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Cultural Considerations for Marketing Research

Learning Objectives

- 1 Introduce unique international marketing research challenges
- 2 Examine the importance of language translation
- 3 Understand how Hofstede's cultural dimensions affect conducting research
- 4 Appreciate the unique ethical issues when conducting cross-cultural research

GLOBAL BUSINESS NEEDS GLOBAL RESEARCH

Looking for investment opportunities? How about a shopping mall in Cambodia?

Here's proof this is a global marketplace. An American is using the AIM market, part of the London Stock Exchange, to raise funds to build an 'American-style' shopping mall in Pnom-Penh, Cambodia. Parkson, a Malaysian department store, has already signed on as an anchor tenant. The planned project will include a 600-space car park and 100 serviced apartments.

The developer of the project is an American married to a Cambodian woman. Asked why he chose to raise the funds for the project in the UK, the developer stated that the project's investor base is global and London is the center of global finance. While the developer has a global outlook on finance, the development plans were born in the USA.

Questions: Will the average Cambodian shopper want an 'American-style' mall? Who is the 'average' Cambodian shopper? What other research questions would you recommend be answered before the project is built?

Source: Rossiter, 2007

5.1 International Marketing Research Challenges

International marketing research can be defined as research that is conducted in one or more countries other than the country of the company commissioning the research. This international

research may be conducted because this company already sells products in more than one country, or because they hope to do so in the future. If more than one country is involved in the research project, the company may decide to conduct the research either simultaneously or sequentially, country by country.

When researching the introduction of an existing product into a new country, any company needs to understand the unique needs, wants and desires of foreign consumers. Companies will use this information to adjust the products, prices, distribution and promotion to make their products more attractive to local consumers. Rather than adapt a current product companies may also use marketing research because they want to develop new products that uniquely meet the needs of consumers in other countries. In this case, research is even more important.

Almost all international marketing research is also cross-cultural research. This is true because national boundaries are usually also cultural boundaries. Marketing researchers need to be aware that within any foreign country there may be more than one cultural group. Therefore marketing research designed for a foreign country may need to be adjusted for more than one culture. Below is some advice that should be considered before any cross-cultural research is conducted.

CONDUCTING GLOBAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Global corporations often have global brands, whether they are Starbucks, McDonalds or IBM. However, even if the brand name remains the same the marketing mix offered will differ across borders and cultures. Qualitative research can be used to determine how product, price, promotion and distribution will need to be changed. However, before research can be conducted there are changes to the research process that need to be made if research is to be successful. These changes can be summarized as:

- *Integrate local knowledge* Hire local researchers to help and then make the necessary changes to the research method they recommend.
- *Form global teams* Before the research starts, use meetings between marketers in the home country and local researchers to share cultural knowledge.
- *Translate carefully* Before starting research, it is not only the words in any research instruments but also their meanings that need to be translated and, if necessary, the language should continue to be adjusted during the research process.
- *Understand the culture* Explore the country using an interpreter to engage consumers in conversation.
- *Find common themes for the final report* Rather than merely listing findings by country, in the final report find common themes before differences are discussed.

Source: Seidler, 2003

5.1.1 Cross-cultural research at home

Cross-cultural research may also need to be conducted in a company's own country. This will be the case if the country where a company is based is home to more than one cultural group. These different cultural groups may have existed together in the same country for centuries. For example, a country such as Romania has been home to culturally unique groups throughout its

history. Alternatively, different cultural groups may result from recent immigration. For some countries, such as the USA, immigration was how such nations were formed.

Unfortunately, just because there is more than one cultural group living in a country does not mean that market researchers are adept or even aware of the need to adjust their methodology. This lack of awareness may result because the newest immigrant groups are usually not represented in the ranks of marketing professionals. In the USA Hispanics now account for 14 per cent of the population, but only 62 per cent of US Hispanic Americans have finished high school (SRBI, 2005). Of course, this fact will change over time as Hispanic Americans take advantage of the educational opportunities available to their families. However, the lower education level that exists now explains why there are few Hispanic marketing professionals. As a result this population might be ignored when conducting marketing research. Unfortunately, by not adapting marketing research techniques to better assess the wants and needs of Hispanic Americans marketers are ignoring a potential consumer segment of 41.3 million people.

