Satisfying the indigenous food needs of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa: A food consumption behaviour model for South Africa’s leading supermarket chains

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This study aims to establish a food consumption behaviour model of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa in order to enable South Africa’s leading supermarket chains to cater for their indigenous food needs. One of the effects of the fall of the apartheid regime is a growing increase of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. This has also given rise to an increase in the demand for indigenous foods. South Africa’s leading supermarket chains have acknowledged the growing potential of the emerging immigrant market and are interested in catering for their culinary needs. However, these chains lack the understanding and knowledge of the market; hence, the purpose of this study is to devise measures aimed at catering for their needs. The methodological framework comprised an elaborate review of contemporary studies in migration and immigrant consumer behaviour; a questionnaire survey and interviews with sub-Saharan African immigrants; as well as interviews with ethnic entrepreneurs and executives of leading supermarket chains in South Africa. This study will make a contribution in enhancing knowledge on the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. It could also serve as a reference document for South Africa’s leading supermarkets and other organisations that may be interested in the sub-Saharan African immigrant market. Furthermore, it may serve as a valuable resource for academians who may wish to develop and pursue new areas of research in immigrant consumer behaviour.

Key words: Apartheid, sub-Saharan African immigrants, consumer behaviour, food, South African supermarket chains, culture, ethnic entrepreneurs.

INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of the apartheid regime, South Africa has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants predominantly from sub-Saharan African countries. This has also resulted in an increase in the demand for indigenous foods. However, unlike their counterparts in Canada, Australia and America (hosting large numbers of sub-Saharan African immigrants), South Africa’s supermarket chains are yet to cater for the indigenous food needs of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. Nevertheless South Africa’s leading supermarkets cater for the food needs of immigrants from Europe, America, Asia, Canada and India. It is worthy to highlight that leading supermarket chains in South Africa acknowledge and appreciate the potential of the sub-Saharan African market in the retail industry and the economy at large. They have also expressed interests to cater for their indigenous food needs but lack a deeper understanding and knowledge of the food consumption behaviour of the market.

Abbreviations: GDP, gross domestic product.
In this regard, this study attempts to establish a food consumption behaviour model of the sub-Saharan African immigrant market in order to enable South Africa’s major supermarket chains to cater for their food needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review looks at the structure and people of sub-Saharan Africa, migration to and adaption in South Africa and the consumer behaviour of immigrants.

The structure and people of sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is a term used to describe the area of the African continent which lies south of the Sahara desert or those countries which are fully or partially located south of the Sahara. It comprises of 42 countries; split as follows:

b) East Africa: Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia.
c) Southern Africa: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
e) African Island Nations: Cape Verde (West Africa), Comoros (Southern Africa), Madagascar (Southern Africa), Mauritius (Southern Africa) Sao Tome and Principe (West Africa) and Seychelles (East Africa) (Dolan and Hobbs, 2009; Holloway, 2005).

There are many nations and hundreds of different ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. Each region has many different cultures and people. The most prominent sub-Saharan African people are the Bantu. They constitute almost two thirds of the population in sub-Saharan Africa. The Bantu people belong to the same language group. According to Burns and Collins (2007), the most abiding part of sub-Saharan African heritage is its cultural value system (Bailey, 2008) maintains that as a distinct cultural region, the cultural unity rests on similar characteristics shared to varying degrees by many popular cultures or small traditions.

The migration of sub-Saharan African immigrants to South Africa

Migration is one of the greatest constants of human history. Long before political borders emerged, people were already traveling from one part of the world to another (Manning, 2005). According to historians, sub-Saharan African immigrants started migrating since about 1000 B.C. in what is known in history as the Bantu migration. For centuries they moved south and east, ultimately spreading along the coast. During their migrations, the Bantu absorbed or displaced other Negroid peoples of eastern and southern Africa, driving pygmies, Bushmen, and khoisan speaking pastoralists into the southern jungle, the Kalahari Desert, or the extreme southwestern savanna. Thus Bantu migrants provided most of sub-Saharan Africa with a common cultural identity.

The dynamics of contemporary migration in sub-Saharan Africa has broadened both in scope and causes, but predominantly takes place within the continent. This is contrary to the prevailing belief caused by one-sided media coverage that a large share of African migrants relocates to Europe, or the developed states in the North. Research has shown that the majority of sub-Saharan African immigrants are within Africa. Only 1.5% of all sub-Saharan Africans, living outside their country, live within the European Union. More than two-thirds of all migrants, from sub-Saharan Africa migrate to other countries within sub-Saharan Africa (BICC, 2009).

