

CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PROMOTION IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

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Abstract

In today's globalized business environment, international marketing plays a crucial role in helping multinational companies build strong and culturally relevant brand identities across diverse markets. One of the main challenges faced by global marketers is adapting promotional strategies to cultural differences that influence consumer behavior, communication styles, and brand perception. Culture significantly shapes how marketing messages are interpreted, how products are valued, and how consumers respond to advertising campaigns. This article examines the relationship between culture and promotion in international marketing, focusing on the ways multinational brands tailor their strategies to local cultural contexts. Using theoretical models such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the study analyzes how cultural factors affect promotional practices and marketing communication across different regions. The research concentrates on four culturally diverse countries—Romania, Brazil, South Korea, and Australia—selected for their distinct social values, communication patterns, and consumer expectations. Romania represents a post-communist Eastern European society with traditional influences, Brazil reflects a high-context Latin American culture, South Korea illustrates a collectivist and Confucian-based East Asian culture, while Australia represents a low-context and highly individualistic Western society. To provide a practical perspective, the article uses McDonald's as a case study to explore how a global brand adapts its promotional campaigns to each national market. The analysis highlights the balance between maintaining a consistent global identity and implementing culturally adapted marketing strategies that resonate with local consumers. The study emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness and cultural intelligence in international marketing. It demonstrates that successful global promotion depends on the ability to combine global brand consistency with sensitivity to local cultural values and consumer expectations.

Keywords: culture, international marketing, promotion, McDonald's

JEL Classification: M16, M30, M31

1.Introduction

Defining the concept of “culture” involves considering a wide range of meanings, perspectives, and fields of study. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, culture is defined as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time” and also as “the attitudes, behavior, opinions, etc. of a particular group of people within society.” In simple terms, culture can be understood as a way of life that characterizes groups of people, nations, or even individuals. It encompasses shared values, norms, beliefs, and patterns of behavior that shape social interaction and influence the functioning of societies. These cultural elements affect not only interpersonal relationships but also the way organizations operate in international environments, particularly in the development and implementation of marketing strategies. In the business context, culture represents one of the most significant factors influencing international operations and strategic planning. In an era marked by rapid globalization, understanding cultural differences and local particularities has become essential for multinational companies seeking to successfully operate across diverse markets.

Within international business, culture is often described as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group from another. It includes aspects such as language, communication style, power distance, time orientation, and attitudes toward uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980). In the context of international business, understanding the relationship between culture and consumer behavior is essential for companies operating across global markets. Cultural

elements such as shared values, beliefs, norms, and social practices significantly influence purchasing decisions and shape consumers' perceptions of brands. As globalization continues to connect markets worldwide, businesses must adapt their strategies to the cultural environments in which they operate in order to engage effectively with diverse consumer groups. The impact of cultural differences on consumer behavior has been widely studied by sociologists and marketing researchers. Among the most influential contributors is Geert Hofstede, who developed a comprehensive framework for analyzing cultural dimensions and their influence on market behavior. His model identifies several cultural attributes that are essential in understanding purchasing patterns and consumer expectations, aspects that will be further explored in the following subchapter (Hofstede, 2001).

Consumer preferences are strongly influenced by the cultural norms and values of the societies from which they originate. These cultural factors affect how individuals perceive marketing messages, products, and promotional campaigns. For example, in cultures where modesty is highly valued, consumers are generally more attracted to clothing styles that emphasize coverage and discretion (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). In addition, traditions, rituals, and festive occasions often influence purchasing behavior, as consumers tend to increase their spending during holidays and cultural celebrations (Xing & Jin, 2023).

For companies operating in multicultural environments, adapting marketing strategies to local cultural values is crucial. Businesses can achieve stronger connections with their target audiences through culturally appropriate advertising messages, product positioning, and customer engagement practices. Research shows that organizations capable of successfully integrating cultural understanding into their operations often experience higher levels of customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (PsicoSmart, 2024).

Overall, culture and consumer behavior are closely interconnected, with each influencing the other in significant ways. Therefore, companies engaged in international markets must prioritize cultural awareness and adaptability in order to better satisfy consumer needs and strengthen long-term customer loyalty.

2. Materials and methods

This article employs a qualitative comparative case study approach to examine the influence of culture on promotional strategies in international marketing, using McDonald's as the primary case study. The research focuses on four culturally distinct countries, Romania, Brazil, South Korea, and Australia, in order to analyze how cultural differences affect promotional practices and marketing communication in diverse international markets. A qualitative research design was chosen because it allows for a detailed and contextual interpretation of cultural elements present in promotional materials. This approach is particularly effective for identifying cultural nuances reflected in language, symbolism, emotional appeal, and visual communication. Rather than measuring quantitative outcomes, the study seeks to understand how cultural characteristics shape the creation and reception of marketing messages within different societies.

