



Brand positioning strategies and sales performance of food and beverages manufacturing smes in Rivers state, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined the relationship between brand positioning strategies and sales performance of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria. The study employed the quantitative research approach and the correlation survey research design. A structured questionnaire which was designed on a four point rating scale was used to elicit data from a sample of 113 food and beverage manufacturers in Rivers State. The data collected were analyzed statistically using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the SPSS 21.0 version. The results revealed that quality positioning strategy has a positive and significant relationship with sales performance (sales growth and sales turnover) of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. The study also found a positive and significant relationship between benefit positioning strategy and sales performance (sales growth and sales turnover) of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. A positive and significant relationship was equally found between price positioning strategy and sales performance (sales growth and sales turnover) of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. From the findings, it was concluded that brand positioning strategies significantly enhance sales performance of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. Based on the findings and conclusion, it was recommended that food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria especially those in Rivers State should adopt brand positioning strategies (quality, benefits and price positioning strategies) as it would enhance their sales performance.

Keywords: Brand positioning strategies, quality positioning, benefit positioning, price positioning, sales performance, sales growth and sales turnover

Introduction

The food and beverage industry is one of the most attractive industries in Nigeria. The industry is so attractive to small business investors because it requires small capital to start a food or beverage business. Due to the small capital requirement, more and more individuals who could not find a white collar job have decided to establish their own food and beverage company on a small or medium scale to earn a living. As more and more individuals entered the industry, the level of competition intensifies. As competition intensifies, it becomes more challenging for food and beverage manufacturers to improve their sales performance. Many small and medium scale food manufacturers are now intensifying their efforts to improve their sales performance since it is the only way to survive in the midst of this intense competition. However, in order for small food manufacturers to improve their sales performance and survive in the midst of intense competition, they need to position their brands in the minds of the consumers.

Brand positioning involves establishing key brand associations in the minds of consumers and other important constituents to differentiate the brand and establish competitive superiority (Keller *et al*, in Shivashankar & Uma, 2017) [25]. The goal of brand positioning is to keep the brand on a top position in the minds of customers when they are considering a purchase (On The Mark, 2005) [20]. To be successful, a brand positioning strategy must differentiate the brand from competitors' own, address the important consumer buying criteria, and articulate the key brand attributes. Brand positioning should not be overlooked by manufacturers of food and beverage products because it is an essential ingredient in the buying process. In fact, brand

positioning creates an opportunity for food manufacturers to positively influence market perception and improve brand competitiveness. Failure of a food manufacturer to embrace brand positioning strategies will lead to low sales and profit margin. Whether a food manufacturer likes it or not customers will always position his or her brand based on the information gathered from competitors which might hurt the manufacturer. Hickey (2017) [9] argued that a good brand positioning strategy creates meaningful difference and distinguish the brand from competitors' offerings. A small food manufacturer can cut down his expenses on advertising and other promotional activities when his brand occupies strong position in the minds of the consumers. This is because the brand position will send the message to the consumers and the brand will be better heard, appreciated and accepted. Once the brand occupies a strong and distinct position in the minds of the consumers it will be difficult to erase it.

A small food manufacturer can position his brand using various strategies. Basically, a brand can be positioned on the basis of quality, attributes, user benefits, price, technology, class, or competitor (Kotler, 2006; Nazmul *et al*, 2012; Hickey, 2017) [13, 17, 9]. Food and beverage manufacturers may decide to position their brand using one or more parameters. If a food manufacturer decides to use benefits as his positioning strategy, he would promote his brand based on the benefit it offers to consumers. Nestle Milo is a good example of a beverage brand that promote itself on the basis of the benefits it offers to consumers. The brand is known for its slogan "The Energy Food Drink" which implies that it gives energy to consumers who purchase and consume the brand. Also, if a food

manufacturer decides to use quality as his positioning strategy, he would emphasize commitment to quality in the brand label. Delta Special Super Loaf, a bread brand, emphasizes its commitment to quality in its brand label "High Quality Bread." However, if a food manufacturer decides to use price as his strategy of positioning, he would promote his company as the cheapest provider of certain category of food products. Kotler (2006) ^[13] reckoned that the positioning strategy adopted by a manufacturer has a significant impact on the sales performance of his brand. Hickey (2017) ^[9] argued that a good positioning strategy will triggers sales and improve the competitiveness of a brand.

