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Emotional Attachment and Laundry Detergent Consumers' Loyalty in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract:

In many markets, particularly in fast moving consumer goods market, brand relationships play a major role in the purchase and repurchase behaviour of consumers. However, empirical studies that focus on these brand relationships, and more so in developing countries such as in Kenya, are scarce even though such relationships often form a foundation for more comprehensive consumer-brand relationships. As a key dimension of brand relationship, emotional attachment has emerged as a salient construct in the study of brand relationship as it plays a key role in building consumer-brand relationships and consequently, loyalty. Therefore, to fill this gap, the key objective of the study was to ascertain the effect of emotional connection on loyalty among household consumers of laundry detergents in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This research was cross-sectional in nature and utilised explanatory research design. A sample of 400 household consumers was randomly selected and collection of primary data done using self-administered questionnaire. Regression was done in testing the research hypothesis using SPSS 25, and the results established that emotional attachment has a significant positive effect on loyalty of household consumers of laundry detergents in Nairobi City County, Kenya, thus the study concluded that emotional attachment has a positive significant effect on loyalty. The study findings will assist organisations in crafting brand marketing strategies for improving loyalty to their brands through the use of the emotional attachment construct.

Keywords: Brand relationship, loyalty, emotional attachment, households, consumer market

1. Introduction

In the global marketplace an emerging trend is the focus of marketing effort in propagating long-term relations with customers (Levy & Hino, 2016; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), as a consumer who develops a strong relationship with a brand is less costly to maintain and are willing to repurchase products or services which deliver value that exceed their expectations (Seock & Lin, 2011; Tarus & Rabach, 2013). This is evident in highly competitive markets with decreasing product differentiation, which make loyalty a key ingredient in the creation of a solid consumer base and a sustainable firm (Hur, Kang & Kim, 2015), as by developing a relationship with the brand, consumers aim to derive emotional, psychological and socio-cultural benefits from the brand (Aurier & Lanause, 2012).

Extant research on brand relationship shows it has been conceptualised in diverse dimensions by different scholars. Veloutsou (2007) suggested that brand relationship consists of two-way communication and emotional exchange, while Peng, Chen and Wen (2014) viewed brand attachment and brand identification as key components of brand relationship. Among the above dimensions, emotional attachment has emerged as salient constructs in the study of brand relationship. This study will focus on emotional attachment in determining its effect on loyalty.

Within the global laundry detergent market, trends such as the growth of single person households in need of package sizes that meet their cleaning needs and increase in urban household population (Nielsen, 2016) have been observed as increasing competition in the market. In Kenya, the laundry detergents market is very competitive (Kamau, 2013), and in this highly competitive context, the importance of loyalty is gaining prominence thus compelling manufacturers to build and maintain a loyal base of consumers to enable the penetration and survival of their brands in the market (Rundle-Thierry & Bennett, 2001).

Emotional attachment has been shown by past studies to have an effect on loyalty. However, past studies on emotional attachment have mainly focussed on its determinants (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011) while few have focussed on emotional attachment as having an effect on loyalty (Bahri-Ammari *et al*, 2016; Levy & Hino, 2016). In the Kenyan context, several studies have been done to ascertain drivers of loyalty, however, studies by Wangari (2012), in the

laundry detergent industry, and Tarus and Rabach (2013), in the telecommunication industry, have not looked at emotional attachment as a predictor of loyalty. Thus, it is evident that there is much needed research to appreciate the effect of emotional attachment on loyalty in the laundry detergents market in Kenya. Therefore, in light of the above identified gaps, the current study aims to determine the effect of emotional attachment on loyalty among household consumers of laundry detergents in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

The paper is structured as follows: first we review the theoretical foundations and concepts of emotional attachment and loyalty. It then elaborates the research hypothesis stating the relationship between the two variables and presents the conceptual framework of the study. Second, we describe the research hypothesis explaining the relationship between the variables. Third, we offer research methodology, then provide the main results and findings. Lastly, we conclude the study by presenting theoretical, managerial and policy implications.

