

BRAND EQUITY AND CONSUMER PATRONAGE OF SOFT DRINKS IN BENIN CITY, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of brand equity on consumer patronages of soft drinks in Benin City, Nigeria. It specifically investigated the extent to which brand awareness, brand association; and perceived quality affects the consumer patronage of soft drinks in Benin City, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of customers of Nigeria Bottling Company and Seven-up Bottling company products in Benin City. Questionnaire was used to collect information from 240 respondents as sample. The data elicited from the respondents were analyzed with regression analysis. The research findings were that there is a significant and positive relationship between customer patronage and the explanatory variables of brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality. On the basis of these findings, the study recommends that producers of soft drinks should create more awareness about their products through promotional advertisement

Key Words: brand equity, Brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, consumer patronage.

INTRODUCTION

Essentially the term brand is used to describe the combined or individual use of a name, sign, symbol or design that is aimed at distinguishing product / service offerings of one seller from the other (Kotler, 2005; Aaker 2011) Comprehending the role that brands play in consumer buying behavior is invaluable in building sustained customer patronage, loyalty and competitive advantage (Kotler & Keller 2011). Lev (2011) avers that brands have the capability of providing value for all stakeholders in the organization. For customers a powerful brand reduces the psychological cost associated with searching for a right brand and is pivotal for firms in creating organizational differentiation and the attainment of sustainable competitive advantage. (Lev 2011;

Jensen & Torben, 2016). According to Aaker, (2005); Lev, (2011) for sustained business advantage it is strategically beneficial to concretize appropriate brand associations in the consumers' mental processes and memory. Kotler and Keller, (2011) submits that branding promotes customer loyalty and generates greater customer value that offers them the desired satisfaction and preserves their patronage of the brand. It is considered to be a significant pillar that allows organizations get positive referrals, reduce customers switching intentions to competitors brand and to establish beneficial relationships with their customers in the long run (Chi, Yeh & Yang, 2014). An understanding therefore of branding and brand equity is crucial and cannot be overemphasized. Kotler and Armstrong, (2010)

sharing same views with Aaker, (2004) opine that brand equity describes a group of brand assets and liabilities connected with the brand and enhances or diminishes the value of the product or service based on the customers' perspectives; and this value may be evidenced through consumers' actions, thoughts and feelings. Some studies have identified brand equity components as brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty alongside other proprietary brand assets (Chen, & Chang, 2016; Shah, Adeel, & Hanif, 2016).

There is agreement in literature that consumers' awareness of the brand is first necessary before the development of a set of association, and scholars have suggested the use of an adequate and coherent publicity, slogans or jingle, sponsorship of events and appropriate packaging to pivotal to increasing the ability of a likely buyer to identify and recall the brand to memory. The brand or product associations include functional attribute associations and non-functional associations (Beristain, & Zorrilla, 2011). The functional attributes relate to the products performance and refers to customer evaluations that products are of good quality and are fault-free and would be of long lasting usefulness. The non-functional associations refer to the symbolic attributes of product which are the non-tangible features that may satisfy customers' desire for personal expression and actualization or personal esteem, approval in society, etc. The most critical component of brand equity is the evaluation regarding its overall excellence or quality supremacy of the brand in terms of intrinsic attributes (shape, flavor, appearance) and external attributes like price, packaging and production information about the brand (Keller, 2013) as this fundamentally informs brand choices and patronage.

The greatest challenges however in brand equity are low awareness (Chen & Zhang, 2013). In the light of this, many firms have engaged in publicity and advertising of their products with the aim of creating brand awareness. However, how the brand awareness created through marketing efforts affects consumer's patronage of beverage products in the Nigerian Food and Beverage Industry has received little empirical studies to the best of our knowledge. Additionally, while brand associations is a criteria used by consumers in making decisions about which brand to patronize, how brand associations have affected customer patronage of soft drinks search in the literature seems to suggest that it has not received much empirical attention. Also while some scholars have advocated that perceived quality of brand promote consumers' patronage of the product; some studies have reported inconclusive findings. Equally important is that some of the available studies on this subject were not conducted in Nigeria. Some studies in Nigeria that have so far focused on brand equity concentrated mostly on the financial services sector. This study is unique as it provides empirical evidence on brand equity and its effects on customer patronage in the beverages industry in Nigeria.

