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THE ROLE OF BRAND ADVOCACY ON CONSUMER SATISFACTION

OMOWALE ADELABU (PhD)
Mass Communication Department
Redeemer's University
Ede, Osun State
adelabuo@run.edu.ng
+2349050691210

&

AYOMIDE FAJOYE
Mass Communication Department
Redeemer's University
Ede, Osun State
Fajoyeayomide@gmail.com
+2348165145978

ABSTRACT

The ability for an organization to create and managed brands by communicating it product and image is steadily declining in effectiveness and relevance. As traditional mass media is overtaken by word-of mouth and peer review dialogue as the primary driver of consumer attitude and brand choice, consumers are more able to challenge an organization's brand promise as well as seek out alternatives. Thus, this paper focused on the role of brand advocacy on consumer satisfaction. Thus the purpose of the paper was to investigate what role (s) brand advocacy play on consumer satisfaction towards the brand. In line with the stipulated objective the cognitive dissonance and brand identity theories were employed to further provide perspective for the study. Similarly, secondary data was retrieved as the research design was documentary. Thus findings showed that in creating successful brand advocacy organizations requires a different set of brand management competencies. It requires organizations to develop and harness the competencies of customers. Also a successful brand advocacy demands new communication infrastructures to enable customers listen and participate brand conversations. It is concluded that brand advocacy is necessary to provide needed information for customer satisfaction .It is recommended that brand managers should make brand advocacy a new paradigm for advertising, since advocacy triggers brand satisfaction and loyalty and enable the brand to compete favourably in the ever changing market.

Keywords: *Brand, Advocacy, Consumer, Satisfaction, Loyalty*

Introduction

Generally, a brand is seen as a mark of ownership, a name, symbol or logo used to distinguish a product or service from that of it competitor. In line with this definition, Kotler, (2014), observe that a brand is a name and a symbol which helps to create a positive image on consumers different from that of rival products. Kotler, (2014) explain that brand provides significant contributions to organizations which enable them to create loyal customer group and retain their market shares. In the opinion of Giddens, (2012) the ability for consumers to identify a brand, makes them to pay high prices to a certain brand within the same product group based on satisfaction. However, in the observation of Wood, (2014)high number of brands that change their brand easily makes the creation of brand loyalty difficult. Firms want their customers to be attached to their brands with strong feelings. Similarly, Ballantyne (2016), said it is important to fulfil customer satisfaction to ensure the continuous existence of brand in the market place. Ballantyne (2016), went further to say that when customers are satisfied, they show commitment to continuously buy the same brand and become a loyal customer. In the opinion of Ballantyne (2016), various factors such as brand trust, quality, image, and equity affect brand satisfaction. Determination of these factors iseffective in creating brand loyalty apart from satisfaction.

Zairi (2013) opines that the importance of customers in the survival of a business cannot be overemphasis, thus business drivers believe that customers are the purpose of what they do and they very much depend on them; customers are not the source of a problem and they should never make a wish that customers should go away because their future and security will be put in jeopardy. That is the main reason Zairi (2013) maintains that financial institutions are focusing much attention on customer satisfaction. Hansemark, (2017), aver that satisfaction is an overall customer attitude or behaviour towards a service provider, or an emotional reaction towards the difference between what customers expect and what they receive, regarding the fulfilment of some desire, need or goal. Anderson (2015) observes that customer satisfaction is the result of an organization creating a benefit for customers so that they will maintain and increasingly repeat business with the organization. Oliver, (2018) says that true customer satisfaction is created when customers become advocate of an organization without any incentive.

Newman (2014)while considering factors responsible for satisfaction says that of customer satisfaction in any dynamic corporate environment is influences customers repurchase intensions whereas dissatisfaction is seen as a primary reason for customer's intentions to switch. Newman (2014) further buttress that satisfied customers are most likely to share their experiences with other people around them. Similarly, dissatisfied customers are more likely to tell other people about their unfortunate experiences with a particular organization.In order to achieve customer satisfaction, Newman (2014) suggest that organizations must be able to build and maintain long lasting relationships with customers through satisfying various customer needs and demands which resultantly motivates them to continue to do business with the organization.

