

Marketing Education in Africa: A Pedagogical Review of Historical Development and Decolonial Transformation

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DOI: 10.65157/JASHS.2026.010

Citation: Aila, F. O. (2026). Marketing Education in Africa: A Pedagogical Review of Historical Development and Decolonial Transformation. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2(1), 01-25.

Abstract

This paper examines the historical development of marketing in Africa through a pedagogical lens, tracing its evolution from precolonial trade networks to contemporary digital ecosystems. It explores how indigenous systems of exchange, colonial legacies, liberalization policies, and globalization have shaped marketing thought and practice across the continent. The study identifies three broad pedagogical phases: imitation, adaptation, and decolonial transformation, each reflecting shifts in Africa's socio-economic and epistemological contexts. Drawing from historical, cultural, and theoretical perspectives, the paper critiques the dominance of Western marketing paradigms and argues for a decolonial, context-sensitive pedagogy rooted in African epistemologies, ethics, and lived realities. The analysis highlights Africa's unique contributions to relational marketing, social entrepreneurship, and digital innovation. Finally, it proposes pedagogical strategies emphasizing experiential learning, linguistic diversity, and Ubuntu ethics to align marketing education with Africa's developmental aspirations. The paper concludes that re-centering African knowledge systems is essential for building an inclusive, globally relevant, and socially responsible marketing discipline.

Keywords: Marketing History, Africa, Pedagogy, Decolonization, Indigenous Knowledge, Globalization, Ubuntu Ethics, Trade Networks, Consumer Culture and Marketing Education

Introduction

In the broader narrative of global commerce, Africa's marketing history has often been marginalized or treated as an appendage to Western economic development. Unlike the linear progression often depicted in Western marketing histories, Africa's marketing evolution reflects a dynamic interplay of cultural exchange, resource control, and adaptation to shifting socio-political environments [1,2]. Yet the continent's marketing

evolution is both rich and instructive, encompassing precolonial trade systems, colonial disruptions, post-independence liberalization, and contemporary globalization. Each era has not only reshaped economic activity but also influenced how marketing is taught, conceptualized, and practiced across African societies.

Before colonial intrusion, African markets such as those of Timbuktu, Kano, and Great Zimbabwe served as thriving centres of exchange linking local, regional, and trans-Saharan economies [3]. These markets embodied sophisticated marketing functions such as segmentation, product differentiation, and relationship management, rooted in communal trust and reciprocity [4]. The colonial era, however, restructured trade networks and introduced capitalist logics that privileged export commodities and metropolitan markets, marginalizing indigenous systems of production and consumption.

In the post-independence period, African nations sought to indigenize economic systems through state-led industrialization and import substitution. Yet the liberalization policies of the 1980s and 1990s, driven by structural adjustment programs, opened African markets to global competition and consumerism [5]. This transformation marked a shift from subsistence-based marketing to brand-driven economies characterized by urban youth culture, digital communication, and hybridized consumption patterns [6].

Marketing education mirrored these shifts. Early curricula imitated Western models with limited relevance to African realities [7]. Over time, scholars began contextualizing marketing by integrating indigenous practices, social embeddedness, and ethical dimensions [8]. In recent years, decolonial thought has emerged as a critical framework, advocating for pedagogies that re-center African epistemologies, languages, and values [9].

This paper, therefore, adopts a pedagogical review approach to trace the historical development of marketing in Africa. It takes a pedagogical lens to interpret marketing history not merely as a chronological account but as a learning process embedded in social and institutional transformations. It aims to answer three key questions: 1) How have Africa's precolonial and colonial economic systems shaped marketing practice and education? 2) What historical continuities and ruptures characterize the post-independence marketing landscape? 3) How can marketing pedagogy in Africa integrate indigenous and global knowledge systems? It argues that a decolonial, context-sensitive approach to marketing education is essential for intellectual sovereignty and sustainable development. The discussion unfolds through thematic sections examining precolonial marketing systems, colonial transformations, liberalization and globalization, evolving pedagogical phases, and emerging theoretical reflections.

Precolonial Trade and Indigenous Marketing Systems

Before the advent of colonial economic structures, African societies developed complex and efficient systems of exchange that reflected sophisticated marketing logic and organization. These systems were neither rudimentary nor static; rather, they embodied a dynamic integration of social, cultural, and economic principles that enabled sustainable

interregional and transcontinental commerce. Indeed, precolonial African marketing demonstrates that the core functions of modern marketing i.e. segmentation, positioning, product differentiation, and relationship management, were already operational within indigenous economies long before industrial capitalism defined the discipline in the West [4].

The geography of African trade prior to colonial rule was organized around interconnected market networks, each operating within specific ecological and cultural contexts. Cities such as Timbuktu, Gao, Kano, Mombasa, and Great Zimbabwe served as nodal points within extensive trade corridors linking the interior to the coast [3]. These centres did not merely facilitate exchange; they coordinated information flows, standardized weights and measures, and maintained reputational systems of trust. The trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt, and slaves, spanning from West Africa to North Africa and the Mediterranean, illustrates how marketing infrastructure, logistics, and communication systems were already institutionalized in African economies. Caravans, periodic markets, and trade diasporas provided a structural basis for supply chains that mirrored modern distribution networks.

At the local level, periodic markets, often held every four or eight days, created predictable trading cycles. This periodicity enabled segmentation of consumers and traders, aligning supply with demand and facilitating price stabilization. These cyclical markets were coordinated through kinship networks and community norms, ensuring reliability and ethical conduct in trade [10]. Therefore, the precolonial market was a socio-economic ecosystem where production, distribution, and consumption were harmonized through collective participation rather than individual competition.

Unlike the transactional orientation dominant in industrial economies, precolonial African marketing was socially embedded i.e. economy and society were inseparable [11]. Exchange was governed by social norms of reciprocity, reputation, and communal responsibility. Goods and services carried symbolic as well as material value, often reinforcing social cohesion or spiritual relationships rather than maximizing profit alone. For instance, long-distance traders known as Dyula in West Africa and Swahili merchants along the East African coast relied on extended kinship networks to facilitate credit, security, and dispute resolution. These networks functioned as relational capital, anticipating what contemporary marketing literature describes as relationship marketing and trust-based exchange [12].

