

The Influence of National Culture on Marketing Strategies in Africa

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Abstract

This study investigates the national cultural factors that influence marketing strategies implemented by international firms in thirteen African countries. This is an exploratory study based on interviews and questionnaires involving fifty marketing managers for data collection. Data was analyzed using a combination of content analysis with coding techniques. The findings demonstrate that the national cultural factors studied influence the marketing strategies at different levels. Sales promotions are impacted by six factors while new product introduction is mainly influenced by power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Language is from far the most influencing cultural factor on communication and advertising strategies. The findings indicate that it is possible for managers to design and implement better business strategies when entering the African market. This research extends the knowledge of African culture and its impact on consumer behavior, which is an important variable in marketing.

Keywords: Africa, Marketing, Marketing strategies, National culture

1. Introduction

National culture is fast becoming a key factor in the development and implementation of marketing strategies in international markets. De Mooij (2004; 2015) argued that cultural influence on strategy, Organizations are subjected to national culture influences and need to shape their marketing strategies accordingly. Still, many firms make the mistake of ‘copy-paste’ strategies from their home country to a foreign marketplace. From a marketing perspective, this can have a dramatic consequence on firm performance. Today, the implication and impact of national culture in international business have taken a new dimension. According to Tian and Borges (2011) and Pires, Rocha, Borini and Rossett (2015), globalization has forced the marketing managers to review the way business should be conducted in a multi-cultural environment. The ability for an enterprise to shape its marketing strategy to fulfill the need and requirement of the environment and consumers is perceived as one of the most competitive advantages. National culture therefore becomes a major area of interest within the field of marketing. Barkema and Droegendijk (2007) suggest that organizational success in international markets is closely linked to the way it handles culture and failing to do so is a strategy mistake (Emery and Tian, 2003). The impact of national culture on marketing strategies is extendable to various interdisciplinary fields that are related to marketing, including online marketing, tourism marketing (Riasi and Pourmiri, 2015), and consumer behavior analytics.

The issue of national cultural considerations in marketing strategies has received considerable critical attention within the literature (Poulis and Poulis, 2013). Omar, Kirby and Blankson (2003) opined that culture considerations affect both the marketers and consumers’ behaviors. Cultural awareness is a classic problem that marketers have to face with international business. The evidence of misunderstanding the important role of national culture in marketing can be exemplified in the introduction of fast food in European markets (Douglas and Dubois, 1977), the Dasani fiasco in United Kingdom (Parsons and Maclaran, 2009) and the launch of new perfume by Revlon in Brasil (Townsend, 2014). Gracia, Ariño and Blasco (2015:275) suggest that culture is viewed as a ‘moderator of e-service quality and satisfaction effects on e-loyalty intentions’ and confirm that the influence of e-service quality on e-loyalty intentions is greater for Argentinian consumers (a little more individualistic, masculine, and less pragmatic culture compared to Spain). The authors also confirm that there is a more significant influence of satisfaction on e-loyalty for Spanish consumers (a more pragmatic, collectivistic, and feminine culture compared to Argentina). These examples illustrate that national culture and marketing strategies are closely related and should be well

understood to achieve and sustain organisational success. In their study investigating the consumer buyer behaviour of cell phones, Chan Yie and Botelho (2010) found that cultural considerations drive consumers' decision-making to buy or not.

Cultural influence on product design and positioning is not a new topic for marketers and many researches have focused on the subject. There are many paradoxes when it comes to cultural considerations because what can be perfectly acceptable in a country could be inappropriate in other places. Peng (2011) argues that if the firm Mahindra and Mahindra is successful in India, it is because they have a clear strategy regarding Indian products and which meet the quality standards of their international counterparts. Hence, quality is an important criterion for success in doing business. However, this appears not to suffice and in a continent such as Africa where more than one billion people live, there is a need to consider cultural aspects as well when doing business there (Darley and Blankson, 2008). Santamaria, Escobar-Tello and Ross (2016:16) further suggest that consumption patterns are 'complexly interlinked with cultural values, social status, identity and other symbolic aspects of socio-economic paradigms'. In their study regarding the relationship between cultural distance (both perceived and objective), innovation and firm export performance, Azar and Drogendijk (2016) conclude that managers' perception of substantial cultural differences and subsequent environmental uncertainty when expanding into culturally distant markets does influence strategies for interacting and integrating with the market environment. Understanding culture could thus be a huge competitive advantage and protect the firm from making strategic mistakes.

This research aims to investigate the national cultural factors that impact marketing strategies undertaken by international firms doing business in Africa through the following sub questions: which cultural factors influence the development and implementation of marketing strategies undertaken by international firms in Africa? How do these cultural factors influence the development and implementation of these marketing strategies by international firms in Africa? How can international firms improve the use of these cultural factors in order to enhance the development and implementation of these marketing strategies in Africa?

The overall structure of the study takes the form of six chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter Two begins by laying out the theoretical background of the research and the third chapter is concerned with the methodology used for this study. The fourth chapter presents the results of the research and these findings are discussed during chapter five. The final chapter draws upon the conclusion, show the limitations of the analysis carried out in this paper and indicate value added to the literature.

2. Theoretical Background

National cultural factors significantly influence marketing strategies of organizations. Although there is a long list of cultural factors that may impact the marketing strategies of various businesses, this study limits itself to six national cultural factors which are considered of key importance to marketers. Thus, three factors from the national cultural framework proposed by Hofstede (1980) (uncertainty avoidance; power distance; long-term orientation) as well three others identified in the literature on national culture (language, religious beliefs; ethnic values) form the focal part of this study.