Considering the intense competition in the food and beverage industry, some small and medium scale food manufacturers are strategizing to position their brand in the market with a view to improve their sales performance and compete favourably with their larger rivals. Some of them have adopted quality positioning strategy while others are embracing price or benefit positioning strategy. However, ever since these manufacturers adopted brand positioning strategies, it is not yet certain whether their efforts have impacted positively on their sales performance as empirical studies that examined the relationship between brand positioning strategies and sales performance of food and beverages manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria are remarkable absent or scanty. This has created a gap in empirical literature which this paper is set to fill.

Concept of Brand Positioning

Brand positioning is defined as the process of creating a desired image for company and its brands in the minds of a target group of consumers (Komaromi, 2016) ^[11]. It is based on the way a consumer compares one brand against alternative brands in the market (Hickey, 2017) ^[9]. Ries in Kamau & Wafula (2015) defined brand positioning as the collection of creative activities that manipulates the consumers' mind in favour of the brand. Heide (2017) ^[7] defined brand positioning as a strategy which a company develops and implements to create a meaningful difference in its brand and ensure that the created difference occupies a strong and distinct position in the minds of the consumers. Kapferer in Musau (2012) stated that a brand position is part of the brand identify and value proposition that is actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates a advantage over competing brands. Positioning a brand means emphasizing the distinctive characteristics that make it different from its competitors and appealing to the public (Kotler, in Musau, 2012). The goal of brand positioning is to differentiate the brand from competitors' own and position it in a market niche (Komaromi, 2016) ^[11].

Brand positioning starts with a product and ends up creating a space and occupying the minds of the target consumers (Ries in Kamau & Wafula, 2015) ^[10]. Ries in Kamau & Wafula (2015) ^[10] further stated that a well-known brand only holds a distinctive position in the minds of the consumers which may be difficult for competitors to claim, and that this position would only be maintained with well-articulated strategies concerning product, price, place and promotion. However, to position a brand in the consumers' minds, marketers must understand the dimensions along which consumers make their buying decisions. Lauga (2011) ^[14] stated that marketing managers must understand how consumers perceive their brand, which brands in the

market consumers perceive to be the closest competitors, and what brand attributes seems to be responsible for this perceived difference. Once a marketer has been able to establish this, he would be able to choose a positioning strategy that will capture the minds of the consumers. Aaker in Musau (2012) stated that positioning gives the brand manager and the creative person a whole battery of strategies to choose from. However, a company's positioning strategy must be consistent with the strength of company and be defensible (Komaromi, 2016) ^[11].

Brand Positioning Strategies and Its Dimensions

A company can position its brand in the marketing using different strategies. Some of the brand positioning strategies identified in literature include quality, attributes, benefits, price, user or application and competitor positioning strategies (Kotler, 2006; Janiszewska & Insch, 2012; Gibson, 2013; Kamau, & Wafula, 2015; Shivashankar & Uma, 2017) ^[13, 4, 10, 25]. However, this study focuses on quality, benefit and price positioning strategies because they are crucial parameters along which consumers make their buying decisions. These brand positioning strategies are discussed below:

Quality Positioning Strategy

Companies generally attempt to position their brand on the basis of quality. Lauga (2011) ^[14] defined quality as the degree to which a product or brand meet customers' needs and expectations. According to him, if a brand meets customer's needs and expectations, such brand is described as a quality brand compared to others in the same industry; and if the brand surpass customer expectations, the brand is judged to be of high quality. Komaromi (2016) ^[11] stated that quality is a crucial strategy of positioning a brand in the market. It sets the brand apart from other competing brands in the market. Kamau & Wafula (2015) ^[10] observed that most successful companies use quality as a strategy for positioning their brand in the market. For instance, BMW and Mercedes are among the automobile brands that use quality as a strategy for positioning. These automobile brands are known for quality cars. Kamau & Wafula (2015) ^[10] argued that most companies that embrace quality position strategy believe that the quality of their product is what will successfully distinguish them from their competitors. Gibson (2013) ^[4] noted that companies that use quality as a strategy for positioning often say that they are committed to quality and incorporates quality in their brand label. Such companies make customers to believe that it is the quality of their brand that set them apart from other competing brands in the market. Janiszewska & Insch (2012) argued that building the right perception of quality in the minds of the consumers helps a brand to succeed in a competitive market.

