

Culture and Consumer Behavior—A Study of Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of culture on consumer behavior in two Caribbean countries namely Trinidad & Tobago, and Jamaica. A set of hypotheses are developed to understand the impact of culture on consumer behavior. Data is collected by surveying consumers from both countries. The findings of the research suggest there is a relationship between family structure, language (local dialect), values and beliefs on consumer behavior in both Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica.

Keywords: consumer behavior, culture, Caribbean, international marketing, Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica

1. Introduction

During 1970s and 80s the argument that consumers were converging (Levitt, 1983) or at least that differences among consumers were fading, gathered wide support among many marketing theorists and practitioners (Ohmae, 1989). This led to the premise that, in international marketing, differences, in consumers does not matter. In the 1990s theoretical contributions of culture's impact on marketing started emerging (McCracken, 1986; Clark, 1990; Manrai & Manrai, 1996). Culture, long recognized as important in anthropology, sociology and psychology, was increasingly deemed to be of relevance in marketing (Ogden, Ogden, & Schau 2004). It was not long for widespread consensus to coalesce in the marketing literature recognizing the influence of culture on the behavior of consumers (Barnhill, 1967; Hall, 1977; Pitts & Woodside, 1984; Kinsey, 1988; Rapaille, 2002; De Mooij, 2005; Backhaus et al., 2005).

1.1 Culture

As early as 1874, British anthropologist, Taylor, defined culture as a complex whole of knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other talents and habits acquired by individuals as members of society. Redfield (1941) later defined culture as the conventional understandings displayed in the act and artifact, which characterizes societies. Herskovits (1969) said that cultures of no two peoples were identical. The customs of those who live close to one another have greater likenesses than do the customs of those who live further apart. When cultures are viewed objectively; they are seen as homogenous clusters. They can be grouped as regions and can be delimited on a map (for example, the Caribbean Islands). Bock (1979) said the striking differences among social groups are cultural. Further, he stated the language they speak, the tools they use, the food they prefer, the career they choose, their ideas about beauty or even the supernatural, all depend mainly on the culture of the group in which they are raised.

Hofstede (1980) highlighted the culture is 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. Similar views are expressed by Schew et al. (1998). In addition, they also said that culture is a set of learned values and beliefs, attitudes, practices and forms of behavior that are shared by a society. These forms of behaviors are passed on from generation to generation within that society, and that culture is one of the determinants of decision-making and buying behavior.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) pointed out that cultural norms and beliefs are powerful forces shaping people's perceptions, dispositions, and behaviors and failure to take these cultural differences into consideration could be the cause for failure of businesses. Apart from supporting the findings of Hofstede (1980), Markus and Kitayama (1991), Havilland (1996) and Schew et al. (1998) are all of the opinions that cultures are learned, mostly through language, rather than inherited biologically, and parts of the culture work as an integrated whole.

Crandall and Schaller (2002) define culture as the total of socially transmitted behavior patterns which are common across a particular group, which distinguishes that culture from other populations. These socially passed on patterns include beliefs, behavior and enduring artifacts that are produced because of those beliefs and behaviors. Schaller and Crandall (2004) argued that the culture is not a single, observable set of behaviors, but it is something of an abstraction inferred from noticing other specific set of actions such as beliefs, habits, and artifacts that are more easily and directly noted.

By reviewing the literature from psychology, anthropology, consumer behavior and international marketing, McCort and Malhotra (1993) hypothesized that there is a cultural impact on individual cognitive functioning, namely perception, information processing, values, and self-concept and contended that culture impacts almost every construct of concern to marketers. Similarly, Usunier (1996) stresses that nearly every facet of consumer behavior is influenced by culture.

Thus, the differences between a home country's culture and international market's culture can have a significant impact and must be well understood before developing country-specific marketing strategies. International marketing research has made associations with culture in recent research, especially associated with product acceptance (Craig & Douglas, 2006), differences in marketing strategies between the home and host country (Hewett et al., 2003).

