

Panama's Consumer Behavior Research Project

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Abstract: The research problem focused on Panama's low-income consumer's decision making process when shopping for consumer-products. The purpose of the research was to determine Panama's low-income consumer's consumption values, preferences and loyalty towards a particular brand over another. The qualitative research method was employed in this study, and data collection process consisted of observation and in-depth interview documents that were organized and categorized. The results of the study found that Panama's low-income consumer's brand preferences were widely varied and brand loyalty behavior was influenced by consumers' knowledge, perceptions and commitment towards a particular product and service provider. Recommendation for further study addressed the marketing strategy that could be used to identify consumers' consumption preferences and loyalty towards a particular brand.

Key words: Latin's consumer; consumption behavioral patterns

JEL code: M31

1. Introduction

In the past two decades, globalization has created economic integration growth for both developed and developing nations alike. This is mostly due to emerging markets accepting trade liberalization policies, which did reduce trade barriers, and dropping tariffs on imports and exports, and thus allowing for foreign capital inflows and domestic outflows to be used as a way to increase economic growth and development for their marketplace. Nevertheless, some economists are suggesting that the international actors, who benefited the most from this globalization process, are developing nations (World Bank Policy Research Report, 2000). For example, globalization has brought advance technology, communication, service industries, and an established knowledge-base with manufacturing opportunities for large developing economies which have an abundant of natural resources such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC). Also, this globalization process is fueling less developed economies with a large cheap labor pool such as East Asian Pacific, Middle East, Africa, and Latin America by allowing them to compete in this global economy (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003).

As a result, some economists have suggested that globalization has helped to revive the growth of developing nations by providing them with foreign capital that has strengthened their domestic financial institutions, stabilized regional stock and currency exchanges rates and controlled domestic inflationary and interest rates, and provided employment opportunities for low income households (Kuczynski, Fishlow & Blejer, 1992). For instance, global economic integration has helped the Latin America's economy gross domestic product (GDP) to grow by an average of 4.5% to 8.5%, but its gross national product (GNP) grew at a lopsided average of 1.5 to

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15.9 percent during this decade (Tolliver-Nigro, 2006). Thus causing large GNP gap between neighboring nations that lead to disparity income distribution in their societies (e.g., “haves and have not”), which is the reason why there no such thing as an “average” consumer in this region (Rubel, 1996).

Therefore, Latin America's income distribution problems have created global marketing dilemmas for marketers that are trying to tap into these region low-income consumers. Due to the host nation's social and economic conditions that influence their buying behaviors. As a result, international marketers must understand the nation's cultural, social and economic and marketing variables, if they are planning to sell any products in this marketplace. For instance, Raju (1995) study proposed that marketing researchers should use these four stage consumer behavior formats, so as to better understand how to deal with the local consumer purchasing and consumption processes. They are as follows: access, buying behavior, consumption characteristics and disposal (with the acronym A-B-C-D). This consumer tool format was design by the author to provide generalization and recommendation for those planning to market their products in developing nations.

For that reason, this consumer behavior format should be used to resolve these recent purchase decision issues that were stated in the Wall Street Journal (January, 07). The article stated that Interpublic Group's McCann (a marketing agency) is launching a \$2 million advertisement campaign to target less-well off consumers in some Latin America countries such as Mexico, Chile, Colombia and Panama. This niche market campaign is aimed at those consumers that probably make less than \$2 a day and others with household income that is about \$500 per month. This international marketer has noticed that people, who were once thought of as not well-off enough to buy their products, may be the fastest growing consumer group. As a result, this spring (March 07), McCann's researchers will be living with those potential consumers to find out their brand loyalty, purchasing habits and symbols or celebrities which motivate them to purchase particular products. According to Regaldo (2007), “McCann plans to study 100 families that makes less than \$500 a month and have at least two children. Research director Josafat Solis will spend a week with a family in Panama City, Panama. Workers will study language use, cultural references, as well as symbols and images that can be used in campaigns.” (p. B3). So the question is; what consumer behavior variables are influencing Panama's low-income consumers' decision making process when buying a particular product?

