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Автор(лар)	Bolat Ainur Sabitkyzy
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**«DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER LOYALTY IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT: A
MARKETING PERSPECTIVE»**

Bolat Ainur Sabitkyzy

ainur.bolat@narxoz.kz

Master's student (Year 2), Marketing program

Narxoz University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

Research Supervisor – PhD, Professor A. M. Duisebayeva

Introduction. The speed at which technology has evolved has changed the marketing landscape, how companies can reach their target audience, and how they communicate with them. Today's consumers use social media platforms, mobile apps, and online communities to connect with each other and with businesses; therefore, these are now considered necessary avenues for building relationships with consumers.

As stated by Kotler et al. (2021), the shift towards digitalization has changed the traditional model of transactions in marketing to a model of relational exchanges. With this new relational exchange model, developing customer loyalty has become one of the most important strategic assets for businesses today. Customer loyalty provides many benefits including repeat business, word-of-mouth advertising, and ultimately profitability. Although, studies show that there is an abundance of options available to consumers when deciding where to spend their money due to the decrease in barriers to entry created by digitalization, specifically by decreasing "switching" costs. Studies further show that more than 60% of customers will engage in some form of interaction with a company via digital means prior to making a purchasing decision (Statista, 2023); therefore, digital touch points play an increasingly larger role in determining how a customer behaves. Therefore, identifying the determinants of customer loyalty in the digital environment is a topic of great interest to researchers and practitioners alike.

The objective of this research is to identify and evaluate the main variables that affect customer loyalty in the digital environment, with specific reference to the FMCG industry and its marketing strategies.

Literature Review.

Concept of Consumer Loyalty

Behavioral loyalty refers to a customer's tendency to make repurchases. Attitudinal loyalty is also conceptualized as emotional engagement and brand preference. The nature of how consumers form their loyalties has been changing with recent research suggesting that customers are developing loyalty to companies based on an overall quality of service they receive in terms of customer experience and interaction versus simply the functionality of the products or services being sold (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). The digital environment also allows for continued customer interaction at many different "touch points" creating a continuous stream of information that affects customer loyalty.

Digital Marketing and Consumer Behavior

The growth of digital marketing has increased the variety and the extent of brand-consumer interaction. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) stated that due to digitalization, the possibility for brands to interact with their customers through personalized and real time communications is enhanced thereby increasing both customer involvement and satisfaction. Digital marketing is also impacted by social media sites, as well as by the perception of those who use them. Tuten & Solomon (2020) pointed out that digital content can be used by companies to provide information about products or services and create emotional relationships with their customers.

Key Determinants of Loyalty in the Digital Environment

The literature identifies several key factors influencing loyalty:

- Trust and credibility
- Emotional engagement
- Content relevance and consistency
- Personalization
- Integrated customer experience

These factors interact dynamically and collectively shape consumer loyalty in digital ecosystems.

Methodology. In this study we are employing a qualitative methodology for our data to be collected through an examination of actual business practice in the FMCG industry. For the empirical part of the study we will rely on case studies that analyze how the company uses digital communication, develops promotional campaigns and engages with consumers using digital technologies. The empirical part of the study is focused on a children's dairy product brand working in Kazakhstan. We are examining their digital communications strategy (digital content), how well they were able to promote their product through different types of promotions (campaign performance) and how effectively they integrated both on-line and off-line marketing tools.

Analysis and Discussion

Factor 1: Trust and Brand Credibility

Trust is one of the most important components of customer loyalty. Morgan and Hunt (1994) also stated that trust will be an important factor for long-term relationship development in exchanges. Transparency and authenticity will have increased importance in the digital world because customers can now find so much information about products, services, etc. and therefore are able to see many competing claims. FMCG practices indicate that brands that do not exaggerate or make unsubstantiated claims and provide clarity on what their products offer build a better reputation of credibility. A study completed by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001), found that building a high level of trust in your brand will help you create customer loyalty.

Factor 2: Emotional Engagement

Emotional connection is an additional major motivator for loyalty, especially when there are family/children focused product categories. Hollebeek et al. (2014) found that consumer engagement has been associated with the degree of emotional/cognitive involvement consumers have with their

chosen brands. Examples of how emotional connection can be built include; stories told about your brand, consistent communication and visual representation of your brand. Since children's brand products influence both the child and parent on purchases, these factors become even more significant.

Factor 3: Digital Content Strategy and Interaction

Content influences both customer loyalty and how customers perceive brands. Pulizzi (2012) believes brands need to provide the right type of content at the right time to build a long-lasting relationship with their customers. However, providing the correct amount of product focused content vs. lifestyle/engagement content is crucial. Although product related posts make up 43% of the overall content in the current example; it appears the company has taken a somewhat balanced approach to the types of content they post. While lifestyle and engagement content are obviously important, if there isn't enough product information or visibility – this could potentially negatively affect the ability of customers to remember your brand name, as well as positively influence purchase intent.

