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The thrill of a smart purchase: Does country matter?

Running title

The thrill of a smart purchase

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Biographies

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The thrill of a smart purchase: Does country matter?

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate the relationship of Schwartz's theory of basic individual values to smart shoppers' predisposition to purchase store brands, considering the mediating role of the smart shopper self-concept and the moderating role of the country of origin. After an initial qualitative analysis, survey data were collected from a sample of 868 shoppers in four western countries (Spain, France, Germany and the United States). Then, a series of statistical estimations was developed through structural equation modelling. The results of these sequential models showed metric equivalence, providing a basis for generating valid comparisons among the four countries. The final findings corroborate the idea that the individual's value structure has a direct and positive effect on the smart shopper self-concept and that this effect in turn influences the shopper's attitude towards store brands. The results also show that although the dimensions of the buyers' value structures are cross-country invariant, the set of values that best define smart shoppers differs significantly by country. Mixed results are found when the relationship between the smart shopper self-concept and the attitude towards store brands is analysed for each individual country. These outcomes offer international retail managers guidance on how to best stimulate smart shoppers' positive responses towards store brands.

Keywords: smart shopper, values, Schwartz, store brands, cross-national, multi-group structural equation modelling

1. Introduction

In the year 2020, shoppers around the globe stockpiled essential goods to prepare their pantries for the coronavirus pandemic. The social distancing requirements, coupled with the undersupplied distribution channels, forced customers to shop in new ways (Knowles et al., 2020). Food and healthcare retailers experienced increased demand opportunities and unprecedented supply-chain management challenges. Both high demand and supply chain chaos favoured the growth of store brands (SB) (Nielsen, 2020).

SB are products sold under a retailer's private label; the label typically displays the store's name or a brand name created by the retailer (Kumar and Steenkamp, 2007). Because retailers changed their product mix to suit the needs arising from the COVID-19 crisis, sales of SB grew significantly (PLMA, 2020b). Moreover, with consumers beginning to feel the effects of the economic crisis that developed following the coronavirus outbreak, store brand options remain strong (Nielsen, 2020), and private labels are likely to continue to play a key role in the post-pandemic retail marketplace across all major regions.

Atkins and Hyun (2016) define smart shoppers as consumers who save time, effort, or money associated with shopping trips whilst maximizing the utilitarian and hedonic benefits of the shopping experience. For these buyers, hunting for deals and making the right purchases are sources of positive emotions such as pride, and enable experiencing positive ego-related benefits (Garretson et al., 2002; Schindler, 1998).

According to Nielsen (2018), 58% of global consumers consider themselves smart shoppers when they purchase SB. Several academic studies corroborate the idea that smart shoppers in nations as culturally diverse as the USA, Chile and Taiwan exhibit positive attitudes towards SB (Garretson et al., 2002; Liu and Wang, 2008; Manzur et al., 2011).

Richardson (1997) was one of the first authors to note that cultural differences could explain the distinct rates of expansion of SB in different parts of the world and identified this area as an important line of future research. Since then, several studies have attempted to link SB proneness to consumers' cultural traits (Budhathoki et al., 2018; Erdem et al., 2004; Herstein et al., 2012; Mandhachitara et al., 2007; Song, 2012). However, most of these studies focused on a small number of cultural dimensions and yielded inconclusive results. One possible explanation for this may be that no past research on the topic of SB preference has considered the complex

structure of individual values. Therefore, research on the SB attitudes of smart shoppers in the context of the individual values that are preeminent in their countries of residence is warranted.

Individual values are defined as abstract beliefs that serve as principles that guide peoples' lives (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1990), influencing attitudes and behaviours (Lee et al., 2019) and being affected by socialization (Roccas and Sagiv, 2010). Thus, consumers' orientations towards different value dimensions may explain the cross-country variations in their behaviour (Steenkamp, 2001), and this could be reflected in the market share of SB versus that of national brands.

In this context, the question that could be posed is the following: Do smart shoppers in different countries also have diverse personal values that could influence their SB preferences? If this is the case, studying whether and how consumers' value structures affect their attitudes towards SB will enhance researchers' and practitioners' understanding of international private label performance. If smart shoppers in various countries have different attitudes towards SB, country continues to be an important segmentation criterion, and the possibilities for retailers to implement a common international marketing strategy will be limited. However, if country differences are small, this would suggest that an overarching, multi-country strategy could be created (Marreiros et al., 2020).

Given the absence of cross-country studies of consumers' attitudes towards SB that build on the shopper value orientation, investigating the relationship between individual values and SB attitude could be the key to understand the differences in SB proneness across countries. Therefore, the objectives of the present research are twofold. First, it aims to investigate the influence of individual values on smart shoppers' attitudes towards SB, considering the possible mediating role of the smart shopper self-concept. Second, it seeks to understand whether and how the relationships among consumers' value structures, smart shopper self-concept and SB attitude differ by country.

In this study, Schwartz's (1992, 1994) theory of basic human values is as a framework to formulate a conceptual proposal that is used to analyse the differences in the predisposition of smart shoppers in different countries to purchase SB. Laroche et al. (2014) have asserted that empirical models derived from the application of this less-exploited theory may deliver findings that could have been neglected in studies based on the more broadly used Hofstede's framework. From a practical perspective, the resulting cross-country differences in individual values, as well

as SB attitudes, may indicate how retailers can best impact the positive affective response of smart shoppers to their brands across countries.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the following section, the conceptual framework of the study is presented and the underlying hypotheses of the model are proposed. The next section describes the data and the methodology used in the empirical analysis. Based on a previous qualitative study and a further multinational dataset of a survey that includes 868 shoppers in Spain, Germany, France and the USA, a cross-country invariant theoretical model is tested. The model serves to identify the influence of shoppers' value structures on their attitudes towards SB across Western countries. The subsequent sections describe the results and provide a discussion of the theoretical and practical contributions made by the findings. The paper concludes by identifying future lines of research.

2. Conceptual Background and Theoretical Model

From the perspective of consumer behaviour, it is widely accepted that the immediate causal antecedent of purchase behaviour is the formation of an attitude (Blackwell et al., 2006), which Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p. 216) define as the "learned predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably towards something". Drawing upon previous research that suggests that values are important forces that affect shoppers' attitudes (Roccas and Sagiv, 2010; Vassallo and Saba, 2015; Yamoah et al., 2016), the theoretical framework used in this study to investigate the effect of individual values on smart shoppers' SB attitude is based on Schwartz's (1992) theory of individual values. This theory has been tested previously using samples from more than 75 countries (Lee et al., 2019) and has been shown to be robust and valid.

