

# From Human Acculturation to Brand Acculturation: A Phenomenological Perspective of University Students of Pakistan

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## Abstract

*Culture plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure of a brand in a particular market. Despite having workable marketing plans, several brands fail globally due to the lack of cultural considerations in their marketing strategies and programs. The acculturation concept has been studied in the context of consumers, marketplaces, and marketers. Past research rarely explores acculturation in global brands. There is an evident lack of concrete models and theories that provide guidelines on how a brand should go for acculturation. Informed by the research gap and following the brand anthropomorphic consideration, this research investigates if brands follow human acculturation patterns in cultures other than the country of their origin (COO). The phenomenological study based on the interviews of 24 students having international consumption experience was conducted in Pakistan along with some case studies of global brands. The result of in-depth interviews followed by thematic content analysis identifies four brand acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, which can be leveraged to develop brand positioning based on the nature and characteristics of the global brands and the country of operations. The paper introduces the first-ever concept of brand acculturation and invites brand researchers to deepen their horizons further. Theoretical and managerial implications of the study are also discussed.*

**Keywords:** Brand acculturation; global brands; country; culture.

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## 1. Introduction

“Acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that occurs due to contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005). Acculturation is also defined as “Attitudinal, value, behavioral and identity adjustments by the people when they interact with other cultures” (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). It includes “assimilation with new culture”, “maintenance of old culture”, and the “resistance to both new and old culture” (Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999). Similarly, Berry and Sam (1997) identified the four levels of consumer acculturation “Integration, assimilation, separation & marginalization”. Integration: when individuals interact with host culture while maintaining their home culture. Assimilation: when individuals fully get attached to the host culture and ignore their home culture. Separation: when people keep their home culture and avoid interaction with the host culture. Marginalization: avoiding both home and host cultures by creating an alternate. Mendoza (1989) used the terms “cultural resistance”, “cultural shifts”, “cultural incorporation,” and “cultural transmutation” interchangeably. Aspects of acculturation such as human acculturation (Berry & Sam, 1997; Mendoza, 1989), consumer acculturation (Benabdallah & Jolibert, 2013; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006), the markets and marketer acculturation (Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999) have been studied extensively. However, the application of acculturation concepts and strategies to global brands has been missing from the canvas. Culture plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure of a brand in a particular market. Despite having workable marketing plans, several brands fail globally due to the lack of cultural considerations in their marketing strategies and programs. The acculturation concept has been studied in the context of consumers, marketplaces, and marketers. Past research rarely explores acculturation in global brands. There is an evident lack of concrete models and theories which provide guidelines on how; a brand should go for acculturation. Addressing this significant gap in the literature, we propose the concept of brand acculturation. The contextual idea of brand acculturation is anthropomorphism, and the literature is silent on how a brand acculturates from its home country of origin (COO) to the host country. This research attempts to bridge the gap by exploring the concept of brand acculturation, hence contributing to the literature.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature on global branding strategy and international marketing has studied the currency of cultural factors and their impact on overall marketing strategy. Steenkamp (2019) argues that the success and survival of a global brand depend on its ability to integrate into and adapt to the changing market environment.

Brands constantly struggle to win and maintain customer loyalty and leave behind global and local competitors by increasing their market share. According to Holt (2002), a brand has better chances of success if it integrates culture and other essential market

dynamics into its branding and advertising strategy. Global brands get insights on enhancing purchase likelihood by incorporating the local cultural elements into their branding strategy; He and Wang (2017) reported a direct and significant positive effect of considering cultural elements on the purchase likelihood of global brands. The authors also identified the need for a more empirical and systematic investigation of global brands to figure out a more effective usage of local cultures.

Previous research shows that local brands portray a sense of pride by conveying the local culture and resources (He & Wang, 2017) and this provides them with more flexibility than the global brands. Along with other benefits, the major advantage of local brand is that they are more connected with the national and regional identity and cultural history and heritage. A local cosmetics company in Pakistan is getting more familiar than the global brands available in the market. There are more customers in local restaurants and fast-food chains than McDonalds and KFC in India. There are more people buying local cellphones (Huawei) than Apple and Samsung in China. Similarly, if a global company wants to be successful, they need to adopt to the local culture. Global companies have also got too much success in nondomestic markets. The world's famous brands like Coca Cola, Shell, Gillette, Pampers, Apple, Nestle, Loreal and many others have been driving revenues and profits from international markets since decades and these companies have motivated many other to inter into the arena of international markets to drive more sales (Saxena, 2012) and enhance market shares. Global marketing needs a deeper understanding of how their 4P's are going to work in different markets and might bring many changes to it as per the cultural sentiments, language, value, lifestyles and other aspects of foreign consumers (Saxena, 2012).

