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# Beyond price competition: the role of emotional response in driving customer loyalty in Uganda's petroleum sector

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## Abstract

Uganda's petroleum retail industry operates in a highly competitive and price-sensitive environment where service differentiation and customer experience increasingly determine business sustainability. While traditional loyalty models emphasize transactional satisfaction and economic incentives, growing evidence shows that emotional response plays a critical role in shaping enduring customer relationships. This study examined the influence of emotional response on customer loyalty, focusing on Stabex Uganda Limited in Wakiso District.
Grounded in emotional response theory and conditioned emotional response frameworks advanced by John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, the study adopted a quantitative correlational cross-sectional design supported by qualitative insights. Data were collected from 80 respondents, including employees, retail customers, and commercial clients. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses were conducted using SPSS. Results revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between emotional response and customer loyalty ($r = 0.664$, $p < 0.01$). Emotional response explained 43.4% of the variance in loyalty (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.434$). Constructs such as pleasure, arousal, trust, and advertising-induced affect significantly influenced repeat purchase intentions and brand advocacy. The study concludes that emotional engagement is a strategic driver of loyalty in Uganda's petroleum sector and recommends emotional branding, customer experience enhancement, and ethical communication practices.

**Key Words:** ***Emotional Response, Customer Loyalty, Petroleum Industry, Uganda, Brand Attachment.***

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## Introduction

Customer loyalty has become an increasingly critical determinant of organizational sustainability, particularly in industries characterized by product standardization and intense competition. In Uganda's petroleum retail sector, fuel products are largely homogeneous, pricing structures are regulated and highly transparent, and switching costs for consumers remain minimal. As a result, petroleum companies must differentiate themselves through non-price factors such as service quality, brand experience, and emotional engagement. In competitive markets, loyalty is no longer secured solely through transactional satisfaction but through deeper emotional connections that influence repeat patronage and advocacy (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Emotional response, defined as the affective reactions customers experience during and after interactions with a brand, plays a central role in shaping attitudes, perceptions, and long-term behavioural intentions.

The Ugandan petroleum industry has experienced significant growth and liberalization over the past two decades, marked by the presence of multinational and indigenous firms such as TotalEnergies, Shell, Vivo Energy Uganda, and Stabex Uganda Limited. With increasing urbanization and vehicle ownership, competition among service stations has intensified, particularly in high traffic districts such as Wakiso and Kampala. In such an environment, customers often base their decisions not only on fuel price but also on service encounters, staff courtesy, station cleanliness, perceived honesty, brand trust, and corporate reputation. These experiential elements trigger emotional responses that may strengthen or weaken loyalty.

Emotional Response Theory suggests that customer emotions such as pleasure, arousal, and trust mediate the relationship between service encounters and behavioural outcomes (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Similarly, the concept of conditioned emotional response developed by John

B. Watson and later expanded through operant conditioning by B. F. Skinner explains how repeated exposure to positive stimuli can reinforce favourable behavioural patterns (Skinner, 1953). In a petroleum retail context, consistent positive service experiences, transparent pricing, loyalty programs, and emotionally appealing advertising can condition customers to associate a brand with reliability and satisfaction. Over time, such associations may translate into emotional loyalty, which extends beyond rational cost benefit analysis.

Research indicates that emotionally connected customers are more valuable than merely satisfied customers. Studies published in the Harvard Business Review report that emotionally engaged customers demonstrate higher lifetime value, stronger advocacy behaviour, and greater resilience against competitor offerings (Aksoy et al., 2015). Emotional loyalty differs from rational loyalty because it is rooted in attachment and identity rather than convenience or habitual purchase (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). In Uganda's petroleum sector, where competitors are often located within close proximity, emotional differentiation may be the most sustainable competitive strategy.

Despite global recognition of emotional engagement as a driver of loyalty, empirical research examining this relationship within Uganda's petroleum retail context remains limited. Most local studies emphasize pricing dynamics, supply chain management, or regulatory frameworks, with minimal focus on affective drivers of consumer behaviour. Consequently, there is insufficient evidence regarding how emotional response influences loyalty outcomes such as repeat purchase intention, word-of-mouth advocacy, and brand commitment within this sector.

