



LONGCHAMP  
x

POKÉMON™



# WHAT IS CULTURE?

## INSIGHTS INTO A KEY DRIVER OF BEHAVIOUR

July 2021

# FOREWORD



*“It’s the culture we don’t see that influences the culture we see – this is an important point I often ponder on, and it occurred to me time and time again when I first read this paper. It is a fascinating exploration on the influence of culture on our individual behaviours, with such case studies focusing on healthcare, beauty and on language and the environment. Each case study demonstrates how every behaviour in so many spheres of life are interconnected with our cultures. We are reminded that we need deep dives and granular data on cultural diversity to best understand how culture intersects with cultural diversity. UNESCO reports that 75% of conflict has a cultural dimension, for example. Surely, if we better understood culture, we could better understand behaviour, thus leading to more cohesive and harmonious global communities.”*

**Peter Mousaferiadis,  
CEO & Founder  
Cultural Infusion**



# INTRODUCTION



Culture is a term that is often misused or misunderstood, one of those generic terms that people use to define a trend, phenomenon or a group of behaviours.

Defining such an “*abstract, complex and problematic term*” (Barber & Badre, 1998) is by no means an easy feat, as emphasised by American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn who were able to compile a list of 164 definitions of the term ‘culture’! Nonetheless, two prominent trains of thought prevailed in their 1952 study: culture is how one group distinguishes itself from another, and culture is what unites people.

Today, with the advancement of digitisation and globalisation, the definition of culture is becoming even more nuanced. Let’s take a look at the definition of ‘culture’ offered by Cambridge Dictionary: “*The way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time*”. The key words here are ‘of a particular group of people at a particular time’, suggesting that culture is no longer considered bound to nationalities, it can also belong to different sub-groups, communities and sub-cultures (for example LGBTQ+, Millennials, Gen Z, LatinX and even corporate culture).

There is no template for culture, no reference point on which all cultures are based. Culture is as multidimensional and ever-evolving as the world we live in today, constantly being shaped by a multitude of factors and events.

In this paper, we are going to explore various currents of thought, theories and concrete case studies to help get a better understanding of what culture is, and how deep it runs. We will then explore how culture can in fact consciously and subconsciously impact the way we see the world and how we act within it. With insights from various experts, we will look into how industries are embracing different cultures and using culture as a tool to create a more connected world.



# ACADEMIC TRAINS OF THOUGHTS ON CULTURE



For decades, professionals from different fields have been designing models, frameworks and tools to help us get a better grasp of what culture is, does and influences.

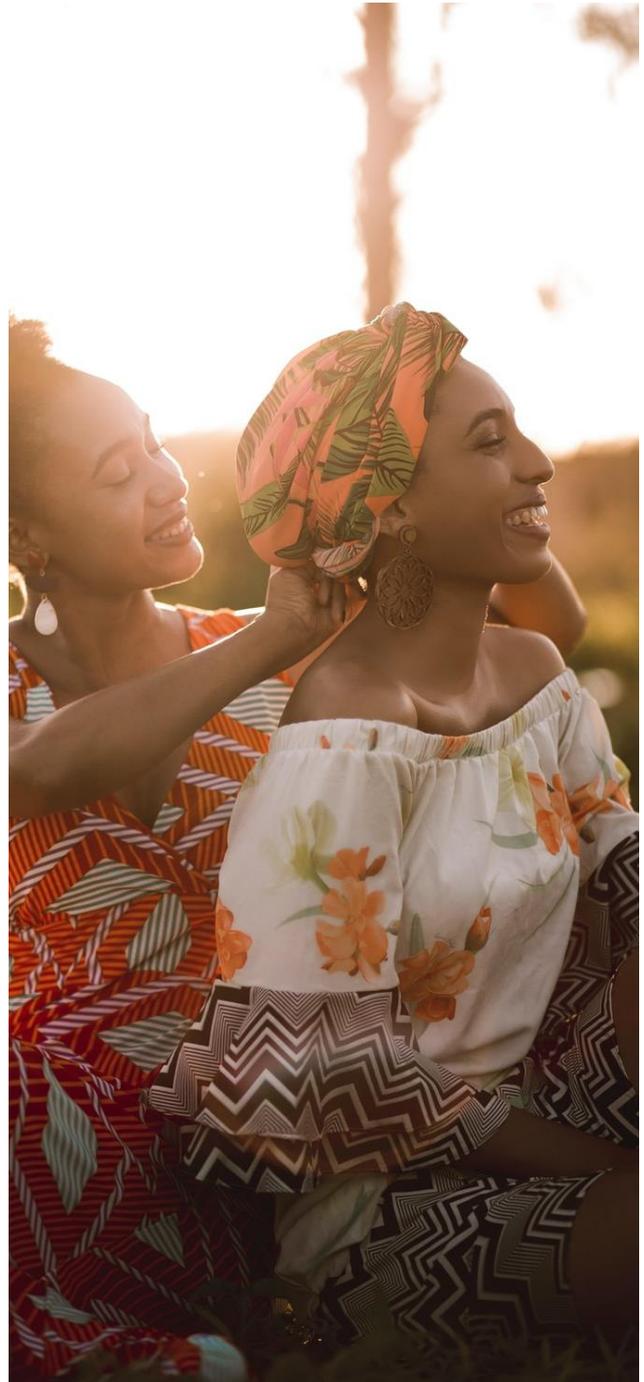
In sociology, Geert Hofstede developed 'Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory', one of the first quantifiable theories to explain differences in national culture. Working for IBM, Hofstede launched a large attitude survey across the company's worldwide subsidiaries. With over 117,000 individual responses, his survey identified four main differences in national culture to help map behaviours across each culture, namely:

