

Perceptions on trade of cultural goods in Mexico, United States And Ukraine

Abstract

This research paper seeks to answer the question of what are the perceptions of trade in cultural property in the USA, Mexico and Ukraine? For this, this paper analyzes the importance of the trade of cultural goods, which cultural goods are the most important for each country, which countries they receive the majority of cultural goods from, and the perception that some nationals of these kind of goods have. This research uses the qualitative method, so I am going to aim describing contextual real-world knowledge about the behavior, social structures and shared beliefs of a specific group of people, in this case about three different cultures: USA, Mexico and Ukraine. This method will be based on interviews, participant observation and existing data, mainly based on Hofstede dimensions. This paper has found out USA perceptions as open to the export of cultural goods, but a little closed to imports in this kind of goods due to they prefer to support local goods; Mexico perceptions show an open thinking about imports and exports of cultural goods, while they maintain their cultural traditions; and finally, Ukraine perceptions show a good reaction for trade on cultural goods, but they still feel a kind of threat for their own culture.

Keywords: cultural goods, international trade, Hofstede dimensions, perceptions, cultural patterns, cultural behavior

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Theoretical framework

Culture is a web, and the “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun”.¹ To understand the theory of culture, the concept of thick description should be review, that is the base of the theory. According to Geertz¹ thick description is a trying to build a reading of transient examples of shaped behavior what means an analysis by sorting out the structures of signification or established codes and determining their social ground and import.

Geertz mentions that “culture is composed of psychological structures by means of which individuals or groups of individuals guide their behavior”,¹ so culture can be seen as an established structure of meaning. I can point out that the theory of culture talks about some symbols, codes or patterns which guides and shapes the behavior of a group of people. In this point it is important to know that if we want to analyze different cultures, we should do a thick description, and we need, following to Geertz, “not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them”¹ what means identify patterns within a culture. Overall, a cultural analysis should create a symbolic system of meanings and never generalize by its own, but generalize within this system.

A way to analyze culture is following the dimensionalization of cultures created by Hofstede² It is important to mention that this author takes culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”² which enter into the definition of culture by Geertz. This dimension of national culture that Hofstede has built can help us to identify and establishes scores to characterize a country and explain the behavior of each one and culture pattern in it.

Methodological framework

As we know every culture is a world, every culture is characterized by some specific symbols or codes that shows us why people behave in one or other way so, culture is a symbolic system where its elements

are isolated, and the connected in internal relations between them and later characterizing all the system on a general way.¹ Because of that, this paper is going to analyze the perceptions on cultural goods exports in Mexico, United States and Ukraine. For this research problem I am going to use qualitative methods which will help me to describe, interpret, contextualize, and gain in-depth insight into culture topic.

As this is a qualitative method, the main objective is analyzing an ethnographic case study, Geertz mentions that ethnography is a thick description and he says “it is interpretative; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse”,¹ so I am going to aim describing contextual real-world knowledge about the behavior, social structures and shared beliefs of a specific group of people, in this case about three different cultures from the countries mentioned above.

This method will be based on interviews, participant observation and existing data. For first one, I will interview some people of each country making them some questions about their perception on cultural good trade, these people are select from our shared session at Intercultural management class with foreign classmates. Second one, I will look for some videos or documentaries online which can show me each community’s behavior in this aspect. And finally, I will review and look for academic articles, case studies, or text on data bases such as: Jstor, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, and so on. Especially I am going to take as base the Hofstede dimensions of culture to classify each culture: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, Indulgence versus Restraint.² This will be my starting point to identify codes and symbols from each culture.

With this method the analysis will have a content, narrative and discursive analysis which allows coding, categorizing themes, looking structures and interpreting their meaning, and looking at communications and meaning in relation to their social context, so I can identify patterns, understand participant’s perceptions and categorize key points.

Introduction

Culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”² since this for knowing which are the perspectives on cultural good, specifically talking of exports on them, in Mexico, United States and Ukraine takes relevance due to each culture create different symbols, codes or patterns that guides or shapes the behavior of that specific group of people, so every culture does not have the same perception as well.

