The present research examines the occurrence of counter-cultural consumer behaviour in an experiential consumption context. We define this behaviour as product or service usage that varies across cultures, contradicting – rather than conforming to – the prevailing values in these cultures. Drawing on Hofstede’s cultural concept, we develop hypotheses on the relationship between two cultural value dimensions – individualism and indulgence – and counter-cultural behaviour in an experiential consumption context. An observational study with 3,710 customers of Starbucks in ten countries supports consumption patterns that oppose cultural value orientation. Specifically, the results of multilevel linear modelling show that individualism increases joint consumption, and indulgence decreases extensive consumption. We discuss these findings, provide recommendations on how a global experiential service provider such as Starbucks can leverage the observed counter-cultural consumer behaviour, and conclude with limitations and guidelines for future research.

1. Introduction

Many empirical studies in cross-cultural marketing show that consumer choice and behaviour are driven by cultural values (Akdeniz and Talay 2013; De Mooij 2003; De Mooij and Hofstede 2002, 2010; Samaha et al. 2014; Van Everdingen and Waarts 2003; Yoon et al. 2011). As a result, the international marketing literature focuses on the appropriate degree of adaptation to foreign markets (Schwarz-Musch 2005). Heretofore, it has been believed that adjustments – if necessary – conformed to local cultural values (Steenkamp and de Jong 2010).

We argue that consumer behaviour can also systematically contradict – rather than conform to – local cultural values. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence of such counter-cultural behaviour in societies: the popularity of Thai Boxing in Thailand, flamenco dance and karaoke in Japan, and ostentatious consumption in China, which are unusual activities for cultures with an emphasis on harmony, self-restraint, and frugality (Aoyama 2007; Fang 2005; Faure and Fang 2008).

Beyond such anecdotal evidence, empirical research in the international marketing literature and the psychological/consumer behaviour literature also presents initial indications of attitudes and behaviours that can be interpreted as counter-cultural. In the international marketing
literature, the respective findings are reported as unexpected and counterintuitive. Specifically, a content analysis shows that values such as modernity and individualism are pervasive in Chinese advertising (Zhang and Shavitt 2003). Furthermore, participants in a qualitative study conducted with young inhabitants of Shanghai view McDonald’s as an adequate place to find privacy from their families (Eckhardt and Houston 2002). Both study results contradict the traditional Chinese value system. Furthermore, a high percentage of Arabs are found to post comments on news articles online, which represents a low-context, anonymous communication style that contradicts the collectivistic value orientation in Arab societies (Kalliny et al. 2014). Finally, experiments with American students show that culturally congruent (vs. incongruent) international brand extensions do not receive more positive evaluations (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012).

In the psychological literature, there is a stream of research on nonconformity. Nonconformity is defined as a behaviour that is inconsistent with the values of group members (Nail et al. 2000). Nonconformity is driven by the need for uniqueness, a motivation of “striving for differentness relative to others” (Snyder and Fromkin 1977, p. 518). Transferred to a consumption context, the consumer behaviour literature describes nonconforming behaviour as buying unusual products or using them in an unusual way (Tian et al. 2001). Such behaviour comprises irregular consumption habits such as buying scarce products (Snyder 1992) or wearing red sneakers in a luxury outlet (Bellezza et al. 2014). Consumers seek to engage in these behaviours in the hope of publicly constructing an identity that reflects uniqueness (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006). As such, nonconforming consumer behaviour is displayed by single individuals who seek to be distinct, but it can also be a collective phenomenon of small subcultures (Thompson and Troester 2002). For example, gay urban communities (Kates 2002) or people in marginal economic positions (Holt 2002) express a common identity by being different from the mainstream.

In summary, empirical research already suggests that consumers can contradict cultural values, but there is a considerable research gap. Empirical evidence in the international marketing literature is limited to advertising (Zhang and Shavitt 2003), branding (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012), and online communication (Kalliny et al. 2014). The only consumption-related study draws on young people in a single Chinese city and refers to counter-cultural attitudes, not to behaviour (Eckhardt and Houston 2002). Likewise, evidence in the psychological and consumer behaviour literature focuses on single uniqueness-seeking individuals or subgroups within a single, mostly Western culture (e.g., Bellezza et al. 2014; Kates 2002; Holt 2002). As such, the literature refers to very specific individuals with a particular trait (i.e., uniqueness) who are reported in intra-cultural studies only.

We argue that a contradiction to the predominating values in a society can be a mainstream phenomenon, triggered in a particular consumption context and observable across cultures. Hence, we seek to answer the following research question: Can we observe counter-cultural consumer behaviour across cultures in a particular consumption context? For this purpose, we define counter-cultural consumer behaviour as a product or service usage that varies across cultures, contradicting the prevailing values in these cultures.

