

A Study on Comparison of Cultural Change in Indian and International Markets

Author

Dr.Preeti Khatri

Assistant Professor

School of Commerce & economics

Presidency University, Bengaluru-560064

Email: preeti.khatri@presidencyuniversity.in

Abstract

Cultural change plays a central role in shaping consumer behaviour, market preferences, and business strategies in an increasingly globalised world. This chapter provides a descriptive, comparative analysis of cultural transformation in the Indian and international markets. It examines the meaning, components, and drivers of cultural change including globalisation, technological advancement, social media influence, migration, and economic development and explains how these forces reshape values, norms, lifestyles, and consumption patterns. The chapter explores India's unique cultural context, where traditional collectivist values coexist with modern, digitally driven aspirations, creating hybrid consumer behaviour. In contrast, international markets, especially in developed economies, demonstrate higher levels of individualism, innovation-driven consumption, and sustainability-oriented cultural shifts. Through comparative insights, the chapter highlights similarities such as youth-driven digital adoption and differences in value orientation, decision-making patterns, and speed of cultural evolution. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, glocalization, and adaptive strategies for businesses operating in culturally diverse global markets.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural Change, Indian Market, International Market, Consumer Behaviour, Globalisation, Glocalization

1. Meaning of Culture and Cultural Change

Culture encompasses shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and symbols that characterise a particular group or society (Hofstede, 2011). This shapes how individuals perceive the world, interact with each other, and make decisions. Cultural change refers to the process through which these shared elements evolve over time, influenced by internal and external factors such as

globalisation, technological advancements, social movements, and economic development (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Pieterse, 2015). Understanding cultural change is crucial in market contexts because culture significantly impacts consumer behaviour, preferences, and expectations (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Businesses must recognise how cultural shifts affect product demand, communication styles, and brand perceptions to remain competitive in both local and global markets (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

This chapter provides an overview of cultural change and explains why studying such change is essential in understanding market behaviour. It includes a comparison of cultural changes between Indian and international markets, highlighting unique patterns, common influences, and key drivers of cultural evolution across different regions (Triandis, 1995). Such understanding helps build the conceptual foundation necessary for evaluating cultural change and its impact on business strategies.

Culture includes shared values, norms, and lifestyles that shape identity and behaviour (Schwartz, 2012). Values represent deeply held beliefs that guide behaviour; norms regulate social conduct; and lifestyle reflects tangible daily practices such as rituals, dress, and language (Hoyer et al., 2020). Norms are unwritten rules and expectations that regulate social conduct, ensuring cohesion and predictability within the community. Lifestyle reflects the daily practices, habits, and ways of living that manifest these values and norms in tangible forms such as rituals, dress, language, and social interactions. Together, these elements create a framework through which individuals can interpret their world and relate to others.

Cultural change is driven by globalisation, technology, social media, and mass communication (Castells, 2010; Boyd, 2014). Globalisation facilitates cross-border exchange of ideas and cultural practices, technology accelerates interactions, and media influences public perception, driving hybrid cultural forms (Strinati, 2004). Technology accelerates this process by enabling instant communication, access to diverse information, and new modes of social interaction that can challenge existing cultural norms and introduce novel lifestyles. Media acts as both a reflector and shaper of culture, disseminating narratives and values that influence public perception and behaviour. These drivers interact continuously, reshaping culture in ways that reflect contemporary realities, while preserving or transforming heritage.

2. Cultural Change in Indian Market

Culture in India is a complex and multifaceted framework shaped by values, norms, and lifestyles governing collective identity (Triandis, 1995; Schwartz, 2012). Values act as guiding principles that influence priorities and interpersonal behaviours, while norms regulate conduct and ensure social cohesion. Lifestyle represents observable expressions of culture through language, rituals, dress, and habits (Hoyer et al., 2020). These values serve as guiding principles that influence decision making, priorities, and interpersonal behaviours. Norms, on the other hand, are the unwritten rules and social expectations that govern behaviour within a group, ensuring social order, predictability, and cohesion. They regulate how individuals interact, communicate, and fulfil roles, often varying in formality and enforcement depending on cultural context. Lifestyle represents observable expressions of culture through daily habits, rituals, language use, dress codes, and social interactions. It is through lifestyle that values and norms become tangible and visible, providing a lived cultural experience that shapes identity and social belonging. Collectively, these elements form an integrated framework through which individuals interpret their environments, establish relationships, and maintain a sense of continuity within their communities.