This study therefore seeks to examine the influence of emotional response on customer loyalty in Uganda's petroleum retail industry, with particular focus on Stabex Uganda Limited. By integrating emotional response theory with empirical analysis, the study contributes to both academic discourse and managerial practice by highlighting affective determinants of loyalty in a developing market context.

**Specific Objectives**

1. To assess the level of emotional response experienced by customers in petroleum service stations.
2. To determine the level of customer loyalty among customers of Stabex Uganda Limited.
3. To examine the relationship between emotional response and customer loyalty in Uganda's petroleum retail sector.
4. To determine the predictive effect of emotional response dimensions (pleasure, arousal, and trust) on customer loyalty outcomes such as repeat purchase intention and brand advocacy.

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant to various stakeholders in Uganda's petroleum sector and the broader field of marketing and customer relationship management.

**1. Significance to Petroleum Companies:** The study provides valuable insights to petroleum firms on the importance of emotional engagement in fostering customer loyalty. The findings demonstrate that customer loyalty is influenced not only by competitive pricing but also by emotional factors such as trust, pleasure, excitement, and brand attachment. Petroleum companies can therefore develop customer-centered strategies, emotional branding initiatives, and enhanced service experiences to strengthen customer relationships and improve long-term profitability.

**2. Significance to Management of Stabex Uganda Limited:** The findings offer practical guidance to managers of Stabex Uganda Limited regarding the role of emotional response in customer retention and brand advocacy. The study highlights areas where management can improve customer experiences, strengthen emotional connections, and enhance service quality. This can contribute to increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and sustainable competitive advantage.

**3. Significance to Customers:** The study contributes to improved customer experiences by encouraging petroleum companies to adopt customer-focused practices that address emotional needs and expectations. As firms become more responsive to customer emotions, consumers are likely to benefit from better service quality, stronger relationships, and more satisfying interactions with service providers.

**4. Significance to Policymakers and Industry Regulators:** The study provides useful information to policymakers and regulators such as the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development and other relevant industry bodies. The findings emphasize the importance of customer experience and ethical communication in the petroleum sector. Regulators may use the findings to encourage customer-centered service standards and promote fair business practices that enhance consumer welfare.

**5. Significance to Marketing Practitioners;** Marketing professionals can benefit from the study by understanding how emotional responses influence purchasing behavior and customer loyalty. The findings support the adoption of emotional branding, relationship marketing, and customer engagement strategies as effective tools for building strong and sustainable customer relationships.

**6. Significance to Academia and Researchers;** The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on emotional response and customer loyalty, particularly within the context of Uganda's petroleum industry where limited empirical research exists. It also provides a foundation for future studies examining emotional engagement, customer behavior, brand attachment, and service marketing in Uganda and other developing economies.

**7. Significance to Ndejje University:** The study enriches academic literature and supports Ndejje University's commitment to research, innovation, and evidence-based decision-making. It serves as a useful reference for students, lecturers, and future researchers interested in marketing, customer relationship management, consumer behavior, and petroleum sector studies.

**Overall Significance:** Overall, the study demonstrates that emotional engagement is a critical driver of customer loyalty in Uganda's petroleum sector. By highlighting the strategic importance of trust, pleasure, arousal, and brand attachment, the research provides actionable insights for organizations seeking to build sustainable customer relationships and maintain competitive advantage beyond price-based competition.

# Literature review

The concept of customer loyalty has evolved significantly over the past several decades, moving from a purely behavioral understanding to a multidimensional construct incorporating attitudinal, cognitive, and emotional components. Early marketing scholars conceptualized loyalty primarily as repeat purchase behavior (Cunningham, 1956). However, later researchers argued that behavioral repetition alone does not sufficiently capture genuine loyalty, as customers may repurchase out of convenience, habit, or lack of alternatives rather than true attachment (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). Contemporary perspectives emphasize that loyalty encompasses both behavioral commitment and emotional attachment to a brand (Oliver, 1999). In highly competitive industries such as petroleum retailing, where product differentiation is minimal and switching costs are low, emotional engagement increasingly becomes the defining determinant of sustainable loyalty.