Benefit Positioning Strategy

Companies often use benefit as their strategy for positioning their brand in the market. Yednap (2013) noted that companies use benefit as a strategy of positioning because it tends to answer the consumer's question of what will this brand do for me? Benefit describes what consumers intend to gain from purchasing a particular brand. That is, what customer stands to gain from purchasing a particular brand which other brands cannot give to him. Kotler (2006) ^[13] believes that benefit is a crucial strategy of positioning

because it is the essence of production. Companies usually designed their products to suit customer needs. Such needs connote the benefits which customers intend to derive from purchasing the brand. Mulei (2005) posited that companies that use benefits as a strategy of positioning tend to focus on what customers stand to gain from purchasing the brand during their brand launching and presentation. When a company focuses on the benefits of purchasing the brand during launching or presentation, it tends to speak the language of the customers. Begum & Sarala (2016)^[1] stated that benefits make people to want to buy the brand. Nestle Milo is a good example of a beverage brand that promote itself on the basis of the benefits it offers to consumers. The brand is known for its slogan “The Energy Food Drink” which implies that it gives energy to consumers who purchase and consume the brand. A good understanding of what consumer intends to gain from purchasing a brand is the motivating factor behind consumer’s decision to buy the brand and ignore other competing brands in the market.

Price Positioning Strategy

If there is any factor that most influence consumer buying decision then it is price. Consumers who are price sensitive will purchase those brands that go for lower price without compromising on quality (Blankson, 2008)^[3]. Kamau & Wafula (2015)^[10] stated that consumers are very sensitive to price when making purchases. They want to buy a quality product at a low price and at the same time get the desired benefits. Hence, some companies use price as a strategy for positioning their brand in the market. Gibson (2013)^[4] noted that companies that use price as a strategy for positioning often highlight how the prices of their brands differ from their competitors’ own in the market. Janiszewska & Insch (2012) posited that companies use price positioning in two ways. First, they attached higher price tag to their brand to exploit the popular belief that the more expensive a product is, the higher its quality. Secondly, they promote themselves as the cheapest marketers of certain category of product by attaching a lower price tag to their brand without compromising on quality. This approach is very common to companies who want to penetrate a particular segment of the market (Janiszewska & Insch, 2012). Companies that use low price strategy for positioning tend to offer high quality product at a cheaper price compared to their competitors in the market. Walmart, a US based retail outlet positioned itself in the market as an outlet where products are sold at affordable prices (Hickey, 2017)^[9].

Concept of Sales Performance

Sales performance is defined as the difference between budgeted sales and the actual sales of a company for a specific period of time (Roberge, 2014). If the actual sales for the year exceed the budgeted or estimated sales for the year, it implies that the company has a good sales performance for the period under review. However, if the budgeted or estimated sales for the year exceed the actual sales for the year, it means that the company has experienced a poor sales performance for the period under review. Improving sales performance is one of the main objectives of business firms. McKinsey, Baungartner and Hatami (2016) stated that increasing sales is the one of the primary objectives of business all over the world. It is the hallmark of business continuity and a pre-requisite for

business growth. When the sales performance of a company is improved, it will manifest in the profit margin of the firm (Nelson, 2015). Bertuzzi (2015) agreed that sales performance has a direct impact on the profit margin of business firms. According to him, when the sales performance of an organization is improved, it is an indication that the company is doing well against its competitors and this has a bearing effect on the profit margin of the firm. Food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria are intensifying their efforts to improve their sales performance in order to maximize profit and grow to become larger firms. Sara (2017) noted that every manufacturer or retailer wants to improve his or her sales performance because it is the only way to survive in the industry. The food and beverage industry is highly competitive and the only way for SMEs to survive in the industry is to improve their sales performance.