2. Review of the Literature

This paper will review academic marketing literatures in the consumer behavior, consumer perception, consumer loyalty, and pricing strategy field from previous empirical studies that are addressing consumer buying power in a developing economy. These marketing concepts were used by marketers to help resolve purchasing decision making issues that affect low income consumers. As a result, these empirical and theoretical contexts will be used to analyze low income consumers in a developing nation such as Panama.

2.1 Why Marketers are Targeting Latin Nation's Low Income Consumers?

As previously mentioned, Latin America's economy is booming due to its economic reforms policy, new democratic outlook and free trade policy that is attracting foreign investors to the region. These foreign investors may have brought tangible and non-tangible assets such as manufacturing jobs and advanced communications and technologies industries, which has help Latin America's GDP rate to grow at a double digit pace (between 4 to 8 percent range) in the two past decades (Hodgson, 2006). As a result, international marketers are trying to find new ways to provide products and services to a marketplace that has over 500 million potential consumers located in

twenty diverse countries with a 35 billion net capital inflow, which is about 4 percent of its GNP (Rubel, 1996). Despite Latin America's GNP prosperity, it has one of the largest income disparity issues among developing nations and thus creating a poverty line between the "haves and have nots" of which the less-fortunate have an average per capita income of US\$7,500 per year for a family of four (Ramos, 1996).

Consequently, some international marketers are trying to design an effective marketing campaign that is tailored to the less well-off consumers by providing affordable products or services, which meet their needs. For instance, Interpublic Group's McCann is conducting a marketing research study to identify what type of products should be sold to the low income classes due to their regions income disparity issues. This marketing research project is exploring why low income groups are the fastest growing buying power in Brazil and other Latin countries. Where one-third of Brazil's population and accounts for at least half of its national income that is about \$239 billion of its annual revenue (e.g., GNP) (Regalado, 2007). Therefore, this marketing research paper will explore a Latin America nation's low income consumers' buying power such as Panama (e.g., Latin/Spanish culture).

There is no statistical information on how many low-income groups make up Panama's population. However, Panama's comptroller-general's office has released this economic figure for the year 2006, which states that the country economic active population (EAP) comprised 62.9% of the urban population and 61.8% of the rural population. This employment growth is due to high the degree of free trade zone activities, tourism, foreign real estate investment, Canal-related inward investment and transportation, and housing construction activities in this country's metropolitan and interior area (EIU ViewsWire, 2006). Therefore, this skilled labor force will give the researcher a better insights on how the other half (i.e., Latin America's less fortunate) really lives.

As stated in a recent news journal that Panama's multicultural population is the creation of many different ethnic groups. For instance, the majority of Panamanians are black mulatto (black and Caucasian) or mestizo (Caucasian and indigenous) an ethnically diverse country to huge immigration during the construction of the Panama Canal that started at the end of the 19th century. As a result, Panama is also known as the "melting pot" of the Central America that includes various nationalities such as the Caribbean or West Indians English-speaking, Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, European and North American descents, which brings a multicultural flavor to this beautiful Latin Isthmus (EIU ViewsWire, 2006). For these reasons, this research paper will look into these multicultural buyer behaviors such as consumer perception, consumer loyalty and consumption values (Raju, 1995). These three consumer behavior dimensions were chosen because of previous empirical studies conducted by Deshpande et al that reported how Hispanic consumers tend to buy more brand name than any other ethnic group. Mulhern and Williams also cited in their study that Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups are not significantly different when it comes to purchasing products (Berkowitz, Bao, & Allaway, 2005).