In answering this research question, we make three contributions to the literature. First, we enrich consumer behaviour research, which already presents nonconforming consumer behaviour within single, mostly Western societies (e.g., Bellezza et al. 2014; Holt 2002; Kates 2002; Snyder 1992). Here, this behaviour is explained by the need for uniqueness; single individuals seek to express identity by being different from the mainstream (Tian et al. 2001). We show that nonconforming behaviour can also be a mainstream phenomenon because it also occurs in multiple countries, including non-Western countries, and can be triggered among many consumers by a particular consumption context that we identify in our research. Second, we provide systematic evidence of a phenomenon that stands in sharp contrast to the majority of cross-cultural marketing studies. Systematic evidence in a particular consumption context would provide an exception to the general assumption made in cultural concepts, which is that cultural values are reflected in corresponding behaviour (e.g., Hofstede 1984, p. 23). Third, we contribute to the standardization vs. adaptation debate that is primarily concerned with the necessary extent to which offerings should fit local values (Steenkamp and de Jong 2010). Although this debate speaks to whether to ignore or conform to cultural values (i.e., standardization vs. culture-conforming adaptation), we suggest that a deliberate contradiction to these values might also be adequate. As a managerial takeaway, global marketing managers might need to position their offerings to accommodate – or even leverage – counter-cultural behaviour.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Experiential consumption as a context for counter-cultural behaviour

We propose that counter-cultural consumer behaviour is context-specific because this phenomenon represents a nonconforming behaviour that contradicts what is desirable in a “normal” context. Psychological research on conformity shows that, generally, people seek to comply with extant norms because of normative social influence; they seek to belong to a group that tends to punish deviant behaviours, for example by rejection (Festinger and Thibaut 1951) or exclusion from the group (Arnold and Greenberg 1980). Cross-cultural consumer research confirms this logic; cultural values represent what is desir-
able (i.e., “normal”) in a society (Hofstede 1984, p. 199); thus, people generally tend to comply with these values (De Mooij 2003; De Mooij and Hofstede 2010; Samaha et al. 2014; Van Everdingen and Waarts 2003; Yoon et al. 2011).

Given the general desire for conformity, we propose that counter-cultural consumer behaviour among a wider range of consumers requires a particular context. This context must represent a strong justification or a trigger of deviant behaviour, inducing people to deviate from the desirable consumption pattern. An experiential consumption context might represent such an environment. Experiential consumption refers to the use of products or services that provide sensory pleasure, fun and cognitive stimulation (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). These hedonic benefits are a main reason why consumers buy or use these products or services (Nysveen et al. 2005). Compared with material purchases (e.g., a car), experiential consumption refers to an experience that entitles consumers to an event that is limited in time (Nicolao et al. 2009). Examples are travelling (Rojeck 1993), watching movies (Addis and Hoolbrook 2010), visiting sports events (Wann et al. 2004), engagement in virtual worlds (Verhagen et al. 2012), a stay at an amusement park, or a dinner in a restaurant (Nicolao et al. 2009).

Given that experiential consumption provides hedonic benefits for a limited period, people often use it for a temporal escape from their usual lives (Labrecque et al. 2011). During joyful activities, consumers tend to become intensely involved in the consumption experience (Mathwick and Rigdon 2004) and, thus, forget about reality (Kargaonkar and Wolin 1999). They therefore can break away from their present environment in which the automatic routines of everyday work and life predominate (Labrecque et al. 2011). Everyday life is guided by societal values with which people usually comply because they seek social approval within a society (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). However, these routines are often perceived as stressful (Labrecque et al. 2011). Here, counter-cultural consumer behaviour – an intentional break with cultural values – offers a temporal refuge from these constraints. As such, an experiential consumption context should trigger counter-cultural consumer behaviour.

2.2. Behaviours in an experiential consumption context

To identify counter-cultural patterns in experiential consumption, we initially describe the conceivable behaviours in this context. Experiential consumption settings offer a variety of behaviours, including buying, usage, social interactions, and activities within the retail or service environment (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Mehrabian and Russel 1974). Concerning buying and usage, we differentiate between intensive and extensive consumption. Intensive consumption refers to the consumed quantities of a product or service, and we subsume two types of buying and usage behaviours from prior research into this category: the choice of a specific product (Mitchell et al. 1995) and the amount of money spent (Guéguen and Petr 2006). Extensive consumption refers to a prolongation of the consumption experience and can be conceptualized by the length of time allocated for the consumption experience, which has been used in prior research on buying and usage behaviours (Spangenberg et al. 1996). In summary, intensive and extensive consumption represent different, although not exclusive, options to increase the joyful experience. Accordingly, Guéguen and Petr (2006) find that both actions show a correlation of .47.

Concerning social interactions and activities within the consumption setting, prior research stresses rather diverse behaviours such as helping to retrieve a dropped pen (Baron 1997), examining product tags (Spangenberg et al. 1996), or contacting frontline employees or other store patrons (Zemke and Shoemaker 2007). In the current experiential context, we consider joint consumption and unsocial activities. Joint consumption is defined as sharing an event with someone else and having a continuing discussion (Zemke and Shoemaker 2007). In other words, the focal customer enjoys the same consumption experience together with another person at the same time. For example, someone goes to a restaurant with a friend, and the two engage in conversation when eating. Unsociable activities are defined as behaviours in which consumers do not want to interact with others around them, for example reading a magazine (Zemke and Shoemaker 2007). These people are concerned with themselves rather than with the people who experience the same event at the same time.

In the following, we discuss cultural concepts and develop hypotheses on how these behaviours (intensive and extensive consumption, joint consumption, and unsociable activities) relate to societal values counter-culturally.