2.1. Schwartz's Theory of Human Values

Prior research has built on several theoretical frameworks designed to measure the effect of culture on various outcomes (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Kahle et al., 1986; Schwartz, 1992; Steenkamp, 2001; Triandis and Gelfand, 1998; Trompenaars, 1993). While Hofstede's (2001) concept is better known than others and is more widely used in marketing research, it has been criticized for the characteristics of its sample and for overlooking individual differences within cultures (Gunkel et al., 2016). Schwartz's theory offers new and alternative insights because it shifts the perspective of study from the cultural to the individual level (Zhang et al., 2012).

Cultural values are broad goals that members of a society share and are encouraged to pursue (Hofstede, 2001), whereas individual values are abstract goals that act as vital principles that guide people's lives (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1990).

Drawing upon empirical research, Schwartz (1992) identified 45 individual values that have equivalent meanings across countries. Schwartz's framework is represented as a circular motivational continuum (see Fig. 1) in which individual values are encompassed within ten motivation types that are arrayed within two bipolar dimensions: (1) openness to change versus conservation and (2) self-transcendence versus self-enhancement. Openness to change includes values that emphasize readiness for action and independence of thought. Conservation encompasses values related to order, self-control and aversion to change. Self-transcendence values emphasize concern for the wellbeing of others as opposed to self-enhancement, which reflects an individual's pursuit of his or her own interests and relative success over those of others. A recent refinement of the Schwartz model partitions the same continuum into 19 more narrowly defined values whose effects are distinguishable across cultures (Schwartz et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2019; Grigoryan & Schwartz, 2020) and could be considered "near universal" (Steinmetz et al., 2009, p. 605).

The circular structure implies that motivationally consistent values are adjacent to each other in the circle, while conflicting values have opposite positions. The values that belong to each of the four higher-order groups (openness to change, conservation, self-transcendence and self-enhancement) respond in a similar manner when associations are made between them and a large number of behaviours, attitudes and personality types. Thus, values falling within the domain of each of the four meta-values (first-order constructs) are likely to be strongly correlated. Based on the above discussion, we propose the existence of a second-order construct that reflects the four meta-values; this construct is named the "value structure".

H1: The shopper value structure reflects the meta-values transcendence, conservation, openness to change and self-enhancement.

2.2. Smart Shoppers' Attitude towards Store Brands

The smart-shopper self-concept reflects a behavioural dimension and an affective dimension. On the one hand, smart-shopping behaviour is characterized by activities such as making shopping

lists, browsing sales advertisements and comparing prices offline and online (Atkins and Hyun, 2016; Burton et al., 1998; Mano and Elliott, 1997). Smart shoppers are not prone to impulsive buying, a method of buying that is prompted by external stimuli rather than internal causes (Maccarrone-Eaglen and Schofield, 2017). They tend to wait for sales, delaying the purchase until the product they need is available at the price they want to pay (Atkins and Hyun, 2016). On the other hand, smart-shopping affective characteristics or feelings refer to the ego-related inner rewards that shoppers experience when obtaining a good deal (Schindler, 1998).

Generally, retailer brands carry lower prices than the manufacturers' brands they compete against (Huang and Feng, 2020). According to IRi (2018), this price gap amounts to 25% in Spain, 38% in Germany and 36% in France. Sethuraman and Gielens (2014) found that the price differential is greater in the USA than in Europe. There is empirical evidence in the academic literature that private label buyers are value-conscious and that they find high quality in retailers' own branded products (Goldsmith et al., 2010; Gómez-Suárez et al., 2016). Smart shoppers tend to be value-conscious as well, have favourable attitudes towards deals and do not necessarily consider lower price a sign of poor quality (Garretson et al., 2002). Because retailer brands often offer the best price–quality balance, when consumers purchase SB as the outcome of their evaluative efforts, they feel self-confident and proud of their purchasing capability (Bicen and Madhavaram, 2013). Moreover, their smart shopper feelings are directly and positively related to SB attitude (Gómez-Suárez et al., 2016).

2.2.1. Formation of SB Attitude

To the authors' knowledge, no previous research has analysed the relationship between Schwartz's individual value structure and SB attitude. A small number of previous studies focused on the relationship of Schwartz's values to product preference (Allen, 2001), purchase intention (Grunert and Juhl, 1995; Lucian, 2017; Rubera et al., 2011; Vassallo and Saba, 2015; Yamoah et al., 2016), the social aspect of purchases (Ackerman and Tellis, 2001), patterns of Internet use (Hartman et al., 2006) or the consumption of commercial information (Laroche et al., 2014). The proposed model specifically focuses on the conceptualization of Schwartz's values as background factors in the formation of a shopper's SB attitude.

Most previous research has used Triandis and Gelfand (1998) and Hofstede's (2001) cultural frameworks to attempt to identify differences in consumers' SB proneness attending to

cultural traits. However, the evidence provided by these authors is inconclusive. While some studies show that shoppers in individualistic cultures have a greater positive attitude towards retail brands than shoppers in collectivist cultures (Shannon and Mandhachitara, 2005), others find that shoppers who share the cultural value of individualism have a lower tendency to purchase SB (Tifferet and Herstein, 2010). Erdem et al. (2004) posit that cultures in which risk aversion is high tend to have a less positive attitude towards SB. However, Sebri and Zaccour (2013) find that uncertainty avoidance has a negative direct impact on SB share only in developing countries. Finally, Budhathoki et al. (2018) conclude that the only cultural traits derived from Hofstede's (2001) framework that have a significant, direct and positive effect on SB share are individualism and long-term orientation. Because of these mixed results, we use Schwartz's (1992) framework to shed light on the effect of personal values on SB proneness.

Each individual has a unique hierarchy of values that determines the trade-offs that motivate his or her attitudes and behaviour (Cieciuch et al., 2014). The process by which shoppers evaluate brands and make purchase decisions depends on their needs, which are largely impacted by their values (Kim et al., 2002). Thus, the study of individual values is considered to represent a proper alternative approach to explaining peoples' actions and evaluations (Roccas and Sagiv, 2010; Schwartz, 2006) and predicting their decision-making behaviours (Lucian, 2017).