This is related with culture diversity, still in a globalized world, and even when borders seem fuzzy, the term of culture diversity takes importance because:

- a. ‘no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of human possibilities’
- b. cultural diversity provides human beings with ‘mini-Archimedean standpoints that enable them to view their own [culture] from the outside, tease out its strengths and weaknesses, and deepen their self-consciousness’
- c. ‘The diversity of cultures also alerts us to that within our own’
- d. it ‘creates a climate in which different cultures can engage in a mutually beneficial dialogue’.³

In this way to know, to analyze and to identify patterns and differences between cultures can provide us a complete landscape of our world. It can help us to understand social structures, interpret shared behaviors and categorize symbolic systems and meanings.

Now, it is important to highlight that in this globalized world and taking into account the cultural diversity in the globe, a special trade is growing since 1980. This is the trade in cultural goods. To begin, it is necessary to identify basic concepts such as: cultural goods, cultural industries and cultural exports. The first concept Klamer⁴ defines it as the representation of cultural values and these can include tangible things like a painting, for example, or intangible things like a ritual, music, a tradition, or even the concept of a flag. The value of this type of good goes beyond the economic or social value they possess. The author sets an example “cows in the experience of India, an aboriginal painting in the aboriginal context, or an icon for a Roman Catholic”.⁴ This is how cultural property operates by defining, reinforcing and Representing a culture. On the other hand, UNESCO defines cultural property as “property, whatever its origin and owner, that the national authorities, for religious or profane reasons, specifically designate as important for archeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science”.⁵ At this point, it is worth highlighting the definition that Ortega⁶ has in his work on cultural property which indicates that these types of goods are symbolic forms that are executed in a ‘cultural production field’ and that you include several factors such as the legitimizing institutions, the artists, the mass media that are considered the main producers and diffusers of symbolic goods in contemporary culture.

Secondly, cultural industries are defined by O’Connor as “those activities that mainly deal with symbolic goods, goods whose primary economic value derives from their cultural value”.⁷ In this article, the author makes a division in the cultural industry that is: the classical cultural industry, which refers to the media, films, publications, films, architecture design and new media; and traditional arts, which focus on crafts, theater, literature, museums and galleries. The author emphasizes that there could be a division here between trade and art, respectively. However, both deal with symbolic value that, whether through the market or the bureaucracy, can represent profits and

employment as a result of the cultural consumption of a population.⁷ In addition to this definition, the field of cultural industries can be further expanded today, for example Quartesan et al.⁸ identified that this sector offers services in the fields of entertainment, education and information and manufactured products that function as distinctive forms of self-affirmation and social manifestation such as fashion and jewelry.

Several decades ago the exchange of goods and services, and the liberation of financial and economic markets between countries has been the basis for international trade. However, traditional international trade theories focus on goods and services in general, leaving aside the importance and characteristics of cultural goods. Beginning in 1980, cultural property begins to be taken into account since “between 1980 and 1998 the commercial exchanges of books, magazines, music, visual arts, film and photography, radio and television equipment, games and sports articles have been multiplied practically by 4, going from 95,345 million dollars to 387,927 million”.⁸ This data demonstrates the relevance that cultural goods have acquired in international markets. In the 90s, 4 countries concentrated around 55% of cultural exports, these were Japan, the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom and, in parallel, 47% of imports were concentrated in Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and France. However, in the late 1990s, new actors entered the field such as Mexico in 1998 as the third largest exporting country⁸ or South Korea in the early 2000s especially with television series.

Nevertheless, in the last two decades the regions that have had a greater flow of cultural goods are North America, Europe and Asia. As UNESCO⁵ mentions in 2004, the whole of North America and Europe dominated the export of all cultural goods by 69% while in 2013 the percentage dropped to 49%. Meanwhile, Latin American countries only have 1.2% export of cultural goods.

USA perceptions

First of all, it is important to classify the country into the Hofstede dimension, this could show some patterns of the culture which help us to analyze the perceptions later. As we can see in the following figure USA is characterized, specially, for the high level of individualism and low level of long term orientation.

First category related with power distance evidences that all people in the society are not equal, so “power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. It has to do with the fact that a society’s inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders”.⁹ This low level of power distance for USA means that, for this culture, hierarchy is inequality of roles and established for convenience, and subordinates expect to be consulted.