The research on culture and global brands has increased in the recent years, but still according to (Samiee, 2019), there is no proper construct available to "define the global brand". According to him, there are two schools of thought concerning the definition of global brands. One is the broad availability of the brand in the different markets with almost similar kind of packaging, target market and distribution strategy. The second school of thought which is considered as main driver of the research on global consumer culture is the consumer perception of "globalness" of a brand. Whether it is first school of thought which is considered or the second one. No matter how a global brand is defined but according (Steenkamp, 2019), future success and survival of a global brands depends on how well it integrates the and is adaptable to the changing market environment. Brands are in continuous struggle to win customer loyalty and maintain and increase the market share while competing with various other global and local brands. A brand according to (Holt, 2004) has more chances of success if it integrates the culture and other important market dynamics into its branding and advertising strategy.

Rahman and Cherrier (2010) asked a pertinent question about the significance of culture, i.e., “what happens to the consumer having a predefined own context of consumption moves to a new market setting where advertising, fashion, food, and other social life aspects are different? McCracken (1986) and Peñaloza and Gilly (1999) appear to address this concern by suggesting that consumer needs to redefine themselves in the new cultural settings. This redefinition refers to “the acquisition of skills and knowledge relevant to engaging in consumer behavior in one culture by members of another culture” (Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999). It is helpful to deconstruct the phenomenon of the cross-cultural journey of a brand; what happens when a brand, with a given set of characteristics (Identity, value, image, personality, and culture), goes to another country where people have different perspectives of things around them; language, religion, lifestyle, race, age structure, values, and belief system with overall different culture. The brand might also consider redefining itself in the new cultural settings.

Although the impact of culture on branding strategies is broadly discussed in the literature, a specific focus on cultural adjustment concepts and strategies concerning brand anthropomorphism is rarely brought into the academic discourse. We propose to bridge this prominent gap in the literature by exploring the concept of brand acculturation. As anthropomorphisms suggest that brands are also considered human beings, the interesting questions are: Do brands acculturate like humans when launched across borders? Do such brands adjust their brand elements, features, and characteristics as humans/consumers do when exposed to different cultural settings? And if yes, what are the patterns of brand acculturation?

Each of the following sections has a specific focus, beginning with methodology, followed by data analysis, findings, and discussion. We conclude with the theoretical, practical implications and limitations of our research.

### **3. Research Methodology**

As discussed earlier, brand acculturation is a novel phenomenon proposed for the first time in our research. Hence, the exploratory objectives of the study matched the qualitative paradigm. In-depth interviews help to deeply understand the phenomenon from a consumer’s perspective (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). For the study’s first phase, phenomenological study based on the in-depth interviews were used to understand consumers’ perspectives regarding global brands in their country. As with the emergence of new concepts, the need for exploratory research is increasing, and the case study method seems most appropriate in this situation. In the second phase, following (Goffin et al., 2019), a case study on brands was performed to observe some cases of global brands and their way of working in the host v/s home country culture.

### 3.1 *Informants*

Based on the authors' affiliation with different universities in Pakistan, a convenient sampling technique was used to identify the participants. Convenience sampling is a non-probability method, usually used in qualitative research when the objective is to approximate a specific topic (Kinnear et al., 1993). The data was collected from a sample of 24 graduate and post-graduate university students; the demographics are mentioned in table 01. The students were selected as respondents for the interview based on their ability to understand the components of the question, their knowledge regarding local and foreign brands in their country, and their exposure to the international consumption patterns and cultural artifacts. The respondents belong to two culturally rich and densely populated provinces of Pakistan, Punjab and Sindh.

### 3.2 *Data collection*

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with the 24 participants, and a semi-directed interview guide was used. On average, each interview took 30 minutes. Respondents were briefed about the purpose of data collection and were ensured of the confidentiality of their responses. Moreover, the Authors also took their consent for recording the interview. The interview questions were asked in the national language of Pakistan, Urdu so that the participants could understand and answer comprehensively without a language barrier.

