

PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES AND CONSUMERS' CHOICE OF POWDER DETERGENTS BRANDS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract: The study examined “product attributes and consumers’ choice of powder detergents brands in south East, Nigeria”. The specific objectives were to: assess safety attributes and consumer’s choice of powder detergents and investigate the relationship between sense-appeal attributes and consumer’s choice of powder detergents. The study adopted the survey research design. The sample size of the study was three hundred and eight four (384). The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaires was .0.70 using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient. The study hypotheses were tested with correlation and regression methods. The findings showed that: safety attributes had a positive significant relationship with consumer’s choice of powder detergents brands and sense-appeal attributes had a positive significant relationship with consumer’s choice of powder detergents brands. Based on findings, the study concluded that product attributes had a positive significant relationship with consumer’s choice of powder detergents brands in South East, Nigeria. Based on findings, the study recommended that local manufacturing companies and foreign companies operating in the south-eastern market should continue to establish safety attributes measures across consumers of their products because we talk about life existence before consumption of goods and services.

Keywords: Product attributes, Consumer choice, Powder detergents, Safety attributes, Sense-appeal attributes

INTRODUCTION

Originally six key players exert enormous influence in the powder detergent market in Nigeria. These key players were: - Unilever Plc, the makers of popular Omo, Surf and Rin Powder detergents. PZ Nigeria which manufactures Elephant Blue Detergent and Drum Detergent and Nasco Industries Limited, the markers of Action Detergent brand. Others were Nidesco Industries Ltd; the producer of King Blue Detergent; International Equitable Association, the manufacturer of Apollo and Procter and Gamble Plc Makers of Ariel Detergent. These six keys’ players together produce over 95% of laundry power detergents in Nigeria (Nnolim, 2016).

The Nigerian powder detergent has witnessed an influx of cottage and unbranded producers who have capitalized on the relative ease of producing the product to introduce a myriad of detergent brands that are often very cheap and of low quality. In recent times the Nigerian detergent market became tough resulting in all manner of marketing strategies to lure customers. For instance, in order to ward off competitors, Ariel launched “The stain challenge campaign” and claimed that it is more effective enzyme cocktail that gently removes tough stains in one wash (Nnolim, 2016).

The company added improved fragrances and redesigned the wrapper. Similarly other powder detergent companies were not left out in their struggle to get a large market share. For instance, Sokline introduced the stain remover technology that removes stains from clothes. It also added fragrance and introduced a redesigned wrapper. On its part, Sunlight introduced a new stylish design for its wrappers, while reformulating its washing technology with the introduction of a “deep wash campaign” that explains the deep wash mechanism embedded into the product (Nnolim, 2016).

As at the time of this study, there are various multinational, national, local and cottage powder detergents that maintained their presence in the Nigerian Market and all are competing for consumers’ disposable income. Surprisingly in spite of the cut-throat competition witnessed in the industry, most of the powder detergent manufacturers in Nigeria, by rule of thumb, employ different strategies to lure customers to their brands. With the exception of some multinationals companies such as Unilever Plc, P.Z Industries and Procter and Gamble Plc, only a few of indigenous powder detergent manufactures make conscious effort to determine context-specific factors that drive consumers choice for powder detergent brands. The growing number of powder detergents in the market has afforded consumers a wide variety of choices and most companies are fast losing grounds to competition. This worrisome situation has evoked the interest of the researcher to determine the product attributes that have strong relationship with consumers’ brand choice of powder detergents in South-East of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerians in general perceive cleanliness of one’s environment and person of utmost importance and non-adherence to the basic rules of hygiene as major factor for illness, infectious diseases and offensive body odor. These basic rules of hygiene include: regular cleaning of human surroundings such as cleaning of convenience and bathrooms; regular bathing at least once a day and regular washing of clothes when dirty. Powder detergent is but one of the products consumers buy in order to adhere to these basic rules of hygiene.

However, due to various reasons, consumers seem quite particular about the brand of powder detergents they use for cleaning purposes. Although risks arising from the use of defective powder detergents are not as life threatening as those arising from the use of defective machinery, equipment, foods and medications; yet consumers nowadays are quite conscious of the brands of detergents they choose for washing and laundry purposes.

