



ANALYTICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE BRAND IMAGE DIMENSION OF BRANDING ON CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION BITTERS BEVERAGE SUB-SECTOR OF THE BEVERAGE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The study empirically investigated the brand image dimension of branding on customers' perception of the bitters beverage sub-sector. The study population entails the consumers of branded alcoholic bitters beverages in Lagos State; 389 were retrieved out of 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, using convenience sampling to select the appropriate locations within the study area and purposive sampling to select respondents whom instruments were administered to based on the researcher judgment. Data collected were analysed using simple percentages, frequency distributions, mean and standard deviation, while stepwise multiple regression was used for analysis. The findings reveal that functional attributes ($\beta = 0.723$, $t = 18.022$, $p < .05$) and the Logo of my choice ($\beta = 0.803$, $t = 14.336$, $p < .05$) are positively significant among the predictors of customers' perception of brand image dimension of branding. Based on this, certain characteristics of functional attributes and benefits of the brand come to mind promptly when consumers are faced with a choice among bitters products. Thus, the marketers should create a desirable identity and image of the product in the minds of consumers which associates with the brand for retention, sustainability and to lure new prospects.

Keywords: Branding Dimension, Brand Image, Customers' Perception, Branding

INTRODUCTION

Branding aims to create and deliver value for the teeming consumers. Strategic branding is about improving a product's success in attracting consumers' perceptions (Keller, 2013). The secret to delivering high perception is, therefore, attracting value of the product to each customer by convincing them that what is being offered is above and beyond their expectations, assisting them in solving a problem they are currently experiencing, providing a solution, delivering results, and making them satisfied (Kotler, Keller & Koshy, 2009). Organisations are using packaging to reposition the brand image, which creates a high perception of the product offering by providing an engaging and shareable experience, adding value for both the customer and the company (Gilainia, Monsef & Soleymani, 2013). The brand image of bitters beverage is one of the key components of bitters' marketing strategies because it has a greater impact on customers' perception of the products, ultimately creating and stimulating customers' desire to experience the product. It has been discovered that brand image through packaging is a potent marketing tool for immediately communicating, conveying the product offering, and providing consumers with additional value (Keller, 2013). Consumers today want products that reflect their attitudes through usefulness and design. It all comes down to perceived usability and aesthetics, which are



the elements that determine how a product looks and what it can do overall (Dadras, 2015; Gilaninia, Hosseini & saeid, 2013). Product packaging stimulates customers feeling of having the real brand perceived in their heads (Gilaninia, Hosseini & Saeid, 2013^B). This is why it becomes necessary for human beings to identify with such a brand in life (Abdalkrim & Al-Hrezat, 2013; Chaneta, 2010).

Bitters' are not new in the Nigerian market, and before now, Nigerians patronised sellers of herbs and roots popularly called *Agbo* (local concoction). Some with alcoholic mixtures, and some with water mixtures which serve as remedies for different ailments and have thrived for centuries as a traditional medicine in Nigeria and are traceable to renaissance era pharmacopeia (Okeke, 2018). This herbal base beverage drink is not just any ordinary alcoholic drink, it is bitters drink made from carefully selected tropical plant extracts, and its popularity is due to its aphrodisiac qualities, which manufacturers are extremely protective of the recipes (Ogbechi, 2019). Notable today is the fact that the majority of Nigerian consumes these bitters herbs openly, fashionably and even in exotic places for the alleged fact that it enhances and stimulates sexual performance by various persons of different social class and gender, both rich and poor, whether it is exact or not is not known until empirically validated.