Current theories on the process through which values affect behaviour point to both direct and indirect influences. Individuals are likely to act in ways that are consistent with their values and to refrain from engaging in behaviours that go against them. Therefore, the shopper's value structure could have a direct influence on the evaluation of SB. In addition, values also indirectly affect behaviour because they influence the manner in which people interpret information, and how individuals process information ultimately affects their choices and behaviour (Roccas and Sagiv, 2010). For example, empirical evidence in the academic literature shows that consumers who are open to change tend to have a positive attitude towards SB (Ailawadi et al., 2001), especially in product categories in which the perceived risk is low (Molinillo et al., 2016).

Consumers make brand choices more easily when they perceive and value their association with a brand (Kapoor and Banerjee, 2020). Therefore, our assumption is that the degree to which consumers consider themselves smart shoppers affects how they perceive and interpret information and that this in turn could shape their decisions concerning SB purchases. If

this is the case, the smart shopper self-concept will mediate the relationship between the shopper's value structure and the shopper's attitude towards retail brands.

Thus, hypothesis H2 is proposed to investigate the existence of a direct effect of the individual value structure on the attitude towards SB. H3 is proposed to investigate the indirect effect of the smart shopper individual value structure on SB attitude through the consumer's smart shopper self-concept:

H2: Individual value structure positively influences attitude towards SB.

H3a: Individual value structure positively influences smart shopper self-concept.

H3b: The smart shopper self-concept positively influences attitude towards SB.

2.3. Moderating Role of the Smart Shopper's Country of Residence

The transmission of values is a necessary aspect of any community (Veloutsou and Black, 2020). However, the understanding of values requires knowledge of the context in which they are embedded because the psychological processes that shape the influence of values on behaviour are strongly impacted by the social context in which people operate (Lucian, 2017). Although it is true that countries are rarely homogeneous societies with a unified culture and that members of a national community may have diverse cultural identities, the work of Schwartz (2006, p. 154) supports the idea that countries are "meaningful cultural units". Based on data from more than 50 countries, Schwartz (2006, p. 154) found that "the similarity of value orientations within countries, when viewed against the background of cultural distance between countries, is considerable". Therefore, shoppers in different countries will have different orientations towards openness to change, conservation, self-transcendence and self-enhancement. Thus, consumers' value structures will vary depending on the country.

Previous studies that have shown that smart shoppers' behaviour differs across countries are rather scarce. Although these studies have used different variables and countries, there is empirical evidence showing that different countries have diverse results related to smart shopping. For instance, Chandon et al. (2000) observe differences in promotional behaviour between smart shoppers in France and the USA, and Chung and Darke (2006) verify differences in word-of-mouth communication between smart shoppers in countries with individualistic and collectivist cultures (i.e., Canada and Singapore, respectively).

Previous studies have verified that there are cross-national differences in the success of SB (Anchor and Kour˘ilová, 2009; Herstein et al., 2012; Lamey et al., 2007; Lupton et al., 2010; Nenycz-Thiel and Romaniuk, 2014). In addition to the previously discussed cultural dimensions that could affect SB share, several market factors that can vary significantly across countries have been found to be potential determinants of retail brands' market shares. For instance, the meta-analysis by Sethuraman and Gielens (2014) corroborates that SB retail promotional strategies and retail concentration influence SB share via competition from manufacturers' brands in the form of brands and price differentials. Additionally, Steenkamp and Geyskens (2014) find that the impact of retail concentration on SB share is positive and stronger in countries in which low market efficiency is determined by the country's infrastructure and administrative procedures.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the role of "country of residence" is expected to moderate the direct and indirect links between value structure and SB attitude. Moderator effects are observed for the model according to the following hypothesis:

> H4: Country of residence will have moderating effects on the relationships between a) value structure and self-enhancement, openness to change, conservation and transcendence, b) value structure and attitude towards SB, c) value structure and smart shopper self-concept and d) smart shopper self-concept and attitude towards SB.

The theoretical model discussed above is depicted in Fig. 2.

3. Materials and Methods

This section describes the data and the methodology used in the empirical analysis. It is divided into four subsections that are, respectively, devoted to the qualitative study, the scales and measurement, the main study based on a survey and the methodology used to conduct statistical analyses.

3.1. Qualitative Inquiry

Prior to data collection, sixteen in-depth interviews were conducted to fully specify the smart shoppers' brand-preference content area. The participants consisted of a convenience sample of shoppers in two urban areas with similar characteristics in the USA and Spain, specifically

Chicago and Madrid[1]. Age, gender and level of education were the stratification variables used to build the sample. USA and Spain were the countries chosen for the qualitative study due to their different situations regarding both cultural values and SB penetration. According to Schwartz (2006), "comparisons of West European with United States samples show large and significant differences in culture orientations" (p. 159). Specifically, Schwartz's (2006) spatial map of 76 national cultures reveals that Spain and the USA display very different value orientations with respect to Schwartz's two bipolar dimensions: (1) openness to change versus conservation and (2) self-transcendence versus self-enhancement. Spain displays a high orientation towards self-transcendence and openness to change at the expense of self-enhancement and conservation, respectively, while the individualistic aspect of the USA translates into a very high orientation towards values associated with self-enhancement (hierarchy, authority, ambition, daring). Moreover, the values associated with conservation (social order, obedience, respect for tradition) are clearly more prevalent in the USA than in Spain.

Regarding the expansion of SB, the contexts of these two countries are also very different. There are three factors that explain the spectacular growth of private labels in Spain (Cordero and Cataluña, 2015): the change in consumption habits resulting from the economic crisis of 2008, the improvement in the perceived quality of SB, and changes in the retail environment. The market share of SB in Spain has reached 49.5% in volume (PLMA, 2020b). In contrast, in the USA, the penetration of SB is lower. However, it has increased in volume and in value in the last decade (PLMA, 2020a).

In-depth interviews were employed to obtain consumers' perceptions of smart shopping and SB. Most Spanish interviewees did not consider themselves smart shoppers, while most of their USA counterparts did. Thus, a cultural factor could be affecting smart shoppers' self-perception. Regarding participants' attitudes towards SB, differences between consumers from the two countries were also observed. USA consumers had a less favourable attitude towards SB than did their Spanish counterparts and associated SB with inferior quality alternatives.

