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FACTORS THAT SHAPE CONSUMERS' EVALUATION OF BRAND POSITIONING OF COCOA-COLA AND PEPSI IN EDO STATE

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ABSTRACT

These researchers examined the factors that shape consumers' evaluation of brand positioning of Cocoa-cola and Pepsi in Edo State. The objectives of the study were to identify the factors that shape consumer evaluations of their positioning strategies, find out the specific strategies employed by each brand. The study is grounded on the consumer culture theory. The researcher employed a descriptive research design and structured questionnaire, as research instrument, was used to collect data from consumers in the target regions. The population of the study comprised the residents of four towns in Edo and Delta States, Nigeria: Warri, Asaba, Benin City, and Ekpoma. As such, the population of the study was 3,733,122 while sample size was 400. Findings revealed that a significant portion of consumers engage regularly with both brands, with Coca-Cola perceived as a staple in Edo State, while Pepsi appeals to younger consumers in Delta State. The researcher also found a significant difference in the brand positioning strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in Edo and Delta states. Additionally, Coca-Cola's product innovations were found to enhance its brand identity more effectively than those of Pepsi, which was perceived as having a less distinct brand image. The researchers concluded that Coca-Cola had successfully established strong emotional connections and brand loyalty with its customers, while Pepsi needs to enhance its emotional branding strategies to strengthen its connection with consumers. It was recommended among others that, Coca-Cola should enhance targeted emotional campaigns reflecting local cultures while Pepsi should focus on relatable marketing to strengthen consumer connections.

Keywords: Brand Positioning, Cocoa-Cola, Pepsi, Consumer Equity Theory, Brand Loyalty

Introduction

A brand is a unique name, term, design, symbol, or feature that identifies a product, service, or organisation and sets it apart from others in the market. Essentially, a brand is a promise of quality, performance and value that a company makes to its customers (Olutola, 2020). This promise encompasses various elements, including visual identity, tone and voice, values and mission, products or services and customer experience (Kamsiliochukwu, 2024). Conversely, consumers are individuals or groups of people who purchase and use products or services to satisfy their needs, wants and desires. They are the end-users of goods and services and their purchasing decisions drive demand in the market.

Coca-Cola and Pepsi employ distinct brand positioning strategies. Coca-Cola focuses on creating a positive emotional connection with its customers (Oke, Oyewole & Ademola, 2022). It emphasises happiness and togetherness, as reflected in its "Open Happiness" slogan. In contrast, Pepsi positions itself as a youthful, fun, and modern brand, appealing to a wide range of consumers through its connection to

popular culture, music, and sports, encapsulated in its "Live for Now" caption. These positioning strategies are crucial in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences, particularly in competitive markets like Nigeria (Eze & Onyemelukwe, 2023)

Brand positioning strategies involve the deliberate actions taken by companies to shape consumer perceptions and create a unique position for their brand in the market (Adegoke & Adeyemi, 2021). Through positioning, companies strive to establish a distinct identity and communicate the unique value proposition of their brand to target consumers. Effective positioning enables companies to differentiate themselves from competitors, attract specific consumer segments and build brand loyalty.

Consumer evaluations are integral to the effectiveness of brand positioning strategies, significantly influencing how a brand is perceived in the marketplace. When consumers interact with a brand, they do not approach it with a blank slate; instead, they carry with them established perceptions and associations formed through past experiences, advertising, and word-of-mouth (Oke, Oyewole and Ademola, 2022). This pre-existing framework of understanding plays a crucial role in shaping their evaluations of the brand's image and messaging.

When the positioning of a brand aligns closely with consumer expectations and reinforces positive associations, it fosters favorable evaluations (Asemah, 2019a, 2019b). This positive alignment is essential, as it not only enhances the brand's reputation but also encourages consumer loyalty. Conversely, when a brand's positioning diverges from what consumers anticipate, or when it fails to effectively communicate its intended message, it can lead to confusion and skepticism. Such negative evaluations can be detrimental, resulting in a loss of consumer trust and, ultimately, brand loyalty (Anderson & Martinez, 2020).

