

BRAND IDENTITY AND CONSUMER CHOICE OF BOTTLED WATER MANUFACTURING FIRMA IN PORT HARCOURT**Barr. Bernard Nwekeala, Ph.D****Department of Marketing, Faculty of Administration and Management****Ignatius Ajuru University of Education***E-mail: benonyedi@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT

It is common for companies to use strategies of branding in order to communicate their identity and their value to potential consumers and stakeholders. To this end; this study examined the relationship between brand identity and consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The study drawing from its objectives tested three (3) hypotheses. The population of the study consists of 110 registered bottled water producers gotten from Water Producers Association of Nigeria (WAPAN) Rivers State Chapter. The sample size of 86 was derived through Krejcie and Morgan sampling technique. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The hypotheses formulated were tested through the spearman rank order correlation co-efficient with the aid Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0The result of the findings showed a significant relationship between brand identity and consumer choice of bottled water. The study therefore concluded that; Brand identity plays a vital role in ensuring that the product stands out among competitive products. The study recommends that; Bottled water manufacturing firms should produce qualitative brands; they should create a positive image of their brands by producing products that will stand the taste of time and also they should use eye catching graphics to design their brands.

INTRODUCTION

The way a company is being identified is referred to as brand identity. The consistency of this brand identity is formed by its features like culture, vision, personality, positioning, presentations, relationships and other meaning beliefs followed by the entity. Further, brand identity will be transformed in one or more of the following components in order to result the desired brand image: logo, apparel, signage, stationery, marketing collateral, messages and actions, products and packaging, emotions and other components. We also like to consider these components as the vehicle that leads to the aimed brand image. Brand identity is the direction the vehicles must follow to reach their destination, namely the customer's perception. It is common for companies to use strategies of branding in order to communicate their identity and their value to potential consumers and stakeholders. It is the specialized departments or external agencies the ones that must convey and develop a suitable brand identity strategy. In order for a brand to differentiate itself, it must follow a complex process considering the components of a specific importance. Every component that will be encountered by the public is relevant for forming brand identity and thus creating brand image. The entire overview upon the brand is developed during the meeting of the public with the brand identity, which divided is formed by logo, stationery, marketing collaterals, products and packaging, signage, apparel design and actions. How a brand is being identified in a market goes a long way determining the choice of the consumer.

Consumer choice explains how a consumer ranks a collection of brands. People often prefer some brand to others; when comparing bottled water (Eva, LaSien, Joshua, Nestle, Aquadana etc.); the taste, quality, price and availability can have an impact on consumer choice (David, 2018).

A broad variety of theories that attempt to describe the factors which influence consumers and their behavior when making purchasing decisions have been done. The goal of the investigation of

consumer behavior is to discover patterns of consumers' attitudes in their decision to buy or to ignore a product (Matsatsinis& Samaras, 2000). Consumers' preferences for products or brands arise from the combination of many different factors. Some factors come from features of the product itself (e.g., price durability), while others are attributes of consumers themselves (e.g., goals, values, attitudes and income), (Venkatraman et ah, 2012).

Ge, Brigden and Haubl (2015), proposed that consumers often make choices in settings where some alternatives are known and additional alternatives can be unveiled through search. When making a choice from a set of alternatives, the manner in which each of these was discovered should be irrelevant from a normative standpoint. Consumers must often decide between choosing among a set of previously discovered alternatives and searching to discover additional alternatives before making a choice. A substantial body of prior work examines consumer choice from pre-determined sets of alternatives. As a result, we know much about the influence of choice set composition and decision context on choice. Additionally, consumer characteristics such as culture, family and social economic conservatism are affecting their choices (Spillan&Harcar, 2010).

Building strong brand identity is the top most priority of many bottled water firms, but attaining this objective is not always an easy task due to the fact that the products and services of many bottled water firms are similar and their means of distributions are alike. Thus, effective brand identity stands as the focal point.

It has been observed that most bottled water manufacturing firms are not making profit has a result of low patronage caused by lack of consumers' preference for the brand; consumers often buy products that have famous brand because they feel more comfortable with things that are already known, hence the need for this study on brand identity and consumer choice.