2. Literature Underpinnings

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

This study is underpinned by the attachment theory which helps to explain how consumers bond to a brand on the basis of the relationship they have with the brand and proposes that a strong attachment is based on the brand providing a safe haven, proximity maintenance and secure base and satisfaction of the needs for security, support, consistency and comfort (Bretherton, 1992; Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011; Velascou, 2015). The theory of attachment also offers the view that the way an individual interacts with a brand is dependent on the level of emotional connection they have with it (Levy & Hino 2016). For instance, when extended to brand relationships, the bonds formed are basically developed based on consistency in brand response as well as the brand's trustworthiness and therefore, consumers develop a stronger bond to a brand as it is perceived as dependable and consistent in terms of being there when the consumer needs the brand (Patrwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011). From a brand relationship dimension, the emotional attachment that consumers develop with a brand can be utilised in illuminating on their loyalty to the brand (Levy & Hino, 2016; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005).

2.2. Conceptual Background

2.2.1. Emotional Attachment

Emotional attachment has been defined differently by various scholars. Bahri Ammari, Van Niekerke, Ben Khelil and Chtioui (2016: p.561) view emotional brand attachment as 'a long-term relationship that foresees the commitment of consumers to a brand'. Levy and Hino (2016: p.138) define emotional attachment as 'a construct which reflects the mental state of feeling connected or attached to a brand, that is, a holistic feeling towards a brand'. Theng So, Parsons and Yap (2013: p.407) opine that emotional attachment is a construct which explains 'the strength of the bond that the consumer has with a brand'. Fournier (1998) defines brand attachment as 'an emotionally laden bond between the consumer and a brand'.

Building long-lasting bonds with consumers cannot be assumed as these bonds enhance emotional attachment with the brand, and ultimately in the development of loyalty (Levy & Hino, 2016; Manyiwa, Priporas, & Wang, 2018), in which consumers build emotional bonds with brands they view favourably and those that surpass their utility (Aurier & Lanause, 2013). Consequently, consumers who are very emotionally attached to a brand tend to be highly committed in maintaining long standing relations with the brand, and stimulate positive word of mouth and preference for the brand (Levy & Hino 2016; Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005).

This study conceptualised emotional attachment as per Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005) who view it as composed of the dimensions of passion, affection and connection, whereby affection is viewed as the warm feelings consumers have for a brand; connection as the feelings that consumers have in terms of merging with a brand; passion as the strong and awakened positive feelings that consumers have towards a brand.

2.2.2. Loyalty

As a key concept in marketing, loyalty has more than 200 definitions (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978) and thus it has been defined by marketing theorists differently. According to Jacoby and Chestnut (1978: p.52) it is the 'biased behavioural response expressed over time by some decision-making unit with respect to one or more brands out of a set of such brands and is a function of psychological processes. This definition by Jacoby and Chestnut views loyalty as non-random, behavioural and does not consider situational influences. Another definition by Oliver (1999: p.34) views loyalty as 'a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronise a preferred product or service consistently in the future thereby causing repetitive same brand or same brand-set purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour'.

Loyalty has been examined from the broad perspectives of attitudinal and behavioural. The attitudinal perspective measures loyalty on the basis of surveys in terms of the consumer's commitment, purchase intention, preference and their overall feelings about a brand, while the behavioural perspective uses measures it using actual purchases made, volume of similar brand purchase and the frequency of purchases (Jensen, 2011; Parahoo, 2012; Goncalves & Sampaiao, 2012). This study will conceptualise loyalty in terms of the attitudinal perspective as behavioural perspective has the drawback of not ascertaining whether a repurchase is purely based on habit, or for psychological and situational reasons (Krystallis, 2013).

This study operationalised loyalty as per Kaura, Prasad and Sharma (2015), Chinomona (2016) and Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, (2017). Preference is the tendency of the consumer to purchase a particular brand consistently over

time, even with the availability of alternative competing brands; Repeat purchase intention is whereby the consumer intends to purchase the brand in future; price tolerance is the tendency of the consumer to spend more in the acquisition of a brand; positive word of mouth is the predisposition to talk positively about a brand (El Mastry, 2016).