On other hand, Walter (2013) says companies are expect to build and strengthen their brands by engaging in brand advocacy, which reflects the display of favourable communication of their brand's values and offerings toward customers during service encounters. Walter (2013) noted that brand advocacyincreases brand awareness in the market and through brand advocacy consumers tend to perceived companies or organization as credible which help to humanize the brand. Miller (2014) avers that many organizations rely on brand advocacy in brand repositioning and new product launches. Miller (2014) says when product needs maintenance a favourable communication about the brand may backfire because it does not directly contribute to addressing the customer's issue. In this regard, Spencer (2013) assumes that customers may perceive brand advocacy in after-sales service encounters as a business policy that gets in the way of reaching their goal. On the other hand, Aaker (2018) observes that reinforcing brand values and product can produce some benefits during after-sales services which may reassure customers that they have made the right purchase decision and signal the accountability of the firm as a whole to solve the customer issue.

In contrast, Morhart (2019) revealed that brand advocacy is one-dimensional, and focuses on favourable communication about a brand's values and offerings, therefore the effects of this behaviour have not been isolated. Also Morhart (2019) assumed that the effects of employee brand-related behaviours on customer evaluations or satisfaction are universally positive and focused on antecedents, not consequences. However, as the negative anecdotal evidence and survey results illustrate, organizations clearly need to know when brand advocacy is appropriate and when not to use this instrument Morhart (2019) stated.Thus many organizations are expected to advocatefor their brand by engaging in favourable communication about their brand and its offerings toward customers. However, this approach is not without risk as customers may be disappointed or even frustrated with brand advocacy behaviour in many service encounters as observe by Aaker (2018).Therefore, studies like Morhart (2019) and Aaker (2018) have examine consumer brand behaviour, satisfaction and loyalty without much attention given to the role of advocacy in consumer satisfaction, which is an area this study is aimed to explore.

Statement of the Problem

Organizations are realizing the importance of brand advocacy as a communication channel for their brands. Luo (2013) observes that many organizations are faced with the challenges of properly providing information or advocating for their brands to produce intended result. Brand advocacy is the extent to which consumers recommend the brand to their community, thus, branding is essential to organizations and consumers as it can save the time and effort related to the information search process of the brands' key benefits and attributes (Rowley 2019), that in turn paved away for brand advocacy. Brand advocacy have been defined as influencing consumerswho are passionate about the brand and are actively recommending it to other targetedconsumers. Rowley (2019) posit that the ability of an organization to actively recommend the brand by spreading positive word about it is the essence of brand advocacyand has been regarded as a key growth indicator of brands.Accordingly, this research aims to examine the role of brand advocacy in providing satisfaction to consumers.

Objective of the study

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of advocacy on consumer satisfaction and identify the conditions under which the effects are detrimental. This paper specifically considers service issue severity and product newness as contingency conditions for advocacy and satisfaction.

Empirical Review

Awad (2015) examined the impact of social media branding on developing brand advocates for start-ups. Awad (2015) noted that organizations are realizing the importance of social media and social networking sites as a communication channel for their brands. Start-ups, which are new small ventures, face many challenges to prosper in today's fast-paced economy. The objective was to investigate the challenge of building brand advocacy against the start-ups' low brand awareness and limited financing capabilities. The research also explored the drivers of brand advocacy onsocial media in the case of start-ups. Quantitative survey method was used to find out relationship between variables. Result showed that brand advocacy facilitates brand loyalty. It is concluded that brands act as a shortcut for consumers about the brands' key features and have been shown to greatly influence consumers' brand evaluation and purchase decisions.

Similarly, Cronin and Taylor (2012), studies, found out that satisfaction felt after the first trial of a brand directedcustomers to prefer the same brand in their decisions to repurchase it. According to the authors, satisfaction level of the consumers is effective in creating brand loyalty by directing their decision about repeat purchase. One of the important factors for the development of satisfaction Cronin and Taylor (2012), observe is the ability of brand to meet the needs of consumers. In line with this Cronin and Taylor (2012) investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand advocacy, and found out that there was a positive relationship between these two variables. Accordingly, satisfaction means repeat purchases of customers and telling their positive experiences about the brand and services to the others. If customers are unsatisfied, the possibility to change the brand and make complaints about the product and the firm is high.

Jeroen and Edwin (2017) examined brand advocacy in the frontline: how does it affect customer satisfaction? The objective was to study the impact of brand advocacy on customer satisfaction with the service encounter. The study also considered service issue severity and product newness as contingency conditions. The paper made use of conceptual model, which was empirically tested using a data set that matches data from service engineers, customers, and archival records from the after-sales service department of a globally operating business-to-business print and document management solutions provider. The paper finds out that brand advocacy behaviour harms customer satisfaction especially in service encounters that involve simple service issues for products that are new to the market. Fortunately, brand identification can compensate this negative effect under many service conditions. While the joint effect of brand identification and advocacy is most beneficial for severe service issues of new products, no effect on customer satisfaction was found for established products.

