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BRAND PERCEPTION AND CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF NDU BOTTLE WATER IN YENAGOA BAYELSA STATE

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ABSTRACT
The paper investigates the relationship brand perception and consumer buying behavior of Ndu Bottle Water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The dimensions brand reception, brand shape, brand design and brand symbols, while consumer buying behviour was adapted as the measure. The study is cross-sectional in nature. The population for the study is 250 customer with a sample size of 153. Questionnaire was adopted as the main instrument for data collection and the data collected was coded and analyzed utilizing the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) inferential analysis was adopted is the Pearson Moment Correlational Coefficient (PMCC) to test the relationship between the studied variables. The findings revealed that there is a significant correlational outcome between the dimensions and the measures, which comprehensively concludes that there is a relationship between brand perception and consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. It is recommended that management of Ndu table water should be given utmost attention in making their Brand symbols attractive, recognizable and very easy to remember, management of Ndu Table on Water should focus designing and implementing packaging shapes that are ergonomic, visually appealing, and easily distinguishable.
KEYWORDS: *Brand Perception, Brand Shape, Brand Symbol, Brand design and Consumer Buying Behaviour*

INTRODUCTION

Brand perception is a significant and vital component of branding strategies, playing a crucial role in a company's profitability. Since brand perception is owned by consumers, it helps build customer relationships (Oliver Koll et al., 2019) and informs branding strategies. Serious companies always aim to develop a positive brand perception to be viewed favorably by consumers. This perception depends on how well the firm can project itself. Both negative and positive brand perceptions can be observed. If a positive brand perception exists, it will influence consumers to prioritize choosing the brand (Jonah Berger et al., 2017). Conversely, a negative perception will push consumers to reject the brand.

As it is clear, brand is not only considered as the name of a company or the name of the product, but also brand illustrates culture, value, vision, mission and even a personality. It also supports to determine the market position and double check whether the vision is still relevant (Ahmed, Syed, 2018). All of the data collected is converted into a mental impression, which in turn influences the product's quality, value, and reputation in the eyes of customers.

Jisana (2020) explains that consumer behavior reflects how individuals make decisions based on their available resources, such as time, effort, and money. According to Kumar (2016), consumer behavior encompasses the attitudes and decisions made by individuals or groups regarding the use and benefits of services, ideas, products, and experiences. The shopping habits of people significantly impact a country's economy (Machova et al., 2021). Companies create marketing strategies to address the needs and wants of these consumers. Asiegbu et al. (2018) also describe consumer behavior as a synthesis of purchasing and using goods or services. The consumer purchasing decision-making process involves seven steps: need recognition, information search, pre-purchase evaluation, purchasing, consuming, post-consumption review, and divestment (Watson and Yan, 2019).

People often prefer branded products, associating higher prices with higher quality. Therefore, higher prices are perceived as indicative of superior quality and branded products. Additionally, brand choice can serve as a status

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indicator. If a brand is well-managed, customers' perception of the brand, its value, and loyalty towards it will be stronger (Aaker, 1996).

If a positive brand perception exists, it will influence consumers to prioritize choosing the brand (Jonah Berger et al., 2017). Conversely, a negative perception will push consumers to reject the brand. A brand represents more than just a company or product name; it embodies the culture, values, vision, mission, and personality of the organization, helping to determine market position and ensuring the vision remains relevant (Ahmed, Syed, 2018). The mental impression formed by consumers influences their perception of the product's quality, value, and reputation.
This ties closely with consumer behavior, which reflects how individuals make decisions based on their available resources, such as time, effort, and money (Jisana, 2020). According to Kumar (2016), consumer behavior includes the attitudes and decisions made by individuals or groups regarding the use and benefits of services, ideas, products, and experiences. The shopping habits of people significantly impact a country's economy (Machova et al., 2021). Companies create marketing strategies to address these consumer needs and wants. Asiegbu et al. (2018) describe consumer behavior as a synthesis of purchasing and using goods or services. However, the study will seek to address issues concerning brand perception ion consumer buying behaviors.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Brand perceptions have been extensively studied from various perspectives, including luxury products, tangible goods, and intangible offerings. A common theme is that brand perceptions are enduring due to their significant impact on manufacturers' products. The introduction of new brands in the market can disrupt consumer choices, especially during times when established brands face challenges. Obuzor (2021) highlights this phenomenon with the introduction of NDU table water, illustrating how market dynamics shift with changes in public opinion.