Table 1  
*Participant's demographics*

Gender		Age (Years)	Education		Location		Total
Male	Female		Graduating	Graduates	Sindh	Punjab	
13	11	23-31	12	12	11	13	24

## 4. *Analysis*

The interview data were transcribed and translated into English before analysis. Authors coded around 60 pages of interview transcripts with about 7000 words. The thematic content analysis technique was performed using NVivo 12 pro qualitative data analysis software as thematic analysis is the best search for describing the phenomena and the emerging themes, perspectives, and processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Authors used the deductive approach to develop themes based on the concept of human acculturation and its strategies (Berry, 2005) and the verbatim extracted from interview transcripts. Two authors of this manuscript analyzed the transcripts separately. After observing the most recurring codes in the text, they reached four global themes, as mentioned in table 2. The most prominent themes were integration, separation, marginalization, and assimilation.

Table 2  
*Results of thematic analysis*

Codes	Themes
<p>Mixing brand elements of both cultures, different for different customers, changing branding as per local values, partial adoption to a new market, accommodating both homes as well as host cultures, suitable to all customers of different cultures, valuing local customers while keeping the heritage intact, a combination of home and host, change some brand elements and keep some same, respect both cultures</p>	<p><b>Integration</b></p>
<p>Love for home culture only, patriotic to own country, against our culture, do not adopt, apart from local society, ignore values of the host culture, introduces home country culture in foreign markets</p>	<p><b>Separation</b></p>
<p>No cultural attachment, newness in everything, no country identification, totally different from particular cultural values, neither follow home nor follow host country culture, having own distinct identity in all markets, introduces own brand culture globally</p>	<p><b>Marginalization</b></p>
<p>Fully adopt host culture values, forget original culture, only care for the host culture, become local by changing inner and outer personality, no identification of culture of origin, forget own values, becomes a foreigner</p>	<p><b>Assimilation</b></p>

The analysis of interviews and cases provided the evidence that brands acculturate much like human acculturation. Our findings suggest that the most frequently used strategy is integration, where brands keep some of their anthropomorphic elements but change some based on the needs of the local culture. Integration was followed by the separation where, instead of adapting or changing their anthropomorphic elements according to local culture, brands keep their culture originality intact. The third most frequently used strategy was marginalization, where brands neither follow their home country's culture nor adopt to host country culture, instead of creating their own alternate global culture and market it in different countries. The fourth strategy, less frequently used by the brands, is assimilation, where brands adapt entirely to the local culture. According to participants and the case study of brands, it is difficult for the brands to assimilate into the host country's culture completely; such a strategy would harm brands' originality and the feel of being global. Although in some cases, brands are found to have completely adapted to the local culture.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 *Brand acculturation*

Based on the results of interviews and case studies of brands, the term brand acculturation can be defined as “the ability of a brand to change its brand elements, features, and characteristics based on culture, values, beliefs, and norms of the host country”. To the best of our knowledge, no one has used the term “brand acculturation” previously. While answering the questions regarding why they think a brand should acculturate, a participant quoted as below:

“I believe that culture has huge influences on the purchase behavior of any customer either national or international. Culture not only changes our minds but the overall perspective of the brands. The values, norms, choices, and even the likes and dislikes of society impact the customer a lot. A good marketer is always aware of the culture. A brand should be according to a particular society’s norms, values, and culture. Doing this will change the customer behavior and bring the brand to the top of the customer mind; if the product is according to our culture, we can be attracted to it more”.

The brands are working on the cusp of global and local consumer culture (Steenkamp, 2019). Due to emerging global technology, much attention has been given to such global cum local strategies in the marketplace. Global companies that do not consider local cultures face several challenges and research has proved that the brand equity of these companies is weaker than that of local companies (Abratt & Motlana, 2002). It could be that local companies better understand local consumers’ culture and local markets’ tastes. “Patanjali,” a local Indian (FMCG) brand, has grown its brand equity and sales drastically in recent years. The brand has given a tough time to global companies like Colgate Palmolive, Nestle, and Unilever, operating in Indian markets for decades (Gupta & Wright, 2019).

