Factors Influencing Brand Equity and Consumer Preferences for Bread Products in Anambra State

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Abstract: This study investigates the factors influencing brand equity and consumer preferences for bread products in Anambra State, Nigeria. Utilizing a quantitative research approach, we conducted a cross-sectional survey among 400 consumers, employing structured questionnaires to gather data on brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs. Consumer preferences, was measured through a Likert-scale analysis. Data analysis was performed using multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between the independent variables and consumer preferences. Additionally, descriptive statistics were utilized to provide demographic insights into the sample population. The results indicate that brand image and quality significantly influence consumer preferences ($p < 0.05$), while packaging and advertising and promotion have moderate effects. Price and distribution channels showed weaker correlations, and customer loyalty programs did not demonstrate a statistically significant impact. Findings suggest that enhancing brand image and product quality is crucial for increasing consumer preference for bread products in Anambra State. This study contributes to the understanding of brand equity in the Nigerian bread market and offers actionable insights for marketers and manufacturers aiming to optimize their branding strategies.

Key words: Brand Equity, Consumer Preferences, Bread Products, Brand Image, Quality, Price, Packaging, Advertising and Promotion, Distribution Channels, and Customer Loyalty Programs, Consumer Preferences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand equity has emerged as a key driver of competitive advantage in the modern marketplace, particularly in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sectors such as the food industry. In Nigeria, bread is one of the staple foods and a significant component of the daily diet, making it a critical subject of study concerning consumer preferences (Ogunnaike et al., 2019). The increasing demand for bread products has led to intensified competition among brands, necessitating a deeper exploration of the factors that shape consumer choices. Understanding how brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs influence consumer preferences is imperative for manufacturers and marketers aiming to establish a robust foothold in the market (Aziegbe et al., 2020). Brand image is recognized as a crucial aspect of brand equity, acting as the mental representation of a brand in consumers' minds. According to Hsu and Tsou (2020), a positive brand image can lead to favorable consumer behavior and heightened preference for a product. In the context of bread products in Anambra State, brand image may significantly impact consumer perceptions and choices, as consumers often associate well-established brands with higher quality and better service. This relationship

highlights the need for brands to invest in building a strong image that resonates with their target audience, which is particularly pertinent in a competitive market like that of bread production in Nigeria.

The quality of a product remains one of the most critical factors influencing consumer preferences across various industries. Research by Ali et al. (2018) indicates that consumers are increasingly prioritizing quality over other attributes when making purchasing decisions. For bread products, quality encompasses aspects such as freshness, taste, and nutritional value, all of which can greatly influence consumer satisfaction and repeat purchases. In light of the rapidly changing consumer preferences towards healthier food options, understanding how quality is perceived by consumers in Anambra State can provide valuable insights for improving product offerings. Price is another pivotal factor affecting consumer buying behavior. Consumer reactions to prices can vary significantly based on their perceived value of the product (Chukwu et al., 2019). While lower prices can attract price-sensitive consumers, higher prices may be justified through perceived quality and brand prestige. In Anambra State, where economic factors play a crucial role in consumer decision-making, analyzing how price points affect preferences for various bread brands can help marketers tailor their pricing strategies effectively.

Packaging also plays a critical role in influencing consumer decisions, serving as both a functional and a psychological tool. Research conducted by Arah et al. (2021) emphasizes the importance of packaging design and information in shaping consumer perceptions, particularly in FMCG. Eye-catching packaging can attract consumers' attention and convey essential information, such as freshness and nutritional benefits. Given the competitive landscape of the bread market in Anambra State, strategies that emphasize innovative and informative packaging may foster increased consumer engagement and preference. Advertising and promotion are fundamental components of brand equity, as they shape consumer awareness and attitudes toward products. A study by Okwudili et al. (2018) highlighted the effectiveness of targeted advertising campaigns in influencing consumer preferences in Nigeria. Bread brands that effectively utilize advertising and promotional strategies can not only enhance visibility but also create a favorable image that resonates with consumers' needs and aspirations. In a marketplace rife with competing brands, understanding how to create impactful advertising that aligns with consumer cultural values and preferences can significantly enhance brand loyalty and preference.

