

The Influence of Ethical Sales Behaviour on Customer Loyalty of Manufacturing Firm

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ABSTRACT

In today's business world, effective and efficient managers have been looking beyond customer satisfaction but toward customer loyalty, because customer loyalty leads to repurchasing, and one of the ways to create a relationship that will lead to customer loyalty is ethical behavior, hence this study investigated the effect of ethical behavior on customer loyalty of noodle products in Akoko Northeast local government, Ondo state, Nigeria. The research design adopted for this study was survey design. Data were obtained through structured questionnaires. The population of this study comprises of 230 sales representatives of Noodle products in Akoko Northeast local government, Ondo State. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw the respondents. The sample size was 147 and was derived using Yaro-Yamane's formula, data were analysed using regression statistical analysis. The results revealed that the predictor variables were individually statistically significant to customer loyalty in noodle products in Akoko Northeast local government, Ondo state. Conversion marketing as proxies of ethical sales behaviour were individually statistically significant to customer loyalty as indicated by its t value and p value shown in parenthesis: appropriateness ($t = 10.357$; $P < 0.01$). However, the overall effect of ethical sales behaviour was significant ($F = 17.307$, $p < 0.00$). The study recommends that noodle companies should continue to be ethical in the marketing of their products because this makes most of their customers to be loyal to their products and the organization itself.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethical behavior in business is paramount in establishing and maintaining customer loyalty. As businesses navigate complex and competitive markets, the importance of ethical conduct becomes increasingly evident (Mansouri, Boroujerdi & Husin, 2022). There is a broad agreement around the world that as a matter of corporate policy, every organization strives to be committed in a manner that is ethically transparent (Alrubaiee, 2012). Aburayya, Marzouqi, Alawadhi, Abdouli, and Taryam, (2020) company's reputation significantly impacts customer loyalty. Ethical behavior contributes positively to a company's reputation, as demonstrated by studies on corporate social responsibility (CSR). Behaving in an ethical manner is seen as part of the social responsibility of an organization, which itself depends on the philosophy that organizations ought to impact the society in ways that go beyond the usual profit maximization objective (Hansen, & Riggle, 2009). It is often argued in many instances that, it is in the interest of an organization to behave in a way that recognizes the need for moral and ethical content in managerial decision as this will benefit the organization especially in the long run. Ethical behavior is essential in building and maintaining trust, it is characterized by honesty, fairness and equity in interpersonal, professional and academic relationships and it respects the dignity, diversity and the rights of individuals and groups of people (Morgan and Hunt 2014). Therefore for an organization to move forward in the aspect of performance, it is however important for such an organization to have a good understanding of ethics and also take it seriously as this can undermine the competitive strength of the organization and the society at large. Ethical behavior is closely linked to

customer satisfaction. Companies that prioritize ethical conduct in their operations, such as fair pricing and honest advertising, tend to have higher customer satisfaction rates. Customers are more likely to exhibit loyalty. Ethical practices ensure that customers feel valued and respected, fostering long-term loyalty.

Nowadays, smart managers have been looking beyond customer satisfaction toward customer loyalty because customer satisfaction is not the sign of repurchasing. In marketing management, it is crucial to ensure customer loyalty and obtain benefits from extending customer life as profitable and long-term investments for any business (Nguyen, 2015). It is of the opinion that loyal customer will repurchase and advertising with the word of mouth to others. Organization always want to improve their performance so that their customers can be satisfy with the service rendered so that it will lead to customer loyalty (Kehinde, 2010). Ethical sales behaviour can play a critical role in the formation and maintenance of long-term relationships with customers (Wray et al. 1994).

Studies by (Alrubaiee., 2012; Maria, 2013; Saeed, Maryam, Mohammad, Seyed& Mohammad, 2012; Manduku, Juliana, Damary, 2017; Razieh, Mohammad &Arash, 2013.) has shown in literature that ethical behavior in organisation had a positive relationship with organization loyalty and performance. But study by Nguyen (2015) shows that ethics does not have direct influence on customer loyalty, this controversy has lead this study to investigate if ethical behavior has influence on customer loyalty. Also, they are yet to identify the extent at which they influence loyalty of customers in their various studies, hence this study find out the extent at which behavioral ethics will influence the loyalty of customer to an organization. the study investigate the influence of ethical sales Behaviour on customer loyalty of manufacturing firm

