Powdered Milk Consumers' Buying Behavior

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Abtract

Following the storm of melamine in milk and lower protein milk index than the published standard, consumers are more and more cautious when they choose powdered milk for their children. More especially, the Vietnamese prefer to buy imported powdered milk rather than domestic powdered milk. Accordingly, this research is conducted to investigate which factors influence consumer-buying behavior toward imported milk powdered in Ho Chi Minh City through a quantitative survey of 110 consumers. Through multiple regression analysis, the findings indicate that product brand, advertisement, and country of origin are significant predictors of consumer-buying behaviors towards imported powdered milk. Sponsorship turned out to be insignificant factor in predicting the dependent variable. Among demographic characteristics only income was found to affect the consumer-buying behavior.

Keywords: consumer-buying behavior; demographic characteristics; brand; advertisement; sponsorship; country of origin

1. Introduction

There is the fact that the price of imported milk in Vietnam is the most expensive in the world. Vietnamese imported milk price is higher than other developing countries such as Thaland, Malaysia, Indonexia from 20-60%, especially in some cases is 100-150% (Nhung, 2009). According to a survey made by the Consumer Protection Division, some Abbott and Mead Johnson milk products imported from the United State are 20% to 30% higher than in Thailand. Dumex one, two, and three products are 100% to 150% higher Malaysia and Indonesia (Nhung, 2009). Enfa Grow A+ (900g) milk of Mead Johnson is 242%, Dugro Gold (800g) of Dumex is 285%, Gain, Pedia Sure, Ensure milk (400g) of Abbott, is 220 - 246% higher than domestic milk (Nhung, 2009). This high price phenomenon leads to instability in the Vietnam milk market in recent years and makes price of foreign milk products increase further continuously as a vicious cycle. More typically, powdered milk for children takes a huge consumption in the milk market in Vietnam. Therefore, parents are elements, which affected directly to this market because they are careful in choosing milk for their children and always want their children to have the best kind of milk. Accordingly, they are easy to suffer from the unstable high price milk market. From the current situation of milk market in Vietnam, this study sought to explore elements affect Vietnamese consumers' behaviors when they buy powered milk for their children from one to five years old in Ho Chi Minh City.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer-buying Behavior

Consumer behavior is a complex pattern and sophisticated understanding for marketing researches, but simply defined; study of psychological, social and physical actions when people buy, use and dispose products, services, ideas and practices (Solomon, 2006; Blackwell et al, 2001; Peter and Olson, 2008). Basic idea behind the consumer research was questioning of buying reasons, however researches have to go deeper and also ask people how and in which circumstances purchase and consume (Blackwell et al., 2001). Consumer behavior consists of ideas, feelings, experiences and actions of consumers with additional environment factors like ads, process and

commends. Furthermore, consumer behavior is a dynamic process, because of the continuous changes in ideas, perceptions and activities of consumers as an individual or in group (Olson and Peter, 2008).

2.2 Product Brand

As Keller (1993) stated, a brand is defined as a "name, term, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, which is intended to signify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". According to Luu (2011), all stakeholders, especially outside stakeholders "contribute not only to the company's value chain but also to the contagion of corporate brand impression". Brand therefore "is not a, static construct, but a dynamic one" (Luu, 2012a).

2.2.1 Brand Equity

Brand equity is "a set of assets and liabilities to a brand's name an symbol that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or a firm's customers" Aaker (2005, p. 173). These assets and liabilities can be defined into four types: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations.

Brand loyalty is, according to Solomon et al. (2001, p. 259), a "form of repeat purchasing behavior reflecting a conscious decision to continue buying the same brand". Moreover, brand loyalty takes place when customers "have a positive attitude towards a brand, as well as being involved in repeated buying". Through advertising, brand loyalty can be built in customer's mind when they generate "emotional attachment by either being integrated into [their] self-image or linked to past experiences" (Solomon et al. 2001, p. 259)

In the Aaker's (2005) point of view, brand awareness present customers' recognition toward a brand, which allows consumers to "identify with the brand product", and thus help companies create a constant competitive advantage.