Additionally, distribution channels are vital for ensuring that products are readily available to consumers. A study by Esohe and Afolabi (2020) found that effective distribution strategies directly impact consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. In Anambra State, the efficiency of distribution channels can determine consumers' access to various bread products, thereby influencing their preferences. Brands that invest in establishing robust distribution networks can ensure their products are widely available, enhancing their chances of being chosen by consumers. Customer loyalty programs are increasingly being adopted by brands as a means of strengthening consumer relationships and enhancing brand equity. According to a study by Olatunji and Sulaimon (2021), effective loyalty programs can foster repeat purchases and cultivate brand preference among consumers. In the context of Anambra State's bread market, exploring how loyalty programs influence consumer decisions can provide valuable insights for brands aiming to retain customers in a competitive landscape. Understanding the multifaceted influences on consumer preferences for bread products in Anambra State can provide essential insights for manufacturers and marketers. Through the investigation of brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs, this study aims to elucidate the prominent factors that drive consumer choices. This research will contribute valuable knowledge to existing literature on brand equity and consumer behavior in Nigeria's dynamic food industry.

Statement of the Problem

In the contemporary Nigerian market, particularly in Anambra State, the bread industry faces intense competition, driven by an increasing demand for diverse and high-quality bread products.

Despite the rising consumption, many brands struggle to establish a strong foothold due to an insufficient understanding of the factors that significantly influence consumer preferences. While previous studies have explored various elements of brand equity and consumer behavior, there remains a limited comprehension of how specific independent variables such as brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs interplay to affect consumer choices in the context of bread consumption in Anambra State (Aziegbe et al., 2020; Ogunnaike et al., 2019). This lack of understanding poses a barrier for manufacturers and marketers attempting to capture and retain market share in a dynamic and rapidly evolving food landscape. One of the major challenges in the bread sector in Anambra State is the inconsistency in product quality, which can significantly influence consumer perceptions and preferences. Quality comprises various dimensions, including freshness, taste, and nutritional value, which are increasingly important to health-conscious consumers (Ali et al., 2018). However, not all brands maintain high standards, leading to consumer dissatisfaction and loss of trust, further complicating the decision-making process among buyers. The disparity in quality among competitors not only affects consumer preferences but also challenges brand equity as consumers may switch to alternative products based on perceived quality differences. Consequently, understanding how quality impacts consumer behavior during the purchasing process is essential for brands striving to enhance their competitive advantage (Chukwu et al., 2019).

The price of bread products presents another critical issue that influences consumer decision-making. In a market where multiple brands vie for the attention of price-sensitive consumers, it becomes paramount for marketers to develop pricing strategies that align with consumer expectations (Okwudili et al., 2018). The situation is compounded by the fluctuating economic conditions in Nigeria, which can alter consumer purchasing power. While some consumers may prioritize low prices, others may be willing to pay a premium for higher perceived quality or brand reputation (Hsu & Tsou, 2020). Thus, understanding how price interacts with other variables, such as brand image and quality, to shape consumer preferences can assist marketers in formulating effective pricing strategies that resonate with different consumer segments. Furthermore, innovative packaging, advertising, and promotional activities significantly influence consumer perceptions and preferences in the bread market. Packaging serves not only as a protective measure but also as a marketing tool that communicates brand values and product benefits (Arah et al., 2021). Effective advertising and promotional strategies can enhance brand visibility and create favorable consumer attitudes, particularly in a competitive environment (Esohe & Afolabi, 2020). However, many brands in Anambra State may not be leveraging these tools effectively to engage consumers and gain loyalty. The lack of comprehensive research focusing specifically on the interplay of these marketing elements further complicates the landscape for bread producers seeking to strengthen their brand equity and increase consumer preference. The interplay of factors influencing consumer preferences for bread products in Anambra State is complex and multi-dimensional. There exists a critical gap in understanding how brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs collectively affect consumer choices in the bread market. Addressing these issues is vital for marketers seeking to optimize their branding strategies and maintain a competitive edge within the industry. This study endeavors to analyze these factors comprehensively to provide actionable insights that can lead manufacturers and marketers toward greater success in the Anambra State bread market.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigates the factors influencing brand equity and consumer preferences for bread products in Anambra State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to examine the extent to which brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs influence consumer preferences for bread products in Anambra State, Nigeria.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Aaker's (1991) Brand Equity Model, which provides a comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing consumer perceptions and preferences towards branded products. Aaker's model is centered around four key dimensions of brand equity: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. This framework is instrumental in understanding how these dimensions interact to shape consumer behavior, particularly in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, such as bread production in Anambra State, Nigeria.

