

# Exploring the Influence of Culture on Marketing and Consumers

Veera

Panchal, Hillsborough High School

## Abstract

Culture significantly impacts people in all aspects of life, including their choices to purchase goods and services. Understanding the influence of culture on both consumers and sellers is crucial for navigating the business world. In this paper, I explore the various areas in which culture shapes marketing techniques and consumer behavior. This paper reveals relationships between concepts like language, social norms, and community movements, and how they are interconnected with choices in marketing and purchasing. Adapting to these key cultural aspects is crucial for businesses to stay competitive and further thrive. This paper includes examples of success stories, along with examples of those that have failed to navigate their way through cultural dynamics.

## Introduction

What drives a business to achieve exceptional success with its target audience? Large corporations that find success on a global scale have to look past just numbers and data. Quantitative factors such as prices and economic stability are widely recognized as influential to marketing and consumer behavior. However, cultural factors are also crucial in shaping consumer trends and determining business marketing strategies.

Understanding these key components of culture is essential for a business to remain competitive. Without considering important factors such as social movements or cultural beliefs, a company risks failing before entering a foreign market. Likewise, disregarding the spending habits and levels of indulgence of a specific culture can be the difference between success and failure. By delving into these cultural dimensions, this paper highlights the diverse ways in which culture impacts both businesses and consumers. The goal of this research is to provide a multidimensional understanding of the various cultural forces that shape consumer preferences, and how businesses can use this knowledge to their advantage to dominate markets through more effective, culturally aware marketing strategies (The Culture Factor Group, 2024).

Today, culture not only defines a niche group of people. Instead, as technology allows for an increasing awareness of different cultures, beliefs, and ideas, people are creating their cultural norms, apart from those set by geographic boundaries. As the world becomes more interconnected, there will be even more changes that businesses must adapt to in order to stay relevant to their audience. Moreover, while globalization continues to blend cultures together, entirely new ones will be formed at the same time. This makes it critical for companies to be aware of these changes and reshape their marketing strategies to fit into these new trends.

Ultimately, this paper will focus on demonstrating how a successful marketing strategy must also consider how cultural aspects significantly shape consumer behavior. By bringing together insights from studies of culture and current marketing examples, this paper will showcase how a better understanding of diverse

cultures can broaden a company's audience (The Culture Factor Group, 2024).

## Background

### *Culture*

Culture can be many things in different contexts. For example, it can be the customary beliefs, social forms, and even material traits of a racial, religious, or social group (Merriam-Webster, 2019). A simpler way to put it is that, "Culture influences what feels right, normal, and desirable" (Williams, 2019). Hofstede divides culture into six subsections, as shown in Figure 1: power distance, indulgence versus restraint, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and masculinity versus femininity. Culture shapes how people perceive and interact with the world. These subconsciously drilled-in beliefs and habits play a much larger role in different aspects of life than one may think. Specifically, regarding marketing and consumer behavior, culture impacts people's preferences, spending habits, decision-making processes, along with so much more (Weil, 2019).

