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The Influence of Culture on Consumer Behaviour

¹Santosh Kr. Pandey* and ²Pankaj Kant Dixit

ABSTRACT

In a diversified country like India cultural factors exert the broadest and deepest influence on consumer behavior. Culture influences consumers through the norms and values established by the society in which they live. The impact of culture is automatic and almost invisible. Culture not only influences consumer behavior but also reflects it. It is the mirror of both the values and possessions. Marketing strategies are unlikely to change cultural values, but marketing does influence culture. Culture influences what people wear, what and how they eat, where they live, etc. It has a broad influence on their buying and usage behavior of products and services, and the extent of their satisfaction.

The definition of culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other system received as a member of society. Culture, as a "complex whole," is a system of interdependent components. Culture is part of the *external Impact* that influences the customer. That is, culture represents effects that are put on the consumer by other individuals.

Keywords : *Deepest Influence, Consumer Behavior, Member of Society, Complex Whole.*

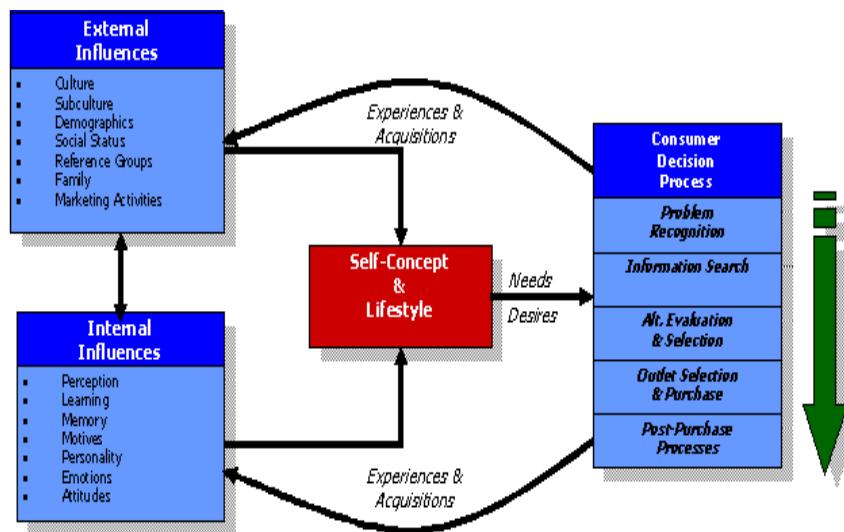
1. INTRODUCTION

Marketers are always concerned about cultural shifts and keen to discover new products or services that consumer may want. The different class of life style also exhibits the response to a culture. Every class behaves as per their own parameters. Language also works with its component. The standard format of language works differently. The regional format of language works differently. The dress code also plays an important role in dealing with culture aspect. Formal dress code and informal dress code affect separately. The formal dress code and informal dress codes decides the status of mindsets for consumers. The festivals also significantly decide the cultural situation. Consumers do not make their decisions in a vacuum. Their purchases are highly influenced by cultural social, personal, and psychological factors. For the most part, they are "non controllable" by the

¹Assistant Professor, ²Professor, ^{1,2}Department of Management, AXIS Institute of Planning & Management, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, INDIA. *Correspondence : skp_4588@yahoo.co.in

marketer but must be taken into account.

A customer's want has to be identified and his expectations must be matched with the other economic and social factors so that their product is receptive. This also means that customers are open to new and different products from time to time. It's just that they want the product to be flexible and adaptable to their needs and preferences. People are changing from time to time, so do their tastes and preferences. Identifying those is the first step towards achieving success and the rest depends on the performance of the product.



2. CULTURE

Culture is the most fundamental determinant of a person's wants and behavior. Whereas lower creatures are governed by instinct, human behavior is largely learned. The child growing up in a society learns a basic set of values, perceptions, preferences and behaviors through a process of socialization involving the family and other key institutions. Thus a child growing up in America is exposed to the following values: Achievement and success, activity, efficiency and practicality, progress, material comfort, individualism, freedom, external comfort, humanitarianism, and youthfulness.