Brand acculturation was also defined through the lens of culture and normative influence, as stated by one of the participants:

“I think the culture plays a significant role in the brands’ selection and purchase decisions. Whenever we buy something, we keep in mind whether that would be acceptable in our society or not. If we wear a clothing brand, we will wear the one having acceptability in our society so that we may feel comfortable. Culture has importance in our purchases because it tells us how we live and wear”. It reflects that consumers also feel obliged to fulfill others’ expectations and need their approval (Myers, 2013). Moreover, our participants stated that consumers need brand acculturation in different product categories, especially food, clothing, and other consumer items.

A participant commented on the importance of culture in clothing selection:

*“Cultures impact our brand choice a lot. Take the example of the “Khaadi” clothing brand that makes different dresses for Sindhi customers in Pakistan. Foreign clothing brands are rarely preferred over local ones here because their style is not compatible with our culture. We only buy products which are according to different cultures like Sindh, KPK. Baluchistan. We don’t prefer foreign cloth brands over ours”.*

Relevant to the participant’s description is Fournier’s (1998) observation that consumers develop relationships with anthropomorphic brands, same as arranged marriages, causal friendships, partnerships with a long-term commitment, and even secrecy and enmity. Suppose a brand truly represents a consumer’s cultural values. Consumers might develop a long-term commitment and partnership with such a brand, whereas enmity might also be developed in other cases. If a brand wants to generate market acceptability and long-term commitment of the customers, it should consider acculturation.

*“As Pakistan is an Asian country, we relate it with our culture when we buy anything. I recently went to the market to buy something; I saw a person selling imported toys like teddy bears from the USA. When I asked my father to buy it for a kid at our home, he denied saying that animal shapes and toys are not allowed in our Islamic culture because when we offer prayer, animal-shaped toys or pictures create a distraction. It’s not allowed in our religion. My father recited a” Hadith” and explained that these items are not allowed in our religion”.* The above statement by a male participant shows the importance of cultural adoption for a brand. Culture is made of various elements, including religion. The participant shared his experience implying that culture influenced his family’s purchase decisions, even of a toy for a kid, and added that they avoided buying a particular product from the USA. The participant’s behavior confirms that culture is a prime determinant of consumer behavior, lifestyle, and attitude, where consumers fulfill their needs by acquiring goods and services of their choice (Cleveland, 2018).

Referring to the symbolic identification of culture and use of brands, a participant mentioned: *“In Indian culture, bride purchases her wedding dress in red color because it is considered as the color of “suhagan” (married) and she will never purchase a white dress as it is considered a sign of a widow, whereas a Christian bride will especially order a white gown for her wedding day because white is a sign of happy bride in their culture. In this way, culture has made our mindset and hence we perceive things accordingly and our purchase decisions are influenced by the culture. We dress and eat according to cultural values so when it comes to the brand, we select those which offer products according to our culture. As J. (Pakistani clothing brand) offers eastern wear and I will select J. because I know it offers the products which suit my culture”.* The people in collectivist cultures such as Pakistan, India, and China behave differently than those of individualistic cultures, mostly found in the

One of the participants stated:

*“Culture is a significant part of our market. We belong to a society where emotions are very important. Family terms, social aspects, relationships, friendships, and overall culture is essential. Every person, belonging to whatever culture in Pakistan prefers such things and gets inspired. For example, there are two brand names, one is written in my language Urdu and the other in some foreign so, we prefer those things which are locally produced and communicated in our local language. So, culture surely influences our purchase”.*

It ensures that its marketing activities reflect the brand’s acculturation. It should not be restricted to the advertisement but must also be reflected through product packaging and labels that are assigned to a brand.

**5.2 Brand acculturation**

*strategies:*

Our research confirmed the following four acculturation strategies based on the analysis and the theory of human acculturation (Berry, 2005).

