

**The Gap between Marketing Expertise and the Sophisticated Consumer:  
in search of New Meanings**

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### **Abstract**

The study indicates that the old marketing prowess is an outdated approach and needs to be redefined. It will look into how complex the customer base is today and hence how challenging it has become for brands to remain relevant and how remaining connected to consumers is out of reach for many brands. The literature will highlight that there several attempts to develop tools to measure how emotional connection can be re-established. However, the subject remains undeveloped and requires a further understanding of the subject matter. This research offers an encircling framework that was developed through extensive secondary research and supported by findings of the primary research. The research will highlight that establishing an emotional bond is a highly complex affair and comprised of many facets. At the same time, being aware of the building blocks of the foundation nurturing the bond between consumers and brands is offered in this research as an enabling tool for practitioners and academics.

Undertaken integrative literature review will demonstrate that consumer-brand co-creation is a new enlightening perspective in fashioning a strong bond. Conceptual analysis of different elements motivating consumers to engage in co-creation activities will produce theoretical propositions that will be tested through primary research.

Keywords: marketer, sophisticated, consumer, social media, informed, marketing methods

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The Gap between Marketing Expertise and the Sophisticated Consumer: in search of New  
Meanings

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Introduction to chapter 1**

Marketing strategies have undergone radical transformations to suit the current market. Marketers are prompted to remain innovative in a bid to capture the interests of their potential customers (Erevelles, Fukawa, and Swayne, 2016; p. 895). The chapter introduces the topic of the proposal, which seeks to assess the gap between marketing expertise and the sophisticated customer. The study starts by examining the background of the subject. It creates conceptual frameworks and develops appropriate research questions that would guide the researcher throughout the study. Accordingly, it also examines the theoretical frameworks that make up the study. Thus, its outcomes would potentially inform marketers on how to counter the demands of the sophisticated customer. The introduction of the study seeks to justify the need to conduct the research and hence develop a formidable mechanism that would ensure a better understanding of the modern consumer, thus reducing the gap witnessed between the marketing expertise and the levels of consumer sophistication.

**Background of Study**

New trends, growths of information technology and a rising sophisticated consumer are some of the attributes known to have transformed the current markets. Marketers are forced to identify new meanings and develop an ideal understanding of the modern consumer to facilitate the better development of effective marketing strategies (Molin and Sjöberg, 2017; p. 24).

Accordingly, poor planning of marketing strategies may have an adverse impact on the business potential. The focus of business strategies should aim at ensuring that the consumer is aware of

the existing products to meet their daily needs. Besides, marketing strategies should foster to develop long-term yet profitable relationships with the clients (Molin and Sjöberg (2017; p. 24). A flexible strategy that can respond to the transformations taking place in consumer perceptions and demand would play a key role in facilitating the marketing departments in the identification of their clients and thus successful targeting of new clients. Ideally, a marketing strategy should foster to identify and then communicate its benefits to its customers (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2014; p. 24). It must counter the changes in the perceptions of the customers as well as the demands to facilitate efficient identification of new markets successfully. Thus, learning more about the modern customer may give better information on the aspects to take note when creating an ideal marketing strategy.

The widening gap and the accelerating complexity of modern consumer markets remain challenging elements for a majority of organizations to comprehend. According to Lovelock and Gummesson (2014; p. 24), most organizations lack the capacity to meet the needs of the modern consumer comprehensively. The increasing demands attributed to the development of the cyberspace have left most marketers vulnerable. Accordingly, the proposal seeks to diagnose the concerns of the increasing gap between marketing expertise and the sophisticated consumer in a bid to develop relevant marketing functions within organizations. Notably, the drivers and levels of sophistication in marketing have created impediments in organization marketing departments making it impossible to realize their objectives. Accordingly, the growing gap continues to cost firms their profitability and hence their future competitiveness.

Alterations in consumer behavior have significantly affected how organizations market their firms. According to Molin and Sjöberg (2017; p. 24), the modern consumer is confident and difficult to please. Besides, the consumer is now aware of the existing platforms upon which they

can raise relevant complaints or satisfaction of a product. The consumer now holds a significantly influential position with regards to the understanding of the satisfaction levels of a product. Online product reviews and social media platforms have become increasingly powerful in dictating how other clients will choose to spend their money on a given product. Thus, a strategy of marketing that would catalyze positive customer responses is considered inevitable to catalyze the success of a firm. The challenge for marketers and organizations is to ensure that they seize the existing opportunities and conform to the new trends of marketing that have seemingly transformed how the consumer responds to existing opportunities and products.

Firms have always developed relevant mechanisms to address the increasing gap created by their competitors. The ability to gain an advantage over slow-moving competitors remains a significant element for firms that want to remain relevant in their respective industries. Thus, the organizations must develop formidable mechanisms that would transcend beyond the narrow confines of traditional marketing mix strategies. Besides, the strategies ought to be adaptive to enable the firm to conform to the dynamic markets. They should provide the organization with the appropriate capabilities to become responsive and accelerate the capability to adapt to the changes. Day (2011; p. 184) emphasizes that the ideal solution to the changing landscape of the marketing sector is easily found on the internet. A market line case study published in 2015 highlights that following the drastic transformation in consumer behavior in the UK, the development of feasible marketing strategies would be of significant help to firms that want to capture greater markets. Erevelles, Fukawa, and Swayne (2016; p. 898) emphasize that the shrinking cost of communication, the sophistication levels of the consumer, the change in developed relationships, authenticity, and new measures imposed on the new marketing environment.



## **Problem statement**

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the marketing environment is becoming increasingly complex. In the yesteryears, marketers relied on the traditional marketing mix strategies to woo their consumers (Erevelles, Fukawa and Swayne, 2016; p. 899). Despite the existence of other platforms of product recommendation amongst other marketing roles, consumers were more likely to believe what their marketer told them about a product. Moreover, there were a few platforms, which customers could lodge their dissatisfaction on a service or even commend it for the good work done (Chen and Xie, 2008; p. 481). Today, cyberspaces have transformed how firms approach the marketing subject. A more informed customer now reigns. Today's marketing environment demands that firms create an environment that is more persuasive to the consumer. Moreover; the marketing trends keep on changing on a daily basis. Only those that can catch up with the pace of changing trends remain relevant in the industry. It is sad that very few firms have managed to demonstrate dynamism with the changing times. Apparently, the number of distribution channels has significantly increased making only the creative institutions to remain successful and relevant in the industry.

However, the increment and transformation of the marketing spaces and the digital world is not necessarily the issue of concern. Lee, DeRosia, and Christensen (2008; p. 913) are concerned that the gap between the marketing expertise and the sophisticated consumer is widening at alarming rates. The identification of new meanings and trends remains a preserve for highly experienced marketers who understand their clients preferences and expectations. Moreover, a concise understanding of the new distribution channels and relevant marketing trends would be considered essential in enabling the marketers to narrow the gap that exists currently in the market. As a result, the focus of the proposal lies in the ability to dissect and

diagnose the sophistication of the current consumer and the gap existing between the marketers to ensure that marketing meets its objectives.

### **Research Objective**

The major objective of the proposal is to investigate the existing gap between the marketing expertise and the sophisticated customer. In a bid to identify the objective, the proposal will diagnose the research problem using three research questions that would lead the researcher into identifying ideal ways for reducing the widening gap between consumer sophistication and the marketing expertise

### **Research Questions**

1. How does the gap between marketing expertise and consumer sophistication affect organizations?
2. How does consumer sophistication affect the degree of marketing expertise?
3. How has the evolution of the consumer affected the widening gap between the marketing gap and the consumer

### **Rationale of the study**

A majority of previous studies look at strategies used to woo the consumer into making a purchase. While the approach is effective, a majority fail to diagnose the existing challenges that limit the marketers from realizing their objectives. Notably, the existing disconnect between the marketer and the sophisticated consumer is because of the lack of dynamic marketing mechanisms that focus more on the customer. Besides, other scholars including the studies conducted by Day (2011; p. 185) have majorly looked at the gaps experienced in the marketing sector but failed to capture the most significant element that causes the drift: the client. As a

result, the study provides a unique approach into marketing in that it would look at the complexity of the consumer and the marketing environment to help realize why the gap has been widening even when helpful tools such as the cyberspace provide ideal platforms to understand the consumer better. The study will be of significant benefit to marketers in various dimensions. It will provide relevant guidance on how to narrow the gap experienced to capture the interests of the customer. Additionally, the research will create an ideal platform upon which marketers can yield positive outcomes of their marketing functions through the better understanding of the customer. Notably, paying attention to the preferences of the consumer will help yield positive outcomes for marketers and help to develop a consistent mechanism for understanding the changing landscape of the marketing world.

#### **Variables in the study**

The study seeks to study the gap existing between consumer sophistication and marketing expertise. Of key interest is the role of the marketer and the consumer in the study the two form relevant attributes of research, which need assessment to help develop an ideal marketing environment that responds to the demands of the marketer and the issues raised by the modern consumer.

#### ***Independent variables***

The independent variables of the proposal include

Consumer sophistication

Marketing gap

#### ***Dependent variable***

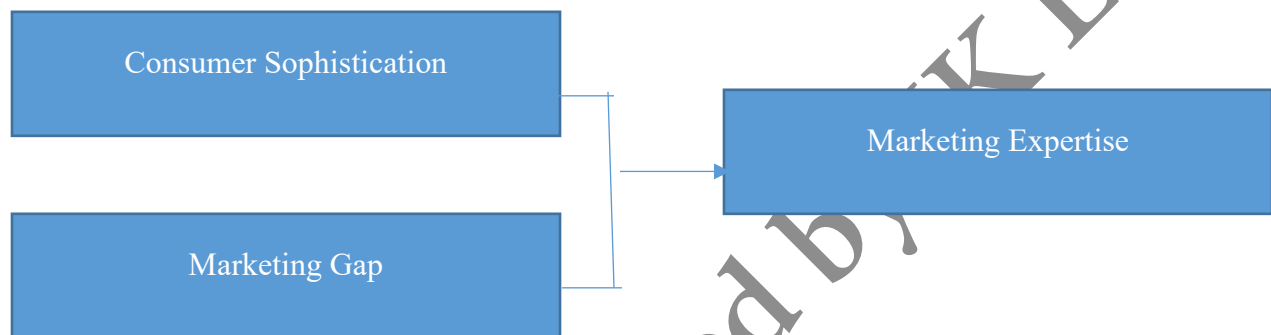
Marketing expertise

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework helps dissect the relation existing between marketing expertise and the sophisticated consumer. The conceptual framework is efficient for the identification of the marketing expertise required to understand the consumer better.