As previous mentioned, Panama's Spanish speaking population is very diverse, and it should not be considered a total Hispanic region, but a Latin country with a Spanish culture that dates back to the 16th Century. Also, according to Panama's Hofstede Cultural Dimension found on the internet, the country has one of the highest scores in Power Distance at 95 percent, which indicates that there is high level of inequality of power and wealth in this region. It also has the second highest Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity score at 86, which means that Panamanian acceptance of power hierarchies are mostly institutionalize within their society. This is why; some Latin America nations with a Spanish culture prefers structured closeness over unstructured situations in which loyalist behaviors seems to be the norm such as tremendous loyalty to their families, communities and as well to the products they purchased (Rosa, 1990).

As a result, these people are more emotionally devoted (i.e., cultural bonds and personal ties) to their society

loyalist concepts. Also, these types of societies are adhering to the collectivistic principles by submitting to their nation's authoritarian traditions in order to maintain harmony among sub-cultural group members (Ball et al., 2006). This explains why, in some Latin countries men are responsible for the households, and they are allowed to make the final purchasing decisions over goods or products that affect the family budget, with the exception of groceries products (Fitzgerald, 1996). This responsibility is given to the woman of the house, where these women are asked to buy low-end products for their families. As a result, in most Masculinity societies, men are responsible for all their families' household bills and financial concerns. Women are required to take a nurturing role that requires them to purchase most of the basic product needs for their families. This is why; Panama's low-income consumers should be investigated, so as to find out why they pick certain brands and if these brands are meeting their consumption criteria's such as practicality, affordability and quality. Also, where there is a strong cohesive in-group throughout people's lifetime, they will continue to protect their nation cultural orientation in exchange for unquestionable loyalty.

2.2 What Are Latin America's Consumption Values?

According to Raju (1995), international marketers must be aware of the developing nation's tradition and cultural orientation history, because they are key factors that determine consumption patterns of the local consumers, which may not be the same as the developed nation's consumptions values.

In some developing nations', low-income consumers may think that durable goods and even moderately expensive products such as kitchen appliances and electronic gadgets to be high-end products for the affluent or well-off consumers only; therefore, they may choose not to purchase them (Raju, 1995). For that reason, the marketers must understand the host nations' culture prior to selling their products in the region, so as to help reduce the product-adaptation risk that may rise from misunderstanding the local consumers' consumption values.

Moreover, marketers must consider the host nation consumers' psychological and socio-cultural beliefs, norms and values, which will determine consumers' behavior and attitude towards particular products that share their lifestyle values. For instance, Santoro (1996), research study stated that a marketing research agency called the Market Development Inc. had conducted an exploratory inquiry on Latin Americans' purchasing lifestyles during the 1990s. This marketing research agency found that Latin Consumers were divided into 5 psychographic segments based on their attitudes towards life. Those were key attitude variables that influenced these consumers' purchasing power such as what, why and when they bought particular types of products. And they are as follows: Laid-back Realists (17%), Cautious Copers (29%), Sophisticated Climbers (24%), Hurried Handlers (7%), and Optimistic Homebodies (23%).

Therefore, the marketing researcher must explore the consumer perceptions towards a particular product or brand that they considered being of good quality and yet at an affordable price, as to fore-fill their basic needs. This could be done by using a brand marketing strategy that would differentiate between their products to meet the local consumer preference. Since the consumer preferences power dictates what products are sold or bought in their marketplace. Subsequently, consumer perceptions about a particular products improves their consumer loyalty towards a brand name by identifying those cultural values, beliefs and norms that provokes consumers to think about particular brand name attributes and thus purchasing it (Raju, 1995).

2.3 What Are the Consumer Perceptions to A Particular Product?

As marketers are trying to figure out why some consumers stick with certain brands while ignoring others, they must also understand that consumer perceptions are tying into how the potential consumers are viewing the existing products' brand equity, which is the value-added due to price-quality relationships (Raju, 1995). Brand

equity is the consumer perceptions about the exclusive value added that brands provide over and beyond their expectations. As a result, consumers may purchase or repurchase the brand due to brand attributes that are still in their memory banks. Therefore, these brand attributes are providing value added as part of its greater value offer to the consumers, and thus building consumer loyalty (Pokorny, 1995). For example, a quality and affordable product can provoke a consumer to buy it, and thus creating a loyal attitude towards this particular brand. Due to consumer responses to brand knowledge and brand image structured in their memory bank that allows them to recall or recognize those products for their value-added, price sensitivity and quality attributes are both prerequisites for brand equity.