The broad objective of this paper is to examine brand equity and its relationship with customer patronage of soft drinks in Benin City, Nigeria. Some specific objectives are:

1. to examine the extent to which brand awareness influences customer patronage of soft drinks in Benin City;
2. to determine the extent to which brand association influences customer patronage soft drinks in Benin City;
3. to ascertain the extent to which perceived quality influences customer patronage of soft drinks in Benin City.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in their null forms have been raised to guide this study:

- Ho1: Brand awareness has no significant influence on customer patronage of soft drinks in Benin City.
- Ho2: Brand association has no significant influence on customer patronage of soft drinks in Benin City.
- Ho3: Perceived quality has no significant influence on customer patronage of soft drinks in Benin City.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

Brands and Brand Equity

According to Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015) brands are very important to the consumers as they reflect the experience and knowledge of the company and its products. The brand serves to identify superior quality products with minimum associated risks, and enables consumers to capture both cognitive and non-cognitive values. It is an important intangible assets valuable for the company and functions as tool in developing productive relationships with customers in the long run (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen, 2009; Tafamel & Abiodun, 2015). Relatedly Jobber, (2001) submits that powerful brands contribute positively both to firms and their customers. Companies benefit because good brands add value to their organization, favorably influences consumers' perceptions and judgments, acts to diminish competition, helps grow firm profits and serve as platform for brand extensions. On the other hand, it is also gainful to consumers as strong brands function as quality certification for that product and build trust (Tafamel & Abiodun, 2015; Ogbeide & Agbadudu, 2015).

The brand equity according to Calvo-Porrall and

Lévy-Mangin (2014) describes a group of attributes associated with the name and/ or symbol of a brand. It refers to attributes that promote or diminish value and satisfaction offered by the product or service of an organization to its customers (Tolba & Hassan, 2009) and is also considered as the usefulness that consumers link with a brand (Christodoulides, & De Chernatony, 2010). It is the customers feeling of superior value of a product brand compared with other brands (Atefeh & Fernanda, 2016). Brand equity thus are those characteristics of a brand that stimulate consumer's favorable or unfavorable dispositions toward the brand. Aaker, (1996, 2004) asserts that brand equity remains a prime non-physical asset possessing and offering psychological and financial benefit to the advantage of the firm, and the extent of its usefulness hinges on the quantity of persons who patronize the product. Studies have reported that brand equity produces increased profits and stock returns (Kurtz & Boone, 2006; Tafamel & Abiodun, 2015).

Dimensions of Brand Equity

From the literature, studies have identified brand awareness, brand association, and its perceived quality as key elements making up the brand (Chen & Chang, 2016; Chen, & Zhang, 2013). Aaker, (1991, 2004) posits that these components of brand awareness, brand association, and its perceived quality with other intangibles like trademarks, channel relationships and patents are important components of brand equity. This paper discusses some components of brand equity investigated in this research.

Brand Awareness

Keller (2013) avers that brand awareness is the capability of the customer to remember and identify the brand and is demonstrated by their been able to specifically pick out the brand

irrespective of the surrounding circumstances and to connect the brand name, signs or logo to related association in memory. Keller (2013) avers that the brand recall describes the customer's ability to bring back that particular product brand from memory as occasion necessitates. For effective competitiveness it is indispensable to measure brand awareness. Chang and Liu (2014) suggested the following as means of promoting brand awareness through avenues such as employing a slogan or jingle, by using and exposing a symbol until well known, by intensive publicity and advertisements, by event sponsorships, by using cues especially through packaging.

Perceived Quality

This describes a customer's judgment concerning the total superiority about technical nature of products/services. It is the extent to which attributes of products delivered meets and exceeds customer's expectation (Davis, Golicic, & Marquardt, 2015). It occurs when customers perceived intrinsic attributes and extrinsic attributes of a brand falls short of meeting the customer's needs and expectations (Calvo-Porra & Lévy-Mangin, 2014). The innate features are connected with the tangible parts of the product (such as color, form and appearance) while external attributes are linked with the quality certification, price, store and packaging (Jalilvand, Samiei & Mahdavinia, 2011; Tam, 2016).