The research is based on secondary data collected from publicly available McDonald's promotional content in the selected countries. The materials analyzed include television commercials, online advertising campaigns, social media content, and official promotional materials published on McDonald's national websites and digital platforms. Additional information was gathered from academic sources, industry reports, and media articles related to McDonald's international branding and cultural adaptation strategies. For non-English materials, translations were used to ensure consistent interpretation and analysis. The study is grounded in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, which serves as the main analytical framework for comparing national cultures. The analysis considers Hofstede's six cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. These dimensions provide the basis for

interpreting the differences observed in McDonald’s promotional strategies across the four countries.

3.Results and discussions

Cultural overview and comparative analysis of Romania, Brazil, South Korea, and Australia

Romania, Brazil, South Korea, and Australia each present distinctive cultural characteristics shaped by their historical development, social structures, traditions, and values. These differences influence not only everyday social behavior but also consumer attitudes and marketing communication strategies in international business environments.

Romania’s culture reflects a combination of Latin heritage and regional influences from Slavic, Turkish, Greek, and Hungarian cultures. Romanian is the official language spoken by the majority of the population, while minority communities contribute to the country’s multilingual character (BBC Languages, n.d.). Religion plays an important role in society, with Eastern Orthodox Christianity being the dominant faith (Cultural Atlas, n.d.). Romanian culture places strong emphasis on family, respect for elders, hospitality, and tradition, particularly in rural communities where collectivist values remain highly visible. Traditional celebrations such as Easter, Christmas, and Mărțișor continue to preserve cultural identity, while folklore and mythological figures remain significant elements of national heritage (UNESCO, n.d.). Although Romania has experienced increasing modernization and urbanization, family relationships and close community bonds continue to shape social life.

Brazilian culture is characterized by diversity and strong social interconnectedness. Portuguese is the official language and reflects influences from Indigenous, African, and immigrant populations (Worldwide Interpreters, 2023). Religion remains highly significant, with Roman Catholicism as the dominant faith alongside Protestantism and Afro-Brazilian spiritual traditions (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Similar to Romania, Brazilian society values family relationships, collectivism, hospitality, and emotional warmth (Cultural Atlas, n.d.). Brazilian cultural identity is strongly expressed through music, dance, and national celebrations such as Carnival, which symbolize the blending of African, Portuguese, and Indigenous traditions. Despite urban modernization in cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, traditional social values and family cohesion remain central to Brazilian society.

South Korean culture is deeply influenced by Confucian philosophy, which emphasizes hierarchy, respect for authority, loyalty, education, and collective harmony (Britannica, n.d.). Korean is the official language, while English is widely taught and used in business and education (Commisceo Global, n.d.). Although many South Koreans identify as non-religious, Buddhism, Protestantism, and Catholicism continue to play important cultural roles (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Family cohesion and educational achievement are considered fundamental values, with strong pressure placed on academic success and professional advancement. Traditional celebrations such as Seollal and Chuseok reinforce family unity and ancestral respect. At the same time, South Korea has become globally recognized through the Korean Wave (Hallyu), including K-pop, cinema, and fashion, which have significantly strengthened the country’s cultural influence worldwide (Korean Cultural Center, n.d.).

Australia represents a highly multicultural and individualistic society shaped by British colonial history, Indigenous heritage, and post-war immigration. English is the official language, although hundreds of languages are spoken due to the country’s ethnic diversity (Macquarie University, n.d.). Australian culture strongly promotes equality, independence, modesty, and informality (Cultural Atlas, n.d.). Compared to the other countries analyzed, Australians generally reject rigid hierarchy and prefer direct and egalitarian social interactions. Family remains important, although personal autonomy and individual achievement are highly valued. Australia’s

multicultural environment is reflected in its customs, artistic expressions, and educational system, while Indigenous traditions continue to hold significant cultural importance.

The comparison of these four countries through Hofstede’s cultural dimensions highlights important differences relevant to international marketing strategies. Romania, Brazil, and South Korea demonstrate relatively high power distance scores, meaning that hierarchy, authority, and social structure are generally accepted within society. As a result, marketing campaigns in these countries tend to be more effective when they emphasize authority, prestige, tradition, or social status. In contrast, Australia’s low power distance reflects a preference for equality and informality, making direct and relatable communication styles more successful.

In terms of individualism, Australia scores very highly, indicating a strong focus on personal achievement, independence, and self-expression. Marketing strategies targeting Australian consumers should therefore emphasize individual benefits and personal success. Romania, Brazil, and especially South Korea display more collectivist tendencies, where family, group harmony, and community relationships are highly valued. Consequently, promotional campaigns in these cultures are generally more effective when they focus on family connections, collective well-being, and social belonging.

Differences also appear regarding uncertainty avoidance. Romania, Brazil, and South Korea score relatively high, suggesting that consumers in these societies prefer stability, detailed information, and predictability. Businesses operating in these markets should therefore focus on reliability, guarantees, and trust-building communication. Australia’s lower uncertainty avoidance score indicates greater openness toward innovation and experimentation, allowing for more creative and flexible marketing approaches.

