



19th International Scientific Conference WoodEMA 2026
Bioeconomy Moves Forward: Perspectives on Wood Product Markets

September 30 – October 2, 2026
Zvolen, Slovakia



CULTURAL SPECIFICS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON COMMUNICATION POLICY IN THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

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Why does culture matter in furniture communication?

- Consumers interpret advertising through cultural values, norms and social expectations.
- Visual communication is especially sensitive to cultural differences.
- Relevant dimensions include family structure, lifestyle, symbolism, colours, living space and communication style.
- International furniture brands therefore face a tension: global consistency vs. local relevance.

How much should communication be standardized, and how much should it be localized?

International cases

Saudi Arabia,
China, Japan and
UAE.

Strategic implication

How to adapt
the visual story
while
protecting
brand identity.

Case 1: IKEA Saudi Arabia

A clear example of the tension between local adaptation and global brand values

- 2012: women were removed from several images in the Saudi Arabian catalogue.
- The same scenes in Swedish/English versions included women.
- IKEA apologized and stated that the modification conflicted with its group values.
- The case illustrates the difficulty of balancing local norms with a common brand identity.



Figure 1. Visual modification of promotional material: Comparison of the original Swedish/English IKEA catalogue layout (left) and the altered Saudi Arabian version excluding the female figure (right)

Source: IKEA catalogue (Saudi Arabia version), reported by BBC

Case 2: Different cultures, different homes

CHINA

- Multi-generational households
- Multifunctional, smaller-scale furniture
- Older relatives visible in communication

JAPAN

- Small-scale, minimalist interiors
- Single occupants / young adults
- Emphasis on compact living



Figure 2 IKEA presents the home as a shared space for several generations.

Source: https://www.ikea.cn/cn/zh/rooms/living-room/gallery/wo3-he2-wo3-de-duo1-dai4-ren2-gong4-tong2-sheng1-huo2-de-jia1-pub360c4ea1?utm_source=chatgpt.com



Figure 3 IKEA tiny apartment promotion in Japan

Source: https://www.ikea.cn/cn/zh/rooms/living-room/gallery/wo3-he2-wo3-de-duo1-dai4-ren2-gong4-tong2-sheng1-huo2-de-jia1-pub360c4ea1?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Case 3: When one culture is not enough

“IKEA Real Life Series” used globally recognized pop-culture living rooms as a shared visual language.

- The UAE has a highly heterogeneous population of immigrants and expatriates.
- A single localized cultural narrative would not address the whole audience.
- IKEA recreated living rooms from popular TV series using IKEA products.
- Pop culture functioned as a cross-cultural communication tool.



Figure 4: Universal appeal through pop-culture: Replicating a globally recognized television living space to target diverse expat demographics.

Source: IKEA & Publicis Spain (2019), via Ads of the World.

The strategic balance: standardization ↔ localization



Adapt the visual narrative to cultural patterns while maintaining a consistent brand identity.



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Thank you for your attention.