Gift exchanges and ritualized trade negotiations were also integral components of marketing practice. In many communities, exchange was initiated with gestures of goodwill, small gifts or hospitality, to establish relational trust before formal transactions commenced. This practice parallels modern concepts of relationship marketing and corporate social responsibility, which prioritize long-term relational value over short-term gain. In essence, the ethics of reciprocity that underpinned precolonial commerce were both moral and strategic, ensuring continuity of trade across generations and regions.

A critical yet often underappreciated dimension of precolonial African marketing systems is the central role of women. In West African societies such as the Yoruba, Igbo, and Akan, women dominated local markets as producers, distributors, and financiers. They managed complex systems of credit, price negotiation, and product specialization, often forming associations that regulated market conduct and ensured fair practices [13]. The Yoruba "market queens" (Ìyálójà) exemplify institutionalized female leadership within indigenous marketing systems: roles that combined entrepreneurship, governance, and social mediation.

Women's trading networks extended across ethnic and linguistic boundaries, creating transregional alliances that sustained commerce even during political instability. Their prominence challenges Western historiography that marginalizes women in economic narratives and reinforces the need for a gender-sensitive reconstruction of marketing history. From a pedagogical standpoint, incorporating women's roles into marketing curricula helps decentre Western male-centric narratives of entrepreneurship and highlights indigenous models of inclusive economic participation.

Even without formal advertising, precolonial African traders practiced branding and differentiation through quality assurance, craftsmanship, and reputation. For example, textiles from Kano, gold from Wangara, and iron tools from Meroë were recognized for their provenance and quality, functioning as proto-brands that commanded customer loyalty [4]. Traders and artisans established distinctive marks or patterns that identified their goods, comparable to modern trademarks. Oral communication, proverbs, and storytelling served as early forms of word-of-mouth marketing, reinforcing brand equity through cultural narratives.

The moral economy of trade emphasized integrity, reliability, and fairness, values encoded in proverbs and customary law. Violating these ethical expectations resulted in loss of social standing, effectively excluding the trader from the marketplace. Therefore, ethical marketing was not an imported modern innovation but an intrinsic element of African economic culture, rooted in communal moral systems and spiritual accountability.

Analysing precolonial marketing systems through a pedagogical lens reveals that African societies had developed not only mechanisms of trade but also systems of learning and knowledge transmission about commerce. Market participation was an educative process: apprentices learned through observation, mentorship, and communal evaluation. Skills in bargaining, pricing, and logistics were transmitted intergenerationally, ensuring continuity and innovation within traditional economies. Such apprenticeship-based education embodies what modern pedagogy now terms experiential learning and community-based knowledge systems.

Incorporating these indigenous models into contemporary marketing education challenges the dominance of Western case studies and quantitative consumer behaviour models. By reinterpreting traditional African markets as living laboratories of marketing innovation, educators can cultivate a curriculum that reflects both historical depth and

cultural authenticity. As Adeola suggests, decolonizing marketing pedagogy requires re-centering local experiences as legitimate sources of theory and managerial insight [5].

These insights collectively refute the long-standing assumption that marketing emerged exclusively as a by-product of Western industrialization. Rather, the African experience demonstrates that marketing principles, understood as systems for creating, communicating, and delivering value, were deeply embedded in indigenous social formations. African trade systems exhibited what Polanyi described as instituted processes of exchange, where economy and culture were co-constitutive [11]. The implication for marketing theory is profound: to globalize the discipline genuinely, we must recognize Africa not as a peripheral consumer of marketing ideas but as a foundational contributor to its intellectual and practical history.

Colonial Transformation of Marketing Systems

The advent of European colonialism in Africa marked a profound transformation of indigenous marketing systems. This period redefined the continent's economic geography, altered value systems, and imposed new hierarchies of exchange that subordinated African markets to imperial interests. From a pedagogical standpoint, understanding the colonial phase is critical for interpreting how modern marketing education and practice in Africa evolved from a legacy of asymmetrical power relations, economic extraction, and cultural reengineering. The colonial encounter did not introduce marketing to Africa, it restructured and recontextualized pre-existing systems to serve metropolitan objectives [14].

European colonial powers systematically dismantled or subordinated indigenous marketing institutions to align African economies with the needs of the imperial metropole. The introduction of cash crops such as cocoa, cotton, coffee, and groundnuts was part of a broader export-oriented economic model that privileged the extraction of raw materials over local industrialization [15]. Colonial administrators, often through chartered companies, imposed new marketing boards and regulatory structures that centralized control over production, pricing, and distribution.

These interventions disrupted the reciprocal and community-based logic of precolonial markets. Traditional barter, gift economies, and kin-based trust networks were replaced by contractual systems mediated through colonial law and bureaucracy [3]. The commodification of land and labour converted people from producers in communal systems to wage laborers in plantation economies. This shift also redefined the African consumer: consumption became linked not to social embeddedness but to participation in the colonial cash economy. Pedagogically, this disruption offers a critical case study of how marketing systems can be re-engineered by ideology, illustrating that marketing practice is never neutral but always shaped by political and cultural power.

Colonial administrations invested heavily in infrastructure, railways, ports, and roads, but these developments were extractive rather than integrative. Transportation networks were designed to move raw materials from the hinterland to the coast for export, not to

promote intra-African trade or regional market integration [16]. This spatial reorganization created a dual economy: an externally oriented modern sector controlled by colonial enterprises and an internal subsistence sector marginalized from capital flows.

The colonial marketing system was therefore characterized by monopolistic control and artificial segmentation. European firms such as the United Africa Company, Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain (SCOA), and Lever Brothers dominated wholesale and retail trade, displacing indigenous traders and artisans [17]. These corporations introduced Western advertising, branding, and distribution practices, creating a commercial environment that prioritized imported goods over local production. The result was an early form of dependency marketing, where African markets became captive consumers of metropolitan goods rather than autonomous producers of value. From a theoretical perspective, this period reveals how marketing practices can both reflect and reinforce structural inequality. Teaching this history invites students to critically assess global value chains and postcolonial marketing ethics in contemporary Africa.

