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Designing in a Multicultural World.

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The purpose of this study is to investigate a new paradigm in consumer behaviour, which is a conceptual framework to study how consumers behave through theoretical categories originating within different cultures. As individuals we belong to different cultures, but all of us belong to a cultural group called consumer culture, where design and branding play a major part when it comes to decision making. Today's consumers are brand weary. They are surrounded by brands; they use brands and in many occasions identify themselves with the brand.

As a result, consumers are becoming more and more demanding when it comes to decisions about purchasing products. The design process is being constantly modified with the use of different techniques and methodologies. Design for global markets requires investigation into consumer needs and wants. It is important to address how a global brand is perceived by different cultures and identify the characteristics that make a product successful globally. The objectives of this study have been to look at the impact of culture on international design and branding, what types of cultural factors are significant and the extent to which the designer should take them into account. Research so far has shown that there are two methods available that connect cultures with design and branding; ethnography and demographics. Ethnography is considered to be a very valuable tool but there are still doubts as to how accurate are the results and the sample size needed. Demographics on the other hand can give us a very clear picture of statistics and cultural characteristics but as a method is not widely used since it is very expensive and time consuming. The aim of this study is to research the activity of decision making in a cultural context with respect to products. Subjects from different cultural groups, of variable social status and age, were asked to create their ideal living environment by choosing a variety of products. The decision making process is based on function, aesthetics, price and brand of the product. Methodologies include both qualitative and quantitative research; ethnography and observation, verbal protocol analysis, questionnaires and interviews.

Results are expected to provide insights into consumer behavior across cultures, as well as valuable information with respect to decision making. This will help us establish the connection between culture, design and branding.

Designing in a Multicultural world. Decision Making Activities

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate a new paradigm in consumer behaviour, which is a conceptual framework to study how consumers behave through theoretical categories originating within different cultures. As individuals we belong to different cultures, but all of us belong to a cultural group called consumer culture, where design and branding play a major part when it comes to decision making. Today's consumers are brand weary. They are surrounded by brands; they use brands and in many occasions identify themselves with the brand.

The issue of culture

A homogeneous world based only on functional concerns is not able to satisfy human need. People's habits of eating, drinking, washing, working, and playing remain distinct. Thus, the products that help them do these things will and should continue to reflect the different way they do them from country to country.

The relationship between 'regional culture tradition' and 'global business competition' sounds like one of conflict, but in fact, it is not. John Heskett thinks that the connection between cultural human factors and business strategy is examined as a competitive tool in the global marketplace. He argues that respecting cultural difference and planned understanding of changing cultural patterns are crucial, though often overlooked. His article titled "Cultural Human Factors" focuses on recognition of a society's learned behaviour regarding social organisation, patterns of object use and values in relation to design and global business. Diverse examples, like Euro Disney and British Telecom, are given. He expresses the importance of the cultural dimension of globalisation, but the meaning of globalisation to him is cultural multiplicity rather than homogeneity, culture creation rather than cultural derivation (Heskett 1995). He believes that culture is not fixed and immutable, but is capable of adaptation in many ways and at many levels.

Traditionally when a product was successful in one of the big markets, companies would just change the language, pay a lot of money in advertising and launch the product in local markets and cultures, hoping that it will achieve the same level of success. Sometimes they would even invest in the country of origin of the product because of the associations that came with that country. For

example, Germany always stood for engineering excellence, while Japan has always been considered the Mecca of electronic products.

In today's marketplace things are quite different. Consumers are more brands wary and due to a plethora of companies and products it is more difficult than ever to design winning products. As a result, consumers are becoming more and more demanding when it comes to decisions about purchasing products. The design process is being constantly modified with the use of different techniques and methodologies. The key to a successful product is to be able to identify consumer needs and desires. It is important to establish how a global brand is perceived by different cultures and identify the characteristics that make a product successful globally.

Samsung is a very good example of an organisation, which invested a lot of time and money in user research and ways to make a product successful globally. Consequently Samsung managed to compete and overtake giants of consumer goods such as Sony and Nokia. According to Mark Delaney, European Design manager of Samsung, "Samsung focus on the how design can improve the brand image, using design as a strategic tool to improve the brand."

Design and branding

Branding is increasingly becoming an integral component of the design development process, complementing and heightening the product's value. Alternatively, the integration of brand into the design development process increases the chances of achieving the desired brand loyalty, as well as the ultimate while brand experience.

Brands have become integral to daily life and as a result consumers have become immune to their presence. Brands are no longer sufficient as consumers seek to be stimulated both emotionally and intelligently, looking for brands that complement their characteristics and add meaning to daily life. Consumers are becoming less media confident and are more astute about traditional forms of brand communication, such as advertisements, product placements, relationship marketing and so forth. On the other hand, consumer lifestyles are becoming increasingly difficult to segment. (Whitney 2003)

The drive for bigger sales has been the main reason organisations invest so heavily in their brand. However we need to understand why people buy products to satisfy their needs and suit their lifestyles. Lifestyle segmentation will become increasingly important as companies move towards a service industry. More segments will arise to satisfy new and different needs, new technology and social change.