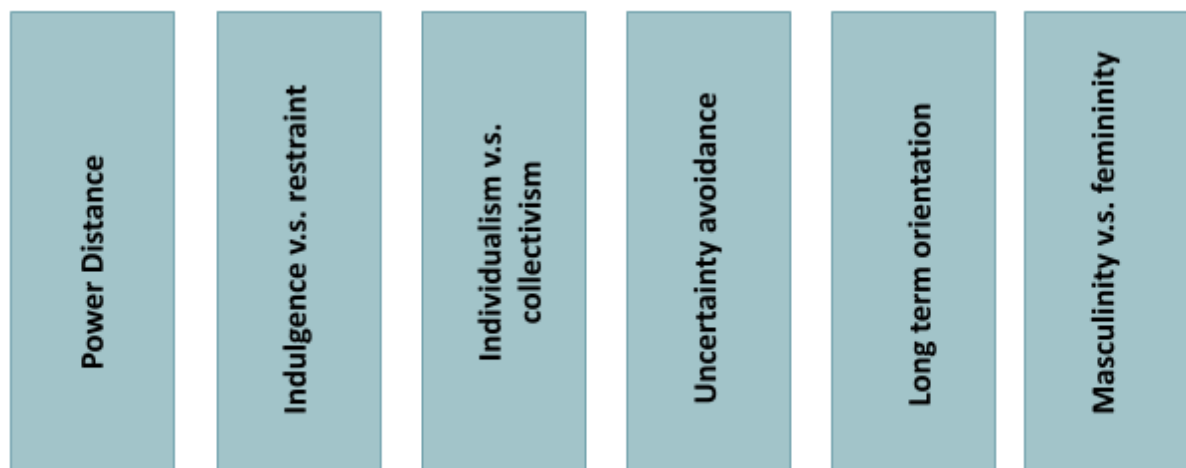


Figure 1.  
Inspired by Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

In order to navigate a diverse global economy, businesses must tailor their strategies to adapt to different cultural contexts. Culture does not only extend to the products themselves; however, it plays a role in how those products are presented and sold. For example, understanding crucial parts of a culture such as symbols, language, and social norms is essential to create appealing, but respectful marketing campaigns. A business may have a typical standard or style in their home country, but spreading a product or service internationally, or even just across communities requires adaptations.

Companies balance remaining true to their brand while being able to connect with a broader audience (M, 2024). Overall, effective global marketing requires sensitivity towards the beliefs and culture of a company's target audience, in order to maintain success.

## Culture and Consumer Behavior

Culture and consumer behavior have many strong connections leading to different patterns, changes, and systems in the business world. In this section, we will discuss indulgence, social movements, individualism, and religion, and see how these pillars of culture impact the various habits and decisions of everyday consumers.

### ***Indulgence***

Hofstadter defines the dimension of indulgence as the extent to which people can manage their inclinations. Having a lesser control is being indulgent and having a stricter control is to restrain (The Culture Factor Group, 2024). This could be in regards to luxury items, status symbols, or just things that bring someone enjoyment. Personal indulgence and spending on unnecessary items hold strong links with how different cultures perceive self-gratification. In general, an indulgent society emphasizes not only basic needs but also human desires; however, a restrained society limits one's desires and sticks more closely to strict spending practices (The Culture Factor Group, 2024).

In the context of business and marketing, a luxury company thinking of branching out internationally may need to consider a factor like this before opening a shop in a less indulgent country. Consumers who have been born and brought up in an atmosphere that heavily values saving rather than spending would likely hesitate to respond positively to a new luxe car dealership, or fine dining restaurant. One widely recognized example of a high-indulgence country could include the United States or Great Britain (Weil, 2019). These countries have cultural norms that value personal autonomy, less moral discipline, and the pursuit of happiness (The Culture Factor Group, 2024).

Moreover, cultures vary significantly in their approach to indulgence. For example, countries with a culture of high-indulgence such as the United States put a greater emphasis on a person's own personal pleasure and immediate gratification. This leads to how many fast food chains like McDonalds, Burger King, and Subway thrive there because they offer instant meals at comparatively low prices. Along with that, their immediate satisfaction attracts customers from indulgent countries, but also budget-conscious countries where affordability and saving are highly valued (Pavlova, 2019). Overall, the spending habits of consumers are a key pillar to the cultural impacts that businesses must consider to succeed.

### ***Social movements***

The National Institute of Health defines a social movement as an organized effort to change laws and practices by people (Roundtable on Population Health Improvement et al., 2014). Cultural movements such as environmentalism, feminism, and other forms of activism have significantly influenced consumer behavior. These movements have led to increased demand for sustainable products, ethical brands, and inclusive marketing. In the United States over the past decade, and most significantly in the "post-covid era" businesses have seen a drastic shift in consumer preference towards inclusivity and moral transparency with the brands they purchase from. Not only this, a strong sense of what is known as "collective consciousness," to make politically correct choices has integrated in recent years with the choices consumers make to purchase goods and services (FasterCapital, 2024).

