

## **IMPACT OF CULTURE ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Every purchase that an individual makes is often a result of the influences he draws from his culture - both the one that he's born into as well as the one that he's drawn from his surroundings. Each cultural group is governed by certain values that they prioritise over others thus forming the guiding principles of their way of life as well as personal choices. This research paper explores the ways culture influences the purchasing patterns of consumers. The mode of study for the research has been secondary where already existing sources have been analysed and the category of research is explanatory.

**KEYWORDS:** Consumer behaviour, Consideration set, Psychological factors, Culture, Self-concept, Hofstede's six dimension theory

### **INTRODUCTION**

Consumer behaviour is the study of the behaviour of the consumer in-terms of the factors that affect the purchase decisions that they make as well as the factors that determine what products make it to their consideration set. Several factors influence the decision of a consumer – their culture, social and environmental factors. Psychological factors as well as the buyer's characteristics affect the buying decision of a consumer. Family, friends as well as the society that a consumer lives in determines the choices that people make. This review will explore the cultural factors that affect consumer behaviour.

Culture refers to the ideologies that a person draws from their community. It determines their values, belief system, thought process and the rituals and customs that they follow. Some values are drawn from those of their families while some are drawn from their surroundings. Culture isn't passed on through blood. They are taught from one generation to another through scriptures, teachings as well through decisions that one makes. They affect the choices a being makes in terms of their eating habits, the products they choose to consume, the marriage laws

and styles they believe in and their habits.

A consumer goes through the following processes while choosing a product:

- Need Recognition
- Information Search
- Evaluation of Purchases
- Purchase Decision
- Post Purchase

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Consumer behaviour is the study of how individuals, groups and organisations select, buy, use and dispose of goods, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants<sup>1</sup>. Culture according to the researchers is one of the prime factors that affect consumer behaviour<sup>2</sup>. They are thought of as the machines that drive people and are the forms in which ideologies are passed on from one generation to the other<sup>3</sup>. A consumer's need is also a portrayal of the value of it in the minds of the society<sup>4</sup>.

Individuals are shaped based on their inferences from their culture as well as their inferences from their surroundings. A huge part of the choices they make in life is due to their idea of their self-concept. Self-concept is a combination of ideas about one's own self - what they think about themselves and what others think about them. Man subconsciously buys the products that he thinks matches with his self-concept<sup>5</sup>. It also determines an individual's own drive and motivations, preferences and personality that ultimately impact his judgements and decisions (here purchase related). Thus, for a marketer to work his way up through the minds of a consumer he needs to decode the factors that affect purchase decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael R. Solomon, *Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, Being, Consumer Behavior*, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Widya Parmita, 'GLOBAL MARKETING AND ADVERTISING UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL PARADOXES', *Journal of Indonesian Economy and Business*, 2014 <<https://doi.org/10.22146/ijeb.17334>>.

<sup>3</sup> Mehdi Murali, Michel Laroche, and Frank Pons, 'Individualistic Orientation and Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence', *Journal of Services Marketing*, 2005 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/08876040510596849>>.

<sup>4</sup> Tahmid Nayeem, 'Cultural Influences on Consumer Behaviour', *International Journal of Business and Management*, 7.21 (2012), 78–91 <<https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v7n21p78>>.

<sup>5</sup> Marieke De Mooij, 'Papers Cultural Marketing : Maximising Business Effectiveness in a Multicultural World', 1 (2015), 11–18.

According to<sup>6</sup> The cultural orientation of an individual is a major determining factor for his/her perceptions about the ethicality of a firm 's marketing behaviour. India is a diverse country. There are several religious groups and respective ideologies that exist. Even a religion has divisions under its basis the ideologies they believe in. Jainism for instance has a group that believes in idol worship where the other group doesn't. Different religions also have different colours and articles that are seen as holy or right to them and others as completely wrong. The colour red is usually associated with the Hindu bride and white with a Christian bride. However white is a colour of mourning for the Hindus whereas black is the colour of mourning for the Christians. Cow is sacred for the Hindus whereas the Muslims relish beef. Likewise, Pig are sacred for the Muslims whereas Hindus enjoy eating the same. Our cultural values thus impact our day to day decisions in such minute routine activities too. However, marketers need to keep in mind that to work in a given culture is much easier and better rather than to try to change the culture of the group in the society<sup>7</sup>.

One of the biggest challenges that marketers face is that culture isn't stagnant. It's ever evolving and changing with time. The norms and values under them will change over time too. Hence the products as well as the strategy to pursue customers to buy their products has to go through change to.

Hofstede developed six dimensions of national culture - power distance, individualism, collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-/short-term orientation and indulgence-restraint. These help determine differences in cultures in countries. In the collectivist culture people have a strong desire for interaction with their group whereas in individualism there is orientation towards self<sup>8</sup>. It helps determine what communication styles would best suit each group depending on hard or soft methods and textual/verbal styles for marketing a product<sup>9</sup>. It also determines the extent of information search that a person does while making a purchase decision<sup>10</sup>. In order to pursue an individualist consumer, they play on the cards of

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<sup>6</sup> Leonidas C. Leonidou, Constantinos N. Leonidou, and Olga Kvasova, 'Cultural Drivers and Trust Outcomes of Consumer Perceptions of Organizational Unethical Marketing Behavior', *European Journal of Marketing*, 2013 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561311297445>>.