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[1] Both Madrid and Chicago have approximately 3 million inhabitants. The average ages of their populations are similar (33.1 years in Chicago versus 40.9 years in Madrid). Both cities have rich university networks. In 2018, the total gross state product for Illinois was approximately 900 billion USD, and Spain's GDP was approximately 1,400 billion USD, which we thought made the two capital cities comparable.

3.2. Measures and Item Refinement

Prior to conducting the main study, it was necessary to perform an exploratory quantitative estimation to identify how the observed variables are related to underlying factors. A comprehensive literature review and the results of in-depth interviews were employed to design a pre-test for scale refinement and content validity assessment. Master's and undergraduate students from the USA and Spain composed the sample of 180 participants used in this pilot study. This convenience sample, a type of sample that is broadly used for pilot testing in academic papers (Lee and Ko, 2020), was readily available and cost-effective.

The tool used in the questionnaire to measure individual values was an adaptation of the Schwartz value scale (SVS). The SVS is a Likert-type scale consisting of 36 representative values or items related to 10 motivational domains and is designed to measure the content of the individual values present in different cultures (Schwartz, 1994). The study participants were asked to grade the importance of each value as a 'guiding principle of my life' on a scale of 7 to -1, where 7 was the highest score ('of supreme importance') and -1 the lowest ('opposed to my values').

Davidov et al. (2008) indicate that some values may exhibit low internal reliability and that some pairs of adjacent values may not be discriminated clearly from one another. To overcome the problems of low reliability and poor discriminability, in this exploratory study we first reduced the number of values and developed a shorter scale with more focused items. Second, we combined adjacent values. Thus, as the number of items that measure each meta-value increased, internal reliability also increased. In order to do so, we run successive estimations to be sure that the process of reducing the items was correct. We examined communality, cross-loadings, contribution to Cronbach's alpha, contribution to AVE, and discriminant validity for all the items using the pilot study data and PCA and CFA estimations. We then dropped the items that did not fulfil all the criteria to improve discriminability and reliability. After three adjustments, 18 of the initial 36 values were retained for the main study.

To assess the smart shopper self-concept, the participants rated four descriptive items related to how they perceived smart-shopping behaviour and three items related to the affective reward resulting from making a smart purchase. All items regarding smart shopping were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Brand attitude was measured using an adapted version of the

scale proposed in Burton et al. (1998, p. 298): "A predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner due to product evaluations, purchase evaluations, and/or self-evaluations associated with private label (...) product."

3.3. Main Study

The hypotheses were tested using a survey that was conducted simultaneously in four countries (Spain, Germany, France and the USA). In addition to the countries that participated in the pre-test, Germany and France were included in the main study given that their cultural, economic and market conditions were sufficiently different to provide relevant information for the research. According to Schwartz's (2006) value map, there are considerable cultural differences within the Western European region. French culture displays a relatively high orientation towards self-enhancement and openness to change. Germany is positioned in the top 10% of countries with the highest conservation orientation. Additionally, Germany and France present different situations regarding the expansion of private labels. In France, the private-label market share appears to have reached a ceiling of approximately 32% in volume, while in Germany the market share of these brands has grown since 2000, and the current volume share is 43% (PLMA, 2020b).

The survey's semantic differences were resolved using a translation/back-translation method. In addition, a professional editing service reviewed all the questionnaires.

Data were collected using a Qualtrics panel in the four countries. This market research company maintains proprietary respondent panels. The researchers shared the entire process of designing the sample (preconditions for survey participation), ensuring the subsample sizes, replacing sample units if needed, and initial depuration. A total of 900 shoppers participated in the final survey through a self-administered online questionnaire. All individuals were 18 years of age or older and responsible for the purchase of consumer-packaged goods within their respective households. After the depuration process, the final sample size for the application of the statistical procedure in this article was 868. Of these participants, 244 were from Spain; 207 from Germany, 214 from France and 197 were from the United States. Demographic profile by country can be provided to readers upon request. The database for the main study was first created in 2017 and has been elaborated throughout the last three years.

3.4. Statistical Procedure

Similar to many recent marketing academic contributions, SPSS and Amos software programs were used to perform the statistical analyses. The application of these software programs has made it possible to obtain all the statistical indicators required to rigorously validate the fit of the contrasted empirical model. With regard to AMOS, since a comparative approach is applied, its systematic estimation procedure has been used to find similarities and differences among the different countries under study. A process of statistical estimation that obtains metric equivalence (or invariance) has been developed and used to perform comparative analyses of information from different countries. Therefore, the results presented below are functionally, conceptually, semantically and metrically equivalent between countries and provide a basis for generating valid comparisons between the different groups/countries analysed (Yoo and Donthu, 2001).

4. Results

The estimation procedure explained below is based on two stages. First, the global model is estimated. Subsequently, multi-group structural equation modelling (MGSEM) is applied.

4.1. Global Model

The analyses synthesized values in the four dimensions (meta-values) of Schwartz (1992) value system (openness to change, conservation, self-transcendence and self-enhancement) to obtain a more parsimonious research framework.

First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. This analysis permits assessment of the degree of reliability of the measurement model that precedes the estimation of the causal model under study in the context of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) methodology. It served to define the homogeneous subgroups of variables (factors) representing the dimensions underlying the value structure. Therefore, this measurement model is the basis of the further estimations (causal relationships global model and cross-national MGSEM comparisons).

The descriptive statistics, parameters, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's alpha for this model are presented in Table 1. Regarding the means, all items had high averages that fell above the midpoint of the scale, which is 4. The standard deviations were relatively high. Thus, differences between countries were expected.

These differences are verified in the following section, which is devoted to the MGSEM analysis.

To meet the criterion of convergent validity based on the AVE, which must be greater than .5, it was necessary to reduce the number of items per construct. The final number of items was 12; this included three items per meta-value.

The global model was configured with loadings higher than .65, fulfilling the construct reliability criterion suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The global model yielded acceptable goodness-of-fit statistics (χ^2 (31) = 32.009, $p < .416$, χ^2/df = 1.003; GFI = .994; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .959; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .983; Tucker Lewis Index = .979; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSA) = .024).