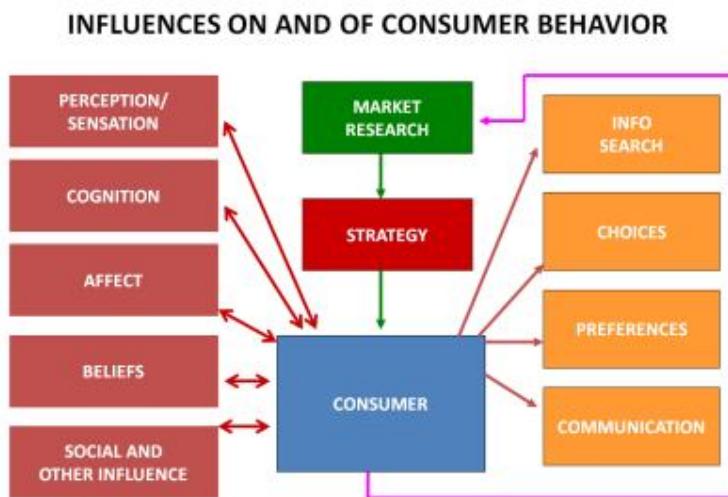
3. KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS ARE IMPORTANT PARTS. CULTURE HAS SEVERAL IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS:

- (1) **Culture is Comprehensive :** This means that all parts must fit together in some logical fashion. For example, bowing and a strong desire to avoid the loss of face are unified in their manifestation of the importance of respect.
- (2) **Culture is learned** rather than being something we are born with.
- (3) **Culture is manifested within boundaries** of acceptable behavior. Failure to behave within the prescribed norms may lead to sanctions, ranging from being hauled off by the police for indecent exposure to being laughed at by others for wearing a suit at the beach.

(4) Cultures fall somewhere on a continuum between static and dynamic depending on how quickly they accept change.

4. SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON THE CONSUMER

The consumer faces numerous sources of influence.



Often, we take cultural influences for granted, but they are significant. Physical factors also influence our behavior. We are more likely to buy a soft drink when we are thirsty, for example, and food manufacturers have found that it is more effective to advertise their products on the radio in the late afternoon when people are getting hungry. A person's self-image will also tend to influence what he or she will buy—an upwardly mobile manager may buy a flashy car to project an image of success. Social factors also influence what the consumers buy—often, consumers seek to imitate others whom they admire, and may buy the same brands. The social environment can include both the mainstream culture and a subculture e.g., rap music often appeals to a segment within the population that seeks to distinguish itself from the mainstream population. Finally, consumer behavior is influenced by learning.

4.1. Subculture

Each culture contain smaller group of subculture that provide more specific identification and socialization for its members. Four types of subculture can be distinguished Nationality groups such as the Irish, polish, Italians, and Puerto Ricans are found within large communities and exhibits distinct ethnic tastes and Jews represent subculture with specific culture preference and taboos.

4.2. Social Class:

Virtually all human societies exhibit social stratification. Stratification sometimes takes the form of a caste system where the members of different caste are reared for certain roles and cannot change their caste membership .More frequently; stratification takes the form of social classes. Social Classes have several

characteristics. First, Person within each social class tends to behave more alike than persons from two different social classes. Second, persons are perceived as occupying inferior or superior positions according to their social class. Third, a person's social class is indicated by a number of variables, such as occupation, income, wealth, education , and value orientation, rather than by any single variable , fourth, individuals are able to move from one social class to another up or down during their lifetime. The Extent of this mobility varies according to the rigidity of social stratification a given society.

4.3. Social Factors:

A consumer's behavior is also influenced by social factors, such as the consumer's reference group, family, and social roles and statuses.

4.4. Reference Group:

A person's behavior is strongly influenced by many group .A persons reference group are those groups that have a direct or indirect influence on the person's attitudes or behavior. Group having a direct influence on a person are called membership group. These are group to which the person belongs and interacts. Some are primary groups. With which there is fairly continuous interaction, such as family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Primary group tend to be informal. The person also belong to secondary group, which tend to be more formal and where there is less continuous interaction: they include religious organizations, professional associations, and trade unions.

