

International Marketing

Cultural Dynamics in Assessing Global Markets - Part 2

The elements of culture

- Culture was previously defined by identifying its **main elements** which are: values, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and thought processes
- International marketers must design products, distribution systems, and promotional programs with due consideration of each of them.

The elements of culture / rituals

- The **term ritual refers** to a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, irregular sequence and that tend to be repeated over time.
- **Ritual** is also a sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects, performed in an appropriate place.

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- **Rituals** are also patterns of behavior and interaction that are learned and repeated.
 - **Rituals** coordinate everyday interactions and special occasions. They let people know what to expect. E.g. marriage ceremonies, funerals, graduation rituals, dinner at a restaurant, holidays rituals, gift-giving rituals.

The elements of culture /Symbols

- **Symbols** are the basis of culture. A symbol is an object, word, or action that stands for something else with no natural relationship that is culturally defined.
- **Symbols** can be inherited or invented. Some symbols mean different things to different people.
- **Symbols take the form** of words, sounds, gestures, ideas or visual images and are used to convey other ideas and beliefs.
- **For example**, a red octagon may be a symbol for "STOP".

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- **Symbols** are also defined as gestures or objects that have meanings associated with them that are recognized by people who share a culture. Therefore, some symbols are actually **types of nonverbal communication**, while other symbols are in fact **material objects**.
 - A common nonverbal **symbol is shaking hands**, it commonly conveys friendship and is used as a sign of both greeting and departure.

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- **Some gestures are nearly universal:** smiles often represent joy, and crying often represents sadness. Other nonverbal symbols **vary across cultural contexts in their meaning.** A thumbs-up, for example, indicates positive reinforcement in the United States, whereas in Russia and Australia, it is an offensive curse
 - Examples of **symbols that are objects** are flags. The U.S. flag is a prime example. For most Americans, the flag is not just a piece of cloth with red and white stripes and white stars against a field of blue. Instead, it is a symbol of freedom, democracy, and other American values and, accordingly, inspires pride and patriotism.

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- **Language** is also the most obvious part of symbolic systems.
 - **Language** is a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, gestures, marks, or especially articulate vocal sounds.
 - **Language** is a system of sounds, gestures and marks that have meanings understood within a cultural group.
 - **Language** is the cornerstone of culture. It reflects a culture's identity.

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- Culture passed through language. People who speak **the same language** often share the same culture. Countries with **many languages** often choose one language for business/education/government (lingua franca).
 - The **successful international marketer** must achieve expert communication, which requires a thorough understanding of the language as well as the ability to speak it.

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- Language capability serves **several distinct roles in international marketing**:
 1. Language **aids in information gathering and evaluation efforts**. Rather than rely completely on the opinions of others, the manager is able to see and hear personally what is going on.
 2. Language permits a **clearer understanding** of the situation.
 3. Language **provides access to local society**. Although English may be widely spoken, and may even be the official company language, speaking the local language may make a dramatic difference. **For example**, firms that translate promotional materials and information are seen as being serious about doing business in the country.

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4. Language capability is increasingly important in **company communications**, whether within the corporate family or with channel members
 5. Language provides more than the ability to communicate. It extends beyond mechanics **to the interpretation of contexts.**

The elements of culture / Beliefs

- **Beliefs** are convictions that people hold to be true.
- Superstitions play a large role in a society's belief system and therefore, to make light of superstitions in other cultures can be an expensive mistake.
- The number 13 in the western hemisphere is considered unlucky, where as the number 8 in China connotes "prosperity."

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- Much of what we learn to believe comes from religious training.
 - Many of our beliefs are secular in nature. What Westerners often call superstition may play quite a large role in a society's belief system in another part of the world.
 - **For example**, in parts of Asia, ghosts, fortune telling can all be integral elements of society.

The elements of culture /Thought processes

- **Thought processes** refers to the degree to which ways of thinking vary across cultures.
- **For example,** new studies are demonstrating cultural differences in consumer impatience and in how consumers make decisions about products—culture seems to matter more in snap judgments than in longer deliberations.

Cultural Sensitivity

- **Cultural sensitivity** is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong.
- **Cultural sensitivity** begins with a recognition that there are differences between cultures. These differences are reflected in the ways that different groups communicate and relate to one another.

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- Marketers must understand how their own cultures influence their assumptions about another culture.
 - The more exotic the situation, the more sensitive, tolerant, and flexible one needs to be.
 - Being culturally sensitive will reduce conflict and improve communications and thereby increase success in collaborative relationships.

Cultural distance

- **Cultural distance** is defined as some measure of the extent to which cultures are similar or different. cultural distance is measured on the country level. It is a given and cannot be controlled by management.
- **Psychic distance** occurs when management believes there are significant differences between home and host cultures. Therefore, it is measured on the individual level and not the country level, as is the case with cultural distance.
- Both cultural and psychic distances affect how management formulates global marketing strategy. Cultural differences influence consumer behavior and preferences for various products.

The necessity for adapting to cultural differences

- **Adaptation** is a key concept in international marketing, and willingness to adapt is a crucial attitude.
- **Adaptation** does not require business executives to forsake their ways and change to local customs; rather, executives must be aware of local customs and be willing to accommodate those differences that can cause misunderstandings.
- **Essential to effective adaptation** is awareness of one's own culture and the recognition that differences in others can cause anxiety, frustration, and misunderstanding of the host's intentions.

Criteria for cultural adaptation

- As a guide to adaptation, all who wish to deal with individuals, firms, or authorities in foreign countries should be able **to meet 10 basic criteria:**
 1. Open tolerance.
 2. Flexibility.
 3. Humility.
 4. Justice/fairness.
 5. Ability to adjust to varying tempos.

Criteria for cultural adaptation cont'2

6. Curiosity/ interest.
7. Knowledge of the country.
8. Liking for others.
9. Ability to command respect.
10. Ability to integrate oneself into the environment.