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cooking based on personal reasons and by their individual differences. Maggi from Nestle Foods had gained popularity in the hearts of many consumers before now but presently competing with Knor from Unilever in the market space. (According to BGL Research and Intelligence, one of the foremost investment banking companies in Africa, the seasoning sector is worth #14.7 trillion and the total national demand for various types of food condiments and seasonings at 5,475 tones per annum. Among the seasoning cubes presently trending in the Nigerian kitchen and markets are Maggi, Royco, Knor, Ajinomoto, Doyin, Onga, Suppy, Vedan and many more, enhancing the flavor of local dishes.

According to the result of a recent random survey conducted by Vanguard Investigation in Lagos, Abuja, some parts of the North, East, and South- South, Maggi controls about 43 percent of the market compared to Knor 41per cent. Although Maggi is the oldest in the market, there is no doubt that Maggi is facing serious challenge in the leadership position, by losing its first comer advantage in the market). Today, knor and Maggi are seriously competing in the menu recipe of many Nigerian homes and restaurants for top position in the seasoning market. While they struggle for leadership and serious attention from consumers; it is not for Maggi or Knor to say they are leading but consumers are the owners of brand and its perception. Consumers decide what a brand stands for, how they buy and why they buy. Consumers go through a lot of processes before finally deciding to settle for a particular brand and thus the need to understand the concept of consumer buying behavior.

Consumer purchase behavior is the study of customers that indicates how they behave during purchasing products or service regarding to satisfy their needs and wants (Sirgy, 2019). Consumer purchase behavior is the systematic procedures that consist of problem recognition information seeking, alternatives evaluations, purchase decision and post purchase behavior of customers. (Suelin, 2019). Consumer behavior involves making a purchase decision based on available resources, i.e., effort, money, and time (Chiang et al., 2016). Furthermore, Tsao et al. (2019) proposed a holistic view of consumer buying behavior. . Consumer behaviors are those activities and processes in which individuals choose and utilize ideas, products, services, and experiences. Li et al., (2021) stated that consumer behavior analysis is another tool to examine the complexity of marketing operations. From the above definitions it would be clearer that consumers decision gives brand image but not actually what brand manufacturers think of their brand. What informs a consumer’s decision to buy a particular brand over another is what we termed in this study as the “consumer buying decision drivers”

Consumer buying decision drivers literally means the reasons behind a particular choice or factors that can drive a consumer to prefer a particular brand over another in same category. When a consumer decides to pick or prefer a product brand over another, it is because of a particular factor. Factors like brand name, brand loyalty, brand price, brand quality, past experience with the brand and even media advertisement can make a consumer decide to go for a particular brand over another in the same category. Brand preference reflects a desire to use a particular company's product(s) or service(s) even when there are equally-priced and equally-available alternatives. Brand preference can also be seen as how much a consumer prefers a particular brand to other competing brands in the same product or service category. It is when a customer identifies a preferred product or service and makes that brand part of their often

purchasing routine. Brand preference is pertinent in influencing customers' choice and creating a strong connection with a brand. Brand preference is usually considered as the main element in consumer decision making process which is based on their pattern of choice, other than the consumers own will. In most cases friends and family's suggestions also play a pertinent role in developing the preference for a particular product brand. The brand preferences of customers are dependent on the positive image of a brand. When a brand shows positive and favorable outcome, customers tend to buy it again and again. Brand preference can be the start for the consumers' decision to buy. Some studies show that there is a positive correlation between brand preference and consumers' decision to buy (Tolba, Hassan, 2009).

The problem that influenced this study is the fact that it is not fully known if the customers who buy seasoning cube brands do so as a result of its price, quality/taste, advertisement, loyalty, awareness, association or because of past experience with the brand. Possible gaps in the literature reviewed lead support for the need of this present study. As against most empirical studies which dwelt on effects of branding on consumer behavior of clothing and textile brands, cosmetics, noodle brands, smart phone brands and car brands, nothing much has been done on seasoning cube brands. For example, Meena (2018) studied consumer brand preference and buying behavior of cosmetics product at Coimbatore City to determine the relationship between the demographic factors with the brand preference of respondents towards branded cosmetics. Also Anojan and Subaskaran (2015) conducted a study in Northern Province of Srilanka to find out the consumer preference and consumer's buying behavior of all the soft drinks in the area.