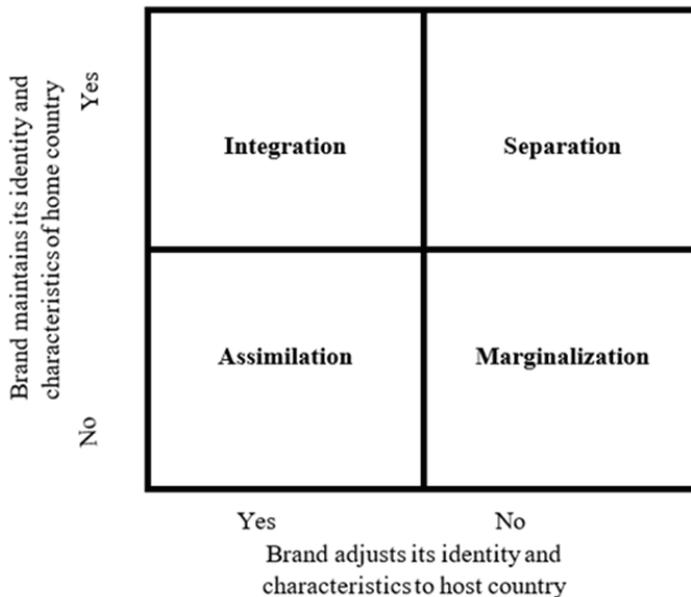


Figure 1: Brand acculturation strategies

*The matrix shows four strategies of brand acculturation. The X-axis demonstrates brand identity and characteristics in the home country, whereas the Y-axis shows the brand identity and characteristics in the host country.*

### 5.2.1 *Integration*

According to Berry (2005), out of four human acculturation strategies, integration allows consumers to interact with the host country's culture while maintaining their home country's culture. Hence, it is the most popular and stress-free strategy. Similarly, Peñaloza and Gilly (1999) has termed this strategy as accommodation of marketer with home country culture and those of ethnic cultures and Mendoza (1989) described it as cultural incorporation. Our analysis and case examples also highlight the integration strategy where a brand keeps some of its elements (Identity, values, personality, image, culture) the same as of home country's culture and alters some others according to the cultural needs of the host country.

The participants under this strategy have quoted several examples. Some of the best examples include Nestle., The company adopts the local consumer taste, targets families using local communication and branding strategies, participate in local events like (Eid and Ramazan) in Pakistan, and follows all customs and traditions of local cultures globally. In Pakistan, Nestle even adopts the national language (Urdu) in its brand names, for example, Nestle "Buniyad", Cerelac, Nestle "Zeera" "Podina" and "Khas Karachi key Lie" yogurt. Nestle Pakistan's website also contains a picture of Pakistani families with descriptions in Urdu and English language. Nestle also adopted the local culture in India by launching "Maggi masala vegetable atta noodles" and "Maggi Bhunna Masala" to promote a healthy lifestyle in India. On the contrary, nestle has different branding strategies in the U.S.A, depicting American cultural values, beliefs, and norms.

One of the participants explained the integration strategy followed by McDonald's:

*"McDonald's is one of the international brands having a presence in many countries and has been continuously doing well. It never loses its originality while trying to provide a product that local people like Hindus prefer. For us Muslims, they have halal products". People have different values, so the brand has to somehow adapt to local culture to capture the market."* McDonald's, an American brand, has a western brand personality, values, identity, and image. The brand is available worldwide and has adapted to the local cultural values as per respective country. In China, for instance, McDonald's opened the restaurant 'Eatery,' having Chinese building structure and style along with localized decoration using lanterns, abaci, and bun streamers (Fournier, 1998; He & Wang, 2017). It reflected a different image and identity of America's McDonald's in China. Similarly, in India and Pakistan, the brand has adopted local culture by maintaining the values, identity, and other aspects of these countries' cultures. In India for example, the brand uses local Indian names on its burgers and

other items such as “Maharaja-Mc”, “Mc-Aloo” and “Mc-Tikki”. A participant stated: *“International brands must go with their first country strategy, but they must follow the needs, wants, appearance and the culture of the host country, as followed by coca-cola; however, Unilever has a different culture in India and Pakistan.”*

Coca-Cola is a useful example of an integration strategy. Coke’s famous marketing campaign of “share a coke” reflects the company’s cultural sensitivity. In Pakistan and India, share a coke campaign used local names and even language in its branding. While maintaining its American brand identity and personality, Coke simultaneously adapts to local cultural values and norms. In China, for example, the website of Coca-Cola is written in the Chinese language and even the company uses the Chinese language on its various brands.