As a result, "brand equity sits in the mind of the consumer consisting of those associations, attitudes and behaviors linking to the brand." (Delgado-Ballester & Munera-Aleman, 2005, p. 4). Therefore, consumer perceptions are strongly and favorably linked to brand equity. When the consumer knows that this brand is capable of living up to its promise of delivering a quality product at an affordable price and reduces the consumers' non-monetary cost prior purchase it, now brand equity becomes a value-added factor. That is an important brand marketing variable that can address brand knowledge and brand image problems, and thus building brand loyalty (Pokorny, 1995). Furthermore, past research studies have shown that if marketers are exploring how to build consumer loyalty towards a product, they must understand what the consumer expect from the brand name and what they are willing to accept as brand performances.

This should be done by implementing a communication strategy that links a favorable perception of the value-added benefits such as prices and quality to the brand equity, which is a key brand association variable that plays an important role on the consumer's acceptance of brand product attributes (Pokorny, 1995). For instance, an effective communication strategy (i.e., coherent advertising and word-of-mouth) may influence consumer perceptions of the brand equity by creating awareness of brand in the consumers' conscious and nonconscious memories banks. Thus causing recognition retrieval process that might influences the consumer's purchasing behavior due to how brand advertising campaigns are being use to close the communications gaps between brand performances and consumer perceptions of the values added, which has an effect on how consumers feels about a particular product that they may buy or repurchase again (Pokorny, 1995).

As a result, "the brand with the greater advertising budget yielded substantially higher levels of brand equity. In turn, the brand with the higher equity can generate significantly greater consumer preferences and purchase intentions." (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995, p. 12). Therefore, It's imperative that marketers promote positive brand images by advertising desirable brand attributes or symbols to the consumers' long-term memory banks. By using brand marketing campaigns with the consumer perceptions (e.g., awareness, brand associations and perceived quality) concerns are being addressed through a coherent advertisement that has a localized media approach to it, so as to ensure that the advertising information can increase the level of brand recognition or recall and thus influencing consumer's retrieval process (Lin, Wu, & Wang, 2000).

2.4 What Marketing Variables Are Needed to Build Consumer Loyalty?

According to Johnson, Bruner and Kanwar study, some marketers are in disagreement to what constitutes brand loyalty in developing or emerging economies where low-income consumers are likely to be branded loyal consumers due to their poverty conditions, income disparity issues, or due to their regions low literacy rates, because of these attributes, it difficult for them to get decent information about quality products (as cited by Raju, 1995). Accordingly, developing nations' consumers brand loyalty has been related to their income status and limited exposure to quality products in these marketplaces. Hence causing a consumers' intrinsic brand preference

effect on the purchaser's decision process when repurchasing the same products over long period of time due to their financial situations (Huang & Yu, 1999). Therefore, the marketers may find it difficult to get these consumers to switch to their products, because the consumer's financial concerns are making some products inaccessible to them and thus creating a brand loyalty, which is mostly due to their socio-economic situations. As a result, these financial variables are probably the reason why some Third World's consumers will stick with certain brands and refuse or hesitate to switch brands that might have the same attributes, but seems unaffordable because their poverty-stricken mentality (Raju, 1995).

However, some marketers had stated that if consumers are displaying an inertia behavior, which means that the buyer continues to purchase the same products without a second thought or out of habit due to the positive advertising message conveyed by the local marketers' brand advertising campaigns. Then they are considered to be more sensitive to marketing variables rather than financial concerns. Therefore, they are willing to switch to a brand that is easier buy due to promotional incidents that they may receive when purchasing to the brand (Huang & Yu, 1999). As a result, "the consumer has little or no underlying commitment to the existing product, because such promotional tools as point-of-purchase displays, extensive couponing, or noticeable price reductions may be sufficient to unfreeze a consumer's habitual pattern." (Huang & Yu, 1999, p. 3).

