

## **Understanding culture to build a successful experience: An Empirical study**

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### ***Abstract***

*Culture and behaviour are interrelated. Ideational definitions on culture often include knowledge, value, belief and information but exclude behaviour. Culture influences behaviour of an individual and by examining the behaviour, culture can be identified. This behaviour is shaped by the experiences, they come across. Studying the cultural variables is an important determinant in marketing. Understanding culture helps the marketers plan communication to better reach the consumers. Most of the research on culture primarily focuses on the organizational culture and the study of consumer culture remains unexplored. This study helps to identify the cultural elements in a diverse population and examine its role in shaping behaviour and shopping experience.*

### **Introduction:**

Culture plays a crucial role in our daily lives. It is a collective attribute of a group. Sociologists define culture as values, beliefs, language, and practices shared by a group of people in common. It is expanded to knowledge, attitude and expectations. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist suggests the material and non-material aspects of culture holds the society together. Culture is defined by different researchers in various ways. Hofstede in 2011 defines culture as, the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others. The term culture is widely used for nations or organizations in sociology or management.

### **Culture in India, overview**

Culture in India is ethnically diverse and heavily influenced by religions. People greet each other with a Namaskar. It includes pressing the hands together when they greet or depart. India is the birthplace of many religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and many other religions[13]. We can also find a fusion of cultures in India[7]. We can find a tradition of joint family system in India. However, the economic development, education and urbanization has led to the break up of joint families into nuclear families. Indian societies practice a norm of arranged marriage. But recent studies suggest that the concept of self-arranged marriages is increasing, particularly in urban[6]. People follow a system of unity in diversity where different culture, religion people live-in unity as a society. We can find diversity in landscape having deserts in Rajasthan to icy mountains in the Himalayas. Based on ethnicity, Dr. B. S. Guha (1931), identifies the people into six groups; Negrito, proto-Australoids, mongoloids, Dravidian, western brachycephals and Nordic[2]. Herbert Risley, categorized people into seven types; Turko-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Scytho-Dravidian, Aryo-Dravidian, Mongo-Dravidian, Mongoloid and Dravidian [13]. He considered Mongoloid and Dravidian as tribal. We can find a diverse culture with many languages, clothing, food habits, religions and traditions

based on the regional group. Language is an important determinant of culture. The values, knowledge and ideas are transmitted through culture. Different forms of arts are also practiced like traditional music, dance and other forms of art differs from place to place within the country. Each and every state has its own cuisine. Traditional clothing include draped garments and is influenced by local culture and urban/ rural setting. However, stitched clothes are also popular, such as salwar-kameez.

### **Cultural shift:**

Dictionary of Sociology defines culture as “Any change in material or non-material aspect of culture, by addition, subtraction or modification of cultural traits. It occurs over a period. Scott in 1988, says that the change in culture occurs when there is contact with other culture. When there is a contact between two different culture, there is usually a diffusion of culture or borrowing of cultural elements, commonly known as “acculturation” by anthropologists. However, the uprooting or loss of the previous culture was termed as “deculturation”. Herskovits in his book on acculturation states, “Culture is stable, yet dynamic and manifests continuous and constant change[10]. The impact of industrial civilization resulted in the cultural change in India is mentioned by Chottopadhyay in 1957[5]. According to M. N Srinivas improvement in the communication system, the advent of western technology and industrialization has led to the change in culture in India[12]. There is a shift in the culture. The official languages tend to shift over a period of time. In ancient past, it was Sanskrit, then in the medieval age Persian and/or Arabic is considered official and now Hindi and English are the official languages. We can find quite a lot of people migrating to cities for job opportunities. As a result, we can find a mix of cultures emerging. Particularly the population of working women has risen in the recent past.

