

Brand loyalty among low-income consumers in South African townships: a case study on Sunlight Liquid

By Sneathemba Phakathi
and Adrie le Roux



Growing up with a father who lives and breathes the industry, marketing is in **Sneathemba Phakathi's** blood. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Media & Writing, Social Anthropology and English Language and Literature from the University of Cape Town. She attained her BA (Hons) in Strategic Brand Communications from the Vega School of Brand Leadership. Sneathemba is a dedicated, dynamic and results-driven individual with a penchant for research who hopes to make waves in the marketing industry.

RESEARCH FOR THIS ARTICLE WAS CONDUCTED IN THE AUTHORS' CAPACITY AS HONOURS IN BRAND LEADERSHIP STUDENTS AT VEGA SCHOOL, A BRAND OF THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION.

This study sought to explore how the Sunlight brand has established and maintained brand loyalty among lower LSM groups in South Africa, with particular reference to the use of advertising. There exists limited literature (from recent years) that focuses specifically on black female South African consumers who fall into lower LSM groups. This article presents findings from a research study conducted in 2016, in which qualitative data was gathered from twenty black females residing in the Msawawa township and Diepsloot, with an income of less than R2 500 a month. Data was gathered using eight semi-structured interviews and one single focus group. Although the sample is not representative of the population and findings cannot be generalized, the data revealed factors that contributed to brand loyalty among the selected participants.

LiveMoya (2016), a South African behaviour change consultancy, notes

that although townships comprise predominantly low-income consumers, the number of consumers living in these segments mean that they represent buying power. Brands should not only market to this segment in their preferred language, but also through the use of narratives that resonate with them. A number of South African brands have already elevated themselves to what Ask Afrika and the Target Group Index (TGI) (2016) refer to as 'icon brands' through the use of narratives that resonate with intended target markets. Alistair Mackay (2014:22) writes that: "South Africa's history and context has profoundly influenced the kind of themes and stories that we tell one another, and the themes that inspire and motivate us. Brands that can authentically leverage these archetypal stories will connect with South African consumers in a way that really makes an impression. But as with all brand-building today, it requires marketers to do things that demonstrate these narratives rather than just talking about them in an ad."

Consumers who fall into lower LSM group categories have limited disposable income, and as such need value for money from the products they purchase.

The data were analysed using



Adrie le Roux recently completed her PhD in Visual Arts at Stellenbosch University, with a focus on the feasibility of the use of wordless picture books in developing a culture and love of reading within the South African context, approached from her viewpoint as an illustrator. She currently works as a freelance illustrator and research supervisor in Pretoria, South Africa, and has published two children's books with Bumble Books.

thematic analysis, and patterns and themes identified are discussed below:

BRAND USE TRANSCENDING GENERATIONS

All participants said that their first encounter with Sunlight Liquid took place at home. Their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and other women in the home used this dishwashing liquid. Based primarily on this experience, they have come to trust and value the brand. They noted that it is hard to break away from products that they grew up with. One participant stated that: "Even though





they would consider using another dishwashing liquid, one participant noted: "I think that I will want to try it but Sunlight is nice...I know ukuthi iyasebenza [I know that it works], futhi anginamali yokudlala [and I do not have money to waste]. So, I will continue to use Sunlight..."

Several interviewees shared a similar sentiment. They would want to try out a new dishwashing liquid, but they have used Sunlight for years, making a brand switch very difficult.



**'A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY'-
PERCEIVED QUALITY AND A
REMINDER OF 'HOME'**

When asked how often they purchase Sunlight Liquid, the focus group immediately recalled the phrase, 'a little goes a long way', the tagline of a popular Sunlight Liquid television advertisement that they had seen on television. This was the phrase that they have come to associate the most with Sunlight Liquid.