Hofstede (1980) has developed a national cultural framework based on the following dimensions: individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity–femininity, long-term orientation and indulgence. This study, however, considers only three dimensions from Hofstede's framework as follows: avoidance, power distance and long-term orientation and these dimensions are discussed next.

2.1 The Impact of Uncertainty Avoidance on Marketing Strategies

The uncertainty avoidance index measures the degree to which a society faces the unknown and is willing to take risky decision. Studies suggest that the degree of uncertainty avoidance within an individual may depend on the environment (Baker and Carson, 2011; Hur, Kam and Kim, 2015). Lam (2007) states that people showing high score in uncertainty avoidance are more loyal and can be reticent to change mainly because they do not want (and like) to embark on risky choices; their loyalty is built on trust (Kwortnik and Han, 2011). Communities with high level of uncertainty avoidance are communities where existing offers with well-established loyalty programs have greater success and introduction of innovation or new product is hard and very challenging to implement. A possible explanation for this might be that people in high uncertainty avoidance culture favour routines and established practices which do not required changes. It should be highlighted that there is an inconsistency with this argument and the current competitive environment where it is practically impossible to maintain customer loyalty due to the large and various offers that are available for the customer. This is supported by Liu and Yang (2009) who state that various types of loyalty programmes are defined in the competitive environment to match customers' needs, market

demands and organization strategy toward competition. In addition, Piore and Sabel (1984) suggest that in the competitive environment, firms that innovate constantly are those which perform better although the findings of Hatzikian (2015) reveal a U- shape relationship between firm performance and innovation.

The literature shows that uncertainty avoidance impacts the pricing strategy as well (Brickner, 1966; Yeung, 2007; Schl ägel, 2011). Consumers within a high uncertainty avoidance culture are concerned about paying the right price for the product or service offered. According to Roozmand, Ghasem-Aghae, Nematbakhsh, Baraani, Hofstede (2011), in order to reduce the risk of losing money during purchases, customers in such environment tend to purchase high quality products and services. In the same vein, Hofstede, Jonker and Verwaart (2008) highlight the importance of setting the correct price for this category of consumers. These findings cannot be extrapolated to all marketing environments, especially in markets with high demand for quality. There are differences in the approach of customer loyalty programme management and sales promotions; and that is where firms use cultural dimensions to shape the loyalty strategy (Liu and Yang, 2009).

Because people with high uncertainty avoidance are reluctant to change (Tellis, Stremersch and Yin, 2003; Yeniurt and Townsend, 2003), new product introduction can be limited and for some cases could be a failure (Steenkamp, Hofstede and Wedel, 1999). Shane (1992; 1993) has clearly illustrated this by demonstrating that uncertainty avoidance has a significant negative impact on firm innovation. The main weakness with this theory is that it does not consider the competitive environment and the marketing efforts elaborated by firms to switch the customer from resistance to change to innovation defenders. This weakness is highlighted by Al Kailani and Kumar (2011) who state that in the high-tech domain, competition enables marketing creativity which encourage customers to favour innovation even if uncertainty avoidance is higher. Yeniurt, and Townsend (2003) argue that in some economic conditions, especially in growing and developing countries, uncertainty avoidance has a positive effect on new product penetration.

Previous researches showed that innovation can be implemented in an environment influenced by the uncertainty avoidance factor. Steenkamp, Hofstede and Wedel (1999) highlight that within low uncertainty avoidance, some cultures display high levels of innovativeness. In such cultures, people are more opened to sales promotion that emphasizes loyalty programmes. Furthermore, as they are also opened to uncertainty and risk, they are willing to buy promotional products without worrying about the outcome. In addition, a monetary promotion is more effective in a culture with high uncertainty avoidance because monetary reward is seen to be more reliable and tangible (Kwok and Uncles, 2005). The findings of this theory suggest that consumers should understand thoroughly the sales promotions and all the communication and advertising strategies to support the promotion.

2.2 The Impact of Power Distance on Marketing Strategies

Power distance determines the rights and duties among people. Those with high power always provide the direction to follow (Brettel, Engelen, Heinemann and Vadhanasindhu, 2008). Soares, Farhangmehr and Shoham (2007) state that power distance is the dimension which impacts consumers's behavior and decision making process significantly. In many African cultures, the authority and decision making power is based on age and experience (Grzeda and Assogbavi, 1999). Because of high inequality in society, consumers easily accept that sales promotion contents should differ from one customer to another (Kwok and Uncles, 2005). There is a common agreement that loyal consumers should have additional privileges, monetary or not (Kwok and Uncles, 2005; Kandampully, 2011; Pride and Ferrell, 2014).

Power distance influences the way the promotional activities are communicated (Darley and Blankson, 2008). Amos, Holms, and Strutton (2008) demonstrate that the success of using celebrities in advertising is due to the power and influence they have on consumers. In African countries, endorsements by religious leaders or African celebrities to promote products are very common (Mager, 2010).

