

## ARTICLE

# PERCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL BRANDS BY CHINESE AND RUSSIAN CONSUMERS

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## ABSTRACT

A brand is of great importance for people when they choose a product or a service. Representatives of different cultures perceive brands in a special way and determine the most significant, necessary, and important one for them, depending on their cultural specifics. An attempt has been made to explain the specifics of brand perception in products and services through the prism of cultural values of Russian and Chinese consumers in this study. Rokeach's value survey construct (terminal and instrumental values) and Keller's brand performance construct, adapted to the goals of this study, have been used to achieve the purpose of the study. The results of the empirical study of brand perception by Russian and Chinese consumers have allowed determining the gaps in the brand construct evaluation and their causes. The hypotheses of the study that brands of products and services are perceived differently by representatives of different cultures and that brand perception depends on the brand belonging to the product category and the specifics of geographic markets have been confirmed. Further directions of empirical research can be aimed at evaluating the factors that influence the choice of brands of products and services by representatives of different cultures.

## INTRODUCTION

**KEY WORDS**  
brand, perception,  
consumer behavior,  
globalization, cross-  
culture

A brand is of great importance for people when they choose a product or service. This fact has been repeatedly proven in the course of various studies by companies trying to identify a direct connection between the brand and its role in consumer buying decisions. It can be said that there is a competition not so much among products or services as among brands for their place in the minds of consumers. Globalization opens up new opportunities for companies but encourages them to make decisions about a marketing strategy aimed at adapting brands to a new sociocultural environment, including their names, slogans, visual identifiers, and advertising messages with due consideration of the cross-cultural specifics of the country, while maintaining their emotional and rational characteristics. This problem cannot be solved without knowledge of foreign consumers, their perception, buying habits, consumption culture, language specifics, and legal and political aspects; therefore, cross-cultural studies are relevant [1-3]. However, companies face some questions regarding the choice of the most efficient research method, tools, brand evaluation indicators, as well as the very strategies of brand development abroad.

Cross-cultural studies, during which, according to D. Matsumoto [4], the specific behavior of two or more cultures is compared, are the main tool that allows companies and their brands to successfully adapt to a new sociocultural environment. Such methods of studying cultural specifics as "Value Orientations" by Rokeach [5], "Personal Preference Schedule" by Edwards [6], the scale of values by Schwartz [7], and morphological test of life values by Sopov [8] are widely known. Cross-cultural studies indicate that the behavior of people from various cultures often differs significantly. The cross-cultural studies allow revealing common features and underlying factors that explain the reasons for these similarities and differences. Such studies include a study by K. Keller et al [9-10] with the aim of studying consumer brand perception in the USA and China in order to clarify measurement scales and evaluate brand performance. Authors have indicated that consumer response to marketing incentives can be evaluated by several indicators that can range from a fairly low level of brand awareness or familiarity with it to a high level of engagement and brand loyalty based on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral attitudes.

According to Aaker [11] and Melewar et al. [12], a brand is a certain idea carried by a product, a service or a value, which occupies a certain place in the mind of the consumer. Indeed, consumers who prefer a particular brand are loyal to it not only because of its excellent external attributes and functions – they want to become a part of the brand as it becomes a part of their life. When choosing a strategy for penetrating a new geographic market, it is important to answer the following question: how will a certain brand be perceived by foreign consumers? Domnin [13], Carpenter et al. [14], and Schmitt et al. [15] believe that the image of the manufacturer's country plays an important role in the perception of the brand by foreign buyers. For example, some countries with high economic potential exert minimal influence on the consciousness of the mass consumer through their brands, which does not contribute to strengthening the positive image of the manufacturer's country in their minds. Such countries include China, the country that maintains a leading position in the world economy in terms of growth rates, production volumes, and economic potential, but despite this, it has a modest and sometimes negative position in the perception of the mass Russian consumer in terms of their emotional component. The formation of a successful brand is based on the knowledge about the consumers, their psychographic and socio demographic characteristics, and the specifics of their perception, which indicates the relevance of the research topic.

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Received: 1 Nov 2020  
Accepted: 3 Dec 2020  
Published: 6 Dec 2020

## METHODS

The purpose of this study is to develop a methodological approach to measuring the influence of cultural specifics of Russian and Chinese consumers on the perception of brands of products and services. The following tasks are set in accordance with the purpose of this research project:

- I. To develop a theoretical model for studying the influence of consumers' cultural specifics on their perception of brands of products and services [Fig. 1].

