



## **BRAND IMAGE AND CONSUMER TASTE PREFERENCE OF BOTTLED WATER MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT**

**Ezekiel-Hart James Carr<sup>1</sup> and Renner Blessing Awaji-Ima<sup>2</sup>**

Department of Petroleum Marketing and Business Studies, School of Business Studies and Management Technology, Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas, Bonny, Rivers State.

<sup>1</sup>Email: carrhartx2@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>Email: blessingawajiima@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** *The study investigated the relationship between Brand image and Consumer taste preference of Bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The study drawing from its operationalized framework answered three (3) research questions and three (3) nullified hypotheses. The population of the study consisted of 110 registered bottled water producers gotten from Water Producers Association of Nigeria (WAPAN), Rivers State Chapter. The sample size of 86 was derived through Krejcie and Morgan sampling technique. The questionnaire was structured in a five (5) point likert scale. The data collected through primary and secondary data sources were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was used to test the hypotheses formulated. The result of the findings showed a significant relationship between Brand image and Consumer taste preference, using Brand trust, Brand association and Brand graphics. The study concluded that Brand Image (brand trust, brand association, and brand graphics) relates significantly with consumer taste preference. The study recommended that: Bottled water manufacturing firms should produce qualitative brands; Bottled water manufacturing firms should create a positive image of their brands by producing products that will stand the taste of time and Bottled water manufacturing firms should use eye catching graphics to design their brand. This will help differentiate the firm's brand from competitors' brands.*

**KEYWORDS:** Brand Image, Brand Trust, Brand Association, Brand Graphics, Consumer Taste Preference.

### **INTRODUCTION**

American Marketing Association (AMA) defined a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler, 2000). This is similar to Aaker (1996) argument that the brand is a name or symbol that distinguishes (in the form of a logo or symbol, stamp or packaging) to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers (Aaker, 1996).

Kotler (2000) mentioned that a good brand will come to boost the company's image. Brand is the front-liner of a product, an initial view that allows consumers to identify those products. In principle, brand is a promise of sellers or producers who continually brings a unit series of performance, benefits and service to buyer. In the perspective of brand communication, Wijaya (2011) defined brand as a mark left on the minds and hearts of consumers, which creates a specific sense of meaning and feeling. Thus, the brand



is more than just a logo, name, symbol, trade mark, or the name attached to a product. Brand is a promise (Morel, 2003).

McNally and Speak, (2004) submitted that brand is a kind of relationship that involves trust. A brand is the sum of an entity, a psychic connection that creates a bond of loyalty with a buyer/ potential buyer, and it includes the perceived added value.

Nilson (1998 in Wijaya, 2011) mentioned a number of criteria to describe the brand is not just a name: a brand must have clear value, the difference can be identified with other brands, attractive, and have a prominent identity. Meanwhile, branding is the process of creation or legacy of certain trail signs in the minds and hearts of consumers through a variety of communication ways and strategies so that create specific meaning and feeling which affect consumers' lives (Wijaya, 2011).

It is sacrosanct to note that brand image plays an important role in the development of a brand, because the brand image regarding reputation and credibility of the brand that later became the "guidelines" for the consumer audience to try or use a product or service. The trial and consumption result towards brand by consumers in the end lead to a certain experience (brand experience) that will determine whether the consumer will be loyal to the brand or just an opportunist (easy to switch to another brand) (Wijaya, 2011).

