

CULTURE AND THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR



Culture is an extremely broad and encompassing term. It includes what we have learned, our history, values, morals, customs, art, and habits. Cultural forces are not static; they change and adapt just as marketing adapts to its environment. Man passes culture along, so it is inculcated. Consumer behavior is influenced very much by the culture to which he belongs. Therefore, marketing takes place within a given culture, and many of the differences in marketing around the world are essentially cultural differences.

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Lesson - 1: Culture - The General Aspects

Objectives of this lesson

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of culture to a marketer in studying consumer behavior
- Define culture and know its meaning
- Reveal its characteristics
- Identify the components of culture
- Explain them for marketing decision making
- Know the cultural influences on consumption.

Introduction

Culture is a comprehensive concept, which includes almost everything around us and also influences individual's thought processes and behavior. It would be difficult for a marketer to succeed if he overlooks the importance of culture as an indicator of behavior. So, it is a must for a marketing executive to consider the importance of cultural setting within which consumer behavior takes place. In this lesson, we will focus on the general aspects of culture viz. definition, importance, characteristics, components of culture and its impact on consumption.



Importance of the Cultural Study

The influence of the religious, family, educational, and social system of a society on the behavior of consumer, and their impacts on marketing, comprise a company's cultural environment. It would be difficult to overlook the importance of culture as a motivator of consumer behavior. While it is easy to state the general significance of culture, it is more difficult to define the term in a way which will receive general acceptance, and, consequently, it is hard to be precise about the impacts of culture on consumer behavior. Cultural dimensions among countries vary even more than economic dimensions so that it becomes difficult at best to find general patterns. For example, even though the economic characteristics of Western European countries are similar to each other, their cultural dimensions make for very different eating habits.

It would be difficult to overlook the importance of culture as a motivator of consumer behavior.

Certainly, culture is the most pervasive external force on an individual's consumption behavior. How people work and play, what they eat, how they eat, how and what they buy are all affected by the cultural traditions and socially developed modes of behavior. Even slight change in them can significantly alter how and what people buy. For example, in US, in early 1980s, some religious groups begun a movement to boycott products promoted on certain highly popular but "immoral" (sex-oriented)

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television shows. Over 6000 churches joined the movement, and some companies agreed to cease their advertising on those shows.¹

Marketing executives must consider the importance of cultural setting within which consumer behavior takes place.

Marketing executives must consider the importance of cultural setting within which consumer behavior takes place. The attitudes people possess, the values they hold dear, the lifestyles they enjoy, and the interpersonal behavioral patterns they adopt are the outcomes of the cultural setting. These forces affect the marketplace by influencing other external forces. They undoubtedly have a bearing on the standards of government, the state of the economy, and the intensity of competition and technological development. You should keep in mind that cultures vary from country to country and as a result consumption patterns among people vary.

Failure to carefully consider cultural differences is often responsible for monumental marketing failures. In fact, it has been convincingly argued that the root cause of most international business problems is the self-reference criteria, i.e., the unconscious reference to one's own cultural values. Marketing across cultural boundaries is a challenging and difficult task. You know that consumer behavior always takes place within a specific environment, and an individual's culture provides the most general environment in which his consumption behavior takes place.

Cultural influences have broad effects on buying behavior because they permeate our daily lives. Our culture determines what we wear and eat, where we reside and travel. It broadly affects how we buy and use products, and it influences our satisfaction from them. For example, in our urban culture, the problem of time scarcity is increasing because of the increase in the number of females who work and because of the current emphasis we place on physical and mental self-development. Many people do time saving shopping and buy time saving products such as instant noodles to cope with the scarcity of time. Since culture, to some degree, determines how products are purchased and used, it in turn affects the development, promotion, distribution, and pricing of products.

From the premise given above, it is now quite evident to you that the study of culture of the market where you operate or plan to operate is vital for your success and even the existence. An understanding of culture is important to you as a marketing manager because it always provides approved specific goal objects for any generalized human want.

Definition and Meaning of Culture

Culture is an extremely broad and encompassing term.

Culture is an extremely broad and encompassing term which includes what we have learned, our history, values, morals, customs, art, and habits. Here in this section we shall mention quite a few definitions of culture and analyze those to form a clear picture about culture that may help us to formulate appropriate marketing strategies.

¹ *Marketing - Principles and Applications, Gaedeke R.M. and Tootelian, West Publishing Company, USA, 1983, p. 119*

A culture is “the complex of values, ideas, attitudes, and other meaningful symbols created by people to shape human behavior and the artifacts of that behavior as they are transmitted from one generation to the next.”²

The above definition highlights three important attributes of an individual’s culture. **First**, it is ‘created by people’, evolving over time as a result of the human activities and passed on to the succeeding generations.

Second, the impact of cultural influence is both intangible and tangible. People’s basic attitudes and values are a direct result of their cultural environment. Beliefs in freedoms of speech and choice, heterosexuality, and God are products of human action. Additionally, people leave physical evidence of their culture, through art and craftwork, buildings, furniture, laws, and food.

Third, the cultural environment evolves over time, and it is most often evolves over lengthy periods. Changes in women’s roles in the home and in business, and the outward desire for leisure time have come about quite slowly. Other changes, however, occur quicker. Clothing styles for example, come and go rather hastily.

Cultural environment evolves over time.

Culture may also be defined in other ways. According to Kroeber, “the mass of the learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas, and values - and the behavior they include - is what constitute culture. It is all those things about man that are more than just biological or organic and that are also more than merely psychological.”³ It is the man-made part of the environment, the total way of life of a people, the social legacy that the individual acquires from his group. The culture, into which we are born, provides a good many ready-made solutions to problems growing out of the geographic, biologic, and social environment in which we live. These ready-made solutions are provided in the form of cultural patterns relating to the ideology, role definitions, and socialization procedures of the society in which we live. These cultural patterns are transmitted to individuals through such social institutions as the family, educational institutions, religious institutions, and social classes, by means of languages, parents’ attitudes and behavior, and reading. As a result, the cultural patterns that consumers learn influence their ideas and values, the roles they play, the way in which they carry those roles out, and the manner in which their needs and desires are handled.

