



Round Table

Cultural Dimensions and International Marketing

Vipin Gupta

*Vipin Gupta is Assistant Professor, Grand Valley State University, USA.
gupta05@wharton.upenn.edu*

Understanding the underlying dimensions of culture can offer powerful guidance to brand managers on how to assess the effectiveness of various elements of their brand image in different cultures, so that effective elements may be transferred across different societies with similar cultures and other elements adapted for becoming effective across different cultures. Such a framework with which to assess the culture of markets can help firms gain substantial competitive advantage over their rivals in a global environment. The firms can more confidently and comprehensively standardise positive elements of their brand image and marketing mix execution. At the same time, they can develop their brand equity by incorporating the meanings associated with alternative cultural conditions.

This article has three objectives: to underscore the relationship between culture and brand image; to establish the basis of cross-cultural brand image effectiveness using the cultural dimensions framework; and to demonstrate how the cultural dimen-

sions framework can help in developing hypotheses about the further development of brand image needed for success in specific cultures. Using the GLOBE framework of cultural dimensions, some brand image propositions are developed for India.

Culture and Brand Image

Culture has been interpreted in a variety of senses¹. In general, culture may be defined as a way of life, cultivated beliefs, learned behaviours, shared mental programmes, compelling ideologies, and inter-related symbols whose meanings provide a set of orientations for members of a society, and are transmitted by them. Culture comprises of several embedded layers, both spatial (international, national, and local) as well as temporal (historical, contemporary, and futuristic) which filter and cast the brand image in the minds, hearts, and lives of the consumers.

Brand image is a vital part of a firm's marketing programme. It lies at the foundation of marketing mix strategies, and supports building of long-term brand equity². How the consumers perceive a brand image is a function of the meaning associated with the brand and the attitude of the consumers, which in turn are shaped by the culture of the consumers.

The set of associations related to a brand image has several layers of abstraction that link the

product and the consumer's sense of self. Higher level brand association, such as the perceived benefits, contains a larger amount of information and has a more powerful influence on the consumer purchasing behaviour, than associations at the lower level of abstraction, such as product attributes³. By uncovering higher level brand associations, which are more strongly inter-linked with the consumer's sense of self, firms may enhance the impact of product and other marketing mix strategies, and establish a sustainable competitive advantage. Culture offers a powerful approach for associating higher-level abstract meanings to a brand image, since it has an important influence on the attitudes, behaviours, and lifestyle of, and on the needs satisfied, symbols associated, experiences derived, and emotional connections made by the consumers through the use of specific brands⁴.

In order to contrast the receptivity to different brand meanings across cultures, an appropriate framework to classify cultural elements is needed. A review of classification frameworks reveals several approaches⁵, which however, suffer from several limitations. In this context, the GLOBE framework holds the promise of making a substantial contribution to the area of cross-cultural marketing.

GLOBE Cultural Dimensions

In the GLOBE framework, culture represents aggregated scores about the beliefs, behaviours, and norms of societies 'as is' and 'should be', obtained from the middle managers born and living in the society. GLOBE evaluates practices in terms of 'as is' scores, and values in terms of 'values' scores. The GLOBE data on societal culture were obtained from the questionnaire surveys administered to about 8,000 managers in 62 societies. In the scale development phase, the items in the GLOBE instruments were endorsed across cultures as being meaningful measures of the relevant constructs. In the scale validation phase, the final GLOBE cultural scales showed sound statistical psychometric properties. Each scale was unidimensional, had adequate Cronbach alpha, and could be aggregated to the society level, and was statistically significant within culture agreement and between culture

differences.

A major concern with cross-cultural research is generalisability of its meanings beyond the sample. Modern societies are diverse – India, for instance, is a nation with multiple regional, age, education, gender, linguistic and religious groups having their own cultural practices and values. The challenge for an international marketer is to uncover some fundamental and common cultural elements of a societal culture, which could be used as a basis for developing higher-level brand image strategies. Using multi-trait multi-method tests, GLOBE has shown that its measures generalise beyond middle managers, and reflect meanings, processes, and outcomes that operate truly at a broader societal level.

In the GLOBE framework, a set of nine dimensions is used to uncover fundamental elements of the culture of each society: Performance Orientation, Assertiveness Orientation, Future Orientation, Humane Orientation, Institutional Collectivism, In-group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, and Uncertainty Avoidance. All these dimensions are strongly rooted in prior cross-cultural work, and therefore have helped re-examine the assumptions about different societies

that are based on the earlier less rigorous cultural frameworks.