The gap that motivated this study lies in the limited scholarly attention given to how Coca-Cola and Pepsi's distinct brand positioning strategies are perceived and evaluated by consumers within the Nigerian market context. Given the critical nature of brand positioning and consumer evaluations, it becomes essential to explore these factors within specific market contexts. This understanding serves as the foundation for this researcher's focus on a comparative analysis of the brand positioning strategies employed by Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing significance of markets in Nigeria and their distinct characteristics, there exists a substantial research gap in understanding how consumers in Edo and Delta States perceive and evaluate brand positioning strategies employed by leading beverage brands, specifically Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

This scarcity of comprehensive research limits the development of effective marketing strategies that resonate with and influence consumer perceptions in these influential markets. Existing studies such as Olajide (2025) have predominantly focused on developed markets or broader national contexts, neglecting the unique dynamics of Edo and Delta States.

The lack of research on consumer evaluations within Nigeria's South-South region, specifically Edo and Delta States, is a significant problem because it restricts the understanding of consumer preferences and behaviours in the region, hinders the development of tailored marketing strategies for consumers, and limits the ability of beverage brands to effectively position themselves in the competitive market. Therefore, this study was motivated by the need to determine the brand positioning strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in Edo and Delta states.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Comparatively identify the factors that shape consumer evaluations of brand positioning strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in Edo and Delta states
2. Find out the differences that exists between Coca-Cola and Pepsi's brand positioning strategies in Edo and Delta states

Conceptual and Literature Review

Branding

Aaker (2017) posits that a brand embodies a distinct personality, representing the core values and characteristics of a company, which is communicated through various touchpoints. This perspective introduces the notion of brand personality, suggesting that brands can indeed be personified, allowing consumers to relate to them on a deeper, more personal level. Such a connection is crucial, as it can greatly influence consumer loyalty and engagement.

The various touchpoints—ranging from customer service interactions to advertising campaigns—serve as essential opportunities for brands to express this personality and reinforce consumer connections. Through consistently delivering messages and experiences that reflect their brand personality, companies can cultivate a strong emotional bond with their audience, ultimately fostering a sense of trust and loyalty that can lead to repeat business and long-term relationships (Asemah & Okpanachi, 2014).

Moreover, Keller (2013) defines a strong brand as one that enhances perceived value, allowing companies to charge higher prices while also fostering deeper emotional connections with consumers. This definition underscores the dual nature of branding, highlighting both its financial and emotional benefits. In particular, this concept is especially relevant within luxury markets, where the emotional ties that consumers form with brands play a critical role in influencing their purchasing behaviours.

By enhancing perceived value, brands can justify premium pricing strategies, as consumers are often willing to pay more for products that they believe offer additional significance or status. Consequently, a strong brand does not merely command higher prices; it cultivates a loyal consumer base that perceives added value in their purchases, thus reinforcing the notion that effective branding can yield substantial financial rewards (Asemah et al., 2017).

Brand Positioning Strategies

Brand positioning strategies have evolved over time, reflecting the changing dynamics of the market and the increasing sophistication of both companies and consumers. It is about establishing a distinct and favourable perception of a brand in the minds of the target audience. However, the approaches to achieving this goal have become more nuanced and multifaceted.

One key distinction lies in the focus - whether the brand positioning strategy is more company-centric or consumer-centric. The traditional approach, as highlighted by Harris (2019), emphasises the deliberate efforts made by companies to differentiate their brand and communicate a unique value proposition. This company-driven strategy relies heavily on crafting the right messaging, identifying key brand attributes and leveraging marketing tactics to influence consumer perceptions. The underlying goal is to create a distinct brand identity that stands apart from the competition.

In contrast, the more consumer-centric approach, as advocated by Adams and Martinez (2020), places a greater emphasis on understanding the target audience. This approach recognises that successful brand positioning cannot be achieved without a deep dive into the needs, desires and preferences of consumers.