In addition to engagement, the company's digital presence had some growing pains. The company's social media audience consists of 5,016 followers. At this point, this number represents a small base, however its one that can be expanded upon by focusing efforts on reaching new people through all forms of social media.

Factor 4: Personalization and Customer Experience

Personalization is a key factor influencing loyalty in digital environments. Wedel and Kannan (2016) argue that data-driven personalization enhances customer satisfaction and retention. Empirical evidence indicates that personalized communication can increase retention rates by up to 20% (McKinsey, 2022). In FMCG practice, personalization is implemented through targeted promotions, segmented communication, and tailored content.

Integrated Marketing Communications. One of the most significant findings of this study is the importance of integrated marketing communications (IMC). According to Kitchen and Burgmann (2015), IMC enhances message consistency and strengthens brand positioning.

The analyzed promotional campaign demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating digital and offline channels. The campaign attracted 1,953 participants, with 701 unique users registering in the Telegram bot, representing 70.3% of total visitors. Among registered users, 426 participants (61%) uploaded purchase receipts, indicating strong conversion from engagement to action. The total number of registered receipts reached 544, with an average of 1.3 receipts per participant.

Furthermore, the campaign demonstrated high efficiency in verification processes, with 92% of receipts approved, reflecting strong execution quality.

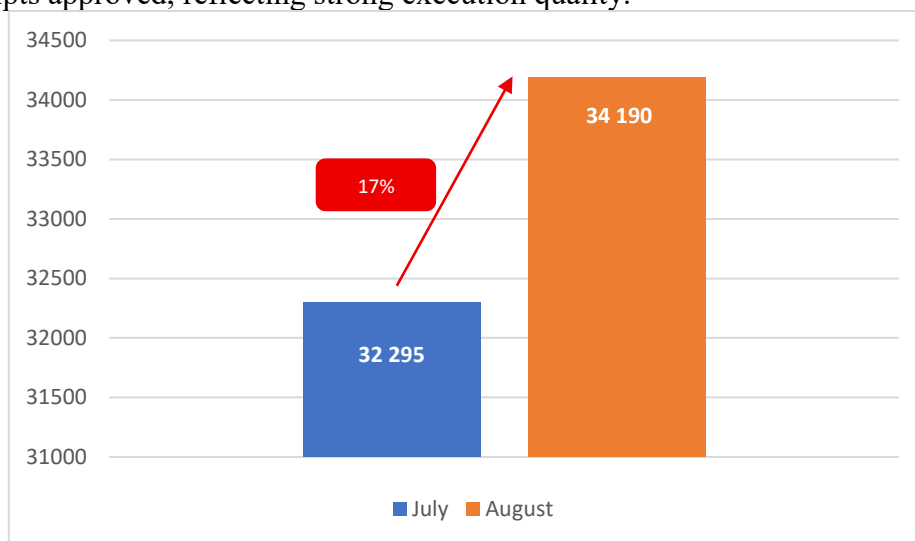


Figure 1 -Sales increase during the promo period

Sales performance also improved during the campaign period. Total sales increased from 23,290 kg in July to 27,223 kg in August, representing a 17% growth (index 117). This confirms the positive impact of integrated marketing activities on sales outcomes.

Market Context and Competitive Environment. The use of customer loyalty building strategies must therefore consider how they will affect the competitiveness of each business in its marketplace.

In Kazakhstan the dairy market is very heavily concentrated with large market share holders. For instance, Lactalis hold's a 45.2% market share by volume of the overall dairy market; and 78.6% of the drinking yoghurt market share (indicating that it has a clear advantage in terms of competitive position). However, in the children's segment, Lactalis hold an almost insignificant 12% of the market share, while one of its competitors leads at just under 67%. Therefore, effective digital and marketing strategies are vital to ensuring that brand positioning is strengthened, and as such, consumers can become loyal customers in those highly competitive areas.

Implications. The results of this research indicate that a holistic, integrative strategy is required for developing consumer loyalty in the online marketplace. In order to provide both engagement and brand recall, companies should establish an equilibrium between emotionally focused and product-oriented marketing communication. Companies need to develop transparently and build trusting relationships with their customers to foster long-term relationships. To create consistency across all customer experiences, a company's use of an integrated marketing communications plan which combines digital platforms, retail events/activations, and promotion (marketing) will be important. To make the customer experience more relevant and to increase retention rates, a personalized/digital strategy based on the collection of data will be effective.

Conclusion. The digital environment has fundamentally changed the mechanisms of consumer loyalty formation. This study identified key determinants of loyalty, including trust, emotional engagement, content strategy, personalization, and integrated marketing communications.

The empirical analysis demonstrates that integrated marketing strategies supported by digital tools can significantly enhance consumer engagement and drive sales growth. However, maintaining a balance between different communication elements remains critical. Future research may focus on quantitative analysis of the relationship between digital engagement metrics and loyalty indicators, such as customer lifetime value and market share.

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