All 24 participants talked about the integration strategy, where they showed how comfortable they feel having a blend of a global brand with local culture. The same has been argued by Berry (2005), stating that integration is the most suitable and widely observed strategy concerning human acculturation. This strategy is stress-free and does not need much effort and investment by the company compared to the assimilation or marginalization strategy. Similarly, Penaloza and Gilly (1999) has used the term accommodation to discuss the marketers’ cultural adoption strategies. “Business accommodated Mexican consumers by (1) product and service assortments, (2) displays, (3) sales support services, (4) holiday celebrations, and (5) community services. Moreover, Mendoza (1989) used the term cultural incorporation in the place of integration strategy. Global brands rapidly penetrate emerging markets like China, India, Brazil, and Pakistan. However, they face cultural resistance in these emerging markets. Özsoy (2012), suggested that while maintaining their perceived globalness, it’s essential for the brands to adapt to local tastes. Even a global brand must sacrifice its brand consistency to capture a larger market share in the emerging markets (Roberts & Cayla, 2009). According to Chiu et al. (2011), combining the global brand image, which is often associated with Western cultural elements, with local cultural elements is “cultural mixing,” representing two cultures in one object. Our research also confirmed various cases and situations where brands have been observed partially adapting to the local culture while keeping their originality intact.

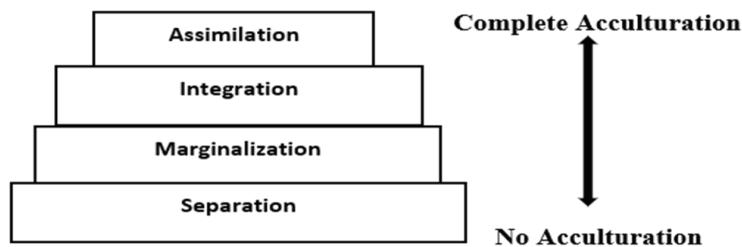


Figure 2: Hierarchy of Brand Acculturation

*Figure 2: depicts the hierarchy of brand acculturation. Assimilation and separation brand strategies include complete acculturation and no acculturation, respectively, whereas integration and marginalization are in the middle of complete acculturation and no acculturation at all.*

### **5.2.2 Assimilation**

Assimilation refers to the acculturation strategy where people embed themselves entirely into the host country's culture and are disconnected from their culture of origin (Berry & Sam, 1997; Mendoza, 1989). This implies brand acculturation in a way that when the brand completely adapts to the local cultural values, norms, and beliefs and looks disconnected from the home country or its originality.

Some of the descriptions from the participant's quotes concerning assimilation strategy are mentioned below: "There are many foreign brands and now it is difficult to identify which one is a foreign brand. There are many brands embedded into Pakistani culture, their promotional activities are also as per Pakistani culture. For example, MINISO is a brand which I had no idea earlier that it's a foreign brand" 50% of participants were able to recall some brands that completely merged into local cultures, and they find it hard to identify these brands as foreign. The rest of the participants talked about the challenges of assimilation strategy and its lesser possibility for an international brand. Berry (2005) argues that this strategy has also been observed in various cases, although rarely. When discussing the brands, we could only find a few examples where brands have changed most of their elements and strategy in favor of local markets. At times brands have achieved this by launching different products with even different brand names to target the local or ethnic customers. Some of the examples are mentioned below.

Wall's Ice-Cream, a Unilever's world-famous ice-cream brand known as walls in countries of Asia and the UK. It is named Holando in central America, Guidant Status in the USA and Israel, Frigo in Spain, Frisko in Denmark, Miko in France, Eskimo in Turkey, Streets in Australia, and New Zealand, Inmarko in Russia, and Algida Ice cream in European countries. The brand uses a different name and other elements based on the country's market dynamics it operates in. Since it is the strategy of Unilever to buy the local ice-cream brands and continue with the names of local brands to make them easily identifiable in the local market. Opavia by a French food manufacturer, Danone is a global packed food manufacturer. When Danone launched its famous global biscuit brand, Lu, in the Czech Republic, despite extensive marketing efforts, the brand failed. When Danone changed its brand name from Lu to a local name Opavia, the company generated substantial sales. Danone could completely change its brand identity as per the host market.