Through conducting rigorous market research and incorporating consumer insights, companies can develop brand positioning strategies that truly resonate with their target market. This consumer-driven approach helps build stronger emotional connections and cultivate brand loyalty, as the brand becomes closely aligned with the target audience's requirements. Another important evolution in brand positioning strategies is the incorporation of brand positionings, as highlighted by Gonzalez (2021). This strategy leverages the existing brand equity and reputation to introduce new products or services in related or complementary categories.

Factors that Influence Consumer Evaluations of Brand Positioning

Consumer evaluations of brand positioning are heavily influenced by the perceived fit between the brand and its market identity. Perceived fit refers to the extent to which consumers believe that the brand aligns with their expectations, values, and the overall market context (Gonzalez, 2021). When consumers perceive a strong fit, it enhances their evaluations and increases the likelihood of positive responses. They view the brand's positioning as a logical and coherent representation, leading to a sense of trust and acceptance.

The reputation of the brand significantly impacts consumer evaluations of its positioning (Adams & Martinez, 2020). A positive brand reputation, built on attributes such as quality, reliability, and customer satisfaction, can lead to favourable evaluations of its positioning. Consumers tend to associate the positive traits of a reputable brand with its market positioning, resulting in enhanced perceptions. Conversely, a negative brand reputation can induce scepticism and unfavourable evaluations, as consumers may question the credibility or relevance of the brand's positioning.

Moreover, consumer perceptions of risk associated with a brand's positioning can influence evaluations (Gonzalez, 2021). Perceived risk encompasses various factors, including financial risk, performance risk, and social risk. High levels of perceived risk can lead to cautious evaluations and lower acceptance of the brand's positioning. For instance, if consumers perceive that the brand's positioning is inconsistent with their social identity or carries a financial burden, they may evaluate it negatively due to these concerns.

Consumer familiarity with the brand also plays a crucial role in evaluating its positioning (Young, 2023; Asemah-Ibrahim, Nwaoboli & Asemah, 2022a, 2022b). When consumers have a high level of familiarity and positive experiences with a brand, it can positively influence their evaluations. Familiarity fosters trust and reduces uncertainty, enabling consumers to draw upon their existing perceptions and experiences when assessing the brand's positioning, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive evaluations.

Consumer Preferences in Shaping Brand Positioning Strategies

Consumer preferences play a crucial role in shaping evaluations of brand positioning strategies. The unique preferences of consumers within specific geographical locations can significantly impact their perceptions and attitudes towards brands. It is important to note that consumer preferences are not static; they can evolve over time due to socioeconomic factors, technological advancements, and globalisation.

Therefore, brand managers must continuously monitor and adapt to changes in consumer preferences to ensure the long-term success of their positioning strategies (Olajide, 2025). In staying attuned

to evolving needs and desires, companies can proactively adjust their branding efforts to maintain relevance and consumer satisfaction. This ongoing adaptation ensures that brand positioning remains aligned with consumer expectations, ultimately contributing to positive evaluations and sustained market success.

For example, consider a global fashion brand planning to enter various markets. Research may reveal that consumers in one market value sustainable practices. To align with these preferences, the brand could position itself as environmentally conscious, promoting ethical production. In another market, consumer research might indicate a preference for exclusivity and luxury. Here, the brand could position itself as a high-end label, featuring limited editions. Through adapting positioning to meet consumer preferences, brands can enhance evaluations and increase the likelihood of successful market entry (Ezejiaku, 2024).

Lifestyle and demographic factors also significantly influence consumer preferences and their evaluations of brand positioning. Age, income level, occupation, and social status can shape preferences, as noted by Sen and Bhattacharya (2001). Brand managers should analyse these factors to tailor their positioning strategies accordingly. For instance, a strategy targeting younger consumers may incorporate trendy designs, while one aimed at older consumers may focus on convenience and reliability. Considering these demographic factors can enhance evaluations by aligning positioning with specific market preferences.

Market competition is another critical factor influencing consumer preferences and evaluations of brand positioning. Examining the competitive landscape allows brand managers to identify unmet consumer needs. In understanding competitors' offerings and positioning strategies, companies can differentiate their approach by providing unique value propositions that fill market gaps. This differentiation captures the attention and positive evaluations of consumers seeking alternatives.