### Independent variables

### Dependent variable



The above conceptual framework illuminates the relationship of the three variables, which include the marketing expertise, the marketing gap, and the sophistication levels of the consumer. Accordingly, when the consumer sophistication level is high, chances are that a high-level marketing expertise must be employed to woo the client. Additionally, when the marketing gap is too high, a sophisticated approach to marketing must also be employed to ensure that the marketer captures the interests of the customer. Poor marketing strategies may have adverse effects on the ability to market organizational products (Chen and Xie, 2008; p. 480). Besides, other intervening factors have a profound effect on the marketing expertise. They include the skill level of the marketers, the technology levels, the market complexity, and financial factors, all of which would have an effect on the progress of an organization

## Theoretical Framework

Several marketing theories have been designed to enhance the understanding of the modern consumer. Notably, understanding the markets would play an instrumental role in ensuring that the correct steps are undertaken to resolve the challenge. According to Day (2011, p. 187), just recognizing the existing gap between the consumer and the marketing expertise does not help to improve their sales or resolve the marketing challenges that they face. Contrariwise, identifying relevant theories as well as how they relate to the strategies of marketing would be instrumental in enabling marketing experts to formulate appropriate mechanisms to respond to the preferences of the sophisticated consumer. Day (2011; p. 185), opines how resource-based and capabilities theories create the assumption that organizations within a given industry are heterogeneous because of the strategic resources that they control. Organizations spend a significant amount of time in the development of various strategies that aim at countering the options offered by competitors. As a result, the firms come up with diverse strategies all of which aim at resolving their organizational marketing needs. The resource base may contain both tangible and intangible endowments, which may include intellectual properties, brand facilities, and networks. The mentioned elements play influential roles in creating a marketing strategy that can be deployed to the advantage of the organization and hence capture the attention of the customer. Accelerating diversity and the demands of the markets is also a key issue of concern to consider given the fact that each organization tailors marketing programs based on the needs of its customers. The following theories provide ideal guidance on how marketing experts can understand the needs of the sophisticated consumer today better. A consumer is a person who expresses capacity and finally purchases a product or service offered by a marketing facility or organization for sale (Lee, DeRosia, and Christensen , 2008; p. 913. The consumer seeks to

satisfy personal needs or desires (Day, 2011; 184). Thus, the theories of consumer behavior offer a relevant focus on human behavior and their behavior towards varying marketing strategies.

### **Theory of Reasoned Action**

Different factors motivate individuals to make a purchase. The theory of Reasoned Action illuminates the importance of pre-existing attitudes during the decision-making process to make a purchase (Pookulangara, Parr, Tanoff and Nix, 2017; p. 2). Notably, the theory asserts that consumers act according to their intention to attain a certain outcome. Accordingly, the theory posits that buyers are rational individuals who choose to act in ways that best suits them. The decision-making process that follows prior to making a purchase dictates. The marketer must associate their products with a positive outcome. Apparently, the ability to yield positive outcomes is dependent on the efforts of the marketer to convince the consumer using all the available resources (Pookulangara et al., 2017; p. 2). The marker must identify the long lags between the intention to purchase and the concepts that may derail the marketing efforts thus hindering the buyer from completing the purchase process.

### **Social-Psychological model**

The theory suggests that human beings are social creatures who tend to conform to the existing standards of culture and the subgroups that they live (Ngai, Tao, and Moon, 2015; p. 37). Individual needs and desires are dependent on a person's membership of given groups (Ngai, Tao, and Moon, 2015; p. 37). The theory highlights that marketers ought to understand the social influences that have an impact on the consumer thus leading to a purchase (Ngai, Tao and Moon, 2015; p. 37). In tandem with the intents of the study, the social-psychological model is enough evidence that marketers must have the relevant knowledge of the social influences that trigger consumers to comprehend the demands of a product in a better way (Ngai, Tao, and Moon, 2015;

p. 37). Consumers are likely to derive satisfaction from a product that makes them be perceived as people in the know. A consumer is likely to spend a lot of money to please others. The ability to be perceived as an individual of a higher social class places significant control in the hands of marketers. At a time when the society has access to several social media handles pages, buyers understand that the impression created amongst their peers commands respect. Thus, marketers can utilize the theory to appeal to buyers who want to impress.

### **Motivation Need Theories**

The theories derive their basic principles from Abraham Maslow who emphasized that people make certain decisions in a bid to fulfill their needs (Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarstedt, and Hair, 2015; p. 123). Individuals adopt a five-part priority system, which analyzes the decisions to make a purchase according to their importance to the life of a person. The adoption of Maslow's theory in marketing plays a pertinent role as it dissects the marketing functions for marketers. Successful marketing campaigns will identify their target group and the content that ought to be used to create successful brands. Besides, the marketing campaigns should not only create awareness regarding the presence of the product in a market. Rather, a marketing expert will make sure that the consumer is able to place a product somewhere in the buyer's hierarchy of needs. The consumer will be motivated to make a purchase by prioritizing the product.

Nonetheless, when the marketer lacks the relevant expertise to trigger a purchase, it is likely that the consumer will not necessarily make a purchase even after expressing interest in the product.

Jussila et al., (2015; p. 123) emphasizes that firms must develop appropriate messages and strategies that will instill a sense of urgency to the consumer to make a purchase.

Marketers must apply the relevance of the theories and their evolution to their practice to win more customers. The marketers must explore diverse ways to utilize the fast-paced

technology to lure their clients into making meaningful purchases. The current society relies heavily on technology to inform their decisions. The ability to gain positive reviews and place a higher value on time should foster to make marketing practices more impactful. Changing values of the consumer such as a decreasing tolerance for marketers especially those that abuse personal data, rising expectations with given brands and the need to utilize modern techniques of marketing should inform marketers of the essence of meeting consumer expectations amidst the dynamic marketing landscape (Jussila et al. 2015; p. 122). Notably, consumer behavior is evolving. The constant change creates a wide gap that market experts have been incapable of diagnosing and developing appropriate responses. However, the analysis of the theories hints that a better understanding of the consumer offers a broad platform for exploration upon which marketers ought to follow to ensure that they realize their objectives.

### **Summary of Chapter One**

The chapter sets the pace for a better understanding of the modern consumer. It provides succinct objectives and research questions, which provide the map that ought to be followed to facilitate a better understanding of the marketing tactics that ought to be deployed to ensure that the gap between marketing expertise and consumer sophistication diminishes. Notably, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks also help construct a clear relationship between the variables that would guide the researcher into making informed decisions on the marketing strategies to adopt. As a result, conducting a literature review of the same would also help in better understanding the views of other researchers on the topic, thus stimulate positive responses from marketers on how to counter the needs and the demands of the emerging customer.



## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **Introduction to Literature Review**

The following chapter incorporates previously conducted studies on the gap between marketing expertise and the sophisticated consumer. It examines the variables of the proposal and then gives relevant explanations based on the concepts of the study. Additionally, the chapter conducts comparisons of the suggestions given by various scholars to identify the cause of the increasing gap between marketing expertise and the sophisticated customer. It analyses the diagnoses of the scholars thereby enabling the researcher to deduce essential points that form the framework of the study.

### **Complexity of the modern Brand Management**

The American Marketers Association define a brand as a term, design, symbol or name or any other feature considered useful in the identification of goods or services from a seller (Wood, 2000; p. 664). Notably, other scholars have defied the definition and believe that the term is outdated and do not necessarily reflect what a brand represents. Apparently, a brand's real value can only be realized when its function is also associated with relevant meanings (Kornberger, 2010; p, 1956). Notably, the process of identification, creating meaning and value is complicated. Apparently, the functions are beyond the control of a company's operations. Thus, marketers are forced to adopt strategies that may make their product have relevance in their respective markets. A report published in the Marketing Week also acknowledges that a brand should not only be color palettes and logos. Rather, a brand should be a distinguishing trait made out of the efforts of successful marketing strategies that aim at convincing the consumer into making a purchase compared to similar products offered by competitors

Contrariwise, Deusen (2016) defines a brand as the amalgamation of external and internal stakeholders whose visions, values, mission and culture are potentially different. The differences are known to play important roles in the creation of tensions and influential perspectives of brand management all of, which have emerged to be new concepts in the world of marketing today. MacInnis and Folkes (2017), also contribute to the discussion of complex brands by adding that the complexity of the modern brand is because of making intricate interpretations of a brand to yield the completeness that a consumer desires to create meaning out of a product. The process of creating meaning and satisfaction demands high levels of proficiency in marketing as strategies to convince the customer to attain the desired meaning of a product from a brand. The ability to interpret a product's intricate meanings is also a subset of the ability to incorporate complex marketing tactics to create an impact to the customer to make a purchase.

A change in the nature of organizational assets is one evidence of the transformation of the marketing landscape. A report in Thomson Reuters acknowledges that unlike three decades ago whereby companies would identify their value with 95% tangible assets, the composition has significantly transformed (Deusen, 2016). Today, the reputation of a brand signifies its value. It represents the firms' possibility to survive in the market and demonstrate its uniqueness to potential consumers. Brand management remains a complex process in today's marketing environment. Unlike the yester years, the process of brand management today encompasses a variety of non-branding facets, all of which are considered essential to stimulate the success of a brand. Today, a good brand reputation value represents a company's intangible assets. Interestingly, Deusen (2016), mentions that the intangible assets comprise 75% of an organization's value. As a result, it is prudent to note that not just the brand names have an

impact on an organization's success. Contrariwise, the processes involved in managing a brand play an instrumental in dictating the success of a given brand (Kapferer, 2015).

A company's focus should seek to capture the interests of its consumers based on the nature of the offerings and product variety that they have. The products should signify the set of mental associations, which consumers should use as cues to add to the perceived value of a product (Keller, 1999;p. 107). The ability to make ideal interpretations of a product plays instrumental roles in convincing the consumer of the validity and of a product compared to another offered by a competitor (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2009; p. 357). Typical examples of companies that have proved their brands are all about performances include Nike and Baileys. Nike News (2009), highlights how its shoes guarantee comfort and performance. Conversely, Baileys mentions that its product is all about the sensations created in taste and not necessarily the alcoholic attribute (Kilbourne, 2012; p.18 ). Thus, brands play influential role in representing the associations of a consumer with a product, they are essential scripts in the definition of individual identities with a product.