### 5.2.3 Separation

Participants mentioned that some of the brands are preferred as they are. Customers of such brands don't want these brands to adapt or change as per local markets because by doing so; the brand will lose its image of being a luxurious global brand. Some of the descriptions supporting separation strategy are mentioned below: *"Most of the brands do not change much as per the country culture. Because brands are strongly developed when their elements are stable. If you consider luxury brands, they hardly follow the local culture because following the local culture will take them out of the luxury brand category in my opinion. For example, we purchase Rolex watches and Tag Heuer watches because of their home country identity. Similarly, Outfitter is a western brand operating in Pakistan, but it supports western culture. Although we use outfitters, it's not according to our culture."*

More than 90% of participants mentioned the separation strategy, the second most prominent brand acculturation strategy. Participants mentioned that some of the brands in a particular category are only preferred because of their image of being a global brand. *"There is a brand Levi's; they always follow their branding, and they don't care about us. They follow the trends, but their branding is international". They always prefer their languages, and they like their country. They use badges on their dresses and launch products according to their nature"*.

According to Berry (2005), separation is not an acculturation strategy; rather, it's the opposite of acculturation; brands do not acculturate under this pattern. Separation refers to the acculturation strategy where consumers show resistance to the new cultural settings and remain associated with their original culture (Berry, 1992). Mendoza (1989) used the term cultural resistance where he revered this acculturation pattern as "resistance either active or passive, against the acquisition of alternate cultural norms". In his "ICMA" framework, Banerjee (2008) termed this strategy as "convince" where he argued that when a brand is strong, having a strong cultural heritage, it doesn't need to adopt the local culture rather convince customers to purchase the brand. Our research also found several examples of rigid and insensitive brands to the local culture. The brands under the separation strategy keep their originality intact in all aspects and do not change their values, identity, culture, and personality in other countries. Wherever they go, they bring the same branding and marketing stagey. Some of the examples are mentioned below:

Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&CO) is an American clothing brand. The brand personality of Levi's is the same for all its markets, even in culturally heterogeneous countries like India and Pakistan. Levi's has a standardized branding and marketing strategy worldwide guided by its core values: empathy, integrity, originality, and courage. The brand carries an American fashion style, culture, personality, and identity; it does not consider the local cultural values in its country. Louis Vuitton, a French luxury man, and women's fashion brand, has a

consistent brand personality of an upper class, charming, elegant, and glamorous brand worldwide. The brand is available in many countries of the world through direct or indirect channels. The company uses standardized branding and marketing strategies. Louis Vuitton has global celebrity endorsers and uses mass media channels, including social media, to communicate with its millions of customers worldwide. The brand possesses an image of being French, luxurious, expensive, and elegant; it does not change its visage in different countries. The brand seems to have a consistent personality, identity, image, values, and culture in all corners.

#### **5.2.4 Marginalization**

More than 70% of participants talked about the situations where brands are perceived to have their own brand culture, independent of their country of origin or the host country. Some of the descriptions related to the marginalization strategy quoted by participants are mentioned below: *“The promotions of Cars and Vehicles are unique as they don’t hit any culture. Fortune, for instance, only focuses on product robustness and sophistication, not on any country or culture, and similarly, if you take the example of IKEA, which follows a global culture. It does not advertise itself differently in Pakistan or change products in Pakistan. It portrays its culture and lifestyle”*.

Some participants also mentioned the marginalization strategy adopted by IKEA and Harley Davidson by stating that: *“Harley Davidson never follows any country or culture. It has its own culture and fan following. Those who use Harley adopt Harley culture. It is a niche marketing brand. It has a distinct group of people who are rugged and rough tough. They never change the culture. Harley Davidson has built its own brand culture. When we see their advertising and products and their macho-man style bikers, they are into their own culture. Marlboro is also trying to create its own culture. They target cowboys and adventurous customers. So, they have created a culture like that”*.

From the results of interviews and cases, it was found that the brands in the automobile industry are observed not to follow any country’s culture rather, they create their own culture and lifestyle. Other than that, some luxury brands, energy drinks, bikes, and cigarette brands are also observed not to follow any country or regional culture but instead create their own culture and market it globally. The literature frequently discusses the brands that have created their own brand culture not related to any specific country (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Holt, 2002; Schroeder et al., 2014). It confirms our findings that marginalization is one of the widely observed brand acculturation strategies, as reflected in figure 3 via case examples of companies following marginalization strategy.

