

The Role of Brand Management on Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Selection among the Unemployed Urban Class During the Covid-19 Era. A Conceptual Paper

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ABSTRACT

Brand management is viewed as one of the marketing practices that may influence the choice of fast-moving goods among customers if effectively managed. Brand management research has been skewed towards the employed class thus leaving research gaps among the unemployed urban class. Considering that pandemics can influence customer choice of products based on the constrained income, it is vital for a research to be conducted to unravel the link between brand management and choice of fast-moving consumer goods and more specifically among the urban unemployed class. Despite extensive studies which have been carried out to unravel the association between brand management and consumer choices of fast-moving consumer goods, little is understood on how the variables of this study are associated thus the need for a study to clear the conceptual controversies. The main objective of this study was to establish the association between brand management and fast-moving consumer goods selection among the unemployed urban class during the Covid-19 Era. The specific objectives were to determine the effect of demographic, psychographic and contextual factors on fast-moving consumers goods selection among the unemployed urban class during the Covid-19 era. Further, the fourth objective was to evaluate the mediating role of Covid-19 pandemic between factors influencing consumer buying behaviour and fast-moving consumers goods selection. This study was anchored on Thurstone model, reference price model, brand loyalty theory, theory of reasoned action, consumer motivation theories, social cognitive theory, life-cycle theory, prospect theory and consumer socialization theory. Exploratory research design was adopted by this study. Exploratory approach is considered appropriate because it facilitates discovery of new knowledge by establishing whether what is being observed can be explained by using existing body of knowledge such as theories and empirical studies in the related field. It lays the foundation that sheds light to future studies. The relationship between the variables of this study was explained based on the principles of the exploratory research design. This study purely relied on desktop analysis of published research papers on brand management in relation to product choices. Papers published between 1991 and 2021 were reviewed. Theses, projects, reports and journal articles relating to social marketing and promotion of products and services were comprehensively reviewed. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of this study were derived from meta-analysis. The meta-analysis in accordance with recommended protocols and guidelines as recommended in statistical literature. Based on the marketing management literature analysis, it is concluded that brand is a multifaceted concept that is perceived differently by individual customers. Considering different results about what triggers consumers to prefer or buy a particular offering in the market, future studies should seek to understand consumer buying behaviour by using a multi-theoretical approach rather than a single theoretical approach that gives partial explanations about consumer behaviour.

Further studies are recommended in other sectors to unravel factors that influence consumer selection in the market.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the changing business environment characterized by competition, technological changes, changing consumer needs and wants, investment organizations are rethinking brand management as an alternative marketing strategy for attracting and retaining customers (Kumar and Pinakapani, 2019). Organizations operating in the 21st century are using brand management as a marketing technique of enhancing the perceived value of products or services (Bijuna, Mohan & Sequeira, 2016). Effective brand management not only leads to enhanced brand awareness but also promotes enhanced customer loyalty (Henrieta, Aleksander & Dagmar, 2015). The development of brand management plans by organizations is viewed as one of the competitive practices of organizations operating in a turbulent business environment (Huang & Sarigollu, 2014).

Organizations that fail to manage their brands in the market may experience a decline in profits, sales as well as market share (Latif, Shah, Syed, Halepoto, Nazar and Shaikh, 2012). According to Godey and Lai (2011), rebranding an organization as well as its product lines is viewed to influence customer loyalty. Organizations that continuously rebrand not only influence customer purchase intentions but also enhances brand preference among customers (Kotler, Keller, Koshy, 2013). For decades, competitive organizations have been investing in brand management despite customer perception of various brands provided in the market (Loken, Ahluwalia & Houston, 2010). Brand awareness in the market can give an organization a competitive edge against its competitors (Huang & Sarigollu, 2014). Further, Mizik (2014) opines that the differentiation of products and services produced by different competitors in the market is conceptualized to be a function of effective brand management techniques. Effective brand management can influence consumer preferences if effectively managed (Srivastava & Gregory, 2010). As individual consumers change their preferences and tastes (Wallace, E Buil & de Chernatony, 2013) from time to time due to the variety of offerings in the market, any organization must rethink branding to reposition the product or service in the market.

The consumer is more likely to prefer brands that conform to their needs and wants and vice versa. Globally, Henrieta, Aleksander and Dagmar (2015) in Russia observe that effective management of brands can influence consumer choice of products. Similarly, Verbeeten and Vijn (2010) argue that effective brand management can result in enhanced consumer preference for particular products and services. The authors contend that strong brand preference by the customer can contribute to increased brand awareness, usages and profits. Regionally, Latif, Shah, Syed, Halepoto, Nazar and Shaikh (2012) suggest that a brand is evaluated differently by customers based on their knowledge and experience. The authors argue that customer can have a strong attachment with a brand that conform with their needs and wants and vice versa. For any brand to remain customer preference, Bijuna, Mohan and Sequeira (2016) India acknowledges that marketing managers should appreciate the role of rebranding over time. The authors contend that, as competition intensifies in any marketing environment, rethinking rebranding strategies is pertinent in any organization.