Brand Associations

This describes all issues linked with the brand and is comprised of mental thought processes, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. It includes everything connected in memory with the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2011). It has historically been grouped into product associations and organizational

associations (Chen, Chen, & Huang, 2012). Other scholars such as Wang, Wei, & Yu, (2008), (Keller, 2013). Buil, de Chernatony and Martinez (2013) Wu, Yeh, & Hsiao, 2011), and Kotler and Keller (2011) have identified product associations, the product *image in society, the value perceived, the level of trustworthiness: the distinctiveness of the product or service offering and place of production essential elements of the brand association and exert effect on customer patronage.*

Brand Loyalty

Loyalty is a prime component of brand equity. It describes the emotional bonding and attachment to a brand (Jensen & Torben, 2016). It is linked to repeated purchases over time and shows a commitment to continue to buy the brand and denotes patronage on which this study dwells on.

Customer Patronage

Customer patronage has been defined by many studies. According to Wu, Yeh and Hsiao (2011), it is customer willingness to purchase a particular brand over again. It is desire to be loyal to a particular firm. It is development of a favorable altitude toward a brand, desire to place a particular brand at top most minds and commitment to the use of a particular product (Jalilvand, Samiei & Mahdavinia, 2011). Chen, Chen and Huang, (2012) opined that customer patronage is the commitment to use a particular brand. This commitment is usually triggered by the degree to which the brand meet customers want and expectation. The consumer buying decision is described as all the mental processes, feelings and actions that an individual engages in prior purchasing any product or service offering or idea and it answers issues relating to the what, why, how, when, and where an individual makes purchase (Kotler, Armstrong, Wong & Saunders, 2008). According to Kotler, Armstrong, Wong and

Saunders, (2008) the process spans several stages that the consumer will go through before culminating the actual purchase recognizing the need, gathering of information, assessment of available alternatives, making the actual purchase and post purchase evaluations. Kotler, et. al, (2008) further reports that the consumer may skip some stages especially during a routinized buying but in a new and uncertain purchase situation, all the stages are needed to culminate the purchase process.

Theoretical Framework

This study presents two key models for explaining brand equity which are Aakers Model and Kelly's Model.

Aaker Models of Brand Equity

Aaker in 1991 developed model of brand equity. This model has gained centre stage in explaining brand equality. Aaker opined that to identify the weaknesses and strengths in a brand, the elements to be considered in a brand are: are the extent of the customers knowledge of the brand, how well the brand differs from the competitors, whether the brand quality perceived to be relevant, assess if the customers are loyal to the brand and if customer demonstrate commitment to the brand on what is this loyalty based. On the basis of this, the favorable brand equity produces a differential effect, greater brand knowledge, and a greater customer responses which translates into an enhanced brand performance when evaluated from all perspectives. Aaker argued that components of the brand equity and other proprietary brand assets are important and exerts effect on customer behavior. He further reports that the economic value created in transactions generates brand equity.

Keller Model

Keller in 1993 introduced the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid. This model

considers brand equity from the perspective of the customer, whether it is an organizational or individual. According to Keller (1993) the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid is the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer's response to the marketing of that brand.

Keller also introduced six building blocks as part of the Customer Based Brand Equity pyramid. These building blocks are salience, performance, imagery, judgment, feelings and resonance. He also affirmed that factors such as brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand relationship are important for the success of the brand in the market place.

Empirical Review:

Numerous works have reported a positive association between perceived brand quality and customer attitude. Jalilvand, Samiei and Mahdavinia (2011) researched on brand equity components and its effect on purchase intentions. They carefully applied Aaker's Model of brand equity using a sample of 242 consumers in the automobile industry. The findings are that brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty and perceived quality exert significant effect on consumers' intention to purchase products. The research suggested that the brand equity components should be adequately considered when designing their branding strategies. The organizations too are to modify their branding strategies and tactics to suit the peculiarity of their marketing environment as this will promote brand loyalty and discourage switching behavior tendencies of their customers.

Furthermore, Tahira, Yaseen, Gulzar, (2011) examined how brand profitability and purchase intention was affected by brand awareness,

perceived quality and customer loyalty. The research employed causal design and data was collected from 200 resellers. The results reported a statistically significant effect of perceived quality on profitability and also established a significant effect of brand awareness, perceived quality and loyalty on purchase intention.