### **Measuring culture**

Culture is a collective phenomenon. Understanding culture is evident in our daily lives. Measuring culture will enable us to understand and deal with cultural differences. There are various models developed by different researchers to measure culture. In cross-cultural psychology, Geert Hofstede in 1980 developed a framework for cross-cultural communication. His model explains the society's culture on its value of individual members and how these values relate to the behaviour. He identified five cultural dimensions: power distance (PDI) which shows the inequality of power and wealth within the society, individualism-collectivism (IDV), masculinity (MAS) which shows the task orientation vs person-orientation, uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), and long-term orientation (LTO)[9]. In 2010, he added the sixth dimension, indulgence versus self-restraint[8]. This was the first quantifiable theories to explain the observed difference between cultures. Though it was the widely used model in cross-cultural studies, it is also criticized that it does not take into account various beliefs of the individuals, and another problem associated with it is that it is formulated based on the western understanding of culture. Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) method extended the Hofstede's work and added Institutional Collectivism, In-Group Collectivism, Assertiveness, Performance orientation, Humane Orientation to the existing model. Schwartz's (1994) studied cultural values and conducted an empirical analysis of ten values namely, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence and universalism[14]. In 1994, a developmental psychologist, Greenfield developed two dimensions to measure culture: Individualism and Independence or Group Membership and Interdependence. This theory states that the members of different socioeconomic class will possess different cultural values and beliefs. In 1997, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner developed a model which comprised seven dimensions of culture. Universalism versus Particularism, 2) Individualism versus

Communitarianism, 3) Neutral versus Emotional, 4) Specific versus Diffuse, 5) Achievement versus Ascription, 6) Sequential versus Synchronous toward time, and 7) Internal Direction versus Outer Direction[15]. Bond, 2002 developed a Confucian dynamic which includes; stability, thrift, respect for tradition and the future, and regard for obligation within limits, catering for the Asian and Pacific countries[4]. Kamaruddin (2009) argued that religion plays a critical part of cultural life[1]. In 2016, A study was conducted in Malaysia to identify cultural dimensions. The study revealed seven factors: oneself values, religiosity, social harmony, humane oriented, ethnic ancestry, group collectivism and environment.

### **Culture, behaviour and experience:**

Culture drives behaviour. Behaviour is the visual nature of the culture. It is an important factor which conveys the values of the society. Research scholar, Bennett (1986) claims that the change in culture is reflected by the change in the behavioural trait[3]. Through socialization, the people learn values and norms of their society. Every society has its own ideologies. Kroeber in 1948 states culture is acquired by learning, and it is super individual and super organic[11]. Expectations are obtained from previous experiences. When a group of people come across a similar experience, they develop a common perspective about the experience. Culture is based on shared experiences. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through learning. But the role of culture in shopping behaviour and experience remains unexplored. Thus, this study gains momentum.

### **Research methodology:**

The primary motive of this research is to understand the cultural diversity and study its role on shopping behaviour and experience. The data for this empirical research is obtained from the customers buying various brands. The questionnaire is prepared mentioning the dimensions of culture, shopping behaviour and shopping experience and is distributed among women buying fashion brand. A sample of 363 with a confidence level of 95% and margin of error being 5% is examined. The data for the study is collected using convenient sampling. The items developed were in the form of statements. The first part of the questionnaire describes the demographics, the second part describes the culture, the third part has questions pertaining to the behavioural aspects, and the last part describes the experience of the consumers. A five-point Likert scale is employed and the participants were asked to choose from a range of 5(Strongly agree) to 1(Strongly disagree) and 3 being neutral.

### **Analysis:**

Based on the previous studies, the scale for measuring culture is formulated. 9 items were formulated namely; Ethnicity, lifestyle, social status, role of reference group, decision-making, knowledge, values, beliefs, materialism. An exploratory factor analysis is conducted using Varimax rotation, and we obtained one factor with eigen values  $>1$ . To interpret a more feasible solution, the values greater than .5 is selected. We obtained one factor with 8 items, thus excluding materialism. The reliability of the construct is analyzed which is greater than 7 and it is satisfactory for the research. Further a confirmatory analysis is conducted to ensure the variables in the factor forms a good fit.

The shopping behaviour is measured by the scale developed by Aiswarya, 2017 which includes statements relating to attribute, attitude and purchase intention. The ideas, beliefs and associations a customer has with respect to the product is identified and termed as attribute whereas the personality aspects of the consumers with respect to the product is identified as attitude and intention to buy the product is termed as purchase intention. The reliability of the variables is found to be .922 which is

acceptable for the study. Shopping experience is measured by 10 variables including effective, enjoyable, thrilling, helpful, necessary, functional, fun, exciting, practical, delightful. Exploratory factor analysis is conducted extracting one factor for the variables. Reliability is examined to be .845 which is satisfactory for the study.

