

MODULE 7.5 CULTURE, SUB-CULTURE AND CROSS CULTURE

- 7.5.1 Meaning of Culture**
- 7.5.2 Characteristics of Culture**
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LESSON – 35 CULTURE AND SUB-CULTURE

Instructional Objectives:

After completion of this lesson, the student shall know about:

Meaning of Culture

Characteristics of Culture

Components of Culture

Measurement of Culture

Meaning of Sub-Culture

Types of Sub-Culture

7.5.1 MEANING OF CULTURE:

Culture may be defined as the “personality of a society”. It is broad and all pervasive in nature, inclusive of language, customs and traditions, norms and laws, religion, art and music, etc. It also includes the interests of people, the work practices and orientations, as also their attitudes towards general and specific issues.

Culture delineates precisely, the do's and don'ts of a society, and specifies all that is acceptable and all that is not. It is reflective of values and beliefs that are widely accepted by members of a society. The members of a society subscribe to the various values, beliefs and norms, and this gives strength to a society's culture. This does not imply that cultures are truly rigid; in fact, they evolve and adapt to changing situations and times.

Culture is a society's personality, unique in itself and differentiated from others; it is further divided into various sub-cultures. Culture is also trans-generational, and is passed on from one generation to another. A study on our culture requires an elaborate and detailed inquiry into the very character and personality of the society that we live in.

The culture of a society also has a bearing on buying patterns and consumption behavior. In terms of consumer behavior, Schiffman defines culture as “*the sum total of learned beliefs, values, and customs that serve to direct the consumer behavior of members of a particular society*”. The kinds of products and services and/or brands that consumers' buy and

use, are all based on their cultures and sub-cultures. For example, the food they eat and the kinds of clothes they buy and wear, are all impacted by their culture, their customs, traditions, norms and values.

7.5.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE:

Culture and its impact on consumption behavior can be better explained by understanding the nature and characteristics of culture:

a) *Culture is natural and permeates naturally into the social system.* Its inbreds into the members of a social system and is all-pervasive. It influences the manner in which a person behaves, as consciously or sub-consciously, we are all governed by culture. Not only do people use their values and beliefs to govern their behavior, but they also expect that others' behavior would also be similar and consistent (as culture is shared). Culture unites the members of a social system.

In terms of consumer behavior, the kinds of food we buy and eat or the clothes that we purchase and wear, are all governed by the socialization process. Similar is with respect to other purchases that we make. Culture encompasses the general and specific patterns of consumption behavior.

b) *Culture helps in satisfaction of needs.* In fact, it exists as it helps satisfy the needs of people. Beliefs, values, customs and tradition, help govern the social system, and specify the manner in which people in a social system should behave; they delineate the do's and don't's, and thereby create boundaries of acceptable behavior in the social system. However, such values, beliefs, customs and traditions continue to exist as long as they meet the needs of the people in the society. That is why culture evolves with passage of time. As the needs of the people evolve, beliefs, values, customs and tradition also undergo change so as to meet and match with newer needs and wants.

For example, in earlier times, people preferred eating their whole meals at home. In fact, eating out was considered unhealthy and undesirable. With a change in society, and the emergence of dual income households, people have begun eating out of home; the fast food culture is in. This has given a boost to the fast food and restaurant industry. Thus, we see that when a value system fails to satisfy the members of a social system, it is adapted, changed and/or modified to suit newer social patterns and trends.

Marketers must be conscious of newly developed and embraced values, customs and traditions, so as to be able to take advantage of the situation. For example, lately developed consciousness of people towards i) fashion, has given boost to the apparel and accessories business; ii) fitness, has given boost to the gymnasium and sports business; iii) health, has given a boost to natural products like fruit juices, honey, aloe vera, etc.

c) *Culture is not inborn; it is learnt as a result of the socialization process.* There occurs a socialization process right from one's childhood, a process that continues throughout life. Culture is imparted by this socialization process. This learning of culture could be of two kinds; viz., enculturation and acculturation. The process of learning one's native culture is known as enculturation, while the process of learning a new or a foreign culture is known as acculturation.

We are impacted by our family (family of orientation and family of procreation), as well as our friends throughout our life. People learn from family and friends about what are acceptable and what is not in terms of our values and beliefs. Cultural learning could take place in three forms, viz., formal learning, informal learning and technical learning.

