



## Culture based buying behaviour in Malawi, Central Africa.

Dr. Robert Edwin Chester\* and Rev. Fr. Sengol Jayaselan

\*Dr. Robert Edwin Chester, Associate Professor and Head, School of Management and Commerce, DMI-St. John The Baptist University, Rep. of Malawi, Central Africa.

Rev. Fr. Sengol Jayaselan, Dept. of Computer Science & Engineering, DMI. St. John The Baptist University, Rep. of Malawi, Central Africa.

\*Corresponding Author Email Id: [edwinshobha@gmail.com](mailto:edwinshobha@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Culture is defined as the learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to direct the consumer behaviour of members of a particular society. The aim of this study is to find out how culture affects the buying decision of the customers. Culture influences the mode of living, how we consume and the decisions which an individual takes. The study set out certain specific objectives as follows: how culture influences consumer's buying behaviour, to identify the prominent factors and also to identify the marketing implications. Based on these objectives, an in-depth study was conducted through survey method. Multi-choice close-ended questionnaires were used for obtaining primary data from the field. The questionnaire contained a variety of times concerning consumer behaviour, life-style, consumption of convenient product and demographic characteristics, A total number of 160 respondents were contacted for the study.

### Introduction

Understanding the significance of culture as an initiator of buying is an important aspect in the study of consumer behaviour. Culture cannot be separated from an individual; it is not a system of abstract values that exist independently of individuals. Every group or society has a culture, and cultural influences on buying behaviour may vary greatly from country to country. Hence marketers have to be familiar with intricacies of culture scenario of target market for an effective marketing.

The success of marketing depends upon the principle of market segmentation. In this regard subculture is also significant in understanding the target market. Each culture has smaller subcultures or groups of people with shared value systems based on common life

experience and situations. Subcultures include nationalities, religions, racial groups and geographic regions. Many subcultures make up important market segments and marketers often design products and marketing programmes tailored to their needs (Kotler & Armstrong)

Society's value may change continuously even though the core values are relatively permanent. Today's young people grow old, they will retain the values of their youth and replace societal values of today's older consumers. Society's values change continuously even though the core values are relatively permanent. Marketers must pay special attention to values in transition because they affect the size of market segments. Changes in a society's values can be forecasted on the basis of a life-cycle explanation, meaning that an individual's grow older, their perceptions may change.

For the purpose of studying consumer behaviour, culture can be an important factor that determine what, how and when consumers as a group will buy goods and services. In this backdrop an exploratory study was initiated to understand the significance of culture in forming buyer decisions.

### **Selection of the Study Area**

The districts of Malawi, namely, Mangochi, Lilongwe, Blantyre and Balaka, Mangochi is purposely selected for the present study since, these districts, are much familiar to the researchers.

### **Objectives**

- (i) To understand the demographic profile of the sample respondents in the Districts.
- (ii) To study the influential attributes of consumer behaviour in Malawi.
- (iii) To analyse the lifestyles, social class, social status of the respondents in Malawi.

### **Research methodology**

In this study, the collected data on the marketing implications of cultural attributes by reading many articles and journals which describes the characteristics and possible reactions on the basis of quantitative research. Fully structured close-ended questionnaires will be used for collecting information. A total number of 160 respondents will be contacted choosing them on a judgemental basis. Next step is data preparation and analysis, which includes data editing, coding, transcription and verification of the data. The final step is report preparation and presentation. The internet also being used to disseminate marketing research results and

reports. In addition to that, an oral presentation will be made using tables to enhance clarity and impact.

Arithmetic mean is used in the present study to estimate the average age, income for conducting likert scale analysis. Standard deviation is calculated on the basis of mean. It is the root mean square deviation. It is used in this study to calculate the variability of age and level of income of the respondents. Likert five point scale, ranging from always to not sure were used to get responses for some questions.

### **Brief Literature Survey**

This part of the paper attempts to make a review of research articles in the related field of the study undertaken. A focused review of the available literature helped us to get in depth of the topic and to understand the contributions of others as well as to identify the research gap.