In fact, powder detergents failures due to it damage their clothes and do not give a clean and bright wash unless combined with hard laundry soap. They also alleged that powder detergents do not even remove stubborn stains as claimed by some of the manufacturers unless they are combined with bleach. Majority of the consumers also perceive product-use-information usually embodied on the powder detergent packaging as false and misleading.

These means that a wide gap exists between consumer's expectations and the actual experience they have with the use of the product. This also suggests that some consumers are not satisfied with the use of the powder detergents existing in Nigerian market. Due to the inability of the manufacturers to track and apply consumer needs in their product formulations, some of them are fast losing a sizeable market shares to competitors; while some are even disappearing from the Nigerian Market. Given the above scenario, it has become necessary to obtain more insight into the actual qualities consumers expect from their ideal powder detergents. This has

become even more imperative as studies conducted to determine the attributes that evoke consumer interest in their choice of powder detergent brands especially in South-East Nigeria are so few judging from past previous studies or empirical reviews.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between product's attributes and consumer choice for powder detergents South East Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Assess safety attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents in South-Eastern Nigeria;
- ii. Investigate the relationship between sense-appeal attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents in South-Eastern Nigeria.

This is a consumer behavior-based study but limited to an assessment of the relationship between products attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South-Eastern Nigeria. This study was restricted to the state capital and one heavily populated area in each of the five states in the south-Eastern Nigeria. These are: Enugu Urban and Nsukka in Enugu State; Awka and Onisha in Anambra State; Abakaliki and Afikpo in Ebonyi State; Umuahia and Aba in Abia State and Owerri and Okigwe in Imo State of Nigeria. The choice of these towns in each of the state is based on Urbanization and commercial nerve center where the dominant users of powder detergents are likely to reside.

This study was restricted to individuals in the study areas between the ages of 18 and 70 who have actually purchased and used detergent powder brands under investigation for personal, family and business laundry purposes. The age restriction was informed by two reasons. First, the individuals within this age bracket appear to be the dominant users of the product under investigation. Secondly, individuals below 18 years are legally deemed as minors with limited capacity for independent decision in the Nigerian context. They are not perceived as adult that can yield quality decisions. Laundry business industrial users are also included in this study.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Product

Products include all manner of things that do not come immediately to mind when we mention the word. It is anything a consumer acquires to meet a personal, family, business or commercial need (Hawkins, *et al*, 2015).

Product Attributes

Product attributes are those characteristics through which products are identified and differentiated. In other words, product attributes can be defined as the features or specific descriptive aspects of a marketing strategy that represent the consumer's evaluative criteria in the selection of particular goods or services (Wu, *et al*, 2018).

Safety Attributes: These refer to the level of safety in the use of the detergent powder in terms of mildness on cloths, clothes color retention, retention of cloth texture, resiliency to fabrics and its mildness when they come in contact with hand or machine.

Sense- appeal attributes in a detergent product refers to color, freshness of its fragrance and texture of the detergents powder when felt with hand.

Consumer Choice

Consumer choice is a judgement regarding which product to select after having deliberated on some possible alternatives brands that are likely to solve an existing need (wier, *et al* 2018). Scholars contend that a consumer choice is made after a series of steps that often begins with recognition of a need or problem that warrant product purchases, followed by search for information about the product (either from marketing communications, previous stored information from memory or friend's recommendations), then followed by

critical evaluation of the brands qualities (brand alternatives) called the evoked set and making a choice from among the alternatives (Nebo & Onyeke, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

In this section, the researcher developed a conceptual framework depicting the relationship between product attributes and consumer choice of detergent brands taking cognizance of the product attributes. Diagrammatically, the synthesized conceptual framework is presented and discussed below.

