

**CHAPTER 1**  
**OVERVIEW ON CULTURE**

The term 'culture' is derived from a French word 'colere' that means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivate and nurture. Culture is a way of life of a group of people; the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them. Such manifestations of culture are generally passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. Therefore different cultural groups think, feel and act differently. Taylor in 1974 described culture as including 'knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'. UNESCO's (2002) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, culture is considered as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs".

With cultural diversity, cultural relativism is also an undeniable fact with moral rules and social institutions exhibiting evident cultural and historical variability (Donnelly, 1984). He further observed that cultural relativism is a doctrine that holds that (at least some) such variations are exempt from legitimate criticism by outsiders, a doctrine that is strongly supported by notions of communal autonomy and self-determination. Though there are no scientific standards for considering one group superior or another inferior, studying difference in culture among groups and societies assumes cultural relativism. With the rise in globalization, there is growing demand for judgment and concern while dealing with groups or societies different from one's own culture. However information about the nature of cultural differences between societies and their consequences need to be explored before judgment and action. With the world becoming a global village, there is increased need for organizations to increasingly form cross border relationships. Thus there is resurgence of interest in problem caused by national cultural differences- in values, ideologies, organizational assumptions, work practices and behavioural styles.

### **1.1 Views on culture**

Literature identifies different levels of culture. At the micro level lies the individual culture that is the foundation of all other levels of culture. Adler (2000) observed that the culture of any group of people is the common denominator of the cultures of individuals forming the group under consideration. At the macro level lies the national culture that is defines by Tayeb (2003) as the 'a constant thread ... through our lives which makes us distinguishable from others, especially those in other countries'. Browaeys & Price (2002) remarked that heterogeneous, national culture contains enough common elements

enabling the formation of a collective identity. In between these two levels lies the Organizational culture and Corporate culture. Schein (1999) described Organizational culture as the set of common norms and behaviours of the members of an organization. Browaeys & Price (2002) extended the notion of Corporate culture as the organizational culture of organizations operating multi-nationally. Penaloza & Gilly (1991) observed that with such levels of culture existing, it is bound to be a fundamental aspect of domestic or international marketing phenomenon. Berry et al. (1992) and Triandis (1972) explain the process of cultural change and adaption in response to ecological and sociopolitical context (Berry, 1980; Berry et al., 1992) as well as response to new contacts between people from different cultures. Erez and Gati (2004) adopted the multi-level model (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000) for explaining the dynamic nature of culture. This model elaborates the top-down and bottom-up processes for explaining the reciprocal influences of constructs of one level on other levels. They further proposed a reciprocal top-down, bottom-up processes across different levels of culture that could serve to explain the dynamic dimensions of culture. Klein & Kozlowski (2000) suggested that top-down process convey the influence of higher-level contextual factors

on phenomenon at lower levels of system while bottom-up processes describe phenomenon that have their origins at a lower level but emerge to become a higher-level property.



**Figure 1.1:** The dynamic of top-down-bottom-up processes across levels of culture.

Adapted from Erez and Gati (2004)

Hofstede et al. (2010) highlighted that culture influences behavior through its manifestations: values, heroes, rituals, and symbols that are the forms in which

culturally-determined knowledge is stored and expressed. However, the anthropological view of culture also recognizes that cognitive constructs (i.e. categories) are determined by cultural manifestations i.e. values (D'Andrade, 1992; Tu et al. 2010).

Hersleth et al. (2013) suggested that the words or expressions describing the product quality are not properly used in market communication, the attributes of the quality construct particularly those relating with immaterial ones linked to the territory, culture and identity, are not sufficiently understood the interactions between local food culture and consumer choices are weak with low impact on market strategies. Pinker (1994) believes language may give origin to values that are literally 'unthinkable' in other cultures because of a lack of adequate terms to represent them. In regards to culture, ethnic identity represents but one aspect of a broader multicultural process intimated by such terms as "culture change" (Keefe and Padilla, 1987).

The concept and definitions of culture is multifaceted. The above paragraphs defining the views of culture throws some light on culture and its manifestations on lives of consumer.

## **1.2 Dynamics of Culture**

The composite and dynamic aspects of culture are emphasized in the various researches on culture. Some of the aspects of dynamism of culture are discussed below.

**1.2.1 Cultural acculturation:** The process of acculturation as an object of study was initiated by anthropologists Redfield and others in 1936. They defined it broadly as 'those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups'.