E. B. Taylor defined culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. Culture is thus composed of common habits and patterns of living of people in daily activities and of the common interest in entertainment, sports, news, and even advertising.

² James F. Engel, Roger D. Blackwell, and David T. Kollat, *Consumer Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973)

³ A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology*, Brace & Co., 1948, p. 8.

Culture is a comprehensive concept, which includes almost everything.

Culture is a comprehensive concept, which includes almost everything that influences individual's thought processes and behaviors. Culture does not include inherited responses and predisposition, rather it is acquired. One more thing should also be borne in mind about culture. That is, in modern complex societies culture seldom provides detailed prescriptions for appropriate behavior. Rather, it supplies boundaries within which most individuals think and act. You should also keep in mind that the nature of cultural influences is such that we are seldom aware of them. An individual behaves, thinks, and feels in a manner similar with other members of the same culture because it seems natural to do so.

The concept of culture has been debated in anthropological literature for at least two centuries and has acquired almost as many definitions as those trying to define it. According to Singer, recent definitions of culture have grown progressively more formal and abstract. Culture has often been loosely defined as behavior as observed through social relations and material artifacts. Although these may provide some raw data for a construct of culture, they are not, in themselves, the constituents of culture. Culture, in a deeper anthropological sense, includes patterns, norms, rules and standards which find expression in behavior, social relations and artifacts. These are the constituents of culture. Singer's definition revealed this development: 'Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior, acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups including their embodiments in artifacts. The essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Thus, according to the above definition, culture is the conditioning elements of behavior and the products of that behavior.

Referring Ralph Linton, Berkman and Gilson in their book 'Consumer Behavior - Concepts and Strategies', defined culture as 'patterns of learned behavior which are held in common and transmitted by the members of any given society.' Culture, thus, consists of those behaviors of a society, which are well established and accepted by the members of that society. These patterns are followed by the majority. For example, majority of Bangladeshi women wears 'sharee', and it is an established pattern of behavior in this culture. There are exceptions to this pattern as well. Some women, for example, may wear T-shirts and trousers, but this will not be considered as a pattern, since it is not found in the majority's behavior. Let us now explain this definition at some length.

If we explain the above definition, we can identify three aspects of a given culture. They are as follows:

- culture is a pattern of behavior;
- culture is learned; and,
- culture is transmitted from one generation to the next.

- **Culture is a Pattern of Behavior :** Culture refers basically to the style of behavior. This style is found to be present in the behaviors of the majority of people living in a particular culture. This pattern varies from culture to culture and as a result consumptions vary among countries. The pattern of behavior that you will see in Bangladeshi culture definitely will not be seen in other cultures. The pattern of behavior established by a culture is found to be practiced by the majority as it satisfies their needs. Someone not following the established pattern of behavior is likely to be condemned by others in the society. Since majority follows the same style of behavior in a particular culture, it becomes a pattern. Marketers, in order to be successful, must find out the patterns of behavior and design their marketing strategies accordingly to be successful in a culture.
- **Culture is Learned :** The second important aspect relating to culture is that, we learn it through experiences and interactions. The aspects of culture are not found in an individual right from his birth. He rather learns those from others in the society as he follows, observes, and interacts with them. Since experiences vary among people of different societies, they learn different things resulting in differences among cultures. A Bangladeshi child, for example, if grows in a European country among the Europeans, will definitely not learn Bangladeshi cultural aspects but, the European cultural aspects, which will influence his behavior. It clearly indicates that culture is learned, not present from birth. Why the same object or situation is seen differently by people of different cultures. The reason is that their learning differs. Wearing mini-skirts by females, for example, is seen negatively in Bangladesh, where it is seen positively in Western countries. Since people of two different cultures learn differently, they are likely to view the same object differently. People learn about their cultures from their parents and different social organizations and groups. This will be discussed later.
- **Culture is Transmitted from one Generation to the Next :** What we have in our culture in terms of values, ideas, attitudes, symbols, artifacts or other, we are likely to conform to those. We not only follow the patterns of our cultures but also teach them to our next generation so that they are guided by them. This process of transmitting the cultural elements from one generation to the next is known as '*Enculturation*'. Thus, cultural elements do not persist in one generation, but are transmitted to the next generation and survive the entire life span of an individual. That is why lot of similarities in behaviors is found between people of two different generations.

Culture refers basically to the style of behavior.

Culture is learned, not present from birth.

Characteristics of Culture

To be successful in a particular culture, it is imperative for a marketer to understand the characteristics of culture. Some of the characteristics were discussed earlier while explaining different definitions of culture. Here we shall highlight on those and others not mentioned earlier. The characteristics may be named:

(a) the invisible hand of culture; (b) culture satisfies needs; (c) culture is learned; (d) culture is shared; and, (e) culture is dynamic. Let us now have a look at them in turn:

Culture affects every sphere of our lives very secretly.

- **The Invisible Hand of Culture :** Culture is like the air we breathe. It is so obvious that we cannot escape from it. It pervades our lives so much so that we cannot actively feel its impact. It affects every sphere of our lives very secretly but strongly so frequently that we do not have the opportunity to even think of its (culture) impact. Its impact is like the secrete chemical that turns a caterpillar into a butterfly with all the beauty that was the caterpillar's potential.