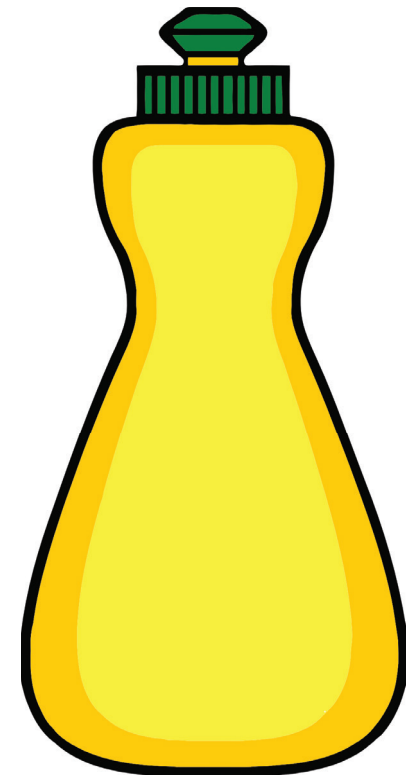
Participants reported that the advertisement reminded them of their childhood homes and the poverty they grew up in. They assert that there is great truth in the advertisement and expressed sentimentality about it. It was clear that the advertisement evoked emotion among the participants.

Value for money was a product benefit that was mentioned numerous times by participants. One participant stated that she thinks many people think Sunlight Liquid is "too expensive and they don't want to buy it so they choose a cheap one that finishes quickly." She explained that people are unaware that Sunlight Liquid actually helps one save money, because it lasts longer. Many respondents from the focus group agreed, saying that the liquid is also multipurpose.

When asked whether or not

there is a cheaper soap, I will still buy Sunlight. Ma, my aunts and neighbour used it when I was young. I still buy it because I saw that it is a nice washer [dishwashing liquid] ...so it works for me and I know that my girls will use it [too]."

Participants have maintained their relationship with the brand, even though they are no longer living 'at home'. One participant stated that "uGogo [grandmother] used it a lot... it would be in a small box...from the stokvel. And took long to finish. I use it still because I can save imali [money]".



**SUNLIGHT LIQUID
ADVERTISEMENTS AND BRAND
LOYALTY**

In an attempt to derive whether or not a relationship between brand loyalty and advertising existed among participants, several questions about the media that they consume and advertisements they encounter were asked. Participant media consumption was predominantly in the form of

magazines, newspapers, posters and television. They mentioned that they had seen Sunlight Liquid print advertisements in local publications such as Drum and Move magazines, and on posters at their local shops. Participants said that they believed that advertising played a role in their purchasing decisions. One noted that: "There is [are] many other soaps at the stores ...I think that I would buy them. I see something in a magazine, paper, TV or poster...I want to find out about it. Like if I see shoes or anything in a Jet advert on the TV, I will want to

see them live [in real life] ...and see if I want to buy them. I think kubanjalo with yonkinto [*it is like that with everything]."

Many stated that they think it is important to see a product and be reminded of its benefits. Product involvement and brand loyalty are positively related, so the more consumers are involved (and exposed) to a particular brand, the more committed and loyal they are to that brand (Karunaratna, Lim and Quester, 2003).

Many participants state that the cost of living in the Gauteng province is too high, and they have had to substitute many of their favourite brands with cheaper ones, but they have been careful to keep the Sunlight brand in their homes because they are constantly reminded, through personal use and advertisements, that the liquid lasts longer than others and is value for money.

DRAWING ON NOSTALGIA AND RELEVANT NARRATIVE

Participants indicated that they felt the role of advertising is just as important as that of encountering a particular product in the home space. Although they stated that their first encounters with Sunlight Liquid took place at home, advertisements about the brand have acted as a reminder of the product benefits, with some participants saying that the more they are exposed to an advertisement, the more likely they are to purchase a product. However, the importance of the perceived benefits of Sunlight among participants was continuously reinforced during interviews. All participants had come to value the Sunlight brand because their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and other females in their childhood homes did.

The study focused particularly on historically disadvantaged black women who occupy informal and formal

housing, a division of people who may still be somewhat excluded from South African studies on advertising. Although these people lack financial resources (income), they still have buying power. This study sheds light on one particular group, extracting nuanced views and opinions on Sunlight Liquid.

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