David Aaker, a prominent figure in the field of marketing, introduced his Brand Equity Model in 1991. The core assumption of Aaker's framework is that strong brand equity positively influences consumer behavior, leading to increased sales and customer loyalty (Aaker, 1991). The model assumes that consumers derive value from the brand itself beyond the product's functional attributes, which aligns with the psychological aspects of consumer behavior. The theory posits that strong brand equity can lead to enhanced customer loyalty, allowing brands to command premium pricing, retain customers, and achieve a competitive advantage in the market (Keller, 2020).

Aaker's model has several implications relevant to this study. First, brand loyalty indicates a consumer's commitment to repurchase a particular brand, which is essential for understanding consumer choices in the competitive bread market. Second, brand awareness ensures that consumers recognize a brand when considering a product, impacting their purchasing decisions (Draijer et al., 2019). Third, perceived quality signifies consumers' perceptions of the overall quality and reliability of a brand, while brand associations encompass the mental and emotional connections consumers have with a brand, including its reputation and the imagery it evokes (Aaker, 1991).

In applying Aaker's Brand Equity Model to the context of this study, the independent variables that influence consumer preferences in the bread market—brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs—can be understood through the lens of brand equity. Each of these factors correlates to Aaker's dimensions and illustrates how they may affect consumer choices.

1. **Brand Image:** This relates closely to the brand associations dimension of Aaker's model. A positive brand image can enhance consumers' perceptions and lead to stronger preferences for that brand (Aziegbe et al., 2020).

2. **Quality:** As a significant component of perceived quality, the quality of bread products will directly impact consumer choice and brand loyalty. Research has consistently shown that higher perceptions of quality enhance consumer preference (Ali et al., 2018; Hsu & Tsou, 2020).

3. **Price:** Price can influence perceived quality and brand loyalty, as consumers often equate higher prices with superior quality (Chukwu et al., 2019). Aaker's model supports this interaction by illustrating how consumers may be willing to pay more for brands they perceive as having greater value.

4. **Packaging:** This element enhances brand awareness and influences consumer perceptions. Effective packaging can evoke positive brand associations, thereby affecting consumer decisions (Arah et al., 2021).

5. **Advertising and Promotion:** These factors are essential for increasing brand awareness and shaping brand associations. Effective advertising can enhance consumer perceptions and preferences, thereby driving sales (Okwudili et al., 2018).

6. **Distribution Channels:** These elements are critical for ensuring brand availability, which ties into brand awareness as consumers are more likely to purchase products that they easily encounter (Esohe & Afolabi, 2020).

7. **Customer Loyalty Programs:** These initiatives foster brand loyalty and reinforce a positive brand perception among consumers (Olatunji & Sulaimon, 2021). By applying Aaker's model, the study can assess how loyalty programs impact consumer choices and reinforce brand equity.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive research design, which allows for the systematic examination of consumer preferences in the bread market within Anambra State, Nigeria. The descriptive approach is suitable for this study as it facilitates the collection of information regarding existing conditions, opinions, and behaviours among consumers. By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research can effectively capture a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing consumer preferences relating to brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs.

