

The Effects of Culture on Consumer Behaviours: Differences Among Ethnic Groups in Jamaica

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of culture on many aspects of consumer behaviour in an integrative framework among the three ethnic groups in Jamaica. Using Hofstede's (1980) the cultural framework, differences in their cultural orientation are hypothesized. Hofstede's four dimensions of culture include collectivism/individualism, masculinity/femininity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. For each cultural dimension, related consumer behaviours are identified and differences in those behaviours are hypothesized regarding the predicted differences in each related cultural dimension. The study revealed that cultural dimensions exert significant influences on consumer behaviours.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Brand loyalty.

Introduction

As firms decided to participate in the global marketplace that is composed of people from many different cultures, it has become very important for marketers to understand culture's influence on consumer behaviours. Many studies have found links between culture and consumer behaviours (McCracken 1986). Wallace (1965), argued that culture is a force that forms personality, which is a key determinant of consumer behaviours. Other cultural studies on the consumer, behaviours found differences in consumption patterns between people of various ethnic groups (Saegert, Hoover and Hilger 1985).

Additionally, researchers have found differences in many consumer behaviour aspects such as decision making (Doran 1994) and brand loyalty (Saegert al. 1985). Although past research has identified differences in various consumer behaviours across cultures, most of these studies dissected consumer behaviours by examining one to two specific aspects of consumer behaviours. These studies lack the cultural influence on consumer behaviours in an integrated framework. However, this study examines the effects of culture on many aspects of consumer behaviour in an integrated framework. Using Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, various consumer behaviours that could be influenced by culture are identified and mapped to Hofstede's dimensions. The influence of the cultural dimensions on the identified consumer behaviours are examined in a multiracial Caribbean Island.

Theoretical Foundations of Consumer Culture Theory

The idea of consumer culture has a broad, even all-embracing quality (Arnould and Thompson 2018). It implies that in a modern world, core identities are defined and oriented concerning consumption. Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 869) define consumer culture as "a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets." Consumer culture theorists have highlighted several defining, interconnected characteristics of consumer culture. First, consumer culture is about consumption. According to Slater (1997, p. 8), consumer culture is "a culture of consumption". People embracing consumer culture regard consumption as important and valuable in its own right (Ritzer 2007, pp. 163 – 69). They attempt to add meaning to their lives, to make collective sense of their environments, and to orient their own experiences and lives through consumption (Tomlinson 1999, p. 18).

Second consumer culture is not just about the consumption of tangible products, but about anything that can be consumed, including services, images, lifestyles, and symbols (Arnould and Thompson 2005). In the literature, these various consumption categories are commonly referred to as commodities. Third, these commodities are the market made, and their consumption is mediated through markets. Fourth, consumer culture is closely associated with the principles of modernity, choice, individual freedom, and market relations (Slater 1997, p.8). All these characteristics underline that consumer culture is of central importance to marketing.

Therefore, cultural differences still play a major role in consumer behaviour (Clark 1990; Steenkamp 1999; Takada and Jain 1991) in determining the values of people in different cultures and ultimately their behaviour (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Cultural differences have been linked to the differences in attitudes and persuasion (Aaker 2000; Chang and Chieng 2006), emotions (Wang 2006) behaviour and habits of consumers (Lee and Green 1991; Malhorta and McCort 2001; Zhang and Gelb 1996).

Culture

Hofstede (1980) defined culture as a broad collective pattern of cognition, results, and actions that have important effects for functioning societies, of groups within those societies and individual members of such groups. It has been argued that culture is a set of learned values and beliefs, attitudes, practices, and forms of behaviour that are shared by society. These forms of behaviours are passed on from generation to generation within that society, and that culture is one of the determinants of decision-making and buying behaviour.

On the other hand, Crandall and Schaller (2002) argued that culture is the total of socially transmitted behaviour patterns which are common across a particular group, which distinguishes that culture from other populations. These socially passed on patterns include beliefs, behaviour and enduring, artifacts that are produced because of those beliefs and behaviours. However, based on the literature reviewed, culture for this research study is defined as a “set of socially acquired behaviour patterns and meanings common to members of a particular society or social group, including the key elements of family structure, language, beliefs, and values Sojka & Tansuhaj, 1995.” Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2010) argued that culture is the most basic determinant of a person's wants and behaviour. They view culture as a composition of values, perceptions, wants, and behaviours that an individual learns continuously in a society.

Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is defined as a field of study that focuses on consumer activities including consumption analysis on why and how people use products, besides why and how they buy products. Consumer behaviour is influenced and motivated by factors such as culture, personality, life-stage, income, attitudes, motivators, feeling, knowledge, ethnicity, family, values, available resources, opinions, experiences, peer groups, and other groups.

Manrai and Manrai (1996) model of the effect of culture on consumer behaviour consider components and consequences of culture, classified into social, personal, and psychological categories. These were further classified as intermediary variables or processes that affect consumer behaviour domains that include product acquisition and consumption behaviour; the adoption and diffusion of innovations; either complaining or complementing behaviour; consumer response to advertising and marketing communication; responses to features on distribution and responses to aspects of pricing. Juna and Gupta (2001) developed the direct and the indirect impact of culture on consumer behaviour. They recognized that culture influencing consumer behaviour through its manifestations: values, heroes, rituals, and symbol.

On the other hand, Khaniwale (2015), views consumer behaviour as the study of individuals and the method they employ to choose, utilize, and set out products and services to fulfil their wants and the effect these methods have on the consumer and society as a whole. Solomon (2011) views consumer behaviour as the study of processes involved individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs or desires.

Jamaica: A Multiracial Society

Although many subcultural studies were done in the past, most are done in the American or European context. Few have examined ethnic effects in the Caribbean context. Jamaica provides a good starting point for subcultural studies on Caribbean customers as it is a multiracial society of African descent, Chinese, and East Indians.

The African descent

The Africans were first brought to Jamaica by the Spanish and later by the British in larger numbers to work as slaves on the plantations. The African slaves became the dominant cultural force as they suffered and resisted the harsh conditions of forced labour. After abolishing slavery, Chinese and East Indian migrants were transported to the island as indentured workers, bringing with their ideas from the Far East. Jamaican of African descent represent about 77% of the population, followed by the East Indians of 4% and the Chinese of 2%. The African/Jamaican has been taught from a young to place their loyalty to their family and kin. In the case of services, where there is interpersonal contact, African/Jamaican consumers would tend to stay loyal to the same provider.

The Chinese

The concept of the face or public reputations is a very important value in the Chinese culture in the context of interpersonal interaction and social exchange. Therefore, the Chinese tend to place high importance on the protection of the face. The maintenance of cordial guanxi have been highly valued and practiced in the Chinese community, particularly in the business community. The term guanxi refers to the special relationship, two persons have with

each other. It is a relationship combined with reciprocity and connections. Hence, loyalty is considered to be a virtue by the Chinese. Also, Chinese consumers tend to stay loyal to the same provider of goods and services. It has been argued that switching would render the loss of face to the firm, an unfavourable move that a Chinese customer would choose to avoid.

The East Indians

East Indians were among the first indentured labourers along with the Free-Africans to be brought to the island between 1845 and 1917 to work on the plantations after Emancipation in 1838. The central religious tenet of orthodox Hinduism was that men were not equal and have never been. The inequality of men was explained in terms of the merits and demerits accrued in previous incarnations. Religion, like ethnicity influences behaviours by the rules and taboos it inspires.

Cultural Difference and Its Influence on Consumer Behaviours

The key cultural tradition of the three ethnic groups, the differences in cultural values and associated consumer behaviours exhibited by the ethnic groups will be analysed using Hofstede's (1980) cultural framework.

Individualism/Collectivism

Family is important to all three ethnic groups. However, differing levels of collectivism could be detected among three ethnic groups in Jamaica. The Chinese see life as an integrated whole. According to Luma & Gupta (2001), 65.7% of Chinese respondents in his study listed loyalty to one's culture and way of life as an important value in their culture. This same value was listed by 50% of African descent respondents. Therefore, the Chinese believe that their religion holds them together as a community.

The East Indians maintain that family solidarity should be shared by all relatives and all members of the family should be integrated into the community. In Jamaica, social and religious functions relating to marriage, birth, and death are treated as important occasions among the East Indians and this practice ensures family and community solidarity among East Indians.

Individualism/collectivism pertains to the behaviour of people in groups, their relationships with others around them, and how they perceive themselves to others. It has been argued that individualism/collectivism is one of the fundamental cultural dimensions that influence the related consumer behaviours, therefore, people from cultures high in individualism would be less influenced by reference groups, less likely to engage in information sharing, less likely to be opinion leaders and are less ethnocentric. Hence, the following ethnic differences are hypothesized:

H1: African descent will exhibit higher levels of individualism, compared to the East Indians and the Chinese.