South Africa is one of the primary destinations of migration within sub-Saharan Africa. Historians have equally argued that the movement of migrants from other sub-Saharan African countries to South Africa is not a recent phenomenon. During the apartheid era, South Africa was host to many Africans mostly from Southern African countries. The majority of these migrants were labourers who worked in the mines and plantations. However, the population of migrant labourers was relatively small compared to that of sub-Saharan African immigrants in the country today; this was largely because the residential policies of the apartheid Government prohibited black migrants from living permanently in South Africa (Bailey, 2008).

The demise of the apartheid government and the establishment of a democratic dispensation in 1994 cleared the way for millions of Africans from other sub-Saharan African countries to settle in South Africa. Though the exact figures are unknown, a study by the South African Institute of Race Relations found that approximately five to ten million sub-Saharan African immigrants currently reside in South Africa. South Africa is by far the continent’s wealthiest state, both in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and in total GDP. Thus, the majority of sub-Saharan Africans migrate to South Africa to improve their living conditions and for educational purposes. Undoubtedly, sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world suffering from the effects of economic mismanagement, corruption in local government, inter-ethnic conflict, diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, low life expectancy, malnourishment and high infant mortality, underdeveloped agricultural systems, drought and lack of infrastructure, electricity, water and health...
facilities which are fundamental impediments to economic development (Materu, 2007; Taylor and Massy, 2004).

Nevertheless, in pursuit of their objectives for moving to South Africa, sub-Saharan African immigrants confront numerous challenges. These include: the rigorous terms and conditions of residency in South Africa, lack of accommodation, employment and awareness and knowledge of how to access and make use of community resources, eccentric behaviours of the South African public which include prejudices, stereotypes, aggressively privileged opportunities along racial, class and citizenship lines and above all, the absence of indigenous foods in South Africa’s major supermarkets. For the majority of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa, the absence of foodstuffs from their countries of origin in South Africa’s leading supermarkets is one of the major challenges faced in South Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2006; Mwakikagile, 2008).

The majority of sub-Saharan African immigrants (especially new arrivals) are unfamiliar with most food products in South Africa and the methods of food distribution. It is worthy to highlight that the supermarket industry in most sub-Saharan African countries is underdeveloped; hence, groceries are predominantly done in open market structures managed by the local municipality. Therefore, upon arriving in South Africa, not only are they faced with the challenge of adapting to the local food products, most sub-Saharan African immigrants also face the challenge of learning to shop in supermarkets (Njomo, 2008).

Immigrant adaptation and food consumption behaviour

Adaption is one of the most important elements in migration studies. Scholars have predominantly (Margar, 2009; Hostfman et al., 2006; Berry et al., 2006) looked at acculturation as the most important mode of immigrant adaptation in host societies. The concept of acculturation has been defined differently in different disciplines and contexts. Within the area of consumer research, acculturation has been defined as a process whereby immigrants acquire the traits of the host culture and at the same time maintain the traits of their culture of origin (Laroche et al., 1997). It has been observed by researchers (Chattalas and Harper., 2007; Batra et al., 2006) that as the individual lives and participates in the new culture, he/she begins to internalize the normative expectations prevalent in that culture, which includes complying voluntarily with the food consumption behaviour patterns which reflect the values and beliefs of the new culture. Studies (Batra et al., 2006) have largely examined the food consumption behaviour of immigrants in the host country in the context of the relationship between food and culture. A study by Counihan and Esterik (2008) argues that immigrant food consumption includes many symbolic aspects and not just functional activities because immigrants have been found to seek food products less for their use value than for what is termed cultural value. Anderson (2005) argues that food is not just feed; it embodies history, memory, tradition, invention, place, diaspora, cultural values and reflects both continuity and change. In a similar analysis, Janer (2008) remarks that the meanings of food products express cultural categories and principles, cultivate ideals, create and sustain lifestyle, construct notions of the self and create (and survive) social change.

Nnakwe (2009) remarks that, as immigrants live longer in the host country they start to think creatively by modifying their indigenous foodways to incorporate relevant local foodstuffs and consumption patterns of the host society. Kirova and Adams (2006) maintain that in most cases unavailability and/or inaccessibility of indigenous foods compels immigrants to switch their food requirements to comply with local availability. A study by Kuma and Lal (2007) depicts that the desire to adapt to the foodways of the host country indirectly strengthens the need for indigenous foods and the connection between immigrant societies and their homelands. Kuma and Lal’s (2007) assertion finds strong evidence in Jennissen’s (2004) study of Italian labor immigrants in Belgium where it was revealed that despite Belgium’s efforts to assimilate Italians to Belgian foodways, Belgian Italians still cook as they do back home. According to Connel (2009), the kinds of foodstuffs consumed by immigrants and the method of preparation recall families and friends left behind and by continuing to consume homeland foods immigrants preserve this transnational relationship and enact their companionship with those back home.