**1.2.2 Cultural interpenetration:** It takes place due to flows from one culture to another resulting in the second culture being interpenetrated by the first. Hermans & Kempmen(1998) suggested that new contact zones or spatial patterns of interaction are established across national groups and cultures thus resulting in the creations of ties that span national boundaries . For example Caglar (1995) observed that Turkish migrants workers to germany and Netherlands have introduced the 'Doner Kebab' a Turkish sandwich of roasted meat, and 'pide' Turkish flat bread into those countries.

**1.2.3 Deterritorialization:** One of the consequence of cultural penetration is that specific culture may not be confined to a defined ethnographic location. Pieterse (1995); Hermans & Kempmen (1998) observed that localized cultural units no longer form the

nuclei for the development of distinct cultures but are replaced by geographically dispersed cultures linked together through modern communications technology. As national boundaries are becoming more porous, more contacts are established between different cultures and there is sharing of values, attitudes and behaviours among different cultural groups.

**1.2.4 Cultural contamination:** Craig and Douglas (2006) observed that due to ease of establishing contact between individuals at geographically dispersed locations throughout the world because of global communication and mass media resulted to breakup of the close knit ties of local cultures and the diffusion of products, ideas and images of diverse cultures. This has further resulted in the blurring of cultural boundaries that is further reinforced by increased consumer mobility and travel and greater exposure to global and culturally diverse media.

**1.2.5 Cultural pluralism:** Thompson and Tambyah (1999) observed that rather than assimilating into a host country, immigrants in many countries and context are retaining their own ethnic or cultural identity. This has resulted in consumers often belonging to multiple cultural groups for example ethnic, linguistic or religious groups. For example, Alexander (1994) observed that a Pakistani immigrant may identify strongly with the Muslim religion, with his country of origin, as well as with his country of adoption. Craig and Douglas (2006) observed that different identities may be operant depending on the specific situation or context involving the individual. The ethnic identity of origin may be operant at the home while that of the host country dominates in the work place. For example while religion may be operant in terms of food and sometimes clothing purchases, ethnic origin influences choice of store, and language determines choice of information sources.

**1.2.6 Hybridization:** Pieterse (1995) defined hybridization as occurring when "... new forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices.". He further observed that coexistence of people from different cultures in close proximity may also lead to hybridization of culture as individuals intermingle due to intermarriage or other forms of social interaction. Thus people from different national or ethnic cultures become exposed to each other's cultural traditions, life styles and behavior patterns as well as those of their common host culture.

Cultural dynamics also influences the diffusion or adoption of objects and artifacts from one culture to another. This movement of objects and artifacts implies that the culture

related studies must not only concentrate on the physical adoption of such goods but also should transfer the meanings associated with the objects. This is more important for objects that are cultural icons or typical of a particular culture.

As the physical boundaries dissolve and there is increased in the fluidity of culture and growth of inter-linkages between cultures, it becomes more necessary to examine cultural similarity or geographic distance influencing adoption of products from one country to another. As communication across wide geographic distances becomes increasingly easy, linguistic similarity of cultures becomes more critical than geographic proximity in determining diffusion patterns

The dynamics of culture emphasizes the fact that culture no longer is a phenomenon defined by and isolated to a particular locale. The dynamics highlight the parallel trends of globalization and multiculturalism, and their influence on the understanding of culture and its various manifestations. A better understanding of the dynamics of culture and their manifestations results in improved knowledge of culture and its role in molding consumption behavior. The dynamic of culture provides a lens to view the intertwined facets of culture. Craig and Douglas (2006) were of the opinion that the complexities of cultural influences and the numerous ways in which they are changing suggest that there may be a need to adopt a broader perspective while conducting cultural research. Such a perspective would capture the diversity of different aspects of culture as well as their influence thus providing an overview of culture that may be more meaningful in research. Moreover the implications of changing cultural dynamics needs to be considered while designing the research design as cultural interpenetration, cultural contamination, cultural pluralism and hybridization while by no means new, have been little studied to date. More detailed understanding of such phenomena and the implications for marketing would undoubtedly provide fruitful avenues for understanding the dynamics of cultural change.

