Why Global FMCG Brands Succeed in Some Countries and Fail in Others: Cultural Adaptation and Consumer Preferences in India and South Korea: A Comparative Study of Nestlé's Maggi and Kellanova's Pringles

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategic factors driving the uneven market performance of multinational fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands across culturally and economically distinct regions. While existing international marketing literature extensively debates global standardization versus local adaptation, there remains a critical gap in understanding why identical brand equity yields deep market penetration in one Asian market while remaining a niche offering in another. Grounded in the theoretical framework of glocalization, this paper presents a qualitative comparative case study of Nestlé's Maggi and Kellanova's Pringles across two contrasting environments: India (an emerging, value-driven market) and South Korea (a mature, trend-driven economy). Utilizing secondary data from corporate disclosures, market research indices, and academic literature spanning up to 2026, the study evaluates four core determinants: cultural preferences, localized consumption behavior, pricing models, and packaging strategies. The findings reveal that Maggi achieved intergenerational market leadership in India through deep flavor localization ("masala" profile) and low unit pricing (LUP) models, yet faced structural barriers in South Korea due to a highly saturated domestic ramyeon market and conflicting category expectations. Conversely, Pringles established a premium, high-margin position in South Korea by aligning with urban convenience-store retail layouts and experience-oriented "kidult" marketing, but remains restricted to a niche demographic in India due to mass-market price elasticity. The study concludes that international FMCG success depends less on global brand recognition than on the structural alignment between strategic positioning and the localized consumption logic of the target market. These insights offer actionable blueprints for multinational firms executing cross-border entry strategies.

Index Terms: Cultural Adaptation, Consumer Behavior, FMCG, International marketing, India, Market Entry Strategy, Price Perception, Product Adaptation, South Korea.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-Economic Context: Glocalization in Asian Markets

The accelerating pace of globalization has forced multinational fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) corporations to constantly navigate the tension between global standardization and localized adaptation. Historically, international marketing scholarship has debated whether a firm should maintain product homogeneity across boundaries to secure economies of scale or modify attributes to appease localized micro-cultures (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003).

In the contemporary global landscape, this dichotomy has evolved into the paradigm of "glocalization"—the strategic practice of blending a standardized corporate identity with culturally customized product features to align with the host nation's consumption habits (Robertson, 1995). However, the strategic efficacy of glocalization is heavily mediated by the cross-national economic and psychological variance between emerging and developed market environments (Kotler & Keller, 2021).

India and South Korea represent two contrasting consumer markets within Asia. The Indian FMCG market is large, highly price-sensitive, and strongly influenced by traditional consumption practices and family-oriented purchasing behavior (Gupta et al., 2024). In contrast, South Korea is a highly urbanized and trend-driven market characterized by advanced retail systems, dense convenience-store networks, and the experience-oriented preferences of the MZ generation and kidult consumers (Lee & Jeon, 2022). These differences create distinct opportunities and challenges for multinational firms and illustrate that successful market strategies are highly dependent on local conditions rather than uniform branding approaches.

From a geographical perspective, the two countries also differ considerably in territorial scale, population distribution, and market accessibility. India occupies approximately 3.29 million square kilometers and consists of diverse climatic regions, extensive rural areas, and substantial linguistic and cultural variation across states. South Korea covers approximately 100,000 square kilometers and is characterized by high urban concentration, advanced transportation infrastructure, and dense metropolitan markets. Its relatively compact geography facilitates efficient distribution networks, rapid product diffusion, and greater standardization of consumer trends (World Bank, 2024). These geographical differences also influence logistics costs, retail penetration, product availability, and the degree of market standardization achievable by multinational corporations.

To examine these contrasting market dynamics, this study focuses on two globally recognized brands: Maggi under Nestlé and Pringles under Kellanova. Maggi and Pringles were selected due to their contrasting performance in India and South Korea. Maggi achieved strong acceptance in India through deep product adaptation and integration into daily consumption habits, but it remains relatively niche in South Korea due to strong local competition and different consumption patterns. Pringles built a premium position in South Korea by aligning with modern retail formats and kidult preferences, while remaining a niche product in India because of price sensitivity and strong local snack competition. This contrast provides a clear basis to examine how cultural and economic factors influence market outcomes.

Historical Trajectories of the Case Brands

The Evolution of Nestlé's Maggi

Maggi was originally founded in Switzerland by Julius Maggi in 1872 to provide nutritious and convenient meals for working-class families and became part of Nestlé in 1987 (Nestlé S.A., 2024). Nestlé introduced Maggi instant noodles to India in 1983, pioneering the convenience-food category in a market historically dominated by home-cooked meals. Over the following decades, the company transformed Maggi from an unfamiliar foreign product into a culturally embedded household brand through localized flavors, affordable pricing, and emotionally oriented marketing strategies. The evolution of Maggi demonstrates how sustained localization can convert a global product into an everyday consumption ritual.

