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## Brand Characterization and Consumer Loyalty to Malt Brands in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the influence of brand characterization on consumer loyalty to malt brands in Nigeria with reference to Anambra State. The study specifically ascertained the influences of brand awareness, perceived brand image, perceived brand quality and brand association on consumer loyalty to malt brands in Anambra State of Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study was infinite; therefore, Topman formula for infinite population was used to derive a sample of 384 selected by convenience strategy. Primary data sourced with the questionnaire were used for the study. A Cronbach alpha coefficients was used to determine the reliability of the instrument which was 0.737. The formulated hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling at 5% level of significance. The study found that brand awareness, perceived brand image, perceived brand quality and brand association had significant positive influence on consumer loyalty. The study concludes that brand characterization has a significant and positive influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands in Anambra State of Nigeria. The study recommended among others that manufacturers and marketers of malt brands should continue to use path-breaking branding strategies in order to maintain brand awareness efforts, better perceived brand image, improved brand quality and good brand association for enhanced consumer loyalty frequency.*

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**Keywords:** Brand Characterization, Awareness, Image, Quality, Association, Consumer Loyalty.

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### **1. Introduction**

Consumer dynamism may be linked to the variations in thinking, feelings, and actions of individuals, target consumer groups as well as the larger society (Peter & Olson, 2008). Human beings act and behave differently in purchase as well as consumption processes. During the past two decades, it has become evident that brands are among a company's most important assets (Anetoh, 2017). Undoubtedly, the success of most powerful organizations in Nigeria was largely based on their strong brand associations (Anetoh & Moguluwa, 2018).

Importantly, successful brands are known to create and articulate the sustainable differential advantages of the underlying products (Isik et al., 2015). Importantly, Nigeria beverage industry seems to be witnessing a radical revolution culminating in huge increase in the production of local brands and heightened importation of foreign beverage brands which arguably create brand preference. The major malt brands covered in this work include; Maltina, Guinness malt, Amstel malt, Grand malt and Beta malt. The rapidly increasing beverage brands appear to have engendered intense competition and facilitated consumer mobility in terms loyalty. Manufacturers appear increasingly compelled to pull more innovative combination of tricks out of the bag to attract consumers towards various brands of beverages. Beverage has been described as recession-proof which is presently witnessing stagflation which has serious potentials for modifying brand preference criteria; heighten disloyalty and as well probably alter purchase patterns (KPMG, 2020). Beverage industry in Nigeria is increasingly witnessing an unprecedented and heightened competition which appears to be increasing steadily. Indeed, the need for this research paper becomes imperative as limited evidence within the extant literature demonstrates that people are unaware about brand characterization and its influence on consumer loyalty.

Regrettably, empirical evidences on the influence of brand characterization on consumer loyalty still have varying findings. For instance, Baba (2014) found significant relationship between brand characterization and the behavior exhibited by consumers with regards to their purchase decisions. Isik et al. (2015) found that brand characterization of a product has a significant influence on consumer loyalty. Perera and Dissanayake (2013) study found that brand awareness, brand association and brand perceived quality have significant influences on consumer's loyalty to malt brands. Baseer, Danish, Mirza and Sana (2015) found a positive relationship between brand image and consumer loyalty. Achmad, Djumilah, Siti and Solimun (2014) study revealed that brand image has a significant role in influencing consumer purchasing behavior. In addition, Naufal, Muhammad and Mukhamad (2016) found that perceived quality and brand image directly influence on consumer loyalty to a particular malt brand. Anetoh and Moguluwa (2018) findings reported a positive and significant influence of brand association on consumer's loyalty. On the other hand, Subhani and Osman (2011) found no significant relationship between brand awareness and consumer loyalty to a particular malt brand. The contradicting empirical findings indicated that the influence as well as the relationship between brand characterization variables and consumer loyalty to selected malt brands is not yet resolved as further empirical justifications are needed. Undoubtedly, it is obvious that an important knowledge gap exists in the literature which this study seeks to fill. Therefore, this work examined the influence of brand characterization on consumer loyalty to selected malt brands in Anambra State of Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to ascertain the influence of brand characterization on consumer loyalty to selected malt brands in Anambra State. This main objective is decomposed into the following specific objectives which are to:

1. Determine the influence of brand awareness on consumer loyalty to malt brands.
2. Ascertain the influence of perceived brand image on consumer loyalty to malt brands.
3. Evaluate the influence of perceived brand quality on consumer loyalty to malt brands.
4. Assess the influence of brand association on consumer loyalty to malt brands.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the objectives of the study enumerated above, the following research questions are formulated to guide this study;

1. How does brand awareness influences consumer loyalty to malt brands?
2. To what extent does brand image influences consumer loyalty to malt brands?
3. How does brand perceived quality influences consumer loyalty to malt brands?
4. To what extent does brand association influences consumer loyalty to malt brands?