Specifically, Performance Orientation has allowed re-examination of McClelland's need for achievement construct⁶; Assertiveness Orientation, the assumptions about aggressiveness-assertiveness research paradigm in the cross-cultural communication literature⁷; Gender Egalitarianism, Hofstede's⁸ Masculinity construct; Future Orientation, the claim that Confucian Dynamism scale is a measure of Long-term orientation⁹, and the psychological construct of future orientation¹⁰; and Humane Orientation has allowed the investigation of the psychological construct of Humanistic Orientation¹¹.

Institutional Collectivism and In-group Collectivism are two different types of collectivism. Institutional Collectivism represents a macro level integration of the society, and is related with the horizontal concept of collectivism. In-group collectivism represents a micro level differentiation of the

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society into different cohesive groups, each of which is held together by some kind of group integration mechanism or power base, and so is related with the vertical concept of collectivism. The findings have helped extend Triandis's work on the horizontal and vertical types of collectivism¹².

Finally, Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance have enabled examining the assumptions deriving from Hofstede¹³. Scholars following Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance, for instance, assume that avoidance of uncertainty is equivalent to running away from uncertainty, or paralysis in the face of uncertainty. However, this is not necessarily true because an important managerial role is to enhance certainty through communication and training programmes and technology, and such a role may be critical in the emerging markets such as India where availability of risk capital is quite limited.

Culture Dimensions and Brand Image

Culture works by generating a sequence of para-conscious vibrations in human life, which reverberate through the mental attitudes, psychological beliefs, physical behaviours, and social breeding of individuals in the system. As such, culture influences the totality of marketing, including awareness, trial, and repeat purchase. It influences the communication and relationship between the company and the customers, and also information flow among the customers. Culture plays a key role in what and how information is scanned, selected, interpreted, validated, and prioritised by the customer¹⁴. An understanding of the cultural dimensions helps pre-validate the effect of planned communication on the customer group, and assess how much priority the customers in a culture would give to that communication. Otherwise, the marketer must wait for the feedback on the effectiveness of its communication, such as in terms of the extent of trial and repeat purchase observed in the marketplace. This 'act, wait and rectify' model of marketing is misplaced; to compete in the fast-paced, high

GLOBE Societal Culture Scores for India and the World				
	Societal Culture Practices		Societal Culture Values	
	India	World	India	World
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.15	4.16	4.73	4.62
Assertiveness	3.73	4.14	4.76	3.82
In-group Collectivism	5.92	4.10	5.32	5.66
Humane Orientation	4.57	4.09	5.28	5.42
Power Distance	5.47	5.17	2.64	2.75
Gender Egalitarianism	2.90	3.37	4.51	4.51
Future Orientation	4.19	3.85	5.60	5.48
Performance Orientation	4.25	4.10	6.05	5.94
Institutional Collectivism	4.38	4.25	4.71	4.73

(1 = low; 4=medium; 7 = high)

Exhibit 1

velocity markets, the firms must provide only 'on demand' and 'in-demand' products and services.

Several models of cross-cultural brand image exist. Based on Perlmutter's¹⁵ work, in an ethnocentric model, the firm may try to communicate the brand image developed in its home country. In a polycentric model, the firm may try to adopt a different brand image in each country, seeking to adapt to the local culture. In a geocentric model, the firm may obtain feedback from different nations, and then try to develop a brand image that would be universally valued. However, for most effective marketing, it is important to consider a cultural-centric model. Once a firm has a framework with which to assess the culture of a society, it could establish the inter-relationships of a specific meaning with the dimensions of culture. Such an approach aids understanding of how the meaning would get modified across different cultures, and offers propositions for brand image effectiveness in each culture.

GLOBE Framework and Brand Image Propositions

We can illustrate how the GLOBE cultural framework can help develop actionable propositions on brand image effectiveness, using the case of India. **Exhibit 1** gives mean scores on the nine societal culture scales for India and for the 62-society GLOBE sample.