- Power Distance Index
- Individualism vs. Collectivism
- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Masculinity vs. Femininity

Over time, another two dimensions were added:

- Long-Term Orientation
- Indulgence vs. Restraint

By combining the scores of all individuals from each nation on each dimension, Hofstede was able to paint a general picture of that particular culture. With these results, he was then able to create an international comparison between national cultures. Hofstede's model can be used in both a business and a personal context to evaluate approaches, decisions and actions based on the results of how people in different societies generally might think and react to diverse situations.



# ACADEMIC TRAINS OF THOUGHTS ON CULTURE



A few years later, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner developed a framework for cross-cultural communication, in the context of general business and management. Their 'Model of National Culture Differences' has seven different dimensions; five of which span the ways in which human beings deal with each other, one focuses on our relationship with time, and one looks at how we interact with the environment we are in.

The realms explored are:

- Universalism vs. Particularism
- Individualism vs. Communitarianism
- Neutral vs. Emotional
- Specific vs. Diffuse
- Achievement vs. Ascription
- Sequential vs. Synchronic
- Internal vs. External control

<b>Universalism (vs. Particularism)</b>	What is more important, rules or relationships?
<b>Individualism (vs. Collectivism)</b>	Do we function in group or as individuals?
<b>Neutral (vs. Emotional)</b>	Do we display our emotions?
<b>Specific (vs. Diffuse)</b>	How separate do we keep our private and working lives?
<b>Achievement (vs. Ascription)</b>	Do we have to prove ourselves to receive status, or is it given to us?
<b>Sequential (vs. Synchronic)</b>	Do we do things at a time, or several things at once?
<b>Internal Control (vs. External)</b>	Do we control our environment, or are we controlled by it?

# ACADEMIC TRAINS OF THOUGHTS ON CULTURE



What we can learn from Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner are that people from different national cultures aren't just randomly different from each other. They tend to differ in specific and sometimes even predictable ways. Each national culture has its own general way of thinking, its own general values and beliefs, and has different preferences placed on a variety of different factors.

While we are able to create a general picture for national culture, it is vital to also consider culture in a wider sense, to understand that each individual may also have many cultures and sub-cultures that shape their personal story and therefore their identity. Take for example this profile: *"Aged 19, non-binary, demisexual-bisexual, Jewish raised in America"*.

Studies on intersectionality are delving into how identities can be formed of many different characteristics (e.g. race, class, gender, etc.), and how this multi-faceted identity means that you can belong to many different sub-groups of culture at the same time. Here, we encourage you to think beyond national culture, and consider how a variety of different factors can shape unique sets of experiences for each individual.