Culture determine the way(s) of satisfying human

- **Culture Satisfies Needs :** Individuals are having different types of needs. They have need for food, clothing, shelter, medicine, love and belongingness, esteem and status, achievement, and a number of physical, social, and psychological needs. How these needs will be satisfied is being determined by the culture. For example, the hunger need is satisfied with different food items by people of different cultures. A man in Bali, Indonesia, is likely to satisfy this need eating mango, whereas a Bangladeshi will take rice to meet this need. By providing standards, culture dictates people about what to buy, when to buy, how to buy, how to use and consume different products, and above everything else, what life style one should assume to satisfy his needs.
- **Culture is Learned :** It is mentioned earlier in the definition of culture that, it (culture) is learned rather programmed genetically. As an individual grows in a particular environment he learns about different aspects of culture through his interaction with other members in the society. One learns cultural values, norms, beliefs etc., formally, informally, or technically. Formal learning occurs when senior members teach different cultural aspects to juniors; informal learning occurs as a result of the child's imitation of behaviors of others such as elder brothers, sisters, parents or heroes and heroines as well as celebrities; technical learning occurs as a result of formal education received from different institutions. All of these three types of learning affect our consumption behaviors which marketers should take into active consideration in their planning and should try to reinforce them.
- **Culture is Shared :** Cultural values, beliefs, norms, etc., are shared by the majority of the members of a given culture because they gratify our needs. As they are transmitted by the members of a society to

their next generation, they are practiced by the majority. They are also taught to us by our educational and religious institutions. There could be some exceptions who may not share the core beliefs, values, and attitudes of their culture, but majority are highly likely to hold them. For example, majority of Bangladeshi Muslim males go to mosque on Fridays to say the 'Jumma' prayer and it is considered as a social activity.

- **Culture is Dynamic :** No culture is static. Cultural swings take place. As the environment is changing, culture has to be changed in order to survive. Therefore, culture is a dynamic concept, rather than a static one. As cultural norms change, they bring changes in our consumption and life-styles. In order to be successful in the dynamic culture, marketers should carefully and continuously monitor the changes and modify their products accordingly for them (products) to be accepted by the consumers.

Culture is a dynamic concept, rather a static one.

Components Of Culture

If you study a culture, whether modern or backward, you will be able to identify three important components in it. The components may be named as (i) cognitive component; (ii) material component; and, (iii) normative component. In other words, culture of a particular society is composed of three distinct elements or components. Let us now have a brief discussion on them:

Culture of a particular society is composed of three distinct elements or components.

- **Cognitive Component :** The basic component of any culture is one relating to people's knowledge about the creation and existence of the universe. This aspect is based on either people's observation or on certain factual evidence that they have. An individual of a backward culture believes in gods, superstitions, and some other objects as a part of his culture's cognitive aspect. But, in a technologically advanced society the cognitive aspect is based on scientific experiments and their applications. Because of refinement of knowledge through systematic testing and observation, the cognitive component of an advanced society's culture is quite distinct from that of a primitive one.
- **Material Component :** Another important component of any given culture is the material feature of the society. It consists of all the tangible things that human beings make, use, and give value to the material component varies from culture to culture as the cognitive component. It is based on the technological state that the society has achieved and understood looking at the artifacts of the society. The artifacts include type of housing where people live, furniture they use, and other material goods they possess. Since it is tied to the level of technological advancement of the society, the material features of

cultures are found to be very diverse as the level of technological achievements vary.

Understanding culture means understanding its values.

- **Cognitive Component** : The other important component of a culture is the cognitive component. The cognitive component is composed of the values and norms of the society which guides and regulates behavior. In other words, it consists of the values, beliefs, and rules by which a society directs people's interactions. Understanding culture means understanding its values. Values are shared standards of what is acceptable and unacceptable, good and bad, desirable and undesirable. Values are abstract, very general concepts that are expressed by norms. Norms are rules and guidelines setting forth proper attitudes and behaviors for specific situations. In Bangladesh, for example, the culture places high value on religious training; therefore, our norms specify formal religious education for every child up to a certain age. The norms of mass religious education create need for religious teachers, books, and other related materials.

Among the values the culture holds, some are core or central values, while others are peripheral values.

Among the values the culture holds, some are core or central values, while others are peripheral values. Core values are the deeply held enduring beliefs that guide our actions, judgements, and specific behaviors and that support our efforts to realize important aims. Although not as deeply embedded or as fundamental as central values, our peripheral values reflect our central values. If you value your health, you may value regular exercise and a low-salt, low-cholesterol diet. You may also abstain from smoking cigarettes and drinking alcoholic beverages.

Marketers should give a deep look at each of the three components of culture discussed above as they determine the consumption of goods and services by people of a particular culture to a great extent. Failure to understand them may become a grave concern for the marketers.

Cultural Influences on Consumption

The culture into which consumers are born, provides a good many ready-made solutions to problems growing out of the geographic, biologic, and social environment in which they live. These ready-made solutions are provided in the form of cultural patterns relating to ideology, role definitions, and socialization procedures of the society in which they live. These cultural patterns are transmitted to individuals through such social institutions as the family, educational institutions, religious institutions, and social class, by means of language, parents' attitudes and behavior, reading, and public school instructions. As a result, the cultural patterns that consumers learn influence their ideas and values, the roles they play, the way in which they carry those roles out, and the manner in which their needs and desires are handled.

Culture provides patterns that guide individuals in the satisfaction of their biological needs. Thus, the child learns the diet pattern of his culture,

modesty and hygiene of elimination, proper conduct of sexual affairs, patterns of propriety in dress. The requirement for food, for example, is met in every society. But the specific foods that an individual regards as acceptable are determined by his culture. The Chinese, for instance, dislike milk and milk products, while dairy products make up an important part of the English diet.

Culture not only patterns the way in which people satisfy their needs but also creates desires that exert a strong influence upon their buying behavior. The learned desires of certain consumers for cigarettes, for example, may be just as compelling as their requirements for food. So, too, the desire for a late-model television set, which may be learned from culture, may occupy a position high in the list of products wanted by a newly married couple.

Self Evaluation

Objective Questions

1. Cultural traditions affect –
 - a. How people work and play,
 - b. What people eat and how they eat
 - c. How and what people buy
 - d. All of the above.

2. Slight change in cultural traditions can significantly alter –
 - a. How people buy
 - b. What people buy
 - c. Both b & c
 - d. None of the above.

3. Which of the following is an outcome of a cultural setting?
 - a. The attitudes people possess and the values they hold dear
 - b. The lifestyles people enjoy
 - c. The interpersonal behavioral patterns people adopt
 - d. All of the above.

4. Cultural forces have a bearing on –
 - a. The standards of government
 - b. The state of the economy
 - c. The intensity of competition and technological development
 - d. All of the above.

