

Consumer Behavior

12. Culture



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12.1. Definition of culture

Culture is the set of “values, attitudes, beliefs, ideas and other meaningful artifacts in the pattern of life adopted by people that help them interpret, evaluate and communicate as members of a society”

Culture is a social characteristic of people, serving the needs of the people making up the society.

It is learned by the process of socialization, defining the behaviors that are acceptable within the society.

It is cumulative, passes from generation to generation and has historical justification.

It is adaptive, changing in response to the needs of the society.

Rice, C. (1993). *Behavioural aspects of Marketing*, Butterworth Heinemann., Oxford.

12.2. Customs and rituals

Customs are established **patters of behavior adopted by the society**. They regulate social practices and define what behaviors are acceptable.

Folkways. An everyday custom widely accepted by the society. They also serve to highlight cultural differences.

Conventions. Folkways reinforced by time and usage. Often concerned with behaviors that the society considers polite. The penalties of non-compliance are not severe, but stronger than with folkways.

Mores. Accepted and strongly prescribed forms of behavior within the society covering the more significant social norms. Failing to comply results in significant reaction and punishment.

Laws. The formalized recognition of mores which the society deems as necessary for its well-being. Laws carry penalties for offenders.

Williams, K. C. (1981). *Behavioural aspects of Marketing*, Heinemann, Oxford.

Rituals have a **symbolic significance**. They are commonly **formal, ceremonial and public**. Ritual behavior often includes religious services or similar public demonstrations. Rituals enable the individual to publicly subscribe to the values of the culture.

Rites of passage usually accompany a **change of status** in the course of the **individual's life cycle**. These rituals are means of drawing attention to changes in social identity, and also offer a way to manage some of the tensions that these changes may involve. These rituals normally involve significant expenditure of resources, and offer **important marketing opportunities for selling the appropriate symbols**.

12.3. Cultural elements and institutions

Values, beliefs and religion.

Shared values play a key role in the integration of a society. Culture is partially a reflection of the ethical ideas accepted by the people making up that group. Religion is often the determinant of values, and beliefs are fundamental for religion.

Language and communication.

Different cultures speak different languages. Language is particularly rich in communicating feelings and emotions as well as facts. A specific problem arises when products or messages attempt to cross cultural barriers. Words may have different meanings and associations in different languages.

Politics, law and education

The **political system** adopted by a nation will be an important determinant of the culture. It will **allocate influence to certain groups of individuals**, affecting the way things are done. Laws formalize the accepted and proscribed behaviors. Education plays an important role in the whole process of socialization.

Customs, artifacts and technology

Cultural differences can be seen attending to sacred symbols, intensiveness of the use of new technologies, appearance and dress, sense of gender roles, food and eating habits, time consciousness...

12.4. Cross-cultural issues

Some problems may appear when **marketing common products in a different culture**. While some products can be standardized in a global market, others are exclusive of a particular culture and difficult to adapt to different markets.

It is worth distinguishing between **macro-cultures and micro-cultures**. Micro-cultures are the different minor cultural groups into which a society or nation can be divided attending to differentiating cultural elements.

The main micro-cultures of any society are based on **geography, ethnicity, religion, age and gender**.

12.5. Socialization and role

Socialization is the process by which the **culture of a society is transmitted to succeeding generations** so that they absorb all of its values and symbols and become a part of it.

It is **concerned with preparing individuals for the roles** that may be required of them and with the continuation of the culture itself.

The process **focuses on the relations between the individual and the society**, modifying his behavior from infancy to conform to the demands of the social system.

Socialization takes place via a number of agencies including **family, school, peer groups and mass media**.

Role is what the occupant of a given position is expected to do in that position in a particular social context. There will be behaviors that the person holding a particular role will be expected to exhibit.

Roles define a relationship between individuals. A **role set** is the group of individuals interacting with the subject who is performing a specific role. Membership of the role set will change according to the roles being played.