Because the United States is the birthplace of marketing and advertising theory and techniques, American cultural assumptions are at the root of philosophies of how advertising works, not only in the United States but also in other parts of the world. If we want to understand how advertising works across cultures, we’ll first have to learn how communication works. Styles of communication vary by culture. One of the clearest distinctions is between high-context and low-context communication. Related to this distinction is how people process information and their expectations of the role, purpose, and effect of communication. Is advertising persuasive by nature, or can it have another role in the sales process? Understanding how advertising works across cultures is of great importance for international companies. With advanced information technology, new forms of communication have emerged. The way people use these and how the content is designed, such as Web site design, are also influenced by culture. Other means of communication are product design, package design, and retail design. The practice and philosophy of public relations, which involves managing relationships between organizations and publics, is also related to culture. This chapter will point at a few cultural aspects of these specializations.

In classic communication theory, communication in a broad sense includes all the procedures by which one mind may affect another. All communication is viewed as persuasive. The traditional model of communication, as depicted in Figure 7.1, includes the source or sender of a message (person, organization, company, brand), the message itself (story, picture, advertisement), the medium (any carrier of the
message: a storyteller, newspaper, television, Internet), and the receiver of the message (person, consumer).

In this communication process, a message is selected and encoded in order to transfer meaning. The receiver of the message must be able to receive the message via the medium and decode it. Generally, the sender of the message wants to get feedback to find out if the message has been received and understood. It is easy to understand that in this process many things can go wrong. Even more in mass communications than in interpersonal communication, the process is difficult to control. In the coding and decoding process, anything may go wrong.

The sender (company, marketer) who formulates and shapes the message uses his or her cultural framework, which will be reflected in the content and in the form of the message. Similarly, the media are shaped by the culture of the people who produce them, both in content and in form. Finally, the receiver of the message uses his or her cultural framework when decoding the message. In the decoding process, selective perception will operate in the sense that people will best understand messages that fit existing schemata. This concerns content, form, and style of the message. In order to understand the influence of culture on styles and forms of mass communication, we first have to understand variation in interpersonal communication across cultures.

Several cultural dimensions explain variance in communication, of which individualism-collectivism explains most. Interpersonal communication styles vary along with the self-concept. The independent self, when thinking about others, will consider the other’s individual characteristics and attributes rather than relational or contextual factors. Interdependence means that the self derives from a relationship between the individual and others. Depending on who the other is, and what type of relationship he or she has with others, each individual needs to adjust communication goals and behaviors. Communication varies with roles and relationships, with concern for belonging and fitting in and occupying one’s proper place. The distinction high- and low-context communication (as described in Chapter 4) fits the differences in communication behavior of interdependent selves of collectivistic cultures and independent selves of individualistic cultures. In low-context communication, information is in the words; in high-context communication, information is in the visuals, the symbols, and the associations attached to them. Because in high-context communication the meaning of the message is difficult to assess by outsiders, such communication is also considered to be inaccessible. In individualistic, low-context cultures, people are more oriented toward the written word whereas in collectivistic, high-context cultures people are more visually oriented.
The verbal orientation of members of individualistic and low uncertainty avoidance cultures is reflected in the degree to which people read books. Over time, several European surveys have asked people how many books they read. Since 1970 in Europe, heavy book reading has been related to individualism, low power distance, and low uncertainty avoidance. Figure 7.2 shows how, for Europe, the relationship between individualism and book reading has remained constant between 1990 (12 or more) and 2007 (5 or more).

![Figure 7.2 Individualism and Book Reading in Europe](image)

**Figure 7.2 Individualism and Book Reading in Europe**

*Source: Data from Hofstede (2001) (see Appendix A); Reader’s Digest 1991 and Eurobarometer European Cultural Values, 2007 (see Appendix B).*

Various other factors explain differences in communication style. Rapid speech rate, for example, suggests to Americans that the speaker makes true and uncensored statements, whereas for Koreans, slow speech implies careful consideration of others and context.3

**Interpersonal Communication Styles**

Interpersonal communication style is made up of verbal and nonverbal styles. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey have best described the influence of the various dimensions of culture on verbal and nonverbal communication style.4 Verbal styles can be **verbal personal** or **verbal contextual**. The two styles focus on personhood versus situation or status. Verbal personal style is individual-centered language; it enhances the “I” identity and is person oriented (e.g., English). Verbal contextual style is role-centered language; it emphasizes a context-related role identity (e.g., Japanese, Chinese), which includes different ways of addressing different persons,
related to their status and/or situation. For example, the Japanese language adapts to situations where higher- or lower-placed people are addressed.

Verbal personal style is linked with low power distance (equal status) and individualism (low context), whereas verbal contextual style is linked with high power distance (hierarchical human relationships) and collectivism (high-context).

Another distinction is between elaborate, exacting, and succinct verbal style. Elaborate verbal style refers to the use of rich, expressive language. Exacting or precise style is a style where no more or no less information than required is given. Succinct or understated style includes the use of understatements, pauses, and silences. Silences between words carry meaning. High-context cultures of moderate to strong uncertainty avoidance tend to use the elaborate style. Arab cultures, for example, show this elaborate style of verbal communication, using metaphors, long arrays of adjectives, flowery expressions, and proverbs. Low-context cultures of weak uncertainty avoidance (e.g., United States, United Kingdom) tend to use the exacting style. The succinct style is found in high-context cultures (e.g., Japan). Silence is particularly appropriate in the contexts of uncertain and unpredictable social relations.

Nonverbal style possibilities are unique-explicit and unique-implicit style and group-explicit and group-implicit style, which echo the self-orientation of individualism versus the group orientation of collectivism, and accessibility-inaccessibility, which refers to the degree to which the home environment emphasizes the openness or closedness of occupants to outsiders. Strong uncertainty avoidance cultures perceive outsiders as more threatening than do weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, and power distance reinforces that.

Figure 7.3 Interpersonal Communication Styles

Together, verbal and nonverbal styles can explain how we communicate. Figure 7.3 clusters countries according to these styles and summarizes the different interpersonal communication styles.