Nevertheless, if they are not pleased with the brand due to its poor performance results, then the Amine study have suggested that consumers may loss confidence in the brand product and thus switching brands due to unsatisfactory direct experience (e.g., trial and usage) with current brands. These unsatisfied consumers may use the word-of-mouth communication process to express their dissatisfaction with the existing brand, which may cause other consumers to stay away from those unpopular brands as well. Therefore, "the consumer may strongly defend a brand and may advise their relatives to buy it when they are highly satisfied with it (from utilitarian, symbolic and psychological viewpoints). Hence, brand support appears as a key variable in building and/or maintaining the popularity of a brand." (Amine, 1998, p. 314).

International marketers should be concerned about what type of communication tools are being used to expose potential consumers to their brands especially if low-income consumers are using the word-of-mouth communications approach as an coherent media outlet to inform their friends and relatives about a particular products rather than waiting for the traditional advertising media outlets (i.e., Print, Radio or TV) to do so. Therefore, international marketers must understand that potential consumers do not always wait around for traditional media to keep them informed about brands attributes. Instead they will find different ways to communicate among themselves by using a localized information-search process, which may influence their brand choice process (Huang, 1999). As a result, this communication problem may lead the low-income consumer to purchase local or store brands due to the fact that they are not aware of or associated with national or foreign brand attributes, because foreign marketers may not understanding how local the information-search behavior process works. Thus creating brand loyalty towards a store brand due to the lack of exposure to favorable information about national brands or other existing products in the marketplace. As a result, "the effective use of word-of-mouth communication might therefore be critical to marketing success in developing countries." (Raju, 1995, p. 9).

2.5 Why Does Store Loyalty Matters?

According to Ettenson and Wagner study (as cited by Raju, 1995), "consumers tend to favor specific local outlets or retailers because of prior contact and/or satisfaction with the retailer. Sometimes store loyalty might be even more important than brand loyalty in determining brand choice. It is important for marketers to understand the factors that lead to store loyalty in different cultures." (p. 9). For example, most of Latin American's shoppers

will purchase utilitarian type of products at neighborhood stores (i.e., la bodega or tenda') or supermarkets, because of its affordability, accessibility, and quality and customer friendliness (Berkowitz, Bao, & Allaway, 2005). This buying behavior is also customary in Panamas' culture due to its collectivistic societal makeup that put more emphasis on in-group well being where the concept of interdependent of self does not correlate with social well-being of the group and community. Most Panamanian believes that a person must have deep loyalty to the group and community in order to achieve any social and economic goals or objectives. As a result, marketers must understand these cultural and marketing variables, so as to overcome any marketing mishaps and dilemmas that might lead to misinterpretation and misunderstand about these consumers' purchasing habits in this multicultural society.

Therefore, marketers should be focusing on the neighborhood stores or supermarkets that have established loyal customer base due to their localized marketing campaigns. For example, some Latin American's retailers are selling utilitarian type of products from large food distributors such as Carrefour, who is one the largest grocery wholesaler in this region that is providing price-sensitive products to the low-income consumers (Linn, 2000). Also, these retailers are more often to sale store brands, which are considered to be less pricey than the national or foreign brands. These store brands are also providing consumers with a competitive alternative to national brands, but at the same time lowering suppliers-to-users' transactions costs by utilizing low production costs, low-cost packaging, minimal advertising, and low operating cost (Dick, Jain, & Richardson, 1996). This can be done by using a localized marketing approach that allows grocery retailers to put their own labels on certain store products that may be use to attract low-income consumers, who are known to trust store brands rather than national brands due to its positive association with their nation's traditional cultural values, which is connecting to the family needs and community wants (Linn, 2000).