Beyond India, Maggi has established strong market positions in several countries, particularly in Nigeria, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, and parts of the Middle East, where the brand has adapted its products to local tastes and consumption patterns (Nestlé S.A., 2024). This broad international presence highlights Maggi’s ability to achieve market success through localization strategies.

The Evolution of Kellanova's Pringles

Pringles was introduced by Procter & Gamble in the United States in 1967 as a uniform potato crisp packaged in a distinctive cylindrical canister. The brand was subsequently acquired by the Kellogg Company, now operating globally as Kellanova, in 2012 (Kellanova, 2024). In South Korea, Pringles established a lifestyle-oriented position by aligning itself with the country’s fast-paced, digitally integrated, and trend-sensitive consumer culture. Through limited-edition flavors, visually distinctive packaging, and experience-based promotional strategies, Pringles strengthened its relevance among younger urban consumers. The South Korean case illustrates how premium snack brands can use digital engagement to sustain market competitiveness.

Similarly, Pringles maintains a strong global identity across the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, and several European markets. The brand's success has largely been driven by premium positioning, flavor innovation, and experience-oriented marketing strategies that appeal to urban and younger consumer segments (Kellanova, 2024).

Problem Statement

Despite global brand equity, many FMCG companies experience uneven performance across countries. A product achieving high penetration in one market may fail in another. Existing research emphasizes the standardization versus adaptation debate but does not fully explain how factors like localized taste, price sensitivity, and packaging strategy influence specific market outcomes (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003).

This creates a gap in understanding how cultural variables shape brand performance. Companies such as **Nestlé (Maggi)** and **Kellanova (Pringles)** demonstrate contrasting results in India and South Korea, serving as ideal case studies. Therefore, this study examines how taste adaptation, pricing, packaging, and consumption patterns affect the success or failure of global FMCG brands in these two diverse markets.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following:

How does localized taste adaptation influence the market performance of Maggi in India and Pringles in South Korea?

To what extent does price sensitivity affect packaging and pricing strategies in the Indian FMCG market?

How do differences in consumption behavior impact product positioning in South Korea compared to India?

What are the key factors determining the success of global FMCG brands across culturally distinct markets?

Significance of the Study

This study provides a comparative framework for analyzing how cultural preferences influence product acceptance. The findings are valuable for managers and decision-makers involved in international marketing and entry strategies, particularly in Asian markets. Additionally, it contributes to academic research by linking consumer behavior theory with practical FMCG business strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Glocalization in the FMCG Sector

The conceptual paradigm of "glocalization" originally popularized by Robertson (1995) serves as the primary theoretical framework for analyzing multinational market expansion. Within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector, international business units rarely achieve sustained commercial viability through unyielding global standardization strategies. Instead, modern multinational corporations increasingly implement hybrid operational matrices that standardize core brand equities while fundamentally modifying tangible product attributes to harmonize with host-nation cultural ecosystems (Robertson, 1995; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003).

Extant international marketing literature underscores that highly effective glocalization strategies empower multinational corporations to exploit operational economies of scale while simultaneously retaining micro-level market relevance. This balance is achieved through the granular configuration of local raw ingredients, targeted flavor profiles, and localized brand messaging (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Robertson, 1995). Consequently, glocalization transforms a foreign market entry from an external commercial intrusion into an organic integration within the consumer's daily retail sphere.

Comparative Consumer Behavior: India vs. South Korea

Consumer purchase behavior is inextricably bounded by macroeconomic baseline conditions and foundational regional socio-cultural values, both of which exhibit sharp structural divergence when comparing the Indian and South Korean retail landscapes.

The Indian Market: Value Co-Creation and Brand Trust

The macro-level consumer architecture of the Indian FMCG sector is defined by intense price sensitivity and an intergenerational value-oriented mindset, particularly across lower-to-middle-income cohorts. Grounded in the "Bottom of the Pyramid" framework established by Prahalad (2004), purchasing workflows within emerging economies are systematically dictated by unit affordability, functional household utility, and historical brand trust.

Mainstream consumer segments routinely prioritize essential, high-volume goods over highly priced discretionary items. As highlighted by Gupta et al. (2024), long-term consumer brand loyalty in the Indian subcontinent is painstakingly secured not through experimental novelty, but via the strict maintenance of quality consistency, physical retail accessibility, and aggressive price-to-volume optimization across fragmented consumer demographics.

The South Korean Market: The MZ Generation and Experiential Consumption

Conversely, the South Korean consumer ecosystem is heavily steered by advanced metropolitan retail distribution channels and trend-driven hyper-consumption. Modern purchasing trends in South Korea are predominantly dictated by younger urban demographics, specifically the "MZ Generation".