### **1.3 Cultural Differences**

Hofstede (1984) remarked that different cultures imply different mental programming that governs activities, motivations, and values. Gilmore & Carson (1992) observed that the experience of culture in everyday life is highly complex but is generally accepted by marketing theorists as being one of the underlying determinants of customer behavior. Markus and Kitayama (1991) observed that culture influences consumers' perceptions,

dispositions, and behavior. Patterson and Johnson (1993) remarked that individuals form expectations of services and once they encounter the service, they evaluate the service performance oftentimes against their expectations. Thus an individual will confirm or disconfirm the performance based on expectation which influences their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service performance. In this context, Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) reported that in many Muslim cultures, smiling may be a sign of sexual interest and therefore, women are socialized not to smile at males thus indicating that the American type service (service with smile) may not be appropriate in some cultures. Ruyter et al. (1997) used emic approach to study how individuals in different cultures evaluate service and form satisfaction. Mattila (1999) compared Western and Asian travelers and found that individuals of different cultures focus on different types of cues to help them evaluate the experience. Stauss & Mang (1999) observed that customers were dissatisfied when service providers failed to meet their culturally determined expectations of foreign customers (for instance the Japanese customer's role expectations such as avoidance of eye contact were not fulfilled by Germans or Americans. Miller (1994) observed that for collectivists the determinants of social behavior are primarily norms, duties and obligations whereas for individuals they are primarily attitudes, personal needs, perceived rights and contracts. Similar observation was made by Triandis & Bhawuk (1997). Triandis (1994) argued that one of the four defining attributes of individualism and collectivism is the relative importance of attitudes versus norms as determinants of social behavior.

In 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn identified 164 definitions of culture that were proposed by historians and social scientists. These definitions were segregated into six major categories and ten subcategories giving an insight to the complexity of culture. Boyd & Richerson (1985) observed that social scientists seem to agree that culture is a socially transmitted heritage peculiar to a particular human society. Keesing (1994) while arguing that contemporary definitions of culture fall into four distinct categories which differ in several ways, labeled the term 'cultural adaptationists'. This term was used to describe members of one group who defined culture in terms of observable, socially transmitted patterns of behavior. For example, Harris (1971) defined culture as patterns of behavior, thought and feeling that are acquired or influenced through learning and that are characteristics of group of people rather than of individuals. Alexander (1979) observed that learning and other modes of phenotypic flexibility (that will cause genetically similar individuals to resemble one another in similar environments) do have a common

feature in culture. But he viewed the social transmission of culture that gives it an evolutionary dynamic different from ordinary learning. Goodenough (1981) noted that people learn as individuals. Therefore if culture is learned, its ultimate locus must be the in the individuals rather than the groups. Hannerz (1969) observed that a culture is not a unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction, but more like a 'tool kit' or repertoire. From here, actors select differing pieces for constructing line of actions. Gilbert & Mulkey (1984) remarked that individuals and groups know how to do different kinds of things in different circumstances.

Karahanna et al. (2006) observed that behavior is influenced by different levels of culture ranging from the supranational (regional, ethnic, religious, linguistic) level through the national, professional and organizational levels to the group level. They theorized that the relative influence of the different levels of culture on individual behavior varies. They were of the same view as Hofstede(1991) that several layers of cultural programming exist that encompass the range of cultures operative on one's behavior. They viewed that these layers of culture consist of national, regional/ethnic/religious/ linguistic/, gender, generation, social class and organizational cultures.

#### **1.4 Culture and Consumer research**

Erez and Gati (2004) observed that globalization enhances cross cultural alliances, knowledge sharing, and technology transfer and that cross-cultural alliances are formed at all levels of intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations and multinational teams. Ingram, Robinson & Bush (2002) observed that global interconnectedness also takes place among governments that regulate economic activities, which positively affect bilateral trade, reduce transaction costs and promote the adoption of international trade. Naisbitt (1994) observed that the newly developed global forms of organizations may create tensions between the local ('tribalism') and global ('universalism') cultures. Taifel & Turner (1979) observed that at the individual level one major psychological consequence of globalization is the transformation in identity as reflected in how people think of themselves in relation to the social environment. Arnett (2002) observed that a global identity means that people develop a sense of belongingness to a worldwide culture, by adopting practices, styles and information that are part of the global culture. The ability to maintain the two types of identity depends on the similarity between the global and local cultures while a good fit



between the local and the global cultures facilitates the integration of global and local identity.

The concept of cultural differences, cross cultural consumer research was launched in the 1970s with an examination of international marketing practices (Costa & Bamossy, 1995). Maheswaran and Shavitt (2000) claimed that although there is a growing interest in cultural differences in consumer behavior, systematic consumer research on the topic is still in its infancy. Maheswaran and Shavitt (2000) further observed that understanding of services-related consumer behavior in a global context, needed to address the conceptual and methodological issues associated with cross-cultural services research. Usinier (1993) & Keegan (1984) suggested that culture and cultural differences are attributed to having an important influence in explaining customer behavior and in helping to design effective marketing strategies and tools. Riesman (1953), Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1984) suggested that consumer research may also be concerned with the constructs of national culture and their variations across the globe while emphasizing the cultural and social anthropology as well as sociology that have attempted to capture and measure the essence of national cultural values based on different approaches. Triandis (1994) developed a model of subjective culture and social behavior relations that has been adapted to consumer behavior domain. He identified three factors that affect social behavior namely subjective culture, past experience and the behavioral situation. Subjective culture represents the categorizations, associations, norms, roles, and values in a culture. He observed that the subjective culture influences the attitude toward the product, perceived purchase consequences, purchase affect, self-definitions, referent expectations, and habits through customs and past experience.

