Cultural Movements and Their Impact on Business and Marketing

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Abstract

Focusing on market-oriented cultural movements, this article examines how they have affected people's behavior and lifestyles, as well as what people are seeking through them. Are there group dynamics with people working to achieve common goals? Do cultural movements stem from a passion for social change or compelling ideas that can build on and grow the momentum of desire, both in business and in the way people become consumers of these creative and dynamic ideas? We look at cultural movements from the perspective of business marketing, technology, and culture. The article highlights the digital age, which is creating opportunities for people, and its effect on the way in which our culture and business are shaping and reshaping our lifestyle.

Keywords: Cultural movement, cultural change, business, marketing, online communities, mobilization, cultural diffusion and communication technology

Introduction

The two major aspects of our world are technology—which is making the world more advanced and effective—and culture, representing our lifestyle and behavior. Cultural movements are a collection of informal networks and unaffiliated individuals engaging in a more or less coherent struggle for change in this shrinking world. As we go forward, we are experiencing a profound cultural transformation, in which modern technology and innovations are making it easier to produce changes through innovative ideas and collaboration. Resource mobilization theory points to the need to share ideas and interests over a broader spectrum. Moreover, it emphasizes the collectivity of participants and other actors in the advancement and success of certain cultural objectives, such as habits, lifestyles, and ways of thinking and consumption (McCarthy & Zald, 1997).

Despite some valuable research on the impact of the cultural movements nationally and globally, study is relatively underdeveloped. Much can be written on this topic, so these pages provide an overview of these issues. The following are a few examples that will provide some idea of the forces of social change that are transforming people's behavior and lifestyle patterns through cultural movements.

Those who are new to cultural movements and how they affect the business marketing should understand that every movement starts from scratch and gradually build up a moment. I have witnessed cultural movements throughout my life, but only recently have I realized that it is possible, and even necessary, to apply them to business, in order for business owners to build their companies' reputation and prosperity. Few people understand the impact of cultural movements on business, or that marketing is crucial for a successful endeavor. Many people and business professionals are quite in the dark regarding the implications of marketing. It often takes a personto put forward new ideas, which then influence public opinion and help the business to win customer loyalty. Once an idea is connected to people's lives and passions, the remainder is plain sailing.

A cultural movement is an idea or group of ideas that promotes and advances certain goals. In fact, ideas such as a new product or invention are extremely important in the realms of art styles, politics, marketing, business, and consumerism, which have grown exponentially and now represent fundamental parts of many economies. Business and marketing, as an example, have had to respond to increasing global competition, and have done so by expanding into new global markets and focusing on the international labor force.

Cultural movements can be tools for social change, depending on the movements' purposes. Internet technology, which has emerged as a commercial social medium, is moving rapidly in new directions, and advertising is driving Internet growth. The technology is so simple that millions of people have set up their own websites. By advocating easy local, national, and global, access to the markets, the technology has also generated change in other areas. For example, wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) technology allows easy Internet access anywhere through radio waves. Wi-Fi serves the local area network market. Simply put, it connects data devices with wireless transmissions. The impact of Wi-Fi is enormous, and it is rapidly changing the world. For example, businesses can stream and receive all manner of broadband video and multimedia information, to and from any spot in the world, without the need for modems or cables to connect them to the Internet. In other words, they can have complete mobility with the two-way transference of business data. In addition to easy mobility, employees and other professionals who are travelling to meet with clients can access company resources and can send and receive email from wherever they are.

This Wi-Fi culture is spreading very quickly, and I believe that the entire USA will be on Wi-Fi within 10 to 15 years, or possibly even earlier. This cultural innovation has facilitated connections and friendships, and has helped individuals to meet new people, who, while never having previously met in many cases, shared the same ideas to generate momentum and then build upon it. The growth of portable devices and portable computers, along with Wi-Fi technology, is already changing our lifestyle. Sassen (2001) observed that, since technology is becoming more widespread, it may be an important resource in connecting people who can quickly go global, because the technology itself is global.