As empirically demonstrated by Lee and Jeon (2022), these consumer clusters relegate pure product functionality to the background, instead optimizing their purchasing decisions around emotional satisfaction, instant gratification, aesthetic layout, and digital novelty. This behavioral pattern has catalyzed the rapid expansion of high-density convenience store networks, where retail actions are frequent, transactional, and intensely vulnerable to shifting social media micro-trends. Consumer patterns in this developed market are thus experience-oriented rather than necessity-driven (Lee & Jeon, 2022; LG Global, 2021).

Marketing Trends: Emotional Engagement vs. Functional Reliability

The distinct divergence in market maturity between the two Asian nations manifests directly in their dominant corporate advertising trends. A defining trend within highly developed retail landscapes like South Korea is the strategic implementation of nostalgia-linked "kidult" marketing. This communication methodology establishes an immediate emotional connection with younger adult demographics by fusing contemporary premium snack varieties with retro, visually shareable, and pop-culture-infused design aesthetics (Lee & Jeon, 2022).

In stark contrast, marketing frameworks within the Indian landscape remain structurally tethered to functional reliability, domestic accessibility, and collectivistic, family-centric narratives (Gupta et al., 2024). While emotional branding is extensively utilized by Indian corporate operations, the emotional hooks are systematically grounded in themes of baseline reliability, historical household presence, and domestic trust rather than ephemeral novelty or individualized aesthetic expression.

Pricing and Packaging: Affordability vs. Premium Positioning

Corporate disclosures and macroeconomic spending indices confirm that market penetration models must follow entirely different structural pathways in these two regions. Within the Indian subcontinent, market penetration is almost entirely volume-driven, relying heavily on the deployment of Low Unit Pricing (LUP) architectures and miniature single-use sachet packaging formats (Nestlé India, 2024). This structural approach drastically lowers the initial financial barrier to trial, facilitating deep penetration into semi-urban and rural retail networks where liquid household disposable income remains constrained.

In contrast, mature, developed environments like South Korea exhibit retail dynamics governed by premium pricing structures and margin-driven differentiation. Backed by robust per capita purchasing power and elevated domestic spending indices (World Bank, 2024), South Korean consumer segments display a distinct willingness to pay premium price premiums for innovative product formulations, superior container ergonomics, and aesthetically distinctive packaging designs.

Theoretical Framework: Standardization vs. Adaptation

This study applies the standardization versus adaptation framework in international marketing. Standardization focuses on achieving cost efficiency and global consistency, while adaptation emphasizes responsiveness to local cultural and consumer differences (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003).

In the FMCG sector, a hybrid approach is considered most effective. Firms maintain core brand identity while adapting product features such as taste, packaging, and pricing to suit local markets (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Robertson, 1995). This framework is used to evaluate how global brands adjust their strategies to achieve market success in India and South Korea.

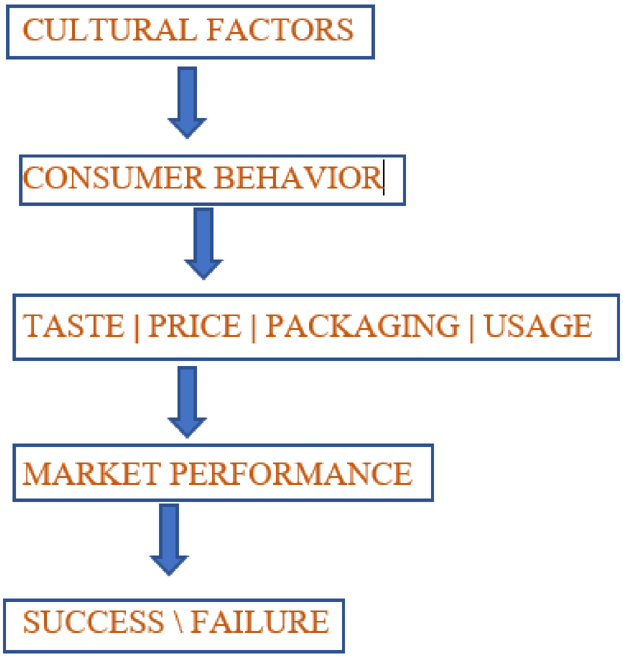

Figure 1. Proposed analytical Framework.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design based entirely on secondary data collection and qualitative text analysis. A comparative case study design is highly effective for international business research as it allows for a deep, contextual evaluation of operational strategies across divergent socio-economic environments. By matching a single strategic framework against two distinct geographical markets (India and South Korea), the research isolates how localized macro-environmental conditions alter commercial brand performance.