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of the study have implications to marketing managers, policy makers, consumer and the general public in the following ways; Marketers are expected to design effective marketing strategies using the information obtained from the study. However, the best strategy is to understand consumers need and their peculiar attitude towards a given malt brands. The findings of this study also enable the policy makers to be focus on channeling the resources towards facilitation of the production of malt beverages. The findings of this study also help consumers and the general public to understand the influence of brand characterization on consumer loyalty to malt brands in Anambra State and beyond.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **Brand Awareness**

Anetoh (2017) states that a brand from the consumer's point, has no equity unless customer is at least aware of the brand. Brand awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category. Brand awareness as defined by Malik et al. (2013), is the probability that consumers are familiar with the availability as well as accessibility of the product. The recall of brand awareness is based on a continuum where the brand recognition is in the lowest level and the highest level where the named brand is going along with unaided cancellation. Brand awareness refers to the ability of a potential customer to recognize the brand while categorizing the brand to a specific class (Aaker, 1991). It is believed that brand awareness is one of the main subjects to pay attention to in brand characterization. It is important to reach the awareness level in order to make a potential consumer to make purchase decisions. Anetoh and Moguluwa (2018) maintained that the product needs to be in the set of awareness before the consideration stage is being reached. It is believed that brands with a higher level of recognition would be more likely purchased than the ones with no recognition. Moreover, brand awareness is an initial goal for new brands. Customers are able to recall a brand with no additional effort. In brand recall level only well-known brands are present. Consequently, Aaker (1991) states that brand awareness is the top level stage where company's brand is the first characteristic that consumers recall.

### **Perceived Brand Image**

This is related to how a brand is currently perceived by consumers. It is the totality of consumer perception about a brand and how they see it which may or may not correspond with their brand characteristics (Chen, 2001). Apparently, it is the reputation of the brand in the market place which represents what the brand means in the minds of consumers. Brand image conveys a brand character in a unique way different from others since it enhances the goodwill and the value of a firm (Akabogu, 2013). Brand is defined as an image that can be remembered by the public, which makes a positive brand, relevant and easy to remember by the people (Aaker, 1991). Brand image that was created to make people think about everything from the business side, so as to be clearly defined brand image can benefit the company in the long term (Cannon, Perreault & McCarthy, 2009). Keller (2003) refers to the image of the brand as a concept that is assumed by the customers due to subjective reasons and their own personal emotions. Consumers consider some attributes of

a product before making purchasing decision. Keller (2003) stated that the brand image is the perception of a product which is a reflection of customers' memory in the product. In addition, the brand image may reflect the strongest association of a brand. Brand image is a perception in the mind of the customer as a good impression of a brand (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2004). The good impression arises if the brand has; a unique advantage, good reputation, popular, trust worthy and willing to provide the best service (Kotler et al., 2012).

### **Perceived Brand Quality**

Akram, Merunka and Akram (2011) defined perceived quality as the subjective judgment of consumer toward a product or brand superiority and distinction. It is an estimation of the customers' perceptions of the overall quality and their intentions (Zeithaml, 1988). Since the quality level is associated with a brand, their perception will be involved in their decision making process. A higher level of perceived quality increases the probability of choosing the brand instead of customers' responses, resulting in brand equity (Keller, 1993). Product quality dimensions include; performance, reliability, conformance with specifications, features, and serviceability, perfect fit and finish. Furthermore, the National Quality Research Centre (2011) defined perceived quality as the degree to which a product or service provides key customer requirements. Customers tend to make purchases according to their beliefs formed by quality performance. This means that customers choose one product over another when they have experience concerning the quality of the brand of the product. Richard (1996) defined perceived quality in terms of consumer judgment of intrinsic attributes. Aaker (1991) observes that product perceived quality may possibly be evaluated by the factors like product price. It has been established that a customer with a lack of knowledge about the brand has a different perception about the quality when the two different prices were indicated. Furthermore, Yee et al. (2011) maintained that perceived brand quality influences consumer purchase behavior.