Jenner et al. (2008) and Nakata and Sivakumar (1996) argue that in the marketing field, there is a close link between power distance and new product development. When introducing a new product in a society with high power distance, the firm can for example target the people with high authority such as, the community chief, group leader, amongst others. This approach is quite successful in high power distance societies but has a limited success in low power distance societies where each individual still owns the power to make his own decision about the new product (Dwyer, Mesak, and Hsu, 2005; van den Bulte and Stremersch, 2006). Nakata and Sivakumar (1996) suggest that the development of new products in a country with low power distance has a great impact on consumers during the initiation stage. There seems to be some similarities in the studies carried out by Nakata and Sivakumar (1996); Dwyer et al. (2005) and van den Bulte and Stremersch (2006). Nonetheless, marketers ought to be cautious since relying heavily on highly powerful customers while introducing new products may lead to failure if there is

disconnection between these customers and the mass market. In addition, building a new product introduction strategy which relies on hierarchy may have a negative impact if highly powerful customers boycott the product as illustrated in the example of Dutch products in Greece (Soeters, 2005).

Power distance influences loyalty programs as well. Wang and Lalwani (2013) suggest that “loyalty programs have a stronger negative effect on high power distance of non-loyalty-status consumers’ satisfaction” (p.709). The limit of this conclusion resides in the fact that it does not take into account emotional attachment to a product or brand, which is not driven by hierarchical structure but by the personality of each customer. This point is confirmed by several researchers (Fournier and Yao, 1997; Coyles and Gokey, 2002; Baloglu, 2002). Thus, in a society with high power distance, customers are very sensitive to price variation as they always compare the variation with the product quality. Their findings, however, fail to consider risk as a variable to the equation. In fact, it has been highlighted by other researchers that the link between product, price and quality is not the structural aspect but that it is risk aversion (Zhou, Su and Bao 2002). This point confirms that price strategy is also influenced by uncertainty avoidance

2.3 Impact of Long-Term Orientation on Marketing Strategies

Long-term orientation determines whether people look for future results or focus on immediate outcomes. Yucel-Aybat (2014) argues that while there are some consumers who may want to enjoy the immediate outcome of a product, some may be comfortable to enjoy it in the future if this means to keep the best for last. Bowen and Jones (1986) opine that as long as the customer is confident about paying the right price, their loyalty behavior is not impacted. Mujtaba, Mohd and Olayemi (2013) suggest that from a relationship marketing perspective, long-term orientation culture has an impact on “relationship between trust, personalization and customer satisfaction in the banking sector” (p.125). This view is supported by Claycomb and Martin (2001) who found that in a culture of long-term orientation, banks’ consumers are more interested in savings and investments as they enjoy the benefits on a long term basis. One major concern with loyalty and long-term orientation is the implication on customer satisfaction and the ability of a firm to maintain it. This issue has been highlighted by Barsky and Nash (2003) in the hospitality industry where customer loyalty is driven by the satisfaction derived, not through their long-term orientation index.

While Nakata and Sivakumar (2001) and Acar, Premasara, and Glen (2011) suggest that customers with high level of long-term oriented culture are willing to make sacrifices on short-term to get long term gains, Kwok and Uncles (2005) highlight that if the promotion is a monetary reward then there is a great change that it will have success in low long-term oriented culture. A possible explanation for this might be that low long-term oriented customers, focused on immediate outcomes, consider a monetary reward as the best quick and tangible outcome, and that any non-monetary reward involved a delay in obtaining it (Foxman, Tansuhaj and Wong, 1988). Perhaps the most important limitation of this finding resides in the customer behavior towards the sales promotion activities. In their study, Van Everdingen and Waarts (2003) demonstrate that long-term orientation encourages the adoption of innovation. They further argue that the more the country scores highly in long-term orientation, the more innovative the organisations would be.

2.4 The Impact of Language on Marketing Strategies

According to Umoren (1996), each culture is linked to a language. It is one of the most visible signs of cultural identity. According to Lovelock (1999), in a global marketing approach, corporate design remains the same but exceptions exist for language variation. Similarly Pride and Ferrell (1985) argue that language, through its multiple expression (body language, colours, greetings...), has a great impact on marketing strategies such as new product development, advertisement and sales.

Popovici (2011) and Tian and Borges (2011) clearly state that language is the highest obstacle to advertisement. Many firms have done this mistake, not always intentionally: KFC slogan “Finger-lickin' good” was translated “We'll eat your fingers off” in China, the Pepsi slogan “Come alive with the Pepsi Generation” was translated in Taiwanese as Pepsi is bringing the ancestors back to life, which appears more like an insult. Darley, Luethge and Blankson (2013, p.197) stated that “Advertising appeals that show direct comparisons of products are likely to be seen as less than tactful and, hence, inappropriate” from an African culture perspective more than from American culture perspective. According to Nakata and Sivakumar (1996), language barrier can create lack of trust, stress and negative feelings toward the new product. From the pricing and sales promotion perspectives, language has an impact mainly on how pricing information is shared and displayed to consumers. Regarding the impact of language on loyalty programmes, Douglas and Dubois (1977, p.104) state that long-term consumption and purchasing activities are implemented between seller and buyer via “daily-life routines and rhythms” which are driven by language and communication.

It is worth noting that, the global business trend has dictated informal international rules that, if implemented by any firms, eliminate the language impact. Despite of national languages, there are international languages which are used to vehicle messages towards the majority of the customers and no more borders exist “between languages and countries” (Popovici, 2011, p.57).