To ensure a rigorous comparative analysis, the selection of the corporate entities and product lines was guided by the following predefined academic parameters like Sector Homogeneity, Global Brand Equity, Commercial Divergence. Because this paper relies on desk research, data triangulation was used to eliminate analytical bias and ensure data reliability. Secondary data was systematically gathered from academic databases, market research indexes, and official corporate disclosures up to 2026. The data collection stream was split into three main channels (i)Corporate and Financial Disclosures, (ii)Macroeconomic and Market Indices, (iii)Peer-Reviewed Literature.

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Analytical Framework

Market performance is evaluated using a structured framework based on four key factors, which allows for a systematic comparison of the two markets, First, **taste adaptation** is examined by analyzing how product flavors were adjusted to match local taste preferences such as spice level, seasoning style, and flavor variety. Second, **consumption behavior** is analyzed by studying how the product was positioned in each market, for example as a meal option, convenience food, or social snack. Third, **packaging and branding strategy** is evaluated by examining packaging size, design, and retail presentation, especially in relation to convenience store culture in South Korea and value-oriented retail patterns in India. Fourth, **price perception and pricing strategy** are analyzed by comparing low unit pack strategies, affordability positioning, and premium pricing approaches used in the two markets.

These factors are compared to explain differences in consumer acceptance, brand positioning, and overall market performance in India and South Korea.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Overview of Market Performance

The findings show that success in the FMCG sector is shaped not only by global brand strength but by alignment with local economic realities and consumer mindsets. Based on the framework proposed by Dhingra et al. (2018), performance depends on brand recall and distribution reach. As of April 2026, Nestlé India recorded its strongest quarterly growth in a decade, with a 22.6% rise in revenue, largely supported by Maggi's volume expansion (Nestlé India, 2026). In contrast, the South Korea snack segment reflects a shift toward engagement-led purchasing, where convenience, visibility, and digital interaction influence buying behavior (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2026).

This contrast suggests that performance is system-dependent rather than brand-led. In India, scale and affordability encourage routine usage, while in South Korea, visibility and engagement stimulate trial and repeat purchase. Firms therefore need to align with the behavioral structure of each market, not just consumer demand.

Comparative Analysis of Maggi (India) and Pringles (South Korea)

Factor	Maggi (India)	Pringles (South Korea)	Strategic Implication
Taste Strategy	Masala localization (Deep cultural integration)	Novelty-based flavors (experimental variety)	Adaptation depth depends on whether the goal is cultural habit or consumer curiosity.
Consumption Role	Functional meal & staple	Lifestyle snack & accessory	Positioning must align with whether a product is a "necessity" or an "experience."
Pricing Model	Low Unit Packs (LUP), Volume-driven	Premium, Margin-driven	Pricing must reflect the specific income structure and value perception of the region.
Retail Strategy	*Kirana* stores +Sachet penetration	Convenience stores+ visual shelf dominance	Distribution success depends on matching the physical retail infrastructure of the country.

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Core Driver	**Trust & Habit (The Heart Model)**	**Trend & Engagement (The Trend Model)**	**Long-term success depends on balancing emotional reliability with experiential value.**
Market Barrier	**Price-Elasticity & Traditionalism: Struggles in “Premium-only” tiers.**	**Price-Volume Wall: Struggles to reach mass-market “bottom of the pyramid.”**	**Brand equity cannot overcome fundamental mismatches in price-to-volume expectations.**
Marketing Friction	**“The Snack Gap”: Failed in Korea by appearing too light for a “Meal” market.**	**“The Value Gap”: Struggles in India when perceived as low-Volume/ high-cost.**	**Even global titans fail when advertising narrative contradict local “Consumption logic.”**

Taste Adaptation

Maggi (India):

Nestlé’s success stems from “masala” localization. By aligning with traditional Indian spice preferences, Maggi evolved from a foreign product into a familiar household item (Nestlé S. A., 2024). The company emphasized regional flavor alignment, ensuring the taste resonated with everyday cooking habits, thereby achieving strong category association (Nestlé India, 2017). This shift reflects cultural integration rather than simple adaptation. Once embedded in daily routines, the product becomes less replaceable, strengthening long-term recall and reducing competitive pressure. (Nestlé India, 2024).

Pringles (South Korea):

Pringles adopts a novelty-focused approach. Instead of acting as a staple, it introduces diverse flavor combinations that match evolving youth preferences, particularly sweet-and-salty profiles (The Korea Herald, n.d.; Pringles, n.d.-b). This reflects a preference for variety and experimentation, where frequent innovation sustains interest (Potato News Today, 2023). Unlike the Indian context, stability is less important than continuous sensory refreshment (The Korea Herald, n.d.; Potato News Today, 2023).

Consumption Behavior and Positioning

India (Functional Staple):

Maggi is positioned as a quick meal option, addressing the needs of students and working households (Hindustan Times, 2015; The Indian Express, 2015). Its role as a meal substitute embeds it into daily routines, creating habit-based usage patterns. As a result, repeat consumption is driven by necessity rather than promotional influence.