Secondly, and one of the most important dimensions for this analysis, Individualism in USA is related to the behavior of people when people are only supposed to look after themselves and their direct family, and where task prevail over relationships. Hofstede says that: The fairly low score on Power Distance (40) in combination with one of the most Individualist (91) cultures in the world reflects the American premise of “liberty and justice for all”. This is evidenced by an explicit emphasis on equal rights in all aspects of American society and government. At the same time, communication is informal, direct and participative to a degree. The society is loosely-knit in which the expectation is that people look after themselves and their immediate families only and should not rely (too much) on authorities

for support. It is often difficult to develop deep friendships. In the business world, employees are expected to be self-reliant and display initiative. Also, within the exchange-based world of work we see that hiring, promotion and decisions are based on merit or evidence of what one has done or can do (Figure 1).⁹

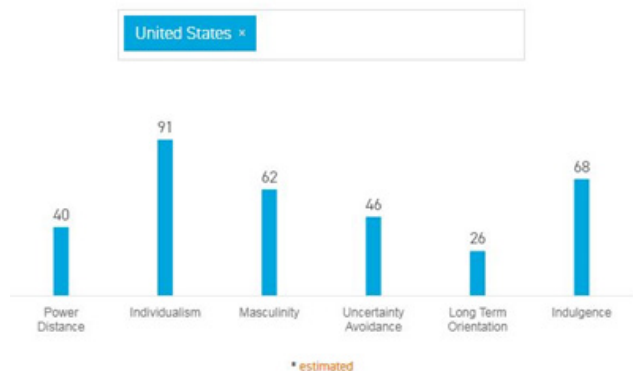


Figure 1 Hofstede dimension in USA.

Next dimension, Masculinity, shows a very strong pattern in USA culture and it indicates that society is competitive, and look for achievements and success and this latest is defined by ‘winner’ this reflects that “Americans will tend to display and talk freely about their ‘successes’ and achievements in life. Being successful per se is not the great motivator in American society, but being able to show one’s success”.¹⁰ Now uncertainty avoidance evidences that people from USA have a high level of acceptance of new ideas, and a willingness to try something new or different, they feel comfortable with ambiguity, chaos or changes.

Moreover, the low score in long term orientations means that the USA culture prefer to maintain traditions and traditional norms while looking at the social change with suspicion. This could be traduced as “many Americans have very strong ideas about what is “good” and “evil”. This may concern issues such as abortion, use of drugs, euthanasia, weapons or the size and rights of the government versus the States and versus citizens”.¹⁰ And the last dimension, Indulgence, shows that USA culture has a high control over its urges, it evidence the proposition that ‘what happens to me is not my own doing’, and people try to control their desires or impulses.

Identified some patterns of USA culture we can talk about cultural goods trade. Nowadays USA exports on cultural goods has decreased, and the first exporter of these kind of goods is China. However, as we see above, United States has had a high level of cultural goods trade since a long time ago. Moreover, we can see that there is a pattern in the world view about foreign goods, and the importance of the origin country of those goods, this means that ‘a product’s country-of-origin frequently influences its acceptability’, since “consumer perceptions of the image and quality associated with imports may actually be stereotyped based on the goods’ country-of origin”.¹¹ In this case for many year there is a consumer preference for ‘American entertainment’ and here there are included cultural good such as music, movies, television programs, and so on. This evidences that cultural goods from USA have a high acceptance in the worldwide trade of cultural goods.

Now, how people from USA perceives the trade of cultural goods? According with some questions made to a group of students from the East Carolina University in United Sates most important goods into United Sates are movies, television programs and music. They

receive more cultural goods from China, and they consume from it more goods of music and books. In the following figure is shown the cultural exports of USA, as proxied by the production of globally famous historical characters. This supports the fact that USA exports more cultural goods related with Arts, mainly in fields as movies, TV programs and music.

Besides, most of them think that cultural goods doesn’t evidence cultural values from each country. About the half of participants consume cultural goods from countries with more cultural proximity from them, and all of them don’t consume more cultural goods from countries with their same language. Most of the participant’s perception about imports in cultural goods think that they should buy more locally to help support their own economy, and 1/3 of people think that trade on cultural goods can be a threat for their culture. I would say that people from USA look at the export of cultural goods as good, but they look at import of cultural goods in a less good level (Figure 2).