Colonialism was not only an economic project but also a cultural enterprise. Marketing became an instrument of acculturation: reshaping tastes, desires, and consumption patterns to align with Western lifestyles. Advertisements and product campaigns celebrated European goods as symbols of modernity, hygiene, and progress while portraying indigenous products as backward or inferior [18]. The imported soap, canned foods, and textiles were marketed as markers of civilization, creating a hierarchy of consumption that mirrored the racialized order of colonial society.

Mission schools, churches, and colonial education systems further reinforced this ideological reorientation by linking consumption with Christian morality and European identity [19]. Thus, marketing during this era was deeply implicated in the construction of colonial subjectivities by teaching Africans not only what to buy but also what to value. Pedagogically, this phase challenges marketing educators to interrogate the historical roots of consumer socialization and cultural branding in Africa. Understanding colonial marketing as a tool of ideological conditioning opens critical spaces for decolonizing marketing curricula, especially by revealing how colonial semiotics still inform modern advertising aesthetics across the continent.

Despite colonial constraints, African traders and entrepreneurs adapted creatively to the new order. Many became middlemen between European firms and indigenous consumers, forming hybrid marketing systems that blended Western business practices with traditional relationship-based approaches [20]. For example, in Nigeria and Ghana, local agents managed import–export transactions, negotiated prices, and extended informal credit to rural buyers.

Women also retained significant roles in the distribution of food and domestic commodities, maintaining localized networks of micro-entrepreneurship that resisted total colonial control [13]. These adaptive strategies demonstrate the resilience and continuity of indigenous marketing ethics within a colonial context. They also provide a lens through

which modern African entrepreneurship can be traced; not as a recent neoliberal phenomenon but as an enduring tradition of resourcefulness and social embeddedness. For marketing educators, this adaptive phase highlights the importance of contextual agility and cultural hybridity, two skills essential for marketing practitioners in multicultural and transitional economies today.

From a pedagogical standpoint, studying the colonial transformation of marketing systems encourages a critical and reflexive approach to the discipline. It reveals marketing as a field deeply intertwined with issues of power, culture, and identity rather than a purely technical domain. In the classroom, colonial marketing history can serve as a foundation for discussing topics such as market ethics, sustainability, global branding, and postcolonial consumer theory.

Moreover, examining how marketing operated as an apparatus of domination helps students appreciate the need for decolonial methodologies: approaches that foreground indigenous voices, local agency, and epistemic diversity in marketing theory [2]. Such critical pedagogy transforms marketing education from vocational training into an arena of intellectual emancipation, aligning with broader movements in African higher education toward curriculum decolonization.

The colonial legacy in African marketing did not end with independence. Many postcolonial economies inherited dualistic structures: formal sectors dominated by multinational corporations and informal sectors sustained by indigenous entrepreneurs. These legacies continue to influence consumer preferences, branding practices, and market hierarchies today. Recognizing these continuities helps marketing scholars contextualize modern challenges such as import dependency, brand perception biases, and uneven global competition.

Pedagogically, the colonial period offers a cautionary tale about the power of marketing to shape not only economies but also identities. By revisiting this history, educators can cultivate critical marketers, that is, professionals who view marketing not merely as a tool for profit but as a force for social transformation and cultural reclamation.

Post-Independence Industrialization and Marketing Modernization

The postcolonial era in Africa, beginning roughly in the 1950s and 1960s, ushered in an era of political independence, economic experimentation, and intellectual reawakening. Yet, the marketing systems that emerged in this period were deeply shaped by the structural legacies of colonialism. The new African states sought to reorient their economies toward national development, industrialization, and self-sufficiency while contending with inherited dependency on global markets and imported brands. This dual ambition: to modernize while reclaiming autonomy; produced a distinctive form of marketing practice that was simultaneously imitative and innovative. It also generated new pedagogical challenges for marketing educators seeking to align theory with Africa's socio-economic realities [21].

In the early years of independence, African governments positioned marketing as a strategic instrument of nation-building. Public enterprises and cooperatives were established to manage agricultural marketing, promote local industries, and ensure equitable distribution of goods [22]. National marketing boards, such as the Cocoa Marketing Board in Ghana or the Cotton Marketing Board in Tanzania, were intended to stabilize prices, protect producers, and generate revenue for development. However, these institutions often reproduced the bureaucratic patterns of their colonial predecessors, entrenching state monopolies and inefficiencies.

Despite such challenges, the early postcolonial state envisioned marketing as an ethical and developmental function: a means of fostering self-reliance and national pride. Domestic industries were encouraged to substitute imports with locally manufactured goods, giving rise to campaigns such as "Buy African" and "Made in Nigeria" in the 1970s and 1980s. These initiatives sought to redefine consumption as a patriotic act and to cultivate new African brands as symbols of sovereignty and progress [5].

From a pedagogical perspective, this era offers fertile ground for exploring the intersection of marketing, nationalism, and identity formation. Teaching marketing through postcolonial case studies enables students to examine how branding, advertising, and consumer education were mobilized as tools of ideological reconstruction in newly independent nations.

The post-independence decades also saw the emergence of developmental marketing as an intellectual framework. African economists and business scholars began questioning the applicability of Western marketing models to African contexts. The developmental marketing paradigm emphasized marketing's potential to contribute to economic transformation by facilitating agricultural modernization, small enterprise growth, and rural development [23,24].

Governments and donor agencies integrated marketing functions into development projects, from the promotion of cash crops and family planning to public health and literacy campaigns. Marketing communication thus expanded beyond commercial advertising into the realm of social marketing, aligning with the broader agenda of modernization theory. However, critics argued that this developmentalist discourse often perpetuated dependency on foreign aid, technology, and managerial expertise [25]. The paradox of postcolonial marketing, therefore, lay in its simultaneous aspiration for independence and its continued reliance on external validation. Pedagogically, this tension underscores the importance of contextualized marketing education: one that trains students not merely to apply Western theories but to interrogate their ideological underpinnings and adapt them to local realities.

While African governments sought economic autonomy, multinational corporations (MNCs) rapidly expanded their presence across the continent. Companies such as Unilever, Coca-Cola, and Nestlé established deep distribution networks and formidable brand loyalty through strategic localization of products and messages. These corporations

often portrayed themselves as partners in progress, supporting local employment and community initiatives, while maintaining significant control over supply chains and consumer markets [26].

