BRAND PREFERENCES SURVEY AMONGST UNDERGRADUATES IN A NIGERIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on top brand preferences survey amongst undergraduates in Benson Idahosa University (BIU) Benin City, Nigeria. The objectives of this paper were: to determine the brands perceived as superior by BIU students, to find out the reasons / factors or attributes that makes them prefer these brands; to ascertain the benefits they derive from these brands and to suggest useful strategies arising from this study to brand managers. Survey research design was employed for this study. The population of the study was undergraduate students in Benson Idahosa University - Benin City, Nigeria with a total student population of about three thousand five hundred students (3,500) and 565 final year students as at the time of the study. A sample size of two hundred and thirty five final year students was employed for the study. A self-developed questionnaire aimed at capturing the issues of the research interest was employed. It was found out that students in the BIU community perceive Fidelity bank as top choice bank, same for ATM services category, then Samsung phone products, HP laptops, Jumia online shop, Whatsapp social network, Uche supermarket, Osas Business Centre, Victor's hair salon, Desti Meals, Bravo noodles, Simon Peter water, Coca Cola, Five alive juice and Toyota brand for the various sampled brands in the BIU community. It was also found that the students prefer these brands because of good quality, reliability, availability, accessibility, confidence in the brand name, comfortable physical environment of service delivery, loyalty to the brands and physical appearance / attraction to the of brands. Based on the findings, this paper recommends therefore that brand managers should ensure high quality in goods and services; managers should ensure that the value of a product is worth its price, ensure products are accessible, easy to use, consistency in quality, especially for services, should be sensitive and responsive to the complaints of consumers, and ensure quick corrective measures to remedy defects. There should be a proper feedback mechanism to ensure openness in communicating with customers. Also brand managers and service providers should adopt a guarantee policy on their brands to foster trust in the minds of consumers, thereby promoting loyalty to the brands, continue to promote good customer relationship and ensure that the environments in which services are provided are conducive.

Keywords: Brand, Brand Equity, Brand Preferences.

1.0. Introduction and Background to the Study

According to Kotler & Armstrong, (2010) a brand represents everything that a product or service means to consumers. It is the image that consumers have in mind and entails also the unique characteristics that have been developed all the time in order to differentiate actual products from that of the competitors (Murphy, 1990; Aaker, 1991). Understanding the role that brands play in consumer buying behavior is invaluable in building sustainable competitive advantage (Jobber 2001).Neil & Lopo, (2008) asserts that it is widely accepted that brands are important intangible assets that can significantly contribute to firm performance. Kotler, (2005) submits that most organizations own large product portfolios and market different brands within their product mix. This requires that they make firm-level

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strategic decisions concerning the brand portfolio as it affects the brand equity, brand personality and identity. Good understanding of reasons for brand choice preferences would provide a clue as to how to promote brand awareness and how brand preference and loyalty is built. Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015) citing Alamore & Rowley, (2011) avers that brand preference is an important aspect of marketing research and is "the extent to which the customer favours the designated service provided by his or her present company, in comparison to the designated service provided by the other companies in his or her consideration set" while according to Singh, Ehrenberg & Goodhardt, (2008) as cited in Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015) it refers to the consumers' hierarchical prioritization of the brand arising from their patronage and cognitive comprehension of the brand.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the why and how of brand preferences among students as they are very enthusiastic about where they shop and services they use. Effort is made to compare between brands on the basis of their brand characteristics and components and how these influences the choice of a particular brand. Specifically the objectives of this study are:

      1.)   To determine the brands perceived as superior by B.I.U students.
      2.)   To highlight the reasons, factors or attributes that makes them prefer these brands.
      3.)   To ascertain the benefits they derive from these brands
      4.)   To suggest useful strategies arising from this study to producers / brand managers

Research Questions

      1.)   Which brands are perceived to be superior by students?
  2.) Why do they prefer these brands?
  3.) What are the benefits they derive from these brands?
  4.) What are the strategies that may be suggested for brand management from this study?

2.0.   Literature Review on Brands, Branding and Brand Equity

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. A brand therefore is a product or service that adds dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products or services designed to satisfy the same need. These differences may be functional, rational, or emotional or intangible related to what the brand represents. A brand name offers a symbol that can help consumers to identify service suppliers and to envisage service outcome (Janiszewski & Van Osselaer, 2000). A brand is the image that consumers have in mind (Aaker, 1991). It is also the unique characteristics that have been developed all the time in order to differentiate actual products from the competitors (Murphy, 1990). Furthermore, according to Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen, (2009) cited in Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015) brands are important intangible assets valuable for the company and are a distinctive tool useful for building long-term relationships with consumers.