### **Brand Association**

Brand associations embrace all brand-related thoughts, feelings, experiences, beliefs, attitudes that are linked to the brand node (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Aaker (1991) captures that it is a link between customer's memory and the brand. Keller (2003) opines that brand equity is supported by the client's association towards the brand which creates a specific and unique brand image. The uniqueness of brand associations, given the increasingly difficult market competition forced the company to be different from creating a competitive advantage that can be used as a reason for customer to choose a particular brand (De Shields, Oscar, Kara, & Kayrak, 2005). Brand associations are the informational nodes that contain the meaning of the brand in the mind of the consumer (Kotler et al., 2012). Brand associations are considered to be any thought linked to a brand in the mind of the consumer (Aaker, 2002). Associations about the brand can help to create or improve the value of the brand to the same level as loyal customers. Consumers, when faced with many brands, can forget one brand over another, but associations derived from their memories can help while they make purchasing decisions. When associations about the brand are combined in a pleasant manner to the customer, the right and strong image can be created. The brand image has an influence on customers' perception and purchasing behavior. There are plenty of similar brands offering the same in terms of utilization and convenience, however, the unique brand image created specifically for the brand is expected to differentiate a brand from others while demonstrating price distribution.

## **Consumer Loyalty**

Consumer loyalty means brand preference that a consumer will not consider another brands when he or she is buying a product (Anetoh, 2017). Consumer loyalty is the degree to which a customer exhibits repurchasing behaviour, possesses a positive disposition toward the product and considers using the product when the need arises (Gremmler and Brown, 1999). Customer loyalty represents a repurchase commitment in the future purchase. This entails that a consumer will not change his brand that he/she still buys his/her favorite brand (Akabogu, 2014). Customer loyalty is consumer attitudes on a brand preference from previous use and shopping experience of a product (Anetoh, 2017). It can be measured by repurchase rate on a particular brand. Customer loyalty can be defined in terms of attitudinal and behavioral perspectives (Aaker, 1991). Behavioural loyalty represents repurchase behavior while loyalty attitude means psychological commitment to a brand (Aaker, 1991). Measures of consumer loyalty include; repurchase intention, recommending to others, price tolerance (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Also, other measures of consumer loyalty are; commitment to repurchase a particular brand as a primary choice (Aaker, 1991); number of repeated purchases (Keller, 2003); intention to buy the brand as the first choice (Yoo & Donthu, 2001); willingness to pay higher price for a particular brands in relation to other alternatives (Aaker, 1991).

## **Related Theory**

This research paper is anchored on consumer loyalty correlate theory. This theory was propounded by Engel, Blackwell & Kollat (1978). This theory states that brand characterization potentiates consumer loyalty to a particular product or brand of product. According to this theory, brand characterization houses brand awareness, perceived brand image, brand association, perceived brand quality and brand loyalty which facilitate consumer behavioral patterns especially consumer loyalty to a particular product or product category. Akabogu (2013) has used this theory in their study. The relevance of this theory to the present study is that it houses all the variables of the study and thus made the study to anchor on it.

## **Review of Empirical Studies**

Subhani and Osman (2011) examined the relationship between brand awareness and consumer loyalty for the packaged milk industry in Pakistan. A sample of two hundred and eighty (280) respondents using packaged milk brands in Karachi was studied. Pearson Chi-square was used to test the relationship between brand awareness and consumer loyalty. The study found a positive significant relationship between brand awareness and consumer loyalty. Oghojafor et al. (2013) assessed the influence of perceived quality on consumer purchase behaviour in Nigerian food and beverages industries in Lagos metropolis. A survey research design was used. The data were sourced using the questionnaire. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the hypotheses. The study found a positive correlation between perceived quality and consumer purchase. Moslehpour and Huyyen (2014) investigated the impact of perceived brand image on consumer purchase behaviour in Taiwan. Four hundred and thirty nine students were randomly sampled and administered with questionnaire. The formulated hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis. The finding showed that perceived quality significantly influenced consumer purchase behavior.