Emotional and psychological factors also play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences and evaluations of brand positioning. Emotional connections, aspirations, and self-identity influence evaluations (Asemah, Kente & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2021a, 2021b). Through storytelling and brand narratives, brand managers can create emotional appeal and align brand positioning with consumers' desires for self-expression or emotional fulfilment. By evoking positive emotions, companies can enhance evaluations and strengthen connections between consumers and their brands.

Consumer Engagement and Brand Positioning

Consumer engagement has become an essential element in the formulation of effective brand positioning strategies in today's competitive marketplace. As brands strive to create meaningful connections with their audiences, understanding the nuances of consumer behaviour is crucial. Brown and Thompson (2020) assert that consumer attitudes towards brand positionings are significantly influenced by advertising, which shapes how consumers perceive brands and their offerings.

Effective advertising not only informs consumers about brand positionings but also creates an emotional resonance that enhances engagement. When brands utilise targeted advertising strategies that align with consumer values and emotions, they can foster a sense of loyalty and connection. This emotional engagement facilitates a deeper understanding of the brand, allowing consumers to feel more invested in its narrative and offerings, thereby reinforcing the overall brand positioning.

The multifaceted relationship between consumer engagement and brand positioning is further emphasised by Davis et al. (2020). They contend that strategic considerations for brand positionings must include a thorough understanding of consumer engagement mechanisms. This entails recognising that brand positionings should not merely be about expanding product lines but should also reflect the core values and identity of the brand.

By engaging consumers through feedback loops, interactive marketing, and community-based initiatives, brands can better understand their audience's expectations and preferences. Such engagement strategies are vital for positioning a brand effectively within the marketplace. For instance, when brands incorporate consumer feedback into their product development processes, they not only enhance consumer satisfaction but also strengthen their positioning as responsive and consumer-centric entities. This alignment between consumer engagement and brand positioning can lead to more successful product launches and sustained market presence.

Organisational innovation is another critical aspect influencing consumer engagement and brand positioning. Okafor and Nwankwo (2021) provide a comprehensive meta-analysis of the determinants and moderators of organisational innovation, emphasising the importance of adapting to changing consumer preferences. Brands that cultivate a culture of innovation are better equipped to respond to evolving market dynamics and consumer needs.

This adaptability allows brands to introduce new products or services that resonate with their target audience, thereby enhancing consumer engagement. For example, brands that invest in research and development to create innovative solutions can capture the interest of consumers looking for cutting-edge offerings. This proactive approach not only positions the brand as a leader in its industry but also fosters a sense of loyalty among consumers who appreciate the brand's commitment to meeting their needs.

Empirical Review

This section reviewed studies related to the current study. Okonkwo, Adebayo, Eze and Obi (2022) explored "Strategic imperatives for brand positioning: A Nigerian perspective". The research objective was to provide strategic imperatives for effective brand positioning within the Nigerian market. The theoretical framework used in this study drew upon various theories and models, including the positioning-differentiation model, the brand resonance pyramid, and resource-based view theory.

This study adopted a literature review approach, synthesising existing research and scholarly articles on brand positioning and strategic considerations relevant to the Nigerian context. Okonkwo et al. (2022) concluded that strategic imperatives for brand positioning in Nigeria include conducting thorough market research, developing culturally relevant brand messaging, leveraging digital marketing channels, and building strong community relationships. The researchers, therefore, recommended that marketers align brand positioning with local market characteristics while upholding global brand values.

In a related study, Taylor (2022) examined the concept of “The Role of Brand Positioning in Consumer Loyalty.” The primary objective of this research was to explore how brand positioning strategies contribute to fostering consumer loyalty. The theoretical framework utilized was the Loyalty-Positioning Model, which posits that a well-defined brand position can enhance consumer attachment and loyalty.

