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BRAND BENEFIT POSITIONING STRATEGY AND REPURCHASE INTENTION OF CONSUMERS OF FOOD AND BEVERAGES BRANDS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:
The study investigated the effect of brand benefit positioning strategy on repurchase intention of customers towards food and beverage products in Rivers State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research gathered data from 490 entrepreneurs and customers who patronise SMEs in Port Harcourt. A well structured questionnaire containing 8 items, with five demographic items was used to generate data from the respondents. The reliability analysis of the instrument with Chronbach Alpha produced a value of 0.775, which confirmed the consistency of the research items. The inferential statistics showed that brand benefit positioning strategy had significant predictive capabilities repurchase intentions. In conclusion, brand benefit positioning strategies had significant statistical influence on repurchase intentions towards food and beverage brands in Rivers State. Precisely, 81.5%, changes in customers' repurchase intentions were significantly predicted by brand benefits. Therefore, this study recommended that food and beverage manufacturing companies should focus on enhancing brand benefits accruable to consumers to enhance repeat patronage.

Keywords: Brand Benefit Capability. Repurchase Intention. Food and Beverages SMEs.

INTRODUCTION

Brand refers to name, symbol, sign or design used by a firm to differentiate its offerings from those of its competitors (Czinkota & Ronkainen,2004). Simply put, brands are means of differentiating a company's products or services from those of competitors. Good brands stand the chance of attracting substantial price premium from customers and it also commands customer loyalty as well as patronage. Keller(2003) defined brand as a distinctive identity that differentiates a company's offering from competitors. It is believed that a strong brand identity based on thorough understanding of the firm's customers, competitors, and business environment is fundamental to firms' success. Considering the intense competition in the manufacturing industry and the accelerated rate of change and development, it becomes imperative for SMEs operators in the food and beverage manufacturing sector to pay attention to brand positioning in the market where they operate. The pressure from competitors coupled with consumers changing taste and preference have continued to underscore the need for brand positioning by SMEs in Nigeria. As a response to the competitive pressure, SMEs must invest huge resources to position their brands in order to meet the changing tastes and preference of consumers, thereby securing higher patronage.

A brand can add significant value to corporate performance when it is well positioned and has positive associations in the mind of consumers. The power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds of customers in terms of what they have seen and heard about the brand through their experience over time (Ries, 2001). Begum and Sarala (2016) observed that most brand positioning efforts fail to yield expected results because such efforts do not resonate with the customers' beliefs regarding quality, benefit, price etc. They further stated that for brand positioning to be successful such effort or idea must be in line with customers' beliefs. Customers' beliefs and perceptions must be taken into consideration when carrying out a brand positioning plan.Pappu and Quester (2016) stated that companies must make their existing customers feel comfortable with their brand position. Nazmul, Islam, Hossain and Chowdhury (2012) added that a company can capitalize on the unique benefits of its brand position to change the perceptions of customers about their brands

A food and beverage manufacturing entrepreneur can position his brand using various strategies. Basically, a

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brand can be positioned on the basis of quality, attributes, user benefits, price, or class (Kotler, 2006;Hickey, 2017). Food and beverage manufacturers may decide to position their brand using one or more parameters. If a food and beverage manufacturer decides to use benefits as his positioning strategy, he would promote his brand based on the benefit it offers to consumers. Nestle Milo is a good example of a beverage brand that promotes itself on the basis of the benefits it offers to consumers. The brand is known for its slogan "The Energy Food Drink" which implies that it gives energy to consumers who purchase and consume the brand.

Emperical evidence exist in developed in developed countries(Walsh & Whelen, 2002; Dirisu, Iyiola & Ibiduni, 2013; Chelumbrun, 2014; Chand, 2016), on how several brand poisoning strategies have been used to influence customers' behavioural intentions. However, empirical studies that examined the relationship between brand positioning strategies and sales performance of food and beverages manufacturing entrepreneurs in SMEs sector in Rivers State are scanty to the best of our knowledge. This study was, therefore, designed to investigate the predictive capability of brand benefit positioning strategy on customers' behavioural intentions of food and beverages manufacturing entrepreneurs in SMEs sector in Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objective was to determine the predictive capability of brand benefit on repeat purchase of food and beverage manufacturing companies in SMEs sector in Rivers State;

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of literature is divided into three parts: conceptual review, theoretical framework, and empirical review.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Brand Positioning Strategy

The essence of brand positioning is achievement of valued distinction in a consumer's mind. Positioning with respect to brand is the act of identifying a market niche for a brand by utilizing traditional marketing placement strategies (i.e. price, promotion, distribution, packaging, and competition). Also positioning can be defined as the way by which business operators create impression in the customers mind regarding their offerings (Kotler, 2003). It is also the act of designing the company's offerings and image to occupy a distinctive place in the target market's mind (Aaker, 1991). The essence of brand positioning is achievement of valued distinction/differentiation in a consumers mind.