2.3. Research Hypothesis

Therefore, based on the theoretical foundations and conceptual background, presented above is reasonable to assume that in the context of the laundry detergent industry that emotional attachment has a significant effect on loyalty. Thus, this study proposes the null hypothesis that:

- H_01 : Emotional attachment has no significant effect on loyalty among household consumers of laundry detergents in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

To address the highlighted knowledge gap, the conceptual framework utilised in this study consisted of emotional attachment and loyalty constructs, and their related indicators and was based on the assumption that emotional attachment has an effect on loyalty. The independent variable was emotional attachment, while the dependent variable was loyalty which was conceptualised as preference, word of mouth, repurchase intention and price tolerance. The conceptual framework below in figure 1 graphically depicts how the identified constructs are interconnected.

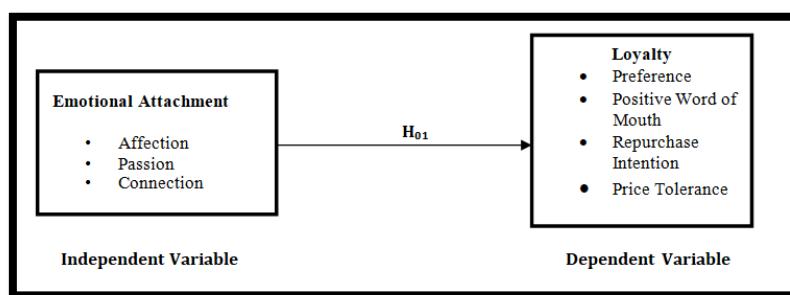


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Hypothesised Relationship
Source: Researcher (2018)

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design, Sample and Sampling Design

This study adopted positivism which is based on the principle of an objective reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Creswell, 2009) as it encourages the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond (Bryman, & Bell, 2007). It also applied an explanatory research design and was cross-sectional in nature as in previous studies by Njuguna (2014), Mwencha (2015) and Mutinda (2016). The target population was household consumers in eleven sub-counties in Nairobi City County, Kenya, from which a sample of 400 household consumers were selected, using cluster and simple random sampling techniques, for the administration of the questionnaire (FSD Kenya, KNBS & CBK, 2016). The Kish grid was employed in the selection of one respondent per household (Elder, 2009), with the household considered as a single purchase and consumption unit.

3.2. Empirical Model

Regression was considered suitable for this study and was utilised in determining the effect of emotional attachment on loyalty, as suggested by Field (2009). The relationship between the independent variable (emotional attachment) and the dependent variable (loyalty) were linearised as shown below in model 1.

Where:

LY = Loyalty

B_0 = LY intercept or constant

β_1 = Regression coefficient measuring the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable

β_1 = Regression coefficient in
EA = Emotional Attachment

ϵ = Error term

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Primary quantitative data was gathered from respondents using a self-administered questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, developed and refined, from a review of past marketing studies on emotional attachment and loyalty. The researcher was personally present during the questionnaire filling by the randomly selected members of households. Inferential statistics were utilised in testing the research hypotheses with the quantitative data analysis being done using SPSS 25.0. The researcher obtained a response rate of 92% after 376 filled questionnaires were returned from the field and upon analysis 368 complete questionnaires were obtained which is adequate (Rogelberg, 2006). All measures in the questionnaires were adopted and adapted from previous studies which had been validated to ensure face and content validity. The research utilised Cronbach alpha as a reliability co-efficient and the results showed that the

emotional attachment variable ($\alpha=0.893$) and the loyalty variable ($\alpha=0.776$) met the 0.7 threshold which indicated they were reliable (Nunnally, 1978; Sekaran, 2003).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Diagnostic Tests

For regression to be accurately estimated, the basic assumptions of linear regression have to be met (Gupta, 2005; Field, 2009). Therefore, the Nunally following tests were performed to fulfil this requirement. The KMO test statistics results showed emotional attachment (0.851) and loyalty (0.705), had p-values which were greater than 0.5, indicating the study sample as adequate and representative (Williams *et al*, 2012), and thus sufficiently large for further analysis. The results of the Shapiro Wilks test showed p-values for emotional attachment were ($0.140>0.05$) and loyalty were ($0.426>0.05$), therefore, the data were normally distributed as per Sekaran (2003). The results of the Levene test of homogeneity of variances for the current study showed that the variances for brand communication as ($0.747>0.05$) thus the homogeneity of variances assumption was achieved as suggested by Dansey and Reidy (2004). The study utilised correlation coefficients to test for linear relationship (Dansey & Reidy, 2004). The correlation coefficient was 0.610 implying a positive moderate linear relationship between the emotional attachment and loyalty. Finally, the results of the multicollinearity test showed that emotional attachment (VIF = 1.429, T = 0.700), had a VIF of less than 10 and a tolerance value greater than 0.1, ruling out the possibility of multicollinearity (Field, 2009).

