

Intercultural Communications Report:
McDonalds Japan

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide insight on McDonald's international presence on the internet and examine how its digital presence is affected and shaped around the culture it claims to represent. An analysis will be conducted of McDonald's website for Japan in opposition to its U.S. counterpart and will reflect on how the difference in cultural values and priorities are showcased within the websites. Recommendations will be provided at the end of the report based on analysis.

Methodology

This report is structured around Hofstede's six dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence), which are "six basic issues that society needs to come to terms with in order to organize itself" (Geert Hofstede). I used online sources (CultureGrams, Hofstede's Country Comparison) designed around the six dimensions to gather information on the cultures of both Japan and the United States and utilized these sources to analyze how these two different cultures influenced McDonald's international online platforms.

Results



Figure 1: Hofstede Country Comparison graph for Japan

Hofstede's six dimensions use a scale from 0-100 to show how a country relates to each dimension. The graph used to visualize Japan's relation to each dimension is pictured above.

First, Japan's view on power distance will be examined. Power distance is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Country Comparison, 2021). According to Hofstede's country comparison, Japan is a borderline hierarchical society. Their society is meritocratic, meaning that positions of power are earned. Their decision-making process is slow, resulting in nationwide changes happening fairly slowly. In their education system, there is a notion that everybody is born equal and has the same opportunity for maximum success if they work hard enough. This reflects in McDonalds' marketing in Japan in that many of its meals revolve around traditional Japanese cuisine: Dishes like a rice teriyaki sandwich, a rice and breaded shrimp sandwich, edamame corn as a common side, and many dishes containing eggs incorporate common Japanese ingredients with the McDonalds menu.

The next dimension is individualism: "the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members" (Country Comparison, 2021). Japanese culture prioritizes harmony of a group and putting the needs of others above one's own. Those from Japan are also famously loyal to their companies—changing jobs every few years is rare. Adding on to this notion of loyalty, they are loyal to their inner circle from birth, whether this be immediate family,

friends, or neighbors. On the McDonalds Japan website, there is a whole tab located on the top taskbar that links to a page for families and show Happy Meal toys and their mission to promote healthy development in children. The site also provides content geared toward entertaining families at home, and even promotes a program that lets children play-work at McDonalds. There are many other resources on this page, everything from supporting children's sports programs to supporting children in need with the Donald McDonald House fund (Ronald McDonald is changed to Donald McDonald in Japan to align with pronunciation patterns within the Japanese language).

Third on Hofstede's dimensions is masculinity, which is "the fundamental issue of what drives people: wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what you do (feminine)" (Country Comparison, 2021). Japan happens to be one of the most masculine societies in the world. Their culture promotes intense competition between groups of people, and with the prioritization of organized sports in schools, brings children to begin heavy competition at a very young age. Their masculine society often makes it difficult for women to climb up the corporate ladder. This culture of masculinity isn't much reflected within the McDonalds Japan website—they claim to encourage a culture of diversity and inclusion within their staff, even providing specialized resources for women within their company. Rather than reflecting a hyper-masculine society, the site reflects a slow shift to equality in the workplace.

Fourth is uncertainty avoidance, which deals with how a society copes with an inevitably uncertain future (Country Comparison, 2021). Japan is one of the most uncertainty avoidant countries on the planet, mostly because of reoccurring tsunamis, earthquakes, typhoons, and active volcanos. This is reflected in a highly ritualized lifestyle, and a need to uncover as much information as possible before a decision is made. This factor also influences a lack of change within the culture. This is reflected within the site through McDonalds' campaigns for sustainable food procurement, recycling initiatives, and climate change initiatives. Japanese companies have a tendency to market their prioritization of sustainability, especially with climate change increasing the number and frequency of natural disasters.

Fifth is long-term orientation, which "describes how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future" (Country Comparison, 2021). Japan is one of the most long-term oriented societies—they tend to see life as a blip in human history, and fatalistic beliefs are common. Monotheism is not popular, and within the corporate world, high rates of investment are a priority. Goals tend to be

generational rather than individual, and there is a perceived need to constantly prepare for anything the future may hold. McDonalds Japan reflects this by committing to the betterment of family dynamics (featuring many programs for children and families), combatting climate change, and assisting employees in collaboration with a university to help provide a higher education.

Lastly is indulgence: “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses” (Country Comparison, 2021). Japan’s culture is a culture of restraint. Cynical and pessimistic attitudes are mainstream, and free time is not prioritized. Many of their actions are restrained by strict social norms, and self-indulgence is generally considered to be wrong. McDonalds acknowledges this by keeping their products at a low cost, including 100-yen coffee in any size (a two-week promotion), and working with cash-back companies like Rakuten to appeal to frugality.

Discussion

Overall, the McDonalds Japan site does a fantastic job of reflecting key elements of Japanese culture while staying at the forefront of social progress. They have mastered balancing traditional values as they reflect to food with current social change—an example is their commitment to diversity and inclusion in their work force, and their food offerings contain many modern dishes using common ingredients historically used in Japanese cooking. A few examples are utilizing the “kawaii” style within their ad campaigns—this cutesy style is quite appealing to a younger audience and draws the attention of consumers: and offering edamame corn as a common side dish for their meals. Another positive element in their site is their dynamic recommended menu, which recommends different dishes for different times of the day.

In terms of what should be changed, McDonalds’ promotion of diversity and inclusion within their work force, as well as specific programs for women within the company, is quite vague. While their efforts are progressive, the company does not elaborate enough on what specific actions they are taking to enforce these efforts. This could be resolved by showcasing results on their site of what these campaigns have done that is beneficial to their communities.

References

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