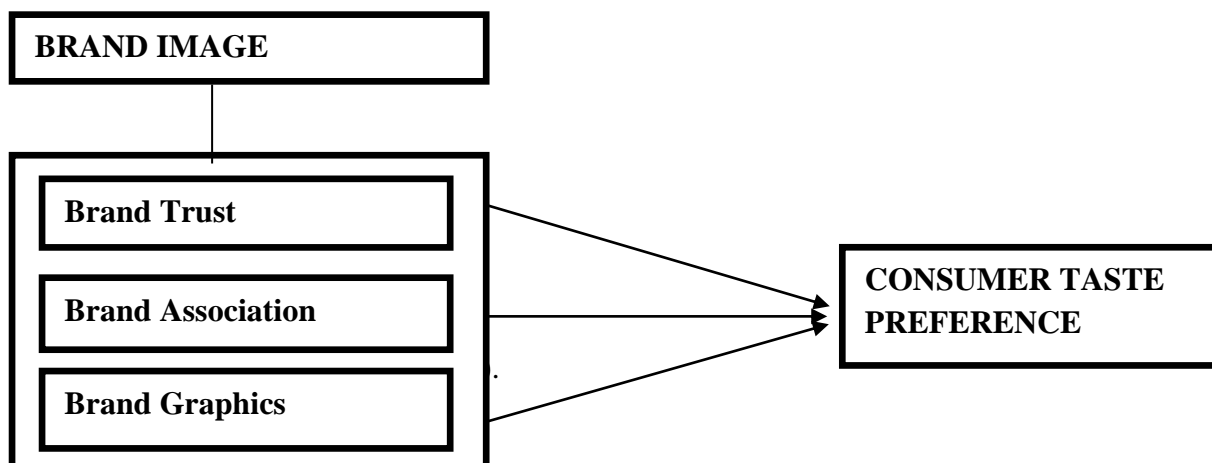
Brand image is a representation of the overall perception formed from information and knowledge on the brand. It is the general impression of a product held by real or potential consumers. Brand image is closely related to attitudes and beliefs that form choice (preference) to a brand. The image of a brand represents the perception that can reflect objective or subjective reality. Image formed by representation of perceptions is the basis for the decision of purchasing a product even for having the brand loyalty (Wijaya, 2011). Aaker (1991), submitted that consumers often buy products that have famous brand because they feel more comfortable with things that are already known. In the same vein, consumers of bottled water in Port Harcourt, Rivers State always prefer Eva bottled water to other brands because it is famous and readily available. In recent times, it has been observed that consumers have shifted their attention towards LaSien bottled water because of its price and availability. The assumption that the well-known brand is more reliable, always available and easy to find, and has a quality that no doubt, make a familiar brand is more potential to be chosen by consumers than a brand that is not familiar. Consumers' preferences for products or brands arise from the combination of many different factors. Some factors come from features of the product itself (e.g., quality, price, durability), while others are attributes of consumers themselves (e.g., goals, attitudes, values and income), (Venkatraman et al., 2012).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Building strong brand image is the top most priority of many bottled water firms, but attaining this objective is not always an easy task due to the fact that the products and services of many bottled water firms are similar and their means of distributions are alike. Thus, effective brand image stands as the focal point.

It has been observed that most bottled water manufacturing firms are not making profit has a result of low patronage caused by lack of consumers' preference for the brand; consumers often buy products that have famous brand because they feel more comfortable with things that are already known, hence the need for this study on brand image.

Horsfall and MacKingsley (2018) Studied brand equity and market performance of food and beverage firms in Rivers State, the hypotheses formulated were tested through PPMC, ANOVA and regression. However, the study of Fianto et al., (2014) showed a geographical gap: they carried out a study on the influence of brand image on purchase behavior in Indonesia. The General Structured Component Analysis (GSCA) was used in hypotheses testing. In the same vein, Adane, (2017) studied brand image and consumer preference in Addis Ababa, using PPMC, normality test and multiple regressions. It is on this premise that this study is designed to fill in the existing gap in content, sector (industry), geographical and instrumentation. The study will focus on brand image and consumer taste preference of bottled water manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The study adopted spearman rank-order correlation in testing the various hypotheses formulated in order to fill in the gap in instrumentation.



**Fig.1.1 Operational Framework of Brand Image and Consumer Taste Preference of Bottled Water Manufacturing Firms in Port Harcourt.**

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aimed at investigating the relationship between brand image and consumer taste preference. Specifically, it intends to:

1. examine the extent to which brand trust relates with consumer taste preference
2. assess the extent to which brand association relates with consumer taste preference
3. determine the extent to which brand graphics relates with consumer taste preference



## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent does brand trust relates with consumer taste preference?
2. To what extent does brand association relates with consumer taste preference?
3. To what extent does brand graphics relates with consumer taste preference?