Aaker (1991) defined perceived quality as "the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives". Perceived quality is tangible opinion about a brand and it bases on different fundamental dimension such as features and performance. Moreover, perceived quality mentioned by Acker (2005) "is often differentiated from the actual quality, and can derive from past experiences involving former products or services".

Brand association links to customer's thought about the brand directly or indirectly. Armstrong & Kotler (2005) states that those associations have the clearest significance to build product attributes, such as physical product characteristics and non-material product characteristics, and customer benefits which Peter & Olson (1994) discusses "the desirable consequences consumers seek when buying and using products and brands", which "provide customers with a motive to buy the product, consequently resulting in brand loyalty" (Aaker, 1991).

Luu (2012b) proposes ''The orbital model of brand equity'' – "a dynamic atom-like model, which comprises a nucleus composed of intrinsic values of a product/service, and four orbitals or surrounding layers – in sequence from inside outwards: perceived quality, brand associations, brand awareness, and brand loyalty – of which the outer orbital or layer embraces the components of the inner orbital or layer."

2.2.2 Brand Positioning

According to Czinkota & Ronkainen (2001), positioning refers to "consumers' perception of a brand as compared with that of competitors' brands, that is, the mental image that a brand, or the company as a whole, evokes". Moreover, Albaum at al. (2002) mentioned that through a set of different product attributes,positioning provides benefits to the consumer and thus to companies too. Therefore, companies must position their brands/products clearly in the target customers' minds by positioning on product attributes. However, companies have to face with the bear that these attributes can be copies easily by competitors. On the other hand, Armstrong & Kotler (2005) declared that "consumers are often not interested in attributes as such, but are rather concerned with what the attributes will actually do for them". Thus, associating a brand with a name that encompasses pleasing and desires benefits can help marketers position their brands (Peter & Olson, 1994). However, strong brands are positioned on strong beliefs and values (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005).

2.3 Advertisement

Advertising notifies consumers of "the existence and benefits of products and services, and tries to persuade consumers to buy them" (MacKenzie, 2004). Furthermore, Kotler *et al.* (2005) allege that "advertising aims at attaining target consumers to either think or react to the product or brand. As a method of achieving advertisement goals, advertisements as well as their content play a vital role in the process of commercial communication".

2.4 Sponsorship

Polonsky et al. (2001) suggested that "sponsorship is primarily a commercial activity, where the sponsoring company attains the right to promote an association with the sponsored object in return for benefit". More specifically, the research defines that "sponsorship is the underwriting of a special event to support corporate objectives by enhancing corporate image, increasing awareness of brands, or directly stimulating sales of products and services" (Javalgi et al.,1994, p. 48). Sponsorship activities are used to build and strengthen brand awareness, brand image, and corporate image (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). More specifically, "advertising tools are designed to expose the sponsoring brand to as many potential customers as possible" (Cornwell et al., 2001).

2.5 Country of Origin

Insch and McBride (2004) discussed "three dimensions (design, assembly and parts), which could influence the overall product quality evaluation, and all three of these could originate in different countries". Chao (2001) found that Country of Design, Country of assembly and Country of Manufacture impact "consumers' perception of product quality and that consumers differ in the weight that they give to the different dimensions. Other perceived quality biases could impact on overall product quality evaluation, such as an unsatisfactory purchase experience in the past."

Buyers often make judgments about product quality and purchase value on the basis of extrinsic cues. According to Johansson et al. (1985), country of origin, COO, is an extrinsic information cue allowing buyers to make inferences about the intrinsic value of a product, this is why country of origin, an extrinsic cue, is often used buy buyers to judge foreign products (Ahmed et al., 1995).

This line of discussion paves the path to the following hypotheses:

H1. Consumers' demographic characteristics positively influence consumer-buying behavior.