Operational Framework

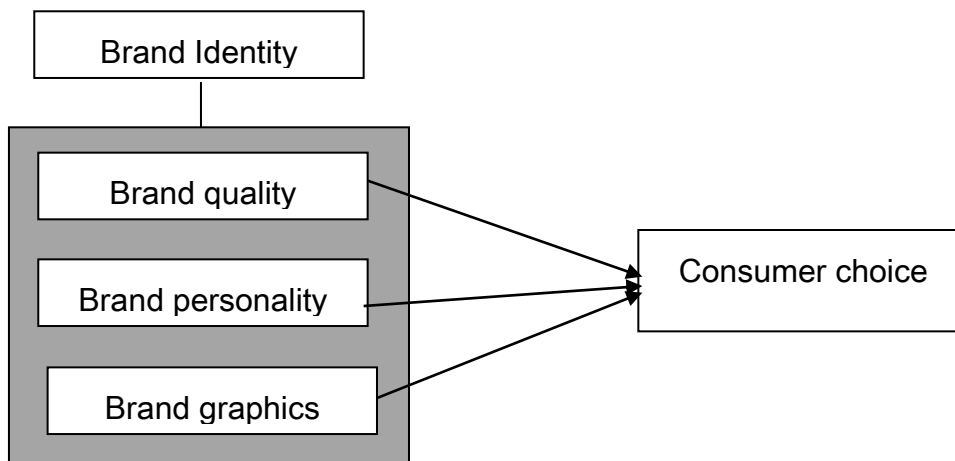


Fig. 1.1: Operational framework of brand identity and consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Source:Aaker (1996).

Objectives of the Study

- (i) To examine the extent of relationship between brand quality and consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.
- (ii) To ascertain the extent of relationship between brand personality and consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

- (iii) To investigate the extent of relationship between brand graphics and consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed:

- i. To what extent does brand quality relate with consumer choice of bottled water - manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.
- ii. To what extent does brand personality relate with consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.
- iii. To what extent does brand graphics relate with consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Research Hypotheses

- (i) There is no significant relationship between brand quality and consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.
- (ii) There is no significant relationship between brand personality and consumer 'choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.
- (iii) There is no significant relationship between brand graphics and consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review Concept of Brand Identity

Kapferer first mentioned the concept of Brand identity in 1986 and since then there have been many discussions of its definition (Janonis et al., 2007). To Janonis et al. (2007). "Brand identity includes everything that makes the brand meaningful and unique". De Chernatony and Harris (2001) "suggest that Brand identity includes values, aim and moral image that together constitute the essence of individuality that differentiate the brand". Brand identity offers a possibility to position a brand and encourages strategic approach while managing it (De Chernatony & Harris, 2001). Kapferer (2008) submitted that Brand identity involves many dimensions and any communication from the brand; whether it is formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, should be synewith its Brand identity. Saaksjarvi and Samiee (2011) propose another definition of Brand identity, describing it as a unique set of brand associations that firms aim to create or maintain. According to the researchers, Brand identity represents how companies aspire to be perceived. They also suggest that the purpose of Brand identity is to establish a relationship between the brand and the customer (Saaksjarvi&Samiee, 2011). Based on the reviewed definitions, the authors of ... have decided to define Brand identity as "a set of distinct characteristics, applied in brand communication, making the brand meaningful and unique".

Brand Quality and Consumer Choice

Brand quality is described as a customer's perception of the overall superiority of a brand with respect to its intended purpose, and relative to alternative brands (Hsu, et. al., 2012). This definition is supported and expanded by Kassim and Abdullah (2010) who articulated service quality as the customer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of a service provider and its services, which is often considered similar to the customer's overall attitude towards the company. To Zeithaml (1988) a product's quality is evaluated as high or low depending on its relative excellence or superiority within consumer's evoked set.

Precisely, brand quality is an impression, judgment, opinion, expectancy, and perception of what customers attribute to a particular brand offered by a firm. Balaji (2011) points out that a brand with high quality perceptions tends to benefit from higher customer preference?, repurchase intentions and equity. Perceived quality, therefore, adds to brand equity, in that it provides value to customers and presents them with more reasons to buy (Al-Hawari 2011). Aaker (2012) explains that the perceived quality or value of a product contributes more to the company's return on investment

(ROI) than marketing overheads, product development or market share. Thus, by increasing the perceived quality of a brand, a company will indirectly be increasing their return on investment. A high degree of perceived quality will increase brand equity (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Ahmed, et. al., (2010) also add that delivery of service quality to customers is required in the long term if the organisation is to experience the benefits of customer loyalty. This could happen when the service organization exceed customers expectation.

The evaluation of perceived quality can be associated with two groups of factors, which include intrinsic attributes and extrinsic attributes. Intrinsic attributes involve the physical composition of the product (e.g. colour, flavour, form and appearance), which "cannot be changed without altering the nature of the product itself and are consumed as the product is consumed". On the other hand, extrinsic attributes are "product-related but not part of the physical product itself" Zeithaml 1988). Price, brand name, level of advertising, stamp of quality, packaging and production information are examples of extrinsic cues to quality (Chieng&Goi. 2011).

