CHAPTER 7

Culture and Communication

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 and are influenced by deeply ingrained habits and philosophies. 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. These are hybrid forms of communication, a mix of oral and literate communication. Understanding this is the basis for proper usage of these new media for marketing communications. Like advertising, the way people use these and how the content is designed, such as website design, are influenced by culture.

Communication

All living human beings communicate through sounds, speech, movements, gestures, and language. Communication involves many human activities: speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, and creating images. How people communicate is based on cultural conventions that are adhered to in interacting with other people, in producing and sending messages and in interpreting messages.

In Western communication studies since the 1960s, many definitions, theories, and models of communication have been developed, varying from process-oriented
models to models that focus on signs, symbols, and the conveying of meaning. Scholars in other parts of the world have developed different theories of the purpose of communication and how communication works, but theories of marketing communication have mainly been derived from Western communication theory that defines communication more or less as a linear process. According to Asian scholars, the Western process approach is not appropriate for understanding communication in most of Asia.

A central element of this book is that in order to understand communication, we have to be interested in people, their being, needs, motives, and so on. Wilbur Schramm, one of the founders of North American communication theory already pointed at this stating,

Let us understand clearly one thing about it: communication (human communication, at least) is something people do. It has no life of its own. There is no magic about it except what people put into it. There is no meaning in a message except what the people put into it. When one studies communication, therefore one studies people—relating to each other and to their groups, organizations and societies, influencing each other, being influenced, informing and being informed, teaching and being taught, entertaining and being entertained—by means of certain signs which exist separately from either of them. To understand the human communication process one must understand how people relate to each other.

When studying communication and its effects, we have to understand how individuals communicate and their effects on others, in particular how communication and its effects are influenced and modified by the social systems in which they take place. Understanding interpersonal relationships across cultures is important for understanding how forms of mass communication work and even more for understanding the new electronic media that are hybrid forms of personal and mass communication. Many of the topics discussed in Chapter 5 serve as the basis for understanding the differences in how people relate to each other across cultures.

**Communication Theory**

In classic North American communication theory, communication in a broad sense includes all the procedures by which one mind may affect another. All communication is viewed as persuasive, and communication is information based. Communication in its most general sense refers to a process in which information is shared by two or more persons and which has consequences for one or more of the persons involved. Implicit in the North American models is a separate self of individuals whose decisions are information based. This tends to be illustrated by a model of communication, as depicted in Figure 7.1, which includes the source or sender of a message (person, organization, company, brand), the message itself
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. The sender is responsible for effective communication by properly coding the message. The model is sender-oriented. Yet the sender of the message, after the message has been sent, wants to get feedback to find out if the message has been received and understood. The model doesn't include empathy with the receiver on the part of the sender of the message before or while sending a message. The sender 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. In mediated communication, the media are also shaped by the culture of the people who produce them, both in content and in form. 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.

The sender orientation of Western communication models is like a monologue and mostly valid for North American and North European communication. In South and East Europe, the dialogue provides a different representation of the communication process, including empathy with the receiver of the message. For example, the Russian scholar Michael Bakhtin views communication as a dialogue. In the dialogue, there is utterance, which refers to language spoken in context, so communication by definition is contextual. It includes the content of the conversation, the communicator's attitude toward the subject, and responsiveness on the part of the person being addressed. The speaker anticipates the viewpoint of the other and adapts communication to that anticipation. This anticipation or empathy that is also recognized in Asian communication is not found as an essential aspect in Western communication theory which generally is presented as a one-way process where feedback is mainly necessary to be certain that persuasion has taken place.

Next to empathy, several other aspects are central to communication in Asia, where, as in most other collectivistic cultures, communication varies with roles and relationships, with concern for belonging to the community and fitting in and occupying one’s proper place. Included are the need for harmony in interpersonal relationships, causing indirectness in communication; distinction of in-group and
out-group; adaptation to the different groups and to the context and situation; deliberation of the message in the mind of the sender of the message; and the ability of the receiver of the message to read the other’s mind. The last two elements are more pronounced in East Asian communication than in communication in India and West Asian countries. Basic to the preservation of harmony in East Asian communication is what Miike describes as a narrow exit and a wide entrance. The “exit” of the sender of a message is small as the message will exit only after careful internal evaluation. This evaluation causes pauses and silence. The “entrance” of the receiver of the message is wide open. Not only is the message indirect, but both parties also use nonverbal cues that have to be interpreted. This is the mind-reading process. Also during the interpretation process, there will be some periods of silence to help the internal evaluation process. Whereas in the Western communication model, the sender is responsible for effective communication, in the East Asian model, both receiver and sender are responsible.