5. Our culture determines –
 - a. What we wear and eat
 - b. Where we reside and travel
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

6. In our urban culture, the problem of time scarcity is increasing because of –
 - a. The increase in the number of females who work
 - b. The current emphasis we place on physical and mental self-development
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

7. Culture, to some degree, determines how products are purchased and used, it in turn affects –
 - a. The development of products
 - b. The promotion and distribution of products
 - c. The pricing of products

- d. All of the above.
8. Which of the following is an important attribute of an individual's culture?
- 'Created by people'
 - The impact of cultural influence is both intangible and tangible
 - Cultural environment evolves over time
 - All of the above.
9. E. B. Taylor defined culture as that complex whole which includes –
- Knowledge, belief, art, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society
 - Knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society
 - Knowledge, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society
 - None of the above.
10. Culture does not include –
- Inherited responses and predisposition
 - Role behavior
 - Acquired responses
 - None of the above.
11. Culture, in a deeper anthropological sense, includes -
- Ppatterns, norms, rules and standards in behavior patterns, norms, rules and standards which find expression in behavior, social relations and artifacts
 - Rules and standards of behavior which find expression in social relations and artifacts
 - None of the above.
12. People learn about their cultures from –
- Their parents
 - Different social organizations and groups
 - Both a & b
 - None of the above.
13. Which of following is a characteristic of a culture?
- The invisible hand of culture
 - Culture satisfies needs
 - Culture is learned
 - All of the above.
14. The cognitive component of a culture is related to –
- Artifacts
 - Knowledge

- c. Values
- d. All of the above



Answers:

1. d, 2. c, 3. d, 4. d, 5. c, 6. c, 7. d, 8. d, 9. b, 10. a, 11. b, 12. c, 13. d, 14. b.

Descriptive Questions

1. Discuss the importance of cultural study to a marketer. Define culture and explain its meaning
2. Identify and explain the characteristics of culture. What are the components of a culture. Explain them with examples.

Lesson - 2: Useful Concepts of Cultural Analysis

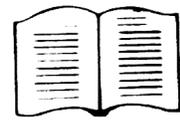
Objectives of this lesson

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand different symbols used by people in a particular culture to communicate among them
- Explain the concept of cultural relativism
- Identify the reasons of cultural change
- Explain how the knowledge of cultural symbolism, cultural relativism, and cultural change helps marketers in taking appropriate marketing decisions.

Introduction

Cultural dimensions among countries vary even more than economic dimensions so that it becomes difficult at best to find general patterns. “Analyzing a total, unified cultural system means identifying its values and norms, observing how these normative aspects are translated into group and individual behavior and examining the material aspects of the culture.”⁴ The symbols people use to communicate, the way they view other cultures, and the changes that take place vary very greatly among cultures. Marketers should have a sound idea on these three aspects - cultural symbolism, cultural relativism, and cultural change - for taking appropriate marketing action. Failure to carefully consider the above aspects may cause irrecoverable loss and even the demise of the firm. The connotations associated with body motions, greetings, colors, numbers, shapes, sizes, and above everything else, symbols vary considerably across cultures. A few examples are shown in the table next page. Marketers may identify these variables through a number of techniques one of which is a ‘participant-observer’ technique as developed by Malinowski. Here the observer enters a culture, observes people and asks question and thus identifies different aspects of it (culture).



Symbols vary considerably across cultures.

⁴ Berkman H. W. and Gilson C. C., *Consumer Behavior - Concepts and Strategies*, Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc. 1978, p. 89.

Table- 4.1: Showing Cultural Variations among Cultures on Selected Dimensions

Areas Symbols	Body motions	Greetings	Colors	Numbers	Shapes Sizes
Japan	Pointing to one's own chest with a forefinger indicates one wants a bath. Pointing a forefinger to the nose indicates "me".	Bowing is the traditional form of greeting.	Positive colors are in muted shades. Combinations of black, dark gray, and white have negative overtones.	Positive numbers are 1,3,5,8. Negative numbers are 4, 9	Pine, bamboo, or plum patterns are positive. Cultural shapes, such as Buddha shaped jars should be avoided.
India	Kissing is considered offensive and not seen on TV, in movies, or in public places	The palms of the hands are placed together and the head is nodded for greeting. It is considered rude to touch a woman or shake hands.	Positive colors are bold colors such as green, red, yellow, or orange. Negative colors are black and white if they appear in relation to weddings.	To create brand awareness, numbers are often used as a brand name.	Animals such as parrots, elephants, tigers, or cheetahs are often used as brand names or on packaging Avoid sexually explicit symbols.
Middle East	The raised eyebrow facial expression indicates 'yes'.	The word 'no' must be mentioned three times before it is accepted.	Positive colors are brown, black, dark blues, and reds. Pink, violets, and yellows are not favored.	Positive numbers are 3,7,5,9, while 13,15 are negative	Prefer round or square shapes. Avoid symbols of 6-pointed star, raised thumb, or Koranic sayings.
Latin America	General gestures are used for emphasis.	The traditional form of greeting is a hearty embrace followed by a friendly slap on the back.	Popular colors are generally bright or bold yellow, red, blue, or green.	Generally, 7 is a positive number. Negative numbers are 13, 14.	Religious symbols should be respected. Avoid national symbols such as flag colors.

Sources: James C. Simmons, "A Matter of Interpretation", American Way, April 1983, pp. 106-111; and "Adapting Export Packaging to Cultural Differences", Business American, Dec. 3, 1979, pp. 3-9.

Anthropology, you know contributes an understanding of the cultural setting in which purchase behaviors take place. Number of anthropological studies were undertaken in the past to identify different aspects of cultures that are to do with consumption behavior. Quite a few number of concepts were identified from these studies of which three are notable influencing consumer behavior. They are: 'cultural symbolism', 'cultural relativism', and 'cultural change'. We shall now discuss them in turn in the following sections:

Cultural Symbolism

A symbol may be defined as the sign or representation of something moral or intellectual by the images or properties of natural things, as “the lion is the symbol of courage”. It may also be defined as a figure or character standing for a letter or word. The symbol makes people different from other animals, because people create and use symbols, not other animals. Obviously, it is important for marketers to be aware of the symbolic nature of their products and packaging. Though one naturally wants to avoid unintended symbolic messages, if used correctly symbolism can enhance product appeal. For example, several brands of cosmetics for young women are packaged in cylindrical containers which are obviously phallic symbols. But, question comes, ‘how do you know the meanings of symbols used by people?’ To get the answer to this, you should first know the types of symbols used by people, and second, find out their inherent meanings as they are used.