## **Research Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were raised to guide this study:

- H0<sub>1</sub> There is no significant relationship between brand trust and consumer taste preference
- H0<sub>2</sub> There is no significant relationship between brand association and consumer taste preference
- H0<sub>3</sub> There is no significant relationship between brand graphics and consumer taste preference

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The AIDA theory was adopted for the study. AIDA is an acronym that stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. The AIDA model is widely used in marketing and advertising to describe the steps or stages that occur from the time when a consumer first becomes aware of a product or brand through to when the consumer trials a product or makes a purchase decision. Given that many consumers become aware of brands via advertising or marketing communications, the AIDA model helps to explain how an advertisement or marketing communications message engages and involves consumers in brand choice. In essence, the AIDA model proposes that advertising messages need to accomplish a number of tasks in order to move the consumer through a series of sequential steps from brand awareness to action “purchase and consumption” ([www.communicationtheory.org](http://www.communicationtheory.org)).

The AIDA theory is relevant in explaining the relationship between brand image and consumer taste preference because the theory supports the notion that if consumers moves through the stages of AIDA it informed their choice and preference for brand.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Concept of Brand Image**

Brand image is indispensable in the market place. Aaker (1992) submitted that brand image is a set of associations, usually organized in some meaningful way. In the same vein, Ballantyne, Warren and Nobbs (2005) viewed brand image as the material property



associated with the brand such as the product name and the packing, which could make profits or sense for customers and help or increase describing the characteristics.

Keller (1993), defined brand image as summation of brand associations in the memory of consumers which leads him towards brand perception and brand association including brand attributes, brand benefits and brand attitude. Karadeniz (2010), state that a brand reflects the quality of firm's products rather than the firm's name, logo, color, etc. In short, the brand is perception of the consumers towards the firm. Therefore, firms are creating strong brands to be one step ahead of their rivals in a fierce competition. Best brands stand for something. Symbols are the fastest form of communication from a brand to the consumer. They become more powerful with frequent use and are the most visible reminders of what the brand stands for.

Brand image is often referenced in the psychological aspects of the image or impression that is built into the subconscious of consumers through the expectations and experience of taking the brand over a product or service. Brand image is the impression the consumers have towards the brand of a firm. Hawkins, Best and Coney (2004) argued that brand image is a perception in the mind of the customers a good impression of brand.

### **Concept of Consumer Taste Preference**

Consumer taste preference is defined as the subjective tastes of individual consumers measured by their satisfaction with those items after they have purchased them. This satisfaction is often referred to as utility. Consumer value can be determined by how consumer utility compares between different items (David, 2018).

A consumer preference explains how a consumer ranks a collection of brands. People often prefer some brand to others; when comparing bottled water (Eva, LaSien, Joshua, Nestle, Aquadana etc.); the taste, quality, price and availability can have an impact on consumer preference (David, 2018).

A broad variety of theories that attempt to describe the factors which influence consumers and their behavior when making purchasing decisions have been done. 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, & Samaras, 2000). Consumers' preferences for products or brands arise from the combination of many different factors. Some factors come from features of the product itself (e.g., price, durability), while others are attributes of consumers themselves (e.g., goals, values, attitudes and income), (Venkatraman et al., 2012).

Ge, Brigden and Häubl (2015), 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 culture, family and social economic conservatism are affecting their choices (Spillan & Harcar, 2010).

### **Brand Trust and Consumer Taste Preference**

Consumers perceptions of the quality the brand created by informational cues associated with the brand (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). The gesture is intrinsic or extrinsic and both or one of them can be found on the brand that became the basis for the perception of quality. Customers tend to believe that the underlying customer evaluation of intrinsic cues because it allows customers to make a decision either or negative as the product of rational choice and objective.

