents substantial methodological challenges. These include: selection of the markets from which respondents will be drawn, the sampling procedure by which the individual respondents are selected, measurement issues such as specification of the product attributes, and the evaluation of the reliability/validity of the measurement instruments as reflected in the collected data.

## Market Selection

The first obstacle to overcome in the original study was to identify markets from which reasonably high quality respondent data could be obtained. The markets chosen were required to represent viable areas of opportunity for marketers and still be distinct in their economic, cultural, and consumer behavior characteristics. The countries determined to fulfill these criteria were the United States, France, and Malaysia. At the time of the original study, the United States was an obvious choice given its role as a major player in the global economy with exports well in excess of 1 trillion dollars. While the intervening economic downturn, and subsequent movement toward recovery, has affected the U.S. market it remains a global market leader. The selection of two other markets was more problematic. While it was necessary to identify markets from which data could be gathered, at the same time the markets selected would need to be reasonably representative as resource constraints prevented the gathering of data from a large number of countries. Given the exploratory nature of the research it was determined a nation from the major global market region of the European Union (France) and an emerging market (Malaysia) would be appropriate. When paired with the United States these two additional nations not only serve as a basis for a study which can be argued to be global in nature, they also can be shown to be reasonably distinct across economic, cultural, and consumer behavior lines.

## Sampling Procedure

The data in the original study and this subsequent follow-up study was collected through personal intercept interviews over approximately a three month period of time (Spring 2000 and Fall 2009), using a quota sampling method. The personal interview method of data collection has several strengths which make it particularly well suited for conducting research in multiple countries. Personal interviews allow the individual gathering the data to clarify and explain

ambiguous or potentially confusing questions (Nowell and Stanley 1991; Bush and Hair 1985), which is particularly important when collecting data in markets where language barriers may exist (Kishii 1994). The ability to explain the selected terminology used to describe the various product attributes is an important concern and a key reason for employing personal intercept interviews. Beyond clarification and comprehension difficulties, multicultural/multinational data collection frequently encounters a number of bias-related problems, particularly social desirability and halo biases. Methodologically, personal interviews have been shown to be less susceptible to social desirability and halo biases than other popular forms of data collection (Han, Lee, and Ro 1994; Bush and Hair 1985).

The use of a quota sampling technique also has advantages that help to overcome problems associated with international data collection. In collecting international data, random sampling techniques used in a researcher's home market are often either impossible to implement or inappropriate to apply causing some researchers to fall back on convenience samples. In contrast to random or convenience sampling approaches, quota sampling allows the researcher to obtain a data base which is representative of the population as a whole along predetermined criteria (e.g., age, gender, etc.).

In comparing quota sampling to random sampling, Marsh and Scarbrough (1990) found no significant differences between respondents which would represent substantial data biases. Further, these authors (Marsh and Scarbrough 1990) also found no significant non-response biases existed when quota samples were compared to random samples. Sudman (1980) suggests using quota sampling based on age and gender to reduce potential biases in intercept-based data collection. The quota sample constructed for the original and follow-up studies were gathered so that each was representative of the American, French, and Malay population based on age and gender distribution (Sudman 1980). To further ensure

a sufficiently high level of data reliability and validity, the survey instrument was translated into French and Malay by native speakers. It was then back-translated (Douglas and Craig 1983) as means of identifying potential terminology problems. The same survey instrument used in the initial study was used in the follow-up study.

### Measurement

One of the challenges in conducting this research was selecting the product attributes relevant to individual consumers. The list needed to be reasonably comprehensive yet concise enough to facilitate respondent cooperation and data analysis. The identified attributes also needed to be relevant over time. Using the existing literature as an initial starting point, sixteen relevant product attributes (see Table 1) were specified which were deemed to be well grounded in existing literature, concise, comprehensive, and sufficiently generalizable across product classification categories over time. In the collection of both samples, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each of the attributes was important in their purchase of a convenience product (grocery products), a shopping product (clothing), and a specialty product (an automobile) based on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1=not important to 6=very important.

While it may be argued that attempting to identify relevant and generalizable product attributes through the use of a list-based approach is problematic, Srinivasan and Park (1997) support the efficacy of such a self-explicated approach for identifying customer preferences for product attributes. Further, Braivik and Supphellen (2003) demonstrate that product attribute data can be reliably and validly collected using intercept interviews and they provide empirical support for the use of product attribute evaluation as a predictor of product purchase intention at all levels of product category involvement.