Aron and Kenny (2016) assessed the influence of brand associations on brand loyalty and purchase intention of young south-east Asian consumers. Data were gathered in Singapore through a self-administered survey. A total of 459 usable questionnaire copies were analyzed. The formulated hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis. The findings indicated that consumer loyalty is influenced by brand associations. Baseer et al. (2015)

investigated the impact of brand image on buying behaviour among teenagers. A sample of 300 respondents was used. A regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The findings showed that buying behavior was significantly correlated with consumer loyalty. The study also found a practical relationship between perceived brand image and consumer buying behavior.

### Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

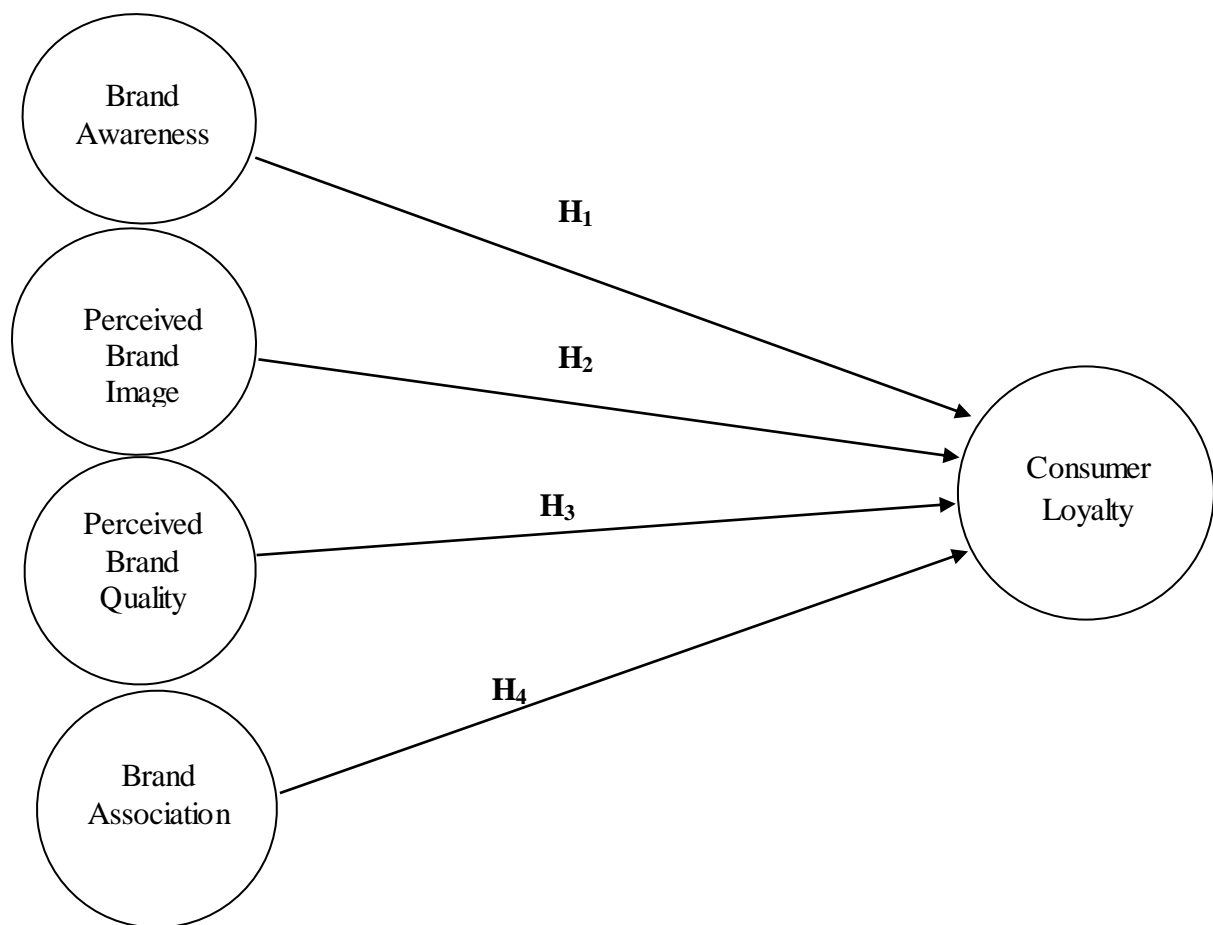
H<sub>1</sub>: Brand awareness has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands.