Individualism/collectivism pertains to the behaviour of people in groups, their relationships with others around them, and how they perceive themselves with others. Several consumer behaviours that could be related to the relationships between individuals and their interaction with the people around them are identified by reference group influence (Childers and Rao 1992; Webster and Faircloth III 1994, information sharing (Hirshman 1981; Webster 1992), and ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma 1987). It could be argued that people from cultures high in individualism would be less influenced by reference groups, less likely to engage in information sharing, and are less ethnocentric. Hence, the following ethnic differences are hypothesized:

H2a: African descent are less likely to be influenced by reference groups compared to the East Indians and the Chinese.

H2b: African descent are less likely to engage in information sharing compared to the East Indians and the Chinese.

H2c: The Chinese and East Indians are more likely to exhibit ethnocentric behaviours compared to African descent

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and how the unknown aspects of the future are dealt with. Extreme uncertainty causes anxiety and stress, and different people have different degrees of tolerance for such anxiety and stress.

Different levels of uncertainty avoidance tendency could influence consumer behaviours that examine the ways people react in situations of uncertainty. Those behaviours could be perceived as risk (Gentry 1988), brand loyalty (Kanwar and Pagiavlas 1992). These behaviours involve an element of risk, and therefore a culture that is high on uncertainty avoidance would exhibit consumption behaviours that may reduce this risk. Therefore, people from such a culture would be likely to experience higher levels of perceived risk, more brand loyal, less likely to seek innovative products, and more likely to engage in information search. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: The East Indians are likely to experience the highest levels of uncertainty avoidance, followed by African descent, then the Chinese.

The Chinese, with their fatalistic nature and their belief that everything is predestined and out of their control, may rank the lowest in terms of uncertainty avoidance. Studies have shown that the Chinese had the lowest levels of brand loyalty and perceived risk as compared to the East Indians and the African Descents. Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

H4a: The East Indians are likely to experience the highest levels of perceived risk in consumption, followed by African descent, then the Chinese.

H4b: The East Indians are most likely to remain brand loyal in their purchase of products and services, followed by African descent, then the Chinese.

Masculinity

It has been argued that sex-role differentiation is still rather prominent in the Jamaican culture. Traditionally, African descent men want their wives to be submissive to the husband and stay at home full-time to look after the children. This is not being changed much in modern Jamaica.

According to several studies, Christian men still hold conservative social-cultural attitudes regarding marriage. On the other hand, the East Indians are becoming increasingly modernized compared to the Chinese. Traditional Chinese women tended to stay at home to look after the household and the children. However, this has been changed in Jamaica, as statistics have shown. Many Chinese women today are economically independent and perfectly capable of economically support themselves. Again, both the Chinese and the East Indians would not be high on masculinity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5: African descent is likely to rate the highest on masculinity, followed by the Chinese, and then the East Indians. The cultural dimension of masculinity-femininity involves sex-role differentiation and the dominance of either male or female values. It can be concluded that decision making in the family differs across cultures and is dependent upon the extent to which the couple's values belong to the traditional patriarchal system where the husband dominates or the more modern view of joint decision-making. Thus, people from cultures higher in masculinity are more likely to engage in husband dominant decision making because they believe that men should be in charge of the household. Again, African descent is the most likely to engage in husband dominant decision making, followed by the Chinese, and then the East Indians.

Power Distance

The Chinese and East Indians, because of their fatalistic nature, willingly accept concepts of inequality, and they accept that being born unequal is part of each person's destiny in life and cannot be altered. The African descent, on the other hand, is not governed by any beliefs of this sort. Although all three ethnic groups share the values of respect for one's elders and filial piety, there is evidence that these traditional perceptions of inequality result in different degrees of power distance among the three ethnic groups. According to Sojka (1995), when presented with the statement: "Respect for authority is important in our society", 80% of African descent respondents agreed with the statement, followed by 75% of East Indian and 70% of the Chinese. Hence the following hypothesis is presented:

H6: African descent and East Indians will exhibit higher levels of power distance than the Chinese.

