QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of culture?

Culture has a number of characteristics. It is: (1) prescriptive, (2) socially shared, (3) learned, (4) subjective, (5) enduring, (6) cumulative, and (7) dynamic. Furthermore, it facilitates communication.

2. Explain the impact of culture on consumption.

Consumption patterns are dictated by culture, and consumption habits vary greatly. Some Chinese do not understand how Americans can eat beef, believing that it is improper to eat cattle that work on farms. Americans, in contrast, do not understand how some Chinese and Koreans can eat dogs, the animal often treated as pets or family members in the United States. Interestingly, the Korean government, during the Olympics, banned such traditional delicacies as dog stew, snake soup, blood worm soup, and deer antlers for fear of offending foreigners who might label Koreans as barbaric. Therefore, not only does culture influence what is to be consumed, but it also affects what should not be purchased.

3. What is the SRC (self-reference criterion)?

The SRC explains how the individual tends to be bound by his or her own cultural assumptions. The individual thus observes foreign cultures by making reference back to personal cultural values. As a result, perception of overseas events can be distorted by the effects of the SRC.

4. Distinguish between high-context and low-context cultures.

In low-context cultures (e.g., the United States), messages are explicit and clear in the sense that actual words are used to convey the main part of information in communication. The words and their meanings, being independent entities, can be separated from the context in which they occur.

In high-context cultures (e.g., Japan), the context of communication is high because, in addition to the verbal part, it includes a great deal of extra information, such as the message sender's values, position, background, and associations in the society. As such, the message cannot be understood without its context. One's individual environment (i.e., physical setting and social circumstances) determines what one says and how one is interpreted by others.

5. Distinguish between monochronic and polychronic cultures.

Monochronic cultures (e.g., the United States) handle information in a direct, linear fashion. Schedules, punctuality, and a sense that time forms a purposeful straight line are indicators of such cultures. In polychronic cultures (e.g., Japan), people work on several fronts simultaneously instead of pursuing a single task.
6. Explain how the meanings of time, space, agreement/disagreement, and friendship can vary from one culture to another. Also discuss their business implications.

Perceptions of time are culture bound. In the United States, there is a direct relationship between time and the importance of a matter. In some countries, a reverse relationship exists.

Space has its own meaning and is relative. What is perceived as crowded in the United States may be perceived as spacious somewhere else.

Culture dictates how an agreement or a disagreement is expressed and resolved. North Americans prefer a straightforward and explicit approach. Elsewhere, one must be careful in a disagreement never to make someone lose face.

The development of friendship is also affected by culture. Americans have no difficulty in developing friendship in a very short time. Friendship is not developed as fast in other countries, but, when it is developed, it tends to be deeper and to be longer lasting.

DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS AND MINICASES

1. Which one of the following seems to better characterize the world: cultural commonality or cultural diversity?

This question is similar to asking whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. The answer thus depends on one's perspective. Still, the world is perhaps much better characterized by cultural diversity. There is no useful purpose to study culture and international marketing if consumers were homogeneous.

The lack of commonality is readily apparent. Countries have religious, philosophical, and environmental differences. Consumption and perceptual differences are everywhere. Conflicts arise because of the failure of nations to understand each other. It is thus a grave mistake to assume that everyone wants to be like us. Cultural commonality will exist only when there is but one language remaining worldwide.

2. Because English is the world language of business, is it necessary for U.S. managers to learn a foreign language?

English is a second language in most parts of the world because of the recognition of the importance of English as a business communication medium. Still American managers should learn a foreign language, especially that of a country with which they do a significant portion of business. Without the knowledge of a foreign language, American managers are at a disadvantage because their foreign counterparts can converse in two languages. Not only the knowledge of a foreign language makes an American manager aware of what his counterparts are saying to each other, but also he can make a good impression by showing interest in the other
country's language and culture. Furthermore, the practice makes it more likely for American managers to understand the logic and thinking of their foreign customers or suppliers.

3. **Do you agree that the United States is a "melting pot"?**

The U.S. melting pot is a misconception because subcultural differences are everywhere. Being aware of these differences, U.S. firms segment the U.S. market based on region (e.g., South, West), race (e.g., white, black), language (e.g., English, Spanish), occupation (e.g., professionals, truckdrivers), age (e.g., young, old), and so on. The idea is to appeal to consumers through their subcultures.

4. **As Hispanic consumers in the United States are also American consumers, is it necessary for marketers to adjust their marketing mix for this market segment?**

This question is highly related to the previous one. It is true that Hispanic consumers are American consumers. Equally true is the fact that they have their own identity, language, and preferences. Thus, it is necessary to adjust the marketing mix for this market segment. It should be noted that all segmentation criteria are met. This Hispanic segment is different, identifiable, accessible through selective advertising media, and sufficiently large. It should come as no surprise then that firms create advertisements just for this group.

5. **Explain how culture affects the ways people use eating utensils (e.g., fork, spoon, knife, chopsticks).**

Culture affects how people use eating utensils. In some cultures, people eat with their hands instead of using utensils. The Chinese and Japanese, of course, are well known for their chopsticks. Americans and Europeans use fork and knife to cut food on their dinner plates to bite-sized portions. Many other peoples have no need for a knife at the dinner table because meat has already been precut to small portions before cooking (e.g., Chinese foods). Asians are likely to use table spoons instead of knives, and they use spoons of varying shapes and sizes.

The way Americans hold and use forks and knives differ from how these things are used in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. People there eat with their forks upside down. Because the curved fork facilitates the lifting of food to the mouth, food is raked onto the fork with a knife. In addition, these Europeans do not set their knives down after cutting meat. They simply eat left handed since switching the fork from the left hand to the right hand is a wasted motion.