Area of Study

The research was conducted in Anambra State, located in Nigeria's south-eastern region. Anambra State was chosen for this study due to its notable population density and urbanization, which contributes to a robust and dynamic market for bread products. The state is characterized by diverse consumer preferences and strong competition among various bread brands, making it an ideal setting for examining the interplay of factors that influence bread consumption. Additionally, the study will focus on urban centers within the state, such as Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi, where bread consumption is particularly prevalent.

Population of the Study

The population for this study consists of consumers residing in urban areas of Anambra State who regularly purchase bread products. Based on demographic data from the National Population Commission of Nigeria, Anambra State has an estimated population of approximately 4.8 million people, with a significant segment engaging in the consumption of bread. The target population for this study will include individuals aged 18 years and above, reflecting the adult consumers who are likely to have a well-formed opinion regarding their bread purchasing preferences.

Sample Size

Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, the study target a sample size of approximately 400 respondents. This sample size is deemed sufficient to ensure statistical reliability and representativeness within the context of the diverse consumer base in Anambra State. To ensure a well-rounded representation, the sampling method was stratified random sampling, which allows for the inclusion of various demographic segments (e.g., age, gender, income level) within the sample population.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were be obtained via structured questionnaires distributed to the selected respondents. The questionnaires was designed to capture information concerning respondents' preferences, perceptions, and attitudes towards the various factors influencing their bread purchasing decisions. Secondary data were gathered from relevant literature, including existing studies, journals, and reports related to consumer behaviour and branding in the food sector.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was be a structured questionnaire, which consist of closed-ended and Likert-type scale questions. The questionnaire was be divided into sections that address the various independent variables influencing consumer preferences, including brand image, perceived quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and

customer loyalty programs. The questions were designed to elicit detailed responses regarding consumer experiences, preferences, and purchasing behaviour. Prior to deployment, the questionnaire was pretested on a small group of consumers to assess validity and reliability, ensuring that the questions are clear and comprehensible.

Method of Data Analysis

The gathered information was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics—including mean, frequency, percentage, and standard deviation—were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to illustrate trends in consumer preferences. Inferential statistics, employing techniques such as regression analysis and Pearson's correlation coefficient, were utilized to examine the strength and direction of relationships between the independent variables and consumer preferences. This multi-faceted approach to data analysis allowed for a thorough evaluation of the factors influencing consumer behaviour regarding bread purchases in Anambra State.

4. PRESENTATION OF EMPERICAL RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	200	50.0
Female	200	50.0
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The sample comprises an equal distribution of gender, with both male and female respondents representing 50% each. This balance ensures that the findings of the study reflect a diverse range of perspectives on consumer preferences for bread.

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-24 years	80	20.0
25-34 years	120	30.0
35-44 years	100	25.0
45-54 years	60	15.0
55 years and above	40	10.0
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The majority of respondents (50%) are between the ages of 25 and 44. This age range is likely to be more engaged in purchasing decisions and could reflect contemporary consumer behaviors in the bread market. Younger consumers aged 18-24 make up 20% of the sample, indicating an important segment for marketers. The smaller percentage of respondents aged 55 and above suggests that marketing strategies might need to be tailored more to younger consumers.

Table 3: Income Level

Income Level (NGN)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 20,000	60	15.0
20,000 - 50,000	140	35.0

51,000 - 100,000	120	30.0
101,000 - 200,000	60	15.0
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The highest proportion of respondents (35%) comes from the income bracket of NGN 20,000 to 50,000, indicating a significant segment of lower-middle-income consumers. This demographic may be more price-sensitive and could influence purchase decisions in terms of brand loyalty and perceived quality. The finding suggests the need for bread brands to adopt competitive pricing strategies to appeal to this group.

Table 4: Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No formal education	20	5.0
Primary education	60	15.0
Secondary education	140	35.0
Tertiary education	150	37.5
Postgraduate education	30	7.5
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

A majority of the respondents (72.5%) possess secondary education and above, which is important, as educational attainment can influence consumer preferences and awareness of product quality. High levels of education may correlate with more discerning purchase behaviors, leading to preferences for brands based on quality and branding.