Whereas the purpose of North American communication is persuasion and communication theory has been derived from Aristotle’s rules for persuasive communication, in Asia, communication takes place according to rules for behavior inherited from the old Confucian and Buddhist philosophies. Buddhism offers guidelines for how people should communicate, following the Buddhist ideal of social order. Communication must be socially appropriate. Also in Hinduism, the positions of the sender and the receiver are not static. Communication is a two-way process resulting in mutual understanding. It does not emphasize dominance of the sender. Commonness of experience has to take place. The effectiveness of any message depends on the communication environment. The same message may have different meanings in different contexts.

Of the differences between Western and Asian communication, silence is one of the most distinguishing elements of communication. Whereas in the United States each day on average time spent on conversation is 6 hours 43 minutes, it is 3 hours, 31 minutes in Japan. Silence as a form of speech in East Asian cultures is greatly influenced by both the Buddhist and Taoist emphasis on tranquility. It is the mind sounding inside, rather than the mouth talking outside. Silence, then, becomes an effective nonverbal expression for mutual understanding.

Silence in communication is found mostly in collectivistic cultures that are also long-term oriented. In collectivistic cultures that are short-term oriented, communication is a continuous stream of dialogue, of speaking and listening. For the Akan of Ghana, silence, unless requested for some scared practices, is considered an insult. Communication is a two-way street, and several proverbs confirm this. For example, “One mind cannot deliberate communal issues by itself.” African communication is influenced by commonness and a central African concept, Ubuntu, that includes concepts such as humanity, affection, and caring. An individual owes his or her existence to the existence of others. “I am” because “you are,” and “you are” because “I am.” We can be human only through others. The African conception of being and communication is also musical. As stated by the Senegalese philosopher Senghor, the African being can be formulated as “I feel, I dance the other; I am.” One of the most distinguishing aspects of African communication is that oral literacy is at the base. Oral literacy uses all sorts of mnemonic devices to help
memory, such as repetitions and metaphors, which are indirect modes of communication. The love of speech, the word, dialogue, the rhythm of talk is thought to be the soul of Africa. The love of speech is reflected in the many artistic forms of rhetoric as by praise singers and storytellers.\(^\text{12}\)

Also in Latin America, where in most areas the combination of collectivism and short-term orientation is found, speech is more important than silence although in some areas silence is part of communication. Discourse-related studies among the peoples of Lowland South America at the end of the 20th century have found dialogue in which the addressed repeats the utterances of the principle speaker in whole or part, a means to indicate understanding, assent, and respect. Findings are also of elaborate greeting processes, body language, and use of prolonged silence.\(^\text{13}\) The elaborate and sometimes extreme style of these cultures is recognized in the extreme response styles in survey research, which is very different from the moderate style of East Asians.\(^\text{14}\)

In sum, in such collectivistic cultures as are found in Asia and Africa, but also Latin America, human communication is an exchange or interaction, more than merely a way that information moves from one place to another.\(^\text{15}\) Yet there are important differences across collectivistic cultures with respect to long-/short term orientation that are also related to literacy and orality.

**Orality and Literacy**

Countries have trodden different paths toward literacy, and the impact of writing has never everywhere been the same. Communication and the cultural products originating in oral cultures are structured in a different way than those developed in literate cultures. These differences can be recognized in communication styles, literary genres, the media, advertising, and electronic communication today.

*Oral* communication is simply said mouth to mouth communication, a speech or conversation, but derived forms are specific literary genres, such as legends, tales, and stories. Any non-literal communication is a process where information is exchanged between individuals or groups through a common system of orality or visual features, such as symbols, signs, or behaviors. Today, primary oral culture hardly exists as every culture knows of writing and has some experience with its effects. Yet many cultures to varying degrees preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality. Oral cultures, even when becoming literate, tend to keep their oral style.\(^\text{16}\) Oral literacy includes several forms of communication that are found less in textual or literate cultures, such as redundancy and repetition. These characteristics, for example, use of metaphors and flowery and elaborate language can still be found in various communication styles such as in Russian, Arabic, and Spanish.