Measures of Sales Performance

Sales performance can be measured using various criteria. In this study, sales performance is measured using sales growth and sales turnover. These measures are discussed below:

Sales Growth

Sales growth can be defined as an increase in the amount of goods sold by a company over a specific period of time (Bertuzzi, 2015). Nelson (2015) stated that sales growth can be determined by comparing the sales of a company on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis. If the sales for the present month are greater than the sales of the previous month, it then means that the company has experienced a monthly sales growth. Also, if a company made a sales amounted to N20 million in 2016 and recorded a sales of N25million in 2017, the N5million increase in sales is regarded as the annual sales growth. Roberge (2014) stated that sales growth is usually calculated and expressed in percentage. The percentage increase in sales is described as the sales growth rate (Roberge, 2014). Food manufacturing SMEs make adequate efforts to achieve sales growth because it is the only way to increase profit. Sara (2017) argued that sales growth helps to increase the profit margin of a company. Reibstein *et al* (2006) noted that an increase in sales means a corresponding increase in revenue for the company and this lead to increase in shareholders’ wealth. By selling more food products from month to month or year to year, manufacturing SMEs increases their profit margin and expand their business operations (McKinsey, Baungartner and Hatami, 2016).

Sales Turnover

Within the marketing context, sales turnover is defined as the amount of goods sold by a company at a given period of time (Roberge, 2014). Similarly, Sara (2017) defined sales turnover as the total sales (in monetary terms) made by a company at a specific period of time. Sales turnover of a company can be calculated periodically usually one year (Bertuzzi, 2015). The essence of calculating sales turnover of a company is to determine how well the company is doing in the market against its competitors (Bertuzzi, 2015). Every company wants to increase their sales turnover and maximize profit. According to Reibstein *et al* (2006), companies in the manufacturing industry are determined to increase their sales turnover because it is a sure way of

maximizing profit. McKinsey *et al* (2016) added that increasing the sales turnover rate does not only help to increase a company's profit margin but also improve the competitiveness of the company. Every company wants to be a leading brand in its industry and to achieve this, their sales turnover must be increased. Sara (2017) posited that increasing sales turnover is a sure way of achieving business growth and continuity. Without increasing sales turnover, companies will find it difficult to breakeven and remain in business (Nelson, 2015). For this reason, manufacturing SMEs in the food and beverage industry are making adequate efforts to increase their sales turnover in order to survive in their industry. They are now strategizing to increase their sales turnover as a way of competing favourably with their larger rivals.

Brand Positioning Strategies and Sales Performance Quality Positioning Strategy and Sales Growth

Quality positioning is regarded as a crucial strategy for achieving sales growth. According to Janiszewska & Insch (2012), a company that positions its brand on the basis of quality will experience massive growth in sales and profit margin. Gibson (2013) [4] agreed with the above opinion stating that quality is the major factor which consumers consider when making their purchasing decision. He further stated that company that embrace quality positioning strategy stands the chance of achieving sales growth within the shortest possible time. (2005) [18] contributed to this argument when he posited that quality parameter is the most important basis for positioning a brand because it has the potentials of achieving sales growth. Some empirical studies have also supported the relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth. Blankson (2008) [3] stated that quality positioning strategy significantly enhance sales growth of firms. In another study on the effectiveness of positioning strategies, it was reported that quality positioning strategy positively and significantly correlated to customer loyalty and sales growth (Musau, 2012). Heide (2017) [7] reported that quality positioning strategy significantly increase the sales of Asian companies by 21.8%. Based on these theoretical and empirical reviews, we develop our first hypothesis:

Ho₁: There is no positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Quality Positioning Strategy and Sales Turnover

There have been several arguments that support quality positioning as a tool for increasing sales turnover of firms. For instance, Blankson (2008) [3] argued that a company can increase its sales turnover if it adopts quality positioning strategy. According to him, quality is the major criteria consumers consider when making choice regarding brands of similar functions. He added that when a company positioned itself in the market on the basis of quality, it will increase the sales turnover of the brand. Mulei (2005) supported this view stating that quality positioning has the capacity of increasing sales turnover of a company. Kamau & Wafula (2015) [10] argued that a company that positions its brand on the basis of quality will experience massive increase in sales turnover and this will enhance the profit margin of the firm. Hartmann, Apaolaza & Sainz (2002) believe that quality positioning is the most effective approach to boost brand loyalty and sales turnover.