Locally, Owino, Cherotich, Karuri, Gitonga, Kimuya and Kaumbulu (2016) observe that customer preferences can be enhanced by effective brand management strategies. The authors view brand rejuvenation as a marketing technique that improves the overall image of the organization as well as increases the profits generated. Karuku (2013) on the other hand attests that effective brand management plans can facilitate an organization to enhance customer loyalty as well as improve overall product perceived value. Consequently, Ogonje (2010) suggests that organizations that manage their brands effectively can change consumer perceptions, attitudes and beliefs.

Concept of Brand

According to American Marketing Association (2010), a brand is viewed to be a variety of both tangible and intangible characteristics that differentiate a product or service of an organization in the market. Similarly, a brand is defined by Kotler (2013) as a name given to a product or service produced by an organization to obtain a differentiated identity among the available products or services in the market. Similarly, a brand is described by Ogonje (2010) as a name, symbol, design, term, symbol or other features that manufacturers use to differentiate their products and services in the market. Whilst, Godey and Lai (2011) view a brand as the core promise organizations give their customers after purchasing the product. Kotler and Keller (2009) regard branding as a practice of shaping how an organization or person is perceived. Effective branding can help organizations enhance customer loyalty as well as the trust of new or existing products and services (Loken, Ahluwalia & Houston, 2010). Branding is seen as a competitive marketing practice that enables companies to manage perceptions held by customer towards their products and services in the market (Mishra & Datta 2011). Effective management of brands by marketing managers in the organization can culminate in increased market share, profits, loyalty and customer referrals. For any organization to thrive in the turbulent modern marketing environment, investment in value-adding brands is key (Kotler et al., 2013).

Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG)

Fast-moving consumer goods are regarded as those products that are easily and quickly sold at relatively low prices (Shilpy, 2014). Munyoki and Kerubo (2018) describe fast-moving consumer goods as products attributed to high demand and bought by consumers frequently due to their low prices. Fast-moving consumer goods and also known as consumer packaged goods are convenience goods that are bought by consumers daily. These products can include: cooking oil, toiletries, soaps, shaving products, teet cleaning items, milk, sugar, shaving products and non-durables such as bulbs, batteries, stationeries, glassware, buckets and plastics. According to Keller (2008), fast-moving consumer goods are those items consumers may purchase in large quantities from retailers due to price affordability. Equally, Kotler and Keller (2009) acknowledge that fast-moving consumer goods are those consumers purchase frequently and take little time to search for information. Organizations dealing with this kind of goods can repackage to stimulate demand. Organizations dealing with these type of products can give gifts and well price discounts to maximize profits (Munyoki & Kerubo, 2018).

Consequently, Ojwang (2014) argues that retailers any can decide to increase or decrease the price of fast-moving consumer goods based on changes in the economy. The stability of the economy can make retailers of dealers of these items maximize profits while the instability of the economy can make retailers stocking the products reduce the price to attract and retain the customers (Keller, Aperia & Georgson, 2008). In most cases, retailers may lose customer loyalty for fast-moving consumer goods due to a high level of switching brand among customers due to competition (Shilpy, 2014). In the modern changing business environment associated with changing consumer preferences, the organization should rethink marketing techniques such as branding to enhance consumer brand choices among FMCG.

Concept of Consumer Selection

Consumer choice is regarded as decisions made by consumers when buying goods and services (Shanmugan & Pradeep, 2014). Product or services choices may vary based on the social class, age, income and value of the product to individual customers. Keller (2010) describe a consumer as the end-user of the product or service produced by companies. The consumer can be categorized into two broad categories. Consumers can be either individuals and organizations. The first category is the individual consumers who purchase goods for their consumption while organizational consumers are those consumers who buy goods and services to

reproduce other goods and services (Kotler et al., 2013). The main objective of consumer buying is to satisfy individual needs and wants while the objective of organizational buying is to make a profit.

Consumers can choose to buy or not to buy particular brands in the market based on the experience or perception they have with the product or service (Loken, Ahluwalia, & Houston, 2010). Consumers tend to buy products that satisfy their needs frequently while developing a cognitive dissonance for products or services that dissatisfy their expectations (Mizik, 2014). The higher the satisfaction levels consumers get after using the product or service, the stronger the drive of the customer to buy the product or service when the need arises. The repeat purchase tendency developed by customers after consuming the product is directly associated with the value of that product or service after consumption (Toit, 2013). Furthermore, Zhang (2015) argues that consumers are driven by various factors before making product choice in the market. Some of these factors include the price of the product or service, perceived value of the product, previous experience and influence from opinion leaders.

The Unemployed Urban Class

The urban poor involves the economically vulnerable people who live in the urban setting without formal employment to sustain their needs and wants (World Bank, 2014). Equally, the urban poor refers to groups of people who experience economic and social strains in industrialized or unindustrialized cities around the world. As cities develop around the world, the majority of the people can move from the village to urban cities to look for employment opportunities to sustain their living standards. Despite this fact, the number of people in urban poverty is growing rapidly in all urban cities around the world due to several factors. The ruling regimes can establish social-economic frameworks that can improve the living standards of people living in urban cities (Kenya Bureau of Standards, 2019). The number of people in urban poverty is increasing at a faster rate due to the inability of the governments to provide job opportunities as well as the slow pace of industrialization and globalization of the economy. Based on the slow pace of economic growth among developing countries and more specifically in Kenya, it is indicated by World Bank (2014) report that since independence, the number of people in urban poverty has tremendously increased thus social and economic strains. With the increased number of people in urban poverty, the consumption pattern of FMCG among the urban poor has continued to shift due to economic constraints attributed to pandemics (Kenya Bureau of Standards, 2019).