Another new group, the coffee chain Starbucks, has also gained huge success with Wi-Fi, as it connects people over the world. Over recent years, the company has grown to satisfy the needs of its coffee drinkers by providing Wi-Fi in a very relaxing and inspiring atmosphere.Since it's beginning, Starbucks has strived not only to make great coffee, but also to bring together people who all share one thing in common: The love of coffee. This purpose-driven, successful marketing can lead to a more meaningful sense of direction that might resonate with regard to thinking of a new idea in connection with a new business or brand one might intend to start.

C&A, an international Dutch chain of fashion retail clothing stores, has taken this a step further by attaching some of its clothes to electronic hangers, which are directly linked to its Facebook account. Why? So that when you're shopping, you can see which garments are the most popular amongst that particular social community. Another example is provided by the American singer-songwriter and fashion model Beyoncé Knowles, who released her own clothing line, House of Deréon, in cooperation with C&A in the summer of 2010. It has beena great success, and people from all walks of life are eager to buy her products. Beyoncé recently traveled to London, UK, to debut the House of Deréon's Autumn/Winter collection; this launch was a global exclusive, since it'sclothing was previously only available in the USA.

The same pattern of business can be observed in many parts of the world today, andthese opportunities to tap into mainstream information have improved the quality of life of millions of people around the globe. If we examine this from the sociological perspective, a group of people with a shared passion can mobilize and change buying behaviors and trends. In our business operations and marketing of a product or service, we should know that an underlying cultural or social message lies behind it, and that people are inclined to relate to such a message.

While the impact of cultural movements is growing, it is certainly not a new phenomenon. For example, Elvis Presley and his style made an extensive cultural impact. Bertrand (2000) described Presley as an American music giant of the 20th century, who single-handedly changed the course of music and culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Elvis was indeed a global cultural icon, and he continues to attract fanatic devotion throughout the world. The spirit of Elvis lives on because people continue to perform his songs, and his recordings, clothing, and style still make an enormous impact on the business community and on people in general. Elvis products still proliferate, and some catalogues are entirelydedicated to selling various commodities, ranging from Elvis shows to giant Elvis figures. What made him so distinctive and successful, and why do fans continue to idolize him today? The answer lies in his phenomenal popularity, and is also associated with the youth cultural movement of his time. His music was arguably the voice of passionate youth culture, and he became its mouthpiece. This youth cultural movement, encompassing Elvis's music and performing style, transcends economic and cultural dimensions with its highly sophisticated marketing and strategy; Elvis is the perfect choice with regard to branding a wide-range of commodities for global circulation.

The Hippie cultural movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s is another example of cultural mania that affected the entire structure of American society. It turned fashion upside down, by veering away from the conservative look and introducing new styles and colors like never before.

These hippie fashion and lifestyle values, which were more liberal in nature, became part of worldwide culture. Rock 'n roll, a new hybrid musical epitomized by Elvis Presley, the Swedish group ABBA, and the Beatles from the UK, appeared in all manner of colorful costumes, both in public and on their record sleeves. They brought global consumers together, with regard to the growing market of the new fashions, designs, music, and lifestyle. Bellbottoms, blue jeans, patchwork jeans, Indian cotton, saris, and silk were all popular fabrics, and were responsible for the huge surge in sales and profits, as well as political and social activism.

Today, the fashion world has once again discovered these styles from the '60s, and we can view as incredible the fact that many items from this era have come back into fashion again over the years. With the advent of the Internet, these cyber hippies and neo-hippies, along with other communities, are gaining strength, particularly in Europe and the USA. Many embrace hippie values, such as freedom of lifestyle, fashion, etc., and these new cultural groups have emerged in online web communities worldwide. For example, many promote their style and opinions through Myspace.com, which encompasses thousands of group members and has millions of listeners.

Peoplelink.org is another example of a technology-related cultural movement that attempts to create new person-to-person links in the global economy, by using the Internet to connect poor artisans in developing countries with buyers in the global market (selling is both retail and wholesale). Artisans express the cultural richness of all societies with the help of the Internet. In addition, this movementis helping selected "grass roots" artisan groups to create specialized network markets and then actively promote them. Since the direct connection between vendors and buyers is so much more efficient than commercial or fair-trade channels, participating producers receive at least twice as much income. Buyers pay the same for items that they would normally purchase through conventional channels, while enjoying a more direct link to the talented artisans. Peoplelink has members in 44 countries and is steadily gaining momentum. In Nepal alone, its success in generating 4000 jobs was documented by the United Nations Development Program.