Again, a brand position is the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands (Kapferer, 2008). The end result of brand positioning is the successful creation of a customer-focused value proposition that is a cogent reason why the target market should buy the company's brand. Brand positioning can as well be defined as the process of creating a desired image for a company and its brands in the minds of a target group of consumers (Komaromi, 2016). It is aimed at establishing uniqueness about a brand in the mind of consumers when compared with alternative brands in the market (Hickey, 2017). Brand positioning involves establishing key brand associations in the minds of consumers and other important constituents to differentiate the brand and establish competitive superiority (Keller et al, in Shivashankar & Uma, 2017).

Brand positioning enables the process of transforming functional assets into relationship assets. Brands that are well positioned occupy particular niches in consumers' minds. Positioning conveys the concept, or meaning, of the product or service in terms of how it fulfils a consumer need. A good positioning strategy should have a two-pronged meaning: one that is congruent with the consumers' needs while at the same time, featuring the brand against its competition. In today's highly competitive marketplace, a distinctive product image is most important, but also very difficult to create and maintain. As products become more complex and the marketplace more crowded, consumers rely more on the product's image and claimed benefits than on its actual attributes in making purchase decisions (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

Brand Benefit Positioning Strategy: Companies often use brand benefit as their strategy for positioning their brand in the market. Yednap (2013) noted that companies use benefit as a positioning strategy because it tends to answer the consumer's question of what will this brand do for me? Benefit describes what consumers intend to gain from purchasing a particular brand. That is, what customers stand to gain from purchasing a particular brand which other brands cannot give them. Kotler (2006) believed that brand benefit is a crucial positioning strategy because it is the essence of production. Companies usually design their products to suit customer needs. Such needs connote the benefits which customers intend to derive from purchasing the brand. Mulei (2005) posited that

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companies that use benefits as a strategy of positioning tend to focus on what customers stand to gain from purchasing the brand during their brand launching and presentation.

When a company focuses on the benefits of purchasing the brand during launching or presentation, it tends to speak the language of the customers. Begum and Sarala (2016) stated that benefits make people to want to buy the brand. Nestle Milo is a good example of a beverage brand that promotes itself on the basis of the benefits it offers to consumers. The brand is known for its slogan "The Energy Food Drink" which implies that it gives energy to consumers who purchase and consume the brand. A good understanding of what consumers intend to gain from purchasing a brand is the motivating factor behind consumer's decision to buy a particular brand and ignore other competing brands in the market. Many companies position their brands on the basis of benefits which customers stand to derive from using their brands (Luaga, 2011). Generally, products are seen as a bundle of benefits, not features. This means that customers are less interested in product features rather they are more interested in the benefits they stand to derive from buying the product. Unfortunately, many business operators focus on their product features while making presentation instead of the benefits buyers stand to gain from owing the product.

Whenever business operators focus on the features of their brand, they tend to speak the language of the manufacturer which is of little or no interest to the buyer. Benefits describe what customers stand to gain from buying the brand (Kongalla, 2013). When a company's salesmen focus on the benefits of buying a brand during presentation, they tend to speak the language of customers. Begum and Sarala (2016) stated that benefits make people to want to buy a brand.It is logical to state that customers would not buy a brand unless they are sure that they can derive benefits from buying the brand. Reibstein (2010) argued that most customers do not care about the features of a brand rather they are concerned about the benefits they can derived from buying the brand. Hartmann, Apaolaza and Sainz (2002) stated that good salesmen focus more on the benefits a person stands to derive from buying their products. According to them, when salesmen focus on the benefits rather than the brand features, they speak the language of the customers.

To this end, a good understanding of the benefits that consumers seek in a brand should be the focus of entrepreneurs when formulating positioning strategies for their brands. In line with this thinking, some companies' position their brands on the basis of benefits which customers stand to derive from buying their brands. Shivashankar and Uma (2017) identified five product benefits which influence consumer buying decision namely: functional, emotional, social, epistemic and aesthetic benefits. According to them, functional benefits are obtained from the tangible and intangible attributes that a customer may directly experience when using the brand. Social benefits are those benefits derived from a brand association with specific social class. Emotional benefits are those affective benefits derived from using a brand. Epistemic benefits are benefits derived from a brand's ability to provide novelty and meet customer's desire for knowledge. Aesthetic benefits are derived from a brand's capacity to give beauty and improve personal expression. Granted that a brandmay offer different types of benefits to consumers, a company can therefore position its brand based on one or more benefits.