Factors Influencing Consumer Brand Choices in FMCG

Consumers are motivated by several factors to purchase a particular brand in the market (Srivastava & Gregory, 2010). In the FMCG, it is viewed from the literature that consumers are inspired to buy goods by various factors. The price of the product is seen as the key factor that inspires the consumer to buy the product frequently as well as in large quantities (Verbeeten & Vijn, 2010). Price discounts provided by retailers can motivate buyers to buy more and vice versa. Mode of payment and flexibility can as well influence consumer brand choices. The quality of the product in terms of quantity, packaging, ingredients, design, colour and texture can influence consumer brand choices (Mishra, Pallabi, Datta & Biplab, 2011). Furthermore, consumers of FMCG are driven to buy by the availability of the product on the retail shelves at any time when there is a need. The use of intermediaries can also enhance customer brand choices (Wallace, Buil & de Chernatony, 2013). The information provided by market intermediaries to customers at the point of purchase can facilitate brand preference and choice. Similarly, Keller (2010) argues that consumers are motivated to buy the product if they are informed, persuaded and reminded regularly. On the same note, Pike, Bianchi, Kerr and Patti (2010) concur that product awareness and brand association are aspects that can enhance customer select a particular brand.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

According to World Health Organization (2020), coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a novel infectious

disease that is transmitted through physical contact with an infected person. It is established that the virus can be transmitted through sneezes and coughs from infected people. The virus can be transmitted by touching surfaces already touched by infected people and then touching your mouth nose and eyes. People infected with this virus are associated with the following symptoms: loss of appetite and smell, general body aches, dry coughs, fever, sore throat, headache, skin rashes and extreme tiredness (WHO, 2020). Considering the increased transmission cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), increased mortality rates, social distancing, isolation and travel restrictions, lockdown guidelines both in the developed and developing countries, the need for FMCG has continued to increase thus affecting the social and economic structures of the urban poor. The change of these social and economic trends attributed to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has not only changed buying behaviours of the urban poor but also contributed to a shift in consumer brand choices both in developed and developing economics.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Thurstone model has continued to gain popularity in the marketing management literature for decades since it was founded by Louis Thurstone (1927). The model depicts how consumers make brand choices based on their psychometric perspectives. The model emphasizes that consumers before consumer choose a particular product or service, compare the variety of brands in the market before making an actual purchase of the product. A consumer may be driven by perception, attitude and beliefs to make an actual purchase of a particular product or service. The model demonstrates that the same consumer may perceive the same product or service differently even if the product has not changed its features or form.

According to Thurstone model, consumers tend to change their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs towards a brand based on the value they get after consumption. Brands with a higher value are more likely to be favoured by consumers for a long period contrary to brands that are perceived to be of less value. However, the theory suggests that companies that consistently advertise their products using different positioning dimensions such as celebrities, country of origin, heritage, place, price and value can influence consumers to change their perceptions. The model opines that consumers are more likely to develop repeat-purchase behaviour for products with higher value and vice versa. Consumers can judge the same product or service differently based on psychometric aspects such as perceptions and attitudes.

Despite the popularity of the Thurstone model in marketing management literature, the model is associated with conceptualization and operationalization constraints. Further, it is noted that the model does not have universal constructs which can be used to explain how consumers form perceptions and attitudes towards products and services in the market. Further, the model fails to give a robust explanation of what motivates consumers to choose a particular brand in the market. Instead, the model generalizes how consumers form perceptions for both products and service. This model is used in this study on the belief that consumers can develop strong preferences for particular fast-moving consumer goods in the market based on how they perceive the variety of the brands in the market.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Factors Affecting Consumer Brand Choice

Using multiple regression and discriminant analysis methods, a study by Sarmin (2015) in Bangladesh revealed that consumers were positively influenced to purchase new cellular phones by other factors such as bonus talk time, SMS charge, free internet browsing network coverage and after-sale services. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that consumers brand choice is a multifaceted ideology from the consumer perspective. In this regard, companies in the dynamic marketing environment not only need to

position their brand in the market using product features only but also to consider other services attributed to the product. To attract and retain more customers for both products and services, companies should rethink multi-theoretical approaches to understand consumer buying behaviours.

Sree and Venkata (2016) in India investigated factors influencing consumer behaviour concerning mobile phone brand preference, usage behaviours and the extent of satisfaction among college students. Using a sample of 100 respondents and descriptive data analysis method, it was found out that consumer behaviour was influenced by factors such as marketing, psychological, demographic and economic. The study concluded that to a larger extent, family income was a major factor that made students purchase smartphones. Other factors that were revealed to influence consumer behaviours were supportive services that were attributed to the smartphones such as digital photography, gaming, internet access and Bluetooth.

Focusing on factors affecting customers' brand choice, it was revealed by Mahmud (2017) that consumer behaviour a complex set of activities in the human mind that determined by intrinsic and extrinsic drives. Companies that position their brands in the market using positioning dimensions such as age, heritage, size, celebrity endorsements, country of origin, quality and price can influence consumer preference positively if effectively embraced. Purchase decisions made by consumers in the marketplace are driven by both psychometric drives such as perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. Equally, extrinsic factors such as change of technology and promotional brand campaigns can influence consumer preferences in the marketplace. For an in-depth understanding of consumer behaviour research, the study concludes that organizations should not only rely on a sole theoretical approach to understand consumer behaviours but rather invest in multi-dimensional theoretical perspectives for comprehensive explanations of consumer behaviour.