An illustrated example is also found in Roger-Winarto’s (2006) study of Indonesians in Australia. Winarto (2006) found that most gatherings of Indonesians in Australia whether formal or informal include food (exclusively Indonesian menus) as a central element. Markovitsch and Rottger–Rossler (2008) argue that such social interactions reflect cultural conformity; consuming the familiar while constructing an interdependent collective/public self-image of the group within the wider community. This article seeks to establish a food consumption behaviour model of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa in other for South Africa’s major retail chains to establish measures to cater for their food needs. Therefore, in realizing the purpose of this study, the author has used the context of consumer behaviour as the framework.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Research (Felipe and Betty, 2005) argues that an organization’s marketing campaign will be futile without a knowledge and understanding of the consumption behaviour of its target consumers. Macinnis and Hoyer
(2008) have defined consumer behaviour as “the totality of consumers’ decisions with respect to the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of goods, services, time, and ideas by human decision making units over time”. According to Macinnis and Hoyer (2008) consumer behaviour involves more than just the way that a person buys tangible products such as a book or a car. It also includes consumers’ use of services, activities, experiences and ideas such as going to the doctor.

Consumer behaviour consists of two parts. These include the factors that influence the consumer’s choice of products and the consumer’s decision making process.

Factors that affect consumer behaviour

Two main sets of factors influence consumer behaviour. They are individual and group or social factors.

Individual determinants of consumer behaviour

These include: age, income, gender lifestyle, personality, attitude, motivation, beliefs, mood and learning.

Age

It goes without saying that consumer’s preferences and tastes undergo considerable changes with age. For instance, the food requirements of an older person will differ significantly from those of younger ones (Majumdar, 2010).

Income

A consumer’s lifestyle can change if his income increases or decreases. Income determines why, what, and when people buy goods and services (Quester et al., 2004).

Gender

The physiological differences between men and women result in different needs such as health, beauty products, cars and clothes (Quester et al., 2004).

Personality

Personality influences the feelings, thoughts, intentions, and behaviour of individuals (Mowen, 2000). In other words, how consumers view themselves relates to their consumption of goods and services (Majumdar, 2010).

Mood

Consumers in good mood are more likely to like a brand, product or service. On the other hand, consumers in a bad mood are likely to feel worse and downgrade their judgments of the product being sold especially when they interact with salespeople who seem to be unhappy (Macinnis and Hoyer, 2008).

Memory

Memory refers to the process of retention of information about past events and ideas. It also involves the capacity to learn, to be influenced by prior experience(s) and to behave differently in the future as a consequence of an experience.

This greatly plays an important role in a consumer’s choice of products and services (Majumdar, 2010; Brenner, 1990; Mullen and Johnson, 1990).

Self concept

Individuals consume products and services based on the fact that the symbolic value of the products and services is congruent with his/her personal picture or image of his/herself. Thus, consumers use products to preserve and enhance their self image and avoid those that do not (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010).

Lifestyle

It represents the external characteristics that pertain to how a consumer lives - the activities he engages in, his habits, his possessions, the interests he expresses, and what he sees as value in his life, reflected in the way he spends his time and money (Quester et al., 2004).

Motivation

A motive is a need sufficiently stimulated to move an individual to seek satisfaction. Consumer motivation represents the drive to satisfy both physiological and psychological needs through product purchase and consumption (Stanton et al., 2001; Pettitt and Brassington, 2003; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010).

Attitude

An attitude is a learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way with respect to an object. Attitudes can help gauge the acceptance of a product or service into the marketplace (Lake: 2009).

Learning

Consumer learning is a process by which individuals
acquire purchase and consumption knowledge as well as the experience that they apply to future related behaviour (Ranju and Mukesh, 2009; Schiffman et al., 2008). According to Law and Miles (2005) a consumer who learns about a product or service behaves rationally when making a decision than one without any knowledge about the product or service.

**Perception**

Perception is defined as the process by which an individual selects, organises, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent manner based on his/her needs, values and expectations (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2006; Stanton et al., 2001).

**Social factors that influence consumer behaviour**

Social factors that influence consumer behaviour include: reference groups, social class, family and culture.

**Reference groups**

In consumer behaviour, a reference group is defined as a group that serves as a point of reference for an individual in forming certain values. All reference groups have distinctive norms of behaviour. Thus, as a member of the group, you are expected to adhere to these norms; if not, sanctions may be applied to you (Cant et al., 2006).