### **Causes of a Brand's Dilution/Breakdown in the UK**

An element that may have also contributed to the complexity of the marketing expertise and consumer behavior is the recession. The 2008 financial crisis transformed how the world viewed some of its strongest markets. Exposure to sovereign debt and trade volume shrinkage dipped the value of 100 global brands by 2.4% (Brownsell, 2011). The household brands such as Habitat, RBS Group, Allied Carpets, and Woolworths were all severely impacted. The crisis either led to their liquidation, capitulation, or administration (Telegraph, 2017). In fact, different brands woke up to a transformation of how they conducted business (Johanson, Dimofte, & Mazvancheryl, 2012). Even brands that were known as household names had to transform their

conventional methods of doing things. A rise in unemployment as well as the dwindling levels in income has significantly contributed to a change in the patterns of consumer behavior. Thus, marketers have been forced to put a little more effort in a bid to woo their customers to make a purchase. Notably, Marketline (2015), highlights that consumers have become increasingly shrewd in seeking cheaper options whenever they are making purchases. The effects of such actions are that discount retailers such as Lidl and Aldi are observed to be gaining a market share. Besides, the purchase of private labels is now on the rise (Kadirov, 2015; p. 1780; (MarketLine, June 2015). Thus, the shift in the trends of purchases are known to have significantly affected how retailers conduct their business. Retailers who lack strategies to convince their customers into loyalty admit that their businesses faced significant challenges especially during the recession. Thus, an ideal branding strategy should be recession proof and seek to make sure that the vision of the firm is realized irrespective of the market situation.

As of 2016, brands started experiencing a change in their markets. The economic outlook was more promising and rewarding. Nonetheless, the same benefits were short-lived in the UK. Just when the signs of economic recovery were considered certain, the decision to leave the European Union (EU), created a new challenge. The Brexit brought about further uncertainty in the minds of brands and consumers. It created a great deal of confusion on the long-term impacts on British economy (Carter, 2017). Notably, experts mentioned that Brexit would not only weaken the trade volume of the UK brands with European countries, but also reduce their domestic value by creating a lethargic image in terms of striking offers (Baylis, Owens, & Smith, 2017). Brands are now either falling victims of the current complex environment or impacted by the effects of boycott (Monllos, 2017). The consumers are increasingly choosing to demonstrate their power by refusing to purchase.

The study by Faraji-Rad, Melumad and Johar (2017; p. 347), highlights how the modern consumer has become rebellious to the adoption of new products whose marketing expertise do not meet their threshold or expectations. The study hypothesized that there is an increasing desire for control such that the user realizes personal outcomes in their lives as they had planned. The study illuminated that when individuals have a higher desire for control, they are able to control their preference and even the type of product consumption (Faraji-Rad, Melumad and Johar (2017; p. 350). Nonetheless, “lucky products” and “high effort products”, did not necessarily have to suffer the challenges that are associated with the control to purchasing (Faraji-Rad, Melumad and Johar (2017; p. 347). As a result, the scholars concluded that having a high desire for control acts as a barrier to the acceptance of new products. The willingness to accept a new product is dependent on a person’s capacity to increase their sense of control, which may in turn nurture a likelihood of the acceptance of a product.

Another contribution to facilitate the understanding of the rebellious consumer is evidence in the research by (Rank-Christman, Morrin and Ringler, 2017; p. 333). Accordingly, Rank-Christman, Morrin and Ringler, (2017; p. 333), mention that marketers should foster to develop a better understanding of the motivation and the identity of the consumer before proposing to put certain products in the market. Today’s consumer exhibits avoidance behaviors, which when misidentified may have adversely affect product the performance in the market (Rank-Christman, Morrin and Ringler, 2017; p. 333). A brand can avoid the challenges that come with misidentification by conducting relevant research of a product to ensure that it communicates respect and creates an affirmation that would convince their fragile egos on the relevance of a product.

## Consumer Disconnection

A brand must create a connection with the consumer for it to resonate its values and benefits. The study by Patterson (2012), ascertained that current unparalleled proliferation of digital innovations and communication technology (social) where consumers have access to information at any time and any place must have been creating disconnection between brands and consumers. Earlier researchers pointed out that the collapse of the dot-com companies in the early 2000's must have begun the process of brand avoidance and enhanced consumer disconnection ((Oh, Jantavongso, & Li, 2004. At the time, unprecedented amount of capital was invested into advertising, designing of brands and logos and promotions. Unfortunately, most of the brands failed to deliver on their promise. Resultantly, companies got closed, investors lost millions, and consumers lost confidence in global brands. Interestingly, despite the assurance of using social media to capture the consumers' attention, it emerges that those who solely use it and lack creativity cannot be assured of the resultant economic gains.

Consumers are no longer isolated. Social media, reviews, and comparison sites have given consumers tools to rely on each other's opinions instead of blind reliance on brand delivery promises. There is evidence that consumers in the new digital era are less tolerant of mainstream marketing techniques, increasingly distrustful and disregard one-flow of information delivered through traditional marketing channels (MarketLine, 2015; (Kadirov, 2015; p. 1781; Pace, 2015; p. 1167). However, it is prudent to mention that social media platforms are not necessarily the fine solutions for contemporary marketing. In the connected society whereby social media represents the ideal platform for brands to survive, the inability to utilize the platform effectively hinders organizations from the realization of their brand vision (Kadirov, 2015; p. 1781). Marketing Week (2017), mentions that the inability to engage customers in an

efficient manner diminishes the capacity of organizations to reach their customers. As a result, consumers are also reluctant to cooperate and support the brands that have poor approaches towards their demands. Interestingly, the reviews and discussions may even take place outside social platforms thereby making word of mouth marketing methods more effective. Accordingly, Kadirov (2015; p. 1781), explains that offering the best services and experiences for the customer yields better methods for firms to remain relevant in their respective industries. Besides, the organizations must also demonstrate their capacities to offer customers with the ideal product quality as advertised. Inadvertently, unscrupulous marketers have been using social media to deceive potential customers. Incidences of the customer receiving a final product that does not match the original expectation or imagery representation have been on the rise. As a result, brands can utilize social media platforms to convince their customers of the legitimacy of their marketing strategies and the benefits that they stand to derive by purchasing their products or services.

### **Efficiency of Social Media Marketing**

Evidently, social media has transformed the marketing landscape in diverse ways. The gap between marketing expertise and the sophisticated customer inadvertently grows due to the emergence of several platforms, all of which the marketer must also demonstrate their ability to evolve with upcoming products. The dynamism exhibited in the market demands a high level of precision that would capture the interests of the consumers. The use of social media has enabled the brands to generate their unique audiences whereby they are able to remain connected with the consumer (Den Bergh & Behrer, 2016). The ability to run a successful brand remains a reserve of a few that is not only desirable but also demands the input of the marketer to understand the traits of the customers. The development of a powerful brand is dependent on the ability to

interact with the consumer and develop a significant connection based on their needs. When the communication becomes a challenge, dissecting, and understanding the needs of the consumer becomes impossible. The effects of such miscommunication are that the brand would be incapable of communicating its objectives to the consumer.

The effectiveness of social media stems from the ability to generate a common interest and need from consumers. According to Crosby (2017), social media has become a powerful marketing tool, which when used appropriately generates significant interest amongst disinterested consumers. How a firm engages its customers using its social media pages and handles plays an instrumental role in inducing the customers to support a product. Effective use of social media pages also ensures that relevant prioritization of product concepts and benefits are communicated. As a result, social media may leverage the performance of a product if the brand positions itself well in the market. Resultantly, using social media also helps in tracking the user ratings as well as responding to actual problems and complains raised by customers.

### **Breakdown of Consumer and Brand Relationship**

Brands, the same as institutions, are not immune to consumer scrutiny. Untreated perception gaps may have a detrimental effect on consumer brand relationship. A typical example of the dilution of brands concepts is the introduction of Dasani water by into the UK market. The company had to admit that the product was essentially purified bottled water. Smallwood (2016), goes ahead to highlight how the media frenzy that followed forced the company to withdraw the product from the market and stall expansion into Europe. Another example illustrated by Delmas and Burbano (2011; p. 70) is the green-washing disingenuous tactics used by companies. The tactics are used in an attempt to create a socially responsible image. Skilton and Purdy (2017), explain that the strategies have made consumers even more



skeptical of their intentions resulting in a deeper consumer-brand disconnection. There is a general feeling that consumers distrust corporations, as they are perceived to be overly business-minded and commercially oriented with a primary focus on making profit (Pace, 2015; p. 1167; Delouse, 2017). As a result, the process of ensuring that the consumer is convinced with the quality or legitimacy of a product is complex. The marketing strategies adopted by organizations must also be reflected on the marketing antics adopted by a corporation such that it confirms their positive intentions.

### **Consumer Sophistication**

The research by Lee, DeRosia, and Christensen, (2008; p. 913), indicates that the levels of consumer sophistication have significantly transformed the marketing landscape. Consumers now pay attention to various elements prior to their making of a purchase. Accordingly, Lee, DeRosia, and Christensen (2008; p. 919) mentions that consumers who exercise higher degrees of care are unlikely to be swayed by the components of a trademark. Resultantly, they focus more on the reliability and dependability of a service or a product. Lee, DeRosia, and Christensen further go ahead to describe the sophisticated as one who will spend more time and attention when making a purchasing decision. The consumer will not only look at the relevance of the product, but its worth and impact on their daily lives. On the other hand, the unsophisticated consumer will make purchases impulsively without a care of the reviews or the role of the purchase in their life. The perceived level of sophistication is known to have a profound impact on the sophistication levels of the customer. As a result, marketers would be required to use simple level explanations for such clients to convince them into making a purchase. Ultimately, the gains derived out of the purchase must also be spelt out to ensure that it captures the interests of the consumer.

