



PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

GLOBAL BRANDS AND CULTURAL HOMOGENISATION: A COMPLEX DEBATE

A

Proponents of the homogenisation thesis argue that global brands are among the most visible instruments of cultural convergence. A traveller can cross borders and still encounter identical logos, store layouts, and packaging conventions, an experience that seems to confirm the rise of a uniform consumer landscape. The argument is often anchored in the built environment: airports, shopping streets, and enclosed malls increasingly present the same constellation of international retailers and franchised outlets. Critics maintain that such spaces become interchangeable, not merely because of aesthetic repetition but because prime sites are captured by firms with superior marketing budgets and the ability to pay high rents, leaving independent businesses to compete from the margins. In this reading, the loss is simultaneously economic and experiential: local commerce is displaced, and public space is narrowed into a standardised corridor of familiar brands, reducing the diversity of everyday encounters that once distinguished one city from another.

B

Conversely, scholars of media and consumer psychology emphasise that homogenisation is accelerated not only by bricks-and-mortar retail but also by the circulation of images and aspirations. Global advertising campaigns distribute the same slogans, colours, and narratives across multiple countries, and social media platforms intensify this diffusion by rewarding repetition and recognisability. When a brand attaches its product to a similar “lifestyle” in many markets—youthfulness, sophistication, freedom, or success—it can encourage consumers to treat global goods as markers of social status, sometimes at the expense of local alternatives. Over time, these shared symbolic cues may contribute to a transnational repertoire of preferences, a shared taste culture in which certain designs, foods, or experiences are valued because they are globally legible. Yet even here, the mechanism is not simply persuasion: consumers participate in the circulation of branded content, reproducing and remixing it, which blurs the boundary between top-down advertising and peer-to-peer influence.

C

A widely cited counterargument is that cultural change is rarely one-directional because firms must negotiate local expectations if they wish to sell. What appears as standardisation at first glance is frequently moderated through localisation, a strategy in



which menus, languages, product sizes, or promotional themes are adapted to local norms. Superficial examples—seasonal flavours, translated packaging, or adverts featuring local holidays—are sometimes dismissed as cosmetic, and critics argue that the underlying commercial logic remains unchanged. However, the very need for localisation suggests that brands cannot simply copy-paste a product into every context and assume acceptance; they must respond to cultural boundaries, regulations, and tastes that remain stubbornly specific. A nuanced perspective therefore treats localisation as evidence of constraint rather than proof that homogenisation has been defeated. It may soften the edges of sameness, but it does not automatically eliminate the broader pressures that global brands exert on local markets and cultural visibility.

D

A further complication arises from the claim that consumers are not passive recipients of corporate meaning. Cultural theorists note that people interpret, display, and combine products within locally meaningful practices, so identical goods can carry different significance across settings. A global sneaker brand, for instance, might be worn to signal membership in a youth subculture; yet that subculture may be rooted in local music, slang, or political sensibilities rather than in the brand's intended message. In some contexts, global brands can even become vehicles for local identity, offering a way to present tradition through a modern format or to communicate belonging within a hybrid community shaped by migration and tourism. From this standpoint, the same commodity does not necessarily produce a single global identity; instead, it can be folded into diverse narratives, supporting different cultural outcomes. Such consumer agency helps explain why the visible spread of brands may coexist with persistent variation in meanings, rituals, and social boundaries.

E

Nevertheless, critics of “choice-based” accounts insist that agency operates within unequal systems of visibility and access. Digital platforms have intensified this concern by turning cultural consumption into a data-driven marketplace in which attention is allocated by algorithms. When recommendation systems highlight what is already popular, they can produce winner-take-most dynamics, concentrating demand on globally recognisable names and reducing exposure for local rivals, even when those rivals offer distinctive products. The mechanism is structural rather than conspiratorial: popularity signals feed into ranking systems, rankings shape further popularity, and smaller producers struggle to break the loop. In this way, homogenisation may be driven as much by platform design as by corporate strategy, creating a subtle but powerful bias toward the familiar. The result can be a narrowing of what is discoverable, which matters culturally



because discoverability often precedes adoption, especially for new or niche local offerings.