From the works of Aaker, (1998); Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015)to the consumers, brands reflect their experience and knowledge; thus simplifying the processing of information accumulated over time about the company and its products. The brands therefore act as signals for products of high quality and low perceived risk, thus, enabling the consumers to capture both cognitive and non-cognitive values expressed in the positive feelings and self-expression experienced. Affirming this, Jobber (2001) submits that strong brands are important to both companies and consumers. The companies get benefits because strong brands add value to the organization, positively affects consumers perceptions of the brands, act as a barrier to competition, improve profits and provide a base for brand extensions. Also, consumers gain because strong brands act as a form of quality certification and create trust (Jobber, 2001;Tafamel&Abiodun, 2015;Ogbeide&Agbadudu, 2015).

Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2003) in describing brands propose that they may be conceptualized variously: **the brand as a good -** (features of a good, quality/equity, experience, consumers, producing country);**the brand as a company -** (features of a company, novelty, care about consumers, reliability, local versus global);**the brand as a personality -** (sincere, active, reliable),the relationship of brand and

consumers; **the brand identity -** extended identity, principal identity, brand essence and **the brand as a symbol - (** visual associations and a number of metaphors and brand inheritance).

Branding according to Nomuoja, Monye & Ekperi, (2013) entails the use of names logos, symbols character, slogans, jingles, distinctive packages and thus brings the product to the attention of buyers, creates brand recognition, differentiation and loyalty. Alamore & Rowley, (2011) cited in Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015)asserts that branding is an important aspect of marketing and is considered to be one of the key success factors in selling products and services to brand conscious customers. According to Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, & Sirgy, (2012) a firm which is capable of establishing a level of brand preference among its customers enjoys a considerable competitive advantage over its competitors. Brand preference is the consumers' decision to purchase a brand instead of another based on experience or positive word of mouth recommendation). It is "the extent to which the customer favours the designated service provided by his or her present company, over competitors for the same service or product (Alamore& Rowley, 2011).The consumers' choice for specific brands is determined by the brand equity.

Brand equity according to Kotler &Armstrong, (2010) sharing similar views with Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, (2014) is the set of attributes that are linked to a brand, its name and symbol. It is attributes that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to the firm's customers (Tolba & Hassan, 2009). It is also viewed as the value that consumers associate with a brand and is the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand that adds to or detracts the product or service value based on the customers' perspectives and this value is reflected in how consumers think, feel and act. Aaker, (1996) further states that brand equity is an important intangible asset that has psychological and financial value to the firm, and its value depends on the number of same people who buy regularly. In this connection, Motameni & Shahrokhi, (1998) aver that the brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand perceived quality are necessary to maintain the brand equity. Furthermore Kotler & Keller (2009) defined brand equity as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on customer response to the marketing of that brand." This hinges on the assumption that the power of the brand lies on what has been learned, heard, seen and felt by the consumer about the brand over time. In other words, high brand equity generates a differential effect, facilities expansion into new markets; promote higher brand knowledge and a higher consumer response which normally leads to better brand performance (Ogbeide & Agbadudu, 2015). A brand with strong brand equity is a valuable asset as they bestow financial advantages on a firm because they often command comparatively large market shares and consumers may pay little consideration to disparity in prices.

Scholars like Lev, (2001, 2005); Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015) opine that brand equity is an intangible resource and leads to high profits/stock returns and brand success. Brand success in the market depends on several factors ranging from brand identity, use of the identity in building the image the organization wishes to project differentiating their products from competitors' products. Kapferer, (2003) opines that the brand image is the most efficient way of communication with consumers and reveals the significance of brand identity. Building a strong brand thus yields a lot of benefits including signaling a definite intensity of superiority so that contented customers can simply select the product again, it provides consistency and protection of demand for the firm, and it forms barriers to entry that make it difficult for other firms to enter the market (Kolter & Keller, 2009).

