

# BRAND PERCEPTION AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR OF CONSUMERS OF SOFT DRINKS IN SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*This study examined brand perception and purchase behaviour of consumers of soft drinks in tertiary institutions in the South East Nigeria. The objectives of the study included to ascertain whether there is a significant relationship between perceived brand attributes, brand benefit value; brand image scale, brand personality and purchase behaviour. In order to achieve these objectives specific research questions were formulated. Various related literature were reviewed with the aim of identifying the missing link that necessitated this study. Descriptive research design was adopted in the study, data was collected from respondents in five selected higher institutions in the five states of the South East Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. Data Collected were organized and analysed using correlation analysis and t-test statistics. Following the analysis these results became evident; that brand attributes like packaging, price, taste and availability in the market place were positively related to consumers' expectation which influences purchase. It was also observed that brand benefits like satisfaction, when positively related to perception of the consumers lead to purchase. Finally the results revealed that perceived brand*

*attributes, brand benefit value, brand image, brand personality have positive effects on purchase behaviour, though the extent was found to be insignificant, The implication of the results is that soft drink bottling companies must put strategies in place in order to understand how consumers perceive their products. Based on the results it was recommended that soft drink bottling companies should direct marketing activities towards positioning brands positively in the minds of consumers. Furthermore bottling companies should device a way of ascertaining the rating of their products in the market, as this will enable the company to re-strategize if necessary.*

The purchase behaviour of consumers is the end result of the battle of perception not necessarily the battle of products. Consumers learn by the flow of information through the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell, and act as a result of the outcome of the processed information about products or a product brand. These five sensory organs are input receptors to perception. Understanding the dynamics of perception is imperative to every marketer today as consumers' decision to purchase a product will be greatly influenced by how they perceive the product quality. Perception is described as the mental grasping of things, it is the feeling, the comprehension, the recognition or how one observes things through the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell (Adedapo, 2013). Perception can further be seen as the process by which an individual selects, organizes and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). In marketing, consumers perceptions are more important than the reality, because it is perception that affects consumers actual behaviour, the key point is that perception does not only depend on the physical stimuli, but also on the stimuli's relationship with the surrounding field and on conditions within each of (Kotler & Keller, 2008). Product perceptions are not only affected by its quality but also by the attributes the producer is able to invest in the product through advertising and packaging of the product (Adedapo, 2013).

Many a time consumer products or services are found to be competing against each other in the market place; this normally leads to a problem of choice for the consumers who have to choose from a number of alternatives. However, the consumer decision will then be based on what the brand stands for. The question then arises, what factors influence the consumer to choose a particular brand of product over another. Brand perception therefore, cannot be viewed in isolation but in relation to consumer purchasing behaviour (Keller, 2003). Branding has become so strong that hardly anything goes unbranded: Brand which can be referred to as the name, sign or design that identifies a particular product and distinguishes it from competitors or any other feature that identifies a seller's product or service (Solomon & Gary, 2010). A good brand helps to build corporate image by carrying the company's name, they help

advertise the quality and size of the company. Distributors might want brand names as a means of making the product easier to identify in terms of quality standards (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Following the definition of brand and perception, consumer brand perception can be described as the interpretation and meaning consumers attach or assign to name, sign/symbols used to identify and differentiate the product from others. Researchers have identified brand perception to consist of various elements such as brand attribute (Keller, 2003), brand image (Shehzad, 2002), brand benefit (Zeithmal, 1998) and brand personality (Naker, 1997).