4.5. Family Group:

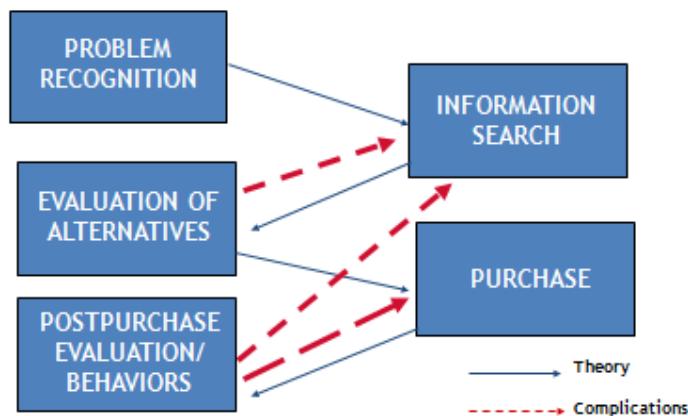
Members of the buyer's family can exercise a strong influence on the buyer's behavior. We can distinguish between two families in the buyer's life. The family of orientation consists of one's parents. From parents a person's acquires an orientation towards religious, politics, and economics and a sense of personal ambitions, self –worth, and love. Even if the buyer no longer interacts very much with his or her parents, the parents influence on the unconscious behavior of the buyer can be significant. In countries where parents continue to live with their children, their influence can be substantial. In case of expensive products and services, husband and wives engage in more joint decision making. The market needs to determine which member normally has the greater influence in the purchase of a particular products or services. Either the husband or the wife, or they have equal influence. The following products and services fall under such: Husband–dominant: life insurance, automobiles, television Wife – dominant: washing machines, carpeting, non–living – room furniture, kitchenware Equal: Living – room furniture, vacation, Housing, outside entertainment.

A customer's want has to be identified and his expectations must be matched with the other economic and social factors so that their product is receptive. This can be related to any product. Reebok today is enjoying a huge market in India even though they have hired a company which is phoenix to manufacture shoes and operate under Reebok. How did they achieve this? Adapting to social conditions play the most important role in establishing your brand in the market.

5. Consumer Choice and Decision Making:

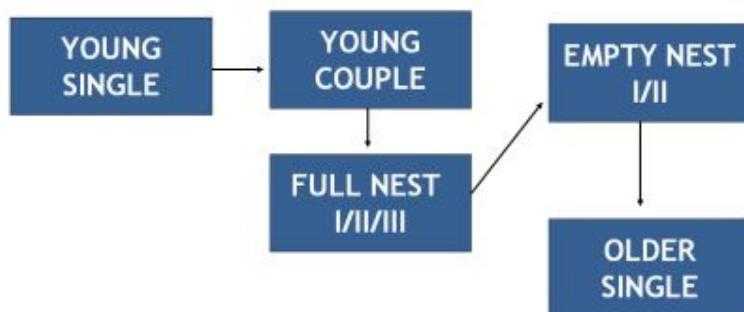
5.1. Problem Recognition :

One model of consumer decision making involves several steps. The first one is problem recognition. Perhaps, for example, your car is getting more difficult to start and is not accelerating well. The second step is information search—what are some alternative ways of solving the problem? You might buy a new car, buy a used car, take your car in for repair, ride the bus, ride a taxi, or ride a skateboard to work. The third step involves evaluation of alternatives. A skateboard is inexpensive, but may be ill-suited for long distances and for rainy days. Finally, we have the purchase stage, and sometimes a post-purchase stage (e.g., you return a product to the store because you did not find it satisfactory). In reality, people may go back and forth between the stages. For example, a person may resume alternative identification during while evaluating already known alternatives.



5.2. The Family Life Cycle :

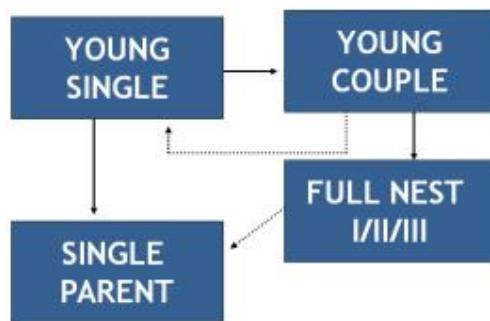
Individuals and families tend to go through a "life cycle." The simple life cycle goes from



A "couple" may either be married or merely involve living together. The breakup of a non-marital relationship involving cohabitation is similarly considered equivalent to a divorce.