Some more examples include the fair trade movements, advocating for people to purchase only from brands that pay proper wages to workers in less industrialized countries (FasterCapital, 2024). Along with that comes corporate social responsibility, which acknowledges how consumers favor brands that have a positive contribution to society. Consumers now actively seek out companies that support social causes or take a stand on controversial conflicts (FasterCapital, 2024). Brands that effectively engage with social movements often see enhanced brand loyalty, while those that fail to adapt may face backlash.

An impactful example of this was a change to LGBTQ+-friendly companies (FasterCapital, 2024). Many members and allies of this community focus on supporting brands that reflect societal progress in this movement, which in turn has increased visibility for brands in LGBTQ+ inclusive countries. Another prevalent aspect is racial inclusivity. In an age where any moment can be captured on the phone in seconds, people have been able to see the impacts of racial inequality in today's world. Hence, supporting brands

that support reform and change in those areas has become more important to consumers.

Overall, in today's world, consumers seek brands that prioritize social progress, influencing society's cultural norms, and reshaping what is considered to be appropriate and positive.

### ***Individualism***

Individualism is the idea of highly valuing freedom of thought and action for each person (Individualism, n.d.). Individualistic countries such as the United States and many Western European countries, place a strong focus on personal identity and uniqueness. Consumers in individualistic countries often want to buy products that reflect their personal style, preferences, and identity. Marketing strategies in these cultures frequently highlight uniqueness, personal achievement, and self-expression. These cultural values play an important role in forming the attitudes and behavior of customers and can significantly impact the decisions of consumers (M, 2024).

Not all countries emphasize these kinds of values, however. Specifically, collectivist consumers are those who emphasize belongingness and acceptance in society. Their decisions as consumers are more likely to stem from recommendations from family, instead of focusing on just their desires (M, 2024). This is an important aspect for brands to take into consideration, as customers in more collectivistic cultures may seek satisfaction from community-driven campaigns, and emphasis on shared values (M, 2024). These cultural values can stem greatly from ethnic groups and religions. For example, as mentioned previously, the United States, Canada, and many European countries are more individualistic. Brands that embrace the inclusivity of all people and their unique identity may thrive. On the other hand, many East Asian, South Asian, and Latin American cultures are very collectivist (Nickerson, 2023). With exceptions, of course, in countries like Mexico, Pakistan, and Japan many consumers prefer and respond more positively to 'mom and pop' businesses, brands with impacts on the community, and products or services designed for groups or communal use.

Another important aspect of collectivism is the emphasis on respect for tradition and cultural heritage (Nickerson, 2023). While ethnic demographics play a large role in shaping individualistic or collectivistic societies, the age cohort also does. Typically younger people such as Gen-Z and millennials have a greater emphasis on their personal desires and ambitions, while older generations have a greater focus on their family and community welfare. This impacts how different groups react in consumer settings.

Another aspect playing a large role in forming individualistic cultures amongst certain generations is social media. Social media plays an important role in people's lives today, specifically millennials and Gen-Z. Many social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram help foster a culture of self-expression and allow people to showcase their own unique identities on the internet. This emphasis on individuality through personal style and creativity has caused younger generations to tend to prioritize their desires. All of this plays a role in consumer choices because children, and teens as buyers will be more drawn to products and brands that cater to this. Social media also highlights self-indulgence by showcasing new products and styles so that people are more likely to keep spending on nonessential things for themselves. The culture of social media has brought on an age of insane amounts of influencers showcasing free public relations products, prompting more new products, and over-consumption, making teenagers and social media users more likely to make unnecessary and impulsive purchases (Williams, 2024).

Overall in regards to culture and consumer behavior, individualistic and collectivistic forces play a large role in how people make choices to purchase goods or services.

### ***Religion***

Religious beliefs can shape consumer behavior by influencing purchasing restrictions, preferences, and

even ethical considerations. These aspects have a strong hold on consumers, leaving them to purchase from brands that align with their values.