Compared to the world, Indian society shows moderate to low practices, but stronger values of uncertainty avoidance and assertiveness. One way the Indian consumer meets this unsatisfied need for uncertainty reduction and assertiveness is by

using perceptions about the degree of foreignness of a brand. Batra et al.⁶ show that Indian consumers use a brand's country of origin as a 'quality halo' or summary of product quality, and also for status enhancing reasons. The brands seen as being sourced overseas are perceived as endowing prestige and cosmopolitanism, and as enhancing the consumer's social identity. Further, 'this local or nonlocal perception effect is greater when the consumer felt a greater need to use quality cues because of lower familiarity with the category'. Moreover, the association of a higher status meaning with the perceived foreignness of a brand is stronger for the consumers who have a greater admiration for lifestyles in economically developed nations, and for the product categories high in social signalling value. Based on this, we suggest:

Proposition 1: The brands perceived to be foreign enjoy a high class, but a low mass, appeal in India.

Compared to the world, Indian society shows very strong in-group collectivism and power distance practices, though its observed values on these are low. Further, it boasts of strong practices and values of humane orientation. Under less conscious, low involvement situations, the Indian consumer may meet the need for a greater freedom from in-group obligations by associating a bold, adventurous, and indulgent image with the brands perceived to be foreign. However, for high involvement products, where the consumers are quite conscious of their social context and norms, they are likely to favour a brand image that is family and fun oriented, very lovable, and that relies on the use of locally popular celebrities in a humane, possibly down to earth milieu.

Proposition 2: The brands perceived to be foreign enjoy a more positive image among Indian consumers in the low involvement product categories, as compared to the high involvement product categories.

Indian society shows a low degree of gender egalitarian practices, as compared to the world, though its values are higher at par with those of the world. Indian consumers may be likely to associate more gender empowering meanings with the brands perceived to be foreign; however an average Indian

consumer is less likely to relate to these meanings. Therefore, the foreign brands seeking to connect to such consumers should underline the capacity of women to create a balanced work-family life, in a way that does not undermine the nurturing role of women.

Proposition 3: The brands perceived to be foreign are more likely to succeed in India if they support a balanced work-family life self-concept of women.

Indian society shows a high degree of future and performance orientation practices and values, as compared to the rest of the world. As a result, Indian consumers may be likely to interpret brands perceived to be foreign in terms of more opportunistic and conspicuous consumption oriented meanings. They may show more positive attitudes towards such brands when they have discretionary income, or when they obtain bonuses and unexpected incomes whose relationship with their efforts is perceived to be weak. Conversely, if the product category is one where the consumers do not spend discretionary income, such as breakfast cereals, the brands perceived to be foreign could have a low likelihood of success unless their brand image is adapted to the Indian culture and/or some other kind of relationship is established with Indian customers. Further, in times of economic recession, when the size of discretionary income diminishes, they are likely to show less positive attitudes towards these brands. Further, heavy advertising by the brands perceived to be foreign may encourage allocation of greater discretionary income on them during times of boom; but is likely to evoke a high level of dissatisfaction when such discretionary income is limited during recession times.

Proposition 4: The brands perceived to be foreign are more likely to succeed in India in situations where the consumers have a high discretionary income.

Finally, in contrast to the world, Indian society shows stronger practices, but comparable values of institutional collectivism. An average Indian consumer is likely to perceive the brands with a foreign image as carrying individualistic connotations. As in the rest of the world, the Indian customer would

Indian consumers use a brand's country of origin as a 'quality halo' or summary of product quality. Brands seen as being sourced overseas are perceived as endowing prestige and cosmopolitanism, and as enhancing social identity.

be more attracted to a brand that explicitly underlines the institutional citizenship behaviour, such as in terms of linking the customer to ecological sustainability and social responsiveness. In other words,

Proposition 5: The brands perceived to be foreign are more likely to succeed in India if they enhance the customer's citizenship behaviour.

Conclusions

This article has looked at the relationship between culture and brand image. Specifically, it was proposed that dimensions of culture can be systematically used to diagnose and bridge culture gaps that arise while trying to transfer a standardised global brand image into other cultures. Using the GLOBE framework of cultural dimensions, and its findings on India and the rest of the world, a practical application of how to assess brand image effectiveness in international marketing was provided. Taken together, the propositions offer directions on how an international marketer could enhance the brand image effectiveness, and go beyond class appeal in India and avoid being vulnerable to the variations in the discretionary income of the consumers.

While GLOBE framework has quite strong theoretical foundations and empirical validity, the meaning and implications of its various dimensions have been studied only to a limited extent.¹⁷ Further research would be needed to investigate if the assumptions based on prior frameworks of cultural dimensions are supported by the GLOBE programme, to confirm if the GLOBE framework as validated by the GLOBE team is indeed robust, and to correct and modify the current cultural models in the light of the new findings for more effective and confident applications in the international marketing domain.

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