NDU table water has recently faced significant challenges. Consumers in Yenagoa are increasingly opting for other brands of table water over NDU, particularly during events, ceremonies, and meetings where large quantities of water are required. The primary reasons cited for this shift include the poor packaging of NDU table water despite its high price, and the more attractive and affordable packaging of competing brands such as Ayalla and Eva. These brands are perceived to offer better value in terms of packaging, affordability, variety, and price compared to NDU table water. This indicates that consumer purchasing decisions are rational and influenced by the attractiveness and appeal of competing brands. It is crucial to address how brand perceptions influence consumer buying behavior of NDU table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions designed for the study are:

1. To what extent does brand bottle shape influence consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State
2. To what extent does brand design influence consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State
3. To what extent does brand symbol influence consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses formulated for the study are:
H01: Brand bottle shape does not have significant influence consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State
H02: Brand design does not have significant influence consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State
H03: Brand symbol does not have significant influence consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between brand perception on consumer buying behaviour of NDU table water in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

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1. To determine the influence of Brand bottle shape on consumer buying heaviour of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.
2. To determine the influence of Brand design on consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State
3. To determine the influence of Brand symbol on consumer buying behavior of Ndu table water in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

Consumer Brand Perception

The attempt to describe the factors which influence the consumers and their behaviours when making purchasing decisions. The goal of the investigation of consumer behavior is to discover patterns of consumers' attitudes in their decision to buy or to ignore a product. (Matsatsinis and Samaras, 2019). Consumers brand preferences for products or brands arise from the combination of many different factors. Some factors come from features of the product itself (price, durability), while others are attributes of consumers themselves (goals, attitudes, discretionary income), (Venkatraman, Clithero, Fitzsimons & Huettel, 2016). Ge, Brigden and Häubl (2018) proposed that consumers often make choices in settings where some alternatives are known and additional alternatives can be unveiled through search.

When making a choice from a set of alternatives, the manner in which each of these was discovered should be irrelevant from a normative standpoint. Consumers must often decide between choosing among a set of previously discovered alternatives and searching to discover additional alternatives before making a choice. A substantial body of prior work examines consumer choice from pre-determined sets of alternatives. As a result, we know much about the influence of choice set composition and decision context on choice (Ge, Brigden, & Häubl, 2015). Additionally, consumer characteristics such as patriotism, protectionism and social economic conservatism are effecting their choices (Spillan & Harcar, 2022).

Brand Symbol

Numerous studies have been conducted in the era of brand symbolism, underscoring its importance (Anisimova, 2016; Bernritter, Loermans, et al., 2016). Brand symbolism has been defined in various ways by different researchers. For instance, Tsai (2015) describes brand symbolism as the consumer's evaluation of a brand name based on the perceived valence of the brand's reputation and its capability for self-expression. Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, and Grohmann (2019) define it as the brand's ability to serve as a resource for identity construction by offering self-referential cues that represent values, roles, and relationships. Schmitt (2012) refers to symbolic brands as those that signify individual self, group, society, and culture. Additionally, Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (2016) define symbolic needs as desires for brands that fulfill internal consumer needs for self-image or self-concept, group membership, and role positioning. Table 1 summarizes these definitions suggested by scholars. In the realm of brand symbolism, several significant theories have illuminated the consumer-product relationship by integrating psychological and sociological dimensions, such as self-image/product-image congruity theory (Sirgy, 2018), symbolic interactionism theory (Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 2020), social identity theory (Tajfel, 2019), and consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2019). These theories focus on the experiential dimensions of consumer consumption, addressing issues like brand symbolism, brand meanings, consumer identity, and the symbolic perspective of possessions.

Brand Design

Brand design is a critical component of marketing and brand management, encompassing the visual, auditory, and experiential elements that create a brand's identity. It involves the strategic development of a brand's logo, color scheme, typography, imagery, and other design elements that collectively form the visual representation of the brand (Wheeler, 2017). Effective brand design not only distinguishes a brand from its competitors but also fosters an emotional connection with consumers. This connection is essential for building brand loyalty and driving consumer engagement (Aaker, 2012). According to Keller (2013), brand design should consistently reflect the brand's core values and mission, ensuring that every touchpoint with the consumer reinforces the brand's identity. Moreover, brand design extends beyond mere aesthetics; it involves creating a cohesive brand experience that aligns with consumer expectations and perceptions (Gobé, 2019).

The role of brand design in influencing consumer behavior has been extensively studied. Research by Hagtvedt and Patrick (2018) highlights that a well-designed brand can significantly enhance perceived quality and prestige, thereby influencing purchasing decisions. Additionally, the consistency in brand design across various platforms and media ensures a unified brand message, which is crucial for brand recognition and recall (Kapferer, 2012). In the digital age, where consumers interact with brands across multiple channels, the importance of a consistent and compelling brand design is paramount. This consistency not only builds trust but also enhances the overall brand experience, making it more memorable and impactful (Schmitt, 2019).