Employing a qualitative research design, the study involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with marketing experts and consumers. The findings indicated that consistent and relevant brand positioning significantly contributes to building consumer loyalty. Brands that effectively communicate their core values and resonate with consumer aspirations are more likely to foster long-term relationships with their customers. The study emphasized the necessity for brands to engage in meticulous positioning strategies that consider consumer perceptions and market trends.

Theoretical Framework

Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a multidisciplinary field of study that explores the relationship between consumers and the broader cultural and social contexts in which they live. The origins of CCT can be traced back to the 1980s and 1990s when scholars such as Arnould and Thompson (2005), McCracken (1986) and Belk (1988) began to challenge traditional approaches to consumer behaviour by emphasising the cultural, symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption (Yaroson&Asemah, 2008).

CCT is characterised by several core tenets. The first tenet is the notion that consumption is not solely driven by functional or utilitarian motives but is deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts. Belk (1988) argued that individuals use consumption as a means of expressing their identities, constructing meanings and navigating social relationships. CCT emphasises the symbolic and cultural dimensions of consumer behaviour, acknowledging that products and brands carry cultural meanings that influence consumer choices and experiences.

The second tenet of CCT is the focus on consumers as active participants rather than passive recipients of marketing messages. Scholars such as Arnould and Thompson (2005) highlighted the importance of understanding consumers' lived experiences and the meanings they ascribe to products and consumption practices. CCT emphasises the role of consumers as co-creators of culture, actively engaging with brands, products and marketing narratives to construct their own consumer identities and narratives (Asemah, 2012' Asemahet al., 2017).

Critics of Consumer Culture Theory have raised several concerns. One criticism is that CCT tends to overlook structural and economic factors that shape consumer behaviour. Some scholars argue that the theory places too much emphasis on cultural meanings and individual agency while neglecting the influence of social class, power dynamics and economic constraints on consumption practices (Asemah & Nwammuo, 2017). Additionally, critics question the generalizability of CCT findings, as the theory often relies on qualitative and interpretive methods that may limit the scope of empirical research.

In the context of this study, the consumer culture theory helps explain how cultural values, beliefs and norms influence consumer attitudes towards brand positioning strategies, ultimately shedding light on the effectiveness of these strategies in the Nigerian market.

Methodology

The current study utilized a mixed method approach comprising survey and interview. The mixed method approach was justified because it combined the breadth of quantitative surveys with the depth of qualitative interviews, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions and brand positioning.As noted by Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo and Okpanachi (2017), a survey is a research design that involves collecting data through a questionnaire, typically administered to a large sample size.

On the other hand, interviews are a qualitative research method that involves engaging in conversations with participants to gather in-depth, detailed insights into their thoughts, feelings and experiences. The population of the study comprised the residents of four towns in Edo and Delta States, Nigeria: Warri, Asaba, Benin City, and Ekpoma. The four towns—Warri, Asaba, Benin City, and Ekpoma—were selected because they represent major urban centres in Edo and Delta States with diverse populations and vibrant consumer markets, making them suitable for capturing varied insights.

Based on Population Census Projection (2024), the total population is 3,733,122 people, calculated as follows: Warri has a metropolitan population of 1,043,122, Asaba has a metropolitan population of

500,000, Benin City has an estimated population of 1,900,000, and Ekpoma has a population of 290,000. Therefore, the aggregate population of these four towns formed the population of this study.

The sample size for the research was 400 and was determined using Taro Yamane's (1964) sample size determination method. A 5-stage sampling technique was adopted for this study. The researcher began with a purposive sampling approach to intentionally select Edo and Delta States. This choice is grounded in the states' significant roles within the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, where Coca-Cola and Pepsi have established considerable market presence. Through focusing on these states, the research directly addresses the regional dynamics influencing brand positioning strategies.