Cultural change in India is influenced by globalisation, technological advancements, social media proliferation, and exposure to global content (Castells, 2010; Prahalad, 2006). Globalisation introduces new cultural elements and enables hybrid cultural expressions, while technology provides instant communication and access to diverse information (Boyd, 2014). Media continues to reshape Indian cultural identity by portraying new narratives, modern lifestyles, and progressive values (Strinati, 2004). This process can lead to the emergence of hybrid cultures that incorporate elements from multiple sources, thus challenging traditional cultural boundaries. Technology accelerates cultural change by providing instantaneous communication channels, widespread access to diverse information, and new platforms for social interactions. These technological shifts enable the rapid dissemination of cultural innovations and facilitate questioning or redefinition of existing norms and lifestyles. Media serves a dual role as both a reflector and creator of culture, shaping public narratives, values, and perceptions through the content it produces and distributes. The interaction of these drivers continuously reshapes culture, allowing it to adapt to contemporary realities, while simultaneously preserving or transforming heritage and identity.

Traditional Indian traits family orientation, hierarchical respect, religious values, and cultural rituals remain strong (Hofstede, 2011). These influence consumption patterns, particularly in collective buying, festival-based purchasing, and preference for culturally symbolic products. In the context of the Indian market, cultural change is particularly pronounced because of the coexistence of deeply entrenched traditional cultural traits alongside rapidly evolving modern influences. These values are embedded in social customs, festivals, and consumption patterns that prioritise the collective well-being, ritual significance, and preservation of cultural heritage. For instance, purchasing decisions often reflect the needs and preferences of the family unit rather than solely those of the individual, and products may have symbolic meanings tied to cultural or religious practices.

However, modern shifts are evident in India due to rising income levels, digital access, and youth-driven aspirations (Sheth, 2021). Urbanisation has increased demand for convenience, branded products, and personalised experiences. Values such as gender equality, sustainability, and individual choice are becoming increasingly prominent among younger generations (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Increasing exposure to global cultures, rising disposable income, and higher educational attainment have contributed to a growing focus on individualism, convenience, and aspirational consumption. Consumers are increasingly drawn to modern retail formats, branded products, and lifestyle experiences that signal their social status or personal identity. Emerging values such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, and digital connectivity influence not only product preferences, but also communication styles and marketing approaches in the Indian marketplace

Digitalisation plays a critical role in reshaping Indian consumer behaviour by democratising information access, enabling e-commerce growth, and creating social media-driven consumption trends (Boyd, 2014). The widespread adoption of digital technologies has democratised access to information, enabled e-commerce growth, and expanded the reach of social media platforms, facilitating the rapid spread of new ideas and consumer trends across diverse segments of the Indian society. Globalisation introduces new tastes, fashion trends, and lifestyle aspirations, pushing Indian consumers toward hybrid cultural preferences (Prahalad, 2006). These forces compel businesses to continuously adapt their marketing strategies and product offerings to

resonate with a culturally complex and evolving consumer base, balancing respect for tradition with responsiveness to modern aspirations.

Industries such as retail, FMCG, apparel, food, and entertainment experience significant cultural changes. Retail has shifted from traditional kirana stores to modern supermarkets and e-commerce formats (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Apparel combines traditional wear with global fashion, and food preferences reflect growing interest in global cuisines along with traditional staples. Media and advertising adopt messaging that blends traditional values with modern narratives to appeal to diverse consumer groups (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

Cultural changes in the Indian market have significantly influenced various industries by altering consumer behaviour, preferences, and expectations. In sectors such as retail, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), and entertainment, traditional purchasing patterns rooted in collectivism and ritual significance are gradually being integrated with modern demands for convenience, personalisation, and brand identity. For example, the retail industry has seen a shift from small family run stores to organised modern retail formats and e-commerce platforms, driven by younger urban consumers seeking efficiency and variety. This transition compels businesses to blend respect for cultural heritage with innovative service delivery, such as incorporating traditional festivals into marketing campaigns, while offering digital payment options and online shopping.

Consumer behaviour in industries such as apparel and personal care reflects increasing openness to global trends alongside sustained cultural symbolism. While traditional attire remains important for festivals and ceremonies, everyday fashion increasingly incorporates western styles and branded products that convey social status and individuality. Similarly, the food and beverage industry experiences a dual demand: a preference for traditional, culturally significant foods coexists with a growing interest in health-conscious international cuisines. Digitalisation facilitates this by enabling consumers to discover and access diverse products rapidly, whereas globalisation introduces new tastes and lifestyle aspirations. These shifts encourage companies to innovate product lines, tailor communication strategies, and engage consumers through social media to balance modernity with cultural resonance.