*Literacy* generally points at writing, reading, learning, and developing knowledge. Reading and writing developed in a different way and at different places in the various parts of the world. In northern Europe, literacy developed with the advent of Protestantism because individuals were expected to read the Bible personally or individually, not hear it read by others. Countries dominated by Catholicism, such
as Spain and Italy lagged.\textsuperscript{17} In East Asia, it was Confucianism which had emphasized written communication and de-emphasized oral communication.\textsuperscript{18}

Generally, literacy is described as the ability to read and write, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute, and use printed and written materials. In 2009, the 10 countries scoring highest on average reading ability of 15-year-olds were in East Asia and Northern Europe. The degree of literacy as measured by UNESCO\textsuperscript{19} correlates significantly with the long-term orientation dimension. An explanation of the relationship with long-term orientation is from Tannen,\textsuperscript{20} who finds that oral tradition is strong in cultures that are oriented toward the past. In more future-oriented Asian thinking, the spoken word is viewed as existent only in the moment it is spoken. Writing is the tool for permanent recording, whereas an oral utterance has vanished as soon as it is uttered. However, in writing, something can be totally and completely deleted, whereas in speaking, what is said cannot be unsaid. Nonverbal features as in oral conversation are not available in writing.

You may wrinkle your face up until it cracks while you write, but this expression will not show up on the written page. You may yell or whisper or sing as you compose sentences, but the words as they fall on the page will not reflect this behavior.\textsuperscript{21}

Literate tradition has not replaced oral. No individual is either “oral” or “literate.” Rather, people use devices associated with both traditions in various settings. Oral formulaic thought and expression do not disappear as soon as one starts writing, and many modern cultures that have known writing for centuries have never fully interiorized it, such as Arabic and Mediterranean cultures. Ong\textsuperscript{22} argues that “many of the contrasts often made between ‘Western’ and other views seem reducible to contrasts between deeply interiorized literacy and more or less residually oral states of consciousness.”

Oral residues have an impact on people’s thinking patterns, people’s mind-sets. People in an oral society had to rely on real situations for the understanding of abstract things; they had to conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human life world. Concepts are used in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract and that are close to the living human world.\textsuperscript{23} This may relate to the differences in abstract and concrete thinking and the differences found in information needs between the Mediterranean countries of Europe and the North. Knowledge is not necessarily gained by active information seeking, but is an implicit part of human communication flows, as described in Chapter 5 (p. 140). As literacy is said to influence all sorts of cognitive processes like categorization and abstract and logical reasoning, in literate cultures, people may prefer searching for facts and data on the Internet whereas more oral cultures may get their information from interpersonal contacts and/or social media. Across Europe, it is in the North that people first started reading books, and it is individualism-collectivism that still explains differences in book reading. 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, representing Northwest Europe, the same area where people started reading the Bible individually. 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).

The need to understand the difference between orality and literacy is growing with the electronic age because of the hybrid communication function of the various Internet and mobile media where we can see a form of communication that can be called digital orality: informal spoken conversation, but written. The difference definitely is more than that between writing and talking; it distinguishes between ways of information seeking and decision making. These influences can be found through individualism/collectivism and the long-/short-term orientation dimension. For example, in cultures scoring high on the long-term orientation dimension, people trust the typical literate Internet-facilitating features, such as search engines and product reviews, whereas in the short-term oriented cultures, people trust more in their family and friends.

The electronic media, in particular the mobile phone, are hybrid forms of oral and literate communication, and oral cultures use it in different ways than literate cultures do. Searching for hard facts on the Internet is an activity found more in literate cultures whereas electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), as via social media, can be viewed as an oral communication form. A logical consequence of orality is preference for the talking, or speaking, function of the mobile phone. An interesting

![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).)

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development is usage of some of the social media, such as Twitter. Basically, this is oral communication, talk written down. But it goes against Tannen’s observation that what is said cannot be unsaid and that what is written down can be deleted. What is written on the Internet is not easily deleted.