H2. Powdered milk brand positively influence consumer-buying behavior.

H3. Advertisement positively influence consumer-buying behavior.

H4. Sponsorship positively influence consumer-buying behavior.

H5. Country of origin positively influence consumer-buying behavior.

3. Methodology

Understanding of different factors affecting consumer-buying behavior toward the powdered milk products in Ho Chi Minh City was attained through quantitative approach. Quantitative approach involves that the researcher collects little information from many investigation units through, for instance questionnaires (Halvorsen, 1992). The target population of this study is parents who have children from 0 to 5 years old. The reason why parents are selected is parents involve directly in buying powdered milk for their children. For this study, 200 questionnaires were distributed to powdered milk customers in Ho Chi Minh City. Data collection was conducted from January to June 2012. From these 200 questionnaires, 128 questionnaires were returned and 110 questionnaires were valid for data analysis. Questionnaire pre-testing was conducted through consulting with experts and some modifications were made to the original questions. The original questionnaire was written in English, and then was translated to Vietnamese to be understandable to respondents. The questions in the questionnaire were based upon our theoretical framework and divided into five dimensions: demographic characteristics, brand, advertisement, sponsorship, and country of origin.

4. Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis presents frequency table and charts for background information of the sample (gender, age, education, income, buying frequency, brand preference) as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution

Variable	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Women	74	67.3
	Men	36	32.7
Age	18 to 25	25	22.7
	25 to 30	46	41.8
	30 to 35	29	26.4
	Over 35	10	9.1

Education	Under diploma	20	18.2
	Diploma	39	35.5
	Undergraduate	45	40.9
	Graduate	6	5.5
Income	Under VND5 mil	29	26.4
	VND5 to 10 mil	44	40
	VND10 to 15 mil	28	25.5
	> VND15 mil	9	8.2
Buying frequency	Under or 1 item	17	15.5
	1 to 3 items	32	29.1
	3 to 5 items	38	34.5
	Over 5 items	23	20.9
Brand preference	Local brand	26	23.6
	Foreign brand	84	76.4

5. Factor Analysis

5.1 KMO and Bartlett Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test measures the adequacy of sample. KMO test's numbers are between 0 and 1. Zero means that sum of correlations for parts of them are large in comparison with sum of correlations, so factor analysis is likely inappropriate. Values near to 1 reflect patterns of R numbers are relatively compact. Kaiser suggests that values over 0.5 are acceptable. For this study the KMO is 0.65, which is acceptable. Bartlett's test measures whether or not original correlation matrix is an identity matrix. Eigen values reflect the characteristics value of data which shows communality of all data and that component. The number of existence initial Eigen values at first is the number of indicators and questions. However for factor loading and categorized indicators to main FACTS, the study need to extract the main and acceptable ones. By Kaiser Criterion, acceptable Eigen values should have variance equal to 1 at least.

Table 2. Test of appropriateness for product brand

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.798
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1275.324
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

Variables for brand display a .798 KMO measure (which satisfies the criteria of the value of least 0.5 and preferably above 0.65); this is considered a meritorious value, showing that these variables are acceptable for factor analysis. Equivalently the Bartlett's test has a probability value of 0.000.

Table 3. Total variance explained of product brand

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.814	40.116	40.116
2	3.480	29.000	69.116
3	1.810	15.086	84.202
4	.437	3.640	87.842

Factor analysis in Table 3 revealed that there are three components with an eigenvalue greater than 1, and these account for 84.202% of the total variance. An eigenvalue is the amount of the total test variance that is accounted for by a particular factor, the total variance for each test being unity (100%). The individual contributions are 40.116%, 29%, and 15.086% of the variation for component 1, 2, 3 respectively.