One prominent example of religious beliefs intertwining with consumer behavior is in the food industry. Many prominent religions across the world assert some sort of food restrictions. For example, Hinduism forbids followers from consuming beef products, Islam restricts non halal foods including pork, and Mormonism has laws limiting the consumption of coffee or tea (Christian, 2003). These are just a few of the many religious implications that impact the decisions people make as consumers. Some may seem obvious, but they are crucial for businesses to take into account to prevent failure and backlash. For example, Gujarat, India has an overarching vegetarian and Hindu population. Setting up a business that sells beef or

animal-based food products could potentially be seen as not only a poor business decision but also offensive, causing a company to damage its brand.

Nevertheless, selecting business locations is just one aspect of the process; ensuring that these choices align with and respect local value systems presents an entirely different challenge. Specifically, if a company uses the wrong symbols or asserts a certain message that is interpreted wrong by a specific religious demographic, it could lead to more challenges. One example of this is Chick-fil-A and the backlash the company received due to its leadership's stance on LGBTQ+ related subjects. Being such a popular American franchise, consumers responded negatively and even boycotted the company when news spread about the company's donations to anti-LGBTQ+ organizations (National LGBTQ Task Force, 2023).

On the contrary, a successful adaptation to religious and cultural practices is with McDonalds. McDonalds is widely known for its "global" friendly menu, and that has been a strong factor leading to its success in such a variety of markets. For example, in India, where a significant population adheres to Hindu dietary restrictions, McDonald's refrained from offering beef products and instead focused on some other meat, but mostly vegetarian options (BBC, 2017). This adaptation caused a positive customer retention rate and prevented the company from alienating potential customers. This connects to how consumers are more likely to have positive experiences from companies and services that adapt to their targeted demographic, whether that be socially or religiously.

### **Culture and Marketing Strategies**

As culture and consumer behavior are so heavily intertwined, businesses must adapt and change their marketing strategies to navigate their way. In this section, we will discuss how indulgence, social movements, individualism, and religion play a role in shaping the ways businesses go about presenting their product to consumers.

#### ***Indulgence***

Indulgence refers to the extent to which a culture allows for the gratification of human desires and the pursuit of leisure. The dimension of restraint versus indulgence examines how much a society satisfies its desires and the extent to which it manages impulses (Wale, 2024). According to Hofstede's dimensions, cultures that score high on indulgence such as the United States and Australia, tend to embrace consumerism and prioritize enjoyment. In general, as explained in the previous section, countries with cultures that support high indulgence are more likely to be full of consumers willing to spend money on nonessentials, while countries with more restraining cultures will likely regulate spending behavior (Indulgence vs. Restraint, n.d.).



For example, countries with a higher indulgence rating likely feel happy and have control of their own lives. Conversely, in a low-indulgence country such as Russia, indulgence is usually illustrated as being wrong (Indulgence vs. Restraint, n.d.). This concept of consumers from different cultures and indulgence backgrounds ties together with the way businesses market and sell products for effective outcomes. Specifically, in terms of risk-taking, indulgence positively influences businesses when deciding on taking risks because it creates a buffer for any negative consequences. In other words, appealing to a population that is ready to indulge is much easier than one that hesitates to spend money, so there is a lesser risk for businesses to set up shop in indulgent societies.

Moreover, indulgence drives innovation and expansion for many goods and services.

Businesses can be motivated to take advantage of lesser-risk markets and grow their product and consumer base (Alipour & Yaprak, 2022). Overall, to sustain a multicultural consumer audience, businesses must be able to adapt and make changes based on what appeals to a specific cultural group. One example of this could simply be font and color choice. Brighter colors and larger and more luxuries appearing in images may be highly appealing to indulgent cultures. On the flip side, a minimalistic and compact design could attract more restrained consumers (Chatterjee, 2024). Another example is evoking different messages with your product. If businesses are looking to appeal to indulgent cultures then focusing on pleasure, fun, and enjoyment may be their strategy; however, for restrained cultures, discipline and longevity may be a better marketing strategy (Chatterjee, 2024)

Understanding the concept of indulgence is important for companies that want to diversify their audience. By tailoring marketing strategies to adapt to cultural attitudes related to spending, brands can engage with consumers.