Nakata (2003) said that 25 percent of leading scholarly journal articles in international marketing incorporated cultures during the period of 1990 to 1995 and the same rose to 44 percent in 1995 to 2000. This was a clear sign marking the importance of the cultural and its influence on international marketing. Osland and Bird (2000) and Nakata (2003) in the same context argued that many of these studies looked at the culture as a static trait theory and argued that research should go beyond "sophisticated stereotyping" towards "cultural sense-making in context."

Based on the literature reviewed, culture for this research study is defined as "set of socially acquired behavior patterns and meanings common to members of a particular society or social group, including the key elements of family structure (Roberts, Gwin, & Martinez, 2004), language (Takada & Jain, 1991), beliefs and values (Sojka & Tansuhaj, 1995)."

1.2 Trinidad & Tobago

The culture of Trinidad & Tobago reflects the influence of African, Indian, Amerindian, Chinese, British, French and to a lesser extent Spanish and Portuguese cultures. The most influential single cultural factor in Trinidad & Tobago is Carnival, brought by French settlers from Martinique in the later part of the 18th century. Originally the celebration was confined to the elite, but it was imitated and adapted by their slaves and, after abolition of slavery in 1838, the practice spread into the people. The cuisine of Trinidad & Tobago is drawn from the origins of its people and as such is influenced by Creole, Indian and Chinese cuisine.

1.3 Jamaica

Jamaican culture represents a combination of cultures that have occupied the Greater Antilles island, Jamaica. The original Taino Settlers, followed by their Spanish conquerors (who were in turn conquered by the British), all made major contributions in developing Jamaican culture. However, it is the African slaves who became the dominant cultural force as they suffered and resisted the harsh conditions of forced labor. After abolishing slavery, Chinese and Indian migrants were transported to the island as indentured workers, bringing with their ideas from the Far East. The official national language is English, with heavy use of local idiom. A local dialect called Patois is widely spoken.

2. Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior 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 (Kotler and Armstrong, 2009). Consumer behaviors are activities and associations that people undertake when buying, consuming, and disposing of products (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006). Consumer behavior is influenced and motivated by factors such as culture, personality, life-stage, income, attitudes, motivators, feelings, knowledge, ethnicity, family, values, available resources, opinions, experiences, peer groups, and other groups.

Culture influences various consumer behavior dimensions. Cross-cultural research, in fact, identify minor or major differences, which may be traced to culture. The need for adopting a broader perspective and exploring fundamental relationships in international marketing was seen essential for advancement in this area (Cavusgil 1998). Efforts to understand consumer behavior led to developing many general models depicting the major influences on consumers internationally. In an early attempt to explain differences among cultures in their perceptions, evaluations, and consumption behavior of a general product or service, Sheth and Sethi (1977) developed a comprehensive theory of cross-cultural buyer behavior. This model on consumer behavior considered many items of culture, including Language, Religion, Education, Roles, Norms, Personality, Lifestyle, Socialization, and Tradition.

According to Samli (1995), consumer behavior could be predicted using a scoring system on relevant cultural variables that would allow to identify specific international consumer behavior patterns. Samli (1995) proposed the following set of variables: class structure, language, context (low/high), interpersonal relationships, needs hierarchy, role of the sexes, role of children, territoriality, temporality, learning, work ethics, need for privacy, exploitation of resources, resource utilization, family role in decision-making, family size, religiosity, tradition orientation, and technology grasp.

Manrai and Manrai (1996) later offered a model of the effect of culture on consumer behavior. They recognized complexity of culture and the difficulty of distinguishing it from its effects. They preferred to 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 behavior domains that includes: product acquisition and consumption behavior; the adoption and diffusion of innovations; either complaining or complimenting behavior; consumer response to advertising and marketing communication; responses to features on distribution and responses to aspects on pricing. Luna and Gupta (2001) developed the direct and indirect impact of culture on consumer behavior. They saw culture influencing consumer behavior through its manifestations: values, heroes, rituals, and symbols.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

3.1 Hypothesis of the Present Study

Based on the above, this study examines the impact of culture on consumer behavior. The core cultural variables considered for this study are; family structure, local dialect (language), and values and beliefs. The study is limited to examining this influence in two selected Caribbean Islands namely, Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica. The intent of this research is to further the existing literature (Tse et al., 1988; Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001; Okazaki, 2004) that examines the impact of culture on consumer behavior.

