

Traffic, religion and electricity... A glimpse into the Nigerian consumer

 By [Ahmed Bulbulia](#)

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With Nigeria overtaking South Africa as Africa's largest economy, many eyes are looking at this bustling nation as a source of opportunity and a key market for business growth...

With a rapidly growing middle class and an estimated population of 178 million people, it is not hard to see why... Why have some brands, such as MTN and Shoprite, managed to succeed in this market while others fail?

The essence of successful marketing is to create an emotional connection between a brand and the consumer. This is only possible if we understand who the consumer is. This post will focus on three key factors that have shaped the Lagos consumers' behaviour, namely: traffic, religion and electricity. **(It should be noted that these points are Lagos specific and should not be used as a universal standard for the whole of Nigeria.)**

Lagos State is the smallest state within Nigeria and is responsible for generating 20% of Nigeria's total GDP. It has the largest population within the country (estimated 5% of the entire population) and is the second-fastest growing city within Africa. It is a coastal town made out of a collection of islands and the mainland, with a majority of individuals residing on the mainland but working on the Islands.

Traffic

Lagos is known for the traffic congestion and this has shaped consumers purchasing behaviour. It is not an uncommon sight to see hawkers selling a variety of goods from gum to hairbrushes on the city's main roads. This has also led to the emergence of micro-communities within the Lagos mainland where most essential items can be purchased within walking distance from a person's residence. This micro community will usually contain: fruit and vegetables; bread; a tailor; a small convenience store (a more formalised one in more affluent communities) as well as a place to purchase meat. In more affluent areas, it's not uncommon to also find a clinic, tailor, laundromat and maybe a gym.

The trend of e-commerce within Lagos is emerging amongst the growing middle class as individuals are looking for alternatives that save time and allow for a greater variety of goods.

Religion

Be it Christian, Muslim or traditional religion, Nigerians are guided by strong religious beliefs. This strong faith-based culture strongly influences consumer behaviour and purchasing patterns. The north of Nigeria is predominantly Muslim and the south is Christian. Religious leaders are key influencers within the community, with the power to influence purchasing decisions as well as to instil consumer doubt. If a brand is seen to be intruding upon religious values, it can be severely detrimental to the brand. An example of this can be found in an article published in the *International Journal of Arts & Culture* where Mr Biggs, a restaurant chain within Nigeria (49% Famous Brands owned), was accused within a newspaper of using pork in their fried rice and meat pies. The claim was never verified but negatively affected the market share of the company. Mr Biggs needed to launch an educational campaign to educate the public on the false nature of the allegations.

Lagos, while being predominantly Christian, also has a very large Muslim population. With this in mind, extra care should be taken with campaigns around religious observances. It can also be seen as an opportunity to ingrain your brand amongst consumers by sharing in their religious festivities.

Electricity

One of the greatest influencers of consumer culture within Lagos is access to electricity. There are many small instances of how electricity has affected both the consumer and business culture such as gas stoves in most homes and laptops replacing desktops due to external power sources.

Due to the limited electricity supply refrigerated goods are sold at a premium. The eating culture has adapted to this with yams, cassava, coconut, rice and plantain being staples within the diet. Most meat and fish that is found is fresh, it is possible to get a chicken killed while you wait in most markets. Businesses have adapted to the electricity shortages and most have generators that they run as their primary source of electricity.

Our job as marketers is to make the most informed decisions we can for the brands that we manage. With many brands looking at exploring the potential that's present within Africa what are we doing to help them to penetrate and understand these markets?

ABOUT AHMED BULBULIA

Ahmed Bulbulia is a marketing professional with 5 years experience within the industry. He is motivated by an insatiable curiosity and has worked with multiple local and international brands.

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