

FACTORS INFLUENCING BRAND LOYALTY IN SPORTSWEAR AMONG KENYAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: THE CASE OF SWIMMERS

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ABSTRACT

The increase and retention of loyal customers has become a factor for long-term success of enterprises. However, the major emphasis is shifting from increasing the number of customers to retention of the same. Sports cannot be as a strategic and an important market segment in the Kenya's clothing industry. With brands being an important source of competitive advantage, knowledge of factors influencing brand loyalty in sports wear is needed in order for a business to strategize on how to remain competitive in the market. However, very little research has focused on the brand loyalty of the sports clothing. This study focuses on the factors influencing the brand loyalty of swimwear among Kenyan University students. The paper also sought to identify the most used brands among the sports students. The sample comprised of students who participated in Kenyan University Sports (Swimming) competitions held in 2009 at the University of Nairobi. The study design used was ex-post-facto and the data collected using a questionnaire. Factor analysis was conducted to reduce the variables into fewer components. Pearson correlation was used to test the hypothesis that the Price and Variety; Uniqueness of Brand; Attractiveness; Ads and Product Quality; Size and Brand Reputation have no relationship with brand loyalty of swimwear among Kenyan university swimmers. The results indicate Price and Variety; Attractiveness; and Size and Brand Reputation as factors with a significant relationship with brand loyalty, while Speedo was the most preferred brand. There is need for dealers in swimwear to focus on prices, provide a variety of designs, be keen on attractiveness and size as well as invest more in ways to increase brand reputation.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Swimwear, Marketing, University Students, Apparel

INTRODUCTION

Customer awareness has been favoured by the globalization of competition, saturation of markets, and information technological development. This has consequently resulted to large-scale competition in the clothing industry. In this phenomenon, businesses have to build their success on a long-term customer relationship rather than through optimized product price and qualities. The increase and retention of loyal customers has become a key factor for long-term success of the businesses. Thus, brand loyalty, is an important aspect and marketers have to create marketing strategies that will appeal to the consumers at an individual level. The main emphasis in marketing has shifted from winning new customers to the retention of existing ones (Aaker, 1991). To achieve this, brand loyalty play a great role and has become of great interest for researchers, business managers/owners and academicians. Customer loyalty determines how much of the product is bought, how often and the repeat purchases made based in its features.

The features that a customer is keen on when making a purchase are multiple and are blended in the product. The product is positioned and distinguished by way of some special offering to establish it as a brand. A customer is loyal towards a particular brand if the particular product has fulfilled all or most of the requirements. From the customer's perspective, a brand provides a visual representation of the

differences between several products in a particular category. Brands allow consumers to shop with confidence and have some expectations (Hu, Chuang, Hsieh, Chang & Chang, n.d). A brand can signify product quality as well as aid consumers in differentiating the product from competitive offerings.

Customer loyalty in the apparel industry presents a paradox and brand loyalty is a key issue. Clothing is one of the consumer products that are vulnerable to fashion dynamics and sways making it important for the marketers to test whether consumer loyalty to the brands has changed. For sports apparel, loyalty has become an important concept in strategic marketing. Studies such as (Hu, *et al.*, n.d) show that in competitive repeat-purchase markets, loyalty is shaped more by the passive acceptance of brands than by strongly held attitudes about them. For a brand to thrive or survive in the market it must be effectively used by its customers. In sports, and especially, swimming, business men or marketers need to understand what factors affect their brands bearing in mind that brand loyalty will be different for each brand managed or stocked. The understanding of the brand loyalty is also essential for the clothing outlets dealing with swimwear in the definition of customer-oriented branding strategies.

There are several studies that have looked at the impact of satisfaction on loyalty. It was revealed that there exists a direct connection between satisfaction and loyalty. The argument brought forward is that satisfied customers become loyal and dissatisfied customers keep on moving from one vendor to another. This is because when a customer's satisfaction is low, they have the option to quit, seeking an alternative brand or going to a competitor (Thomas, n.d). It's clear that there must be also other factors beside satisfaction that have a certain impact on customer loyalty.

Yee & Sidek (2008) indicate that there are several factors that influence consumers' brand loyalty towards certain sportswear brands. In Kenya, sportswear brands such as Nike, Adidas, Puma, Umbro, Speedo, Reebok and Fila are popular among sportswear consumers yet there is lack of information on sportswear marketing. Sportswear has become a common and popular category among young people as it identifies them with a more relaxed lifestyle, greater versatility and comfort. This sector of the garment industry is not only under-investigated but also a sector that cannot be ignored. However, there is no known study that has been conducted in Kenya focusing on sportswear and in particular swimwear. The purpose of this paper was to determine the factors influencing brand loyalty among swimmers as well as the most preferred brand for swimming costumes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Branding serves the purpose of differentiating homogenous product and brand loyalty has become an important concept in understanding apparel consumer behaviour. Generally the term is used to describe the extent to which consumers buy or use a brand in preference to other brands available in the market. It occurs because consumers perceive that the brand offers the right product features, images, or level of quality at the right price in a particular brand category (Malinowska-Olszowy, 2005). This perception forms the foundation for a buying habit thus the consumer becomes loyal to that specific brand. Basically, consumers first make a trial purchase of the brand and, after satisfaction, tend to form habits purchasing the same brand because the product is safe and familiar. In practice consumers often buy or use several brands, but will tend to concentrate on some brand more than others. A brand can be a name, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, consumers use to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate from those of competitors.

Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty of Swimwear Consumers

Brand names that are famous can disseminate product benefits and lead to higher recall of advertised benefits than those that are not (Malinowska-Olszowy, 2005). There are many brand names and alternatives available in the market place some of which are unfamiliar to the consumers. Consumers may prefer to trust major famous brand names and totally ignore the unfamiliar ones. These familiar brand names and their images attract consumers to purchase the brand and result to repeat purchasing behaviour thus reducing price related switching behaviours (Aaker, 1991). Brand personality also provides linkages to brand's emotional and self-expressive benefits for product differentiation. This is important for brands which have few physical differences and are consumed in social settings where the brand plays a vital role in creating a visible image about the consumer.

Product Quality refers to the features or characteristics of a product or service that is able to satisfy the stated or implied customer needs. In other words, product quality can be defined as "fitness for use" or 'conformance to requirement" (Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy & Coote, 2007). Consumers may repeat the purchase of single brands or switch around several brands due to the tangible quality of the product sold. According to Swinker & Hines (2007), the components of product quality of fashion items include size measurement, cutting or fitting, material, colour, function and the performance of the swimwear. Fitting is one of the crucial aspects in apparel selection because some fitted garments such as swimsuits and aerobic wear can ideally enhance the consumers' general appearance. Material is important in garment quality because it affects the hand feel, texture and other performance aspects of the product. Further, consumers relate personally to colour, and could select or reject a fashion item because of colour. If the colour does not appeal to them or flatter their own complexion, they will reject the fashion (Swinker & Hines, 2007). Functional attributes in sportswear include quick-dry, breathable, waterproof, odour-resistant, lightweight, and antimicrobial and finally, durability which is the use life of garments. For instance, some consumers wear their sportswear for heavy work and some for leisure and sports, as they need a lot of movement, while durability is an important consideration in purchasing sportswear. According to a study by Swinker & Hines (2007), majority of the respondents (65%), indicated that quality was important in their clothing purchase. The product quality factor thus has a great influence on consumer loyalty and business owners need to provide the best quality possible.

According to Yee & Sidek (2008), price is probably the most important consideration for the average consumer. Consumers with high brand loyalty are willing to pay a premium price for their favoured brand, so, their purchase intention is not easily affected by price. In addition, customers strongly believe in the value and price of their favourite brands so much so that they would compare and evaluate prices with alternative brands (Azevedo & Farhangmehr, 2005). Consumers' satisfaction can also be built by comparing the perceived costs and values with price. If the costs are greater than the perceived values of the product the consumers will not purchase the product. It is important to note that loyal customers are willing to pay more even if the price increases because they would prefer to pay a higher price to avoid any perceived risks (Swinker & Hines, 2007). However, loyalty discourages customers from making price comparison with products of the same category. Price is one of the focal points in consumers' judgments (Jones, 1998). According to Hu, *et al.* (n.d), price significantly influences consumer choice and propensity to purchase.

Style is another factor influencing brand loyalty. It is the visual appearance, which includes line, silhouette and details affecting consumer perception towards the garment (Swinker & Hines, 2007). Consumers' judgment depends on the consumers' level of fashion consciousness of what is currently fashionable. According to Azevedo & Farhangmehr (2005), brands that supply stylish garments attract

loyal consumers who are also fashion conscious. Apparel consumers gain satisfaction from wearing the latest fashion and style which also leads to the enhancement of their self esteem.

Promotion is a marketing mix component which is concerned with information delivery to consumers. Promotion includes the use of personal selling, sales promotions, advertising and publicity. Promotion greatly affects consumers' images, beliefs and attitudes towards product brands which consequently influence their purchase behaviours (Russell-Bennett, *et al.*, 2007). Promotion, especially through advertising, is important in establishing ideas or perceptions in the consumers' minds as well as differentiating brands in a particular product category. According to Kotler & Armstrong (1994), promotion is an important element that is used to communicate the product offerings to consumers. It also encourages purchase or sales of a product or service. Sales promotion tools are also used in support of advertising and public relations activities, and they are targeted toward the consumers. Kotler & Armstrong (1994), also posit that promotion is important in determining market success and profitability.

