



Branded Vegetable Oil and Consumer Preference among Students of Delta State Polytechnics.

¹Emmanuel, Francisca Ebele, ²Prof. Nwaizugbo, I.C Ph.D and ³Oparah, Promise Chika Ph.D

Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined branded vegetable oil and consumer preference among students of Delta State Polytechnics. Several brands exist in the market, consumer choice frequently changes as per new innovations, changes in test like and dislike related to vegetable oil, vegetable oil is an important element in the food items. Thus, there is need to know the factors that influence consumer preference. To achieve this objective, a structured questionnaire was developed to measure the variables that influence consumer preference towards vegetable oil. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample object, a sample size of 397 was determined using Taro Yamene's formula and Bowleys proportion allocation formula was adopted to allocate questionnaire to strata. Copies of questionnaire were distributed to students of Delta state Polytechnics in the three senatorial districts and 320 copies of questionnaire was suitable for analysis. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the reliability of the research instrument. All variables exceeded 0.70. The hypotheses tested using Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) showed that brand awareness, perceived quality and brand image have positive effect on consumer preference. The findings equally show that brand awareness is the most contributing factor to consumer preference having the highest β - value of 0.437. The study therefore concluded that consumer awareness of a particular brands leads to purchase of that brand. Based on the findings, the study recommended that Brand manager should actively promote and improve brand awareness of their vegetable oil brands to ensure that consumers recognizes and recall the brand through frequent advertisement and Vegetable Oil Company should dedicate effort and resources to improve on quality in terms of taste and flavor of vegetable oil.

Keywords: *Branded Vegetable Oil, Consumer, Preference and among Students, Delta State Polytechnics.*

1. Introduction

In recent times, consumers choose their favorable and familiar brands due to the rise in their consciousness. Consequently, for brands to compete with others, marketers must create love for their brands in the minds of consumers. Consumers gather information on the brands that are available in the market, and based on the information and knowledge, they ranked their preference. Nondzor, Taiwah and Michael (2015) opined that consumers learn about products and services they are exposed to and adjust their brand preferences to those things they learn.

Brand is a name, term, sign, or design or combination of them intended to encourage prospective customers to differentiate a producer's product from other competitors (American Marketing association, 1994). The Nigerian market is flooded with various brands of vegetable oil such as Power oil, Devon Kings oil, Grand oil, Mamador, Kemas oil, Vino oil, among others, hence consumer selection of vegetable oil brands is governed by the knowledge, information and attribute of the brand. Such attributes include quality, brand image, brand awareness, availability, and price among others. These attributes according to Nondzor, Taiwah and Michael (2015) are used to measure the consumer perceptions in selecting a particular brand of vegetable oil as they are believed to have effect on consumer preference. According to Raut and Walvekar (2014), the selection procedure among these varieties of brands is through a complex process.

Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2001) stated that young consumers especially teenagers live in a fast shifting world with information and technology advancing at a volatile rate. New technology adopted by teenagers are preferably than all other age groups and are more naturally influenced by peer pressure and media. It is seen more authenticity, at this time that, the marketers spend excessive amount of money and time trying to acquire more knowledge and skills and as well as to forecast varying behavior of adolescence. Blackwell et al. (2001) observed that most youths learn their purchasing skills while shopping with parents. John (2009) stated that early consumers usually have many stages while buying the products or brands and shows different behavior with respect to different products and brands.

Vegetable oil is one of the important consumer items which impact the health of consumers. As a major source of energy requirements for the human body, consumers use edible oils in the preparation of everyday meals. Vegetable oils are one of the most essential commodities in the agricultural economy. It is an inevitable ingredient in the preparation of most of food products of daily consumption (Ushadevi, 2013).

1.2 Statement of Problem

Consumers are lovers of tasty meals and vegetable oil continues to play a crucial role in the preparation of such meals. In the past, most household depended largely on locally sourced vegetable oil and expensive imported vegetable oil such as Turkey and Kings vegetable oil this are consumed by few. Consumer preference differs from each other in other of choice of purchase and consumption of any product and services before them, this is because they put into consideration a lot of things before reaching their purchase decision.

Recently Nigeria market is flooded with different brands of oil by difference manufacturers, with different added features on their product and services with the aim of dominating the market. Thus, this development has heightened competition among various brands of vegetable oil in the market. Producers are trying their best to differentiate their brands and services compared to their competitors. It on this that this study wants to know what influences the choice of purchase of branded vegetable oil by consumer using this attributes brand awareness (availability, knowledge etc.) brand quality (nutritional and health value content) brand image (goodwill) brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is often said to be the core of brand equity, if customers buy a product with little or no concern to the brand name but only look to the price, product feature and convenience, then there is little equity (Sera & Zeina, 2012). Several loyalty campaigns are conducted to keep their customers and promote the brand image; however, it is uncertain if young consumers are specifically loyal to a particular brand.