Different studies on cultures identified two types of symbols used by people in communicating among them. They are: (a) referential symbols; and, (b) expressive symbols.

Referential symbols are those that mean or indicate specific objects. The word ‘pen’, for example, means an item which is used for writing purpose. It is easy for the marketers to understand the meaning of referential symbols, and as a result they do not face much problem with regards to the referential symbols.

Expressive symbols are those that may carry different meaning to people of different cultures. They need to be interpreted from the particular cultural context since they carry connotative or implied meaning. The meaning of the same expressive symbol may be interpreted differently by people of different cultures. Thus, their meanings are not limited. An expressive symbol, such as showing thumb, may mean an appreciation to an American, whereas, the same symbol may carry a negative connotation to a Bangladeshi. Marketers thus face a lot of problems with regards to the expressive symbols. Misinterpretation of an expressive symbol may cause a monumental loss to a marketer. If a US citizen, for example, finds a baby wearing a blue outfit, he would most likely assume the child to be a male. The same assumption may not be true to other parts of the world. In Holland, blue for example, connotes femininity. There could be many other examples of different interpretations of the same symbol by the people of different cultures. Red is considered as an unlucky sign in Chad, Nigeria, and Germany. The same color is considered positive in Denmark, Rumania, and Argentina. Yellow flowers are the signs of death in Mexico and infidelity in France. The number seven is considered unlucky in Singapore, Kenya, and Ghana. It is considered as a lucky number in India, Morocco, Nicaragua and here in Bangladesh. Triangle is a negative sign in Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan and positive in Columbia.

Expressive symbols are those that may carry different meaning to people of different cultures.

Failure to recognize the meaning assigned to a symbol can cause serious problems. For example, a leading US golf ball manufacturer was initially

disappointed in its attempts to penetrate the Japanese market. Its mistake was packaging its golf balls in sets of four, which is a symbol of death in Japan. Another manufacturer of water recreation products lost heavily in Malaysia because the company's predominant color, green, was associated with the jungle and illness in Malaysia. Since the meaning of symbols vary from culture to culture, marketers must take them into active consideration when doing business in other cultures.

Cultural Relativism

One of the basic human tendencies is to consider their cultures as superior to others.

Another important concept revealed from anthropological studies regarding culture is '*ethnocentrism*' which gave birth to the concept of cultural relativism. One of the basic human tendencies is to consider their cultures as superior to others. This tendency is found to be present both in advanced as well as technologically backward countries. In Bangladesh, for example, we consider ourselves as friendly, warm, and hospitable. According to us, Western people are heartless. Again, Westerners consider us dirty and backward. We conclude this way because we measure other cultures by our own cultural context. This tendency to view and judge other cultures by the standards and context of one's own culture is known as '*ethnocentrism*'. If an individual views other cultures based on this concept, he will always think that the way he does things is right and standard, where the way people of other cultures do things and behave is either substandard or wrong. If a marketer adopts his marketing strategies for other cultures guided by the concept of ethnocentrism his chances of becoming successful there is slim. The reason is that the way he will develop, price, distribute, and promote the product will not match with the standards of those other cultures. From this experience, researchers have developed the concept of cultural relativism. Under the cultural relativism concept, marketers view and judge other cultures by the standards of those cultures not by their (marketers) own cultural standards. Thus, cultural relativism is the elementary proposition of judging a particular culture and behavior of people of that culture in the social and cultural context of the culture in question. Marketers, if want to be successful in other cultures, should study consumer behavior following the concept of cultural relativism.

Cultural Change

Cultural values and norms undergo changes.

Cultural values and norms undergo changes. Changes are occurring in both core and secondary beliefs and values. All of the changes as well as absence of change, have important implications for marketing practice as they change consumer behavior. Even in a traditional culture like ours, lot of changes has taken place over last few decades having profound impact on our consumption and life styles.

Change is an evolutionary process, which can be accelerated by number of factors. They are: (a) technological changes; (b) conflicts between existing values; (c) exposure to another culture's values; and (d) dramatic events. The marketing executive must analyze the changes occurring in the

culture in order to see how they have shaped the marketplace. Unquestionably, these changes create many new market opportunities and destroy existing ones. Let us discuss the above factors in the following sections:

- **Technological Changes:** Technology is changing everyday bringing new products to the marketplace. The availability of these new products has radically changed our lifestyles and consumption pattern. Automation and information processing technology, for example, have transformed the very nature of work. Medical technology has provided control over the birth of children. Development in food processing technology has made available number of food items throughout the year, which was unthinkable before such development in technology took place. Other technological developments have made available, products like mineral water, instant food items, cable television channels and so on. All of these brought significant changes in our consumption patterns.
- **Conflicts Between Existing Values:** Values are also changing among cultures. For example, one of the core values of our culture is parent oriented family and family dominated by males. With modernization and increased urbanization, this value is eroding. Mass media have provided extensive exposure to alternative value systems and lifestyles. This creates conflict with our traditional value system. Those who will hold the traditional one will behave quite differently from those accepting the value change in terms of their consumption behavior.
- **Exposure to Another Culture's Values:** People's consumption behavior also changes because of the exposure to other cultures. This is known as cultural diffusion. Cultural diffusion basically means the changes that take place in people's consumption and lifestyles as their cultures are exposed to others. Number of reasons may be identified causing cultural diffusion. Some of the notable reasons are bilateral/multilateral agreements, trade arrangements, exchange and visits of cultural, sports, academic and other groups, migration, development of jet and satellite communications, and the popularity of sky culture. These give opportunity to people to get to know each other's cultures and also adopting some of their cultural traits in terms of consumption. Cultural diffusion brings significant changes in people's purchasing habits. The popularity of jeans in Bangladesh in early 1980s, habit of eating out, changes in women's fashion, and method of urban entertainment are all examples of the impact of cultural diffusion. Marketers should keep close eyes on the cultural diffusion and consequent changes in consumption to adapt their marketing strategies accordingly.