The topmost priority of any competitive organization around the world is to build a sustainable brand that will provide lifetime value to individual customers (Alamro & Rowley, 2011). The authors acknowledge that despite the perceived value of the brand, tangible aspects such as features size, packaging, texture can influence consumer brand preferences in the marketplace. The study observed that younger and older people were driven by different factors when buying new products and more specifically mobile phones in the market. The study concluded that in any buying process, organizations in the telecommunication industry should not only focus on product features but rethink other factors that enhance brand preference such as after-sale services. Furthermore, the study noted that for enhanced customer loyalty to a brand, telecommunication companies should be in a position to produce products based on consumer income. Considering the theoretical constraints attributed to consumer behaviour theories such as brand loyalty theory and consumer reasoned action theory, future scholars should seek to re-examine how the theories can be used to measure consumer brand choice in both the service and product categories.

Using a multi-stage sampling approach to select a sample size of 387 mobile subscribers in Nairobi City County, it was revealed by Onyango, Bwisa and Odhiambo (2017) that there is a positive and significant relationship between advertising and consumer brand preference for mobile phone services in Kenya. The study concluded that for enhanced brand loyalty telecommunication companies in Kenya, prioritization of advertising is key. It was revealed by the authors that the tendency of consumers to favour a particular brand in the market is dependent on print, electronic, digital and outdoor advertisements. Advertisements not only entertain customers but also contribute to attitude change of consumers towards the brand. Advertising research has demonstrated that consumers can like and at the same time dislikes an advert in equal measure. The level of information and knowledge of the consumer can determine the kind of advertisement liked or disliked in the marketplace. For enhanced consumer brand preference in the market, it is recommended that companies should invest in consumer research to establish advertisement messages consumers can identify with as well as have emotional connectedness with the brand. Although the advertisement is not directly linked to brand preference in the consumer research literature, companies should appreciate the role of market segmentation strategy when developing advertisement messages for a combination of customers in

the market.

Mohd, Devi and Pagadala (2019) focused on determinants of brand preference of three-wheel passenger carriers in the road transport sector in Ethiopia. Using a sample size of 40 respondents and the factor analysis method, it was revealed that brand preference was determined by the cost of transport and convenience. Further, it was noted that perceptions held by consumers towards the brand were also determinants that influenced consumer behaviour. Brands that are perceived to be relatively cheaper as opposed to competing brands were favoured more among the passengers. The study concluded that despite the different positioning dimensions used by companies to position their brands in the mind of the consumer, many aspects such as price, quality, promotion, location and service provider qualities should be given priority.

Marketing mix elements such as product, price, place and promotions have a positive and significant impact on brand preference among Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) (Mohamud, 2018). Aspects of the product such as size, colour, packaging, design, texture and brand name were found to influence consumer preferences. Equally, pricing aspects such as mode of payment, credit facilities, cash price, hire purchase and leasing are some of the arrangements that enhance customer preferences both in the product and service category. Organizations that consistently use various promotional strategies such as advertisements, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotions and personal selling can enhance customer preferences. Furthermore, it was noted that brand preference among the consumers can be enhanced if the customers access the brand more conveniently. Further, the ability of the outlets to stock a brand and use reliable means of transport to avail their products in the market are all factors attributed to the brand preference among consumers. Although marketing mix elements research is popular in the marketing literature, researchers have recommended for future studies to reconfigure the elements to suit different product and service categories examined. In different contexts, the elements are operationalized differently thus constrained understanding of how the elements can be used to measure brand choices in different contexts.

Consumer preference in the choice of petroleum products in Kenya is dependent on several factors which involve employer influence, price of the product, advertisements, extended services attributed to the offer, heritage of the supplier, image, location and influence from family members (Kakunu, 2012). The author acknowledges that the consumer buying process is a complex activity that is influenced by both internal and external consumers drives. To attract and retain customers, organizations should rethink and invest more in consumer behaviour research. Over time, consumers can perceive the same brand differently due to the assessment of the brand against competing brands.

Increased choice for customers has culminated in companies rethinking alternative marketing strategies that can facilitate enhanced customer brand preference. Globalization has resulted in a variety of choices to consumers thus making companies use discounts and loyalty programs to enhance customer loyalty. The foregoing developments have in the market; consumers are becoming more sceptical. For risk-aversion, consumers are seeking the best brand from the alternatives companies produce in the market (Ismail, Sarah & Zainab, 2012). The study further observed that consumers are not only relying on the information they receive from family members, workmates and opinion leaders but also using previous experience with the brand to make an actual purchase of the product. The study concluded that consumer preference in choice is influenced by both psychological and external environmental factors such as advertisements and changes in technology.

Laizer, Baharanyi, Zabawa and Kadigi (2018) focused on determinants of consumer preference for and expenditure on rice in Tanzania. A sample size of 230 respondents was used in the study. The descriptive and regression method of data analysis was used. The findings revealed that the most significant attribute of the enhanced consumer preference for and expenditure on rice was the aroma taste of the rice. Further, it

was found out that cleanliness and the price of rice were also other determinants of consumer preference. Consequently, it was unveiled that the income of the people and household size had a significant impact on expenditure on rice.