Regarding long-term orientation, South Korea stands out with a very high score, reflecting a culture that values perseverance, future rewards, and long-term planning. Marketing messages emphasizing durability and future benefits resonate strongly with Korean consumers. Australia, on the other hand, is more short-term oriented, with consumers responding positively to immediate benefits and quick results. Romania and Brazil occupy intermediate positions between these two approaches.

Finally, the indulgence dimension reveals that Australia and Brazil are societies that place greater value on leisure, enjoyment, and personal freedom. Marketing campaigns in these countries often succeed by promoting fun, lifestyle enhancement, and emotional satisfaction. Romania and South Korea, by contrast, are more restrained cultures, where consumers tend to value responsibility, self-control, and adherence to social norms.

Overall, the cultural differences identified through Hofstede’s framework demonstrate the importance of adapting international marketing strategies to local cultural values and consumer expectations. Understanding these distinctions allows multinational companies to design promotional campaigns that resonate more effectively with target audiences while maintaining global brand consistency.

Comparison of promotional strategies across cultures

Between 2021 and 2024, McDonald’s adapted its promotional strategies in Romania, Brazil, South Korea, and Australia to reflect the cultural values, communication styles, and consumer expectations specific to each market. Although global themes such as sustainability, community engagement, and digital innovation remained consistent, the company tailored its tone, storytelling techniques, and emotional appeals according to local cultural contexts.

In Romania, McDonald’s adopted a warm and emotionally driven communication style centered around family, tradition, and everyday comfort. Campaigns such as “Home Menu” emphasized familiarity, belonging, and national identity, positioning the brand as part of daily Romanian life. Promotional messages focused on nostalgia, shared meals, and traditional tastes, while collaborations with local personalities reinforced authenticity and trust. The overall tone was personal and sincere, aiming to create emotional closeness with consumers.

Brazilian campaigns, by contrast, relied on energy, enthusiasm, and collective participation. Promotional initiatives such as “McDia Feliz” used vibrant and expressive language designed to encourage social involvement and national unity. Campaigns often connected products with larger social causes, celebrations, or sporting events, creating a strong sense of community and shared emotion. Unlike the intimate tone used in Romania, Brazil’s communication style was dynamic, festive, and highly engaging.

In South Korea, McDonald’s employed a more subtle and socially conscious approach. Promotional campaigns favored minimalist storytelling and emotional nuance rather than direct or exaggerated advertising. Campaigns such as “Mom’s Bed” used understated language and digital interaction tools, allowing consumers to engage with the message more personally. Sustainability campaigns focused on concise, future-oriented communication that emphasized responsibility and long-term thinking. This strategy reflected Korean cultural values related to harmony, reflection, and social awareness.

Australia’s promotional style emphasized practicality, convenience, and immediacy. Campaigns such as “Monopoly” and “30 Days 30 Deals” used direct and concise language focused on value, accessibility, and quick consumer response. Messaging was highly integrated with digital platforms like the MyMacca’s app, reinforcing efficiency and ease of use. Even sustainability-related campaigns maintained a simple and informative tone rather than relying heavily on emotional storytelling. Compared to the more emotional or symbolic approaches used in other countries, Australian campaigns prioritized clarity, functionality, and consumer benefit.

Despite these differences, McDonald’s successfully used language and communication as cultural adaptation tools in each market. In Romania, the brand positioned itself as a comforting presence connected to family values; in Brazil, it became associated with celebration and collective identity; in South Korea, it reflected social responsibility and emotional subtlety; while in Australia, it focused on convenience and practical value.

Overall, McDonald’s demonstrated that effective international marketing requires more than simple language translation. The company adapted the emotional tone, structure, and cultural meaning of its campaigns to resonate with local audiences. This balance between global brand consistency and local cultural relevance highlights the importance of cultural intelligence in international promotional strategies.

4. Conclusions

Through a comparative analysis of Romania, Brazil, South Korea, and Australia, the study demonstrated how cultural dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and communication style shape the creation, adaptation, and reception of marketing messages across different societies. Using McDonald’s as the central case study, the research highlighted the ability of a global brand to preserve its international identity while adapting its promotional strategies to local cultural expectations. In Romania, promotional campaigns focused on family values, familiarity, and national identity. In Brazil, McDonald’s emphasized emotional connection, vibrant communication, and collective participation. South Korean campaigns reflected collectivist values, technological integration, and sensitivity to social trends, while Australian marketing strategies prioritized simplicity, individual choice, practicality, and lifestyle-oriented communication. The findings of this research demonstrate that standardized promotional approaches are rarely effective in culturally diverse international markets. Instead, successful international marketing depends on understanding local cultural characteristics and adapting communication strategies accordingly. Cultural adaptation enhances consumer engagement, strengthens brand loyalty, and contributes to long-term market success. In the context of globalization, cultural intelligence has become an essential competency for international marketers. As shown throughout this study, culture is not a secondary element in marketing strategy, but a central factor influencing the effectiveness of promotional communication. Future

research could broaden this analysis by examining additional industries, emerging global brands, or the growing influence of digital culture and social media on consumer behavior. Nevertheless, the study clearly confirms that cultural awareness remains fundamental for companies seeking to succeed in international markets.

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