In a study carried out by Simsek and Noyan (2019) the factors affecting brand satisfaction. They tested the relationship among brand advocacy, trust, customer satisfaction, perceived product value, perceived quality, customer expectations and brand image. Simsek and Noyan (2019), found out that customer satisfaction, trust and perceived product quality is the effect of advocacy; trust and perceived value on customer satisfaction. In the study, the effects of various factors such as brand value, brand equity, perceived brand quality, image, conversion cost and brand trust on satisfaction were investigated.

Theoretical Review

Dissonance Theory

The Cognitive Dissonance Theory was propounded by Leon Festinger in 1957. The Cognitive Dissonance theory suggests that a person who expected a high-value product and received a low-value product would recognize the disparity and experience a cognitive dissonance. Yi (2015) posit that a state of disconfirmed expectations sometimes create a state of dissonance or a psychological discomfort. The theory assumes that the existence of dissonance produces pressures for its reduction, which could be achieved by adjusting the perceived disparity. The theory holds that post exposure ratings are primarily a function of the expectation level because the task of recognizing disconfirmation is believed to be psychologically uncomfortable. Therefore, customers are posited to perceptually distort expectation discrepant performance so as to coincide with their prior expectation level as observe by Oliver (2014). Putting the theory into perspective, Yi (2015) explains in a situation where there is disparity between product expectations and product performance, consumers may have a psychological tension and try to reduce it by changing their perception of the product. Meanwhile, Oliver (2014) argues that consumers may raise their evaluations of those products when the cost of that product to the individual is high. According to Leon Festinger in 1957 in Oliver (2014), in terms of dissonance, when consumers discover that a product performance has deviated in some respect from their expectations, an effort of repositioning will be needed to reposition such product in the mind of consumers. Notwithstanding, theory has not gained much support from researchers, perhaps because it is not clear whether consumers would engage in such discrepancy adjustments as the model predicts in every consumption situation. In the criticism of Oliver (2014), satisfaction is a result from a comparison between product, one's expectation, and product performance. Thus, it is the magnitude and direction of this difference, which affects one's post-decision affect level. Therefore, applying this theory to the existing study, organizations should strive to raise expectations above their product performance in order to obtain a higher product evaluation. Thus raising expectations substantially above the product performance and failing to meet these expectations may backfire, as small discrepancies may be largely discounted while large discrepancies may result in a very negative evaluation as suggested by the theory. Thus meeting up with the expectations of consumers strengthens the existing of brands in a competitive market, making this theory relevant to the study.

Brand Identity Theory

The identity theory traces its origin to George Herbert Mead in 1934. In the assertion of Kapferer (2017) brand identity theory contains various brand identity elements that equip brands to remain true to their identities in order to confront dynamic market environments.

Brand identity theory argues that actual brand identity comprises of an internalized brand perspective, while conceived identity comprises of external brand interpretations. In essence, the views of the sender inform internalized elements, and those of the receiver inform external elements. In the opinion of Kapferer (2017) brand personality provides human characteristics to products and services as means to help consumers relate to producing companies, furthermore, a brand is personified by the manner in which it communicates it products. Kapferer (2017) said it is also through communication initiatives that brands assume personality traits, while the communicated brand then gradually develops into a character. Kapferer (2017) maintain that messages that are communicated by the brand should be consistent with the brand's personality in order for it to be believable to consumers. Kapferer (2017) suggest that self- image is the image that consumers have when consuming the brand, and can be seen as the target market's own internal mirror. At this stage, it can be claimed that these consumers resonate with their brand, and the brand resonance model is addressed next Kapferer (2017) said. Thus, applying this theory to the present study the theory reveals that brands have certain association based on their history, such as memorable events or brand encounters with consumers which may vary from personal experiences to experiences with friends or family, hence, brand's experience could yield strong point of difference in the minds of consumers making this theory relevant to the present study.