Several studies conducted on edible oil are foreign base research (Thoma, Boshnjaku & Pagria, 2018; Prasad, 2016; Kumar, 2014; etc.) and some studies focused on women consumers such as (Kavitha & Meenakshi Sundaram, 2017). It is against this backdrop that the study intends to unravel consumer (young consumer) preference towards branded vegetable oil.

1.3 Objective of the Study:

The broad objective of the study is to examine branded vegetable oil and consumer preference in Delta State Polytechnic. Other specific objectives of the study include to:

- i. Determine the effect of brand awareness on consumer preference;
- ii. Find out how perceived quality affect consumer preference.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

To achieve the stated objectives, the following research questions is addressed?

- i. What is the effect of brand awareness on consumer preference?
- ii. How does perceived brand quality influence consumer preference?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The study is anchored on the following testable hypotheses stated in null format

H0₁: Brand awareness has no significant effect on consumer preference.

H0₂: Perceived quality has no significant effect on consumer preference

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

The brand loyalty produces a vital close relationship with customers preferences. In other words, it produces a batter buying behaviors. When determining customer preferences, one can experience indecision from time to time. The dimension of those indecision from the customers might increase or decrease depending on whether the related product produce to demonstrates the expected performance or function (functional risk) of the brand. The expected benefit may be obtained in return for the money and time spent (financial and physical risk). It may favour the entire public or not that is the social risk. The product may either satisfied the customers who are consumer or not, if that occurred, it is describe as psychological risk. This risk is highly rated high, the customers may prefer the same product or not. However, particularly in times where we may experience low financial risk or when others related product fails to satisfy the customer. Taskin & Akat, (2012) opine that, Brand loyalty is a psychological commitment comparable to friendship.

Brand loyalty is a conscious act and cannot be formed by coincidence. Brand loyalty can be perceived as a behavioral reaction. It is developed in a certain period of time. It is realized through decision making units. It occurs in cases where more than one brand alternatives are involved. It is a situation that occurs after the decision making and evaluation processes (Cakirer, 2013). Traditional marketing literature generally emphasizes two different magnitudes of the concept of brand loyalty, attitudinal and behavioral. Attitudinal brand loyalty may include behavioral intent dimensions, cognitive, and affective, while, on the other hand, behavioral loyalty reflects the repeat buying behavior.

Behavioral intent, may be described as an intention to act during buying decision process. It is also considered by (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001) who opine that, it is the act of being intermediary between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, appearing either as a tendency to buy a product for the first time or a commitment to buy back as current brand. Attitudinal brand loyalty is a requirement for behavioral loyalty. some scholars such as (Baldinger & Rubinson, 1996) review that, if customer attitude towards a new product is positive therefor, highly loyal buyers will always tend to remain loyal, while switching buyers might be turn into loyal buyers more easily.

Aaker (1991) introduce the brand loyalty pyramid which represent five levels of brand loyalty.

The indifferent to the product and who perceived any product that seem to be adequate and the product name has slight influence over the buying decisions. Those customers who may get satisfied with the product are the best customers because they keep buying the product. The next customers are those who have no choice and they don't want take the risk of changing product therefore, they buyers with switching costs and they may become habitual buyers. The next customers are the loyal buyers who considers the product as their personal brand. The last customers are those who really committed themselves as the main buyers or those who are tremendously loyal to the product. They comprise those who are proud users and will recommend the product to others (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker (1991) cited that brand loyalty is at the core of brand equity, it is tied more closely to the use experience as it cannot exist without prior purchase and use experience. However, loyalty is influenced by other major dimensions of brand equity, namely awareness, associations and perceived quality but in many instances, loyalty may be independent of other factors such as perceived quality or attribute associations as the nature of the relationship is unclear.