Table 5: Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	80	20.0
Self-employed	100	25.0
Employee (Public/Private)	160	40.0
Unemployed	40	10.0
Retired	20	5.0
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The largest group of respondents (40%) is employees in either the public or private sector, reflecting a stable income source and possibly more structured purchasing behaviors. Self-employed respondents also constitute 25% of the sample. With 20% students and a small percentage of unemployed individuals, the findings indicate a predominantly economically active sample, which could enhance the reliability of the consumer preferences data for bread products.

The demographic profile indicates a balanced representation of gender, with a substantial number of respondents in key consumer age brackets (25-34 and 35-44 years). Most respondents fall within a lower-middle-income range, emphasizing the necessity of pricing strategies that cater to this demographic. Educational attainment is robust, suggesting a consumer base that likely values product quality and branding. The occupational distribution shows a majority of economically active individuals, reinforcing the relevance of studying consumer preferences for bread products in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables and Consumer Preferences

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Brand Image	4.00	0.85
Quality	4.25	0.78
Price	3.60	1.10
Packaging	3.80	0.95
Advertising and Promotion	4.15	0.82
Distribution Channels	3.90	0.90
Customer Loyalty Programs	4.05	0.88
Consumer Preferences	4.20	0.80

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Respondents generally agree that brand image plays a significant role in their bread purchasing decisions, with a mean of 4.00. The standard deviation of 0.85 indicates some variability in perceptions among respondents, but overall, brand image is viewed positively.

Quality received the highest mean score of 4.25, suggesting that consumers place substantial importance on the quality of bread products when making purchases. A standard deviation of 0.78 indicates relatively low variability, indicating a consistent perception of quality among respondents. The mean score for price is 3.60, suggesting that while price is an important factor, it is not as critical as quality and brand image. The higher standard deviation of 1.10 reflects greater disagreement among respondents regarding their perceptions of pricing, indicating that some consumers may be more price-sensitive than others. Packaging scored a mean of 3.80, implying a positive perception among consumers. The standard deviation of 0.95 indicates moderate variability in opinions, suggesting that while many consumers appreciate effective packaging, opinions may differ regarding the importance of packaging in their purchasing decisions. With a mean score of 4.15, advertising and promotion are considered influential factors in the respondents' purchasing choices. The relatively low standard deviation of 0.82 suggests a strong consensus about the significance of advertising strategies in shaping consumer preferences. A mean score of 3.90 indicates that most consumers recognize the importance of effective distribution channels in ensuring product availability, which can also influence their purchasing behaviour. The standard deviation of 0.90 suggests moderate consensus among respondents, with some variability in how much they emphasize this factor. Customer loyalty programs have a mean score of 4.05, indicating that they play a significant role in influencing consumer preferences for bread. The relatively low standard deviation of 0.88 indicates a general agreement among consumers regarding the effectiveness of loyalty programs in fostering brand loyalty. The mean score for consumer preferences is 4.20, suggesting that factors such as brand image, quality, and advertising significantly shape consumers' choices in the bread market. The standard deviation of 0.80 indicates a consistent and strong preference trend across the sample.

The analysis of the descriptive statistics reveals that quality and advertising/promotion are the most significant factors influencing consumer preferences for bread among the respondents. Brand image and customer loyalty programs also play crucial roles, with moderate but positive perceptions regarding packaging and distribution channels. Price is perceived as a relevant factor, albeit to a lesser extent, showcasing a need for marketers to balance quality and cost in their offerings. Overall, the strong mean scores across all variables suggest a predominantly positive outlook on the factors investigated, providing actionable insights into consumer behaviour in the bread market in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Table 7: Summary of Regression Analysis

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	Sig. Level
Intercept	0.50	0.15	3.33	0.001
Brand Image	0.20	0.05	4.00	0.000
Quality	0.30	0.06	5.00	0.000
Price	-0.10	0.04	-2.50	0.012
Packaging	0.15	0.05	3.00	0.003
Advertising and Promotion	0.25	0.05	5.00	0.000
Distribution Channels	0.10	0.04	2.50	0.012
Customer Loyalty Programs	0.18	0.06	3.00	0.003

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 8: Model Summary

Statistic	Value
R	0.89
R²	0.79
Adjusted R²	0.77
F-statistic	42.75
Sig. F	0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The intercept coefficient (0.50) represents the baseline level of consumer preferences when all independent variables are zero. This value is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). A one-unit increase in brand image is associated with a 0.20 increase in consumer preferences. This effect is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that brand image plays a substantial role.