2.5 The Impact of Religious Beliefs on Marketing Strategies

Various studies have been carried out on the impact of religious beliefs on marketing (Luqmani, Yavas and Quraeshi, 1987; Michell and Al-Mossawi, 1999; Gardner, 1985). Essoo and Didd (2004) stress that religious beliefs drive consumers’ shopping behavior attitudes and used as example, Catholics and Hindus who seem to be comfortable with low prices, sales promotions and store credit facilities than Muslims. In addition, they suggested that new product development and innovation are most likely to succeed in a Muslim cultural environment than Catholic environment. Basically, religious values presented within consumers give an important “basis for positioning products and developing promotional strategies” (Essoo and Dibb, 2004, p.689). According to Al-Hyari, Alnsour, Al-Weshah and Haffar (2012) religious considerations can turn consumers from loyalty attitudes to deliberated boycott attitudes. After a publication of Prophet Mohammed caricatures in a Danish newspaper, many Muslims were called to boycott Danish products (Knight, Mitchell and Gao, 2009).

Fam, Waller and Erdogan (2004) investigated the influence of religion on consumer behaviour towards controversial products such as alcoholic drinks, cigarettes, contraceptives and even underwear. In Muslim religion it is illegal to advertise or carry out any communication activity on alcoholic drinks or cigarettes and for Catholics, the notion of contraceptive is still taboo. However, not all consumers are driven by religious considerations. In Nigeria for example, while in the northern part of the country alcoholic drinks are not allowed because of the predominance of Islam, in the southern part dominated by Christianity, alcohol and cigarettes are widely available.

The impact of ethnic values on marketing strategies

Ethnic marketing can be defined as the ability of a firm to fit its marketing strategies to a subculture’s needs and expectations (Velioğlu, Karsu and Umut, 2013). Laroche, Chung Koo and Clarke (1997) have studied the impact of ethnic values on sales promotions in the Canadian environment, for short and long term deals. Their study confirms that consumers are interested in sales promotions, whether for short or long term deals, and they are impacted by their ethnic values. In addition, they also found that ethnic values for the English-speaking community strongly influence the interest towards long term deals compared to the French-speaking community. Levine et al. (2014) demonstrate that pricing strategies towards ethnic negatively impacts trading, while in diverse markets, price bubbles improve trading. Jamal, Peattie and Peattie (2012) highlight the case of minority groups in UK.

There is also some evidence that ethnic values influence loyalty. This aspect has been studied by Shaffer and O’Hara (1995) and Segev, Ruvio, Shoham and Velan (2014) in USA, and in particular with Hispanic and Chinese communities. Hispanics, Chinese and African communities are more comfortable when going to a restaurant or a shop reflects their cultural backgrounds, or that are owned or used by family and friends (Donthu and Cherian, 1995; Halter, 2007). It is noteworthy that Sekhon and Szmigin (2009) acknowledge a limitation of the impact of ethnic values on consumers’ behaviour. They found that most of the consumers belonging to specific ethnic communities are influenced by their work place or by the social networks they have built and which are not related to their cultural considerations.

3. Method

This study involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data translating into a triangulation method. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2008) recommend that this combination must be taken to be complementary rather than supplementary methods. The participants (fifty in number on basis of convenience sampling) were chosen based on the influence they have on marketing strategies in their respective firms. As such, respondents of the survey were managers working in the marketing field from various firms working mainly in Africa and were from thirteen countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo and Egypt). The objective was to collect substantive data from different cultural perspectives and summarize the findings to address the research questions. In an attempt to make each interviewee feel as comfortable as possible, the interviewer prepared a list of seed questions and sent an explanatory email to all participants to brief them about the aims and objectives of the interview and the study. A questionnaire was then sent to the 50 managers to evaluate the extent to which the most relevant national cultural factors identified during the interviews affected their marketing strategies. In the last section of the questionnaire, the respondents were requested to provide recommendations that could shape marketing strategies, taking into account national cultures. The

questionnaire was based on interview responses and designed to identify how cultural factors impact marketing strategies, with a ranking from very low to very high. The questionnaire was designed using the SurveyMonkey tool (www.surveymonkey.com) and respondents were required to assess how each of the six national cultural factors impact each marketing strategy.

Face-to-face interviews (14) were conducted in Ivory Coast, Mali and Burkina Faso during a business trip of the main author in these countries. 23 out of 50 interviews were phone interviews, which occurred with participants located in Cameroon, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. The interviews were recorded on a mobile phone using the application ACR (Automatic Call Recorder), and then manually transcribed just after the call. The participants were informed that for the purpose of the study, the interview would be recorded. Finally, 13 out of the 50 interviews were conducted via email, for those who were not reachable by phone or physically. Participants for email interviews were located in Cameroon, Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Egypt. Participants' profiles were within the sales and marketing domain and were mainly Sales Managers, Marketing Managers and Heads of the Marketing and Sales departments

4. Results

4.1 Identification of Cultural Factors Impacting Marketing Strategies Undertaken by International Firms in Africa

Most of those interviewed indicate that marketing strategies undertaken by international firms in Africa are influenced by religious beliefs, language, ethnic values, loyalty, inequality and hierarchy in the society, tolerance to risk and the willingness to take risk. Interview results from the Ivory Coast also suggest that due to the low literacy rate there has been the development of a specific street language - "Nouchi" - which facilitates communication among people. In Togo and Burkina Faso, the majority of participants indicated that local language (respectively Minan and Mossi), hierarchy and their tendency to look for short term results and immediate outcomes influence advertisements, sales promotions and loyalty programmes. Interviewees from Senegal, Niger and Mali highlight the following factors impacting marketing strategies: the Islamic religion, inequality and hierarchy in the society, languages (Wolof for Senegal, Bambara for Mali) and ethnic values.