H<sub>2</sub>: Perceived brand image has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands.

H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived brand quality has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands.

H<sub>4</sub>: Brand association has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands.

### Proposed Research Model for the Study



**Figure 1: The Proposed Conceptual Model**

Source: Authors' Schematics, 2021.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The target population of the study comprises consumers of the selected malt brands in Anambra State of Nigeria namely; Grand malt, Amstel malta, Maltina, Malta Guinness, and Dubic malt. The sample size of 384 was statistically determined using Cochran formula for unknown population size. The study utilized a convenience sampling technique. The source of data collection was the use of primary data sourced using self-administered copies of the questionnaire. The scale used in

the current study was adapted from scholars and modified to suit the context of this study. The questionnaire items were developed from the literature and the measurement scale adapted from the previous. The questionnaire items for each construct were pilot tested and revalidated due to alterations made to the measurement instrument. The Likert's five-point interval scale style of structured questionnaire was adopted. The data collection lasted for 54 days at different times of the day as suggested by (Kok&Fon, 2014). The average reliability alpha coefficient value of 0.737 as well as average composite reliability value of 0.766 proved the internal consistency of the instrument accepted for the main survey. In addition, the face validity of the instrument was done by three research experts. However, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranging from 0.558-0.687 confirmed the convergent validity among the constructs based on threshold as proposed by Hair et al. (2017) as revealed by table 1. Three hundred and eightyfour copies of the questionnaire were distributed across the seventeen selected paints manufacturing companies under survey in the study areas. A second generation Partial Least Squares Structural Equation modeling was the statistical tool used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study which was facilitated using Smart-PLS 3 software package. In addition, the four formulated hypotheses were tested and decision made based on 0.05 (5%) level of significance. The stipulated decision rule for the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis is as follows: accept the alternative hypothesis if the p-value is less than 0.05; otherwise, reject the alternative hypothesis.

**Table 1: Factor loadings, reliability and validity**

Construct	Indicators	Factor Loading	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Brand Awareness	BAW1	0.892	0.722	0.750	0.646
	BAW2	0.804			
	BAW3	0.798			
	BAW4	0.742			
	BAW5	0.776			
Perceived Brand Image	PBI1	0.728	0.738	0.744	0.531
	PBI2	0.736			
	PBI3	0.740			
	PBI4	0.724			
	PBI5	0.714			
Perceived Brand Quality	PBQ1	0.833	0.812	0.845	0.662
	PBQ2	0.824			
	PBQ3	0.728			
	PBQ4	0.796			
	PBQ5	0.787			
Brand Association	BAS1	0.768	0.676	0.763	0.588
	BAS2	0.726			
	BAS3	0.770			
	BAS4	0.783			
	BAS5	0.784			
Consumer Loyalty	CLY1	0.828	0.738	0.727	0.617
	CLY2	0.814			
	CLY3	0.728			
	CLY4	0.766			

Source: PLS-SEM Algorithm Output, 2021.

#### 4. Results and Findings

The researchers used 372 out of 384 copies of the research instrument for analysis. The four hypotheses formulated to guide the study were tested using Partial least squares structural equation modeling at 5% level of significance. Pertinently, the path coefficient is significant at 0.20 if the t-statistic is greater than or equal to 1.96 (Wong, 2013). Also, null hypothesis is rejected if the p-value is less than or equal to 0.05 thus favouring the alternative hypothesis as suggested by (Hair et al., 2017). The R<sup>2</sup> value is 0.588. This measures the total variations in the dependent variable as a result of changes in the independent variables in the model. The model explains the positive significant variance of 58.8% for consumer loyalty. The R-square value (coefficient of determination) generated showed the moderate power of the exogenous constructs to explain the endogenous construct which is above the benchmark given that the R<sup>2</sup> values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 stand for substantial, moderate and weak respectively as proposed by (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Accordingly, the significance of the structural model was evaluated based on the values of the coefficients, statistical t-values and the p-values. Table 2 depicts the SEM results for the test of hypothesized relationships formulated to guide the study.