5.1.2 Unique research questions

The marketing research process does not change because it is being conducted across cultures. What does change is the choice of methodology and how that methodology is implemented. In addition, marketing across cultures may result in unique research questions. For example, aspects of consumer behavior that researchers take for granted in their own culture may need to be researched in another culture. Design preferences such as color, style and package size may also change from culture to culture. The preferred brand name may vary as well. In addition, where a product is purchased and how that product is used may differ. These variations will result in the need to ask additional research questions.

Examples of research questions which address cultural differences

- What are the design preferences for color and style?
- In which retail outlets would our ethnic target market segment be looking for our products?
- Who makes purchase decisions in these families?
- What type of media does the culturally distinct target market segment use?
- Do consumers want different packaging of products?
- In what language should products' instructions be written?
- How much disposable income does the average consumer have?
- How are our products used?

5.1.3 Availability and comparability of secondary data

Much of the secondary data that a marketing researcher might find available in the USA or Europe may not be available in other countries. The availability of information on demographics and consumer behavior depends on having an institution gathering and maintaining the data over a period of time. This continuity in turn depends on having a stable government or non-governmental bureaucracy to support that institution.

Another issue when conducting international secondary research is that many researchers have become dependent on using online sources of data. However, these sources may be absent in other countries because the relevant information has not been computerized due to the cost. In this case, researchers will need to find and analyze original documents and sources, but even then they may

experience problems because the data may not be accurate. In some countries the purpose of collecting data may not have been to provide an objective source of information for researchers. Rather, the purpose may have been to only collect data that supported government policy.

5.1.4 Level of cultural difference

When developing a research plan for conducting international research marketing researchers should consider the level of cultural dissimilarity between a company's home country and the new geographic area in which it plans to market. These differences could include both language differences and cultural values or dimensions. Sometimes research conducted in the same country as where a company is located might still be faced with language and cultural values issues when researching consumers from a minority cultural group. While the considerations of language and cultural values must still be taken into account, this research will be easier to undertake. This is because even if they are not members of a culture, researchers will probably have been exposed to that culture through personal relationships or through the media. In addition, finding assistance in obtaining cultural information will be easier as local experts can be found to assist with research.

It is important for marketing researchers to remember that even if the minority culture uses the same language as the majority culture, there will still be differing cultural values that must be considered when designing the research methodology. Below is an example of research that was conducted on international students studying in the UK.

HOW DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS VIEW STUDYING IN THE UK? A SURVEY CAN ANSWER THE QUESTION

Ipsos MORI, based in the UK, is a research company that conducts both quantitative and qualitative research. Not only do they meet the research needs of UK companies, through their links with Ipsos companies located around the world, they also serve the research needs of companies world-wide.

To learn about the motivation and attitudes of international students studying in the UK, Ipsos MORI conducted in-person interviews with 1,025 undergraduate and postgraduate students at 20 UK universities. The sample was constructed so that the students' areas of study were proportional to the number of full-time students studying in the field across the UK. The resulting report, 'The International Student Experience Report 2006', contained facts about international students studying in the UK such as the following:

Why do they come? Because the education will help them find a job.

How do they choose? Academic reputation is the reason for their choice of university.

How do they pay? Money is less of an issue than for UK students as families help financially.

Who are their friends? They mostly make friends with students from other countries.

All of this information could be used by UK universities in developing a promotional campaign targeted at potential international students.

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2006

When research is conducted in another country that shares the same language, it is easy for researchers to assume that the values are the same. However, a shared language does not mean that the cultural dimensions are similar. Americans, Australians, Canadians and British people may all speak English, but a marketing research plan will still need to be adjusted for cultural differences.

Research is most challenging when both the language and cultural dimensions are different. In this case, researchers must use local expertise to ensure that their research design will obtain the needed information. Even when using local research firms companies must be aware of communication difficulties that might arise from language and cultural differences between management teams and foreign marketing researchers.

5.2 Language Issues

Differences in languages between the country where management is located and the country where the research is being conducted will result in additional steps in the research process, including research questions and translation needs.