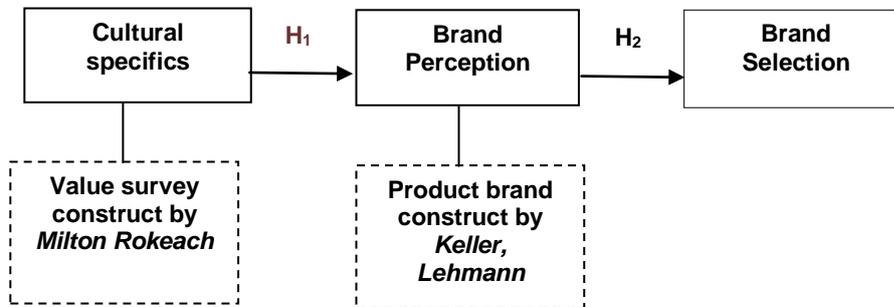


Fig. 1: Theoretical research model

H<sub>1</sub>: the brands of products and services are perceived differently by representatives of different cultures; and  
 H<sub>2</sub>: the brand perception depends on the brand belonging to the product category and the specifics of geographic markets.

- II. To choose constructs for measuring the cultural values of consumers and perception of product brands. We developed a questionnaire to test the hypotheses put forward, which included constructs (a set of variables united by a common research subject) adapted from the works of such authors as Rokeach [5], Keller et al. [10].

The construct of "cultural values" covers 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values: active life, life wisdom, health, interesting job, beauty of nature and art, love, financially secure life, good and faithful friends, public recognition, cognition, productive life, development, entertainment, freedom, happy family life, happiness of others, creativity, self-confidence, diligence, good manners, high demands, cheerfulness, duty performance, independence, intransigence to shortcomings in oneself and others, education, responsibility, rationalism, self-control, courage in defending opinions and views, strong will, tolerance, open-mindedness, honesty, efficiency in business, and sensitivity.

The product brand perception construct includes 27 positions: presence, awareness, knowledge, relevance, level of distinction, degree of respect, effectiveness, advantage, affection, heritage, trust, innovation, care, nostalgia, prestige, acceptance, recommendation, quality, environment, service, commitment, intention, value for money, overall attitude, expansion potential, consistency, and activity. According to this classification, the consumer brand perception can vary from a standard level of brand awareness or familiarity with it to a high level of engagement and brand loyalty based on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral attitudes. All variables in the construct were measured using the Likert scale, where one was "strongly disagree" and five was "absolutely agree".

- III. To quantify:

- the cultural values of consumers; and
- the perception of brands of products/services.

The opinions of the Russian and Chinese respondents were studied using an online survey. The purpose of the questionnaire survey was to obtain quantitative estimates for establishing connections among the constructs of the research model. The results of the questionnaire survey were processed using the SPSS software package. The sample included 764 respondents: 397 people (52%) from Russia and 367 people (48%) from China. In general, the sample included a proportional number of women and men, including 24% of women from Russia and 26% from China, and 28% and 22% of men, respectively. The sample included representatives of different age groups.

- IV. To select brands that will be used as an example to estimate the impact of cultural values on the perception of brands of products. The following brands were selected for research:

- information services (Google, Microsoft, Facebook);

- catering services (KFC, McDonald's);
- FMCG (Nestle, Coca-Cola, Pepsi); and
- electronics (Apple, Samsung).

The sample included brand leaders; they were grouped into categories depending on the market and the type of products and services sold for convenience.

Our contribution consists in the development of a method for studying the influence of consumer cultural values on the perception of brands of products and their choice.

## RESULTS

Values underlie the concept of marketing communications designed for a specific brand of a product or service, because a brand acquires emotional value for consumers over time, being the sum of associations, images, and impressions.

Values help a person and society define good and bad, beautiful and ugly, essential and secondary. The priority of certain values reflects the degree of a person's spirituality. A five-point Likert scale was taken as a basis to more accurately evaluate the respondents' opinions on certain cultural values. According to the results of the study, out of 36 cultural values, 11 were excluded that had the least significance for the respondents (beauty of nature and art, public recognition, entertainment, happiness of others, creativity, diligence, duty performance, education, self-control, strong will, and tolerance) [Table 1].