This study ascertained the level at which some seasonings cubes are preferred over others by consumers. Also determined how much brand name, brand quality and taste, price, brand loyalty, past experience with brand, packaging and media advertisement influenced consumers on their brand preference and choice. The study therefore examined consumer decision drivers of seasoning cube brands in Aba metropolis. Based on the objectives, the hypotheses were stated in the null forms as follows:

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between consumer brand preference of seasoning cube and brand name.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between consumer brand preference of seasoning cube and product price
- Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between consumer brand preference of seasoning cube and brand loyalty.
- Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between consumer brand preference of seasoning cube and brand quality/taste
- Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between consumer brand preference of seasoning cube and past experience with the brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Brand is a term closely linked to a product or places image and reputation in that it “captures the idea of reputation observed, reputation valued and reputation managed”. (Anholt, 2010). A brand can also encompass the name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. In simple terms what makes a product or service unique and differentiates it from competitors. People have preferences for all sorts of things including the brands they buy. Brands influence consumer behavior by finding ways to fit in with consumers’ “self - image”. Adverts show levels of by finding ways to fit in with consumers’ “self - image”. Adverts show levels of happiness and type of lifestyles that consumers want to have and those acts as symbols of what the brand represents. A brand's impact on consumer behavior depends a great deal on how consumers perceive and relate to the brand.

Branding is acknowledged to be one of the most fascinating marketing strategies used for the purpose of winning or overcoming competition (Ogbuji, Anyanwu and Onah, 2011). It is known to have accounted for one third to half of all consumers expressions of intent to purchase (Joshi, 2013). Brand name is a valuable asset and has a vital role in marketing strategy; it should influence the customer purchasing decision unique from other products and easy to remember. Furthermore, Doostar, Akhlagh and Abadi (2012) said that brand is an important tool that helps out corporations to receive a competitive advantage. Brand names can be an extremely successful means of communication. Some companies assign their product with a brand name that in reality has nothing to do with the emotional experience but is catchy and a name that people can easily memorize. The core base of naming a brand is that it should be unique so that it can be easily discriminated from other names, easy to remember and are attractive to customers (Keller, 2008).

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty describes a client’s connection with a brand (Coelho et al., 2018). Brand loyalty is the tendency to be loyal to a brand, and loyalty demonstrates the consumer’s buying intention (Atulkar, 2020). Additionally, Zhang X. et al. (2020) stated that a loyal consumer characterizes a basis for a price premium, a barrier to entry, protection against deleterious price accomplishment, and responding to competitors. The basic dimension of brand equity is brand loyalty. Similarly, the objective of brand management is brand loyalty. If the company needs to examine the strength and weaknesses of its consumer loyalty, whether the consumer is promoting its product more compared to competitors can be examined (Coelho et al., 2019). Moreover, it is the attitude of the consumer on brand preferences from prior shopping experiences of a product summed up (Bairrada et al., 2018).

Brand Equity: Brand equity is most times seen as an indication of its quality which affects the choice of consumers. It seems that brand equity from the perspective of consumer is an appropriate starts to assess product equity which contains a lot of interrelated dimensions such as brand awareness, brand quality, brand association and brand loyalty (Jing et al., 2015). This

relationship includes mutual exchanges between the brand and consumers by a duplicate set of actions that has many advantages for both sides (Huang, Kandampully, 2012). The goal of any brand is to attract and retain customers to ensure the success of the brand and the product (Zavattaro et al., 2015 and it is observed that consumers are looking for brands that have specific features (Garsvaite, Caruana, 2014; Londoño et al., 2016). Brand equity is a powerful tool to improve marketing productivity (Cai et al., 2014) and evaluating brand equity is an effective way to measure customers' satisfaction and brand performance by marketing managers (So, King, 2010; Sung Ho et al., 2015).

Perceived quality: It includes the customers' judgment of the advantage, excellence, credibility and a brand difference compared to other competing brands. Perceived quality not only affects other aspects of the brand, but also has impact on the classification of the product from the customer's perspective (Aaker, Joachimsthaler, 2000). Once customers trust a brand, they prefer that particular brand among a wide range of products even if the price is higher than competitors' products (He, Wang, 2014).