Factors influencing Brand awareness

The different types of variables that influence consumer's awareness about new products in the market are;

- i. Product name,
- ii. Method of advert
- iii. Sales and promotion of the product.

i. Product Name: The product name, market the product more especially when it is new product. It is the first that attracts customers. If the firm has given the product attractive name, it usually attracts customers attention and it usually encouraged them to buy that product.

ii. Method of Advert: The method of advertisement matters. An effective advertisement usually helps the firm to increase the product awareness. The inspiration of an effective advertisement is usually on a large scale and it always attracts more customers and the happiest customer will always advertise the product to others customers by the Word of Mouth (WOM). The superstar who is endorsing the product is also play a significant part of advertising the product. Firms can hire famous faces as their product ambassadors and customers get more attracted towards the product.

iii. Sales and Promotions of the Product: The sales and promotions of the product always help to increase the awareness of the product. Firms usually apply different means of promoting their brand like a free gift, free sampling, giving their product as a gift with another well-known product of their own brand or in collaboration of any other company.

Benefits of Creating Brand Awareness

There are many benefits of creating brand awareness, these include the followings;

- i. The brand stays on top of the minds of the consumers. This is the first step in building customer-based brand equity to get fruitful results.
- ii. It will become part of the consideration set; the brands that make up the part of the consideration set are considered for purchase decision (William, 2006).
- iii. It affects choices among the brands, the more a consumer is aware and informed about a product, the more at ease and comfortable he or she feels in buying that brand (Adaval, 2003).
- iv. Atingan et al. (2005) opine that product equity arises when the consumer possesses awareness and familiarity with the product at high level and hold some strong favorable, unique brand association in memory.

Brand awareness can be created by repeated exposure to enhance familiarity. The more the consumer sees a brand, hears about it, comes across it and thinks about it through experience, its surroundings or through word of mouth the more likely he or she is able to retrieve the information regarding the brand in its memory when needed (Keller, 2009).

Logos, slogans, packaging, jingles, advertisements or any marketing campaign aimed to communicate the meaning of the brand enhances the ability of the consumer to recall as well as recognize the brand by repeated exposure and adding it up with favorable and desired associations of that brand relative to its product category (Keller, 2009).

Brand Image and Consumer Preference

Brand image according to Keller (2009) is all about what consumer perceives about a brand, which is derived from brand associations created in the customer's memory. Image of the brand exist in the consumers' mind and depends on the associations that consumers have, to have a good image the brand must have unique, strong and favourable associations (Keller, 2003).

Kotler (1999) define brand image as the set of beliefs that consumers hold about a particular brand. Uggala (2001) further stated that identity is what the company is sending out and image is the consumers' view of the brand in their minds. Consumers interpret the brand through many filters; experience, perceptions and people.

Brand image is closely related to brand awareness, if the consumer recognizes and recall a brand, they will probably even have some association about the brand. According to Keller (2009), Brand associations can be distinguished into attributes, benefits and attitudes. These different kinds of brand associations make up a brand image.

Attribute

Attributes can be distinguished in product-related attributes and non-product related attributes. Product-related attributes (or intrinsic attributes) relate to a physical product or service requirements, they cannot be changed without altering the physical product/service itself. Food products have intrinsic attributes like taste, freshness and texture (Méndez, Oubina & Rubio 2011). Non-product related attributes (or extrinsic attributes) are external aspects of the product that relate to its purchase or consumption. Keller identified four main types of non-product related attributes: price information, packaging or product appearance, user imagery (type of person that uses the product) and usage imagery (situation in which product is used) (Keller, 1993). For image products, extrinsic attributes like brand name and packaging are more important than intrinsic attributes (Steenkamp, 2000). For food products there are contradictory findings, some researchers argue that intrinsic attributes are more important than extrinsic attributes and other researchers argue the opposite (Mendez et al., 2011).

Benefits

Benefits refer to what consumers think the product will provide them. Consumers learn to associate particular consequences with certain actions, in other words consumers learn to choose for product attributes that have desirable consequences (benefits) and reduce undesirable consequences (Gutman, 2002). Three types of benefits can be identified: functional, experiential and symbolic benefits (Keller, 2009). Functional benefits are directly related to the consumed product and correspond to the product-related (intrinsic) attributes. Experiential benefits are related to how it feels to use the product and also correspond to the product-related attributes. Symbolic benefits correspond to non-product-related (extrinsic) attributes and are related to more psychological needs (Keller, 2009). Usually symbolic benefits provide an indirect advantage by consuming a product, for example self-esteem or the feeling of power (Fuchs and Diamantopoulos, 2010).

