

8.4: Multicultural Marketing

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to

- Define culture.
- Explain the difference between tangible and intangible cultural objectives.
- List the main elements through which culture is expressed.
- Describe Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

What Is Culture?

You have already read about corporate culture in Marketing and Customer Value and cultural factors influencing buying behavior in Consumer Markets and Purchasing Behavior. Let's explore culture in more detail. After all, learning about culture is the first step to understanding why the concept is a fundamental component of multicultural marketing and how it connects with diversity marketing.

Culture refers to the social norms, beliefs, behaviors, and accomplishments that characterize a particular set of individuals. Culture also encompasses shared customs, arts, language, foods, and knowledge. In essence, it is a snapshot of a society's accepted way of living at a given place or time. Figure 8.7 provides a more extensive view of the things that represent it. As you can see, culture clearly influences many aspects of life.

The term originates from the Latin word *cultura*, which is associated with nurturing, growing, and cultivating (Merriam-Webster, 2024). This explanation makes sense because some cultural aspects are taught or passed down from one generation to the next. Think of it as planting a seed—not a physical seed, but a seed of inner values. Culture is also fostered through community socialization. The outcome of these shared learnings leads to the continued growth of a group's cultural identity and its idiosyncrasies.

To be effective in an increasingly diverse marketplace, marketers need to recognize the profound role that culture plays in consumers' behaviors and purchasing decisions. That is why multicultural insights are so important to diversity marketing.

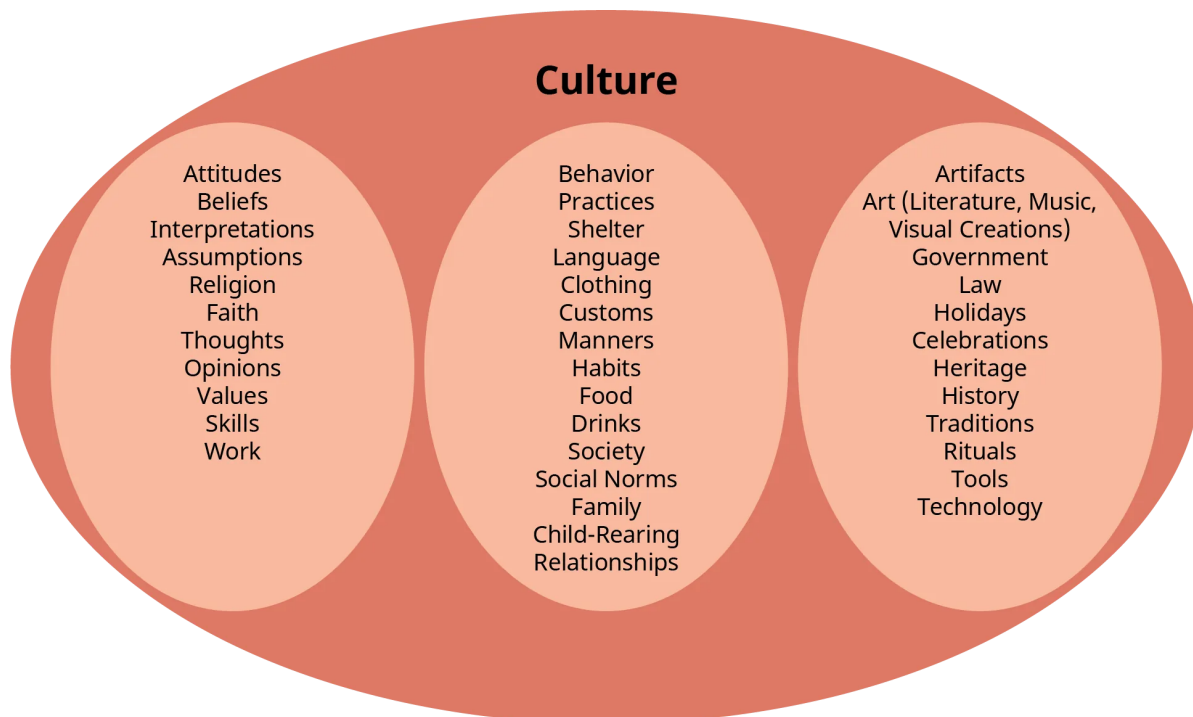


Figure 8.7 What Is Culture? (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

