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**THE MEANING OF CULTURE
IN MARKETING ACTIVITIES
OF ENTERPRISES WORLDWIDE
– SELECTED ASPECTS**

Summary: The subject of the article is the notion of culture and its components. In the article close attention has been given to a discussion on cultural factors, which affect the decisions taken in preparation for advertising campaigns on foreign markets. Also, some examples of mistakes made due to the lack of knowledge of cultural differences in planning marketing activities in various countries are discussed.

Keywords: marketing, culture

1. Economic culture – its definition and significance for development

The notion of culture has been present in people's lives since they started deliberately shaping the reality by adjusting it to their needs, likings, ideas and creating communities guided by the same common values. Describing culture one refers to a model of the social development, which reflects the system of knowledge, principles, laws, daily routine, beliefs and customs that are characteristic of a particular society. Culture, therefore, is the result of bio-anthropo-socio-cultural interactions. It may closely depend on a country or region. It is worth mentioning that not only the location criterion may determine culture, but also other criteria such as religious affiliations and ethnic backgrounds.

According to the above notion of culture the term is ambiguous and it is the subject of many scientific discussions in the field of culture studies, history, sociology, anthropology, management and others. The word 'culture' appeared in antiquity. Its etymology derives from the Latin expression *cultura mentis*, which means soil cultivation. At that time it signified transforming a natural condition into a better, improved, that is, more useful state. That use of the term 'culture' was applied by Marcus Tullius Cicero in his 'The Tusculan disputations of Cicero'. He used a

metaphorical expression *cultura animi* which means mind cultivation or spiritual culture. From Cicero onward the term has been associated with any human activity aimed at preservation, education and development: At the same time it is necessary to pay attention to associating culture with natural phenomena when referring to original interpretations of the term.¹

The definition of culture has undergone modifications, as well as has been affected by interpenetrating sciences. As a result of these processes the present meaning of culture is very varied. The following approaches can be distinguished:²

1. thematic – culture as a list of artefacts,
2. historical – culture as social legacy and traditions passed down to future generations,
3. behavioural – culture is a divided, trained behaviour,
4. prescriptive – culture as a set of ideas, values and rules governing our behaviour,
5. functional – culture as a way of solving problems in adapting regarding the surroundings and being part of a group,
6. mental – culture as a set of ideas, learnt behaviours which eliminate primitive instincts and in this way people can be distinguished from animals,
7. structural – culture is a system composed of assumptions, values, behaviours and symbols,
8. symbolic – culture is based on arbitrarily defined meanings.

Table 1. The scope of research into culture

Science	The scope of research into culture
Archaeology	examines a set of artefacts made of bone, metal and wood
Ethnography	examines a currently existing region of folk culture which consists of not only artefacts, but also social behaviours: dialects, folk songs, festivals, myths, ceremonies, beliefs and proverbs
Anthropology	examines artefacts, behaviours, institutions, business activity, art, entertainment, language and religion
Psychology	examines culture as a set of behaviours of an individual, his thoughts, feelings and responses. In the psychological approach culture is a set of rules and norms of conduct, modes of expression, orders, prohibition, assessments and opinions
Sociology	examines present structures and functions of society characterised by the dividing up of work. The research covers certain aspects of life and human activities
Economics	examines opinions and actions in relation to resource management

Source: [Filipak 1996, passim].

In specialist literature there are different suggested classifications of cultural differences, particularly cross-cultural differences. The attempts to describe them all

¹ A. Glińska-Noweś, *Kulturowe uwarunkowania zarządzania wiedzą w przedsiębiorstwie*, Dom Organizatora, Toruń 2008, s. 131.

² Ibidem, s. 132.

were quite unsuccessful therefore one group only was chosen to be described in the article according to the subject. The classification is based on Geert Hofstede and Bob Waisfisz's work of 1980 who established the Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation. Geert Hofstede described the following cultural dimensions:³

1. Power Distance Index (PDI) determines relationships between superiors and subordinates, authorities and citizens. Also, it suggests a level of tolerance for society's inequality and superiors' abilities to communicate with their subordinates.

2. Individualism (IDV) represents proportions between the importance of an individual and group interests. Most societies are collective in which the position of an individual is determined by membership of a group.

3. Masculinity (MAS) this particular dimension points to the differentiation of roles between the two sexes.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) as Hofstede writes: 'avoiding uncertainty can be [...] defined as a degree of danger sensed by members of a given culture in new, unknown and uncertain situations.' In other words, it determines the level of unpredictability of new social conditions and future uncertainty, which they are likely to accept.