# BEHAVIOUR IS JUST THE TIP OF THE CULTURE ICEBERG

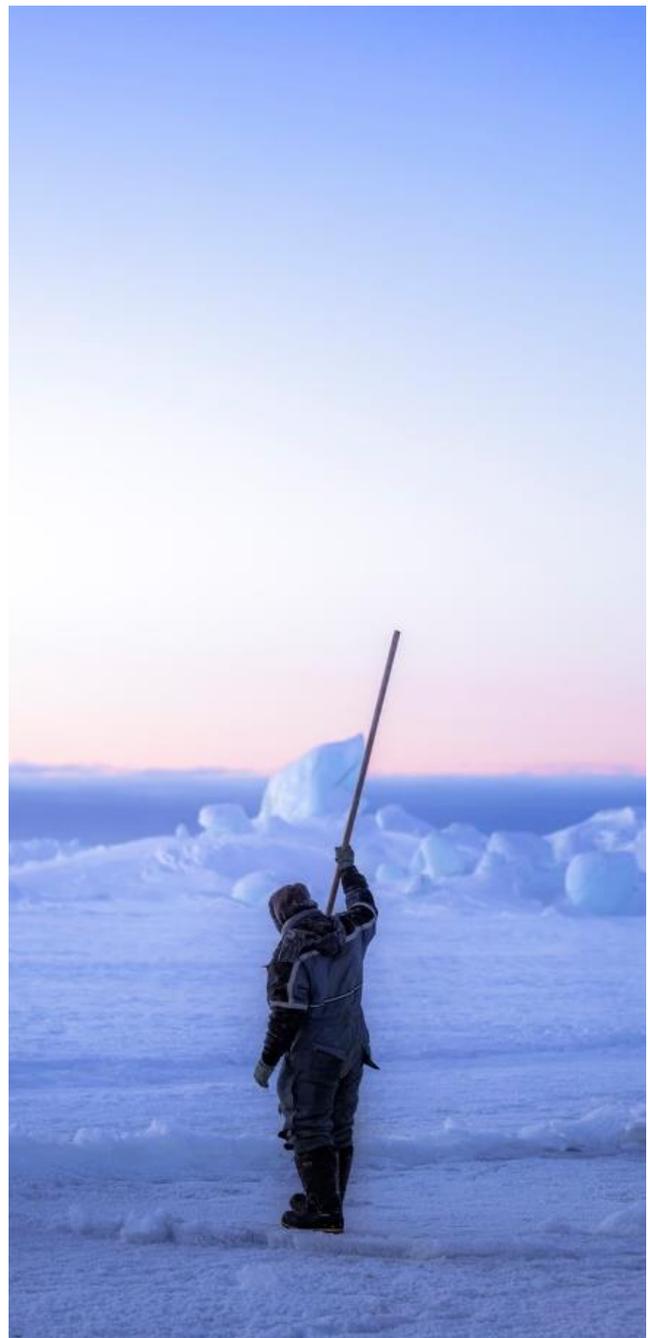


When we think of culture, it is easy to imagine the visual representations of culture that we see in everyday life. Yet culture and identity are much more profound. To explain this, we tend to think of identity like an iceberg; depending on your perspective, this could be personal identity, brand identity, or perhaps the identity of your organisation.

The visible part of the iceberg represents external behaviour, out in the open for everyone to see. Yet the large bulk of the iceberg, the foundation below the surface, represents culture. If we take this metaphor, we can interpret culture as the bedrock on which our behaviours are formed, yet our behaviour is only a small part of our culture. Culture is therefore much more profound than simply what is portrayed on the surface.

At an individual level, you may exhibit certain behaviours externally, but beneath the surface there is a much larger picture, made up of your views, opinions, biases or perceptions of the past, present and future. These have all been shaped by cultural factors.

Therefore, whilst there are obvious elements of culture, the things that we present in our external behaviour and those that we even rejoice and celebrate, there is also a huge part of culture that we keep private. Things that are so hidden, that we aren't even conscious of them. Culture can therefore have a great subconscious impact on our perceptions of the world, as well as our experiences and behaviours within it.





# CASE STUDY: CULTURE AND HEALTHCARE



**Jan Liska, Global Patient Strategy Lead of the Virtual Healthcare team at Sanofi,** tells us about the critical role that behaviour and culture play, when it comes to health outcomes and the management of chronic conditions. The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author.