- formal learning: when a child is taught how to behave by family, viz., grandparents, parents and siblings; they tell him about the right's and wrong's in behavior.

- informal learning: when the child learns by imitating the behavior of others, be it members in the family, or friends, or celebrities, or characters.

- technical learning: when the child is taught how to behave in a formal educational environment by a teacher.

As consumers, it is through our culture learning that we are taught what is regarded as a desirable purchase and what is not. Similar is with respect to brands. Our perception about brands is influenced i) informally by views and opinions from family, friends, and colleagues, and ii) formally by the marketer, the dealer and the sales people. Thus, both general and specific consumption behavior is indicative of the culture that we live in. The kind of products/services consumers buy are ultimately determined by culture as well. For example, in certain cultures, eating pork and beef is a taboo; thus, when McDonalds came to India, they had to introduce the chicken burger, instead of the normal beef burger sold in the US. They could not disregard the vegetarian population of the country and so introduced the veg-tikki burger.

MNC's who desire to enter foreign markets, and wish to introduce their products and services there, should carefully study and understand the cultures of such countries. They need to go through an elaborate process of acculturation so that they can understand the inhabitants of such cultures and their needs, so as to assess whether such potential markets could be

profitable target segments. They should design the product and service offerings (including the 4Ps), in line with the culture so as to be able to gain quicker acceptance. The colors, language and symbols, should all be kept in mind. The marketer could use all the three forms of cultural learning through designing appropriate promotional messages and using an appropriate channel.

d) *Culture is shared.* It is accepted and imbibed by all the members of the social system. In fact, it ties together the people that form a social system. Social institutions (family), educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities), political institutions (law, public policy, leaders and government), and religious institutions (like places of worship, artifacts, and religious leaders) etc., all help in transmitting this culture to the members of the society. The mass media, print and audio-visual, also has a role to play in the transmitting of culture.

Also today, cultures and sub-cultures are shared by people within, and outside. Needless to say, the mass media has a big role to play. With the various satellite channels vying for viewer ship across India, and higher TRP ratings, the various soaps and serials reflect cultures of all kinds; they portray all kinds of families, all types of cultures and sub-cultures. We get to see stories on families from Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi and TAMILIAN cultures; the dressing patterns, the favorite dishes, the customs and rituals etc. With the various national and vernacular channels that we have in India, we have begun to share sub-cultures too. Sub-cultures are no longer restricted to geographical boundaries today.

As consumers, we are also impacted most by such institutions, and primarily by mass media. As discussed in the above paragraph, with the advent of satellite channels, there is growing awareness of other cultures and sub-cultures. An important role on spread of culture is also through advertisements. Today there is demand for *dhokla* and *khakra* (Gujarati food) in North India, or *mishti doi* and *hilsa fish* (Bengali food) in South India. This trend is also increasing because people are crossing borders of their states and moving elsewhere for jobs and assignments.

d) *Culture is dynamic in nature, and evolves constantly with time.* It adapts itself to the changing environment. As said above, values, beliefs, customs and traditions continue to exist as long as they satisfy the needs and wants of the people. Once they cease to satisfy people's needs, they change. Thus, culture changes and adapts to the environment.

Marketers need to continually assess the environment so as to identify changing need patterns, and change/modify/adapt existing products and services, and even come up with new

ones. One such example, i.e. dual income households and the need for eating out, resulting in demand for fast food and restaurants, has already been discussed above. With changes in culture, we can also witness its impact on the buying roles. The marketers have to identify the initiators, influencers, deciders, buyers and users, and approach them accordingly, either personally or impersonally via media. Marketers who continually assess the environment can identify opportunities and exploit them to their advantage.

7.5.3 COMPONENTS OF CULTURE:

Culture is reflected through the various components that it comprises, viz., values, language, myths, customs, rituals and laws. These are briefly explained as follows:

- **Values:** Values are the beliefs and ideals shared by the people of a society, for which they have great respect and regard. They could assume both positive (do's) and negative (don't's) connotations, and are indicative of appropriate thoughts, feelings and acts of behavior.

