

# POWER DISTANCE AND UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE, AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH MATERIALISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM: EXAMINING THE MEDIATING IMPACT OF CONSUMER GLOBAL BRAND ATTITUDE

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## Abstract:

This article targets to examine the impact of cultural values- power distance and uncertainty avoidance on consumer attitude towards global brands and how this consumer attitude further influences materialism and cosmopolitanism. Also the mediating impact of consumer attitude is tested. An aggregate of usable 455 questionnaires were collected from consumers from numerous Indian cities through the mall intercept approach. Structural Equation modelling was applied to test the hypothesized model. Results suggested a positive association between cultural values (uncertainty avoidance and power distance) and consumer attitudes towards global brands. In line with the hypothesis, consumer attitude was positively linked to consumer domain values- materialism and cosmopolitanism. Results revealed a partial mediating effect of consumer attitudes in paths involving materialism. While full mediating effect of consumer attitudes was found in paths involving cosmopolitanism.

## Introduction

With increasing globalization, many international companies have been on a constant exercise on promoting global brands worldwide (Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003). Consumers prefer global brands due to its numerous attractive traits such as universal significance, standardization, esteem, superior quality and social responsibility (Dimofte *et al.*, 2008). Understanding what determines and impacts consumer attitude towards global brands in emerging economies is a key concern for marketing scholars and practitioners (Dalmoro *et al.*, 2015). Although the discussion about global brand strategies in developing markets have been well documented, few researches have explored the role of cultural values in influencing consumers perception of global brands (Swodoba *et al.*, 2012; Guo, 2013). In comparison to other factors, culture has the greatest impact on consumer attitudes, activities and lifestyles and therefore, on the needs that consumers satisfy through the procurement and usage of goods and services (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007).

Power distance and uncertainty avoidance have been specifically chosen because though there is evidence that both these values influence conspicuous consumption positively (Souiden *et al.*, 2011; Mooij and Hofstede, 2010), there is extremely scant research conducted on the influence of power distance and uncertainty avoidance on consumer attitude towards global brands. Previous researches have suggested that global brands are widely preferred because it fulfils people's aspirations of accomplishment and happiness, and also since they are convenient to use and have less risk and infer strong perceived quality association (Dimofte *et al.*, 2008; Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003). Thus, we can construe that power distance and uncertainty avoidance has a positive influence on consumer attitude towards global brands. Materialistic consumers exhibit their status through possessions of global brands (Kilbourne *et al.*, 2005); also global brands help consumers be global citizens without having to leave their nation (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). Owing to the gap that very scant research exists that deals with the influence of power distance and uncertainty avoidance on consumer attitudes towards global brands, and also since the impact of consumer attitude towards global brands on materialism and cosmopolitanism has not empirically tested, we propose and empirically test an augmented model wherein power distance and uncertainty avoidance influences consumer attitude towards global brands and further this attitude towards global brands positively influences materialism and cosmopolitanism. Also, the mediating role of consumer attitudes towards global brands on the relationship between cultural values (power distance and uncertainty avoidance) and consumer domain specific values (materialism and cosmopolitanism) is also tested.

## **Theoretical Framework and Research Hypothesis**

### **Power Distance**

Power Distance is the degree to which the less powerful members of a culture accept and expect that power is distributed unevenly, in terms of social status, wealth, respect, rights, and privileges. In cultures that score high on power distance index, all individuals have their rightful place in the social hierarchy, therefore approval and providing of authority comes naturally (Mooij, 2011). Luxury items, some alcoholic beverages and fashion products typically appeal to the social status needs (Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). It has been confirmed that in cultures with high power distance, the influence of social positioning on conspicuous consumption, self-image, and on self-esteem will be more powerful as compared to cultures with low power distance (Souiden *et al.*, 2011). Global brands are perceived to provide status benefits and are considered prestigious owing to their global recognition and availability (Steenkamp *et al.* 2003). As global brands benefit consumers in cultivating their social strata, individuals high on power distance find global brands more attractive than local brands (Kim and Zhang 2014). Since fashion products appeal to social status needs, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Power Distance will positively influence consumer attitude towards global brands.

## Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance can be defined as the society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It mirrors the extent to which individuals of a society try to handle apprehension by reducing uncertainty (Hofstede 2001). Consumers in high uncertainty avoidance societies are risk averse and therefore adhere to historically tested patterns of behaviour (Verhage *et al.*, 1990). In high uncertainty cultures individuals prefer stability, and look out for strong relations, endurance and loyalty (Zhang *et al.* 2014). Though individuals high on uncertainty avoidance struggle to accepting change (Swierczek and Ha 2003), it is also seen that these individuals are more brand loyal (Lam 2007). Brand trust is therefore given much significance where uncertainty exists (Lam 2007). Reliability, safety and honesty are some significant traits that make global brands attractive (Thakor 1996). Studies show that when a brand is able to establish trust, a positive association occurs between global brand and brand relationship quality for individuals with high uncertainty avoidance (Sahin *et al.* 2012; Hudson *et al.* 2016). Such individuals consider the global perception of brands as highly important and thus evade taking risks by purchasing unfamiliar brands (Matzler *et al.* 2008). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Uncertainty Avoidance has a significant positive association with consumer attitude towards global brands

## Consumer Attitude towards global brands

With the ever increasing globalization, many international firms are increasingly exporting global brands internationally. Global brands are marketed globally in many countries in a centrally synchronized, near-uniform fashion (Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003). While widespread accessibility and acknowledgement, universal significance, global image, esteem, superior quality, standardization, and social responsibility are the key characteristics of global brands (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008).

## Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism refers to a definite set of qualities held by certain persons, comprising an inclination to engage with other cultures (Hannerz, 1992). Cosmopolitans are those individuals who are at home in the cultures of other individuals as well as of their own (Konrad, 1984). Cosmopolitans want to engage themselves in other cultures, and have the needed skills to do so (Hannerz, 1990). Hammerz (1992) states that due to the cultural influencing power of the media, a person can be cosmopolitan without ever having left their country of origin (Hammerz, 1990). Global brands functions as a medium in the establishment of cosmopolitan lifestyle (Zhiyan *et al.* 2013), and impact persons' lifestyle wherein they consume brands that is related to universal culture (Featherstone 1991). The progressive implications of global brands provide consumers a personality of global citizenship (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

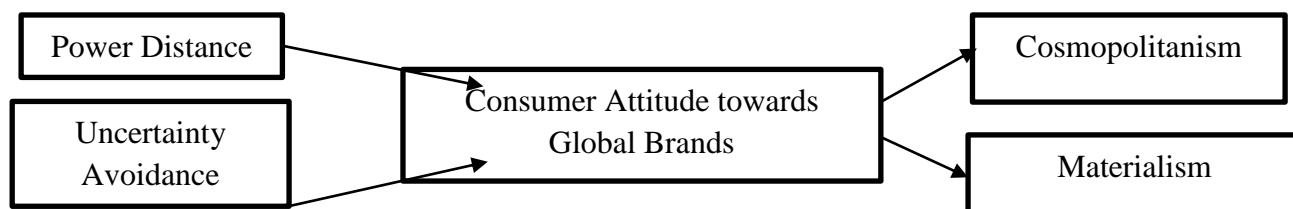
H3: Favourable attitude towards global brands is positively associated to cosmopolitanism.

## Materialism

Past literature has defined Materialism as the relative significance committed to belongings with three sub-characteristics – jealousy, non-generosity, and possessiveness (Belk, 1985); and as a consumer value – an alignment towards the role of belongings in life with three dimensions – achievement, centrality, and joy (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Materialistic consumers lay much importance on exhibiting their status and belongings in their relevant social groups, buying and consuming renowned global brands represents higher degree of material accomplishment, and assists such consumers create a positive imprint on others (Kilbourne *et al.*, 2005). Alden *et al.* (2006) found that materialism helps in understanding consumer reactions to globalization. The influence of western cultures has been huge on Indian consumers and they have found to imitate the western lifestyles (Batra *et al.* 2000). Materialism significantly influences a consumers' insight, inclination and choice of brands (Sharda and Bhat 2018). Materialistic individuals are highly status cognizant and thus prefer global brands for their social status augmenting capability (Chan *et al.* 2015). Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis

H4: Favourable consumer attitudes towards global brands will positively influence materialism.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**



## Mediating role of Consumer global brand attitude

Cultural models state patterns of basic difficulties that have concerns with respect to the effective working of groups and individuals, e.g. relation to power, the idea of self, comprising ego identity, and crucial conflict dilemmas and dealing with them (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961). Past researches have shown that cultural values specifically power distance and uncertainty avoidance influence consumer attitude towards global brands (Steenkamp *et al.*, 1999; Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). It has been observed that global brands help consumers display their social status and material achievement (Kilbourne *et al.*, 2005). Cosmopolitans have been identified as world-minded consumers and have more global self-perceptions. Global brands today provide a platform to individuals to cultivate cosmopolitan values without

leaving their home countries (Craig and Douglas, 2006). Thus we provide the following hypotheses:

H5: Consumer attitude towards global brands mediates the relationship between power distance and cosmopolitanism.