**Social class**

A social class is defined as the division of members of a society into a hierarchy of distinct status or classes, so that members of each class have relatively the same status and members of all other classes have either more or less status. This greatly influences their choice of goods and services (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010; Cant et al., 2006).

**The family**

In a more dynamic sense, the individuals who make up a family can be described as members of the most basic social group who live together and interact to satisfy their personal and mutual needs. In this regard, the family or household plays a key role in shaping the consumption behaviour of not only the individuals within the family but the family at large (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010; Cant et al., 2006).

**Culture**

Culture is the adaptation of a people to the conditions of life. It distinguishes one group of people from another. Thus, the learned beliefs, values and customs of a peoples’ culture serve to direct their consumption of goods and services (Blackwell et al., 2006; Mullins et al., 2005).

**The consumer decision making process**

The consumer decision making process is made up of five stages. These include: need or problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase evaluation.

**Need or problem recognition**

This occurs when a consumer is faced with a problem. That is, when a consumer realizes a difference between what he or she perceives to be the ideal or desired state (the situation the consumer wants to be in). Need recognition is triggered when a consumer is exposed to either an internal or external stimulus. Internal stimuli are occurrences you experience such as hunger or thirst. External stimuli are influences from outside sources such as someone’s recommendation of a new restaurant or retail shop, a brand name mentioned by a friend or an advertisement on television or radio (Blackwell et al., 2006).

**Information search**

In many buying situations, once the consumer has recognized the problem, he/she starts looking for information. Consumer information search entails the mental and physical activities undertaken by consumers to obtain information on identified problems. It is a learning process by which consumers become aware of alternative products or brands, specific stores, specific trading centers, prices of products, terms of sale and consumer services (Cant et al., 2006).

**Evaluating alternatives**

Consumers are exposed to a broad range of products and services to select from on a daily basis. The product options are not only varied but complex and sophisticated; hence, the need to evaluate the available options (Hoffman et al., 2005; Czinkota and Ronkainen., 2000). It is important to highlight that different consumers employ different evaluative criteria - the standards and the specifications used to compare different products and brands (Cant et al., 2006; Stephen and Beaton-Wells, 2003; McDaniel et al., 2008).

**Purchase decision**

The consumer makes a purchase decision when he/she
believes that the product’s benefits will satisfy his/her desired needs. The decision is based on the assumption that the alternatives generated have all been evaluated accurately and that the one chosen will best solve the consumer’s problem (Stanton et al., 2001; Danziger, 2004; Strydom et al., 2000).

**Post-purchase behaviour and decision**

All purchase behaviour as a continuous process must entail consequences for the buyer. In the post-purchase evaluation process, the consumer examines the level of satisfaction derived from the product. In other words, the consumer finds out whether the product solved his/her problem or satisfied the need (Reddy and Naik, 1999; Czinkota et al., 2000).

**METHODODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

The methodological approach in all intents and purposes presents the specific tools used to acquire and measure data that enabled the author to realize the purpose of the research.

The study was conducted in the Western Cape Province of South Africa with the notion of using the findings as a representation of the food consumption behaviour of the larger sub-Saharan African immigrant population in South Africa.

The data collection method comprised of interviews and a questionnaire survey with sub-Saharan African immigrants. Interviews were also conducted with executives of South Africa’s leading supermarket chains and ethnic entrepreneurs.

A total of 409 immigrants from 26 sub-Saharan African countries took part in the study. The countries include: Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

**Interviews with sub-Saharan African immigrants**

The author interviewed 173 of the 409 sub-Saharan African immigrant respondents. The interviews were aimed at establishing an understanding of the immigrants’ consumption behaviour of local and indigenous foods in South Africa. The interviews took place at the immigrants’ homes, their shops, shopping malls, ethnic retail shops and restaurants, traffic intersections (where immigrants gather every morning seeking temporary employment or begging for money from motorists) train and taxi stations, and the Refugee Reception Centre in Maitland. The majority of the interviewees were residents of renowned immigrant communities in the Western Cape Province such as Bellville, Parow, Maitland, Brooklyn, Table View, Mowbray, Rosebank, Rondebosch, De Noorns, Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Haut Bay and central Cape Town.

**Interviews with executives of major supermarket chains**

With the exception of Pick’n Pay Group Holdings Limited, interviews were held with representatives of Shoprite Group Holdings Limited, Woolworths Group Holdings Limited and Spar Group Holdings Limited. The interviews were aimed at exploring the factors that inhibit South Africa’s leading supermarket chains from catering for the indigenous food products of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. The author also wanted to establish whether these chains will cater for the needs of the sub-Saharan African immigrant market if their food consumption behaviour pattern is established.