II. LITERATURE REVIE

2.1 Ethics in business

According to Manduku, Juliana, Damary, (2017), ethical behavior is fair and honest actions that enable the salesperson to foster long-term relationships with customers based on customer satisfaction and trust. Business ethics behaviour is described as the ultimate rules which dominate the assessment of “what constitutes right or wrong, or good or bad human conduct in a business context” (Shaw, 2010). The theme of ethics in business has been widely approached on a global scale. Business ethics is sometimes referred to as management

ethics or organizational ethics, limiting its framework to organizations (Beekun, 1996). Ethnical behaviour is acting in ways that are consistent with one’ personal values and the commonly held values of the organization and society,[Nielsen,1999].

Ethics are moral principles that explain what is right or wrong, good or bad and what is appropriate or inappropriate in various setting. Bucholz [2003], in his work on business ethics, sees ethics as the guiding values; principles and standards that help people determine how things ought to be done. Ethics is a set of standard of right and wrong established by a particular group and imposed on members of that group as a means of regulating and setting limit on behavior, Alrubaiee (2012). Ethics are defined as the system of rules that governs the ordering of values. This idea makes it possible to prescribe a code of behavior for both work and one’s personal life.

To sum-up the above definitions, one can therefore define ethics as standard of morality that guides individual and organization in following certain norms of conduct when dealing with each other. It can be said to be the moral evaluation of decision and action as right and wrong on the basis of commonly accepted principles or behavior. More so, it is applied of society relationship

2.1.2 Ethical behavior

Much literature has been published on the effects of ethical behavior. Some authors studied the effects of ethics on employee behavior (Alrubaiee, 2012) and on an organizational level (Singh & Del Bosque, 2008). In the following section we will approach two different types of effects of ethics: individual and organizational effects. There has been a long ongoing debate between scholars, on whether unethical behavior and decision making is a consequence of “bad apples” or “bad barrels” (Treviño& Youngblood, 1990). While the former theory argues that organizational unethical behavior is caused by the personal characteristics of its employees; the latter states that it is the organizational behavior or climate that influences employee behavior. Given the main objective of this dissertation, our greatest emphasis will be on the effect of ethics on a firm’s performance, more specifically, to what extent a firm’s ethical behavior will influence its loyalty of customers, although we will briefly mention the effects on individuals. Ethical behavior will be linked and measured in accordance to a firm’s social responsibility.

2.1.2.1 Individual and Organizational Ethics

“In business, when people talk about ethics they’re talking about behavior” (Treviño & Nelson, 1999). It is stated that individual characteristics, such as values and moral issues, influence ethical conduct (Jones, 1995). People frequently face ethical dilemmas such as whether to use office supplies for personal purposes, cheat on a test, inflate their business results, or fail to report an additional source of income on a tax return. “Employees are not just organizational drones; they are individual human beings who are concerned about their relationships and their personal reputation.

Some scholars suggest that people engage in unethical behavior, when they are faced with an opportunity to do so (Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008). The fact that one’s behavior is forbidden or reprehensible may strengthen this experience. Brass, Butterfield and Scaggs (1998) suggest that unethical behavior of one person may influence the behavior of another, enhancing the importance of relationships among employees. Employees are also more committed to organizations, in which the top management represents highly ethical and credible standards, supporting and rewarding ethical conduct, and disciplining unethical behavior. Another study showed that managers, who believe in the credibility of their senior management, also feel more attached and committed to the organization (Posner & Schmidt, 1992).

Stevens, Steensma, Harrison and Cochran, (2005) found that financial managers are willing to consider the company’s code of ethics in the decision-making process when they are obliged to do so, when faced with pressure from the company’s stakeholders or, if and when they believe that a code can promote a better external image of the company. Much research has focused on understanding the factors that influence ethical conduct in organizations, specifically the conduct of its members. However, employees express the company’s organizational ethics in the way they are personally treated. (Treviño & Nelson, 1999). Ethical climate, as introduced by is defined as a shared perception among organization members, reflecting organizational practices with moral consequences. found that the ethical climate of a company can influence its compromise, stating that a favorable climate has a positive relationship with organizational commitment, while a selfish climate has a negative relationship with commitment