It is hypothesized that in the study area:

H1: There is a relationship between family structure and consumer behavior.

H2: There is a relationship between Language (local dialect) and consumer behavior.

H3: There is a relationship between values and beliefs and consumer behavior.

3.2 Methodology

Following the extant literature, this study intends to study whether the independent variables Family Structure, Language (Local Dialect), Values and Beliefs have any impact on consumer behavior or otherwise.

No known measure of the impact of culture on consumer behavior in the study area was available, so the researchers constructed their own instrument based on the literature. Munroe Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire, which measures the multicultural attitudes, was consulted in designing the questionnaire (Munroe & Pearson, 2006). The instrument was pretested on 40 respondents.

Data was collected by administering a questionnaire to a pool of 428 respondents from both the countries, 144 from Trinidad & Tobago and 284 from Jamaica. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula was used to decide the sample size. Hodge and Hodge (2004) supported this method for sample size determination. Simple, convenient sample was used to collect data.

To examine the relationship between a dependent variable Consumer Behavior and the independent variables of culture, namely FS = Family Structure, LD = Language (Local Dialect), VB = Values and Beliefs, a Stepwise Multiple Regression was utilized.

Multiple Regression Analysis a good method to find out the extent and magnitude to which the movement independent variables was explained by the independent variables. Multiple regression analysis was chosen as it selects the Independent Variable that contributes the most to explain the dependent variable. The relationship is deemed as significant if it satisfied the statistical significance level of 0.05.

The general regression model used for the study is specified below:

$$CB = \alpha + b_1FS + b_2LD + b_3VB$$

Where:

b1 through b3 = regression coefficients for independent variables

Where, CB = Consumer Behavior

FS = Family Structure

LD = Language (Local Dialect)

VB = Values and Beliefs

3.3 Data Analysis

Table 1. Model summary for Trinidad and Tobago

Dependent variable: consumer behavior

Model	Coefficients		
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Sig
(Constant)	-0.846		0.613
Family Structure	0.788		0.036
Language (Local Dialect)	-0.061		0.559
Values and Beliefs	0.235		0.042

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.673a	.452	.014	.50929

Note. Predictors: (Constant), Family Structure, Language (Local Dialect), Values and Beliefs.

In Trinidad & Tobago, the independent variables Family Structure (sig 0.036), Values and Beliefs (sig. 0.042) had a significant impact on the dependent variable, Consumer Behavior. The other variable Language (Local Dialect) do not significantly impact Consumer Behavior.

Multiple regression analyses indicated a strong relationship with the independent variables of family structure, and values and beliefs with significances of 0.036 and 0.042 respectively with that of the dependent variable consumer buying behavior.

In Trinidad & Tobago 67.3% of the variation in the dependent variable, Consumer Behavior, was explained by the independent variables—Family Structure; Language (Local Dialect); Values and Beliefs. The overall explanatory power of the model is good.

The R² (coefficient of determination) was used as a measure for the collective effects of all of the independent variables. In Trinidad & Tobago 45.2% of the variation in the dependent variable, Consumer Behavior, is explained by all the independent variables.

Table 2. Model summary for Jamaica

Dependent variable: consumer behavior

Model	Coefficients	
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Sig
(Constant)	1.639	0.036
Family Structure	0.494	0.047
Language (Local Dialect)	-0.13	0.041
Values and Beliefs	0.129	0.036

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.797a	.635	.269	.35397

Note. Predictors: (Constant), Family Structure, Language (Local Dialect), Values and Beliefs.