## The Rise of the Smart Consumer

The modern consumer is more knowledgeable, sophisticated and well informed. Thus, unlike the yester years whereby traditional brands were able to impose their products to consumers, the modern customer is aware of the benefits that they stand to derive from brands. They are able to access information and relevant reviews of products by the click of a button. In a market that is difficult to identify genuine and fake products, it is evident that only companies with integrity can survive in the highly competitive market environment (Day, 2011; p. 184). The ability to create a loyal following and hence the reassurance of the genuine levels of a product is essential. Follows (2015), goes ahead to illuminate that several household names became popular because of the reassurance that they gave their clients. They were able to build a brand name because of the quality of products that they made in the earlier years. The brand purpose in the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> seemed less elude too. Product scarcity was replaced with product abundance. In effect, the outcomes led to the rise of materialism, which in turn, created several unintended consequences (Galbraith, 1958). Brands recognized early how powerful and lucrative exploitation of consumer materialistic tendencies can be. Marketing strategies were designed to instil in consumer minds that a choice of a specific brand predictably demonstrates ‘‘their association or dissociation with members of their own and other groups’’ (Han, Nunes & Drèze, 2010). Earlier Richins (1994) established a strong link between the status signaling and conspicuous consumption. The research found that perceptions of others are key influential drivers for materialistic individuals in the product selection process and that the preference is given to publicly visible and prestigious possessions (Richins, 1994).

Value co-creation has also emerged as a significant element to consider for a majority of the companies that seek to impress their customers. The study by (Martínez-Cañas, Ruiz-

Palomino, Linuesa-Langreo and Blázquez-Resino (2016; p. 793) highlights that the adoption of a holistic management strategy that seeks to create a distinct agent and produce mutually valued outcomes ought to be considered. The processes are known to have a distinct impact on the outcomes of an organization's reputation and brand value.

However, the consumer base epitomizes a different phenomenon in the modern context. According to Burnett and Hutton (2007; p. 344), one of the four trends influencing the modern consumer culture-dominant group is the age of the 77 million baby boomers whose median age is now around 50. It is difficult to ignore that one fourth of the global population is increasingly questioning themselves if their earthy existence has a purpose and how they can influence the change. The Deloitte Survey (2017), highlights that millennials are also seeking deeper meanings and societal stability in an uncertain world. 64% millennials surveyed believe that corporations are not considerate of wider society but focus on their own agenda. An overwhelming 85% agree that financial performance alone should not measure business success (Deloitte, 2017).

The new consumers are on the quest for self-actualization that stems from unrelenting strive to close the gap between their real and ideal selves (Burnett & Hutton, 2007; p. 344). This resonates with Maslow theory (1968) that depicts a human hierarchy of needs, as a spectrum between lower-order physiological needs to higher-order self-actualization needs (Hagerty, 1999). Now that individuals' own needs are satisfied, individuals feel free of neurotic self-concerns and closer to becoming self-actualized. Nowadays society can be described by terms such as "altruistic" and "socially conscience". Consumers are increasingly more inclined towards purchasing products, which are both beneficial to society as a whole as well as themselves (Martínez-Cañas, Ruiz-Palomino, Linuesa-Langreo, & Blázquez-Resino, 2016).

Unfortunately, the more marketers try to bridge the gap between ideal and real expectations the wider it gets. Striking a balance between “material wants” and a “broader sense of life purpose” represents a conundrum, as acquiring a sense of meaning is much difficult than attaining possessions (Easterbrook, 2004). The outcomes lead to a feeling of alienation as marketers gradually find themselves disconnected not only from their ideal self but also, from the people they thought offered the ideal solution to their challenges (Lewis & Bridger, 2011).

Global leadership crisis (Shahid, 2015) coupled with the large-scale of changes in the global economy further heighten consumer sense of estrangement. The media is heavily laden with images of failing societies, violence, fallibility of government leaders, which according to Bauman (2013) leads to escalation of “existential tremors”. This sense of unpredictability and apprehension is responsible for the transformation of the society from an ideal model of solid state with established structures and dependable roles to one where traditional sources of security community, family, and religion – are observed to be undergoing significant changes and transformation feasibly referred to as liquid states (Bauman, 2013). Besides, leadership trends are also known to have a major impact on the way the society relates with its spending habits. Notably, the leadership of a society will have an effect on its economy. The spending ability of the consumers will then be considered to be at the mercies of the consumers who irrespective of the approaches of marketing adopted, they may not necessarily yield into making a purchase.

Undeniably, the topic of consumer behavior has taken a prominent stance in contemporary marketing literature (Goodhope, 2013). What is evident though is that understanding a modern consumer can be an enigma (Saysell, 2017). Current literature is riddled with consumer behavior contradictions. Accordingly, the modern consumer is becoming less isolated and ever connected, increasingly shrewd, ever sophisticated, skeptical of corporate

intentions, less tolerant of traditional marketing, powerful, exercising controls through boycotting, demanding respect. On another hand, the society is growing distrustful, suspicious, alienated, confused, tormented. Perhaps, consumer base is indeed turning from historically homogenous – traditional, loyal, affluent - to highly heterogeneous who is not so much interested in possessions (Duma, Willi, Nguyen, & Melewar, 2016) but in finding deep meaningful connections among themselves and community and society as a whole. Rather, instead of entering into a new era, perhaps, brands and researchers may need to open their eyes to “*deep-seated realities about how people are*” – the spirit of humankind that might have been lost to constraints of artificially created logical and rational world (Burnett & Hutton, 2007; p. 345).

### **New Measures**

The literature demonstrates that traditional ideals of “manipulation and control” need to be replaced by a new whole different set of skills. It seems that marketers are not able to grasp new fields of explanation; this shift is twisting the traditional worldview of marketing and calling for new theoretical tools and methodologies. Heller (2012) highlighted that future models should shift from being product-centric to consumer-centric with its absolute focus on consumers (Heller & ACNielsen, 2012). Zorfas & Leemon (2016) illustrated a real need for brands to create, develop and sustain deep emotional connections with consumers, in fact it was suggested that an emotional connection matters more than customer satisfaction (Zorfas & Leemon, 2016). Notably, the adoption of new marketing tactics are bound to transform how the society perceives the marketing efforts. Marketers need to understand what captures the interests of the consumers before composing their messages and hence their intentions. Some of the notable themes to pay attention to include the need to guarantee the authenticity of a product as well as utilize strategic marketing themes that would convince consumers into making a purchase.

## Re-occurring topics

As it has been established the delicateness of brand management and consumer disconnection is grounded on a number of re-occurring literature topics that will be discussed next with the purpose to establish a research gap and determine if supporting insights can be found.

## Authenticity

One of the revolutionary elements of the marketing environment is authenticity. The 21<sup>st</sup> century consumer expects marketers to deliver on their promise. Accordingly, content creators are aware that they can no longer sell empty promises anymore. Unlike the initial social media marketing strategies, which aimed at bombarding the consumer with empty promises, images and photography for capturing attention, modern day marketing emphasizes on the need to remain legit and ensure that the product on offering matches the expectation of the consumer. Beverland & Farrelly explain that authenticity is a challenging concept to comprehend and intertwined part of the notion of trust. Beverland & Farrelly, (2010) agrees that there is a high degree of agreement that authenticity associations such as truthfulness, genuineness, and conveying meaning to consumers are relevant consumer, behavior factors (Morhart, Mal'ar, Gu'evremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2014). The concept of authenticity escapes a commonly shared designation (Pace, 2015; p. 1167). The concept of authenticity is not fully understood or clearly defined (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014; p. 1093).

According to the Webster's dictionary the term authentic means "being totally trustworthy based on a fact or actuality". Consumers are increasingly questioning what and who they can trust and whether they are too trusting (Burnett & Hutton, 2007; p. 342). As earlier acknowledged in this research the quest for authenticity is fuelled by a collapse of traditional

sources of meanings (Bauman, 2013) and dilution of self-identity in the post modernistic world (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Burnett & Hutton, 2007; p. 344). Being confronted with increasing commercialization, and overwhelmed with meaningless market offers, consumers struggle to differentiate between the “real” and “fake” (Beckett, 2003). The authenticity collapse debate has been further reinforced through emphasis on societal realization that brand stories and advertising simply do not marry up (Campbell, Piercy, & Heinrich, 2012).

To overcome this meaninglessness, consumers are increasingly seeking out authenticity in brands. Consumers demand brands that are relevant, original, genuine and truthful (Morhart, Mal'ar, Gu'evremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2014). To find insights as to how this demand for truth and authenticity can be potentially established by brands to evoke emotional connections with their audience is one of the paramount objectives of this research. It appears that, to achieve the harmonious relationship, the brand needs to engage in meaningful and truthful conversations – being true to consumers, being true to itself, and help consumers to stay true to themselves (Morhart, Mal'ar, Gu'evremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2014); essentially start practicing what is being preached.

### ***Commercial authenticity***

The need to express, self-reference and self-verify plays an essential role in consumer's identity projects and brands are fundamental in realization of those desires (Kirmani, 2009).

Authenticity is recognized to be a crucial element to corporate reputation, brand status and brand equity (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). As quoted by Gilmore and Pine (2007, p.5) – “in industry after industry, in customer after customer, authenticity is considered as the prevailing purchasing criterion for the modern customer. The concept can be equated to that which quality overtook

cost. Alternatively, it could be examined from the perspective of and cost overtaking availability”.

Yet, how can commercially oriented brands enter the group of authentic brands when business and commerciality is generally an opposite idea of sincerity (Pace, 2015; p. 1167). Holt (2002), suggested that to be perceived authentic brands should appear disinterested, of trivial economic agendas (Holt, 2002). Beverland (2005) agreed that obvious marketing prowess need to be downplayed and sincerity conveyed through narrating a story of a brand that would give an idea of being “above commercial gains or economic considerations” (Beverland M. , 2005).

Kadirov’s study (2015) on the perceived authenticity gap between national and private labels also proved that mass-marketing techniques are not suitable for authenticity-enhancing purposes (Kadirov, 2015). However, Beverland et al. (2013) argued that carefully planned advertising, that avoids direct authenticity claims and does not lead to the consumer perception of increased advertising, paradoxically, can be effective in reinforcing authenticity perceptions (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2013) .

Some researchers (Holt, 2002; Beverland, 2005) appear to advocate that one way brands can build sincerity is to connect to communities and subcultures by appealing to more timeless values whilst delivering to members' needs. However, it should not be forgotten that authenticity is not an inherit trait of the brand (Pace, 2015; p. 1167) but either a creation of the individual realized through an act of referencing to their true self (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) or co-created within the community or subculture and grasped through the process of legitimization (Kates, 2004)

Consequently, if a brand advocates or respects the concerns of its subculture it withstands the legitimization test. Most importantly, the brand gains an aura that depicts its sincerity,



because of its cultural characteristics and the subculture's correlating values are accentuated (Kates, 2004). In case of individual consumers, to find essence of the brand, consumers apply a reduction strategy whereby they eradicate unessential components to establish the brand core (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Therefore, Pace (2015; p. 1167) claimed that "no brand can be judged inauthentic aprioristically". The argument emphasized that a commercially oriented brand will never be considered a sincere brand unless a positive attitude towards business is nurtured. Consequently, as long as overarching characteristics of the brand are linked to its ethical and morality values only the consumer can validate that the brand walks its talk (Pace, 2015; p. 1167).