The dominance of MNCs produced a dual consumer order: on one hand, Western-branded goods symbolized sophistication and upward mobility; on the other, local products were often perceived as inferior or parochial. Advertising played a crucial role in constructing this hierarchy of desire, promoting consumption as a pathway to modern identity. As a result, marketing in postcolonial Africa became entangled with the ideology of modernity, where to consume Western brands was to participate in global civilization.

For marketing educators, this dynamic presents a valuable opportunity to teach critical consumer culture theory (CCT) in the African context. By deconstructing the semiotics of postcolonial advertising, students can analyse how global branding shapes notions of class, gender, and progress, often perpetuating neo-colonial value systems under the guise of choice and modernity.

Amidst the dominance of MNCs, the postcolonial period also witnessed the rise of indigenous entrepreneurs and local enterprises that began to challenge foreign hegemony. In Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, African-owned companies such as Dangote Group, BIDCO Africa, and Shoprite (originally South African) developed new approaches to branding, pricing, and distribution tailored to local consumers' socioeconomic realities [27].

These enterprises leveraged cultural symbols, vernacular languages, and community engagement to cultivate authenticity and loyalty. Informal markets and small-scale traders also innovated within resource constraints, using personal relationships, word-of-mouth, and flexible pricing, practices that anticipated the relationship marketing and bottom-of-the-pyramid (BoP) strategies now celebrated in global marketing literature [26].

Such indigenous marketing ingenuity underscores Africa's capacity to generate knowledge and innovation from within its own economic logic. For educators, incorporating these local success stories into curricula is vital for decolonizing marketing pedagogy, validating African examples as legitimate sources of theory and managerial practice.

The postcolonial period also marked the establishment of business schools and marketing departments across African universities. Early curricula, often modelled on American and British syllabi, emphasized quantitative analysis, market segmentation, and consumer behaviour rooted in individualist paradigms. However, these frameworks frequently overlooked the communal and relational dimensions of African societies [2].

By the late 20th century, African scholars began advocating for a context-sensitive marketing education that integrates cultural anthropology, ethics, and indigenous

knowledge systems. The call for decolonizing marketing pedagogy emphasized that teaching materials, case studies, and methodologies must reflect African business environments rather than replicate Western textbooks [5].

Pedagogically, this represents a paradigmatic shift, from marketing as a value-neutral managerial science to marketing as a contextual, ethical, and developmental practice. Decolonial marketing education encourages critical reflexivity, cultural empathy, and social accountability; competencies essential for practitioners in a globalized yet unequal marketplace.

From the 1990s onward, globalization reconfigured African marketing landscapes through liberalization, technological diffusion, and regional integration. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) introduced by the IMF and World Bank dismantled many state-led marketing boards and opened markets to foreign competition [28]. While this created opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation, it also exposed local industries to volatility and market shocks.

Simultaneously, the digital revolution and mobile technology catalysed a new phase of digital and informal marketing, from mobile money systems like M-Pesa in Kenya to social media branding among young entrepreneurs. These innovations signify Africa's ongoing capacity to adapt and lead in marketing creativity, even amid global asymmetries.

From a pedagogical standpoint, globalization demands that marketing educators train students to think glocally by balancing global competence with local relevance. The African marketing classroom thus becomes a site of synthesis, where indigenous wisdom meets contemporary technology to create sustainable and inclusive futures.

The postcolonial evolution of African marketing reveals the discipline's dual nature: as both a mechanism of adaptation and a vehicle for emancipation. Understanding this history equips educators and students to approach marketing not merely as a commercial practice but as a form of social negotiation and cultural redefinition. The African experience demonstrates that marketing's ultimate purpose extends beyond profit generation: it involves mediating between tradition and modernity, local values and global aspirations.

Pedagogically, this implies that marketing education in Africa must cultivate critical consciousness, empowering students to interrogate power relations, cultural biases, and ethical dilemmas within global capitalism. The postcolonial era, therefore, provides not only a narrative of economic transformation but also a moral and intellectual challenge i.e. to imagine a marketing discipline that serves African humanity as well as its markets.

Contemporary Perspectives: Toward an African-Centered Marketing Paradigm

The twenty-first century marks a critical juncture in the historical evolution of marketing in Africa. Globalization, digitalization, and demographic transformation have redefined both the scale and character of African markets. Yet, the intellectual and pedagogical

foundations of marketing remain deeply influenced by Western theories and paradigms. To move forward, scholars and practitioners must reimagine marketing not as a borrowed discipline, but as an African-centered knowledge system, a framework that draws from the continent's historical experiences, cultural logic, and socio-economic aspirations [29]. This paradigm is not a rejection of global theory but a reclamation of agency: a process of centering African epistemologies within the universal discourse of marketing.

The first step toward an African-centered paradigm involves reclaiming intellectual agency in defining what marketing means within African realities. The continent's historical experiences, from precolonial exchange systems to postcolonial reconstruction, offer rich conceptual resources for theorizing marketing beyond Western industrial capitalism. For instance, indigenous marketing practices based on reciprocity, trust, and collective well-being can inform contemporary models of ethical marketing, community-based entrepreneurship, and relational value creation [4].

African marketing thought must therefore emerge from reflexive scholarship, one that does not merely apply imported frameworks but questions their relevance. As Adeola [5] argues, "African marketing education must move from mimicry to originality." This implies a deliberate effort to build theory from African data, indigenous proverbs, oral histories, and business practices that reveal unique insights about consumer behaviour, communication, and branding in communal contexts. For example, the Ubuntu philosophy, emphasizing interconnectedness and mutual humanity, provides a moral and conceptual foundation for rethinking marketing ethics and corporate social responsibility in African markets [30].

A truly African-centered marketing paradigm cannot exist without decolonizing the classroom. This involves revising curricula, case studies, and teaching methodologies to reflect African realities, innovations, and challenges. For decades, African business schools have relied on Western textbooks that privilege individualism, profit maximization, and consumer sovereignty, principles that often clash with African communal values and subsistence-oriented economies [21].

A decolonial pedagogy calls for contextualized teaching that integrates ethnographic research, local case studies, and experiential learning rooted in African communities. Instead of importing Harvard-style case studies, students can analyse indigenous enterprises, informal sector strategies, and social innovation models emerging across the continent. This approach aligns with what Freire described as problem-posing education, where learners engage with real-world issues as co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients [31].