Tangible versus Intangible Culture

Culture is both tangible and intangible. This means that it can be seen, but it can also be concealed. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall describes it as an iceberg with external and internal surfaces (Ruiz & Spínola, 2019). As Figure 8.8 depicts, some elements of culture are readily visible, like the tip of the iceberg. Traditions, music, languages, artifacts, clothing, and literature are just a few aspects that are easy to recognize. They are tangible and external. In other words, they are the conscious part of culture.

Other aspects of culture are like the bottom part of the iceberg. Did you know that 90% of an iceberg's mass is hidden below the waterline? Thought processes, assumptions, skills, beliefs, and interpretations are more difficult to observe. Can you see a person's thoughts? Can you understand a person's worldview without asking? These things happen out of sight, making them the subconscious part of culture. Intangible and internal aspects are just like the larger portion of the iceberg in that they are often beneath the surface.

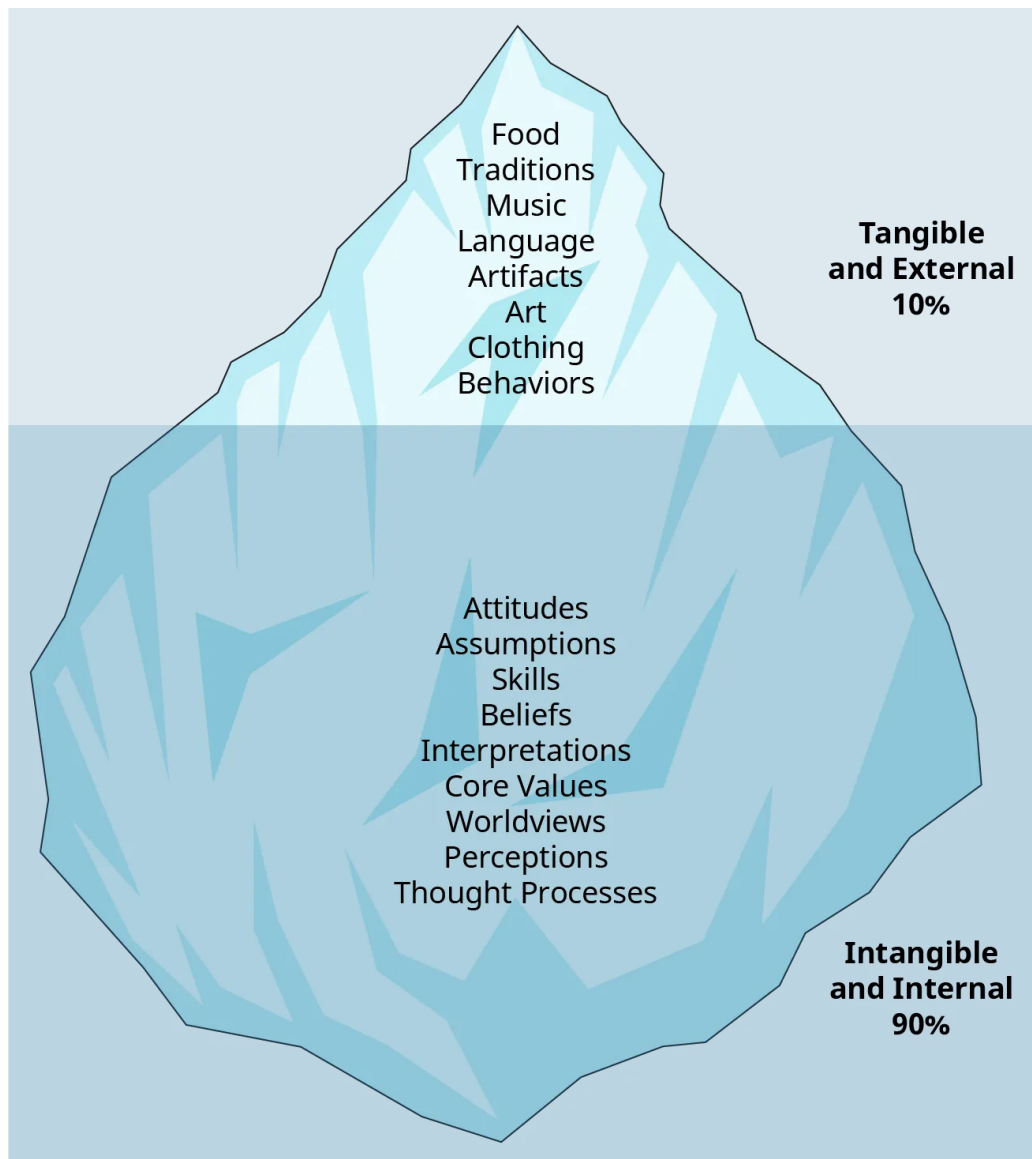


Figure 8.8 The Cultural Iceberg (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

The iceberg analogy gives us a valuable lesson about cultural insights. Connecting with multicultural consumers requires understanding not only those elements of culture that can be observed but also those that are deep-seated in a specific community.

The “Texican Whopper” campaign from Burger King (see Figure 8.9) makes this point clear. Burger King was forced to revise the ads that featured a tiny Mexican wrestler dressed in a poncho-style Mexican flag standing next to a tall American cowboy. Some Spanish-speaking customers thought the campaign was funny. However, others were offended. Insights about the distaste for

stereotypes and the high respect for the flag as a national symbol could have prevented this situation. It could have also saved Burger King money because the campaign had to be redone.