In summary, learning and understanding the culture of society is the key to an explanation for social behaviours and activities, which give some areas – regions or places, unique character. Culture defines any forms of social and economic awareness, including the one connected with somebody's place of residence, region and country (local identity). Culture is an open system, which supports and strengthens values and behavioural patterns. As the open system, it is likely to be influenced by external forces. On the other hand, it affects the surroundings itself. It is of a dialectic-progressive nature in relation to both internal and external events in a synchronic and diachronic dimension.⁴ The contents and forms of culture may develop different systems of socio-economic relations. The power of interaction depends on the results of diffusion processes and cultural interaction of social systems inspired deliberately as well as happening in a dynamic and an uncontrolled way.⁵

Axiological differentiation of culture points to its ability to reach any fields of the socio-economic life. According to J. Lipiec at the congress: Culture-economy-media, he concluded '[...] it is not enough, fully axiological and shining with its own glitter, the word culture. It is necessary to always ask: culture, but which one?'⁶

Another noteworthy approach to culture called economic examines processes and social behaviours affecting economic development. The essence lies in the

³ G. Hofstede, *Kultury i organizacje*, PWE, Warszawa 2000.

⁴ F.J. Lis, *Wartości w kształtowaniu motywacji i organizacji życia społecznego*, Politechnika Lubelska, Lublin 1996, s. 101.

⁵ *Ibidem*, s. 102.

⁶ A. Gardowska, *Kultura ekonomiczna jako instytucja*, www.mikro.univ.szczecin.pl/bp/pdf/17/24.pdf, s. 230.

economic situation of a community. Mutual interaction between individuals is established, which in fact constitute economic entities.

Table 2. Economic culture according to the ontological concept

Ontological question on the meaning of culture	The meaning of economic culture
Where does culture exist?	It exists in society of specific economy
What forms does it take?	Those which are all material objects and intellectual works of human activity (including all autotelic and instrumental values), behavioural patterns affecting productive resources and production conditions
Due to whom does it exist?	It exists due to <i>homo oeconomicus</i> (<i>homo hubris</i>)
Due to what does it exist?	It exists due to the awareness and the deliberate activity of business entities
What are the contents?	General knowledge and expertise, business, values and norms – a social world view determining the structure of socio-economic life (social capital)

Source: A. Gardowska, *Kultura ekonomiczna jako instytucja*, www.mikro.univ.szczecin.pl/bp/pdf/17/24.pdf, s. 231.

The analysis of the subject enables us to state that economic culture is the property of society which shapes norms and people's behaviours, the quality of interpersonal relationships in organisations and the conditions of developing society's knowledge of economic processes. The notion can be understood in two ways. The first one describes a system of values, behavioural patterns and cognitive and adaptive capabilities essential to business activity. The other one refers to the main factors affecting cultural evolution and then it focuses on the subject of the conducted research around several components such as entrepreneurship, the attitude to work and education.⁷

According to the above, economic culture the same way as the general definition of culture refers to:

1. a human being as a member of a particular society,
2. a repeatable economic or social occurrence,
3. a set of learned phenomena,
4. time dimension,
5. spatial dimension,
6. a system of internal logic,
7. human adaptation mechanisms.

Economic culture is of dependent nature – it exists within a specific economy, it is not self-reliant – it is dependent on the real existence of economic units and

⁷ G. Krzyminiewska, *Wiedza ekonomiczna i umiejętności społeczne młodzieży wiejskiej*, Acta Scientiarum Polonorum Oeconomia 2009, nr 8 (3), s. 60.

physical objects, and close but indirect existential relationship to its nature and it is derivative – culture is created and processed by *homo oeconomicus*.⁸

2. Cultural differences and marketing behaviours

The above analysis of understanding the concept of culture demonstrates that many socioeconomic phenomena result from distinct features of a given society. Types of marketing behaviours are strongly connected with the nature of social relations and the culture of a given country or region. According to Mitchell, each year there are about 40,000 products launched into the foreign market and 85% of the products are not successful.⁹ In order to avoid mistakes concerning cultural differences while conducting negotiations and launching advertising campaigns into foreign markets it is essential to realise the dissimilarities relating to:¹⁰

1. desired look of goods, for example colours, shape, the size of packaging and symbols,

2. the way goods are advertised, for example the form of advertising:¹¹ TV advertising, trade fairs and press advertising – their message, length, humour and passing on facts,

3. distribution channels, for example the place of sale – small family-run shops, supermarkets and mail-order sale,

4. carrying on dialogue, for example language, context, direct and indirect conversations, formal and informal style,

5. appropriate business names and brand labels, for example language inexplicitness, other meanings, associations, symbols and colours,

6. the attitude to foreign goods, for example the attachment to domestic brands – ‘Buy British.’