- **Language:** Man is a social animal and needs to communicate with others. Language is used as a means to communicate with people in a social set up. It is the common language that binds together the people in a social structure.

- **Myths:** Myths are legendary folktales and stories that describe events and occurrences, and teach values to society. They are imaginary and fictitious, and comprise characters that are gods, heroes and common men, ultimately aimed at giving lessons to the people, with respect to the causes and effects, good and bad, right and wrong, etc. Myths describe the values that members of a social structure should share.

- **Customs:** Customs are habitual practices that formulate the established way of doing things and reflect culturally accepted patterns of behavior. They reflect practices that have permanent continuance and are so long established that they have the force of law; in other words they are conventions. People in a social system follow such practices collectively, and the habitual activity gets transmitted from one generation to another.

- **Rituals:** Rituals are prescribed processes and procedures for conduct of religious or social rites. They are established rites, ceremonies and proceedings that are symbolic in nature. Rituals are collective in nature, comprising many patterns of behavior that are interdependent to each other.

- **Laws:** Laws are principles, rules and regulations that are formulated/sanctioned by an authority (ruler, government, constitution etc.), and supported/protected by judicial authority. Their basis can actually be found in the society's values, customs, and rituals. Laws are universally applicable across people in a society/country. They are written collection of rules and regulations to be adhered to by the people, and non-adherence to which would lead to legal action from the judiciary.

7.5.4 MEASUREMENT OF CULTURE:

Culture can be measured through use of many techniques, some of which are i) Projective Tests; ii) Attitude measurement tests and techniques; iii) Content analysis; iv) Consumer fieldwork; and v) Value measurement instruments. These techniques are used to study and assess cultural patterns, changes and trends.

i) Projective Tests: Projective tests can be traced to the [psychoanalytic](#) psychology, which argue that human beings have conscious and [unconscious](#) attitudes, motivations and personalities that are hidden and unknown from conscious awareness. The projective tests attempt to measure underlying traits, fears, anxieties and attitudes, motivations and personalities. They help reveal people's orientations towards the cultural values, myths, customs, traditions and rituals.

The participants are shown pictures, images, cartoons and characters, inkblots and incomplete sentences/paragraphs to understand, interpret and comprehend them. The participants are asked to give as responses all that first comes into their minds. Gestures and body language, tone of voice and other reactions are also noted. The assumption behind use of such tests is that one tends to project and interpret to these ambiguous stimuli from ones' sub-consciousness. Such tests are used to study motivation and personality. The two commonly used tests are the Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

ii) Attitude measurement tests and techniques: Attitude measurement tests and techniques are used to measure attitudes of people towards persons, objects, and situations. They reflect people's attitudes and orientations towards the cultural values, myths, customs, traditions and rituals.

iii) Content analysis: Content analysis focuses on the examination of verbal, written, non-verbal and pictorial compositions/communication. The content analysis helps reveal and explain the content of messages and the varying interpretations. Assessment about the society, and its culture as well as evolutionary socio-cultural changes can be gauged through the content of verbal, written, non-verbal and pictorial compositions/communication.

iv) Consumer fieldwork: Fieldwork may be conducted on consumers, so as to observe their behavior, and draw generalizations about the values, myths, beliefs, customs, traditions and rituals. Such generalizations are drawn on observable in store shopping behavior. Verbal and non-verbal body language are also observed and recorded. Sometimes, instead of being passive observers, the researchers may assume active roles and interact with the consumers (participants) as salespersons. Interviews and focus group sessions may also be used.

v) Value measurement instruments: Researchers today, are increasingly making use of value measurement instruments. These are scales that measure values by means of a questionnaire. Participants are asked to give their opinion on varied issues like peace, freedom and independence, comfort and convenience, ambition and success etc. Through interpretation of their responses and the observation of behavior, researchers can infer the dominant or underlying values of the society. Such values would influence general and specific consumption patterns and buying behavior. Commonly used value measurement instruments are the Rokeach Value Survey, the List of Values (LOV), and the Values and Lifestyles—VALS.

