The mind of a Kenyan shopper

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It is that time of the year - the season of promotions, raffles, freebies and sales. But marketers in Kenya have to work twice as hard because of high inflation that has seen the cost of living go up. Basic commodity prices have almost doubled in the last 12 months and consumers have been forced to dig deeper into their pockets and make tough choices when it comes to purchases.

A research conducted by research company, Consumer Insight reveals that a majority of shoppers would buy a brand other than their usual one due to in-store influence. These findings are likely to re-focus marketing efforts to the point of sale. Brand marketers have a huge opportunity to influence their brand's preference over the competitor brands with appropriate in-store communication and presence. Changing retail trends has seen a drastic change in communication and marketing strategies. A few years back, marketers used to advertise directly to consumers but now retail outlets advertise directly to shoppers.

Research findings

Consumer Insight sampled 1 200 shoppers in 328 outlets across seven major towns and cities in Kenya. Information was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to shoppers as they exited the outlets.

An interesting highlight is that more than 55% of the respondents are frequent supermarket shoppers who make purchases weekly. This trend busts the myth that promotions, sales and offers can only be done at the end of the month or during particular seasons like Christmas. From the findings, big shopping moments can be created anytime and marketers do not have to wait for month end to influence shoppers.

In terms of motivation to shop, a convenient location, price, and variety were rated amongst the top three. 49% of the respondents said they shopped at their usual supermarket outlet because it was located in a convenient location. However, of those interviewed 55% were not regular shoppers in the particular outlet but were shopping there because the outlet was conveniently located. These figures show that what drives the Kenyan shopper is the expediency of a retail outlet. Convenience means, the supermarket is located in a mall that has other services like coffee shops, bookshops, launderettes, banking facilities, restaurants, and ample parking.

The second rated motivator is pricing which drives supermarket loyalty. 45% of the respondents said they shopped at their regular supermarkets because of price. This is comparable to another 15% who at the time of the interview were not shopping in their usual supermarket and were in the particular outlet because of price.

Variety was rated third with 42% of the respondents saying they stuck to their regular outlet because of variety of products on sale.

Gender of shoppers

Contrary to popular belief, most shoppers in Kenya are male who represented 53% compared to 47% of females. The findings also revealed that 77% shop alone compared to 23% who have company. In terms of age, 20-29 year olds accounted for 61% of shoppers. This group represent the growing Kenyan middle class who are in their first or second jobs and shop based on need. 30-40 year old represented 22% and shopper over 40 years represented 8%. For marketers, their marketing messages and initiatives should be targeted to 20-29% because they make up majority of shoppers.

When it comes to sources of awareness, 30% of the respondents said they learnt about an alternative product brand through media advertising while 56% said they learnt about alternative product brands through in-store advertising.

Retail sector in Kenya

Kenya's retail sector has been growing steadily in the last decade with major retail outlets being: Uchumi (a publicly listed company), Nakumatt, Tuskys, Ukwala, and Naivas. All these outlets operate in all the three cities in Kenya (Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa) and major towns. The main differentiators for the outlets include: price, location, ambience, product range, and service.

The growing retail sector has been a catalyst in the growth of shopping malls which offer eateries, specialty shops, bakeries, and groceries. According to Vision 2030 (Kenya's economic blue print), the government of Kenya aims to increase efficiency in the country's retail sector and raise the market share of products sold through formal channels to 30% by 2012, and to contribute an additional KSh 50billion to the GDP.

Kenya has a growing middle class is a factor that has seen the growth of the country's retail sector. However, because of access to more media and information, they have become more discerning and knowledgeable. These middle class shoppers want flexible shopping hours - which has seen an increase of 24 hour shopping outlets, they (shoppers) want a wide variety of products to choose from, a good shopping location and convenience.

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