

Model: Five cultural dimensions

Type of model: Structure model
 Author(s): Geert Hofstede
 Domain: Identity and Image

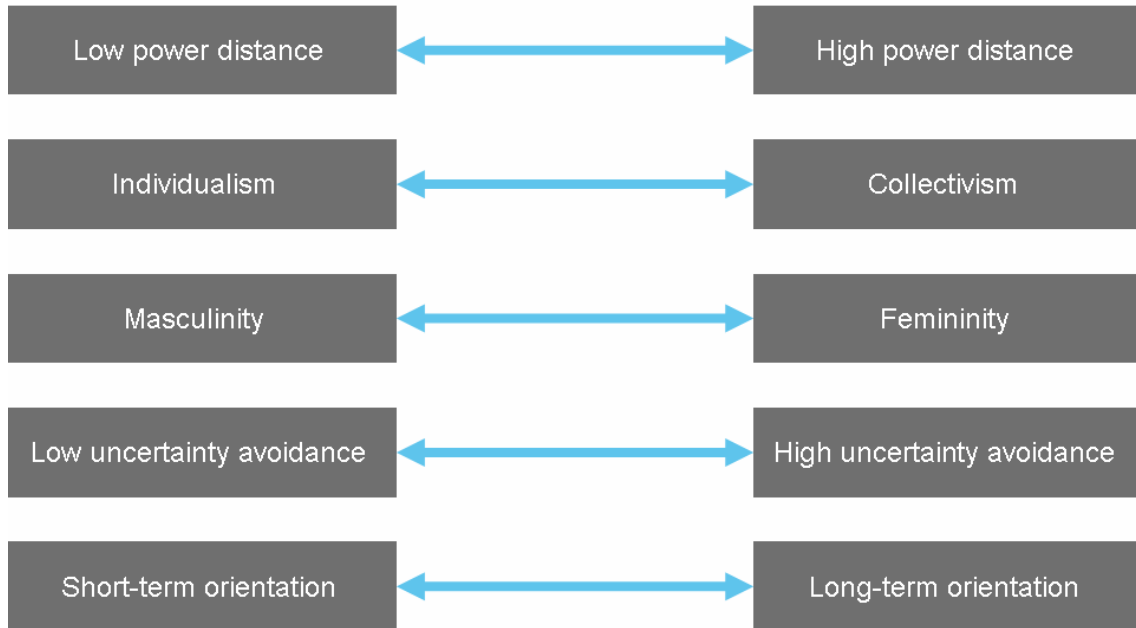


Figure 1: The Five Cultural Dimension (Geert Hofstede)

In order to make a brand stick in people’s minds, advertising surrounding that brand has to tie in with the values of the target group. But when a brand operates internationally, cultural differences between countries also have to be taken into account. Hofstede has developed a model of five cultural dimensions: *low vs. high power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, low uncertainty avoidance vs. high uncertainty avoidance and long vs. short-term orientation*. He did so after a large-scale study of IBM staff members in 56 countries. This study showed that organisations and institutions in different countries often face the same problems, but that these are tackled differently. That is down to differences in culture. The IBM study initially only led to Hofstede formulating four explanatory, culture-related factors (the fifth was added later). In subsequent studies, these five factors were mapped for 74 countries. The following outlines the five cultural dimensions:

Low power distance vs. high power distance: Hofstede defines power distance as the extent to which less powerful members of institutions or organisations in a country expect and accept that power is spread unevenly. If this expectation

and acceptance is low, the power distance is also referred to as low. In case of high expectation and acceptance, the power distance is considered high as well (uneven within the society). Countries with high scores on the power distance list are largely found in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Arab world, Africa and Southern Europe. Countries with low power distance scores include: German-speaking countries, Northern European countries and the US. One striking thing here is that the power distance in the Netherlands is far lower than in Belgium, even though these countries are neighbours.

Individualism vs. collectivism: a society can be considered individualistic when mutual bonds between individuals are informal. Within such societies, people only look after their own interests and those of their immediate family. A society is collectivistic when individuals are part of groups right from birth, where they spend their whole lives looking after each other in exchange for loyalty. Most Western countries have a high individualism rating (including the Netherlands). Southern European countries are more collectivistic than Northern European ones. Asian and Latin American countries are mainly collectivistic.

Masculinity vs. femininity: a society is, in Hofstede's view, masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly separated. For men, the emphasis is on performing and success; for women, it is on modesty and tenderness, and the quality of life. A society is feminine when emotional gender roles overlap. Both men and women are modest and tender, and focus on the quality of life. Japan, Austria and Venezuela score high on masculinity, with Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands scoring high on femininity.

Low uncertainty avoidance vs. high uncertainty avoidance: uncertainty avoidance constitutes the extent to which people in a society feel threatened by insecure or unknown situations, and attempt to avoid such situations. This feeling comes to the fore in high stress levels, and an above average need for predictability. Countries with high uncertainty avoidance levels need rules and formality. Latin American, Southern European, Eastern European and Mediterranean countries turn in high uncertainty avoidance scores. Denmark, Jamaica and Singapore have the lowest scores on uncertainty avoidance. The Netherlands' scores are somewhere in between, close to the average.

Short-term orientation vs. long-term orientation: Hofstede defines short-term orientation as the pursuit of virtues centred on the past and the present, respect for tradition, avoiding loss of face, and meeting social obligations. Long-term orientation represents, in Hofstede's theory, the pursuit of future reward

(delayed gratification), mainly through perseverance and frugality. East Asian countries score highest in terms of long-term orientation. Pakistan has the highest score on short-term orientation, but the UK and the US also turn in high scores on short-term orientation. Again, the Netherlands turns in scores close to the average.

Hofstede's model is intended to provide insight into cultural differences, in order to subsequently make it easier to bridge these differences. Although Hofstede's study targets work-related values, Marieke de Mooij argues it can also be applied to consumption-related values. De Mooij analysed a large number of TV ads from eleven different countries, and found that Hofstede's dimensions are reflected in advertising. People's behaviour is a reflection of their culture. Therefore, if companies want to make their brand stick in the minds of consumers in different countries, and want these consumers to buy their products, they cannot ignore the cultural differences in and between countries.

Reference(s)

- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J. (2005), *Allemaal andersdenkenden; Omgaan met cultuurverschillen*. [Dissidents everywhere; Dealing with cultural differences] Uitgeverij Contact, Amsterdam/ Antwerpen. *
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* : available in the EURIB library.