2.1.2.2 On an organizational level,

“organizational ethics is a company’s adoption of desired ethical standards and business practices” (Valentine & Fleischman, 2007), and therefore, organizational ethics should be a fundamental management concern, at all levels of an organization (Treviño & Nelson, 1999). Unethical business practices can possibly undercut the development of trusting, long-term business relationships. Among venture partners, unethical behavior can cause conflicts between partners, creating suspicion and lack of trust, which may end up terminating the relationship (Manduku, Juliana, Damary, 2017). Unethical behavior can lead to negative publicity, substantial fines, and ultimately decreased sales and profits (McGuire, Sundgren & Schneeweis, 1988). The effects of ethics on a company’s reputation have taken on particular urgency, given the struggle with an increased media scrutiny of governance, social and environmental issues. The Reputation Institute (RI) finds that corporate ethics has become an indelible feature of stakeholder engagement — not just as a set of principles but as a cultural process affecting decision-making at all levels. Ethical culture has been defined as a slice of the organizational culture that influences employees’ ethical behavior through formal and informal organizational structures and systems.

2.1.3 Unethical Behaviour: Why Does It Occur In Organizations

The potential for individuals and organization to behave unethically is limitless. Unfortunately, this potential is too frequently realized. Consider, for example, how greed overtook concerns about human welfare in a number of cases. Companies that dump dangerous medical waste materials into our rivers and oceans also appear to favour their own interests over public safety and welfare. Although these examples are better known than many others, they do not appear to be unusual. In fact the story they tell may be far more typical than we would like, as one expert estimates that about two thirds of the 500 largest corporations have been involved in one form of illegal behavior or another. Gellerman, (1986). Unfortunately, unethical organizational practices are embarrassingly very common today. It is easy to define such practices as dumping polluted chemical wastes into rivers, overcharging the government for Medicaid services. Yet these and many other unethical practices go on almost routinely in many organizations. Why is this so? In other words, what accounts for the unethical actions in which

individuals knew or should have known that the organization was committing an unethical act? One answer to the question of why individuals knowingly commit unethical actions is based on the idea that organizations often reward behaviors that violate ethical standards. Consider, for example, many business executives and top government officials deal in bribes and payoffs, despite the negative publicity and ambiguity of some laws, and how good corporate citizens who blow the whistle on organizational wrongdoing may fear being punished for their actions.

Jansen and Von Glinow (1985) explain that organizations tend to develop counter norms, accepted organizational practices, which are contrary to prevailing ethical standards. Indeed, governmental regulations requiring full disclosure and freedom of information reinforce society's values towards openness and honesty. Within organizations, however, it is often considered not only acceptable, but also desirable, to be much more secretive and deceitful. The practice of stonewalling, willingly hiding relevant information, is quite common. One reason for this is that organizations may actually not reward those who are too open and honest. Look at the negative treatment experienced by many employees who are willing to blow the whistle on unethical behavior in their organization. Many other organizational counter norms that promote morally and ethnically questionable practices. Because these practices are commonly rewarded and accepted suggest that organization may be operating within a world that dictates its own set of accepted rules. This reasoning suggests another answer to the question of why organizations knowingly act unethically namely, because managerial values exists that undermine integrity. In an analysis of executive integrity.

2.1.4 Ethical Variables

The construct of ethical Behaviour variable according to (Manduku, Juliana, Damary, 2017) are covert marketing, force or misleading advertisement and Provocative marketing.

2.1.4.1 Covert Marketing

Covert marketing consist of marketing messages and promotional materials that appears to come from independents parties when, in fact, they are sent by marketers(Manduku, Juliana, Damary, 2017). Some maintain that covert marketing strategies often violate the FCT definition of deceptive advertising, endorsement guild lines and other regulations pertaining to marketing, and belief that the organisation should establish clearer rules to

reduce the use of masked advertising. Others argue that the widespread use of covert advertising abuses consumers efforts to avoid advertising and will result in increased consumer distrust of product information; of particular concern here is the increased number of communication that are created by marketers but made to resemble genuine word of mouth

2.1.5 Loyalty

In practice, loyalty is seen as one of the most important criteria for a company to obtain competitive advantage because it determines customers' repurchase in future . in spite of various marketing efforts of competitors and situational influences on them (Lin, 2012). Nguyen (2015) pointed out that perceived quality stimulates satisfaction, and that satisfaction increases customer loyalty. Thanks to rapid development of service industries during last decades, the concept of customer loyalty has expanded to cover not only tangible products but intangible ones, and not only actual purchasing behavior but combined measures of behavior and attitude (Lin, 2012). Nowadays, many companies implement customer respect oriented strategies to attract, retain, and get on well with customers (Nguyen, 2015). An expectation of continuity indicates the customer's intention to manage the relationship and the likelihood of repurchase. The operational definition of customer loyalty was based on Lin (2012),the work of Nguyen (2015) use Trust and Commitment to measure Loyalty. And for the purpose of this study trust and loyalty will be used to measure customer Loyalty.