Culture and Communication Styles

The need for context, directness versus indirectness, literacy or orality, and the purpose of communication, altogether make up communication styles of cultures, both interpersonal communication style and mass communication styles. 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.25

Interpersonal Communication Styles

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey distinguish interpersonal communication styles between verbal and nonverbal each with further distinctions, and found these differences explained by power distance and uncertainty avoidance by which they mapped different cultures.26

Verbal styles can be distinguished between verbal personal and 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 according 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 which often is a remnant of orality and mostly found in collectivistic and short-term oriented cultures. Exacting or precise style is a style where no more or no less information than required is given, mostly found in individualistic cultures that have been literate for a long time. Succinct or understated style includes the use of understatements, pauses, and silences. Silences between words carry meaning.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey27 found that 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 East Asian cultures (e.g., Japan).

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.

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. 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. Particularly
in East Asia, communication implies empathy or “understanding without words.” 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. So here, the receiver is responsible for effective communication. 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.

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.

Digital Communication

How people use the Internet, e-mail, the mobile phone, and other electronic 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 North 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.

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 messaging is used as a group-talking tool. But in some countries, the mobile phone has been adopted less for its talk function and more for its Internet-facilitating features. The key digital device for Japanese youngsters is the mobile phone since they generally don't have a PC until they go to college. The Chinese prefer real-time communications, such as instant messaging.

Social network services originated in the Western world, and Western services like Facebook are sender oriented; they activate short-term memory. They do not allow for dialogue. Yet people in collectivistic cultures have become the leaders in social networking on the Internet as they allow for continuous flows of information. However, people use social network services in different ways, and local
services have adjusted to local cultural habits. The number of contacts (what in Western terms are called friends) vary enormously (see Chapter 8).35 The number of friends people have across cultures correlate with short-term orientation. It is a manifestation of self-enhancement.

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.36 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.37 However, for collectivists also, 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 near as much as East Asians perceive themselves to be.38 North Americans view their East Asian partners as indirect without sufficient self-disclosure. At the same time, East Asians feel that their North American partners are overly explicit and rude.39

The combination of talking and texting on the mobile phone makes it the most hybrid medium of all new technology. It allows illiterate people to connect with others who are not close by, and it also allows literary expressiveness. In many countries, the texting (SMS) function has created a new type of language. Across cultures, people have also adopted the mobile phone to express themselves in their own culturally appropriate way. Whereas in individualistic cultures people use texting for efficiency reasons, in collectivistic culture, also those with oral literacy, people use it to express themselves in style. One example is Senegal, where students tend to send SMS poems, in particular romantic poems, in their own language (Wolof), which generally is not used for writing, as the language in which students learn to write is French. One example of such poetry40 is the following:

May the sun of godsend lighten up your way, may the sky of peace be above you, may you walk on the earth of happiness, (with) the wind of love refreshing you.

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.

Chapter 8, on media and culture, will deal with the electronic media in more depth.
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 as well as differences in orality and literacy. The influence of culture on content, form, and style can be recognized in literature, mass media programs, public relations, and advertising.

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, speaking of 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. It is 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. A characteristic of Latin American literature is a general aesthetic outlook, moving into a world of the fantastic and bizarre, a baroque artistic style. The mystic and supernatural is reflected in Latin American novels in which fantastic and incredible things may occur in mythical cities as in Gabriel García Márquez’s novel One Hundred Years of Solitude.

Underlying Models

The basis of communication styles of the different world regions are the age-old philosophies of these regions: those of Aristotle, the Buddha, and Confucius.

At the base of Western mass communication theory is Aristotle’s On Rhetoric. It is, in the broadest sense, the theory and practice of spoken or written eloquence: the art or study of effective and persuasive use of language when addressing a public. A style of speaking or writing especially regarding a particular subject is also a feature of rhetoric. The Western description includes the following essential characteristics of rhetoric: (1) It has to accomplish an intended goal; (2) it is geared
toward influencing human choices on specific matters that require immediate attention; and (3) it concerns persuasion pursued at public forums. The rhetorically competent communicator consciously uses symbols to create understanding and to form, strengthen, or change an attitude in their audience.

The rules of rhetoric are known as the five canons of rhetoric: (1) invention (how to persuade), (2) arrangement (structure of a coherent argument), (3) style (presentation of the argument to stir the emotions), (4) memory (memorize a speech), and (5) delivery (making effective use of voice, gesture, etc.). In particular, the first three steps can be recognized in much of Western advertising. An example is the French commercial for Freedent (Illustration 7.1). It demonstrates that the boy doesn’t dare to kiss because of bad breath and uses a puppet to show his affection. The argument stirs negative emotions that can turn positive.