Technology is changing everyday bringing new products to the marketplace.

Cultural diffusion brings significant changes in people's purchasing habits.

- ***Dramatic Events:*** Events or happenings that are not anticipated may be termed as dramatic events. Happening of such events in a particular culture has impacts on marketing decisions as they affect consumer behavior. Dramatic events may alter the existing way of life in terms of art, sports, fashion, and so on. When Bangladesh Cricket Team, for example, won ICC Trophy, it created a cricket craze among the youth of this country resulting in huge demand of items used in cricket.

It is an important, though difficult, task for marketing managers to be aware of the extent and nature of cultural changes as they relate to consumer behavior. After realizing the changes, they should make appropriate adaptations in their products, prices, distribution and promotion for ensuring their long-term existence in the marketplace.

Self Evaluation

Objective Questions

1. Analyzing a total, unified cultural system means –
 - a. Identifying its values and norms
 - b. Observing how normative aspects of culture are translated into group and individual behavior
 - c. And examining the material aspects of the culture
 - d. All of the above.

2. Which aspect of a culture should be deeply studied by a Marketer?
 - a. Cultural symbolism
 - b. Cultural relativism
 - c. Cultural change
 - d. All of the above.

3. Failure to carefully consider the three aspects of a culture may cause–
 - a. Irrecoverable loss to the firm
 - b. The demise of the firm
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

4. Which of the following may vary among cultures?
 - a. Connotations associated with body motions and greetings
 - b. Connotations associated with colors, numbers, and shapes
 - c. Connotations associated with sizes, and symbols
 - d. All of the above.

5. Anthropology contributes an understanding –
 - a. Of the cultural setting
 - b. Of the cultural setting in which purchase behaviors take place
 - c. Of the psychological setting in which purchase behaviors take place
 - d. None of the above.

6. A symbol may be defined as the sign or representation of something–
 - a. Moral or intellectual by the images or properties of natural things
 - b. Intellectual by the images of natural things
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

7. Referential symbols are those –

- a. That means or indicates specific sign
 - b. That means or indicates specific objects
 - c. That means or indicates specific animal
 - d. None of the above.
8. Expressive symbols are those –
- a. Created by people
 - b. That may carry different meaning to people of different cultures
 - c. That may carry the same meaning to people of different cultures
 - d. All of the above.
9. An expressive symbol, such as showing thumb, may mean –
- a. An appreciation to an American
 - b. An appreciation to a Bangladeshi
 - c. An appreciation to an Indian
 - d. An appreciation to a Napalese.
10. In Holland blue connotes –
- a. Masculinity
 - b. Animality
 - c. Femininity
 - d. None of the above.
11. Red is considered as an unlucky sign in –
- a. Rumania, and Argentina
 - b. Chad, Nigeria, and Germany
 - c. Chad, Bangladesh, and Germany
 - d. Chad, Afghanistan, and Germany.
12. The number seven is considered unlucky in –
- a. Singapore, Kenya, and USA
 - b. Singapore, Kenya, and Bangladesh
 - c. Singapore, Kenya, and Ghana
 - d. None of the above.
13. Triangle is a negative sign in –
- a. Hong Kong
 - b. Korea
 - c. Taiwan
 - d. All of the above countries.
14. One of the basic human tendencies is to consider their cultures as –
- a. Superior to others
 - b. Inferior to others
 - c. Comparable to others
 - d. None of the above.

15. The tendency to view and judge other cultures by the standards and context of one's own culture is known as –
- Cultural relativism
 - Ethnocentrism
 - Cultural symbolism
 - None of the above.
16. Cultural change takes place due to –
- Technological changes
 - Conflicts between existing values
 - Exposure to another culture's values
 - All of the above.

Answers:

1. d, 2. d, 3. c, 4. d, 5. b, 6. a, 7. b, 8. b, 9. a, 10. c, 11. b, 12. c, 13. d, 14. a, 15. b, 16. d.



Descriptive Questions

1. Identify few symbols used by people in a particular culture to communicate among them and show their marketing significance. Explain the term 'cultural relativism and show its uses to a marketer.
2. Identify the reasons of cultural change. Explain how the knowledge of cultural symbolism, cultural relativism, and cultural change helps marketers in taking appropriate marketing decisions.

Lesson - 3: Cross-Cultural Perspective

Objectives of this lesson

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the use of cross-cultural study in marketing
- Define the concept of cross-culture
- Know how the knowledge of cross-cultural perspective may help a multinational marketer.
- Explain how to adapt your marketing decisions with other cultures

Introduction



Marketing, now-a-days no more considered as a local, regional, or national phenomenon. It is rather considered a multinational or international phenomenon. The product that you produce here in Bangladesh, may have market overseas, well beyond your national boundary. In order to be successful in foreign market(s), your marketing strategies should be based on a multinational perspective.

Why the Knowledge of Other Cultures is Required for a Marketer?

A person is born into a society and is socialized in its ways. His interactions with others, education, and exposure to information all take place within the societal framework. These influence his consumption behavior in turn.

Differences in cultures exist because the problem solving needs of various societies have not been the same.

Differences in cultures exist because the problem solving needs of various societies have not been the same. Each society has developed institutional arrangements and behavioral prescriptions that seemed appropriate for dealing with its particular problems. These solutions then were handed down to successive generations and were given whatever additional transcendent explanations or justifications seemed to enhance their effectiveness. The problems of people living in a dry and unfertile land, for example, are in large measure different from those of people living in a temperate and fertile environment.

Not only will solutions to problems of survival differ, but so will related values and ways of looking at events. The former people might well choose to lead a nomadic life. They should become knowledgeable about geography and skilled in finding water. Obedience to tribal edict might well evolve as a generalized response to needs to keep the tribe together, especially throughout long journeys. Authoritarian bonds may extend down to the family level in an effort to minimize individual deviance.