Consumer Decision Making and Consumer Models

According to Nomuoja, Monye & Ekperi, (2013) understanding consumer decision making is of significant importance to the marketer as it is both a process and also the point of consumers demonstrating their desired preference amongst competing brands .Cobb, Rubble & Donthu, (1995) cited in Tafamel & Abiodun, (2015) asserted that "it is essential to understand how brand value is created in the mind of the consumer and how it transforms into choice of behaviour". Ogbeide & Agbadudu, (2015) posit that consumer brand preference is key to understanding consumer behaviour and has always received great attention from marketers as brand preferences reveal the type of attributes a product possesses, to strengthen its position and increase its market share. Over by& Lee, (2006) asserts further that brand preferences represent consumer dispositions to favour a particular brand and depicts the behavoural tendencies reflecting the extent to which consumers favour one brand over another (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, & Rickard 2003).

Previous Empirical Studies

From the works of Aaker, (1997) research establishes relationship between brand personality and brand equity as two related concepts and that brand personality is one important component of brand image and helps build brand equity (Aaker, 1997). Oduor, Lomkhosi, & Sibusiso (2008) in their study in Swaziland focused on establishing leading brands in several product categories and found that quality, prompt services, trustworthiness, convenience, availability, affordability and dependability were factors influencing brand choice.

In their work PeirVallet- Florence, (2009) relates personality dimensions to brand equity, and reports that numerous studies have revealed effect of elements on brand personality which is reflected in the components and outcomes of brand equity. This is in line with Kim, (2000) who submits that successful brand personality increases customer preference, encourage consumption of the brand, increases consumers' emotional attachment, build brand trust and loyalty and provide a context for differentiation, brand attachment, brand trust and brand loyalty.

According to Bauer (2007) as cited in Oduor, et, al (2008) in a top brand choices survey conducted in South Africa, results indicates considerable stability in the leading brands over a three year survey period and that the brands have been able to achieve high brand equity and maintain strong positions in the minds of South Africans. In that study identified leading brands were Coca Cola,Vodacom, ABSA Bank, Nokia, Toyota etc. in various categories respectively. While the above cited works are essentially foreign in origin, this research attempts to undertake a top brand choice survey in the Nigerian environment amongst university undergraduates.

3.0 Methodology

Survey research design is employed for this study. The population of this study are the full time undergraduate final year students of Benson Idahosa University, (BIU) - Benin City -Nigeria, totaling 565(Source: University Records 2015). The study used a sample size of 235 employees as drawn from the population using Yamane (1968) formula for sample size determination. The instrument was validated using face validation technique while the reliability was determined by cronbach alpha reliability test that yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88.Some criteria used in evaluating brand selection choice included quality, reliability, availability, responsiveness, assurance, convenience, courtesy, proximity, empathy and tangibles. In all a total of two hundred questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in BIU, out of which one hundred and ninety four copies were returned and found usable. Results were aggregated using Excel package and are presented using simple descriptive statistics and prose explanations.

4.0. Findings

The results of the study reveals that in the Automated Teller Machines (ATM) category, 39 (20.1%) persons of the total respondents patronize UBA ATM, 39 (20.1%) persons also make use of First Bank ATM, 14 (7.2%) persons make use of Eco Bank while 102 (52.6%) people make use of Fidelity Bank ATM. This reveals that majority of the respondents of this study make use of Fidelity Bank ATM. The reasons behind the respondents choice on their preferred ATM brands are 69(35.6%) made their choices based on high service quality, 56(28.9%) persons made their choice based on availability 49(25.3%) made their choice based on dependability, and 20(10.3%) persons made their choice based on other reasons. This result shows that high service quality informed the choice for most of the respondents.

In the banking and financial services brand that the respondents patronize, 13(6.7%) of the respondents patronize Above Only Bank, 75(38.7%) of the respondents patronize Fidelity bank, 47(24.2%) of the respondents patronize UBA, 51(26.3%) of the respondents patronize First bank, 5(2.6%) of the respondents patronize Keystone bank, while 3(1.5%) of the respondents patronize Ecobank. This shows that majority of the students prefer Fidelity bank. Furthermore, for the reason behind respondents' first bank choice, 69(35.6%) respondent based their choice on service quality, 48(24.7%) persons based their choice on availability, 32(16.5%) respondents based their choice on dependability, 14(7.2%) persons based their choice on conducive environment, 31(16.0%) persons based their choice on good customer relationship. The majority of the respondents made their choice based on the quality of services rendered by the bank.