According to Bilgin, (2018), brand awareness is a reflection of concrete indicators of a brand such as names, signs, symbols and slogans, while brand image is the position of the brand in the minds consumers outside of these signs. Brand Awareness is a situation where consumers associate brands with obtaining or seeking information about brands and brands that have a higher level of awareness that can be considered to be used to meet their needs. Agnes, (2020). Consumers usually get brand awareness through various kinds of existing marketing, for example communication channels, namely smart phones, television, and an online advertisement that can make consumers feel they have a guarantee for product quality and can reduce risk in evaluating and selecting products when consumers want to buy a product (Sasmita & Suki, 2015).

Consumer buying behavior: Consumer purchase behavior is the systematic procedures that consist of problem recognition information seeking, alternatives evaluations, purchase decision and post purchase behavior of customers (Suelin, 2019). Consumer behavior involves making a purchase decision based on available resources, i.e., effort, money, and time (Chiang et al., 2016).

Consumer decision drivers: Consumer decision drivers are the essential factors that influence a consumer's decision – making process when buying a product or service. It reflects why consumers inherently buy the same brand or service over and over again.

Seasoning cube brands in Nigeria: These are wide range of products used to enhance the flavor of local dishes in Nigeria. Seasoning cube often referred to as bouillon cube or stock cubes are very popular cooking ingredients in Nigeria. They have the ability to add rich and savory flavors to variety of dishes. Prominent among them are Maggi, Knor, Onga, Royco, Doyin and many more.

Theoretical Review

One of the models that best suit this study is Engel Kollat and Blackwell model. This model is also called the consumer decision model. The model is “structured around a seven-point

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decision process: need recognition followed by a search of information both internally and externally, the evaluation of alternatives, purchase, post-purchase reflection, and finally, divestment” (Solomon, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2012). A consumer identifies a need before proceeding to carry out a search based on the complexity of the issue at hand.

- Need Recognition
- Search for Information
- Evaluation of Alternatives
- Purchase Decision
- Post – Purchase Evaluation

The Engel Kollat Blackwell Model of Consumer behavior was created to describe the increasing fast – growing body of knowledge concerning consumer behavior. The consumer decision making process is relatively an easy way to determine the level of consumer involvement in buying a product or services. EKB always assume that all customers go through all the stages as stated above while purchasing products but it is not so at times some situations does not engage in all the stages of the consumer decision making process. This is the criticism about EKB model. The relevancy of EKB to this study could be seen on the seasoning cube consumers’ behavior of trying to solve problems and motivation at every stage before making their decision to buy a particular brand of seasoning cube.

Empirical Review

Umer et al., (2014) in their study on influence of brand name on consumer choice and decision making in university students of Gujranwala, Faisalabad and Lahore used questionnaire survey to collect data exploring the effect of consumers with respect to brand; using non profitable convenient sampling technique. 300 questionnaires were sent out to different university students in the above mentioned cities, in which 250 responses were collected in a period of one month. Findings show that brand name has significant positive relationship with consumer buying behavior. Findings also show that the university students studied are brand conscious and prefer branded products to show off their self.

Faud and Ozgur (2020) also in their study on the effect of brand name on consumer buying behavior on Somali students in Istanbul examined the impact of a brand on consumer buying behavior using questionnaire to collect data measuring factors such as the excellent price of branded products, perceived quality of branded products, marital status and brand name and association with brand consumption of Somali students Istanbul which is the working population of the study since most of the students in Turkey study in Istanbul. 110 responses collected over a month period. Results show that brand name has a strong positive impact and an important relationship with consumer buying behavior. The study concludes that the effectiveness and efficiency of a brand also depends on the quality of service offered by its customers depending on the level of loyalty, efficiency and creativity of these customers.

Also, Lejla and Mersid (2022) studied the influence of brand loyalty on consumer purchase behavior in Serbia with the aim to determine whether there is significant difference in brand loyalty factors according to socio-demographic characteristics of confectionary consumers

(age, education, income level) and also to determine whether there is a significant relationship between brand loyalty factors and brand loyalty of confectionary consumers. 200 respondents completed the structured questionnaire. Determining the difference in brand loyalty factors according to socio – demographic characteristics of confectionary consumers was performed using the F – test, while the correlation between the brand loyalty factors and brand loyalty was performed using Spearman’s rank correlation as a non parametric alternative to Pearson’s correlation. It was determined that there is a significant difference in brand loyalty factors according to the age, education, and income level of confectionary consumers. There is also a statistically significant correlation between all brand loyalty factors and brand loyalty.