Despite the position of the study, it was noted that there existed differences in perception between imported and domestic rice. Most of the consumers who bought imported rice were motivated by the country of origin features while those customers who were loyal to domestic rice were motivated by the price of the rice. Due to constraints associated with the consumer behaviour models, researchers have proposed further research to be conducted using a multi-theoretical approach to unravel conceptualization uncertainties both in the product and service category. Otieno (2018) investigated the factors influencing consumer choice of beer brand in Kenya using a case study research design. The objectives of the study were to determine how the external influencers affected brand choice, how did external influencers affect consumer choice of beer and how did the marketing factors influence consumer choice of beer. Using a sample size of 399 respondents and regression data analysis technique, it was revealed that consumer choice of beer was greatly influenced by the income of the consumer, the cost of the beer, lifestyle and personality.

Subsequently, it was established that other external factors such as religion, culture and social class had a significant impact on the consumer choice of beer. Further, other marketing factors such as product, promotion, price, and distribution had also a significant influence on the choice of the beer. In light of these results, the study concluded that the choice of beer in the alcoholic industry was not dependent on a single product aspect but rather dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic motives. In this regard, future scholars should seek to consider multi-theoretical approaches in understanding consumer behaviours among the users of alcoholic drinks. Monirul, Abul and Afia (2018) in Bangladesh investigated the factors affecting customers' brand choices behaviour of semi-processed frozen food products. Using the factor analysis method, the seven factors selected namely; promotional incentives, the brand image of the product, packaging of the product, the taste of the product, quality of the product, availability of the product, price of the product and seeking alternatives before buying were found to influence customer brand choices behaviour. However, out of these factors, only four factors namely; price of the product, quality of the product, availability of the product and taste of the product that was found to strongly determine customer brand choices behaviour. This study concluded that for a comprehensive understanding of factors that influence customers brand choices, future studies should close examine consumer motivation theories to find an explicit explanation both in the service and product category sectors.

A study in the Netherlands by Creusen (2010) established that brand association was one of the fundamental factors that made consumers prefer a particular brand in the market. Further, it was pointed out that consumer demographic aspects such as age, gender and social class and lifestyle had a significant influence on brand choices. It was noted that both the internal and external factors were key determinants of consumer buying behaviour. Companies that positioned their products in the market using their innovative features, as well as employee competence, had a high chance of influencing consumer brand choices and vice versa. Customers were more than willing to associate themselves with companies that produced quality goods and service as opposed to companies that did not invest in consumer research.

Household Purchasing Decisions Among the Urban Unemployed Class

The consumer buying process are steps made by consumers in making buying decisions. Personal consumers are described as those people who buy goods and services for their consumption. The five steps that constitute the consumer buying process are; problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase decision. The problem recognition phase involves the ability of the consumer to accept that there exists a need to be filled by buying a particular product or service. Consumers can be aroused to recognize their needs by internal and external drives. The internal

drives entail the psychological aspects such as perceptions, attitudes and beliefs while the external drives involve aspects such as influence from the social environment such as friends, technology and advertisements.

Information search is the second phase that involves the extent to which customers make efforts to find more information about the product. Customers can search for information about the product from various sources which include: personal sources, print media, electronic internet and experiential. The personal sources involve family members, and neighbours. The print media may entail newspapers, journals and magazines. Electronic media may involve television and radio advertisements. Internet sources encompass telemarketing and emails while experiential sources may include usage or examination of the product by the customer. The third phase of the consumer buying process is the evaluation of alternatives. This is a stage where the customer obtains the relevant information concerning the product or service before making the actual purchase. Alternatives of the consumer may be based on the price of the product, quality of the product, availability of the product in the market, brand image as well as the perceived value of the product. Purchase decision which is the fourth stage involves that state at which the consumer makes the actual purchase of the product or service after evaluating all the alternatives available. The purchase decision is greatly influenced by the retail price, availability of the product, after-sale services provided, mode of payment and attitude held by the customer at the point of purchase. The fifth stage of the consumer buying process is the post-purchase phase. Consumers at this stage evaluate the product value after consumption.

Further, if the experience was positive or exciting, consumers can develop repeat-purchase behaviour and if the experience was negative or not exciting they develop cognitive dissonance towards that brand. In the modern competitive marketing environment, companies should not only focus on just satisfying customers but rather rethink consumer research to unravel factors that make consumers buy or not buy the product. Purchase decisions in any household are influenced by several factors. Both employed and unemployed class in the urban context are motivated to purchase products and services by different factors. Buying decisions made in any family unit are influenced by either of the following role, namely; influencers, initiators, buyers, users deciders, preparers, gatekeepers, maintainers and disposers.