Based on the objectives of the study, the relation between the culture, shopping behaviour and shopping experience are analyzed. Culture differs from one country to another. Understanding culture is vital for marketers. On the other hand, beliefs of a group of people are similar. The role of reference group affects the purchase and consumption behaviour. Shopping behaviour is highly dependent on cultural factors. Shopping behaviour helps to understand the decision making process of an individual. The theoretical model of culture and its influence on buying behaviour suggests the role of subjective culture (regional, ethnic, religious, linguistic, national, professional, organizational and group) in determining cognitive beliefs, practices, and values which in turn affects the attitude and social norm thereby ultimately affecting behaviour. Thus we formulate the following hypothesis;

H1: Culture affects shopping behaviour positively .

H2: Shopping behaviour affects shopping experience positively.

H3: Culture affects shopping experience positively

### **Findings**

The ethnicity is analyzed based on the region they belong to. Our respondents are 21% from Kerala, 15% from Andhra Pradesh, 25% from Tamilnadu, 17% Delhi, 3% Bihar, 4% Orissa, 5% Bengal and 10% from other regions. 23% of the respondents claimed they are traditional whereas 20% choose modern and 53% tend to have a mixed outlook of both traditional and modern lifestyle. Social status is obtained based on the income level and family background. 11% were from lower-income group, 45% were lower middle class, 52% constituted higher middle class and only 2% ranging upper class. Influence of the reference group is analyzed and we found that family accounts 36%, 42% friends, 2% other reference groups and 30% deny the role of the reference group and believed in self. When asked about the decision making during purchase, 74% take their own decision and the rest of them have the influence of family and friends. Education of the respondents was obtained. 71% of the respondents were graduate and 21% of them were postgraduate. 81% of them were of age 15-30 years and 16% were from 31-40 years. Consumer involvement while shopping is analyzed. The respondents are asked if they value their tradition. 92% responded saying yes and 69% claimed that they follow them. Chi-square test is conducted to find the role of education on the lifestyle of the people. The results show positive.

Regression analysis is conducted to test if the culture has a direct influence on shopping behaviour. The results show a beta value of .581 which shows culture's involvement in shopping behaviour. Another regression analysis is conducted keeping shopping behaviour as the independent variable and shopping experience as the dependent variable. We find a positive beta value of .475 which signifies its role. Thus we can state shopping behaviour affect the shopping experience positively. We also like to test if the culture has direct involvement in shopping experience. The results of the regression analysis show a positive value of .586. Thus we obtain the role of culture in shopping experience.

**Table 1:** Results of Regression analysis

| Independent variable | Dependent variable  | R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | F      | Sig   | Beta  |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| Culture              | Shopping behaviour  | 0.585 | 0.342    | 0.336             | 0.071                      | 51.153 | 0.000 | 0.581 |
| Shopping behaviour   | Shopping experience | 0.479 | 0.229    | 0.222             | 0.899                      | 24.886 | 0.000 | 0.475 |
| Culture              | Shopping experience | 0.587 | 0.344    | 0.338             | 0.848                      | 44.262 | 0.000 | 0.586 |

### Interpretation and Conclusion

People are well educated and most of them were graduates. They are fairly knowledgeable and possess decision making skill of their own. People have great involvement in shopping. People are becoming more independent and like to take their own decisions. We also find that education affects lifestyle positively. We find that educated people move towards a modern lifestyle. Though most of them possess a modern outlook, people value their tradition and they follow it. Reference group plays a crucial role in the culture, especially family and friends.

In a nutshell, we find that culture affects shopping behaviour and in turn shopping behaviour affects shopping experience. However, we also find culture directly affecting the shopping experience positively. Thus we can conclude saying, understanding the culture is evident before product positioning and marketing. Culture plays a major role in driving the behaviour of consumers. Creating a positive experience drives the consumers where the role of reference people is more in a country like India. The reference group influences the buying behaviour and when people are exposed to positive experience, it influences the whole group thereby stimulating the market.

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