

Brand Equity and the Influx of Counterfeit Automotive Lubricants among SMEs Engaged in Lubricants Trading in Kenya

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Purpose: To establish the extent to which brand equity influence influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya.

Methodology: The technique to be used in this research was descriptive in nature. The study targeted the 42 licensed SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Nairobi. Thus, the study conducted a census survey by covering all the units in the population. Semi-structured questionnaires formed a primary mode of data collection in the research with special focus on SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Nairobi County. In order to ascertain how valid and reliable the questionnaires are, a pilot study was carried out. The study used qualitative as well as quantitative methods which prior to analysis, data were sorted to ensure completeness. Coding of the responses was done, in order to enable the data to be analyzed using SPSS software. The quantitative information was analyzed descriptively, and inferential statistics were drawn by the use of SPSS software.

Results: The study found that, brand equity ($\beta=0.284$, $p=0.010$) had a positive and statistically significant relationship with influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading related.

Contribution to policy and practice: Therefore, based on the above findings, the study recommended the implementation of working and operational policies on forging need to be made serious. The key enforcement agencies including the police, Customs, the Fiscal Service, the anti-monopoly authorities and the consumer protection authorities need to cooperate and work in unison for the best interests of the automotive industry and to protect the brand owners. The customs register at the border likewise need to maintain high quality standards to face out the sale of counterfeit automotive counterfeit lubricants.

INTRODUCTION

The automotive industry is a vital component of Kenya's economy, contributing to employment, technological advancement, and trade. Within this industry, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role, driving innovation, competition, and economic growth. The automotive lubricants sector, a crucial segment of the industry, ensures the smooth functioning and longevity of vehicles. However, the presence of counterfeit automotive lubricants threatens the industry's integrity, SMEs' operations, and consumer safety.

Counterfeit automotive lubricants, often substandard and unauthorized, imitate reputable brands, deceiving consumers and compromising vehicle performance. The proliferation of counterfeit products poses multifaceted challenges, including economic losses, decreased consumer trust, and potential safety hazards. This issue has drawn attention from policymakers, industry stakeholders, and scholars, prompting inquiries into the factors contributing to the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants.

Among these factors, brand equity emerges as a critical consideration. Brand equity encompasses the perceptions, associations, and sentiments consumers hold towards a brand, resulting from their interactions and experiences with it. A robust brand equity instills confidence, reliability, and quality assurance among consumers, discouraging them from opting for counterfeit products. Conversely, a weak brand equity may lead SMEs to choose cheaper alternatives, inadvertently contributing to the counterfeit lubricants market.

While brand equity's influence on consumer behavior has been studied extensively in various contexts, its specific impact on SMEs' purchasing decisions concerning automotive lubricants remains relatively unexplored, particularly in the context of the Kenyan automotive industry. Investigating the relationship between brand equity and the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs is essential to comprehend the mechanisms driving SMEs' preferences and choices.

This study seeks to explore the intricate dynamics between brand equity and the prevalence of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs in Kenya. By analyzing SME owners' and managers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, the research aims to provide insights into the extent to which brand equity serves as a deterrent to the purchase of counterfeit lubricants. Through an in-depth investigation, this study endeavors to contribute to the understanding of SMEs' decision-making processes and their implications for the automotive industry's integrity.

Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of counterfeit automotive lubricants poses a substantial challenge to SMEs operating within Kenya's automotive industry. These SMEs, crucial contributors to economic growth and employment, face vulnerabilities stemming from limited resources, inadequate awareness, and insufficient regulatory oversight. The prevalence of counterfeit lubricants not only undermines the quality and performance of vehicles but also threatens the safety of consumers and the reputation of SMEs.

At the core of this issue lies the interplay between brand equity and the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants. Brand equity encompasses intangible assets such as consumer perceptions, loyalty, and trust, which significantly influence purchasing decisions. A strong brand equity often leads consumers to opt for genuine products due to the assurance of quality

and reliability. Conversely, a weak brand equity may prompt SMEs to consider counterfeit or low-quality alternatives, inadvertently contributing to the counterfeit lubricants market.

Despite the potential significance of brand equity in deterring the purchase of counterfeit products, limited empirical research has investigated its specific role among SMEs in the Kenyan automotive lubricants sector. This research gap highlights the need for an in-depth examination of the relationship between brand equity and SMEs' decisions to purchase automotive lubricants, particularly within the context of counterfeit products.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- i. What is the level of brand equity among SMEs in Kenya's automotive lubricants sector?
- ii. How does brand equity influence SMEs' purchasing decisions concerning automotive lubricants?
- iii. To what extent does brand equity serve as a deterrent to the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs?
- iv. What strategies can SMEs adopt to enhance brand equity and mitigate the purchase of counterfeit automotive lubricants?

