CONSUMER CULTURE AND CONSUMER IDENTITY

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Abstract  
This paper examines the consumer culture and consumer identity. Theoretical books and articles from academic journals were used as secondary sources of data for this study. Subsequently, the paper reveals consumer culture as a broader category that gives a label (an identity) to individual consumers who tend to purchase goods and services according to how their culture and identity dictate. And the marketer’s ability to understand consumers from their cultural and perspectives identity needs a desires to help them produce products that would meet consumer culture and identity meanings. It is proposed in this paper that an empirical method could be adopted by researchers to further look at this phenomenon to give insightful knowledge about how consumer culture and identity could dictate which products a company should offer to the targeted market.

Keywords: Consumer, Culture and Identity
1. Introduction
The issue of how dispersed consumers (the final users of purchased products) are, and the
need to locate them for an effective provider of value have long been a topic of discussion
among producers as well as marketers of consumer products, and have recently become
pertinent issues in our modern marketing. It is highly presumed that a thorough understanding
of consumers in totality (culture) would be a perfect antidote to curtail this malignancy in
marketing, and this seems to have thrived number of literatures than serve as a perfect cure to
this menace.

The vivacious and conceptual scenery of consumers makes it tiresome to agree on a single
definition of their respective culture, which is highly presumed that understanding it will aid
the provision of value to such consumers. But notwithstanding this, Kardes et al. (2008, p.
261) noted that some behavioral scientists referred to culture as the “patterns of meanings
acquired by members of society expressed in their knowledge, beliefs, art, laws, morals,
customs and habits”. In other words, culture represents the meanings commonly shared by
most people in a social group (Olson et al, 2008, p. 280). These suggest that, who one is,
what he or she beliefs or does or prefer (identity) is a true reflection of his or her culture.
But it must also be noted that social groups or cultures differ in the way they shape their
members’ identity. For instance, the people in American or European social groups have a
wider range of freedom to select cultural meanings and use them to form or express their
desired personal identity (Olson et al, 2008) and marketers being aware of them ought to
incorporate these into their marketing strategies in order to locate or identify their customers
for provision of valuable products. The aim of this study is to examine the propensity of
consumer culture and consumer identity to tailor the products offered to the market.

The remainder of this paper is organized sequentially in two sections: the first section
involves a critical review of related literature on consumer culture, consumer identity and
their effects on purchasing or consumption pattern of consumers with respect to the kind of
products they often buy. The last sections discusses entails data and methodology used, key
findings as well as the limitation(s) of the paper and also comment on possible direction for
future research.

2. Literature Review
The global market is swift and fragile such that the “the interaction between cultures and
market are accelerating in the global economy” (Cleaveland & Laroche, 2007. P.).Progressively, the penchant of purchasing for consumption’s sake is losing its
susceptibility in the sense that, in the 21st Century “people use goods to create social bonds
or distinctions” (Featherstone 1990. p. 5). In order to be successful in reaching the target
market (Ogden et al, 2004), marketing managers ought to be abreast with the understanding
valid assumptions about cultural influences (Cleaveland & Laroche, 2007) on product-
specific patronage by customers or consumers. This affirms the globally recognized assertion
that the growth of demand to some extent depends on the capacity of cultural specialists and
intermediaries to ransack various traditions and cultures in order to produce new symbolic
goods (Touraine, 1985). It is evidently clear that, new ways of doing things are unveiling to
pave way for our 21st century to eradicate the primitive and routine ways of marketers to
offer products to a specific market without a prior knowledge and understanding of key
participants (customers or consumers) of such market. Which depends on the pre-informed
knowledge of their ‘culture and identity’ as vividly dichotomized in the beneath exegesis.
An attempt to understand and acquire knowledge of customers’ culture and identity in order to tailor the products to be offered to the market. Culture is seen as “a construct at once pervasive, compelling, and elusive, from which a person’s sense of reality, identity and being emerge” (Penaloza and Gilly, 1999, p. 86). Ironically, their definition perceives culture as an enclosed object which contains other objects such as reality, Identity and being. This presumes that culture has the propensity to curve or determine the reality and identity of every single individual. On the other hand Cleaveland & Laroche (2007) also asserted that culture is a collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group from another (p. 201). Like others, they also relate culture this time to people’s mind set which is extremely difficult to predict, but can only be manifested through what they do or eat outwardly. It has sometimes become difficult to completely understand cultural systems of people, but through what they openly or publicly do which connotes their identity, one could possibly make some inferences. Like an adage goes ‘offspring always possess some genetic attributes of parents, it sometimes becomes a bit difficult to get sole meaning to what real identity is despite several attempts from scholars from the academia forest (environment full of intellectuals). One of those scholarly expressions that clearly explains my theoretical perspicacity of identity as an element or a subject of the universal culture is by Reed II et al. (2012, p. 1) Who defined identity as “any category label which a consumer self-associates that is amenable to a clear picture of what a person in that category looks like, thinks, feels, and does”. This expression to me gives a clear picture of consumer culture and identity in the sense that, it perceives consumer culture as a broad category that dictates how a person in that category will look like, think, feel, and what he or she will do in accordance with his or her categorical label.