2.3. Culture and relevant cultural value dimensions

2.3.1. Cultural concepts

The concept of culture is rooted in many disciplines. An early definition is provided by social anthropologists (Kluckhohn 1951), who define this construct as a social phenomenon of “shared, socially learned knowledge and patterns of behaviour” (Peoples and Bailey 2010, p. 25). Marketing research uses numerous approaches to conceptualize and measure culture (e.g., House et al. 2004; Hofstede 1984; Inglehart 1971; Schwartz 2013, 1992). For the present research, we draw on Hofstede (1984), who defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (p. 21). This conceptualization stresses values as the core of culture, describing a preference for certain states of affairs over others; the values describe what people consider desirable, which is proposed to drive corresponding behaviour (Hofstede 1984,
pp. 18–23). Hofstede (1984, pp. 65–210) originally captured cultural values on four dimensions and later added a fifth (Hofstede and Bond 1988) and sixth dimension (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 44): power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence.

We draw on Hofstede rather than on alternative cultural concepts, for example by Schwartz (2013, 1992) or House et al. (2004). Notwithstanding its several shortcomings, such as using managers rather than the general population and a lack of a priori theorizing (e.g., Schwartz 2013), Hofstede’s approach is deemed appropriate for our research for several reasons. First, the approach is most widely recognized in cross-cultural marketing research (e.g., Akdeniz and Talay 2013; De Mooij and Hofstede 2002; Schaffer and Riordan 2003; Zhang and Shavitt 2003), including cross-cultural consumer service research (Zhang et al. 2008). This application is important for our study because services are intangible and because we draw on experiential (i.e., intangible) elements of consumption. Second, the value dimensions could be replicated with other populations, including consumers (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 34). Third, Hofstede’s dimensions predict numerous marketing-related phenomena such as responses to advertising (Zhang and Gelb 1996), the box office performance of movies (Akdeniz and Talay 2013), and responses to services and to service recovery efforts (Zhang et al. 2008).

2.3.2. Two relevant dimensions

Of the six Hofstede dimensions, individualism and indulgence appear salient for experiential consumption. Individualism (vs. collectivism) describes “the relationship between the individual and the collectivity which prevails in a given society” (Hofstede 1984, p. 148). In individualistic cultures, a single human being is considered relatively autonomous, which renders interpersonal relationships less important. In collectivistic societies, human beings are considered dependent upon each other, which renders interpersonal relationships more important (Hofstede et al. 2010, pp. 90–92). Given these properties, the individualism dimension should be relevant for experiential consumption, which entitles consumers to an event with hedonic benefits (Nicalao et al. 2009). Events are often enjoyed with others because sharing one’s experience might be of value to individuals (Delre et al. 2016). In other words, experiential consumption represents a hedonic consumption experience whose value can depend upon whether this experience is shared with someone else. Accordingly, the individualism dimension, which directly refers to interpersonal bonding, is considered salient for our investigation of an experiential consumption setting.

The second relevant dimension, indulgence (vs. restraint), was recently added to Hofstede’s framework. It is based on Minkov’s analysis of data from the World Value Survey (WVS) and contrasts a society’s allowance of “relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun” vs. a suppression of the gratification of needs and a strict regulation of social norms (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 281). This dimension directly speaks to the nature of experiential consumption, which is deemed to fulfill hedonic benefits such as perceived enjoyment and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), including the fulfillment of aesthetic and autotelic desires (Holt 1995). In a word, enjoying life and having fun – part of the definition of indulgence – is inherent to experiential consumption. Accordingly, prior research has related indulgence to aspects of experiential consumption in the case of movies (Akdeniz and Talay 2013). Furthermore, it has been found that indulgence explains behavioural patterns such as buying from multiple departments in a store, which can also be considered to carry hedonistic benefits (Kumar and Pansari 2016). Therefore, we investigate indulgence as a second cultural dimension relevant for experiential consumption.

2.4. Hypotheses on individualism

According to the definition of individualism provided above, members of individualistic societies (e.g., the UK) consider personal interests more important than those of the group and thus strive for a personal sense of self-accomplishment (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 91). In collectivistic societies (e.g., China), social networks are relatively tightly knit. Members of these societies are less concerned with their individual goals but tend to be loyal to their in-group, which – in return – takes care of them (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 91). Accordingly, people tend to construct identity from their social environment rather than considering themselves independent (de Mooij and Hofstede 2010). Therefore, social interactions and relationship building are of minor importance in individualistic cultures in which an independent idea of the self is prevalent. In contrast, social interactions and relationship building are of major importance in collectivistic cultures, in which the ideal of an interdependent self is prevalent (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

Thus, counter-cultural behaviour is present if consumers from individualistic cultures, more than those from collectivistic cultures, display consumption patterns that comprise and support social relationship building with members of their in-group. Joint consumption reflects these relational patterns. In summary, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Individualism has a positive effect on joint consumption.

Furthermore, counter-cultural consumer behaviour is present if consumers from individualistic cultures, compared with those from collectivistic cultures, exhibit fewer consumption patterns that avoid or exclude social relationship building. Unsociable activities reflect these non-relationship-oriented patterns. In summary, we propose the following hypothesis:
H2: Individualism has a negative effect on unsociable activities.

2.5. Hypotheses on indulgence

Consistent with the definition provided above, the gratification of human needs such as enjoying life and having fun is recognized in indulgent cultures (e.g., Chile). Accordingly, prior research, for example in the motion picture industry, finds that a hedonic marketing signal such as star power has a particularly strong effect on box office performance in indulgent cultures (Akdeniz and Tallow 2013). In restrained cultures, gratification of needs is generally suppressed and regulated by strict social norms (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 281). Suppression of needs is related to thrift and frugality, which are traditional values in a restrained culture as in China. Accordingly, spending money on consumption – unless for gift giving – has low priority in this country (Ackerman and Tellis 2001).