### ***Social Movements***

Social movements, ranging from environmental sustainability to social justice, have a large impact on brand identity and marketing strategies. Throughout the years, consumers have become more socially conscious, and they tend to prefer to support brands that align with their values. A social movement is defined as a social movement by citizens and communities, joined together by similar goals to act to overcome a pressing issue (UNICEF, n.d.).

In the present day, there are innumerable movements that everyday consumers are taking a stand on. This means businesses must take a stand as well so that they can attract more consumers. As Standard University puts it, “Marketers must learn to understand and relate to people in interconnected groups; instead of convincing people to believe an ad message, marketers must try to tap into what it is that people already believe and care about” (Branding Social Change? (SSIR), 2012). This is what they call “movement marketing” and its meaning is very literal. Instead of focusing on selling the product itself, brands need to sell their message and morals, which have been becoming increasingly important to consumers (Branding Social Change? (SSIR), 2012).

One well-known example of this was Patagonia’s stand on environmentalism. Patagonia put out statements regarding animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and equitable and safe working conditions (Patagonia, 2024). Through this, they have indirectly made their brand a key factor in these social movements, leading to consumers being attracted to their products. Their marketing strategies often highlight their commitment to ethical practices, and this overall creates a loyal consumer base, also aligning with these values (Patagonia, 2024).

Moreover, another example of a company that established its stance on social issues includes Ben and Jerry’s. Directly on their website, they have a page with all of the causes they support and how they are

continuing to make an impact. For example, they write about their climate impact and how they produce ice cream in a way that reduces carbon footprint, or how they have partnered with organizations to take a stand with the Black Lives Matter movement (Ben & Jerry's, 2024). Overall, in addition to advocating for social changes, they engage with customers who share the same values and believe in supporting these causes as well, leading to a strengthened customer bond and trust.

On the other hand, an example of a marketing failure could be Nivea and their “white is purity” deodorant advertisement. This was released and aimed at their Middle Eastern market and it was withdrawn shortly after it faced backlash for promoting colorism and ethnic discrimination (BBC, 2017). This example showcases how brands can fail to realize misleading marketing that can be taken poorly by consumers, especially when there are rising movements trying to stop colorism.

Overall, as social movements continue to shape consumer behavior brands must also recognize these changes and adapt to them. This is important because as companies align their marketing strategies with changing times they can see better consumer engagement and differentiate themselves from competitors.

### ***Individualism***

Individualism emphasizes personal autonomy, self-expression, and independence. These characteristics are predominantly found in Western cultures such as the United States and Canada. This cultural trait significantly impacts consumer behavior, leading to companies seeking to leverage this by promoting messages that align with a cultural group's level of individualism. For example, when aiming for a product to sell in a more individualistic culture, businesses may highlight personal achievements or self-expression.

On the other hand, group benefits or longevity may be a leading factor for marketing to a collectivist society (Chatterjee, 2024). In order for companies to build lasting relationships with consumers they must focus on their target audience and adapt their marketing styles accordingly. Moreover, one example of a brand that markets itself towards individualism is Nike. Nike creates marketing campaigns centered around personal fitness, achievements, goals, and being one's best self. Their products promote health and fitness, leading them to sell well in many individualistic societies such as the United States. Even their slogan “Just do it” implies a right to self-determination which aligns well with individualistic cultures, overall promoting their success (Casnocha, 2010). Another prominent example of a brand focusing on self-expression is Dr. Martens, a popular shoe brand. This company promotes values of nonconformity which is appealing to individualistic cultures that want to express their unique identities through fashion (Dr. Martens, 2010). Moreover, some brands aim to do the opposite to appeal to different audiences. For example, Airbnb promotes the idea of belonging and local experiences. This emphasizes themes of community and family which are important in collectivist societies. Through doing this, they are able to expand their business outside of just the U.S. but also to countries with lower individualism scores such as those in Asia.