**Table 1:** Comparative evaluation of the cultural values of Russian and Chinese consumers, points

Cultural values	Russia	China	Gap value
Active life (fullness and emotional richness of life)	3.86	2.80	1.06
Life wisdom (maturity of judgment and common sense that are achieved by life experience)	4.03	3.70	0.33
Health	<b>4.46</b>	3.10	1.36
Interesting job	4.29	3.55	0.74
Love (spiritual and physical closeness with a loved one)	4.26	2.85	1.41
Financially secure life (no financial difficulties)	4.00	<b>4.65</b>	0.65
Good and faithful friends	4.14	3.10	1.04
Cognition (possibility to expand education, horizons, general culture, and intellectual development)	3.69	3.60	0.09
Productive life (the fullest use of capabilities, strengths, and abilities)	3.74	3.80	0.06
Development (self-improvement, constant physical and spiritual improvement)	3.83	3.60	0.23
Freedom (independence in judgments and actions)	3.66	3.40	0.26
Happy family life	4.06	2.95	1.11
Self-confidence (inner harmony, freedom from internal contradictions and doubts)	4.09	3.50	0.59
Good manners	3.74	2.90	0.84
High demands (high demands to life and high aspirations)	2.14	3.75	1.61
Cheerfulness (sense of humor)	3.83	2.70	1.13
Independence (ability to act independently and decisively)	3.43	2.95	0.48
Intransigence to shortcomings in oneself and others	2.40	3.30	0.90
Responsibility (sense of duty, ability to keep the word)	3.71	2.95	0.76
Rationalism (ability to think soundly and logically, make deliberate and rational decisions)	3.30	3.60	0.30
Courage in defending opinions and views	3.40	3.26	0.14
Open-mindedness (ability to understand someone else's point of view and respect others' tastes, customs, and habits)	3.43	3.35	0.08
Honesty (truthfulness and sincerity)	3.71	3.50	0.21
Efficiency in business (hard work, performance at work)	3.31	3.60	0.29
Sensitivity (caring)	3.43	3.10	0.33

According to the results of the comparative analysis, it can be seen that different values prevail among the Russian and Chinese respondents. For example, health is absolutely important for the Russian respondents, while financial security is absolutely important for the Chinese ones. The largest gaps between the evaluation of Chinese and Russian consumers are noted for high demands for life and aspirations (1.61 points), where the demands are higher for Chinese consumers, which correlates with their high demands for a financially secure life. The gap between the evaluation of Chinese and Russian consumers is slightly smaller for love (spiritual and physical closeness with a loved one) (1.41 points). This value is important for Russian consumers, which correlates with their high evaluation of such cultural value as happy family life (4.06 points). The third-largest gap between the evaluation of Russian and

Chinese consumers is in health (1.36 points), which may be explained by the growing popularity of a healthy lifestyle among the Russians.

The respondents were offered ten service brands and ten product brands to evaluate brand perception, each of which had to be evaluated using a number of constructs developed by Keller and Lehmann. Twenty-one constructs were selected for the study, which were modified in accordance with the objectives of this study and the specifics of the target audience for the survey. Each construct included several parameters, with the total number of parameters being 45. The parameters were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale was used due to the need to evaluate the attitudes and opinions of the respondents in order to determine a pronounced positive or negative attitude towards the brand. The answer options in the range from one maximum to another were expressed in words (from "absolutely disagree" to "absolutely agree"), the unipolarity was preserved, and the odd number of answer options were provided for subsequently obtaining average values. As a result, the average value of the ratings obtained for each brand was calculated within each of the 45 parameters, then the average value of the ratings of all the parameters that form the construct was calculated.

The respondents were asked to evaluate the service brands first. Among them, the brands of the companies providing information and catering services were analyzed [Table 2].

**Table 2:** Average ratings of the Russian and Chinese respondents regarding brand perception in the category of information and catering services, points