The study of Yang (2014) on the effects of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and customer purchase intention and mediating effects of perceived quality and brand loyalty on brand awareness and purchase intention. The findings established that brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty significantly and positively affected purchase intention.

Irshad (2012) examined the association between brand equity as a whole construct and purchase intentions. The components brand association, brand awareness, perceived service quality and service loyalty were employed as dimensions of brand equity. **Needed information was obtained from the sampled populace using a properly structured questionnaire. Findings established that brand equity had a significant and positive relationship with purchase intentions.**

A study on Brand Awareness and Brand Characteristics towards Customer Loyalty in the Milk Industry in Pakistan was undertaken by Khan (2012). The research was conducted in the Peshawar region. Using a sample of 200 branded milk users that was ascertained from the populace, copies of the research instrument were administered to them. With regression and correlation analysis the data were analyzed. Findings show that brand characteristics had huge influence on customer loyalty. Quality of the product and brand image were identified as the key factors which accounted for customer loyalty within the brand characteristics. While in the case

of brand awareness advertising contributed more towards building customer loyalty for branded milk

METHODOLOGY

The study used survey method and the data collection was from the primary source through the administration of a questionnaire. The population of the study is made up of the entire customers of Nigeria Bottling and Seven Up Bottling Company in Benin City. The study adopted Krejcie and Morgan' (1970) probability sampling techniques formula for determining sample size from unknown population which gave a sample size of 384. Cluster sampling technique was adopted in the study as the city was divided into 5 clusters which were used. A total of 77 copies of the questionnaire was administered in each cluster. Cluster sampling was used so as to reduce cost and time wastage and also achieve adequate representation across the city. **This study used questionnaire to collect data and the items of the questionnaire** were adopted from Aaker, (1991) scale on brand equity and consumers patronage using Likert scale question format. The reliability of research instrument was determined using twenty 20 copies of the questionnaires which were first of all administered to consumers of Nigerian Bottling and Seven Up Bottling companies products in Benin City. Data obtained from the retrieved questionnaires were tested using Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics. The Cronbach's alpha value for each constructs is showed in Table1 below.

Table 1 : Reliability Statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Customer patronage	.986	6
Brand Awareness	.852	4
Brand Association	.962	8
Perceived Quality	.822	6

Source: Researcher's Field Work.

Model Specification

The model of this study was based on the model adopted from Aaker, (1991). The model for the study is therefore stated functionally as:

$$CUSPATRO = f(BRAWARE, BRASSOC, PERQUAL) \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Econometrically, the model was specified as:

$$CUSPATROL_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 BRAWARE_i + \beta_2 BRASSOC_i + \beta_3 PERQUAL_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:

CUSPATRO = Customer Patronage

BRAWARE = Brand awareness

BRASSOC = Brand association

PERQUAL = Perceived quality

β_0 = constant

$\beta_1, \dots, \beta_3, \dots > 0$ = coefficients and apriori signs of the independent variables

ε_i = Error term

The econometric model for the study basically relates customer patronage (dependent variable) with the dimension of brand equity which includes brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality (independent variables). The data generated were analyzed and the hypotheses were tested with multiple regression analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire administered, 240 representing 62.5% of the sample size filled and returned the questionnaire.

Table 2: Customer Patronage

S/N	Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean
8	I purchase my most preferred soft drink regularly	4 (1.7%)	8 (3.3%)	24 (10%)	40 (16.7%)	164 (68.3%)	240	4.47
9	I will not change from my most preferred soft drink to another	10 (4.2%)	22 (9.2%)	20 (8.3%)	56 (23.3%)	132 (55%)	240	4.16
10	The more often I purchase my most preferred soft drink the more I get attached to it	4 (1.7%)	36 (15%)	28 (11.7%)	48 (20%)	124 (51.7%)	240	4.05
11	I usually recommend my most preferred soft drink to others	12 (5%)	24 (10%)	18 (7.5%)	53 (22.1%)	129 (55.4%)	240	4.13
12	I intend to keep purchasing my most preferred soft drinks	16 (6.7%)	32 (13.3%)	22 (9.2%)	60 (25%)	110 (45.8%)	240	3.90

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2016)

As shown in Table 2 above, the mean score on the degree of customer patronage of soft drinks is 4.12. This indicates that the degree of customer patronage of soft drink in Benin City of Nigeria is above average of 2.5 on a five-point Likert scale. Given that strongly agree was represented with 5 and strongly disagree with 1, therefore the degree of customer patronage of soft drinks is considerably high in Benin City.