Overall, recognizing the significance of individualism allows brands to create personalized marketing messages that resonate with their target audiences. Another way Airbnb creates a sense of community with customers in collectivist cultures is through their collection of stories of their customers and travelers (AdExpert.Inc, 2024). This builds a sense of transparency, but also an international community that can be appealing to customers who prefer group or shared benefits.

Overall, companies that align with the desire for self-expression can enhance their consumer engagement and loyalty to create a connection with consumers, driving their brand's success.

### ***Religion***

According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, more than 75% of consumer decisions are based on culture, meaning businesses must also make decisions based on culture as well (Chatterjee, 2024). Within the context of culture, religion, and generally accepted beliefs have a great influence on consumer behavior and brand perception. When brands accommodate certain religious practices or beliefs into their business, they can broaden their customer base and build a stronger connection with consumers they already have. Brands must consider religion when expanding to different cultures, as it plays a significant role in many people's lives. Understanding these beliefs can help businesses connect more with their audience. One prominent example could be dietary restrictions. As mentioned in the previous section, many of the most common religions have restrictions on food consumption. This has caused companies to shift their products to accommodate this. For example, Pillsbury, a food company specializing in baked goods, is 100% Kosher certified (OU Kosher, 2012). This is important for them to build trust and attract Jewish consumers who are looking for this in a company.

Another example is Dairy Queen, a popular American fast-food chain. Dairy Queen has over 6,000 locations across the globe, including some in the Middle East and North Africa (Dairy Queen, n.d.). Although Dairy Queen is an American-based brand, as they expanded to different cultural contexts, they adapted their menu to accommodate more people. Specifically in their locations such as Qatar and the UAE, they adopted a 100% halal menu since those countries have a predominantly Muslim population (HalalRun, 2025). This is important because without doing this, a large majority of the population in those locations would not be able to consume Dairy Queen products, overall leading to a business failure. Instead, by making these locations 100% halal, they built a relationship with consumers based on trust and acceptance, which will help them in the long run.

By embracing cultural sensitivity in marketing strategies, companies can build stronger connections with consumers across diverse backgrounds. Understanding different religions and general beliefs allows brands to develop more effective marketing messages that resonate better with their audience. Overall, this approach respects cultural values and positions companies as adaptable and diverse.

### **Future Trends**

Cultural boundaries have been set in place by several generations, but as years have gone by, people have adapted, blended, and found similarities between many distinct cultures. As globalization continues to spread its force and interconnect communities and people, more cultural boundaries will eventually be broken, and new ones will be created. There will be new social movements, spending patterns, and different emphasis on religion.

In the years to come, new technology such as artificial intelligence and advanced robots may impact the decisions that businesses make and the way they operate in foreign markets.

However, with a rise in technology, it will become crucial for companies to maintain a sense of trust and personalization, to stay connected with their customers.

Regardless of the cultural changes, some businesses have successfully adapted while others have not. This highlights what it takes for companies to thrive and build loyalty with their customers. In the future, businesses will likely see more social movements, and the blending of values and morals into a more interconnected society, overall impacting the choices consumers make.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the immense interconnectedness between different aspects of culture with consumer patterns and marketing strategies showcases the need for businesses to make calculated decisions to grow and maintain their consumer platform. Indulgence impacts people's choices on how much they want to spend, impacting their decision to purchase unnecessary items. Additionally, social movements play a role in impacting people's decisions to support certain brands that align with their core values and take a stand on causes they believe in. Moreover, individualism changes people's focus from community-centered spending to self-indulgence, and this impacts the message consumers seek when purchasing a good or service. Lastly, religion instills beliefs into individuals, associating them with specific symbols, messages, values, and practices that they often seek in consumer contexts. Overall, these factors all come together under culture which is a driving force impacting consumer decisions and marketing strategies.

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