When the service provider delivers poor-quality service it leads to customer dissatisfaction, and customers may not want to patronise the business in future and may switch to other providers (Prentice 2013; Cheng and Rashid 2013).

Brand Personality and Consumer Choice

The brand personality establishes what specific characteristics the brand has, and these characteristics should indicate how the brand would be in human life. By humanizing a brand, it plays a more central part in consumers' lives (Kapferer. 2008), which is good considering individuals are to keener towards brands that share the same or similar ideas (Ponnam, 2007). Aaker (1997) also states that brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. It regards how the brand personality enables a consumer to express his or her self through the consumption of a brand. Furthermore brand personality increases consumer preference and usage, evoke emotions in consumers, and increases levels of trust and loyalty (Aaker, 1997). Aaker (1997) has developed a theoretical framework of brand personality dimensions that measures the perception of a brand. These are measured by considering the extent to which the respondents believe it possesses the characteristics of personality dimensions. This framework enables experimental researchers to measure symbolic meanings of brands as if they were people (Aaker, 1997). Swaminathan et al. (2009) highlight that brand managements need to understand which brand personality traits are going to matter to customers in order to attach the potential of brand personality. However, not all customers are equally sensitive to a brand's personality. Interpersonal attachment styles determine what types of customers are most likely to be influenced by a brand's personality (Swaminathan et al., 2009).

Brand Graphics and Consumer Choice

Graphics include image layout, colour combination, typography, and product photography. The combination of all these components communicates an image. Graphics on the brand are telling detailed information about the product. It becomes a product branding or identity, followed by the information. When the consumers examine brands in the supermarket, the differential perception and the positioning of the graphics can be the difference between identifying and missing the product (Silayoi&Speece, 2007). However, eye-catching graphics make the product stand out on the shelf and attract the consumers. Graphics can affect through colours and printed lines on the package on which different signs and symbols are located. Holograms and combinations of various materials can encourage consumers to touch the package, thereby inspiring them to try the product (Rundh, 2009).

It is common for retail brands to remain faithful to solid, bold colours and pictograms to spur consumer's interest in a product's purchase (Adhesives & Sealants Industry, 2011). Apart from illustrations and other pictograms, the use of photography is a great way of communicating a brand's message. The use of photography can also be an important feature that helps consumers

understands complex regulations and safety concerns. When graphic design is used for brands, it explains that the designer solely uses visual symbols to express abstract aspirations. If photography, illustrations and/or decorative patterns are utilized on the package, they may stimulate people's associations: "Decorative patterns are a visual graphics that do not require too much explanation if they are used properly in the design. A kind of cordial visual beauty will be produced. Also the same meanings are requested between the value of content and visual performance" (Wu & Fu, 2009). If the producer wants consumers to remember the brand, then the elements that most likely will influence remembrance are font styles, sizes, and colors. Graphically, pictorial elements such as photography should be positioned on the left hand side of the package, while verbal elements should be placed on the right. This is because the "brain laterality results in an asymmetry in the perception of elements in package designs" (Silayoi&Speece, 2004).

In a study made by Westerman et al., (2013), the results indicated that participants favored brand designs that had the graphics on the right-side of the text because these designs were referred to as more practical, pleasing and less annoying. However, it should be taken into account that this particular study was specifically related to the brands of beverages, namely water and vodka. Westerman et al (2013) , also found that upward oriented graphics are commonly preferred because they are perceived as more pleasing and appealing, and they lead to greater purchase intention. The brand design adds value to the package and to the product respectively. Design elements such as colors, font, text, and graphics have an important role in package appearance. Pictures on the package in form of attractive situations (mountains, beaches, luxury houses and cars) can assist in triggering lifestyle aspirations (Rundh 2009). At the point of purchase, the primary role of the package and packaging design is to catch the consumers' attention and to stand out among the competition in the store or at the supermarket. Successful package design and packaging itself is the result of the involvement and the work put forth by marketers, designers, and customers. Hence, brand design is a major instrument in modern marketing activities for consumer goods. Brand design can attract the customers' attention, communicate company's name and image, differentiate the brand from competitors, and enhance the product's functionality (Garber & Burke & Jones 2000). Therefore, the package itself acts as a decisive communication tool and provides consumers with product-related information during the buying decision process.