F

Economic analysis adds yet another layer to the debate. Global brands can generate jobs, training, and supply-chain opportunities, and franchise models may allow local entrepreneurs to operate outlets while using established systems of marketing and quality control. Some cities welcome international chains as signals of modernity or investment, particularly in districts designed to attract visitors and mobile professionals. However, the benefits are contested. Critics note that profits may flow outward through licensing fees and repatriated earnings, and that employment quality can vary widely: wages, hours, and job security are not guaranteed simply because a brand is well known. Moreover, when global firms set purchasing standards and control distribution channels, local suppliers may face demanding compliance costs without acquiring meaningful bargaining power. Thus, while global branding can create economic activity, it can also reinforce structural dependence, leaving local actors participating in the system without controlling its terms.

G

In response to concerns about cultural erosion, governments and communities sometimes pursue protective measures: zoning rules that limit chain density, subsidies for small producers, support for local media, or heritage-based initiatives such as heritage preservation. Proponents argue that such policies defend diversity without requiring a ban on trade; critics counter that enforcement is often weak, or that “protection” can become symbolic while global commercial incentives remain dominant. At the same time, global firms increasingly market diversity itself, selling “authenticity” through regional motifs or narratives—an approach that may support local crafts yet also commodify cultural symbols by detaching them from their original contexts. Ultimately, the most defensible conclusion is neither blanket condemnation nor celebration. If the focus is on visible storefronts, product availability, and platform-driven discoverability, the pressure toward sameness is hard to deny. If the focus is on meanings, practices, and hybrid identities, variation remains strong. Global branding, therefore, encourages similarity in form while still enabling adaptation and cultural mixing in use—an outcome that is best understood as a complex negotiation rather than a simple takeover.

Questions 27–32

Select the correct answer.

27 In the discussion of shopping streets, airports and malls, what is the critics’ main concern?



A Similar retail environments reduce the range of everyday experiences and disadvantage smaller local businesses.

B International visitors prefer familiar spaces, so local retailers choose to imitate global layouts.

C The standardisation of public space is driven mainly by government planning rules rather than market forces.

D Airports and malls are becoming interchangeable because consumers demand identical products everywhere.

28 What does the passage suggest is one effect of global advertising across many countries?

A It can encourage consumers to link social status with global goods rather than local ones.

B It makes national cultures more distinct by highlighting local humour and holidays.

C It weakens global brands by forcing them to abandon consistent visual identities.

D It affects only travellers and migrants, not resident populations.

29 What point is made about localisation by global firms?

A Localisation demonstrates that global brands have little influence beyond superficial appearance.

B Localisation is chiefly a cost-saving measure, since copying products across markets is expensive.

C Localisation is usually rejected by consumers, who prefer global products to remain unchanged.

D Localisation shows that brands must respond to local norms, regulations and tastes, although it does not necessarily remove broader homogenising pressures.

30 What view of consumers is presented in the passage?

A Consumers generally resist global brands unless they are strongly protected by government policy.

B Consumers interpret global products in the same way because marketing creates identical meanings.

C Consumers may assign locally specific meanings to global goods, producing different cultural outcomes.

D Consumers increasingly abandon local practices because they prefer predictable international experiences.

31 Why does the passage mention “winner-take-most” dynamics in relation to platforms?



A To show that algorithms reduce corporate influence by prioritising niche and local products.

B To argue that popularity-based systems can concentrate attention on well-known brands and reduce visibility for local alternatives.

C To claim that digital platforms make consumer choice largely unpredictable and random.

D To suggest that online recommendations eliminate the need for brand advertising.

32 What conclusion does the writer finally reach about global brands and cultural homogenisation?

A Cultural homogenisation is best understood as the inevitable replacement of local practices by global consumer habits.

B Global branding encourages similarity in some visible respects, while allowing adaptation and cultural mixing in others.

C The effects of global brands are too inconsistent to justify any general claims about culture.

D Concerns about homogenisation arise mainly from misunderstanding how supply chains operate.

Questions 33–36

Complete the summary below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Mechanisms and responses to cultural homogenisation

Global advertising and social media can spread similar slogans and aesthetics, contributing to a shared taste **33** Many firms attempt to gain acceptance through **34**, adjusting elements such as menus and advertising. The passage notes that platform design can create **35** dynamics that reduce exposure for local competitors. Some communities respond by using zoning rules to limit chain **36**

Questions 37–40

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

37 The passage argues that localisation is always sufficient to prevent cultural homogenisation.

38 The passage suggests that global brands may sometimes help express local identity.



39 The passage states that franchise systems guarantee high-quality employment for local workers.

40 The passage gives a single agreed method for determining whether culture has been homogenised.

Answer Key

27. A

28. A

29. D

30. C

31. B

32. B

33. culture

34. localisation

35. winner-take-most

36. density

37. FALSE

38. TRUE

39. FALSE

40. FALSE