Many studies that compare differences in perceived quality of store brands and national brands and found that the factors that contribute to differences in perception is the perception of customers on extrinsic attributes of the product as an indicator of quality (Essoo & Dibb, 2004). Customers often measure the quality of the basic cues are displayed externally on the product itself such as price, brand image, corporate image, the image of the store or even the image of the country of origin. The perception of value (perceived value) is reflected in the perception of quality is also affected by the price perception among customers with high involvement, so it can be concluded that the perception of value can also be evaluated from the quality of the brand.

Khraim (2010) examined the variables of culture and subculture that focuses on the elements of religion because religion still plays an important role in influencing and customer behavior. Purchase behavior is considered as a relational asset market implications for the development and maintenance of trust is at the core of the brand, because it is a key characteristic of successful long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The idea used in this study is that trust is a key driver of purchase behavior because it creates a valuable transactional relationship. In such a context, buying behavior is not exclusively focused on the purchase alone, but in an internal position or behavior towards the brand, cannot show a sufficient basis for a complete understanding of the brand-customer relationship. Purchase behavior emphasizes the ongoing process and maintenance of valuable and important relationships that are created on the existence of a trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Consumer market has a lot of customers who are anonymous, making it difficult to establish the company into a more intimate relationship with each customer. The main purpose of marketing is to generate intense relationship between customers with the brand, and the main basis underlying this relationship is trust. Based on this idea, Delgado and Munuera (2005) formulated the hypothesis that assumes that the emergence of brand trust affects consumer preference as expression of successful relationships between customers and brands.

### **Brand Association and Consumer Taste Preference**

The most accepted aspect of branding is the brand association (Aaker, 1992). It represents reason for deciding to purchase and having loyalty for a brand. Kotler and Keller (2006), submitted that brand association consist of all brand related feelings, thoughts, images, beliefs, experiences, attitudes and is everything associated with the brand. There are two types of brand associations and they are organization association and products associations (Chen, 2001).



Research by Romaniuk and Gaillard, (2007) showed that customers most often use and are willing to pay higher prices for branded products when they have the opportunity to choose other products that fall into the same category. Corporate brand associations refer to a customer's evaluation of a brand that is determined by the knowledge stored in their memory, based on past brand-customer interactions (Romaniuk & Gaillard, 2007). Product associations consist of non-functional associations and functional attribute associations. (Chen, 2001). The tangible features of the product are the functional attributes. In evaluating a brand, the performance of the functional attributes are linked to the brand by consumers. Organizational associations which include corporate ability associations, are those associations related to the expertise of the company in the production and delivery of its outputs and corporate social responsibility associations including the organization's activities with respect to its societal obligations.

### **Brand Graphics and Consumer Taste Preference**

Graphics include image layout, colour combination, typography, and product photography. The combination of all these components communicates an image. Graphics on the brand are telling detailed information about the product. It becomes a product branding or identity, followed by the information. When the consumers examine brands in the supermarket, the differential perception and the positioning of the graphics can be the difference between identifying and missing the product (Silayoi & Speece, 2007). However, eye-catching graphics make the product stand out on the shelf and attract the consumers. Graphics can affect through colours and printed lines on the package on which different signs and symbols are located. Holograms and combinations of various materials can encourage consumers to touch the package, thereby inspiring them to try the product (Rundh 2009).

It is common for retail brands to remain faithful to solid, bold colours and pictograms to spur consumer's interest in a product's purchase (Adhesives & Sealants Industry, 2011). Apart from illustrations and other pictograms, the use of photography is a great way of communicating a brand's message. The use of photography can also be an important feature that helps consumers understand complex regulations and safety concerns. When graphic design is used for brands, it explains that the designer solely uses visual symbols to express abstract aspirations. If photography, illustrations and/or decorative patterns are utilized on the package, they may stimulate people's associations: "Decorative patterns are a visual graphics that do not require too much explanation if they are used properly in the design. A kind of cordial visual beauty will be produced. Also, the same meanings are requested between the value of content and visual performance" (Wu & Fu, 2009).

If the producer wants consumers to remember the brand, then the elements that most likely will influence remembrance are font styles, sizes, and colors. Graphically, pictorial elements such as photography should be positioned on the left-hand side of the package, while verbal elements should be placed on the right. This is because the "brain laterality results in an asymmetry in the perception of elements in package designs" (Silayoi & Speece, 2004).