No.	Construct	KFC			McDonald's			Google			Microsoft			Facebook		
		Russia	China	Gap	Russia	China	Gap	Russia	China	Gap	Russia	China	Gap	Russia	China	Gap
1	Presence	3.57	3.82	0.25	2.85	3.79	0.94	4.65	4.02	0.63	4.57	3.76	0.81	3.69	3.27	0.42
2	Awareness	3.90	3.85	0.05	4.20	3.63	0.57	4.79	3.85	0.94	4.84	3.63	1.21	4.07	3.33	0.74
3	Knowledge	3.57	3.72	0.15	3.83	3.72	0.11	4.72	3.75	0.97	4.81	3.49	1.32	3.74	3.27	0.47
4	Respect	2.86	3.34	0.48	2.95	3.33	0.38	4.45	3.82	0.63	4.44	3.78	0.66	3.28	3.48	0.20
5	Relevance	2.74	3.39	0.65	2.90	3.48	0.58	4.45	3.75	0.70	4.36	3.41	0.95	2.63	3.22	0.59
6	Distinction	2.57	3.62	1.05	3.27	3.36	0.09	3.63	3.72	0.09	3.78	3.47	0.31	2.54	3.30	0.76
7	Proximity	2.61	3.66	1.05	2.88	3.39	0.51	4.12	3.68	0.44	3.89	3.42	0.47	2.56	3.21	0.65
8	Effectiveness	2.93	3.57	0.64	3.24	3.51	0.27	4.53	3.82	0.71	4.46	3.54	0.92	3.00	3.17	0.17
9	Affection	2.33	3.47	1.14	2.58	3.43	0.85	3.68	3.63	0.05	3.64	3.46	0.18	2.22	3.13	0.91
10	Nostalgia	2.94	3.28	0.34	3.69	3.28	0.41	4.55	3.63	0.92	4.69	3.42	1.27	3.14	3.46	0.32
11	Innovation	3.74	3.67	0.07	3.39	3.50	0.11	2.90	3.41	0.51	2.94	3.54	0.6	2.52	3.49	0.97
12	Care	3.08	3.40	0.32	3.24	3.58	0.34	4.02	3.52	0.50	3.96	3.44	0.52	3.10	3.26	0.16
13	Quality	3.13	3.50	0.37	3.34	3.39	0.05	4.36	3.50	0.86	4.38	3.35	1.03	2.91	3.04	0.13
14	Prestige	2.90	3.42	0.52	3.29	3.42	0.13	3.90	3.66	0.24	3.80	3.46	0.34	3.22	3.16	0.06
15	Value for money	3.07	3.43	0.36	3.36	3.27	0.09	3.44	3.63	0.19	3.77	3.50	0.27	2.92	3.11	0.19
16	Readiness	1.67	3.42	1.75	1.97	3.30	1.33	2.12	3.64	1.52	2.59	3.36	0.77	1.78	3.04	1.26
17	Intention	2.31	3.65	1.34	2.45	3.35	0.9	3.05	3.59	0.54	3.21	3.39	0.18	2.16	3.19	1.03
18	Atmosphere	2.74	3.38	0.64	3.41	3.32	0.09	4.38	3.77	0.61	4.37	3.69	0.68	2.67	3.27	0.60
19	Recommendations	3.44	3.50	0.06	3.90	3.52	0.38	4.24	3.65	0.59	4.30	3.46	0.84	3.31	3.28	0.03
20	Activity	1.72	3.46	1.74	2.01	3.36	1.35	2.47	3.52	1.05	2.62	3.56	0.94	1.88	3.07	1.19
21	Overall attitude	3.00	3.62	0.62	3.65	3.44	0.21	3.84	3.72	0.12	4.10	3.50	0.60	2.47	3.12	0.65

According to the results of the study, it was found that brand perception through the prism of the construct by Russian and Chinese consumers differed. Significant gaps were recorded for some elements of the construct. For example, the largest gaps for the KFC, McDonald's, Google, and Facebook brands were observed in such elements as "readiness" and "activity". The respondents were asked to rate the following statements for the construct elements according to the degree of agreement/disagreement:

- readiness: "I am ready to pay more for this brand" and "I can spend a lot of time looking for this brand in my city" (the gap values were 1.75 points for KFC, 1.33 points for McDonald's, 1.52 points for Google, and 1.26 points for Facebook); and
- activity: "I discuss this brand with my friends" and "I search for and read additional information about this brand" (the gap values were 1.74 points for KFC, 1.35 points for McDonald's, 1.05 points for Google, and 1.19 points for Facebook). The specifics of the perception of the Microsoft brand by Russian and Chinese consumers must be noted. The gap in the "activity" element of the construct is quite large (0.94 points), but the maximum gap in relation to the perception of this brand is noted in the "knowledge" element of the construct: "I understand well how this brand works"; "I have experience using this brand"; and "I know a lot about this brand" (1.32 points).

