

IMR&D Report: Intercultural Communication in Sweden-Based McDonald's

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Abstract

Numerous online websites and databases were utilized in compiling the enclosed information found in this report detailing the way in which a worldwide fast food corporation, McDonald's, attunes its message to its offshore franchises operating in the European country of Sweden. This report offers prospective business people who are looking to license out McDonald's restaurants in the Scandinavian nation essential information in strategizing the display of their exemplar online presence by making sure not to miss critical elements of cultural values and communication practices.

Keywords

McDonald's corporation, Sweden, communication, online presence, cultural values

Introduction

The Scandinavian country of Sweden is located in northern Europe, sharing its borders with Norway to the north and west along with neighboring Finland to the east. The country also shares oceanic borders with countries like Denmark, Germany, and Russia, but has maintained a state of armed neutrality during both world wars. (K. K., & The Nations Online Project.) This exemplifies the culture of Sweden as a progressive nation in all aspects, its citizens holding a much more contemporary system of values with the welfare of its citizens having top priority. Full-fledged access to the latest advances in communications, technology, transportation, wellness, and overall infrastructure has led Sweden to become the innovative society it is notorious for.

Sweden has seen much international influence, integrating both traditional and foreign customs that have emerged from immigration within the country as well as economic ties with other global forces. The purpose of this report is to examine how an international corporation—McDonald's American fast food company—effectively communicates its message via its online presence to the European country of Sweden. This report is directed at McDonald's liaisons and American entrepreneurs who are looking to expand the McDonald's franchise in reformist Sweden. Due to the unique history of the establishment of McDonald's chain restaurant in the Scandinavian country, this report will cover the founding of McDonald's from its beginnings in San Bernardino, California to its influence overseas in Sweden. This report will also provide insights on the cultural values that the general Swedish populace holds which potential franchisers can display in their representative websites.

Methodology

For this report, I conducted research using secondary resources that provided me with useful information about the values maintained in the country of Sweden, a brief overview of the history of McDonald's, and the challenges associated with intercultural communication. I began my research by looking for background information on Sweden, accessing the official website of Sweden and the Nations Online Project. From there, I visited the Swedish McDonald's website to garner information on the establishment of the chain from its origins in America to the Scandinavian country. I also referenced Hofstede Insights Organizational Culture model to evaluate the factors of power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation versus short term normative orientation, and indulgence in Sweden to gain some additional perspective on its culture and values. After taking a look at the Swedish McDonald's webpage, I applied the information from the official site of Sweden, the Nations Online Project, and Hofstede Insights to further evaluate how well the McDonald's corporation attunes its central message for the Swedish public.

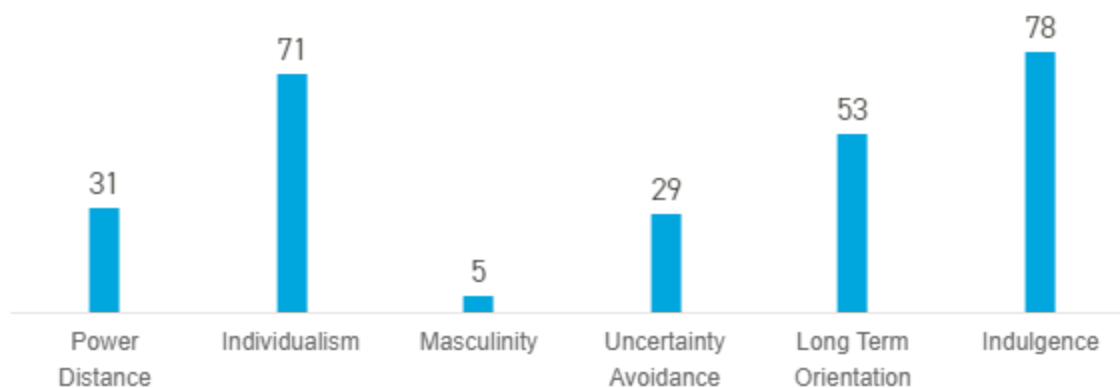
Research

McDonald's Meets Sweden

The first McDonald's to appear in Sweden was in its capital city of Stockholm on October 27, 1973. Swedish entrepreneur and then-kitchen equipment supplier, Palle "Paul" Lederhausen, initially went on a trip in the early 1970s to the United States for matters related to his business in equipping USA-made grills for use in Swedish restaurant kitchens and dining halls. It was after driving around the Des Plaines, Illinois region and catching sight of a McDonald's restaurant that he became interested in opening his own series of McDonald's stores in his native Sweden. Shortly after his discovery of the small yet ever-expanding food chain, Lederhausen directly contacted McDonald's head franchisor, Ray Kroc, who eventually granted him the rights to franchise the restaurant beyond its U.S. omnipresence to Kungsgatan 4, Stockholm, Sweden. (Novak, R.)