The objectives of this study have been to look at the impact of culture on international design and branding, what types of cultural factors are significant and the extent to which the designer should take them into account. Research so far has shown that there are two methods available that connect cultures with design and branding; ethnography and demographics. Ethnography is considered to be a very valuable tool but is mainly used to identify how a product is used as part of a daily activity. It provides detailed information and insight with regards to the actual design and how it is used. Consequently we don't get any information as to what actually drove the consumer to select the particular product over a competitive brand that has the exact same use and functions. Demographics on the other hand can give us a very clear picture of statistics and cultural characteristics but as a method is not widely used since it is very expensive and time consuming. Adding the fact that the world is constantly changing makes this particular method very unappealing to companies who want to launch their products fast and to as many markets as possible.

The aim of this study is to research the activity of decision making in a cultural context with respect to products. Subjects from different cultural groups, of variable social status and age, were asked to perform different tasks by selecting the product that seems more suitable to them. The decision making process is based on function, aesthetics, price and brand of the product. Methodologies include both qualitative and quantitative research; Ethnography and Observation, Verbal Protocol Analysis, Questionnaires and Interviews.

Decision making activities

This particular study is not focusing on a specific product or a general culture, but on the consumer's activities when it comes to decision making about purchasing a product or a service. This can be achieved not by looking at specific products or general cultures but by studying the needs and the drivers of the decision making process within different cultures.

For example, if someone wants to purchase a mobile phone, we would look at whether his or her decision is based on the brand or the functions of the actual product. We will test different products according to the four pleasures established by Patrick Jordan. Those pleasures are Physio-pleasure, Socio-pleasure, Psycho-pleasure, and Ideo-pleasure. The particular taxonomy of pleasures as described by Jordan (2002), which is considered by many to be a contemporary version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

It is important to examine what are the criteria that consumers have when it comes to decision-making. There are many different categories of consumer behaviour and different factors that we have to take into consideration. In a way we are going to examine how a product or a service fits into a consumer's life, in

terms of necessity and lifestyle. Looking at the different factors surrounding the decision to buy a product, we learn much more about the consumer culture and what they hope to achieve in terms of needs and status of the society they belong to.

Results are expected to provide insights into consumer behaviour across cultures, as well as valuable information with respect to decision-making. This will help us establish the connection between culture, design and branding. These insights will enable companies to make improvements to their designs according to various consumer needs, as well as manage their brand over a spectrum of cultures.

The Study

Phase 1 - Selecting the participants.

The number of participants involved in this study is 60 divided into 3 groups of 20 according to the continent of origin. The 3 continents selected are Europe, Asia, and North & South America. The selection of those 3 continents was based on the fact that they are the biggest markets in terms of consumer goods. A profile of each participant has been created with the aid of interviews and questionnaires. Selection of people is based on age, sex, profession, social status and cultural values, meaning to what extent their cultural background influences them as consumers when it comes to deciding about purchasing a product or not.

Phase 2 – Scenarios

This will involve certain set tasks, a particular task scenario, and the operation of one type or different types of products. The aim is to examine the relationship between products, brands and culture, which are systematically approached by considering three areas:

- (1) The surface level- visual element, which mainly deals with the aesthetics and the brand
- (2) The inner level- functional element, which mainly deals with the functions and the interface of the product.
- (3) The underlying level- 4 P's of pleasure, Physiological pleasure, Psychological pleasure, Sociological and Ideological pleasure.

Phase 3 - Instruct and Train the Participant

Standard instructions and training will be provided to the participant as to what tasks they need to perform for every experiment. These often take the form of informing the participant about what aspects of the decision-making process they should be talking about, and most importantly, that they should continue to verbalise information that may appear to be obvious. The experimenter should also demonstrate the method to the participant, showing them the desired form and content of verbalisations. Furthermore, it is helpful if a brief practice can be undertaken, with the experimenter able to interject in the participants' verbal commentary to offer advice and feedback.

Phase 4 - Methods used to record results

A number of empirical methods to be used in the experiment are described. The methods can be used for understanding people, for understanding what benefits they want from products and for understanding how those products are selected to cover their needs and suit their lifestyles with respect to culture. Each of the methods has particular properties that affect their suitability for use at every stage of the experiment.

Ethnographic Research

It is believed that the purpose of ethnography is cultural description. It often starts with observation and description, but its goal is to learn how people belonging to a particular cultural group respond to the situations they find themselves in and attribute meaning to them and thereby come to an understanding of them. The particular method was used to monitor the body language and the way participants were behaving when choosing a product.

Verbal Protocol Analysis

The purpose of Verbal Protocol Analysis is to make 'valid inferences' from the content of discourse (Weber, 1990). In Human Factors applications this discourse is a written transcript gained from individuals thinking aloud as they perform a task. The valid content of this written transcript can either be found within individual words, word senses, phrases, sentences, or themes. The analysis proceeds by extracting this valid content and categorising it according to a defined categorisation scheme (Walker, 2001). Thus, Verbal Protocol Analysis is a means of data reduction, keeping the content derived from transcripts of thinking aloud manageable in size, and theoretically valid. This enables relevant concepts or interrelationships to be analysed and inferred.

With this method, as described by Jordan (2000), participants are asked to verbalise the thoughts they have when examining a product. The main advantage of this method is that we are able to understand why the participant chose a specific product over something else. For example running a test of the method it was discovered that participants chose a flat screen television over a

widescreen because they thought it fits better with the minimalist style of their lounge. The main disadvantage of the particular method is that it is very time consuming to analyse data.

Conclusion

Design, branding and culture form a triangle that holds the secret to the way consumers make purchasing decisions. Design for global markets requires investigation into consumer needs and wants. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the global consumer thinks when it comes to decision-making and provide a methodology for companies to design products and services for various markets with respect to culture.

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