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Satisfaction

The concept of customer satisfaction according to Cha and Bryant (2013) has been one of the top tools for a successful business. Cha and Bryant (2013) view customer satisfaction as an evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with the good or service over time.Cha and Bryant (2013) maintain that customer satisfaction comes with expectation of the customer and how the goods and services will be facilitated by the companies. According to Oliver, (2018) customer satisfaction is a crucial component of a business strategy as well as customer retention and product repurchase. Oliver, (2018) emphasis that in order to maximize customer satisfaction organizations should sell ideas and methods after the completion with all the necessary documents. In the opinion of Hill and Allen (2017) customer satisfaction is a barometer that predicts the future of customer behaviour. Notwithstanding, Hill and Allen (2017) suggest that the product/service and its features, functions, reliability, and customer support are the most important aspect required to meet or exceed the satisfaction of the customers. In line with the above assertion, Hague and Hague (2016) revealed that satisfied customers usually rebound and buy more and besides buying customers also work as a network to reach other potential customers by sharing experiences.

In customer satisfaction, Lovelock and Wright (2012) aver that it is dynamic and relative,and the idea of customer-centric can help companies improve satisfaction and keep customer truly, conversely, if competitors improve customer satisfaction.Thus, Lovelock and Wright (2012) explain that while improving customer satisfaction, customer expectations should be noticed in line with providing service quality, product quality and value for money which directly produce positive impact on customer satisfaction. However, in the opinion of Zeithal and Bitner (2013), customer satisfaction is influenced by thefeatures and perceptions of a product or service quality as well as customer's emotional responses. Meanwhile, Tao (2014) says when a customer is satisfied with the product or service of the company; it can make the customer to purchase frequently and to recommend products or services to potential customers.

Factors Affecting Customers Satisfaction

There are certain factors which affect customer satisfaction as mentioned by Gajjar (2013), these factors are:

Cultural Factors: Gajjar (2013) observe that culture is crucial when it comes to understanding the needs and behaviour of an individual. The values, perceptions, behaviours and preferences are the factors basically learned at the very early stage of childhood from the people and the common behaviours of the culture. Norms and values are carried forward by generation from one entity to the other. Cultural factors represent the learned values and perceptions that define consumer wants and behaviours.

Social Factors: In terms of social factor Gajjar (2013) maintain that human beings live in an environment surrounded by several people who have different buying behaviour. Hence, person's behaviour is influenced by many small groups like family, friends, social networks, and surrounding who have different buying behaviours. These groups form an environment in which an individual evolves and shape the personality. Hence, the social factor influences the buying behaviour and satisfaction of an individual to a great extent.

Personal Factors: Another factor that affects consumer satisfaction are age, occupation, economic situation, and lifestyle. Therefore, consumer changes the purchase of goods and services with the passage of time. Occupation and the economic situation also have a significant impact on buying behaviour. On the other hand, a person with low income chooses to purchase inexpensive services. The lifestyle of customers is another crucial factor affecting the consumer buying behaviour.

Psychological Factor: Psychological factors like motivation, perception, learning, and attitudes and beliefs play a crucial role in purchasing a particular product and services. To increase sales and encourage the consumer to purchase the service Gajjar (2013) says organization should try to create a conscious need in the consumer's mind which develops an interest in buying the service. Similarly, depending on the experiences of the costumer's experiences, beliefs, and personal characteristics, an individual has a different perception of another. Attitudes allow the individual to develop a coherent behaviour against the class of their personality.

Brand and Consumer Advocacy

Advocacy according to Jupiter (2014)is not a way for an organization to speak at customers but it is a mutual dialogue and a partnership that assumes that if the organization advocates for its customers, those customers will reciprocate with trust, purchases, and enduring loyalty. Advocacy in the opinion of Jupiter (2014) is a partnership between a firm and its customers to the mutual benefit of both. Thus, an organization advocates for customers' interests, and customers advocate for the company by buying its products and helping it design better products. Jupiter (2014)explain further that organizations that advocate for customers enjoy more opportunities to sell a broader range of products to more people, which can lead to growth in sales because customers and their friends choose the organization's products. It also leads to greater profit margins because customers come to realize that the organization offers an extra value that is reflected in an honest price that is worth paying.

Furthermore, Blackshaw (2013) observe that advocacy can be viewed as the top of a pyramid that is the total quality management and customer satisfaction are at the base of the pyramid. In the opinion of Blackshaw (2013) brand advocacy is the necessary conditions for customer trust. Therefore, if an organizationmust recommend its own products honestly, it must have products that are good enough to be recommend. In many markets, Blackshaw (2013) reveal that advocacy has become the preferred strategy as firms respond to the new reality that customers are in control, not manufacturers and distributors. An organization might choose to embrace advocacy by becoming a faithful representative of customers' interests. Under this approach, the organization will provide customers and prospects with open, honest, and complete information about the brand. On the contrary, Blackshaw (2013) stated that if an organization is distorting the truth, customers can detect the falsehoods and act accordingly, whereas if the organization embraces honesty, it must be good, if not the best, products/services.