For the phone brands of respondents, 48(24.7%) of respondents make use of Samsung phone, 21(10,8%) respondents make use of Nokia phone, 34(17.5%) of the respondents make use of Blackberry phone, 26(13.4%) of respondents make use of I-Phone, 23(11.9%) of respondents use Techno phone, 6(3.1%) of respondents use Lenovo Phone, 27(13.9%) of respondents make use of Infinix phone and 9(4.6%) of respondents make use of Apple phone. Thus majority of the respondents make use of Samsung phones. As regards the reason for respondents choice on phone brands, 80(41.2%) persons made their choices based on the product quality, 41(21.1%) made their choices based on dependability of the product,12(6.2%) made their choice based on the appearance of the product, 19(9.8%) made their choice based on confidence in the product,30(15.5%) made their choice based on affordability of the product while 12(6.2%) of the respondents made their choices based on other reasons not stated. This shows that majority of the respondents got their Samsung phones because of its quality.

In the laptop brands used by the respondents, 119(61.3%) of respondents use HP laptop, 22(11.3%) of respondents use Dell laptop, 10(5.2%) of respondents use Lenovo Laptop, 20(10.3%) of respondents use Apple laptop, 8(4.1%) use Samsung laptop, 8(4.1%) of respondents use Acer laptop, 7(3.6%) of respondents use Toshiba laptop. This implies that majority of respondents make use of HP laptop. As regards the reason for respondents choice of laptop, 105(54.1%) of respondents made their choice based on the product quality, 13(6.7%) made their choice based on advertisement, 38(19.6%) made their choices based on confidence in the brand, 23(11.9%) made their choice based on affordability of the product, 15(7.7%) based their choice on other reasons not stated. This implies that majority of respondents made the choice of HP laptops because of the product quality.

As regards the online shops patronized by respondents, 118(60.8%) respondents preferred Jumia, 33(17.0%) of respondents patronize Konga, 11(5.7%) of respondents patronize Jiji, 19(9.8%) of respondents patronize Alli express, 9(4.6%) of respondents patronize E-bay, and 4(2.1%) of respondents patronize Amazon. Jumiais thusthe preferred online shop. The identified reasons behind respondents choice of online shop, 95(49.0%) of respondents made their choice based on quality delivery, 38(19.6%) of respondents made their choice based on advertisement, 30(15.5%) made their choice based on confidence in the brand, 23(11.9%) made their choice based on service quality, while 8(4.1%) of respondents made their choice based on other reasons not stated. Majority of the respondents patronize Jumia online shop because of their quality / effective and efficient delivery.

For the social network respondents prefer to use, 74(38.1%) of respondents prefer using Whatsapp, 54(27.8%) of respondents prefer using Instagam, 33(17.0%) of respondents prefer using Facebook, 25(12.9%) of respondents prefer BBM, 7(3.6%) of respondents prefer using Twitter and 1(0.5%) of respondents prefer using Skype. This shows that majority of the respondents prefer using Whatsapp. For the reasons behind respondents choice of social network, 49(25.3%) based their choice on quality service, 47(24.2%) based their choice on reliability, 69(35.6%) based their choice on affordability while 29(14.9%) made their choice based on other reasons not stated. This shows that majority of the respondents made their choice based on affordability of the social networks.

With respect to the different local supermarkets/ shops respondents patronize, 70(36.1%) of respondents patronize Uche's shop, 19(9.80%) of respondents patronize Harriet's shop, 39(20.1) of respondents patronize Jennifer's shop and, 66(34.1%) of respondents patronize Entrepreneur. This indicates that majority of respondents make use of Uche's shop. The reason behind respondents choice of supermarket, 83(42.8%) of respondents made their choice based on good customer relations, 30(15.5%) of respondents made their choice based on convenience/proximity,12(6.2%) of respondents made their choice based on conducive environment, 44(22.7%) of respondents made their choice based on availability of products, 10(5.2%) of respondents made their choice based on reliability, 15(7.7%) of respondents made their choice based on other reasons not stated. This means that good customer relations and availability of desired products are key influences in choice of preferred shops.