5.2.1 Translation needs

The first issue here is that additional research will need to be conducted to determine the correct wording for brand names and promotional material (see the box below). The wording used in advertisements (including written ads, brochures, billboards, posters and also broadcast messages) must be researched. It is not enough to simply translate a message. While factual information can be translated and still be understood, promotional material often conveys an emotional rather than a purely factual message. Emotional messages are difficult to communicate, even between people sharing the same culture and language. Therefore additional research will need to be conducted in order to choose how a message should be conveyed, even before the translation issue is faced.

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME MIGHT NOT BE A ROSE!

When a company markets internationally, they must conduct additional research to ensure that their marketing message is translated and communicated correctly. Language is especially important when choosing brand names. Sometimes companies may decide that they want a name that is recognized globally. Therefore they may choose to keep the sound of the brand name similar, even if the meaning to the local language-speaking group may change. However, while this technique might make sense to the company trying to build global awareness, it might be ineffective in attracting foreign local consumers to the product. Even so, most companies try for a similar sounding name believing it builds on their global presence. Yet conducting research on this issue may show it is best that a company sacrifices global branding and finds a name that will more effectively build a local market share.

Source: Francis et al., 2002

5.2.2 Translation during the research process

The second issue is that companies must translate all research material. Translation of both verbal and written information may be needed during several steps in the research process. This includes the planning phase, when preparing research materials and putting together a final report.

Planning phase

If possible, companies undertaking international marketing research should do so by partnering with a research firm in the country where the research will be conducted. This would be advisable because a commissioning company will lack both the language and cultural knowledge needed to conduct effective research in a foreign country. However, this partnership does not mean that translation will not be needed. While all the marketing researchers in a foreign research firm may speak the language spoken by the local consumers, not everyone in a foreign research company will speak the same language as the management in the commissioning company.

If everyone does not speak a language at the same level, a translator should be employed at the research planning meetings. After all, it is difficult enough to communicate effectively about research goals and objectives when everyone speaks the same language. In addition, communication in planning meetings is generally difficult as people start with generalities as research ideas are sorted through and then a meeting will build in complexity as various needs are prioritized. If the added difficulty of language misunderstandings is present, there is an even greater likelihood that miscommunication will take place. If there is any confusion about the purpose of research and the research question it will result in designing a study that will not provide the needed information in any language.

Research material

Translation of questionnaires, interview questions and focus group scripts is more involved than simply having an adequate word for word translation. There are many important cultural issues that will affect word choice. For example, when writing questions, researchers should be aware of wording issues involving ethnicity. There may be many names for the same ethnic group. There may be an official government designation, a commonly used name by other members of that society, and a name that is used within a group itself. Researchers should always use the term that an ethnic community prefers to have used when addressed by those people who are not members of their group. The term that members use among themselves may not always be the term that they prefer others to use, and in fact they may even find it offensive. Besides the research instruments, researchers should not forget that any participant instructions will also need to be translated.

In addition to translating all written material, oral translation will be needed when conducting interviews and focus groups. Of course interviewers and moderators must speak the same language as research subjects as this is the only way to ensure that effective communication can take place. They will therefore need to be bilingual so that a written and oral report can be prepared for management.

Another translation issue arises if someone from the company commissioning the research wishes to observe a focus group or interview. It will then be necessary to provide for simultaneous translation while the research is being conducted. This translation should take place in a separate area designed for viewing and listening to the research while it is being conducted so that the translation will not disrupt the research. For example, if a German automotive company

has commissioned research regarding the auto preferences of Romanians, they will observe the research while the translator repeats in German what both the moderator and the participants are saying in Romanian. When simultaneous translation is to be used, the translator should be briefed about the purpose of the research so that they can be ready to translate any industry-specific jargon.

Research findings reporting

Of course, the final written report will need to be translated. The company commissioning the research should request a copy of the research in both the language in which the research was conducted and the language of management. In addition, any research instruments and research notes should be translated even if originally written in another language. If there are any difficulties with the research recommendations, the research instruments can be checked to discover if the problem was as a result of language misunderstandings. Finally, a researcher who is bilingual should give the oral presentation. If this is not possible an oral translation may be needed at the presentation of the report.

5.2.3 Back translation

To ensure that the translation of all written material is correct, researchers may want to use back translation. When using this translation method the written material is first translated from the home into the foreign language. For example, a questionnaire written by researchers in French will be translated into German. Then another translator will translate the same questionnaire from German back into French. If the translation has been correct, the meaning should still be the same to the French researchers who originally designed the questionnaire.