Brand Shape

Brand shape plays a pivotal role in conveying a brand's identity and influencing consumer perceptions. It encompasses the geometric and organic forms used in a brand's visual elements, such as logos, packaging, and product design. Research suggests that different shapes can evoke distinct psychological responses. For instance, circular shapes often symbolize unity, community, and friendliness, while angular shapes convey strength, stability, and efficiency (Henderson, Giese, & Cote, 2021). The choice of shape can significantly impact how consumers perceive the brand's personality and values. According to Silayoi and Speece (2017), packaging shapes influence consumer buying decisions by affecting perceptions of product size, usability, and attractiveness. Moreover, shapes play a critical role in brand recall and recognition. Consistent use of distinct shapes can make a brand more memorable and easily identifiable (Pittard, Ewing, & Jevons, 2017). In a crowded marketplace, leveraging the psychological and perceptual impacts of shapes can provide a competitive edge, enhancing brand differentiation and consumer loyalty. Thus, the strategic use of brand shapes is essential for effective brand communication and long-term success.

Theoretical Framework

Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model by Keller (2003), which highlights the importance of brand knowledge, composed of brand awareness and brand image. This model suggests that strong brand equity is achieved through a pyramid of brand building blocks, starting from brand salience and moving up to brand resonance, which represents a deep, emotional connection with consumers. Complementing this is **Aaker's (1991) Brand Equity Model**, which identifies brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand awareness as critical components of brand equity.

Additionally, the Theory of Planned Behavior **by Ajzen (1991) emphasizes the role of consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping purchase intentions and behaviors.** Social Identity Theory **by** Tajfel and Turner (1986) also plays a crucial role by explaining how brands contribute to consumers' self-concept and social identity, influencing their preferences and loyalty based on the brand's alignment with their personal and group identity. Together, these theories and models provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of consumer brand perception.

Empirical studies

Okeke and Adebayo (2020), examine the relationship between brand shape and consumer purchasing decisions was examined. The research utilized a quantitative research design, focusing on a small population of consumers in Lagos, Nigeria. The sample size consisted of 150 respondents, selected using convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, facilitated by SPSS software. The findings revealed that the shape of bottled water packaging significantly impacts consumer perceptions and purchase decisions, with taller and slimmer bottles being preferred over shorter and wider ones. The study concluded that packaging shape plays a crucial role in influencing consumer buying behavior in the bottled water market. It recommended that manufacturers consider ergonomic and visually appealing bottle designs to attract and retain customers. The study highlights the importance of packaging aesthetics in the competitive bottled water industry and suggests that strategic design can enhance brand equity and consumer loyalty.

Mwangi and Afolayan (2021), investigate the relationship between brand design and consumer purchasing decisions was examined. The research employed a quantitative research design, focusing on a small population of consumers in Nairobi, Kenya. The sample size consisted of 120 respondents, selected using purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, facilitated by SPSS software. The findings indicated that various elements of brand design, including logo, color scheme, and packaging shape, significantly influence consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Consumers

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showed a preference for well-designed and visually appealing bottles, associating them with higher quality and better value. The study concluded that effective brand design is critical in influencing consumer buying behavior in the bottled water market. It recommended that bottled water manufacturers invest in innovative and aesthetically pleasing designs to enhance brand appeal and competitiveness. The study underscores the importance of strategic brand design in driving consumer preference and loyalty in the bottled water industry.

Adeyemi and Okafor (2022), examine the impact of brand symbols on consumer purchasing decisions was examined. The research adopted a quantitative research design, focusing on a small population of consumers in Lagos, Nigeria. The sample size consisted of 100 respondents, selected using convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, facilitated by SPSS software. The findings revealed that brand symbols, such as logos, icons, and emblems, significantly influence consumer perceptions and buying behavior. Consumers exhibited a strong preference for bottled water brands with recognizable and appealing symbols, associating them with quality and reliability. The study concluded that brand symbols play a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences and driving purchase decisions in the bottled water market. It recommended that bottled water companies invest in creating distinctive and memorable brand symbols to enhance brand recognition and consumer loyalty. The study highlights the strategic importance of brand symbols in competitive market positioning.

METHODOLOGY

In view of this study, descriptive research design was used to determine the nature opinion and perception of the customers of NDU table water in Amassoma, Bayelsa State. The population of the study is two hundred and fifty (250) customer of NDU Table Water. A sample size of one fifty-three (153) was calculated using the Taro Yamene formula while 120 questionnaires was returned and useful for analysis. The questionnaire was structured in a four (4) point Likert scale measurement. The data collected through the questionnaire were coded and analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation through the aid of SPSS, version 21.0.