On the otherhand, people living in a fertile land will probably tend to build their way of life around the permanence of their homes, the seasonality of

their agriculture, and other related factors. Not only will their skills and interests be quite different, but their interpersonal relationships and codes of conduct should reflect the greater autonomy and independence of their way of life. Members of such a culture are apt to take a pragmatic view of life built around such notions as rugged individualism. Religious ideals should tend to extol an ethic built around hard work and self-determination.

There appears to be systematic differences among cultures, for example, in attitudes toward time. The American is apt to be impatient and sometimes vulnerable to delays and 'ever-so-slow' progress. But, the attitude toward time here in Bangladesh is different. Delays here do not bother us much since we are used to delays. Some cultures equate time with importance, so that anything important must be led up to slowly and carefully, even a business contract, which might be negotiated in a matter of hours in such cultures.

Each culture has evolved its own rules regarding the space around another person and his possessions. In the US, for example, excessive touching of others, even good friends, during conversation is not common. But in our country, it is a common practice. In Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, an Englishman might be regarded as cold and un-courteous, unless he adapted to the greater physical closeness of interpersonal relationships in these cultures.

From the above description it is evident that international marketers find that people in other regions of the world have different attitudes, values, and needs, which in turn call for different methods of doing business, as well as different types of marketing mixes. Some international marketers fail because they do not or cannot adjust to cultural differences. In order to adjust your marketing strategies with other cultures, you need a sound knowledge of those cultures in terms of every aspect. The idea of cross-cultural study has emerged from the need to know other cultures.

What Cross-Cultural Study Means?

Cross-cultural study or research is a technique applied for comparing cultures on the basis of similarities and differences as well as studying different segments of a total culture. Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard in their book 'Consumer Behavior', defines cross-cultural study as the systematic comparison of similarities and differences in the material and behavioral aspects of cultures. One could go on, of course, and cite an almost endless list of cultural differences among societies. Cultural anthropologists have termed the observable and typical behavior patterns of a people their 'explicit culture'. The study of the underlying determinants of these observed regularities (the modal needs, goals, values, and beliefs of a society) has been termed the study of 'implicit culture'. Research on implicit culture leads, by its very nature, to a more configurational and integrated analysis of observed statistical regularities within a society.

“Cross-cultural research methodology involves standard research techniques adapted to the special requirements of different languages, structural characteristics of the societies and values of the investigator. Cross-cultural studies in anthropology often focus upon social organization, child rearing, belief systems, and similar topics. In marketing, the elements studied are more likely to be distribution systems, beliefs about sales and pricing activities, and communications channels”⁵.

The cross-cultural researcher must go beyond the descriptive data often so laboriously assembled, and search for interrelationships, which he must then account for in terms of common problems and solutions.

The aim of the researcher is to understand not only the similarities in behavior across a society, but also the differences within a society. Societies may be thought of as having a common core culture of general set of attitudes and orientations shared by the majority of members. As a society continues to develop, greater differentiation in meeting its needs is a consequence. Systems of positions and roles evolve to meet the objectives of the continuously diversifying society and its members.

How the Knowledge of Cross-Cultural Perspective May Help a Multinational Marketer?

Cross-cultural study is an extremely important activity for a multinational marketer.

Cross-cultural study is an extremely important activity for a multinational marketer. There are a great many cross-cultural variations in consumer behavior that are of particular interest to the marketer operating in more than one culture. They are particularly obvious when one looks at cultural values or symbolic communications across cultures.

As differences in verbal communication system across cultures are found such as the symbolic communications, multinational marketers must also take that into active consideration for success in other cultures.

Understanding cross-cultures help marketers to understand values of other cultures which influences their purchase behavior. This understanding helps marketers making proper adaptations in their product, pricing, distribution, and promotion policies. No matter how outstanding the product a marketer produces, it cannot satisfy the needs of the entire market. Thus markets must be segmented. To segment markets effectively, marketers also require an understanding of other cultures. Values also determine whether people of a particular culture will be influenced by others in the society. Knowing this aspect of a culture helps marketers identifying reference groups that will have bearing on consumer behavior. Thus it helps marketers to tailor their promotional programs on specific reference group.

⁵ Engel J.F, Blackwell R.D., and Miniard P.W., *Consumer Behavior, Fifth Edition, The Dryden Press, USA, 1986, p. 397.*

People's views toward their environment also vary. These views influence their consumption to a great extent. Some view nature as finite and it should be protected. This led them toward seeking environmentally friendly products. Failure to understand people's views toward environment may influence marketers developing products that are likely to be rejected by them. Cross-cultural research helps them identifying views of a specific target market toward the environment thus developing products that will sell well in that culture. People's views toward themselves also vary requiring different types of products by them. They (views) determine their approaches and objectives toward their lives. Because of the variation in people's views toward themselves, people of a particular society are too much materialistic and try to consume whatever possible. Knowing people's view of themselves, again, helps marketers to devise appropriate strategies and this is possible through a cross-cultural analysis.

Finally, cross-cultural analysis helps marketers in understanding meanings of time, space, friendship, agreements, things, symbols, and etiquette across cultures and segments of a total culture, and they can make appropriate adaptations in their product, packaging, pricing, distribution, and communication strategies to be successful in overseas.

How to Adapt Your Marketing Decisions with Other Cultures?

To be successful in foreign markets, a marketer must adapt his marketing decisions with that of the new culture. Lot of companies made mistakes and incurred huge loss in overseas markets by following marketing strategies successful in their own cultures. Multinational marketers should take lessons from the tactical mistakes made by other marketers following the same strategy found successful in the home country. Therefore, adaptations are required with the foreign culture in terms of all marketing decisions. To make appropriate adaptations, number of questions must be asked by a multinational marketer to himself and answers must be sought. The right questions and their appropriate answers help marketers to adapt with the new culture. The questions are: (i) is the geographic area homogeneous or heterogeneous with respect to culture?; (ii) how does the cultural setting influence or determine product and service needs?; (iii) what needs can this product or a version of it fill in this culture or how could it be adapted to do so?; (iv) can enough of the group(s) needing the product afford the product?; (v) what values or patterns of values are relevant to the purchase and use of this product?; (vi) what is the distribution, political and legal structure concerning the product?; and, (vii) in what ways can we communicate about this product?.