2.2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

Empirical Review

Razieh, Mohammad &Arash (2013) opined that the purpose of this study is to analysis of a model for investigation the influences of ethical sales behavior on customer loyalty in insurance industry with a case study in Parsian Insurance Company in Iran. The theoretical topics collected by means of library and Internet and the data was obtained from questionnaire. To analyze the data, the structural equation modeling embedded in the AMOS software was applied. The results of analyzing data reveal that the presented model is an appropriate model for investigation the influence of ethical sales behavior on customer loyalty in insurance company. Results also show that the salesperson's ethical behavior has an important influence on customer satisfaction from salesperson and their trust to the seller. Ethical behavior also has

great impact on customer loyalty to the insurance; however this influence is not proven directly, it is mediated by customer satisfaction and trust to the salesperson

Manduku, Juliana & Damary (2017) sought to study was to determine the influence of Ethical Advertisement practices on the financial performance of the listed firms. The study adopted a census method of research involving all the listed firms. Structured questionnaires were used as the data collection tool. The results established that ethical advertising practices have a positive impact on financial performance. The study findings indicated that financial performance was high when firms adhered to ethical advertising, when advertisements satisfied customer requirements and when the firms employed ethical practices for their products.

Musa, Kunle & Folake (2012) stated that Commitment of employees to their organisations has been one of the central research themes in organisational study. Though, many predictors of organisational commitment abound in the literature, much is however not known on how ethical behaviour in the organisation affects employees' commitment. Considering the nature of insurance services, and high potentials for ethical dilemma in the industry, this study contributes to organisational commitment literature by providing further understanding on the impact of corporate ethical values on organisational commitment in Nigeria. Underpinned by cognitive dissonance theory, the study proposes a significant relationship between the two constructs. While controlling for some demographic factors, corporate ethical values was hypothesized as a significant determinant of organisational commitment. With data from 415 managers, collected through Hunt's et al (1989) Corporate Ethical Value and Hunt's et al (1985) organisational commitment scales, the results of the multivariate analysis were presented, and discussed with managerial implications.

Saeed, Maryam, Mohammad, Seyed & Mohammad (2012) examined impacts of salesperson's ethical behavior on customers' satisfaction, trust, and commitment to the salesperson. The sale as one of marketing aspects is the building block of success of any business. In fact, marketing without the sale would not lead to its goals. Following the long-term procedures and basics, improving personal skills, and salespersons' ethical behavior levels result in forming the success bases of the marketing and sales. Although, the salesperson's ethical behavior could increase the

sale, much research has not been conducted on examining the impacts of the salesperson's ethical behavior on the customers. The statistical population of the present study includes customers of Panasonic and Sony electronic products. Data used in this study have been collected using questionnaires. To analyze the data, the structural equation modeling embedded in the LISREL software was applied. Results show that the salesperson's ethical behavior has important influences on customers' satisfaction, trust and commitment to the salesperson.

Maria (2013) analyzed the effects of ethical behavior on a firm's financial profitability. Corporate social responsibility has been used as an indicator of ethical performance. After analyzing the financial indicators ROA and PM, from a sample of the twenty biggest civil construction companies in Portugal, between 2007 and 2011, we conclude that ROA is significantly related to a firm's ethical performance. However, we did not find any statistical evidence that relates PM to ethical performance. Although the scores are very low on all CSR indexes, we can conclude that companies, who are exporting, seem to be more concerned with environmental issue than ethical issues. The top management in the civil construction should take a deeper look into their CSR activities, and should not neglect the impact social inactivity may have on their financial performance.

Summary and Gaps in the Literature

Studies have indicated that ethical sales behaviour have become topical issues attracting the attentions of researcher both in the developed and developing countries. Despite the plethora of researches on this area of study, there are still gaps yet to be covered. Studies revealed that attention has been given to the factors that influence ethical behaviour in Nigeria there is need to continuously investigate the factors that influence ethical sales behavior in Nigeria. Studies also indicated in the literature that there is a controversy among scholars between ethical sales behaviour and customer loyalty which will be necessary to look into.

