

Book Review:

GLOBAL MARKETING AND ADVERTISING UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL PARADOXES

Widya Paramita

Universitas Gadjah Mada
(widyaparamita@hotmail.com)

It is quite common in both business and academia to hold a naïve assumption such as: people's rationality as producers differs from their rationality as consumers. In fact, producers are consumers to other producers. The aforementioned assumption does not reflect observable reality but, instead, reflects a perception process in which those in control define rationality in their way. Therefore, there is no such thing as a universal rationality—a discovery which economists applying “rational choice” models have still got to make. What is rational or irrational to a person depends on that person's value system, which in turn is part of the culture that person acquires early in her or his lifetime. What people around the world value the most, thus, varies enormously.

In business, if there is one aspect that is culture-dependent, it is consumer behavior. Marketing and advertising are basically about consumers, not about producers. Marketing and advertising theories based on producers' logic but missing consumers' logic are useless. Interest in understanding culture's influence on marketing and advertising is growing. There are many studies that have analyzed the influence of culture on various aspects of consumer behavior and marketing and advertising practice.

Globalization has not produced globally uniform consumers. Although there is a worldwide convergence of technology, media, and financial systems, the desires and behaviors of consumers are not converging. In global marketing, “think global, act local” is a paradox. Thinking and behavior are equally influenced by culture. Someone who thinks globally is still a product of

his or her own culture. Although consumers are consuming global products, it doesn't mean that they are becoming the same. Yet, there is ample evidence that, to consumers, the local is more meaningful than the global.

A value is an enduring belief that one mode of conduct or end-state of existence is preferable to an opposing mode of conduct or end-state of existence. Individuals hold a value system, which is a learned organization of principles and rules to help one choose between alternatives, resolve conflicts, and make decisions. The preferred-value sometimes seems to be universal, but priorities vary and how individuals express values varies too. Values can serve as standards that guide our choices, beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Values are more stable than attitudes and occupy a more central position in our cognitive systems. Values that are held collectively by a society are called macro-level values or cultural values, while values held by individuals are called micro-level values or value orientation. Values are enduring, yet how people express their values may change over time.

There are two opposing aspects of values: the desirable and the desired, the distinction between what people think ought to be, versus what people want for themselves. Both of them do not always overlap and it leads to seemingly paradoxical values in one culture. In reality, it's too early to jump to such a conclusion. Researchers should understand the concept of culture to be able to capture and explain the different value system and related paradox.

Hofstede defines culture as the collective mental programming of the people in an envi-

ronment. It is not the characteristics of individuals; it encompasses a number of people who have been conditioned by the same education and life experience. The term culture may apply to ethnic or national groups or to groups within society at different levels. Individuals are products of their culture. The cultural programming of an individual depends on the groups or categories to which he or she belongs. The expression of culture belonging to a certain level of cultural programming will differ. Therefore, when discussing culture, it is important to be specific about the level, whether it be national, corporate, or age culture, in order not to create confusion.

Culture is manifested through symbols, rituals, heroes, and values. Those four manifestations are included in the term *expression of culture*. They are visible to an outside observer, yet the cultural meaning is invisible since it lies in the way the expressions are interpreted by the insiders of the culture. For example, brands are part of a ritual, and advertising helps make the ritual. Manufacturers use and create rituals around their products to differentiate them from competing products. Advertising displays rituals around products and brands; it reflects how people behave and interact, how they are dressed, their language, their eating habits, and how their houses look. At the core of culture lie values. A so-called global culture refers to expression of culture, the symbols, converging eating habits, and global heroes. For instance, fast food has become a global ritual yet our values vary across cultures and are not likely to change during our lifetime.

Advertising often appeals to what is lacking in society. For instance, the happy family is more often depicted in advertising in nations where family coherence is lacking. In a country where family is part of one's identity, advertising focuses less on family values. Family is like air: you don't have to pay attention to it. This is called a paradox. Paradoxical values are found within cultures and between cultures. Every culture has its opposing values. Equality is an American core value, but in the United States, there is a wide gap between rich and poor. What

is interesting in the global marketplace is that certain opposing values of one culture also exist in other cultures but in reverse. An example is an individual freedom-belonging paradox. Individualism is a strong element of American society, and so is the need to belong. The explanation is that in an individualistic society where people want to do things in their own way and go it alone, people tend to become lonely if they don't make an effort to belong.

In Indonesia, there is now increasing concern about the changes to what people thought was the culture, especially with youth in general. As youth become more familiar with gadgets and the online world, many people think that they are becoming detached from real life and moving into a so called virtual life. An extreme point of view regards this phenomenon as a sign of cultural shift from collectivism to individualism. Another example is how observers easily jump to the conclusion that Indonesians are nowadays becoming weaker in terms of the power distance dimension. It is manifested in the way seniors, recently, have been communicating with their juniors in a less formal way, such as text-messaging, social media, email, etc., while in the past, it was considered impolite to use anything other than formal media.

However, does it mean the culture or the values held by people have changed? Or merely the way they express their culture is different? Marketers have recognized this by displaying such shifts in their advertising scenes. For example, one advertisement for an Indonesian brand of tea shows a family whose members are busy with their own virtual activities and it suggests that the family should restore their evening tea time in order to regain the warmth of the family. One might conclude that Indonesians are now individualist, and yet another might question in detail about whether the online activities carried out by Indonesians are virtual - interactions serving the need for social interaction or serving the need to escape from social life. There is the question of whether the suggested restoration of family tea time is possible or whether it will create frustration for the viewers due to its impossibility. The success of

this advertisement will depend on how marketers understand customers culture and values, as well as the way these are expressed.

This book provides comprehensive explanations and outstanding insights into understanding culture and its elements. It reviews various research related to culture that has been conducted.

This book will be very useful for marketers, researchers, and practitioners who are interested in culture-affected behavior. Researchers will be able to find the gap between previously conducted research and the current situation, while marketers will be able to get useful insights into designing advertising or other marketing tools.