



Impact of Culture on Meat and Related Food Preferences in Akwa Ibom State

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of meat and related food products marketing in Akwa Ibom State is conditioned by the specifics of culture. In this study, cultural effect on meat consumption is examined. A sample of 568 respondents were analysed with OLS regression. The results reveal that meat consumption and preferences for related products is a function of culture. Employing cross sectional regression methodologies, this study finds that culture is a significant and robust determinant of meat and related products consumption in Akwa Ibom State. We concluded with a discussion of implications and promising directions for the development of a vibrant meat market in Akwa Ibom State.

Keywords: Culture, consumption behaviour, food decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of culture on consumers consumption behaviour has been well documented (Musaiger, 1993; Derone, 2003; Hofstede, 1984; Hateh, 1985 and Levitt, 1988). Akwa Ibom State reportedly has more than 150 different organized cultures. Of this number, Ibibio, Annang, Oron and Ibeno are the principal organized cultural settings. The members of these different cultural groups at times are likely to make purchase and consumption decisions that are influenced by their cultural identity. Commonly, certain food and meat items in Akwa Ibom State are directly affected by culture in terms of products that are symbolically and ritualistically associated with the celebration of various cultures.

However, very little consumer research has been devoted to examining how the different cultural affiliations and commitment to cultural practices influence consumption preferences of Akwa Ibom State. Each of the major sub-cultural groups appear to have some distinct beliefs, values, and customs;

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thus, a marketing strategy that may be successful with the Ibibios might fail with the Annangs in Akwa Ibom.

Moreso, although differences in lifestyles and consumer-spending patterns exist among these groups, the vast majority of culturally oriented consumer research has focused on consumer differences among other cultures. Only recently has particular research attention been given to consumers in this part of the country (Amanam, 2000; Ibok, 2006).

Although, there may be many similarities among the different cultural identities of Akwa Ibom State in terms of consumption behavior, there are also some meaningful differences in terms of practices, preferences and brand purchase patterns. Some meaningful differences exist among Ibibios, Annangs and Oron consumers in the purchase and use of a diverse group of products including meat and food items. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore the impact of cultural values on meat and related food preferences among Akwa Ibom people.

Research Question

Does culture have any significant influence on meat and other related food preferences among the different cultural affiliations in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypothesis:

There is no significant influence of culture on meat and other related food preferences among Akwa Ibom People.

Theoretical Framework

It is widely recognized that marketing activities the world over are culture bound (Hofstede, 1993; Tse et al. 1985), as marketing in one culture can be very different from marketing in a number of cultures. Accordingly, Hatch (1985) sees culture as the way of life of a people, which consists of conventional patterns of thought and behaviour, including values, beliefs, rules of conduct, political organizations, economic activity and the like, which are passed on from one generation to the other by learning and not by biological inheritance (Hofstede, 1993).

Viewed from this definition, it does suggest that when a marketing programme is deeply rooted in a particular culture, the marketing programme can easily enjoy sustainable competitive advantage. When the culture of a particular society is challengingly different, more often than not there should be commensurate differences in marketing efforts in order to enable the company to stem the tide.

Research on consumer behaviour has identified a tenuous link between culture and meat and certain food preferences (ASP, 1999). Some studies have found evidence that culture influences food habits and the type of food

choices people make (Becker, 2000; Dindyal, 2003; Candle, 1993 and Musaiger, 1993).

In some culture people choose not to eat animal at all or eat only certain meat or food items as restricted by their tradition, belief, custom or heritage (Candle, 1993). In this case, an individual's preferences towards the consumption to meat and other related food items are largely determined by their cultural settings (Devine, 2003). Musaiger, (1993) maintains that food habits and the type of food choices made by members of a given society are learned preferences shaped by their culture, belief, norms and traditional belief, thus endorsing what is appropriate and inappropriate for consumption. This therefore follows that culture and cultural settings decide the food choices for any member of a culture and even in some cases spell out punishment for defaulter.