*More than ever before, the life sciences industry's attention has been directed towards understanding the person beyond the patient, to uncover the drivers of sustainable self-care. Longer life expectancies, ageing populations, and the increasing prevalence of chronic conditions will vastly increase the number of people living with multiple conditions, placing strain not only on the patients themselves, but also on the governments and businesses investing in their care. Pharmaceutical companies and healthcare providers have evolved from disease and medication-centred approaches towards a human-centred focus on patients as real people with real lives. Healthcare providers use various methods to ensure patient adherence to medication and care intervention. For instance, the ABC taxonomy "awareness, initiation and persistence" helps structure the patients' chronic care adoption process. Scientifically validated patient behaviour measurement tools such as PAM – Patient Activation Measure – have become a new standard for design and implementation of outcome-based chronic patient care interventions. Individual health aspirations, religious beliefs and care habits have been addressed, yet culture has not always been included as a systematic design component of personalised care approaches. From the perspective of social determinants of health, culture plays a fundamental role in designing effective chronic care management models, especially in the cardiometabolic field. Up to 80% of cardiovascular health outcomes are driven by the individual's behaviour and a vast majority of health outcomes are driven by factors located outside the medical setting.*



*Critical societal and behavioural determinants such as nutrition habits, compliance with health guidelines or persistence with medication and care routines, are all deeply rooted in individual and community cultures, and have consequently become the next frontiers for improving health across large global populations. Culture appears to be a critical success factor for design and implementation of effective care interventions this decade (2020-2030). In an increasingly culturally diverse landscape of patient communities, determined by shared beliefs and practices, acculturation of care appears as a critical design component of chronic care solutions for conditions such as Diabetes. Recent studies have started to show how the shift towards a human-centred care delivery culture in hospitals is having a positive impact on the outcomes of patients' cardiovascular health.*

*By becoming a new standard for care design in healthcare systems that are facing exponential financial strains, cultural savviness holds the potential to act as a catalyst of positive impact on population healthcare interventions. It is both as a powerful trust builder within communities of care and an accelerator of healthcare intervention adoption and sustainable appropriation of new lifestyle routines.*

# CASE STUDY: CULTURE IN BEAUTY



**Miyabi Kumagai, Brand Culture & Heritage Manager at Shiseido** tells us how culture influences Japanese people's perception of ageing and thus her brand's foundations and mission.

*As a Japanese origin brand, we have aligned our brand with this traditional philosophy:*

***“Sonae areba urei nashi”  
(Anticipation will save you from troubles)***

*This Japanese way of thinking allows us to stay calm and be prepared for the eventual ageing process. Aligning our brand with this philosophy has given Shiseido a unique positioning, placing cultural beliefs at the heart of our brand.*

*It is impossible to prevent or stop ageing completely, but signs of ageing can be minimised through a daily routine, making our skin stronger and more resistant – like everyday training for your body. We believe in the power of homeostasis; we only give a little help to each individual with the potential of our products.*

*We also embrace the fact that “physical aging = mental maturing” and the influence this has on inner beauty. In the 1980-90's, Shiseido headed a series of international forums about how to age successfully. We invited many international specialists from various fields to exchange and discuss the notion of beauty as well as a holistic approach: how we should appreciate and endorse the influence of inner beauty on external beauty.*



*Looking back, this may have sounded quite unscientific or out of the box to a Western public, but we can all relate to how inner stress can affect health and beauty. Shiseido has been leading the art of successful and beautiful ageing, and providing Japanese know-how to the world for more than a century.*

*Culturally speaking, we may say that one of the Japanese secrets of beauty lies in daily prevention coupled with one's inner peace, allowing us to face the inevitable phenomenon in a confident and serene manner, and not relying on “day after remedies”.*

Not only does Shiseido place culture at the very heart of their brand, they are also embracing the essence of this philosophy and using it to spread a more positive image of the ageing process around the world.

# CASE STUDIES: CULTURE AND LANGUAGES



The idea that culture can shape our perception of the world around us is also seen in the way we communicate and how different languages approach the future. For the purpose of this paper, let's look specifically at how our use of language impacts our attitude towards the environment. In a paper entitled *'Talking in the present, caring for the future: Language and environment'*, researchers have identified a new source that may explain why certain countries are more environmentally aware than others: the use of the future tense in language.

In English and in other future-tensed languages, we express future actions with a distinct future tense:

*"Next week, I will/shall do it".*

In other languages, such as in Finnish and German, there is no distinct future tense:

*"Next week, I do it".*

The study concluded that speakers of languages without a distinct future tense care more about the environment than people who speak with the future tense. But why is this?

Language is a deep reflection of our culture. It plays a critical role in the way we perceive the world. In languages without a distinct future tense, rather than saying *"I will"* or *"I shall"*, the idea of tomorrow is expressed in the present tense *"I do"* and in doing so, speakers treat the future as if it were today. This makes the future seem closer, leading speakers of these languages to take more immediate actions.