In summary, members of indulgent cultures place more emphasis on happiness and ‘savoir vivre’ than do members of restrained cultures. Therefore, counter-cultural behaviour will be present if people from indulgent cultures engage themselves less in experiential consumption than do people from restrained cultures. Hence, we set up the following hypotheses:

H3: Indulgence has a negative effect on intensive consumption.

H4: Indulgence has a negative effect on extensive consumption.

3. Empirical study

3.1. Design and sample

Previous analysis of actual behaviour across cultures employed direct observation, which has some advantages over self-reports (Ackermann and Tellis 2001). First, habitual behaviour is often unconscious, which limits people’s ability to express their actions (Ackermann and Tellis 2001). Second, observation rules out biases stemming from socially desired self-reports. It unobtrusively reflects behaviour in a naturalistic social setting and does not require willingness to participate. Thus, non-response bias is minimised (Larsen and Fredrickson 1999). However, an observation cannot provide insights into the consumer, thus leaving reasons or motivations of the individual unexplored. Further limitations are revisited in the final section.

As an observation setting, we chose Starbucks coffee houses because they offer an experiential service on a worldwide scale (Thompson and Arsel 2004). Hedonic benefits in a Starbucks restaurant refer to the aesthetics comprised in celebrating coffee culture; they are about enjoying lifestyle food and a natural stimulant rather than basic, staple food. As such, an experiential service such as Starbucks offers a space for temporarily escaping from the monotony of everyday life. Prior to conducting the observation, we received permission from the local store managers. No incentives were involved for Starbucks, its customers, or the observers.

Country selection was based on the Hofstede scores for individualism and indulgence (Schaffer and Riordan 2003). Our sample comprised ten countries, which is comparable to prior cross-cultural marketing research (Schumann et al. 2010; Strizhakova and Coulter 2015). Countries were selected in a systematic manner and guided by two objectives. First, country scores for individualism and indulgence must be independent to avoid confounding effects when integrating them simultaneously as predictors in subsequent analysis. Second, the variance within both dimensions was required to be maximized to ensure a meaningfully and large degree of variation within the cultural dimensions. For this purpose, we created four cultural groups – 2 (individualism high vs. low) x 2 (indulgence high vs. low). Furthermore, we selected two countries per group, which allows for variance in noncultural factors and yields more-robust results (Samiee and Jeong 1994). The eight countries were the UK (89, 69) and the Netherlands (80, 68) for “high individualism – high indulgence,” Poland (60, 29) and the Czech Republic (58, 29) for “high individualism – low indulgence,” Chile (23, 68) and Brazil (38, 59) for “low individualism – high indulgence,” and China (20, 24) and Russia (39, 20) for “low individualism – low indulgence”. [1] Because these countries score rather high or low on the two cultural dimensions (because our goal was to increase variance), we added two more countries with average positions on individualism and indulgence, namely India (48, 26) and Germany (67, 40). The US was excluded to avoid country-of-origin effects because Starbucks is a US-based company. Tab. 1 depicts the country profiles.

To ensure comparative data collection procedures, we employed a uniform sampling procedure across countries (Schaffer and Riordan 2003). We always chose two cities (Ackerman and Tellis 2001) – a capital and one secondary city – to ensure breadth in the within country samples (see Tab. 1). [2] To rule out weekday-related effects, observation lasted two days for each city – one weekday (i.e., Monday) and one day of the weekend (i.e., Saturday). In all cases, we completely covered the open hours, which varied from 10 to 16 hours across locations. An additional measure to establish procedural equivalence was taken to ensure a similar degree of respondents’ interaction with the researcher (Schaffer and Riordan 2003); the Starbucks customers did not know about the observation because the data collectors camouflaged themselves in the role of a customer and did not interact with the subjects. Furthermore, all observers (four research assistants and one co-author) were trained to follow standardised observation guidelines to rule out potential biases stemming from inter-individual variation in perception (Cavusgil and Das 1997). Part of these observation guidelines indicated that the observers were to
position themselves in proximity to the checkout counter, allowing them to document purchase-related information such as the amount of money spent.

Furthermore, comparative data collection requires sample equivalence, which was established by only including home nationals in each country (Malhotra et al. 1996). Following prior observations, customers’ nationality was determined by spoken language (Ackerman and Tellis 2001). Language evolves closely with the culture of a community and represents a key means of cultural expression (O’Guinn and Faber 1985). Therefore, language is closely related to and indicates the cultural allegiance of an individual (Ackerman and Tellis 2001). Spoken language was easily recognizable during the order process or communication with other patrons and had to match native speaker level for the respective country. Finally, randomized data collection, which was performed as follows, is recommended to ensure sampling equivalence (Cavusgil and Das 1997). Up to five persons were observed simultaneously. When one of the five persons left, the next person entering the coffee house became the fifth subject of observation. When a person was accompanied, we only observed the person who paid the bill.

Sample size varied across the consumption process. A total of 3,710 Starbucks customers subject to observation entered the store. On average, there were 186 patrons per location (ranging from 138 to 227) and 93 per day (ranging from 67 to 118). The total number of observed patrons was well balanced across countries, as indicated in

Tab. 1. Of the customers who entered the store, 145 patrons did not use a Starbucks focal service (i.e., purchased nothing or merchandise articles only). The resulting 3,565 customers ordered 5,006 drinks altogether. After ordering, 1,972 customers stayed on site and sat down, whereas the others left the store (i.e., take away). Tab. 1 provides the sample characteristics. Overall, 54.3 % were female (45.7 % male), 73.8 % were estimated to be 40 years of age or younger (26.2 % older than 40 years). Sociodemographics were controlled for in subsequent analyses.