Ignorance of those basic factors related to a given foreign market may lead to many misunderstandings and removing the specific commodity or service from the market because of its bad reception. In agreement with the accepted assumption in the article in which there is the division of cultural differences by Geert Hofstede and Bob Waisfisz used for making an analysis it is worth pointing to some differences (discussed below) which may appear in planning marketing activities.

The first of the differences is respect and strict hierarchical characteristics of the Easterners, which is visible in the workplaces of superiors and older employees. Far more respect is shown to men, which will be a vital element in starting adver-

⁸ A. Gardowska, *Kultura ekonomiczna...*, op. cit., s. 232.

⁹ Ch. Mitchell, *A short course in international business culture*, World Trade Press, Novato 2000.

¹⁰ E. Duliniec, *Marketing międzynarodowy. See more of that*: M. Bartosik-Purgat, *Style reklamowe w zróżnicowanym środowisku kulturowym* [Advertising styles in a varied cultural – International Marketing], PWN, Warszawa 2004, s. 66.

¹¹ Environment on: http://www.swiatmarketingu.pl/index.php?rodzaj=01&id_numer=114916.

tising activities. The hierarchy is also inevitable in many European countries such as Germany, however, it is not stressed so strongly. On the opposite side there are countries such as the United States where hierarchy in the workplace is of little importance. For example, a trainee calls his superior by his first name. An advertising campaign may, therefore, approach those aspects in a more casual way.¹²

Table 3. Guidelines on building a motivational system and advertisement management according to Hofstede's model

Dimensions of Hofstede's model	Guidelines on building a motivational and management system for each dimension
High Power Distance	Centrally-taken decisions
Low Power Distance	Decisions should be decentralised, taken on the principle of cooperation and consultancy
High Uncertainty Avoidance	The necessity of establishing detailed procedures and schedules; strong technological support, clear allocation of responsibility, expert support is required; emphasis on long-term planning, monitoring and reporting
Low Uncertainty Avoidance	High formalization, stiff regulations and procedures are not required, the necessity of providing autonomy and short-term planning
Individualism	Work should give a sense of self-development and enable self-expression. Informal relationships between employers and employees are recommended. Competitiveness should be achieved by the synergy of individualities, own initiative and creativity which should be stimulated and promoted
Collectivism	Cooperation, loyalty, harmony and the recognition of authorities are the base of partnership
Masculinity	A clearly determined career and chances of promotion. Promotion and control of employees' aspirations and ambitions. A motivational system based on competition and rewarding in the form of material interests which are highly effective
Femininity	High motivational effectiveness creates a friendly atmosphere, mutual respect and warm and close relationships

Source: O. Skupna, M. Waszczyk, *Różnice kulturowe w marketingu międzynarodowym*, www.waszczyk.pl/.../Skupna_Waszczyk_Kultura_Marketing_PL.doc.

When initiating an advertising campaign, bearing in mind cultural differences, one has to remember the approach to individualism and collectivism in a given country. For example, Western cultures are connected with individualism and Eastern cultures identify themselves with collectivism. Such countries like the United States, Canada, Belgium and Denmark are nations promoting individualism with which they connect their socio-economic development. People coming from such cultures are single

¹² A. Wacza, *Różnice kulturowe w pracy*, <http://poradnik-kariery.monsterpolska.pl/w-miejscu-pracy/problemy-w-miejscu-pracy/roznice-kulturowe-w-pracy/article.aspx>.

Table 4. The configuration of cultures and social norms

Country	Dimensions	Outcome
The United States	Individualism Sense of community Hierarchy Equality High tolerance of uncertainty Low tolerance of uncertainty	High level of individualism High level of equality High level of uncertainty
Germany	Individualism Sense of community Hierarchy Equality High tolerance of uncertainty Low tolerance of uncertainty	Moderate level of individualism High level of hierarchy Moderate tolerance of uncertainty
Russia	Individualism Sense of community Hierarchy Equality High tolerance of uncertainty Low tolerance of uncertainty	Moderate level of individualism Moderate level of hierarchy Low tolerance of uncertainty
Poland	Individualism Sense of community Hierarchy Equality High tolerance of uncertainty Low tolerance of uncertainty	High level of the sense of community Moderate level of equality Fairly high level of uncertainty