According to the classification of alternative second-order factor models specified by Jarvis et al. (2003, pp. 204-205), the final model for values is a type I model (reflective first-order construct, reflective second-order). Schwartz (1992) suggested a continuum for the meta-values (see Fig. 1); therefore, the four first-order constructs may show a certain correlation. To test for discriminant validity, the procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was followed. The four-dimensional structure was constrained against a series of alternative models with pairwise correlations between the four factors fixed at 1.0. Then, a series of chi-square difference tests was conducted for all dimensions in pairs to determine whether the freely estimated model (correlation estimated freely) provided a better fit to the data than the restricted model (correlation fixed to 1). For all of the alternative models, the estimation of the restricted model offered a worse estimation than the free model. Thus, the χ^2 difference tests confirmed that the four-factor structure performed better than the alternative models. Moreover, the correlations among all the variables did not include the unit value; thus, they supported the discriminant validity of such a four-dimensional structure.

A second-order CFA was then conducted. The results showed adequate goodness-of-fit indexes (χ^2 (30) = 30.428, $p < .444$, χ^2/df = 1.014; GFI = .994; AGFI =.946; CFI = .975; TLI = .971; RMSEA = .004). This second-order construct called the *value structure* reflected the four meta-values: openness to change ($\lambda = .941$), transcendence ($\lambda = .928$), conservation ($\lambda = .918$), and self-enhancement ($\lambda = .887$).

The model shown in Fig. 1 was estimated using structural equation modelling (SEM). The fit obtained was satisfactory (χ^2/df = 1.616; GFI = .965; AGFI = .949; CFI = .987; TLI =

.967; RMSEA = .031). However, the relationship between value structure and SB attitude was not significant (λ = .063; CR = .094). Hence, H2 was not supported.

Therefore, an alternative model based only on an indirect relationship between value structure and SB attitude through smart shopper self-concept was estimated. This SEM estimation also presented adequate fit indexes (χ^2/df = 1.860; GFI = .954; AGFI = .959; CFI = .988; TLI = .987; RMSEA = .031). The path coefficients for the overall model are shown in Fig. 3. The results indicated that value structure reflected the four meta-dimensions: openness to change (λ = .936), conservation (λ = .919), self-transcendence (λ = .911), and self-enhancement (λ = .888). Value structure had an effect on smart shopper self-concept (λ = .738), which, in turn, had a positive effect on the attitude towards SB (λ = .120). Hence, H1, H3a and H3b were confirmed.

4.2. Cross-National Comparison

The results of a previous ANOVA test revealed significant differences among the countries for all value, smart shopper self-concept and attitude items (for space reasons, this test is not included in the document; it can be provided to the reader upon request).

The measurement invariance among the four groups was examined by performing a multi-group confirmatory analysis for the first- and second-order constructs. The results showed a satisfactory fit. These findings ensured the equivalence of the measurement instrument between subsamples; that is, the instrument was interpreted in the same way in all four countries. Thus, the variations among the causal relationship models were not due to the measurement process but to the different causal relationships themselves.

To ensure the validity of the model structure in the cross-cultural study, a multi-group analysis (MGSEM) was then conducted for the four countries. MGSEM uses configural, metric, and factor variance invariance tests. The equivalence in questionnaires, as well as in any other psychometric test, is a central point of measurement in social sciences, since it is closely linked to validity, especially in cross-cultural research. However, this procedure alone is insufficient to ensure this property. The advantage of using multi-group analysis is that it provides the strictest level of measurement equivalence test and it is estimated in successive stages, so that a new restriction is incorporated in each of them. If the equivalence of measurement is fulfilled, this guarantees that the instrument used is valid to interpret the parameters, since it does not depend

on the specific conditions of a country, but rather that the tool is common to all but produces different results (or not) for each.

First, the unconstrained model was compared to the model that assumes equal measurement weights in the four countries. Then, the equal measurement weights model was compared to the equal structural weights model. Although the chi-squared difference between the models was not significant, the other goodness-of-fit measure comparisons (NFI, IFI, RFI and TLI) did not surpass the threshold of .01 indicated by Chen (2007), indicating that the models were not significantly deteriorated when the restrictions were imposed. Table 2 shows that hypothesis H4 is partially supported. These results should be complemented with the calculation of the critical ratio for differences for each proposition/hypothesis formulated (Byrne, 2010) [1].

The value structure was reflected in the constructs differently according to country, supporting H4a. Spain presented the lowest coefficient for openness to change (.893) and conservation (.824). This country had a high coefficient in self-enhancement (.949), as did Germany (.948). Germany stood out for its high coefficient in transcendence (.937) and its openness to change (.962). France showed the lowest coefficient in self-enhancement (.788), a high value in openness to change (.953) and an intermediate value in transcendence (.923). For the USA, the coefficient for transcendence was the lowest among the four countries (.937), while its coefficient for conservation was the highest (.987).

Given that the hypothesis that proposed a direct relationship between value structure and SB attitude was not supported, H4b was not supported either. Significant differences were found across countries in the relationship between value structure and smart shopper self-concept. Thus, H4c was supported. Spain showed the lowest coefficient (.597). The highest coefficient was in the USA (.764), followed by Germany (.728). The parameter for France (.680) had an intermediate value.

Regarding the relationship between smart shopper self-concept and SB attitude, in Germany, smart shopper self-concept had a significant and negative influence on the attitude towards private labels (-.182). In Spain, smart shopping had a significant and positive influence on the attitude towards this type of brand (.137). In both France and the USA, the relationship was not statistically significant. Therefore, H4d was only partially supported.

5. Discussion

This study is the first to empirically investigate the effects of individual values on smart shopping in a cross-country context. Following the recommendation that a well-founded comparison of structural relations across groups requires equivalence of the measurement scale underlying the indicators (Steinmetz et al., 2009), a cross-country invariant model that links individual values to smart shoppers' self-concepts and their attitudes towards SB is proposed and tested. The results provide theoretical and managerial contributions.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The literature suggests that in the area of consumer behaviour, Schwartz's less exploited theory of human values may deliver richer findings than Hofstede's model (Laroche et al., 2014). The results of the current study have theoretical implications that benefit cross-national consumer research in several ways.