**Interviews with ethnic entrepreneurs**

Nine ethnic entrepreneurs from sub-Saharan Africa also took part in the study. The aim was to deeply understand the indigenous foods consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. The author was also interested in exploring the challenges faced by ethnic entrepreneurs in the indigenous foods industry.

**The questionnaire survey**

In addition to interviews, sub-Saharan African immigrants also took part in a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was carefully designed to achieve similar aims as the interviews. The questionnaire was structured in three parts. Part one looked at the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Part two explored the immigrants’ local food consumption behaviour while part three examined the indigenous food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. Of the 400 administered questionnaires, 236 came back completed - a response rate of 59%.

**Analytical procedures**

In this study, qualitative data was analysed using a Noticing, Collecting and Thinking method. A salient feature of this method is that it is progressive and recursive in that it is a cycle that keeps repeating, and when the author thinks of one thing, new things are noticed, collected and given a deeper thought.

At the noticing stage, the author took note and wrote down salient points made by respondents during the interviews. At the end of every interview, the data was computed according to themes, incidents and topics. By doing this, the author produced a record of the things he had noticed.

At the collection stage, the author sorted and sifted the facts already broken down into manageable pieces. In other words, each appropriate line or section of the data was marked and coded in the margin.

Finally, at the thinking stage, the author examined the data that has been collected with three goals in mind:

a) To make sense out of each collection.

b) To look for patterns and relationships within and across the collections; and

c) To make general discoveries about the phenomena that the author is researching.

Quantitative data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel to establish frequencies and percentages of the variables reviewed. The data analyses involved four stages. In stage one, the author created a workbook that contained the worksheets of the analysis. The database was titled and columns were created and given labels. The first column was labelled as the ID number – where the number of each question was computed. In stage two, the author coded the data, that is, every response was given a number. In stage three, the author entered the responses on the spreadsheet. The ID number was usually entered first, followed by the code of the selected response. The author carefully computed the data to ensure accuracy of the findings. In stage four, the author calculated the frequencies and percentages of the different categories, which were then interpreted to give meaning to the data.
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the following discussions, the researcher presents the findings of the study; which have been split into three parts to ensure a deeper and clearer understanding of the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. In part one, the researcher has examined the origin and growth of the sub-Saharan African market in South Africa. Part two explores the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa and in the part three; the author presents some salient features worthy to be considered by major supermarket chains in South Africa intending to invest in the sub-Saharan African immigrant market.

The origin of the sub-Saharan African immigrant market in South Africa

As indicated earlier, the emergence of democratic governance in South Africa has resulted to a mammoth growth of sub-Saharan African immigrants in the country. According to the findings, 69% of sub-Saharan Africans immigrate to South Africa to enhance their living conditions and those of their families back home. According, to 22% of them, movement to South Africa was for educational enrichment while 9% of sub-Saharan Africans immigrate to South Africa due to political instability in their countries of origin.

A regional representation of the respondents uncovered that 27% (n=111) of the immigrants came from Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe); 26% (n=107) from Central Africa (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Gabon, Rwanda and DRC); 24% (n=100) from West Africa (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo) and 21% (n=91) of the respondents came from the East African countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda and Eritrea.

The food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa

In line with the concept of consumer behaviour, the researcher has split the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa into two parts. The first part examines the factors that influence their food, needs choices and desires; while the second part looks at the food decision-making process of the immigrants.

Factors that influence the food needs of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa

The factors have been split into groups. These include personal and social factors.

Personal factors

The personal factors that impact the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa include: gender, marital status, length of residency, education, price, product quality, taste, similarity of local to home products, nutritional benefits, product assortment, service, proximity and employment.

Gender

In this study, 58% of the respondents were males and 42% of them were females. The study uncovered that unlike, their male counterparts, sub-Saharan African females (especially those who are married) consume more indigenous than local foods. Also, when shopping for food, immigrant females from sub-Saharan Africa visit more than one shop to assess the prices and the quality of the products; as well as how similar the products are to those consumed back home.

On the other hand, sub-Saharan African males are more loyal patrons of ethnic restaurants than females. It was found that most males (especially singles) are usually very busy and hardly have time to prepare food, thereby relying on ethnic restaurants for food. Also, for most sub-Saharan African males, ethnic restaurants are social joints and meeting places.