According to them, when a company adopts quality positioning strategy, customers will be impressed with its brand and they will remain loyal to the brand which will in turn increase the company's sales turnover. Begum & Sarala (2016) [1] agreed that quality positioning has the capacity of increasing sales turnover of business firms. Based on these theoretical arguments, we formulate our second hypothesis:

Ho₂: There is no positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Benefit Positioning Strategy and Sales Growth

Benefit positioning is a crucial positioning strategy that has the capacity of achieving sales growth. According to Blankson (2008) [3], a company that position its brand on the basis of benefit stands a better chance of increasing sales than those companies that do not position their brand on the basis of benefit. Gibson (2013) [4] posited that benefit positioning has the potentials of increasing sales because customers will consistently patronize a brand that is beneficial to them and ignore those brands that they feel are not beneficial to them. When customers ignore those brands that are not beneficial to them, it will result to low sales for those companies producing such brands. Janiszewska & Insch (2012) explained how benefit positioning strategy helps to achieve sales growth. According to them, consumers do not just buy a brand just to answer that they are loyal to the brand; they buy the brand because of what the brand will do for them which other brands cannot do. When customers buy a brand that gives them the desired benefits, the manufacturer of that brand will enjoy increased sales as customers will remain loyal to the brand. This implies that when companies position their brand on the basis of benefit, they tend to achieve massive sales growth within a shortest possible time. Shivashankar and Uma (2017) [25] agreed that benefit positioning is an effective strategy to achieve sales growth. According to them, a small company that is experiencing drastic decline in sales can used benefits to reposition its brand in the market and achieve sales growth. Based on these postulations, we formulate our third hypothesis thus:

Ho₃: There is no positive and significant relationship between benefit positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Benefit Positioning Strategy and Sales Turnover

Benefit positioning strategy does not only enhance sales growth but also increase the sales turnover of a company. According to Musau (2012), benefit positioning strategy helps to shorten the cycle of a brand and enhance the sales turnover of the company. Kongalla (2013) agreed that benefit positioning strategy has the ability to increase sales turnover of a company. According to him, when a company embraces benefit positioning strategy, they tend to speak the language of the customers and answer their question that this brand will solve their problem or meet their needs. When customers feel that the brand will be beneficial to them they will patronize the brand regularly and this will help to fasten the sales turnover rate of the company. Mulei (2005) supported this position stating that when a company produces a product that consumers find beneficial, the sales turnover rate of the brand will increase and this will equally shorten the sales cycle of the brand. Nazmul *et al* (2012) [17] agreed that benefit positioning has the potentials of

increasing sales turnover of a company. According to them, when a company positions its brand on the basis of benefit, it will attract more customers, increase customer loyalty and the overall sales turnover of the firm. In line with these beliefs, we develop our fourth hypothesis:

Ho₄: There is no positive and significant relationship between benefit positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Price Positioning Strategy and Sales Growth

The relationship between price positioning strategy and sales growth is well documented in literature. According to Begum & Sarala (2016) [1], price positioning is an effective strategy for positioning a brand in the market because it has the ability of boosting sales of a firm. Shivashankar & Uma (2017) [25] argued that price positioning is indeed significant in the market world because it is the most influential factor in consumer buying decisions. According to them, consumers are price sensitive and if a company positions its basis on the basis of price (i.e. as the cheapest provider of certain brand), it will experience massive increase in sales. Janiszewska & Insch (2012) agreed with this position stating that rational consumers are price sensitive and they will always patronize those brands whose prices are relatively lower in the market. They further stated that if a company can capitalize on this area of advantage and positions its brand as the cheapest among other competing brands in the market (without compromising on quality), it will enjoy remarkable increase in sales. Heide (2017) [7] supported this argument when he stated that price is a deciding factor for consumers. According to him, consumers will always stick to those quality brands whose prices are relatively cheaper in the market. Heide further stated that a company that is able to position its brand as the cheaper substitute in the market will experience massive sales growth. Based on these theoretical arguments, we develop our fifth hypothesis:

Ho₅: There is no positive and significant relationship between price positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

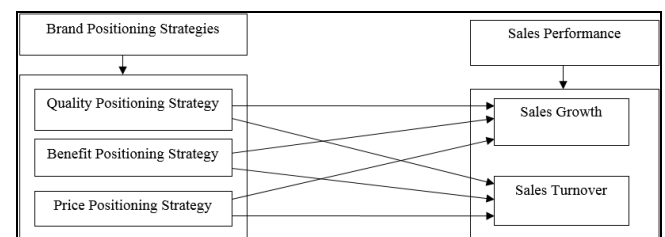
Price Positioning Strategy and Sales Turnover

There are several arguments in literature that support the relationship between price positioning strategy and sales turnover of firms. For instance, Nazmul *et al* (2012) [17] argued that price positioning is a suitable approach to position a brand in the marketplace to attract customer patronage and increase sales turnover. Shivashankar & Uma (2017) [25] noted that some companies use pricing positioning as a strategy to increase sales turnover and profit margin. Hickey (2017) [9] posited that price positioning strategy is an indispensable strategy for fastening the sales turnover rate of a company. According to him, when a company positions its brand as the cheapest among other competing brands in the market, it will attract more customers, increase repeat purchases and sales turnover of the company. Kongalla (2013) noted that some companies have been successful in using price as a positioning strategy to increase sales turnover. According to him, these companies produce quality products and priced their brands slightly lower than their competitors' own which consequently attract more customers and boost sales turnover. Gibson (2013) [4] agreed with Kongalla's position stating that price positioning is the most captivating tool

used by new companies to increase sales turnover. According to him, companies that intend to penetrate a new market use price as their positioning strategy to increase sales turnover. Mulei (2005) [16] argued that price positioning strategy has the ability to boost company's sales turnover. Blankson (2008) [3] shared the same view with Mulei stating that most small scale firms used low price as a strategy for positioning the brands in the market because of its capacity to increase sales turnover. In line with these arguments, we formulate our sixth hypothesis:

Ho₆: There is no positive and significant relationship between price positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

The conceptual framework of this study is shown in figure 1.1 below:



Source: Author's Conceptualization

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The study employed the correlation survey research design in which the researcher measures two variables and assesses the statistical relationship between them with little or no effort to control extraneous variables. The population of this study consisted of manufacturing SMEs in the food and beverage industry in Nigeria. A sample of 126 small and medium scale manufacturers of food and beverage products was drawn from Rivers State using purposive sampling technique. The sample was selected using sampling random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents. The questionnaire sought information on the study variables such as the different brand positioning strategies (quality, benefit, price positioning strategies) and the key measures of sales performance (sales growth and sales turnover). The questionnaire was structured on a four (4) point rating scale which range from strongly agree, agree, disagree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire was validated by three research experts while its reliability was determined using the test-retest method. A total copy of 126 questionnaires was administered to the respondents (small and medium scale manufacturers of food and beverage products) in Rivers State. Out of the 126 questionnaires administered, 113 copies were collected and used for analysis. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 21.0 version was used to correlate the data on the study variables. The results of the correlation analysis were used to confirm the postulated hypotheses.

Empirical Results and Discussion

Results

The results of the correlation analysis carried out on the study variables are presented in tables and interpreted accordingly. The SPSS 21.0 version was used to correlate

the data on the study variables (quality positioning, benefit positioning, price positioning, sales growth and sales

turnover). The results of the correlation analysis are presented tables below:

Table 1: Relationship between Quality Positioning Strategy and Sales Growth

| | | | Quality Positioning Strategy | Sales Growth |
|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Pearson (r) | Quality Positioning Strategy | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .817* |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | . | .001 |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |
| | Sales Growth | Correlation Coefficient | .817* | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | .001 | . |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |

Source: SPSS-generated Output **Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed) *Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 1 shows the result of SPSS correlation analysis carried out on quality positioning strategy and sales growth. The result indicated that quality positioning strategy is positively correlated to sales growth (r = .817*) and that this correlation is significant at 0.05 level. Consequently, the

null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that we then accept that there is positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Table 2: Relationship between Quality Positioning Strategy and Sales Turnover

| | | | Quality Positioning Strategy | Sales Turnover |
|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Pearson (r) | Quality Positioning Strategy | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .869* |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | . | .001 |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |
| | Sales Turnover | Correlation Coefficient | .869* | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | .001 | . |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |

Source: SPSS-generated Output **Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed) *Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 2 depicts the result of the correlation analysis carried out on quality positioning strategy and sales turnover. The result revealed that quality positioning strategy is positively correlated to sales turnover and this correlation is significant at 0.05 level (r = .869*). Hence, the null hypothesis is

rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Table 3: Relationship between Benefit Positioning Strategy and Sales Growth

| | | | Benefit Positioning Strategy | Sales Growth |
|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Pearson (r) | Benefit Positioning Strategy | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .912* |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | . | .002 |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |
| | Sales Growth | Correlation Coefficient | .912* | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | .002 | . |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |

Source: SPSS-generated Output **Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed) *Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 3 presents the result of SPSS correlation analysis carried out on benefit positioning strategy and sales growth. The result revealed that benefit positioning strategy has a positive with sales growth and this relationship is significant at 0.05 level (r = .912*). As a result of this, the null

hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is positive and significant relationship between benefit positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Table 4: Relationship between Benefit Positioning Strategy and Sales Turnover

| | | | Benefit Positioning Strategy | Sales Turnover |
|-------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Pearson (r) | Benefit Positioning Strategy | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .954* |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | . | .002 |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |
| | Sales Turnover | Correlation Coefficient | .954* | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | .002 | . |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |

Source: SPSS-generated Output **Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed) *Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 4 depicts the result of correlation analysis carried out on benefit positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage firms. The result indicates that benefit

positioning strategy is positively related to sales turnover and this relationship is significant at 0.05 level (r = .954*). Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected and the

alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that we then accept that there is positive and significant relationship

between benefit positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Table 5: Relationship between Price Positioning Strategy and Sales Growth

| | | Price Positioning Strategy | | Sales Growth |
|-------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Pearson (r) | Price Positioning Strategy | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .961* |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | . | .003 |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |
| | Sales Growth | Correlation Coefficient | .961* | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | .003 | . |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |

Source: SPSS-generated Output **Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed) *Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 5 shows the result of correlation analysis carried out on price positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage firms. The result shows that price positioning strategy has a positive relationship with sales turnover and this relationship is significant at 0.05 level (r = .961*).

Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. By rejecting the null hypothesis, we then accept the alternate hypothesis which states that there is positive and significant relationship between price positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Table 6: Relationship between Price Positioning Strategy and Sales Turnover

| | | Price Positioning Strategy | | Sales Turnover |
|-------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Pearson (r) | Price Positioning Strategy | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .924* |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | . | .003 |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |
| | Sales Turnover | Correlation Coefficient | .924* | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2 tailed) | .003 | . |
| | | N | 113 | 113 |

Source: SPSS-generated Output **Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2 tailed) *Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Table 6 presents the result of correlation analysis carried out on price positioning strategy and sales turnover. The result revealed that price positioning strategy is positively and significantly correlated to sales turnover (r = .924*) at 0.05 level. As a result of this, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is positive and significant relationship between price positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