Brand attributes can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic brand attributes are product or service attributes, which are directly related to products physically (Keller, 2003). Intrinsic brand attributes is measured in terms of product quality. External brand attributes are external characteristics derived from a product or service. Brand benefit value according to Zeithmal (1998) has to do with the overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Value stands for an overall assessment of tradeoff between what is given and what is received. It includes only the utilitarian side of value. Value is conceptualized to include both the functional benefit of performance and non-functional benefits of performance and can be objectified as a multi-dimensional construct. (Babin, Darden & Grifitin, 1994). Brand image scale is the rating of a specific brand in the market. It is the overall impression in the consumers' mind that is formed from all sources. An image scale is developed about the product based on subjective perceptions (Shehzad, 2002). Brand personality is a set of human characteristics associated with a brand. It includes demographic characteristics (Sex, age, and socioeconomic status) life style characteristics (activities, interest and opinions) and also human personality traits (warmth, concern, thoughts). Based on the theory of animism brands can also have their own unique personality. Aaker (1997). An example is advert on "addidas" being associated with the famous Micheal Jordan. A brand personality explains how an organization penetrates the brand into the market by human personality characteristics considered to make the powerful, unique and compatible symbolic association for consumers (Freling and Forbes, 2005).

Consumers' purchasing behaviour could be described in line with different purchasing approaches. Each consumer has an individual understanding about purchase. Purchase approach is formed and developed during the life time since childhood of the consumer According to Ubeja (2014) soft drinks can be classified into major categories namely carbonated and non-carbonated drinks on the basis of their composition. A soft drink carbonated beverage is a non-alcoholic beverage that typically contains water, a sweetner and a flavouring agent. The sweetner may be sugar high-fructose corn syrup or a sugar substitute (in the case of diet drinks). e.g. coke, sprite, fanta, krest, limca, mirinda, etc. whereas non-carbonated drinks can be further classified into nectar and juices (Ubeja, 2014). Hence, soft drinks in this study would mean carbonated drinks.

Therefore, this study examines in details brand perception on purchase behaviour of consumers of soft drinks in South East Nigeria.

Coca-cola company (Nigerian Bottling Company) and the Seven-up bottling company are the two major soft drinks producing companies in Nigeria that produce carbonated drinks, hence a brief history of the two companies highlighted to put the study in the right perspective.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are several competing brands of soft drinks in Nigeria. The competition comes in two ways - one is company brand competing among other company brands while the other is the company brands competing among its own brands. Thus, it is observed that some brands sell more than others both within the company's brands and other competitors' brands. This implies that consumers prefer some brands to others such that it becomes pertinent to ask why? Companies spend a lot on branding, which can be seen through constant advertisement, brand packaging and so on. Brandings are investments, which are expected to yield profit by getting consumers to purchase the brand. Nigerian Bottling Company PLC invented a diversity of carbonated water (soft drinks) brand to suit a variety of consumers with diverse tastes, hence, brands like; Coke, Sprite, Ginger Ale, Krist and so on, while the 7up bottling company is known for brands like 7up, Pepsi-Cola, Mirinda and so on. These various brands compete against each other in the same company and at inter-company levels.

The question then arises, why do consumers perceive one brand as having a better quality than the other, or prefer one brand to another. People tend to see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear as no two individuals perceive the same object as the same (Adedapo, 2013). How does perception affect consumer purchase behaviour? Is there any relationship between perception and purchase behaviour of consumers towards soft drinks? However, it is not disputable, that producers of soft drinks engage in branding activities through the use of advertising, packaging, pricing and distribution tools with the hope to creating or building in the minds of consumers certain kinds of brand image, brand personality, brand value and brand attribute with the expectations of consumers making the brand their choice for purchases.

One of the vital questions that need answers as it concerns the marketer's branding activities is whether all those brand perception variables have any influence in persuading or influencing consumers to buy such product brand. Bearing in mind the advertisements that the consumers are exposed to every day, are mostly deceptive and conflicting. The question then arises, does the perceived brand attributes both extrinsic and intrinsic such as packaging, colour, price and taste, content amount influence purchase behaviour?

Does the consumers' perception of soft drink attributes affect purchase behaviour? Information on the labels of most products carry promises of excellent benefits from the use of such products conversely, functional, social, and emotional

dimensions of brand benefit value has remained a mirage to consumers of soft drinks Sweeney & Soutar, (2011). This is as a result of the fact that consumers end up not deriving satisfaction from taking soft drinks. The monetary savings and convenience benefits of soft drinks has remained in doubt as prices of soft drinks (carbonated water) are not any lower than malt drink. Hedonic dimensions of entertainment and exploration including social dimensions of status, and self esteem enhancement has remained an illusion for consumers.