Product Attributes

(Independent Variables)

(Dependent Variable)

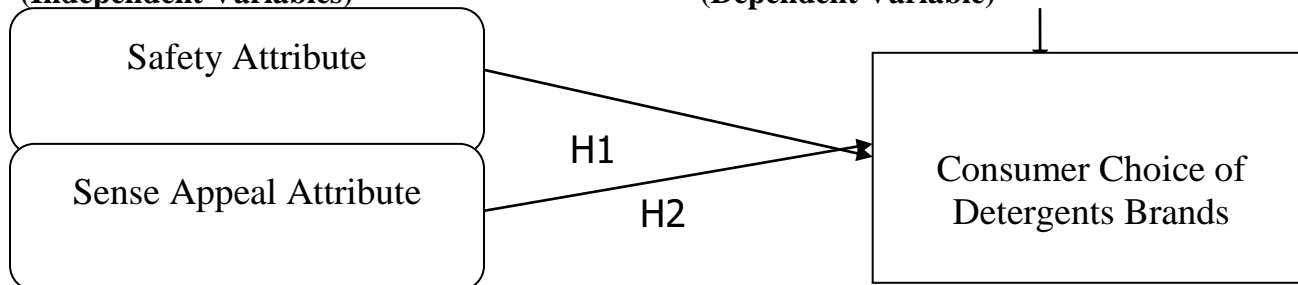


Figure 2.12 Proposed modified conceptual model of the relation between Product Attribute and Consumer's choice of Powder Detergent Brands. Source: Neecu and Gupta, 2014, Parimatu 2014, Tan and Teo, 2019, Dawis, 2019, Chematony and Riley 2018, Nlson and Ostron, 2018.

Theoretical Frameworks

Fishbeins Attitude Theory form the basis of this study and discussed below.

This model of consumer behaviour was developed by Fishbein. The theory advocated that consumer attitude depends on the following: i. consumer beliefs that a certain product has some benefits or attributes and consumer evaluations of these attributes will determine whether the consumer will buy the product or not. The model attempts to explain the rationality of choice of the product by the consumer using measure of his overall attitude towards it. Symbolically, Fishbein (1967) Theory is given by the following function:

$$A_o = \sum_{i=1}^n (B_i E_i)$$

i - i

Where;

A_o = the consumer overall attitude towards the object

B_i = the strength of the belief that the product possess attribute

E_i = the subjective evaluation or intensity of the feeling towards each attribute

n = the number of relevant beliefs considered by that consumer. *How Fishbein's Attitude Theory Relate to the Present Study.* Consumers develop overall attitude or likings to a particular brand based on the attributes it possesses.

Empirical Review

In this section, past related studies were reviewed in line with the objectives of the study.

Akpoyomare, Adeosun and Ganiyu (2018) investigated the influence of product attributes on consumer purchase decision in Nigerian food and beverages industry: A study of Lagos Metropolis. Descriptive research method was used to survey 400 customers of the selected two companies in food and beverages industry. Data were collected through questionnaire administered. Descriptive statistic and Pearson correlation coefficient was used as a method of data analysis. The result of the analysis reveals a positive correlation between products attributes of safety, price, quality, performance and consumer purchase decision.

Karumba and Ngigi (2018) assessed factors that influence customer choice of supermarkets in Karatina Town, Nyeri County, Kenya. The study established that safety, security, cleanliness, product quality, special discounts and fast customer service influenced the customers' choice significantly. Free goods, loyalty cards, vouchers, background music, frontage and parking space do not significantly affect choice of the supermarkets. The study observes that supermarkets that have high levels of cleanliness, security, variety and quality products, fast customer service and convenient operational schedules attracts the big proportion of customers.

Oghojafor and Nwagwu (2019) undertook a study on choice of shopping outlets for grocery products in Lagos, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive and cross-sectional research design. Respondents for this study were female residents of Lagos State of Nigeria, who by culture shop for their families especially for groceries. Questionnaire served as the study instrument. Respondents were drawn through a convenience sampling technique. Pearson moment correlation coefficient and the Chi -square were used to test the hypotheses while SPSS (version 19) aided in analyzing generated data. The results obtained were statistically significant with safety, product quality, location and price at 5% ($P > 0.005$) significant level.

Malasi (2020) examined the influence of product attributes on mobile phone preference among undergraduate university students. A descriptive research design was used for this study. The descriptive statistics used were percentages and mean. The study indicates that varying the product attributes has an influence on the undergraduate students' preferences on mobile phones. Finding of this study indicates that these attributes have a significant influence on the student's preference of mobile phone. Although, most of the respondents would not consider these attributes to be important when making the decision of which mobile phone to purchase.