Farhina et al., (2023) studied brand awareness and purchase intentions in the age of digital communication: a moderated mediation model of celebrity endorsement and consumer attitude. Their paper addressed how and when awareness leads to purchase intention in the age of digital communication. Based on the quantitative design, 208 response conveniently collected were analyzed, and PLS- SEM was employed to examine the hypothesized relationship. The study clarifies empirically the indirect effect of brand awareness, consumer attitude and purchase intention in the age of digital communication. The study also provides new insight into the moderated meditation relationships, results indicate that brand awareness in the presence of celebrity endorsement will develop a positive attitude that will positively affect purchase intention. The findings of the study not only contribute to advancing the mediating effect of consumer attitude but also verify the buffering role of celebrity endorsement. In conclusion, companies that use digital communication technologies, and take into consideration celebrities who are well – liked by the target market may be able to attract consumers attention, shape attitude,, and influence them to make a purchase. In the end, both theoretical and practical implications are discussed. The respondents were selected by convenient sampling method and data was analyzed and interpreted with the help of statistical technique. Based on the analysis, it is concluded that Himalaya brand has a very good market and brand choice. The family size and the number of earning members in the family of respondents do influence the brand preference. Findings have it that most of the cosmetic products are used by females respondents as out of 500 respondents, 171 are male. Also that the solution for skin/hair has been given top priority for preferring cosmetic products by the respondents (1 Rank. 4.18). Majority of the respondents were used by brand is Hindustan Unilever Ltd.

Meena (2018) studied consumer brand preference and buying behavior of cosmetics product at Coimbatore City to determine the relationship between the demographic factors with the brand preference of respondents towards branded cosmetics. The respondents were selected by convenient sampling method and data was analyzed and interpreted with the help of statistical technique. Based on the analysis, it was concluded that Himalaya brand has a very good market and brand choice. The family size and the number of earning members in the family of respondents do influence the brand preference. Findings have it that most of the cosmetic products were used by female’s respondents as out of 500 respondents, 171 are male and the rest are females.

Anojan and Subaskaran (2015) conducted a study in Northern Province of Srilanka to find out the consumer preference and consumer’s buying behavior of all the soft drinks in that area.

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They tested by taking two main variables such as consumer's preference and consumer's buying behavior which again include sub variables. They collected information from 300 respondents. They analyzed the result using regression and correlation and concluded that there is significant relationship between consumer's preference and buying behavior.

Shiva (2014) studied brand preference and buying decision with reference to organized Indian edible oil brands. The study explored the consumer's preference for oil brand, oil variants and factors influencing the purchasing decision. The study highlights that buyers showing preference towards soya bean variety and mustard oil variety. Hence the marketer can take mileage of the current health awareness to persuade the consumers to accept other variants of the edible oils in addition to the sunflowers variant. Both primary and secondary data were used to collect data. Primary data was collected from 406 respondents in the city of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India. The sampling method used in the study was random sampling. Data collected was processed, analyzed and interpreted to draw the valid inference: for analyzing the data and providing the realities of the research outcomes suitable statistical techniques were employed. It was observed that consumers of 26 to 35 age bracket are shopping for their preferred oil brand, and buyers who are shopping to purchase their preferred oil brand are males. Findings suggest that brand image, price, health consciousness and quality of a particular brand are the most important factors influencing decision making for purchase in this particular context, and thus the marketer's value proposition and positioning should build around health and value for money. Study highlights that sample buyers are showing interest on sales promotional schemes and consumer offers. So companies should run effective promotional schemes and consumer campaigns.

Kailash (2019) measured the consumer preference on instant noodles in Kathmandu city. The study attempted to measure customer preference on instant noodles in Kathmandu city.. Descriptive and causal research design was used. 100 samples were taken through structured questionnaires. Convenient sampling was used. Descriptive and correlation analysis was done to analyze the data and to test the hypothesis. The study confirmed that brand, price, quality, taste, easy and fast and availability is factors for purchasing noodles in Kathmandu City.