Repurchase Intention

Ebrahim, et al (2013, p.1244) defined the concept of repurchase intention as "consumers' decision about repeating the action of purchasing the brand". Garga and Bambale (2016) noted that customers who are satisfied with a particular brand will possibly like to repeatedly purchase the same item/brand again and again. On the other hand, customers that are dissatisfied will likely switch to competing brands. It is good to note that customer satisfaction is not the only factor that determines the repurchase intention of customers. Some other factors include avoiding switching costs, opportunity to obtain discounts, etc. extant literature tend to suggest that switching costs are recognised as one of the easiest strategies to increase repeat purchase because it prevents customers from considering or moving to alternative suppliers (Chin, 2014; Salim & Kitapci, 2013). With stiff competition in the food and beverages from other firms marketing similar products, SMEs need to make customer satisfaction their priority as it is a sure way to increase repeat purchase.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Benefit positioning is a crucial positioning strategy that has the capacity of achieving better sales level with respect to sales growth and sales turnover. According to Blankson (2008), a company that positions its brand on the basis of benefit stands a better chance of increasing sales than those companies that do not position their brand on the basis of benefit. Gibson (2013) posited that benefit positioning has the potentials of increasing sales because customers will

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consistently patronize a brand that is beneficial to them and ignore those brands that they feel are not beneficial to them. When customers ignore those brands that are not beneficial to them, it will result to low sales for the companies producing such brands.

Janiszewska and Insch (2012) explained how benefit positioning strategy helps to achieve increase in sales. According to them, consumers do not just buy a brand just to answer that they are loyal to the brand; they buy the brand because of what the brand will do for them which other brands cannot do. When customers buy a brand that gives them the desired benefits, the manufacturer of that brand will enjoy increased sales as customers will remain loyal to the brand.

This implies that when companies position their brand on the basis of benefit, they tend to achieve better sales within a shortest possible time. Shivashankar and Uma (2017) opined that benefit positioning is an effective strategy to achieve increase in sales growth. Benefit positioning strategy does not only enhance sales growth but also increases the sales turnover and repeat purchase of a company. According to Musau (2012), benefit positioning strategy helps to shorten the sales cycle of a brand and enhance the sales turnover of the company.

Kongalla (2013) agreed that benefit positioning strategy has the ability to increase sales turnover of a company and encourage repeat purchase. According to him, when a company embraces benefit positioning strategy, they tend to speak the language of the customers and answer their question that this brand will solve their problem or meet their needs. When customers feel that a company's brand will be beneficial to them they will patronize the brand regularly and this will help to fasten the sales turnover rate of the company. Mulei (2005) supported this position stating that when a company produces a product that consumers find beneficial, the sales turnover rate of the brand will increase and this will equally shorten the sales cycle of the brand. Nazmul et al (2012) agreed that benefit positioning has the potentials of increasing sales turnover and commanding repeat patronage. According to them, when a company positions its brand on the basis of benefit, it will attract more customers, increase customer loyalty and the overall sales of the firm.

Kamau and Wafula (2015) examined the effects of strategic positioning of service delivery on customer satisfaction. The study employed qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the variables of the study. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design where questionnaire was used to elicit data from 67 customers and staff of Fina Bank in Mombosa, Kenya. The data collected by the researchers were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools as well as the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation which was computed using the SPSS version 21.0. The result revealed that all the positioning strategies (such as technological advancement, product classification, customer segmentation and brand benefits) have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. This study undertook a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach and adopted a descriptive research design. But the current study adopted quantitative approach and employed descriptive research design.

Baek and Kim (2010) carried out an empirical study on the roles of brand positioning in consumer brand choice. The researchers adopted a quantitative approach where data were collected from 143 customers visiting selected supermarkets in China. The multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected and the result showed that a significant positive relationship exist between brand positioning and consumer brand choice. The study also found a significant positive relationship between brand prestige and consumer brand choice. This study was similar to our current study given that both studies adopted quantitative approach and employed the use of questionnaire for data collection.