It is also clear in the Table above that the mean scores on each question poised on customer patronage indicates that the majority of the respondents did agree or strongly agree that they purchase their most preferred soft drink regularly, they will not change from their most preferred soft drink to another, the more often they purchase their most preferred soft drink the more they get attached to it, they usually recommend their most preferred soft drink to others, they intend to keep purchasing their most preferred soft drinks and they consider themselves loyal to their most preferred soft drinks.

Table 3: Brand Awareness and Customer Patronage

S/N	Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean
A Brand Awareness and Customer Patronage								
1	I usually recommend my most preferred soft drink because am highly knowledgeable about it.	3 (1.3%)	4 (1.7%)	17 (7.1%)	73 (30.4%)	143 (59.5%)	240	4.45
2	I usually recommend my most preferred soft drink because it keeps me healthy.	5 (2.1%)	20 (8.3%)	31 (12.9%)	69 (28.8%)	115 (47.9%)	240	4.12
3	I intend to keep purchasing my most preferred soft drinks: it is well published and advertised.	12 (5%)	32 (13.3%)	24 (10%)	68 (28.3%)	108 (43.3%)	240	3.92
4	I intend to keep purchasing my most preferred soft drink because am loyal to it.	4 (1.7%)	23 (9.6%)	32 (13.3%)	72 (30%)	102 (45.4%)	240	4.08
Overall average for brand awareness								4.17

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2016).
 For further analysis, the frequency and mean scores on the various questions on brand awareness as shown in Table 3 above indicate that majority of the respondents strongly agree that their most preferred soft drinks is reasonably

priced, members speak often about the health implication of their most preferred soft drink and their most preferred soft drink is well published/advertised.

Table 4: Brand Association and Customer Patronage

S/N	Variables	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Total	Mean
5	Soft drink has no influence on customer patronage	84 (35.0%)	60 (25.03%)	24 (10.23%)	31 (28%)	41 (1.7%)	240	0.42
6	Soft drink has influence on consumer patronage	21 (8.8%)	27 (11.3%)	24 (10%)	64 (26.7%)	104 (43.3%)	240	3.85
7	My most preferred soft drinks portrays a good image of soft drink and has influence on consumer patronage, it is reasonably priced, I intend to keep purchasing it.	24 (10%)	18 (7.5%)	24 (14.2%)	42 (17.5%)	132 (50.8%)	240	3.92
8	I recommend my most preferred soft drink to families, friends and others because its producer portrays a good image.	21 (8.8%)	27 (11.3%)	24 (10%)	64 (26.7%)	104 (43.3%)	240	3.85
9	The producer of most preferred soft drink has long history of good reputation, and I consider myself to be loyal to my most preferred soft drink.	20 (8.3%)	36 (15%)	20 (8.3%)	58 (24.2%)	106 (44.2%)	240	3.81
10	My most preferred soft drink is readily available; hence I will not change from it to another.	12(5%)	15 (6.3%)	24 (10%)	56 (23.3%)	134 (55.4%)	240	4.18
11	The most preferred drink provides good value for money, so am attached to it.	6 (2.5%)	48 (20%)	40 (16.7%)	64 (26.7%)	82 (34.2%)	240	3.7
Overall average for brand association								3.85

Source: Author's Fieldwork.

More so, the frequency and means score for brand association as shown in Table 4 indicate that majority of respondents agree that purchase their most preferred soft drinks because it is reasonably priced, the producer of their most preferred soft drink portrays a good image, the producer of most preferred soft drink has long history of good

reputation, their most preferred soft drink is readily available and their brand provides good value for money.