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The study was based on the premise that emotional attachment influences loyalty and in order to establish the statistical significance of the hypothesised relationships, linear regression was conducted at 95 % confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$). Below are the results of the hypothesis test in Table 1.

| Post Estimation Diagnostics | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------|---------|
| | Test Statistic | p-value | |
| Adjusted R Squared | 0.370 | | |
| R Squared | 0.372 | | |
| F Statistic (1,366) | 216.365 | 0.001 | |
| Regression Results | | | |
| | Coefficients | t-statistic | p-value |
| Emotional Attachment | 0.610 | 14.709 | 0.0000 |
| Constant | 1.308 | 9.633 | 0.0000 |
| Variable: Loyalty | | | |

Table 1: Effect of Emotional Attachment on Loyalty

Source: Survey Data (2019)

The results shown in Table 1 indicate an adjusted R^2 of 0.370, which implies that the emotional attachment variable has a moderate explanatory power on loyalty since only 37.0% of loyalty was explained by the predictor variable. The results, Table 1, also indicate the regression model is statistically significant at F (1, 366) = 216.365 and a p-value of 0.001 < 0.05 implying that the proposed model fitted the data well. Therefore, there was significant effect of emotional attachment on loyalty and thus emotional attachment contributed significantly to changes in loyalty. The coefficient results of emotional attachment and loyalty in Table 1 indicate a relationship that is positive, linear and statistically significant ($\beta=0.610$, $p=0.001$). Hence the study rejected H_0 at $\alpha=0.05$, since $p=0.001<0.05$, and concluded that emotional attachment has a significant effect on loyalty among household consumers of laundry detergents in Nairobi City County in Kenya. These findings corroborate those of Levy and Hino (2016), Theng So, Parsons and Yap (2013) and Peng, Chen and Wen (2014).

4.3. Discussion

The research objective was to ascertain the effect of emotional attachment on loyalty among household consumers of laundry detergents in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study's findings revealed that emotional attachment had a significant effect on loyalty. These findings concur with a study by Bahri-Amari *et al* (2016) that as customers become more attached, emotionally, to a certain brand they increasingly resist changing their preferred brand and are relatively unresponsive to rising price increases, thus maintaining their relationship with the brand. Levy and Hino (2016) add that emotions are crucial in motivating consumers when choosing and connecting to a specific brand and ultimately in the development of a brand relationship. Aurier and Lanauze (2012) concur that consumers create affective bonds with their preferred brands, that surpass the brand's utility, which is crucial in influencing their brand choice and subsequently their loyalty to the chosen set of brands.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study purposed to establish the effect of emotional attachment on loyalty among household consumers of laundry detergents in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Based on the study findings, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that emotional attachment had a significant linear effect on loyalty.

5.2. Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study recommends that marketing practitioners should build and maintain an emotional connection with their consumers by creating brands, and their supporting promotional strategies, which appeal to the emotions and feelings of their consumers as well as develop appropriate customer retention strategies to aid in establishing a loyal base of customers through meeting the affective needs of their consumers.

Also, this study recommends environmentally friendly ingredients and packaging should be utilised as this creates an emotional bond with the consumers as caring for their social, health and environmental needs in terms of detergent use and disposal of the packaging thus sowing the seed for long-term loyalty. Thus, consumers will not overlook a brand that offers them what rival brands cannot in terms of a brand that excites, delights and cares for them.

Finally, this study notes that since the study's sampling pool was constrained to household consumers in the identified sub-counties in Nairobi City County, it recommends that the scope of the current research be expanded to samples of households in other counties and to industrial consumers in the country so as to generalise the results to the larger population. Also, since this study only considered a consumer's affective aspects that have an effect on loyalty, future research can be conducted on factors such as corporate identity, brand image, culture, brand equity as well as psychosocial factors, to ascertain if they have an effect on loyalty towards a specific product or service brand.

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