Communication in the cultures in the two left quadrants is direct, explicit, verbal, and personal. People like written communication. In business, they prefer using e-mail to using the phone. They use the exacting style and like data. The sender is responsible for effective communication. Communication in the mostly collectivistic cultures in the two right quadrants is more implicit and indirect. France and Belgium, which are individualistic, are exceptions, and communication can be both explicit and implicit. Communication is role centered. Particularly in Asia, communication implies “understanding without words.”5 Children learn to “read the other’s mind,” to read subtle cues in the communication from others. They are expected to feel the mood or air of each interpersonal situation and improvise appropriate social behavior and communication depending on the reading of the contextual features.6 So here the receiver is responsible for effective communication. In cultures in the top right quadrant, the elaborate style is used, and communication can be inaccessible. In the lower right quadrant, the succinct style is found. In particular, the difference between the indirect style of the East and the direct style of the West can cause grave misunderstandings in international business.7

The most pronounced difference is between the direct versus the indirect style, or the extent to which speakers reveal their intentions through explicit verbal communication. In the direct style, wants, needs, and desires are expressed explicitly. The indirect verbal style refers to verbal messages that conceal the speaker’s true intentions. Wordings such as absolutely and definitely to express buying intentions are an example of the direct style, whereas probably or somewhat are examples of the indirect style.

Different communication styles influence writing styles, so academic writing styles also vary across cultures. Editorial boards of most marketing and advertising journals are dominated by Americans who set strict rules and formats for academic papers according to American writing style. Authors who do not follow this tend to be rejected. As a result, scholars from outside the United States are poorly represented in marketing journals. Thus, American students are deprived as so few studies from outside the United States can be accessed.8

Interpersonal Communication and the Electronic Media

How people use the Internet, e-mail, the mobile phone, and other technological means of communications reflects their interpersonal communication style. One example is how people deal with the answering machine or voice mail. Japanese—because of stronger emphasis on the relational aspects of communication—find it more difficult than Americans to leave a message on an answering machine. They use their answering machines less often and are more likely to hang up when they reach one, compared to American callers.9

In Asia, usage of technology is related to relationship and context. The mobile phone is used as a medium to communicate with people with strong ties, whereas instant messenger is used as a group-talking tool.10 People in collectivistic cultures are the leaders in social networking on the Internet, but the number of contacts
(what in Western terms are called friends) can vary. Analysis of the networks people have shows that Japanese teenagers have only seven online friends they haven’t met as compared with a global average of 20. Brazilians claim to have most: 46. The key digital device for Japanese youngsters is the mobile phone, as they generally don’t have a PC until they go to college. The Chinese prefer real-time communications such as instant messaging.

Blogging has become a global phenomenon, but the degree to which people blog, their motives, and their topics vary by country. In 2006, there were more blogs in the Japanese language than in the English language, and the French spent five times as much time blogging as the Americans. For the French, the blog is like the café where they discuss everyday life and politics, fitting in with French argumentative culture. Japanese tend to care less whether their blog influences others, and they are reluctant to reveal their identity, even with the use of aliases. Generally, Asians tend to disclose themselves less to friends and strangers than Westerners do.

Whereas in the West the Internet provides an ideal context for self-disclosure, and people tend to release verbal emotions more than they would in a person-to-person context, self-disclosure has a negative connotation for East Asians. If one partner reveals too much about himself or herself, the other may take it as inappropriate or as an indicator of incompetence. However, also for collectivists, the Internet appears to be a context that allows for more self-disclosure than face-to-face relationships do. Yet, North Americans do not perceive East Asians as self-disclosing as much as East Asians perceive themselves to be. When East Asians feel they cross their typical cultural constraints and engage in greater self-disclosure than they would do in face-to-face communication, North Americans still view their East Asian partners as indirect without sufficient self-disclosure. At the same time, East Asians feel that their North American partners are overexplicit and rude.

When people of different communication styles interact with each other online, they may encounter unexpected communication behaviors and barriers due to cultural differences. Across cultures, people construct culturally specific norms and patterns of online interactions and relationships and will continue to do so as the role of the Internet evolves and expands.

Mass Communication Styles

Three aspects determine mass communication styles: content, form, and style. Differences in form and style of mass communications reflect interpersonal communication styles. The influence of culture on these three elements can be recognized in literature, mass media programs, advertising, and public relations.

American television, for example, is more action oriented than Finnish television. Domestically produced Finnish video dramas are much more static. They sacrifice action and setting for dialogue and extreme close-ups. Both the Russians and the Japanese depict boredom in their novels whereas American novels do not do much with the theme. “Fun is not a Russian concept,” says Moscow sociologist Maria Zolotukhina on the difficulties faced by the creators of a Russian version of the popular American children’s television program Sesame Street. The “happy ending” is rare in Japanese novels and plays whereas
American popular audiences crave solutions. This is reflected in American TV dramas and commercials. The essence of much drama in Western, individualistic literature is an eternal struggle of the hero (“to be or not to be”). Chinese essayist Bin Xin has noted that real tragedy has never existed in Chinese literature because the Chinese have hardly any struggles in their minds. Also, how people behave in literature and what motivates them reflect cultural values. An example from literature is the Italian Pinocchio, by Carlo Collodi; Pinocchio is an obedient and dependent child, as compared with the nephews of Disney’s Donald Duck, who are much more independent and less obedient. Strong uncertainty avoidance is reflected in the novel Das Schloss (The Castle), by Franz Kafka, in how the main character K. is affected by bureaucracy. Alice in Wonderland, where the most unreal things happen, is a typical work to originate in a culture of weak uncertainty avoidance, England. No surprise that in the same culture the Harry Potter books originated and The Lord of the Rings. Press releases from American public relations agencies reflect U.S. culture. They are short and to the point.

Advising Styles

Advertising is a symbolic artifact constructed from the conventions of a particular culture. The sender crafts the message in anticipation of the audience’s probable response, using shared knowledge of various conventions. Receivers of the message use the same body of cultural knowledge to read the message, infer the sender’s intention, evaluate the content, and formulate a response. Cultural knowledge provides the basis for interaction. If advertising crosses cultures, it lacks the shared conventions. Content, form, and style are a reflection of interpersonal communication styles, but they also reflect different roles of advertising across cultures.