Table 5: Perceived Quality and influence Customer Patronage

S/N	Variables	SD	D	NS	A	SA	Total	Mean
12	I consider myself loyal to my most preferred soft drink because its tastes quality is superior.	5 (2.1%)	6 (2.5%)	17 (7.1%)	73 (30.4%)	139 (57.9%)	240	4.4
13	My most preferred soft drink has a nice flavour; I tend to keep purchasing it.	6 (2.5%)	20 (8.3%)	31 (12.9%)	70 (29.2%)	113 (47.1%)	240	4.1
14	My most preferred soft drink is well packaged; I will not change from it.	13 (5.4%)	30 (12.5%)	17 (7.5%)	64 (26.3%)	116 (48.3%)	240	4.0
15	The scent of my most preferred soft drink is nice	17 (7.1%)	25 (10.4%)	18 (7.5%)	57 (23.8%)	123 (51.3%)	240	4.02
16	The taste of my most preferred soft drink is good compared to the price, this make me to get attached to it.	6 (2.5%)	32 (13.3%)	27 (11.3%)	80 (33.3%)	95 (39.6%)	240	3.94
17	The taste of my most preferred soft drink is good compared to the price	12 (5%)	17 (7.1%)	48 (20%)	72 (30%)	91 (37.9%)	240	3.89
Overall average for perceived quality								4.06

Source: Author's Fieldwork (2016).

Finally, the means score of the various questions on brand quality depicted in Table 5 showed that majority of the respondents on average did agree that they patronize their most preferred brand because the tastes quality of their most preferred soft drink is superior, their most preferred soft drink has a nice flavor, their most preferred soft drink is well packaged, they like the odour of their most preferred soft drink and the taste of the most preferred soft drink is good compared to the price.

Table 6: Summarized report of grand mean values of respondents' opinion on

	Hypothesized Relationships.	No of question items	Mean
H1	Brand Awareness and Customer Patronage	4	4.17
H2	Brand Association and Customer Patronage	6	3.85
H3	Perceived Quality and influence Customer Patronage	6	4.06

hypothesized relationships.

From the Table 6 above, it is clear that the level of perception of all the dimensions (brand awareness, association, and perceived quality) of brand equity of soft drinks in Benin City is high. Specifically, with mean values of 4.17, 3.85, and 4.06 it indicates how customers perceived each dimension of brand equity and all of them were high.

Hypothesis Testing

This study employed multiple regression. The hypotheses formulated for the study was tested at 5% significance level. The decision rule is that where p-values are greater than or equal to 0.05, the alternate hypotheses (H₁) are accepted and where the p- values are less than 0.05, the null hypotheses (H₀) are accepted. The result is presented as follows:

Regressions Results.

Table 7a . Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.366 ^a	.134	.123	.56047

a. Predictors: (Constant), PERQUAL, BRASSOC, BRAWARE

Table 7b .ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.439	3	3.813	12.138	.000 ^b
	Residual	74.135	236	.314		
	Total	85.574	239			

a. Dependent Variable: CUSPOTRONAGE

b. Predictors: (Constant), PERQUAL, BRASSOC, BRAWARE

Table 7c. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.475	.355		15.429	.000
	BRASSOC	.217	.053	.250	4.055	.000
	BRAWARE	.523	.103	.407	5.073	.000
	PERQUAL	.219	.068	.257	3.242	.001

a. Dependent Variable: CUSPOTRONAGE

The above regression result shows that when the explanatory (independent) variables: brand association, brand awareness, and perceived quality were regressed on customer patronage (CUSPOTRONAGE) an R² value of .134 is noticed. The value of adjusted R² of .134 indicates that the independent variables i.e brand equity jointly explain 13% of the systematic variation in the dependent variable – customer patronage (CUSPOTRONAGE). The result reveals that all components of brand equity studied have positive and significant relationship with customer patronage at p < 0.05. The F-statistic of 12.138 is significant at p < 0.05; meaning that the independent variables as a group have a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀: Brand awareness has no significant influence on customer patronage.

From the results shown above, there is positive and significant relationship between brand awareness and customer patronage. This is affirmed by the p-value of .000 which is less than 5% critical value. We therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate which states that brand awareness has significant influence on customer patronage.

Hypothesis Two

H₀: Brand association has no significant influence on customer Patronage.

For hypothesis two, the regression results show that there is positive and significant relationship between brand association and customer patronage. This is affirmed by the p-value of .000

which is less than 5% critical value. Therefore we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative that brand association has significant influence on customer patronage.