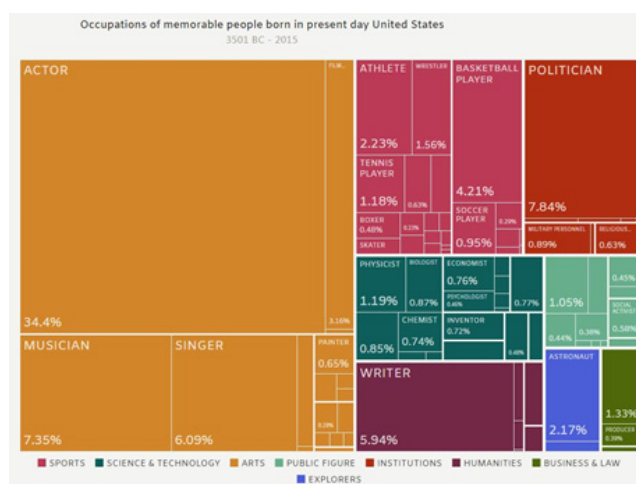


Figure 2 Cultural exports in USA. Resource: Pantheon.

This results evidences some common patterns that the USA culture has about trade in cultural goods. As we can see, and according to latest statistics, China is the biggest exporter of cultural goods nowadays, all of participants received cultural goods from this country. Secondly, cultural proximity and the same language is not the most important variables to consume cultural goods in USA. Thirdly, the perception of most people in USA about imports in cultural goods is not very good, they prefer to consume and to help support their own goods and their own economy. This can be related with the dimension of Hofstede, that masculinity dimension that we see in individual we can transfer to a bigger stage, people in USA looking after their own economy and their own development than see other countries. It is a competitive society where, of course, they are looking for their own success and their achievements, and also the long term orientation can be evident here due to, although when they see very good the export of their own cultural goods to the world, they don’t see very good the import of cultural goods from other countries because it can mean a social change or even a threat for their country.

Mexican perceptions

Following Hofstede dimensions Mexican culture has a high level in Indulgence a low level of long Term Orientation. Firstly, Indulgence is defined as “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised”,¹⁰ so weak control is called indulgence, and a strong control is called restraint (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Hofstede dimension in Mexico. Resource: Hofstede insights.

In this dimension Mexico has a score of 97, this means Mexicans generally “exhibit a willingness to realize their impulses and desires with regard to enjoying life and having fun. They possess a positive attitude and have a tendency towards optimism. In addition, they place a higher degree of importance on leisure time, act as they please and spend money as they wish”.¹⁰

Secondly, long term orientation describes “how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with challenges of the present and future”,¹⁰ so countries with a low score prefer to maintain traditions and norms, and viewing social change with suspicion. In the other hand, countries with a high score encourages efforts in modern education to prepare for the future. With a score of 24, Mexican culture has a great respect for its traditions, and they are normative in their thinking.

The second dimension with a high score is Uncertainty avoidance, here Mexico has a score of 82, this means the country has rigid codes, beliefs, and behavior, and they are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas, so there is an emotional need for rules.¹⁰ Next dimension is Power distance, with 82 score Mexican culture is a hierarchy society, everyone has a place and which needs no further justification, and everyone accept it. This can reflect inequalities, and subordinates always expect to be told what to do.¹⁰

Next dimension is Masculinity with 69 score, this fix Mexican culture as a competitive one, it is driven by achievement and success, Mexicans ‘live in order to work’, and conflicts are resolved by fighting them out.¹⁰ And, finally, Individualism has a low score with 30, what means it is a collectivistic society, they have a characteristic of extended family, or extended relationships. They create strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for member of their group.¹⁰

Now, how are the perceptions of Mexican people about trade on cultural goods? According to some questions made to a group of students from Universidad Regiomontana (U-erre) in Mexico the most important goods into Mexico are works of art, music, and movies; they receive more cultural goods from United States, and they consume from it more goods of music, movies and clothing. In the following figure is showed the cultural exports of Mexico, as proxied by the production of globally famous historical characters. This supports the fact that Mexico exports more cultural goods related with Art, the fields of movies and TV programs, music and painting or works of art (Figure 4).