Table 1: Correlations between Brand design and Consumer Buying Behaviour

		BRAND DESIGN	CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR
BRAND DESIGN	Pearson Correlation	1	.742**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR	Pearson Correlation	.742**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table 1 shows a strong positive significant correlation ($r = 0.742$, $p < 0.01$) between brand design and consumer buying behavior among the 109 participants. This implies that better or more appealing brand design is associated with more favorable consumer buying behavior in the bottled water industry. The significant p-value reinforces that this relationship is unlikely to be due to chance, providing strong evidence that brand design plays an important role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

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Table 2: Correlations between Brand shape and Consumer Buying Behaviour

		BRAND SHAPE	CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR
BRAND SHAPE	Pearson Correlation	1	.770**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR	Pearson Correlation	.770**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table 2 shows a very strong and positive significant correlation ($r = 0.770$, $p < 0.01$) between brand shape and consumer buying behavior among the 109 participants. This implies that better or more appealing brand shapes are associated with more favorable consumer buying behavior in the bottled water industry. The significant p-value shows that this relationship is unlikely to be due to chance, providing strong evidence that brand shape is a critical factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

Table 3: Correlations between Brand symbols and Consumer Buying Behaviour

		BRAND SYMBOLS	CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR
BRAND SYMBOLS	Pearson Correlation	**1**	**.670****
	Sig. (2-tailed)		**.000**
	N	**120**	**120**
CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR	Pearson Correlation	**.670****	**1**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	
	N	**120**	**120**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table 3 shows a strong and positive significant correlation ($r = 0.670$, $p < 0.01$) between brand symbols and consumer buying behavior among the 109 participants. This suggests that more effective or appealing brand symbols are associated with more favorable consumer buying behavior in the bottled water industry. The significant p-value shows that this relationship is unlikely to be due to chance, providing strong evidence that brand symbols play an important role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the empirical study conducted by Nwangi, P., & Afolyan, D. (2021), which investigated the impact of consumer brand perception and consumer buying behaviour of NDU table water, the findings discussed below corroborate the importance of brand design and consumer buying behavior

Hypothesis one revealed the correlations between brand design and consumer buying behaviour.
The table 1 shows a strong positive significant correlation ($r = 0.742$, $p < 0.01$) between brand design and consumer buying behavior among the 109 participants. This implies that better or more appealing brand design is associated with more favorable consumer buying behavior in the bottled water industry. The significant p-value reinforces that this relationship is unlikely to be due to chance, providing strong evidence that brand design plays an important role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. The study align with Nwangi, P., & Afolyan, D., (2021), that various elements of brand design, including logo, color scheme, and packaging shape, significantly influence consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Consumers showed a preference for well-designed and visually appealing bottles, associating them with higher quality and better value.

Hypothesis two revealed the correlations between brand shape and consumer buying behaviour.
The table 2 shows a very strong and positive significant correlation ($r = 0.770$, $p < 0.01$) between brand shape and consumer buying behavior among the 109 participants. This implies that better or more appealing brand shapes are associated with more favorable consumer buying behavior in the bottled water industry. The significant p-value shows that this relationship is unlikely to be due to chance, providing strong evidence that brand shape is a critical factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions. The study support that of Okeke, J., & Adebayo, T. (2020), revealed that the shape of bottled water packaging significantly impacts consumer perceptions and purchase decisions, with taller and slimmer bottles being preferred over shorter and wider ones.

Hypothesis three revealed the correlations between brand symbols and consumer buying behaviour.
The table 3 shows a strong and positive significant correlation ($r = 0.670$, $p < 0.01$) between brand symbols and consumer buying behavior among the 109 participants. This suggests that more effective or appealing brand symbols are associated with more favorable consumer buying behavior in the bottled water industry. The significant p-value shows that this relationship is unlikely to be due to chance, providing strong evidence that brand symbols play an important role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. The study collaborate with that of Adeyemi, T., & Okafor, C. (2022) revealed that brand symbols, such as logos, icons, and emblems, significantly influence consumer perceptions and buying behavior

CONCLUSION
From the findings it reveals that brand shape, brand design and brand symbols has significant relationship with consumer buying behaviour of Ndu Table water, it is based on the findings, the researcher concludes that there is a relationship between brand perception and consumer buying behavour of Ndu table water in terms of service they receive from the consumption by the customers.

RECOMMENDATION
On the backgrop of the findings of the study, the study recommends;

1. Management of Ndu table water should be given utmost attention in making their Brand symbols attractive, recognizable and very easy to remember
2. Management of Ndu Table on Water should focus designing and implementing packaging shapes that are ergonomic, visually appealing, and easily distinguishable.
3. Management of Ndu Table Water should invest in creating cohesive and aesthetically pleasing design elements, including logos, color schemes, and packaging graphics.

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