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INTRODUCTION

What if the world map were redrawn according to personality type—what would it look like? Which countries would share borders? In which hemisphere would each reside? And what can multinational marketers learn from this reimagined map, especially as they look to expand into new markets and strengthen their presence in others?

JWT addresses these questions and more in the second of a series of reports based on a 27-market study of 6,075 adults aged 18-plus (225 in each market) conducted in October 2012.

Our respondents provided their perceptions of each country surveyed, including their own—we looked at overall perceptions, as well as perceptions related to people, culture, government and brands/products.

Taking it one step further, we had respondents assign personality traits to each country. We then redrew the world map (twice) based on the personality profiles assigned to each country, creating continents out of countries with similar personalities and plotting dissimilar types in opposing hemispheres. One map showcases the personality traits assigned by the global population; the second reflects each country’s self-ascribed attributes.

These maps reveal that aside from a few exceptions, global perceptions don’t align with local ones. Quite often, our attitudes toward and perceptions of a particular country are dictated by our level of familiarity with that market and the stereotypes related to it.

Whether we admit it or not, the vast majority of us organize the world according to stereotypes—standardized mental pictures that represent an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude or uncritical judgment. Some have argued that as the world becomes more interconnected, its citizens will develop more informed and nuanced views on other countries and cultures. But it seems we are relying more than ever on stereotypes as shortcuts to navigate a global landscape that’s increasingly complex and information-dense.

This report (literally) maps out gaps in perception between how locals view their country and how the global population views it, offering ways multinational marketers can reconcile these gaps and handle stereotyping as they expand into new markets and strengthen their presence in others.
We conducted a quantitative study using SONAR™, JWT’s proprietary online research tool, from Oct. 1-10, 2012. We polled 225 adults aged 18-plus in each of the following markets:

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<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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Source: Developed vs. developing, as outlined by The Economist
In examining perceptions of the 27 countries surveyed, we found a positivity gap between the local view of a country, culture and people, and the global perception.

The gap is most pronounced for developing countries such as India, Colombia, Egypt and Mexico. (See Figure 1, page 6.)

It’s least pronounced for Japan, France, Germany, Italy and the U.K., all long established as global powerhouses. This local-global alignment is likely a result of widespread familiarity with these markets and thus a higher comfort level—people know them (and these countries know themselves), and that translates to their brands, which are positively perceived. (See Appendix, Figure 9, page 25.)
Q: How do you feel about each of the following countries overall?
In addition to measuring overall perceptions, we looked at perceptions of the cultures, people and governments of the countries we surveyed—and found that they are closely intertwined. The anomaly here is government: There is a 30-point differential between how people perceive a country and how they perceive its government. It seems that when people consider a country, they don’t immediately think about its government, for the most part. When people do take government into account, it tends to have a negative halo effect—so as a brand, it’s clearly best to keep business and politics separate. (See Appendix, Figures 6-9, pages 22-25.)

Across all the factors surveyed, developed countries are regarded most positively—in particular Canada, Australia, Japan, Germany, the U.K., France, Italy and the U.S. (See Figure 2, page 8.) Again, familiarity likely plays a key role here.
Q: How do you feel about each of the following countries overall?

FIGURE 2: THE POSITIVITY INDEX

Overall Feeling About Market — % Very Positive

Tend to be more developed
- Canada: 46
- Australia: 38
- Japan: 37
- Germany: 36
- United Kingdom: 34
- France: 31
- Italy: 30
- United States: 28
- Finland: 25
- Saudi Arabia: 23
- Hong Kong: 22
- Spain: 21
- China: 21
- Brazil: 20
- Thailand: 16
- South Africa: 15
- Argentina: 15
- Czech Republic: 14
- Russia: 14
- Egypt: 13
- Singapore: 13
- South Korea: 12
- Pakistan: 11
- India: 11
- Indonesia: 11
- Colombia: 8
- Mexico: 6

Tend to be less developed
Understandably, perceptions vary based on familiarity: Those who have visited a country feel more positive about it than those who have not. (See Figure 3, page 10.)

