

# The Influence of National Culture on Consumer Buying Behaviour: An Exploratory Study of Nigerian and British Consumers

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**Abstract**—Despite the considerable body of literature investigating the influence of National Culture (NC) dimensions on consumer behaviour, there is a lack of studies comparing the influence of NC in Africa with Western European countries. This study is intended to fill the vacuum in knowledge by exploring how NC affects consumer buyer behavior in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. The primary data were collected through in depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with three groups of individuals: British students, Nigerian students in the United Kingdom, and Nigerian-based students. This approach and new frontier to analyze culture and consumer behaviour could help understand residual cultural threads of people (that are ingrained in their being) irrespective of exposure to other cultures. The findings of this study show that Nigerian and British consumers differ remarkably in cultural orientations such as symbols, values and psychological standpoints. This ultimately affects the choices made at every stage of the decision building process, and proves beneficial for international retail marketing.

**Keywords**—National culture, consumer behaviour, international business, Nigeria, UK.

## I. INTRODUCTION

GLOBALIZATION, notwithstanding numerous criticisms against it, is generally seen to deepen interconnectedness among nations economically, technologically, politically and culturally. In today's economy, the globalisation of business and the marketplace have increased and international businesses are growing like never before, mainly because countries cannot be completely autonomous. Thus, organisations all over the world must be prepared to conduct their businesses effectively in a global competitive marketplace [1].

A culture shapes lives, and builds the personality of an individual. According to [2], culture has 'natural' and 'automatic' effects on behaviour. It is assumed to trigger every behavioral element [2]. In the marketing world, every construct of concern to marketers is impacted by culture [3]. Consequently, culture determines how people choose to buy

and consume various products and services [1], [3]-[5]. Thus, business organizations need to have an in-depth knowledge of different national cultures in order to increase the likelihood of their success in various international markets. Understanding culture is imperative today because of its believed strong influence on consumer behavior [6].

Empirical research investigating the relationship between NC dimensions and consumer behaviour dates back to the 1990s (see, among others [7]), and has flourished since then. Yet, the search for an improved understanding of NC – consumer behaviour relationship continues.

A review of relevant literature on comparative cross-cultural effect on consumer behavior revealed that many authors have compared the influence of NCs such as Japan, Brazil and USA, on consumer buyer behaviour [8]. However, very limited studies have covered a comparative study of Nigeria and the United Kingdom. The remarkable cultural differences between the two countries suggest that international marketers should consider understanding the culture of both countries and their effect on consumer behavior, in order to develop efficient business strategies. Moreover, the research provides a basis that reinterprets contemporary research on cross-cultural influence on consumer buying behaviour, while identifying areas for additional research.

## II. NATIONAL CULTURE

Defining NC can be difficult and debatable; therefore, various definitions of the term 'culture' can be found in the literature. This is due to differences in orientation of the definers [9]. Reference [10] defines NC as a sum of shared values and norms, articulated in the behaviour of the members of a group. Conversely, [11] agrees that it is learned from and shared among the people of a society, and therefore, he defines NC as: "The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" [11, p.9].

Reference [12] observed that culture, viewed from a broad perspective, involves the entirety of human actions transmitted socially from generation to generation. Culture is mutual mental indoctrination, which differentiates the affiliates of one group from the other [13]. According to [14, p.181], "culture comprises of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists

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of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action". Whatever definition assigned to culture, it uniquely identifies a group(s) of people. People's identity is usually enshrined in their culture. Identity is treasured by cultural people [9, p.269] and reflected in the food they eat, what they wear, their language, values, norms, prisms from which they view life and all it encompasses, and ultimately their purchase decisions.

Many scholars developed cross-cultural frameworks. Most dimensions are theoretically similar [15]-[17]. However, Hofstede's model is considered the most prevalent [16] as its scores are available for different countries nations, enabling a comparison between nations [7].

Hofstede developed five NC dimensions to decrease the complexity of cultural studies; his dimensions interpret cultural values and behaviour patterns for numerous countries [11] and distinguish the differences between cultures [17]. These dimensions are: "Power Distance (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) and Long-term Orientation (LTO) [11]. Several scholars argue that individualism and UAI" are both critical to comprehend managerial behaviours [18].

Many researchers have criticised Hofstede's work, appealing they were developed above thirty years ago, suggesting they may be out-dated [19]. In response, Hofstede claims that culture change is slow, and changes would have to be very dramatic to invalidate his dimensions, therefore, they should be valid until 2100 or later [11]. Many scholars repeated Hofstede's research generating similar findings [19]. Therefore, Hofstede's dimensions are still considered the best method to explore culture.

Britain and Nigeria are believed to have dissimilar NCs based on the scores of Hofstede's dimensions. Judging from the comparative assessment of Hofstede's culture dimensions in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, it is apparent that both societies are masculine, but differ markedly in terms of Power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance [11].