### **Measuring Authenticity**

Mohart et al. (2014) appreciated the heterogeneity of the consumer base and recognised that the distinction between the authentic and inauthentic tends to be influenced by three perspectives – objectivist (It is a quality aspect in an object and evaluated by experts), constructivist (socially or personally constructed phenomenon), and existentialist (a being true to one's self notion). Napoli et al. (2014; p. 1093) established their own consumer-based brand authenticity (CBBA) scale that was based on three dimensions - quality, heritage, sincerity and commitment, that, in turn, were found to correspond with a higher order brand authenticity construct. Sincerity is again represented as an essential concept that captures the value and principles of the brand, and through which consumers evaluate if a brand demonstrates loyalty to its core credos. The sincerity hypothesis was measured by interrogating two items: "The brand refuses to compromise the values upon which it was founded" and "The brand has stuck to its principles" (Napoli et al., 2014; p. 1092).

Manifestly, the constructs of the both studies are overlapping – Napoli et al. (2014)'s quality commitment and heritage are comparable to Mohart et al. (2014)'s credibility and continuity measures. Even though cultural symbolism failed to materialize in any form in Napoli et al. (2014)'s research, the operationalization and conceptualization of the concept's construct was challenged and called for further examination by Mohart et al. (2014). Considering involvement of the highly abstract ideas, this only confirms how complex the process of understanding this subject area is and accentuates the need for more insights. The researcher observes that it is not so much about the value types but rather, the tie between the brand and the values identified. Since values are demonstrated to be of stereotypical nature - personal and/or communal - it is argued, that any values can be considered authentic, as long as the brand maintains its connection with those values

### **Loss of consumer trust**

In 2010, Michael Hulme of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Lancaster University carried out a research for brand owners, alarming US/UK businesses to the trust issue, highlighting the need for wider research into the topic and, ultimately, establishing the practitioner guidance (Robles, 2010). It was found that only 5% of consumers choose to trust advertising, around 8% choose to believe what companies project about themselves, and only 10% believe that businesses are genuinely interested in consumer opinions (Robles, 2010). More recently, Edelman's annual Trust Barometer (2015) found that more than two thirds of consumer would not purchase products from companies they distrust and as many would criticise those products to their close ones (Edelman, 2015).

To mitigate against the lack of consumer trust a "word of mouth" concept represents a new narrative model that, according to Chu & Kim (2011), consumers refer to evaluate "the firm's

ability to make the brand promise real''. This act of exchanging marketing information among consumers assists in better understanding of the firm's marketing messages (Chu & Kim, 2011). The process is also a powerful tool in influencing consumer choices – as much as 68% of users will recommend a trusted company to others (Tag der Marke, 2015). The power of consumer-to-consumer advocacy is really gaining momentum and adoption (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). Trust expressed through online communities is considered a cornerstone in building trust and loyalty amongst participants to the product (Martensen & Mouritsen, 2016).

There is a consensus that brands need to divert their focus from short-term objectives towards fostering long-term relationships with their consumers (Heller & ACNielsen, 2012). Old metrics of measuring credibility and trust need to be redesigned as the power of a brand name or recognized institution is no longer enough to originate trust (Hosein, 2010). Social salience and enduring engagement are fundamental key drivers in ensuring brand longevity (Smith, 2011; P. 40). Marketing communications need to be incorporated into strategic brand dialogues to provide a platform for consumer co-creation, dissemination, and advocacy (Banerjee, Bhattacharyya, & Bose, 2017).

### **Enabling factors**

The earlier discussions have helped to grasp an elusive nature of the concept of trust, its underpinning pillar of authenticity and its constituents. However, it is not yet understood how the brand can introduce those constructs to yield deep mutual relationship. Marketers must identify reliable mechanisms upon which they can tell their product story as well as convince the consumer into making a purchase. Besides, the marketers must adopt the convincing elements that may raise any forms of suspicion amongst buyers thereby diminishing the trust levels that

they have built for their customer. Some of the enabling factors to consider have been discussed below:

### **Narrative Prowess**

Marketing equates storytelling. The creativity of an individual determines their ability to woo their customers into making a purchase. The knowledge savvy consumer is more likely to be convinced by facts rather than narratives that do not necessarily yield accurate information of a product, the narratives are known to have a profound impact in the story telling ability and hence relay relevant content to the customer. Brands can reinforce their identity using the storytelling approaches as long as their models support authenticity. The analysis by Edgecomb (2017), suggests that the presence of social platforms has made storytelling and the formation of narratives. Notably, the analysis explains that the storytelling narrative helps organizations in involving the consumer in several activities. The consumer online experience would also have a profound impact on the narrative that the marketers would adopt. Thus, the social media outfit of any brand will play an instrumental role in creating the image of an organization. It will also build the confidence of the clients with regards to the ability of the formulation of two-way communication methods, known to add value unlike contemporary forms of marketing. Thus, effective management of social media pages plays a vital role in enabling organizations to show the personality of their brands as well as communicate at human levels, which would be impossible when contemporary marketing methods are adopted.

### **Changing consumer role**

Previous consumers relied on marketers to tell them more regarding the benefits of using a particular role. The modern consumer is well informed. The consumer takes time to research, analyze reviews, and identify product components prior to making a purchase. Consumer

participation in the marketing environment implies that the marketer must also be savvy to help the customer make informed decisions regarding their product offerings. Sadly, statistics indicate that a majority of the marketers are clueless and unaware of the demands of their marketing environment. Lack of control and a poor understanding of the trends of the market have had adverse impacts on the abilities of the consumer to respond accordingly to their responsibility. A marketing analysis on the changing marketer's role in the modern marketing environment indicates that firms should have a framework that would enable their marketing employees to prioritize projects and understand their impacts (Yu, 2014). Particularly, subject matter expertise and understanding the solutions of the brands should be a top priority. Notably, the marketers influence how a brand is built. By encouraging employees, marketers develop a formidable method upon which products can perform better in their respective markets. It is easier to convince a client when the marketers are aware of the branding strategy, and the opportunities it brings along (Yu, 2014). As a result, the marketer ought to be their own CEO who will catalyze positive reception of a product in the markets.

Deloitte (2017) emphasizes that the role of building a product brand should be the responsibility of all employees in an organization. Notably, brand managers ought to act as the spiritual leaders and the guides of building a product brand (Deloitte, 2017). Besides, the staffs ought to undergo relevant training and building of their capacities to develop the ideal brand that can communicate organization objectives to the consumers. The modern consumer wants the brand to communicate to them. The consumer wants a voice in their chosen brands, which would enable them to highlight the values that they stand for as the consumers. The competitiveness of a firm in today's marketing environment is dependent on its ability to communicate its objectives to the customer and yield long lasting impacts on their decisions to make a purchase.

## Conclusion to the Chapter

The perspectives analyzed in the literature review are evidence that customers now want a brand that demonstrates their personality. They seek to interact with products whose core values and objectives resonate with their personal purchase decisions. Building a desired brand personality would require the efforts of the brand managers and marketers to build a product transparency that would be adopted by all stakeholders. Besides, it is prudent for organizations to identify feasible mechanisms that would ensure transparent communication takes place, guarantee of product authenticity and their values.

Organizations admit that the only way to remain relevant in any industry is to build a recession proof concept and brand. The recession that took place in 2007/2008 transformed how consumers made purchases. Besides the introduction of technology, consumers admit that understanding more regarding the value of a product informs their decision of a purchase. As a result, marketers and brand managers ought to put more effort to understand the demands of their customers. They should also invest in elements that would trigger positive response depending on their sale environment. The attributes should foster to create value and thus attain the relevance of a product in respective markets. The chapter indicated that the creation of value is web of several intricacies all of which significantly control the ability of a brand to woo its potential client to remain loyal or initiate a product switch from their preferred brands. Poor understanding of the market triggers, customer preferences amongst other factors will have detrimental effects on an organization's ability to convince its customers into adopting their brands. The review has emphasized on the need to demonstrate legit authenticity, a broad understating of the product and ultimately, an ideal understanding of the changing landscapes and triggers of the modern consumer market.

## Chapter 3 Research Methodology

### Introduction to Chapter 3

The chapter provides a direct response to the problem statement whose major aim is to investigate the gap existing between marketing expertise and consumer sophistications. It provides an insight regarding the design, data collection methods, population, sampling, instrumentation and data analysis processes. The chapter also offers insight into any other limitations that may have an impact on the outcomes of the research process. Accordingly, the chapter provides relevant insight that would guide the researcher towards the realization of the study objectives. It ensures that the correct approaches to the theoretical framework and the outcomes of the literature review processes are taken into consideration to help diagnose why there is a growth in the gap between marketing expertise and the modern consumer. Typically, the study will majorly delve on the qualitative approaches, which are well known to offer relevant mechanisms for the assessment of how human beings interact with the components of their environment (Mugenda & Mugenda. 2003; p. 4; Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015; p. 27). The fact that identifying consumer levels of sophistication cannot be quantitatively measured, it is evident that a qualitative approach will provide a formidable approach towards the attainment of the research objectives. Moreover, using a qualitative research approach will provide a distinct insight upon which the research hypothesis and objectives were formulated. It will ensure that the researcher develops adequate information to help inform its audience on the reasons of the escalation of the gap between marketing expertise and the levels of consumer sophistication.

The methodology section will provide a better understanding to the relevance of the better understanding of marketing expertise strategies as well as consumer sophistications, all of

which are known to have played instrumental roles in shaping the modern marketing world. The researcher will pay a greater emphasis on the attitudes of the consumers and the trends indicated by the marketers to help identify why they are unable to meet the expectations of the consumer with regards to their approaches to convincing them into making a purchase.