Theoretical Background

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

TRA was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). It comprises of three constructs known as: behavioral intention, attitude as well as the subjective norm. According to this theory, a person's behavioral intention is a component of the person's disposition about the conduct and subjective norms. Behavioral Intention is characterized as the person's motivation or expectation to conduct themselves in a certain way. Attitude on the other hand includes the different convictions about the results of playing out the conduct, while subjective norm relates to the apparent societal expectations from different people and the eagerness to conform to these expectations. To put it plainly, a person's willingness towards a certain behaviour/conduct is anticipated by the frame of mind toward the conduct being referred to and how it is expected that other individuals would see them if the conduct is performed (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

TRA, is still widely known as a general model that does not directly state specifically the beliefs that are operative for a certain behavior, it suggests that a person's behavior is determined by the intention to do a certain action. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) recommended using modal salient beliefs for the population obtained by taking the beliefs most frequently drawn out from a representative sample of the population. The Theory of Reasoned Action was also successfully applied in a reasonable number of times to predict the performance of behavior and intentions. A good example is when TRA was used to predict education in a study by Fredricks and Dossett (1983) which predicted the behavior and intentions of individuals who used different types of technologies.

According to Doswell, Braxter, Cha and Kim (2011), the main aim of the TRA is to comprehend the voluntary conduct of an individual by examining the underlying fundamental incentive to act. Thus, TRA posits that the intention of a person to execute a conduct is the primary predictor of whether or not that behavior is actually performed (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2015). Pikkarainen *et al.* (2004) states that the Theory of Reasoned Action operates with some

assumptions. It assumes that consumers behave rationally, and consumers gather and analyze information systematically. It was also determined that based on this rational decision making, consumers would evaluate the risk of that action and decide on their next steps (McNeil, 2012).

To the current analysis, the theory explains how legislation influences influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya. Despite counterfeits being illegal, the populace still manufactures, trade in or buys and consumes such products in case of non-deceptive counterfeiting. This is encompassed in peoples' attitude towards breaking the law in regard to knowingly purchasing counterfeit commodities.

METHODOLOGY

The technique to be used in this research was descriptive in nature. The study targeted the 42 licensed SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Nairobi. Thus, the study conducted a census survey by covering all the units in the population. Semi-structured questionnaires formed a primary mode of data collection in the research with special focus on SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Nairobi County. In order to ascertain how valid and reliable the questionnaires are, a pilot study was carried out. The study used qualitative as well as quantitative methods which prior to analysis, data were sorted to ensure completeness. Coding of the responses was done, in order to enable the data to be analyzed using SPSS software. The quantitative information was analyzed descriptively, and inferential statistics were drawn by the use of SPSS software.

FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics was done to show the summary of the findings by including mean and the standard deviation.

Influx of automotive counterfeits

The respondents were supposed to indicate respond to the statements. The results were presented in the following table:

Table 1: Table showing the frequencies and percentages of the influx of Automotive Counterfeits

Statements	Scale	Frequency	Percent
How many times have you unknowingly purchased counterfeit automotive lubricants from wholesalers	Infrequently	17	41.5
	Frequently	24	58.5
	Great extent	16	39
To what extent do you receive customer complaints about counterfeit automotive lubricants	Moderate extent	17	41.5
	Low extent	8	19.5
	Great extent	13	31.7
To what extent is the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricant a problem to your firm	Moderate extent	18	43.9
	Low extent	10	24.4

The results in table 1 above show that 58.5% agreed that they have frequently and unknowingly purchased counterfeit automotive lubricants from wholesalers. In addition, 80.5% also indicated that they have to a great extent received customer complaints about counterfeit automotive lubricants. Furthermore, 75.6% of the respondents indicated that the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricant is a problem to their firm.

Descriptive statistics of influx of automotive counterfeits

The respondents were supposed to indicate respond to the statements regarding influx of automotive counterfeits. This was done using the **5 point scale of Strongly Agree (5) Agree (4) Neutral (3) Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1)**.

Table 2: Descriptive results in percentage, showing the responses regarding legislation

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	S.D
The counterfeit automotive lubricants have led to revenue loss in your firm	0.00%	14.63%	9.76%	39.02%	36.59%	3.98	1.04
The customers have raised many complaints regarding counterfeit automotive lubricants	0.00%	7.32%	19.51%	39.02%	34.15%	4.00	0.92
The purchase of counterfeit automotive lubricants has lowered the loyalty of the customers and thus loss of customer base	4.88%	14.63%	7.32%	41.46%	31.71%	3.80	1.19
The profitability of the firm has been inconsistent due to the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants	2.44%	2.44%	19.51%	41.46%	34.15%	4.02	0.94
Average						3.95	1.02

The results in Table 2 revealed that majority of the respondents (75.61%) indicated that the counterfeit automotive lubricants have led to revenue loss in their firms. The responses had a mean of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 1.04. Majority of the respondents (73.17%) indicated that the customers have raised many complaints regarding counterfeit automotive lubricants. The responses gave a mean of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 0.92. Furthermore, majority of the respondents (73.17%) indicated that the purchase of counterfeit automotive lubricants has lowered the loyalty of the customers and thus loss of customer base. The responses showed a mean of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 1.19.