The International Society for Marketing and Development (ISMD) is a collection of academics, from many developing countries, in marketing and other related fields. The ISMD grew out of two primary foundations; a fast developing interest in the field of marketing and development, and the building of a critical mass and collegiality among scholars from around the world.The society's members are interested in markets and helping consumers at various stages of their business development. The ISMD is more international than many other research groups in existence, and its membership is growing fast, as it is building bridges and forging alliances through social relationships and in social groups, such as annual meetings and international symposia.

As we have seen in the above examples, a number of cultural movements have been successful in motivating people to rally round ideas and common interests, and, by doing so, these movements have introduced some changes to mainstream culture. Of course, cultural movements make sense; in his recent book, *Drive* (2010), Daniel Pink asserted that the secret to success is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and the world in which we live. Indeed, Pink's observation that passion drives people to join movements makes sense, but the question arises as to what benefits people will ultimately gain if they join these movements. If we consider some of the cultural movements described above, young people wanted to break away from old norms and think for themselves, do new things, have new freedoms. There was a lot of intellectual "ferment" at the end of the twentieth century, and new ideas in music, films, and literature, new clothing fashions, and new ways of seeing and thinking about things. This variety of new ideas meant that our culture changed in many ways. Relative deprivation theory argues that people are driven into movements out of a sense of deprivation, particularly (1) in relation to others or (2) in relation to their expectations. With regard to the first of these, individuals observe others who have greater power, economic resources, or status, and attempt to acquire these same things for themselves (Edwards and McCarthy 2004).

That said, there is a strong sense of devotion and loyalty among people who find that their interests are better served if they collectively act and organize. If we examine this from a social and political perspective, people tend to join multiple movements. They align themselves with other groups in the hope of furthering their causes, and this allows for a unique experience. In today's globalized societies, diversity and a mixing of cultures have enabled people to overcome national boundaries and to embrace common causes. People often join multiple movements because of common interests; multiple alliances may work well for common causes.

Individuals with similar goals, who are members of different cultural movements, can find one another, get together, and organize. Many people, especially those who are younger, choose to join multiple movements to express their interests and identity.

They seek out groups of like-minded people with similar interests or concerns to give themselves a sense of belonging; environmental issues, such as pollution and global warming, are good examples. People who are concerned with environmental pollution may be a member of other movements, such as Save the Earth or Greenpeace. These individuals are usually defined by the group of which they are a part; belonging to a certain group or movement strengthens integration of ideas and opinions, which may benefit the movement as a whole.

In addition to political and social change through cultural movements, people are attempting to be more active and involved in issues such as global consumerism and communication. Therefore, they are building consumer culture out of these movements. The commercialized culture of the USA is marketed around the world, and appears to be accelerating. For example, the fast-food concept is so omnipresent in global culture that it has become a common phenomenon in many parts of the globe; examples are McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Dunkin Donuts, and KFC, as well as the widespread use of Coca Cola. Hollywood movies, fashions, Disney products, and other cultural values are attracting increasing numbers of people around the world, and many other brands use information technology to enable their products to reach their customers. Facebook, Twitter, and blogs have now become genuine forces in the exchange of information and ideas currently circling the globe. A website need not cost anything if only something basic is required, and creation of a basic website is not really particularly difficult to accomplish nowadays. Although many might criticize the growing fusion of Western culture and the traditional values of the local communities, the USA dominates the world market. This market is largely developed in a post industrialized future, and is reflective of the highly technological and consumer-based society and the global markets, bringing improved opportunities for expansion, which in turn, helps economies to grow, providing better lifestyles for people.

People's Interest in Cultural Movements and Group Dynamics

In the following section, we explore the motivations that lead people to participate in market-oriented social movements. An interest in cultural movements includes a search for community, affiliation, and inspiration, as well as the desire to lead a better life at the level of social change and integration. Participants in these movements place a high value on services provided through information technology (as it is easier to organize, reach, and grow), including the possibility to make their lives move faster and better. Proponents of the movement communicate and interact through the Internet and other digital components. Today, we are fortunate to have the Internet and related technology, which did not exist in the 1950s and 1960s, and was not in common use until the 1990s. Our ability to organize and communicate is greatly enhanced by this technology, and once we coordinate our efforts we can become a truly effective force in society. People who have found success through the Internet have stated that it empowers them to direct their own futures. Here, I would argue that, although Internet use is growing rapidly, it is not accessible to everyone. Therefore, those who can afford this technology will benefit tremendously, but what about those who cannot? This question must be addressed.