H6: Consumer attitude towards global brands mediates the relationship between power distance and materialism.

H7: Consumer attitude towards global brands mediates the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and cosmopolitanism.

H8: Consumer attitude towards global brands mediates the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and materialism.

## **Methodology**

### **Choice of industry and sector**

Fashion apparel brands were chosen in the present study since Indian consumers' attitude towards apparel brands is highly influenced by cultural values. Additionally, the attractive quality of global brands to Indian consumers makes it advisable to conduct research on this industry. Due to the increasing availability of global apparel brands from advanced economies such as U.K. and U.S.A., consumers in India have become highly brand conscious as global brands provide strong hedonic satisfaction (Press Release, 2009).

### **Selection of Brands**

Four global apparel brands were chosen for our research selected through the top of the mind awareness. The process was carried with 135 students of business management through convenience sampling. Students were asked to pen down four global apparel brands on a blank sheet that came into their mind immediately as they heard global apparel brands. Analysis of the blank sheets led to the shortlisting of four global apparel brands that had the highest frequencies. The brands shortlisted were Levi's, Pepe Jeans, United Colors of Benetton and Zara. The usage of multiple brands enhances the generalizability of results.

### **Sampling**

Mall-intercept method was employed for the collection of data. This technique holds merit in being highly cost effective and the ability to be administered by the researcher (Zikmund and Babin, 2006). Every tenth customer leaving the mall was approached. Data collection was conducted from Amritsar, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Darjeeling, Hyderabad, New Delhi, and Shillong so that the sample could be a representative of various ethnicities. Out of the 575 questionnaires distributed, 455 were retained for the analysis purpose. The remaining 120 questionnaires were rejected as they were only partially filled. The response rate of 79.13% is noticeably high and represents the population studied. Roscoe (1975) states that so as to elude

sample bias in the questionnaire distribution technique, response rate should be more than 10 per cent. This helps us to generalize the results (Sekeran, 2003).

### Instrument

The questionnaire comprised of three sections. The first section required the respondents to select one brand out of the shortlisted global brands and then answer brand related questions relating to the brand they had chosen. The second section is designed to capture the respondent's response on various constructs that include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, materialism and cosmopolitanism. The final section is aimed to record demographic responses such as gender, city, age and occupation.

### Measures

All constructs in the study were measured using the multi-item scales. A 7 point Likert scale was applied for capturing responses on the items ranging from strongly agree and strongly disagree. Measurement scales adapted for consumer attitude towards global brands were of Steenkamp and Ramachander (2000), and Bhardwaj *et al.*, (2010), Yoo *et al.*, (2001) for power distance, Jung (2002) for uncertainty avoidance, Richins (2004) for materialism, and Cleveland *et al.* (2009) for cosmopolitanism.

### Data Analysis

In line with Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-stage structural equation modelling (SEM) process was applied to examine the hypotheses. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model. Next, a sequence of SEM analyses was conducted to examine the relationships among the latent constructs in the structural model.

### Measurement Model

Validation of the measurement model that comprised of five variables measured by 30 items was done through CFA. The measurement model showed an acceptable model fit:  $\chi^2/df = 2.428$ , GFI=.876, NFI=.895, TLI=.928, CFI=.935, RMSEA=.056. Table I indicates the goodness of fit indices of the measurement model.

Model fit Indices	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	GFI	NFI	RMSEA
Model	2.428	.935	.928	.876	.895	.056

**Table I** - Summary of the goodness of fit indices of the measurement model

Though the GFI and NFI values did not meet the threshold values of 0.90, their values of .876 and .895 were quite close to the threshold value, thus exemplifying an acceptable model fit (Garg and Chauhan, 2014). Further, the psychometric properties of the measurement model in terms of reliability, convergent and discriminant validity was calculated. The psychometric properties are indicated in Table II.

For determining reliability, we calculated internal consistency which serves as a reliability measure for various survey items envisioned to capture similar characteristics (Sekaran 2003). Reliability is considered adequate when the Cronbach alpha value is above 0.7 (Hair *et al.* 1998). All the constructs that are investigated in our study hold a superior degree of reliability and the values ranged from .886 to .953.

Convergent and discriminant validity were calculated to deduce the construct validities of the latent constructs. Convergent is measured through standardised factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). The composite reliability for all the constructs was above the acceptable value of 0.7 and the values ranged from .886 to .953. Also the AVE of all the constructs was found to be above the acceptable limit of 0.5, ranging from .520 to .895. The findings also showed that the standardized factor loadings of the statements onto its respected constructs were above the threshold value of 0.5 and were also found significant at 5 per cent level of significance which further verifies the convergent validity. Table 11 indicates that all the parameters of the convergent validity were met.