Table 4. Test of appropriateness for advertisement

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.708
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	423.616
	df	15
	Sig.	.000

Variables for advertisement display a .708 KMO measure; this is considered a meritorious value, showing that these variables are acceptable for factor analysis. Using PCA, factors were extracted using the eigenvalue technique (Table 5). Two factors have eigenvalues over 1.0, therefore, all other factors will be ignored, and total variance from these two factors is 82.767%. This figure represents almost 83% of the total factor.

Table 5. Total variance explained for advertisement

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.863	47.717	47.717
2	2.103	35.049	82.767
3	.409	6.810	89.577

Table 6. Test of appropriateness for sponsorship

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.887
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	406.395
	Df	10
	Sig.	.000

Variables for technology display a .887 KMO measure; hence these variables are acceptable for FA. Using PCA, factors were extracted using the eigenvalue technique (Table 7). The table shows that one factor has eigenvalues over 1.0, therefore, all other factors will be ignored. The total variance derived from these three factors is 75.536%. This high figure represents almost 85% of the total factor.

Table 7. Total variance explained for sponsorship

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.827	76.536	76.536
2	.423	8.450	84.986

Table 8. Test of appropriateness for country of origin

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.880
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	507.143
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

Variables for information display a .880 KMO measure; these variables are acceptable for factor analysis. Using PCA, factors extracted using the eigenvalue technique are shown in Table 9. Total variance from the three selected factors is 58.790, almost 60% of the total factor.

Table 9. Total variance explained for country of origin

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.071	81.410	81.410
2	.328	6.555	87.965

6. Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is a useful indicator to test the internal consistency of the items that make up a scale. The higher the Cronbach's Alpha, the more reliable the scale (Dunn et al. 1994). Malhotra and Birks (2003) state that a coefficient above 0.65 is acceptable. Furthermore, the deletion of one or more items from a scale can also contribute to an increase of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and should therefore be carefully checked for. The scales such as age, income, brand, advertisement, sponsorship, country of origin have Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.919, 0.901, 0.919, 0.833, 0.922 and 0.941 respectively which are very high to the threshold, and cannot be further improved by deleting an item. All coefficients have the highest possible values because it has been tested whether the deletion of further items could help to increase the Cronbach's Alpha values.

7. Regression Analysis

Table 10 presents the regression weights for unstandardized and standardized coefficient.

Table 10. Regression weights for dependant variable equation

	Coefficients				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.647	.109		15.130	.000
Brand	.127	.025	.263	5.042	.000
Sponsorship	.038	.026	.078	1.425	.157
Country of origin	.194	.040	.401	4.812	.000
Advertisement	.138	.024	.286	5.802	.000
Age	-.075	.024	-.145	-3.176	.002
Income	.058	.029	.125	2.003	.048

By looking at the Sig value in Table 10 it is possible to interpret whether the particular independent variable has a significant relationship with the dependent variable *consumer-buying behavior*. The relationship is significant if the Sig.-value is not larger than 0.1 (Pallant, 2010). The results show that there is a significant relationship for brand (0.000), advertisement (0.000), Country of origin (0.000), Age (0.002), Income (0.048). This means that

the variables are good predictors of the dependent variable *consumer-buying behavior*. The independent variable Sponsorship (0.157) are not significantly related to the variable *consumer-buying behavior* and thus are not good predictors.

Proposed hypothesis are tested based on the results of the multiple regression analysis. A hypothesis is supported when the Sig. value is smaller than 0.05; and a null hypothesis is rejected when the Sig. value is equal or larger than 0.05 (Pallant, 2010). The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that the most significant relationship is between the independent variable *brand, advertisement, country of origin, Age and Income* and dependent variable *consumer-buying behavior*. These results imply that the variables *brand, advertisement, country of origin, age and income* are good predictors of the variable *consumer-buying behavior*. Thus, the hypotheses H1, H2, H4 and H5 are supported. Besides, *sponsorship* has not affected to consumer-buying behavior as findings presented. As a result, the hypothesis H3 is rejected.