Four elements of advertising style can be distinguished. Each will vary by culture:

1. Appeal (including motives and values)
2. Communication style (e.g., explicit, implicit, direct, indirect)
3. Basic advertising form (e.g., testimonial, drama, entertainment)
4. Execution (e.g., how people are dressed)

An example of a typical appeal of high uncertainty avoidance cultures is purity, as in the German advertisement for Gerolsteiner, a German mineral water brand (Illustration 7.1). An example of an individualistic appeal is the international advertisement for Vodafone (Illustration 7.2), which focuses on the individual. The Spanish Airtel (acquired by Vodafone) used a collectivistic appeal, an example of group identity (Illustration 7.3). Chapter 9 describes more examples of relationships between culture and advertising appeals. How the basic forms used in advertising reflect culture will be discussed in Chapter 10. The term execution refers to the casting and activities of people, as well as the setting. A British kitchen, for example, looks different from a German kitchen. In this chapter, we focus on the cultural aspects of communication styles used in advertising.
A major distinction is between direct style of individualistic cultures and indirect style of collectivistic cultures. In advertising, the direct style uses the personal pronoun (you, we), whereas the indirect style doesn’t address people directly but uses indirect methods such as drama or metaphors. There are variations in indirectness among collectivistic cultures. Singapore Chinese are, for example, more direct than are the people from Taiwan. Cutler et al. examined advertisements from eight different countries (United States, United Kingdom, France, India, Japan, Turkey, Taiwan/Hong Kong, and Korea) and measured the use of a direct, personalized headline, which appeared to be related to individualism.

Examples of the direct style are ads from the United Kingdom for Centrum (Illustration 7.4) and ProViva (Illustration 7.5), and a German ad for Dove shampoo, saying “can your hair cope with the morning hair brush test?” (Illustration 7.6).
Examples of the indirect approach are the international advertisement for Thai Airlines (Illustration 7.7), which uses the eye of the needle to symbolize a small world, and a Spanish ad for Heineken (Illustration 7.8), which reflects the collectivist Friday feeling in an indirect way.

An example of the indirect style from Latin America is a Brazilian TV commercial for Sara Lee Pilão coffee. The message is that it is strong coffee. This message is conveyed by showing just a cup of coffee and a continuous squirt of milk that doesn’t make the coffee look lighter. This is a purely visual demonstration.

Direct style communication also tends to be more verbal whereas indirect style tends to be more visual. Whereas U.S. advertising utilizes more copy, Japanese advertising uses more visual elements. Chinese-speaking consumers tend to judge a brand name based on its visual appeal whereas English speakers judge a brand name based on whether the name sounds appealing. In Asia, visual symbolism is a key aspect of a firm’s corporate identity. The differences between cultures with respect to verbal and visual orientation are reflected in all aspects of marketing communications such as corporate identity, brand name, package design, advertising styles, and Web site design. Cultures can be mapped according to their advertising styles, similar to communication styles, as in Figure 7.4.

The advertising style in the two left quadrants is direct and explicit. Within the direct-explicit distinction, there are also differences. In cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, positioned in the upper left quadrant, advertising is more serious and structured. The execution of the visuals will be detailed, often including demonstration of how the product works. An endorser must be an expert. That is the style of the Germanic cultures. In the masculine cultures
(United States, United Kingdom), presenters are personalities or celebrities, whereas in the feminine cultures (Scandinavia, the Netherlands), the personality of the presenter will be downplayed. In the weak uncertainty avoidance cultures of the lower left quadrant, where ambiguity is tolerated, more humor is used in advertising. Many centrally developed television commercials for Anglo-American brands in the household cleaning products category and personal products have used the personalized testimonial format. They are carefully directed to focus on the personality of the endorser and not to include any implicit nonverbal behavior. For the U.S. market, the typical person endorser and spokesperson have a positive impact on recall.23

The two quadrants at the right include styles that are implicit and indirect. The upper right quadrant covers several styles. It includes cultures that combine low-to-medium individualism with high power distance and high uncertainty avoidance. Advertising style is mostly indirect and uses drama and metaphors. Inaccessibility is recognized in the frequent references in advertising to other forms of communication such as films, art, or even advertising by others. An example of indirectness in Japanese advertising is saying “These times exist in life, when someone wants to go somewhere very comfortable,” instead of saying

**Figure 7.4 Advertising Styles**

*Source: Data from Hofstede (2001) (see Appendix A).*
Communication is subdued and works on likeability or on bonding, building an emotional relationship between brand and consumer without too much focus on the product attributes. The use of aesthetics and entertainment as an advertising form is characteristic of this communication style. If celebrities are involved, they are not likely to address the audience directly. They play a more symbolic role and associate more with the product rather than endorsing it in a direct way. Visual metaphors and symbols are used to create context and to position the product or brand in its “proper place.” Drama (see Chapter 10) is an indirect style that fits countries like Spain and Italy, as well as Latin American cultures. Variations are found between masculine and feminine cultures. In Italy, high on masculinity, show is favored, and the drama form tends to be theatrical and often not based on real life. In Spain, drama style is softer, and metaphorical stories are used to place the product in a context that provides meaning. Although in the United States the drama style is also used, it is more popular in the countries in the upper right quadrant. Drama in the United States is more “slice-of-life,” a form that demonstrates how a product is used in everyday life, whereas drama in the right quadrants is entertainment, meant to build a relationship between the consumer and the brand. The advertising style of collectivistic cultures of large power distance and weak-to-moderate uncertainty avoidance in the lower right quadrant must ensure group norms and help maintain face. Next to the use of drama and metaphors, visuals, play with words (visually), songs, and symbolism are important in advertising in these cultures, but the audience can be directly addressed. Advertising in Hong Kong, Singapore, and India fits this style. These cultures are more direct in their communication, which can be explained by low uncertainty avoidance. Chinese consumers like visual and straightforward, vivid ads with images. For India, the direct communication style is confirmed by Roland, who states, “Indian modes of communication operate more overtly on more levels simultaneously than do the Japanese.”