Back translation is useful for both technical documents and research material. A research proposal and contract will contain technical and business jargon that has a very specific and legal meaning. It is very important that these documents be translated correctly. Research materials, such as questionnaires, will often use terms such as idioms and clichés which are common in everyday life and are therefore culturally specific. Not all translators are comfortable with translating all types of language. After all, many people would have difficulty explaining the exact meaning of legal jargon or idioms in their own language. While the use of back translation is the norm when a company needs to conduct a survey in another language, another proposed method involves researchers and translators working as a collaborative team to establish equivalency (Douglas and Craig, 2007).

5.3 Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture

Many of the decisions people make each day as they go about living their lives are made at an unconscious level. After all, life would be much too difficult if every decision had to be carefully considered. So people get up in the morning and eat what they consider to be 'normal' breakfast food. They commute to work in a normal fashion, work at normal occupations, and have normal family living arrangements. Of course, a 'normal' breakfast meal of cornflakes for one person may be fish soup for another – and meanwhile, each may consider the other's choice 'strange'.

Self-reference is a term used to describe the fact that everyone believes his or her way of life is the 'norm'. This is not necessarily a problem unless a person comes into contact with other people who have different ideas of what constitutes a 'normal' life. This person then has the choice of feeling threatened and reacting negatively or reacting with interest and exploring the cultural difference. Below is an example of how one company approached consumer research in the People's Republic of China.

USING RESEARCH TO GAIN INSIGHT INTO CHINESE CONSUMERS

Lenovo, a producer of PCs and other technological products, wanted to sell products to the Chinese consumer. However, so did Hewlett-Packard, Dell and IBM. Lenovo knew that to successfully compete they would have to understand what benefits Chinese consumers wanted in technological products. Discovering consumer preferences is difficult enough when you are familiar with the consumer culture. Therefore, Lenovo established a team to undertake marketing research to discover more about the needs, wants and desires of the Chinese consumer.

This process involved inventive secondary research before they went to China and observation, ethnography and projective techniques once in the country. The research started even before the Lenovo team left for China. Researchers studied photos of Chinese billboards while listening to all types of Chinese music. The team also examined Chinese consumer products. A professor was asked to teach them Chinese history and cultural differences. A Chinese exchange student was asked to describe the Chinese lifestyle and their use of technology. All of this was done so that the team would be better able to conduct research when they went to China.

The next step in the research was to directly experience Chinese culture. The team members lived in China – commuted to work on bicycles, ate in dining halls, sang in karaoke bars. While they did so, they conducted observational research by noting how people used technology in their everyday life.

The researchers then conducted ethnographic research in consumers' homes. They not only observed the use of technology, they also analyzed the fashion tastes of consumers by examining their clothing and furnishings. Although an interpreter was used on these home visits, the researchers also broke down communication barriers by using projective techniques. Research participants were each given a camera, a glue stick and a poster board, and asked to record their actions during a typical day.

Once the research was done, the information was compiled onto 'Ethnography Inspiration Sheets'. These sheets were used to position Chinese consumers within five segments and products were designed to meet the needs of each. The research was so successful in predicting Chinese preferences it won a gold medal in the 2006 Industrial Design Excellence Award.

Source: ZIBA Design, 2006

When researching marketing issues across cultures it is imperative for researchers to remember that the self-reference criterion is unacceptable. Instead, researchers must remain aware that all

consumers have their behavior and desires shaped by their national and ethnic culture. Even within a single country several different ethnic and cultural differences may exist among people who belong to different groups.

Of course, on a basic human level people have the same emotional makeup. Everyone feels pride, humility, anger, love, anxiety and courage. What differs in cultures is which emotions are encouraged and which are suppressed. One model of trying to understand the similarities and differences across cultures was developed by Geert Hofstede. He argued that everyone carries mental programs that shape their actions and values (Hofstede, 2001). These mental programs are the result of socialization from within families, schools and other organizations to which a person is exposed while young. Of course even in the same country the values and behaviors of individuals, families, schools and organizations may vary. However, there will also be striking similarities that will distinguish one country's culture from another's.