Vinayaga and Madevan (2014) studied about the influence of advertisement in consumer brand preference. This paper also studied the role of advertisement in brand preference. In this paper researcher used convenience sampling. The sample size was 150. The data were collected through structured questionnaire. The result of study identifies as the consumer's preference and the attitudes change with the passage of the time and age mediums of advertisements also plays an important role in promotion.

Zhao et al., (2022) studied untying the influence of advertisement on consumer buying behavior and brand loyalty through brand awareness: The moderating role of perceived quality; aiming to determine how advertisement affects consumer buying behavior and brand loyalty by considering a mediator between brand awareness and the moderating role of perceived quality. For this purpose, the study targeted the rising cosmetics industry. The study used the purposive sampling technique to collect data from 300 respondents with the help of an online survey method *via* Google doc. The partial least squares structural equation modeling PLS-SEM was

applied to verify the hypotheses relationships. The findings confirmed that advertisements substantially predicted brand awareness, brand loyalty, and consumer buying behavior. Furthermore, brand awareness partially mediated the association of advertisement with brand loyalty and consumer buying behavior. Also, perceived quality is significantly moderated on the association of brand awareness with brand loyalty and consumer buying behavior.

Cagatay (2021) studied the effect of price on consumer purchase decision making aiming to reveal how the product's price can affect the purchase decision processes of consumers. For this purpose, two different groups, each consisting of 50 people, were created by random placement using the convenience sampling method. The same products were offered to people in these groups at different prices and with varying payment methods and it was tried to reveal which products the participants preferred to buy. First of all, both groups were asked to choose from two laptops brands (non-existent brands) with very similar technical specifications but different prices. The answers given by the participants were analyzed with independent sample t-test and chi-square tests. In the analysis results, it was determined that socio-demographic variables did not make a difference in product preferences and eliminated other possible variables other than the price variable. As a result of the research, it was stated that the cheaper one was preferred out of two laptops with very close technical features because the participants did not want to pay more for similar features. In the popcorn experiment, offered small-medium-large size popcorn options to two groups at different prices. As a result of the chi-square test, there is no statistical difference between the groups, but it is seen that small size popcorn is more preferred when the price decreases. In the headphone experiment, the participants determined approximately 78% higher value for the headphone in the image credit card and installments facility than the other image. Within the framework of these results, it is seen that the price variable and payment options in different product categories are critical in the consumer purchase decision-making processes.

Karbaspour (2009) conducted a study entitled "Evaluation of brand equity and the affecting factors from the consumer's perspective". The results showed that brand loyalty and association factor have direct impact on brand equity, and the factor of perceived quality has indirect impact on brand equity through loyalty.

Razavi et al., (2016) investigated the relationship between brand equity and consumer behavior. In the model proposed in this study, the relationship between brand equity and the dimensions of consumer behavior including the willingness to pay for extra cost, brand preference and purchase intention is investigated. The research method is a descriptive correlation. Structural equations, descriptive and inferential statistics and factor analysis were used to analyze the data. The statistical population of the study includes the owners of Grand Vitara, Sportage and Santafe from the companies of Iran Khodro, Kia and Hyundai. The population was unlimited including 384 people using Cochran formula; and cluster sampling and endemic questionnaire tool were used. In the marketing literature, the lack of empirical research that seeks to explore the relationship between brand equity and consumer behavior is tangible. This research focuses on those reactions that provide more sales and the ability to grow. According to the results, it seems that there is a relationship between brand equity and consumer behavior including paying extra cost, brand preference and purchase intention.

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Utkal et al., (2016) in their study to measure the impact of consumer's past use experience on attitude formation along with a comparative study between metro and non metro cities of consumers in India. Since, Metro and non-metro customers are different in their consumer behavior in many ways. Linear regression and z-test was used to measure the impact of these attributes on consumer attitude and difference in metro and non-metro customers respectively. Study identified eight different antecedents of consumer past use experience through literature and then developed a simple model of consumer past use experience for the study. The result revealed that consumer past use experience in formation of positive consumer attitude found high in metro city as compare to non-metro city. Regression result between consumer attitude and consumer past use experience clearly explained that the higher level of consumer reference provide higher level of positive consumer attitude among customers of both the metro and non-metro city. Marketers have to understand the various components of consumer past use experience in order to enjoy the substantial competitive and economic advantages.