7.5.5 MEANING OF SUB-CULTURE:

While culture is defined as the “personality of a society”, (inclusive of language, customs and traditions, norms and laws, religion, art and music, etc), it is not entirely homogenous in nature. Not all people within a social system, share the same language, religion, customs and traditions. Every society is composed of smaller sub-units, homogenous within, and heterogeneous outside, all of which when put together make a complex society. Such sub-units or sub-groups are known as sub-cultures; people within sub-cultures possess distinctive sets of values, beliefs, customs and traditions etc. The members of a subculture possess such values and beliefs, as also customs and traditions that set them apart from people belonging to other sub-cultures.

For example, while we are all Indians, and our culture is Indian (with a common national language, Hindi, and common festivals like Diwali), North Indians are different from South Indians. While North Indians, celebrate Lohri, as a harvest festival in January, the South Indians celebrate Pongal as their harvest festival at the same time. In other words, people within smaller units share the same language, religion, customs and traditions; and, this would be different in smaller or larger magnitude to people in other sub-units.

A single culture can be broken up into various consumer subcultures. A subculture can be defined as a culture that is not dominant in its society. As consumers from various sub-cultures, we are different to each other. We have varying values and beliefs, customs and traditions, etc. These get reflected in our perspectives and orientations that influence our purchase patterns and consumption behavior. That is why a study of sub-culture becomes important for a marketer.

7.5.6 TYPES OF SUB-CULTURE:

Based on the varying criteria, there can be different types of sub-cultures. The important sub-cultural categories are nationality, geographical location, religion, race and caste, gender and age. From a marketing perspective, these could also be discussed as market segments, which need to be studied and assessed carefully before deciding on a product/service offering and formulating a marketing mix for a particular segment(s).

- **Nationality:** Sub-cultures could be based on nationality. While we are all Asians, we are distinct with respect to culture, and are different in terms of language, customs and traditions etc. Thus, we are classified as Indians, Burmese, Nepalese, Pakistani etc.

- **Geographical location:** Within a country, we could be different across geography, climatic conditions, regions and terrains, and density of population. This is more so in cases where the country is large and borders spread across a huge population occupying a vast territory. People tend to develop regional affinity and identification, and this gets reflected in the food they eat, clothes they wear, interests they pursue, etc. They constitute as distinct sub-cultures and people across such sub-cultures are different to each other. For example, we can be classified as North Indians and South Indians. As consumers, our needs are different and would translate into various wants, for example, i) differences in food habits, and demand for poori-sabji, paratha, idli-vada etc.; or ii) differences in clothing, and demand for cottons, woolens and silk.

- **Religion:** People also exhibit differences when it comes to the religions that they belong to. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis etc. are all different from one another and have different values and beliefs, customs and traditions etc. As consumers, they make purchase choices and purchase decisions that are influenced by the dictates of their religious leaders, scriptures, and holy books. In fact, many products/services are symbolically and ritualistically associated with religion. For example, as per Islam, non-vegetarian food must be “Halal”, and this itself comprises a huge segment that marketers across national boundaries are catering to.

- **Race and caste:** Culture and its components also vary across race and caste. Jats, Jaats, Rajputs, Pathans and Yadavs are all different from one another. Such racial sub-cultures also impact buying behavior and consumption patterns.

- **Gender:** Because gender roles have an impact on acts of behavior, gender constitutes an important cultural sub-group. Males and females across all cultures are assigned different traits and characteristics that make them masculine and feminine. They also perform different roles in society and are two distinct sub-groups. It is true that gender roles have got blurred, and both men and women are performing such roles that they did not perform earlier. Product usage is common to both man and woman; for example, a man shown as using a LG washing machine or making Act II popcorn. Similarly products like shavers and razors exclusive to usage by men, are also being used by women (Gillette thus introduced a razor for women). All this has brought about a big socio-economic change and led to cultural transformation. The values espoused by the generation of today is much different to the one espoused by the previous generation.

The pace of change has been further accelerated with households no longer being single income households, but turned to dual-income households. The role of women is no longer restricted to bearing children and managing the home. Women have started working outside, and are contributing to household income. This has impacted consumer needs and wants as also the priorities. The impact is evinced on consumption behavior, where the 'decider' role is no longer confined to a single person, i.e. the man of the family. Today buying decisions are jointly taken by husband and wife.

