



SELLING NATIONALISM: INFLUENCE OF PATRIOTIC ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM IN KENYA

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Abstract

In the present society, consumers develop stereotypical ideologies on the products manufactured in a particular country. This paper examines the direct effect of patriotic advertising on consumer ethnocentrism. The paper gives a background on the concept of patriotic advertising and how it evokes feelings of nationalism and patriotism among consumers. The key findings of the paper illustrate that consumers are most vulnerable to patriotic advertising in the event of a national crisis. In addition, consumers were found to have stereotypical ideologies on the services and products based on their country of origin. These findings confirm the need for local companies to exploit patriotic advertising as a means of promoting citizen consumerism and counter competition from international brands.

Keywords: patriotic advertising, consumer ethnocentrism, country of origin, nationalism, globalization

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the era of globalization, firms are working towards expanding their business into other markets. Subsequently, the increase in competition has forced companies to come out and develop strategies that can counter rivalry in both local and international markets. In some countries, local consumers tend to be more patriotic and ethnocentric,

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hence they prefer to buy locally produced goods and services in comparison to imported products as an expression of love for their country. In some cases, consumers might abandon their ethnocentrism and patriotism, and purchase foreign brands as they give them value for their money. Consequently, marketers have to understand the dynamics and complexities of their target market in order to remain competitive in a globalized business environment. However, Al Taei (2012) notes that whereas the survival of local firms is threatened by the entry of international companies into the local market, there is a segment of local consumers who still express a negative bias towards foreign products. This presents an opportunity for local marketers, especially those from developing countries to capitalize on their negative attitude towards imported goods and encourage the purchase of domestic products through patriotic advertising.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The advancement and proliferation of communication technologies has increased diffusion of information and subsequent exposure of consumers to international products. In line with this development, Kenyan consumers have become more educated and conscious of their utility needs to an extent that they have accused of having a positive bias towards imported products (Kong'ong'o, 2013). Local manufacturers have realized that Kenya has not been insulated from the effects of the globalization process that exposes consumers to a wide variety of foreign brands. As a result, Kenyan firms such as the East African Breweries (Tusker), Kenya Airways, Mumias Sugar, Safaricom, Kenya Tea Packers Limited (KETEPA) among others have used promotional themes that emphasize national identities and patriotism in their advertisements. This promotional strategy exploits the idea of consumer nationalism and has been adopted by firms in other countries to promote their products in the local and international market. German and Japanese vehicle manufacturing firms and Italian fashion retailers have successfully used the country of origin to market their products as a way of emphasizing their quality. According to Han (1989), the Country of Origin (COO) signifies a halo that is used in the evaluation of a product, where a positive COO shows an individual's willingness to identify with the country.

Previous studies on the Country of Origin that were conducted in developed countries indicate that local consumers have a preference for domestic products followed by those manufactured in developed countries and lastly by developing countries (Okechuku and Onyemah, 1999). Countries that have a strong sense of ethnocentrism and patriotism prefer domestic products. However, the preference for locally manufactured products tends to be weaker in developing countries. Whereas

Chinese prefer local products, Mexicans and Indians are obsessed with American products. Similarly, stakeholders in the Kenyan economy hold the view that there is a strong demand for foreign products at the expense of those manufactured locally. Since most of the studies on consumer ethnocentrism have been done in developed and developing countries in the east and west, this study seeks to establish the influence of patriotic advertising on consumers preference for products manufactured in Kenya.

1.3 Research Question

This paper was guided by the following research question:

1. How do patriotic advertisements in Kenya construct ethnocentric messages?

1.4 Objective

The main objective of this paper was to explore how patriotic advertising has influenced consumers' ethnocentrism towards domestic products. A related objective was to assess the type and use of national identities in television advertisements of local products. Whereas marketers are using patriotic appeals in advertising domestic products, Kenyan consumers continue to have a preference for products of foreign origin.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Social Learning Theory

The theory of social learning was developed by Albert Bandura in 1986. The theory argues that besides the primary reflexes, people do not possess innate behavior but rather they acquire them through direct experience or observation. Bandura (1986) asserts that by watching other people perform some action, one learns a full range of behavior. Television messages and advertisement are powerful and influential especially when the subjects are personalities who are admired and people would want to identify with. The theory suggests that there are three major impacts on the observer which include imitation, distribution and resource facilitation. The media is one of the socializing agents that influence peoples.

2.1.2 Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) started as the Theory of Reasoned Action in 1980 to predict an individual's intention to engage in a behavior at a specific time and place. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein, (1985).

TRA proposes that individual beliefs influence attitudes, hence creating intentions that will generate behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1985). It is concerned with consciously intended behaviors, and links behavioral intention to the person's actual behavior. A person's attitude toward the behavior coupled with the subjective norm concerning the behavior determines the behavioral intention. The theory was intended to explain all behaviors over which people have the ability to exert self-control. The key component to this model is behavioral intent; behavioral intentions are influenced by the attitude about the likelihood that the behavior will have the expected outcome and the subjective evaluation of the risks and benefits of that outcome.