The impact extends to sectors such as media and advertising, where narratives must navigate the complex cultural identities shaped by both tradition and modernity. Messaging, which acknowledges family values and community ties while embracing themes of empowerment, sustainability, and digital connectivity, resonates strongly with contemporary Indian audiences. Overall, cultural change in the Indian market drives industries to adopt a hybrid approach that honours enduring cultural values while embracing evolving lifestyles, requiring nuanced understanding and agile adaptation to maintain relevance and competitive advantage.

3. Cultural Change in International Market

Cultural changes in international markets are characterised by widespread shifts influenced by globalisation, technological advancements, and evolving social dynamics. These changes manifest in how societies adopt, adapt, or resist new cultural elements, resulting in diverse transformation patterns across different regions. Global markets increasingly experience a blend of cultural identities where traditional values and norms coexist or merge with modern lifestyles, creating complex cultural landscapes that businesses must navigate carefully.

In developed countries, cultural shifts emphasise individualism, innovation, sustainability, and ethical consumption (Hofstede, 2011; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Consumers increasingly prefer personalised products, eco-friendly brands, and digital experiences. Health-consciousness and inclusivity reflect broader societal values. Trends include greater environmental consciousness, inclusivity, and focus on health and well-being, reflecting broader societal values. By contrast, emerging countries frequently experience rapid modernisation alongside persistent traditional cultural frameworks. Rising incomes, urbanisation, and exposure to global media drive aspirations for modern lifestyles, branded goods, and digital connectivity, while cultural heritage and community-oriented values remain influential. This duality creates dynamic markets, in which hybrid cultural expressions flourish. Emerging countries experience rapid modernisation but retain strong cultural heritage. Urbanisation, rising incomes, and global media exposure fuel aspirational consumption and demand for branded goods (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). However, traditional values still influence social and consumption behaviour.

Global connectivity accelerates cultural change across markets by enabling real-time access to global trends, facilitating cultural convergence in fashion, entertainment, and technology, while preserving local identities (Castells, 2010). Social media fosters hybrid cultural behaviours, allowing individuals to adopt global trends while expressing local identities (Boyd, 2014).

Marketing strategies in developed markets emphasise ethical branding, sustainability, and innovation, whereas emerging markets require balancing modernity with cultural tradition (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This interconnectedness fosters cultural convergence in certain aspects, such as fashion, entertainment, and technology usage, but also encourages the preservation and reinvention of local traditions. Consequently, lifestyle and consumption patterns are increasingly shaped by a complex interplay between global influences and localised cultural contexts, requiring businesses to adopt culturally sensitive and adaptable strategies to remain relevant in international markets.

Cultural shifts in international markets significantly influence consumer behaviour and marketing strategies in diverse regions, shaped by the interplay of globalisation, technology, and socioeconomic factors, as outlined in the selected text.

In developed countries, consumers increasingly prioritise individualism, sustainability, and innovation. This manifests in the demand for personalised products and ethical consumption, with marketing strategies focusing on transparency, environmental responsibility, and inclusivity. Brands often leverage digital engagement platforms to foster direct communication and community building, aligning with consumer values regarding health, well-being, and social impact. For example, campaigns that highlight eco-friendly practices or social causes resonate strongly and reflect broader societal shifts.

Conversely, in emerging markets, rapid modernisation coexists with enduring traditional frameworks. Rising incomes and urbanisation fuel aspirations for branded goods and digital connectivity, while cultural heritage remains influential. Marketing strategies must balance modern appeals with respect to local customs and values. This duality leads to hybrid cultural expressions in which global trends are localised through culturally relevant messaging and product

adaptations. For instance, multinational companies often customise offerings to incorporate local tastes, festivals, or social norms to ensure relevance and acceptance.

Global connectivity, particularly through social media and digital platforms, accelerates these cultural dynamics by enabling instant access to global content, while allowing consumers to express and preserve local identities. This dual role fosters convergence, seen in shared fashion or technology trends, and divergence through the reinvention of traditions. Therefore, businesses operating internationally must adopt culturally sensitive and flexible strategies that accommodate this complexity, tailoring communication, product design, and customer engagement in diverse cultural contexts.

4. India vs. International Market

The comparative view of cultural change in India versus international markets reveals both convergences and divergences shaped by digital influence, generational dynamics, and the interplay between tradition and modernity.

Similarities in digital influence and youth-driven changes are prominent across India and global markets. In both contexts, digital technologies and social media platforms act as powerful catalysts for cultural transformation, enabling rapid access to information, facilitating new forms of social interaction, and promoting global trends. Youth populations, being more digitally connected and open to innovation, have driven shifts toward modern lifestyles, consumption patterns, and value systems. This results in a greater emphasis on individual expression, convenience, and aspirational consumption across diverse markets.