Degeratu, Rangaswamy and Wu (2019) examined consumer choice behavior in online and traditional supermarkets: The effects of brand name, price, and other search attributes. The empirical results from our choice models indicate that: 1 Brand names become more important online in some categories but not in others depending on the extent of information available to consumers brand names are more valuable when information on fewer attributes is available online. 2 Sensory search attributes, particularly visual cues about the product e.g., paper towel design, have lower impact on choices online, and factual information i.e., non-sensory attributes, such as the fat content of margarine have higher impact on choices online. 3 price sensitivity is higher online, but this is due to online promotions being stronger signals of price discounts.

Gap in Empirical Review

Following the theoretical review of the extant theories and empirical reviews some gaps were observed and noted as these shortcomings could form a platform for conceptualizing a more integrative theory or model for explaining consumer choice behaviour. In this study therefore, the researcher makes a constructive critique of theories of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour and proposed a conceptual model recognizing the shortcomings of the previous models or theories. The shortcomings which limit the use and the extent to which the theories can be deemed composite models of consumer's choice decision is evident. Arguably the assumption surrounding the theory of Reasoned Action and the theory of planned Behaviour which have been widely used in western landscape (Bagozzi, 2018) have never been applied in our local domain. Similarly, the models do not well cater for all variables of interest in the choice decision model. Furthermore, from the empirical reviews, gaps also exist. Despite the overwhelming interest of scholars found on socio-economic factors influencing consumer's choice of products. Not much had been done on the issue of product attributes and consumer's choice especially in South East, Nigeria (Okeke, Iheanacho & Obasi, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative descriptive survey design was used in this study. Survey design involves asking respondents questions using oral interview or questionnaire to get their opinion on the subject being investigated. The researcher used primary source of data which was gathered through the use of questionnaire. Therefore, the population of the study is adjudged to be infinite or unknown. The population of the study is unknown or

infinite and as a result, Topman's formular was used in determining the sample size which gave us 384. Sampling techniques show how the total sample size of 384 detergent consumers were distributed and selected in the study areas namely: Enugu State (Enugu Urban and Nsukka), Ebonyi State (Abakaliki and Afikpo), Imo State (Owerri and Okigwe), Anambra State (Awka and Onitsha) and Abia State (Umuahia and Aba). Since the population of those who buy detergents in the study areas are not available, the researcher used the 2006 census figures of the affected areas as basis for sample size distribution. The reason is because it is assumed that the population of detergent consumers in the areas of the study were vary according to the population figures in those areas such that areas with higher population figure are likely to have higher number of detergent consumers and vice versa.

Table 1. Sample Size Distribution according to the Population Proportion of the study Areas.

S/NO	STATE	STUDY AREA	POPULATION OF THE STUDY AREA	RESPONDENTS SELECTED FROM EACH TOWN
1.	Enugu	Enugu Urban	722,664	$\frac{722,664}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 74$
		Nsukka	309,448	$\frac{722,664}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 32$
		Total	1,032,112	106
2.	Ebonyi	Abakaliki	141,438	$\frac{141,438}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 14$
		Afikpo	156,611	$\frac{156,611}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 16$
		Total	298,049	30
3.	Imo	Owerri	400,000	$\frac{400,000}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 41$
		Okigwe	132,701	$\frac{132,701}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 13$
		Total	532,701	54
4.	Abia	Umuahia	220,660	$\frac{220,660}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 23$
		Aba	359,230	$\frac{359,230}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 37$
		Total	579,890	60
5.	Anambra	Awka	301,657	$\frac{301,657}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 31$
		Onitsha	1,003,000	$\frac{359,230}{3,747,409} \times \frac{384}{1} = 103$
		Total	1,304,657	134
GRAND TOTAL			3,747,409	384

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in presentation and analysis of the data. In descriptive analysis data were presented and analysed using tables, frequencies and percentages while in inferential statistics, hypotheses were tested using correlation and regression statistical tools.

Test of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis One

Step One: Restatement of hypothesis in null and alternate form thus:

H₀₁: There is no significant positive relationship between safety attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South-Eastern Nigeria.