Wang and Yang (2010) empirically investigated the effect of brand positioning on consumers' brand purchase intention. The researchers used trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness to measure brand positioning and relate each of them to brand purchase intention. The study also used brand awareness and brand image to moderate the relationship between brand positioning and brand purchase intention. After analyzing the data collected from 135 customers in China, the researchers reported that brand trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness were positively and significantly related to brand purchase intention. The study also reported that brand positioning awareness and brand image significantly moderated the relationship between brand and brand purchase intention. This study had dissimilarities with the current study in terms of the inclusion of moderating variables and the fact that it was carried out in China while the current study was conducted in Nigeria.

Iyiola and Bidunni (2014) investigated product positioning as a strategy that enhances the survival of the small and medium enterprises in Nigeria, using Prodco Foods Nigeria Limited as a case study. Among the objectives set out were to determine the relationship between product positioning strategy and the survival of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), to ascertain changes in tastes and preference of consumers necessitating product positioning, and to

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determine whether product positioning increases sales volume of SMEs. They surveyed one hundred and forty respondents using questionnaire approach. The formulated three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significant levels using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between product positioning and the survival of SMEs, also, that changes in tastes and preference of consumers necessitate product positioning, and that product positioning increases sales volume of SMEs.

From the foregoing, it was hypothesised that;

H1: Brand benefit has significant predictive capability on the customers' repurchase intention of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Distinctive Competency Theory

The distinctive competency theory is traceable to the works of Clark and Maurice (1961), and Alderson (1957, 1965) and has been extended by such researchers as Aaker and Mascarenhas (1984); Barney (1991); Bharadwaj, Varadarajan, and Fahy (1993); Day (1994); Day and Wensley (1988); Porter (1990) and Hunt and Morgan (1997).The underlying position of this theory is that firms are able to achieve superior performance when they are able to develop or gain superior skills and resources that enable them to achieve a position of competitive advantage in the market. In this regard, skills encompass "the distinctive competencies of a company that sets it apart from competing firms" (Day & Wensley, 1988).

The focus of firms, according to this theory should be on the value creating activities (Porter, 1990). Only those activities with the greatest impact on differentiation or those that amount to a large or growing proportion of the costs should be considered (Day & Wensley, 1988). Firms that are successful in managing their value creating activities are posited to achieve positions of competitive advantage which are viewed as either cost leadership or value advantages (Bharadwaj, Varadarajan, & Fahy, 1993). Distinctive Competency theory therefore suggests that successful firms are those that generate competitive advantage and superior performance.

Besides, Michael and Ireland (1985) argued that the capability of an organization manifests in its demonstrated and potential ability to accomplish whatever it sets out to do. They observed that what a firm can do, to a large extent, is a function of the resources at the disposal of the company and not just the opportunities it confronts. They opined that the veritable tool to a company's success has to do with its ability to find and or create a competence that is truly unique. Distinctive competences are those peculiar things that a firm or its units can do better when compared to its competitors. According to Michael and Ireland (1985) a firm can develop distinctive capabilities in such areas as general administration, operations, R&D, marketing, personnel, etc. It can be added that distinctive competence can help a firm to be better positioned to create value for customers by adopting appropriate brand positioning strategies that can enhance sales performance. Competencies represent major factors which can give rise to success in organizations (Levina & Ross, 2003; Feeney et al., 2005). Distinctive competencies can be considered as uncommon abilities a company enjoys in an industry or a target market segment and which serves as a platform to create superior value for customers which will in turn lead to competitive advantage. The superior values so created constitute benefits that consumers will gain by consuming the brand.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To explore and understand the predictive capability of brand benefit positioning strategy on customers' repurchase intentions in food and beverage SMEs in Rivers State, the study adopted the descriptive survey research design because of its ability to elicit opinion and beliefs of customers who are the study participants (Leedy & Ormod, 2010). The target population of the study were the customers of food and beverage companies in the SME category in Rivers State. The geographical area covered in the study was Rivers State, which is in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, the organisational scope was made up of food and beverages manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State and their respective customers. The record at the Rivers State Ministry of commerce and industry as at March 2019, showed that 125 were registered food and beverages manufacturers: 80 Small Scale operators and 45 Medium Scale Operators (45) respectively) were operating in Rivers State. The reliability analysis of the instrument with Chronbach Alpha produced a value of 0.775, which confirmed the consistency of the research items. The sampling method adopted was the judgmental sampling technique considering that the researcher knew that the samples were actual customers of food and beverage products in Rivers State. The sample size was ascertained using the Krejcie and Morgan Table, which amounted to 384 from a population size that is considered to be 1,000,000.

The questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection for this study The questionnaire was divided into two parts: section A which comprised items for

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demographic characteristics of the respondents, while section B had items on brand benefit positioning strategy items and that of repurchase intentions. The dimensions and measures were measured using four (4) items instruments on a five-point Likert scale adopted from Likert and modified to suit the study from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree (3) undecided (4) agree and (5) strongly agree. The simple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis with the aid of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval: The number of questionnaires distributed to the food and beverage customers in Rivers State were 384, while 370 were retrieved. This represents a 96.35% return rate. All the returned questionnaires were useful and therefore used for statistical analysis.

Demographic Profile of respondents: The **analysis of the retrieved questionnaires based on the years of patronage were as follows:** 39(11%) between 1-5 years, 147(40%) between 6-10 years, 184(49%) between 10 years and above.

Bivariate Data Analysis
Testing of Hypothesis

To ascertain the effect of brand benefit positioning strategy on repurchase intention, simple regression analysis was conducted.

Hypothesis 1 Brand Benefit Positioning Strategy and Repurchase Intentions

Table 1-3 Simple Regression analysis showing the effect of brand benefit positioning strategy on customers' repurchase intention.

Table 1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.903[a]	.815	.814	.23432

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Benefit Positioning Strategy

Table 2 ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.041	1	31.041	565.357	.000[b]
	Residual	7.028	128	.055		
	Total	38.069	129			

a. Dependent Variable: Repurchase Intention
b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Benefit Positioning Strategy

Table 3 Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.984	.115		17.191	.000
	Brand Benefit Positioning Strategy	.599	.025	.903	23.777	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Repurchase Intention

Table 1 shows that R is .903, and represents the simple correlation which is considered to be strong. R^2 value ("R" Square) is .815 and adjusted R square is .814. The implication is that 81.5% of the variance in repurchase intention can be explained by the changes in independent variables of brand benefit positioning strategy. This model is a 'good fit' as the linear regression model is able to explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: repurchase intention in the context of repurchase purchase (Moosa & Hassan, 2015).

The *p* value .000 is <0.05 in Table 2 which is the ANOVA analysis shows that the regression model statistically significantly predicts repurchase intention which is the outcome variable. This shows that the hypothesis is supported.

Table 3 provides the required information to predict repurchase intention of customers in the regression equation. With $\beta = 0.599$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$) the degree

of contribution of brand benefit positional strategy to repurchase intention of customers is high and significant. This result implies that brand benefit positional strategy made significant unique contribution to the equation.
Therefore the model can be written as:

Repurchase Intention = 1.984 +0.599 (BBPS)

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings in hypothesis one ($r = 0.903$; $r^2 = 0.815$; $\beta = 0.599$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$) revealed that brand benefit has a significant predictive capability on the repurchase intention of food and beverages manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. The finding suggests that the respondents agreed that the brands they buy offer value for money to them that the brands are user friendly in terms of food preparation, the products are made based on identified consumer needs in the market and the food products offered by these firms have long shelf life. In the work of Shivashankar and Uma (2017), it was found that brand benefit positioning enhances the sales of apparel in Bangalore. This concurs with the findings of the present study. Besides, Gibson (2013) posited that benefit positioning has the potentials of increasing sales because customers will consistently patronize a brand that is beneficial to them and ignore those brands that they feel are not beneficial to them. This implies that a company that positions its brand on the basis of benefit stands a better chance of increasing sales than those companies that do not position their brand on the basis of benefit. When customers buy a brand that gives them the desired benefits, the manufacturer of that brand will enjoy increased sales as customers will remain loyal to the brand. This finding is also supported by the work of Blankson (2008) who reported that benefit positioning strategy has the capacity of achieving increase in sales growth of business firms. Besides, Mulei (2005) and Musau (2012)noted that benefit positioning is a strategy used by firms to increase their sales turnover.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has proven that brand benefit can increase repurchase intention. Therefore, when companies embrace brand positioning strategies and endeavour to position the brands they offer in terms of benefit, they stand chances of enhancing repurchase intentions from their customers. Drawing from the findings above, the study concludes that brand benefit has a significant predictive capability on the repurchase intention of food and beverages manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. In other words, a company that positions its brand on the basis of benefit stands a better chance of increasing sales than those companies that do not position their brand on the basis of benefit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of this study, it was recommended that;

1. Manufacturing entrepreneurs, especially, those in SMEs sector in Rivers State, should increase their brand benefits, since it has the potentials of increasing sales because customers will consistently patronize a brand that is beneficial to them and ignore those brands that they feel are not beneficial to them.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study was limited on the basis of using only one dimension of brand positioning strategy(brand benefit). It is suggested that further studies could add more elements of the brand positioning framework.

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