According to the results of the evaluation, a pronounced degree of cross-cultural differences for the analyzed brands was revealed. Despite their adherence to certain brands, Russian consumers are not always ready to spend more money and a lot of time searching for a particular service in their city – unlike Chinese consumers, who are ready to devote more resources to finding and buying apps from Google and meeting the need for food and communication through their visits to KFC and McDonald's. With regard to the "activity" construct element, Chinese consumers are more proactive in discussing brands and searching for additional information about them.

The brands of products were evaluated next, including FMCG (Nestle, Coca-Cola, Pepsi) and electronics (Apple, Samsung) [Table 3].

**Table 3:** Average ratings of the Russian and Chinese respondents regarding brand perception in the categories of FMCG, electronics, points

No.	Construct	Nestle			Coca-Cola			Pepsi			Apple			Samsung		
		Russia	China	[Gap]	Russia	China	[Gap]	Russia	China	[Gap]	Russia	China	[Gap]	Russia	China	[Gap]
1	Presence	4.43	3.33	1.1	4.58	4.70	0.12	3.65	3.00	0.65	4.38	4.65	0.27	4.56	3.57	0.99
2	Awareness	4.47	3.29	1.18	4.57	4.65	0.08	3.83	2.95	0.88	4.52	4.64	0.12	4.54	4.47	0.07
3	Knowledge	4.06	3.31	0.75	4.20	4.44	0.24	3.33	2.99	0.34	4.23	4.66	0.43	4.19	3.39	0.8
4	Respect	4.16	3.28	0.88	3.91	3.72	0.19	3.34	2.97	0.37	3.97	3.44	0.53	3.85	3.42	0.43
5	Relevance	3.94	3.45	0.49	3.39	4.23	0.84	3.21	3.03	0.18	4.12	4.49	0.37	4.02	3.23	0.79
6	Distinction	3.04	3.27	0.23	2.57	3.36	0.79	2.53	2.94	0.41	4.10	3.58	0.52	2.99	3.43	0.44
7	Proximity	3.74	3.23	0.51	3.32	3.66	0.34	2.81	2.85	0.04	3.92	3.34	0.58	3.29	3.25	0.04
8	Effectiveness	3.77	3.31	0.46	3.40	3.81	0.41	3.30	2.99	0.31	4.01	3.47	0.54	3.81	3.37	0.44
9	Affection	3.33	3.19	0.14	2.45	3.15	0.7	2.50	2.91	0.41	3.57	3.52	0.05	3.05	3.41	0.36
10	Nostalgia	3.65	3.19	0.46	3.12	4.35	1.23	3.37	2.98	0.39	2.05	2.35	0.3	3.42	3.19	0.23
11	Innovation	4.14	3.34	0.80	3.62	4.22	0.6	3.76	2.90	0.86	4.40	4.50	0.1	4.20	3.66	0.54
12	Care	3.82	3.26	0.56	3.04	3.58	0.54	3.34	2.86	0.48	4.04	3.36	0.68	3.56	3.38	0.18
13	Quality	4.02	3.36	0.66	3.48	3.91	0.43	3.78	2.92	0.86	4.36	3.49	0.87	4.18	3.51	0.67
14	Prestige	3.26	3.24	0.02	3.10	3.60	0.50	3.26	2.86	0.4	4.58	3.60	0.98	3.62	3.56	0.06
15	Value for money	3.78	3.48	0.30	3.72	3.77	0.05	3.38	3.11	0.27	2.78	3.40	0.62	3.69	3.75	0.06
16	Readiness	1.89	3.12	1.23	1.88	1.87	0.01	1.73	2.93	1.2	3.05	3.30	0.25	3.46	3.17	0.29
17	Intention	2.89	3.29	0.40	2.32	2.89	0.57	2.29	2.89	0.6	4.06	4.49	0.43	3.82	3.48	0.34
18	Atmosphere	3.70	3.39	0.31	3.05	3.46	0.41	3.10	2.86	0.24	4.18	3.48	0.70	3.36	3.32	0.04
19	Recommendations	3.76	3.24	0.52	2.90	3.17	0.27	3.55	2.89	0.66	4.25	3.46	0.79	3.65	3.36	0.29
20	Activity	2.06	3.42	1.36	1.82	2.47	0.65	1.76	2.87	1.11	2.70	3.48	0.78	3.95	3.61	0.34
21	Overall attitude	3.74	3.48	0.26	3.06	3.84	0.78	3.28	3.02	0.26	3.76	3.62	0.14	3.68	3.54	0.14