Literature uses the term marginalization, where people neither follow their home country’s culture nor they follow the host country’s culture but rather create a substitute for both cultures (Berry, 2005). According to Mendoza (1981), the fourth acculturation pattern is called “cultural transmutation” which refers to forming an alternative subculture instead of following home or host country cultures. This applies to the brands that create their own brand culture different from home and host country culture. Brands do create their own culture of consumption globally. Based on the cases and extracted from participants’ descriptions, some of the examples of marginalization are mentioned below:

Harley Davidson, “We are not a motorcycle company; we are a culture on wheels”. Harley Davidson is an American heavy bike company. The brand possesses a robust image and identity for its global customers. Harley has a rugged brand personality; it carries a rebellious identity and has created its own culture through brand communities. Harley consumers in these communities are grouped around the brand’s values, culture, lifestyle, activities, and ethos. Harley has a global standard brand strategy. The core brand value is personal freedom and the brotherhood of bikers regardless of national boundaries. If you own a Harley bike, you are a member of the “global family”.

Another example is Red Bull BmbH, an Austrian energy drink brand that globally uses a standardized branding strategy. The brand has the same personality, identity, values, and culture everywhere. Red bull has created its own sporty culture worldwide the “Red Bull culture” (Gorse et al., 2010). The sporty brand participates in sports and musical events and competitions locally and globally. “Red Bull creates its “brand culture” by associating the brand with a very diverse range of sports, music, and other cultural activities”. The brand has 21 variants with a similar logo, color, design, name and has used the slogan “Red bull gives you wings” in all cultures since 1987.



Figure 3: Case examples for each acculturation strategy

## 6. Conclusion

Following the concept of human acculturation (Berry, 2005; Mendoza, 1989), market and marketer acculturation (Peñaloza & Gilly, 1999), the brand cultural fit (Banerjee, 2008), and consumer acculturation (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006), our study adds to the body of acculturation literature by exploring brand acculturation and its strategies. To the best of our knowledge, no study has specifically applied the concept of acculturation to brands. Based on the interview results and fieldwork on brand examples, we conclude that like humans, acculturation when they migrate to another country with different cultural settings, the anthropomorphic brands also go through a similar process. From our qualitative study that was based on the semi-structured interviews and case study on brands, we coined the term brand acculturation, which can be defined as “the ability of a brand to change its brand elements, features, and characteristics based on cultural values, beliefs, and norms of the host country”. The findings of the study also show that brands use four acculturation strategies; “integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization” based on several factors. Our results also confirm that, if a brand truly represents a consumer’s cultural values, consumers might develop a long-term commitment and partnership with such a brand (Fournier, 1998). However, an enmity might also be developed in other cases. Suppose a brand aims at market acceptability and long-term commitment of the customers. In that case, it should consider acculturation based on the nature of its business and relevant category i-e (luxury versus non-luxury and food versus non-food).

### 6.1 Research Implications

The study has various implications, both theoretical and managerial. First, it is an addition to the literature of culture-specific strategies of global brands. Secondly, to the best of our knowledge, no study has taken the concept of human acculturation and applied it to global brands; this study is the first to propose the concept of brand acculturation. Thirdly, the study contributes to filling the gap of availability of some profound brand acculturation strategies. Along with theoretical implications, the study has some implications for marketers. First, it provides a very specific concept of brand acculturation, which could help marketers specify their brand cultural adoption programs. According to Banerjee (2008), marketers find it challenging to integrate brand-culture in different countries. Second, it gives some direction for marketers to choose an acculturation pattern from the four patterns; integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization and develop brand positioning based on the nature and characteristics of their global brands and the country of operations and decide on a suitable cultural adoption strategy to face the fierce global competition (Bartikowski & Cleveland, 2017).

## 6.2 *Limitations and future research*

No research is free of limitations; the first limitation of this study is its inability to generalize the framework presented here. The study was qualitative with a concentrated sample of university graduates and final year undergraduate students in Pakistan. Future research may use a different methodology, such as quantitative, to include a large sample in the same or different country and might have a different result. Secondly, although several authors have studied global branding strategies and the role of culture, the concept of brand acculturation, especially with brand anthropomorphism, is novel. Future research is invited for a deeper understanding of the concept. Our study mainly explores acculturation and its strategies; future research can devise a model depicting the brand acculturation process, its determinants, and outcomes. Although we have provided some examples of different product categories, Product-acculturation strategy mapping was beyond the scope of the study. It could be of interest for future research in this domain. Lastly, future research may also include the outcomes of brand acculturation and its various strategies that we have discussed through the lens of this research.

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