Ethnocentrism and patriotic behavior can be promoted to citizens through advertising campaigns. Patriotic ads serve as a reminder to ethnocentric consumers to remain patriotic when purchasing products and services (Nik-Mat et al., 2015). At the same time, the objective of such campaigns is to develop consumers' intention of buying domestic products. Behavioral intentions illustrate the willingness of individuals to perform a specific act. This is best explained by the theory of planned behavior. According to the theory, a person's action is determined by their behavioral intentions which are influenced by their attitude towards a behavior and subjective norms (Alam & Sayuti, 2011). At the same time, their behavior is also determined by peoples' intention to perform certain acts.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Patriotism and Patriotic Advertising

Patriotism, which is the antecedent of ethnocentrism, refers to the strong feeling of love and devotion towards ones' country without a corresponding hostility towards other countries (Balabanies et al., 2001). It is argued that there are similarities between nationalism and patriotism. Whereas they both evoke a positive feeling towards ones' country, nationalism represents a negative connotation of a positive in-group evaluation. Nationalists hold the view that their country is superior to others hence it should be dominant. Patriotism affects the consumer purchase decision as it plays an important role in the choice between domestic and foreign products (Luque-Martinez et al., 2000). Consumer ethnocentrism is closely associated with consumer nationalist and patriotic tendencies.

Patriotic advertising attempts to appeal to the emotions of the people with their country and promote in-group feelings. The sense of connectedness with a country created by patriotic advertisements creates a positive attitude towards a brand, and a positive impact on the purchase intention. Patriotic appeals have long been used in advertising especially when there are major national events whether natural or

manmade (Kinnick, 2003). For instance, during the “Kenyans for Kenya” fundraising campaign that was initiated by the Red Cross in response to media report on famine in Turkana, patriotic appeals were used in advertising. The advertisers used the patriotic message format with the aim of evoking a positive attitude and behavioral response towards the crisis.

Advertisements using symbols such as the Kenyan flag, patriotic colors (e.g., red, black, and white) and phrases such as “My country, My Beer,” “Proudly Kenyan,” “The Pride of Africa” began appearing in the media to drive home the perception of companies’ commitment to and pride in the nation. Additionally, the use of “Made in Kenya” and other similar slogans with patriotic appeals have significantly increased over the years. In patriotic appeals, the use of such symbols and phrases are meant to elicit patriotic thoughts and feelings. A strong association between an individual and his country of origin encourages one to have a positive attitude towards national concepts such as the national flag, patriotic symbols and belief. Hence, a consumer who has a strong national identity can use products association with the country of origin to make product choices that reinforce their identity.

McGovern (1998) suggests that advertising metaphors influence consumption by transforming them into a ritual that affirms ones’ national identity. He found that patriotic ads that communicated the pride of America and its values using symbols such as flags or nationals’ colors evoked patriotic emotions among consumers which led to favorable evaluation of the ads. Similarly, Tsai (2010) also found that participants’ interpretation of patriotic ads that used words with strong patriotic connotation such as Freedom, independence illustrate how consumption is an important element in the formation of the American identity. Furthermore, some of the participants were moved by the patriotic narrative and imagery in the advertisements and in the process of identifying the ad, they embraced the advertiser as being one of them.

In Kenya, the national airline carrier “Kenya Airways” has over the years been running ads that feature nationalistic identities such as the Kenyan flag, the country’s landscape, wildlife, Maasai people, national colors and the national rugby team. Tsai (2010) further asserts that when people show their support for domestic products, they do so out of national altruism to support their country. However, Kenya Airways is on the verge of collapsing after incurring losses amounting to ksh. 26 billion (Okoth, 2015). Among other reasons contributing to this include, poor customer relations as well as cancellation of flights that have aggravated the situation. Therefore, this indicates that the effectiveness of the patriotic ads has been watered down by the poor services offered by the national carrier compared to international airlines. Karimah et al. (2015) found that patriotism is one of the direct drivers of actual purchase behavior.

2.3.2 Country of Origin

According to literature evaluating country of origin and consumer preferences, consumers often develop stereotypical ideologies on the services and products manufactured in a particular country. Such viewpoints are based on a country's perceived weaknesses and expertise in the production and marketing concepts. In the present society, people place emphasis on the place of origin of a particular product and evaluate them accordingly.

In a study conducted by Rezvani and Salehi (2012) it was established that managers often view the country of origin effect as an extrinsic factor during the evaluation of the traits of a particular service or product. It is significant to note that the concept of country of origin undermines the clients' perception of products. According to Nes and Bilkey (1992), business environments and cultures also influence the intentions of customers as they develop both negative and positive views by comparing these factors to the type and nature of goods they are being offered. According to some scholars, the COO can be used as a product quality measure as clients are more likely to buy products that have greater market share.