The problem arises as several studies have written extensively on how the brand image dimension of branding affects the degree of perception of consumers in developed countries across sectors other than the bitters beverage sub-sector industry. The introduction of different control variables added to brand image on customers' perception in the studies and the methodology used by most of the studies differs in design, population, area of coverage, sampling technique and method of analysis (Yang & Wang, 2010). Also, findings of the bulk of such studies on the brand image dimension of branding on customers' perception in developed countries may not apply to transition economies like ours because of the characteristics of the respondents, their attitudes towards research instruments and the environment. Therefore, it becomes imperative to conduct an empirical study of the brand image dimension of branding on the customers' perception of the herbal-based beverage called bitters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Branding Dimension

Differentiating the products of one producer from those of another has been done through branding for generations. In reality, the word "brand" comes from the old Norse word "brander," which means "to burn," as this is how cattle owners branded their animals to identify them and still do today (Inter-brand group, 1992). According to Alton (2016), branding affects every facet of business operations; no part of the firm can function without branding. He also contends that there is no stronger relationship than that between brand perception and consumer perception. Any business that wishes to improve client relations and foster long-term loyalty must be mindful of the brand image it develops. Branding has taken on a significant role in the context of contemporary marketing. It can give the marketer a competitive edge because it is an intangible asset of a firm (Richa, 2015). The goal of branding is to differentiate products through their advantages. Branding provides a product with a unique identity and increases its value, known as brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2012). When consumers organise their knowledge about items, it helps them make decisions more clearly and adds value to the company. This is how mental structures are created through branding (Keller, 2013).



Consumer perception of distinctions across brands in a product category, which may be tied to features or advantages of the product itself or may be related to more ethereal image considerations, is the key to branding (Eells, 2010; Gaoth, 2010; Kohli & Labahn, 2006). Branding gives a product a distinctive identity and a compelling visual representation for consumers. It consists of components including visible symbols, values, reputation, customer experience, recognition, and market awareness (Ana, 2015). According to Einarsen (2013), branding communicates the fundamental truth or worth of a company's offering to consumers by communicating the brand's qualities, values, and attributes. When branding became an important marketing activity for businesses in the 1950s, it became one of the most important assets that should be cherished for an organisation's existence and the acceptance of its products and services (Blois, 2000; Nijssen, 1999). Because of this, the majority of significant conglomerates in the global economy attribute their achievements to their powerful brands, which are the same as the company's primary resources (people, cash, and equipment) (Davis, 2002).

Brand Image

Corporate image, which is the sum of how people view an organisation, is acknowledged as a key concept in marketing. Brand image is the idea that an organisation's impression is reflected in the connections maintained in consumers' memories (Keller, 2013). Images are generated using all of the senses, including sight, sound, touch, taste, and sensation, as well as the business environment, customer service, and internal communications (Smith & Taylor, 2004). Brand image is said to be all about how consumers see a certain brand, which is a reflection of what goes on in their minds (Keller, 2008). According to Mwanzia (2018), a brand's image describes consumers' attitudes toward it. According to Faircloth (2005), a brand's image is also the consumer's overall mental picture of the product and what makes it stand out from other companies. Consumer knowledge and beliefs about the many goods of a specific brand while omitting non-product attributes make up the bulk of brand image. Another definition of brand image is "a depiction of the personal symbolism that the customer links with a particular brand and is composed of both descriptive and evaluative information about the brand" (Iversen & Hem, 2008). As a result, the brand's reputation is believed to be a key factor in influencing consumer behaviour (Burmman, Schaefer & Maloney, 2008).

Customer Perception

Customer value is a marketing and branding concept that emphasises how much a product's success depends on whether or not customers believe in it or that it can meet their requirements and wants (Kokemuller, 2018). In other words, customers ultimately decide how to interpret and respond to marketing communications and form an opinion of a company as it builds its brand and markets its products. Much effort is spent conducting market research to understand what consumers believe and feel. The researcher must cultivate the desired value perception with customers to affect how people view the product's value (Kokemuller, 2018). Customer perception is an assessed value that a customer believes they will receive from purchasing a product. It is also the difference between the benefits they believe they will receive overall and the price they paid for the goods (Li, 2017). Customer perception is measured in terms of a product's needs to satisfy a prospective customer (Korankye, Asante, Asirifi-Danquah & Okyere, 2015). If the consumer believes he is getting value from the product and only if his impression of the product matches his experience with it after consumption will he continue to purchase it