Figure 8.9 Burger King’s “Texican Whopper” campaign was a failure because the marketers lacked an understanding of the unseeable elements, or the internal and intangible aspects, of Mexican culture. (credit: “Burger King” by Mike Mozart, JeepersMedia/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Main Expressions of Culture

Culture is expressed through emotional experiences, symbols, linguistic communication, values and attitudes, and other practices. Cultural expressions are a vital part of a person’s identity. They provide insights about what an individual believes in or why an individual behaves a certain way. How would you perceive somebody waving an American flag on a holiday such as Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, or Veteran’s Day? You would probably think the person is patriotic, right? What about somebody with a colorful sugar skull face painting on Día de Los Muertos? Or how about someone with beautifully henna-decorated hands for Diwali? Visible manifestations of culture empower people to be comfortable with personal thoughts and feelings. Visible symbols also help people to be accepted in a given community by showing solidarity.

Symbols

Symbols are essential expressions of culture that represent a group’s ideologies, values, and actions. They include things such as objects, ceremonial artifacts, designs, colors, and ideas. Printed characters, words, signs, and logos can be symbols too. Even punctuation marks, or emoticons, symbolize facial expressions or people’s feelings. Marketers must be careful when using symbols because they can have different representations or meanings among different cultures. For instance, the emoticon :) symbolizes happiness in the United States. However, in Japan the emoticon for happiness looks more like this (^_^) or has a triangle-shaped mouth instead of a parenthesis (University of Alberta, 2007).

In the United States, the rainbow flag and its variations are symbols of the LGBTQIA+ community. Yet, for people who emigrated from Peru or have family in the Andes, the rainbow flag symbolizes the reign of the Inca empire (Springerová & Picková, 2018). As you can see in Figure 8.10, both flags are alike but not identical (the Andean rainbow flag has two blue stripes). Despite the similarities, the rainbow flag as a symbol has a different meaning for each group.