As a result, the store brands have been known to increase shopping traffic and thus building store and brand loyalty at the same time (Dick, Jain, & Richardson, 1996). If international marketers are planning to sale their products in Panama City, Panamas' lower-class neighborhoods, then they should do an exploratory inquiry on low-income consumers, who are buying utilitarian types of products from neighborhood grocery retailers. This investigation process should give the researcher better insights on the consumer's cognitive and interactive shopping habits, which could provide the international marketer with some kind of brand marketing information about those consumers' purchasing behaviors.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

When conducting a qualitative research inquiry the first step is to identify the problem within the context of the research topic. Thereafter, the researcher will review most current academic literature and news journals that identify the problem and thus creating boundaries in which the problem can be analyzed. The researcher would then use a research design approach to resolves the current problem identified in this reviewed article by Raju (1995), which is asking: what consumer behavior variables are influencing Panamas' low-income consumers' decision making process when buying a particular product? As a result, for this study an exploratory approach is appropriate, because it's providing insight and understanding on how to define the consumer behavior problems that influence low-income buying power in developing economies such as Panamas'. Therefore, the researcher will use an exploratory qualitative research method that reports authenticate findings through naturalistic inquiry

and responsive evaluation application process. That allows in-depth interviews that can identify the low-income consumer concerns when buying products in a developing country. This is done by using a descriptive approach that will record each interviewee response to the researcher questions about their buying habits at the neighborhood grocery stores. As a result, this exploratory method is allowing the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews, so as to probe the respondents about their purchasing habits.

Also, all four triangulation approaches are being implemented in this study (e.g., methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation and theory and perspective triangulation) to add credibility and validity to the study by illuminating the data that is needed to support or strengthen whatever conclusion is drawn. (Patton, 2000). This thick description approach will use a tape recorded and field notes to capture respondent conversation (e.g., individualized) about the essence of buying particular products in a low-income environment, so as to describe the physical environment and social atmosphere.

For this study, *applied research* approach is appropriate, because it can help the researcher to understand this nation human and societal problem. Also, it focuses on specific social problems that are happening at a specific time period, place or condition (Patton, 2000). Hence, the researcher is trying to understand how to resolve it by using the framework paradigm called A-B-C-D. As a result, this researcher will use an in-depth interview session to address how developing nation's income disparity (i.e., social status) can influence an individual buying behavior.

3.2 Research Questions

Since, this is a qualitative inquiry, all research questions are open-ended and they are as followed: (1) *How does consumers' measure store loyalty? How important is neighborhood grocery stores to the consumers? Are neighborhood grocery stores attributes influencing the consumer's buying habits?* Sub questions are: Where do you shop for grocery? For example, Rice____, Fruits and Vegetables ____ Meat____ Dairy____; why do you choose this store? How often do you go to this grocery store in a seven day period? Which one do you feel provides affordable products the corner-grocery store or supermarket?

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Process

The data collection process will be natural artifacts such as tape recorded interviews and field notes methods to ensure the validity of the interpreted documents and thus converting them to context for examination. In doing so, it will provide rich description of the interactions among low-income consumers and retailers in this location and helps an outsider understand these consumers buying decision making process when buying a particular type of products. Also, the secondary data (academic literatures and news journals) will be collected from such as the Raju (1995), consumer behavior in global markets: The A-B-C-D paradigm is as followed: access, buying behavior, consumption characteristics and disposal. This present study is predicting that consumer behavior patterns are influencing consumer preference, consumption values and consumer loyalty. The author suggested that paradigm can be applied in any country or culture of interest. Also, this consumer tool format was design by the author to provide generalization and recommendation for those planning to market their products in developing nations. Both the journal articles provide the researcher with updated documentation about this region social and economic condition. As a result, this data collection process is appropriate for exploratory research due to those above open-ended questions and secondary documents, which allows the researcher to gain primary information about respondents' buying habit within a short period of time.