Moreover, they think that cultural goods evidence cultural values from each culture. All of the participants consume more cultural goods with countries with more proximity and with the same language from their country; most of the participants mention that some cultural

goods that have they received from other country have influenced their life in some way, for example one of them tend to copy the accents and says from other countries in Latin America, and other one has influence from other countries due to his work. They have a good perception on cultural goods, by saying that cultural exchange is important, and they value some cultural goods from other countries, and they have made it part of their everyday life. Finally, less of the half of the participants think exchange in cultural goods can be a threat for their culture.

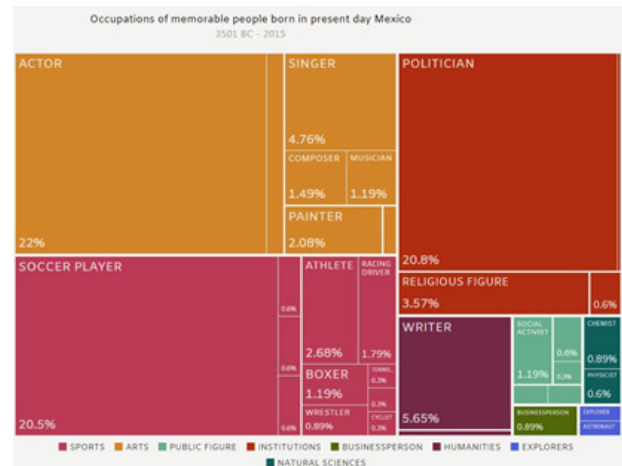


Figure 4 Cultural exports in Mexico. Resource: Pantheon.

This results evidences some common patterns of the Mexican culture has about trade in cultural goods. As we can see, Mexicans have a tend toward consume cultural goods from countries with proximity from them, due to this the country where they consume more cultural goods from is United States, this country has a big influence in trade in cultural goods in Mexico, and as I mentioned above, this country is currently the second country with bigger export in cultural goods in the world. I would say this country has a big influence in America and the cultural goods is a big part of it. Secondly, besides of proximity, Mexicans receive cultural goods with the same language, this can be a consequence of the countries speaking Spanish, a lot of countries in central and south America, and Spain speak Spanish, this made much easier receive and understand the cultural goods we are consume. Thirdly, the perception of all of Mexicans about trade in cultural goods is good, they have even adapted some styles and manners from other countries, and they mostly don’t think it can be a threat for their own culture.

This aspects can evidence some pattern in Hofstede dimension, for example the fact that one of the most important cultural goods within Mexican culture are works of art shows the importance of traditions in Mexico. The works of art represent, most of the time, Mexican culture traditions, even if they receive cultural influence from other countries, its traditions are maintained in the country, and they have a big level of respect for them.

Ukrainian perceptions

According Hofstede dimension Ukrainian culture has a high level of uncertainty avoidance and low level of Indulgence. Firstly, Uncertainty avoidance in Ukrainian culture means Ukrainians have a great feeling of threatening by ambiguous situations. Detailed planning and briefing is very common. Also, “as long as Ukrainians interact with people considered to be strangers they appear very formal and distant. At the same time formality is used as a sign of respect”.¹⁰ This can be showed as a strict culture with defined rules and plans.

The lowest score in the dimensions is Indulgence, this establishes Ukrainian culture as restrained, so it has a tendency to cynicism and pessimism. Also, this kind of culture do not put much emphasis in leisure time and they control desires, and they are restricted by social norms. The behavior of these two dimensions show a very strong relation that evidence some patterns of the culture. I could identify Ukrainian culture as a society with a high sense of planning, rules, social norms, and control (Figure 5).

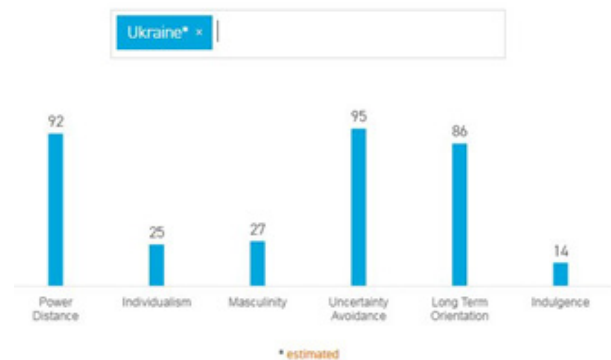


Figure 5 Hofstede dimension in Ukraine. Resource: Hofstede insights.