South Korea (Lifestyle-oriented snack):

Pringles functions as a lifestyle product. Its consumption is associated with leisure, solo dining, and digital culture trends such as “*hon-sul*”, a Korean term meaning drinking alone (FoodUnfolded, 2022; Pringles, n.d.-c). This reflects identity-linked consumption, where products contribute to personal expression. In such contexts, relevance depends on staying aligned with trends rather than fulfilling basic needs.

Packaging and Retail Strategy

India:

Maggi relies on low unit packs (LUPs), including small sachets, to penetrate traditional retail channels such as *kirana* stores (Tradologie, 2026; MAGGI India, n.d.). This approach enables frequent low-value purchases, which suit income-sensitive environments (Tradologie, 2026). It also encourages product trial and repeat buying across varied consumer segments (MAGGI India, n.d.).

The India case also reinforces Prahalad's (2004) bottom of the Pyramid framework. Maggi's low-unit-pack strategy improved affordability and accessibility across lower-income segments, particularly through rural retail distribution networks. The findings demonstrate how packaging and pricing innovation can significantly expand market penetration within emerging economies.

South Korea:

Pringles benefits from prominent placement in convenience store chains such as GS25 and CU. Its cylindrical packaging enhances shelf presence and attracts attention. Here, packaging serves as a visual marketing tool, not just a container (BBC News, 2020; Chosun Biz English, 2026). In dense retail environments, strong visual appeal directly shapes purchase decisions (BBC News, 2020).

Pricing Strategy and Market Sensitivity

Maggi follows a cost-based pricing strategy in India, reflecting a price-sensitive market where affordability and accessibility matter across consumer segments (Euromonitor International, 2025; Prahalad, 2004). Pringles, by contrast, is positioned as a convenient and globally branded snack with portable packaging and lifestyle appeal, which support a differentiation-based value perception rather than purely low-price competition (Kellanova, n.d.; Pringles, 2025).

Cross-Market Entry Barriers and Adaptation Constraints

A comparative assessment of Maggi and Pringles indicates that successful brand performance in one market does not guarantee equivalent acceptance in another. Despite strong international recognition, both brands encountered structural and cultural limitations when operating outside their dominant consumer environments. These constraints were shaped by differences in taste preferences, pricing expectations, consumption behavior, and category perception (Korea Herald, 2022; Euromonitor International, 2025).

Maggi and the South Korea Market

Maggi's limited presence in South Korea can largely be explained through the highly saturated and culturally embedded nature of the Korean ramyeon industry. The market is dominated by domestic companies such as Nongshim, Ottogi, Samyang, and Paldo, which together account for the overwhelming majority of domestic market share (Korea Herald, 2022; Korea JoongAng Daily, 2020).

Consumer expectations within South Korea differ significantly from those of the Indian instant noodle market. Ramyeon in Korea is widely described as comfort food and as part of everyday eating culture, rather than a light snack alternative (Yonhap News Agency, 2023; The Takeout, 2021). By comparison, Maggi's thinner noodle texture and masala-oriented flavor profile occupy a different sensory and cultural space. While these characteristics contributed to strong acceptance in India, they did not align naturally with dominant Korean taste expectations (Yonhap News Agency, 2023; Korea JoongAng Daily, 2020).

In addition, Maggi's long-standing "2-Minute" positioning emphasizes speed and convenience, whereas Korean consumers often perceive ramyeon as a filling comfort meal rather than a quick snack substitute (Yonhap News Agency, 2023; The Takeout, 2021). This mismatch in category perception reduced Maggi's ability to establish strong cultural relevance within the South Korean market. The case illustrates how deeply localized food preferences can restrict the transferability of successful FMCG positioning strategies across regions (Korea Herald, 2022; Korea JoongAng Daily, 2020).

Pringles and the Indian Market

Pringles experiences a different form of limitation within India. Although the brand achieved visibility among urban consumers and younger demographics, large-scale penetration remained constrained by pricing structures and localized snacking behavior (Euromonitor International, 2025; Prahalad, 2004).

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The Indian snack sector is heavily shaped by affordability and value-based purchasing patterns. Euromonitor notes that snacks in India are increasingly influenced by health and value sensibilities, while Prahalad's bottom-of-the-pyramid framework emphasizes the importance of affordability, access, and low-cost formats in mass markets. In this environment, purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by quantity perception and value-for-money considerations (Euromonitor International, 2025; Prahalad, 2004).