Such a pedagogical shift also demands linguistic inclusivity. Teaching marketing in African languages, where possible, enriches conceptual understanding by connecting abstract theories with local idioms of exchange and cooperation. Language, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us, is not merely a medium of communication but a carrier of culture [32].

Decolonizing marketing education, therefore, involves not only changing content but transforming how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and valued.

Contemporary African economies are characterized by the vitality of informal markets, which account for over 80% of employment in many countries [33]. These markets are not chaotic or underdeveloped, as often portrayed, but are governed by intricate systems of trust, negotiation, and reciprocity. Informal traders, hawkers, and small entrepreneurs embody a form of indigenous marketing rationality that is adaptive, flexible, and socially embedded [34].

The innovative practices emerging from these spaces such as mobile money, social media marketing, and community-based branding, demonstrate Africa's capacity to generate bottom-up marketing models that challenge conventional theory. For example, Kenya's M-Pesa system redefined the global understanding of digital marketing ecosystems by showing how technological innovation can flourish in resource-constrained settings through social networks and trust-based adoption [35]. Pedagogically, these phenomena offer living laboratories for marketing education. Incorporating informal sector case studies enables students to appreciate marketing as a social craft, not just a corporate science. It also trains them to approach markets as dynamic and human-centered rather than as mere economic abstractions.

An African-centered paradigm must also address the continent's pressing developmental challenges e.g. poverty, inequality, climate change, and governance, by aligning marketing with the principles of sustainability and justice. In this context, marketing becomes an instrument of inclusive growth, promoting products and services that enhance rather than exploit human well-being [26]. Concepts such as bottom-of-the-pyramid innovation and social entrepreneurship resonate strongly with African traditions of communal welfare and self-help.

Contemporary African marketers and scholars have an opportunity to redefine corporate social responsibility (CSR) through indigenous ethics. For example, the Akan concept of Nkabom (unity and interdependence) or the Swahili notion of Ujamaa (cooperative economics) can guide businesses toward more participatory and equitable market relations [36]. Such frameworks suggest that marketing, when grounded in local moral economies, can become a transformative force for sustainable development rather than a driver of consumerism.

Digital technology has catalysed a new phase in Africa's marketing evolution. The continent's youthful demographics, rising Internet penetration, and mobile connectivity have birthed a generation of digital entrepreneurs who blend global aesthetics with local storytelling. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become vibrant spaces of digital African marketing where cultural authenticity, humour, and identity politics intersect with commerce [37].

This digital revolution democratizes marketing knowledge: small entrepreneurs can now compete with large firms through creativity, community engagement, and digital literacy. Yet, it also raises new ethical and pedagogical questions about data privacy, representation, and cultural homogenization. Therefore, African marketing education must evolve to include digital ethics, data governance, and critical media literacy as essential competencies for the next generation of marketers.

Pedagogically, the digital transformation enables experiential and participatory learning. Students can engage in online campaigns, community-based social media projects, and digital storytelling to explore marketing as both a technical and cultural practice. In this sense, the African marketing classroom becomes a microcosm of Africa's digital renaissance.

The future of marketing in Africa lies in cultivating a holistic and human-centered ethos: one that integrates the continent's historical wisdom, ethical traditions, and technological creativity. This ethos moves beyond the transactional model of exchange to embrace marketing as a practice of relationship-building, empowerment, and meaning-making. The Ubuntu philosophy, which asserts that "I am because we are," offers a moral compass for this new paradigm. It calls for marketing strategies that honour community, sustainability, and dignity over mere profit.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, this vision requires educators to train critical and compassionate marketers as professionals capable of balancing innovation with responsibility, globalization with cultural rootedness, and competition with cooperation. The African-centered paradigm thus becomes not only a theoretical reconstruction but also a moral and pedagogical commitment to building marketing systems that serve both people and planet.

The historical journey of marketing in Africa from indigenous trade networks through colonial transformations to postcolonial and digital innovations reveals a continuous struggle for intellectual and economic self-definition. Each phase reflects a negotiation between external influence and internal agency, between imitation and originality. To entrench marketing as a transformative discipline in Africa, scholars must now embrace a decolonial and reconstructive agenda, i.e. one that reclaims Africa as both a source and subject of marketing theory.

For educators, this means cultivating classrooms that are simultaneously critical and creative, rooted in history yet oriented toward the future. By embedding African epistemologies, ethics, and innovations into marketing education, the continent can contribute not merely as a market for ideas, but as a producer of global marketing knowledge. In doing so, Africa will not only decolonize its markets but also enrich the global marketing imagination by transforming the discipline into a more humane, inclusive, and pluralistic enterprise.

Liberalization, Globalization, and the Rise of African Consumerism

The 1990s marked a major turning point in Africa's marketing and economic history, characterized by economic liberalization, global integration, and the emergence of a distinctly African consumer culture. Following decades of state-led development and protectionist policies, most African countries adopted structural adjustment programs (SAPs) under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These programs promoted privatization, deregulation, and the opening of domestic markets to foreign investment [38]. The ideological shift from state control to market-driven growth redefined the political economy of African consumption and catalysed the transformation of marketing practice across the continent.

The liberalization era dismantled many of the monopolistic and parastatal structures that had dominated African economies since independence. As state enterprises were privatized, new private firms and multinational corporations entered African markets, introducing competitive pricing, branding strategies, and modern marketing techniques [39]. The proliferation of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs), financial services, and telecommunications industries created unprecedented exposure to global brands. Companies such as Unilever, Coca-Cola, and MTN adapted their strategies to fit local contexts, while domestic firms struggled to compete or reinvent themselves under the pressures of globalization.

This period also marked the emergence of marketing as a formal business function in many African corporations. Firms began to recognize the importance of market research, customer segmentation, and promotional strategy in gaining a competitive advantage. Whereas marketing in earlier decades had focused on distribution and pricing in resource-constrained environments, the liberalization era expanded the marketing mix to include brand positioning, customer experience, and digital communication [40].