Whether it is online or face-to-face in a small town, these behaviors and expressions enhance group solidarity, strengthen movement-bred identities and social solidarity, and bring people and society together, according to Emile Durkheim (1893). Durkheim's notion of solidarity is based on social cohesion, in which people are bound together for a passionate cause with a sense of common duty and responsibility, which, in turn, can spark cultural movement. Another classical sociologist and thinker, whose work figures heavily in discussions of social cohesion and group solidarity, is Max Weber. He argued (1978) that success is achieved through social interaction and by strong convictions of believing in something, and is further endorsed by the economic structure that is guided by the norms and values of a society. If you truly believe in something, you will tend to shape or change people dynamics with regard to their shared beliefs and agenda.

From a business standpoint, one should be aware that a people or group dynamic has a strong impact on the behavior of others. Together, they can take the message further, as we have observed in the case of innovations such as iPhone and other interactive technologies, which are spreading and connecting people and societies like wildfire in our competitive society. However, digital technology is not just something that we use to connect the world around us, it also has intrapersonal effects.

People who are engaged in one issue are likely to also be involved in other issues; they are questioning the ways of traditional businesses, such as car buying and rentals, hotel stays, academic admissions, and buying clothing and other items alike. For example, the online surge and use of other digital devices are shaping our behavior and lifestyle. Today's consumers need not go through large companies and business corporations to obtain what they need.Their loyalty toward the new technology is reshaping human nature and making it easier to share common interests and ideas.

For some, these technologies are important for human success and are constantly in development; the history of the impact of technology is irrelevant compared to what we have now or what will be available tomorrow.

The USA s is a nation comprising all types of groups, including ethnic and racial populations that contribute to making this society multicultural. A group dynamic in such a diverse society as the USA motivates people and brings participants together through activism in the sociocultural sphere. This group dynamic and solidarity shapes our current cultural behavior. People are bound together by the idea of a common cultural platform that tends to form within cultural movements. This applies to their shopping trends, academic admissions, or vacations to exotic locations. For example, in a classroom setting, if a few students begin to use a particular product, all the remaining students will soon be using or buying that same product. The popularity of the product may then quickly spread through social sharing, and the use of social media coverage, and become global. This all helps to explain how our thoughts and behaviors are influenced by the groups to which we belong. Research mobilization theory (2004) suggested that individuals are easily persuaded and influenced when they are in groups.

Groups are highly cohesive in relationships, and have great similarities in their goals,some members are more likely to influence oneanother's behaviors and attitudes, as well as how the group thinks and behaves as a whole.Cultural movements result in enduring social and cultural changes in society. Americans have always participated in cultural movements, which are something that people create to press for social change. These movements have been linked with group dynamics and thus have a strong voice of the people.The power of group dynamics was first described by German sociologist George Simmel, who wanted to understand why people connected to other people so quickly. The phrase "group dynamics" means a social unit of people who have a set of beliefs and valuesin common, follow the same norms, and work for a common goal, through the flow of coherent and dynamic activities (Simmel 1902). Simmel argued that people have an inherent instinct to be identified with other people or a group. From this perspective, we can argue that belonging to any type of cultural movement has strong appeal to people who are connected because of a shared common sense of purpose and values. This, in turn, is a motivator to join together to be a part of culture, which is rapidly transforming our society from a traditional to a cyber-age consumer society.

Leadership in Cultural Movements.Do We Need Them?