<sup>7</sup> N Ramya and SA Mohamed Ali, 'Factors Affecting Consumer Buying Behaviour.', *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Geert Hofstede, Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviours, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*, Sage Publications, 2001 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/ejoc.201200111>>.

<sup>9</sup> Mooij.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Piron, 'Consumers' Perceptions of the Country-of-Origin Effect on Purchasing Intentions of (in)Conspicuous Products', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2000 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760010335330>>.

familiar attributes of the brand that are already known to the consumer<sup>11</sup>.

Culture thereby is a characteristic we learn within the boundaries of what is acceptable. It influences how we perceive a brand and thereby its products basis the values we stand for while making a purchase decision.

## **DISCUSSION**

The values and governing factors of each culture influence their purchase patterns. People often make impulsive purchases under different moods. They could be happy mood purchases or ones out of emotional stress. Beliefs are the foundation of a culture and those belonging to each group share the same. In Japan, products are mostly sold in groups of five. This is so because of their cultural belief that four and any multiple of it would bring bad luck<sup>12</sup>.

Sub-cultures stem out of geographical dynamics where those who live nearby each other are likely to share the same consumption preferences. Marketers thus clearly define their target market and create strategies accordingly depending on whether the sub-group would be interested in the product/service or not. In collectivist cultures, there is an emphasis on group goals and group preference thus leading to the suppression of individual/personal needs and wants. The brands that target these groups use ads that depict a group's benefit or gain or usage with an aim to persuade the customer to make that purchase decision<sup>13</sup>. Such groups look at social values and look at what is best for the group. One's selfish needs are less likely to take over here while making purchase decisions. Here consumers prioritise high quality and brand loyalty over cheaper prices. They are crowd followers and spend extensive time researching on a product or service before making a purchase decision. They are thus less likely to make impulse purchases as compared to individualistic groups.

Unlike collectivist culture groups, those belonging to an individualistic cultural group tend to buy products that provide them some personal benefit, gain, or social status. Here ads that are aimed at group benefits are less likely to work as they aren't persuasive enough. Products like personal care or status enhancement would sell higher here in individualistic cultural groups. Consumers belonging to such cultural groups are price sensitive. They look for the best deal that

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<sup>11</sup>Lalita A. Manrai and others, 'A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Style in Eastern European Emerging Markets', *International Marketing Review*, 2001 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/02651330110396479>>.

<sup>12</sup> Yakup, Durmaz, Celik Mucahit, and Oruc Reyhan, "The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Consumer Buying Behaviors Examined through An Impirical Study", *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2(5): 109–14, 2011< [http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol.\\_2\\_No.\\_5\\_\[Special\\_Issue\\_-\\_March\\_2011\]/13.pdf](http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol._2_No._5_[Special_Issue_-_March_2011]/13.pdf)>

<sup>13</sup> Han, Sang Pil, and Sharon Shavitt, "Persuasion and Culture: Advertising Appeals in Individualistic and Collectivistic Societies." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 30(4): 326–50,1994

they can get at the moment and thus are not exactly brand loyal. Fast fashion and fads are examples of their purchase patterns<sup>14</sup>.

For brands, learning and understanding the impact of culture has been crucial since the positioning strategy as well as the target market entirely depends on the purchase traits of the audience at large. A fair understanding of the cultural beliefs and founding values is essential to persuade them. In order to be accepted as a part of the community of collectivist groups, activities (CSR) or campaigns that target the same values as those of the cultural groups would help increase the fondness and brand loyalty towards the brand. For those targeting individualistic cultural groups discount coupons and incentives like free shipping would help increase the brand's attractiveness.

While there has been a lot of focus on how peers or reference groups and families influence purchase decisions, there however has been a limited amount of focus on the importance of cultural factors having a role in influencing purchase decisions. The lack of understanding of multicultural countries could lead to businesses being unprepared for the market thus causing both entry issues as well as sustainability issues. Since cultures are so different and sometimes at opposite ends of a pole poor knowledge could lead to heavy losses and failure. It is this curiosity that led me to research the very influence of culture on consumer buying behaviour.

## **CONCLUSION**

Each consumer goes through a journey called the decision-making process before they zero down on a product. Along this journey brands compete and fight in order to make consumers aware of their product/service offerings. Some already existing brands fight to remind consumers about their offerings. After making consumers aware brands then move on to compete to be considered. They do so by using ads that depict the benefits or attributes of the offering.

In order to choose what product/service offering they'd like to purchase, consumers turn to their cultural, social, and personal decision-making factors. Culture determines the way people perceive things, their way of life and their actions (here purchase). As it determines one's personal beliefs it heavily impacts one's purchase decision. With the world coming closer and global distance decreasing, the cultures of one region often rub off on another. This results in an ever-changing or continuous cultural change. The aim of marketers should be to understand the beliefs and values that govern the market they choose to enter and to accordingly strategise their persuasion approach.

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<sup>14</sup> Tan, C. C. , *Collectivist vs individualist societies: How do these impact upon retail?* Beyō Global, 2019 <<https://beyo.global/thinking/collectivist-vs-individualist-societies-how-do-these-impact-upon-retail> >

While the available data does prove the existence of a cultural influence on purchase behaviour, however, there isn't enough data to determine the extent of this influence or the percent of upper hand it has a determining factor over other factors.

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