Factor analysis was employed to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument of both samples. It was important for comparative purposes that there be a high level of consistency between product classifications and the underlying factors with which each product attribute was associated. Therefore, 48 items (16 specified product attributes across the three identified product classifications) were entered into each factor analysis. A Varimax rotation was utilized and factors established based on a minimum scale item loading of .40 (Rummel 1967). No items produced factor loadings below the .40 cut-off. A reliability analysis was also conducted utilizing coefficient alpha (Cronbach 1951).

In the case of the initial study data an overall computation of coefficient alpha, using the 48 items produced a coefficient alpha of .93 while computed coefficient alphas for the 16 items based on each product classification produced scores of .85, .85, and .79 for the respective convenience (grocery products), shopping (clothing), and specialty (automobiles) classifications. Similar results were obtained from the follow-up data with the overall coefficient alpha for the 48 items being .90 and the 16 items for each product category being .83 (convenience/grocery products), .81 (shopping/clothing), and .78 (specialty/automobiles) respectively. All of the coefficient alpha scores obtained from both samples exceeded the recommended .70 criterion suggested by Nunnally (1978).

#### DATA ANALYSIS

In the initial study a total of 372 completed and usable questionnaires were obtained (131 from Malaysia, 129 from the United States, and 112 from France). The follow-up study had a comparable sample size of 412 (141 from Malaysia, 148 from the United States, and 123 from France). Prior to subjecting the data to statistical analysis, frequency distributions were tabulated for each item to ascertain possible response biases or other data anomalies. None were detected and the sample was determined

to be of sufficient quality to be subjected to statistical analysis.

#### Economic Comparisons

The data in the study was analyzed by using paired significance tests of the mean responses for each group (i.e., Malaysia, France, and the United States) across the 16 specified product attributes within three basic product categories (i.e., convenience products represented by grocery products, shopping products by clothing, and specialty products by automobiles) using data from both the original and follow-up study. Table 2 shows the results of the comparisons.

It has been suggested that the importance placed on product attributes should be significantly different across economically dissimilar markets. That is, the more important product attributes directly tied to a consumer's economic situation should be related to the individual consumer's ability to engage in consumption (e.g., price vs. income) in markets characterized as being less developed or economically less stable. Malaysia was the market identified as being at the lower end of the economic spectrum, the United States on the opposite end, with France somewhere in the middle range. It is important to note that it is not suggested here that the French economy is less developed than that of the U.S., in fact the two could be considered very similar in many respects. However, the market economy of the United States was shown to be substantially more stable in the years prior to the initial study. In the intervening years, while the U.S. has suffered substantial economic setbacks this has been a worldwide phenomena and the U.S. appears to have emerged from this recession faster and stronger than most of the rest of the world. From a consumer's perspective, the implications of residing in a more developed economy (e.g., lower unemployment, lower inflation, higher levels of disposable income, etc.) would potentially mean less emphasis would be placed on "rational" consumption attributes. It should also be noted that, in order to obtain reliable and valid data, it was