In Akwa Ibom State for instance, some cultures ban the consumption of meats like pork, monkey and dog over the belief that these meat items possess some demonic powers and in many cases are messengers of witchcrafts (Amanam, 2000). In some parts of Ibibio land, particularly Itam axis, Monkeys are forbidden from being killed because it is believed that monkeys are step-kin of man. Thus, anyone who kills monkey in this part of the state has committed an offence of manslaughter against the gods and until recently, culprits were punished by amputating their arms. Candle (1993) further asserts that cultural diversity is a major issue in food choice. Some cultures base their belief on the fact that production and consumption of certain meat and related food items for mass consumption is unsustainable and otherwise harmful (Becker, 2000).

ASP (1999) reveals that some cultures and customs consider the consumption of certain meat and food items as unwholesome and inherently wrong. Musaiger (1993) and Dindyal (2003) in their research concluded that observed food taboos in different cultural settings account for poor production and consumption of certain food items like meat and vegetables. Therefore, the ability of a firm to implant a successful marketing programme in any culture is dependent on the firm's ability to develop a specific product or items of cultural appeal. This becomes the basis for the achievement of a successful implantation of marketing programme.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional correlational field survey. Data on the dependent and independent variables were collected from 600 consumers in the three geo-political zones of Akwa Ibom State through the questionnaire. The population for the study comprised all consumers of meat and other food items in Akwa Ibom State. A systematic sampling procedure was first used to select 30 cultural affiliations from the various regions of the State from which a sample of meat/related food consumers were drawn. Then through a

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simple random sampling procedure, 20 consumers from each of the cultural settings were chosen for the study. The total sample size was 600 and responses were received from 568, for a 94.7 percent response rate. The unit of analysis was the individual who responded to the survey. Modified Likert's Scale instrument was used for data collection ranging from strongly Agree with 5 points to strongly disagree with 1 point. The data collected for this study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The hypothesis was tested at $p > 0.05$ level.

RESULTS

All respondents had at least First School Leaving Certificate. Their ages ranged between 20 to 55. About 60 percent of the respondents were over 30 years of age. The average number of children in the household below the age of 18 was two. This indicates that meat and related products consumption cuts across different age groups, thus age is no barrier to consuming meat and certain food items. Moreso, study also indicates that the largest proportion of meat consumers are between 20 and 45 years. Of the number of respondents interviewed, 60 percent of them were women while 40 percent were men. 80 percent of the respondents interviewed are married, 20 percent of them are single. The study further revealed that 6.7 percent of the respondents received primary education, 26.6 percent received secondary education, 20 percent had either OND or NCE, while 13.4 percent received university degrees, the remaining 33.3 percent claimed to receive one form of education or the other.

Test of Hypothesis

H₀: The hypothesis stated that there is no significant influence of culture on meat and other related product preference among the different cultural affiliations in Akwa Ibom State.

In order to test this hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows:

- (i) Culture as independent variable.
- (ii) Meat and other related food consumption as dependent variable.

Thus, meat and other related food consumption is estimated as a function of culture, which can be expressed in an equation form as:

$$Y = f(\text{cul}), \text{ that is } Y = f(x)$$

Where Y = meat and related product consumption

$$X = \text{culture}$$

Therefore $Y = a + bx$.

The two variables were then subjected to regression analysis in order to generate predicted (Y) value of (Y) (meat and other related products consumption) for x as the value of x (culture). Please see tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1:Model summary of linear regression analysis of aggregate meat and other related products consumption against culture.

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted Square	R- Estimate	Standard Error of the	T statistics
Total	0.894	0.799	0.799	1.37161		47.456

*P<0.05; df = 566; critical R-value = 0.195; critical t = 1.96.

Table 2: Analysis of variance of the influence of culture on meat and other related products consumption.

Model	Sums of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean Square	F-ratio	Significance
Regression	4236.923	1	4236.923	2252.108	.000
Residual		566			
Total	5301.746	567			

*P<0.05; df = 1 and 566; critical F-value = 3.84.