The shift toward a more sophisticated marketing ethos coincided with the rise of urban middle classes, whose consumption patterns were increasingly aspirational. Urbanization, foreign media exposure, and improved access to credit all contributed to the rise of a consumerist ethos among African youth and emerging professionals. Shopping malls, fast-food outlets, and branded retail spaces proliferated across major cities such as Nairobi, Lagos, and Johannesburg, symbolizing the spatial and cultural reorganization of consumption in the liberalized African economy [41].

Globalization brought both homogenizing and hybridizing effects on African consumer behaviour. While global brands flooded the continent, consumers did not simply imitate Western lifestyles; rather, they localized consumption patterns, blending global products with local meanings, a process scholars describe as "glocalization" [6].

For instance, African consumers embraced global technology brands such as Nokia and Samsung but repurposed them within local communication cultures e.g. using mobile phones for micro-entrepreneurship, remittances, and community coordination rather than merely personal luxury. Similarly, the rise of fashion, music, and food industries reflected

a dynamic synthesis between the global and the local. Ghanaian kente designs appeared on global runways, Nigerian Afrobeats gained international appeal, and South African cuisines like biltong were rebranded for global markets, all manifestations of Africa's growing power to shape global cultural flows rather than merely consume them.

The glocalization phenomenon also transformed advertising and communication strategies. Marketers began to integrate indigenous languages, symbols, and cultural idioms into campaigns that resonated with local sensibilities. For example, Kenyan and Nigerian advertising agencies developed "Afrocentric branding" approaches that combined Western-style visual aesthetics with African humour, folklore, and music. In this sense, globalization became a site of cultural negotiation and identity formation, where marketing operated as a tool for both consumer empowerment and cultural reproduction [34].

The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the rapid diffusion of mobile technology and the Internet, which revolutionized African marketing landscapes. The telecommunications boom, spurred by liberalization policies, enabled millions to access digital platforms for communication, commerce, and entertainment. The mobile phone emerged as Africa's most powerful marketing medium, that is, simultaneously a tool of connection, payment, and identity expression [35].

Kenya's M-Pesa, launched in 2007, epitomized this technological leap. By transforming the mobile phone into a banking and marketing platform, it not only enhanced financial inclusion but also demonstrated how indigenous innovation could disrupt global marketing models [4]. Similarly, Nigeria's Nollywood film industry leveraged affordable digital technologies and community distribution networks to create one of the world's largest entertainment markets, illustrating how African entrepreneurs used storytelling and cultural familiarity to cultivate loyal audiences and lucrative brands.

These developments expanded the definition of marketing to include digital ecosystems and cultural production. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter became new arenas for African consumer expression, brand interaction, and activism. Urban youth, in particular, turned to social media not just for entertainment but as a means of identity construction and political engagement, therefore, merging the economic and sociocultural dimensions of marketing.

While multinational corporations dominated the early years of liberalization, the 2000s witnessed the rise of indigenous African entrepreneurs who redefined authenticity in branding. Companies such as Safaricom (Kenya), Dangote Group (Nigeria), and Shoprite (South Africa) became symbols of African excellence and self-reliance. Their marketing narratives often emphasized local ownership, cultural pride, and social contribution; values deeply rooted in indigenous traditions of community and reciprocity [36].

This search for authenticity also inspired a new generation of creative entrepreneurs, particularly in fashion, music, and food industries. African designers began branding

traditional textiles and crafts as global luxury products, while chefs and influencers reimagined local cuisines through social media storytelling. These developments underscore the fusion of entrepreneurial innovation and cultural identity, positioning marketing as both an economic and a cultural enterprise.

The concept of "Africapitalism", popularized by Nigerian entrepreneur Tony Elumelu, captures this synthesis of profit and purpose. It promotes a distinctly African approach to capitalism that foregrounds social responsibility, inclusive growth, and cultural rootedness [42]. As such, African entrepreneurs and marketers increasingly view success not merely through financial metrics but through contributions to community development and continental transformation.

The liberalization and globalization era also transformed marketing education. African universities, professional associations, and business schools began revising curricula to reflect new realities of digital transformation, entrepreneurship, and global competition [5]. Business programmes introduced courses on brand management, consumer behaviour, e-commerce, and strategic marketing, aligning their pedagogy with international accreditation standards.

However, these reforms also exposed persistent challenges of contextual relevance and epistemic dependency. Much of the instructional content continued to rely heavily on Western case studies and theories that were ill-suited to African social and economic contexts. As a result, African marketing education often mirrored global best practices without adequately integrating indigenous marketing logics such as communal trust systems, informal economies, and moral economies of exchange [21].

To address these challenges, scholars and educators have called for pedagogical decolonization, emphasizing the inclusion of African experiences, languages, and epistemologies in marketing education. This movement parallels broader calls across the humanities and social sciences for decolonial knowledge production. It seeks to reposition African students and scholars as producers rather than consumers of marketing knowledge, thereby aligning pedagogy with Africa's cultural identity and developmental priorities [32].

Pedagogical Dimensions of Marketing Development

The evolution of marketing pedagogy in Africa has closely mirrored the continent's broader socio-economic, political, and cultural transformations. As marketing emerged as a formal discipline within African higher education, its pedagogical trajectory reflected shifting intellectual dependencies, cultural negotiations, and aspirations toward epistemic sovereignty. Three broad phases can be identified in this development: the Imitation Phase (1960s–1980s), the Adaptation Phase (1990s–2010s), and the Decolonial Phase (2010–present). Together, these stages capture the movement from dependence on Western models to the pursuit of indigenous relevance and pedagogical autonomy.

The early decades following independence were characterized by the imitation and transplantation of Western marketing education into African universities. Most business schools were established with technical and curricular support from European or North American institutions, which supplied syllabi, teaching materials, and academic staff. As a result, marketing education in Africa was largely derivative, emphasizing imported theories and case studies from industrialized economies [7].

The prevailing textbooks during this period, many authored by American scholars, framed marketing as a science of consumer manipulation, driven by concepts such as the "marketing mix," "consumer decision-making models," and "mass communication strategies." These frameworks were often disconnected from African economic structures, which were dominated by informal markets, subsistence economies, and communal exchange systems [8]. Students were thus trained to think within paradigms suited for mass-production capitalist economies rather than the complex realities of African trade.