3.2. Measures

Individualism and indulgence represent the independent variables, measured by the societal level scores provided by Hofstede et al. (2010). Higher (lower) numbers indicate an individualistic (collectivistic) or indulgent (restrained) value orientation.

The dependent variables were measured at the individual level. For H1, joint consumption with companions was captured by two variables: company (customer was accompanied: 1 = yes, 0 = no) and conversation (customer engaged in conversation with a known person: 1 = yes, 0 = no). For H2, unsociable activities refer to behaviours indicating that consumers do not want to interact with other people when experiencing the environment. Accordingly, these activities were operationalized by the number of activities related to one’s self or to physical objects: use of computer, use of mobile phone, talk on mobile phone, and miscellaneous (i.e., reading, writing,
listening to music, watching movies, taking photos, sleeping, Skyping, or drawing; see Zemke and Shoemaker 2007 for a similar approach). For H3, intensive consumption was operationalized by four variables: food orders, merchandise orders, drink size and bill size at PPP (US$). Food (yes = 1, no = 0) and merchandise orders (yes = 1, no = 0) captured whether the customer ordered the respective product category. For drink size, we organized the ordered drinks into small (= 0) and large (= 1) [3]. Bill size at PPP (US$) represented the order amount in US$, corrected for price level. For H4, extensive consumption was operationalized by the length of stay, that is, the time span from sitting down until leaving. For analyses, the natural logarithm of time span was used to correct for the variable’s skewness to the right as recommended by Cohen et al. (2003, p. 222). The number of dependent variables relating to each hypothesis varied because the behavioural patterns comprised in our hypotheses can comprise different numbers of conceivable actions. Tab. 2 depicts the descriptive statistics for the dependent variables, namely the frequencies in per cent for the dichotomous variables (company, sociable activities, food orders, merchandise orders, and drink size) and the mean values for the continuous variables (number of unsociable activities, bill size at PPP, and length of stay).

Control variables at the individual level were age (> 40 years = 1, ≤ 40 years = 0), gender (female = 1, male = 0), day (weekend = 1, weekday = 0), and daytime (time when the customer entered the store). Control variables at the societal level were uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. Of the remaining Hofstede dimensions, these two dimensions were statistically significant in subsequent hypotheses tests and, hence, were controlled for to isolate the hypothesized effects from other potential cultural influences.

Tab. 3 shows the correlations among all variables examined and the sample sizes for each variable. Interestingly, we only observe small correlations between the variables capturing intensive and extensive consumption. Specifically, a correlation of .03 (p = .132) between length of stay and bill size at PPP renders both actions distinguishable options to increase the joyful experience. Furthermore, significant correlations between the control variables and the dependent variables justify their inclusion in subsequent model estimations. The correlations also provide a first snapshot of the hypothesized relationships. For example, positive correlations are observed between individualism and joint consumption as captured by the variables company (r = .10, p < .001) and conversation (r = .15, p < .001). A negative correlation occurs for indulgence and length of stay (r = -.13, p < .001). Although initially indicative, hypotheses tests are needed to corroborate these findings.

Finally, in relation to variable measurement, common method variance and violations of measurement invariance are considered as potential sources of bias. Concerning common method variance, the present investigation used two unrelated data sources for the independent and dependent variables, which prevented this bias by design (Chang et al. 2010). Furthermore, violations of measurement invariance can occur in cross-national research when measuring non-observable behaviour in the form of constructs (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1998). We ruled out this bias by measuring the dependent variables in the form of actual behaviours.

### 3.3. Method

Examining dependent variables at the individual level and independent variables at the societal level mandated the use of multilevel modelling. Multilevel models allow data points to be hierarchically structured when single data points (here: Starbucks patrons) are nested within classes (here: countries). Data points that belong to the same class can share variance, and multilevel models partition this variance between individual (level 1) and country (level 2) variables (Field 2013).

For calculation, we used HLM7 with full maximum likelihood estimation (Raudenbush et al. 2013). We decided on HLM because it is often used in marketing research that embarks on multilevel regressions (e. g., Schumann et al. 2010). The multi-level regression consisted of two models. The level 1 model specified the relationships at the individual level as a traditional regression (Formula 1). The regression used the “identity link function” in the case of a continuous level 1 dependent variable (e. g., BILLSIZE; Formula 2) and the logit link function in the case of a binary level 1 outcome variable (e. g., COM-
In the level 1 equation (Formula 1), \( \eta_{ij} \) represented the individual level outcome for person \( i \) in country \( j \). \( \beta_{0j} \) denoted the intercept, and \( \beta_{1j} \ldots \beta_{4j} \) were the slopes for the individual level control variables estimated for each country indicated by the subscript \( j \). The individual level control variables were \( \text{AGE} (>40 \text{ years} = 1, \leq 40 \text{ years} = 0) \), \( \text{GENDER} (\text{female} = 1, \text{male} = 0) \), \( \text{DAY} (\text{weekend} = 1, \text{weekday} = 0) \), and \( \text{DAYTIME} \) (hours). The level 1 variables were grand mean centred, that is, centring based on the overall mean and not on the country means. Grand mean centring is the recommended approach when the primary interest is in level 2 variables while controlling for level 1 variables (Enders and Tofighi 2007). The level 2 equations are depicted in Formulas 4a to 4e and are the same for the two types of outcome variables:

\[
\begin{align*}
(4a) \quad & \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} \text{IDV}_j + \gamma_{02} \text{IND}_j + \gamma_{03} \text{UAI}_j + \gamma_{04} \text{MAS}_j + u_{0j} \\
(4b) \quad & \beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j} \\
(4c) \quad & \beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j} \\
(4d) \quad & \beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + u_{3j} \\
(4e) \quad & \beta_{4j} = \gamma_{40} + u_{4j}
\end{align*}
\]