Hofstede's Insights on Swedish Culture

According to Hofstede Insights six-dimensional model, Sweden's culture tells one that the scores of each factor as described in the Organizational Culture model vary greatly:



(Figure 1: 6-D Model© of Swedish Culture)

Individualism: Upon visiting the link to the Swedish McDonald's online site, one can immediately see the links displayed at the top of the page (Our Menu, About Our Food, For the Family, and About Our Place). The link name that stands out most when analyzing the site in the perspective of a Swede is For the Family. When looking back at how Sweden ranks a high score of 71 on the Individualism factor per Hofstede's six-dimensional model, Sweden is considered an individualist society wherein people look solely after themselves and their immediate family and hold their wellbeing and general happiness in the highest regards. (Hofstede Insights) Clicking this link reveals an initial subsidiary link appropriately titled Sweden's Most Family-Friendly Restaurant revealing McDonald's as "... the favorite family of Sweden's families with children' thence 'promis[ing] to continue our efforts to remain your first choice.'" This sublink in addition to the site's social media links do an effective job of creating a personable connection with the Swedish community to satisfy their assumed demands of customers who dine at McDonald's with their families, especially those with young children ages

0-8. The page even includes a video and supplemental photos from the family demographic of McDonald's customers, showcasing multiples of one or more parents seated at a table inside a McDonald's with their child(ren) as they indulge in their food. This brings one to the next factor of Hofstede's factors that the Swedish McDonald's representative site covers which is Indulgence.

Indulgence: Indulgence in this context not only means satiating one's literal *appetite* but the yearning of an individual living by the proverbial phrase of the glass half-full. Under the About Our Food link is a sublink entitled Our Food Philosophy that highlights the optimistic Swedish point-of-view: Scoring a high 78 on the Hofstede model, the populace has a clear focus on reaching for what they want, "do[ing] as they please, and spend[ing] money as they wish" (Hofstede Insights). Swedes have the option to customize their hamburgers, sandwiches, and other items on the menu to suit their particular wants and meet their individual nutritional needs. The Swedish McDonald's page upholds the country's agricultural standards, too, by using exceptional and wholesome ingredients in food that is freshly prepared for customers so they get exactly what they ask for every time without exception.

Masculinity and Power Distance: Sweden scored a low of 5 on the Masculinity scale, furthering the sentiment that Sweden is more feminine in its dominant or power values (Hofstede Insights): Equality is valued in Sweden so much so that there exists an unequivocal word that roughly translates to "not too much, not too little, just the right amount", based on a philosophy that everyone should enjoy the small things in life and refrain from dwelling on the bad. (Condé Nast Traveler.) The McDonald's website supplements this via its lack of an individual employee section of the site, possessing a larger focus on serving the environment, community, and their specific consumer base as opposed to the achievements of individual customer and fast food service members and higher-ups employed at McDonald's.

Long Term/Short Term Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance: Sweden achieved an offset rating of 53 on Long Term/Short Term Orientation (Hofstede Insights), however franchisers should bear in mind that Sweden as a whole is matter-of-fact with prospects evidently high for the future of the country and its people. Despite the country sustaining good standings across the board (e.g. health and wellness reform, job opportunity, standard of living, modernization), Sweden is prepared though not anticipating, the worst that could happen. Their representative McDonald's website displays these ratings accordingly by giving off a vehement vibe and warm tone throughout the site.

Discussion

When comparing Hofstede's factors of the Organizational Culture model with the official site of McDonald's based in Sweden then analyzing and reviewing the data obtained through vigorous research, the webpage is infallible in reflecting all aspects of Swedish culture valued among the members of its society. Business owners, entrepreneurs, and franchisers alike can trust that the online website touches base with the cultural values held by the people of Sweden. The online representative platform must be reviewed carefully in addition to the aforementioned sources referenced within this report to avoid any gaps in intercultural communication. Doing so will positively affect prospective franchisers in 1) honing the central message of the McDonald's

corporation to cater to the people of Sweden and 2) procuring the trust of the potential customer base of the region-specific establishment.

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