Li (2018) in his study on influence of brand experience on peoples revisit and purchase intention in the context of China Museum had it that brand experience has been considered a tactical tool that satisfies consumers' needs and allows them to engage with the brands. Considering the global economic slowdown, China's traditional museums are less visited and the sales of relevant products (e.g. souvenirs) are declining. With a combination of literature review and primary research, the study has drawn a positive conclusion that brand experience (sensory, affective, behavior and intellectual) can effectively motivate people's intention to revisit and purchase in museums in China. Therefore, the study will give important implications to the insights of consumers' experience preferences and will guide an upgraded marketing strategy for the development of museums.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design, Population, Sample, Scope and Source of Data

The survey research design which dwells on the use of questionnaire was used to collect data from 300 households. The rationalization for using questionnaire is to help get information from our large respondents within a short period and to provide a more comfortable way for the respondents to divulge information that can make them uncomfortable in a face to face setting. The questionnaire was distributed randomly in the streets, offices, churches and public places. Population of study includes all households in Aba metropolitan city of Abia state. Any major city in Nigeria would have been chosen for this study; but a purposeful decision was taken to delimit this study to households in Aba the commercial hub centre of Abia state Nigeria, with the full knowledge that there could be a replication of this study in other parts/states of the country which were not covered.

The generated quantitative data was subjected to multiple regression analysis that was carried out with SPSS 22.00 package. The reliability of the research instrument was done through a test-retest content reliability; focusing on the questionnaire's capacity to elicit the respondents' opinions. However, the Cronbach's Alpha Model was adopted. The result of not less than 0.75 was judged as accepted for the instrument reliability (Onyedijo, 2016).

Measurable variables

The variables of this study focused on consumer brand preference as the predictor and branding components (Brand name, product price, brand loyalty, brand quality/taste and brand past experience) as criterion.

The independent variables were measured by asking the respondents the particular branding components that informs their decision to purchase and prefer a particular seasoning cube.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentages
Gender	Female	260	87%
	Male	40	13%
	Total	300	100%
Age	Below 20	30	10%
	21 – 30	90	30%
	31 – 40	100	34%
	41 – 50	45	15%
	51 – 60	25	8%
	61 – 70	10	3%
Occupation	Students	60	20%
	Self-employed	80	27%
	Government-employed	80	27%
	Professionals		
	Retired	30	10%
	Others	10	3%
		40	12%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 2: Household Size

No of Household members	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1 – 2	20	7%
3 – 4	120	40%
5 – 6	110	37%
7 – 8	40	13%
9 – 10	10	3%
Total =	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3: Frequency of seasoning cube purchase

Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	110	36%
Twice a week	60	20%
Once in a week	80	27%
Every fortnight	30	10%
Occasionally	20	7%
Total =	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4: Seasoning cube brands and preference

SEASONING CUBES	No of Respondents	Percentages
Ajinomoto	42	14%
Doyin	10	3%
Knor	100	33%
Maggi	78	26%
Royco	35	12%
Onga	30	10%
Vedan	15	5%
Total =	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 5: Buying decision drivers of seasoning cube brands

DECISION DRIVERS	No of Respondents	Percentages
Brand name	40	13%
Brand quality/ taste	70	23%
Price sensitivity	32	11%
Brand loyalty	38	13%
Media Advertisement	45	15%
Past experience with brand	55	18%
Total =	300	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Analysis of Research Questions

The variables of this study focused on consumer brand preference as the predictor and branding components (Brand name, product price, brand loyalty, brand quality/taste and brand past experience) as criterion.

Table 6: Reliability Analysis of the Variables.