Concerning PDI, Nigeria scores very high on PDI (80) while the United Kingdom scores low (35) indicating that the majority of Nigeria accepts power inequality in society as given and not to be contested, unlike the United Kingdom [11].

On 'individualism/collectivism', Nigeria, however, scores very low (30), unlike the United Kingdom which scores a high (89). Based on these scores, Nigeria is regarded as a 'collectivist' society while the United Kingdom is essentially an 'individualistic' society [11]. Uncertainty avoidance levels between the United Kingdom and Nigeria show that Nigeria scores (55) and the UK (35). The British cultural characteristics, according to the Hofstede Centre, are reflected in the popular British term of 'muddling through' unclear situations [11].

### III. THE INFLUENCE OF GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Many authors, such as [20], believe that consumer behaviour can be affected by some internal factors such as local culture. On the other hand, it can be affected by some external factors resulting from globalization such as communication, information, technology and interaction [7], [20].

Authors strived to examine the impact of culture on consumer behavior, particularly consumer purchase decisions, in order to predict a relationship between marketing variables and consumer response, often assessing from two prisms; that is, convergence and divergence [21], [23].

Certain theorists such as [22], [24], admitted that globalisation is creating a convergence of culture, which leads to more homogeneous culture adopting the Western Euro-America cultural traditions. In a famous article by [24], "the Globalization of markets," he argued that homogenization of consumers wants and needs is because of new technology [7]. Modern technology has enabled the population to see information at any time, in any place, which has led consumers living in a global village [7]. It is considered that more and more people across the world watch the same television drama, listen to the same music, consume well-known global brand products and services, and wear the same or similar clothes [7], [22]. Consumers are expected to favour standard products of high quality and low price [24]. These studies have also revealed that globalization has brought about convergence in income, media and technology and presumed to reduce dissimilarities in consumer buying behaviour worldwide, although this remains controversial amongst researchers. However, other authors, such as [11], believe that consumer behavior will transform to be more heterogeneous, and therefore, the theory of convergence is unrealistic [7]. There are considerable differences in consumer behavior between international markets because of heterogeneous consumers created by cultural differences [7]. Therefore, it is apparent the theory of homogenisation does not take into account cultural creativity occurring from the interaction of local and global communities. Consequently, homogenisation does not reflect reality, and although consumer consumption occurs globally, purchasing and/or using the product would likely differ across culture as a result of perceived value [7].

### IV. METHODOLOGY

Although the design of this study consists of two initial exploratory and main phases, using quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures, this paper focuses on the preliminary (exploratory) stage dealing with the collection and interpretation of the qualitative data.

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of this study, we mainly used quantitative data gleaned from surveys (questionnaire based). However, before designing and conducting large-scale questionnaire surveys, the researchers conducted some semi-structured exploratory individual

interviews as an initial pilot study and supporting method. This is because it is strongly advisable not to rush into detailed surveys before less expensive and more readily available sources of information have been exhausted [25]. Thus, this research study follows a sequential less dominant-dominant qualitative-quantitative methodology (qual/QUAN) where the quantitative part of the research is the dominant [25], [26]. Mixed or hybrid research methods, by using quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures, either at the same time or one after the other, are increasingly advocated within business research [26]. Mix research methods provide broader information on the phenomenon being studied [25], [27]. Moreover, they increase the quality, validity and reliability of the findings and decrease the degree of bias [25]. The research design adopted in collecting the data was the cross-sectional design.

Although the research was conducted in two stages, only the initial exploratory stage will be discussed in this paper. To achieve the aim of this study, individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were implemented. Interviews are considered as one of the most common methods of qualitative data collection [25]; they are very useful for obtaining detailed information from interviewees on the research's subject. Given that the first stage of this study is exploratory, open-ended questions were used as they allow the researcher to obtain more in-depth information, and are particularly useful for exposing attitudes and opinions [26], [28]. This method allows to modify the order of questions and ask additional questions where needed [26]. Thus, the semi-structured, in-depth interview enabled the researcher to obtain an unbiased and accurate record, and ask questions which might otherwise not be captured by the structured questionnaire [28], [29]. The questions are adapted and modified from the previous works of [30]-[32].

The sampling frame constituted of undergraduates from the Federal University of Lagos, Nigeria, and Bournemouth University, UK. 15 Telephone interviews were conducted with the students in Nigeria, 15 and face-to-face interviews were conducted with Nigerian and British students in the Bournemouth University. The data obtained were decomposed into the three (3) distinct groups as stated earlier.

#### A. British Students

Five respondents were interviewed studying at Bournemouth University. They consisted of two males, aged 19 and 20; and three females, aged 18, 20 and 21.

#### B. Nigeria Students in the UK

Five respondents were interviewed studying at Bournemouth University. They consisted of three males, aged 24, 26, and 31; and two females, aged 23 and 27.