According to Maneses & Perez (2002), the relationship between brand image scale which is the rating of brands of products in the minds of consumers and purchase behaviour has remained a matter of debate. Furthermore there is a lack of studies in the area of relationships between brand image scale and purchase behaviour (Sondoh 2007).

Similarly, brand personality which according to Aaker (1997) is a set of human characteristics associated to a brand lacks literature on the relationship with purchase behaviour and to what extent it affects purchase behaviour of brands of soft drinks. Many researchers such as Yella and Ramesh (2007) carried out a study on consumer preference of soft drinks among others but none has actually examined the cause of the preference (perception). It is perception of a brand that will result in its preference. Why do consumers perceive some brands as having a better quality than others? What are the factors that affect the perception of a particular brand of soft drink and influence its preference over another? Hence, there is need to develop a better understanding of consumers brand perception and purchase behaviour of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria.

The perceived brand attributes, brand benefit value, brand image scale and brand personality differs in individuals. Consumers may perceive one brand as having more utility than another. This has a basic problem as marketers are at cross roads as to why .Therefore, these variables affect consumers purchase decision, but the extent of its effect is not established. Establishing this missing link is of utmost importance to the success of any soft drink bottling company especially in the South East Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to ascertain any relationship between of brand perception and consumer purchase behaviour towards soft drinks in the South East Nigeria. The specific objectives therefore are to:

- a. Ascertain whether there is a significant relationship between perceived brand attributes and purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria.
- b. Determine whether there is a significant relationship between perceived brand benefit values and purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria.

- c. Ascertain whether there is a significant relationship between perceived brand image scale and purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria.
- d. Determine whether there is a significant relationship between perceived brand personality and purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

- a. To what extent does perceived brand attributes significantly relate to purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria?
- b. To what extent does perceived brand benefit value significantly relate to purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria?
- c. To what extent does perceived brand image scale significantly relate to purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria?
- d. To what extent does perceived brand personality significantly relate to purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

- a. There is no significant relationship between perceived brand attributes and purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria.
- b. There is no significant relationship between perceived brand benefit value and purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria.
- c. There is no significant relationship between perceived brand image scale and purchase behavior of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria..
- d. There is no significant relationship between perceived brand personality and purchase behaviour of consumers (undergraduates) of soft drinks in the south east Nigeria..

### **Methods**

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The study was carried out using five tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern States of Nigeria. The population was made up of sixty-six thousand six hundred and ninety five. The sample size therefore was determined using Taro Yamane formula Yamane (1967) since the population is very large. Taro Yamene formula for determining sample size of infinite population is given as:  $n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$

Where n = Sample size, N = population, e = error margin

N = 66,695; e = 0.05;

$$n = \frac{66.695}{1 + 66.695 (0.05)^2} = 397.61 = 398$$

n = 398

The researcher adopted the modified 5 point likert scale with nominal values of SA = 5, A = 4, U = 3, D = 2 and SD = 1. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the undergraduate consumers of soft drinks using the sample of 398, however only 332 were retrieved after administration and used. The questionnaire was subject to validity text before use (Sauders 2009). Cronbach alpha method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument based on 20 respondents, and 0.92 was derived.

## Results

**Table 8: Summary of the Correlation Coefficient between Perceived Brand Attributes and Purchase Behaviour**

Variables	N	R	% contribution
Perceived brand attributes	332	0.356	12.7
Purchase behaviour	332		

The result in Table 8 shows that perceived brand attributes related positively with purchase behaviour. This implies that if consumers perceive brand attributes like packaging (bottling), taste of soft drink, price of soft drink and its availability in the market as being positively related to their expectation, then purchase of the product will increase. However, brand attributes contributed, 12.7% to the variance observed in the purchase behaviour.

