

# 2021 “OUT OF (AND INTO) AFRICA” CONFERENCE BRIEFING

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Following the success of the Inaugural “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference - International Symposium on African Consumer Marketing and Firm Strategies - which was held at the Graves School of Business and Management, Morgan State University, Baltimore in 2018, the second edition was launched, organized and subsequently hosted online by Morgan State University on **October 25-26, 2021**.

This 2021 conference has turned out to be a **resounding success**, far exceeding the conference team’s initial projections! Counting each individual attendee only once, we had **236 attendees** at the 2021 “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference. This is especially remarkable, given that this was only the second conference in our biennial “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference series. Attendees, including presenters, joined from all across the African continent, United States and several other parts of the world. A truly international event! Best of all, given vagaries of online conferences and time zone differences, we are proud to say that the conference ran very smoothly indeed.

This 2021 edition of our biennial “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference series was held completely online (using the zoom platform), included multi-HBCU involvement and had three major tracks: consumer marketing, firm strategy and society & institutions. We received strong submissions leading to insightful selected papers, exciting panels, and forward-looking discussion at the conference. A few key features of this 2021 conference were as follows:

- 1) Online conference format: This online venue (through Zoom) was warranted to manage COVID-19 pandemic consequences, and also dramatically lowered costs for attendees.
- 2) Multi-HBCU involvement: Following the initiative led by the Graves School of Business & Management at Morgan State University, we expanded engagement across the HBCU community in enhancing leadership of business and marketing scholarship regarding Africa. Howard University is a partner in this edition.
- 3) Three “divisions” or programs to the conference: In addition to the Firm Strategy (firm-level research) and Consumer Marketing (consumer-level research), a third division/program of Society & Institutions was added to capture the macro-level research that addresses public policy and institutions that are intertwined with business and entrepreneurship development.

Before the pandemic this year, African consumer and business spending was expected to grow beyond \$4 trillion, with a striking demographic dividend indicated by a massive working-age population that will be larger than either China or India by 2034, abundant resources, and fast-paced growth (McKinsey, 2016). While the current pandemic did cause a recessionary environment across the continent, it has also created opportunities (and challenges) for entrepreneurship and small & medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (World Economic Forum, 2020). Innovative solutions including products/services have been introduced in various countries across the continent in response to the pandemic - which may have far-reaching implications well after the current pandemic subsides in Africa and across the globe.

The past few years have witnessed cross-fertilization of African-born entrepreneurship and innovation into other parts of the world, along with growth opportunities for MNCs and SMEs into Africa. We firmly believe that the time is ripe for a biennially-updated showcase of scholarly insights regarding international business in this under-studied continent - including, and especially, insights and strategy/tactics that originated from Africa. This 2021 conference

edition also marked a significant step toward creating a sustained effort among HBCUs - with Morgan leadership - to connect with Africa in business-related research at both the micro and macro level.

Despite the promising social economic development in Africa and foreign marketers' enthusiasm toward its future growth, there has historically been limited market or consumer research for marketing practitioners (McKinsey's, 2012). The literature shows that existing knowledge on African consumption and behavior is fragmented. We set following three goals for the conference:

1. Reviewing current knowledge on African consumers, marketing, firm strategy, and societal policies - highlighting gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the field in that African context.
2. Developing an agenda for future research
3. Fostering collaborations among consumer, marketing, firm strategy and public policy researchers with similar interests.

Africa's consumer market is continually reshaped by technological advances and urbanization. Despite the growing middle class and economic opportunities in the African consumer market, African consumers are often poorly understood and the research has remained fragmented. The papers in the Consumer Marketing Track explored emerging consumer issues such as privacy concerns that are associated with online banking and factors (i.e. ethnic identity and impulsivity) that may lead to consumer online shopping addiction. Our researchers also examined the retail revolution brought by augmented reality technology and online shopping and how they influence customer experience. Finally, a study on African luxury showed that values associated with authenticity, materialism, and culture/ tradition from an Ubuntu context are valued by African luxury consumers, thus differentiating them from Western luxury consumers. A plenary presentation, delivered by the CEO and co-founder of Survey54, followed with a deep-dive into enabling effective and accurate consumer insights from around Africa.