Marital status

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents in this study were singles. Sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa who are single spend less on food and eat more often at ethnic restaurants than their married and cohabiting counterparts. Married immigrants constituted 28% of the respondent population.

These immigrants strive to ensure unity in their families by considering the food needs of their family members during groceries. They also act as custodians of their indigenous cultural heritages by ensuring that indigenous foods are mostly eaten by their families. In addition, married immigrants who have lived longer in South Africa have incorporated some traditional local foods on their menus.

Length of residency

In this study, it was found that the majority (59%) of the respondents had lived in South Africa for more than three years. These immigrants have attained a certain degree of familiarity with local foods and consumption patterns. Some traditional local foods such as braai, poitjie, curry and samp have been integrated on the menus of these immigrants.

Forty-one percent of the respondents had lived less than three years in South Africa. These immigrants
consume more indigenous than local foods. According to these immigrants, local foods and consumption patterns are still strange. Most of them rely on ethnic restaurants as their primary source of food. This is because they are still in the process of settling comfortably in the country.

**Education**

The majority (62%) of the respondents in this study had attained at least a high school qualification. This reflects a well educated sub-Saharan African immigrant community in South Africa. However, conventional education has little or no impact on the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. In other words, their food consumption behaviour is not a characteristic of their level of conventional education.

It was found that cultural education (handed down by their parents and/or elders back home) has a greater influence on the food consumption behaviour patterns of most sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. This is expressed in their increasing need for indigenous foods, the evaluation of products stocked by ethnic entrepreneurs and their assessment of the similarity of local to indigenous foods during groceries.

**Employment**

Employment is a very important factor in the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. It determines their monthly spend on food. Most (52%) sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa are self-employed. Self employed immigrants and those who earn a high hourly wage (e.g. managers, teachers, accountants, doctors and lecturers) spend more (up to about R3000) on food monthly. A greater fraction of their monthly spend is on indigenous foods.

On the other hand, those who earn a lower hourly wage such as cashiers, sales clerks, cleaners, security guards, and waiters and unemployed immigrants spend less (under R2000) on food monthly. They consume more local than indigenous foods since indigenous foods are perceived to be expensive.

**Price**

The prices of food products determine the food needs of 92% of the respondents in this study. Most sub-Saharan African immigrants (especially females) visit different shops to compare the prices of products during groceries. For the majority of sub-Saharan African immigrants, price accounts for one of the reasons for their loyalty to Shoprite stores. Shoprite is perceived to be cheaper than other leading supermarket chains. Also, most sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa would like to buy indigenous products from supermarkets such as Shoprite should these supermarkets stock them. According to them, ethnic enterprises are very pricey and because supermarkets buy in bulk, they will sell at lower prices.

**Quality of product**

For 99% of the respondents in this study, quality plays a very important role in their food consumption behaviour. According to most (55%) consumers of indigenous foods, stocks at ethnic retail shops and restaurants are lacking in quality. South Africa’s leading supermarkets are passionate and commit enormous resources to enhance the quality of their products. Therefore, most sub-Saharan African immigrants would prefer to buy indigenous products from major supermarkets in case they are stocked by supermarkets.

**Taste**

Taste is also a very important element in the consumption behaviour of 96% of sub-Saharan African immigrants. It is used as a benchmark to determine the amount of satisfaction derived from local products since most of the products are strange to them. Sub-Saharan African immigrants also measure the quality of indigenous products stocked by ethnic retailers by their taste since they are familiar with the products.

**Similarity of products**

Seventy-two percent of the respondents in this study assess the similarity of local to indigenous foods during groceries. Since most local products are new to the majority of sub-Saharan African immigrants, evaluating the level of similarity of the products to those back home gives them a sense of the satisfaction to be derived from the products. Patrons of Shoprite supermarket chain maintain that one of the reasons for shopping at Shoprite stores is because the products are perceived to be somewhat similar to indigenous ones.

**Nutritional benefits**

The desire to lead a healthy lifestyle is a special element in the food consumption behaviour of 59% of the respondents in this study. It is one of the reasons why these immigrants shop at Pick ’n Pay and Woolworths stores. It also explains why most sub-Saharan African immigrants prefer indigenous to local foods. According to them, indigenous foods are organically cultivated.
Product assortment

Most sub-Saharan African immigrants prefer to shop where there is a wide range of products to choose from. According to 52% of them, stocks at ethnic retail shops and restaurants are very limited; hence they would buy indigenous products from supermarkets, should supermarkets stock them. Supermarkets are perceived to offer a broad range of products to their customers.