Pringles, however, operates through a premium branding and differentiated packaging structure. Its portable cylindrical canister supports convenience-oriented consumption, but it also positions the product above mainstream Indian snack alternatives in perceived value terms (Pringles, n.d.-c; Kellanova, 2024). As a result, the product maintains a higher price point than many local alternatives, which weakens mass-market adoption in a price-sensitive environment (Euromonitor International, 2025; Prahalad, 2004).

Another limitation affecting Pringles' mass-market expansion in India relates to ingredient perception and value sensitivity among consumers. Although Pringles is positioned as a premium international snack brand, Indian consumers increasingly associate premium pricing with expectations of superior ingredient quality and healthier oil compositions. Ingredient disclosures on Indian product listings show the use of edible vegetable oil, including palm oil, in Pringles formulations, which can weaken the brand's premium-value appeal among health-conscious urban consumers (Zepto, 2025; House of Indya, 2025). Within the Indian consumer context, palm oil is often perceived negatively compared with sunflower or rice bran oil, particularly among middle-class consumers who are becoming more health-conscious. This creates a "premium-value contradiction" in the Indian market: consumers may recognize Pringles as an international brand with strong recall and attractive packaging, yet still question whether the ingredient composition justifies its higher price relative to domestic alternatives such as Lay's or Haldiram's.

Other important factor relates to consumption format. Indian snack markets are strongly shaped by accessible, portioned, and shareable formats that suit everyday use and group consumption, while premium single-container snacks align more closely with convenience-oriented snacking behavior. Consequently, Pringles succeeded in building brand recognition and aspirational appeal, but faced limitations in achieving widespread mass-market adoption (Euromonitor International, 2025; Prahalad, 2004).

Another limitation affecting Pringles' mass-market expansion in India relates to premium pricing and value sensitivity among consumers. Although Pringles is positioned as an international snack brand with strong recall and attractive packaging, Indian consumers often judge premium snacks against expectations of affordability and value for money . As a result, Pringles succeeds more strongly as an aspirational or occasional purchase rather than a high-frequency household snack (Euromonitor International, 2025; Prahalad, 2004).

Comparative Interpretation

Taken together, these findings suggest that global brand equity cannot automatically compensate for deeper incompatibilities in taste structure, pricing logic, retail accessibility, and cultural consumption behavior. Both Maggi and Pringles performed strongly within markets where their positioning aligned closely with local consumer expectations. However, when transferred into structurally different environments, the same branding frameworks encountered adaptation constraints (Korea Herald, 2022; Euromonitor International, 2025).

The comparison therefore reinforces the argument that successful FMCG internationalization depends not only on product quality or global visibility, but also on the ability to align brand identity with the dominant consumption culture of each market (Yonhap News Agency, 2023; Prahalad, 2004).

Advertising Misalignment and Consumer Perception

The adaptation challenges identified above were also reflected in the communication strategies of both brands. In several instances, advertising themes that performed effectively in one market generated weaker resonance when introduced into culturally different consumer environments.

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Maggi's Convenience Positioning in South Korea

Maggi's historical advertising strategy has consistently emphasized speed, convenience, and simplicity through its well-known "2-Minute" identity. In India, this message aligned effectively with the needs of students, working households, and time-constrained consumers (MAGGI, 2026; BBC News, 2015). Nevertheless, within the South Korea context, this positioning faced perceptual limitations. Korean ramyeon culture places considerable emphasis on richness, intensity, and meal satisfaction, and ramyeon is widely described as a comfort food rather than a light snack substitute. As a result, messaging centered primarily on convenience may appear less compelling to Korean consumers accustomed to more meal-oriented noodle experiences (The Takeout, 2021; Yonhap News Agency, 2023).

This communication gap contributed to weaker category relevance, as Maggi's established brand identity did not fully correspond with ramyeon consumption in South Korea.

Pringles' Premium Positioning in India

Pringles encountered a different communication challenge within India. The brand's communication and product framing emphasize portability, convenience, sharing, and a premium snack experience, which supports a lifestyle-oriented brand image rather than a low-cost staple position (Pringles, n.d.-c; Kellanova, n.d.). Although these messages generated visibility among urban youth audiences, they addressed only a limited segment of the broader Indian snack market. Many consumers continued to prioritize affordability, quantity, and practicality over novelty-based positioning (Euromonitor International, 2025; Prahalad, 2004).

In addition, the premium canister packaging created mixed consumer perceptions. While some consumers associated the packaging with imported quality and modern branding, others viewed it as comparatively expensive relative to the quantity offered. This reduced the product's appeal within highly price-sensitive purchasing environments (Business Standard, 2013; Euromonitor International, 2025).

Consequently, Pringles achieved strong recall and niche urban popularity, but encountered challenges in converting aspirational recognition into broader repeat consumption across mass-market segments.