In the second stage, the populations of Edo and Delta States were stratified based on key urban centres and demographic segments. This stratification ensured that diverse consumer segments—rural and urban—were adequately represented in the sample. The major cities identified for stratification include:

State	**Major Cities**	**Population Estimate**
Edo	Benin City, Ekpoma	1,900,000 + 290,000 = 2,190,000
Delta	Warri, Asaba	1,043,122 + 500,000 = 1,543,122
Total		**3,733,122**

To ensure a representative sample, the total sample size of 400 respondents was distributed proportionally based on the population of each state:

State	**Population**	**Sample Size**
Edo	2,190,000	215
Delta	1,543,122	185
Total	**3,733,122**	**400**

This proportional allocation ensured that the sample accurately reflected the population distribution, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

In the fourth stage, cluster sampling was employed within each state to select major cities as clusters. For Edo State, Benin City and Ekpoma were selected, while Warri and Asaba represented Delta State. Cluster sampling was chosen to directly target key consumer hubs in Edo and Delta states, ensuring the sample was concentrated in high-density, market-active areas like Benin City, Ekpoma, Warri, and Asaba, thereby maximising relevance and representativeness.

The allocation of sample sizes within these clusters was done based on their population density and market activity:Edo State (Benin City: 60%; Ekpoma: 40%) and Delta State **(**Warri: 50%; Asaba: 50%). Calculating the sample sizes for each cluster:

State	Cluster	Sample Size
Edo	Benin City	129
Edo	Ekpoma	86
Delta	Warri	93
Delta	Asaba	92

This targeted approach ensured that the most relevant areas were adequately represented in the sample.

In the final stage, simple random sampling was applied within each cluster to select individual respondents. This method guaranteed that every individual had an equal opportunity to be included, thereby minimising biases and increasing the generalisability of the findings.

For the interview, the branch managers of Coca Cola and Pepsi in Benin City and Asaba were purposively interviewed for this study because they possessed valuable insights and knowledge about their respective brands' extension and positioning strategies in the South-South region of Nigeria. As such, two persons were interviewed from this study.

As the spokespersons for their brands, they were well-positioned to provide information on the brands' marketing strategies, consumer engagement and brand management in the region. Additionally, their expertise in public relations and communications provided valuable, for the study, relevant data were collected from respondents on a face-to-face basis.

For the survey, Statistical Package for Social Science version 21 was used to analyse the data gathered (SPSS-21). In addition, for the interview, thematic analysis which is a systematic process of coding, categorising and theme development, allowing for a rich and detailed understanding of the data would be used to analyse data from the interviewees.

Data Presentation

This section presented the findings of the study, providing a comprehensive analysis of the data collected. The chapter focused on the presentation of results, interpretation of the data, and discussion of the implications of the findings in relation to the research questions and objectives. Four hundred copies of questionnaire were distributed but 375 copies were successfully retrieved, while 25 were lost or invalid.

Table 1: Brand Preference for Overall Positioning Strategy by State

Brand	Edo	Delta	Total	Percentage (%)
Coca-Cola	115	108	223	59.5
Pepsi	78	74	152	40.5
Total	**193**	**182**	**375**	**100**

Table 1 demonstrates a clear distinction in brand preference between Coca-Cola and Pepsi in both Edo and Delta states. Coca-Cola emerges as the preferred brand in both regions, but the margin is more pronounced in Edo. This suggests that Coca-Cola's overall positioning strategy resonates more strongly with consumers in Edo, possibly due to its emotional appeal and effective branding initiatives. In Delta, while Coca-Cola still leads, the competition is closer, indicating that Pepsi may have successfully captured a portion of the market through targeted strategies.

Table 2: Positioning Strategies of Coca-Cola in Edo and Delta States

Positioning Strategy	Edo	Delta	Total	Percentage (%)
Emotion-Based	79	69	148	39.5
Lifestyle	51	49	100	26.7
Quality	31	25	56	14.9
Experiential	23	30	53	14.1
Value-Based	9	9	18	4.8
Others	0	0	0	0.0
Total	**193**	**182**	**375**	**100**

Table 2 examined the positioning strategies employed by Coca-Cola and reveals differences in consumer responses between Edo and Delta. In Edo, the emotional-based strategy is highly effective, indicating that consumers are drawn to the brand's storytelling and emotional connections.