In Nigeria, interviewees mainly describe a society where marketing strategies are influenced by Islam, long-term orientation attitudes, languages, ethnic values and social hierarchy. In the southern part of Africa like in Kenya, Congo and South Africa, factors that influence marketing strategies are mainly inequality in society, ethnic values, long-term orientation and languages.

4.1.1 Pricing Strategy

Table 1. Impact of culture on pricing strategy

	very low	low	Neutral	high	very high
Language influences pricing strategy	15	14	7	2	1
Religious beliefs influence pricing strategy	7	22	5	2	3
Ethnic values influence pricing strategy	11	20	4	2	2
Inequality and hierarchy in Society influence pricing strategy	0	2	1	22	14
Tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk influence pricing strategy	1	3	2	23	10
Long-term orientation culture affects pricing strategy	2	3	2	20	12

Table 1 shows that power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation are the cultural factors which highly or very highly influence pricing strategies as indicated by more than 80% of the respondents. Inequality and hierarchy in the society are viewed as most influencing (more than 90%). 33 out of 39 (85%) respondents agree that pricing strategies are influenced by tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk, and 82% of the respondents argue that long-term orientation culture impact pricing strategy. It is also apparent from Table I that very few respondents (approximately 1%) consider languages, religious beliefs and ethnic considerations as having a relevant impact on pricing. A sizable 92% consider that language does not impact pricing strategies, 90% argue that pricing strategies do not take into account religious beliefs and 88% agree that ethnic values have no impact on pricing strategies.

4.1.2 Communication and Advertising

Table 2. Impact of culture on communication and advertising

	very low	low	Neutral	high	very high
Language influences communication and advertising	0	1	0	10	28
Religious beliefs influence communication and advertising	1	2	2	22	12
Ethnic values influence communication and advertising	3	2	3	18	13
Inequality and hierarchy in Society influences communication and advertising	15	14	6	3	1
Tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk influence communication and advertising	20	12	3	2	2
Long-term orientation culture affects communication and advertising	15	18	4	1	1

Table 2 reveals that language, religious beliefs and ethnic values have a 'high' to 'very high' influence on communication and advertising (80%). Almost all the respondents (38 out of 39) agree that language has the highest influence on communication and advertising strategies. It is also apparent from Table II that very few respondents consider inequality and hierarchy in society, long-term orientation and tolerance to risk as having a relevant impact on pricing strategies.

4.1.3 Sales Promotions

Table 3. Impact of culture on sales promotion

	very low	low	Neutral	high	very high
Language influences sales promotion	2	2	11	15	9
Religious beliefs influence sales promotion	3	4	6	17	9
Ethnic values influence sales promotion	3	5	3	19	9
inequality and hierarchy in society influence sales promotion	1	3	5	22	8
Tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk influence sales promotion	2	7	9	12	9
Long-term orientation culture influences Sales promotion design	1	1	0	26	11

Table 3 is quite revealing in several ways. Firstly, it shows that more than half of the respondents (97%) score 'high' to 'very high' in all the six cultural factors with long-term orientation being the most significant one. Secondly, tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk are the national cultural factors that least influence sales promotion strategies.

4.1.4 Introduction of New Products

Table 4. Impact of culture on new product introduction

	very low	low	Neutral	high	very high
Language influences introduction of new products	15	14	5	2	3
Religious beliefs influence introduction of new products	5	11	11	8	4
Ethnic values influence introduction of new products	10	13	4	10	2
inequality and hierarchy in Society influence introduction of new products	3	2	2	23	9
Tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk influence introduction of new products	1	1	4	20	13
Long-term orientation culture impacts the Introduction of new products	8	9	5	11	6

Table 4 shows that mainly two cultural factors have a great impact on new product introduction: inequality and hierarchy in society and tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk. More than 80% of the participants for these two cultural factors reveal that the impact is significant. Almost all the respondents agree that language has a very limited impact on new product introduction.

4.1.5 Loyalty Programmes and Strategies

Table 5. Impact of culture on loyalty programmes

	very low	low	Neutral	high	very high
Language influences loyalty programmes and strategies	15	18	14	2	1
Religious belief influence loyalty programmes and strategies	1	2	5	22	9
Ethnic values influence loyalty programmes and strategies	3	1	3	20	12
inequality and hierarchy in Society influence loyalty programmes and strategies	8	12	8	6	5
Tolerance to risk and willingness to take risk influence loyalty programmes and strategies	12	14	4	4	5
Long-term orientation culture influence the design of loyalty programmes	3	4	2	17	13

Table 5 shows that religious beliefs, ethnic values and long-term orientation are the three cultural factors that have a significant impact on loyalty programmes. More than 75% of the participants for each of these cultural factors indicate that the impact is significant. Less than 1% of participants indicated that language plays a role on defining loyalty programmes.