### Research Aims, Questions and Introduction on the Impact of the Themes

The premise of the research is to identify the “what, how and why” impacts of the narrative on the widening gap between consumer expertise and the sophistication levels of the customer. The development of a framework that would act as a guide for practitioners and marketers is set to transform how marketers frame their marketing content to capture the interest of the consumer. The paper helps in the definition and the creation of relevant drivers, which can help marketers and brand owners to come up with feasible mechanisms of understanding the modern customer. Accordingly, the methodology reiterates the objectives of the literature review, which covered questions associated with the relevant themes that are known to surround the concepts of marketing expertise and consumer sophistication.

Additional sub questions would be used to help address the major objectives of the study. The additional questions will be instrumental in enabling the researcher to structure the interviews and hence develop a relevant approach and mechanism to yield reliable study outcomes. The additional sub-questions for the study will include:

- Do you think social media is an effective marketing strategy?
- Do you think consumer reviews have an impact on your purchasing decision?
- What are your views on commercial authenticity?
- How do you identify an authentic marketer from one that is not?

The literature review illuminated that several factors are to blame for the growth in the gap between marketing expertise and the consumer sophistication. The studies emphasized on



authenticity concepts, essence of knowing the consumer, a review of the marketing expertise, using the ideal narrative, and knowing the customer well (Yu, 2014). Most importantly, understanding the customer provides the relevant platform to customize marketing antics to capture the interest of the consumer.

### Research paradigm

A research paradigm provides a framework or a system of belief that guides an investigation. It identifies the basis of orienting individual research in which a starting point for the research work can begin. The research paradigm is responsible for the development of an ideal belief system, which guides the research process (Saunders et al., 2007). The following study follows the ontological, methodological and epistemological aspects of research, which provide a self-certified philosophy for arriving to the logical process of a study. A broad understanding of the research philosophy offers a platform upon which other audiences can have an ideal understanding of the paradigm prism that the process ought to be addressed. In the research context, paradigms provided the best mechanism to identify the appropriate mode of enquiry.

### An overview of the Research Design

The methodology applied for the study follows a critical realist view approach. Arguably, it seeks to make causal statements and explain the events of the social world using existing phenomenon. The ontological view explores the underlying causes of the observed events and helps in the development of relevant questions to help explain the nature of the phenomena.

Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015) opines that the approach also provides the relevant framework to shed light on the aspects that underlie experienced events. The outputs of such a research framework are that the researcher gains a broader overview of the concept and derives a much better understanding of the data collected. Besides, the interview approach offers an

inductive mechanism whereby the researcher can identify the point at which data patterns start to form and emerge. Relevant themes for the study can also be generated from the output, to help generate a feasible analysis that corresponds to the study outcomes. In view of the study, an inductive approach is identified as more feasible given the fact that it provides a suitable mechanism to uncover the necessary themes for the study.

The use of qualitative design of study will provide a viable method of better understanding of the attributes that create the discrepancy and thus the gap experienced on marketing expertise levels incapable of responding to the demands of the modern consumer. The descriptive approach provides a better framework for understanding the components that are responsible for the making of the complicated consumer.

### **Researcher Position**

The standpoint of the researcher plays an instrumental role in guiding the direction of the study. The need to understand why certain issues happen was a triggering element for the researcher. Thus, the desire to conduct the study was borne out of the need to diagnose the rise in the gap of the sophisticated consumer and the level of marketing expertise. The researcher abides by guided principles that represent a high degree of stoicism in which practical knowledge on the views to minimize the gap of marketing expertise and consumer sophistication can be identified. Besides, the researcher adopts the research mantra in which one identifies that the only way to understand the process is by living in it. It provides a resonating premise that helps in the identification of the relevant structures that help develop broader levels of inquiry for the research design (Lewis (2015; p. 473). Resultantly, the methodology explores feasible mechanisms that would ensure data collection processes yield relevant outcomes to understand the challenges that lead to the broadening of the gap of marketing expertise. The ability to delve

into the concept amicably plays an instrumental role in ensuring that the researcher explores all possible themes that contribute to the outcomes of the study.

Some of the attributes of the research are that it offers a valuable mechanism to get in depth information and rich outcomes out of the study process. Besides, the design approach was useful in facilitating a better understanding of the experiences of the people thus ensuring that qualitative data is inductively generated to yield a required phenomenon (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Finally, the research process was useful given its ability to enable the respondents to open up by describing the events in a way that they best understand.

### **Data Collection**

Consumers have proved to be the trendsetters that inform marketers on the ideal approaches to utilize in marketing. The ability to draw informed conclusions on their preferences with regards to the marketing expertise plays instrumental roles in setting up of new frameworks that would inform future researchers on how to approach the research process. The qualitative design research method will provide a feasible mechanism for the better understanding of how consumers interact with the various marketing strategies in their quest to initiate a purchase (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016, p. 33). Various Assessments on the marketing expertise strategies applied will be conducted to ascertain the efficacy of their ability to mitigate the growth in the gap that exists in the market making it impossible to target the sophisticated consumer. For ease of the analysis process, the study will employ a structured approach of the interview. The responses collected would be instrumental in the formation of informed opinions regarding the study.

The data collection process will be an interview process. Firstly, the researcher will obtain relevant introduction letters before conducting the interviews. The letters aim at enabling

the respondents to identify with the research process as well as understand their obligations when responding to the questions. Besides, the interview processes will give a unique chance to the marketer to understand the issues that may have led to the transformation of the attitudes and the trends of the customers.

### **Interviews and Interview Schedules**

Qualitative design approaches rely on interviews to gain a deeper understanding of a concept. Structured and unstructured interviews may be utilized depending on the audience. However, Lewis (2015; p. 474) confirms that unstructured interviews are normally biased, which makes it difficult to assess a concept. The interviewer may choose lead questions, which tend to favor the marketer and not necessarily yield actual outcomes of the study objectives. As a result, the study will employ the use of structured interviews, which would be employed across all the marketers. Inadvertently, using interviews is expected to yield superior outcomes given the fact that the interviewees will all have a chance to describe the differences in their areas of specialization.

Sekaran and Bougie (2016; p. 33) mention that qualitative study interview approaches also provide an ideal mechanism for the researcher to realize a 100% response rate. Unlike questionnaires, the researcher will have time with the interviewee, thereby garnering relevant answers to the topic of study. However, concerns of bias and control may emerge given that human beings tend to form opinions of their respondents depending on several factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and social status. Nonetheless, for the given study, the researcher emphasizes that the research aims at developing an increased confidence for the outcomes of the study given the superiority levels associated with face to face interviews. The use of the interviews will also be instrumental in enabling the researcher to yield supplementary

information for the interview process (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016; p. 33). It will ensure that the researcher is able to exchange information on their opinions regarding the topic concerned in various dimensions thus yielding higher quality outcomes for the confirmation of the study.

### **Target population and Sampling**

The primary populations of the study were modern consumers aged twenty five to forty five years. The population comprises of 2 two groups. In a bid to gain the insiders point of view, 2 managers were interviewed. Next, a focus group of 5-7 ABC1 consumers were also involved in the study to help provide guidance into the consumer process and the understanding of the consumer process. An assessment of the populations provides relevant evidence of the transformation of the modern markets. Besides, relevant studies indicate that a high percentage of the modern consumer relies on the internet to make their purchases (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003; p. 4). The selection methodology would also be useful in enabling the researcher to identify the triggers that made the consumers prefer making purchases from given online marketers instead of others. Notably, other attributes besides the marketing strategy applied come into play when assessing the willingness of a consumer to select a particular product instead of another. Besides, it is also essential to note that the efficiency of the marketer should not necessarily be limited to the cyberspace. Accordingly, the literature review illuminated that: other concepts including the authenticity of a product, commercial authenticity, and the prowess of storytelling by the marketers may have a profound impact in changing a customer's attitude towards a product. The sampling process will play an instrumental role in shaping the outcomes of the study, given that different marketers utilize varying strategies to fulfill the objectives of the study.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Study**

Conducting the validity of a study offers a unique opportunity to understand better the degree to which the instrumentation tools have identified its objectives. According to Lewis (2015; p. 475), the validity will help yield accurate details of the study variables and the elements that would be considered as utilities. Thus, the extent to which a variance would be identified in the measuring instrument and thus its ability to replicate its true variance with those that have tested positively. The validity test will be employed to ensure that accuracy and meaningfulness of the study is guaranteed. The researcher has the advantage of gaining meaningful outcomes of the study given that interviews will be applied to a given set of respondents while the customers will exclusively use questionnaires. The approach provides a feasible mechanism that makes data analysis process easier and makes the process of assessing the study easier.

The reliability of the instruments used will also be useful in the assessment of the consistency and the stability of the research outcomes. Thus, the degree to which marketing expertise has transformed as well as the changing attitudes of the customers with regards to the market changes will be evaluated. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003; p. 6), highlight that in qualitative studies, the nature of interpretations done on the study outcomes have a profound impact on its outcomes. Thus, the study questionnaires will employ simple language that is easy to understand to ensure that the interpretations made out of the process all match with the intended study outcomes. A consistent approach in the contents of the study will be attained given the fact that the study methods employ relevant mechanisms to yield the results of the two classes of the study groups.

## **Timing**

An ideal project must comply with the set time frames of the study. As initially indicated in the literature review chapters the marketing world experiences a high level of dynamism, which when not considered may affect the outcomes of the study. The data collection period will run from 1<sup>st</sup> August to 25<sup>th</sup> August 2018. The duration is expected to give ample time for the responses and the interaction of the researcher with the relevant groups of the research process.

## **Limitations of the Methodology**

Researchers have always discredited the efforts of qualitative research design mentioning that they are subjective. However, in the context of the research, the researcher intends to attain accurate results regarding marketing and the attitudes of the consumer towards the content of the information given regarding specific products. Another challenge will emanate from the inability to convince marketers regarding the privacy of their trade secrets. Different firms have varying marketing strategies used to convince customers into making a purchase. Despite the assurance of the secrecy and confidentiality of the research process, it is likely that other parties would be skeptical regarding the ability to maintain their business concepts. Others would be willing to give relevant information on how to respond to the needs and demands of their organization. Another challenge would be the ability to gain accurate information from consumers. Sending online questionnaires, which are anonymous, implies that the researcher may have to filter through several responses to find accurate and relevant information for the study process. Thus, the researcher will have to set aside adequate time to ensure that relevant information that responds to critical attributes and variables of the study are answered.