Moreover, marketing pedagogy in this period reflected a broader postcolonial pattern of educational dependency. Business education, like other disciplines, was seen as an instrument of modernization and integration into the global capitalist order [43]. The goal was to produce managers who could operate within multinational corporations or newly privatized state enterprises, not necessarily entrepreneurs capable of innovating within African market conditions. Consequently, marketing knowledge remained cognitively imperial, privileging imported frameworks over indigenous knowledge systems.

The institutional structure of marketing education also reinforced this dependency. Examination systems were often modelled on British or American accreditation standards, and success was measured by conformity to international curricula rather than by local problem-solving capacity. The result, as Nwankwo observed, was a "pedagogy of mimicry" that produced technically competent graduates but few original African marketing thinkers [7].

The liberalization and globalization era brought profound economic and intellectual changes that prompted a gradual adaptation of marketing education to African realities. As African markets became more dynamic and diversified, scholars and practitioners recognised the inadequacy of purely Western models in explaining local consumer behaviour, distribution systems, and branding practices. The need for contextual relevance catalysed what may be termed the adaptation phase of marketing pedagogy. During this period, African academics began to reinterpret and localize global marketing concepts by integrating sociocultural dimensions into teaching and research. Themes such as communalism, extended family networks, religious beliefs, and informal economies entered the marketing classroom, reshaping discussions around consumer motivation, communication, and entrepreneurship [8]. The study of indigenous entrepreneurship, e.g. as exemplified by the Yoruba market women of Nigeria or Ghanaian makola traders, provided new insights into relational marketing, negotiation ethics, and social capital formation [13].

Furthermore, African universities began developing localized case studies and research projects that reflected the lived experiences of African consumers and businesses. Marketing departments collaborated with local firms, NGOs, and cooperatives to produce applied research on small enterprise development, microfinance, and rural marketing systems. This period also saw the rise of African marketing associations and journals, such as the African Journal of Business and Economic Research and the Journal of African Business, which provided platforms for knowledge exchange and critical debate.

However, this adaptation remained partial and uneven. While scholars increasingly acknowledged cultural diversity and informal sector dynamics, much of the theoretical framework still rested on Western epistemology. Marketing models were adjusted rather than fundamentally reimagined. In other words, the adaptation phase marked an incremental localization rather than full epistemic independence. The pedagogical goal was to make Western theories "fit" African realities, not to replace them with African ones.

Nevertheless, this period laid the intellectual groundwork for a more radical transformation of marketing pedagogy. It cultivated an awareness of Africa's intellectual agency and prepared the ground for the current decolonial turn in marketing thought.

Since the 2010s, a growing body of African scholars has called for the decolonization of marketing education, advocating a paradigm shift from adaptation to epistemic reconstruction. The decolonial phase is characterized by efforts to ground marketing pedagogy in African epistemologies, languages, ethics, and worldviews, while embracing experiential and community-based learning methods [5,9]. This movement aligns with broader intellectual currents in African studies that seek to provincialize Western knowledge and re-center African ways of knowing.

In the decolonial classroom, storytelling, oral traditions, and case narratives drawn from indigenous contexts are increasingly used as pedagogical tools. These approaches resonate with African modes of communication and collective learning. Marketing students engage in community-based projects, such as supporting women's cooperatives, cultural tourism enterprises, or digital start-ups, that connect theoretical learning with social responsibility. This experiential pedagogy not only enhances practical competence but also reinforces the moral and cultural dimensions of marketing as a human-centered enterprise [5].

Furthermore, the decolonial movement emphasizes linguistic and cognitive justice in marketing education. Teaching and research in African languages enable students to articulate concepts and metaphors of exchange that are often lost in translation. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argued in literary education, language is not a neutral medium but a vessel of worldview [32]. Incorporating African languages and idioms into marketing discourse therefore allows for the recovery of indigenous business philosophies embedded in proverbs, rituals, and communal practices.

Decolonial marketing pedagogy also challenges the traditional hierarchy between academic knowledge and lived experience. It promotes co-learning and co-creation, where students, local entrepreneurs, and community members become active participants in knowledge generation. This epistemic democratization redefines marketing education as a space for empowerment and transformation rather than passive consumption of theory.

At a theoretical level, scholars have begun developing African-centered marketing frameworks based on philosophies such as Ubuntu, Ujamaa, and Africapitalism. These frameworks foreground values of interdependence, moral reciprocity, and social welfare as guiding principles of marketing practice [30,42]. In doing so, the decolonial phase reframes marketing from a purely economic science into a moral, cultural, and developmental discipline.

However, challenges remain. Institutional inertia, limited resources, and global accreditation pressures continue to constrain pedagogical innovation. Many universities still rely on imported textbooks, and African-authored materials remain underrepresented in curricula. Yet, the momentum toward decolonial pedagogy is undeniable. Conferences, networks, and digital platforms now provide growing visibility for African marketing scholarship, signalling a shift toward intellectual pluralism and continental self-definition.

Theoretical Reflections: Rethinking African Marketing History

The historical trajectory of marketing in Africa invites profound theoretical reflection that transcends conventional Western frameworks. Classical marketing theory, largely grounded in industrial capitalism, rational choice models, and mass production-consumption cycles, tends to assume a universal logic of exchange that fails to capture the plurality of African market rationalities [4]. African societies have long exhibited marketing practices driven by social, moral, and communal imperatives rather than purely profit-oriented motives. This relational and holistic orientation suggests that marketing in Africa cannot be meaningfully understood solely through Western managerialist paradigms.

African marketing history illustrates the primacy of relational exchange over transactional exchange, social embeddedness over market abstraction, and collective identity over atomized individual consumption. In many African societies, relationships between producers, intermediaries, and consumers are mediated by kinship, trust, and communal accountability rather than impersonal contracts [10,13]. These patterns reveal the coexistence of moral economies, where economic decisions are intertwined with cultural and ethical considerations, and modern capitalist forms of exchange.

Theoretically, this calls for a pluralistic framework: one that accommodates both formal and informal market systems and recognizes Africa's hybrid economic logics as sites of creativity rather than deficiency. The notion of market pluralism becomes critical here, positioning African markets as dynamic ecosystems where global and local forces

constantly interact [2]. Moreover, African marketing challenges the linear, evolutionary models of marketing history that assume development follows Western industrial progression. Instead, marketing in Africa unfolds through syncretism, combining indigenous knowledge, colonial legacies, and digital modernity in complex, non-linear ways.