**The best paper presentation award in the Consumer Marketing Track** was won by Evelyn Quartey and Israel Kpekpena (both from Ghana Institute for Management and Public Administration) for their paper, "Privacy concerns and customer engagement in online banking through the lens of protection motivation theory".

Effective firm strategy and organization faces great challenges and opportunities in Africa. The papers presented in our Firm Strategy Track examined knowledge creation for emerging market MNEs as evidenced in Africa. An extensive retrospective and future agenda was also presented regarding foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa. Other researchers in the track studied service marketing opportunities in Africa, while still others focused in on the Africa retail sector response to the ongoing pandemic impact. We also had an interesting paper on product design effect on female medical tourists. Indeed, within a short time span, the research presented in the Firm Strategy Track encompassed a variety of core issues salient to international business conduct around Africa. Two panels were also featured in this track: the first highlighting and discussing the role of SMEs in Africapitalism and the second delving into MNE vs. NGO investment in Africa.

**The best paper presentation award in the Firm Strategy Track** was won by Joan Lilian Ogendo (from The Technical University of Kenya) for her paper, "Knowledge creation for performance of emerging economy MNEs".

Society and institutions provide an important context within which firm strategy and consumer behaviour is evidenced. As such, our Society & Institutions Track examined a multitude of papers looking at societal influences on the progress of international business in Africa. Examination of the sharing culture and sharing economy was presented. Management's role in malaria eradication was discussed, along with the effect of food safety signals on African consumers. Ease of doing business and poverty reduction in Nigeria were highlighted. Finally, to wrap up the track presentations, family influences on women's entrepreneurial journeys were discussed. The papers evinced good discussion from attendees, especially in the role of public policy measures to encourage international business development around Africa. A panel delving deep into youth entrepreneurship in Africa, along with the impact of

exogenous/endogenous shock followed, which yielded further insight on the significant role of Africa's "great demographic dividend" in the years to come. A further panel into the role of language (with historical context) in establishing trust and "clout", particularly in business negotiations, brought the conference proceedings to a close.

The **best paper presentation award in the Society & Institutions Track** was won by Jane Chege, Arnout Fischer and Paul Ingenbleek (all from Wageningen University, Netherlands) for their paper, "Is food safety a satisfier or a dissatisfier for African consumers? Evidence on green leafy vegetables from Nairobi."

The conference, thus, provided great opportunities for brainstorming and dialogue among researchers and marketing practitioners. We are hopeful that we encouraged collaboration between academia and businesses in the US (and other parts of the world) with those from all over Africa. Our attendees included academic faculty, doctoral students, policy makers, economic development experts, bureaucrats, think tank researchers, NGO experts, and senior corporate managers. We encourage scholars from Africa and worldwide to continue collaboration and remain connected with the "Out of (and Into) Africa" platform we are creating at Morgan. We encourage those interested in the developing platform to email the Conference Chair, so we can help maintain success of our biennial conference series and progress in this research stream. We envision the platform to act as a dynamic repository devoted to international business research with an Africa-centric focus.

The 2021 conference featured **U.S. State Department Bureau of African Affairs, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Ervin Massinga, as keynote speaker** There were multiple full sessions of cutting-edge academic research presentations **focusing on the African context and innovative international business approaches**. Highlights included multiple panels on African consumer insights, SME development and Africapitalism, NGO vs. corporate investment, youth entrepreneurship, and the role of language. This scholarly event also highlights the growing significance of the Graves School of Business and Management, and underscores Morgan's leadership in disseminating African international business scholarship. The 2021 conference was sponsored by Morgan State University, Howard University and CIBER-CMCC.

#### **References:**

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