- **Age:** Infants, kids, teenagers and adolescents, adults and the aged, may all be looked up as distinct sub-groups. They have different values and beliefs, and all this impacts upon their priorities in life. Daily lifestyles, activities and interests, fashion and accessories, food and diet, etc. receive varying priorities across the various sub-groups. For example, an aged person would prioritize health and go in for nutritious home food as opposed to young man who would prioritize work and go in for fast food. Today we see a rising trend amongst kids, adolescents and the young towards junk food, and they constitute a lucrative segment for restaurants providing fast food.

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FAQS (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS):

Ques 1 What do you mean by the term “culture”? Discuss the characteristics of culture?

Ans 1 Culture may be defined as the “personality of a society”. It is broad and all pervasive in nature, inclusive of language, customs and traditions, norms and laws, religion, art and music, etc. It also includes the interests of people, the work practices and orientations, as also their attitudes towards general and specific issues.

Culture delineates precisely, the do's and don'ts of a society, and specifies all that is acceptable and all that is not. It is reflective of values and beliefs that are widely accepted by members of a society. The members of a society subscribe to the various values, beliefs and norms, and this gives strength to a society's culture. This does not imply that cultures are truly rigid; in fact, they evolve and adapt to changing situations and times.

The culture of a society also has a bearing on buying patterns and consumption behavior. In terms of consumer behavior, Schiffman defines culture as “*the sum total of learned beliefs, values, and customs that serve to direct the consumer behavior of members of a particular society*”. The kinds of products and services and/or brands that consumers' buy and use, are all based on their cultures and sub-cultures. For example, the food they eat and the kinds of clothes they buy and wear, are all impacted by their culture, their customs, traditions, norms and values.

Culture and its impact on consumption behavior can be better explained by understanding the nature and characteristics of culture:

a) *Culture is natural and permeates naturally into the social system.* Its inbreds into the members of a social system and is all-pervasive. It influences the manner in which a person behaves, as consciously or sub-consciously, we are all governed by culture. Not only do people use their values and beliefs to govern their behavior, but they also expect that others' behavior would also be similar and consistent (as culture is shared). Culture unites the members of a social system.

In terms of consumer behavior, the kinds of food we buy and eat or the clothes that we purchase and wear, are all governed by the socialization process. Similar is with respect to other purchases that we make. Culture encompasses the general and specific patterns of consumption behavior.

b) *Culture helps in satisfaction of needs.* In fact, it exists as it helps satisfy the needs of people. Beliefs, values, customs and tradition, help govern the social system, and specify the manner in which people in a social system should behave; they delineate the do's and don't's, and thereby create boundaries of acceptable behavior in the social system. However, such values, beliefs, customs and traditions continue to exist as long as they meet the needs of the people in the society. That is why culture evolves with passage of time. As the needs of the people evolve, beliefs, values, customs and tradition also undergo change so as to meet and match with newer needs and wants.

For example, in earlier times, people preferred eating their whole meals at home. In fact, eating out was considered unhealthy and undesirable. With a change in society, and the emergence of dual income households, people have begun eating out of home; the fast food culture is in. This has given a boost to the fast food and restaurant industry. Thus, we see that when a value system fails to satisfy the members of a social system, it is adapted, changed and/or modified to suit newer social patterns and trends.

Marketers must be conscious of newly developed and embraced values, customs and traditions, so as to be able to take advantage of the situation. For example, lately developed consciousness of people towards i) fashion, has given boost to the apparel and accessories business; ii) fitness, has given boost to the gymnasium and sports business; iii) health, has given a boost to natural products like fruit juices, honey, aloe vera, etc.

c) *Culture is not inborn; it is learnt as a result of the socialization process.* There occurs a socialization process right from one's childhood, a process that continues throughout life. Culture is imparted by this socialization process. This learning of culture could be of two kinds; viz., enculturation and acculturation. The process of learning one's native culture is known as enculturation, while the process of learning a new or a foreign culture is known as acculturation.

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- formal learning: when a child is taught how to behave by family, viz., grandparents, parents and siblings; they tell him about the right's and wrong's in behavior.
- informal learning: when the child learns by imitating the behavior of others, be it members in the family, or friends, or celebrities, or characters.
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d) *Culture is shared*. It is accepted and imbibed by all the members of the social system. In fact, it ties together the people that form a social system. Social institutions (family), educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities), political institutions (law, public policy, leaders and government), and religious institutions (like places of worship, artifacts, and religious leaders) etc., all help in transmitting this culture to the members of the society. The mass media, print and audio-visual, also has a role to play in the transmitting of culture.