Of the nations that people want to visit, there are clearly some favorites: Australia and countries in Western Europe and North America. This reinforces a predisposition to developed countries, but there’s some variation here by generation: Older cohorts are somewhat more positive about developed than developing markets, while the perceptions of younger generations are more consistent across markets regardless of developmental states. (See Appendix, Figure 10, page 26.) Naturally, the closer in proximity people are to a region, the more likely they are to visit.
Q: How do you feel about each of the following countries overall?
We had our respondents assign personality traits to the 27 countries surveyed, including their own. We then redrew the world map based on the personality profiles assigned to each country, creating continents out of countries with similar personalities and plotting dissimilar types in opposing hemispheres.

The results: a Stereotype Map, which depicts how the global population perceives different countries (see page 12), and a Introspection Map, representing how the locals perceive their own countries (see page 14).

In comparing the two maps—global versus local views on each country—we see significant disparities between the perceptions of outsiders and insiders.
The Stereotype Map illustrates the global population’s perceptions.

Australia, Canada, Finland and France are perceived as balanced and democratic, so we grouped them into a continent named Balancia. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan project religiosity, so we’ve reimagined them as the continent of Spiritania. Germany, Hong Kong and Japan comprise the continent of Uniformany, as they are most associated with a hard-working and orderly ethos.

Funlandia is a continent that encompasses Brazil, Italy and Spain, countries perceived as charismatic, fun, humorous and passionate. And Chillville is made up of Mexico and Thailand, both associated with people who are content, welcoming and polite.

Russia, the U.K. and the U.S. are most associated with arrogance and therefore reside in Smugville. China is a continent unto itself, Geniustan, as it’s the only one that’s overwhelmingly perceived as smart.

Egypt and France are divided by the Cultural Sea, as respondents chose “cultured” as a secondary trait for both countries. The Silicontic Sea borders Hong Kong, Japan and the U.S., countries also seen as tech-savvy. Pakistan and Russia share the Shrewd Channel, as they are perceived as corrupt.

There are eight countries that fall in the middle of the spectrum, with no personality characteristics popping out for respondents. So Argentina, Colombia, Czech Republic, India, Indonesia, Singapore, South Africa and South Korea are grouped together into Vanillia.
The Introspection Map represents how the locals perceive their own countries.

Not surprisingly, people in the countries that don’t stand out as specific personality types to the global population have a much clearer vision of their homeland. Respondents in Argentina, Czech Republic and South Africa see corruption as a key personality trait; we’ve therefore grouped them in the continent of Schemany. Indians and Indonesians consider their countries religious, while Colombians view their nation as humorous, so they’ve been moved to Spiritania and Funlandia, respectively. Among locals, Singapore stands out as hardworking (Uniformany) and South Korea as reserved and productive (Dilligance).

What are some other notable global-local differences?

- While the global population sees Mexico and Thailand as relatively chill, Mexicans perceive their homeland as humorous (so it’s now in Funlandia), and Thais see their country as religious (it has shifted to Spiritania).
- The world sees Italy as fun and the U.K. as arrogant, but their locals believe the countries stand out as cultured, so we’ve made them a part of the continent Culturis.
- The global view is that Finland is balanced and Germany orderly, but locals think of their countries as reliably tough; they’ve landed on Uniformany, forming the Rules Peninsula.
- Perceived as smart by the global population, China rates high as reserved and productive by its population, so here it belongs to the continent of Dilligance.
By contrast, for some countries, the global and local populations align in perceptions: Australia and Canada (balanced); Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (religious); and Hong Kong and Japan (hardworking).

In some cases, the secondary trait that the global population chose is seen as the dominant trait by locals: culture for France, corruption for Russia, tech-savviness for the U.S. and humor for Brazil and Spain.

Britons and Indonesians also associate their countries with politeness, so here they share the Sea of Civility. Likewise, Japanese and Thai respondents also think of their countries as polite, so they are bordered by the Considerate Coast and the Bay of Please, respectively.