Strategic Case Analysis: Brand Resilience and Cultural Penetration

Maggi in India: Trust-Based Recovery and Market Leadership

Maggi's trajectory in India demonstrates how emotional attachment and cultural integration can sustain long-term market leadership. Since its launch in India in 1983, Nestlé positioned Maggi not merely as an instant noodle product but as a convenient meal solution associated with family life, affordability, and time-saving convenience (BBC News, 2015; Nestlé India, 2024). Through the widely recognized "2-Minute" positioning, the brand became deeply embedded in the routines of students, working households, and middle-class consumers (MAGGI, 2026; BBC News, 2015).

Nestlé's advertising strategy also contributed significantly to Maggi's emotional positioning in India. Many campaigns focused on themes such as family bonding, motherhood, childhood memories, and everyday convenience rather than product features alone (BBC News, 2015). This emotional storytelling strengthened consumer familiarity with the brand and helped Maggi develop strong intergenerational recognition within Indian households (BBC News, 2015).

Over time, Maggi evolved from a foreign FMCG product into a household staple within the Indian food market. Its localized "masala" flavor profile, affordable pricing structure, and widespread distribution across urban and rural retail networks enabled the brand to dominate the instant noodle category (BBC News, 2015; Nestlé India, 2024). Prior to the 2015 crisis, Maggi controlled approximately 75–80% of the Indian instant noodle market, reflecting exceptionally strong consumer loyalty and category association (BBC News, 2015).

In 2015, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) imposed a nationwide ban on Maggi following concerns related to lead content and labeling compliance (BBC News, 2015). The suspension disrupted nationwide distribution and caused a sharp decline in sales and visibility (BBC News, 2015). In response, Nestlé adopted a recovery framework centered on transparency, regulatory compliance, and consumer reassurance (BBC News, 2015). Maggi's recovery was supported not only by regulatory compliance but also by emotional recall and trust-building communication. Nestlé India stated that it conducted more than 3,500 safety tests across accredited laboratories in India and abroad, reinforcing its safety message during the relaunch (Nestlé India, 2024; Nestlé, 2024). Nestlé also leveraged nostalgia through the #WeMissYouToo campaign, which framed Maggi as an emotionally missed household brand and helped preserve consumer attachment during the crisis (India Today, 2015; YouTube, 2015).

The relaunch strategy produced a strong market response. In November 2015, online coverage reported that 60,000 Maggi welcome kits sold out within five minutes during a flash sale, illustrating that consumer interest returned quickly after the relaunch (Hindustan Times, 2015; New Indian Express, 2015). This response suggests that nostalgia and emotional recall helped the brand recover faster than a purely functional product might have done (BBC News, 2015).

Maggi's recovery illustrates that emotional equity and cultural familiarity can function as strategic assets during periods of crisis (BBC News, 2015). The case further demonstrates that in a highly relationship-oriented market such as India, long-term trust may outweigh temporary reputational damage when supported by effective recovery measures (BBC News, 2015).

Pringles in South Korea: Trend Alignment and Experience-Driven Positioning

Pringles' presence in South Korea demonstrates how global FMCG brands can strengthen market relevance through continuous product innovation and localization. As one of Kellanova's flagship global snack brands, Pringles emphasizes innovation, differentiated branding, and consumer-focused product development as part of its long-term growth strategy (Kellanova, 2024). In South Korea, the brand has also introduced market-specific products that reflect local consumer preferences while maintaining its global brand identity (Pringles, n.d.-b).

The South Korean market provides favorable conditions for brands that combine functional value with symbolic and experiential appeal. The MZ generation increasingly values novelty, aesthetics, and products that express personal identity, while the expansion of the country's kidult economy has further increased demand for distinctive and experience-oriented consumer products (Lee & Jeon, 2022; Korea Creative Content Agency, 2024). These market characteristics encourage global brands to adapt their offerings to local consumer expectations.

Pringles has responded through localized product innovation and consumer engagement. The introduction of products such as Pringles Korean Sweet Crispy Chicken Flavour and promotional activities conducted through the official Korean Pringles platform illustrate the company's efforts to maintain consumer interest and strengthen interaction with customers (Pringles, n.d.-b; Pringles Korea, n.d.). These initiatives are consistent with Kellanova's broader strategy of driving growth through innovation and differentiated consumer experiences (Kellanova, 2024).

The South Korean case can also be interpreted through Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy framework, which argues that consumers increasingly evaluate products not only for their functional benefits but also for the experiences and symbolic meanings they create (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). By combining localized product offerings with consumer-oriented promotional activities, Pringles enhances its relevance within a highly competitive snack market while reinforcing its global brand identity.

Overall, Pringles' experience in South Korea illustrates that sustained success in mature FMCG markets depends on continuous innovation, cultural responsiveness, and effective consumer engagement. Rather than relying solely on product functionality, the brand combines global consistency with localized adaptation to strengthen its competitive position in the South Korean snack market (Kellanova, 2024; Pringles, n.d.-b; Pringles Korea, n.d.).