(a)



(b)

Figure 8.10 Marketers need to be aware of what symbols mean to different groups so that they can be sure the messages they share are interpreted as intended. (credit: “Rainbow Flag” by Dave/flickr, CC BY 2.0; “Cusco-Peru” by Paulo Guereta/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Language

Like symbols, language is an important part of culture. Language communicates personal identity. It also shapes how people perceive the world around them. Have you heard of 9Lives? It is a popular brand of cat food in the United States owned by the J.M. Smucker Company. The brand’s name comes from the popular expression that cats have nine lives. However, did you know that in Spanish and Portuguese, the expression is that cats only have seven lives? For these multicultural consumers, such language differences can influence their perceptions of the product.

Language takes verbal and nonverbal forms; it can be spoken, signed, or written. In fact, there were 7,139 living languages reported around the world in 2021, with 23 of them, in particular, adding up to a combined number of speakers totaling over half the globe’s population (Eberhard, et al., 2021). The top 15 languages in Figure 8.11 are based on the number of native- and second-language speakers in the world. Language is a main expression of culture because it provides insights to connect with audiences.

Most Spoken Languages Worldwide 2022

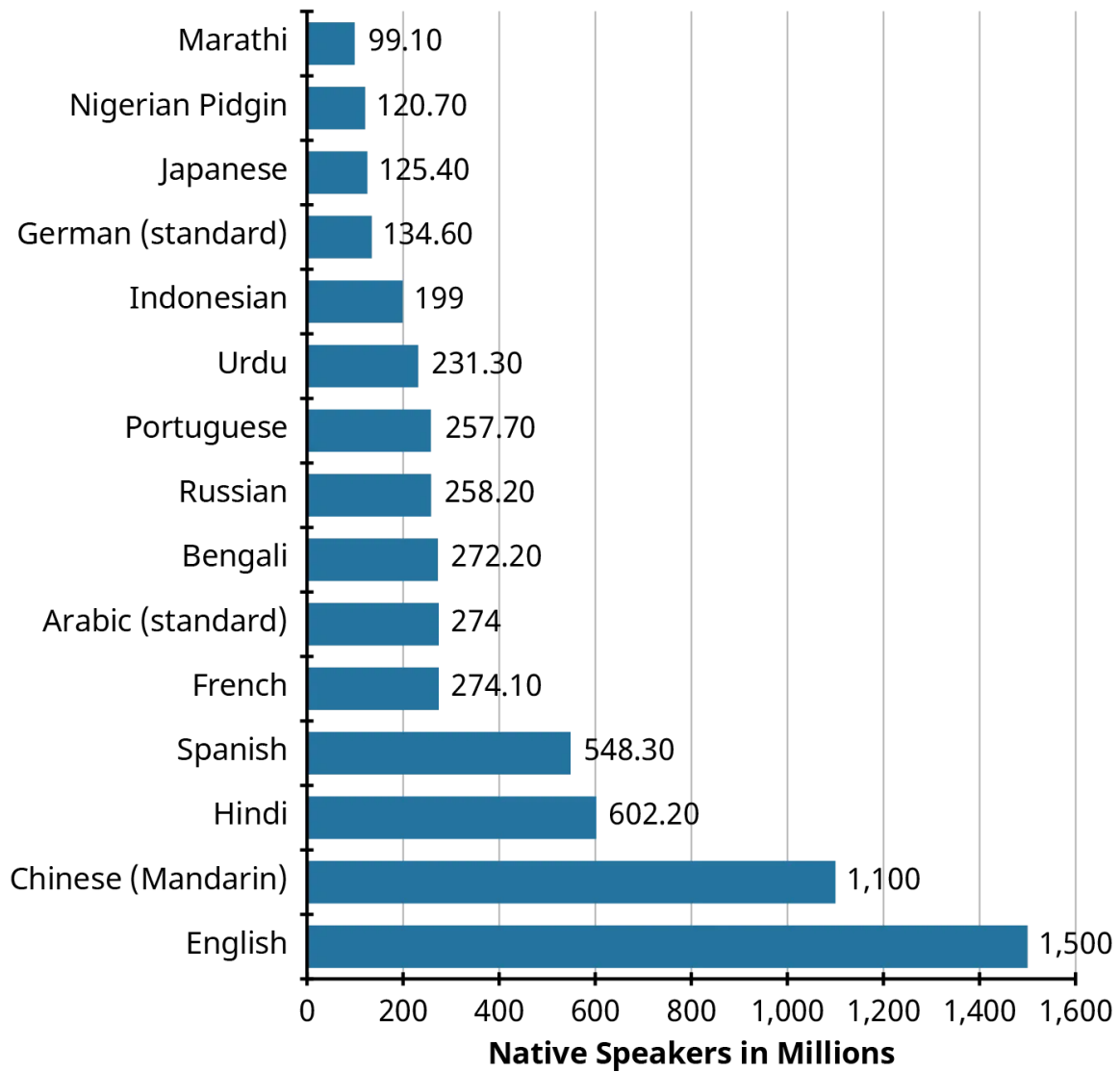


Figure 8.11 The Languages Most Spoken around the World (data source: Ethnologue, 2022; attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

As you have read, consumer diversity in the marketplace is growing. That is why marketers must conduct language research with targeted populations to avoid miscommunication or lost opportunities. This means that even within cultural groups, speech regionalisms and slang terms can affect the success of marketing campaigns (Otto, 2018).

The Hispanic population has multiple subethnicities that prove this point. Let's say that an automotive tire company wants to market its product to Hispanic consumers throughout the United States. The company could create several ad variations using words for *tire* that are popular among the subgroups. It could use the word *gomas* for Puerto Rican consumers in New York, *llantas* for Mexican buyers in Texas, *neumáticos* for Chilean clients in California, or *ruedas* for Cuban shoppers in Florida. The challenge for the company would be to decide if the effort and expense associated with creating multiple ads are justified. It should also consider if the words have other meanings among the subgroups. For example, for Puerto Ricans, *ruedas* are thin wheels, not something associated with car tires.

Values and Attitudes

Values are cultural indicators of a society's standards for goodness and justice. They are described as basic beliefs that guide behavior and give meaning to actions and attitudes. Dutch social psychologist and diversity thinker Geert Hofstede created a survey to uncover how national culture reflects a society's values (Hofstede, 2024). Hofstede summarized the survey's findings into the following dimensions:

- **Individualism versus Collectivism.** Culture is classified as either individualistic or collectivistic. In the United States, non-Hispanic White people and individuals of European descent tend to have an individualistic view. Individualism places a higher value on personal accomplishments and individual experiences. Hispanic, Black, and Asian people lean toward a collectivistic view (Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2001). Collectivism values achieving group or family goals above those of individuals. The level of individualism versus collectivism, however, varies within multicultural segments, so it is important not to make assumptions.
- **High versus Low Power Distance.** In addition to their basic function, products can also serve to display an individual's power or position in society. Think about flip phones and smartphones. Cost-wise, the traditional flip phones are a lot less expensive in general. Yet, smartphone ownership is on the rise. This is due not only to the additional capabilities of smartphones but also to the fact that their ownership is seen as a symbol of social status. Hispanic and Black people also use smartphones more than other groups for online access to health information and educational content (Anderson, 2015).
- **Masculinity versus Femininity.** Gender can strongly impact the creative concept and messaging behind marketing promotions, ads, and social media. American society in general is masculine-oriented, with Black men having a stronger view of masculinity than their non-Hispanic White and Hispanic counterparts (Horowitz, 2019). Achievement, power, and strength are considered masculine traits. For this reason, the message of many ads in the United States is about product performance and functionality. Some Asian groups, such as Japanese and Chinese, are also masculine-oriented. However, other Asian subgroups are considered more feminine-oriented (Culture Factor Group, 2023). For these consumers, visual ads that emphasize quality of life, people, and relationships would have a higher appeal.
- **Uncertainty Avoidance.** A high dislike for ambiguity and the unknown is not just an individual trait; it is a characteristic of societies in general. Cultures that do not tolerate uncertainty well seek safety and rules to reduce anxiety. These cultures also embrace technology to feel safer, which might explain why Hispanic people are such quick adopters of it. Black and Asian people also tend to avoid uncertainty and high risks more than non-Hispanic White people (Hofstede et al., 2010).
- **Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation.** This dimension describes how individuals believe and behave in society. It is also based on links to the past and challenges in the future. Cultures with long-term orientation value perseverance, orderliness, thriftiness, and having a sense of shame. Asian people, overall, rate extremely high in the long-term orientation (Change Factory, 2021). Short-term cultures, on the other hand, focus more on personal steadiness, happiness, and stability. The challenge for marketers is to balance orientations to successfully reach diverse audiences and influence consumption.
- **Indulgence versus Restraint.** Societies that prioritize satisfaction, leading a happy life, and savoring leisure activities with family and friends are described as indulgent. On the other hand, societies that favor living according to strict traditional norms

