Trajectory 6: The Global Values Dichotomy

Introduction

An understanding of consumer values is of vital importance for brands as they seek to achieve the correct position to engage consumers. In some cases it seems the advanced and emerging worlds are pulling in the same direction; but in others they are clearly moving further apart (and not in the way we might expect). Here we analyse the divergence in consumer values and attitudes – towards each other and common societal practices – across different markets worldwide.

The international picture is not one that allows for either simplistic assumptions or banal ideas of secular liberal progress. We cannot simply assume that consumers in advanced markets hold liberal views while consumers in emerging markets hold traditional views, even if some correlation does exist. For example, 15% of consumers in the US, and 25% of consumers in Italy agree that ‘when jobs are scarce’, men should have more right to one than women. Contrastingly, in emerging economies such as Brazil or Mexico, this figure is lower, with around 10% agreeing.

Furthermore, in some areas, consumers in emerging and advanced economies display very similar values – for example, a majority of people in every country surveyed through Trajectory Global Foresight agreed that the needs of their own country should be top priority against reducing global poverty; from 60% of people in Sweden (the lowest) to 87% in China (the highest).
The Global Values Dichotomy

While the above caveats do apply, there is a dichotomy between consumer values in emerging markets and advanced ones. The chart below illustrates this difference; consumers in emerging economies are more likely than those in advanced ones to agree that practices around ‘playing the system’ – such as benefit fraud or fare-dodging – are justifiable. Contrastingly, they are far less likely to agree that values around freedom of choice or identity – for example, homosexuality or abortion – are justifiable.

Chart 1: % responding that each of the following is always or sometimes justifiable

![Chart showing percentage responses for different values in Germany and Malaysia]


The chart above shows the divergence in values between an advanced economy (Germany) and an emerging economy (Malaysia). In Germany, personal freedoms are considered important – reflected in the high levels of tolerance for divorce, homosexuality and abortion. Contrastingly, there is a low level of support for certain societal practices – tax evasion or benefit fraud among them. The opposite is true of Malaysia. Practices such as tax

---

1 The divergence visible in the chart works across a range of countries; these two have been selected as the contrast is particularly strong
evasion or fare dodging are considered to be on a par with homosexuality and abortion. The key difference is in the type of value in question; social values involving the relationship between the citizen and the state elicit one pattern of responses, whereas values around personal orientations or freedoms elicit quite another.

It seems possible that the values of the population are strongly influenced by the political priorities of that country’s government. Democracies – far more common in advanced economies – tend to allow for inclusivity and freedom of identity – not least as the broad economic battles have been fought. In contrast, the national priorities of emerging states are primarily economic. The practices these countries are more likely to find acceptable – from fare dodging to tax evasion – are all financial. In emerging economies, the race for economic development is reflected in tolerant attitudes towards personal advancement (and enrichment).

**Chart 2: % responding that ‘Giving people more say’ or ‘protecting freedom of speech’ is the most important to them**

![Chart showing percentages of people in different countries who consider giving people more say or protecting freedom of speech is the most important.](chart)


Of all twenty Trajectory Global Foresight countries, the three with the highest responses for freedom of speech and political representation are advanced economies with established democratic governments (and struggling economies); contrastingly, two of those with the lowest support are rapidly industrialising emerging economies. In these economies, ‘fighting rising prices’ or ‘maintaining order in the nation’ receive more support – economic or authoritarian measures. The focus on rapid economic growth in emerging
regions has in many cases been to the detriment of some personal freedoms; by contrast, advanced economies endure economic stagnation, but sustain a strong public and political respect for civil liberties.

The onus placed on economic development is by no means the only factor shaping values; in both emerging and advanced economies, cultural factors, especially religion, play a key role. The chart below demonstrates the correlation – evident in both advanced and emerging nations – between the importance of religion and intolerance of homosexuality.

**Chart 3: Importance of religion amongst consumers believing homosexuality is never justifiable**


The sharpest contrast is evident in the USA. Here, the proportion of the population agreeing that homosexuality is never justifiable is limited to a minority (18%), but a strong correlation between religious identification and intolerance of homosexuality exists. This prevalence indicates that the divergence in national ambition is not the only arbiter of tolerance – deeply held cultural beliefs, even in advanced economies, have a palpable effect on what is acceptable in different areas.

The divergence in values and tolerances has important implications for brands and commercial organisations – especially ones established in advanced economies. Issues important to these consumers – personal
freedoms or choice – may not resonate (or be actively resisted) in emerging economies, where economic growth has been prioritised over equality of opportunity and the group is considered more important than the individual. Similarly, brands cannot take for granted that advanced economies contain consumer populations that are entirely socially or sexually tolerant; in some cases, established cultural or religious beliefs are still influential.

**Moving in different directions**

The variance in consumer values is not entrenched; on different issues, consumers around the world are moving in different directions – and not necessarily in the way we might expect. Higher levels of tolerance and democratic systems in advanced economies do not automatically preclude intolerance. Similarly simplistic views of emerging nations are also misguided – as the trend data in the chart below suggests, emerging economies (such as Poland, China or Mexico) are moving towards greater tolerance. This is illustrated by the sharply declining number of people who say they would not like to live next door to ‘an immigrant/foreign worker’. Immigrants are of enormous benefit to developing countries, as they fill gaps in the rapidly expanding workforce. High rates of both immigration and emigration in emerging economies have helped create more fluid societies – engendering not just an appreciation of the economic benefits of foreign workers, but the cultural ones as well.