6. **Explain why people in several countries are upset when they see: (a) an advertisement showing an American crossing his legs at the reader or putting his legs on a table; and (b) Americans wearing shoes into their homes.**

In many cultures, feet are low and dirty. As a result, it is an insult to cross the legs, put the legs on a table, or use a leg to point at something.
Americans wear shoes into their own houses, thinking that the floor is dirty. In most cultures, shoes—not the floor—are the ones which are dirty. Since the floor is swept and mopped every day, walking into someone's home with shoes on is a sign of ignorance and disrespect of someone's home.

7. According to Edward T. Hall, a renowned anthropologist, Americans are more comfortable with Germans than with the Japanese because Germans generally make eye contact to indicate attention to a speaker. Still, the Americans feel that the Germans do not smile often enough. How do the Germans and Japanese regard the Americans' frequent smiles and eye contact?

Americans smile frequently to show friendliness and make frequent eye contact to show interest and sincerity. But quick and frequent smiles may be taken as a sign of insincerity and an indication of suspicious motive. Germans regard smiling and casual touching as things for friend. Friendship cannot be developed alone by smiles. Also eye contact is a sign of aggression. In many countries, people get into a fight just by looking at each other.

8. According to William Wells of the DDB Needham Worldwide advertising agency, American TV commercials are usually shown either as an illustrated lecture or as a drama in which a product is a prop (or a mixture of both techniques). Why is the lecture approach (a low-context technique) inappropriate for high-context cultures? Why is the drama approach (a high-context technique) appropriate for Japan? Note that Japanese commercials go to great lengths to present cues that are not product-related before devoting only a few seconds to the product itself at the end. To American advertisers, this advertising approach is ambiguous and puzzling.

The lecture approach is inferior to the drama approach for such high-context cultures as Japan. In many parts of the world, peoples are very aware of their social classes and status. The social standings affect how the message is conveyed and interpreted. There is an emphasis on interpersonal relationships between communicators, nonverbal expression, physical setting, and social circumstances. The lecture alone is thus inadequate because it is not capable of carrying all the meanings. As a result, additional cues, although not necessarily product related, must be presented so that the audience will understand the target market of the product and the appeal of the product. The drama is therefore more effective in sending the additional message as related to the message sender's and the receiver's values, position, background, and social circumstances. For example, a print advertisement or commercial which shows a young girl kneeling while talking with another person implies that she is a servant—someone of lower status.

The drama approach is high-context in the sense that the product is shown in its natural settings. As a result, there are opportunities to present contextual cues. An advertisement showing a luxury car by itself (or even the owner with it) is not capable of conveying the meaning of luxury unless such additional cues as a uniformed chauffeur are brought in. In high-context cultures, owners of luxury cars rarely, if ever, drive their own cars.
The Japanese pay attention to nuances and tone (i.e., the music and scenery and how people act). These contextual cues are too subtle for those of the low-context cultures to understand because these cues do not get to the point. Although the day-after recall method is appropriate in measuring advertising effectiveness in low-context research, the attitude-change measurement is more appropriate for high-context advertising studies.

9. What are the stereotypes of the following groups: Arabs, Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans? Why is it undesirable to use stereotyping as a basis to understand foreigners? Also identify the positive traits and values of the groups mentioned above.


The stereotypes of Arabs include: terrorist, sheik, harem, revenge, and torture.

The stereotypes of Asians include: geishas, being submissive, gangsters, Samurai, pigtailed “Chinamen,” snake-charmers, turbaned Indians, and enemy.

The stereotypes of Africans include: pygmies, cannibals, and savages.

The stereotypes of Latin Americans include: being dirty, being lazy, and the character in sombrero reposing against a basket or cactus.

It is undesirable to use stereotyping to characterize foreigners and minority groups. Some feel that stereotyping is a lazy way to learn about the others since it assumes that all members of the same group (e.g., women, Asians, etc.) are all alike. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that some type of generalization and stereotyping is often a necessity if learning is to be facilitated. The world will be a chaotic place if a person has to learn from scratch about each new person, object, or event. Both generalization and discrimination are needed.

This discussion assignment is a good way to get students to become culturally sensitive and examine their own biases and prejudices. The goal is to prevent a student from making a sweeping generalization. Instead, everyone will be better off if the focus is on the cultural values that are stressed by a certain target group.

Marketers should use values on which Arab cultures place a high value. These values include: hospitality, personal dignity, continuity, stability, and psychological and emotional strength.

The traits valued by Asians include: sense of obligation and loyalty, strong work ethic, oneness with nature, modesty, harmony with others and with the universe, transcendence, and human dignity.
In the case of Africans, they value: story-telling and the oral tradition, continuity, respect for elders, memory, oneness with nature, interdependence, community, cooperation, and harmony.

The values emphasized by Latin Americans include: survivability under adversity, patience, interdependence, and cooperation.

10. What are some of the unique characteristics of the U.S. culture? What are some of the unique business characteristics of the Japanese culture?

American culture has several distinctive characteristics. It is: (1) materialistic, (2) individualistic, (3) achievement-oriented, (4) time-oriented, (5) youth-oriented, and (6) practical and efficient.

Some general characteristics of the Japanese culture are: (1) permanent and irrevocable membership, (2) recruitment and selection based on personal qualities, (3) status acquired based on an extension of the person's status in the society, (4) compensation including nonmonetary benefits and based on broad social criteria, (5) corporate responsibilities extended to employees' nonbusiness activities, (6) job responsibility and authority not being well-defined, (7) decision-making style of risk minimization and confrontation avoidance, and (8) prevalent sexual discrimination.