This study found a positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. This finding was derived from the result of the correlation analysis carried out on the variables in the first hypothesis. The result of the correlation analysis showed that quality positioning strategy has a positive relationship with sales growth and this relationship is significant at 0.05 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. This finding is supported by Blankson (2008) [3], Musau (2012) and Heide (2017) [7] as they all reported that quality positioning strategy significantly enhance sales growth of firms. The implication of this finding for food manufacturing SMEs is that if they adopt quality positioning strategy, it will go a long way in improving their sales performance. This study also found a positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. This finding was obtained from the result of the correlation analysis carried out on the variables in the second hypothesis. The result

revealed that quality positioning strategy is positively correlated to sales turnover and this correlation is significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is positive and significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. This finding is in line with the postulations of Nazmul *et al* (2012) [17] and Begum & Sarala (2016) [1] that quality positioning strategy has the potentials of increasing sales turnover of business firms. The implication of this finding is that if food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State position their brand on the basis of quality, it would increase their sales turnover. This study equally found a significant positive relationship between benefit positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. This finding was derived from the result of the correlation analysis carried out on the variables in the third hypothesis. The result revealed that benefit positioning strategy has a positive with sales growth and this relationship is significant at 0.05 level. As a result of this, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is positive and significant relationship between benefit positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. This finding is supported by Shivashankar and Uma (2017) [25] and Blankson (2008) [3] as they postulated that benefit positioning strategy has the capacity of achieving sales growth of business firms. This implication of this finding is that if food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State position their brand on the basis of benefit, it would increase their sales and profit margin. More so, it was discovered that benefit positioning strategy is positively and significantly related to sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. This finding was

deduced from the result of the correlation analysis carried out on the variables in the fourth hypothesis. The result indicated that benefit positioning strategy is positively related to sales turnover and this relationship is significant at 0.05 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is positive and significant relationship between benefit positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. This finding is supported by Mulei (2005) ^[16] and Musau (2012) who noted benefit positioning is a strategy used by firms to increase their sales turnover. This finding implies that food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State will increase their sales turnover if they position their brand on the basis of benefit.

Furthermore, it was revealed that significant relationship exists between price positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. This finding was obtained from the result of the correlation analysis carried out on the variables in the fifth hypothesis. The result indicated that price positioning strategy has a positive relationship with sales turnover and this relationship is significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. By rejecting the null hypothesis, the alternate hypothesis was accepted. This indicates that there is positive and significant relationship between price positioning strategy and sales growth of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. This finding is supported by Heide (2017) ^[7] and Begum & Sarala (2016) ^[1] who postulated that price positioning is an approach used by firms to achieve sales growth. This implication of this finding is that if food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State adopt a price positioning strategy, it leads to massive growth in sales.

Finally, it was reported in this study price positioning strategy is positively and significant correlated with sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs. This finding was derived from the result of the correlation analysis carried out on the variables in the sixth hypothesis. The result revealed that price positioning strategy is positively and significantly correlated to sales turnover ($r = .924^*$) at 0.05 level. As a result of this, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is positive and significant relationship between price positioning strategy and sales turnover of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. This finding is supported by Mulei (2005) ^[16], Blankson (2008) ^[3], and (2005) ^[18] who noted that price positioning is an effective strategy to increase sales turnover of business firms. This implication of this finding is that if food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State position their brand on the basis of price, it would increase their sales turnover.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing analysis, it was evident that quality positioning strategy is positively and significantly related to sales growth. This study also found a significant relationship between quality positioning strategy and sales turnover. A significant positive relationship was equally reported between benefit positioning strategy and sales growth. Benefit positioning strategy was also found to have a positive and significant relationship with sales turnover. The study also discovered a significant relationship between price positioning strategy and sales growth. A significant

positive relationship was equally reported between price positioning strategy and sales turnover. From the findings, it is concluded that brand positioning strategies (quality, benefit and price positioning strategies) significantly enhance sales performance (sales growth and sales turnover) of food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Rivers State. Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Manufacturing SMEs in the food and beverage industry in Nigeria especially those in Rivers State should adopt quality positioning strategy as it would enhance their sales performance and profit margin.
2. Nigerian manufacturing SMEs particularly those in the food and beverage industry should position their brand on the basis of benefit as it would surely enhance their sales performance.
3. Manufacturing SMEs in the food and beverage industry especially those that are experiencing poor sales performance should position their brand on the basis of price (i.e. as the cheapest provider of food products) as it would help to increase their sales performance and profit margin.
4. Finally, it is recommended that food and beverage manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria should adopt brand positioning strategies (quality benefit and price positioning strategies) as it would not only improve their sales performance but would also enable them compete favourably with their larger rivals.

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