As regards the business centers/ clerical shops that respondents patronize the most, 23(11.9%) of respondents patronize Da point, 49(25.3%) of respondent patronize Mrs. Agbonkpolo, 42(21.6%) of respondents patronize Mr. BB, 51(26.3%) of respondents patronize Osas, while 29(14.9%) of respondents patronize Madam Happiness. This shows that majority of respondents patronize Osas business centre. The reason behind respondents choice of business centers, 83(42,8%) of respondents made their choice based on service quality, 62(32.0%) of respondents made their choice based on convenient proximity,24(12.4%) of respondents made their choice based on conducive environment

while 25(12.9%) of respondents made their choice based on dependability. The convenience, proximity and the quality of services obtained influenced respondents' preference.

For the hair salon respondents patronize, 129(66.5%) patronize Victor's salon while 65(33.5%) patronize Romeo's salon. This shows that majority of respondents patronize Victor's salon. The reasons are because of their service quality, 55 persons (28.4%); 34(17.5%) of respondents patronize them because of convenient proximity, 69(35.6%) of respondents patronize them because of good customer relation, 7(3.6%) of respondents patronize them because of their conducive environment, 7(3.6%) of respondents patronize them due to dependability while 22(11.3%) of respondents patronize them for other reasons. This shows that many respondents patronize this salon because they have good customer relations.

For the different restaurants/food vendors' respondents patronize, 51(26.3%) prefer Desti's restaurant, 30(15.5%) of respondents patronize Favour's restaurant, 22(11.3%) of respondents patronize Oge's restaurant, 30(15.5%) of respondents patronize Hebron's restaurant, 16(8.2%) of respondents patronize Tracy's restaurant, while 45(23.2%) of respondents patronize Midesta's restaurant. This implies that a large number of respondents patronize Desti's restaurant. As for the reason for respondents' choice of food vendors, 29(14.9%) of respondents based choice on the quality of service gotten, 106(54.6%) of respondents because of the quality of meals served, 15(7.7%) of respondents because of the quality of environment in which meals are served, while 22(11.3%) purchase food from vendors they have a good relationship with showing that respondents place high priority on quality of meals and services rendered in patronizing food vendors.

As regards the respondents choice of fast foods - noodle shops, 68(35.1%) of respondents prefer Bravo's noodles, 64(33.0%) of respondents chose Bala's noodles, 47(24.2%) of respondents patronize Pastor's noodles, while 15(7.7%) of respondents patronize Juliet's noodles. This implies that majority of the respondents prefer Bravo's noodles shop. As for the reason for respondents choice of noodles shops, 46(23.7%) of respondents made their choice based on the quality of service rendered, 65(33.5%) of respondents patronize the shops based on the quality of meals served, 11(5.7%) of respondents patronize them because of the conducive environment, 49(25.3%) of respondents patronize the shops due to the good relationship they have with the noodles vendors, while 23(11.9%) of respondents patronize them for reasons not stated. This implies that majority of respondents patronize the noodles shops because of the quality meals served and services rendered

As regards the respondents choice of water brands, 92(47.4%) of respondents prefer Simon Peter water, 13(6.7%) of respondents prefer Vasco water, 21(10.8%) of respondents prefer Olivia water, 21(10.8%) of respondents prefer Notre Dame water, while 47(24.2%) of respondents prefer Eva water. This shows that a large number of respondent prefer purchasing Simon Peter water. As for the reasons for respondents choice of water brand, 109(56.2%) of respondents made their choice based on the quality of the water brand while 85(43.8%) made their choice based on easy access to the product. This implies that respondents place priority on quality in choice of water brands.

For the respondents choice of Malt and Soft drinks, 56(28.9%) of respondents chose Fanta, 71(36.6%) of respondents chose Coke, 34(17.5%) of respondents chose Sprite, (6.2%) of respondents chose Maltina, 12(6.2%) of respondents chose BIG, and 9(4.6%) of respondents chose Fayrouz. This implies that majority of respondents prefer Coke. Forreason of respondents choice of soft drink, 103(53.1%) of respondents made their choice based on the quality of the soft drink, 27(13.9%) of respondents made their choice based on the fact that those soft drinks were accessible, 35(18.0%) of respondents made their choice based on the affordability of the soft drinks, 29(14.9%) of respondents based their choice on other reasons not stated. This implies that majority of respondents based their choice of soft drinks on the quality of the product.