Attitudes

Attitudes are an overall evaluation of a brand (Del Vazquez & Iglesias, 2001). According to the theory of reasoned action (or theory of planned behavior), attitudes and values are antecedents of food behavior, they can predict and explain consumer's choices for products and services (Ajzen, 1991). Through the attitudes and beliefs that consumers hold towards products/services, purchase intentions can be predicted (Thompson et al., 1994). Although this theory of Ajzen and Fishbein has been applied to many food studies and has proven its predictive power (Thompson et al., 1994), other important components of consumer behavior are underrepresented. As the theory of planned behavior is focused on rational decision making and consumer's cognitive impact on their behavior, affective influences are neglected (Hauser et al., 2011). Both cognitive and affective factors are predictors of brand attitudes (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005).

Perceived quality and consumer preference

According to Aaker (1991) perceived quality is the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service, which is directly related to his satisfaction. As the name of the measurement reveals, quality cannot be objectively determined due to the subjective nature of perception. Customers differ in regard to needs and preferences. Perceived quality is important from a consumer perspective because when customers lack motivation to obtain information, then a quality brand provides a reason to buy.

The term perceived quality is used to explain that quality judgments are based on the perceptions, needs and goals of consumers. Consumer's evaluation of product attributes can be used to investigate the formation of perceived quality in brand choice (Mendez et al., 2011). A positive link between loyal and perceived quality has also been found by researchers. Perceived quality makes the consumers satisfied which make them repurchase the product which leads to loyalty (Lin & Chan, 2003).

Consumer evaluate a brand as unique, prestigious and reliable for its superior quality. If the product is associated with high-perceived quality, the consumers' trust of a brand is increased and thus a brand preference is also increased. Moreover, consumer use the brand quality to differentiate a brand from the other brands. Similarly, Saleem, Ghafar, Ibrahim, Yousuf and Ahmed (2015) opine that Product perceived quality directly influences to purchase intention. Customers have some perceptions about the product quality, price and styles before going to purchasing the product. After using of product, purchase intention increases as well as decreases, because it has direct relations which affect each other's. If the quality is high, purchase intention of customer is also high.

Perceived product quality is a very essential issue in the development and implementation of marketing strategies aimed at building brand image and increasing market share (Tsiotsou, 2005). Aaker (1996) also considered perceived quality as a necessary measure to achieve good brand equity. Thus, quality is a main factor affecting customer perception and underlying the long-term success of products and firms (Mitra & Golder, 2006). He and Li (2011) found that service quality has a positive influence on brand identification. Furthermore, Rameseshan and Tsao (2007) stated that an exciting brand with a trendy style and design would be perceived to have quality because, when consumers make judgments about perceived quality, they will assess not only the product but also attributes such as packaging, aroma, style, fit and overall appearance.

Brand Loyalty and Consumer Preference

Brand Loyalty can be seen as commitment of the customers to their brand and how many occasions they always patronize the same product. A loyal customer will always prefer to buy his or her brand consistently no matter what price the product is been offered. Firms continuously thrive to sustain its customers. They make strategies not only to attract new customers but to cultivate loyal customers (Shahid, Hussain & Zafar, 2017).

Brand loyalty affects consumers' choice of brand to a high extent, when consumers are loyal to a brand, they buy the producer of this specific brand on a regular basis. Through this behavior, they can be sure to get what they pay for. Further, by being this loyal, the consumers close their eyes for other brands, which may be even better brands than the chosen one. In that way, brands with many loyal consumers have great advantages. They handle competition in terms of lower price and improved products much better if they have many loyal consumers (Usiner, 2000). Therefore, there is low equity if the buyers have low care about the brand and its name. the other way around, there is high equity if the consumers focus on the brand or maybe even the logo and jingle and have little respect if other brands have better product and or a lower price (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker (1991) explains that loyalty is basically a measured capacity of how much a purchaser can be emotionally involved in a brand. It shows how much consumers are willing to keep to a particular product especially when the other brands have greater feature or a more positive price difference. Keller (2003) highlights the fact that repeated purchase does not signalize brand loyalty itself. He points out that customers make repeated purchase actions towards the same brand as they have specific habits which do not change or they are being affected by sales or other promotions.

3. Methodology and Data Analyses

The research design adopted in this study is survey which involves administering questionnaire to the respondents in order to address the objectives of the study. The study was conducted in the three senatorial districts in Delta State which are Delta North, Delta South and Delta Central. The total population of the study comprised students of Delta State polytechnic, Ogwashi-uku (Delta North), Delta State Polytechnic Ozoro (Delta Central) and Delta State Polytechnic, Oghara (Delta South). The population of the study is finite, it means the population can be assessed. The study made use of Taro Yamen's formula in determining the sample size. This study employed stratified random sampling technique. Structured questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. A five-point likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used in designing the questions. The experts and supervisor did a face validation of the instrument to ensure that the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. To ensure reliability of the instrument, the internal consistency commonly measured in Cronbach alpha was adopted.