Conceptual framework

The relationship between independent and dependent variables was showed in this framework. Ethical sales behaviour acts as the independent variable and it was measured using: covert marketing, in line with the work of (Leon, Joseph & Ramesh, 2014). Customer Loyalty will be act as the dependent variable. This is diagrammatically show in fig 2.1



III. METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was survey Design. Data were obtained through structured questionnaires. The population of this study comprises of 230 sales representative of Noodles products in Akoko Northeast local government, Ondo State, Simple random sampling technique was used to draw the respondents. the sample size was derived using Yaro- Yamane’s formula

$$S = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

The variable N represents the population of the study which is 230, Margin of error is denoted by ‘e’ which was put at 0.05. while the S is the unknown sample size.

$$\frac{230}{1 + 230(0.05^2)}$$

$$\frac{230}{1 + 230(0.0025)}$$

$$\frac{230}{1 + 0.575}$$

$$\frac{230}{1.575}$$

147 sales representatives

Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the sales representative who can provide the necessary information needed for the study. The data was analysed using regression statistics.

IV. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the results obtained from the study in the form of tables to which references were made. The study considered the analysis of data generated from the study in relation to the responses obtained through the administration of questionnaire. A total of 147 members was used for the study. Out of 147 copies of questionnaire administered, 100 (69.4%) were retrieved from the respondents and this was considered to be representative enough. The data presented, analyzed and interpreted were based on the retrieved useable questionnaire.

4.1 Testing of Hypothesis

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We have below the regression analysis of ethical sales behaviour using Covert Marketing (cm) on customer loyalty (CL)

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients Beta	T	Sign	Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std Error				Tolerance	VIF
Constant	27.766	1.441		19.231	.000		
CM	.377	.035	.462	10.357	.001	1.603	1.603
Model Statistics							

R	.463
R ²	.214
Adjusted R ²	.212
S. E of estimate	5.40522
F- stat	17.307
Sig (F stat)	0.000
DW stat	1.404

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

a. Dependent variable CL

Predictors: (Constant), CM.

CM= convert marketing

inferential analysis (regression analysis) was used to test hypothesis: effect of ethical sales behavior and customer loyalty of customers in manufacturing firm. The analysis indicates the effect of ethical sales behavior and customer loyalty of customers in manufacturing firm. The results revealed that the predictor variable were individually statistically significant to customer loyalty in noodles products in Akoko Northeast local government, ondo state. Convert marketing explained 37.7% of the variance in the customers loyalty of noodles product. Convert marketing as proxies of ethical sales behaviour were individually statistically significant to customer loyalty as indicated by its t value and p value shown in parenthesis: appropriateness (t = 10.357; P < 0.01) However, the overall effect of ethical sales behaviour was significant (F = 17.307, p < 0.00).

Essentially, multiple regression is a measure of naturally occurring scores on a number of predictor variables and establishes which set of the observed variables gives rise to the best prediction of the dependent variables. The R value of the model of this study was .469 while the R² was .214 which represented the simple correlation and therefore indicated a good degree of correlation. Adjusting to a degree of freedom, the model of this study could still account for 21.2% of the variation in ethical sales behaviour to customers loyalty while 78.8% in ethical sales behavior on customer loyalty were accounted for by other variable not included in this study.

The regression assumptions were also checked by autocorrelation and multi-collinearity tests. The results of the Durbin Watson (DW) was satisfactory at 1.404 implying that in this model the residuals are not auto-correlated as the value is close to 2. The multi-collinearity of the variables in the model was verified by the Tolerance (Tol.) and the values were satisfactory. The Tolerance values

were 1.603 which are far above 0.1 the worrying level and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values 1.603 were also lower than the worrying level of 10 and above indicating that there were no multi-collinearity problems among the independent variables in the data.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results revealed that the predictor variable were individually statistically significant to customer loyalty in noodles products in Akoko Northeast local government, ondo state. Convert marketing as proxies of ethical sales behaviour were individually statistically significant to customer loyalty as indicated by its t value and p value shown in parenthesis: appropriateness (t = 10.357; P < 0.01) However, the overall effect of ethical sales behaviour was significant (F = 17.307, p < 0.00).

The study recommends that noodles company should continue to be ethical in the marketing of their products because this makes most of their customer to be loyal to their products and the organization its self.

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