However, differences emerge in the values, consumption patterns, and speed of adoption. Indian consumers often balance modern aspirations with deeply rooted traditional values, such as collectivism, family orientation, and ritual significance, which continue to influence purchasing decisions and social behaviour. By contrast, many developed international markets tend to prioritise individualism, sustainability, and innovation more strongly, reflecting different historical and socioeconomic trajectories. Emerging international markets share some similarities with India

in terms of coexistence between tradition and modernisation but may vary in the pace and extent of cultural shifts due to differences in infrastructure, income levels, and exposure to global media.

The role of tradition versus modernity in shaping market behaviour is a defining distinction. In India, tradition remains a resilient force shaping consumption through cultural symbolism, community cohesion, and familial priorities, even as modernity introduces new values, such as gender equality and environmental consciousness. This duality requires businesses to adopt hybrid strategies that respect heritage, while embracing change. Internationally, especially in developed countries, modernity often takes precedence, with tradition playing a more symbolic or niche role, whereas in emerging markets, a dynamic tension exists in which businesses must navigate carefully to address diverse consumer expectations.

This nuanced comparative understanding highlights the need for culturally sensitive, adaptable marketing and product strategies that reflect both shared global digital influences and region-specific cultural complexities.

Tailored marketing approaches for India and selected international markets must strategically address the coexistence of tradition and modernity, digital influence, and generational shifts highlighted in the comparative analysis.

For the Indian market, marketing strategies should adopt a hybrid approach that honours deep-rooted cultural values such as collectivism, family orientation, and ritual significance, while simultaneously appealing to modern aspirations such as individual expression, convenience, gender equality, and environmental consciousness. This can be achieved by integrating culturally resonant themes, such as festivals, family centric messaging, and symbolic product meanings, into campaigns that also leverage digital platforms favoured by the youth for aspirational storytelling and personalised experiences. Brands should emphasise multichannel engagement, combining traditional retail presence with robust e-commerce and social media strategies to capture diverse consumer segments across urban and rural contexts. Messaging that balances respect for heritage with progressive values fosters stronger consumer identification and loyalty.

In developed international markets, marketing should focus heavily on individualism, sustainability, and innovation. Here, benefit from strategiesom emphasises ethical consumption, transparency, and personalised offerings that align with consumer values regarding health, inclusivity, and social impact. Digital engagement through interactive platforms, influencer partnerships, and cause-driven campaigns can build community and brand trust effectively. Messaging, which highlights environmental stewardship and social responsibility, resonates strongly and reflects broader societal priorities.

For emerging international markets, marketers must navigate a dynamic tension similar to India's, where rapid modernisation coexists with persistent traditional frameworks. Customised product adaptations, culturally sensitive communication, and localised content that respects heritage while introducing modern lifestyle elements are essential. Leveraging global trends through local narratives and festivals could create hybrid cultural expressions that resonate authentically. Digital tools should be deployed to bridge urban-rural divides and facilitate access to modern retail experiences.

Across all these contexts, the pervasive influence of digital technologies and youth-driven change requires agile, data-informed marketing that continuously monitors evolving consumer behaviour and cultural nuances. Successful strategies are those that combine global best practices with deep local insights, enabling brands to remain relevant and competitive in culturally complex and rapidly changing markets.

5. Business Implications

The business implications of cultural change in international and Indian markets require strategic consideration of product adaptation versus standardisation, cultural sensitivity in marketing, and the importance of glocalisation.

Product Adaptation vs. Standardization

Culturally diverse markets such as India require product adaptation to accommodate traditional values and modern aspirations (Prahalad, 2006). Businesses face a choice between adapting products to meet local cultural preferences or standardising offerings for global efficiency. Products often require modification to align with local tastes, rituals, and consumption habits, such as incorporating culturally significant symbols or addressing family-oriented purchasing decisions.

Conversely, in some international markets, especially in developed countries with more homogenised consumer preferences, standardisation can leverage economies of scale and consistent brand identity. In contrast, standardisation works in culturally homogenous developed markets but still requires subtle cultural sensitivity (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The balance between adaptation and standardisation depends on the degree of cultural divergence and market expectations.