**TABLE 2**  
**Product Attribute Mean Score Comparisons**  
(2000 vs. 2010)

Product Attribute	Malaysia		France		United States	
	2000	2010	1999	2010	1999	2010
Product Quality	5.42* (G)	5.39 (G)	5.41* (G)	5.43 (G)	5.00 (G)	5.35 (G)
	5.06 (CL)	5.61 (CL)	5.28 (CL)	5.38 (CL)	5.55 (CL)	5.65 (CL)
	5.58 (AU)	5.55 (AU)	5.64 (AU)	5.69 (AU)	5.85* (AU)	5.85 (AU)
Hygiene/Clean Appearance	5.61* (G)	5.67 (G)	5.57* (G)	5.59 (G)	5.10 (G)	5.46 (G)
	4.94 (CL)	3.69 (CL)	4.64 (CL)	3.61 (CL)	4.61 (CL)	3.56 (CL)
	4.55* (AU)	3.71 (AU)	3.69 (AU)	3.73 (AU)	3.39 (AU)	3.47 (AU)
Chemical Free/Organic Components	5.16* (G)	4.27 (G)	4.32* (G)	5.23* (G)	3.23 (G)	2.88 (G)
	4.64* (CL)	4.85* (CL)	3.20* (CL)	3.11 (CL)	2.59 (CL)	2.66 (CL)
	4.33* (AU)	2.85 (AU)	2.42 (AU)	2.55 (AU)	2.03 (AU)	2.42 (AU)
Service Availability/Return Policy	4.43* (G)	3.70 (G)	3.72 (G)	4.36* (G)	4.11 (G)	3.80 (G)
	4.23* (CL)	4.23 (CL)	3.52 (CL)	4.17 (CL)	3.96 (CL)	4.38 (CL)
	5.19 (AU)	5.17 (AU)	4.78 (AU)	4.95 (AU)	5.31* (AU)	5.24 (AU)
Attractive Packaging/ Attractive Appearance	3.74* (G)	4.35 (G)	3.05 (G)	4.00 (G)	3.36 (G)	4.18 (G)
	3.80* (CL)	3.77* (CL)	2.50 (CL)	2.60 (CL)	3.37* (CL)	3.57* (CL)
	4.14* (AU)	4.10* (AU)	2.66 (AU)	3.01 (AU)	4.06* (AU)	4.11* (AU)
Product Availability	4.66* (G)	5.00 (G)	4.26 (G)	4.78 (G)	4.94* (G)	5.09 (G)
	4.29 (CL)	4.52 (CL)	4.00 (CL)	4.48 (CL)	4.62* (CL)	4.72 (CL)
	4.93* (AU)	4.90 (AU)	4.45 (AU)	4.81 (AU)	4.60 (AU)	4.76 (AU)
Warranty/Guarantee	4.74* (G)	4.66* (G)	4.39* (G)	4.41* (G)	3.32 (G)	3.13 (G)
	4.42* (CL)	3.24 (CL)	4.32* (CL)	3.01 (CL)	3.75 (CL)	3.11 (CL)
	5.57 (AU)	5.54 (AU)	5.67 (AU)	5.61 (AU)	5.77 (AU)	5.69 (AU)
Value/Price	5.03* (G)	5.15 (G)	3.95 (G)	4.96 (G)	5.25* (G)	5.30 (G)
	4.91* (CL)	4.96 (CL)	3.88 (CL)	4.61 (CL)	5.27* (CL)	5.15 (CL)
	5.34* (AU)	5.82 (AU)	4.68 (AU)	5.76 (AU)	5.73* (AU)	5.55 (AU)
Number of Features/ Product Flexibility	3.38* (G)	3.40* (G)	3.63* (G)	3.57* (G)	2.67 (G)	2.77 (G)
	3.78* (CL)	3.20 (CL)	3.22 (CL)	3.19 (CL)	3.49 (CL)	3.15 (CL)
	4.67 (AU)	5.31 (AU)	4.84 (AU)	5.44 (AU)	5.62* (AU)	5.65 (AU)
Recyclability/ Environmentally Friendly	3.38* (G)	3.21 (G)	3.64* (G)	4.11* (G)	2.87 (G)	2.81 (G)
	3.37* (CL)	3.35 (CL)	2.79* (CL)	3.19 (CL)	2.08 (CL)	3.21 (CL)
	3.63* (AU)	3.50* (AU)	2.91* (AU)	3.27* (AU)	2.31 (AU)	2.26 (AU)
Usable Packaging/ Functional Features	3.66* (G)	4.00 (G)	3.87* (G)	3.91 (G)	3.04 (G)	3.86 (G)
	3.48* (CL)	3.03 (CL)	2.35 (CL)	2.79 (CL)	2.14 (CL)	2.81 (CL)
	3.64* (AU)	3.78* (AU)	1.73 (AU)	1.99 (AU)	2.34* (AU)	3.35* (AU)
Safety/Personal Risk	5.26* (G)	5.21* (G)	4.50 (G)	4.28 (G)	4.31 (G)	4.30 (G)
	4.70* (CL)	4.67* (CL)	3.55* (CL)	4.57* (CL)	2.97 (CL)	2.83 (CL)
	5.62 (AU)	5.58 (AU)	5.53 (AU)	5.55 (AU)	5.38 (AU)	5.47 (AU)
Brand Image	3.79 (G)	3.99* (G)	3.33 (G)	3.31 (G)	3.89* (G)	4.09* (G)
	4.07 (CL)	5.03 (CL)	3.66 (CL)	4.98 (CL)	4.84* (CL)	5.11 (CL)
	4.60 (AU)	5.01 (AU)	4.23 (AU)	4.95 (AU)	5.06* (AU)	5.12 (AU)
Store Image/Retailer Image	3.71 (G)	3.72 (G)	3.34 (G)	3.51 (G)	3.44 (G)	3.46 (G)
	3.78 (CL)	4.61 (CL)	3.56 (CL)	4.73 (CL)	4.44* (CL)	4.71 (CL)
	4.23* (AU)	4.89 (AU)	4.09* (AU)	4.81 (AU)	3.45 (AU)	4.93 (AU)
Financing/Credit	3.65* (G)	2.86 (G)	2.93 (G)	2.95 (G)	2.55 (G)	3.57* (G)
	3.54* (CL)	3.81 (CL)	2.71 (CL)	3.83 (CL)	2.79 (CL)	4.04 (CL)
	5.04 (AU)	5.10 (AU)	4.67 (AU)	4.96 (AU)	5.12 (AU)	5.20 (AU)
Locally Produced/Product Origin	3.96* (G)	2.37 (G)	3.98* (G)	3.83* (G)	2.10 (G)	1.79 (G)
	3.58* (CL)	2.41 (CL)	2.95* (CL)	2.35 (CL)	1.64 (CL)	1.90 (CL)
	3.75* (AU)	2.31 (AU)	3.23* (AU)	2.65 (AU)	2.11 (AU)	2.22 (AU)