Since citizens of the U.S. and U.K. ascribe leadership traits to their countries, they share the Leader Strait. And Russians and Italians consider their countries corrupt, hence the Calculating Sea that divides these countries.
IN CONCLUSION

We don’t see things as they are; we see them as we are.

author Anaïs Nin
What can brands learn from these new world maps? How can they reconcile their views of each market with local views?

For starters, a prerequisite is to ensure that talent from key growth markets represents a significant share of voice within the organization. There’s no better way to gain a nuanced, current, on-the-ground view of the market; avoid offensive oversimplification; and connect on a higher level with the modern consumer.

As we said at the start: Whether we admit it or not, the vast majority of us organize the world according to stereotypes—standardized mental pictures that represent an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude or uncritical judgment. Rather than developing more informed and nuanced views of other countries and cultures as the world gets more globalized, it seems we’re relying more than ever on stereotypes as shortcuts to navigate a landscape that’s increasingly complex and information-dense. Arguably, this is even more prevalent in marketing communications—with a brief span of time to communicate, shortcuts are always valued.

How consumers receive stereotypes varies greatly from market to market and by stereotype. In Japan, for instance, it’s best for marketers to avoid stereotypes as much as possible—people tend to see the world in shades of gray, believing this is a closer reflection of life than the more black-and-white lens of Westerners. In this market, any use of stereotypes (positive or negative) largely comes across as unsophisticated.

Italians, on the other hand, are OK with stereotypes—as long as marketers lean into the positives: Italy’s culture, creativity, innate sense of beauty and style, and “la dolce vita” way of life versus its loudmouthed, mom-reliant, Mafiosi alter ego.

This is the case for many cultures, which embrace positive or aspirational stereotypes—as long as marketers understand the nuances. Keep in mind that what gets classified as positive or negative varies, as well, by market.
By definition, however, stereotypes are an oversimplification. The trouble is when they become oversimplified to a fault. Many multinational marketers, for instance, have leaned into a very naive portrayal of Mexico, relying heavily on sombreros, mariachis and luchadores—leading consumers there to believe that brands don’t get them, are out of sync with the times or are just plain glib.

This becomes an even bigger issue when marketers perpetuate these images in other markets as well. The world is indeed smaller, thanks to globalization and the rise of social media and sharing tools. A campaign that may be innocuous in one market may ignite fury in another.

Often, stereotypes—positive and especially negative—and humor go hand in hand, allowing people to laugh at their cultural foibles. However, while we found that most cultures see themselves as good-humored, humor has local flavorings. When portraying a culture’s idiosyncrasies in a comedic light, marketers have to be clear that they’re laughing with their audience, not at them. It’s dangerous to make fun of cultures, as they are so tied to identity. Err on the side of invoking stereotypes that are benign.

One reason stereotypes can sting is because they often contain some element of truth—and that makes people question the intent of the “teller.” This doesn’t mean campaigns should be restrained by political correctness, but marketers must lean in to stereotypes in a thoughtful way and be well aware of the upsides and downsides.

Ultimately, marketers have to know the modern country rather than relying on potentially outdated and ill-informed impressions of a country. They’ll likely discover many new themes to reach today’s consumer.

A word for government tourism boards: As our map exercise proves, what you think about your destination may or may not jibe with the world’s view of what you have on offer. It’s useful to understand both so that you can reinforce the world’s positive perceptions or perhaps talk about an aspect of your destination that might surprise the world—something you know about your destination that they don’t.
BONUS: PERSONALITY TEST

Have you ever wondered where in the world your personality would fit best? Take our test, which matches your personality traits with the personality profiles assigned to these 27 countries by their local citizenry!

www.PersonalityAtlas.com
APPENDIX:
ADDITIONAL CHARTS
FIGURE 6: PEOPLE PERCEPTION

Q: How do you feel about the people in each of these countries?
Q: How do you feel about the culture in each of these countries?
Q: How do you feel about the government in each of these countries?
Q: How do you feel about the brands and products that each of these countries produces?
Q: How do you feel about each of the following countries overall?
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