For instance, if one belongs to the group of homosexuals, this group accordingly becomes the broader category which gives a label (identity) to its members as homosexuals. Therefore, what they do, how they think, look like and feel presage the attributes of their broader category not their individual attributes. This is clearly envisaged in early 1920s, during the modernization of Turkish social engineering, people were given a monoculture identity, where the common language was used in public institutions to orientate every citizen’s duty and obligations toward Oman culture (Baris and Binark, 2002, p. 496). These prove beyond every reasonable doubt that, the members of a category or social group or to be precise cultures dance to the rhythms of their associated culture in the sense that any hierarchical attempt to alter the cultural systems has retrospective repercussions on the individual members. Therefore, who one is, what her beliefs, does, prefers or associates herself (identity) to, really become a true reflection of her culture.

3. Effects of Consumer Culture and Identity on Consumer Products
Like individuals having personal goal(s), every company or business has gotten a mission statement which spells out what the company wants to accomplish in the future. Uniqueness in the knowledge of each company’s expertise brings about differences in how each company states its mission. And this according to Kottler & Armstrong (2010), “should be market oriented and defined in terms of satisfying basic customer needs” (p. 54). Literally, satisfying the basic needs of customers is offering products that will be useful to serve the needs of customers of which marketers cannot do in isolation. Customers of our generation are steadily moving from the ‘mere purchase’ to the ‘meaningful purchase’. Here I mean they are moving from the normal routine purchases to those that will not make them misfit in their society and for marketers to move in-line with them; they ought to understand their customers in a totality which includes their cultural background, who they are, what they prefer and what they dislike. Understanding the culture of customers, therefore becomes imperative
when endeavoring to sell to certain ethnic groups (Gore 1998). For instance, an attempt to sell clothes to the people in Oman needs a thorough understanding of their culture and if possible be a participant in their culture to know exactly the type of clothes they admire and when almost everybody would like to get such cloth since close to hundred percent of their entire populace appreciate their traditional cloth called ‘smoke’. Knowing the identity of an individual as a Muslim in the ‘Zongo ‘(Islamic) community as known in Ghana would help marketers to be aware that veils as well as long dresses are inseparable from their culture, also designing products, marketers should be cautious about the product’s features since certain colors are forbidden by certain groups. For instance, marketing to the members from the gay group, the marketers should understand their culture in order not to provoke them by offering products with their dislike color such as pink. Ostensibly, there is an agreement in the marketing literature (Ogden et al, 2004), that culture from which one’s identity emanates greatly influence the way consumers perceive and behave (Hall 1977; McCracken 1988; Clark 1990) toward the kind of products they buy. And in order to be more effective in reaching the target markets, marketers must have an understanding of how intra-national culture impact product –specific purchase by consumers (Ogden et al, 2004 p. 1).

Over the years businesses as well as marketers have been paying attention to the improvement of their products’ quality at the expense of the realities in the market. Thus, seeing the needs of customers from the company’s perspective (marketing starting from the company’s premise) which has been the norm in marketing for quite a long time. But this paper will absolutely eradicate the long and adhered style of most marketers and will start seeing production from the customers’ perspective.

4. Conclusion
This paper was theoretically set out to examine the propensity of consumer culture and consumer identity to tailor the products that marketers ought to be offered to the market. Books as well as articles from academic journals were used as secondary sources. The paper clearly revealed that people (consumers) live in accordance with their culture and tend to purchase products that would be meaningful to their culture, therefore for marketers to be able to provide something of meaning to them they ought to identify their dispersed consumers through understanding of their (consumer) respective cultures. Consumers are widely dispersed such that how they react within the parameters of their culture; it becomes extremely difficult to understudy them outside their culture to get an insightful knowledge about their culture to modify company’s products that would be meaningful to their culture. Due to this I therefore propose that, in future, researchers can empirically understudy this phenomenon through acting as participants in their consumer culture.
References
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