**Table 2: Bootstrapping result of the structural model**

Hypotheses	Hypotheses paths	Path coefficient	T-value	P-value	Decision
H1	Brand awareness ->Consumer loyalty	0.620	5.823	0.013	Supported
H2	Perceived brand image ->Consumer loyalty	0.783	10.715	0.001	Supported
H3	Perceived brand quality ->Consumer loyalty	0.829	13.124	0.000	Supported
H4	Brand association ->Consumer loyalty	0.731	9.223	0.002	Supported

Note: Path is significant at 5% level of significance; if the t-value is  $\geq 1.96$ , or p-value  $\leq 0.05$ \*

Note = CLY: consumer loyalty; BAW: brand awareness; PBI: perceived brand image; PBQ: perceived brand quality; BAS: brand association.

Source: SEM-PLS Output, 2021.

Taking into consideration that the path coefficient should be equal to or greater than 0.20 to demonstrate its significance; the t-value should be  $\geq 1.96$  while the p-value should be  $\leq 0.05$  to be significant as proposed by (Wong, 2013). An examination of the path coefficients, t-values as well as the p-values of the structural model in table 2 show that brand awareness had a positive significant influence on consumer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.620$ ,  $t = 5.823$  and  $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, perceived brand image had a positive significant influence on consumer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.783$ ,  $t = 10.715$  and  $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, perceived brand quality had a positive significant influence on consumer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.829$ ,  $t = 13.124$  and  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, brand association had a positive significant influence on consumer loyalty ( $\beta = 0.731$ ,  $t = 9.223$  and  $p < 0.05$ ). Accordingly, all the hypothetical hypotheses (H1, H2, H3 and H4) earlier postulated were supported.

#### Discussion of Findings

This research work examined the influence of brand characterization on consumer loyalty to malt brands. The data sourced were analyzed and the formulated hypotheses tested. Based on the results, the findings are discussed. The study found that brand awareness has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. This finding collaborates with the finding of Perera et al. (2013) that brand awareness is one of the influential brand characteristics that influence consumer purchase decision. It also tallies with the findings of Naufal et al. (2016)



that brand awareness influences consumer loyalty. This implies that consumers' awareness regarding malt brands influence their loyalty to the brands. The findings also revealed that perceived brand image has a significant and positive influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. This finding agrees with the findings of Baseer et al.(2015) that brand image has a significant relationship with consumer loyalty. It is also consistent with the findings of Achmad et al. (2014) that brand image has a significant role in influencing consumer purchasing behavior. In addition, the findings further showed that perceived brand quality has a significant and positive influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. This agrees with the findings of Erfan et al. (2013) that brand perceived quality influences consumer loyalty. The finding is also in accord with the findings of Naufal et al. (2016) that found that perceived brand quality positively and significantly influences consumer loyalty. This implies that the overall perceived quality of malt influences consumers' choice and loyalty to malt brand. Their findings also imply that a consumer chooses a particular malt brand over another based on the perceived quality of that brand. Furthermore, brand association had a positive and significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Aron et al. (2016) that consumer loyalty is influenced by brand associations. The finding also concurred with the findings of Anetoh and Moguluwa (2018) that brand association has a positive and significant influence on consumer loyalty. This implies that when consumers are faced with many malt brands, the associations derived from their memories about malt drinks influence their loyalty to a particular malt brand.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has provided a comprehensive knowledge that brand characterization has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands in Anambra State of Nigeria. Conclusively, brand awareness has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. Therefore, malt manufacturers should plan to allocate more budget on brand awareness for enhanced brand loyalty. Marketers should also continue to use more promotional mix in order to increase the brand awareness level. This research has demonstrated that brand perceived image has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. Hence, malt manufacturers and marketers should continue to use more effective promotional tools in order to create strong brand image on their consumers. This paper has verified that perceived brand quality has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. So the malt manufacturers and marketers can adapt this knowledge in their marketing plan and activities to satisfy customers and provide the offerings based on the factual consumers' needs. Firms can increase sales by offering the right brand characteristics in order to stimulate consumer loyalty. Malt manufacturers and marketers should continue to improve on the quality of products in order to create loyal customers towards their brands. They should provide a proper level of ingredient quality and functional quality in order to sustain consumer loyalty. This study also concludes that brand association has a significant influence on consumer loyalty to malt brands. Malt manufacturers and marketers can identify that brand association has a positive influence on consumer loyalty to malt drinks. Therefore, malt manufacturers and managers should also invest more in connecting their products' features and characteristics to their respective customers.

### **Acknowledgement**

We thank our respondents for filling out the questionnaire. Also field assistants are appreciated.

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