**Chart 4: % responding that they would not like to live next door to an immigrant/foreign worker**
Contrastingly, and perhaps as a reflection of the prevailing economic circumstances (and relatively high unemployment particularly) as the chart clearly illustrates, some consumers in advanced countries do not have the same view – in the Netherlands, for example, the proportion of people saying they would not like to live next door to an immigrant or foreign worker has trebled since the turn of the century, and is now far higher than the proportion responding similarly in Poland, Mexico or China. In the UK the figure is even higher. The trend in attitudes towards immigration in advanced economies has moved in a very different direction to emerging economies, and has become a divisive political or social issue, with many parties claiming they erode national unity. This divergence in opinion on immigration references the central point – the complexity of navigating different issues in different markets, and avoiding the assumption that emerging economies will replicate the values exhibited by consumers in advanced economies. With regard to immigration, emerging economies are moving in one direction and advanced economies in another.

The debate around the free movement of global labour is of course in stark contrast to the generalised acceptance in developed markets of the free movement of capital in our globalised economy – and is clearly seen as such by many in the developing world - where they have been among the worst affected by unregulated capital outflows and their destabilising effects.
The (il)liberal generation

In many advanced economies, views expressing intolerance are ascribed to generational differences; with regard to the issue of immigration, younger consumers who have grown up in a multicultural society might be expected to display more liberal attitudes than their older peers. One reason for this is that they have grown up around connective technologies – with everyone able to link to anyone else through social networks, obstacles to cultural cohesions have supposedly been overcome. For a sizeable minority, however, this is not the case.

Chart 5: % of respondents agreeing with the following (selected countries, aged 18-24):


Rather than fulfilling expectations as a liberal, tolerant generation, the youngest cohorts in many advanced economies display a greater tendency toward intolerance than their emerging market counterparts. This can be perhaps be interpreted as a reflection of recessionary pressures and the resulting political narrative in these countries and we should acknowledge that with the exception of giving priority to nationals when jobs are scarce, these views remain a relatively small minority perspective.

Nevertheless brands that are used to the established narrative surrounding younger consumers in developed nations may need to reconsider elements
their communications. In many respects, not only are young consumers in advanced markets less liberal than previous cohorts, they are less liberal than the same cohort in emerging countries.

Brands and values

A key dichotomy between emerging and advanced economies exists in the realm of consumer values: consumers in emerging nations display a far greater affinity for brands than consumers elsewhere. In Mexico, for example, 72% of consumers say buying trusted brands is important to them when shopping; in the UK, this figure is 39%. More positive attitudes towards commercial enterprises and consumer brands not only represents an economic advantage to Western organisations looking to expand globally, but also allows them to take a prominent role in advancing social development. In many emerging markets, brands can realistically play a role in progressing social values provided, perhaps, they respect existing cultural barriers. This avenue is likely closed to most brands in advanced markets – where not only is brand cynicism higher, but consumer deference towards state institutions is also higher (in the UK, 42% of people have high amount of confidence in the civil service; for Mexico, this is just 16%).

Further opportunities for brands exist in issues that remain more relevant to one market or region than others. Environmental concerns are one such issue: consumers in emerging nations are more likely to feel a strong attachment to the local areas where they were born or currently live, and the reality of environmental degradation through accelerated climate change is also greater. As such, in contrast to recessionary advanced economies where environmental concerns have taken something of a back seat for many consumers, in the developing world environmental responsibility issues continue to resonate profoundly with consumers today.

In conclusion

What this Trajection has sought to demonstrate is that social attitudes do not follow a consistent or easily predictable pattern.

The dichotomy between emerging and advanced economies is not always what we might expect; while it is true that both governments and consumers in emerging nations have in recent years prioritised economic development over social inclusivity, this does not extend to what might be viewed as ‘blanket intolerance’ in emerging economies. In fact – not least in the views
on immigration and ethnic diversity – values in emerging economies are strikingly more tolerant than those in advanced nations.

Global economic development presents fantastic opportunities and challenges for governments, businesses, individuals and societies. These are reflected in the challenges facing global brands in their communications and in the management of their developing market operations. We cannot assume a linear, homogenous (neo-liberal) development narrative to prevail.

Each market and region contains its own historical, cultural, political and economic background; the smart businesses are the ones that study these closely before making their next move. As for the rest, the lessons are out there to be studied.

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

This Trajection is driven by data and thinking from Trajectory’s Global Foresight service (TGF) which covers 20 countries. The service provides analysis on the trends driving consumer and citizen behaviour - what they are, why they are important and where they are heading. All of the content is supported by research amongst over 40,000 people per annum.

For more information about TGF or any associated research projects please get in touch:

@ sarah@trajectorypartnership.com

www.trajectorypartnership.com

+44 (0)2079021171  #TrajectoryTweet