Illustrations 7.9, 7.10, and 7.11 show how in different countries, different styles are applied in advertising for one international brand. All use the drama form, but the U.S. and the U.K. approach (Illustrations 7.9 and 7.10) is competitive. Both compare the Bounty kitchen towel with another (not named) brand. Yet the U.S. approach is straightforward, comparing Bounty with the next leading brand, whereas the British one is humoristic, showing two males dressed as females, demonstrating that Bounty works faster. The Bounty user is drinking tea while his partner is still scrubbing. The Swiss commercial, which like the U.K. commercial is also focusing on wet usage of Bounty, shows a mother at leisure, phoning her partner to say that he has to clean up. He discovers Bounty and its effects and decides to use it to clean his motor bike. This is the more serious approach and also a reflection of strong role differentiation of a masculine culture.
The Purpose of Marketing Communication

Americans view communication as a process of transmitting messages for the purpose of control. They see it as a means to persuade others, to change attitudes, and to influence or condition behavior. This view is reflected in the theories of how advertising works. The role and purpose of marketing communications vary across cultures, in particular between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In individualistic culture, advertising must persuade whereas in collectivistic cultures, the purpose is to build relationships and trust between seller and buyer. The desire of Japanese consumers to establish trusting, in-group-like relationships with suppliers and their products is reflected in the tendency of Japanese advertising to focus on inducing positive feelings rather than on providing information. The different purposes are reflected in the difference in timing and frequency of verbal or visual mention of the brand name in television commercials. In a typical Japanese television commercial, the first identification of a brand, company name, or product occurs later than in a typical U.S. television commercial. Japanese advertisers tend to take
more of a commercial’s time to develop trust, understanding, and dependency. In Japan, the brand name is shown for a longer time than in the United States, where it is more frequently mentioned verbally. In Chinese commercials, brand acknowledgment also appears later than in U.S. commercials.28

For Americans, persuasiveness, repetition, and hard sell arise from a model in which “advertising and consumer are on two sides of a counter, and some kind of confrontation is taking place with one side trying to persuade the other to change attitude or behavior.”29 The persuasion test to measure advertising effectiveness is based on this pattern of thinking. The basic procedure is measurement of purchasing intentions before and after exposure, which reflects a cause-effect way of thinking.

The persuasive communication function of advertising appears to be viewed with a bias toward rational claims and direct address of the public. All elements of advertising—words and pictures—tend to be evaluated on their persuasive role in the sales process. Although in other cultures sales will also be the ultimate goal of advertising, advertising’s role in the sales process is obviously different. In collectivistic cultures, using a hard sell or directly addressing consumers turns them off instead of persuading them. Advertising must build trust and advertising must be liked.

The U.S. persuasive communication model is based on U.S. information processing theory of how people acquire information (see also Chapter 5). How people acquire, organize, and utilize information is related to how they have learned to process information. It is related to the type of information they are used to getting. People of high-context cultures, used to symbols, signs, and indirect communication, will process information in a different way than people of low-context cultures, who are used to explanations, persuasive copy, and rhetoric.

There are significant cross-cultural differences in pictorial perception. Imagery is an important element of advertising, yet it is undervalued in research because of the historical focus on verbal communication. The phrases “copy research” and “copy testing,” which are used for testing effectiveness of advertising, including visuals, demonstrate the bias toward thinking in verbal stimuli.

The eternal dilemma of advertising is whether to follow the conventions of advertising for a particular product category in a particular culture or to be distinctive in order to raise awareness and find a place in people’s memories. Within countries, the danger of using distinctive, unusual information in advertising to attract attention is that it will not fit in consumers’ schemata and will be discarded. This risk is even greater across cultures than within cultures because people’s schemata vary.

**Informational Versus Emotional**

The assumption that advertising’s main role is to provide information as part of the persuasive process has undervalued other elements of advertising. Not so long ago, advertisers started to realize that the consumption experience also includes emotional components. Consumers’ emotions were recognized as having a significant influence on purchase and consumption decisions. As a result, “emotional,” “transformational,” “evaluative,” or “feeling” messages are often contrasted with
“rational,” “informational,” “factual,” or “thinking” appeals. This suggests that emotions do not carry information. “Logical, objectively verifiable descriptions of tangible product features” and “emotional, subjective impressions of intangible aspects of the product” are viewed as contrasting.

When discussing the role of emotions in advertising, one must distinguish between emotional stimuli (advertising content) and emotional response. Percy, Rossiter, and Elliott view emotion as one of four main processing responses to advertising: attention, learning, accepting or believing what the ad says, and emotion that is stimulated by the ad. An emotional response will mediate what is learned and whether or how a particular point is accepted. Typical emotional responses may be connected to specific motivations. Examples are problem removal, portrayed by annoyance with the problem followed by relief, or social approval, ending with brand usage that flatters the user.

This description of the role of emotions fits the way emotions are exploited in Anglo-American advertising content, which is different from European advertising. Whereas in the United States emotions in advertising tend to be used as part of the argument (dirty goes with disgust and clean with relief or pleasure), in other cultures, in particular in the south of Europe, advertising reflects the pure emotional relationship between consumer and brand without the argumentation. In some cultures, the word emotion, in itself, is popular in advertising. An example is the Spanish pay-off Auto Emoción for the Seat make of cars. A U.S. example is a TV commercial for Dixie disposable plates (Illustration 7.12). A French example is for Kelloggs (Illustration 7.13) and an Italian for Alfa Romeo (Illustration 7.14).
U.S. Dixie uses disgust to debase the competitive brand, which is not strong enough to use in a microwave oven. The competitor’s plate becomes soft; the spaghetti falls and damages the shoes. In the French Kellogg’s TV commercial, the actor drops the milk jug and spills the milk. He starts crying because he cannot enjoy the cereal. In the Italian ad for Alfa Romeo, a young man sees the car and gets so excited that he grabs a bottle of champagne and sprays everybody.

As described in Chapter 5, emotions such as happiness and sadness are universal only when described abstractly. Rules for emotional displays are culture-specific. Expressive behavior varies by culture, which makes the emotional behavior of people of one culture often not understood by members of another culture. Also, what Americans call emotional can be perceived as sentimental by members of other cultures. Several researchers have tried to classify the emotional content and responses to advertising. A classic example is a study by Holbrook and Batra, who identified dimensions of emotional content in U.S. advertising and linked these to emotional responses. To understand the role of emotions across cultures, this study should be replicated in other cultures. Typologies of emotional content can be useful to measure the effectiveness of emotional appeals for one culture but not for others.