Han and Shavitt (1994) State that individualism and collectivism is the most basic dimensions of cultural variability identified in the cross cultural research. The study conducted two experiments to examine whether the core dimensions of cultural variability is reflected in the types of persuasive appeal by comparing two countries United States an individualistic country and Korea a collectivistic country. The first experiment shows that magazine advertisement in United States appeal to individual benefits and preferences than the advertisements in Korea and the Korean advertisement appeals in-group benefits, harmony and family integrity to greater extent than US ads. In the second stage controlled experiments conducted in the two countries discloses that advertisements emphasizing individualistic benefits are more persuasive and advertisement emphasizing family and in-group benefits are less persuasive than those were in Korea. The authors conclude that individualism and collectivism is reflected in the content of advertising in different culture.

Lee and Oyserman (2008) discuss how individualism and collectivism influences values, self-concept and even life style. The study shows us how culture is different in different societies. The impact of individualism and collectivism comes from two sources: multinational studies and cross national comparisons. Multinational studies show us the countries differ due to the samples drawn from their citizenry values relevant to individualism. The drawback of this study was the researchers did their study independently on samples and measures.

## Research Results

### I. Demographic profile of the respondent.

In the demographic profile the personal information will be analysed. The demographic profile taken for the analysis comprises of gender, age, Nationality, level of education, professional status and the income level. The personal information of the respondents is correlated and regressed to variables for predicting or inferring the general purchasing behaviour. The results of these variables are presented in the following table:

**Demographic profile of the respondents (%) N=160**

Sl. No	Category	Percentage
I	Gender:	
	Male	71
	Female	29
II	Age:	
	Below 25	15
	25 – 35	21
	35 – 45	35
	45 – 55	24
	Above 55	05
III	District wise :	
	Mangochi	51
	Lilongwe	21
	Blantyre	11
	Balaka	18
IV	Level of Education:	
	Schooling	06
	Diploma	43
	Graduate	37
	Post Graduate	14
V	Employment:	
	Student	21
	Agriculture	56
	Unemployed	12
	Own Business	11
VI	Monthly Income:	
	Up to Mk. 2,5000	35
	Mk. 2,5001 – 5,0000	27
	Mk. 5,0001 – 7,5000	15
	Mk. 7,5001 – 10,0000	14
	Above Mk. 10,0000	09

*Source: Primary Data*

More than half of the respondents contacted, in the survey, were males (71%). Gender, being one of the prominent variables of culture, can explain the reasons for varied performance of men and women.

Age has been identified as another factor constituting culture. Purchase behaviour and consumption pattern may change with respect to different age strata. The analysis of the age structure of the respondents shows that majority of them were in the age group of 35-45 years (35%). The two alternate age group which were seen almost in close proportion, were in the age group of 25-35 (21%) and 45-55 (24%). The rest of the respondents were in the age group of below 25 years (15%) and the lowest proportion of respondent was in the age group above 55 years. The general observation of the data structure shows that around 55% belong to above 35 years. The average age estimated as 37.25 years with SD as 13.11. This signifies high variability of age distribution among the respondents. The data tendency from mean and standard deviation shows that more than 68% of the respondents are in the age group of 24-50 [mean PLUS or MINUS]. Since the majority of the respondents belong to upper age category there may possibility of sustainable cultural practice

District wise classification of the respondents was identified as yet another in the cultural framework. It is seen in the above table, noticeable that among the total number of respondents interviewed 51% were belonging to Mangochi District, 21% were Lilongwe District, 11% were Blantyre District and the rest of 18% were belonging to Balaka District.

It was an important aspect to find out the educational background of the respondent. This was done to find out how the educational level influences their purchasing behaviour. Majority of the respondent comes the category of diploma were 43% whereas those who are qualified graduate are about 37% followed by 14% being post graduate and 6% having completed their secondary level. This shows most of the respondents were highly qualified and this helped us to understand culture better.