In addition, majority of the respondents (75.61%) indicated that the profitability of the firm has been inconsistent due to the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants. The responses gave a mean 4.02 and a standard deviation of 0.94. On a five-point scale, the average mean of the responses was 3.95 which mean that majority of the respondents agreed with the statements regarding the influx of automotive counterfeits; however the answers were varied as shown by a standard deviation of 1.02. These findings have been found to be consistent with those according to worldwide annual trade reports which indicated that counterfeit goods are on the rise and currently stands at 3.3% (OECD, 2018). Furthermore, the findings of the IACC show that this problem has grown by more than 10,000% over the past 2 decades, partly due to increased consumer demand. Falsification costs companies up to \$250 billion annually in the United States (IACC, 2017). In addition, according to Kojima, Matthews and Sexsmith (2010), petroleum products which drives a better part of the economy of African countries has been noted to have encountered numerous cases of adulteration. In Tanzania an estimated loss of up

to US\$ 1.5 billion is due to counterfeits. Other statistics going by conservative estimation from the study on counterfeits conducted in 2012 indicate 40% of their genuine goods sales are lost annually as a result of trade (Kanyathare, Kuivalainen, Rätty, Silfsten, Bawuah & Peiponen, 2018). This is an indication that the problem is worth the focus even in the current contextual focus.

Brand equity

The respondents were supposed to indicate their understanding on the following statements relating to brand equity and its influence on influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya. These were their responses as shown below:

Table 3: Table showing the frequencies and percentages regarding brand equity

Statements	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Does brand equity influence influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya?	Infrequently	8	19.5
	Frequently	33	80.5
To what extent does brand equity influence influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya?	Great extent	9	22
	Moderate extent	19	46.3
	No extent	13	31.7

The results in the table 3 above revealed that 80.5% indicated that brand equity has an influence on the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya. In addition, 68.3% of the respondents indicated that brand equity influences influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya to a great extent.

Descriptive statistics of influx of statements regarding brand equity

The respondents were supposed to indicate respond to the statements brand equity. This was done using the **5 point scale of Strongly Agree (5) Agree (4) Neutral (3) Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1)**.

Table 4: Descriptive results in percentage showing the responses regarding brand equity

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Usually, individuals who are in the same social class or the class above them, are more likely to buy lubricants that are branded	12.20 %	0.00 %	14.63 %	36.59 %	36.59 %	3.85	1.28
Benefit segmentation advocates have emphasized the significance of product characteristics in the persuasion process	14.63 %	4.88 %	4.88%	43.90 %	31.71 %	3.73	1.36
Customers are not willing to compromise their loyalty because of lower prices of the fake automotive lubes	2.44%	0.00 %	14.63 %	41.46 %	41.46 %	4.20	0.87
The attributes of the image of the product can influence the way customers feel about them	14.63 %	2.44 %	4.88%	46.34 %	31.71 %	3.78	1.33
Customers are well aware about the genuine automotive brands and can distinguish them from the fake ones	2.44%	4.88 %	9.76%	39.02 %	43.90 %	4.17	0.97

Average

3.95 1.16

The results in table 4 above revealed that majority of the respondents (73.18%) agreed that usually individuals who are in the same social class or the class above them, are more likely to buy lubricants that are branded. The responses had a mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 1.28. The results also exposed that majority of the respondents (75.61%) agreed that benefit segmentation advocates have emphasized the significance of product characteristics in the persuasion process. The responses gave a mean of 3.73 and a standard deviation of 1.36. Additionally, 82.92% of the respondents agreed that customers are not willing to compromise their loyalty because of lower prices of the fake automotive lubes. The responses scored a mean of 4.20 and a standard deviation of 0.87. The results also showed that 78.05% of the respondents agreed that the attributes of the image of the product can influence the way customers feel about them. The responses gave a mean of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 1.33.

Moreover, majority of the respondents (82.92%) agreed that customers are well aware about the genuine automotive brands and can distinguish them from the fake ones with the responses getting a mean of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.97. In conclusion, the average mean of the responses was 3.95 when viewed on a scale of five points. This means that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statements on brand equity. However the answers were varied as shown by the standard deviation of 1.16.