Maheswaran & Shavitt (2000) observed that a special issue of the Journal of Consumer Psychology dealt with cultural issues thus, highlighting the growing interest in cultural differences in consumer behavior and the importance of understanding the cultural context of consumer behavior in an increasing globalized marketplace. Kacen & Lee (2002) believed that cultural factors significantly influence consumer behavior giving special emphasis to impulsive buying. Their work examined the effect of regional level and individual level cultural factors on consumer's impulsive buying behavior over consumers from Western and Eastern cultures. The comparison was explained to be important because shopping is considered to be a major leisure activity in many East Asian Countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). However caution is needed in the field of consumer behavior and further advancement of

consumer research as an academic discipline as it requires that the validity of models of consumer behavior developed in one country (mostly the United States) be examined in other countries as well (Bagozzi 1994; Dholakia, Firat, and Bagozzi 1980). Hui & Triandis (1985) observed that a key concern in extending theories and their associated constructs to other countries is whether the instruments designed to measure the relevant constructs are cross nationally invariant. Horn & McArdle (1992) suggested measurement invariance as "whether or not, under different conditions of observing and studying phenomena, measurement operations yield measures of the same attribute".

An emerging field of consumer research with its roots in culture is study of consumer acculturation. Penaloza (1989) observed that consumer acculturation is a subset of acculturation, focusing on how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are appropriate to consumer culture. He further observed that generalizations of increasing homogeneity or increasing heterogeneity are insufficient to describe the dynamics of intercultural contact; consumer change can and does occur simultaneously in both directions. This results in greater similarities and differences than can be accounted for by a single continuum of culture change. Echoing similar views, Oswald (1999) states, "In consumer culture, ethnicity can be bought, sold, and worn like a loose garment". Arnett (2002) argues that the primary psychological influence of globalization is on identity and today, many people develop bicultural identities. They "...combining their local identity with an identity linked to the global culture".

With globalization, the global consumer culture is a "cultural entity not associated with a single country, but rather a larger group generally recognized as international and transcending individual national cultures" (Alden et al., 1999). Global consumer segments (Dawar et al., 1996; Hassan & Katsanis, 1991) are those segments that "...associate similar meanings with certain places, people and things" (Alden et al., 1999). Keillor et al. (2001) Those "...individuals around the world whose cultural, social, and other differences are becoming less important as influences on their consumer behavior". Domzal & Kernan (1993) observed those "... segments of people who regard a product category in essentially the same way, regardless of their country of residence". Considering notions of cultural maintenance and adaptation, Yoon et al. (1996) assert that individuals can be cosmopolitan (global) in one domain but local in another. Ger and Belk (1996), "The dialectic of globalization-localization cannot be understood unless we begin with how the local experiences that dialectic". Friedman (1994) observed that these global and local cultural forces "...are constantly felt in the lives of those trying to

get from one day to the next”. Therefore in order to assess clearly the role of global cultural forces on consumer behavior, consumer research therefore simultaneously considers local cultural influences.

Stauss & Mang (1999) observed that interactions between these factors play an important role in affecting customer assessments of service quality. When a hospitality firm delivers its service in the international marketplace, problems may emerge from the differing perspectives of the interactions partners in a service encounter (Bianchi, 2001; Sizoo et al., 2005). Many research indicates that customers from different cultural backgrounds have different expectations as well as different perceptions of service quality (Furrer et al., 2000; Kandampully et al., 2005; Matilla, 1999; Witkowski & Wolfinbarger, 2002). The intangible and inseparable characteristics of services are especially susceptible to cultural influences. Kandampully et al., (2001); Heo et al., (2004) and Sizoo et al., (2005) observed that a clear understanding of service differences and preferences of customers from different cultural backgrounds will make it possible to provide compelling service and exceed customers expectation. Gilmore & Carson (1992) claimed that the cultural differences between the market lead to substantial variances in the standard of service and customer behavior as well as expectation which was explored in ferry travels from Scandinavia and the UK. Lee & Ulgado (1997) also argued that cultural background influences service expectations.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter gives an overview of the topic of culture in reference to consumer research. The dynamism nature of culture is also briefly discussed. The top down and bottom up approach to culture gives an insight of how the levels of culture operate at different levels.

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