Service

Seventy percent of the respondents in this study assert that they prefer to shop at stores that are customer service oriented. South Africa’s leading supermarket chains are perceived to deliver excellent service than ethnic enterprises. Therefore, most immigrants would like to buy their indigenous foods from supermarkets should they stock them.

Proximity

In this study, 79% of sub-Saharan African immigrants patronize shops not far from where they live. It also accounts for one of the reasons why most sub-Saharan African immigrants shop at Shoprite stores. Shoprite is represented in every immigrant community. These immigrants maintain that shopping at close proximity saves time, cost and the inconvenience of travelling by taxi, bus or train to shop at distant places.

Social factors

Social factors such as culture, relationship with South Africans, family and reference groups also greatly determine the food consumption behaviour of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa.

Culture

Cultural values play a significant role in the food consumption process of 82% of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. According to these immigrants, despite its functional activity, food consumption is endowed with symbolic meanings that govern the social and economic fabrics of their society. This explains why, sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa largely prefer indigenous to local foods.

Relationship with South Africans

Sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa have established numerous forms of relationships with local South Africans. According to 24% of them, their choice of food and consumption behaviour is partly to sustain such relationships. Most sub-Saharan African immigrants’ food choices and consumption behaviour are not influenced by relationships with local South Africans. This is indicative of the measure of importance and significance of indigenous foods to these immigrants.

Reference groups

Reference groups are an indispensable factor in the consumption behaviour of 71% of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa, especially recent immigrants. Reference groups such as immigrant cultural associations dispense valuable information pertaining to indigenous and local foods and consumption ways. From reference groups sub-Saharan African immigrants also learn about the different types of food products, where to find them, prices, and methods of preparation, consumption and disposal.

Family

The family is an integral part of the food consumption behaviour of many sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. Sub-Saharan African immigrants (predominantly couples) uphold the needs of their family members in their choice of food products. In addition, immigrant families relatively consume more indigenous than local foods since one of the responsibilities of sub-Saharan African immigrant wives is to enforce the cultural heritages of their country of origin. Also, at family events such as birthdays, weddings, funerals, baptisms, graduations and awards, indigenous foods are exclusively served.

It is important to highlight that the above factors determine the food needs, choices and desires of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. However, in order to realize their needs, choices and desires these immigrants embark on a decision-making process.

The food decision-making process of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa

In accordance with the consumer behaviour concept, the food decision making process of sub-Saharan African immigrants entails five stages. These include: (a) Needs recognition (b) Information search (c) Evaluation of alternatives (d) Purchase decision and (e) Post purchase behaviour.

Needs recognition

In this research, it was found that sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa consume food products for
numerous reasons. These include:

a) The need to satisfy hunger.
b) To acquire immense satisfaction from their choice of foods reflected in the benchmarks used in evaluating local and indigenous food products.
c) To fulfill recommendations from friends and relatives (older immigrants).
d) To have a feeling of home (evident in the consumption of indigenous foods).
e) To uphold their cultural values.
f) To sustain relationships with local South Africans.
g) To lead a healthy lifestyle.

Information search

The majority of sub-Saharan Africans immigrate to South Africa with very little or no information on what to expect. At this stage, the most important information is that which can enable the immigrant to evaluate alternatives in order to solve his/her problem. Sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa obtain information about different food options from five sources: These include:

a) Friends and/or relatives
b) Ethnic enterprises
c) Immigrant associations such as cultural groups
d) Media
e) Product trials

Evaluating alternatives

According to this study, sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa are exposed to a broad range of local and indigenous food options. Therefore, in order to ensure that these products are in line with their expectations, these immigrants have established a set of criteria used to evaluate available food options. These criteria include:

a) Quality
b) Taste
c) Price
d) Cultural values
e) Nutritional benefits
f) Service
g) Similarity of products

Making a purchase decision

The evaluation stage is a platform on which sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa decide on what food products to buy and where to buy them. At this stage these immigrants make a decision to purchase a food product if the product is perceived to satisfy their needs and those of members of their families (immigrants with families). In some cases, other family members (for example, wife or husband) are also involved in the decision making process.

Post-purchase behaviour

At this stage, sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa evaluate the amount of satisfaction derived from a purchase. These immigrants express delight if food products meet their expectations. In this case, most of them continue to buy from the shop. They also spread positive information about the shop and the products to friends and relatives. Equally, if their purchase fails to realize their expectations, these immigrants feel disappointed. In such circumstances, most sub-Saharan Africans refrain from buying the product, switch to other shops and spread negative marketing about the shop and product.