Emotional response refers to the affective reactions that consumers experience during interactions with a brand, service, or product. These responses may include pleasure, excitement, trust, pride, frustration, or disappointment. Theoretical grounding for emotional response in consumer behavior can be traced to the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which posits that environmental stimuli trigger internal emotional states (organism) that subsequently influence behavioral responses. In a petroleum retail setting, stimuli such as service quality, station ambience, employee friendliness, brand imagery, and promotional communication may generate emotional states that shape loyalty behaviors such as repeat patronage or brand advocacy.

The emotional dimension of consumer behavior is also supported by appraisal theory, which explains how individuals evaluate situations based on personal relevance and perceived outcomes (Lazarus, 1991). When customers perceive fairness in pricing, respect in interpersonal interactions, and consistency in service delivery, they are likely to experience positive emotional appraisals that strengthen loyalty. Conversely, perceptions of dishonesty, neglect, or poor service may trigger negative emotions, resulting in avoidance behavior and brand switching. This is particularly relevant in petroleum markets where consumers can easily switch between service stations located within close proximity.

The conditioning theories advanced by John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner further explain how emotional responses can be reinforced over time. Watson's classical conditioning experiments demonstrated that emotional reactions can become associated with specific stimuli through repeated pairing (Watson & Rayner, 1920). Skinner later introduced operant conditioning, emphasizing reinforcement as a mechanism for shaping behavior (Skinner, 1953). In marketing contexts, consistent positive experiences—such as courteous attendants, transparent fuel measurement, and loyalty rewards—serve as reinforcements that condition customers to associate a petroleum brand with positive emotional outcomes. Over time, such conditioning fosters habitual patronage grounded in emotional attachment rather than rational evaluation alone.

Emotional loyalty differs fundamentally from transactional or rational loyalty. Rational loyalty is often driven by price incentives, location convenience, or promotional discounts. While these factors may encourage repeat purchases, they are highly vulnerable to competitive imitation (Dick & Basu, 1994). Emotional loyalty, by contrast, reflects a deeper psychological bond characterized by trust, identification, and affective commitment (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Emotional attachment enhances customer resilience against competitive offers because the relationship is anchored in personal meaning rather than economic calculation. In petroleum retail environments where price fluctuations are common and standardized fuel quality limits differentiation, emotional loyalty offers a more sustainable competitive advantage.

Brand attachment theory provides additional insights into emotional loyalty formation. Park, MacInnis, and Priester (2010) argue that strong brand attachment arises when a brand becomes integrated into a consumer's self-concept. When customers perceive a petroleum brand as trustworthy, community-oriented, or aligned with their values, they may develop emotional bonds that transcend transactional exchanges. For example, corporate social responsibility initiatives, sponsorship of local events, or community engagement programs may enhance emotional identification with a petroleum company. Emotional branding strategies thus contribute to long-term loyalty by strengthening relational bonds.

Service quality literature further supports the link between emotional response and loyalty. The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) identifies reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles as key dimensions influencing customer perceptions. In petroleum stations, reliability in fuel dispensing accuracy, assurance regarding product quality, and empathetic customer service interactions directly influence emotional responses. Research indicates that perceived service quality significantly predicts satisfaction and loyalty (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). However, scholars increasingly argue that satisfaction alone does not guarantee loyalty unless it translates into positive emotional engagement (Oliver, 1999).

Neuroscientific research further substantiates the role of emotions in consumer decision-making. Studies show that the amygdala and related neural structures play central roles in processing emotional stimuli and influencing memory retention (LeDoux, 2000). Emotional experiences are more likely to be remembered and recalled during subsequent decision-making processes. In petroleum retailing, a positive emotional encounter such as exceptional customer service during a stressful travel moment may leave a lasting impression that influences future patronage decisions. Emotional memory thus reinforces loyalty behaviors.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate the predictive power of emotional engagement on loyalty outcomes. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) found that emotional attachment significantly predicts purchase frequency and willingness to pay premium prices. Similarly, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) established that brand affect contributes to brand loyalty and market share. Research published in the Harvard Business Review indicates that emotionally connected customers deliver higher lifetime value and are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth (Aksoy et al., 2015). These findings suggest that emotional response is not merely a supplementary variable but a central determinant of economic performance.