From a pedagogical standpoint, integrating these African epistemologies into the classroom deepens understanding of marketing as not merely a technical or managerial discipline but a cultural, ethical, and historical practice. Teaching marketing through African case studies, such as informal markets, cross-border trade, and indigenous branding, helps students see marketing as embedded in lived experience, power relations, and identity formation. Thus, African marketing history invites a paradigm shift: from studying Africa through marketing to studying marketing through Africa.

Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

Despite significant advances in theory and practice, the marketing landscape in Africa continues to face persistent structural and pedagogical challenges. Infrastructure limitations, such as poor transport networks, unreliable electricity, and high logistics costs, impede efficient distribution and market integration [44]. These physical constraints restrict the reach of products, particularly in rural areas, and increase operational costs for small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, informal markets, which account for up to 80% of retail trade in some regions, remain largely unaccounted for in formal marketing research and policy frameworks [5]. This exclusion not only distorts understanding of market behaviour but also perpetuates academic biases toward Western-style formal economies.

Consumer heterogeneity across Africa further complicates segmentation and targeting strategies. The continent's vast linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity means that marketers must navigate multiple layers of identity, aspiration, and consumption patterns. The urban–rural divide remains particularly salient, with urban consumers increasingly embracing globalized lifestyles while rural consumers retain traditional consumption habits [6].

Educational challenges persist as well. Many universities continue to rely on imported marketing curricula that inadequately reflect local realities. Research capacity in marketing remains uneven across the continent, and gaps in digital literacy limit the adoption of contemporary marketing analytics and e-commerce platforms [5]. Pedagogical decolonization, though increasingly advocated, faces institutional inertia, resource constraints, and epistemic resistance.

Nonetheless, the African marketing environment is also rich in opportunities. The rise of digital platforms, mobile money, and social media has democratized access to markets and information. Innovations such as Kenya's M-Pesa and Nigeria's Jumia demonstrate the continent's capacity for technological leapfrogging and digital entrepreneurship. The creative industries, including Nollywood and Afrobeat music, have transformed marketing

into a form of cultural diplomacy and identity expression. Moreover, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) opens new frontiers for cross-border branding, logistics integration, and regional value chains.

Emerging domains such as green entrepreneurship, sustainable production, and circular economies further provide fertile ground for marketing innovation rooted in local environmental ethics. These shifts require new pedagogical approaches that integrate sustainability, digital fluency, and cultural literacy into marketing education. In this context, Africa's marketing future is not merely adaptive but transformative, redefining global marketing theory from the margins to the centre.

Toward a Decolonial Pedagogy of Marketing in Africa

The call for a decolonial pedagogy in marketing is not merely an academic trend but a necessary response to historical epistemic imbalances. It recognizes that African marketing knowledge must emerge from African experiences, histories, and cultural logics rather than from derivative application of Western models [9]. Decolonizing marketing education entails a re-centering of African epistemologies, methodologies, and ethical frameworks.

- **Epistemic Recentering:** Marketing curricula should place African trade histories, indigenous entrepreneurship, and informal market systems at the heart of teaching. This means re-examining precolonial trade networks, local market hierarchies, and indigenous branding systems as legitimate foundations of marketing theory [4]. By doing so, students learn to see Africa not as a consumer of foreign knowledge but as a producer of marketing insight.
- **Critical Reflexivity:** Educators must cultivate reflexivity by encouraging students to interrogate imported theories and assess their relevance to African contexts. Comparative frameworks that contrast Western models (such as the four Ps) with African relational marketing practices can reveal hidden assumptions and open possibilities for new theory-building.
- **Experiential Learning:** Pedagogical innovation should promote experiential engagement with real markets through community-based projects, internships, and collaborations with local enterprises. Such approaches transform classrooms into laboratories of lived marketing practice, where theory and experience intersect. Storytelling, simulation, and ethnographic learning can enhance contextual sensitivity and ethical awareness.
- **Linguistic Diversity:** The use of African languages in case studies, advertising analysis, and consumer research not only validates local cultures but also deepens understanding of symbolic and affective dimensions of marketing communication. Language becomes a site of identity, persuasion, and meaning-making. These are key components often overlooked in global marketing texts.
- **Ethical Foundations:** Incorporating African philosophies such as Ubuntu, the belief in shared humanity and communal responsibility, provides a moral compass for marketing education [45]. Ubuntu-based marketing ethics foreground empathy, reciprocity, and collective well-being as guiding principles for responsible marketing practice.

A decolonial pedagogy of marketing thus envisions a contextually grounded, globally engaged, and ethically conscious discipline. It seeks not to reject global knowledge but to reframe it through African realities, ensuring that marketing education contributes to inclusive development and epistemic justice. Ultimately, such a transformation aligns marketing with Africa's broader quest for intellectual sovereignty and human-centered progress.

Conclusion

The history of marketing in Africa reveals a continuous negotiation between indigenous wisdom and external influence, between social embeddedness and global integration. From the bustling precolonial markets of West Africa to the digital marketplaces of the twenty-first century, African marketing has never been static. It has evolved dynamically, shaped by culture, community, and creativity.

This review demonstrates that the continent's marketing trajectory cannot be fully understood through Western theoretical models alone. Instead, it calls for pluralistic, historically grounded approaches that value Africa's relational exchange systems, moral economies, and hybrid innovations. Pedagogically, this entails moving beyond imitation of Western textbooks toward experiential, critical, and culturally embedded learning. A decolonial pedagogy rooted in Ubuntu ethics, linguistic diversity, and community engagement holds promise for transforming marketing into a tool of inclusive growth and ethical leadership.

Ultimately, the African marketing experience challenges global marketing scholarship to rethink its assumptions about rationality, value, and progress. It invites educators and practitioners alike to view Africa not as a peripheral market but as a fertile ground for theoretical innovation and pedagogical renewal. The future of marketing in Africa, and perhaps marketing globally, lies in its ability to harmonize tradition and transformation, local wisdom and global vision [46-57].

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