With respect to respondents choice of juice brands, 80(41.2%) prefer Five Alive juice, 60(30.9%) prefer Chivitajuice, 29(14.9%) prefer Caprisonne juice, while 25(12.9%) prefer Viju juice. This implies that a large number of respondents prefer Five Alive juice. As regards the reason for respondents choice of juice brand, 110(56.7%) based their choice on the quality of the juice brand, 40(20.6%) made their choice based on ease in accessing the brands, 23(11.9%) based their choice on affordable prices and 21(10.8%) of respondents on reasons not stated. Majority respondents thus based their choice juice on the quality of the product and availability.

As regards the respondents Automobile brand choice, 74(38.1%) of respondents chose Toyota, 55(28.4%) of respondents chose Mercedes, 29(14.9%) of respondents chose KIA, 11(5.7%) of respondents chose Nissan while 25(12.9%) of respondents chose Honda brand. This reveals that majority of respondents prefer Toyota brand of cars. With respect to the reason for respondents car brand choice, 109(56.2%) chose the car because of its quality, 31(16.0%) chose the brand because of affordability, 41(21.1%) of respondents

made their choice based on trust in the brand name, while 13(6.7%) of respondents based their choice on reasons not stated. This implies that respondents preference were for cars with high quality.

Table 1: Summarized Reports on Respondents Opinion on Various Brands Categories.

Product Category	Responses			
	Top brand Choice	Frequency	Percent-age	Some identified reasons
Automated Teller Machine (ATM)	Fidelity Bank	102	52.6	dependable, availability, high quality etc.
Banking Category	Fidelity Bank	75	38.7	high service quality, dependability, decent environment, availability, good customer relations etc.
Mobile Phones Category	Samsung	48	24.7	quality, dependability, affordability product appearance, confidence in the product etc.
Laptop brand	HP	119	61.3	product quality ,adverts on product, confidence in the brand name, affordability etc.
Online Shop Category	Jumia	118	60.8	quality delivery, advertisement, confidence in the brand, service quality etc.
Social Network Category	Whatsapp	74	38.1	high service quality ,reliability, affordability etc.
Local Shops / Supermarket	Uche Shop	70	36.1	good customer relations, convenient proximity, conducive environment, products availability, reliability etc.
Clerical Services Shops / Business Centre	Osas	51	26.3	good customer relations, convenient proximity, conducive environment, product availability, reliability etc.
Preferred Hair Salon Shop Category	Victor Salon	129	66.5	good customer relations, convenient proximity, conducive environment, availability of products, reliability etc.
Preferred Food Vendor	Desti	51	26.3	quality, service, quality meals, conducive environment, good relationship management etc.
Choice of Indomie Shops Noodles/ Fast Foods	Bravo	68	35.1	quality service, quality meals, conducive environment, good relationship with suppliers etc.
Water Brand	Simon Peter	92	47.4	quality, product availability etc.
Choice of soft drink / malt drinks category	Coca-Cola	56	28.9	quality products, affordability availability etc.
Juice Brand	Five Alive	80	41.2	quality product, affordability availability etc.
Car Brand Choice	Toyota	74	38.1	quality, reliability, affordability etc.

Source: Field Work 2016

Discussion of Findings.

In the ATM category, the researcher discovered that majority of students prefer to make use of Fidelity bank ATM, reason being that the Fidelity Bank ATM offers high quality service when compared with other ATM's. A reasonable number of students also chose Fidelity because it is easily accessible and reliable. It was discovered that students prefer banking with Fidelity bank because of their high

service quality. Other reasons for their choice are that the bank is easily accessible, reliable, has good customer relationship and a conducive environment (Tangibles). Furthermore, students in BIU mostly use Samsung phones because of its quality, reliability, its price and appearance. In the category of laptops, most students use HP because of the quality, confidence in the brand name price of the laptop and adverts about their products. For the different online shops majority of students patronize Jumia because of their quality delivery, advertisement and confidence in the brand name. This finding is supported by the study of Oduor, Lomkhosi, & Sibusiso (2008) in their study in Swaziland which focused on establishing leading brands in several product categories. They found that quality, prompt services, trustworthiness, convenience, availability, affordability and dependability were factors influencing brand choice.