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach $\alpha$	Composite Reliability	AVE	MSV	ASV
Consumer Attitude toward Global Brands	Given a choice, I would buy global brands.	.805	.886	.889	.889	.103	.049
	I have a strong preference for global brands.	.847					
	Global Brands are of high quality.	.763					
	I have a positive opinion about global brands.	.848					
Power Distance	People in higher positions should make decisions without consulting people in lower positions	.923	.953	.953	.837	.122	.045
	People in higher position should not ask the people in lower position	.954					
	People in higher position should avoid social interaction with people in lower position	.937					
	People in higher position should not delegate important task to people in lower position	.841					
Uncertainty Avoidance	I prefer structured situations to unstructured situations	.639	.888	.886	.886	.096	.047

	I prefer specific instructions to broad guidelines	.688					
	I tend to get anxious easily when I don't know an outcome	.785					
	I feel stressful when I cannot predict consequences	.788					
	I would not take risks when an outcome is predicted	.687					
	I believe that rules should not be broken for mere pragmatic reasons	.723					
	I don't like ambiguous situations	.755					
Materialism	I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes	.756	.909	.906	.520	.122	.081
	Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions	.785					
	The things I own say a lot about how well I am doing in life	.727					
	I like to own things that impress people	.776					
	Buying things give me a lot of pleasure.	.717					
	I like a lot of luxury in my life.	.784					
	My life would be better if I owned certain things in life.	.614					
	I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	.700					
	It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	.607					
Cosmopolitanism	I enjoy exchanging ideas with people from other cultures and countries.	.740	.888	.895	.895	.014	.006
	I am interested in learning more about people who live in other countries.	.805					
	I enjoy being with people from other countries to learn about their views and approaches.	.841					
	I like to observe people of other countries to see what I can learn from them.	.809					
	I like to learn about other ways of life.	.785					
	I find people from other countries stimulating.	.608					

**Table II-** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis



The level to which a latent variable truly differs from other latent variables is specified by discriminant validity (Hair *et al.* 2010). The presence of discriminant validity is confirmed when AVE of the latent variable is greater than the marginal shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) between the constructs (Fornell and Lacker, 1981). Table IV indicates the AVE's of the constructs in comparison to their shared variance (MSV and ASV).

### Structural Model

For examining the hypothesized research model, the structural model was tested through SEM. The satisfactory fit was found for the hypothesized model: CMIN/DF=2.424, GFI=.876, NFI=.895, CFI=.935, TLI=.928, RMSEA=.056. Even though the GFI and NFI values were a little below the threshold value of 0.90, their values were extremely close to it, thus representing an acceptable model fit for the structural model. Therefore, we can continue with the further examination of the research hypothesis presented in our model.

Model fit	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	NFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model Index						
Model	2.424	.876	.895	.935	.928	.056

**Table III** – Summary of goodness-of-fit of the structural model

In line with H1, the results showed that there existed a significant positive relationship between power distance and consumer attitude towards global brands ( $p < 0.05$ ). H2 proposed that uncertainty avoidance positively influenced consumer attitude towards global brands. The results supported the hypothesis as  $p < 0.001$ . Likewise in support of H3, there existed a positive significant association between consumer attitude global brands and cosmopolitanism ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, H4 proposed a significant positive relationship between consumer attitude towards global brands and materialism ( $p < 0.001$ ). The summarized results of the hypothesis testing are given in Table IV.

Path Relationship	Estimates ( $\beta$ )	S.E.	t-values	p	Results
Power Distance → ATGB	.070	.032	2.215	.027	Supported
Uncertainty Avoidance → ATGB	.202	.050	4.038	***	Supported
ATGB → Cosmopolitanism	.073	.032	2.297	.022	Supported
ATGB → Materialism	.321	.070	4.613	***	Supported

**Notes:**  $\beta$  denotes standardized coefficients; S.E. denotes standard error; t-values signifies critical ratio and \*\*\*p denotes  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table IV:** Summarized results of hypothesis testing

## Mediation Analysis

The bootstrapping sampling procedure was employed for examining the mediation effect. By using this procedure the researcher is able to initiate various subsamples from the original database. This procedure helps researchers to govern the stability of parameter approximations and delivering their values with greater accuracy (Byrne, 2010). To display the mediation effect, indirect path is inspected through two-tailed significance with 95% confidence interval.