G = Grocery Products      CL = Clothing    AU = Automobile      \* = Sig. < .01

NOTE: Based on a scale ranging from 1 = Not Important to 6 = Very Important



necessary to identify a lesser-developed, or emerging, market which also populated by consumers who are reasonably sophisticated in product evaluation and consumption. This led to the choice of Malaysia as the third market (Aliman and Othman 2007).

In the first study a review of the identified product attributes showed that the Malaysian respondents reported placing relatively high levels of importance on product attributes which were tied directly to their economic condition and the financial/economic risks associated with obtaining and consuming a given product. This was demonstrated by the lower end of the product classification, convenience goods (grocery products). With these products the Malaysian consumers placed high levels of importance on such attributes as product quality, warranty/guarantee, return policy, and even financing/credit. At the same time, these same respondents reported relatively low levels of importance being placed on attributes related to affective aspects of consumption (e.g., brand image). While the Malaysian respondents had some of the same emphasized product attributes in common with the French respondents, a comparison in the context of all three market economies showed a more complex pattern. Taking into account the data obtained from the Malaysian market, through the French market, to the United States revealed a tendency toward more emphasis on image and psychic-related attributes in the more developed/stable markets. For example, both the Malaysian and French respondents placed a high level of importance on product quality for grocery products when compared with the U.S. respondents. At the same time, French respondents did not place a high level of importance on financing and credit for grocery products. The U.S. consumers reported brand image to be significantly more important for grocery products than either the Malaysian or French consumers.

In the second study, several notable differences from the initial study were revealed in the data analysis. Malaysian consumers continue to place high levels of importance on product

quality and warranty/guarantee for convenience goods, in contrast to the initial study they did not place significantly high levels of importance on financing and credits but do emphasize brand image as an important product attribute. The notion that these consumers seek out chemical free or organic grocery products and place high importance on service availability and the recyclability of convenience products is also no longer supported. Overall, the results of the second study show a general movement toward image and psychic-related attributes in all three markets.

An alternative means of considering the data in light of the first research question is to note the levels, based on the 6-point scale used in the measurement instrument, reported for each attribute across the three samples. In the initial study the Malaysian respondents tended to report relatively high levels of importance being attached to "practical" product attributes such as product quality, cleanliness, service availability/return policy, product availability, warranty/guarantee, value/price, and safety across all three product classification categories. These same respondents reported relatively low levels of importance for more affective product attributes such as brand image, store/retailer image, features, and recyclability. As one then compares the results of the original study obtained from the other markets (France and the United States), there appears to be a movement away from similar high levels of importance being placed on practical product attributes and increased levels of importance being placed on the image/psychic attributes (e.g., brand image). The results from the first study do tend to provide some support for the notion that as markets become more developed economically, consumers in those markets began to evaluate products more on image-related attributes while consumers in lesser developed markets focused on objective/practical product attributes. However, as noted above, the more recent data does not support this distinction when considering the three markets.