Consumers and more especially the unemployed urban class are motivated to buy products and services by several factors (Laizer et al., 2018). A study conducted in India by Guha (2013) among non-working women revealed that purchase decisions were influenced by the price of the product, quality of the product, brand awareness and influence from other shoppers. The bargaining power of buyers in any marketplace may be low due to income levels and vice versa. Based on the economic status in a country and population demographics such as the age gap between the young and older generation can determine the kind of products a company manufactures. The study concluded that, for companies to be in a position to attract and retain customers for both working and non-working class in any context, consumer intrinsic and extrinsic factors should be closely examined using multi-theoretical perspectives. Another study conducted in Malaysia by Yong (2014) established that women were a vital and integral part of the buying process. Factors such as age, marital status, income, gender, ethnicity, education religion, occupation, location of residence were found to influence the purchase of health-promoting goods and services. Based on the results of the study, it is noted that consumer motivation theories were used to explain consumer behaviour towards health-promoting goods and services thus theoretical gaps formed the basis of the current study. The consumer motivation theories were used in the current study to evaluate fast-moving consumer goods among the urban unemployed class in the post-covid 19 era in Kenya.

Equally, Marium, Mohammad and Nayyer (2016) conducted a study focusing on developed Nations to examine income, social class and consumer behaviour. The study established a positive and significant relationship between income and spending. Further, it was revealed that despite to novelty of the social

class theory in consumer behaviour research, to a larger extent, social class is one of the vital factors that influence consumer buying decisions. As postulated in the socialization theory of consumer behaviour, most of the consumers shape their buying and consumption patterns as they share information with other members of the family or reference groups. In this regard, it is concluded that companies need not only use a single theory to understand consumer buying behaviours but rather they should rethink multi-theoretical approaches to find a clearer understanding of the relationship between tangibles products and more specifically FMCG choices among the urban unemployed class in post-covid-19 times in Kenya.

Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on Consumer Brand Choices

Regulations put in place by the government around the world to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted consumer buying behaviours and shopping across the globe. Social distancing, complete and partial lockdown rules have contributed to market dynamics. Critical situations can result in to change in human behaviours in terms of product consumption. Because consumers are the drivers of any competitive economy, instability of the economy can make consumers change their buying behaviours or brand preferences. However, this sudden change of consumer buying behaviour during a crisis or pandemic is uncertain. The period in which consumers can revert to previous consumption patterns is a question in consumer behaviour research. This study attempts to closely examine the existing literature to understand consumer buying behaviours during the Covid-19 pandemic concerning past behaviours.

Consumers during normal and crisis time are influenced by different external and internal factors which constitute consumer buying behaviours. According to Valaskova, Kramarova and Bartosova (2015), consumer behaviour approaches are divided into three classes namely; psychical, sociological and economic. The psychical approach is based on the association between the psyche and the behaviour of consumers in the marketplace. The sociological approach is based on consumer reactions to different situations during normal and crisis time and the economic approach is founded on the basic knowledge of consumers about microeconomic aspects that reflect how consumers rationally satisfy their needs during normal and crisis times. Abe (2020) contends that people in the marketplace may perceive the same product differently during normal and crisis times. The study observed that during pandemics, people are cautious in spending their income due to fear of the unknown. Further, the study notes that consumers around the world can spend less of their income on goods they perceive to be non-essentials such as jewellery, electronics, make-ups, shoes and games. On the other hand, the study observes that consumers can spend more but cautiously on goods they perceive to be essentials such as food, health and shelter. Boston Consulting Group report (2020) on market dynamics noted that most of the consumers in developed countries were shifting towards post-stock piling due to uncertainties attributed to pandemics.

Thich (2019) elucidates that consumer behaviour is based on experiences and impressions that are expressed via consciousness and senses. Further, the study observes that consumers can reverse their consumptions behaviours based on the change in economic trends and marketing structures. New segments are identified by companies during the crisis time. Consumers income can dictate the consumptions patterns during normal and crisis time. However, due to constrained incomes when there is a crisis, consumers can become more frugal and focus on the necessities which involve personal health and well-being. Consumers can exhibit frugal behaviours while making brand choices during normal times and at the same time and revert their buying behaviours when the situation of the crisis is over.

Consumers can exhibit frugal behaviours when using economic goods and services when the economy is constrained by pandemics (Abe, 2020). Frugality has been termed as a voluntary simplicity culture among consumers in the marketplace when the income is constrained (Valaskova et al., 2015). On the other hand, frugality is viewed as a unidimensional consumer lifestyle that is not dependent on multiple economic aspects in the consumption life-cycle. When consumers are restrained in acquiring economic goods and services, they simply switch to relatively cheaper products for personal satisfaction and happiness

(Accenture, 2020). Covid-19 pandemic has influence consumers buying behaviours for both non-working and the working class around the world due to resource constraints (Boston Consulting Group, 2020). Many consumers can consider some goods and services to be of less value thus changing their way of buying goods and services for personal satisfaction (Deloitte, 2020). Covid-19 has not only made companies rethink redefining their segments but also their products and services to sustain the changing consumer needs and wants due to constrained income

iRi POS report (2020) asserts that the next normal in consumer behaviour research can only be managed if companies are ready to reconsider the spiritual approach embedded in consumer health, economies of consumption and savings (KPMG, 2020). Furthermore, the future survival of companies can only be sustained if companies develop new products based on the consciousness of the new generation as well as the new life principles (Mckinsey, 2020). For enhanced comprehension of the buying behaviours of the new generation in the post-Covid-19 scenario, research should be geared towards spirituality in modern consumption. Exploration of new market segments with new needs can only be achieved if companies appreciate the brand repositioning in the post-Covid-19 era (Deloitte, 2020).