These results were in line with the findings from Abid and Abbasi (2014) who indicated that toughness (durability), quality and physical appearance are 3 most important attributes customers search for when thinking about buy of fake items. It has been said that in purchasing of these counterfeit products, physical appearance and the strength of the forger, might be more critical to the purchaser than long-run item quality. For instance, on account of luxury goods, a trademark or brand is utilized to motivate the customer/viewer instead of to ensure quality. Thus, customers/shoppers will be progressively propelled to purchase the item.

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the association between the variables. That is if it was positive or negative. It measures the strength of two variables that in a linear association, with a denotation of r . The denotation of r , is estimated using a threshold of +1 to -1. The association when a value is above 0 means the value of the other variable in linear comparison increase with a positive value, when the value is below 0 this shows that there is a negative association and the linear relation decreases on the same line. When $r = 0$, we may not assert that there is no correlation at all between X and Y. The extreme values of r , that is, when $r = \pm 1$, indicate that there is perfect (positive or negative) correlation between X and Y. However, if r is 0, we say that there is no or zero correlation (Taylor, 1990; Gogtay & Thatte, 2017).

Table 5: Correlation results between lubricants and its determinants

Variables		Influx	brand equity
Influx	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
brand equity	Pearson Correlation	.502**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results in the table 5 show that brand equity and influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Nairobi County have a positive and significant relationship ($r=0.502$, $p=0.001$). The r value of 0.502 indicates a value of greater than 0 which implies that brand equity as a linear variable has a positive association with influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants. This implies that an increase in units related to brand equity resulted in a direct increase in the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants. These findings were consistent with those of Sharma, Saboo and Kumar (2018) whose claim was that the customers tend to associate with numerous traits with a specific item or brand. Their attitude in general, towards a brand is an element of the significance the person in question. Similarly, Chung (2017) indicated that as the quantity of imitator brands rises, so too will lawful activities for trademark encroachment, in view of customer confusion, unjustifiable misappropriation of brand proprietors' protected innovation, and decreased revenues from sales. Plan of action to the law is time-consuming, costly, and can be unusual due to the profoundly emotional and conflicting manners by which brand confusion is estimated and demonstrated.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

the study sought to establish the extent to which brand equity influence influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Nairobi County. The results revealed that brand equity has an influence on the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Kenya. In addition, the correlation findings noted that brand equity and influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading in Nairobi County have a positive and significant relationship. The r value of 0.502 proved that the association was positive thus, an increase in units related to brand equity resulted in a direct increase in the influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants. Furthermore, the regression corroborated the findings by indicating that the relationship was statistically significant, where an increase in one unit related to brand equity would result in influx of counterfeit automotive lubricants among SMEs engaged in lubricants trading by 0.284 units. These findings were consistent with those of Sharma, Saboo and Kumar (2018) whose claim was that the customers tend to associate with numerous traits with a specific item or brand. Their attitude in general, towards a brand is an element of the significance the person in question. In addition, they were in line with the findings from Abid and Abbasi (2014) who indicated that toughness (durability), quality and physical appearance are 3 most important attributes customers search for when thinking about buy of fake items. It has been said that in purchasing of these counterfeit products, physical appearance and the strength of the forger, might be more critical to the purchaser than long-run item quality. For instance, on account of luxury goods, a trademark or brand is utilized to motivate the customer/viewer instead of to ensure quality. Thus, customers/shoppers will be progressively propelled to purchase the item.

Recommendations of the Study

Since counterfeit products are fakes bearing a trademark that is identical to, or indistinguishable from, a trademark registered to another party, they infringe on the rights of the holder of the trademark. This deteriorates the automotive lubricant industry affecting not only the companies whose goods are copied but also, more broadly, trading relationships, the economy

and consumers. Therefore, based on the above conclusions, the study recommended the following:

The implementation of working and operational policies on forging need to be made serious. On account of their more fragile lawful assurances for International Property Rights and lower dimensions of authorization, the government needs to enforce laws that exhibit piracy at its highest levels in order to protect the copyrights of the lubricant producers. The enforcement needs to likewise cover the consumers in order to ensure that the lubricants are genuine for quality purposes.

The key enforcement agencies including the police, Customs, the Fiscal Service, the anti-monopoly authorities and the consumer protection authorities need to cooperate and work in unison for the best interests of the automotive industry and to protect the brand owners.

The customs register at the border likewise need to maintain high quality standards to face out the sale of counterfeit automotive counterfeit lubricants by tracking and confiscating them right at the border and the right legal action to be taken before illegal automotive counterfeit lubricants enter the market.

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