This aligns with the brand's historical emphasis on community and shared experiences. On the other hand, Delta consumers also respond positively to emotional appeals, yet they display a stronger preference for lifestyle positioning. This may reflect cultural differences, where Delta consumers are looking for brands that complement their modern lifestyles and aspirations.

Table 3: Comparative Factors Influencing Beverage Choice (Coca-Cola and Pepsi)

ITEM	State	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
Availability influences my beverage choice	Edo	91	48	7	23	24	4.09
	Delta	86	53	8	19	16	4.13
Unique flavours influence my beverage choice	Edo	94	46	9	21	23	4.07
	Delta	89	49	8	17	19	4.14
Beverage advertisements impact my preference	Edo	77	59	10	29	18	3.95
	Delta	72	54	9	26	21	3.89
Price affects my decision to choose a specific brand of beverage	Edo	85	43	7	32	26	3.91
	Delta	80	48	8	21	25	3.98
Overall Total Perception							**4.03**

Table 3 delved into the factors influencing beverage choice, revealing both commonalities and differences between consumers in Edo and Delta. Availability emerges as a critical factor in both states, underscoring the importance of product accessibility to consumers. However, Edo consumers place a slightly higher emphasis on unique flavours, indicating a preference for diverse taste experiences.

This may suggest that Coca-Cola could leverage local flavours in its product offerings to enhance appeal. In contrast, Delta consumers show a heightened sensitivity to price, which could imply that competitive pricing strategies may be more effective in this state. Additionally, while advertisements influence preferences in both regions, they appear to resonate slightly more with Delta consumers, suggesting that branding efforts should be intensified in this region.

Responses from the Interview Questions

Various Brand Positioning Strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi

The brand positioning strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in Edo and Delta states reflect their respective marketing approaches and brand identities. The Coca-Cola branch manager described their strategies as focusing on emotional and experiential marketing. "By leveraging nostalgia and happiness, Coca-Cola aims to create a strong emotional bond with consumers," he stated.

The brand also engages in lifestyle positioning by associating its products with social gatherings and celebrations, reinforcing its presence in the community. Quality positioning is emphasised through communication about the superior taste and reliability of Coca-Cola, which is conveyed through various advertising channels. Furthermore, Coca-Cola actively participates in community events and sponsorships, enhancing brand visibility and commitment to local culture.

In contrast, the Pepsi branch manager outlined that their brand positioning strategies revolve around lifestyle and youth-oriented marketing. "Pepsi is positioned as the drink of choice for the young and vibrant, often featuring music festivals and popular influencers in our campaigns," he explained. The experiential strategy includes hosting events like Pepsi Live concerts, creating memorable experiences for consumers.

Additionally, Pepsi emphasises quality positioning by highlighting its unique taste, setting it apart from competitors. The manager also mentioned that the brand employs an innovation positioning strategy, introducing new flavors and limited-edition products to appeal to consumers' desire for variety and novelty.

Factors That Shape Consumer Evaluations of Brand Positioning Strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi

Several factors influence how consumers evaluate the brand positioning strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in Edo and Delta states. The Coca-Cola branch manager emphasised that emotional connections are paramount in shaping consumer perceptions. "Our advertising often evokes nostalgia, which resonates deeply with consumers," he noted.

Additionally, the availability of Coca-Cola products in retail outlets and at events is crucial for maintaining high consumption rates. Quality perception also plays a significant role; Coca-Cola maintains rigorous standards that reinforce consumer trust. The manager added, "Social influences, such as peer recommendations, significantly impact consumer choices, particularly among younger demographics."

Conversely, the Pepsi branch manager highlighted that lifestyle alignment is a key factor in Delta State. "Our marketing campaigns frequently feature music and entertainment, appealing to younger audiences and positioning the brand as a companion to social activities," he explained. Taste perception is another critical factor, with many consumers preferring Pepsi for its distinct flavor. The manager further noted that competitive pricing and targeted promotions enhance positive evaluations, especially during peak

consumption seasons. This multifaceted approach to brand positioning allows both companies to effectively engage their target audiences.