We can argue that perhaps we do not need leaders in this digital age of communication, because any person can plant an idea or ideas that can be followed by people and communities. However, the need for continual organization and expansion of that idea means that the importance of some form of leadership should not be ignored. It appears to be difficult for many to grasp the idea of a cultural movement without a recognizable and intelligent business personality at its head. Steve Jobs' and Howard Schultz' relationships to the Apple industry and Starbucks, respectively, are good examples. Their saga is the entrepreneurial creation of unimaginable success. By the time Steve Jobs died, in October 2011, he had built Apple into the world's most valuable company, helping to transform several industries, such as personal computing, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing, retail stores, and digital publishing, along the way. He is therefore considered to be one of the greatest American innovators. History will remember the way he and Schultz exemplified strength of leadership, and how they applied imagination to technology and business, as well as the way in which people who were inspired by them supported their services, products, and craft.

Johnsen (2012) argued that people are interested in movements that can inspire them to stand behind a cause. Therefore, leaders are crucial for a moment of success, and they can develop the sense of joining with others in shared concerns. Smelser (1968), a pioneer in the study of cultural movements, further pointed out that leaders are essential to mobilization, and can play a role in creating other conditions in the value-added process of collective behavior. This, in turn, generates social change. Many have drawn on Weber's theory of charismatic leadership, a relational approach that assigns a key role to followers in imputing charisma to leaders.

Weber (1972) elaborated on the movements with charismatic leadership, including the emotional character of people who join these movements and are loyal to their leadership and the message they convey.

A charismatic personality has a profound impact on people and the movement of which they are a part. The leaders can direct the action so that it can be focused toward accomplishment of the movement's goals. They serve our purpose. They help us spread our ideas, for example, how the social and cultural change would make the world a better place. Many of us are not effective communicators, and so are afraid to speak in public. Therefore, we are in real need of those fearless marketing forerunners, who are willing to speak out about innovations and technologieswith intensity and enthusiasm, and are effective at spreading ideas regarding brands and products, such that other people are motivated to get on board with these ideas and make them a reality.

Leaders are known to start or spark movements of new thinking, new ideas, and new visions, and state how to achieve the aims of these movements. However, this does not always hold true. Often, it is other people or followers who start movements, simply by chatting and sharing their stories, socially constructing meanings, and exploring new ideas. Leadership becomes important to mobilize movements around these early interactions, because of the centrality of communication from which frameworks and policies are developed to achieve objectives. There are examples of cultural movements that are run by cultural and social elites; doctors, lawyers, artists, coordinators, other professionals. In addition, women, and even individuals with a political background and experience, are active in mainstream cultural groups. The majority of movements require assistance with strategic planning of a particular agenda, program enrichment, and specific project execution. The leaders may or may not have any formal authority. However, these people develop the sense of joining with others in common and shared goals, and direct the action, such that it is focused toward accomplishment of the movement's goals. For movements to be sustained and active, someone must initiate and guide their direction.

Kari Warberg Block, founder and CEO of Earth-Kind, is an inventor, serial entrepreneur, and small-business champion, with a passion for growing people, products, ideas, and businesses through a sustainable approach. In her blog, she recently wrote (December 4, 2013) that behind every great success story is a leader with an eye on the future and a passion to change the past. The previously described Apple and Starbucks leaderships are just two examples of many that have proved that effective business makes a positive difference in the world. Therefore, leadership and guidance must be constant, motivating, and sustainable, as movements strive toward achieving their specific goals. Today, many leaders understand the rapidly changing business environment and how to cope with these changes. Steve Jobs was not the sole leader of his famous company; he also extended leadership roles to several people around him. He believed in greater creativity and increased delegation of responsibility, which, in turn, produced great success for his company, which is followed by millions of people around the world. Therefore, it is also true that any ideas and visions are worthless without support from those who are followers, and who have the courage to embrace their direction, and from those who have faith in the leadership's capability to change society from one direction to another.

The Mass Media and Business

Social media is now a crucial part of any successful business, marketing, and public relations. They offer us a platform to interact with existing and potential customers, and can often provide us with feedback and new ideas. Social media use is about communicating with your customers; media are the technologies we use to make the connections. The mass media are technology-driven, and satellite communications, digital messages, and the use of Internet have enormous power to shape public opinion and behavior (Hiebert 1998). Modern movements often utilize technology and the Internet to mobilize people globally, and adaptation to communication trends is a common theme among successful movements. Therefore, the importance of media should not be ignored today or in the future. People relate to one another through email, forums, blogs, twitter, virtual reality (computer control of human perception), and the posting of links. You can even create your own network, with websites, which allows you to create your own branded MySpace-type pages. These serve as breeding grounds for ideas to develop further. Technological change has already changed *how* humans relate to each other.