Next dimension with high score (92) is Power distance, this establishes the country as a centralized one, with an important sense of status symbols, which evidences a gap between the less and most powerful people, and behavior reflect status roles. Now, the long term orientation (86) indicates that Ukrainian culture is very pragmatic, where people believe that the truth depends on situation, context and time, so “they show an ability to adapt traditions easily to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results”.¹⁰

The following dimensions with low scores are masculinity and Individualism. First one, Masculinity (27) point out the dominant values are caring for others and quality of life, so this is the sign of success and standing out of the crowd is not admirable. On this way:

Ukrainians at workplace as well as when meeting a stranger rather understate their personal achievements, contributions or capacities. They talk modestly about themselves and scientists, researchers or doctors are most often expected to live on a very modest standard of living. Dominant behavior might be accepted when it comes from the boss, but is not appreciated among peers.¹⁰

Finally, in Individualism (25) its low score defines Ukraine as a collectivism culture where people belong to groups that take care of them in exchange of loyalty, so family, friends and usually neighbors are very important to get along with everyday life’s challenges. Thus “relationships are crucial in obtaining information, getting introduced or successful negotiations. They need to be personal, authentic and trustful before one can focus on tasks and build on a careful to the recipient, rather implicit communication style”.¹⁰

Now, how people from Ukraine perceives the trade of cultural goods? According with some questions made to a group of students from the East Central University in Ukraine, most important goods into Ukraine are antiques, and sport merchandising. They receive more cultural goods from European Union, and they consume from it more goods of fashion, music and books. In the following figure is showed the cultural exports of Ukraine, as proxied by the production of globally famous historical characters. This has a difference related with other two countries analyzed in this paper. While USA

and Mexico export art, mainly movies and music, Ukraine export sports through its athletes, and institutions as a good model through politician, military personnel or religious figures.¹²

Most of participants have a neutral though about if cultural goods evidences cultural values, they think it is in the middle, cultural goods can represent a couple of values, but not absolutely does it. They think they consume cultural goods from countries with more proximity of them, they think cultural goods can influence their life in some way, and they think cultural exchange is important. However they think trade on cultural goods can threat their own culture (Figure 6).

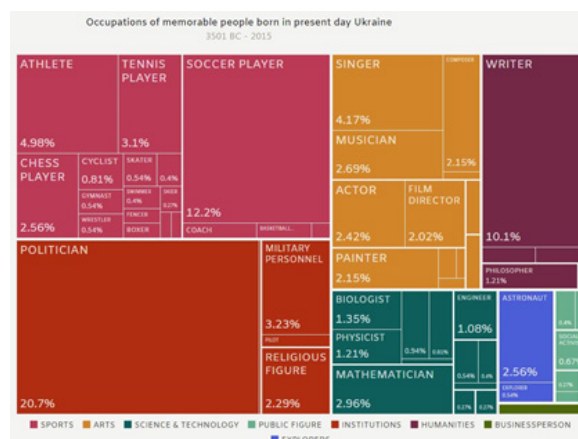


Figure 6 Cultural exports in Ukraine. Resource: Pantheon.

This evidences some cultural patterns that Ukrainians have about trade on cultural goods. Firstly, they consume more cultural goods from countries with more proximity from them, and this is supported by the fact that they consume more cultural goods from EU, those countries have a closer proximity geographically than others. Secondly, they do not consume cultural goods from countries with their same language, this can attempt to the diversity of languages in EU and the fact that only they speak Ukrainian, or only Russia and they speak Russian. Thirdly, although when they see good and important the exchange of cultural goods, they think it can be a threat for their own culture.

This results can be related with Hofstede dimension due to they have a high level of uncertainty avoidance since they feel very much threatened by ambiguous situations, and they are a little close to new ideas or behavior. Also, the fact of being a restrained culture they are limit by social norms can define the perception of trade on cultural goods, for example if they achieve to adapt some traditions easily to changed conditions, they can accept cultural goods from some selected countries that they have decided before and in a collective way.