To put this into perspective, according to estimates based on World Value Surveys, if a future-tensed language changed to a present-tensed language, there would be a 20% increase in the individual's tendency to help protect the environment, and a 24% increase in willingness to pay higher taxes to fund environmental policies. Similarly, countries with a present-tense language generally exhibit stricter climate change policies.

This study shows how language, an element that is so engrained in our culture, can subconsciously shape our perceptions of the world and time. In turn, this can also unknowingly shape our attitudes, behaviours and decisions to even the most critical of events.



# CULTURE IS ALSO A CONSCIOUS AND INTIMATE DETERMINANT OF WHO WE ARE



While there are many elements of our culture that subconsciously affect our life experiences and actions, there are also many other aspects of our culture that we can more easily recognise and relate to. In this section, we are going to look at the importance of accurate and sensitive representation of different cultures in the media, and how this can create a bond with the target culture if done right as well as the dangers of getting it wrong.

**Chris Arning, Founder and Creative Strategist at Creative Semiotics Ltd** shares his insight.

*‘Culture’ is an overused buzzword in colloquial discourse. People often take it as a synonym for the high arts or national identity. Semiotics, a technique of reading rooted in academia, but used as a strategic tool within the marketing industry, defines culture as a set of inter-locking codes that have meaning for people within a particular society.*

*Codes can be visual (like a certain aesthetic), narrative (like certain stories), linguistic (like slang), or behavioural (like modes of behaviour). These codes bind people together in shared cultural norms and can be used by brands as shortcuts to convey mass meanings. To give a couple of examples, British humour can be used as a broad-based code, or forms of ‘cuteness’ in Japan.*

*Mainstream codes often express ideologies (or underlying sets of beliefs and values about the world and how it should be) in the way ideas, people and places are represented. This notion of ‘representation’ is bound up with the idea of constructivism – that the truths of the world are not there to be discovered, but are effectively constructed by language and image.*

*Stuart Hall, the British pioneer of Cultural Studies, developed a model of cultural consumption involving both mainstream and marginal codes and argued that, depending on the audience, there are three modes of reading: receptive, negotiated and oppositional.*



*He states: “When the viewer takes the connoted meaning, from, say a television newscast or current affairs programme full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, we might say that the viewer is operating inside the dominant code.”*

*But this does not always happen. When consumers of such content have cultural minority identities within a society, their codes of reading and interpretation may become oppositional and they may even disengage from the content when they encounter stereotyping and tokenism. Anything that may be construed as subtle microaggressions in the way people who look and talk like them are represented can lead to feeling un or misrepresented.*

# CULTURE IS ALSO A CONSCIOUS AND INTIMATE DETERMINANT OF WHO WE ARE



So what happens when the representation of a culture in the media doesn't align with how members of this culture self-identify? Although this may not be intentional, it shows a clear misunderstanding and misrepresentation of different cultural groups.

This is of particular note for brands. If seeking to represent diverse cultures authentically, it is vital to conduct proper market research to understand the target culture, as well as sense-checking with the local community represented.

Take for example US-based multi-national food and drink brand Pepsi. In 2017 they launched an ad as part of their "Live for Now – Moments" campaign, starring 21-year-old supermodel Kendall Jenner. We first see the star being part of a photoshoot, then jumping in with Black Lives Matter protestors, and finally stepping up to the cops and handing them a can of Pepsi.

Despite the brand's intentions; to showcase Pepsi as a millennial-friendly brand with a socially unifying and relevant message, the ad was heavily criticised for its insensitivity to historic and current events, inappropriate choice of protagonist, suggested co-opting of protest movements for commercial gain, and various other reasons.

Not only did this cause a short-term PR nightmare, it resulted in the lowest perception levels the brand has seen in over eight years.

Although the brand appeared to have the best intentions at heart, this example demonstrates that representations of culture, and cultural events, cannot be rushed. Your own culture, and how others approach and present your culture, can be an incredibly sensitive matter.

So, how can we make culture more influential while avoiding the pitfalls of cultural bias?



# CULTURE IS THE FINAL PIECE OF THE GLOBAL STRATEGY JIGSAW



Increasing our understanding of different cultures and sub-cultures, provides an eye-opening insight into different people's conscious and sub-conscious perspectives, decisions, actions and experiences. We should never stop learning about cultures, they are as ever-evolving, multi-dimensional, and extraordinary as the world we live in today.