#### C. Nigerian Students

Five undergraduate respondents were interviewed, studying at the Federal University of Lagos. They consisted of three males, aged 19, 20 and 21; and two females, aged 19 and 22.

The researcher chose university students (purposive sample) because they are considered a homogenous group [33]. To

improve the reliability and validity of the method and reduce possible bias, the interviews were audio-recorded and notes were taken to aid further analysis. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes, allowing sufficient time to explore the topic.

A qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data which was collected from the semi-structured interviews. Qualitative content analysis is the most common method adopted when conducting semi-structured interviews [34]. This method creates codes and categories in a systematic manner to explore large amounts of textual data and interpret and identify trends, meanings and patterns [35].

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. *The Influence of Individualism vs. Collectivism on Consumer Behaviour in the UK and Nigeria*

Hofstede's studies denote that Nigerians have a communal living pattern wherein individuals have stronger feelings and a sense of obligation towards the interest of immediate family members, extended family members and members of social/religious groups to which they belong [11]. In addition, [36] suggests that the Nigerian cultural landscape is diverse but the people remain highly collectivist and express geo-ethnic feelings such that everyone around them is taken into consideration and even protected. He further proposes that this affects buying behavior because when a person travels and is returning home, everyone expects gifts from them. Also, food items are shared amongst siblings, cousins, in-laws and even neighbours.

The results of the data analysis show that Nigerians are collectivists in nature. The majority of Nigerian based interviewees put group interest over personal interest; enjoy sharing a meal with friends or relatives and shop with company:

*"I consider group interest more important than personal interest. I will rather pursue the former."*  
(Respondent 11)

The UK based Nigerian interviewees share similar traits with the latter:

*"At home in Nigeria, I will go with group interest but here, it is every man for himself."* (Respondent 9)

However, both groups share the same distinction; they make their own decisions but largely consider the opinion of people around them.

*"I make decisions myself almost all the time but with utmost consideration for people around me."*  
(Respondent 13)

*"I make decisions all by myself but sometimes consider the opinion of others."* (Respondent 6)

These findings confirm the previous research of [36], and [11] that suggests Nigeria is a collectivist's society with consideration for group interest over individual interest.

The majority of Nigerians prefer eating and shopping with their friends, relatives and family:

*"I would prefer to go shopping with my friends. Their inputs could help me make better choices."* (Respondent 10)

*"I would rather have a meal with friends/relatives."*  
(Respondent 13)

Like consumer behaviour in many collectivist cultures, the consumer buying behaviour decision in Nigeria will bear in mind their family's needs and the opinion of reference groups, such as friends and relatives. These findings are similar to the findings of many authors such as [37], [38]. On the other hand, British interviewees demonstrated high individualistic features. The majority, if not all, would rather pursue personal interest over group interest and single-handedly took decisions:

*"I would rather pursue personal interest. Everybody does that!"* (Respondent 2)

*"My decision is most often made by myself without input from anyone else."* (Respondent 5)

More so, most are in the habit of eating alone and a few preferred online shopping to shopping with friends and family.

*"I will prefer to go shopping alone. It could be time wasting going with friends."* (Respondent 3)

*"I prefer shopping online. It is faster and less stressful."* (Respondent 1)

Therefore, the findings of data analysis comply with Hofstede's claim that the British are very individualistic [11]. Moreover, our results are in line with many studies, such as [40]-[44] who found that people from high individualist cultures are less likely to be influenced by groups than those from cultures of high collectivism.

#### *B. The Influence of Masculinity vs. Femininity on Consumer Behaviour in the UK and Nigeria*

According to [13], the masculine culture character reflects an interest in materialism, assertiveness and a drive towards success. A feminine society on the other hand gives priority to personal relationships and livelihood. His study shows that Nigerians are masculine (60) just like the British, (66). According to [39], Westerners are more masculine (to the exception of Sweden and Spain) and focus on the accumulation of wealth and possession and take pride in status, which is the opposite of feminine cultures. The findings of data analysis, show that the Nigerians are very masculine. Both Nigerian respondent types are aimed at being the best in whatever they do, and do have preferred brands. In addition, most prefer popular brands, which ascertain their status in society or recognition from peers. There consideration for brand names and brand popularity is a high indicator for masculinity. However, respondents value price as much as quality.

*"I prefer popular brands which everybody will recognize; that way people know the value of what I have."* (Respondent 14)

*"Yes I prefer popular brands. We are Nigerians remember!"* (Respondent 7)

With regards to the British respondents, the findings indicate that some interviewees expressed that being the best was satisfying, while others admitted it was not a priority to them as long as they were good enough. Also the British respondents preferred brands, but are largely indifferent when

it comes to choosing a popular brand over a less popular one.