Methodology

Samples

The research data were collected utilizing a survey. A total of 350 questionnaires was distributed and 295 were returned, thus the response rate was 84%. The sample comprised of 118 of African descent (40%), 89 East Indians (30.2%), and 88 Chinese (29.8%). Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula was used to decide the sample size.

Measures

The cultural dimensions are measured using Hofstede's (1980) framework. Additionally, measures for consumer behaviours were adapted from past studies (Hirschman 1981, and Shimp and Sharma 1987). Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire, which measures multicultural attitudes were consulted in designing the questionnaire (Munroe & Pearson, 2006). The scale was chosen based on the following criteria: (1) it should be generic, unlike Hofstede's values module survey which pertained to work; and (2) it should fit accurately to the descriptions of the four cultural dimensions outlined by Hofstede. Using this method, a list of statements were generated and screened for their face validity.

Results and Discussion

Differences in Cultural Dimensions

The results of ANOVA tests on the cultural dimensions show no difference among the three ethnic groups on individualism/collectivism ($F = 1.13$, $p = .35$), uncertainty avoidance ($F = .93$, $p = .42$), and power distance ($F = .13$, $p = .89$), rejecting H1, H3, and H5. The three ethnic groups show significant differences in the masculinity dimension ($F = 18.78$, $p = .00$). On the other hand, the pair-wise comparisons with the Duncan test reveal significant differences among the three ethnic groups as predicted. Therefore, H3 is supported by Table 1).

Differences in Associated Consumer Behaviours

Hence, no significant difference is found on the relevant cultural dimensions, significant differences are found on the utilitarian reference group influence ($F = 6.91$, $p = .00$), the information sharing ($F = 4.89$, $p = .02$), the ethnocentric tendency ($F = 8.12$, $p = .00$), and the brand loyalty ($F = 4.39$, $p = .01$). As for the ethnic differences, East Indians tend to be more ethnocentric and to share information more than the African descent and the Chinese.

On the other hand, the East Indians tend to be less brand loyal and less likely to be influenced by the utilitarian reference, group information compared to other ethnic groups (Table 2).

| Cultural Dimensions | African descent (n = 118) | East Indians (n = 89) | Chinese (n = 88) | F | F-Prob |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------|--------|
| H1: Individualism | 2.95 | 2.75 | 2.85 | 1.13 | 0.35 |
| H3: Uncertainty Avoidance | 3.05 | 3.02 | 3.15 | 0.93 | 0.42 |
| H5: Masculinity | 3.00 ^a | 3.45 ^b | 2.75 ^c | 18.78 | 0.00 |
| H6: Power Distance | 2.78 | 2.75 | 2.72 | 0.13 | 0.89 |

TABLE 1: Mean Cultural Dimensions Among the three Ethnic Groups*

* Different letters (a, b, c) indicate significant differences between groups at 0.05 level with Duncan tests.

| Consumer Behaviours | African descent(n = 118) | East Indians(n = 89) | Chinese(n = 88) | F | F-Prob |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|--------|
| H2a: Reference Group Influence Utilitarian | 3.03 ^a | 2.85 ^a | 2.74 ^b | 6.67 | 0.00 |
| H2b: Information Sharing | 2.75 ^a | 3.04 ^b | 2.75 ^a | 4.89 | 0.02 |
| H2c: Ethnocentrism | 2.58 ^a | 2.79 ^b | 2.39 ^a | 8.12 | 0.00 |
| H4a: Perceived Risk | 3.52 | 3.50 | 3.36 | 0.37 | 0.75 |
| H4b: Brand Loyalty | 3.27 ^a | 3.17 ^a | 2.87 ^b | 4.39 | 0.01 |

TABLE 2: Mean Consumer Behaviour Ratings Among the three Ethnic Groups*

* Different letters (a, b, c) indicate significant differences between groups at 0.05 level with Duncan tests.

Conclusion

The relevance of culture on consumer behaviour is confirmed in this study. The research results suggest the culture has a significant influence on consumer behaviour in Jamaica. The findings presented in this study indicate that culture is robust and significant determinant of consumer behaviours. A better understanding of the effect of culture on consumer behaviours may provide insight into why the dimensions of culture vary across models and ethnic groups in Jamaica. These findings call for a deeper analysis of the links between culture and its effect on consumer behaviours to come with more specific relationships between them. Therefore, future researchers should continue to explore relationships between culture and consumer behaviours to enhance the prior understanding of how cultural dimensions affect consumer behaviours.

Works Citation

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