The results indicated that the standardized indirect effects of the association between power distance and cosmopolitanism, and power distance and materialism were found significant at  $p < 0.05$ , supporting H5 and H6 and therefore confirming the presence of the mediation effect. The direct effect of power distance on cosmopolitanism was found insignificant which indicates a full mediation effect for the path  $PD \rightarrow ATGB \rightarrow COS$ . Furthermore, the direct effect of power distance on materialism was found significant at  $p < 0.01$ , also the indirect effect of the association between power distance and materialism was found significant in the presence of the mediator consumer attitude towards global brands. As both the direct and indirect effects were found to be significant there exists partial mediation for path  $PD \rightarrow ATGB \rightarrow MAT$ .

The results also showed that the standardized indirect effects of the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and cosmopolitanism, and uncertainty avoidance and materialism were found significant at  $p < 0.05$ , thus supporting H7 and H8 and thereby confirming the presence of mediation effect. Furthermore, the direct effect of uncertainty avoidance on cosmopolitanism was found insignificant, thus indicating a full mediation effect for the path  $UA \rightarrow ATGB \rightarrow COS$ . The direct effect of uncertainty avoidance on Materialism was found significant at  $p < 0.001$ , also the indirect effect of relationship between uncertainty avoidance and materialism in the presence of the mediator consumer attitude towards global brands was also found significant, since both the direct and indirect effects were found significant, this indicates the presence of partial mediation for path  $UA \rightarrow ATGB \rightarrow MAT$ . The summarized results of mediation have been presented in Table V.

Direct Path	Indirect path via mediators	Direct Effect	Indirect effect	Total Effect	P value	Mediation
PD $\rightarrow$ COS	PD $\rightarrow$ ATGB $\rightarrow$ COS	.080	.014	.094	.029	Full
PD $\rightarrow$ MAT	PD $\rightarrow$ ATGB $\rightarrow$ MAT	.277	.026	.303	.010	Partial
UA $\rightarrow$ COS	UA $\rightarrow$ ATGB $\rightarrow$ COS	.025	.027	.052	.027	Full
UA $\rightarrow$ MAT	UA $\rightarrow$ ATGB $\rightarrow$ MAT	.205	.050	.255	.001	Partial

**Table V:** Summarized results of Mediation Analysis

## Implications of the study

Our study offers substantial implications to marketing theory as well as global brand managers. Keeping in mind the empirical results of our research, the findings contribute to the marketing oeuvre through the examination of power distance and uncertainty avoidance as antecedents of consumer attitude towards global brands, and cosmopolitanism and materialism as outcomes of it. Further, contribution to the marketing oeuvre is made through our findings on the mediating effect of consumer global brand attitude on the link between power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and cosmopolitanism, materialism.

Positive association of power distance with consumer global brand attitude provides valuable understandings on brand communication to marketers' and managers and managers could target individuals and consumer segments wherein augmented social strata and prestige are vital (Kapferer 1994). Managers can create greater brand prestige through creation of hedonic values such as introduction of new lifestyles and providing new experiences (Park et al. 2006; Choi et al. 2017).

The resent study further confirmed a positive impact of uncertainty avoidance on consumer attitude towards global brands. So as to tap on consumer segments with high uncertainty avoidance global brand managers should focus on generating greater brand trust (Chinomona 2016). The existing marketing oeuvre discloses that trust is vital in circumstances of uncertainty, information irregularity and fear of opportunism (Chiu et al. 2010). Managers can augment brand trust trough creation and communication of brands' utilitarian and hedonic values (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006).

In line with the results of the present study, global brand managers could maximise on positive consumer attitude towards global brands to create greater materialism and cosmopolitanism values (Alden et al. 2006). A better comprehension of cultural values, global branding and consumer domain values – materialism and cosmopolitanism assists global marketers to build brand loyalty.

## Limitations and Future Research

While our research empirically examines the augmented comprehensive model and elucidates how cultural values such as uncertainty avoidance and power distance impacts consumer attitude towards global brands and how these positive attitudes further lead to the development of consumer specific domain values such as materialism and cosmopolitanism, gaps and prospects for amelioration in the conceptual framework still remain and our model could be replicated and tested with certain enhancements. Future researches could empirically test our conceptual framework in local brand settings. Moreover, no moderating variable was employed in our conceptual model. Future studies could test the moderating impact of age, income, gender, etc. on the relationship between cultural values (power distance and uncertainty avoidance) and consumer attitude towards global brands. Further, the

conceptual model could be tested in other market segments apart from apparel sector.

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