Because of the strong focus on verbal communication, problem solving, and assumed need for information in low-context cultures, Western advertising people tend to think of the rational elements as the content and the emotional element as execution, seeing them as separate entities. One cannot separate what is said from how it is said. Consumers see the whole picture; they don’t see the separate elements.

Theories of how advertising works are based on the assumption of an active information-gathering and rational consumer who wants to solve problems. To operationalize the distinction between informative and noninformative, the Resnik and Stern typology is usually applied, in which the criterion for considering an advertisement informative is whether the informational cues are relevant enough to assist a typical buyer in making an intelligent choice among alternatives. Next to the fact that in some cultures people do not consciously search for information, what is informational for members of one culture may not be informational for members of another culture.

Information-gathering behavior varies across cultures. Eurobarometer asks European consumers which information sources (e.g., newspapers, TV, Internet, magazines, friends and relatives, consumer publications) they consult to prepare for purchases.
The degree to which people inform themselves is related to individualism and power distance. In the Chapter 5 section, “Information Processing,” we mentioned that the degree to which people view themselves as well-informed consumers correlates with individualism. The percentages of answers, “Normally I don’t consult any information source” correlate with high power distance, which explains 56% of variance. The problem-solving and argumentation approach to advertising will be less effective in cultures where people don’t consciously search for information in the buying process and consumers’ decision making is emotion based instead of information based. Figure 7.5 illustrates the relationship for 12 countries. Also the effect of online research on the brand chosen correlates with low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance.34

Answers to questions about how well people think they are informed about all sorts of issues follow this pattern. For example, the percentages of respondents who feel well informed about environmental issues across 23 countries in Europe correlate with low power distance, individualism, and low uncertainty avoidance.35 So it basically is the cultural configuration of individualism, low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance, which is the North-West of Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world where people consciously search for information. The role of information in advertising is more important in these cultures than it is elsewhere.

![Figure 7.5 Information Behavior](image)

**SOURCE:** Data from Hofstede (2001) (see Appendix A); Consumer Survey; Flash Eurobarometer 117 (2002) (see Appendix B).

**Measuring Advertising: Persuasion or Likeability**

Traditional measures of advertising effectiveness are based on persuasiveness of an advertisement. Measures include attitude toward the advertisement (Aad), brand attitude (Abr), purchase intention (PI), memory, and market performance.36
In Chapter 5, we discussed the varying relationships between attitude and behavior across cultures, as well as how intention operates differently, so these measures will not work equally well in all parts of the world. A second limitation is that most effectiveness studies are conducted in laboratory settings, out of context, which may cause bias even more in collectivistic cultures than it does in individualistic cultures.

In advertising effectiveness research in the Western world, it has been recognized that persuasion measures do not capture a key element in the link between communication and the thoughts and behavior of consumers. That missing link is the degree to which an advertisement has personal significance for the consumer. When people experience advertising, they do not behave as passive, objective receivers of messages about brands. They interpret the advertisement for themselves, using their own worldview as an interpretative filter. It seems inappropriate to use persuasion tests based on rational, linear processing to test advertising meant for people who process information in a different way.

Next to persuasion, therefore, likeability has become a measure to predict sales. The following are aspects that contribute to the likeability of advertising:

- Meaningful (worth remembering, effective, believable, true-to-life, not pointless)
- Does not rub the wrong way (not irritating, worn out, phony)
- Warm (gentle, warm, sensitive)
- Pleases the mind (entertaining, aesthetic)

Likeability will be a better effectiveness measurement for cultures where pleasing the consumer is an important objective of advertising. In most cultures where the purpose of communication is to raise trust between the company and the consumer or to build an emotional relationship between consumer and brand, likeability will be a better purpose and measurement criterion than persuasion.

### How Advertising Works

Most models of how advertising works are based on an assumed hierarchy of effects and on sequential thinking. Although academics worldwide have modified this hierarchy-of-effects model, the sequential way of thinking remains the basis of much of the thinking about how advertising works.

### The Hierarchy of Effects

The underlying assumption of how advertising works is that advertising takes people from one stage to another. These linear or sequential or “transportation” models are based on a logical and rational process. This hierarchy-of-effects model has strongly influenced American advertising style and the style used by U.S. advertisers elsewhere. Also, later models such as the FCB matrix, which categorizes products according to the degree of involvement and cognitive-affective attitude components, are derived from the concept of multiple hierarchies.
High and Low Involvement

One of the early sequences in theory of how advertising works was that people would first learn something about a product or brand, then form an attitude or feeling, and consequently take action, which meant purchasing the product or at least going to the shop with the intention of buying. This sequence is summarized as “learn-feel-do.” It was later seen as mainly applicable to products of “high involvement,” such as cars, for which the decision-making process was assumed to be highly rational. This so-called high-involvement model assumes that consumers are active participants in the process of gathering information and making a decision.

In contrast, there are low-involvement products, such as detergents or other fast-moving consumer goods, with related low-involvement behavior when there is little interest in the product. The concept of low involvement is based on Herbert Krugman’s theory that television is a low-involvement medium that can generate brand awareness but has little impact on people’s attitudes. The low-involvement sequence was assumed to be “learn-do-feel.” Again, knowledge comes first, after that purchase, and only after having used the product would one form an attitude.

The FCB planning model suggests four sequences in the process by which advertising influences consumers: (a) learn-feel-do, (b) feel-learn-do, (c) do-learn-feel, and (d) do-feel-learn. The first two sequences are related to high involvement; the third and fourth sequences are low involvement. International advertising scholar Gordon E. Miracle argued that for the Japanese consumer, another sequence is valid: “feel-do-learn.” Japanese advertising is based on building trust, a relationship between the company and the consumer. The purpose of Japanese advertising is to please the consumer and to build **amae** (dependency), and this is done by the indirect approach. As a result, “feel” is the initial response of the Japanese consumer, after which action is taken: a visit to the shop to purchase the product. Only after this comes knowledge. Miracle suggests that this sequence also applies to Korean and Chinese consumer responses. It may well apply to other collectivistic cultures.