In a study made by Westerman et al., (2013), the results indicated that participants favored brand designs that had the graphics on the right-side of the text because these designs were referred to as more practical, pleasing and less annoying. However, it should be taken into account that this particular study was specifically related to the brands of beverages, namely water and vodka. Westerman et al (2013) also found that upward oriented graphics are



commonly preferred because they are perceived as more pleasing and appealing, and they lead to greater purchase intention.

The brand design adds value to the package and to the product respectively. Design elements such as colors, font, text, and graphics have an important role in package appearance. Pictures on the package in form of attractive situations (mountains, beaches, luxury houses and cars) can assist in triggering lifestyle aspirations (Rundh 2009). At the point of purchase, the primary role of the package and packaging design is to catch the consumers' attention and to stand out among the competition in the store or at the supermarket. Successful package design and packaging itself is the result of the involvement and the work put forth by marketers, designers, and customers. Hence, brand design is a major instrument in modern marketing activities for consumer goods. Brand design can attract the customers' attention, communicate company's name and image, differentiate the brand from competitors, and enhance the product's functionality (Garber et al., 2000). Therefore, the package itself acts as a decisive communication tool and provides consumers with product-related information during the buying decision process.

### **Empirical Review**

Horsfall and MacKingsley (2018) carried out a study on brand equity and market performance of food and beverage firms in Rivers state. Data were drawn through questionnaire from the management of food and beverage firms in Rivers state and academic staff of three tertiary institutions of learning in Rivers state. The various hypotheses formulated were tested through PPMC, ANOVA and regression technique. In conclusion, there exists sufficient evidence to show that brand equity significantly affects market performance.

Fianto et al., (2014) carried out a study on the influence of brand image on purchase behavior in Indonesia. The study was conducted on 386 students at 13 Islamic universities in East Java province. The questionnaire was structured in 5-point likert scale; Generalized Structured Component Analysis (GSCA) was used in testing the hypotheses formulated. The research revealed that brand image has a significant role in influencing the purchasing behavior of consumers.

Adane (2017) carried out a study on the effect of brand image on consumer preference; the case of ambassador garment, Addis Ababa. The study used estimation method to select a sample size of 422. Pearson correlation analysis, normality test and multiple regressions were used to test the relationship among variables. The result revealed that brand image variables have statistically significant relationships with consumer preference.

### **Gap in Literature**

Horsfall and MacKingsley (2018) Studied brand equity and market performance of food and beverage firms in Rivers State, the hypotheses formulated were tested through PPMC, ANOVA and regression. However, the study of Fianto et al., (2014) showed a geographical gap: they carried out a study on the influence of brand image on purchase behavior in Indonesia. The General Structured Component Analysis (GSCA) was used in hypotheses testing. In the same vein, Adane, (2017) studied brand image and consumer preference in Addis Ababa, using PPMC, normality test and multiple regressions.