Illustration 7.1 Freedent, France

Five steps in the Buddhist rhetorical model are (1) theme glorification; (2) explain the main idea; (3) allegory; (4) karma, prove the truthfulness of a theme; and (5) summarize and conclude by giving peace of mind.45 Again, such steps can be recognized in advertising styles, in particular the use of allegory and metaphors. Illustration 7.2 shows pictures from a Chinese TV commercial for Shangri-La hotels. A hiker gets lost in deep snow and falls down. The wolves come and cover him, so he doesn’t freeze. The tagline is “Embrace a stranger as one’s own.”

Illustration 7.2 Shangri-La hotels, China

Three of the steps in the Hindu rhetorical model are (1) simplification, (2) reach commonness of experience, and (3) aesthetic delight.46 Aesthetic delight, as one of the communication effects, can be recognized in Hindu cultural products, their temples, art, TV programs, and in advertising. An example of a television program reflecting this was the Indian soap opera Ramayana.47 An advertising example is
the ad for Happydent in India (illustration 7.3). It shows examples of humans serving as lamps which don’t shine: as head lights of a car, as lamp posts, as chandeliers, and so on. A wise old man is not able to read a book. The protagonist takes a piece of Happydent, and all lamps start to shine.

These different rhetorical styles are part of mass communication style and forms of advertising used in the various parts of the world. Other elements are appeals and motives as well as specific forms and executional aspects, which will be elaborated in the next sections.

![Illustration 7.3 Happydent, India](image)

**Advertising Styles**

Advertising can be viewed as a symbolic artifact or communication product 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 reflect different roles of advertising across cultures.

In order to analyze differences in advertising styles across culture, 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, the look of kitchens, or male-female roles)**

An example of a typical appeal for high uncertainty avoidance cultures is purity, as in the German advertisement for Gerolsteiner, a German mineral water brand.
(Illustration 7.4). An example of an individualistic appeal is the international advertisement for Vodafone (Illustration 7.5), which focuses on the individual. The Spanish Airtel (acquired by Vodafone) used a collectivistic appeal, an example of group identity (Illustration 7.6). 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 or a Japanese 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 that vary with long-/short-term orientation. 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 7.7) and ProViva (Illustration 7.8), and a German ad for Dove shampoo, saying “can your hair cope with the morning hair brush test?” (Illustration 7.9). Examples of the indirect approach are the international advertisement for Thai Airlines (Illustration 7.10), which uses the eye of the needle to symbolize a small world, and a Spanish ad for Heineken (Illustration 7.11), 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 website design. Cultures can be mapped according to their advertising styles, similar to communication styles, using power distance and uncertainty avoidance. However, for mass communication, the new long-/short-term orientation data appear to be a better mapping tool, together with
individualism-collectivism, because this dimension distinguishes between literate and oral styles. Cultures thus can be mapped as in Figure 7.4.

The advertising style in the two right quadrants, where cultures are individualistic, is direct and explicit, more verbal than visual, and it uses argumentation. Within this direct-explicit distinction, there are also differences, for example, with respect to the degree of self-enhancement and hard sell arguments for short-term effects. Within the quadrants, we find differences with respect to the other dimensions. For example, in cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, advertising is more serious and structured. The execution of the visuals will be detailed, often including demonstration of how the product works. In the weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, 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.51

The two quadrants at the left where cultures are collectivistic include styles that are implicit and indirect using symbolism and visuals. The cultures in the upper left quadrant use less argumentation and more symbolism, metaphors, and aesthetics. These are also literate cultures, and playing with words and use of taglines in

![Figure 7.4 Advertising Styles](source: Data from Hofstede et al. (2010) (see Appendix A).)
advertising is popular. But verbal expression is not direct and double entendre is appreciated. 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 “This car offers the most comfortable interior and the smoothest drive.” Communication is subdued and works on likeability. The use of aesthetics and entertainment as an advertising form is characteristic of this communication style. Chinese consumers like visual and vivid ads with images. 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.” They must ensure group norms and help maintain face. Next to the use of drama and metaphor, visuals, play with words (visually), songs, and symbolism are important in advertising in these cultures.