Image of brand is one of the most complex factors. It affects loyalty when a customer uses his preferences to present his own image. That may occur both in conscious and subconscious level. According to the Belk's theory of extended self, people define themselves by the possessions they have, manage or create (Spratt, Czellar & Spangenberg, n.d). Aaker (1991) indicate that consumers prefer brands with personality traits that are congruent with the personality traits that constitute their (malleable). Studies show that the attractiveness of the brand personality indirectly affects brand loyalty and people use products to enhance self-image (Spratt *et al.*, n.d).

METHODOLOGY

An ex-post-facto design was used. This design was chosen the study tried to examine whether the pre-existing factors that could possibly have caused subsequent swimwear brand loyalty among the respondents. The sample comprised all the 38 competitive swimmers (students) who participated in the Kenya inter-university sports held in 2009 at the University of Nairobi organised by Kenya University Sports Association (KUSA). The participants filled a questionnaire consisting of two sections. The first section included questions that provided data concerning the demographics (age, gender, year of study, institution, brand one is loyal to, places they do the purchasing). The second section consisted of 18 five-point likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-uncertain, 4-agree and 5-strongly agree) items relating to brand loyalty.

The data was subjected to exploratory factor analysis. This reduced the variables by summarizing the important information contained in the variables to a fewer number of factors. Factor analysis was used to find the variance of each variable and detect the structure in correlation between the variables as well as correlate and test the hypothesis by ranking the obtained factors and to determine which of the variables contained in these factors are the most important when it comes to the brand loyalty in swim wear purchase. After factor analysis was performed, a score was calculated for each of the respondent on each factor by obtaining the mean for all items comprising each factor. Pearson correlation was used to test the hypothesis that the Price and Variety; Uniqueness of Brand; Attractiveness; Ads and Product Quality; Size and Brand Reputation have no relationship with brand loyalty of sportswear.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper seeks to determine the most preferred brand, the factors influencing brand loyalty and test the hypothesis that the Price and Variety; Uniqueness of Brand; Attractiveness; Ads and Product

Quality; Size and Brand Reputation have no relationship with brand loyalty of sports wear among Kenyan university student swimmers

Most Preferred Brand

The results indicate that most of the respondents (47%) were loyal to Speedo, while 24% were loyal to Nike, Addidas, Masuca and Diadara (Table 1). This means Speedo as a brand is familiar to most swimmers, thus tradesmen need to focus on such a brand. Results also reveal that 29% of the respondents were not loyal to any brand. This present a potential market to focus on when promoting sportswear, one can devise strategies to capture this market. According to Thomas (n.d), Speedo swimwear is one of the successful swimwear brands. It has a built a good reputation for itself in the market.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Most Preferred Brand

	Frequency	Percent
None	11	29
Speedo	18	47
Nike	4	11
Others (Addidas, Masuca, Diadara)	5	13
Total	38	100.0

Factors Influencing Brand Loyalty in Swim Wear

Factor analysis indentified five factors from 16 variables. These are Price and Variety; Uniqueness of the Brand; Attractiveness; Ads and Product Quality; and Size and Brand Reputation. These factors extracted had eigenvalues greater than 1 and accounted for 73% of the total variance (Table 2).

Table 2. (Part-I) Rotated Component Matrix for Factors Influencing Brand Loyalty in Swimwear

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Price and Variety					
increase of price not hinder me to purchase	.829	.061	.049	.028	-.036
brand name selected regardless of price	.785	-.058	.475	-.056	-.063
brand provides wide variety of styles	.673	.273	-.339	.174	-.081
brand provide my choice of color	.666	.038	.164	-.011	.178

Table 2. (Part-II) Rotated Component Matrix for Factors Influencing Brand Loyalty in Swimwear

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	15
Uniqueness of Brand					
brands reflect my own personality	.202	.891	.008	.094	-.188
styles of the brand are trendy and fashionable	-.043	.785	.332	-.116	.238
styles of the brand have distinctive features	.104	.631	.259	.253	.375
Attractiveness					
window displays are attractive	.236	.149	.806	.105	-.053
ads attract me to purchase	.057	.247	.757	.181	.332
brand name and image attractive to me	.003	.554	.623	.001	.089
Ads and Product Quality					
materials used comfortable	-.038	-.002	-.242	.773	.368
styles of the brand suitable for me	.251	.169	.113	.772	.089
brand has good functional quality	.041	-.170	.197	.664	.328
ads on the brand attractive	-.345	.216	.306	.637	-.214
Size and Brand Reputation					
size of sports wear fits me	.038	.067	.150	.075	.862
brand is reputable	.000	.092	-.011	.340	.779

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy .598. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity 267.661. Approx. Chi.Square 120.000 df .000 Rotation converged in 9 iterations.