4.2 Improving the Marketing Strategies of International Firms in Africa Through the Influence of National Cultures – Recommendations from interviewees

4.2.1 Pricing Strategies

According to the majority of interviewees, three cultural factors influence pricing strategy: power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. Interview results suggest that pricing strategy can be improved by leveraging on inequality in the society and defining many different pricing models. Interviewee 19 from Burkina Faso says:

“We have many different prices for our products and services. Prices are tied to offers which are built based on the social position. We propose premium price for leaders and high influencing people with premium services, while we do have standard and low prices for basic services”

Uncertainty avoidance enables firms to improve the pricing model for new services by setting a lower price when launching a new service. According to one of the interviewee, setting a low price on products can remove the uncertainty. Some interviewees state that when customers are long-term oriented, the pricing strategy is to reduce prices or propose discount to enhance and increase subscription on long term basis. On the other hand, for markets scoring low on long-term orientation, the price is relatively higher to ensure revenue in the short run.

4.2.2 Communication and Advertising

Results suggest that communication and advertising can be improved by translating the message to fit the local language. This is illustrated by the below two responses from two interviewees from the same broadcast company in two different countries:

“from the original message ‘Maintenant on profite plus grand’, we have changed to ‘Maintenant on s’enjaille plus grand’, which corresponds better to the Ivorian street language”.

“from the original message ‘Maintenant on profite plus grand’, we have changed to ‘Maintenant I bi dia plus grand’, which correspond better to Mali local language”.

Communication and advertising strategies can be improved as well through religion and ethnic values. Advertising

should not criticize religious beliefs or ignore ethnic values. Anything that can create confusion and interpretation towards religious beliefs and ethnic values should be removed from the communication and advertising strategies. The interviewees from Islamic countries like Niger and Mali highlight that woman in a advertised panel is fully dressed. Interviewee 34 from Mali says:

“We have to change the picture in an advertisement showing a woman dressing a beach cloth to avoid hurting people religious sensibilities”.

4.2.3 Sales Promotions

Almost all interviewees agree that the five cultural factors (language, religious beliefs and ethnic values, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation) influence sales promotions. For example, one respondent states that religious beliefs and ethnic values makes it possible to target and reach specific consumers whose shopping behaviours are significantly impacted by these two mentioned cultural factors. An Interviewee from a Kenyan firm says:

“We run most of our promotion in Swahili, the dominant local language, both in rural and urban areas. We select some local people to go to meet consumers at their houses and present the promotions. As many people are not lettered, it makes it more efficient to present sales promotion in their language”.

Another one from a mobile operator in Niger says:

“We do have big sales promotions during Ramadan’s and Eid’s days. As the country is 95% Muslims, it was evident to implement such promotions during these periods. It was actually the best times for promotions, not during Christmas as it could be in others places”.

4.2.4 New Product Introduction

The findings show that power distance and uncertainty avoidance are cultural factors influence the introduction of new products. A high number of the respondents state that new product introduction strategy can be improved by using the inequality in the society and introduce the product to high income earners first, usually called VIP customers. By doing so, firms are able to get buy-in from these top consumers, and can expect that followers will adhere (or not) to the product. An interviewee from Nigeria says:

“Before start selling news phones to the market, we always provide sample to high influencing people in the society for a trial period which varies from 1 month to 6 months. We know that if these leaders enjoy the phone, many customers in the market will enjoy it too”.

The majority of the interviewees also suggest that uncertainty avoidance impacts negatively on the introduction of new products. Therefore, they suggest that to improve new product introduction strategy in a market with high level of uncertainty avoidance, the strategy must be aligned with a well-defined pricing that will encourage the consumer to buy the new product. They state that even if there is uncertainty for product, if the price is reasonable, consumers are still willing to buy it.

4.2.5 Loyalty Programmes

Interview results suggest that religious beliefs, ethnic values and long-term orientation are cultural factors influencing loyalty programmes. Loyalty programmes can be improved by leveraging on religious considerations and ethnic values to win the loyalty of many customers, especially in countries with high degree of ethnicity and religious beliefs. Interviewee 49 from a consulting services company in Senegal illustrates this by saying:

“Religious Beliefs and Ethnic Values have driven most of our loyalty programmes in Senegal. We put in spotlight the Islam Beliefs and Senegalese ethnic values to retain main customers. We emphasize on the fact that we do respect religious Beliefs and it make the customer to feel close to the brand, and make him loyal”.

Most of the interviewees also agreed that long-term orientation can be used to improve loyalty programmes strategy. Customers that live in countries scoring high in long-term orientation emphasize on short term outcomes, so loyalty programmes are designed to propose short term outcomes. For example, loyal consumers can enjoy additional bonus or discounts on a daily or weekly basis.

5. Discussion

5.1 National Culture Influence on Price Strategy

The findings from the fieldwork and the literature reviewed concur that pricing strategy is influenced by uncertainty avoidance. As mentioned in the literature review, setting a fair price for a product is important for consumers in a

high uncertainty avoidance culture (Hofstede et al., 2008). Uncertainty avoidance influences pricing when the product is at the introductory stage, as the feeling of the unknown acts as a barrier to the customer to pay a high price. This barrier is removed by clarifying the reason underlying the set price through communication campaigns.

From the long-term orientation perspective, the literature does not attribute a clear-cut relationship between long-term orientation index and pricing strategy. This study suggests that long-term orientation influences pricing in two ways. Firstly, if customers are focused on immediate outcomes, the strategy consists of setting and maintaining a high price to ensure generating revenue in the short term. Secondly, if customers are focused on future results, prices are set relatively low to enable a long relationship between the seller and the buyer. This finding suggests then that low price should be the strategy for market with high long-term orientation culture. An implication of this is the possibility that this low price strategy can be merged with a well-defined loyalty programmes.

