

Cultural Connections: A new framework for modern marketers

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Consumers are products of culture. Their attitudes, ideas, and opinions are all shaped by the environment around them. As marketers, it's vital that we understand these behaviours. But breaking behaviour down into data is no easy task. It's not an exact science.

At least, it didn't use to be. Fortunately, there are now a number of tools that can help us quantify culture and understand why a marketing or media strategy that works in one market won't work in the nation next door.

The foundations of these tools can be found in the work of Dutch social psychologist, Professor Geert Hofstede. His work identified a number of key factors – or dimensions – that managers, HR teams, and change consultants have long used to explain the workplace challenges that sometimes emerge when different cultures are asked to work together.



Introducing Cultural Connections: A new framework for modern marketers

Working with Iitim International's Hofstede Centre, MediaCom has now added new insights to Hofstede's original study, updating the original dimensions framework to reveal the cultural forces that influence the motivations and behaviours of consumers.

As part of this study, we have interviewed more than 60,000 consumers in 63 markets around the world to understand why they think, feel, and behave differently.

We have quantified these responses using the following nine consumer-specific (or consumer-modified) dimensions.

Consumer-centric cultural dimensions

Five cultural dimensions reveal insights into the national psyche that underpins consumer attitudes:



Identity (Fixed or Flexible) measures the strength of a nation's self-image.

Monumentalist or 'Fixed' societies have clear identities rooted in tradition; they see no reason to change or evolve. Examples include Venezuela and Colombia.

'Flexible' countries, however, are always looking to adapt and improve. They might have

traditional values, but they are interested in moving with the times. Examples include Japan and Taiwan.



Individualism (Me or We) measures the extent to which people think about themselves as 'Me or We'. Australia and Canada, for example, are 'Me' cultures, where people think of themselves and their immediate family first and let the state take care of the welfare of everybody else.

Nigeria and Kenya are more collective. People here put the welfare of their community or group first, rather than the specific wants or needs of individuals within it.



Emotional state (Anchored or Anxious) determines whether a culture is emotionally stable or more anxious. Countries that score highly (Anxious) tend to show their emotions easily. One example is Italy. Emotionally stable (Anchored) markets include Indonesia. They tend to be more relaxed and calm.



Ambition (Content or Competitive) measures the degree to which people want to climb the social ladder. People in highly ambitious societies, such as China and South Korea, tend to put pressure on themselves and judge others by their social and professional successes. The converse is true in countries like Chile and Egypt, where success is more about achieving



Curiosity (Closed or Curious) assesses the degree to which people follow a prescribed way of life or actively pursue new experiences and ideas. Indonesia and Thailand, for instance, are typically more closed cultures, while Portugal is more curious.

Marketing dimensions

Four marketing-specific dimensions consider how consumers are likely to respond to certain types of brand messages and content:



Vanity (Secure or Insecure) measures how much consumers are likely to buy certain products to feel good about themselves. A high score suggests insecurity. In these countries, people use products to reinforce a positive self-image.

A low score suggests security. In these countries, people already have a positive self-image so this is not a motivator for buying a product. Russia and Hong Kong score high on vanity, while New Zealand and Peru score low.



Impact (Concerned or Unconcerned) assesses how conscious consumers are of the impact their purchases have on themselves or others. Do they buy products just to serve their immediate needs or do they make more considered choices?

While Indonesia and the Philippines tend to focus on immediate needs, societies like Belgium and France consider a range of factors (like health benefits).



Information need (Informed or Impulsive) measures the extent to which consumers research products. Impulsive cultures, like the Philippines and Vietnam, prefer to share opinions and act on anecdotal recommendations.

Informed cultures, like Norway and Sweden, prefer more qualified opinions. They like detail and want to know everything about a product before buying.



Badge appeal (Functional or Fashionable) measures the extent to which consumers are susceptible to the glamour or allure of – often high-end – products. Do they use designer labels as status symbols?

Turkey and Indonesia are big fans of luxury goods and score highly for ‘Badge appeal’. Consumers in Israel and Ukraine care more about functional benefits.

Marketers can use Cultural Connections to spot where countries differ, and where their campaigns will have to be modified

We will continue to grow and evolve Cultural Connections to keep pace with changing cultures. This level of cultural detail is essential information for marketers looking to

succeed in different countries and regions around the world.

For the first time, they can use data to qualify which markets are culturally consistent (and therefore likely to react to brand messages in the same way). This kind of knowledge can make or break multi-market campaigns.

Conversely, marketers can use this more scientific approach to spot where countries differ, and where their campaigns will have to be modified – or media rules re-thought – to successfully transfer between markets.

Want to know how Cultural Connections can help your business around the world? Email [Pinaki Dutt](#), Global Head of Applied Connected Intelligence, for more information.