The Roles of Advocacy in Brands Management

One of the roles of advocacy in brand management according to Freeland (2013) is to facilitate good relationship with customers. In the attempt to maintaina more powerful customer base, an organization might pursue a strategy of building good relationship with customers by advocating the brand.In recent times Freeland **(**2013) observe that most organization have channelled their focus into ensuring customer satisfaction, creating consistency in customer interfaces, building better products through total quality management, and emphasizing more personalized service which are most communicated to customers through advocacy based on cordial relationship. Managing good relationship with customers help the organization to understand each customer and then deliver a consistent message or service to that customer. For most organization, advocacy and creating strong relationship with customers is a more efficient means of targeting customers in the sense of drawing accurate crosshairs on their chests.

Similarly, Urban (2016) says building customer trust towards brand is another role of advocacy in brand management. Urban (2016) says advocacy depends on trust, and organizations must learn about the determinants of trust and the dynamics of building enduring trust. Thus, customers need honest and complete help in picking the best product for themselves, not the product that maximizes the manufacturer's profit contribution Urban (2016) explain. For the customer to have confidence, belief, and willingness to accept any information about a brand then there must be a trust based on a carefully constructed advisor, whether through the Web or in person (Urban 2016). A transparent and intelligent advisor is genuinely in the corner of the customer and represents advocacy for the customer across the organization's product offerings. Customers want to trust an advisor to save time and make a better decision. In line with the above organizations must go beyond transparency and be proactive in representing customers' best interests.

Nelson (2017) position that the provision of information for brand choice is another role of advocacy in brand management. Nelson (2017) holds that in recent time, there has been growing concern about the rate of increase in choice, uncertainty, confusion and complexity within markets. As brands, media, products and services proliferate and the volume and depth of information content grows, customer overload can result in stress, frustration and sub-optimal decisions. Nelson (2017) explain that as a matter of concern, complexity can affect consumer's ability to make an informed and confident purchasing decision, especially when many individuals report that they now have less time to spend on making such decisions. While it is true that the explosion of choice has occurred with an accompanying demand for differentiated products and services, it should also be remembered that the benefits of greater choice are ultimately dependent on the continued ease by which customers are able to find the most appropriate solution for their needs in the shortest amount of time. Nelson (2017) suggests that organization should strive to diverse new approaches to deliver superior information which will help the consumers make smarter decisions.

Method

This study examines the role of brand advocacy on consumer satisfaction. Secondary data was retrieved from this study as the research design used was documentary. Secondary sources of data collection were from published and unpublished materials like books, research papers and periodicals relevant to the subject matter under study.

Discussion and Findings

This study looked at the role of brand advocacy on consumer's satisfaction. Thus the purpose of the paper was to investigate what role(s) brand advocacy play on consumer satisfaction towards the brand. In line with the stipulated objective the cognitive dissonance and brand identity theories were employed to further provide perspective for the study. Similarly, secondary data was retrieved as the research design was documentary. Thus findings showed that in creating successful brand advocacy organizations requires a different set of brand management competencies. It requires organizations to develop and harness the competencies of customers. Also a successful brand advocacy demands new communication infrastructures to enable customers listen and participate brand conversations. It demands that brand managers must do away with traditional notions of brand ownership, protection and control and have a rethink of customer value and the role of advocacy and satisfaction. Furthermore, it was discovered that some of roles of brand advocacy on consumer behaviour are to build trust towards the brand, facilitate good customer's relationship and provide information for brand choice.

Based on the views and research done by numerous researchers and academicians, it can be concluded that brand advocacy is necessary to provide needed information for customer satisfaction. Thus, though customer satisfaction does not guarantee repeat purchases on the part of the customers but still it plays a very important part in ensuring customer loyalty and retention. However as pointed out by researchers, advocacy is a direct determining factor in customer satisfaction and loyalty which in turn allow the brand to survive in a competitive environment. Therefore organizations should always strive to ensure that their customers are very satisfied. Brand advocacy is potentially one of the most powerful weapons that brand managers can employ in their fight to gain a strategic advantage and survive in today's ever-increasing competitive environment.

Recommendation

This study therefore recommends that brand managers should make brand advocacy a new paradigm for advertising, since advocacy triggers brand satisfaction and loyalty and enable the brand to compete favourably in the ever changing market.

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