Discussion of Findings

This section provides an in-depth discussion of the study's findings, interpreting the results in the context of the research questions and objectives.

The brand positioning strategies of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in Edo and Delta states reveal distinct approaches that significantly influence consumer perceptions. According to the data from Table 8, Coca-Cola employs several positioning strategies, with the most prominent being emotion-based positioning, which garnered 39.2% of the responses.

Campaigns such as "Share a Coke" exemplify this strategy, highlighting how emotional connections play a critical role in consumer perceptions. As noted by the Coca-Cola branch manager, the brand's ability to evoke nostalgia and happiness contributes to its strong market presence in Edo State. This aligns with the Consumer Culture Theory, which posits that consumer identities and preferences are shaped by cultural narratives and social contexts (Hogg, 2001).

In terms of lifestyle positioning, Coca-Cola's association with cultural experiences, such as music festivals, received 27.5% recognition. This indicates that Coca-Cola effectively connects its brand with the social activities of its consumers, reinforcing its image as a companion to enjoyable moments. However, the lower recognition rates for quality (15.2%) and experiential positioning (15.5%) suggest potential areas for improvement. Consumers may not be fully aware of Coca-Cola's commitment to quality ingredients or its experiential offerings, indicating an opportunity for the brand to enhance its marketing communications in these areas.

Similarly, Pepsi's positioning strategies, as outlined in Table 9, reflect a blend of emotional and lifestyle appeals. Emotion-based positioning, exemplified by campaigns like "Live for Now," accounted for 37.6% of responses, which underscores the brand's focus on creating an emotional connection with consumers. Lifestyle positioning, including its association with celebrities and music festivals, garnered 29.6% recognition. This alignment with contemporary cultural trends is essential for appealing to younger consumers, particularly in Delta State, where Pepsi has established a strong foothold.

The recognition of quality positioning (20.5%) and the introduction of youth-oriented positioning (13.1%) further highlight Pepsi's strategic efforts to resonate with its target demographic. However, the relatively low percentages for innovation positioning (4.0%) suggest that consumers may not perceive Pepsi as a leader in introducing new concepts, which could be a disadvantage in an increasingly competitive market.

Both brands show a commitment to emotional and lifestyle positioning, but Coca-Cola appears to have a stronger emphasis on emotional connections, whereas Pepsi focuses on lifestyle alignment. This distinction is crucial, as it reflects the different strategies each brand employs to resonate with their respective consumer bases. The findings support the notion that effective brand positioning is not static but evolves with consumer demographics and cultural contexts, as highlighted by Davis et al. (2020) and Eze & Onyemelukwe (2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that Coca-Cola has successfully established a strong emotional connection with consumers, leveraging nostalgia and lifestyle alignment to foster brand loyalty.

This emotional branding, coupled with effective marketing campaigns, has enabled Coca-Cola to achieve a higher frequency of consumption and a more pronounced impact on core brand identity compared to Pepsi. Conversely, while Pepsi has made strides in appealing to younger demographics through lifestyle-oriented positioning, its brand image remains less distinct and impactful than that of Coca-Cola. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that:

1. The Coca-Cola and Pepsi marketing team should enhance their emotional branding initiatives by developing more targeted campaigns that resonate with the local cultural practices and values of the consumers in these regions.
2. Retailers and distributors of both brands are advised to ensure the consistent availability of Coca-Cola and Pepsi products across various retail outlets in Edo and Delta states.

Limitations/Implications of the Study

This study has several limitations and implications that should be considered. One limitation is the geographical scope, which was restricted to Edo and Delta states, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions in Nigeria. Additionally, the study focused primarily on Coca-Cola and Pepsi, which may not represent the entire beverage industry.

Conversely, the implications of this study suggest that brands should prioritize emotional connections and lifestyle alignment in their positioning strategies to effectively engage consumers. Moreover, ensuring product availability and maintaining high-quality perceptions are crucial for building consumer trust and loyalty. Brands should also consider the impact of social influences and peer recommendations in shaping consumer choices, particularly among younger demographics.

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