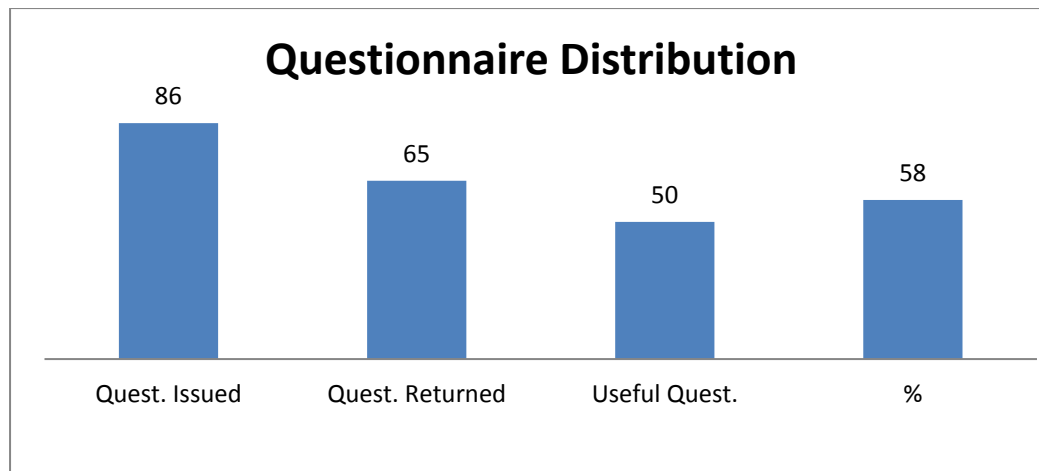
It is on this premise that this study is designed to fill in the existing gap in content, sector (industry), geographical and instrumentation.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this study was the objectivism philosophical strands which based on quantitative approach to scientific research; the study is correlational in nature. The data for the study were collected primarily through the use of a structured questionnaire (5-point likert scale). They were handed directly to the various bottled water manufacturing firms. The population of the study consisted of 110 registered bottled water producers gotten from Water Producers Association of Nigeria (WAPAN) Rivers State Chapter. The sample size of 86 was derived through Krejcie and Morgan sampling technique. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The hypotheses formulated were tested through the spearman rank order correlation co-efficient with the aid Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0

The reliability of the instrument was tested through SPSS Conbach's Alpha and it stood at 0.88 higher than Nunnally's (1978), benchmark of 0.7

## Data Analysis and Results

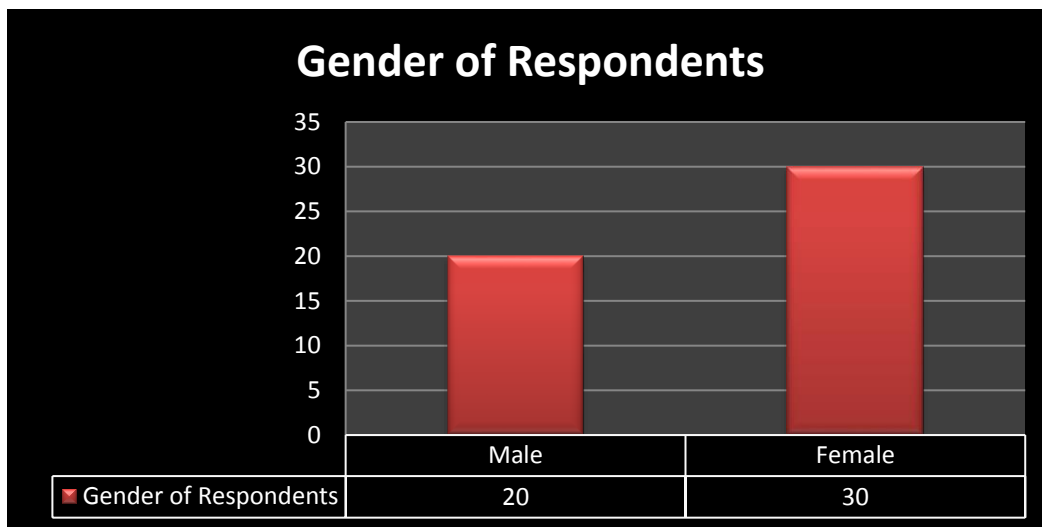


*Source; survey Data, 2020*

The chart above shows that 86 Copies of questionnaire were issued, 65 copies were returned and 50 copies were useful making it 58%.



**Demographic Analysis**



Source: survey Data, 2020.

The above chart shows the gender of respondents as a means of ensuring that both male & female are represented in the study 20 (40%) of the respondents are male and 30 (60%) are female. This shows that majority of the respondents are female.