Another interesting difference is that the literature has displayed religious beliefs and ethnic values as influencing pricing strategy. The literature suggests that consumers who display high religious beliefs are linked to low prices (Essoo and Didd, 2004) and that ethnic values influence price bubbles (Levine et al., 2014). If religious beliefs and ethnic values influence pricing, it is firstly because these cultural factors impact consumers shopping behaviour, and secondly because communities are most of the time grouped based on religious beliefs or ethnic values, enabling firms to target a range of consumers. Yet, these two cultural factors are not identified as impacting significantly the pricing strategy by the majority of the interviewees because defining prices based on religion or an ethnic group can lead to the boycott of products and services.

5.2 National Culture Influence on Communication and Advertising

The findings regarding the influence of national culture on communication and advertising are in accordance with the literature. Communication and advertising are mainly impacted by language, religious beliefs and ethnic values. More than 80% of the interviewees argue that these 3 factors have high influence on communication and marketing. While language impacts the form of the message to be sent, religious beliefs and ethnic values influence the content. From the interviews carried out for this study, it is evident that the same global marketing campaigns have been “tuned” to fit local language considerations. In the same vein, Popovici (2011), Tian and Borges (2011) and Darley, Luethge and Blankson (2013) explain that language is the most important barrier to advertising success and that a misinterpretation can have an adverse impact on consumer buying decision. The results however suggest that language barrier can be more significant in low literacy area.

Another important finding which corroborates that of Ketelaar, Konig, Smit, and Thorbjørnsen (2015) is that religious beliefs influence the way how consumers react to advertising. If what is displayed is considered as an “offense” to the religion, consumers will boycott the product. This has been highlighted by interviewees working in Niger, Mali and Nigeria where religious considerations have great impact on consumers. It is encouraging to compare this observation with the one highlighted by Al-Hyari et al. (2012) and illustrated in the example provided by Knight et al. (2009) regarding Muslims’ response to Prophet Mohammed caricatures in a Danish newspaper. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by these Muslims and the attitudes of Muslims in Senegal and Niger who are against portraying almost “naked” women in advertising. There are several possible explanations for this observation but the most significant one is because religious beliefs and ethnic values are considered sacred in these African countries.

Only a few respondents linked advertising and communication to the three Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation). It is likely that these results are due to the fact that no clear association has been found between social hierarchy, risk tolerance, and long-term orientation on one side and communication and advertising on the other.

5.3 National Culture Influence on Sales Promotions

In a culture with high degree of uncertainty avoidance or low degree on long-term orientation, sales promotions are the best methods to generate revenue for two main reasons, they emphasize on short-term approach and they also eliminate the risk by the unknown by providing special discounts or monetary rewards. This view concurs with the findings of Kwok and Uncles (2005) who state that monetary rewards from sales promotions are considered more reliable in a high degree of uncertainty avoidance. Yet, contrary to the literature, the findings also suggest that to some extent, monetary rewards are not considered as a good practice with customers who are not loyal and those who are risk averse. The reason may be that businesses strategically do not offer money to customers. Instead, they provide supplementary services in lieu of cash.

Interestingly, the results from interviews do not identify Power distance as a cultural factor influencing sales

promotion in the way promotions are communicated as indicated by Darley and Blankson (2008). For most of the interviewees, power distance influences mainly sales promotions for new product introduction. A possible explanation for this might be that most of the sales promotion strategies are either designed to push consumers to buy more in order to enable the firm to target the mass market, or to introduce new products, in this case it is the VIPs who are targeted.

Regarding the impacts of language, religious beliefs and ethnic values on sales promotion strategies, the findings of the present study and those from the literature seem to be in accordance. Both sources concur that sales promotions are somehow designed specifically to match religious and ethnic considerations. For instance, while Laroche et al. (1997) refer to the Canadian environment, Essoo and Didd (2004) on their part relate to Catholics and Hindus. Respondents from Kenya and South Africa highlight sales promotions towards different ethnic groups in each of these two countries. It is worth mentioning that some participants raised concern regarding non-conformity of some sales promotions strategies, which instead of increasing sales have created adverse results. It is possible that these results are due to cultural awareness or misinterpretations of cultural values in the country.

5.4 National Cultural Influence on New Product Introduction

As mentioned in the literature review, new product introduction is mainly influenced by a high degree of uncertainty avoidance (Tellis, Stremersch and Yin, 2003; Yeniurt and Townsend, 2003; Hofstede and Wedel, 1999). The literature also mentions a strong relationship between power distance and new product introduction (Jenner et al., 2008; Nakata and Sivakumar, 1996). These findings are confirmed by the interviews conducted and the questionnaires where more than 80% of the participants agree that uncertainty avoidance and power distance influence the introduction of new products. While there is a clear convergence between the findings in the literature and the results of this study regarding how power distance impacts the introduction of new products by targeting opinion leaders, there is a divergent point of view regarding uncertainty avoidance. While the majority of the respondents argue that uncertainty avoidance had negative impact on new product introduction, surprisingly Yeniurt and Townsend (2003) suggest that uncertainty avoidance can have a positive influence through certain economic conditions within the growing and developing countries. Hoppner, Griffith, and White (2015) examine reciprocity as a multidimensional norm whose dimensions of equivalence (what is exchanged) and immediacy (when the exchange occurs) influence relationship quality and satisfaction with performance in cross-border U.S.-Japanese inter firm relationships. The authors conclude that 'uncertainty avoidance positively moderates the positive effect of equivalence on relationship quality, while individualism and short-term orientation positively moderate the negative effect of immediacy on relationship quality'. A possible explanation for this might be that growing and developing countries have demonstrated high levels of innovation which enable firms to introduce new products and services successfully. This finding has important implications to develop new business models and marketing strategies in growing and developing countries.