A *convenience sampling* method is selected for this study, because there are no updated statistical estimated sampling sizes on low-income groups' purchasing power for this region and it also allows the researcher to use "people on the street" interview approach. In conjunction with a *homogenous sampling* approach that allows the

researcher to interview about twenty female adult at least 18 years age old in this metropolitan (i.e., Panama City), because they are more often to purchase groceries products for the household (Fitzgerald, 1996). These women are living in low-income status neighborhoods due to their social and economic environment, but not due to their educational background, age, gender, and purchasing habits.

As a result, this researcher will use two translators or interpreters (bilingual) as interviewers. They will translate these sub-questions into the Spanish language, so to capture what participants' direct quotes and words as verbatim as possible. These interviewers were instructed by the researcher on how to conduct a personal in-home, traditional telephone and focus group interviews with (6 to 10 people) for about thirty minutes to hour time period, and what research questions they need to ask. They were also instructed to use an overt interview process where the purpose of research project is fully disclosed to the participants. After these interviews are conducted, one of them will translate the recorded field notes back to the English language, so as to ensure that researcher has a better understanding on who said what during these interviewing processes. This transcribing procedure allows them to compare and resolve translation differences that may rise prior to analyzing this recorded data. Afterward, the collected data and field notes will be given to the researcher to be analyzed. During the analysis process the researcher will be looking for "convergence" within the interior transcripts by using a qualitative coding process that identifies patterns and themes. These patterns or themes may reveal recurring regularities in this qualitative data that will be sorted into categories (i.e., homogeneity), and thus providing the researcher with an illuminative explanation on these low-income consumers' buying behavior when grocery shopping at the local corner-store or supermarket.

3.4 Results

The Nvivo 7 QSR International analytical program was used by the researcher to code, node and tagged this existing data. This electronic coding and query process did allow the researcher to use a cross-comparison of passages technique, which grouped the data and passages with the available categories. Afterwards, the researcher used a multiple coders categorizing process to analyze these participants' brief descriptive contexts. This coding framework was used to create two comprehensive coding schemes that were later broken down into fourteen independent codes, so as to verify the significances and truthfulness of the data being analyzed (See Appendix). As a result, these classifying, categorizing and coding procedures were used to explore trends among women shoppers when buying utilitarian types of products in their neighborhood grocery stores. And they are: Code: (Intprt Store Attributes) Interpreting what grocery store's attributes such as affordability, variety, low-prices, sales and quality products are influencing consumer buying habits; Code: (Intprt Frq Vst) Interpreting which grocery stores are visited frequently by consumers because of its location, service and advertisement campaign. The information below is providing the common theme from those research questions that were asked by the researcher to these participants and their response.

Research Questions and Sub-Questions: Common Theme

Research Questions	Sub-Questions	Common Theme
RQ	Q1 – Q4	Store loyalty

Sub-Question 1: Where do you shop for grocery? These females' shoppers told this researcher (i.e., interpreter) that they preferred to shop at their local supermarkets because of the array of quality products that were priced within their budgets. The women shoppers also stated that they bought more meat and rice, and cooking oil products at these supermarkets due to low price on those perishable products. *Sub-Question 2: Why do you choose this store?* This question received mixed reply among women shoppers that bought utilitarian types of products in either the corner-grocery store or supermarket. However, most of these females' shoppers agreed that