and curbing life's enjoyment are seen as restrained.

How Culture Influences Diversity Marketing

Identifying multicultural population segments and engaging them with intentional efforts is at the core of multicultural marketing. However, this requires having cultural insights because culture influences consumers' decision-making processes and purchasing behaviors. The lack of cultural insights can spell disaster when marketing to this audience.

Let's look at some cultural perspectives about living experiences, outlook, and community involvement. Living in the present moment and sharing situations with loved ones is an important goal to 42% of Hispanic people compared with only 23% of non-Hispanic White people (Tomashevskaya, 2018). Based on this insight, marketers targeting Hispanic consumers should create advertisements that feature meaningful messages and friendly people sharing a profound experience instead of simply showing the features of a product or service.

Hispanic, Black, and Asian consumers, overall, are more optimistic than non-Hispanic White consumers. In a study about their financial outlook, multicultural consumers were twice as optimistic as non-Hispanic White consumers about reaching economic success in their lifetime. As members of collectivistic-oriented cultures, they also think more about family and community when making financial decisions. Moreover, when it comes to community, Hispanic and Black consumers believe more can be achieved by working together than non-Hispanic White consumers (Tomashevskaya, 2018).

These insights suggest that expressions of culture and elements such as confidence, hope, and teamwork are crucial for implementing multicultural marketing campaigns. As you read earlier, multicultural marketing is a subcategory of diversity marketing. This means that culture has a significant impact on diversity marketing as well.

Knowledge Check

It's time to check your knowledge on the concepts presented in this section. Refer to the Answer Key at the end of the book for feedback.

1.

Culture is described as which of the following?

- a. Social norms, beliefs, and accomplishments of particular individuals
- b. Elements taught or passed down from one generation to the next
- c. Something that influences consumers' decision-making processes and purchasing behaviors
- d. All of these

2.

Which of the following are not examples of tangible or external expressions of culture?

- a. Actions and behaviors
- b. Traditions and customs
- c. Values and attitudes
- d. Music and visual arts

3.

Marketers must be careful when using symbols as cultural expressions because _____.

- a. there are too many to choose from among different cultures
- b. they can have different meanings among different cultures
- c. they can have similar meanings among different cultures
- d. they are verbal and nonverbal forms of communication

4.

An advertisement that appeals to personal accomplishments, independence, and assertiveness is an example of which of Hofstede's cultural dimensions?

- a. High power distance
- b. Masculinity

- c. Individualism
- d. Long-term orientation

5.

An advertisement that is visually appealing and emphasizes quality of life, people, and relationships is an example of which of Hofstede's cultural dimensions?

- a. Femininity
- b. Masculinity
- c. Uncertainty avoidance
- d. Short-term orientation

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