The results of the analyses reveal that there is 89.4 percent correlation between meat and related products consumption and culture as shown in the table above. This means that culture accounts for 79.9 percent change in meat and other related products consumption. This is confirmed by the adjusted r^2 (after adjusting for error) of 95 percent. When this was subjected to analysis of variance as indicated in table 3 to test for the strength of the relationship between the two variables, the F-value and the T-test at 5 percent proved that there is a significant relationship between meat and related products consumption and culture. Specifically, the F-ratio gave a computed value of 2252.108 as against the critical F-ratio of 3.84. This is also confirmed by the value of the t-test, which has a computed value of 47.456 as against critical value of 1.96. The implication of this relationship is that culture is important and influences meat and related products consumption. That is, the more favourable the people’s culture is, the more people will tend to patronize meat and meat products. This indicates a strong positive relationship.

Decision Rule

The decision rule is that if our computed values are less than the critical values at the chosen level of significance, we accept the null hypothesis; otherwise we reject it. It can therefore be seen from the above computations that the computed r-value is 0.894, t-value is 47.456 and F-value is 2252.108 as against the critical r-value of 0.95, critical t-value of 1.96 and critical F-value of 3.84. The above computed values are all greater than the critical values at the stated level of significance. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative, which states that there is significant influence of culture on meat and other related products preferences among the different cultural affiliations in Akwa Ibom State.

DISCUSSION

The empirical evidence from this study has shown that indeed, cultural values of Akwa Ibom people had some reasonable measure of influence on consumption of meat and meat related product items. This is because the t-test and the F-test performed on the available data demonstrated that there was a significant influence of culture on meat preferences. This qualitative deduction meant that such differences were not just due to chance occurrence. Therefore, the significance of this results is in agreement with the opinions of Amanam (2000), Tse et al (1988), Hofstede (1993), Candle (1993) and Becker (2000), whose respective studies have found culture to be correlated with food consumption. This finding also supports a similar one revealed by Devine (2003) and Dindyal (2003) whose studies also found a positive correlation between culture and some food consumption.

Summary, Implications and Conclusion

Marketing, whether of meat or any other product in one culture can be very different from marketing in a number of cultures. Thus it becomes important to understand the various issues related to launching marketing in a different cultural context. This concept has a lot of economic consequences since it affects the marketing performance and the risk exposures of marketers. Therefore, meat and other related products marketers should always endeavour to maintain a deliberate balance between the needs of the consumer and the requirements for effective marketing. Marketers should always manipulate the marketing mix variables to enhance patronage and consumption. In doing so, however, marketers must contend with various cultural values as culture sets artificial limits to the consumption of certain products.

A marketer should be guided by the philosophy of marketing concept, which is the hallmark of marketing. Within limits set by cultural constraints, marketers could still exercise a lot of discretion particularly in the area of product innovation. Moreso, it is obviously necessary for marketers to ensure that all known cultural barriers to meat and related products consumption in the state are reduced to the barest minimum. It is difficult to eliminate cultural barriers or values. All that we can do as marketers is to take very bold steps to identify the causes of these barriers and attempt to influence them through the various marketing variables since culture is developing and ever changing. It becomes imperative to examine the cultural aspects of meat marketing even when one is operating in a different cultural setting.

The implication of this findings suggest that a targeted marketing can aid meat/food marketers in reviving stagnant sales by focusing specific meat and related products to precise market segments. This would allow for market segments to feel that the products are customized to their needs, desires and cultural affiliations. The lack of interconnectivity between culture and meat consumption is a tactical issue with a very clear implication that a firm needs

a robust micro-mechanism of marketing research to coordinate marketing across cultures. In this way, the strategic direction will then have an opportunity to impact the market and streamline offerings that will possibly fit with the cultural yearnings of the people. However, further research is needed to reflect the dichotomy in meat consumption crated by the different cultural systems.

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