Within the petroleum industry specifically, studies emphasize experiential differentiation as a key strategy for loyalty development. Clean facilities, safety standards, loyalty programs, and courteous service interactions enhance affective perceptions (Kumar & Shah, 2004). Given that petroleum products themselves are standardized commodities, emotional and experiential dimensions become critical drivers of customer retention. Moreover, trust plays a particularly significant role in fuel retailing, as customers rely on service providers for accurate measurement and product integrity. Perceived dishonesty or meter manipulation can rapidly erode trust and trigger negative emotional responses, leading to immediate brand switching.

In emerging market contexts such as Uganda, emotional loyalty may be even more influential due to the relational nature of business interactions. Personal relationships, community ties, and social networks shape consumer behavior in African markets (Nwankwo & Gbadamosi, 2011). Positive interpersonal engagement between station attendants and customers may thus create relational bonds that reinforce loyalty. Conversely, negative interpersonal treatment may generate reputational damage through word-of-mouth within close-knit communities.

Despite the robust theoretical and empirical support for emotional response as a driver of loyalty, limited research has examined this relationship in Uganda's petroleum retail sector. Existing local studies tend to focus on pricing policies, taxation, supply chain management, or regulatory compliance, with minimal emphasis on affective consumer behavior. This gap underscores the need for context-specific empirical investigation to determine the magnitude and nature of emotional response effects on loyalty outcomes within Uganda's competitive fuel retail environment.

In summary, literature across behavioral psychology, marketing theory, service quality research, and neuroscience consistently supports the proposition that emotional response significantly influences customer loyalty. Conditioning mechanisms reinforce affective associations, service experiences shape emotional appraisal, and brand attachment fosters enduring commitment. In industries characterized by product homogeneity such as petroleum retailing, emotional differentiation offers a strategic pathway to sustainable competitive advantage. This study builds upon these theoretical foundations to examine the extent to which emotional response predicts customer loyalty in Uganda's petroleum sector.

**Table 1: GAPS MATRIX**

| Literature Theme | Key Authors | Existing Knowledge | Identified Gap | Gap Category | Current Study Contribution |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Customer Loyalty Theory | Cunningham (1956); Jacoby & Kyner (1973); Oliver (1999) | Loyalty evolved from behavioral to attitudinal and emotional perspectives. | Limited focus on emotional response as a standalone predictor of loyalty. | **Theoretical Gap** | Examines emotional response as a direct determinant of customer loyalty. |
| S-O-R Framework | Mehrabian & Russell (1974) | Environmental stimuli influence emotions and behavior. | Limited application in petroleum retail settings. | **Contextual Gap** | Tests the S-O-R framework within Uganda's petroleum retail sector. |
| Emotional Appraisal Theory | Lazarus (1991) | Positive emotional evaluations enhance behavioral outcomes. | Insufficient evidence on emotional appraisals among petroleum consumers. | **Empirical Gap** | Investigates how emotional evaluations affect loyalty in fuel retailing. |
| Conditioning Theory | Watson & Rayner (1920); Skinner (1953) | Positive experiences reinforce future behavior. | Limited empirical validation in petroleum retail environments. | **Methodological Gap** | Empirically assesses the effect of repeated positive experiences on loyalty. |
| Emotional vs Rational Loyalty | Dick & Basu (1994) | Emotional loyalty is more sustainable than price-based loyalty. | Petroleum studies largely focus on pricing and convenience. | **Conceptual Gap** | Shifts focus from transactional factors to emotional drivers of loyalty. |
| Brand Attachment | Park et al. (2010); Thomson et al. (2005) | Emotional attachment strengthens commitment and retention. | Limited evidence from developing economies and fuel retailing. | **Geographical Gap** | Provides evidence from Uganda's petroleum sector. |
| Service Quality & Loyalty | Parasuraman et al. (1988); Zeithaml et al. (1996) | Service quality influences satisfaction and loyalty. | Emotional response is often overlooked as a key mechanism. | **Conceptual Gap** | Examines emotional response beyond customer satisfaction. |
| Petroleum Retail Loyalty | Kumar & Shah (2004) | Experiential differentiation drives loyalty in commodity markets. | Few studies focus on emotional experiences in petroleum retailing. | **Industry Gap** | Investigates emotional response in Uganda's fuel retail industry. |
| African Consumer Behavior | Nwankwo & Gbadamosi (2011) | Relationships and social interactions strongly influence consumer behavior. | Limited studies on emotional loyalty in Uganda's petroleum sector. | **Contextual Gap** | Provides localized evidence on emotional response and customer loyalty. |
| Uganda Petroleum Studies | Various Local Studies | Focus on taxation, regulation, pricing, and supply chains. | Neglect customer emotions and affective loyalty dimensions. | **Empirical & Contextual Gap** | Addresses the unexplored relationship between emotional response and customer loyalty. |

