Cross-Cultural & Environmental Influences On Consumer Behaviour In Current Scenario

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Abstract
Everybody in this world is a consumer. The heterogeneity among people across the world makes understanding consumer buying behaviour an intricate and challenging task. Every day of our life we are buying and consuming an incredible variety of goods and services. However, we all have different tastes, likes and dislikes and adopt different behaviour patterns while making purchase decisions. Many factors affect how we, as individuals and as societies, live, buy, and consume. External influences such as culture, ethnicity, and social class influence how individual consumers buy and use products, and help explain how groups of consumers behave. The study of culture encompasses all aspects of a society such as its religion, knowledge, language, laws, customs, traditions, music, art, technology, work patterns, products, etc. Culture is an extremely critical and all pervasive influence in our life. The purpose of the study was to aware about the Impact of cultural & environmental influences on consumer behaviour.

Keywords:

Introduction
Consumer behavior which is comparatively a new field of study which evolved just after the Second World War. The seller’s market has disappeared and buyers market has come up. This led to paradigm shift of the manufacturer’s attention from product to consumer and specially focused on the consumer behavior. Consumer is regarded as the king in modern marketing. In a market economy, the concept of consumer is given the highest priority, and every effort is made to encourage consumer satisfaction. Consumer behavior covers a broad variety of consumers based on diversity in age, sex, culture, taste, preference, educational level, income level, etc. Consumer behavior can be defined as “the decision process and physical activity engaged in evaluating, acquiring, using or disposing of goods and services.”

For the purpose of studying consumer behavior, culture can be defined as the sum total of learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to guide and direct the consumer behavior of all members of that society. Howard and Sheth have defined culture as —A selective, manmade way of responding to experience, a set of behavioral patternl. Thus, culture consists of traditional ideas and in particular the values, which are attached to these ideas. It includes knowledge, belief, art, morale, law, customs and all other habits acquired by man as a member of society. An accepted concept about culture is that includes a set of learned beliefs, values, attitudes, habits and forms of behavior that are shared by a society and are transmitted from generation to generation within that society. Culture also determines what is acceptable with product advertising. Culture determines what people wear, eat, reside and travel. Cultural values in India are good health, education, respect for age and seniority. But in our culture today, time scarcity is a growing problem, which implies a change in meals.

Cultural Influences
Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society. Culture influences the pattern of living, of consumption, of decision-making by individuals. Culture is acquired. It can be acquired from the family, from the region or from all that has been around us while we were growing up and learning the ways of the world. Culture forms a boundary within which an individual thinks and acts. When one thinks and acts beyond these boundaries, he is adopting a cross-cultural behavior and there are cross-cultural influences as well. The nature of cultural influences is such that we are seldom
aware of them. One feels, behaves, and thinks like the other members of the same culture. It is all pervasive and is present everywhere. Material culture influences technology and how it brings cultural changes like use of telephones, mobile phones, clothing styles and fashions, gives the marketers a chance to improve the product, packing, etc. to meet the needs of the customers. Norms are the boundaries that culture sets on the behaviour. Norms are derived from cultural values, which are widely told beliefs that specify what is desirable and what is not. Most individuals obey norms because it is natural to obey them. Culture outlines many business norms, family norms, behaviour norms, etc. How we greet people, how close one should stand to others while conducting business, the dress we wear and any other patterns of behaviour. Culture keeps changing slowly over time; and is not static. Changes take place due to rapid technologies. In case of emergency, war, or natural calamities, marketers and managers must understand the existing culture as well as the changing culture and culture of the country where the goods are to be marketed. Major companies have adapted themselves to international culture and are accepted globally. Coca Cola is sold all over the world. Procter & Gamble and other companies give cross-cultural training to their employees. By making cross-cultural mistakes, many companies have difficulty in pushing their products for example,

(i) Coca Cola had to withdraw its 2 liters bottle from Spain, because it did not fit in the local refrigerator
(ii) Many countries are very traditional and do not like women displayed on the products. This acts as a detriment to business in those countries.
(iii) McDonald don’t sell beef products in India as that is not accepted in Indian culture.

Environment Oriented Values
These values reflects the view of society towards the relationship with environment. It has following aspects:

- **Cleanliness:** If a culture lays too much stress on cleanliness. There is scope for the sale of beauty creams, soaps, deodorants, insecticides, washing powder, vacuum cleaner, etc. In western countries, a lot of emphasis is placed on this aspect and perfumes and deodorants are widely used.
- **Performance/status:** A status oriented society cares for higher standards of living, and chooses quality goods and established brand names and high prices items. This is true for the United States, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and most Arabic countries. In performance oriented societies, where rewards and prestige is based on an individual's performance, less importance is given to brand names. Products which function equally well and may not be big brand names are used. Germans do not give the same amount of emphasis to brand names. The marketers adopt strategies accordingly.
- **Tradition/change:** Traditional oriented societies stick to the old product and resist innovation or new techniques. In traditional societies, there is less scope for new products, and old traditional products are in greater demand. In some societies which are upwardly mobile, consumers are looking for modern methods, new products, new models and new techniques.
- **Risk taking/security:** An individual who is in a secure position and takes a risk can be either considered venturesome or foolhardy. This depends on the culture of the society. For developing new entrepreneurs risk taking is a must. It leads to new product development, new advertising themes and new channels of distribution. Security oriented societies have little chances of development and innovation.
- **Problem solving/fatalist:** A society can be optimistic and have a problem solving attitude or, be inactive and depend on fate. This has marketing implications on the registering of complaints when consumers are dissatisfied with the purchase of the products. Advertising plays an important part and gives guidance to the consumer, and removes these doubts to a great extent.
- **Nature:** There are differences in attitude over nature and its preservation. Consumers stress on packing materials that are recyclable and environment friendly. Some countries give great
importance to stop environmental pollution and to recycling of products. Companies like P&G, Colgate-Palmolive captured a great extent of the market by offering products which are less harmful to the environment. They also use ingredients in the products which are not harmful in any way.

**Self-Oriented Values**
These values are the objective or approaches to the life that are found desirable by the society.

- **Active/passive**: Whether a physically active approach to life is valued more highly than a less active orientation. An active approach leads to taking action all the time and not doing anything. In many countries, women are also taking an active part in all activities. This makes the society a highly active one, where everybody is involved in work.
- **Material/ non-material**: In many societies money is given more importance, and a lot of emphasis is on being material minded. While in many societies things like comfort, leisure and relationships get precedence over being materialistic. Materialism can be of two types
  a) Instrumental materialism, which is the acquisition of things to enable one to do something or achieve something. Cars are used for transportation. People like to possess things of material value which would help them to bring efficiency.
  b) Terminal materialism is the requisition of materialism for the sake of owing it rather than for use. Art is acquired for owing it. Cultural differences play an important role in this type of materialism. Instrumental materialism is common in the United States of America, whereas Japanese advertisements are mostly dominating terminal materialism.
- **Hard work/leisure**: This has marketing implications on labour saving products and instant foods. Some societies value hard work and consider it as a fuller life. Others adopt labour saving devices and instant foods to have more leisure time at their disposal.
- **Postponed gratification/ immediate gratification**: Should one save for the rainy day or live for the day? Sacrifice the present for the future, or live only for the day? Some countries like The Netherlands and Germany consider buying against credit cards as living beyond one’s means, whereas credit cards are very popular in America and other countries having a different cultural orientation, some prefer cash to debt. Some societies save for tomorrow; others enjoy the present and spend lavishly.
- **Sexual gratification/Abstinence**: Some traditional societies curb their desires, food, drinks or sex, beyond a certain requirement. Muslim cultures are very conservative, and do not want their women to be seen in public or be exposed, so the Polaroid camera which gives instant photographs can be purchased and pictures can be taken by the family members without their women being exposed to the developers in a photo lab.
- **Humor/ serious**: Should we take life lightly and laugh it off on certain issues or, take everything seriously? This is another aspect of culture. Advertising personnel selling techniques and promotion may revolve around these themes and the way the appeal for a product is to be made in various cultures.

**Other Oriented Values**
It is the societies view of relationship between people. The relationship influences marketing practices. If the society values collective activity, decisions will be taken in a group. It gives rise to following questions which affect consumer behavior.

- **Individual/ collective**: Whether individual initiation has more value than collective activity?
- **Romantic orientation**: This depicts whether the communication is more effective which emphasizes courtship or otherwise. In many countries a romantic theme is more successful.
- **Adult/ child theme**: Is family life concentrated round children or adults? What role do children play in decision-making?
- **Masculine/ Feminine**: Whether the society is male dominant or women dominant or balanced.
• Competitive/Cooperation: Whether competition leads to success. This is achieved by forming alliances with others.
• Youth/age: Are prestige roles assigned to younger or older members of the society. American society is youth oriented and Korean is age oriented. Decisions are taken by mature people in Korea.

Conclusion
To determine whether and how to enter a foreign market, we need to conduct some form of cross-cultural consumer analysis. Cross-cultural consumer analysis can be defined as the effort to determine to what extent the consumers of two or more nations are similar or different. Such analysis can provide marketers with an understanding of the psychological, social, and cultural characteristics of the foreign consumers they wish to target, so that they can design effective marketing strategies for the specific national markets involved. A major objective of cross-cultural consumer analysis is to determine how consumers in two or more societies are similar and how they are different. But there are still some problems that are needed to address like
1. Problems related to product selection: The marketer going for cross cultural marketing has to select the customers/market not on the basis of the superficial similarities of age or income, but by using the real motivating factors that prompt them to accept or reject products.
2. Problems related to promotion/marketing communication: e.g. Ariel in the Middle East and also Pepsi.
3. Problems related to pricing: the marketer has to adjust his pricing policies according to the local economic conditions and customs.
4. Problems related to selection of distribution channels: in Japan, P & G used this to sell soap.

References