In Jamaica, all independent variables Family Structure (sig 0.047), Language (Local Dialect) (sig. 0.041), and Values and Beliefs (sig 0.036) have a significant impact on the dependent variable, Consumer Behavior.

Multiple Regression Analysis supports that there is a strong relationship with the independent variables of Family Structure, Attitudes, Values and Beliefs and Local Dialect with significances of 0.047, 0.036 and 0.041 respectively with that of the dependent variable consumer behavior.

In Jamaica 79.7% of the variation in the dependent variable, Consumer Behavior, is explained by the independent variables, Family Structure; Language (Local Dialect); Values and Beliefs. The overall explanatory power, R, of the model is good.

The R² (coefficient of determination) is used to measure for the collective efforts of all the independent variables. In Jamaica, 63.5% of the variation in the dependent variable, Consumer Behavior, is explained by all the independent variables.

Table 3. Data results and analysis for Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica

Dependent variable: consumer behavior

Independent Variables	Trinidad (Sig.)	Jamaica (Sig.)
Family Structure	0.036	0.047
Language (Local Dialect)	0.559	0.041
Values and Beliefs	0.042	0.036

The findings suggest that consumers in these two countries exhibit different buying behavior. The local culture of each country has an impact on consumer behavior. These findings support the research results of Brown (1995). Her study found that people show strong loyalty to their country and its heritage. It suggests that certain markets are diverse in their interests and levels of appreciation for foreign goods and services. The same continues even though ease of access to foreign cultures through modern-day technologies is becoming increasingly cheaper and more accessible and thus more prevalent in these societies.

In addition, given the number of factors that play an important role in consumer decision-making, cultural factors do contribute significantly to the process. However, consumers in the study areas continue to be influenced by their cultural identities which in turn affects their consumer behaviors.

4. Conclusions

The research results suggest the culture has a significant influence on consumer behavior in Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica. The data and results suggest that buyers do not follow a standardized purchase pattern in these two countries, and display different buying habits. The findings clearly suggest that these cultures differ from each other. Further, the findings also suggest that people display strong loyalty to their home country and its heritage. There is a linkage between cultural norms affecting consumer behavior and marketers have to consider these local characteristics when approaching these islands or two "pockets of uniqueness." So, despite globalization and the supposed shrinking and convergence of markets with markets supposedly becoming more similar, consumers continue to preserve their cultural identities, heritage and ancestry.

International marketers strive for efficiencies of scale by developing standardized products of dependable quality to be sold at reasonable prices across the global market. This approach highlights cultural likenesses, regardless of geographic location of consumers. This approach usually results in higher profits, lower real costs, global sourcing, homogeneity of consumer behavior, political, legal, environmental compatibility, global corporate orientation, economies of scale, and global corporate philosophy. There are disadvantages to a company adopting a standardization approach in these islands as it will become less responsive to local needs, distance itself from the market and customer reduces its adaptation to local behavior and often will become less competitive locally. The data supports the findings of Herbig (1997) that there may be the added difficulties of cultural differences, legal differences, language, communication problems, geography, and parallel imports that a global corporation will face in trying to market in Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica.

Globalization trends have driven and will continue to drive consumers towards assimilation in many ways. Convergence should not be taken for granted given the resilient and marked impact of culture on consumer behavior (for example, Malhotra & McCort, 2001; Usunier, 1996). This scenario stresses the importance of cross-cultural marketing research (Malhotra & Peterson, 2001; Craig & Douglas, 2006). If cultures were converging, as predicted, the opposite reaction would be seen in this world of globalization.

Since marketing is based on the premise of satisfying the varied needs or wants of customers, and these needs and wants are culturally driven, a successful marketer will seek to understand the cultural values of the country in which they choose to operate. If a product fails to satisfy or adequately address the consumer's particular cultural values, the firm producing it must then adjust or revise its product offering. In addition, the ability to address potential market from a cultural point of view before marketing to a foreign country or even to transact business with another society will separate the successful firm from the unsuccessful one.

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