First, the replication of Schwartz's value structure finds full support across all countries. The results show that the values that describe the goals and aspirations of shoppers in Spain, France, Germany and the USA can be measured using an invariant model and are significantly different by country. This finding is important because it not only provides a measure of discriminant validity for the value structure construct but also shows that the core antecedents of the phenomenon remain invariant regardless of the smart shoppers' specific cultural context.

In line with Schwartz's (2006) work, our findings support the concept that conservation (conformity and tradition values) is the most important value in the USA, while openness to change (creativity, broadmindedness, and curiosity) is the most salient value in France and Germany. Spanish shoppers also appear to be highly oriented towards values related to egalitarianism, social justice, equality and helpfulness. However, they are more oriented towards self-enhancement (achievement values) than to any other meta-value.

Second, cross-country differences are observed in the link between value structure and smart shopper self-concept, proving that smart shoppers embrace the values of the social context in which they operate.

As an additional theoretical contribution, the present study sheds new light on the role of the smart shopper self-concept in SB attitudes across countries. Because the smart shopper self-concept has been shown to contribute to the attitude towards brands, the literature is extended by

examining how this relationship varies depending on the shopper's country. No prior research has conducted a similar cross-country analysis.

As expected, in the case of the Spanish sample, the smart shopper self-concept positively influences consumers' attitude towards SB. Contrary to the hypothesized expectations, the findings presented here indicate that this effect has a negative sign in the case of Germany. A potential explanation for the negative influence of smart shopper self-concept on SB attitude in Germany might be that consumers who perceive themselves as smart shoppers are more likely to experience the thrill of the hunt when they shop for national brands on sale. Discounters enjoy a high share of the market in Germany, and most German consumers take SB low prices for granted (Seitz et al., 2017). Therefore, the attribution of responsibility for obtaining a good deal on SB would not generate for these consumers the intrinsic rewards associated with smart shopping. Garretson et al. (2002) suggest that the attribution of responsibility for making a smart purchase could be higher when shoppers purchase national brands on promotion than when they purchase more readily available, everyday-low-price SB. In the cases of France and the USA, the relationship is nonsignificant. SB hold a significantly inferior share position in these two countries compared to Spain and Germany, suggesting that they may have a lower appeal to French and American consumers. According to Lacœuilhe et al. (2017), standard SB in France suffer from their 'me-too product' policy, and their price level has become much less attractive. In the United States, private labels still mainly serve as price fighters (Sethuraman and Gielens, 2014).

5.2. Managerial Implications

These findings offer a clear reference point for designing effective marketing tactics that stimulate smart shoppers' self-concept and that, in turn, will influence shoppers' positive response to SB. The empirical results related to the value structure provide guidance in evaluating the importance of some values over others as determinants of smart shopper self-concept across countries. The study also demonstrates the existence of differences in the intensity with which consumers in different countries are involved in smart shopping and in the impact of smart shopper self-concept on the attitude towards private labels. Hence, when implementing smart shopper-targeted communications, retailers should incorporate references to the most salient individual values for each country.

Depending on the country, different types of motivational goals should be highlighted, such as achievement in Spain, transcendence in Germany, openness to change in Germany and France and conservation in the USA. In addition, retailers' interaction with smart shoppers should aim to trigger the ego-related positive reward that obtaining a discount stimulates in these shoppers (Schindler, 1998). A potentially highly effective method of engaging smart shoppers would be through personalized communications about special, short-term sales events, promotions and price discounts. Smart shoppers experience feelings of joy and pride when they make a good purchase that they can attribute to their shopping capability. Therefore, assortment and merchandising strategies that intensify the "treasure hunt" shopping experience would be of interest to them. Additionally, given that smart shoppers actively organize and compare information, apps that can be used to handle coupons, draft shopping lists or compare prices could be very relevant to this group of shoppers.

The findings of the study indicate that the smart shopper self-concept has a significant positive influence on SB attitude in Spain and a negative influence in Germany. Thus, Spanish retailers could further extend the favourable SB image that these brands already have among their clients by reinforcing their customers' smart shopper self-concept, which some authors suggest may increase the likelihood of engaging in word-of-mouth communication and influence future purchases (Chung and Darke, 2006). However, in Germany retailers should acknowledge that consumers who perceive themselves as smart shoppers are more likely to pursue good deals in promoted national brands than to purchase SB.

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study is subject to certain limitations that, in turn, open up new avenues for further research. Following the structure proposed by Lee and Ko (2020) and Gilal et al. (2019), in this final part of the manuscript, we would like to provide the readers with directions for future research and identify how other researchers could build on our conceptualization in conducting their studies.

First, because successful entry into markets with deep cultural and demographic differences compared to Western countries requires a thorough understanding of local retail structures and customer preferences (Paul et al., 2016), future in-depth investigations of cross-national smart shoppers would need to include a broader range of countries in the MGSEM analysis. The shopping behaviour of consumers is known to vary among countries with different

levels of economic development (Mishra et al., 2020). Hence, researchers could consider replicating this study with consumers from Asia, Africa or Latin American to further assess the generalizability of our approach.

Second, it would also be interesting to deepen the knowledge of the methods used by smart shoppers to obtain pre-purchase information and to explore the channels used to purchase products. Today, consumers expect to interact with retailers in a way that seamlessly straddles both online and offline experiences. Smart shoppers might look for information and buy through the same distribution channel, but they could also search in the store to later shop online, or vice versa. Thus, retailers should leverage showroomers' and webroomers' opportunities. The results of a recent study show that webroomers have greater perceptions of making the right purchase and more intense smart-shopper feelings than showroomers (Flavián et al., 2020). Moreover, future studies could also try to understand how new retail business models (e.g., second-hand stores, pop-up retailers, subscription services, online platforms) impact the manner in which smart shoppers make decisions. Replicating our cross-country model in these different scenarios opens potentially interesting new lines of research that will contribute to expanding knowledge about omnichannel retailing from the customer's perspective.

Third, we believe that the application of smart retail technologies on firms' strategies aimed at delivering customer value is a research area that demands increasing attention. As posited by Paul and Rosenbaum (2020), most consumer theories and conceptual frameworks might not apply when technology is brought into a consumer's consumption context. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to explore customers' perceptions about the use of technological solutions in retail and their influence on shopping behaviour.