The variations of possibilities are too numerous to list here, but the examples mentioned in this section regarding media networking explain that our business and marketing trend today is not outdated, and that it empowers people to fulfill their passion. Rice et al. (2007) noted that people could develop extremely close and in-depth relationships as a result of their interaction on social networks. In a matter of seconds, individuals can communicate with others around the world, whether for important business matters or just for talking to friends.

Social media is very useful in many different ways; for example, helping people with their homework, via search engines such as Google, providing entertainment through game websites/video websites, such as YouTube, delivering rapid communication, via email websites, such as Hotmail, and providing online shopping facilities, such as Amazon, among other retail sites.Integrating your business website with different engines has never been easier, and it delivers great success; Facebook is near the pinnacle in the world of social media, as is LinkedIn, which is a more professional network, with a rapidly increasing membership of over 200 million.

These are excellent places to build business connections, and allow you to hunt for potential employees and ascertain what other businesses are doing to stay ahead.

The Internet is filled with millions of individuals who are looking to meet other people, to share information regarding new ideas, products, and services, and to develop friendships or professional alliances, as well as business-to-business marketing. The role of television as a source of entertainment and information, and the massive expansion of consumerism encouraged by advertising campaigns, have been key components in the formulation of new social patterns and behaviors. Advertisements exhort people to spend their money on items such as clothes, shoes, automobiles, etc. Resistance to political oppression often takes the form of a cultural movement, and technology plays an important part. The widespread social unrest that began in Egypt early in 2013, and that quickly spread to other Middle Eastern and North African countries, demonstrated how social interactionwebsites allow large numbers of people to mobilize quickly and easily. People in a variety of countries write blogs, and post on Twitter and Facebook, as a means of spreading their opinions on issues such as democracy, political rights, and freedom. Shawn Fanning's Nafstar and Apple technology (iPod and iTunes) initially appeared on Facebook, and has continued to gather membership and consumersupport through file-sharing sites, such as Instagram and Flickr.

Many of today's businesses have launched a quick-sales type of marketing for their product with great success. AdWords, Google's online advertising program, is a highly targeted and measurable system that helps advertisers find their customers online, and the revenue potential of these social media activities is enormous. Technological advancement, such as streaming media, cloud computing, and mesh networking (15 times faster than DSL services today) will revolutionize people's lifestyles in the near future, and will help to facilitate the formation and mobilization of social and cultural movements.

The future is unpredictable. However, I believe that many of today's businesses, for example, print media, electronic media, and movies, as well as the buying and selling of social and technological products, will be significantly altered in the near future. Therefore, a business must be flexible, cost-effective, and efficient. It is also obvious that customers will remain the primary source of new products and ideas in a few years from now. Consumers are crucial for any business success, and will be more empowered than ever before by technological advances.Businesses today know that they will be judged by the consumers who buy their products, from music to clothing, and from small to large. Ideas for future products and services can be gained in huge volumes through online communities, social networking, customer loyalty, and an increased focus on personalized marketing strategies.Therefore, business interest in movements will remain strong in future. As we have discussed, movements represent people and their passion for particular ideas and products. This passion will remain intact, and will make a strong impact on our thinking and lifestyle.

Conclusion

This article has touched on several aspects of cultural movements, focusing on business and the use of communication technology that helps businesses to win loyalty and passion for their products from consumers. The future is difficult to predict; however, in the days ahead, the key to success in achieving your goals is to listen and participate. Tell others about your ideas, in the hope that they resonate with people, who will then support them and find a purpose. The Apple products and the success of Starbucks are just two examples in this regard. Be open to new ideas and gain people's attention right at the start. You must take part in social networking, and it is not cultural lag, but cultural diffusion that is a key to success in this competitive world. First as an individual, and then as a group, you must constitute a movement and build a community that is loyal to you and your goals. Future innovations and business will arise from an idea that will not be limited to a few. We do not know what they will bring, but, with the help of new and advanced technology, these cultural movements are going to build consumer cultures and change the world again, but in new ways.

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