(Korankye, Asante, Asirifi-Danquah & Okyere, 2015)? Customer perception is, therefore, equal to the sum of the benefits and expenses they perceive (MBASKOOL, 2018; Ryu & Han, 2013). A customer's perception is an assessment of a product's value if the consumer purchases it and pays for it (MBASKOOL, 2018). Similarly, it is an assessed value that a customer perceives when acquiring or purchasing a thing. Customer perception is thus the perceived value that a consumer sees in receiving or purchasing a product. It is viewed in terms of the potential customer's needs being met. As a result, determining perception hinges on how the consumer evaluates the product and the manufacturers or marketers.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE

Balance Theory

This research was founded on the principle of balance. According to Aron, Davis, and Irwin (1996), balancing theory provides a logical explanation for the phenomena of interest. It predicts how consumers' distinct opinions toward brand names are reconciled when evaluating the whole brand package. Heider's balancing theory is one of several cognitive consistency theories (Schewe, 1973). According to the notion, people try to maintain internal harmony or consistency in their attitudes, values, and opinions (Heider, 1945; Okechuku & Wang, 1988). The likelihood of conflicting perceptions toward the two brands is a key factor in the branding strategies. Combining two names to make the product appear more valuable is how businesses are battling the value-conscious 1990s consumer (Carpenter, 1994). Pairing two brands raise the possibility of connecting one with a favourable impact with another that has a less positive, or even harmful, impact. Balancing theory would suggest assimilation if a lesser-known or unknown brand is coupled with a well-known brand in the current situation since the consumer's perception of the lesser-known brand might be improved. Contrarily, it is asserted that it is also conceivable for the evaluation of a well-known brand to decline when coupled with a lesser-known or less favoured brand, which is compatible with the balance theory (Okechuku & Wang, 1988). Because balancing theory focuses on the direction of attitude change, Aron, Davis, and Irwin (1996) contend that it is possible to forecast results when mixing positive, neutral, and negative brand names. Different assessments of the individual brand names and the final overall evaluation may emerge from the variable combination. The results will be easier to comprehend using balance theory.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

In a study conducted by Harsono, Perdana, Riyadi, and Normasita (2018), the authors examined the effects of brand image, brand trust, perceived quality, and perception on consumers' intentions to buy various product categories. The findings showed that these factors significantly impact consumers' intentions to buy. Additionally, Ngo, Nguyen, Ngo, and Karg's (2018) study showed how perception, brand image, and corporate reputation affect customer engagement and loyalty. The results of a similar study by Hung (2018) on the relationship between brand image, perceived risk, and purchase intention in the food and beverage industry demonstrate that brand image has strikingly favourable effects on this behaviour. In the same vein, Rahi (2016) conducted research on the effects of customer value, public relations perception, and brand image on customer loyalty. The results showed a significant positive association between public relations perception and customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is positively and significantly impacted by customer value and brand perception. Additionally, brand image has a favourable



impact on perception and referrals to others, according to Ebrahimi and Tootoonkavan's (2014) research. Similarly, Kambiz and Fatemeh (2011) discovered that a positive brand image positively affected how the public perceived loyal customers.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design used the cross-sectional survey method of administering questionnaires. The population of the study entails all consumers of branded alcoholic bitters in the 20 LGA of Lagos State, Nigeria. Lagos State was chosen because it plays a pivotal role in the Nigerian economy, being the Commercial and financial never centre with a high level of social activities (Afe, 2016). A total of 400 respondents were chosen randomly from each of the 20 local governments in Lagos State that are recognised by the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended. Convenience sampling techniques were used to select the appropriate locations within the 20 LGA in Lagos State. Also, purposive sampling techniques were used to select the individuals who were administered the study instrument based on the researchers' judgment. Five-point Likert scale structure questionnaire were used for data collection. The instrument validation was subjected to experts to fine-tune questionnaire items with the suitability of the study. The constructs' Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients vary from 0.70 to 0.86. Inferential statistics such as stepwise multiple regression were employed for the analysis, along with descriptive statistics such as simple percentage, frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation.