Miracle summarized the logic of advertising in two distinct ways. The logic of advertising in Western societies is basically to tell the audience the following:

a. How you or your product is different.
b. Why your product is best, using clearly stated information and benefits.
c. Consumers then will want to buy, because they have a clear reason or justification for the purchase.
d. If they are satisfied, consumers will like and trust the company and the product and make repeat purchases.

The logic of advertising in Japan, which is probably valid for most Asian collectivistic cultures, is essentially the reverse:

a. Make friends with the target audience.
b. Prove that you understand their feelings.
c. Show that you are nice.
d. Consumers will then want to buy because they trust you and feel familiar with you (i.e., the brand and the company).
e. After the purchase, consumers find out if the product is good or what the benefits are.

Later models continue to follow the assumption that the advertising concept is what classical rhetoricians call an “argument from consequence,” following the cause-effect way of thinking. Petty and Cacioppo’s elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is one of the most advanced U.S. models of how advertising works. Taking into account the role of involvement, it states that persuasion follows a central route, peripheral route, or both. Within the central route, a person engages in thoughtful consideration (elaboration) of the issue-relevant information (arguments) within a message, so actively thinking about the arguments in the message is the central route. When the person is not motivated to think about the arguments, the peripheral route is followed. In the theory, the peripheral route generally includes visual cues like the package, pictures, or the context of the message.

The theory is embedded in Western advertising practice, which uses pictures as illustration of words. Various studies have been conducted to find the influence of pictures, in both the central route and the peripheral route, reviewing affective responses as determinants of persuasion. In collectivistic cultures, where people process advertising holistically and pictures provide the context, the theory may not apply.

**Visuals in Advertising**

Little is known about how consumers from different cultures process visual images in print advertisements. Visuals have been used for standardizing print advertisements worldwide with the underlying assumption that consumers from all around the world can “read” a picture whereas the copy of the advertisement often needs to be translated. These highly standardized visual campaigns, however, do not always convey a uniform meaning among audiences. For example, Benetton’s ad showing a black woman nursing a white baby won awards for its message of unity and equality in Europe. At the same time, the ad stirred up controversy in the United States because many believed it depicted a black nanny in the subordinate role as a slave. It is a misconception that visuals are universally understood across cultures. Pictures fit into schemata people have, and schemata vary by culture. A picture, meant in one culture to be associated with freedom (e.g., a lion), may be known in another culture to represent strength. Volkswagen showed a black sheep in a flock in Italy in order to portray the VW Golf owner as an independent self-assured person, but the black sheep doesn’t carry the same symbolism in many other cultures. Whereas a black sheep in Italy is the symbol of independence and going one’s own way, in other cultures it is a symbol of the outcast. People can derive different meanings from the same message because contextual people will “see” more in the message than is intended by the producer of the message. Because in high-context
cultures people are used to contextual messages, they will read more in pictures and derive “hidden” meaning from a visual image. Even for simple visual images with highly explicit information, the high-context audience may try to construct metaphorical meaning that is not intended by the sender of the message.

Differences in perception and visual processing result in a range of differences in the use of pictures in advertising. A multicountry comparison of visual components of print advertising in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Korea, and India found variations with respect to the size of the visual, frequency of usage of photographs and product portrayals, the size of the product, usage of metaphors, and frequency of persons in general, and specifically women and children, depicted in advertising.

Also music used in advertising needs careful consideration. Although music in advertising that is culturally incongruent may enhance memory, it doesn’t improve attitude toward the advertisement.

Appreciation of Advertising in General

In the discussion of how advertising works, another aspect of advertising plays a role: appreciation of advertising in general. In the United States, consumers’ attitudes toward advertising in general have been found to influence attitudes toward individual advertisements and brand attitude. Across countries, several factors influence perceptions of advertising in general: the political climate, culture, and the advertising landscape of a country. In small markets, where international advertisers dominate with messages that do not fit the culture of the consumer, people tend to dislike advertising more than in large markets with much home-grown advertising. U.S. students, for example, have been found to have a significantly greater number of affective responses to advertising than Danish and Greek students.

A universal finding is that advertising in general is praised for its economic effects, whereas it is criticized for its social effects. In developing economies, because of lesser knowledge of how advertising works, expectations of the economic effects may be higher than in developed economies. A 1994 study found that Russians at that time viewed advertising very positively. They saw it as an “engine of trade.” Studies comparing people’s attitudes toward advertising in the United States and Asian countries found more favorable attitudes toward advertising in Asia than in the United States, which was attributed to economic development and the development of the advertising industry: the more developed, the less favorable attitude. Data from TGI for 12 countries worldwide of mixed economic development confirm this relationship. The percentages of respondents who agree with the statement, “I find TV advertising interesting and quite often it gives me something to talk about,” correlate significantly with low GNI per capita \( r = \) \( -0.79^{***} \) and with low individualism \( r = -0.62^* \). An explanation may be that in collectivistic cultures, where advertising is indirect and entertaining, it doesn’t offend consumers the way it does in individualistic cultures, in particular when combined with masculinity as in the United States, where conflicts are not viewed as threatening and where consumers...
can be approached in a somewhat aggressive, direct way. For example, in the United States, comparative advertising is viewed as informative whereas the people of Taiwan view it as distasteful.\textsuperscript{55}

Appreciation of advertising is also related to media usage. Across countries, reading the news in newspapers every day goes together with viewing advertising in newspapers as a source of new product information.\textsuperscript{56} For television, we see similar relationships. Heavy TV viewing is related to a positive attitude toward advertising on TV. The percentages of heavy viewers correlate positively with the percentage of respondents saying that advertising on TV is a useful source of product information ($r = .66^{***}$).\textsuperscript{57}

Thus, certain value patterns make some people generally more receptive to advertising as a phenomenon than others, which must be taken into account when comparing advertising effectiveness across borders.

### Public Relations and Culture

PR managers who develop and execute PR campaigns that target multiple national publics must take into account many variables that influence the effectiveness of their campaigns across nations. Examples of such variables are language, available media, and differences in how people process information.