Moving to the lower left quadrant, we see India and Spain in the border area, where communication may be more direct, and a mix of Hispanic, African, and a few Asian cultures that are collectivistic as well as short-term oriented. Advertising style is mostly indirect and uses drama and metaphor although these cultures are more verbal in their communication. For India, a more direct communication style was noticed by Roland, who states, “Indian modes of communication operate more overtly on more levels simultaneously than do the Japanese.” In this cluster are mostly oral cultures with intensive interpersonal communication and dialogue as in soaps and other forms of drama. Drama (see Chapter 10) is an indirect style based on dialogue that fits countries such as Spain 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 even more popular in the countries in the lower left 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 Purpose of Marketing Communication

The different styles discussed before reflect the differences in the purpose of advertising and how advertising works. In individualistic cultures, 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. In advertising theory and practice, both the way advertising styles or forms are distinguished and the measurement of advertising effectiveness are based on Western thinking about the purpose of advertising. An example is the distinction between informational and emotional advertising. For the measurement of advertising effectiveness, other models should be developed next to the standard persuasion model.

**Informational Versus Emotional**

In much Western advertising theory, a distinction is made between informational and emotional advertising. All that is not factual is considered emotional. “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. This approach to advertising theory varies across Western cultures and is even less applicable to Asian advertising theory. When following this distinction in Asia, most indigenous advertising, being indirect, can be characterized as emotional.

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. An example is problem removal, portrayed by annoyance with the problem followed by relief, or social approval, and 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 in advertising 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.

Advertising theories are also 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. What is informational for members of one culture may not be informational for members of another culture. As described in Chapter 5, information-gathering behavior varies across cultures, and the degree to which people view themselves as well-informed consumers correlates with individualism. 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. It basically is the cultural configuration of individualism, low power distance, and low uncertainty avoidance, which is Northwest 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.

**Measuring Advertising: Persuasion or Likeability**

Because of the different purposes and effects of advertising, measuring effectiveness will need to be different across cultures. Traditional measures of advertising effectiveness are based on persuasiveness of an advertisement. The basic procedure is measurement of purchasing intentions before and after exposure. All elements of advertising—words and pictures—tend to be evaluated on their persuasive role in the sales process. Measures include attitude toward the advertisement (Aad), brand attitude (Abr), purchase intention (PI), memory, and market performance. In Chapter 5, we discussed the varying relationships between attitude and behavior across cultures, as well as how buying 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.
Also 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. In collectivistic and long-term oriented 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. Also, Eastern demands such as proper conduct should be a criterion for effective advertising, as in the Buddhist communication model. A Korean study measuring advertising creativity found that advertising should be socially appropriate, sincere, and pleasing, an aspect that has not emerged from past studies among U.S. populations.

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, sensitive)
- Pleases the mind (entertaining, aesthetic)
- Be socially appropriate (following the Buddhist demand for proper conduct)

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. Generally, it would be advisable to develop measurement criteria that are appropriate for the advertising styles, purposes, and desired effects for specific countries or clusters of cultures.

A new area for developing effectiveness measurement systems is advertising on the Internet. Next to simple click-through measurement (see Chapter 8), several other aspects play a role. One example is a study of advertising responses in Korea, which found that Korean youngsters respond more positively to advertising on a website after they have revealed personal information on that site. Also, for Internet advertising in Asia, trust may be an important criterion.

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 using 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. There are significant cross-cultural differences in pictorial perception. People from different cultural backgrounds are likely to interpret the imagery included in advertising in different ways. 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.

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 multi-country 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.

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.

**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 homegrown 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.77

A universal finding is that advertising in general is praised for its economic effects, whereas it is criticized for its social effects.78 In developing economies, expectations of the economic effects tend to 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.”79 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 the attitude.80 Data from TGI81 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 ($r = −.79^{***}$) and with low individualism ($r = −.62^*$). 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.82

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.83 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 ($r = .66^{**}$).84

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.

**Website Design**

The Internet has become one of the most important means of communication. International companies have to go beyond allowing for only foreign names, zip codes, and countries; currency formats; units of measurement; international
telephone numbers; and translation and adapt their websites to the culture of the user. People appear to perform information-seeking tasks faster when using the web content created by designers from their own culture. Cultural adaptation not only enhances ease of use on the website but also leads to more favorable attitudes toward the website, which in turn affects the intention to buy.