Model Specification: The linear equations model was formulated to capture the variables of brand image dimension of branding (Functional attribute, Logo of my choice, Its benefits). The impact of brand image characteristics was established using stepwise multiple regression analysis, which is the independent variable (Functional attribute, Logo of my choice, Its benefits) on the dependent variable (Customers' Perception).

To empirically investigate the influence of the brand image dimension of branding on customers' perception of bitters beverages, the model adapted from Li (2017); Richa, 2015 and Chien (2013) was employed:

$$Y=f^1(X).....(1)$$

$$CP = f^1 (BIM)(2)$$

$$BIM= f^1 (FA, LC, IB).....(3)$$

$$CP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FA + \beta_2 LC + \beta_3 IB + e.....(4)$$

Where: CP=Customers' Perception, FA= Functional Attribute, LC=, Logo of my Choice, IB= Its Benefits, β_0 = Regression Intercept, $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$, = coefficients of Independent variables.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the model summary of the stepwise regression output of brand image and customer perception. Functional attributes and the "my choice" logo were used in a stepwise multiple regression analysis to predict customer perception. SPSS processor developed 3 models, adding a predictor to the stepwise equation at each step. As more predictors were added in the iteration process, adjusted R^2 levelled off from an increase of 0.188. Table 1 revealed that only two variables were partially significant determinants of customer perception. The model's first variable to be fixed is functional attributes with an R^2 value of 455 or 45.5%. This implies that



about 45.55 variations in customer perception are due to functional attributes. The second variable fixed in the model is the Logo of my choice contributed 0.189 to the R^2 . This indicates that the Logo of choice contributed only 18.9% to the variation in customer perception.

Table 1: Model Summary of multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis of the effect of Sub-Variables of Brand Image on Customer Perception of Bitters Beverage

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			df2	Sig. F-Change
					R^2 Change	F Change	df1		
1 Functional attributes	.676 ^a	.456	.455	.612	.456	324.804	1	387	.000
2 Logo of my choice	.803 ^b	.645	.643	.495	.189	205.510	1	386	..000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Functional Attributes

b. Predictors: (Constant), Logo of my Choice

Table 2 shows that the F-Statistics, 324.804 and 205.510, respectively, are significant at over 95% confidence level. This implies that there was over 95% confidence that the model of customer perception estimate was reliable for predicting customer perception. In other words, there was only about .05 liable to error if the prediction model had been used.

Table 2: ANOVA output of Stepwise Regression analysis of multiple Stepwise Regression analyses of the effect of Sub-Variables of Brand Image on Customer Perception of Bitters Beverage

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	121.771	1	121.771	324.804	.000 ^b
Residual	145.088	387	.375		
Total	266.859	388			
2 Regression	172.179	2	86.089	350.978	.000 ^c
Residual	94.680	386	.245		
Total	266.859	388			

Dependent Variable: Customer Perception

Predictors: (Constant), Functional attributes

Predictors: (Constant), Logo of my choice

Table 3 revealed that the multiple stepwise regression procedure terminates step 2 after fixing functional attributes and the Logo of my choice in the model. The two variables are positively significant at 0.05 level. The R^2 , as shown in Table 1, are .645 or 64.5%, and the F-statistics indicated in Table 1 is 205.510 and is significant at 0.05 level. From the model and Table 3, functional attributes ($p=0.001$, $p>0.05$) were significant, hence the null hypothesis was rejected. Also, Table 4 confirms that the Logo of my choice ($p=0.000$, $p>0.05$) is significant; hence the null hypothesis was rejected. This clearly showed that functional attributes and the Logo of

choice are significant strategic determinants of customer perception of bitters beverages. Based on this result of multiple stepwise regression analysis, one could specify the model of customer perception as: $CP = .172 + 0.168 \text{ FA} + 0.803 \text{ LC}$. Where CP = the predicted customer perception, FA = Functional attribute, and LC = Logo of my choice. This implies that for every 1 unit increase in functional attributes, there is approximately a 16.8 unit increase in customer perception. A unit change in the Logo of choice will also cause an 80-unit change in customer perception.