Methodology

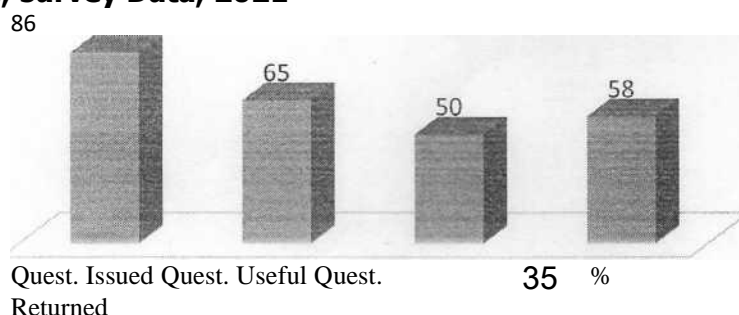
This study adopted descriptive survey research. The data for the study were collected primarily through the use of a structured questionnaire (5 point likert scale). They were handed directly to the various bottled water manufacturing firms. The population of the study consisted of 110 registered bottled water producers gotten from Water Producers Association of Nigeria (WAPAN) Rivers State Chapter. The sample size of 86 was derived through Krejcie and Morgan sampling technique. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The hypotheses formulated were tested through the spearman rank order correlation co-efficient with the aid Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0

The reliability of the instrument was tested through SPSS Conbach's Alpha and it stood at 0.88 higher than Nunnally's (1978), benchmark of 0.7

Data Analysis and Results

Questionnaire Distribution

Source; survey Data, 2021



The chart above shows that 86Copies of questionnaire were issued, 65 copies were returned and 50 copies were useful making it 58%.

Bivariate Analysis Test of Hypothesis One (1)

There is no significant relationship between brand quality and consumer choice.

Correlations

		Brand Quality	Consumer Choice
Spearman's rho	Brand Quality	1.000	1.000
	Consumer Choice	1.000	1.000
	N	3	3
	N	3	3

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). **Source:** SPSS output, 2021

A spearman correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between Brand quality and Consumer choice. The result revealed a significant and positive relationship, ($r = 1.000$, $N = 3$, $P < 0.01$). The correlation was strong in strength. Higher levels of Brand quality were associated with higher levels of Consumer choice. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Test of Hypothesis Two (2)

There is no significant relationship between brand personality and consumer choice.

Correlations

		Brand personality	Consumer choice
Spearman's rho	Brand personality	1.000	.802*
	Consumer choice	.802*	1.000
	N	3	3
	N	3	3

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Source:** SPSS output, 2021.

A spearman correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between Brand personality and Consumer choice. The result revealed a significant and positive relationship, ($r = .802$, $N = 3$, $P < .005$). The correlation was strong in strength. Higher levels of Brand association were associated with higher levels of Consumer choice. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Test of Hypothesis Three (3)

There is no significant relationship between brand graphics and consumer choice

Correlations

		Brand graphics	Consumer choice
Brand Graphics	Brand Graphics	1.000	.866
	Consumer choice	.866	1.000
	N	3	3

Spearman's rho	N	3	3
	Correlation	.866	1.000
Consumer choice	Sig. (2-tailed)	.333	'A
	N	3	3

Source: SPSS output, 2021.

A spearman correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between Brand graphics and Consumer choice. The result revealed a significant and positive relationship, ($r = .866$, $N = 3$). The correlation was strong in strength. Higher levels of Brand graphics were associated with higher levels of Consumer choice.

Summary of Findings

Based on the data analysis, the following findings were discovered:

1. Brand quality showed a strong, positive and significant relationship with consumer choice.
2. Brand personality also showed a strong, positive and significant relationship with consumer choice.
3. Brand graphics equally showed a strong, positive and significant relationship with consumer choice.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the data revealed that brand identity showed a significant relationship with consumer choice. The various dimensions of brand identity; brand quality, brand personality, and brand graphics showed a significant relationship with consumer choice. This is in line with the work of Adane (2017). He carried out a study on the effect of brand image on consumer preference. The result revealed that brand image variables have statistically significant relationships with consumer preference.

The study equally revealed that brand personality showed a positive and significant relationship with consumer choice. In the same vein, the study of Adane (2017) indicated that brand personality has a positive influence on consumer preference of Ambassador Garment.

It was equally revealed that brand graphics showed a significant relationship with consumer choice of bottled water manufacturing firms, this is in line with the study of Westerman et al (2013). The result of their study showed that consumers favoured brand designs that had the graphics on the product.

Conclusions

Brand identity plays a vital role in ensuring that the product stands out among competitive products. The result of the analysis has revealed that Brand Identity (brand quality, brand personality and brand graphics) relates significantly with consumer choice. Consumers are loyal to the brand they can easily recall and brands that has quality. Brand identity influences brand reputation and credibility which later becomes guideline for consumer choice and preference.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Bottled water manufacturing firms should produce qualitative brands. Because trust is the basis for every customer brand relationship; trust is the key driver of purchase behavior.
2. Bottled water manufacturing firms should create a positive image of their brands by producing products that will stand the taste of time.
3. Bottled water manufacturing firms should use eye catching graphics to design their brands. This will help differentiae the firm's brand from competitors' brands.

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