In general, they specify the level 1 parameters as a function of the level 2 parameters. In particular, parameter \( u_{0j} \) signified that the level 1 intercept varied across countries (random intercept), which can be considered the mathematical basis for modelling that the data points originate from different classes (i.e., countries). To incorporate the country level variables individualism (IDV), indulgence (IND) and the country level controls uncertainty avoidance (UAI) and masculinity (MAS), the level 1 intercept \( \beta_{0j} \) was estimated from the level 2 slopes \( \gamma_{00} \ldots \gamma_{40} \). In addition, the level 1 slopes of the control variables could be specified to vary across countries, which was achieved via parameters \( u_{1j} \ldots u_{4j} \), yielding a random intercept and slope model in summary (Strizhakova and Coulter 2015). Theoretically, the slopes of the control variables can also be constrained to be constant across countries. However, the random intercepts and slope approach was considered the most realistic situation (Field 2013). Finally, \( \gamma_{00} \ldots \gamma_{40} \) denoted the level 2 intercepts.

In subsequent hypothesis tests, a multilevel model was estimated for each dependent variable. Each model applied a weight to correct for varying sample sizes across countries to avoid over- or underrepresentation of na-

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**Tab. 3: Correlation matrix for the variables under investigation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual-level variables</th>
<th>Gender (female = 1, male = 0)</th>
<th>Number of unsociable activities (n)</th>
<th>Drink size (large = 1, small = 0)</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Age (&gt; 40 years = 1, 40 years = 0)</th>
<th>Company (yes = 1, no = 0)</th>
<th>Merchandise orders (yes = 1, no = 0)</th>
<th>Food orders (yes = 1, no = 0)</th>
<th>Uncertainty avoidance</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Indulgence</th>
<th>Conversation (yes = 1, no = 0)</th>
<th>Bill size at PPP (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.20 **</td>
<td>-0.01 ns</td>
<td>0.01 ns</td>
<td>-0.12 ***</td>
<td>0.01 ns</td>
<td>-0.05 *</td>
<td>-0.02 ns</td>
<td>0.03 **</td>
<td>.03 **</td>
<td>-0.05 *</td>
<td>-0.07 ***</td>
<td>0.03 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.00 ns</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.01 ns</td>
<td>1.00 ns</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03 **</td>
<td>0.03 ns</td>
<td>.03 **</td>
<td>-0.05 *</td>
<td>-0.07 ***</td>
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</table>

Notes:
1. Sample sizes are 3,710 for Company, Age, Gender, Day, Drink size, Length of stay, Individualism, Indulgence, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity. The individual-level variables individualism (IDV), indulgence (IND) and the country level controls uncertainty avoidance (UAI) and masculinity (MAS), the level 1 intercept \( \beta_{0j} \) was estimated from the level 2 slopes \( \gamma_{00} \ldots \gamma_{40} \). In addition, the level 1 slopes of the control variables could be specified to vary across countries, which was achieved via parameters \( u_{1j} \ldots u_{4j} \), yielding a random intercept and slope model in summary (Strizhakova and Coulter 2015). Theoretically, the slopes of the control variables can also be constrained to be constant across countries. However, the random intercepts and slope approach was considered the most realistic situation (Field 2013). Finally, \( \gamma_{00} \ldots \gamma_{40} \) denoted the level 2 intercepts.

In subsequent hypothesis tests, a multilevel model was estimated for each dependent variable. Each model applied a weight to correct for varying sample sizes across countries to avoid over- or underrepresentation of na-
tions (Raudenbush et al. 2011, p. 52). Before hypothesis testing, we formally tested whether the data demanded an HLM approach. For this purpose, we tested whether there was variance in the outcome variable that was to be explained by the level-2 classes (i.e., test of the significance of $u_{ij}$ in a null-model) according to Woltman et al. (2012). The results for all dependent variables were significant at $p < .001$, providing statistical justification for running HLM analyses. In addition, for the continuous variables, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) and the corresponding design effect (DEFT) allowed determining whether a multilevel approach was appropriate, particularly for cases when the design effect exhibits values greater than 2 (Muthen and Satorra 1995). The ICCs were .11 for unsociable activities, .03 for bill size, and .08 for length of stay, with corresponding DEFT values of 6.55, 5.68, and 3.50, respectively. Hence, a multilevel approach was required.

### 3.4. Hypothesis tests

Tab. 4 shows the multilevel regression results. H1 proposes a positive effect of individualism on joint consumption, captured by company (whether the customer was accompanied) and conversation (whether the customer engaged in conversation with a known person). The results indicate significant positive effects of individualism on consumption, captured by four variables: food orders (yes vs. no), merchandise orders (yes vs. no), drink size (large vs. small) and bill size at PPP (US$). The results for all dependent variables were significant ($b = .010, p = .015, p = .105, p = .019$). These results support H1.