Cultural differences and its influences in perception in trade on cultural goods

Figure 7 shows a comparison between Hofstede dimension between USA, Mexico, and Ukraine. According with this figure and information from Hofstede web page, I have made a Table 1 to compare these three culture to make it easier for understanding.

As we can see these cultures has some similities and differences. However the most different culture is Ukraine, it is a feminine, pragmatic and restrained cultured, very different from other ones. Otherwise, Mexico and USA have more similities by beign normative and indulgence culture.

Table 1 Comparison between cultures of USA, Mexico and Ukraine

	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long term orientation	Indulgence
USA	Equality in all aspects	Individualist society	The winner takes all: Live to work	Acceptance for new ideas	Normative: strong ideas about what is “good” and “evil”	Indulgence: Work hard and play hard and weak control over their impulses
Mexico	Hierarchy with inequalities	Collectivist society	Competition: Live in order to work	Rigid belief and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas	Normative: Respect for traditions	Indulgence: realize their impulses and desires with regard to enjoying life and having fun. Optimism.
Ukraine	Centralized with status symbols	Collectivist society	Feminine. Values: caring for others and quality of life	Feel very much threatened by ambiguous situations	Pragmatic: ability to adapt traditions easily to changed conditions	Restrained: Tend to pessimism, not emphasis in leisure and restrained by social norms.

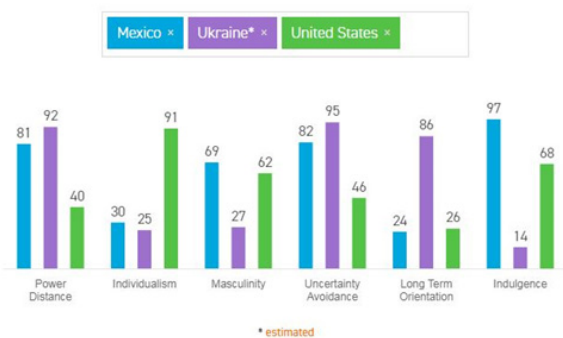


Figure 7 Hofstede dimension comparison between USA, Mexico and Ukraine. Resource: Hofstede insights.

These differences show us some patterns that can be translate to the field of perception in trade on cultural goods. It is necessary to point out that I am not doing a generalization in how every person in USA, Mexico or Ukraine perceive this kind of trade, but finding some patterns in Hofstede dimension which can be moved to this ground. Also, I should mention that even if two countries have a similar score in one dimension, the combination with the other ones can modify its behavior, and it is not necessary equal in the global result.

For example, still when USA has a low level of uncertainty avoidance what makes it have a high level of acceptance for new ideas, its level of individualism and masculinity makes it a special case, people feel they should support local industries rather than importations. This define USA perceptions in cultural goods as good for exportation but not too good in importation.

In other hand, still when Mexico has a high score in uncertainty avoidance being intolerant of new behavior and ideas, they accept and see good exchange in cultural goods, they can adapt some cultural ways from other countries, but they always maintain and respect their own traditions.

Finally, still if Ukraine has the higher score in uncertainty avoidance and they feel threatened by ambiguous situations, they see good trade on cultural goods, and they think it is important. However, they think it can be a threat for their own culture.

Conclusion

To analyze the perception in trade on cultural goods, what definitely depends on cultural behavior, codes and thoughts from each country, it is necessary to classify each country in Hofstede dimension and later move them into perceptions by recollecting people’s thoughts. This research has showed that Hofstede dimensions have relation with

what common people think. As I have mentioned before, I can identify USA perceptions as open to the export of cultural goods, but a little closed to imports in this kind of goods due to they prefer to support local goods; Mexico perceptions show an open thinking about imports and exports of cultural goods, they maintain their cultural traditions, but they see like good imports of these goods too; and finally, Ukraine perceptions show a good reaction for trade on cultural goods, but they still feel a kind of threat for their own culture.

This become in an important topic in international trade since cultural goods have taken significance in latest years, and due to the high-up of the origin country of those goods. This can influence its acceptability into other countries. How people perceive trade on cultural goods depends in the country of origin (and its image or stereotype) and their own cultural patterns.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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