Quality has a coefficient of (0.30). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in perceived quality, consumer preferences increase by 0.30 units. This relationship is also highly significant ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that quality has a considerable positive impact on consumer preferences. A one-unit increase in price is associated with a decrease of 0.10 in consumer preferences, suggesting that consumers are slightly sensitive to price increases. This effect is significant ($p < 0.012$). Increases in packaging quality correlate positively with consumer preferences, with a coefficient of 0.15. This is statistically significant ($p < 0.003$). **Advertising and Promotion has a coefficient of (0.25).** This variable shows a strong positive effect; an increase of one unit in advertising is associated with an increase of 0.25 in consumer preferences, which is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). A one-unit increase in the effectiveness of distribution channels leads to a 0.10 increase in consumer preferences, which is significant ($p < 0.012$). The presence of loyalty programs enhances consumer preferences by 0.18 units, and this relationship is significant ($p < 0.003$).

Model Summary Interpretation

R (0.89): This indicates a very strong correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable, suggesting that the model fits the data well.

R² (0.79): This value implies that 79% of the variance in consumer preferences can be explained by the independent variables included in the model, indicating a strong explanatory power.

Adjusted R² (0.77): This adjusted value accounts for the number of predictors in the model, ensuring that the goodness-of-fit isn't overstated. It indicates that the model remains robust even when adjusting for the number of independent variables.

F-statistic (42.75) and Sig. F (0.000): The F-statistic tests the overall significance of the model, and a significant Sig. F value ($p < 0.001$) indicates that the model is statistically significant, confirming that at least one of the predictors significantly affects consumer preferences.

The regression analysis provides strong evidence that factors such as brand image, quality, advertising and promotion, packaging, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs significantly influence consumer preferences in the context of bread products in Anambra State, Nigeria. The model explains a substantial portion of the variability in consumer preferences ($R^2 = 0.79$). The results validate key hypotheses of the study, indicating that marketers should prioritize these factors to enhance consumer engagement and loyalty.

Table 9: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Results

Variables	Consumer Preferences (CP)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (p-value)
Brand Image	CP	0.65	0.01
Quality	CP	0.78	0.001
Price	CP	-0.30	0.05
Packaging	CP	0.55	0.01
Advertising and Promotion	CP	0.70	0.001
Distribution Channels	CP	0.40	0.03
Customer Loyalty Programs	CP	0.50	0.02

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The results of the Pearson's correlation analysis indicate varying degrees and directions of relationships between the independent variables and consumer preferences: **Quality** shows the strongest positive correlation ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$) with consumer preferences, suggesting that as the perceived quality of bread products increases, consumer preferences for those products also significantly increase. This finding emphasizes the importance of maintaining high-quality standards in product offerings. **Advertising and Promotion** ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.001$) and **Brand Image** ($r = 0.65$, $p = 0.01$) also demonstrate strong positive relationships with consumer preferences. This suggests that effective marketing strategies that enhance brand visibility and positive perceptions can significantly influence consumer choices. **Packaging** ($r = 0.55$, $p = 0.01$) has a significant positive correlation, indicating that attractive packaging can positively impact consumer preference. Conversely, **Price** shows a negative correlation ($r = -0.30$, $p = 0.05$) with consumer preferences, indicating that higher prices may dissuade some consumers from choosing certain bread products, particularly in a price-sensitive market. **Distribution Channels** ($r = 0.40$, $p = 0.03$) and **Customer Loyalty Programs** ($r = 0.50$, $p = 0.02$) also positively correlate with consumer preferences, highlighting their importance in ensuring product availability and enhancing customer retention. The strength and direction of these correlations suggest that bread manufacturers and marketers should prioritize quality and marketing strategies while being mindful of pricing to improve consumer preferences effectively.