In real life, this situation is, of course, a bit more complicated. For example, many couples undergo divorce.

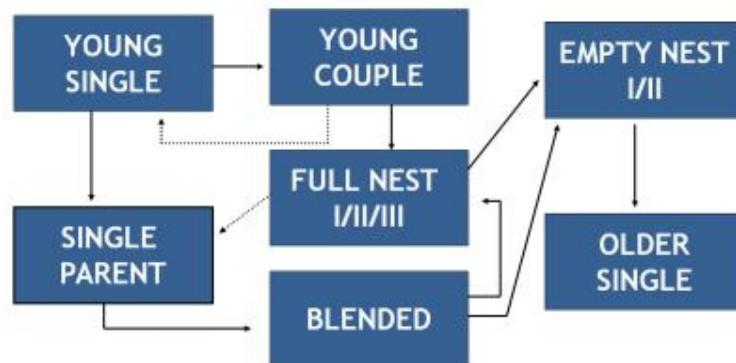
Then we have one of the scenarios:



Single parenthood can result either from divorce or from the death of one parent. Divorce usually entails a significant change in the relative wealth of spouses. In some cases, the non-custodial parent (usually the father) will not pay the required child support, and even if he or she does, that still may not leave the custodial parent and children as well off as they were during the marriage. On the other hand, in some cases, some non-custodial parents will be called on to pay a large part of their income in child support. This is particularly a problem when the non-custodial parent remarries and has additional children in the second (or subsequent marriages). In any event, divorce often results in a large demand for:

- Low cost furniture and household items
- Time-saving goods and services

Here, the single parent who assumes responsibility for one or more children may not form a relationship with the other parent of the child. Integrating all the possibilities discussed, we get the following depiction of the Family Life Cycle:



Generally, there are two main themes in the Family Life Cycle, subject to significant exceptions: *As a person gets older, he or she tends to advance in his or her career and tends to get greater income (exceptions: maternity leave, divorce, retirement).

Unfortunately, obligations also tend to increase with time (at least until one's mortgage has been paid off). Children and paying for one's house are two of the greatest expenses.

5.3. Family Decision Making:

Individual members of families often serve different roles in decisions that ultimately draw on shared family resources. Some individuals are information gatherers/holders, who seek out information about products of relevance. These individuals often have a great deal of power because they may selectively pass on information that favors their chosen alternatives. Influencers do not ultimately have the power decide between alternatives, but they may make their wishes known by asking for specific products or causing embarrassing situations if their demands are not met. The decision maker(s) have the power to determine issues such as:

- Whether to buy;
- Which product to buy
- Which brand to buy;
- Where to buy it; and
- When to buy.

However, that the role of the decision maker is separate from that of the *purchaser*. From the point of view of the marketer, this introduces some problems since the purchaser can be targeted by point-of-purchase (POP) marketing efforts that cannot be aimed at the decision maker. Also note that the distinction between the purchaser and decision maker may be somewhat blurred:

- The decision maker may specify what kind of product to buy, but not which brand;
- The purchaser may have to make a substitution if the desired brand is not in stock;
- The purchaser may disregard instructions (by error or deliberately).

Organizational buying usually involves more people than individual buying. Often, many people are involved in making decisions as to (a) whether to buy, (b) what to buy, (c) at what quantity, and (d) from whom. An engineer may make a specification as to what is needed, which may be approved by a manager, with the final purchase being made by a purchase specialist who spends all his or her time finding the best deal on the goods that the organization needs. Often, such long purchase processes can cause long delays. In the government, rules are often especially stringent—e.g., vendors of fruit cake have to meet fourteen pages of specifications put out by the General Services Administration. In many cases, government buyers are also heavily bound to go with the lowest price. Even if it is obvious that a higher priced vendor will offer a superior product, it may be difficult to accept that bid.

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