H_{a1}: There is significant positive relationship between safety attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Decision Rule: Accept the null hypothesis if the sign of the coefficient is negative and probability value < 0.05 . Otherwise, reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate accordingly.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	Detergents are mild on cloths.	Most detergents powder retain the colour of cloths.	Most detergents powder retain the texture of cloths.	Most detergents are good for both hand and machine wash.	Most detergents irritate hands/skin.
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 369	.420** .000 369	.511** .000 369	.783** .000 369	.783** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.499** .000 369	1 369	.814** .000 369	.811** .000 369	.811** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.640** .000 369	.880** .000 369	1 369	.769** .000 369	.769** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.699** .000 369	.696** .000 369	.669** .000 369	1 369	.769** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.510** .000 369	.796** .000 369	.796** .000 369	.796 .000 369	1 369

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

Table 2 provides the correlation coefficient between safety attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands which was found using the SPSS version 20. The results indicated that safety attributes have a strong positive relationship with consumer's choice of powder detergents brands. According to evidence of all this result, safety attributes have a high correlation output with consumer's choice of powder detergents brands as provided by the respective correlation coefficients of first rows $r=.783$ (sig .000 < 0.05), second rows $r= .814$ (sig .000 <0.05), third rows $r= .880$ (sig .000 < 0.05), forth rows $r= .769$ (sig .0000 < 0.05) and $r= .796$ (sig .0000 < 0.05). Thus, we accept alternate hypothesis of H_{a1} which postulated that there was a strong positive relationship between safety attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South East, Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis Two

Step One: Restatement of hypothesis in null and alternate form thus:

H₀₂: There is no significant positive relationship between sense-appeal attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South-Eastern Nigeria.

H_{a2}: There is no significant positive relationship between sense-appeal attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Decision Rule: Accept the null hypothesis if the sign of the coefficient is negative and probability value < 0.05 . Otherwise, reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate accordingly.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	The brand of detergent I use give bright and clean wash.	My favourite detergent removes stubborn stain on cloths.	Detergent I buy remove odour on cloths.	Most detergents have good lathering effect.	Most detergents remove heavy dirt on cloths.
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 369	.520** .000 369	.516** .000 369	.773** .000 369	.773** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.459** .000 369	1 369	.810** .000 369	.810** .000 369	.810** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.610** .000 369	.817** .000 369	1 369	.720** .000 369	.720** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.619** .000 369	.619** .000 369	.619** .000 369	1 369	.721** .000 369
Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.510** .000 369	.701** .000 369	.701** .000 369	.701 .000 369	1 369

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

Table 3 provides the correlation coefficient between sense-appeal attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands which was found using the SPSS version 20. The results indicate that sense-appeal attributes have a strong positive relationship with consumer's choice of powder detergents brands. Based on the result, sense-appeal attributes have a high correlation output with consumer's choice of powder detergents brands as provided by the respective correlation coefficients of first rows $r=.773$ (sig .000 < 0.05), second rows $r= .810$ (sig .000 <0.05), third rows $r= .817$ (sig .000 < 0.05), forth rows $r= .721$ (sig .0000 < 0.05) and $r= .701$ (sig .0000 < 0.05). Thus, we accept alternate hypothesis of H_{a2} which postulated that there was a strong positive relationship between sense-appeal attributes and consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South East, Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

After data analysis and test of hypotheses, we discovered that:

1. Safety attributes had a positive significant relationship on consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South East, Nigeria ($r = .880$, $p < 0.05$).
2. Sense-appeal attributes had a positive significant relationship on consumer's choice of powder detergents brands in South East, Nigeria ($r = .817$, $p < 0.05$).

Conclusion

Based on summary of findings, the researcher concluded that detergent attributes particularly safety, sense appeal had significant positive relationship with consumer's choice of brands. It is extremely important for marketers to understand how consumers react to products they offer to the market. A marketer wants to know what attributes make a product attractive and what price consumers are willing to pay for a product or for a specific feature of a product. Conjoint analysis is a technique, which helps to measure consumer preferences for certain attributes of products or services.

Recommendations

In the light of study findings, the following recommendations were made;

1. Local manufacturing companies and foreign companies operating in the South East market should continue to establish safety attributes measures in detergent production. They should ensure that their detergents are mild on cloths, retain colour of cloths, and do not irritate hands.
2. Manufacturers of detergents should ensure that they appeal to consumer sense organs. By ensuring that the product has good colours, texture, fragrance (perfume) and packaging.

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