H2 suggests a negative effect of individualism on unsociable activities, captured by the number of activities related to one’s self or to physical objects. The relationship between individualism and unsociable activities is non-significant ($b = .004, p = .278$). Consequently, H2 is not supported.

H3 advances a negative effect of indulgence on intensive consumption, captured by four variables: food orders (yes vs. no), merchandise orders (yes vs. no), drink size (large vs. small) and bill size at PPP (US$). The results show that indulgence is not significantly linked to food orders ($b = .004, p = .457$), drink size ($b = .003, p = .552$) or bill size ($b = .010, p = .453$). A significant effect in the predicted direction emerges for merchandise orders ($b = -.043, p = .007$). In summary, the tests confirm H3 for one out of four variables, which is why we consider H3 not supported.

Finally, H4 proposes a negative effect of indulgence on extensive consumption, captured by the length of stay (the time span from sitting down until leaving). The data indicate a significantly negative effect of indulgence on the length of stay ($b = -.016, p < .001$). Hence, H4 is supported.

### Tab. 4: Multilevel regression results for tests of hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Company (% H1)</th>
<th>Conversation (% H1)</th>
<th>Food orders (% H3)</th>
<th>Merchandise orders (% H3)</th>
<th>Bill size (% PPP in US$)</th>
<th>Length of stay (LN[mm:ss], H4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control variables (individual-level)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day (weekend = 1)</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>-.180</td>
<td>-.084</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daytime (hours)</td>
<td>-.726</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (&gt; 40 years = 1)</td>
<td>-.263</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.880</td>
<td>-.170</td>
<td>.030</td>
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<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control variables (societal-level)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes: Unstandardized coefficients are shown. Sample sizes are 3,710 for Company; 3,565 for Food orders, Merchandise orders, and Bill size; 1,972 for Conversation; and 5,006 for Drink size.</td>
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4. Discussion

4.1. Theoretical contributions

The present research makes three contributions to the literature. (1) We enhance the consumer behaviour literature by showing that nonconforming behaviour can be a mainstream phenomenon in a certain consumption context. (2) We enrich the cross-cultural marketing literature by challenging the proposed congruency of values and behaviours. (3) We extend the standardization vs. adaptation debate by suggesting a deliberate contradiction to cultural values.

Concerning our first contribution, previous consumer behaviour literature presents nonconformity as a form of identity expression. It is shown to occur in single, mostly Western societies and is performed by single consumers or subgroups with a particular personality trait (i.e., need for uniqueness; Tian et al. 2001). Our findings suggest that countercultural behaviour can be a mainstream phenomenon that occurs in multiple countries, possibly triggered by a particular consumption context. Specifically, we provide evidence of countercultural behaviour at Starbucks restaurants, which represent an experiential consumption context. Experiential consumption provides hedonic pleasure and stimulation (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), which has been linked to escapism (Mathwick and Rigdon 2004). Although consumers experience joyful activities, they can escape from the monotonous routines of everyday life (Labrecque et al. 2011), in which the need for social approval within a society fosters compliance (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004).

Concerning our second contribution, our findings contradict the majority of cross-cultural marketing research. Prior research largely supports the so-called onion assumption that (consumer) behaviour corresponds to the underlying cultural values (e.g., Hofstede 1984, p. 23). Two of our findings challenge this assumption; they refer to the two hypotheses supported in our study, H1 and H4. According to H1, consumers from individualistic cultures engage more in joint consumption than do their counterparts from collectivistic cultures (i.e., are accompanied more often and converse more with companions). This behaviour clearly contradicts the common notion of individualists as being autonomous and independent; when going to Starbucks, they share this experience with others. This demeanour represents a relationship-oriented behaviour, which is usually ascribed to collectivistic cultures. Furthermore, in support of H4, consumers from restrained cultures are more engaged in extensive consumption compared with their counterparts from indulgent cultures (i.e., longer stay). This behaviour also indicates a clear contradiction to cultural values because restrained people tend to suppress their needs and emphasize frugality. Hence, they should not spend much time on hedonic consumption.

However, two hypotheses are not supported, H2 and H3. H2 proposes a negative effect of individualism on unsociable activities. Contrary to our expectation, there is no significant effect. One reason might be that unsociable activities relate to one’s self or to physical objects such as mobile phones. Mobile phones might also provide a social component to a conversation (e.g., exchanging pictures). Hence, the behaviour that we measured can in part be used for socialising purposes. As a result, it is not clearly “unsociable”; thus, our hypothesis was not supported. H3, which proposes a negative effect of indulgence on intensive consumption, is also not supported, except for the purchase of merchandise articles. Intensive consumption was operationalized, for example, by purchase amount or by ordering food. A possible explanation is that economic considerations superimpose cultural effects on consumption intensity. In particular, consumers from restrained cultures—in an attempt to escape from the usual focus on frugality—may seek to spend more money on food and drinks but cannot afford to reach the desired degree because they lack financial resources. This explanation would also be in line with H4: lacking sufficient monetary resources, they might act out their countercultural hedonism by staying longer (H4 supported) rather than spending more money (H2 not supported).