S/N	Items	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1.	Brand Preference	3	.968
2.	Brand Name	3	.922
3.	Price Sensitivity	3	.996
4.	Brand loyalty	3	.942
5.	Brand Quality/Taste	3	.912
6.	Brand Past Experience	3	.980

Source: Researcher's computation, 2024

The table 6 above summarizes the reliability result of the dimensions of buying behavior driver. The reliability scale was examined by computing their coefficient alpha. All scales were found to exceed a minimum threshold of 0.7 recommended by Cronbach, (Nunnally, 1978) as cited by Creswell & Creswell (2018). Hence, we accept that the research instrument measured the variables of the study accurately.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in the study and provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Consumer brand Preference	300	3.8314	.77916
2. Brand Equity			
Brand Name	300	3.8034	.66280
Price Sensitivity	300	3.7758	.65443
Brand Loyalty	300	3.9633	.61130
Brand Quality/taste	300	3.8766	.63321
Past Experience	300	3.8456	.66120

Source: Researcher's Computation from SPSS 22.0

Table 7 above shows that the brand equity variables have mean scores that show central tendency between 3.8-3.9 with standard deviation ranged from 0.61- 0.66. Mean score of brand loyalty is lower than the rest of the brand equity variables. The consumer brand preference variables have mean scores that show central tendency of 3.8 with standard deviation of .77. This could reasonably be expected, based on the characteristics of the chosen brand performance categories of Seasoning cubes in Abia State are sensitive to price differences.

Hypotheses Tests Results

In order to test Ho₁ to Ho₅ we employed a multiple regression analysis. The rationale for this is that the scaling of the items, as well as the construction of the aggregated variables is of a multiple nature. The findings from this analysis are shown in Table 8

Table 8: Multiple regressions of dimensions of brand Extension on the brand equity

Independent Variables	B	T-test		F-test		R ²
		Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.	
Constant	.325	2.599	.001**	417.93	.001**	63.0
Brand name	.163	1.490	.001**			
Price sensitivity	.348	10.261	.001**			
Brand Loyalty	.575	15.854	.001**			
Brand Quality/taste	.234	11.345	.001**			
Past Experience	.563	12.844	.001**			

****Significant at the (.01) level**

Source: Researcher’s Computation from SPSS 22.0

Hypotheses One

Ho₁: there is no significant relationship between customer brand preference of seasoning cube and the brand name

Testing of Ho₁ postulates that consumers brand preference has no relationship with brand name.

The t-test 10.261, of the coefficient of the variables representing independent variables shows that the independent variable brand preference have a significant effect on the brand name, = .163; p= .001.

This means Ho₁ is rejected and the alternative accepted.

The Ho₁ test result prove that brand name is considered as the outcome of consumer brand preference, hence leading to customer preference, the firm’s marketing activities and acceptance in the market place, Brands with higher perceived reputation provide consumers with greater risk relief and so encourage more positive evaluations of brand equity, and also build brand loyalty as the relative willingness of a consumer to try a new product evaluate FMCG brand equity more favorably. This finding is in tandem with Umer (2014) where it was observed that brand name played a critical influence on consumer choice.

Hypotheses Two

Ho₂: there is no significant relationship between consumer brand preference and product price sensitivity of seasoning cubes

This hypothesis Suggest a strong consumer brand preference which reflects consumers’ acceptance of the product price. Product price with the brand and with its entire product

portfolio has a positive impact on consumer brand preference for such product. Table (8) shows the t-test (10.261) of the independent variable (perceived quality) have a significant effect on the brand equity (customer preference), = .348, P= .001.

This means H_{o2} is rejected and the alternative accepted.

The H_{o2} test result proves that, Brands with positive fair price have a way of encouraging high customer preference. Customers tend to preference products that they have high perceived fair price.

Hypotheses Four

H_{o4} : there is no significant relationship between consumer brand preference and Brand quality/taste of seasoning cubes

This hypothesis Suggest a strong consumer brand preference which reflects consumers' perception of such brands quality/taste. Brand quality/taste of the cube and with its entire product line has a positive impact on consumer brand preference for such seasoning cube. Table (8) shows the t-test (11.345) of the independent variable.

This means H_{o4} is rejected and the alternative accepted.

The H_{o4} test result proves that, customers are more comfortable with seasoning cubes that they have used and seen the content value and taste. Customers tend to prefer products that they are highly recommended by their circle. Hence brand quality/taste is paramount and a driver for consumer buying decision for seasoning cubes. This is in tandem with Kaiash, P. A. (2019) study were it was revealed that the brand, price, quality, taste, easy and fast availability are the major factors in purchasing noodles.

Hypotheses Five

H_{o5} : there is no significant relationship between customer brand preference of seasoning cube and past experience with brand

Testing of H_{o1} postulates that consumers brand preference has no relationship with past experience with brand.