Last, as Roggeveen and Sethuraman (2020) suggest, future academic research must strive to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on consumer behaviour. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, a large number of consumers have shifted to e-commerce and new delivery options and have also tried new products or brands (McKinsey @Company, 2020). During the first phase of the health crisis, consumers actively stockpiled emergency supplies. With restaurants closed for weeks, families ate more meals at home, and consumers spent more at grocery stores. To cope with the growing demand for essential products, some retailers had to change their product mix and increased SB' share of shelf (PLMA, 2020a). In parallel, some shoppers, not finding their preferred brands, bought private labels instead. The fact that SB tend

to be priced below manufacturers' brands made SB more appealing to consumers as the health crisis developed into an economic crisis for certain households.

With consumers trying new brands and shopping channels that reduce physical, in-store interactions, it will be important to understand whether and how the smart shopper omnichannel experience has changed due to the COVID-19 outbreak and—consequently—smart shoppers' preferences for different SB bought through different channels. Some of the new behaviours adopted by retailers and consumers that have affected SB brand success during the pandemic may become the new normal in the future. Therefore, it is likely that the demand for SB will remain significant. Future studies are expected to provide guidance on how retailers should operate in the post-pandemic retail environment.

6. Conclusion

Building on the theoretical foundation of Schwartz's value framework, this study contributes to the current literature by extending the knowledge on smart shopping, proving that the shopper's value structure has a direct and positive effect on the smart shopper self-concept in all of the countries that were the objects of research. The findings support prior research that suggests that smart shoppers embrace the values of the communities in which they socialize, and cross-country differences are observed in the links between the shoppers' value structures and their smart shopper self-concept.

The results of the estimation of the global model also confirm the findings of previous studies, showing that the smart shopper self-concept has a positive effect on the attitude towards SB. However, mixed results are found when this relationship is analysed by country, providing valuable insights to retailers and manufacturers regarding their international brand strategies, especially as consumers are likely to continue the growing trend of buying SB post-pandemic.

As a final remark, this study is but a starting point from which to demonstrate the impact of values and country of origin on the attitude of smart shoppers towards retail brands. The research findings offer academics and retail practitioners a clear reference point for exploiting the methods of targeting smart shoppers by considering individual values across countries. We hope that the directions for future research that we highlight in this study will provide a source of inspiration for marketing scholars across the globe to build on our conceptualization in conducting their studies.

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Figure Legends

Fig. 1. Schwartz's framework

Fig. 2. Theoretical Model

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Schwartz (1992), Allen (2001), Mano and Elliott (1997), Atkins and Kim (2012) and Garretson et al. (2002).

Fig. 3. Path coefficients for the overall model

Note: *** p < .01

Tables

Table 1. Global model (CFA) for individual values

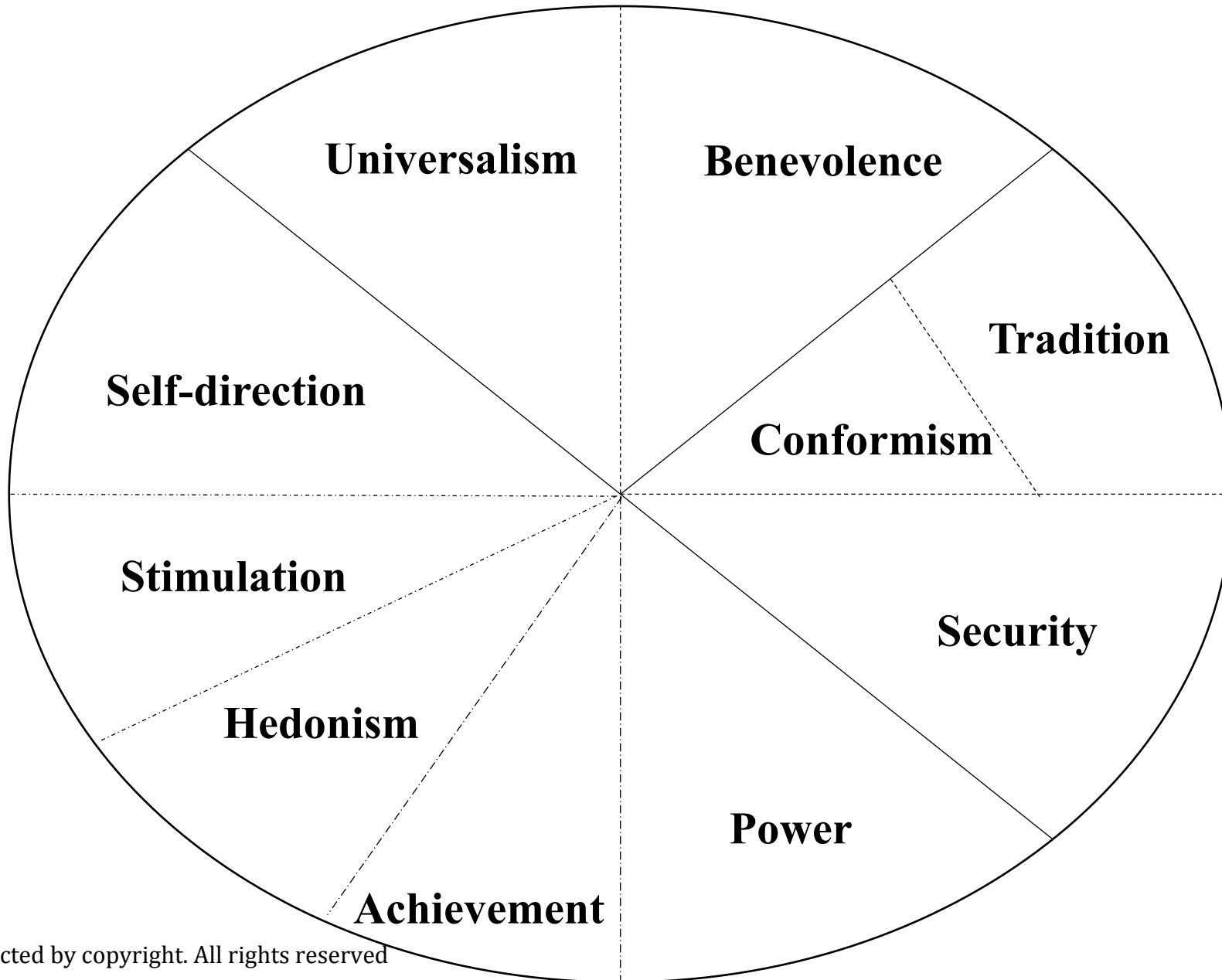| ITEM	Description	Mean	SD	Value domain	Estimate	Compos.	AVE	Alpha (a)	CR	P
Q18_30_1	Self-discipline	6.685	1.924	Conservation	.737					
Q18_27_1	Politeness	7.014	1.953	Conservation	.775	.780	.542	.804	18.408	***
Q18_28_1	Honouring elders	6.889	2.098	Conservation	.695				16.245	***
Q18_18_1	Independent	6.876	2.044	Openness	.820					
Q18_17_1	Own goals	6.971	1.929	Openness	.797	.848	.651	.856	22.678	***
Q18_16_1	Freedom	7.146	2.048	Openness	.803				23.228	***
Q18_19_1	Equality	6.892	2.122	Transcendence	.849					
Q18_20_1	World at peace	6.976	2.172	Transcendence	.805	.865	.682	.850	22.52	***
Q18_21_1	Inner harmony	6.913	2.041	Transcendence	.822				21.487	***
Q18_10_1	Achievement	6.512	1.915	Self-enhancement	.829					
Q18_8_1	Intelligent	7.071	1.966	Self-enhancement	.792	.827	.615	.793	17.558	***
Q18_9_1	Capable	6.651	2.103	Self-enhancement	.729				18.475	***