A much used definition of PR that originated in the United States says that it involves managing relationships between organizations and publics. This implies, among other things, a communication dialogue.\textsuperscript{58} European academics tend to point at communication as central to PR, as expressed in the definition “PR is the maintenance of relationships with publics by communication in order to establish mutual understanding.”\textsuperscript{59} How people maintain relationships and how they communicate are defined by culture.

Theories of public relations are dominated by Western ethical standards, views on the role of governments and media, and a Western perspective on history.\textsuperscript{60} Discussing these aspects goes beyond the scope of this book. There also are few comparative international PR research studies, so this section will not discuss PR philosophy across borders but will point at a few practical aspects.

The Anglo-Saxon origin of PR has led to focus on conveying explicit information, based on the assumption that target groups want to be informed and that information will lead to a positive attitude. In collectivistic cultures, usually also of high power distance, an important goal is developing personal relationships. In China, for example, maintaining “pleasant interpersonal relationships” is an important task of a PR manager. It means frequent chatting with secretaries or other intermediaries “at the right time and in a pleasant way.”\textsuperscript{61} Interviews with Korean PR practitioners show that they view personal relationships as an influence on communication. They believe journalists will select news stories based on journalists’ personal relationships with PR practitioners.\textsuperscript{62}

PR communicates with publics via the media in all sorts of ways, for example, by issuing press releases or by organizing events that are covered by the media. The Western, individualistic origin of PR is recognized by the importance of the press
release. International PR has to take into account differences in media usage across cultures and differences in usage of electronic media like Web logs and other computer-mediated communication. These differences will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Because communication management is essential for PR, sensitivity to different communication styles is essential. Whereas in individualistic cultures press releases can be short and to the point, a different style is likely to be more effective in collectivistic cultures. PR also assumes a need for information, which is not necessarily the same in all cultures as we have seen in the previous sections. In high power distance cultures, where power holders disperse information as they see fit, PR is likely to have a different function, more to build relationships to achieve trust than to inform, as in low power distance cultures where information builds trust. In individualistic cultures, when a problem occurs, a company tends to organize a great PR effort, providing information to contain the damage. In collectivistic cultures, companies have problems admitting mistakes and see it as loss of face. Sometimes companies try to hide mistakes or tragedies because of feelings of shame. In collectivistic and high power distance cultures a firm’s reputation is important because of the need for trust in the company, which is particularly important for online shopping. A firm’s good reputation contributes to customer e-loyalty.63

In international PR, whatever is communicated should be locally relevant, or the message will be thrown into the waste basket. For journalists, what doesn’t fit their mental maps will not be used. If you don’t have locally relevant messages, it is difficult to maintain an ongoing relationship with journalists of the relevant media. Messages will have to be translated, as not all journalists are fluent enough to understand the essentials of a message. Better do a translation yourself than depend on the journalists’ capabilities.

Companies increasingly use corporate Web sites with virtual press rooms for PR purposes. How content is designed is also culture-bound. Analysis of corporate press rooms of 120 companies in the United States and seven European countries found most of them lacking with respect to resources like reports, financial data, and histories, as well as having poor organization and classification of certain sections.64 As discussed in Chapter 5, people classify information in different ways across cultures, so when people organize information when designing a Web site, they will do this according to their own cultural practice. The result is that people from other cultures may have difficulties getting information that may not be in the place they expect it to be.

**Web Site Design**

When the Internet became operational for the world, it looked as if its users were part of a global community with similar interests, but people soon started to use it for different purposes. International companies have to go beyond allowing for foreign names, zip codes, and countries, currency formats, units of measurement, international telephone numbers, and translation and adapt their Web sites to the culture of the user. People appear to perform information-seeking tasks faster when using Web content created by designers from their own culture.65 Cultural adaptation not
only enhances ease of use on the Web site but also leads to more favorable attitudes toward the Web site, which in turn affects the intention to buy.66

For Web site design, the same laws operate as for other communications. Across cultures, people vary in the ways they want to be addressed. Values and motives vary as well as communication styles. For example, university Web sites in feminine cultures have a softer approach and are more people oriented than Web sites of universities of masculine cultures, which are more focused on achievement.67 Local Web sites of India, China, Japan, and the United States not only reflect cultural values of the country of their origin but also seem to differ significantly from each other on cultural dimensions. A striking feature of Chinese Web sites is the recurrent image of the family theme. Japanese Web sites exhibit clear gender roles and are rich in colors and esthetics with pictures of butterflies, cherry blossoms, or other nature scenes. Indian Web sites prominently depict the titles of the employees to demonstrate hierarchy. U.S. Web sites are low-context, direct, informative, logical, and success-oriented with prominent independence themes.68 Also, local Web sites for global brands distinguish between low- and high-context communication with more literal visuals in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany and more symbolic visuals in countries like Japan, Korea, and China.69 McDonald’s uses culturally relevant approaches in their Web sites to profess its slogan “I’m lovin’ it”: people alone or together, images of individuals separate or together with the product, more text, or more pictures. High-context cultures use more animation and images of moving people than low-context cultures, and the images promote values characteristic of collectivistic cultures.70 The United Kingdom leads both in text-heavy layout and shorter pages, whereas South Korea leads both in visual layout and in longer pages. South Korea utilizes much more multimedia presentation than the United States and the United Kingdom, where presentation more often is based on text only.71 There are significant differences between East and West in terms of interactive communication styles used by corporate Web sites. High-context Eastern Web sites employ less consumer-message and consumer-marketer interactivity than low-context Western Web sites. High power distance explains less consumer-marketer interactivity because of a larger gap between marketers and consumers. Collectivism explains more group activities among consumers.72 So in high-context cultures where people are more motivated by social interaction, online marketers should generate more consumer interaction, such as discussion forums and chat rooms, whereas in low-context cultures where people search for information, online marketers should emphasize information features such as keyword search and virtual product display.73

In short, along with culture, there is variation in the way information is presented, the amount of data used, the use of extreme claims, rhetorical style, the use of visuals or animation, the degree to which information is explicit, precise, and direct, and the option to contact people.74 Companies reaching their local customers through the traditional media do not have international customers to worry about, but the Internet is available for the world to see. Therefore, it is critical for companies to develop culturally designed international Web sites.75 The more the design of a Web site conforms to culturally familiar communication styles and cultural habits, the more trust is established.76
Design: Logo, Product, Package, and Retail Design

Design is a means of communication. Color communicates corporate position. Whereas blue is the corporate color in the United States, red is the winning business color in East Asia. There is one logo design rule that seems universal: the divine proportion (a ratio of 1:1.618). Many successful global logos follow this rule.