The t-test 10.261, of the coefficient of the variables representing independent variables shows that the independent variable brand preference have a significant effect on past experience with brand, = .563; p= .001.

This means H_{o1} is rejected and the alternative accepted.

The H_{o5} test result prove that past experience with brand helps in building up consumer brand preference for seasoning cubes brands, hence leading to repeat purchase and usage, the firm's marketing offering and acceptance in the market place. When a customer uses a product, possibility of cognitive dissonance sets in if the product fails the measure up to the promised features and his expectations. But once he is delighted and satisfied, he will spread about the product through word of mouth communication.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the analysis of the research findings most household respondents were females as could be seen in their 87% as against 13% of males. Also most household respondents fall within the age category of 31-40 followed by age 21-30. Those above 50 and above 60 were few, may be this age group are inactive in the kitchen. Again most of the respondents were mainly self employed individuals and government workers followed by students especially of higher institution. The study also found out that family sizes these days have reduced, people no longer have large family sizes. We had mainly family size of between 3-4. This could probably be attributed to present economic situation in the country.

The study H_{04} test result proved that, customers are more comfortable with seasoning cubes that they have used and seen the content value and taste. Customers tend to prefer products that they are highly recommended by their circle. Hence brand quality/taste is paramount and a driver for consumer buying decision for seasoning cubes. This is in tandem with Kaiash, P. A. (2019) study where it was revealed that the brand, price, quality, taste, easy and fast availability are the major factors in purchasing noodles.

The H_{01} test result prove that brand name is considered as the outcome of consumer brand preference, hence leading to customer preference, the firm's marketing activities and acceptance in the market place, Brands with higher perceived reputation provide consumers with greater risk relief and so encourage more positive evaluations of brand equity, and also build brand loyalty as the relative willingness of a consumer to try a new product evaluate FMCG brand equity more favorably. This finding is in tandem with Umer (2014) where it was observed that brand name played a critical influence on consumer choice.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present results may help brand managers to monitor important variables when launching brand extensions, Brand name is important for the survival of any brand and as such firms should focus on the features and characteristics of their offering that will encourage high customer preference.

Moreover, firms should emphasize the response to product quality and product offering issue as this builds high brand association and customer preference and this to a large extent depend on both the consumer innovativeness hence, the strategy of improving consumers satisfaction through strengthening brand equity dimensions should be evaluated on regular bases.

Hence, it is concluded that for a firm to have customers with high preference for their brands, they should have good features and characteristics that can always be associated with their brands.

Based on the reviews, findings and analysis so far, the study recommends thus;

- i. Decision drivers' components as discussed in this study should be of importance to marketing managers. It will help them keep abreast of changes in customers tastes and wants as this will always be reflected in their perception about the product quality/experience and preference for the product thereof.

- ii. Marketing managers should pay attention to producing quality products that can speak for itself since customers pay attention to quality/taste more than packaging, advertising and other decision drivers' components.
- iii. Unilever and Nestle owners of Knor and Maggi respectively should continue in their struggles to stay afloat in the competitive market by continuous use of various tools including advert, pricing, personal selling, activation, distribution network, quality control and sales promotional activities. Companies who produce Ajinomoto and other seasoning cubes should also continue in the struggle to maintain market share because some customers have loyalty for them as could be seen in Ajinomoto.
- iv. The Marketing managers should make a campaign for the consumers to make them know more about their brand offering, thereby maintaining their loyalty and also encouraging high customer preference.
- v. Firms should always strive to associate their brands with positive characteristics and features that customers can always pinpoint as this alone will enhance customer preference for a brand..
- vi. Managers have to study a multitude of consumer associations that influence overall image, e.g., the variety and quality of products, services, and brands sold; the physical store appearance; the appearance, behavior and service quality of employees; the price levels, depth and frequency of promotions and so on.

Limitation/Suggestion for Further Studies

The study covered only the consumer buying decision driver (Brand name, Product price, brand loyalty, brand quality/taste and past brand experience) and customer brand preference thereby excluding other dimensions. It examined the brand strategy from the point of view of consumers only, not from the point of view of the retailers.

Future studies should try to incorporate other components of brand equity and brand preference that was not captured in this study.

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