Hypotheses Three

H₀: Perceived quality has no significant influence on customer Patronage.

From the results shown in Table 4.5 above, it shows that there is positive and significant relationship between this is affirmed by the p-value of .000 which is less than 5% critical value. Based on the result, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that states that brand association has significant influence on customer patronage.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

For hypothesis one, the study revealed a significant relationship between brand awareness and customer patronage. This is in line with the findings of Chi, Yeh and Yang (2014) in the study on the effects of brand awareness on customer purchase intention when they found significant relationship between them. The findings of this study also agreed with Keller (2013) assertion that customer's ability to recall and identify the brand as evidenced by their ability to identify the brand under different scenarios and to link the brand name, logo and symbol to certain association in memory usually increase the intention of such customer to patronage the brand.

Hypothesis two revealed a positive and significant relationship between brand association and customer patronage. This result is similar to the findings of **Irshad (2012)** when he explored the relationship between brand equity as a whole construct comprising (brand association and brand awareness, perceived service quality

and service loyalty) and purchase intention and at individual level, found a significant and positive relationship between brand associations and purchase intention and also in harmony with the results obtained by Haemoon, (2014) when he examined the price on customer value which is an aspect of brand association attribute on behavioral intentions and found price fairness to play significant roles in the customer value process and intention to repurchase; and also with the work of Wu, Yeh, and Hsiao, (2011) who reports that product associations include functional attribute associations and non-functional associations which are used to judge the performance of a brand.

Hypothesis three of the study revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived quality and customer patronage. This finding is consistent with Jalilvand, Samiei and Mahdavinia (2011) findings when they conducted a study on the effect of brand equity on purchase intention and found perceived quality to significantly impact on consumers' intention to purchase products. This finding is also in line with Chi, Yeh and Yang (2014) when they found perceived quality to significantly impact on cellular users purchase intention. Furthermore, the finding of this study is consistent with the studies of Davis, Golicic, and Marquardt, 2015 and Calvo-Porra & Lévy-Mangin, 2014) that revealed that colour, flavour, form and appearance as well as stamp of quality, price, store and packaging of brand often use to measure quality of a brand affect emotional attachment to a brand. It is linked to repeated purchases or commitment to rebury the brand (Jensen & Torben, 2016). However, when customers perceive these quality dimensions of a brand fall short of meeting the customer's needs and expectations, intention to purchase,

repurchase products or continued patronage of the product will be low (Jensen & Torben, 2016).

From the findings of this study, there is significant and positive relationship between brand equity components (brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality) and customer patronage. These findings validate the model of equity developed by Aaker in 1991 that brand assets are important marketing activities that impact on customer behavior.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings are that:

1. There is a significant relationship between customer patronage and all the explanatory variables (brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality);
2. The relationships between customer patronage and the explanatory variables (brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality) are positive; and
3. The most important among the independent variables is perceived quality, followed by brand association. The least important is brand awareness. However, all of them are significant and positively related to customer patronage.

Conclusions

This study revealed that brand equity factors that significantly influence customer patronage of soft drinks are brand association, brand awareness and perceived quality. The firms in beverage industries need to devise means to create more awareness about their brand, deliver their brand at a competitive price and sustain continued improvement on the quality of their brand.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, this paper recommends the following:

1. Management of soft drinks companies should create more awareness about their brands and provide adequate information on associated benefits of their products.
2. Management of soft drinks should put measures in place to ensure that the quality of their products conform to the best practices in the industry.
3. Efforts should be made to ensure that actual customers' experiences conform to expectations. To this end, management should seek to always ascertain the opinion of customers about the quality of their products/services vis-à-vis their expectations through customer surveys.
4. Lastly, managers of soft drinks companies should constantly engage in competitor analysis to know what competitors are doing which they are not currently doing as well as the things which they can do better than competitors. This will help to enhance brand association and consequently customer patronage.

Suggestions for Further Studies

It is suggested that there is need to investigate the relationship between brand equity and customer behavioral intention in other sub service sectors like telecommunication, hotel and insurance firms. Secondly, other studies should examine the influence of brand equity on customer patronage of soft drinks in other states of the federation with larger sample sizes.

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