Following the analysis of brand perception in the FMCG and electronics categories, it must be noted that the scope of brand ownership influences their evaluation. The smallest gaps in the perception of brands by Russian and Chinese consumers are noted in the field of electronics. For example, the minimum gaps are observed for the Apple brand, and all the elements of the brand construct were evaluated by consumers at a high level, which indirectly testified to competent brand management. The degree of cross-cultural differences is pronounced for such constructs as "prestige" (0.98 points), "quality" (0.87 points), "recommendations" (0.79 points), and "activity" (0.78 points). Russian consumers consider the Apple brand to be of higher quality and more prestigious, and they are also more willing to recommend the brand's products to others. However, low indicators were recorded for "value for money" due to the high price, as well as for "readiness" from both cultures, i.e., a relatively small number of the respondents agreed that they were willing to pay more money for the brand and spend a lot of time searching for Apple products. It must be noted that Apple strives to maximize access to its products through a variety of distribution channels to facilitate the shopping process. Both Russian and Chinese consumers agree that Apple is an innovative brand. According to Russian consumers, the company cares about its customers, and they feel comfortable and pleasant with this brand. The mean values are almost identical for the "general attitude" construct; both cultures agree rather than disagree that they have positive images, thoughts, and associations with the brand. Following the analysis of the perception results, the Apple brand can be assigned the status of a leader in the Russian and Chinese markets. The degree of cross-cultural differences in the Samsung brand is clearly expressed for such constructs as "presence", "knowledge," and "relevance" in favor of the Russian market. In general, it can be noted that the brand received an above-average rating due to its acceptable value-for-money ratio. There are maximum gaps in the "readiness" and "activity" elements of the construct in the FMCG category, which repeats the situation with the elements of the brand construct in the category of communication technologies and catering enterprises.

The hypotheses put forward in the study that brands of products and services are perceived differently by representatives of different cultures and that brand perception depends on the brand belonging to the product category and the specifics of geographic markets were confirmed.

## DISCUSSION

Two constructs were used to achieve the research objectives: Rokeach's value scale and K. Keller's brand performance construct. It has been found in the course of the analysis of scientific literature on this topic that many methods of measuring cultural values are now used [4-7]. However, problems arise in the choice and application of a particular method when conducting empirical marketing research. This problem is related to the specifics of the subject area of research and the specifics of geographic markets, determined by cross-cultural differences of consumers. The study has confirmed the possibility of using Rokeach's value survey construct [5] to measure the characteristics of brand perception through the prism of the values of consumers from Russia and China.

The ability to use Keller's brand performance construct [10] is fraught with difficulties, which are due to the discrepancy in the answers of the respondents from different cultures in the analyzed markets of information services (Google, Microsoft, Facebook), catering services (KFC, McDonald's), FMCG (Nestle, Coca-Cola, Pepsi), and electronics (Apple, Samsung), caused by different interpretations of the elements of the brand construct. In the course of this study, K. Keller's brand construct was adapted to the goals of the study, which allowed us to obtain comparable results for evaluation.

The conducted research prompted us to believe that the brand construct directly depended on the industry specifics of the brand and the geography of the study. In this regard, the testing of the brand construct in

different product markets and geographic segments is a promising research vector, which will ultimately allow forming a universal construct for future research.

## CONCLUSION

The following results have been obtained in the course of this study:

1. A theoretical model of research has been developed, and constructs have been proposed:
  - for measuring the cultural values of Russian and Chinese consumers; and
  - for measuring the performance of brands of products and services (the K. Keller's brand performance construct has been adapted for the goals of this study).
2. Cultural values of Russian and Chinese consumers have been evaluated; gaps and their causes have been identified. According to the results of the evaluation, we have recorded that health is absolutely important for the Russians, while financial security is absolutely important for the Chinese.
3. The specifics of the brand perception of products and services have been established in the course of the survey of Russian and Chinese consumers. Significant gaps have been recorded for individual elements of the construct. For example, the largest gaps have been observed in the "readiness" and "activity" elements for the KFC, McDonald's, Google, and Facebook brands. The smallest gaps in brand perception by Russian and Chinese consumers have been noted in the field of electronics. For example, the minimum gaps have been observed for the Apple brand, and all the elements of the brand construct have been evaluated by consumers at a high level, which indirectly testifies to competent brand management. Future research may focus on detecting differences in factors that influence brand choice among different cultures.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None.

### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None.

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<sup>#</sup>English translations of the references are presented..