The employment status of the respondents was also identified as an element of culture. Knowledge regarding the professional status of the respondents will help to identify the pattern of cultural formation through peer and colleague influence. The data show that maximum number of respondents falls in the category of agriculture, which was 56%. Next highest category is student community, which constitutes 21% of the data. Almost 12% of the

respondents were unemployed and the same proportion is identified for the respondent, who have own business and the remaining 11% are covered by students.

The level of income is an important determinant for purchasing a product. As a general perception consumers with higher income are willing to spend more and lesser income level spends less. Among 160 respondent, 35% were with the income level up to Mk. 25,000 followed by 27% were in the category of Mk. 25,001 – 50,000 out of the remaining 15% and 14% were under the category of Mk. 50,001 – 75,000 and Mk. 75,001 – 100,000 respectively. The least respondent fall in the category of above Mk. 100,000. The data tendency from mean and standard deviation shows that more than 68% of the respondents are in the income level of Mk. 12,000 – 82,500 [Mean Plus or Minus].

## II. Marketing implication of cultural attributes

This section analyses the cultural attributes of the respondents such as life styles, social class, social status etc. Each culture contains sub-culture that is group of people which share values. Sub-cultures can include nationalities, religions, racial groups sharing the same geographical location. Shopping behaviour will vary based on variety of different factors. The life styles of the respondent varied according to their districts. People of different districts also follow the life style of their own and of other districts as well. People learn their cultures from their ancestors. In this section the researchers also try to analyse how the social status and social class of the respondents influence them while purchasing a product. It was also explored the frequency of maintaining a particular behaviour that may lead to a potential purchase. The total of 10 statements were identified and presented to record their frequency towards a particular behaviour. The range of response were given in 5 point scale and coded as follows: Always = 5, Quite often = 4, Sometimes = 3, Never = 2 and Not sure = 1.

### *Influential Attributes of Consumer behaviour:*

No.	Statement	Likert Score	Rank
1	My practical experience influence my consumption behaviour	3.95	I
2	My family members greatly influence my purchase behaviour	3.83	II
3	I purchase product only after collecting full information about the product.	3.76	III
4	My friends have good influence on my consumer behaviour	3.62	IV
5	My status of the product is relevant to me	3.53	V
6	My social interaction influences my purchase behaviour.	3.39	VI

7	My social status influences my purchase behaviour.	3.33	VII
8	I tend to avoid shops that have low image.	3.13	VIII
9	I purchase most commodities due to children's pressure tactics.	2.82	IX
10	I prefer celebrity endorsed product.	2.58	X

*Source: Primary Data*

A majority of the respondents agreed that they are influenced by their practical experience which helps them in their consumption. It is seen that most people have picked up their shopping behaviour from their parents. Family influences on consumer socializing, decision making within the family. Practical experience is developed from childhood. We grow up shopping with our parents and we learn them which in turn influence us when we shop as adults. This means that practical experience and family members are equally important to show what influences the buyer the most to buy the product. In many cases people who are wealthy, shopping is the form of entertainment as they buy many things which they do and do not need. The social status of the respondent does not influence them while purchasing a product. Social interaction is another attribute which influences a consumer to purchase a product. Shopping behaviour varies greatly. Some people enjoy shopping while others do it only when necessary. Some people do shopping on influence of their friends or others. In this study, friends do have influence on purchasing a product.

## Conclusion

Culture has an effect on fashion. Most of the people are fashionable in their own ways of culture. Changes in a society's values can be forecasted on the basis of a life-cycle explanation, meaning that an individual's grow older, their values change. Certain consumers purchase product because of prestige. It was recognised that prestige may vary for different people depending on their social interaction which was not a major factor which the respondents considers before he purchases a product. Many respondent were neutral in their response to the statements celebrity endorsed products and influence for buying due to children's pressure. People use products by seeing that it also suits their culture or not. Consumers may range from those who are relatively knowledgeable about fashion, style, trend to those who have interest. Culture has a great effect on marketing of a product. Marketers must pay special attention to values in transition because they affect the size of market segments.

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