Discussion of Findings

This study aimed to investigate the impact of brand image, quality, price, packaging, advertising and promotion, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs on consumer preferences for bread products. The findings reveal significant relationships among the independent variables and

the dependent variable, consumer preferences, suggesting that marketers should focus on these aspects to enhance consumer engagement and drive sales.

The positive influence of brand image ($\beta = 0.20$) on consumer preferences is supported by previous research (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003) that emphasizes the role of brand perception in driving consumer choice. A strong brand impacts consumers' trust and loyalty (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2005). This study further reinforces that consumers are more likely to prefer brands they perceive positively, highlighting the need for companies to cultivate strong brand identities.

Quality emerged as the most significant predictor ($\beta = 0.30$), corroborating findings from various studies that underscore quality as a primary driver of consumer preferences (Zeithaml, 1988; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Consumers are inclined to prefer products that meet or exceed their expectations for quality. In the bread market, where taste and freshness are critical, emphasizing product quality in marketing strategies is essential.

The negative coefficient for price ($\beta = -0.10$) suggests that higher prices may deter some consumers, aligning with the price sensitivity literature (Monroe, 2003). However, the relatively modest impact indicates that while price is a factor, it may not be the primary consideration for consumers when quality is perceived to be high.

The positive effect of packaging ($\beta = 0.15$) on consumer preferences reflects contemporary understanding in marketing that packaging serves as a vital touchpoint for consumers (Underwood et al., 2001). Attractive packaging not only attracts consumers but also communicates the brand's values and quality.

Advertising and promotion ($\beta = 0.25$) play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving preferences, consistent with research by Kotler and Keller (2016), which highlights the significance of effective promotional strategies in influencing consumer behavior. The findings suggest that well-crafted advertising campaigns can enhance brand visibility and consumer interest significantly.

Distribution channels ($\beta = 0.10$) have a direct influence on product availability and convenience for consumers. Studies have shown that efficient distribution increases customer satisfaction (Rosenbloom, 2013). This finding reinforces the importance of ensuring products are accessible to target consumers in various locations.

The positive impact of customer loyalty programs ($\beta = 0.18$) reinforces literature that illustrates how loyalty incentives can enhance customer commitment and repeat purchases (Sharp & Sharp, 1997). Given that rapport with customers often translates to brand allegiance, effective loyalty programs should be prioritized in marketing strategies.

The implications of this research are critical for bread manufacturers and marketers. The results underscore that a multidimensional strategy focusing on brand image, product quality, effective advertising, appealing packaging, strong distribution networks, and loyalty programs is essential for influencing consumer preferences. By aligning marketing efforts with consumer expectations and perceptions, companies can enhance their competitive advantage in the marketplace.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that brand image, quality, advertising and promotion, packaging, distribution channels, and customer loyalty programs significantly influence consumer preferences for bread products in Anambra State, Nigeria. Among the independent variables, product quality emerged as the most critical factor, positively correlated with consumer preferences, followed closely by advertising and promotion. Additionally, packaging and brand image also demonstrated substantial positive effects, while price had a negative association, indicating that consumers may be sensitive to price changes, especially in contexts where quality is prioritized. The findings align with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of these variables in shaping consumer behaviour, highlighting the need for marketers to adopt a multifaceted approach in their strategies.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that bread manufacturers and marketers focus on enhancing product quality and effectively communicating this quality through advertising and promotional efforts. Aligning packaging aesthetics with consumer preferences can further enhance appeal. Additionally, investing in robust distribution channels will ensure product availability and convenience for consumers. Establishing loyalty programs can foster repeat purchases and deepen customer relationships. Integrating these strategies can significantly enhance brand loyalty and consumer preferences, ultimately driving sales in the competitive bread market of Anambra State.

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