Source: www.kzsil.ae.jgora.pl/pliki/SRO/1%20Kultura%organizacyjna.doc.

players but if they work as a group, the group and their activities are treated as a means of achieving success. However, in countries of collective cultures such as Columbia, Pakistan, Taiwan and Hong Kong the goals of a team are more significant than those of individuals. Also, their behaviours are adjusted to group, not individual, norms. Compared to a person from an individualistic society, a member of a collectivist society is more likely to treat other members of the same and the opposite culture differently, to influence other members' behaviour and to determine their own 'I' in relation to the group and the emphasis on obedience to their parents.¹³ It is worth mentioning that in those cultures hierarchical relationships dominate those egalitarian ones. Special attention is paid to social skills, which ensure harmonious coexistence and the maintenance of prestige. Those principles are more valued than skills expressing oneself and their independence. Both individualistic and collectivist cultures are different in terms of displaying emotions, which may again be a vital element in planning a marketing process in a specific country.

What is more, when launching an advertising campaign it is useful to remember that members of individualistic cultures favour a greater personal distance and

¹³ *Relacje międzykulturowe*, <http://bi.gazeta.pl/im/5/4688955.pdf>.

they use nonverbal behaviours in order to demonstrate the need for communication. It should not be surprising that body movements are more predictable and synchronised in collectivist than in individualistic cultures.¹⁴ It is helpful to consider those cultural aspects when undertaking marketing activities since they will matter in perceiving an offered product or service.

Another dimension of cultural differences is the approach to masculinity and femininity. On the basis of features and the stereotype of masculinity one can determine a male culture, which includes assertiveness, the expectation of competition and ambition. Feminine values, however, comprise emotion, sympathy and care. The consequences of male or female domination are, therefore, essential for the communication process in advertising. An example of that is the United States where cultural expansion is marked male. In Arab countries male culture is also dominant although it is of a different nature.¹⁵

Uncertainty avoidance shows to what extent ambiguity and uncertainty are considered in some societies as a danger.¹⁶ The dimension demonstrates the attitude to schedules, procedures and autonomy. The societies of low level of uncertainty avoidance are determined as those which take a risk search for new methods and solutions. On the other hand, the societies of high level uncertainty avoidance are likely to do some long-term planning which is aimed at protection against future problems. It is worth mentioning that those countries have poor skills in crisis management. For example, the inhabitants of Denmark, Norway, the United States, India, the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong have a low level of uncertainty avoidance while Japan, Greece, Portugal, Germany, Belgium and Peru belong to the countries where there is a high level of uncertainty avoidance.¹⁷ The level of uncertainty avoidance may influence the communication strategy in advertising and the manner of conducting business activity.

It is reasonable to note that when preparing marketing activities one should examine other cultural differences such as religion, social norms and language. The presented religious contents in an advertisement will vary in the Eastern and Western countries. Religious affiliation influence the patterns of consumer behaviours. Presentation of some neutral topics relating to the daily routine of the Western countries too freely in Arab countries may cause an offence against religious feelings and violate the traditional division of female and male social roles. The advertising contents, trademarks and packaging should be rather free from religious mo-

¹⁴ *Komunikacja niewerbalna a różnice kulturowe*, <http://www.egospodarka.pl/28948,Komunikacja-niewerbalna-a-roznicekulturowe,2,20,2.html>.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ H. Christensen, *Compendium. International business marketing*, 2nd ed., Denmark, August 2002, s. 7, w: O. Skupna, M. Waszczyk, *Różnice kulturowe w marketingu międzynarodowym*, www.waszczyk.pl/.../Skupna_Waszczyk_Kultura_Marketing_PL.doc.

¹⁷ S. Dahl, *Transfer report. Cultural values in advertising*, UK: University of Luton, 2000, s. 173, w: O. Skupna, M. Waszczyk, *Różnice kulturowe...*, op. cit.

tives and associations. Colours play an essential role in a marketing process as well. A company may not find buyers for its goods and services if colours and symbols are not consistent with the tradition of a country or region. That assumption is also appropriate for numbers. For instance, in Islam the colour green is used only in religion and it should not be employed in advertising.