Hofstede's model is based on research conducted on the characteristics and values of IBM employees in many different countries. The research revealed that human behavior is not random. Statistical analysis revealed four main characteristics where differences were shaped by an individual's cultural environment. These dimensions of predictable behavior are termed power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity.

5.3.1 Power distance

Power distance describes how individuals react to authority. No society exists where everyone has equal power. For example, within an organization a boss has more power than a subordinate. Because of this power difference, the boss can determine the behavior of the subordinate much more than the subordinate can determine the behavior of the boss. This would also be true between those in political power and ordinary citizens. The same could be said between family members, although who holds the power in a family may differ between cultures.

This situation of inequality, where one person has the power to determine the behavior of another, holds true across all cultures. What differs is the acceptance of such inequality or power distance. Do those without power try to reduce the control that the powerful have over their lives? Or is there an acceptance that such a difference in power levels is 'normal' and therefore acceptable?

People in a country with high power distance will believe that decisions made by those in power should be accepted. There is a belief that those with power will make rules that will lead to the happiness of most people and therefore these rules should be followed. However, in an organization in a country with low power distance there will be the belief that people at all levels have the ability to make the decisions that are best for them. Because everyone has the ability to make good decisions, subordinates will expect to have an input into decision making. Therefore, if more people from every level are involved in the decision making, the better the decision will be. Some examples of power distance and specific countries are:

Lowest power distance countries

Austria
Israel
Denmark
New Zealand
Sweden
Ireland

Highest power distance countries

Malaysia
Romania
Guatemala
Panama
Philippines
Russia

Relation to marketing research

The dimension of power distance has a direct application to marketing research. For example, the USA is a country that ranks low on power distance. Therefore, a marketing researcher should expect that the average consumer will have insights that they believe will be valuable to those making product decisions in the company. Based on this assumption, a researcher will plan a focus group or interviews to gather opinions on management's decision to introduce a new product.

In a high power distance country research participants might find this idea rather ridiculous. Those in a focus group will see the researcher as someone in a position of power and not to be challenged. Interview subjects will believe that the management of the company includes the best people to make the decision as to what to produce. If those in power have both the authority and the responsibility to make decisions, why are consumers being asked what should be produced?

5.3.2 Uncertainty avoidance

Part of being human involves being conscious of time and therefore being aware that we are constantly confronted with an unknown future. However, it is psychologically impossible to live in a state whereby a person must acknowledge that at any moment the future could radically change. To lessen this anxiety regarding this unknown future, countries create laws, perform religious rituals and use technology. Such laws govern people's behavior so that it can be more predictable and this therefore results in less anxiety. Religious rituals are used to provide comfort and also a belief in a knowable future that will occur after the present uncertain reality. In addition, countries will use technology to protect against the randomness of Nature.

How accepting people are of the ambiguity of the future differs between cultures. Families, schools and governments transmit this level of acceptance through their use of laws, religion and technology. Avoidance of uncertainty will lead to behavior that is considered rational, such as keeping the same job for a lifetime. In contrast, this same behavior in a country with less uncertainty avoidance will be seen as irrational.

Organizations cope with uncertainty avoidance by creating rules and organizational rituals. An organization in a high uncertainty avoidance country will have many rules that govern behavior. People who live in a high uncertainty avoidance culture will find these rules comforting rather than restrictive. They will know that if they follow the rules the future should hold few surprises. Employees in these countries will also tend to stay with the same employer to avoid the implied threat that a new employment situation would present.

Lowest uncertainty avoidance countries

Singapore
Jamaica
Denmark
Sweden
Hong Kong
Vietnam

Highest uncertainty avoidance countries

Greece
Portugal
Guatemala
Uruguay
Belgium
Malta

Relation to marketing research

People from countries with high uncertainty avoidance cultures will find novelty a threat rather than exciting. They will fear failure more than they will anticipate success. Therefore a task with

no rules and without any definition of what is to be expected would not be welcomed. However, people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures will find new challenges and unfamiliar situations exciting. Rather than worry about failure, they will focus on the possibility of success.

Research techniques that require participants to take risks based on little information would make individuals in high uncertainty avoidance cultures uneasy. Creative projective techniques, such as asking participants to draw a visual ad for a product based on their opinions, provide little guidance as to what is expected. Such techniques would not work well in a high uncertainty avoidance culture. Even open-ended questions in a survey form may go unanswered as there is too much risk of giving an answer that might be perceived as wrong.