A coefficient result of 0.70 was deemed appropriate for the study. Data obtained was analyzed with SPSS (Statistical package for social sciences), Multiple Linear regression was used to analyze the data after coding. The background variables were analyzed with descriptive statistics.

Table 4.3.1 Research question 1: How has brand awareness affect consumer’s preferences?

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree		A g r e e		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1	I can differentiate the vegetable oil brand I use among the other competing brands	110	34	130	41	25	8	30	9	25	8
2	When buying vegetable oil, the first brand to my mind would be the brand I use	115	36	95	30	38	12	35	10	37	12
3	The vegetable oil brand I use is sold in more stores compared to the competing brands	4	31.2	140	44	15	4.6	40	13	25	7.8
4	The brand I use comes up first in my mind when I need to make a purchase decision on vegetable oil	125	39	135	42	10	3	25	8	25	8
5	The brand is the only brand recalled when I need to make a purchase decision on vegetable oil	116	36	139	43	15	4.6	25	8	25	8

Source, Field survey, 2020

Table 4.3.2 Research Question 2: what is the effect of perceived quality on consumer preference?

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree		A g r e e		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1	The vegetable oil brand I use is better compared to other brands in terms of taste, flavor and appearance	95	30	126	39	35	11	34	10.6	30	9
2	The product quality of the vegetable oil brand I use is very high	124	39	100	31	40	13	33	10	23	7
3	The brand I frequently purchase is very reliable	80	25	140	44	40	13	30	9	30	9
4	Long life shelf of the branded vegetable oil influences my purchase decision	75	23	101	32	46	14	58	18	40	13
5	The brand is always a good product	95	30	98	31	41	13	52	16	33	10

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 4.3.2 shows that 221 (69%) of the respondents agreed to statement 1, 35 (11%) were undecided, while 64 (20%) disagreed. The table also showed that 224 (70%) agreed to statement 2, 40 (13%) were undecided while 56 (17%) disagreed. The table indicated that 220 (69%) of the respondents agreed to statement 3, 40 (13%) were undecided, while 60 (18%) disagreed. In statement 4, 176 (55%) of the respondents agreed to statement 4, 46 (14%) were undecided while 98 (31%) disagreed. Lastly in statement 5, 193 (61%) of the respondents agreed to statement 5, 42 (13%) were undecided while 83 (26%) disagreed. This result shows that consumers buy brand they perceived to be quality, in other words, consumer are quality conscious.

H0₁: Brand awareness has no significant effect on consumer preference

The regression coefficient in table 4.5.3 shows that brand awareness has a P- value of 0.000 which is less than the critical level of significance (t-value = 1.193, P < 0.05). This therefore means that brand awareness has a significant positive effect on consumer preference, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate accepted. This result gives credence to the research of Thoma et al., (2018), the study shows that consumer prefer oil brand they are aware of.

H0₂: Perceived quality has no significant effect on consumer preference

The regression coefficient in table 4.5.3 shows that perceived quality has a p-value of 0.003 which is less than the critical level of significance (t- value = 1.126, $P < 0.05$). This therefore means that perceived quality has a significant positive effect on consumer preference for branded edible oil, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate accepted. This result is in consonance with the findings of Ceyda et al. (2015), the study revealed that perceived quality has a positive significant effect on buying behavior.

Summary of Findings

- i. Brand awareness has a positive significant effect on consumer preference, the P-value calculated (.001) is less than the critical level of significance.
- ii. Perceived quality has a positive significant effect on consumer preference, the p-value calculated (.003) is less than the critical level of significance.

5. Conclusion

This study examined branded vegetable oil and consumer preference, the results indicated that consumer awareness of a particular vegetable oil leads to their purchasing of the oil. Consumers also think of quality, before embarking on a purchase. When consumers perceived a product to be of high quality, they become loyal to the product and develop a positive image towards the product.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, recommendations were made as follows;

- i. Brand manager should actively promote and improve brand awareness of their vegetable oil brands to ensure that consumers recognize and recall the brand through frequent advertisement. They can adopt a pull strategy to maintain consumer awareness of their brand. Frequent advertisement about the brand and promotional activities serves as reminder to consumers and position the brand in the minds of the consumer.
- ii. Vegetable Oil Company should dedicate effort and resources to improve on quality in terms of taste and flavor of vegetable oil. Getting a feedback from consumers will help maintain and improve the quality of the brand.

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