**Table 9: Summary of the Correlation Coefficient between Perceived Brand Benefit Value and Purchase Behaviour**

Variables	N	R	% contribution
Perceived brand benefit value	332	0.495	24.5
Purchase behaviour	332		

The result in Table 9 shows that perceived brand benefit value related positively with purchase behaviour. The implication of this, is that, if consumers perceive that a product will give them anticipated benefit such as satisfaction, low price and benefit from promotional effort, consequently, it would affect how soft drinks are bought. The

findings showed that perceived benefit value attached to a product contributed 24.5% to the variance observed in the purchase behaviour.

**Table 10: Summary of the Correlation Coefficient between Perceived Brand Image Scale and Purchase Behaviour**

Variables	N	R	% contribution
Perceived brand image scale	332	0.438	19.2
Purchase behaviour	332		

From the result as shown in Table 10, perceived brand image related positively with purchase behaviour. This implies that a brand of soft drink, being rated highly in the mind of consumers will induce purchase. The finding also showed that 19.2% variance was observed in the relationship

**Table 11: Summary of the Correlation Coefficient between Perceived Brand Personality and Purchase Behavior**

Variables	N	R	% contribution
Perceived brand personality	332	0.347	12.0
Purchase behaviour	332		

The result in Table 11 shows that perceived brand personality related positively with purchase behaviour. This is an indication that the brand personality the consumer places on the product affects the product (soft drink) purchase by consumers with a 12.09% relationship.

**Test of Hypothesis**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between perceived brand attributes and purchase behaviour.

**Table 12: Summary of the t-test for Correlation between the Two Variables**

R	T	p-value	Decision
0.356	0.093	0.176	Accept H <sub>0</sub>

From the results of the t-test as shown in Table 12, the statement of hypothesis 1 is accepted; implying that there is no significant relationship between perceived brand attributes and purchase behaviour ( $t = 0.093, p = 0.176; p > 0.05$ ).

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between perceived brand benefit value and purchase behaviour.



**Table 13: Summary of the t-test for Correlation between the Two Variables**

R	T	p-value	Decision
0.495	1.194	0.051	Accept H <sub>0</sub>

From the results of the t-test as shown in Table 13, the statement of hypothesis 2 is accepted; implying that there is no significant relationship between perceived brand benefit value and purchase behaviour ( $t = 1.194, p = 0.051; p > 0.05$ ).

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between perceived brand image scale and purchase behaviour.

**Table 14: Summary of the t-test for Correlation between the Two Variables**

R	T	p-value	Decision
0.438	1.080	0.090	Accept H <sub>0</sub>

From the results of the t-test as shown in Table 14, the statement of hypothesis 3 is accepted; implying that there is no significant relationship between perceived brand image scale and purchase behaviour ( $t = 1.080, p = 0.051; p > 0.05$ ).

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between perceived brand personality and purchase behaviour.

**Table 15: Summary of the t-test for Correlation between the Two Variables**

R	T	p-value	Decision
0.347	-0.067	0.188	Accept H <sub>0</sub>

From the results of the t-test as shown in Table 15, the statement of hypothesis 4 is accepted; implying that there is no significant relationship between perceived brand personality and purchase behaviour ( $t = -0.067, p = 0.188; p > 0.05$ ).

### **Recommendations**

Perception which is more important than reality is the bedrock of activities that lead to purchasing. It is the position a brand occupies in the consumers mind that ensures that it is purchased.

Bearing in mind the foregoing and based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

- i. That brands are primary sources of competitive advantage and a very strategic asset. Therefore, Manufacturers should bottle soft drinks in attractive designs to elicit wider patronage.
- ii. Carbonated water (soft drinks) should be produced bearing in mind the health and utility benefit to the consumers such as taste.

- iii. Soft drink bottling companies should devise a marketing strategy that will enable them know how their brands are rated in the market
- iv. In order to influence the consumers purchasing behaviour, the companies should maintain good personality and create awareness towards maintaining strong personality traits in the minds of consumers.

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