Limitations And Future Scope

Several limitations should be acknowledged within this study.

First, the research focused only on two FMCG brands within the noodle sector, and adaptation strategies may differ across other sectors such as beverages, personal care products, or health-oriented consumer goods. As a result, the broader applicability of the findings across the entire FMCG industry remains limited.

Second, the analysis relied primarily on secondary data sources, including academic literature, industry reports, company disclosures, and market publications. The absence of primary research methods such as interviews, surveys, or focus-group discussions limited direct insight into individual consumer perceptions and behavioral motivations.

Additionally, certain observations related to 2026 market performance were based on recent fiscal disclosures and ongoing industry projections. Future market developments may therefore slightly alter competitive conditions and consumer trends.

Future research could expand the comparative scope by examining additional FMCG categories or including multiple Asian and emerging markets for broader regional analysis. Further studies may also explore how artificial intelligence, personalized digital marketing, quick-commerce platforms, and sustainability-oriented consumption are reshaping competitive strategies within the global FMCG sector.

Managerial Implications

Several strategic implications emerge from this research for multinational corporations operating in the global FMCG industry.

First, firms should recognize that consumer priorities vary significantly across markets. In emerging economies such as India, affordability, accessibility, and emotional trust remain key drivers of long-term competitiveness. Companies entering similar markets should emphasize localized product adaptation, value-based pricing, and extensive retail penetration to strengthen consumer acceptance.

Second, the findings highlight the strategic importance of emotional branding. Maggi's recovery demonstrates that brands with strong emotional connections are more resilient during crises because consumers maintain psychological attachment even after temporary reputational setbacks. Relationship-oriented communication can therefore create sustainable competitive advantages beyond short-term sales performance.

The South Korean market presents a different managerial challenge. Consumers in digitally integrated urban markets respond more positively to innovation, visual differentiation, and engagement-driven marketing. Limited-edition products, influencer collaborations, gaming partnerships, and platform-specific campaigns help brands remain relevant in rapidly evolving consumer environments.

The findings also indicate that multinational firms should carefully evaluate market-entry barriers before transferring successful strategies across countries. Product positioning, pricing, packaging, and consumption occasions that succeed in one market may not generate similar outcomes elsewhere. Effective international expansion therefore requires alignment with local consumer expectations, retail systems, and purchasing behavior.

Packaging should also be viewed as a strategic branding tool rather than merely a functional container. In India, smaller packaging formats improve affordability and distribution efficiency across diverse income groups. In South Korea, packaging enhances product visibility and reinforces lifestyle positioning, particularly within convenience-store retail environments.

Beyond instant noodles and potato chips, these findings are applicable to other FMCG categories, including beverages, dairy products, confectionery, biscuits, personal care products, and household goods. Multinational companies in these sectors should recognize that successful international expansion depends on adapting product features, pricing, packaging, branding, and distribution to local consumer preferences rather than relying solely on global brand strength. These principles provide a broader strategic framework for international market entry and localization across the FMCG industry.

Finally, the findings emphasize the importance of proactive crisis management. Nestlé's response to the Maggi ban demonstrates that transparent communication, regulatory compliance, and sustained consumer engagement are essential for rebuilding trust after market disruptions. Firms operating in highly visible consumer markets should therefore establish crisis-response frameworks that protect long-term brand reputation.

CONCLUSION

This research examined how cultural and economic differences influence the performance of global FMCG brands in India and South Korea through the comparative cases of Maggi and Pringles. The analysis demonstrates that successful international branding depends not only on product quality or global recognition, but also on the ability to adapt strategically to local consumption behavior and market expectations. Maggi achieved long-term leadership in India through affordability, emotional familiarity, localized positioning, and integration into everyday household routines. Pringles, on the other hand, strengthened its market position in South Korea through innovation, experiential branding, digital engagement, and alignment with youth-oriented lifestyle trends. Limited-edition flavors, visually distinctive packaging, gaming collaborations, influencer partnerships, and convenience-store visibility helped position Pringles as a socially engaging product rather than merely a snack item. The popularity of “kidult” culture and digitally shareable consumption experiences further strengthened this positioning. Unlike the Indian market, where loyalty was built gradually through familiarity and routine, consumer engagement in South Korea depended more heavily on trend responsiveness and experiential value. The comparison also reveals that global brand recognition alone is insufficient for long-term success. Both brands maintained their international identity, yet their pricing structures, promotional methods, packaging strategies, and consumer engagement models differed substantially according to local market conditions. This suggests that sustainable growth of multinational firms within culturally diverse landscapes remains dependent on their capacity to balance global brand consistency with continuous adaptation to local economic conditions, cultural values, and evolving consumer behavior.

Disclosure

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