Additionally, there is a close tie between consumer ethnocentrism and country of origin. Before consumer ethnocentrism studies were conducted, it was difficult to compare the qualities of domestic and foreign products with little emphasis being placed on the foreign imports country of origin. These studies also evaluated the preferences of the clients in specific countries such as the consumer attitudes of Americans towards foreign and domestic commodities. In a study conducted by Evanschitzky, Wangenheim, Woisetschl'ager, and Blut (2008) it is evident that past examinations on the correlation between consumer ethnocentrism and country of origin failed to extensively analyze the variable implications of customer ethnocentrism across the various services and products being offered.

In Kenya, consumers are very conscious about the country of origin when making product and service purchase decision. For instance, there is a shared belief among Kenyan consumers that any product bearing a "Made in China" tag is either fake or substandard. Whereas this might not be entirely true, this prevalent misconception is attributed to poor customer experience with Chinese products in terms of their quality and durability or misinformation. Therefore, the country of origin does not provide an added advantage to Chinese manufacturers and marketers seeking to make an entry into the local market since consumers have a poor perception of their products.

Both local and international marketers should focus on understanding the potential implications of ethnocentrism on the behaviors of consumers as it helps in

depicting the various defects in the products thus deducing the most appropriate ways of improving the quality.

2.3.3 Consumer Ethnocentrism and Patriotism

The term consumer ethnocentrism is adapted from the concept of ethnocentrism which refers to the tendency of people to look at their own group as the focal group and differentiate among other social groups from the view of their own group (Jain & Jain, 2013). Therefore, ethnocentric people consider their way of life as being superior in comparison to groups or persons who are culturally dissimilar to them. When ethnocentrism is described in the context of consumption or related activities, it is referred to as consumer ethnocentrism.

Shimp and Sharma (1987) developed an economic version of consumer ethnocentrism with the objective of analyzing the emotional implications that consumers expressed when purchasing foreign products, especially in situations where the local economy was poor. They further defined consumer ethnocentrism as the belief held by consumers about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign products. Thus, ethnocentric consumers will evaluate locally produced products differently from those manufactured in other markets. The concept of consumer ethnocentrism is based on the fear that buying foreign products may harm the country's economy, consumers' unwillingness to buy foreign products and prejudices against imports.

Ethnocentric consumers are of the view that purchasing foreign products is unpatriotic and could cause unemployment since it affects the domestic economy. Sharma et al., (1995) note that some of the implications of consumer ethnocentrism include inaccuracies in the estimation of the quality of domestic products, a moral obligation to buy domestic products and an intense preference to purchase domestic products. Consequently, there is a tendency of ethnocentric consumers focusing on the positive attributes of products manufactured in their country. Highly ethnocentric consumers buy local products even though they know that products from foreign countries are of high quality. In addition, ethnocentric consumers view domestic products as superior and they discourage the purchase of foreign products. On the other hand, non-ethnocentric consumers evaluate products based on their attributes without paying close attention to its country of origin.

Sharma et al. (1995) argues that the idea of nationalism and patriotism tends to increase in intensity in the event of a crisis. Similarly, Lee, Hong and Lee (2003) assert that the behavior of consumers during a crisis is largely influenced by ethnocentric tendencies that may lead to conflict between consumers and citizen identities.

Purchasing locally manufactured products in such situations can be seen as morally good and the preferred choice of consumption. Recent cross-sectional studies between the U.S. and China by Tsai, Lee and Song (2013) revealed that there was an increased level of nationalism and patriotism in American advertising following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A few weeks after the attacks U.S. vehicle manufacture General Motors launched a campaign dubbed “Keep America Rolling” that promoted the idea that it is the duty of all Americans to support domestically produced products in the event of a crisis (Whelan, 2001). It is evident that companies capitalize on crises to appeal to consumer’s sense of patriotism and subsequently convince them to buy local products.

3. Research Methodology

This is a review paper and the methodology adopted was desktop research in which a review of available literature was done to put emphasis on patriotic advertising by domestic companies. The analysis was based from relevant journals and articles. .

4. Conclusion

Patriotic advertising influences the level of consumer ethnocentrism. The expansion of domestic markets and subsequent entry of foreign companies has increased competition for local consumers. In response to this, companies are adopting patriotic advertising as part of their marketing strategy to compete with international brands. Such advertisements feature national symbols and identities as a means of evoking patriotic emotions among consumers. The study concludes that patriotic advertisements reinforces consumer ethnocentrism which leads to favorable evaluation and preference for locally manufactured products

4.1 Recommendation

While national companies have adopted patriotic advertising to appeal to the domestic market, the following considerations should be made:

Given the competitive advantage associated with patriotic advertising, local companies should adopt this strategy in their ad messages to appeal to consumers’ sense of nationalism and subsequently persuade them to purchase local products. Whereas consumers are encouraged to purchase domestic products as a show of patriotism, local companies should work on improving the quality of their products to match or surpass that of international brands.

Local companies should view national crises as an opportunity to evoke the sense of patriotism and nationalism among consumers to market their products since at the time they are highly ethnocentric.

In the present society, people place emphasis on the place of origin of a particular product before evaluating them. In addition, consumers often develop stereotypical ideologies on the services and products manufactured in a particular country. However, advertisers should emphasize their country of origin only if it would lead to a positive evaluation of their product.

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