Social norms are another key element, which should not be avoided in publishing advertisements. For example, Colgate-Palmolive suffered a defeat in promoting toothpaste in southern Asia when the company used the catchphrase 'You will be surprised where yellow has gone.' In that area there is a custom of chewing nut leaves what results in dying teeth a yellowish-brown colour. That is identified with social prestige. The advertisement, therefore, was recognised as inappropriate and what is more, it was spreading a racist message.¹⁸ The approach to family and family bonds are another significant factor. In African countries or China there is 'multigenerational' family. Consequently, a future seller should bear in mind who in that society is the head of a family and who makes decisions. A completely different approach is taken in Germany and the United States. Here, the 'multigenerational' family is not the priority. Life to the full is associated with freedom and the lack of obligation.¹⁹

Table 5. Creative advertising strategies and culture dimension

Strategy	Comment	Culture dimension
Factual	based on facts without any additional arguments and conclusions	individualism low level of uncertainty avoidance
Argument	based on facts supported by reasonable arguments	low level of power distance
Psychological and motivational	based on imaginary advantages, little involvement of facts	high level of power distance collectivism countries having considerable expenditures on advertising
Symbolic	a product is related to symbolic elements	low level of power distance markets with strict regulations regarding advertising (e.g. USA)
Imitating	based on recommendations	high level of power distance low level of uncertainty avoidance

Source: compiled from: S. Dahl, *Cross-cultural advertising research. What do we know about the influence of culture on advertising?*, Middlesex University Business School, London, January 2004, s. 12–14, w: O. Skupna, M. Waszczyk, *Różnice kulturowe...*, op. cit.

The last remarkable issue is the language used in communication with the receiver of a product. In the past there were cases when the creators of advertising campaigns forgot about linguistic problems, which caused a lot of trouble. An example of that is the situation when one of the best Irish liqueurs, called Irish Mist,

¹⁸ M. White, *A short course...*, op. cit., s. 47.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

was being launched into German market under the same brand name. For months the product filled the shelves when one bartender told the producer what the word 'mist' means for the Germans. There are examples of such misinterpretation in the Polish market as well. For instance, Osram (in Polish the word means 'shit') light bulbs and Pupa (in Polish the word means 'bottom') beauty products. Both advertisements defended themselves successfully, the first one by amusing pictures and the other one by having an excellent reputation in the world.

In summary, in the discussion on the selected issues related to advertising on worldwide markets it is necessary to point out that a researcher working on cultural differences, Zandpour, suggested creative advertising strategies on the basis of cultural dimensions in 1994. His research (table 5) was based on examining eight countries – Taiwan, Korea, German, Great Britain, France, Spain, the United States and Mexico. In a clear and simple way the analysis shows the importance of certain cultural conditions in countries for which an advertising campaign for a product or service will be prepared. The application of the above shall help to avoid mistakes in the presented topic.

3. Conclusions

The globalization of the socioeconomic life creates opportunities of running business activities in every country in the world. Despite the standardization and integration of economies, there is no homogenization of cultures whose blending should be based on tolerance, freedom and cooperation. The awareness of cultural differences and respect towards them are the key to enable us access to those communities.

When planning any business activity in any country one should be aware that culture consists of visible and invisible elements. Consequently, special attention should be paid to the familiarity with the culture in relation to our daily routine, tradition, language and art. Also, it is essential to know the following components: the level of direct communication, chances to take a risk, the effectiveness of a rational or emotional technique and collectivist and individualistic values. Commercial success in countries has to be built up in a conscious and sensitive-to-cultural-differences manner. It is worth remembering that the high level of cross-cultural knowledge not only help avoid mistakes and the cultural inadequacy of marketing activities and management, but also increase an additional value, competitiveness and let them derive advantages from the synergy. On the other hand, the ignorance of basic cultural differences may influence the image of a product or service negatively, which we intend to sell in a chosen market. That may result in a negative perception of a company offering the product or the whole country of origin. A lot of research is carried out whose aim is to facilitate a potential entrepreneur to develop freely in worldwide markets without any negative consequences of their activity.

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ZNACZENIE KULTURY W DZIAŁANIACH MARKETINGOWYCH PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW NA CAŁYM ŚWIECIE – WYBRANE ASPEKTY

Streszczenie: Przedmiotem zainteresowania artykułu jest pojęcie kultury i jej części składowych. W rozważaniach szczególną uwagę skupiono na omówieniu czynników kultury w różnych krajach, które uwarunkowują decyzje w przygotowaniu kampanii reklamowych na rynkach zagranicznych. Próbowano zaprezentować przykłady błędów popełnianych przy braku znajomości różnic kulturowych w planowaniu działań marketingowych w różnych krajach.