### Cultural/Consumer Behavior Comparisons

As was the case with the economic comparisons, an analysis of differences between the three samples across the 16 specified product attributes (see Table 2) does reveal certain characteristics that make each culture unique in terms of the product attributes emphasized over the ten year time span. The data obtained in the first study indicated that for convenience goods (i.e., grocery products), Malaysian respondents were unique in that they placed higher levels of importance than did French or American consumers on service availability/return policy, attractive packaging/attractive appearance, safety, and financing credit. However, in the second study Malaysian consumers placed significantly higher levels of importance on a single convenience good attribute – safety/personal risk – than did their French and American counterparts.

Malaysian consumers also differed from their French and American counterparts in the shopping product category (i.e., clothing) in their emphasis on chemical free/organic components, service availability/return policy, number of features/product flexibility, recyclability, functional features, store image, and country-of-origin. As was the case for convenience products, Malaysian consumers rated only one shopping product attribute – chemical free/organic components – significantly higher than in the French and American respondents.

In the specialty product category, Malaysian consumers were distinct from French and U.S. consumers in the importance placed on clean appearance, the organic nature of components, the product availability, recyclability, functional features, retailer image, and country-of-origin when buying an automobile. These original results are in sharp contrast to the second study where Malaysian consumers did not specifically identify any specialty product attribute to be more significantly important than the responding French and American consumers.

Based on the original study data, French consumers were characterized by placing a relatively lower level of importance on value/price for any of the goods - convenience, shopping, or specialty. Additionally, French consumers appeared to be unique in the low level of importance placed on product availability for grocery or clothing products. This may have been a function of the wide availability of these products in the French market. Another explanation might be that the emphasis, at least at that point in time, on these types of products in the French culture elevated the social significance of these products such that price/value comparisons were not considered important. These results from the original study were confirmed in the follow-up study. At the same time, for convenience products, the second data set showed that French consumers placed significantly higher levels of importance on chemical free/organic components, service availability, recyclability/environmentally friendly, and locally produced/country-of-origin product attributes.

American consumers were also unique in the emphasis they placed on certain product attributes within particular product categories. Originally, brand image and value/price were both significantly more important to American consumers, when compared to Malaysian and French consumers, across all three product classification categories. Further, when clothing was considered, American consumers were unique in the importance they placed on store/retailer image. Product attributes related to automobiles were another area where American consumers were distinct from Malaysian and French consumers. The U.S. respondents in the first study placed significantly higher levels of importance on product quality, service availability/return policy, value/price, number of features, and brand image in considering the purchase of an automobile perhaps reflecting the traditional importance placed on the automobile in American culture (Halberstam 1986). In the second study, U.S. consumers did not indicate any product attributes to be significantly more

important across all three product categories than did the Malaysian or French consumers.

**MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this longitudinal study helps provide some basis for understanding and applying the notion of a global (i.e., “think global, act local”) marketing strategy as a firm moves beyond its domestic market boundaries and the ways the market environment, and by extension a firm’s strategy, evolves over time. Clearly, the findings here show that the importance placed on certain product attributes do cut across economic and cultural differences as reflected in the relatively high levels of importance placed on those attributes across the three nations sampled over the ten year time period. At the same time, the need to “act local” is revealed in the differences which were identified between the three samples. By breaking out these similarities and differences along product classification categories, it is possible to gain some practical insight into how to apply the principle of global marketing over

time for firms whose product offering falls into a particular product category by showing which emphasized product attributes are more likely to be longitudinally stable. Table 3 begins this discussion by considering similarities and differences within the convenience product category over a ten year time frame.

