Foreword

One of the most important forces of social and economic change today is the increasing interconnection and interdependence of people and organizations located in different countries. People however often disagree on whether we are experiencing too much or too little globalization.

Many believe that globalization threatens their way of life or that it creates a world with few winners and many losers, and that therefore countries should fight against it. Others argue instead that countries should find ways to accelerate their links to global trading networks, because the new markets offer great opportunities and because trade barriers hurt producers in poor countries.

Whatever their position, people are rarely indifferent to globalization. From an academic point of view, globalization is interesting because it often requires consumers to make difficult trade-offs and to hold potentially conflicting beliefs. To make an example, can one at the same time enjoy foreign-made goods and believe that it is important to support local producers?

It is my belief that many tensions associated with globalization stem from two opposing trends. Both of these trends relate to how globalization is impacting diversity. Luckily, both of these trends feature prominently across the chapters of this book.

First, globalization leads to a decrease in diversity between countries. Whereas few decades ago, people in different regions lived very different lives, we can now observe a remarkable cultural convergence. For example, teenagers today listen to the same music, dress in the same way, and play the same games regardless of whether they live in New York, Rotterdam, or Beijing. Many people find this decrease in diversity worrisome because cultural homogenization is leading to the erosions of traditions.

Second, globalization also leads to an increase in diversity within countries. Contemporary societies are vastly more diverse than they used to be, as can be easily noticed by taking a walk in the center of Rotterdam or most other major cities. Many people find this increase in diversity worrisome because it raises questions about old ways of thinking and the role of people in society.

In sum, a paradox of globalization is that it both increases and decreases diversity. On the one hand, in a sleepy Italian town one can nowadays eat sushi and Indian food. On the other hand, these restaurants look pretty much the same as those found in similarly sleepy towns in other countries or continents. These two trends raise important new questions for marketing researchers and this book is an effort to provide an answer to many of them.

With regard to the decrease in diversity between countries, one of the most visible aspects of globalization is the spread of English as the new lingua franca. The recent growth of English as the global language has been quite extraordinary and the process is still gathering pace. Due to the process of cultural homogenization that accompanies globalization, messages in English are very common in many countries that don’t have English as an official language. At the same time, a backlash against “linguistic
imperialism” can be detected among many people. Understanding how the global marketplace impacts linguistic processes is therefore central to the more general endeavor of understanding how globalization impacts marketing practice and consumer behavior. The insights in this area brought by the authors of the various chapters of this book dedicated to language issues are thus timely and important.

Second, with regard to increasing diversity within countries, today companies face much more segmented markets than they used to. One of the most obvious research topics in this area is ethnic marketing, which is the study of how to effectively target and reach members of ethnic and cultural minorities. Ethnic minorities are important for companies because of their growing size and spending power. More generally, understanding the impact of greater cultural diversity on consumption is central to the agenda of many researchers studying the global marketplace. This book is therefore a welcome addition to the current body of work in marketing and consumer behavior.

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