5.3.3 Individualism versus collectivism

All human beings are social animals with a need to belong. However, whether this desire to bond is encouraged varies between cultures. The issue of individualism versus collectivism affects social and living arrangements both at home and at work. This cultural dimension will shape the decision of who people will choose to live with, whether alone or with family members, and will even shape who is considered 'family'. In individualistic cultures, 'family' often means the nuclear family only. Even within the nuclear family children will move away as soon as they can be self-sufficient. An adult child still living at home will need to be explained to other family and friends, as it seems somehow 'unnatural'. In collectivist cultures the concept of family is extended much more broadly to include those who may be distantly related. In these cultures adult children who choose to move away from the family may be seen as 'unnatural'.

However, the concept has a broader implication than just where people live and who they consider relatives, it also impacts on how people think and work in organizations. In an individualistic society people are expected to have their own unique thoughts and ideas and are rewarded for doing so. In collectivist societies, people will tend to think the way others do so and group decisions will be respected.

Highest individualism countries

USA
Australia
UK
Canada
Netherlands
New Zealand

Highest collectivism countries

Guatemala
Ecuador
Panama
Venezuela
Columbia
Indonesia

Relation to marketing research

The marketing concept puts the individual needs and wants of the consumer at the heart of the marketing mix. The purpose of marketing research is to uncover these needs and wants. While it is true that individuals differ because of their genetic makeup, their family experiences and their external environment, in collectivist cultures it will be much harder to prompt individuals to express these differences.

Particularly in focus group situations, research subjects from collectivist cultures will be more likely to agree with other group members rather than explore the differences that might cause disagreements. Also, when answering survey questions, people from collectivist cultures are likely to respond to questions based on the views of their families and friends rather than on their own opinions.

5.3.4 Masculinity versus femininity

Biological differences between the genders are the same everywhere, but the importance of these differences and how they are reinforced differ across cultures. Differences involved in child bearing are biologically determined. However, while not absolutely determined by biology other behaviors are statistically more common in males or females. This is because every society has ideas of what behaviors are considered appropriate for males or females.

While these ideas of gender specific appropriate behavior vary between cultures, there are similarities. In most cultures men are expected to be more aggressive and concerned with status while women are expected to be more nurturing and concerned with the family. However, how these roles are applied may differ. For example, in Russia the occupation of doctor has been seen as one that is natural for women because it involves caring for people. In the USA the occupation of doctor has been seen as natural for men because the power of being able to heal gives status (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

A culture is referred to as 'masculine' when the difference between gender specific behaviors is reinforced. In a highly masculine country, men are expected to be aggressive, tough and driven by the need for status, while women are expected to be modest, to nurture the family and maintain social relationships. The difference in a highly feminine country is that there is more leeway for these roles to overlap. Women are allowed to be more aggressive and it is socially acceptable for men to be more caring.

Highest masculinity countries

Slovakia
Japan
Hungary
Austria
Venezuela
Switzerland

Highest femininity countries

Sweden
Norway
Netherlands
Denmark
Costa Rica
Estonia

Relation to marketing research

Masculine versus feminine behavior has a direct implication for consumer research as it affects who is considered as a consumer. In a high masculine country, men make the major shopping decisions involving expensive products while women will shop for food and everyday items. Therefore men will be asked to participate in research that asks for opinions on expensive products such as automobiles. In feminine countries, men would feel free to involve their wives in making this decision. As a result, women will have an impact on the purchase decision and should be included in the research. Likewise, in a highly feminine country, men may equally take on the task of food shopping. Research on household products, such as laundry soap, will also want to gather male opinions. Table 5.1 below summarizes the effects and the necessary adjustments.