CRITIQUE OF THE LITERATURE

From existing marketing management literature, it evident that consumer buying behaviour is influenced by both internal and external factors. Despite the pertinent role of branding in consumer behaviour research, researchers have equally revealed both significant and insignificant results between branding and consumer choice of brands in the marketplace. For instance, a study by Onyango et al. (2017) identified a positive and significant link between advertising and Consumer brand preference for mobile phone services in Kenya while a study by Owino et l. (2016) revealed an insignificant link between social media on brand equity in the Kenyan banking industry. Based on these conflicting findings, there is a need for further studies to be conducted to bridge the conceptual knowledge gaps. Future scholars can examine variable of the studies by using different theories thus the discovery of new. Consequently, most of the studies conducted were limited to different cultural and contextual environments thus non-generalizability of the results in the current study. Sarmin (2015) investigated the factors affecting the consumer brand choice preference towards the new package of cellular phone in Bangladesh. The findings revealed consumer choices were determined by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Another study by Pike et al. (2010) was confined to the tourism industry in Australia.

A study by Owino (2016) was confined to the banking industry in Kenya and a study by Mohd (2019) was limited to the road transport sector in Ethiopia thus contextual research gaps to be addressed by future scholars. Further, most of the studies discussed examined variables of the current study partially and in isolation thus constraints of understanding the direct and indirect link between variables of the current study. For instance, a study by Marium et al. (2016) examined the link between income, social class and consumer behaviour among Nations. Latif et al. (2012) studied the relationship between advertising, brand judgment and consumer preference in purchasing decision in Pakistan. Jalilvand, Samiei and Mahdavinia (2011) investigated the effect of brand equity components on purchase intention and Henrieta, Aleksander and Dagmar (2015) examined the link between brand and consumer behaviour. The research gaps were addressed by the current study seeking to establish the indirect role of the Covid-19 pandemic on the relationship between brand and FMCG choices among the urban unemployed class during the Covid-19 pandemic times. Generally, conceptual, theoretical, contextual and methodological gaps are evident from the existing empirical studies (Alamro & Rowley, 2011; Bijuna, 2016; Creusen, 2010; Elena, 2012; Godey & Lai, 2011, Guha, 2013; Huang & Sarigollu, 2014; Henrieta, 2015), thus the need for further studies to unfold these research gaps using a direct and indirect approach. Further, multi-theoretical perspectives are pertinent in future studies as it seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the influence of the brand on brand choices among the urban unemployed class is thought to be mediated by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Conceptual Framework

