Chapter 8

Social Class and Consumer Behaviour in Sub–Saharan Africa:
Implications for Cross Cultural Marketing

Ayodele Oniku
University of Lagos, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The development around social class evolvement in sub-Saharan African market dated back to pre-colonial era when traditional African institution operated on the basis of royalty, land ownership, subjugation of weak tribe and superiority of strong and powerful tribes. The advent of slavery and migration of white settlers and traders (slaves and goods) further entrenched social class structure in the system. The advent of colonial rule greatly impacted social class system whereby new strata were created based on the new administrative system that colonial system introduced into sub-Saharan Africa. Largely, acquisition of formal education, salary and wage-collection jobs, business opportunities, western religion, clothing styles and new roles to the traditional chiefs opened doors for new social class strata. Social class has witnessed development and improvement that has further improved marketing system and consumer understanding in the society through design of products and services for the market.

INTRODUCTION

Social class measurement in behavioural marketing represents a fusion of socio-economic developments with different behaviours exhibited by consumers in market which invariably affect the buying decisions. In other words, social class is a function of economic power, lifestyles and societal values possesses by individual that influences his/her position in the social classification in terms of what he buys, uses or types of association he/she belongs to in the larger society. By and large, the social classification or level relies largely on the socio-economic power an individual controls and the level of societal values and prestige attached to each stratum of the social class.

In the early work of Myers, Stanton and Haug (1971), "social class is based upon the idea that a society…constructs some ideal or optimum which is most highly regarded by members of the society… The more closely individuals or group conform with the ideal, the more they are respected and admired by others and the higher their position in the hierarchy of social levels. Higher societal levels or strata are said to carry more status in society than lower status; they are of higher social class" (Myers & Reynolds, 1967, p. 206). Thus, the basic operating powers that social class identification hinge on is socio-economic conformity, societal appraisal of hierarchy level and respect and status attributed to each hierarchy level and stratum. It further shows that social class mobility exists in that individual can aspire to move across the ladder rung as he/she increases the economic power he possesses which thrust certain respect and prestige on him. Thus, every society can be viewed in terms of social class because it defines the classification of skills, achievement, wealth, association, and other qualifications that set apart people within a system (Berkman, Lindquist & Sirgy, 1997).

In business and, largely marketing, social class is regarded as a basis to identify different consumers in market, and hence polarisation of market into different segments so that right products will be made available to the right consumers. American Marketing Association describes "social class as a national status hierarchy by which groups and individuals are distinguished in terms of esteem and prestige" (Peter & Olson, 1999, p. 317). The hierarchies for marketing decision recognition are entrenched in the following classes – upper, middle, working and lower class (Peter & Olson, 1999); the privileged/skill chooser, the semi-skilled chooser and disconnected chooser (Robenstine, 2001); the Peninsula People approach – upper class, upper-middle class, lower-middle class, upper-lower class and lower-lower class (Berkman *et al*, 1997).

Besides being a basis for market segmentation, social class levels further provide opportunities for marketing organisation in effective application of pricing, product, distribution and promotion decisions to meet the different requirements and needs of each stratum of social class. For instance, different good and services are available to meet social status needs, and products are equally available to propel or establish individual in desired social class status. Also, social class projects different lifestyles that individual or consumers in a society can aspire to experiment or exhibit; hence products and other marketing policies and strategies like promotion are tuned to help consumers identify and actualise chosen or aspired lifestyles. Social class reveals why consumer buys a particular goods or service at a particular time and what will be needed to fulfil the purpose. For instance, the yearning for a specific clothing style is a function of desired purpose or needs.

Importantly, social class is not really measured on individual economic power neither on consumption decisions but rather it is determined on the platform of household income or a family resources or economic power. The basis in turn shapes, largely, the type, volume and quality of consumption that can be attained e.g. education, leisure, accommodation, etc. This is further reflected in the fact that members of a household or family share the same characteristics which distinguish them from another families or households. So the level of income commands by a particular household will go a long way in determining the social class it belongs; and further reflected in the family members' lifestyle. Myers *et al*., (1971) corroborate that expenditure on commodity groups like food; shelter and education really vary among different occupational groups which remains one of the potentials ways of determining social class. Peter and Olson (1999) further stress that social class of a family or household is affected by variables like social skills, status aspiration, community participation, family history, social acceptance; source of income, possessions, level of influence and association with others (Berkman *et al*., 1997).

Related Content

Changing Nature of Customer Relationships in Organizations: Strategies and Initiatives
Pratap Chandra Mandal (2023). *International Journal of Public Sociology and Sociotherapy (pp. 1-16).*
www.irma-international.org/article/changing-nature-of-customer-relationships-in-organizations/317920

Migration and Refugee Crisis: Structural and Managerial Implications for Education
efika ule Erçetinand Ssali Muhammadi Bisaso (2018). *Educational Development and Infrastructure for Immigrants and Refugees (pp. 47-71).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/migration-and-refugee-crisis/187969

eLearning and Distance Education in Higher Education Accessibility: South African Perspective
Gezani Phineas Baloyi (2020). *African Studies: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice (pp. 534-544).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/elearning-and-distance-education-in-higher-education-accessibility/253164

Innovation, Organisational Structure, and Culture: Its Impact and Linkage on Organization - A Review
Sayan Banerjeeand Dinesh Srivastava (2017). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change (pp. 1-22).*
www.irma-international.org/article/innovation-organisational-structure-and-culture/183698

Understanding Social Identity Through Autoethography: Building Intercultural Communication Competencies in Higher Education Classroom
Maria S. Plakhotnik (2020). *Multicultural Instructional Design: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1414-1435).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-social-identity-through-autoethography/231406