So, how can we begin to understand different cultures? Our simple model can be used across all industries to understand different target cultures:

- **Explore:** We deem that each individual culture can only truly be understood and represented by those living and breathing it, at any particular time. We therefore seek the expertise of in-market specialists around the world to unearth cultural differences and insights and convert them into opportunity.
- **Enhance:** With cultural insights uncovered by in-market specialists, we consolidate our findings and work with brands to create the most appropriate content. Whether in conception, execution or post-rollout stages, we use these cultural insights to inform and enhance each campaign, making it as engaging as possible for the local target audience.
- **Engage:** Our role is to allow all local stakeholders to have a say in the process whether they are internal or external to the organisation. An inclusive and collaborative framework with open communication channels is the only way to truly benefit from what cultures have to offer.





## Conclusion

### DIVERSITY CREATES OPPORTUNITY

Despite the rapid globalisation of the last decade, and particularly the last year, we are reminded daily that we all see the world very much through our own cultural prism and make decisions based on this perspective, whether consciously or subconsciously. It has now become critical to put culture and human interactions, back at the centre of the conversation.

While AI and digitisation may represent a large proportion of our future, we should also not take our finger off the pulse of culture. Culture remains a profoundly human identity component and determinant, and as such, a strong and heartfelt differentiator for products, services, brands and organisations. And it is only with culturally-sensitive human intelligence that you'll be able to make sense of the "why" and go beyond the tip of the iceberg.



CREATIVE CULTURE

195–197 Victoria Street

London SW1E 5NE, UK

E [info@creativecultureint.com](mailto:info@creativecultureint.com)

W [creativecultureint.com](http://creativecultureint.com)

WOMEN  
OWNED

Atlani, C., Beal, A., Bosworth, H., Liska, J., Ngouyombo, B., Zullig, L., (03/2018). The importance of cholesterol medication adherence: the need for behavioral change intervention programs. *Patient Preference and Adherence Journal*. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29563777/> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Beal, A., Liska, J., (05/2017). One Patient Is Not One Condition: Delivering Patient-Centered Care to Those With Multiple Chronic Conditions. *Therapeutic Innovation & Regulatory Science*. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30227056/> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Boehmer, K., Bradley, E., Cherlin, E., Curry, L., Linnander, E., McNatt, Z., (07/2020). Changing hospital organisational culture for improved patient outcomes: developing and implementing the leadership saves lives intervention. *BMJ Quality & Safety*. Available at: <https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/30/6/475.info> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (03/2021). About Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Choi, C., Sonin, J. (08/2017). Determinants of Health. *Go Invo*. Available at: <https://www.goinvo.com/vision/determinants-of-health/> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

De Geest, S., Hughes, DA., Vrijens, B., (05/2012). A new taxonomy for describing and defining adherence to medications. *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22486599/> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Enrique Caballero, A., (08/2018). The “A to Z” of Managing Type 2 Diabetes in Culturally Diverse Populations. *Front Endocrinol*. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30233490/> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Hall, S., (11/1973). Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. *Council of Europe Colloquy*. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/81670115.pdf> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A., Willis, P., (11/1980). *Culture, Media, Languages*. Routledge. Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/Culture-Media-Language-Working-Papers-in-Cultural-Studies-1972-79/Hall-Hobson-Lowe-Willis/p/book/9780415079068> [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Hibbard, J., Gilbert, H. (05/2014). Supporting people to manage their health: An introduction to patient activation. London: The Kings Fund. Available at: [https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field\\_publication\\_file/supporting-people-manage-health-patient-activation-may14.pdf](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/supporting-people-manage-health-patient-activation-may14.pdf) [Accessed 21/05/2021].

Mavisakalyan, A., Tarverdi, Y., Weber, C., (12/2018). Talking in the present, caring for the future: Language and environment. *Journal of Comparative Economics*. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147596718300039> [Accessed 21/05/2021].



**CREATIVE  
CULTURE**

Creative Culture is a cross-cultural consultancy. We draw upon the expertise of over 2,800 in-market specialists in over 120 countries to unearth cultural differences and insights, and turn them into opportunity. We understand and apply cultural differences, drive relevance, optimise delivery and enhance local engagement with your customers and within your organisation.

Find out more about  
Creative Culture

[www.creativecultureint.com](http://www.creativecultureint.com)  
[info@creativecultureint.com](mailto:info@creativecultureint.com)

**WOMEN  
OWNED™**