In addition, the research has highlighted the highly powerful and influential side of the consumer. However, the researcher has sensed an underlying side to this phenomenon. Through

the analysis, it became evident that consumers feel empowered, but the literature review suggests that we are also confused, tormented and insecure. Academia could benefit from studies that will investigate if the weak side of consumers are exploited by brands, whether consumers are aware of this, how it is instrumented (stealth, secrets, and duplicity in marketing relationships). The interviews with brand consultants revealed that understanding the consumers helps in making sense of the existence of environment. For example, in case of storytelling, how real does it need to be? How authentic does it have to be? We have adopted a positivist approach in this research, but it would be interesting to investigate negative impact of shared narrative

The outcomes of the results would be generalized for the populations sampled. The methodology discredits the efforts of other strategies utilized by marketers in different parts of the world. Thus, the trends set by marketers in the city may not necessarily be applicable for all. Additionally, despite the desire to attain highly accurate and homogenous data that describes the trends of marketing and consumer sophistication, it is likely that the researcher will be prompted to make data interpretations that suit given organizations depending on their marketing tactics. Consequently, consumer attitudes may differ in different parts of the world. The outcomes of the study will majorly generalize for the area of study and disregard other parts of the world, which majorly rely on traditional marketing tactics before making a purchase. Nonetheless, despite the discrepancies of the limitations, the researcher will ensure the deployment of accurate results and utilization of relevant research instruments to make an informed decisions on the outcomes of the given study.

### **Conclusion on the chapter**

The methodological approach adopted by a researcher plays an instrumental role in defining the outcomes of a study. The chapter gives a broad overview of how the researcher will



use given research tools and instruments to develop informed opinions about the study. It also helps in the identification of given shortcomings that may have a profound impact on the study. The nature of the data collected will be instrumental in the formation of relevant opinions regarding the marketing trends that have transformed the outlook and the landscape of the modern marketing environment. Besides, the interview outcomes will be useful in the formation of relevant opinions on why it is harder to convince the modern customer and hence the growth in the gap of informed consumer opinions and the marketing expertise employed. An instrumental role of the chapter is that it will in a great deal affect the outcomes of the study, how they will be presented and finally the analysis process which will form relevant opinions about the subject.

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## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction to Results

The chapter introduces preliminary outcomes that would be expected once the research is conducted. The literature review provides a clear direction of the study outcomes. It illuminates some of the essential components that the researcher would expect based on the methodology adopted. A typical concept of the chapter is that it gives a general overview on how to use relevant descriptive tools to tie the outcomes of the study to the research objectives and questions. Thus, the section helps the researcher and audience understand the implications of the study outcomes. Nonetheless, the results may deviate from the outputs derived at this stage given that market factors are dynamic. Besides, the consumer controls a significant percentage of the action that marketers can undertake to stimulate their marketing strategies.

### Analysis of Research Themes

#### Role of Marketing Expertise

In the yester years, marketers presumed that irrespective of the marketing tactic used, the consumer would still purchase their product. An analysis of the outcomes of the literature review indicated that the modern consumer is more informed and is unlikely to purchase a product based on the marketing approaches listed. Thus, the results identified that firms are currently forced to revise their marketing budgets in a bid to encourage the new consumer. The outcomes of the questionnaire also indicate that consumers are more likely to make a purchase from an organization that communicates issues that resonate with a majority of their concerns.

Accordingly, consumers will be comfortable to purchase a product from a facility that understands their product preferences. Marketers who understand the changing needs of the consumer admit that they do not have to struggle in convincing their clients to make a purchase.

### Impact of the Recession on Marketing Tactics

Notably, the outcomes of the research illuminated that up to 67% of the firms acknowledged that their performance has been inconsistent for the past decade. Besides, the firms also admitted that a transformation in the marketing environment is known to have affected their performance.

Apparently, organization leaders admitted that they have to remain innovative to realize the benefits of their marketing strategies. Those that fail to take into consideration the changes that are taking place in the marketing environment lose business and are forced to re-strategize their business. The results are consistent with the outcomes of the literature review, in which Johanson, Dimofte and Mazvancheryl, (2012), explained that after the recession, marketers who failed to incorporate the essential elements of marketing expertise to upgrade their operations, experienced a significant shift in their performance.

Subsequently, the research responses also indicated that organizations have recently been forced to adjust their marketing tactics given the fact that the impacts of the recession had adverse impacts on their performance. Apparently, the recession changed how consumers spend their income (Brownsell, 2011). The fact that disposable income has significantly shrunk, consumers are now more careful with their expenditure. As a result, marketers ought to convince their consumers of the need to invest in their products. Organizations have been forced to revamp their marketing strategies in a bid to capture greater markets. 65% of the marketers mentioned that they are now forced to change their marketing strategies at least biannually. The changes provide them with a platform to stay in touch with their consumers. The outcomes are evidence that marketers do not rely on conventional methods. Majorly, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were found to provide alternative avenues for capturing the interest of the consumer.

### **Disconnect with Consumer Needs**

Besides, in a bid to guarantee the authenticity of their products, marketers mentioned that they make relevant follow ups to ensure that they get relevant consumer feedback regarding the products that they offer. Apparently, an issue of major concern was the ability to guarantee that the quality of product advertised matches that on sale.

Thus, the outcomes of the research question indicated that organizations that are able to remain creative, innovative and assure consumers of quality could wade through the challenges of the modern marketing environment. In addition, a revision of the marketing trends and tactics was found to be essential in enabling the organizations to remain relevant in their areas of expertise. Interestingly, the new changes in marketing strategies were found to be affordable, simple to use and convenient. Consistent with the findings of on Kadirov (2015; p. 1781) regarding Facebook and the ability to provide prompt feedback, the marketers admitted that interacting with clients provides firsthand information to understand better the preferences for consumers.

However, it is evident that the frequency of changing marketing strategies is one of the reasons why marketers are out of touch with their customers. Apparently, adequate time is required to enable marketers learn the preferences of their customers. That does not imply that the marketers stay out of touch with the events that are taking place in the market. Nonetheless, to learn more about a consumer, time is required. Consumers would also prefer a marketing approach that seeks to understand their preferences. Thus, firms should not misinterpret the concept of revamping marketing expertise frequently, yet what they need is a better understanding of the preferences of the modern consumer.

### **Consumer Sophistication**

The literature review identified that marketing expertise is an essential ingredient to understanding the consumer better. The article by Yu (2015), illuminated how clueless some of the marketers are with regards to attending the needs of the customers. Replies from the questionnaires also indicated that marketers would have to put more effort in convincing their customers. One of the challenges identified based on the replies of the questionnaires was that consumers mentioned that no longer do marketers have a significant impact on their ability to make purchase decisions. Notably, if the marketers are unable to change the attitude of the customer to influence a purchase, then it is likely that they would have a difficult time in convincing consumers to make a purchase (Kadirov, 2015; p. 1782). Understanding what the consumer wants and the elements that convince them into making a purchase is essential in enabling the marketers to customize their messages and repackage what they are selling to ensure that resonates with consumer expectations. However, when the consumer admits that they have no idea of what influences their decision, then the gap between marketing expertise and the consumer is bound to increase.

When the marketer is unable to convince the customer into making a purchase, then it is likely that the customer would make a purchase. Understanding such a consumer complicates the ability of the marketer to customize the appropriate message to ensure that the product sells. The literature review indicated that one of the components that make it difficult to understand the modern consumer is consumer disconnection (Patterson, 2012). Resultantly, the marketer is prompted to put more effort in convincing the consumer to make the purchase. Additionally, the consumer is no longer dependent on blind reliance for a brand to communicate its product offerings. Besides, the new consumer is less tolerant on brands that are unable to deliver their promises. Thus, it is prudent for the marketer to identify strategies that would resonate well with

the consumer. When the consumer does not appreciate the effort of the marketer in informing them regarding a product, then the sale process and hence the organization performance would be significantly affected.

The adoption of unique platforms such as online marketing is a by-product of the sophisticated customer. Marketers and organizations are forced to restructure their marketing efforts in a bid to convince consumers. According to the report by Yu, (2015), a lack of understanding of the sophisticated customer has cost many organizations the chance to convince the customers into brand loyalty for their products. Thus, the complexity of the customer makes it difficult for marketers to design an appropriate response mechanism to respond to the needs of the customers. Moreover, when the marketer is unaware of the preferences of the customer, it is likely that the efforts utilized would not even resonate well with the consumer to trigger a purchase.

### **Consumer Evolution**

Marketers develop appropriate response mechanisms to counter the sophistication levels of the customer. The response mechanisms aim at ensuring that the consumer makes a favorable decision to ensure the purchase of their products and services. The development of a brand is a complex process, which demands a careful analysis of the target market. Nonetheless, the outcome of the study process illuminated that the gap between the sophisticated consumer and the level of marketing expertise continues to widen. The rate at which new marketing strategies are deployed implies that it would be difficult to deploy an appropriate approach to even remain loyal to a particular brand. However, the outcomes of the questionnaire illustrated that known brands had an easier time to market their products. In fact, product reviews of popular brands were found to have a significant influence on the consumers' decision to make a purchase (Tag der Marke, 2015).

Thus, as much as online marketers rely on online media platforms to give their products limelight in the markets, it is evident that if they are unable to maintain interaction with their clients, then their products and services would not necessarily have an impact to the client. The reviews made by other persons tend to initiate a purchase (Chu & Kim, 2011). As a result, marketers should consider the need to interact with their consumers through a narrative approach that resonate with their expectation. The only way to capture the interest of the consumer is through maintaining a consistent communication channel whose objective is to monitor consumer.

Given that consumers admitted that, they majorly rely on online platforms to identify the existence of a new product and their reviews, marketers ought to identify strategic means to woo their clients towards making a purchase. Apparently, the inability to understand client preferences stems from a lack of follow up by the marketer to identify the preferences of the consumer. Nonetheless, it is also evident that the complexity of the modern consumer gives a challenge to the marketers making it impossible for them to respond accordingly to the preferences and needs of their customers. A disconnect between the two parties is a significant aspect to consider, as it has led to the widening of the gap between marketing expertise and the consumer sophistication.

#### **Relationship of outcomes with variables**

The study analyzed the 3 variables: consumer sophistication, marketing gap, and the level of marketing expertise. Based on the outcomes of the study, it was identified that marketing gap and expertise are directly proportional consumer sophistication. When the consumer is more sophisticated, it is imperative that the marketing tactics applied also be more complex. Notably, the review identified that the modern consumer is highly learned. The modern consumer is no longer dependent on the type of marketing information disseminated to enable them make a

decision regarding a product. The use of platforms such as social media have emerged as game changers in the industry making it impossible to presume that the consumer would be driven by marketing tactics to make a decision regarding a purchase.