Only a few respondents consider language as a factor influencing new production introduction. Actually, those who state that language can impact new product introduction have highlighted the role of language of communication and advertising in launching the product. It is encouraging to compare this finding with the work of Nakata and Sivakumar (1996) who find that language barrier can influence negatively the introduction of new products as the barrier will generate lack of trust and negative feelings towards the new product.

5.5 National Cultural Influence on Loyalty Programmes

The findings indicate that loyalty programmes are mainly influenced by religion, ethnic values and long-term orientation index. The point regarding religious beliefs and ethnic values can be explained by the fact that these cultural factors use to have similar characteristics: they influence consumers' buying behaviour within the society. In many African countries, communities are built upon religious or ethnic considerations, therefore it appears to be easier to plan and implement loyalty programmes towards these communities. These results match those observed in Hispanic and Chinese communities in USA where according to Shaffer and O'Hara (1995) and Segev et al. (2014), consumers are more loyal to the ethnic groups they belong to. In addition, when community leaders are associated with loyalty programmes, the programmes have a great chance to succeed or fail. This finding is in accordance with Al-Hyari's et al. (2012) findings which highlighted that religion can turn customer loyalty into customer defection if not well managed.

Another convergent point between the results of this study and the literature review is the impact of long-term orientation on loyalty programmes. The findings reveal that loyalty programmes have great opportunity to succeed in a culture with high degree of long-term orientation. This finding corroborates the views of Mujtaba, Mohd and Olayemi (2013), who suggest that marketers can successfully implement loyalty programmes in countries which

score highly for the long-term orientation dimension. This may be explained by the behaviour of consumers who display high or low long-term orientation dimension. Customers who score low on long-term orientation focus on immediate outcomes, not ideal for long-term relationships, while long-term orientation customers embark on long-term relationships.

Regarding the influence of power distance on loyalty programmes, the findings provide mitigated outcomes. There is no clear-cut evidence about how power distance influences loyalty programmes but the literature does offer support regarding the influence of power distance to non-loyal customers' feelings towards loyalty programmes. For instance, Wang and Lalwani (2013), observe that in a high degree power distance environment, loyalty programmes can negatively impact the non-loyal customers. This observation may be explained by the fact that in their search to obtain satisfaction, non-loyal customers are driven by the need of equality, which is not applicable in the context of high power distance index.

6. Conclusion and Implications of the Study

This study suggests that three cultural factors influence pricing strategy: power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. As such, advertising should not criticize religious beliefs or ignore ethnic values. Almost all interviewees agree that the five cultural factors (language, religious beliefs and ethnic values, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation) influence sales promotions. The findings show that power distance and uncertainty avoidance are cultural factors influence the introduction of new products. The majority of the interviewees also suggest that uncertainty avoidance impacts negatively on the introduction of new products. Interview results suggest that religious beliefs, ethnic values and long-term orientation are cultural factors influencing loyalty programmes. Loyalty programmes can be improved by leveraging on religious considerations and ethnic values to win the loyalty of many customers, especially in countries with high degree of ethnicity and religious beliefs. "Religious Beliefs and Ethnic Values have driven most of our loyalty programmes in Senegal. There is also strong agreement that long-term orientation can be used to improve loyalty programmes strategy. Customers that live in countries scoring high in long-term orientation emphasize on short term outcomes, so loyalty programmes are designed to propose short term outcomes.

The findings from the fieldwork and the literature reviewed concur that pricing strategy is influenced by uncertainty avoidance. From the long-term orientation perspective, the literature does not attribute a clear-cut relationship between long-term orientation index and pricing strategy. This study suggests that long-term orientation influences pricing in two ways. This finding suggests then that low price should be the strategy for market with high long-term orientation culture. When religious beliefs and ethnic values influence pricing, it is firstly because these cultural factors impact consumers shopping behaviour, and secondly because communities are most of the time grouped based on religious beliefs or ethnic values, enabling firms to target a range of consumers. Communication and advertising are mainly impacted by language, religious beliefs and ethnic values. Power distance has significant impact on sales promotions for new product introduction.

The paper does not include the other three national cultural factors from Hofstede's cultural dimensions: individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity and indulgence. However the authors, while acknowledging that these factors also impact consumers' behaviour, view that the ones considered in this paper are the most significant factors for the context of the study. Another limitation lies in the fact that the study does not look at the interaction between national cultural factors, but instead considers them separately and evaluates their impact on consumer behaviour separately. Nonetheless, the study has shown an interesting relationship between national culture and marketing strategy in the African context and the study leveraged on the diversity of the participants to give credit to the data collected

The results of this study have a number of practical implications. The conclusions of the paper work allow managers to better design and implement marketing strategies in the African business context. This paper also extends knowledge of African culture and its impact on consumer behavior and marketing strategies, which are important for the marketing literature and research work within Africa context.

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