Price and Variety factor explained 27% of the total variance and correlated positively with four variables. Half of the respondents indicated that Price and Variety influences their brand loyalty (Table 3).

Table 3. Factor Influencing Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty factor	Influences	Does not influence
Price and Variety	19 (50%)	19 (50%)
Uniqueness of the Brand	31 (82%)	7 (18%)
Attractiveness	24 (63%)	14 (37%)
Ads and Product Quality	34 (90%)	4 (10%)
Size and Brand Reputation	36 (95%)	2 (5%)

These results are consistent with the findings by Yee & Sidek (2008), who argue that price is the most important consideration for the average consumer. In Kenya, university students can be categorized under average consumers because they have no income of their own yet they have the freedom to make clothing purchases on their own.

Uniqueness of the Brand accounted for 16% of the total variance. The factor correlated positively with three variables. Eighty three percent of the respondents indicated that this factor influences their brand loyalty while 18% indicated it does not. Apparel consumers prefer a brand that is unique and whose personality traits are congruent with their own. This is because apparel is usually used to extend oneself. Thus university students involved in swimming also prefer styles that are trendy, fashionable and have distinctive features. The manufacturers' and the retailers will thus have to focus on these features in order to present unique products to the consumers of swimwear.

Attractiveness of the promotional tools as a factor accounted for 13% of the total variance. The factor correlated positively with three variables. Sixty three percent of the respondents indicated that this factor influences their brand loyalty while 37% indicated it does not. This indicates that window displays and well designed adverts have some "pulling" or appealing effect causing the customer to be loyal to a particular brand. The image created by the trader or manufacturer also plays a vital role in persuading the customers to be loyal to a brand. This is consistent with views held by Aaker (1991), that attractiveness of the brand indirectly affects brand loyalty.

Ads and Product Quality accounted for only nine percent of the total variance. The factor correlated positively with four variables. Ninety percent of the respondents indicated that this factor influences their brand loyalty while 10% indicated it does not. As indicated by Swinker & Hines (2006), the quality of any apparel product is paramount since the consumers will always consider the quality vis' a vies the price. If the materials used are not comfortable or it is deemed unfit for use, the consumers tend to abandon the products and focus their attention on those products that are rated fit.

Size and Brand Reputation accounted for eight percent of the total variance. The factor correlated positively with two variables. Ninety five percent of the respondents indicated that this factor influences their brand loyalty while five percent indicated it does not. All apparel items are selected based on their fitting (relationship between the swimwear and the body size) qualities. Swimwear is of no exception. As indicated by the results, size is very critical in that it provides for comfort during swimming.

Correlation between Brand Loyalty and the Factors

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the hypothesis that Price and Variety; Uniqueness of Brand; Attractiveness; Ads and Product Quality; Size and Brand Reputation have no relationship with brand loyalty. The correlation between the brand loyalty and Price and Variety was 0.395 (Table 4). This portrayed a fairly strong relationship that was statistically significant ($p=.014$). That of brand loyalty and Uniqueness of Brand was 0.237. This is a weak relationship that was not statistically significant indicating that the business people dealing with swim wear should not focus their efforts on the uniqueness of the brand name because this factor does not affect brand loyalty at all. The correlation of Attractiveness and brand loyalty was also fairly strong and statistically significant ($r=.388$, $p=.016$). This means that business people dealing with swim wear can focus on how attractive the outfit is as a tool of increasing brand loyalty. Ads and Product Quality had a very weak negative relationship with brand loyalty. This contradicts the results by Yee & Sidek (2008), who indicated that there is a moderate positive relationship between quality and brand loyalty. Size and Brand Reputation had a strong relationship with brand loyalty that was statistically significant ($r=.410$, $p=.011$) (Table 4)

Table 4. Correlations for Brand Loyalty and Factors

Factor	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Size and Brand Reputation	.410	.011*
Price and Variety	.395	.014*
Attractiveness	.388	.016*
Uniqueness of Brand	.237	.152
Ads and Product Quality	-.010	.954

* Correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the current study indicate that it is not accurate to handle all the swim wear customers the same in regard to methods of increasing their loyalty. The results indicate that Kenyan university students who actively participate in swimming as a competitive activity will be loyal to swimwear brands based on factors such as Price and Variety; Attractiveness; and Size and Brand Reputation. These factors were found to have a positive relationship with brand loyalty. Thus manufacturers and dealers of swimwear targeting university students will need to focus on prices, provide a variety of designs, pay particular attention on how attractive the swimwear is size as well and invest in ways to increase brand reputation.

There is need for further research to find out why most customers will prefer Speedo as opposed to other brands. A study on the influence of these factors on different levels of loyalty is needed. There is also need for a similar research with other sporting groups of consumers.

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