**Bivariate Analysis**

**Test of Hypothesis One (1)**

**There is no significant relationship between brand trust and consumer taste preference.**

**Correlations**

|                |                           | Brand Trust | Consumer Taste Preference |
|----------------|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Brand Trust               | 1.000       | 1.000**                   |
|                |                           |             |                           |
|                | Consumer Taste Preference | .           | .                         |
|                |                           | 3           | 3                         |
|                | Consumer Taste Preference | 1.000**     | 1.000                     |
|                |                           |             |                           |
|                | Brand Trust               | .           | .                         |
|                |                           | 3           | 3                         |

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

Source: SPSS output, 2020



A spearman correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between Brand trust and Consumer taste preference. The result revealed a significant and positive relationship. ( $r = 1.000$ ,  $N = 3$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). The correlation was strong in strength. Higher levels of Brand trust were associated with higher levels of Consumer taste preference. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### Test of Hypothesis Two (2)

**There is no significant relationship between brand association and consumer taste preference.**

#### Correlations

|                           |                           | Brand association | Consumer taste preference |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Spearman's rho            | Brand association         | 1.000             | .802*                     |
|                           | Correlation Coefficient   | .                 | .017                      |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)           | 3                 | 3                         |
| Consumer taste preference | Consumer taste preference | .802*             | 1.000                     |
|                           | Correlation Coefficient   | .017              | .                         |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)           | 3                 | 3                         |
|                           | N                         |                   |                           |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS output, 2020.

A spearman correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between Brand association and Consumer taste preference. The result revealed a significant and positive relationship. ( $r = .80$ ,  $N = 3$ ,  $P < .005$ ). The correlation was strong in strength. Higher levels of Brand association were associated with higher levels of Consumer taste preference. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Test of Hypothesis Three (3)

**There is no significant relationship between brand graphics and consumer taste preference**

#### Correlations

|                           |                           | Brand Graphics | Consumer Taste Preference |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Spearman's rho            | Brand Graphics            | 1.000          | .866                      |
|                           | Correlation Coefficient   | .              | .333                      |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)           | 3              | 3                         |
| Consumer Taste Preference | Consumer Taste Preference | .866           | 1.000                     |
|                           | Correlation Coefficient   | .333           | .                         |
|                           | Sig. (2-tailed)           | 3              | 3                         |
|                           | N                         |                |                           |

Source: SPSS output, 2020.



A spearman correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between Brand graphics and Consumer taste preference. The result revealed a significant and positive relationship. ( $r = 86$ ,  $N= 3$ ). The correlation was strong in strength. Higher levels of Brand graphics were associated with higher levels of Consumer taste preference.

### **Summary of Findings**

Based on the data analysis, the following findings were discovered:

- Brand trust showed a strong, positive and significant relationship with consumer taste preference.
- Brand association also showed a strong, positive and significant relationship with consumer taste preference.
- Brand graphics equally showed a strong, positive and significant relationship with consumer taste preference.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The analysis of the data revealed that brand image showed a significant relationship with consumer taste preference. The various dimensions of brand image; brand trust, brand association, and brand graphics showed a significant relationship with consumer taste preference. This is in line with the work of Adane (2017). He carried out a study on the effect of brand image on consumer preference. The result revealed that brand image variables have statistically significant relationships with consumer preference.

The study equally revealed that brand association showed a positive and significant relationship with consumer taste preference. In the same vein, the study of Adane (2017) indicated that brand association has a positive influence on consumer preference of Ambassador Garment.

It was equally revealed that brand graphics showed a significant relationship with consumer taste preference of bottled water manufacturing firms. This is in line with the study of Westerman et al (2013). The result of their study showed that consumers favoured brand designs that had the graphics on the product.

### **CONCLUSION**

Brand image plays a vital role in ensuring that the product stands out among competitive products. The result of the analysis has revealed that Brand Image (brand trust, brand association, and brand graphics) relates significantly with consumer taste preference. Consumers are loyal to the brand they can easily recall and brands that has quality. Brand image influences brand reputation and credibility which later becomes guideline for consumer choice and preference.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings made the followings are recommended, that:

1. Bottled water manufacturing firms should produce qualitative brands. Because trust is the basis for every customer brand relationship; trust is the key driver of purchase behavior.
2. Bottled water manufacturing firms should create a positive image of their brands by producing products that will stand the taste of time.
3. Bottled water manufacturing firms should use eye catching graphics to design their brands. This will help differentiae the firm's brand from competitors' brands.

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