## Methodology

This study employed a comprehensive methodology designed to examine the influence of emotional response on customer loyalty in petroleum companies in Uganda, with a specific focus on Stabex Uganda Limited. To ensure a thorough investigation, the study integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches, allowing for a robust understanding of measurable outcomes and the subjective experiences of employees and customers. The methodology was structured around the research design, study area and population, sampling design and procedures, data collection methods and instruments, data quality assurance, data processing and analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations.

The study adopted a quantitative correlational cross-sectional survey design, complemented by qualitative methods. The cross-sectional design enabled the collection of data from participants at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of emotional response and loyalty dynamics within Stabex Uganda Limited (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The correlational approach was chosen to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between emotional response, conceptualized as the independent variable, and customer loyalty, the dependent variable. Descriptive research was also employed to provide detailed information about demographic characteristics, attitudes, and perceptions of the respondents, and to describe the current status of the phenomena under study (Kothari, 2004). The use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches allowed for triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study by integrating statistical analysis with thematic insights (Natow, 2020).

The study was conducted at Stabex Uganda Limited, located along Nansana-Hoima Road, Lubega Valley Area, Kampala. The company was selected due to its accessibility and the ability to obtain both primary and secondary data from employees and customers. The target population comprised employees and customers of the company. Employees were included because they are directly involved in day-to-day operations, advertising, and customer service, all of which influence customer experiences and emotional responses. Customers were selected to capture the perspectives of the service recipients, including both retail and commercial clients, thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of loyalty dynamics. The population included senior staff, other employees, retail customers, and commercial customers, reflecting a diverse range of roles, knowledge, and experiences within the organization. Senior staff provided strategic insights into marketing and branding practices, while other employees contributed operational perspectives. Retail and commercial customers offered firsthand insights into their emotional experiences and loyalty behaviors toward the brand.

To ensure accurate representation of these diverse groups, the study employed a stratified sampling design. Stratification was based on key respondent categories: retail customers, commercial customers, senior employees, and other employees. This approach improves the precision of estimates and allows for analysis of subgroup differences (Lohr, 2021). Within each stratum, a combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was applied depending on accessibility and feasibility. For retail customers, convenience and judgmental sampling were used. Convenience sampling enabled the inclusion of participants who were readily available during the data collection period, while judgmental sampling targeted individuals considered particularly relevant to the study objectives (Amin, 2005). Commercial customers were selected using simple random sampling, ensuring each customer had an equal chance of inclusion, thereby minimizing selection bias. For senior employees, purposive sampling was used due to their specialized knowledge and strategic perspectives. Other employees were selected through random sampling to ensure fairness and generalizability across departments.