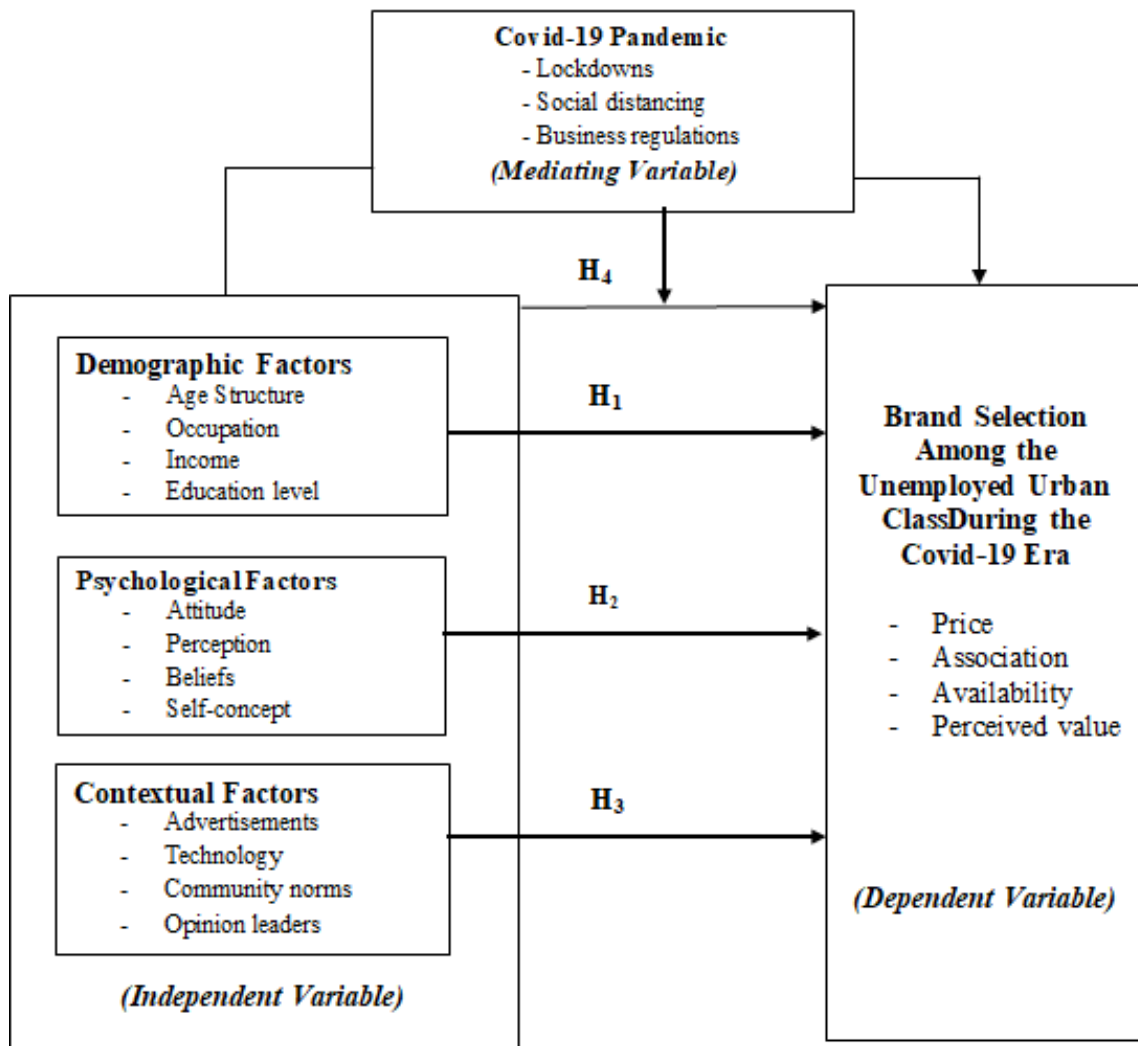


Figure 4.1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Current Researcher

As depicted in Figure 1.1, the dependent variable (brand choices among the unemployed urban class) is measured using four metrics from marketing management literature. The metrics involve rice, association, availability and perceived value. It is conceptualized that brand choices among the unemployed urban class are influenced by demographic, psychological and contextual factors if effectively managed. Further, the relationship between brand and brand choices among the urban unemployed class is thought to be mediated by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Demographic factors are statistical characteristics of the human population in a given context such as age, gender, occupation, income, education level, religion, size and lifestyle (Laizer, 2018). The selected indicators from literature to measure demographic variable in this study involve population age structure, occupation, income and education level. If effectively managed, these indicators are conceptualized to influence brand choices among the urban unemployed class during the Covid-19 pandemic time.

Psychological factors are intrinsic human aspects that determine the way of thinking or conduct (Monirul et al. 2018). These aspects include attitudes, perception and beliefs. Similar aspects were used in this study to evaluate the extent to which they influenced brand choices among the urban unemployed class during the Covid-19 pandemic time. Contextual factors are environmental aspects that influence consumer behaviour

directly or indirectly (Mohamud, 2018). Environmental factors may include technology, legal regulations, advertisements, reference groups, community norms and resources and the healthcare system. The selected indicators for the current study conceptualized to influence brand choices among the urban unemployed class during the Covid-19 pandemic time are advertisements, technology, community norms and opinion leaders. Covid-19 pandemic is also known as coronavirus pandemic is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Boston Consulting Group, 2020). Covid-19 Pandemic was measured using three antecedents, namely; lockdowns, social distancing and business regulations.

Conceptual hypotheses

Based on empirical literature review and theoretical logic, the following hypotheses were formulated as depicted in Figure 1.1.

H₀₁: There is a positive significant relationship between demographic factors and fast-moving consumers goods choices among the urban unemployed class in the post-Covid-19 pandemic.

H₀₂: There is a positive significant relationship between psychographic factors and fast-moving consumers goods choices.

H₀₃: There is a positive significant relationship between contextual factors and fast-moving consumers goods choices.

H₀₄: There is a positive significant mediating effect of the Covid-19 pandemic between factors influencing consumer buying behaviour and fast-moving consumers goods choices.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the marketing management literature analysis, it is concluded that brand is a multifaceted concept that is perceived differently by individual customers. The study concluded that fast-moving consumers goods choices in the marketplace are influenced by multiple factors that range from population demographics, psychological and contextual factors. Further, the study concludes that the Covid-19 pandemic can influence the FMCG choices in the marketplace insignificantly due to constrained income among the consumers.

Considering the instability of the economy attributed to lockdowns, social distancing, and business regulations, the volume of goods and services purchased by consumers at a given point in time can decline due to the notion of consumer frugality habits. Consumers are likely to scale down the quantities of the products bought to embrace the concept of voluntary simplicity in consumption patterns due to constrained income and resources attributed to pandemics both in developed and developing countries. Companies should rethink refining their market segments to addressing the emerging needs and wants among consumers that are inclined towards necessity goods and services rather than focusing on goods and services that are perceived as luxuries from the consumer perspective during the pandemic times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering different results about what triggers consumers to prefer or buy a particular offering in the market, future studies should seek to understand consumer buying behaviour by using a multi-theoretical approach rather than a single theoretical approach that gives partial explanations about consumer behaviour. Explicit explanations would be generated if future scholars re-examine how theories used in the current study can be used to explain or measure customer preference of brands in other sectors. The findings would

also help researchers to collaborate on the results thus a comprehensive understanding of consumer buying behaviours.

Further studies are recommended in other sectors to unravel factors that influence consumer choices in the market. Researchers should seek to understand the concept of consumer frugality behaviour among fast-moving consumer goods in the post-Covid-19 era. Further, apart from the indicators used to measure the key constructs of the current study, future scholars should seek to measure the variables of the current study using different indicators for collaboration of the results. Considering the psychometric nature of measuring the variables of the current study, there is a need for researchers to unravel constraints associated with the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables in different contexts.

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