*"I really do not have a preference. Sometimes I go for popular brand or less popular."* (Respondent 2)

Lastly, most consider quality over price saying that a product of high quality will last longer and usually reflects they are getting their money's worth. The research results for these are mixed showing a moderate level of masculinity in British consumers.

*"The price matters, but I always take quality over price. It makes me feel more secure."* (Respondent 1)

#### *C. The Influence of Uncertainty Avoidance on Consumer Behaviour in the UK and Nigeria*

Previous literature reveals that people from high uncertainty avoidance cultures such as Nigeria, experience higher levels of perceived risk, remain brand loyal in their purchase, are less likely to seek innovative products, and are more likely to get involved in an information search than those from low uncertainty avoidance cultures, such as the United Kingdom [6], [41], [45].

The result of the interview conforms to previous literature on the uncertainty avoidance cultural dimension established by Hofstede. The majority of respondents from Nigeria are not willing to take risks or engage in uncertain situations. More so, few are willing to try new foods from different countries, but most of them prefer the traditional Nigerian spicy food, and purchase products they are familiar with.

*"Risk? Yes! I have to be sure of what I am getting into before I make a move."* (Respondent 8)

*"Yes, all the time I buy products I am familiar with. That way I can vouch for it."* (Respondent 6)

According to these results, Nigeria is a high Uncertainty avoidance culture and consumers prefer to be sure about the products, which they are buying. They are likely to do an extensive information search and remain brand loyal.

The United Kingdom could be considered a low uncertainty avoidance culture in conformity with previous literature on the uncertainty avoidance cultural dimension established by Hofstede [13]. The interviewees show a willingness to take risks almost irrespective of the situation. Also, they are excited about trying new food and feel more inclined to testing innovative products as opposed to ones they are familiar with. This could mean that they do less information search and have less loyalty towards certain brands.

*"I believe we all have to be spontaneous. That is what life is about isn't it?"* (Respondent 4)

*"I am open to trying new things and all types of food."* (Respondent 2).

#### *D. The Influence of Power Distance on Consumer Behaviour in the UK and Nigeria*

Previous research claims consumers from power distant societies tend to exhibit impulsive buying tendency than those from a low power distance culture [46]. This dimension is based on societal equality and the degree of respect given to authoritative and powerful figures in the society. This is revealed in opinion seeking and restrictions applied before or



during purchase.

According to [7], international brands, in high power distance societies make recognition of social position dominant. Persons gain information from unspoken communication, and base their purchase judgments on how they feel about the business. Thus, our findings are in line with Hofstede's theory, which suggest that in high power distance culture, hierarchy matters and children are dependent on their parents, like subordinates are dependent on management [11].

The Nigerian respondents do not generally believe in equality and recognize authority either through education, experience, age or social status.

*"Everyone cannot be equal. Like we say in Nigeria, all fingers are not equal."* (Respondent 9)

This aligns with [47], who reckon Nigerians respect authority, be it children to parents or a downward flow of information from authority to subordinates. The Nigerian respondents agreed that their parents restrict their purchases, although every now and then give their opinion.

*"Yes, my parents could restrict my purchase."* (Respondent 13)

*"I have to seek my parents' opinion before I make any important decision and sometimes even before I buy a t-shirt."* (Respondent 11)

One the other hand, the majority of British respondents believe in equality, be it for social reasons or professional hierarchy.

*"Yes, I believe everybody should be equal or given equal opportunities."* (Respondent 2)

Similar to other low power distance societies, the British respondents indicate that their parents do not restrict their purchase in any way.

*"My parents cannot affect my purchase decisions in a million years mate."* (Respondent 5)

This study therefore confirms previous literature, wherein Nigeria is considered a high power distance culture and United Kingdom being low. Consequently, Nigerian consumers are likely to rely on the opinions of persons who are in authority of powerful figures in their society to influence their purchase decisions, than British consumers.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was aimed at analyzing cross-cultural influences on consumer buying behavior in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Reflecting on the literature review, these findings corroborate the interrelationship between NC and consumer behaviour, as established by earlier researchers [48], [49], who suggested that social differences influence purchase, need satisfaction must be consistent with culture, and lastly culture determines eating habits and generally consumption patterns. From the interviews conducted, it is evident that Nigerian and British consumers have remarkably different buyer attitudes, and this is as a result of their cultural differences based on values, symbols, heroes and rituals.

Additionally, the results reveal that marketers are better positioned if they adapt their marketing strategies and communications to suit the country, which they are selling to.

Although markets are clearly converging [50], [51], evidently, consumers make varying purchase decisions in different countries. For instance, Nigerian respondents tend to eat more with company (friends, family, and colleagues) than alone (British). Hence, marketing food to Nigerian consumers should incorporate 'group packages', shared platters or 'bundle deals'. This confirms with previous literature on the influence of culture in diverging consumer behaviour [52], [53], [54].

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