Product ownership and usage is culture-bound, and product styles also vary with culture. Washing machines adapt to the type of clothes people need to wash, to the available electrical current, to the size of kitchens. American pillow cases are a different size than German ones. Lack of such knowledge added to Wal-Mart’s failure in Germany.

Some design elements have cultural meaning. How designers shape objects is part of their culture. Scandinavian design is sleek and simple, which can be recognized by the design of the Nokia mobile phones. The Chinese like phones with glitter or perfumed phones or anything that delivers status. The perception of what is nice, beautiful, and necessary in kitchens is different. Unlike American cartoons, which tend to be bold and full of aggressive colors, the characters by Japanese Sanrio, the owner of Hello Kitty, are more subtle, with rounder features, more pastel colors, and a kind of coziness that strikes a chord in Japan. Sanrio also gives more freedom to designers to adapt to the context than consistency-loving American companies would. Dutch Dick Bruna sets strict guidelines for the Miffy character. Designers who want to design for other cultures should be aware of the fact that cultural variations may result in different product designs. Designers usually have a deeper knowledge about their own culture than about others and therefore are better able to design products for them.

Package design varies with respect to three-dimensional design as well as graphic design, and it often has local flavor. Packages vary with respect to the use of textual information, contrast, position and size of the brand logo, the quantity of verbal information, aggressiveness of typography, use of colors (soft or bright, harmonious or contrasting), shape, use of symbolism, degree of structure, and detail in the packaging design. For deodorants, for example, Japanese packaging uses relatively abstract symbolism, whereas German packaging uses more concrete symbols. In the feminine cultures, softer harmonious colors are used more than in the masculine cultures. The Japanese are extremely fond of well-packaged products. Mineral water manufacturer Kinki Partners made a package for Hyotan Kara Mizy mineral water in the shape of traditional water gourds to differentiate their product. These gourds used to be scooped and dried and used to carry water or grain. Inside is the water of the famous Yoshino mineral water source in the prefecture of Nara. The product is endorsed by a professional golfer from the Kinki region, with his son, also a professional golfer. See Illustrations 7.15 and 7.16.

The design of shop interiors, the type of product offered, and how products are presented in retail varies. The IKEA formula is based on self-assembly, which is not attractive to high power distance cultures where people want service. However, IKEA offers total concepts—living rooms, bedrooms—which are attractive to collectivist and high power distance cultures where people think more holistically. Although
Russia scores high on power distance, IKEA is very successful in that country. In supermarkets in feminine cultures, more men do food shopping, even with children. This influences the type of shopping carts. In low power distance cultures where independence of children is important, small shopping carts are available for children so they can shop independently. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, more product information is provided on the shelves next to the price. Personnel are better dressed, and cleanliness must be demonstrated, for example, by white floors. To symbolize freshness of food products or the offer of the day, handwritten information may be provided instead of well designed, consistent printed information, which cannot be produced instantaneously. A difference related to individualism and power distance is how products are categorized: by sort or by relationships or even by color. Belgian supermarkets tend to present products by relationship, for example, pastas with pasta sauce or wine with meats, whereas in the Netherlands, products are often categorized by sort, for example, pasta with rice. Other differences are visual routing signs versus verbal routing signs.

How communication works and how advertising works are culture-bound. Advertising styles follow interpersonal communication styles. Also, the roles and function of advertising varies. In one culture, advertising is persuasive by nature; in another, it must be liked in order to build trust between companies and consumers. Thus, models of one culture cannot be projected to other cultures. The
basic difference is between communication styles. Different verbal and nonverbal communication styles can be recognized in both interpersonal and mass communication, and culture clusters can be defined where one or the other style prevails. People process information in different ways. For some, pictures contain more information than words; for others, the only way to convey meaning is verbal. These differences are also relevant for e-communications. Academics and researchers across cultures have disputes about the different theories of how advertising works. Maybe no one is right, or maybe all are right. People look at how advertising works from the perspective of their own culture, which may indeed be very different from the perspective of their counterparts in other cultures. The consequence of the different roles of advertising across cultures is that international advertisers cannot use one standard for measuring effectiveness worldwide. Little is published about the effect of culture on international public relations. This chapter includes a few communication-related differences. Finally, design is a communication tool and a few examples are given of how culture influences design.

Notes

34. Online shoppers. (2008). Mediascope Europe, EIAA. Europe 10 countries. PDI: $r = -0.57^*$; UAI: $r = -0.68^*$.
43. Doi, T. (1973). *Amae No Kouzou* [The anatomy of dependence]. Tokyo: Kodansha. *Amae* can be explained as follows: The Japanese divide their lives into inner and outer sectors, each with its own different standards of behavior. In the inner circle, the individual is automatically accepted. There is interdependence and automatic warmth, love, or *amae*, the best translation of which is “passive love” or dependency. Members of the inner circle experience *amae* between each other, but it does not exist in the outer circle. You lose *amae* when you enter the outer circle. You don’t expect *amae* in the outer circle.

54. The global view of TV advertising. (2007). Global TGI barometer Issue 30. www.tgisurveys.com. Countries are Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, South Africa, Chile, Bulgaria, United States, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Australia, Spain.


56. Data from Eurobarometer, 1997–1999 (see Appendix B).

57. European Media and Marketing Survey, 1999 (see Appendix B).


83. www.inventorspot.com/articles/new_designer_water_japan_evokes_7982

84. These are examples of findings by students of the Master of Retail Design at the Willem de Kooning Academy at Rotterdam, 2006, 2007, and 2008. They compared the Dutch supermarket Albert Heijn and the Belgian supermarket Delhaize, using stores of the same size in similar neighborhoods.