Seeking answers to the above few questions may help marketers to think of adapting their marketing policies in an overseas culture. Let us now examine each of them in turn:

- ***Is the Geographic Area Homogeneous or Heterogeneous with Respect to Culture?*** Marketers must find out whether there is any distinct subcultures in the geographic area under consideration. All people in the same culture may not represent same consumption and life-style patterns. In UK, for example, Indian British, American British, Somalian British, and so on, may display different consumption behavior. Therefore, a standardized marketing policy will not be effective in such a culture.
- ***How does the Cultural Setting Influence or Determine Product and Service Needs?*** Same need, for example, is not satisfied by the same product, in all cultures. Transport need, for example, is satisfied by different modes in different cultures. A multinational marketer should determine the particular cultural setting under consideration that determines the needs of different products and services. Knowing this will help him to decide which product(s) to be offered for sale in the new culture.
- ***What Needs can this Product or a Version of it Fill in this Culture or How Could it be Adapted to Do So?*** Most firms examine a new market with an existing product or product technology in mind. Marketers should know exactly, what particular need might be satisfied by his product in the new culture. He should also try to find out what changes may be brought in his product to make it more acceptable in the new culture. He must be aware of the needs that exist in a culture, how they are presently met, and how his product can better meet one or more needs of the customers in the new culture. Bicycles, for example, meet the recreational needs in the developed countries, where it meets basic transportation needs in underdeveloped countries.
- ***Can Enough of the Group(s) Needing the Product Afford the Product?*** In this stage, a multinational marketer tries to know how many in the new culture requires his product, as well as the percentage of people who can afford to buy his product. Whether the credit purchase facilities will help more people to buy the product need also to be identified. Knowing the answers to this will help him decide on the price and credit policies.
- ***What Values or Patterns of Values are Relevant to the Purchase and Use of this Product?*** Since value system of a particular society influences consumption in a society, marketers should also know whether the existing values held by people will encourage the purchase and use of his product. If not, he can decide, whether any thing can be done to make the product consistent with the values held by people of the new culture.

A marketer should know exactly, what particular need might be satisfied by his product.

- ***What is the Distribution, Political and Legal Structure Concerning the Product?*** The same pattern of distribution of products is not followed in every culture. In Bangladesh, for example, consumer goods are distributed following very extensive distribution channels as people opt for it. The same channel may not work in other countries for the same type of product. In Western countries, for example, people prefer to buy their necessities from department stores or super markets, as they do not want to be disturbed at home. If a multinational marketer can identify the preferred channels of distribution, it will help him decide accordingly.
- ***In What ways Can We Communicate About this Product?*** No matter, how outstanding your product is, how attractive the price is, and how well its distribution channel is designed, it will not sell unless target customers are informed of the availability of the product. Different channels of communications are found to be effective in different cultures. In Bangladesh, for example, radio is found to be the most effective medium of communication, where in other cultures it may prove quite ineffective. To decide on the selection of communication medium, a multinational marketer should know which medium is going to be effective in the culture where he plans to enter with his product and decide accordingly.

It is imperative for a multinational marketer to know the answers to the above mentioned questions before he launches his product in a new culture. Knowing the answers to them will help him make necessary changes in his product, price, distribution, and communication strategies. The answers may be sought by studying the cognitive, material, and normative components of a culture .

Activity:

Interview two students from two different foreign cultures. Report their perceptions of the major differences in cultural values between their culture and the Bangladeshi culture.



Self Evaluation

Objective Questions

1. Marketing, now-a-days considered as a/an –
 - a. Local, regional, or national phenomenon
 - b. Multinational phenomenon
 - c. International phenomenon
 - d. Both b & c.

2. Differences in cultures exist because –
 - a. The problem solving needs of various societies have not been the same
 - b. The incomes of people of various societies have not been the same
 - c. Cultural change
 - d. All of the above.

3. Not only will solutions to problems of survival differ among cultures, but so will –
 - a. Related values
 - b. Ways of looking at events
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

4. People living in a fertile land will probably tend to build their way of life around –
 - a. The permanence of their homes
 - b. The seasonality of their agriculture
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

5. Some cultures equate time with –
 - a. Money
 - b. Importance
 - c. Work
 - d. Leisure.

6. Each culture has evolved its own rules regarding the –
 - a. Space around another person
 - b. His possessions
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

7. In the US, excessive touching of others, even good friends, during conversation is –
 - a. Common
 - b. Not common
 - c. Expected
 - d. None of the above.

8. Cross-cultural study or research is a technique applied for comparing cultures on the basis of –
 - a. Similarities
 - b. Differences
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

9. The study of the underlying determinants of observed regularities such as the modal needs, goals, values, and beliefs of a society has been termed the study of –
 - a. 'Explicit culture'
 - b. 'Implicit culture'
 - c. 'Cross culture'
 - d. None of the above.

10. Cross-cultural studies in anthropology often focus upon –
 - a. Social organization
 - b. Child rearing
 - c. Belief systems
 - d. All of the above.

11. Understanding cross-cultures helps marketers making proper adaptations in their –
 - a. Product, and promotion policies
 - b. Product and pricing policies
 - c. Product and distribution policies
 - d. All of the above.

12. People's views toward themselves determine their –
 - a. Approaches toward their lives
 - b. Objectives toward their lives
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

13. Cross-cultural analysis helps marketers in understanding meanings of –
 - a. Time, space, friendship and agreements
 - b. Things, symbols, and etiquette across cultures and segments of a total culture
 - c. Both a & b
 - d. None of the above.

14. Bicycles meets the recreational needs in the –
- Developed countries
 - Underdeveloped countries
 - Both a & b
 - None of the above.
15. In Bangladesh, consumer goods are distributed following –
- A very extensive distribution channels
 - A short distribution channels
 - Direct marketing method
 - None of the above.



Answers:

1. d, 2. a, 3. c, 4. c, 5. b, 6. c, 7. b, 8. c, 9. b, 10. d, 11. d, 12. c, 13. c, 14. a, 15. a.

Descriptive Questions

1. Define the concept of cross-culture and explain the use of cross-cultural study in marketing.
2. Explain how to adapt your marketing decisions with other cultures.