For the various social networks, students mostly use whatsapp because of its low cost of usage, service quality and reliability. Students mostly patronize Uche's shop because of the good relationship they have with their customers, and that students' needs are always met because of the availability of products. Students prefer to patronize Osas's business center because of the good services they render and proximity to their hostels and lecture rooms. Most students prefer Victor's salon because of the good relationship they have with their customers, good service quality and convenient proximity. These findings is supported by the study of Wogu, (2016) in the study on service quality analysis in the telecommunications industry who reported that factors such as quality, reliability, availability, responsiveness, assurance, convenience, marketing communication, courtesy, customer service, proximity, empathy, tangibles/ physical evidence etc. are important determinants of customer preferences for a particular brand over another and all contribute to successful brand performance.

For the food vendor category students prefer Desti meals to others because of the quality meals served. Students prefer Bravo noodles to others because of quality meals and quality service rendered. Students also prefer Simon Peter water because of its quality and accessibility. Furthermore students prefer Cokebrand to other brands of soft drinks because of its quality; while they prefer five alive in the juice category while in the Automobile brands category, preferences were for Toyota brand of cars because of its quality and dependability. The study shows that brand patronage is influenced mostly by the quality of those brands in comparison with competing brands. The findings of this study is supported by several other studies such as Pasuraman, Zeithanl & Berry (1985) in their work on service quality and performance; Oduor, et. al (2008) on top brands preferences survey in Swaziland, and PeirVallet- Florence, (2009) who reports diversely that factors such as quality, reliability, availability, responsiveness, assurance, convenience, marketing communication, courtesy, customer service, proximity, empathy, tangibles/ physical evidence etc. are important determinants of customer preferences for a particular brand over another and all contribute to brand attachment, brand trust brand loyalty and successful brand performance.

5.0. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations.

This study was embarked upon with the intention to survey the top brand choices among students in the BIU community. Several product brand categories ranging from ATM services, Bank services, Phone brands, Laptop brands, Online shops, Social networks, Supermarkets, Business centers, Hair salons, Food vendors, Noodles shops, Water brands, Soft Drinks, Juice brands, and automobile brands were sampled. In summary,

1.Students in the BIU community perceive Fidelity bank to be superior to other banks in the BIU environment in terms of rendering quality services, ATM inclusive. Also Samsung phone products, HP laptops, Jumia online shop, Whatsapp social network, Uche supermarket, Osas Business Centre, Victor's hair salon, Desti Meals, Bravo indomie, Simeon peter water, Coca Cola, Five alive juice and Toyota brand are perceived by students to be superior to their competing brands in the BIU community.

2.It is also discovered that students prefer these brands because they are of good quality, reliable, available, accessible, confident in the brand name, comfortable with the environment in which the service is provided, loyal to the brands and attracted to the physical appearance of products brands. The students thus derive satisfaction from the utilization of these brands.

Conclusions and Contribution to Knowledge

This study provides useful information on students' choice of product brands and why they prefer these brands and also highlights factors that are perceived to make a particular brand of product more appealing or important. This is useful for marketers and product brand managers so as to concentrate on aspects that are important for successful product performance and sustainable competitive advantage.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations from this study:

1. The businesses should continue to focus on quality improvement. It is evident that quality largely influences consumer purchase behaviour, therefore producers and service providers should ensure top quality always in goods and services. Managers should ensure consistency in the quality and also ensure that the value offered is worth the prices.

2. The businesses should ensure that products are easily accessible by consumers. There should also be ease of use of products and functional after sales service arrangements. The distribution network should thus be efficiently managed.

3. Producers should intensify adopting the strategy of integrated marketing communications as it would enhance adequate promotion of the brand awareness, recall, and benefits, encourage trial, preferences, improve brand equity and enhance brand positioning.

4. The businesses should be sensitive to the complaints of consumers, especially when they are dissatisfied with the products. Quick corrective measures should be taken to correct such defects. There should be an open and functional communication mechanism to ensure ease in getting feedback.

5. Business owners should adopt a guarantee policy on their brands to foster trust in the minds of consumers, thereby promoting loyalty to the brands.

6. The act of good customer relationship should be emphasized. Service providers also should ensure that the environments in which services are provided are conducive.

7. Managers of leading brands should continue to improve on their areas of strength and identified reasons for consumer preference.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research.

This research was conducted in just one private university and this has limitations both in geographical coverage and in sample size. It is therefore suggested that the scope of the study and the sample size should be enlarged to enhance generalization of results. Future researches should also be done on related issues of brand equity and consumer preferences and patronage.

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