In a bid to understand marketing expertise, several evidence linked marketers to lack of information and knowledge on how to capture the consumer's attention. Apparently, when the marketer is clueless about the consumer, chances are that the nature of message disseminated would not necessarily capture the interests of the customer. As a result, the research encourages marketers to remain proactive in identifying the mechanisms to capture the interest of the marketer, in a bid to convince the consumer into making a purchase.

The marketing gap escalates because the levels of expertise and consumer sophistication differ in various levels. When there is a disconnect on the marketing strategy utilized ad the client expectations, it is likely that the gap would equally reduce. Thus, it is imminent that organizations identify relevant mechanisms to meet the expectations of customers.

### **Evaluation**

The above results play an instrumental role in the marketing sector with regards to convincing the consumer regarding the need to consider their products and services for purchase. A significant challenge identified is the inability to predict the customer's preferences using conventional marketing tactics. The study provides an ideal platform upon which marketers can exploit their potential to enable them transform their approaches towards the modern consumer. The results, helped convince the audience that online marketing ha significantly transformed people's attitudes towards the marketing process. Thus, how other consumers recommend a product define their attitude towards it.



**Limitation**

The study also had its weaknesses. Firstly, the methodology used to select the participants of the study implied that there would be very few participants. The participants were also from one town. The limitations make it difficult to assess the impacts of given marketing methods. Identifying what works for one region cannot be generalized to represent the views of other consumers in other parts of the world. It can only apply in the country where the research was conducted. Time and financial constraints may also be to blame for the inability to conduct a comprehensive study. Finally, the research did not conduct relevant assessments to identify specific interventions that ought to be applied to ensure that the marketing expertise resonates with the expectations of the customer. As a result, the research process may consider such shortfalls to help yield the desirable outcomes of undertaking the reason for the widening of the gap between the modern sophisticated customer and the marketing expertise available.

**Conclusion of the chapter**

The chapter conducts an analysis on the responses made by the consumers regarding their attitudes towards different marketing styles that have an impact on their intent to purchase. The analysis identifies that a dynamic market environment, complex customer and evolving marketing trends are some of the challenges that have widened the gap of marketing expertise and the ability to woo the complex consumer into making a purchase. Notably, the influence of online marketing has also been identified as marketers are unable to exploit the potentials of the platform, as it should be done. Constant transformations of the marketing environment are also known to change how the consumer responds to given marketing approaches. As a result, marketers should concentrate more on understanding their customer to enable them to develop an appropriate response mechanism that would counter their attitudes towards them.

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## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The chapter provides an overview of the lessons gained through the study in the quest to understand the reason why the gap between marketing expertise and the sophisticated consumer is widening. It further goes ahead to offer relevant recommendations, which marketers can consider to enable them to convince the customer into making a purchase. Most importantly, the section combines the outcomes of the objectives of the study to those identified in the result section to enable marketers to come up with a responsive mechanism to counter the challenges that they are facing to understand the consumer.

### **Conclusion on Themes**

#### **Authenticity**

The analysis of the themes identified key issues that have an impact on the marketing expertise and levels of consumer sophistication in today's markets. Consistent with the literature review outcomes, the study identified that authenticity in marketing is one of the critical ingredients to take into consideration the new trends and events that are transpiring in the modern markets.

#### **Social Media Marketing**

The other contribution is the rise and impacts of social media marketing. Arguably, the research identified that social media transforms the current marketing landscape by providing an avenue for prompt feedback and interaction with the consumer. Unlike the yester years, social media has proved to create a sudden shift or organization mechanism of marketing. The research identified that a marketing platform that triggers interaction and prompt feedback is much better than one, which is static.

#### **Sophisticated Consumer**

One notable element that stood out in the study is the sophisticated customer. Arguably, the research identified that the events of the last recession yielded a consumer who thinks twice

before making a purchase. The customer has all the relevant information that makes them able to counter any claims given by a marketer if not well researched. Thus, marketers must conduct thorough analyses of their products before entering into a sale or agreement with consumers given the fact that consumers not only make decisions based on the marketing information. Rather, they also derive relevant reviews on products from reviews.

### **Marketing Expertise**

The ability to remain dynamic yet retain the principal concept of marketing also arose in the study. Marketing methods, which are not necessarily commercial oriented yet evoke authenticity were found to be more effective. As a result, it is prudent that organizations identify feasible ways to market their brand mages to enable them to remain relevant.

### **Implications of research**

There is a tremendous opportunity for businesses to stand out and demonstrate that they have a strong commitment to people. We posit that reputation and character will be what matter most, and that the ability to give your brand a personal connection with customers will be a measure of success in the future. Ultimately, a brand willing to make this commitment also becomes a key tool for gauging customer circumstances so that the company can recalibrate its approach in order to remain relevant. That is, company management must understand the customer's emotional and social "context" for making decisions. During economic slowdowns, customers may scrutinize more and differently, allowing fear and uncertainty to seep into their psyches. But they still make purchases, and they continue responding to brands they consider relevant, whose core value propositions resonate and which are flexible enough to accommodate any changes or disturbances to their mental state and their personal values". (Burnett & Hutton, 2007)

**Recommendations for future study**

Inadvertently, future researchers may conduct assessments on the appropriate variables for investigation to facilitate a better understanding of marketing expertise and the sophistication levels of the client. Future studies can evaluate specific marketing expertise traits thus identify their impacts in convincing the customer on making a purchase.

**Recommendations of the study**

Several improvements ought to be considered to enable the marketers counter the challenge of the widening gap to capture the attention of their customers. The following recommendations are appropriate in enabling marketers to counter the challenges associated with the inability to capture the interest of the consumer.

*Ensure that the brand manages an active social media platform-* one of the outstanding elements of the study is the use of social media for marketing. The platform helps marketers to interact with their customers, thereby deriving relevant cues from the customers regarding their product preferences

*Consider mixing marketing strategies and revamping marketing approaches-* A critical attribute of the research process is that the modern consumer is still evolving with regards to the retrieval of information. The consumer is more informed and would not shy from discrediting untrue marketing methods. As a result, marketers must conduct relevant researches to help them identify the approaches that would capture the attention of the consumer.

*Guarantee authentic marketing approaches-* a major complaint of the customers that led to their evolution is untrue marketing strategies. The consumer expects the product on sale to be of the same quality as that advertised. As a result, when authenticity is of products is guaranteed, and then the customer reviews would be positive (Napoli et al. (2014; p. 1096). Such a tactic

encourages the customers to support a brand. They would also give positive reviews that would encourage other consumers to purchase the product.

### **Conclusion**

Resultantly, the evolution of the customer emerges from the need to identify authentic marketing approaches that would encourage the customer to make a purchase and even recommend others to consider using a product or service. The challenge of working with marketers who are clueless about the needs of the customer and deploy conventional marketing practices should also be dealt with. Notably, the new customer has proved to have an unmatched prowess with regards to soliciting of information. Marketers should also move with equal speed to counter the evolution of the consumer. Most importantly, a unique focus on a marketing approach that guarantees narratives and authenticity rather than commercial hype should be adopted. Additionally, marketers should embrace given marketing strategies by embracing researches, which seek to understand the consumer better. The actions would ensure that the marketer identifies how to respond to the needs of the customer amidst turbulent market times. Most importantly, identifying how to convince the customer that a product is essential and authentic would play a vital role in creating the desire to close a purchase.

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Examples Provided by JK Essay

**Appendices**

The appendix section contains the introduction letter, which would be submitted to given marketing departments in organizations, the consumer questionnaire and the interview schedule for marketers.

**Structured Interview for Consumers**

Please respond with a tick (✓) where appropriate

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age

19-25

26-30

31-35

3. Do you use online marketing to make purchases?

Yes

No

4. Do you think online marketing has transformed the traditional marketing outlook?

It has transformed very much

Little transformation

No transformation

None of the above

5. If no, why not?

Lack of access to reliable internet



- Inability to authenticate products
- Prefer traditional purchasing methods
- Lack of trust for modern marketing methods
- None of the above

6. What impact do marketers have an impact on your decision-making ability when making a purchase?

Very high impact

High impact

Moderate impact

No impact at all

7. Do you think an advert or marketers message can change your opinion on a product?

Very likely

Likely

Moderately

Not likely

8. After making an online purchase, do the products meet your expectations?

Always meet expectation

Sometimes meet expectation

Never meet expectations

None of the above

9. Do other people's product reviews affect your decision when making an online purchase?

They always affect

They sometimes affect

They never affect

None of the above

10. What is your attitude on established brands in the marketing scene?

Always have an impact on my purchasing decision

Have negligible impact on y purchasing decision

Do not have an impact on my purchasing decision

None of the above

Examples Provided by JK Essay

**Introduction letter**

Date

Dear Participant:

Re: request for participation in research

My name is xxxx. I am a graduate of the xxx institute marketing department. I am conducting a study titled “The Gap between Marketing Expertise and the Sophisticated Consumer: in search of New Meanings”, which aims at shedding more light to consumers and marketers on the importance of understanding the changes that are taking place in today’s marketing environment.

I am inviting employees from several firms of the marketing department. The employees are expected to help shed light on the changes that have taken place in today’s marketing environment. The process will take only fifteen minutes and does not have any adverse effects on your work schedule, ethics or security. Copies of the responses of the interview schedule will be used for analyzing the research work after which they will be destroyed. Anonymity will be guaranteed as well for all the marketers and their respective organizations.

Thank you for the anticipated cooperation. I believe that the study outcomes will be useful in facilitating a better understanding as to why marketing expertise has been unable to respond to the expectations of the modern consumer.

*JKEssay*

*VX: ProWriter-1*

### Interview Schedule for Marketers

Are you a marketer?

Yes

No

How many years of experience do you have in the departments?

0-2

2-4

4-6

6-8

How often do you revise your marketing strategies?

Monthly

Quarterly

Bi-annually

Annually

Do you utilize online marketing methods?

Yes

No

How do you capture the interest of the consumer into making a purchase?

Do you make follow ups to ensure that what you offer is what you advertised?

Yes

No

How do you respond to negative and positive reviews posted on social media network?

How do you handle the concept of authenticity with regards to your marketing strategies?

*Examples Provided by JK Essay*

*JKEssay*  
*VX: ProWriter-1*