Cultural Sensitivity in Marketing

Cultural sensitivity entails understanding and respecting a target market's values, norms, and lifestyles when crafting marketing messages and campaigns. In India, marketing must navigate the duality of tradition and modernity, integrating family centric themes, religious festivals, and community cohesion with progressive values, such as gender equality and environmental awareness. Marketing messages must align with societal values, traditions, and modern expectations (Hofstede, 2011). Messaging that resonates authentically with local cultural narratives builds consumers' trust and loyalty. Internationally, cultural sensitivity involves tailoring communication to reflect local societal priorities, whether emphasising sustainability and individualism in developed markets or balancing modernisation with heritage in emerging economies. Insensitive marketing risks alienating consumers and damaging brand reputation.

Importance of Glocalization

Glocalization—global brands adapting locally—is critical for cultural acceptance (Pieterse, 2015). It enables businesses to maintain a coherent global identity while customising products, services, and marketing in local cultural contexts. In India and similar emerging markets, glocalisation supports hybrid cultural expressions by combining traditional symbolism with modern lifestyle aspirations facilitated by digital platforms that amplify local voices. In international markets, glocalisation ensures responsiveness to cultural nuances, enabling brands to engage meaningfully across multiple regions. This approach maximises market relevance and competitive advantage by balancing global consistency with local authenticity.

These strategic imperatives highlight the need for businesses to adopt flexible and culturally informed approaches that integrate product design, communication, and engagement to effectively navigate the complexities of evolving cultural landscapes.

Case Study 1: Product Adaptation and Glocalization in the Indian FMCG Sector

A leading multinational FMCG company has successfully implemented product adaptation and glocalisation strategies in India by modifying its product formulations and marketing campaigns to suit local cultural preferences and consumption habits. Recognising the importance of family orientation and ritual significance in Indian culture, the company introduced variants of its products that catered to traditional tastes and usage occasions, such as herbal or Ayurvedic ingredients, aligned with local health beliefs. Marketing campaigns were designed around major Indian festivals and family centric themes, integrating symbolic elements that resonate with collective cultural values.

Simultaneously, the company leveraged digital platforms to engage younger, urban consumers with aspirational messaging, emphasising convenience, modernity, and individual expression. This dual approach allows the brand to maintain its global identity while authentically connecting with diverse Indian consumer segments. The integration of traditional symbolism with modern lifestyle aspirations, supported by localised digital content, exemplifies effective glocalisation. This strategy enhances brand relevance, loyalty, and market penetration in culturally complex environments.

Case Study 2: Standardization and Cultural Sensitivity in a Global Technology Brand

A global technology brand operating in developed international markets has adopted a predominantly standardised product offering to leverage economies of scale and maintain a consistent brand image. However, it incorporated cultural sensitivity in its marketing communications by tailoring messaging to reflect local societal values, such as sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation. For example, in markets with strong environmental consciousness, campaigns have highlighted a brand's commitment to eco-friendly practices and ethical sourcing.

The brand uses digital engagement tools and influencer partnerships to foster community building around shared values, aligning with consumer priorities for health, well-being, and social impact. While the core product remained globally uniform, subtle adaptations in language, imagery, and

campaign themes ensured cultural resonance and brand trust. This balance between standardisation and cultural sensitivity enables the brand to operate efficiently while maintaining relevance and competitive advantage across diverse developed markets.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of cultural change in India and international markets reveals several key insights. Both contexts are significantly influenced by digital technologies and youth-driven shifts, fostering modern lifestyles and consumption patterns centred on individual expression and convenience. However, India uniquely balances these modern influences with deeply rooted traditional values, such as collectivism, family orientation, and ritual significance, which continue to shape consumer behaviour and social norms. In contrast, developed international markets emphasise individualism, sustainability, and innovation more strongly, while emerging markets share similarities with India, but vary in adoption speed and cultural dynamics. Thus, the interplay between tradition and modernity creates a complex cultural landscape in India, requiring hybrid strategies that respect heritage while embracing change. Globally, cultural change is accelerated by globalisation, technology, and the media, which foster the convergence and preservation of local identities.

For global business strategies, these insights underscore the critical importance of cultural sensitivity, product adaptation, and glocalisation. Businesses must balance standardisation for efficiency with localised customisation to align themselves with diverse cultural values, consumption habits, and social expectations. In India, this involves integrating traditional symbolism and family centric themes with modern aspirations and digital engagement. In developed markets, strategies should focus on ethical consumption, personalisation, and innovation, whereas emerging markets require nuanced approaches that blend modernisation with cultural heritage. Glocalisation serves as a strategic framework that enables brands to maintain global coherence while authentically engaging local consumers. Overall, success in international markets hinges on flexible, culturally informed strategies that continuously adapt to the evolving cultural landscapes shaped by digital connectivity and generational change.

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