8. Conclusion and Future Research Direction

Vietnam has about 200 enterprises importing raw milk and milk products. Therefore, improving quality, availability and accessibility of powdered milk are important factors. There is a need to adopt modern technology in processing packaged milk and milk based products. There is a need to obtain certification of standards (SLS, ISO or HACCP). Pasteurization also can be a good way to reach standards. This processing will give confidence to consumers and create the competitive advantages for companies.

According to VTC News, powdered milk products of Abbot were clumped and made consumers feel worried the quality of this brand. The representative of Abbot reported that it could be errors in distribution or maintenance process (Bao, 2011). In consequence, distribution strategies, such as installing an efficient reliable delivery system are to be introduced to ensure uninterrupted delivery processing, distribution, and sale of powdered milk and milk-based products. Accordingly, it is important to commercialize marketing activities in order to ensure reliable delivery system. Therefore, it is essential to invite private sector participation, which will promote profit-oriented operations.

Furthermore, sales strategies such as increasing outlets, establishing milk parlors, appointing sales persons and expanding retail selling and ensuring availability in the locality are some of the mostly preferred options. Such things require investments in infrastructure development. The federation and the local cooperatives may have to focus on institutional development while outsourcing marketing activities. The study revealed that majority of the households women made the buying decisions of consumer-buying behavior products. Sales promotion should target this group as Luu (2012c) highlights that to build marketing effectiveness, marketing strategy must be effectively "translated into marketing actions in proactive response to movements in the marketplace for customer affinity to the corporate or product brand and dissemination of brand impression through the community". This translation will be more effective if managers adopt transformational leadership which cultivates market culture in the company (Luu, 2010). Market-oriented culture, as Luu (2012d) highlights, enhance brand performance. Moreover, "transformational leadership, once built, can expand ethical behavior orientation beyond primary stakeholders towards secondary stakeholders, leading to the development of ethical corporate social responsibility (ethical CSR)" (Luu, 2012e), which foster ethical advertizing in marketing strategies.

The retailers influence plays very important role in the purchasing of powdered milk products and retail shops are the important source for purchase of these products by consumers. Retailers therefore should be given training and incentives to promote sales because consumers are careful in choosing powdered milk for children as a foundation for their further development.

The research results show that in pursuing particular image benefits, managers must thoroughly choose areas of sponsorship concentration and reliaze that the manner and intensity with which they manage their sponsorship involvements will have image consequences and will determine ultimate success in achieving specific image objectives.

Managers may also ponder whether or not country of origin choices can be used in other ways to gain competitive advantage. For example, "whole companies are looking to gain cost advantage by setting up customer call centers in India, others may choose to emphasize their decisions to keep such call centers in the US to attract disgruntled American consumer" (Brodowsky et at., 2004).

Chao (2001) recommended that "for the products originating from countries associated with unfavorable stereotypes, the priority should be given to attributes and benefits that are capable of countering the influence of country of origin. Other strategies should also be used to effectively lessen the influence of negative country stereotypes. Price reduction, for example, may offset a negatively perceived country of origin". A brand also

reduce negative country of origin effects by "presenting itself as a hybrid brand that is assembled by, designed by, or uses parts from, favorable countries" (Chao, 2001).

The research was conducted in Ho Chi Minh City with the sample size of 110 respondents, which should be increased in further research. Furthermore, this study is to investigate consumer buying behaviors toward the brand in manufacturing field; it is thus potential to conduct a research in services industries such as hospitality and healthcare, since "healthcare is a sector that is currently experiencing immense pressure from the market" (Luu, 2012f). This study is cross-sectional, which may not provide definite information on the direction in which factors affect consumer-buying behaviors. The causal direction of the relationships among the variables has been partially built (Luu, 2012g). Therefore, it is useful to conduct a longitudinal study that helps detect developments or changes of the findings, as well as objective measures should be used instead of perceptual measures (Luu, 2012h).

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