The information presented in Table 3 suggests that certain product attributes lend themselves better to a global strategy which positions and promotes a convenience product in a similar fashion across a variety of markets around the world. Alternatively, it could be suggested that those product attributes which do not fall into the “global” category in Table 3 may not be consistently emphasized in a variety of markets. This is evidenced by the data obtained in both studies which indicated some variation in the importance of attributes, either significant or relative, across the three nations sampled. What is particularly important for this study is that the number of product attributes which fall into the “global” category increased for all three product types over the ten year time

<p align="center"><b>TABLE 3</b>  <b>Attributes for Convenience Products</b>  <b>2000 vs. 2010</b></p>			
Global Attributes		Multi-Domestic Attributes	
2000	2010	2000	2010
* Product Quality	* Product Quality	* Chemical Free/ Organic Components (Malaysia; France)	* Chemical Free/ Organic Components (France)
* Hygiene/Clean Appearance	*Hygiene/Clean Appearance	* Service Availability (Malaysia)	* Service Availability (France)
* Product Availability	* Product Availability	* Attractive Packaging/ Appearance (Malaysia)	* Warranty/Guarantee (Malaysia; France)
* Value/Price	* Value/Price	* Warranty/Guarantee (Malaysia; France)	* Number of Features/ Product Flexibility (Malaysia; France)
	* Attractive Packaging/ Appearance	* Number of Features/ Product Flexibility (Malaysia; France)	* Recyclability/ Environmentally Friendly (France)
	* Usable Packaging/ Functional Features	* Recyclability/ Environmentally Friendly (Malaysia; France)	* Safety/Personal Risk (Malaysia)
		* Safety/Personal Risk (Malaysia)	* Brand Image (United States; Malaysia)
		* Brand Image (United States)	* Financing/Credit (United States)
		* Financing/Credit (Malaysia)	* Locally Produced/ Country-of-Origin (France)
		* Locally Produced/ Country-of-Origin (Malaysia; France)	

period separating the two data sets. Those product attributes which appear were emphasized consistently (i.e., are associated with a relatively high importance score based on the 6-point scale used) in the convenience category include: product quality, hygiene/clean appearance, product availability, and value/price. In the second data set attractive packaging/appearance and usable packaging/functional features were also added. For a firm with a grocery/convenience product offering that is attempting to formulate, or improve, its global product strategy these findings support the notion that consumers are becoming increasingly “global” in the attributes they seek out even in low involvement, convenience products. At the same time, the results show that a wide-range of other product attributes may be important for maximizing success when a firm adopts a multi-domestic, or individual market strategy, but may not be the best choice for building a global product strategy.

The information in Table 4 provides further support for the notion that not all product attributes carry over from one economy to another in the global marketplace but the numbers are increasing over time. Interestingly, in the first study the same four product attributes (i.e., product quality, hygiene/clean appearance, product availability, and value/price) were consistently rated to be of relatively higher importance for shopping goods than other types of goods in each nation sampled. But another aspect of shopping goods can also be seen. Product attributes which are frequently emphasized by American firms in product positioning and promotional activities for shopping goods, such as brand image, were not universally valued. However, the second data set shows many of the attributes originally classified as multi-domestic moved into the global category. The emerging picture is significant in terms of its implications for firms moving into the global marketplace. This study

<b>TABLE 4</b> <b>Attributes for Shopping Attributes</b> <b>2000 vs. 2010</b>			
Global Attributes		Multi-Domestic Attributes	
2000	2010	2000	2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Product Quality</li> <li>* Hygiene/Clean Appearance</li> <li>* Product Availability</li> <li>* Value/Price</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Product Quality</li> <li>* Product Availability</li> <li>* Value/Price</li> <li>* Brand Image</li> <li>* Store Image/ Retailer Image</li> <li>* Finance/Credit</li> <li>* Service Availability/ Return Policy</li> <li>* Product Availability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Chemical Free/ Organic Components (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Service Availability/ Return Policy (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Attractive Packaging/ Attractive Appearance (Malaysia; United States)</li> <li>* Product Availability (United States)</li> <li>* Warranty/Guarantee (Malaysia; France)</li> <li>* Number of Features/ Product Flexibility (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Recyclability/ Environmentally Friendly (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Usable Packaging/ Functional Features (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Safety/Personal Risk (Malaysia; France)</li> <li>* Brand Image (United States)</li> <li>* Store Image/ Retailer Image (United States)</li> <li>* Financing/Credit (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Locally Produced/ Product Origin (Malaysia; France)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Chemical Free/ Organic Components (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Attractive Packaging/ Attractive Appearance (Malaysia; United States)</li> <li>* Safety/Personal Risk (Malaysia; France)</li> </ul>

provides empirical evidence that understanding the nuances of a single market may not be necessary for creating a successful marketing strategy in another market. For convenience and shopping goods providers, the message seems to be clear - a global strategy should be founded on the basics (e.g., quality, value, availability, etc.) which represent the “think global” component of a global strategy. At the same time, other attributes play an important role for global consumers depending on the product type. Further, these results appear to carry over, with some modifications, to specialty goods as well (see Table 5).