For website 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 websites in feminine cultures have a softer approach and are more people oriented than websites of universities of masculine cultures, which are more focused on achievement. Local websites 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 websites is the recurrent image of the family theme. Japanese websites exhibit clear gender roles and are rich in colors and esthetics with pictures of butterflies, cherry blossoms, or other nature scenes. Indian websites prominently depict the titles of the employees to demonstrate hierarchy. U.S. websites are low-context, direct, informative, logical, and success-oriented with prominent independence themes. Also, local websites for global brands distinguish between low- and high-context communication with more literal visuals in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany and more symbolic visuals in countries such as Japan, Korea, and China. McDonald’s uses culturally relevant approaches in their websites 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. 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. There are significant differences between East and West in terms of interactive communication styles used by corporate websites. High-context Eastern websites employ less consumer-message and consumer-marketer interactivity than low-context Western websites. High power distance explains less consumer-marketer interactivity because of a larger gap between marketers and consumers. Collectivism explains more group activities among consumers. 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.

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. 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 websites. The design of a website conforms to culturally familiar communication styles and cultural habits, the more trust is established. Also, designers of web banners tend to follow their own cultural values. They take the same mental approach to their creative activity as do advertising copywriters for traditional media.

Based on content analysis of a large number of business-to-business websites, Usunier & Roulin argue that for global business-to-business communication, high-context cultures are at a relative disadvantage, as the Internet doesn’t provide the context that high-context communication needs to be processed, and as a result, these websites are easier to read by people of the same culture but not by people of other cultures, which restricts the usefulness. High-context communication styles may be detrimental to the design of business-to-business websites, making them less readable, less effective in the use of colors and graphics, and less interactive for the global audience. Thus, the advice is to design business-to-business websites following low-context communication rules and/or employ low-context communication designers. On the other hand, Pollach found that for Asian visitors to corporate websites, online game-animated intros are important factors, more than for European visitors, who view animated flash intros as a web design error because of their lack of usability. This is an argument in favor of adapting corporate websites targeting global audiences. Apart from such practical aspects, most of the differences in communication styles discussed in the previous chapters play a role when designing websites.

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. Taglines and brand logos in Korea are more symbolic than those in the United States. 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.

Yet across cultures, corporate identity design follows different rules as can be discovered from manuals for corporate identity design. For the purpose of shaping and maintaining corporate identity, companies develop an “identity standards manual,” which is a guide to managing the application of the corporate identity visual system, or how an organization uses logotypes, typography styles, names, and architecture to communicate its corporate philosophy. In high-context cultures, these manuals include more nonverbal features (logo and symbol), traditions and customs (history, values), features defining the context of the communication, accessories or decorative elements, and people (uniforms). In low-context cultures, these manuals include more textual features (name and publications) and direct messages (e.g., incorrect applications); manuals are more prescriptive and simpler than in high-context cultures where manuals use more indirect language and are more complex because of use of indirect language and also have more sections.
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. The 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. Chapter 11 offers more information in product and packaging design and culture.

Summary

Human communication follows age-old patterns that are still relevant today. Knowing cross-cultural differences in both interpersonal and mass communication is necessary to understand how advertising works and how the media function. How communication works is culture-bound. 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. 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. Other communication-related differences are website design and design in general. Design is a communication tool and a few examples are given of how culture influences design.

Notes

1. In particular, authors like Yoshitaka Miike, Guo-Ming Chen, and Wimal Dissanayake have worked on development of Asiacentric communication theory counter to the dominance of Eurocentric communication theory.


27. Although the configuration of dimensions chosen by Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey explains much of the differences in interpersonal communication, adding the new data for the long-/short-term orientation dimension might add to the explanation. It would, for example, place Japan together with the other East Asian cultures. We will use this dimension for explaining the differences in styles of mass communication.


44. Ong, 1982.


50. In previous editions of this book for advertising styles, we followed the interpersonal communication model. However the new long-/short-term orientation data seem to be more appropriate for understanding differences in styles of mass communication as they cover the oral-literal difference which is of more importance to mass communication.


70. 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.


81. 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.
83. Data from Eurobarometer, 1997–1999 (see Appendix B).
84. European Media and Marketing Survey, 1999 (see Appendix B).