Guidelines for major supermarkets intending to invest in the sub-Saharan African immigrant market in South Africa

It is worthy to note that, South Africa’s leading supermarket chains (Woolworth exclusive) will invest in the sub-Saharan African immigrant market if the food consumption behaviour of the market is established. Equally, the majority of sub-Saharan African immigrants would buy their indigenous foods from supermarkets, should these supermarkets stock them. However, in addition to the food consumption behaviour model, this study uncovered other salient features about the sub-Saharan African immigrant market worthy to be considered by major supermarket chains intending to invest in the market. These include the following:

The immigrants’ monthly spend on indigenous foods

Most (75%) sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa spend between R500 to R999 monthly on indigenous foods. The study found that these immigrants may increase their spend on indigenous foods with better quality, affordable prices and increased assortment.

The immigrants’ preferred indigenous foods

The respondents in this study could not resist the delight to mention indigenous food products that they would like to find in South Africa’s major supermarkets. Immigrants from West Africa would like to find yams, maize, cocoyams, cassava, plantains, green banana, sweet potato, millet, sorghum, rice and beans. Most
recipes contain a mixture of fish, meat and vegetables.

East Africans prefer maize, millet, sorghum, green bananas, plantains, lentils, rice, pepper, cassava, sweet potato, beans and leafy vegetables such as spinach and cabbage.

Immigrants from Central Africa would like to eat plantains, cassava, peanuts, pepper, cocoyam, rice, palm oil, potato, maize, sorghum, millet, green bananas and a variety of vegetables such as green, okro and enu.

While South Africans prefer crops such as sorghum, maize (corn), pumpkin beans, leafy greens (for example, spinach and cabbage) potato, rice, cassava, banana and beans. Influences from the Indian and Malay community can be seen in the use of curries, sambals, pickled fish, fish stews, chutney, and samosa. European influences can be seen in cuisines like biltong (dried beef stripes), potjies (stews of maize, onions and tomatoes).

Challenges encountered by ethnic entrepreneurs

Trading in food products from sub-Saharan African countries in South Africa entails numerous challenges which according to this study, are important for South Africa’s leading supermarket chains to know and understand before investing in the market. These chains may devise appropriate measures to overcome the challenges prior to investing in the indigenous market. These challenges include:

a) The difficulty of obtaining travel documents of countries of supplies.
b) The possibility of acquiring sub-standard quality products due to suppliers’ inability to enforce the quality of their produce.
c) The difficulty of importing perishable products to South Africa due to Government’s stringent regulations and the cost involved.
d) Intense competition in the industry due to increase in the number of ethnic entrepreneurs in South Africa.

The significance of ethnic retail shops and restaurants

Though the weaknesses of ethnic entrepreneurs (poor quality products, high prices, limited products and poor customer service) have compelled most sub-Saharan African immigrants to believe that major supermarket chains would effectively meet their expectations of indigenous products, ethnic retail shops and restaurants play a fundamental role in the welfare of sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa. They perform the following functions:

a) They provide indigenous food and non food (for example, clothing, jewelry, magazines, videos, and cultural artifacts) products.
b) They instill a feeling of home. According to most sub-Saharan African immigrants in South Africa, a visit to ethnic enterprises is metaphorically considered a visit back home. This is because, the layout of the stores, presentation of products and the multiple types of verbal lore that circulate within these shops are reflections of home.
c) They are social hubs and a conduit of folklore. At ethnic enterprises, sub-Saharan immigrants meet friends, relatives and other immigrants from their countries with whom they share not only cultural knowledge but also new world experiences.

Thus, it is important for South Africa’s supermarket chains to understand not only the chemistry of indigenous products but also the psychology of the immigrants and the sociology of immigrant groups and networks.

Conclusion

This study has established a food consumption behaviour model of sub-Saharan African immigrants in order for South Africa’s major supermarket chains to establish measures to cater for their indigenous food needs. The model is split into two parts, which are (a) the factors that influence the food needs, choices and desires of the immigrants; and (b) the stages in their food decision making process. It is important to highlight that South Africa’s major supermarket chains will invest in the sub-Saharan African immigrant market with the creation of a food consumption behaviour model of the immigrants. Equally the majority of sub-Saharan African immigrants believe that leading supermarket chains in South Africa will meet their expectations of indigenous foods. In addition to the model, the study uncovered other important features about the sub-Saharan African immigrant market that must be considered by leading supermarket chains. If given adequate consideration, these features may facilitate investment in the sub-Saharan African immigrant market in South Africa. These features include (a) the immigrants monthly spend on indigenous foods (b) their preferred indigenous foods (c) challenges encountered by ethnic entrepreneurs and; and (d) the significance of ethnic enterprises.

REFERENCES