the grocery store location and its service policy were influencing their buying behaviors. For instance, the statistical analysis results have indicated that 66.67 percent of the females less than 50 years old thought that location were key factor. Relatively speaking, only 16.67 percent of this age group felt that service and advertisement variables were not important variables when choosing a grocery store. Nevertheless, the women shoppers said that the supermarkets are cleaner and spacious than the corner-grocery store. *Sub-Questions 3: How often do you go to this grocery store in a seven day period?* Most of the women shoppers told the researcher that they shop at the supermarket at least twice month and they will only shop at the corner grocery store when they forgot to purchase a less pricey product from the supermarket. However, the women shoppers were more costumed to shop for breakfast products at the corner-grocery store rather than supermarket, because it's more convenient for them. The qualitative analysis also revealed that 40 percent of females between the ages of 30 to 40 stated that price mattered when shopping at the supermarket and 88.89 percent of them shopped occasionally at the corner grocery store. *Sub Questions 4: Which one do you feel provides affordable products the corner-grocery store or supermarket?* All the women shoppers in this research project agreed that their local supermarkets were providing affordable products at a reasonable price over their corner-grocery stores. For example, they said that these supermarkets were offering discount cards to the consumers, so as to ensure they were getting massive coupons benefits or visible price reductions on any products that were purchased by them. The researcher believed this to be factual for all these females' shoppers that were interviewed in these fourteen boroughs (e.g., Rio Abajo, Pechegal, Caledonia, Parque Lefebvre, Pueblo Nuevo, Bethania, Santa Martha, Vila Lucre, Villa Rica, Hato Pintado, Las Acacias, Plaza Amador, Dos Mares, Nuevo Esperanza, and Mananita). Therefore, this statistical analysis provides the researcher with some evidence that this exploratory format was useful in answering all the research questions. However, this statistical analysis was not shown to the participants due to short time duration of the exploratory project and location of the involved participants.

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that Panamas' low income female consumers were influenced by neighborhood grocery stores attributes in their boroughs. These marketing attributes were important factors (i.e., affordability, accessibility, product quality and friendlily service), which caused them do to majority of their grocery shopping at the local supermarket rather than the corner-grocery store when buying utilitarian types of products for their families. As a result, this research project has provided credible data on low income consumer purchasing habits that was used to measure the store loyalty concept.

5. Future Research Recommendation

Future research needs to be conducted on those loyal customers that are shopping in their neighborhood supermarkets due to their affordable products because some marketers are suggesting that store loyalty may be important factor in determining brand loyalty (Raju, 1995). Therefore, this information can be used by international marketers, who are trying to figure out what motivates a low income consumer to buy a particular brand over another. For that reason, the researcher must explore if the local brand marketing campaign is influencing the buyer's decision making process when it comes to choosing a particular brand.

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Panama's Consumer Behavior Research Project

Appendix

Panama's Low Income Consumers Coding Charts: Sources Code

	Age Group = 60+	Age Group = 50-60	Age Group = 40-50	Age Group = 30-40	Age Group = 20-30
1: Image of loyal shopper	1	0	4	12	3
2: affordable products	1	0	0	1	2
3: frequent corner store grocery shopper	0	0	3	4	2
4: frequent supermarket shopper	1	0	4	12	3
5: good service	0	0	1	0	1
6: less pricey	0	0	0	5	0
7: meet shopper needs	1	0	2	1	0
8: minimal advertising	0	0	1	0	0
9: nearby	0	0	1	4	1
10: occasional corner grocery store	0	0	1	8	0
11: once a week corner store grocery shopper	0	0	1	0	2
12: quality products	0	0	1	2	1
13: supermarket fresh products	1	0	0	0	0
14: variety products	0	0	1	7	1

Column Percentage

	Age Group = 60+	Age Group = 50-60	Age Group = 40-50	Age Group = 30-40	Age Group = 20-30
1: Image of loyal shopper	5%	0%	20%	60%	15%
2: affordable products	25%	0%	0%	25%	50%
3: frequent corner store grocery shopper	0%	0%	33.33%	44.44%	22.22%
4: frequent supermarket shopper	5%	0%	20%	60%	15%
5: good service	0%	0%	50%	0%	50%
6: less pricey	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
7: meet shopper needs	25%	0%	50%	25%	0%
8: minimal advertising	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
9: nearby	0%	0%	16.67%	66.67%	16.67%
10: occasional corner grocery store	0%	0%	11.11%	88.89%	0%
11: once a week corner store grocery shopper	0%	0%	33.33%	0%	66.67%
12: quality products	0%	0%	25%	50%	25%
13: supermarket fresh products	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
14: variety products	0%	0%	11.11%	77.78%	11.11%