As was the case with convenience and shopping products, the two universally important product attributes identified over time with specialty products are product quality and value/price. This would seem to be consistent with the nature of specialty products, particularly their infrequent purchase and the financial commitment/risk associated with consuming these products. The other universally accepted

attributes for this category also seem to support this perspective of consumers seeking to minimize the risk and commitment associated with consuming a specialty product, whatever their cultural or economic situation. These include: service availability/return policy, warranty/guarantee, safety/personal risk, and financing/credit. However, as was the case with the previous product classification categories, attributes such as appearance, brand and store/retailer image, and features which are commonly used to differentiate specialty products but were not universally emphasized as one moves from market to market around the world in the first data set were globally emphasized in the second study.

**CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

This study has attempted to address some of the issues related to constructing an effective product strategy in the global marketplace taking into account the possible impact of market and consumer changes over time. The

Global Attributes		Multi-Domestic Attributes	
2000	2010	2000	2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Product Quality</li> <li>* Service Availability/Return Policy</li> <li>* Warranty/Guarantee</li> <li>* Value/Price</li> <li>* Safety/Personal Risk</li> <li>* Financing/Credit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Product Quality</li> <li>* Service Availability/Return Policy</li> <li>* Warranty/Guarantee</li> <li>* Value/Price</li> <li>* Safety/Personal Risk</li> <li>* Financing/Credit</li> <li>* Brand Image</li> <li>* Number of Features/Product Flexibility</li> <li>* Store Image/Retailer Image</li> <li>* Product Available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Hygiene/Clean Appearance (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Chemical Free/Organic Components Friendly (Malaysia)</li> <li>* Attractive Packaging/Attractive Appearance (Malaysia; United States)</li> <li>* Product Availability ( Malaysia)</li> <li>* Number of Features/Product Flexibility (United States)</li> <li>* Recyclability/Environmentally Friendly (Malaysia; France)</li> <li>* Usable Packaging/Functional Features (Malaysia; United States)</li> <li>* Brand Image (United States)</li> <li>* Store Image/Retailer Image (Malaysia; France)</li> <li>* Locally Produced/Product Origin (Malaysia; France)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Attractive Packaging/Attractive Appearance (Malaysia; United States)</li> <li>* Recyclability/Environmentally (Malaysia; France)</li> <li>* Usable Packaging/Functional Features (Malaysia; United States)</li> </ul>

results show that, in order to “think global”, it may be important to begin any product positioning, differentiation, and promotional activities with the fundamentals of quality, value, price, appearance, and availability. Based on the results obtained in this longitudinal study, there appear to be an increasing number of product attributes which are universally emphasized across markets. That would seem to indicate that in order to optimize penetration in any given market around the world, the key success factor may be the “thinking global” rather than the “act local” component of the global marketing approach. Effective positioning and differentiation appear to be increasingly more feasible using universal product attributes, particularly in the face of substantial competition for customers in the global marketplace (White and Griffith 1997). Further, the data indicate that the frequently applied positioning and differentiation techniques used by U.S. firms may hold little sway with consumers in some markets outside the United States. Thus, this study provides some empirical support for the “think global, act local” approach to global marketing strategy as well as giving some direction in terms of what both “thinking global” and “acting local” might involve, especially in economically diverse markets.

In closing, it is important to note some of the key limitations of this study. In doing so, the limitations of this present study suggest future research opportunities in the area of global product strategy. While substantial effort was expended to obtain data from three economically and culturally diverse markets over a reasonably long period of time, it could be argued that additional national samples might be necessary before any definitive conclusions can be drawn regarding globally universal product attributes. Similarly, although the sixteen specified product attributes were anchored in a comprehensive synthesis of existing published literature, it may be argued that a more comprehensive listing of product attributes would provide better insights. Along the same lines, explication of each of the attributes (e.g., aspects of product quality) in a

global context would represent an area of future research suggested by, but not addressed, in this study. Finally, another potentially fruitful area of future research implicit in this study would be to examine the stability of the identified product attributes in each product category given specific changes in the market environment faced by individual consumers in different markets.

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