Note: The original scale, ranging from -1 to 7, was transformed into a scale ranging from 1

("opposite to my values") to 9 ("supreme importance"). Significance level: *** p < .01

Table 2. Results of MGSEM analysis

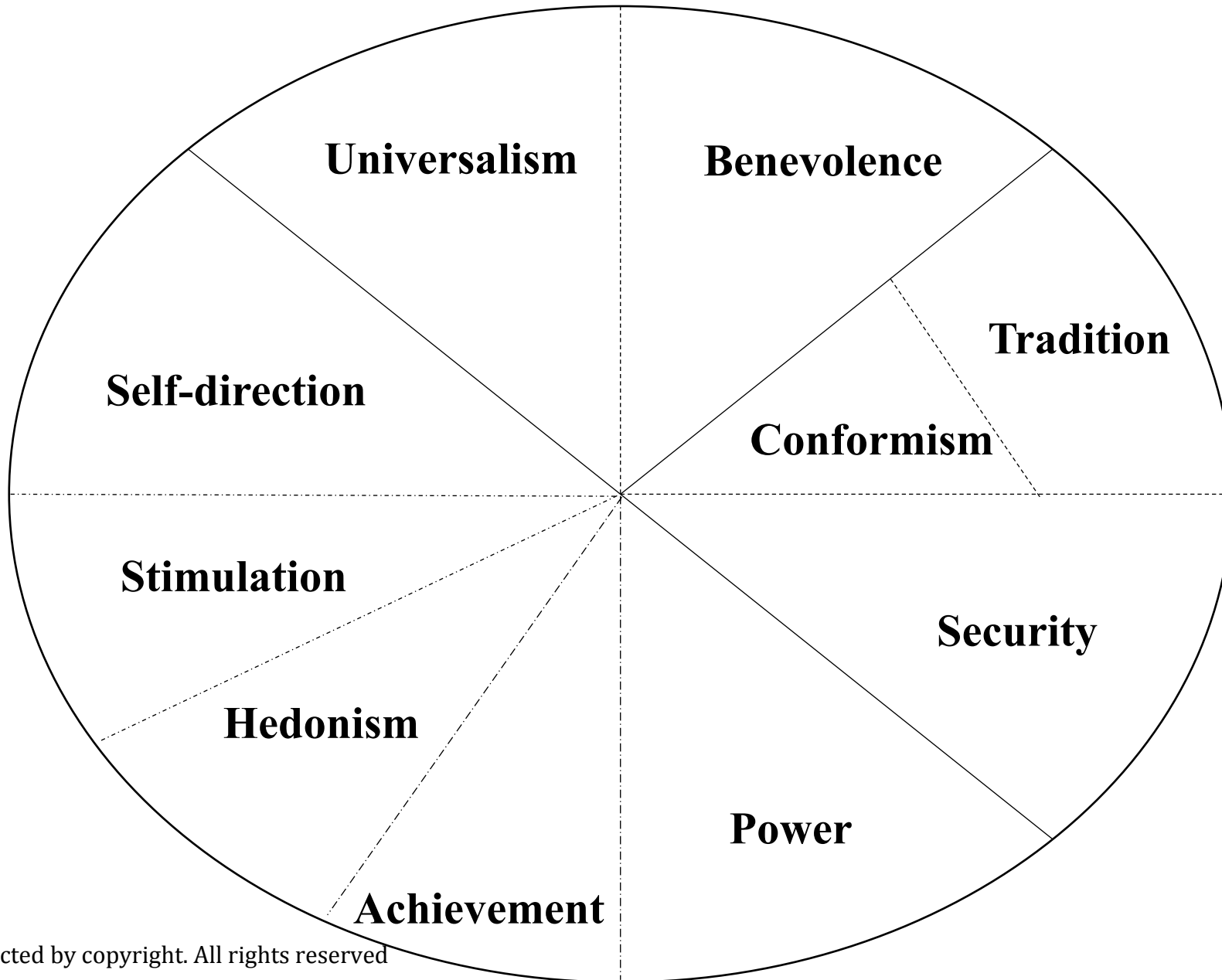| Hypotheses	Paths	Standardized parameters				Results
		Spain	France	USA	Germany	
H4a1	Value Structure – Self-enhancement	.949***	.788***	.836***	.948***	Supported
H4a2	Value Structure - Openness to change	.893***	.953***	.935***	.962***	Supported
H4a3	Value structure – Conservation	.824***	.923***	.987***	.930***	Supported
H4a4	Value structure –Transcendence	.921***	.923***	.863***	.937***	Supported
H4b	Value structure – SB attitude	.003	.039	-.054	.077	Not Supported
H4c	Value structure - SS self-concept	.597***	.680***	.765***	.728***	Supported
H4d	SS self-concept - SB attitude	.137**	.008	.330	-.182**	Partially supported

Note: *** p < .01; ** p < .05; * p < .10

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Benevolence

Tradition

Self-direction

Conformism

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Stimulation

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