5.4 Marketing Ethics and Cultural Values

Ethics are socially based ideas of what is correct behavior versus wrong behavior. Ethical rules are learned while young from family, the educational system and religious institutions. If ethics

Table 5.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Effect on research</i>	<i>Needed adjustments</i>
Power distance	Participants in focus groups and interviews from high power distance countries will defer to a researcher as the person with a position of authority.	Use techniques that will allow participants to provide information anonymously.
Uncertainty avoidance	Participants from high uncertainty avoidance countries will find techniques that provide little direction threatening.	When using such techniques more information on expectations needs to be provided.
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Participants from collectivist cultures in focus groups will not want to disagree with other participants. Survey questions may be answered based on the opinions of the group rather than the individual.	In-depth individual interviews may be needed so that sufficient time is available to convince participants that their views are valid and necessary.
Femininity vs. Masculinity	Who makes the purchase decision varies based on the cost of a product and its perception as something that is used by only men or women.	The research sample will need to be adjusted to adapt for gender differences in product purchasing.

are the result of socialization it can be assumed that they may differ from culture to culture. This leaves marketing researchers with a dilemma. When market researchers are in 'Rome' should they 'do as the Romans do' even if it conflicts with their own ethical principles? One theory that can help clarify the issue is contextualism (Hooker, 2003).

Contextualism argues that while the rules of conduct may vary in different cultures, they may still spring from the same universal principle. A universal principle is one that is true across cultural boundaries. An example of such a principle is that the strong should protect the weak from harm. However, the application of a rule can vary depending on who it is that a culture defines as being in need of protection. A culture that sees women as being in need of protection will seek to protect women from strangers, particularly men. Therefore they will not be open to the idea of a male researcher interviewing a female participant without a male family member present.

The researcher may come from a culture that does not believe women need this type of protection. Therefore this refusal to allow women to participate in research if the moderator or interviewer is male may be difficult to accept. However, it may help if the researcher remembers that the behavior is the result of a universal belief that both cultures share. Rather than waste time in disagreement, it might be better spent on adapting the research methodology to ensure that the cultural value of the protection of women is respected.

5.4.1 Stereotyping

Everyone constructs stereotypes of groups of people different from themselves. These stereotypes take the qualities of a few members of a group and project them onto all members of that group. People construct stereotypes, either positive or negative, in an effort to make sense of the world.

A researcher may have a positive stereotype of groups based on perceived personality traits. For example, Americans may be seen as friendly, Germans as hard working, and the French as romantic. However, some stereotypes held by researchers may be negative. While stereotypes can be used as a 'shorthand' method of understanding the world, the problem is that they may blind researchers to reality. If a researcher holds the stereotypes mentioned above they are much less likely to note that Americans can be unfriendly, Germans can be laidback, and the French can be unromantic. Researchers will only notice these traits if they are very extreme because they conflict with their stereotypes.

It is impossible for researchers to be free of all stereotypes. Researchers are naturally more likely to feel positively about groups that they associate with positive personal qualities and to feel negatively about a group that they associate with negative qualities. Rather than be free of all stereotypes, the goal is for researchers to be aware of their stereotypes and to make the necessary adjustments in their attitudes. For example, a researcher working with a group of Japanese focus group participants may believe that the Japanese are hard working with little preference for leisure time. As a result this researcher is less likely to see the variation in the group members. Therefore, they are less likely to notice the focus group member who is unhappy with his or her job and dreams of living on a beach somewhere.

5.4.2 Prejudice

Prejudice is always a negative phenomenon. It can be based on age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, occupation and sexual orientation. This type of attitude engenders negative attributes which may have no basis in reality to all the members of a specific group. Prejudice is usually learned early as a result of family, school and social experience. However, it can also be developed later in life as the result of associating with others who share a common prejudice. It can make a person so uneasy that they will avoid contact with members of a group he or she views negatively. Prejudice can even lead some people to actively seek out members of a group so that they can express their hostility.

Because prejudice is usually learned early in life, it can be difficult to overcome. If researchers realize that they have a problem with prejudice they should avoid working with groups they view negatively. Even if researchers feel they can hide their feelings, their attitudes may still show. For example, a researcher may have learned a very negative view of an ethnic group. Even if the researcher is now aware that this prejudice is incorrect, part of their feelings may still show in a focus group setting. Because members of the ethnic group have probably all experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity, they will be quick to pick up on this prejudice and the focus group will not be effective as a result.

Summary

- 1 A company may need to conduct marketing research across cultural boundaries whether on a unique cultural group in the same country or a different country. There are a number of unique challenges a company may face when it conducts marketing research across cultural boundaries, including the need to research consumer preference questions that would normally not require research.

The amount of research challenge will depend on the level of cultural difference between the marketing researchers' own culture and the culture that is being researched.