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favorite dishes, the customs and rituals etc. With the various national and vernacular channels that we have in India, we have begun to share sub-cultures too. Sub-cultures are no longer restricted to geographical boundaries today.

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Ques 2 What are the various methods by which culture can be measured?

Ans 2 Culture can be measured through use of many techniques, some of which are i) Projective Tests; ii) Attitude measurement tests and techniques; iii) Content analysis; iv) Consumer fieldwork; and v) Value measurement instruments.

i) *Projective Tests*: Projective tests can be traced to the [psychoanalytic](#) psychology, which argue that human beings have conscious and [unconscious](#) attitudes, motivations and personalities that are hidden and unknown from conscious awareness. The projective tests attempt to measure underlying traits, fears, anxieties and attitudes, motivations and personalities. They help reveal people's orientations towards the cultural values, myths, customs, traditions and rituals.

The participants are shown pictures, images, cartoons and characters, inkblots and incomplete sentences/paragraphs to understand, interpret and comprehend them. The participants are asked to give as responses all that first comes into their minds. Gestures and body language, tone of voice and other reactions are also noted. The assumption behind use of such tests is that one tends to

project and interpret to these ambiguous stimuli from ones' sub-consciousness. Such tests are used to study motivation and personality. The two commonly used tests are the Rorschach Inkblot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

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v) *Value measurement instruments*: Researchers today, are increasingly making use of value measurement instruments. These are scales that measure values by means of a questionnaire. Participants are asked to give their opinion on varied issues like peace, freedom and independence, comfort and convenience, ambition and success etc. Through interpretation of their responses and the observation of behavior, researchers can infer the dominant or underlying values of the society. Such values would influence general and specific consumption patterns and buying behavior. Commonly used value measurement instruments are the Rokeach Value Survey, the List of Values (LOV), and the Values and Lifestyles—VALS.

SELF EVALUATION TESTS/QUIZZES:**Section A True/false:**

1. Culture is a society's personality, unique in itself and differentiated from others
2. A single culture can be broken up into various social classes.

Section B Fill up the blanks:

1. The process of learning one's native culture is known as _____, while the process of learning a new or a foreign culture is known as _____.
2. MNC's who desire to enter foreign markets should carefully study and understand the cultures of such countries. They should go through a process of _____.
3. _____ tests can be traced to the [psychoanalytic](#) psychology, which argue that human beings have conscious and [unconscious](#) attitudes, motivations and personalities that are hidden and unknown from conscious awareness.

Section C Short answers:

1. Define culture in the context of consumer behavior.
2. Mention the characteristics of culture.
3. What are the forms in which cultural learning take place?
4. Mention the various components of culture?
5. Mention commonly used value measurement instruments.

KEY**Section A True/false:**

1. True
2. False

Section B Fill up the blanks:

1. Enculturation, Acculturation
2. Acculturation
3. Projective

Section C Short answers:

1. The culture of a society also has a bearing on buying patterns and consumption behavior. In terms of consumer behavior, Schiffman defines culture as "*the sum total of learned beliefs, values, and customs that serve to direct the consumer behavior of members of a particular society*". The

kinds of products and services and/or brands that consumers' buy and use, are all based on their cultures and sub-cultures.

2. a) Culture is natural and permeates naturally into the social system; b) Culture helps in satisfaction of needs; c) Culture is not inborn; it is learnt as a result of the socialization process; d) Culture is shared; e) Culture is dynamic in nature, and evolves constantly with time.

3. Cultural learning takes place in three forms, viz., formal learning, informal learning and technical learning. Formal learning occurs when a child is taught how to behave by the family; Informal learning occurs when the child learns by imitating the behavior of others, be it members in the family, or friends, or celebrities, or characters; Technical learning occurs when the child is taught how to behave in a formal educational environment by a teacher.

4. The various components of culture are values, language, myths, customs, rituals and laws.

5. Rokeach Value Survey, the List of Values (LOV), and Values and Lifestyles—VALS.