Concerning the third contribution, we enrich the standardization vs. adaptation debate held in international marketing (Steenkamp and de Jong 2010). This debate centres on the necessary degree to which offerings should be adapted to the institutional environment including local cultural values, customs and traditions (Steenkamp and de Jong 2010). This discussion is also a major issue in international retailing (Swoboda et al. 2014). Here, a major question refers to which elements of a retail format should be replicated vs. adapted to local markets (Swoboda et al. 2009). In a survey among executives of international retailers, Swoboda and Elsner (2013) find that performance in a host country is increased if retailers replicate core elements of their retail format (e.g., store types and locations) but adapt peripheral elements (e.g., prices, assortments, and promotions). As a result, they suggest a hierarchical solution to the standardization vs. adaptation debate, reflected in a flexible format replication that, for example, is pursued by successful international retailers such as Ikea. Ikea relies on an unchanged transfer of higher-level features (e.g., vision) but on country-specific lower-level features (e.g., pricing; Jonsson and Foss 2011). Our research suggests that an experiential retail service provider such as Starbucks may be well advised to add a few counter-cultural elements to this flexible format replication. As suggested in our managerial implications, these elements refer to both a core element (store layout) and a peripheral element (pricing).

4.2. Managerial implications

The present findings are of interest for international marketing management practice. However, our recommendations should be treated with caution. They are derived
from our observation of Starbucks’ customers and may not necessarily apply to other multinational firms. Based on our findings, we suggest that multinational experiential service firms such as Starbucks should consider not only adjusting marketing practices to conform culturally as most of the current literature suggests for firms that seek to fully exploit local market potential (Steenkamp and de Jong 2010). Specifically, our research suggests that counter-cultural adaptations can be beneficial. We derive these adaptations from the counter-individualistic and counter-indulgent behaviours observed in our study.

Specifically, Starbucks can further facilitate length of stay in restrained cultures by offering comfortable seats such as couches or armchairs. Because seating comfort is less important in individual societies, bar tables could also be conceivable. Likewise, pricing strategy as a peripheral format component can be enriched by a counter-cultural element. In particular, discounts could be adapted to the length of stay, i.e., linked to the next visit or to a coffee-to-go in indulgent countries, but to a second order during the stay in restrained countries.

With respect to counter-indulgent consumption, patrons from individualistic societies (e.g., China and Brazil) stay for a shorter period than do customers from restrained countries (e.g., Russia, China, or India). Again, this finding suggests evaluating counter-cultural adaptations of the store design as a core format element. Specifically, Starbucks can further facilitate length of stay in restrained cultures by offering comfortable seats such as couches or armchairs. Because seating comfort is less important in individual societies, bar tables could also be conceivable. Likewise, pricing strategy as a peripheral format component can be enriched by a counter-cultural element. In particular, discounts could be adapted to the length of stay, i.e., linked to the next visit or to a coffee-to-go in indulgent countries, but to a second order during the stay in restrained countries.

5. Limitations and future research

As an initial study on a particular phenomenon, our research has natural limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, the major limitation lies in the nature of an observation, which does not uncover the motivations that trigger behaviour. Hence, in the current context, we could only infer that consumers visit Starbucks for the hedonic benefits drawn from this experiential consumption context. Accordingly, we suggest, but do not empirically test, that an experiential consumption context triggers escapism, which in turn drives counter-cultural behaviour. In a similar vein, it is conceivable that Starbucks generally attracts consumers with a high need for uniqueness. Given that this personality characteristic is considered the main driver of deviant consumer behaviour in intra-cultural psychological research (Tian et al. 2001), it might serve as an additional antecedent to countercultural behaviour. Hence, future research might be needed to analyse the drivers (antecedents) and anchors (mediators) of counter-cultural behaviour to enrich the theoretical foundation of this phenomenon.

Second, the observational approach also entails other limitations. In our case, we had to infer nationality from the spoken language. Furthermore, we had to use proxies for the dependent variables, which might not be fully reflective of the underlying phenomenon (e.g., unsociable activities). Finally, more control variables are conceivable at both the individual (e.g., regular or occasional visit) and the societal (e.g., price level of local competitors) level. Future research might therefore complement an observational approach with interviews.

Third, our observation is restricted to Starbucks, and recommendations apply only to this particular firm, based on the observed counter-cultural behaviour tendencies. For generalisability, an examination of other experiential consumption contexts would be necessary.

Fourth, the present research has observed overt consumer behaviour, suggesting that a firm such as Starbucks could adapt parts of its pricing strategy and store layout to contradict local cultural values. Future international marketing research can examine the effect of these counter-cultural adaptations on performance as has been done for culture-congruent adaptations in prior research (Swoboda and Elsner 2013).

Notes
[1] Numbers in brackets indicate individualism (first number) and indulgence (second number) scores.
[2] In the UK, we favoured Edinburgh (i.e., capital of Scotland) over the multicultural city of London (i.e., capital of England) to reduce possible confounds due to heterogeneous subcultures (Malhotra et al. 1996). In Brazil, we decided on São Paulo as the country’s largest city because there is no Starbucks outlet in the capital, Brasília.
[3] We converted the bill size to US$ based on the exchange rate on the day of observation, which was then adjusted for Starbucks’ different price levels across the ten countries. The price level was calculated as follows. First, drink prices for 35 identical drinks were converted to US$ and then averaged (see Tab. 1, last row). Then, the ratio of the country’s average drink price to the overall average drink price (4.37 US$) yielded the country’s price level.

References


**Keywords**

Counter-Cultural, Cross-Cultural, Consumer Behaviour, Experiential Services, Observational Study.

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