Table 3: Coefficients Output of Stepwise Regression of Multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis of the effect of Sub-Variables of Brand Image on Customer Perception of Bitters Beverage

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlation			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.448	.168		8.627	.000	.676	.676	.676	1.000	1.000
Functional attributes	.723	.040	.676	18.022	.000					
(Constant)	.172	.162		1.057	.291					
Functional attributes	.168	.050	.157	3.331	.001	.676	.167	.101	.413	2.422
Logo of my choice	.803	.056	.676	14.336	.000	.797	.589	.435	.413	2.422

Dependent Variable: Customer Perception

Table 4: Excluded Variables of multiple Stepwise Regression Analysis of the effect of Sub-Variables of Brand Image on Customer Perception of Bitters Beverage

Model	Beta In	T	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics		Collinearity Statistics
					Tolerance	VIF	Minimum Tolerance
1 Logo of my choice	.676 ^b	14.336	.000	.589	.413	2.422	.413

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Perception

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Functional attributes

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Since the sub-variables employed in the stepwise multiple regression analysis were positively significant, the results showed a significant positive influence on the sub-variables of brand image and customer perception. It implies that certain product characteristics, functional attributes, and benefits come to mind promptly when consumers are faced with a choice among the brands. Indicating that brand image contributes to customer perception of bitters brand in the market, and it is supported by the studies of previous researchers that there is a positive relationship between brand image and consumers' perception. Norouzil, Jafarizadeh, Karbalaee,



and Najafi (2013) found that company image affects customer perception, as Ngo, Nguyen, Ngo and Kang (2018) found in their study that brand image positively affects customer engagement and direct influences perception. Keller (2013) discovered that brand attitude depends on the abstract of the product imagery and that brand image reflects customer perception of a brand. According to the findings of a different study, a brand's image has a favourable, considerable impact on consumers' inclination to acquire that brand (Harsono, Perdana, Riyadi & Normasita, 2018; Hung, 2018). Also, Ebrahimi and Tootoonkavan (2014) found that brand image positively affects the perception and recommendations to others. In the same vein, Kambiz and Fatemeh (2011) found a favourable brand image to positively affect perceived public relations to the customers' loyalty. Zarantone and Pauwels-Delassu (2015) found that brand image is born in the minds of the customer.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study analysed the brand image dimension of branding on customer perception of bitters beverage in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study provided an overview of emerging trends in the bitters beverage sector. It highlighted the dimension of brand image that strategically enhances brand positioning and repositioning because of the stiff market competition. The results of the data analysis based on related literature revealed that fair usage of this brand dimension gives an organisation a competitive edge over its competitors in the market environment by effectively creating a powerful brand image in the mind of the consumers. The study's findings showed that the brand image dimension optimally affects customer perception of bitters beverage brands in the market. Finally, the study revealed that the brand image dimension has a strong role to play in a competitive marketing environment since it significantly influences the decisions of customers based on their perceptions. Thus, the manufacturers of bitters beverages should prioritise a relation to its' important perception of consumers to achieve marketing objectives and have a cutting edge over competitors by improving the customers' perception through paying adequate attention to the brand image dimension. Also, marketers of bitters beverages should ensure that the appropriate brand image that portrays their product offering at any time, as this determines the level of the association the customers will have with the brand, which goes a long way in defining the degree of customer perception of the brand. This study also suggests that, although brand image is an important factor, it cannot account for all consumers' favourable perceptions of beverages, particularly in the bitters subsector of the beverage business; therefore, further research is also recommended.

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