- 2 Marketing in other countries where a different language is spoken will require translation. Translation issues the company will face include the need to translate meetings, research materials and the final written and oral report. To ensure accuracy, back translation, where the language is translated from the home to the foreign language and then back again, is recommended.
- 3 The self-reference criterion refers to the fact that most people assume their own behavior is the normal standard against which other behaviors should be judged. While all people have the same range of emotions their behavior is shaped by culture. An international marketing researcher must be able to understand the validity of the choices made by members of other cultures. These cultural differences can be explained using the dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. Each of these will affect the choice of research subjects, research methodology and the way that methodology is implemented.
- 4 Contextualism is a theory that explains that although behaviors may vary across cultures they may still be the expression of the same underlying value. Rather than focusing on the disagreement regarding this behavior, it is better for marketing researchers to understand what value the behavior expresses. Marketing researchers must also be aware of their own stereotypes and prejudices. Stereotypes, either positive or negative, occur when the actions of a few are believed to be true of everyone in a group. Prejudices are always negative and are based on preconceived ideas rather than reality.

Key Terms



back translation translation of a document from the original to another language and back to the original language to determine if the first translation was correct

contextualism different behaviors may arise from the same underlying ethical principle

cross cultural research research where the marketing researchers are of a different cultural background than research participants

cultural dimensions classification of cultural characteristics and behavior

power distance cultural dimension that describes the level of acceptance of power and status differences

prejudice dislike of all members of a group based on a preconceived idea which may have no basis in reality

self-reference criterion judging the values and actions of other cultures by the standards of the home culture

stereotyping believing the actions or values of a few members of a group must be true of all members of that group

uncertainty avoidance level of acceptance of the ambiguity of the future

Discussion Questions

- 1 What are some of the reasons why organizations may be unwilling to undertake international marketing research?
- 2 What different cultural groups could be researched in the country where you live?
- 3 Can you think of some consumer preference questions you would need to ask because you currently do not have the necessary information?
- 4 What country would be very dissimilar from your own in terms of culture and language?
- 5 Why is it more difficult to conduct secondary research in other countries?
- 6 How do Hofstede's cultural dimensions affect marketing research?
- 7 Give an example of how power distance is exhibited in the classrooms of your country.
- 8 How would uncertainty avoidance affect how individuals in different countries approach an open-ended question on a survey or participate in a focus group?
- 9 Can you think of an example from your culture that explains the difference between masculine versus feminine behavior?
- 10 Why is it important that researchers understand their own stereotypical beliefs and prejudices about people?

Recommended Reading



Brewer, Thomas L. (ed.) (2003) *Oxford Handbook of International Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Twenty eight chapters on different aspects of international business written by leading experts comprise the contents of this book. It also contains an interesting chapter on research trends in international marketing.

Edmunds, Holly G. (2006) *The AMA Guide to the Globe: Managing the International Marketing Research Process*. Mason, OH: Thomson/Southwestern. This book provides a step-by-step process for a marketer who is confronted with the need to conduct international consumer research.

Ember, Carol R. and Melvin Ember (2001) *Cross Cultural Research Methods*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press. Rather than showing how to conduct marketing research this book covers how to research cultures, a useful skill for someone responsible for international consumer research.

Gannon, Martin J. (2001) *Working Across Cultures: Applications and Exercises*. London: SAGE. Marketers who research cross-culturally not only need to know theory, they also need to understand how to interact with people from different cultures. This book uses easy exercises and questionnaires to help the reader gain insights into their ability to interact cross-culturally.

Guirdham, Maureen (2005) *Communicating Across Cultures at Work*. Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press. Topics include how culture affects behavior, communicating interculturally and working abroad. Interesting European diversity data are included.

Harkness, Janet A., Van De Vijver, Fons J.R. and Mohler, Peter P.H. (2003) *Cross-Cultural Survey Methods*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Interscience. Equivalency of method and comparability of findings are addressed in this book. Also included are 21 articles on international research.

Rugimbana, Robert and Nwankwo, Sonny (2003) *Cross-Cultural Marketing*. London: TL EMEA Higher Education. This book examines multi-culturalism from a consumer perspective rather than that of the organization. While all the information is interesting, the book also includes a chapter dedicated to conducting cross-cultural marketing research.