The study included a total of 80 respondents, determined using the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) table, which provides an appropriate sample size for a given population. The final sample comprised 10 senior staff, 20 other employees, 40 retail customers, and 10 commercial customers. The distribution of the sample ensured that all relevant subgroups were represented. All 80 questionnaires were returned, yielding a 100% response rate, which is considered excellent in survey research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Primary data were collected using semi structured questionnaires and key informant interviews (KIIs). Questionnaires captured quantitative measures of emotional response, including pleasure, arousal, trust, and advertising-induced affective reactions, as well as customer loyalty behaviors. KIIs with senior employees and select commercial customers allowed the researcher to explore organizational branding strategies, emotional engagement practices, and customer experiences in depth. Secondary data were sourced from company records, journals, research reports, textbooks, and online databases to provide theoretical context and support the findings.

The questionnaires consisted of both closed and open-ended items, including a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Closed-ended items enabled quantitative measurement of emotional response and loyalty constructs, while open-ended questions allowed participants to express subjective opinions and experiences. Key informant interviews were conducted with senior staff and select commercial customers to explore emotional engagement strategies, advertising effectiveness, and loyalty-building practices. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded for qualitative analysis. A research assistant facilitated questionnaire administration, while the researcher personally conducted interviews to ensure high-quality data collection.

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's supervisor and three other experts. Each item was assessed for relevance, clarity, and alignment with research objectives. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed at 0.8, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating that the instrument adequately measured the intended constructs (Amin, 2005). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs exceeding the 0.6 benchmark, indicating good internal consistency (Sekaran, 2001).

Data processing involved editing, coding, and entry into SPSS software to ensure completeness, accuracy, and consistency. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and responses. Inferential statistics included Pearson correlation to test the strength and direction of the relationship between emotional response and customer loyalty, and linear regression analysis to examine the predictive power of emotional response on loyalty, including $R^2$, adjusted $R^2$, and beta coefficients (Sekaran, 2003). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic and content analysis, coding responses into recurring patterns that complemented the quantitative findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of emotional engagement and loyalty behaviors.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed. Permission was obtained from Stabex Uganda Limited, and participants were informed of the purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of the study. Questionnaires were anonymous, and respondents were assured that the information collected would only be used for research purposes, adhering to ethical principles of respect, informed consent, and confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Finally, the study acknowledged potential limitations, including reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias. Time constraints limited direct observation, and some participants were busy, requiring flexible scheduling and follow-ups. While the study focused on a single petroleum company, the findings provide valuable insights applicable to other companies in Uganda's petroleum sector.

# Findings and Analysis

## Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study began by examining the demographic characteristics of respondents to provide context for subsequent analyses on emotional response and customer loyalty. Out of 80 respondents, 66.7% were male and 33.3% were female, reflecting a male-dominated workforce and customer representation at Stabex Uganda Limited. Age distribution indicated that 35.9% were between 40–44 years and 29.5% between 45–49 years, highlighting the inclusion of mature adults who may demonstrate stable consumer behavior patterns. Educational qualifications were predominantly at the degree level (84.6%), suggesting respondents were well-equipped to understand questions on emotional response and loyalty. Regarding tenure, 41% had worked with the company for 6–10 years, demonstrating familiarity with organizational practices and customer engagement strategies. This demographic diversity enhanced the reliability of the findings by capturing perspectives from employees and customers across multiple dimensions.

**Emotional Response Descriptive Statistics**

The descriptive analysis revealed that respondents largely agreed that emotional engagement through advertising and brand interactions motivates purchasing and fosters loyalty. Emotional constructs such as pleasure, arousal, trust, and attitude towards advertising were strongly associated with repeat purchase behavior.

**Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Response Variables**

| Statement | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neutral (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advertisement emotionally motivates purchase | 8 (10.3%) | 10 (12.8%) | 11 (14.1%) | 14 (17.9%) | 35 (44.9%) | 3.74 | 1.409 |
| Advertising creates brand awareness & preference | 7 (9.0%) | 14 (17.9%) | 11 (14.1%) | 25 (32.1%) | 21 (26.9%) | 3.50 | 1.307 |
| Attitude towards advertising influences marketing | 8 (10.3%) | 11 (14.1%) | 11 (14.1%) | 35 (44.1%) | 10 (12.8%) | 3.56 | 1.184 |
| Advertising influences consumer brand attitudes | 5 (6.4%) | 11 (14.1%) | 4 (5.1%) | 33 (42.3%) | 26 (32.1%) | 3.88 | 1.116 |
| Consumer attitude predicts loyalty | 5 (6.4%) | 3 (3.8%) | 11 (14.1%) | 24 (30.8%) | 35 (44.9%) | 4.04 | 1.156 |
| Pleasure from product interaction | 4 (5.1%) | 7 (9.0%) | 14 (17.9%) | 34 (43.6%) | 19 (24.4%) | 3.73 | 1.089 |
| Arousal or excitement about product | 3 (3.8%) | 16 (16.7%) | 15 (19.2%) | 31 (39.7%) | 16 (20.5%) | 3.56 | 1.112 |
| **Overall Mean & SD** | | | | | | **3.71** | **1.196** |

These results demonstrate that emotional responses, particularly pleasure, arousal, and attitude toward advertising, are perceived as strong drivers of customer engagement and loyalty. Respondents highlighted that advertisements and consistent brand interactions elicited positive emotional responses, which translated into increased preference and likelihood of repeat purchase.

## Correlation between Emotional Response and Customer Loyalty

To determine the relationship between emotional response and customer loyalty, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results indicated a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation, suggesting that enhanced emotional response is closely associated with increased customer loyalty.

**Pearson Correlation Between Emotional Response and Customer Loyalty**

| Variable | Emotional Response | Customer Loyalty |
|---|---|---|
| Emotional Response | 1 | 0.664** |
| Customer Loyalty | 0.664** | 1 |

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

The positive correlation ($r = 0.664$, $p < 0.01$) confirms that improvements in emotional engagement, whether through advertising, personalized experiences, or trust-building initiatives, are likely to enhance customer loyalty in Stabex Uganda Limited.

**Regression Analysis: Predictive Power of Emotional Response**

A regression analysis was conducted to assess whether emotional response predicts customer loyalty and to quantify its impact. Results revealed that emotional response accounted for 43.4% of the variance in customer loyalty, confirming its significant predictive role.

**Regression Model Summary**

| Model | R | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | Std. Error of Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.664 | 0.442 | 0.434 | 0.378 |

**ANOVA for Regression Model**

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 8.575 | 1 | 8.575 | 60.079 | 0.000 |
| Residual | 10.847 | 76 | 0.143 | | |
| Total | 19.422 | 77 | | | |

**Coefficients for Emotional Response Predicting Customer Loyalty**

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients (B) | Std. Error | Standardized Coefficients (Beta) | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 1.337 | 0.309 | | 4.327 | 0.000 |
| Emotional Response | 0.643 | 0.083 | 0.664 | 7.751 | 0.000 |

The regression results indicate that for every unit increase in emotional response, customer loyalty increases by 0.664 units. The model is statistically significant ($F = 60.079$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the critical role of emotional engagement in shaping repeat purchase behavior and advocacy.

**Summary of Correlation and Regression Results**

| Analysis | Statistic | Value | Significance | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Correlation (Emotional Response & Loyalty) | r | 0.664 | 0.000 | Strong positive relationship |
| Regression | Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.434 | 0.000 | Emotional response predicts 43.4% of loyalty variance |
| Regression Coefficient (β) | β | 0.664 | 0.000 | 1 unit increase in emotional response → 0.664 increase in loyalty |

## Discussion of Findings

The study examined the influence of emotional response on customer loyalty in Stabex Uganda Limited, focusing on constructs such as pleasure, arousal, trust, and advertising-induced affective responses. Descriptive statistics indicated that respondents strongly agreed that advertisements emotionally motivate consumers, create brand awareness, and influence attitudes toward the brand (Mean = 3.71, SD = 1.196). These results align with prior research by Cudby (2020), who emphasized that emotional connections strengthen customer loyalty, particularly when brands resonate with personal identity, values, and expectations. Furthermore, constructs such as pleasure and arousal were identified as critical drivers of repeat purchase behavior, confirming the role of affective reactions in shaping sustained brand engagement (Bansal, 2016; Kwiatek, Morgan & Thanasi-Boçe, 2020).

Correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between emotional response and customer loyalty ($r = 0.664$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that heightened emotional engagement correlates with increased loyalty behaviors such as repeat purchases, brand advocacy, and positive word-of-mouth. Regression analysis confirmed that emotional response accounted for 43.4% of the variance in customer loyalty (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.434$), highlighting its predictive power. These findings are consistent with the research of Aksoy et al. (2015), who reported that customers with a strong emotional connection to a brand contribute substantially higher lifetime value and advocacy than those driven solely by satisfaction or rational choice.

The study also highlights a nuanced dimension: while positive emotional responses enhance loyalty, factors such as consistent branding, value alignment, and reliable customer experience strengthen this effect. Qualitative insights from interviews confirmed that customers are more likely to remain loyal when companies consistently demonstrate trustworthiness, shared values (such as sustainability), and personalized experiences (Wheeler, 2017; Oyebode, Steeves & Orji, 2024). This indicates that emotional loyalty is not automatic; it must be nurtured through deliberate brand strategies and authentic engagement.

These findings demonstrate both direct and indirect effects of emotional response on loyalty. Direct effects include increased repeat purchases and brand advocacy, while indirect effects involve strengthened trust, perceived brand authenticity, and alignment with personal values. The study confirms that emotional loyalty extends beyond transactional exchanges and is a critical mechanism for achieving long-term customer retention and competitive advantage in the petroleum sector.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

The study established that emotional response significantly influences customer loyalty in Stabex Uganda Limited. Positive emotional engagement, driven by factors such as pleasure, arousal, trust, and advertising-induced affective reactions, contributes directly to repeat purchase behavior, brand preference, and advocacy. Statistical analyses confirmed a strong, positive, and predictive relationship, with emotional response accounting for 43.4% of the variance in customer loyalty.

The findings emphasize that emotional loyalty extends beyond mere transactional satisfaction. It is nurtured through authentic engagement, consistent branding, value alignment, personalized customer experiences, and social proof. While the petroleum industry in Uganda is highly competitive, firms that strategically invest in evoking positive emotions are likely to achieve stronger customer retention, increased advocacy, and long-term revenue growth.

In practice, petroleum companies should adopt deliberate emotional branding strategies, optimize customer experience across touchpoints, engage employees as emotional ambassadors, and provide continuous feedback channels to monitor loyalty. By doing so, they can convert emotionally connected customers into advocates, fostering sustainable business growth and resilience in Uganda's dynamic petroleum sector.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, several strategic measures are recommended for petroleum companies in Uganda to strengthen emotional loyalty and enhance customer retention:

- **Strategic Emotional Branding:** Companies should design campaigns that evoke positive emotions such as joy, surprise, and trust. Personalized messages, rewards programs, and storytelling-based advertisements can help build affective bonds with customers, enhancing brand attachment (Clinehens, 2025; Oyebode et al., 2024).
- **Value Alignment and Sustainability Messaging:** Firms should clearly communicate their organizational values, particularly in areas like sustainability and social responsibility. Customers who perceive alignment with their personal values are more likely to exhibit long-term loyalty (Wheeler, 2017).
- **Consistent Customer Experience (CX) Optimization:** Emotional loyalty is strengthened by consistent, reliable service across touchpoints. This includes transparency in communication, timely response to complaints, and uniform brand messaging across physical stations and digital platforms (Kemp, Briggs & Anaza, 2020).
- **Leveraging Social Proof and Advocacy:** Encouraging testimonials, reviews, and influencer partnerships can reinforce emotional connections and provide reassurance to prospective and existing customers, thereby enhancing loyalty (Hughes, Swaminathan & Brooks, 2025).
- **Employee Engagement as a Loyalty Driver:** Employees play a critical role in shaping customer emotions. Training staff in customer-centric service and empowering them to create memorable interactions ensures that emotional engagement is embedded in operational practices (Bansal, 2016).
- **Measurement and Continuous Feedback:** Companies should implement mechanisms to monitor emotional response, such as surveys, loyalty metrics, and sentiment analysis. Continuous assessment enables iterative improvements in branding, service delivery, and CX strategies.

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