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BRAND EQUITY AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR AMONG AUTOMOBILE OWNERS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study centers on the influence of brand equity on the purchase of automobile. Over the last two decades, the majority of automobile users patronized used automobile but with the federal government new automotive policy, there seems a gradual decline in the purchase of these used automobile. Despite this, no empirical study has been done to look at the effect of brand equity on repurchase of automobile. The general objective of this study is to investigate the influence brand equity has on repurchase of automobile in Awka metropolis. The study employed survey research design and the population of study comprises owners of used automobile. Topman's formula was used to arrive at the sample size of 246 automobile owners. The sampling technique was quota sampling and the research instrument was questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the instrument. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regressions were used to test the significance of the hypotheses. It was found out that brand loyalty is the strongest predictor of repurchase then, perceived quality. It was concluded that brand equity management and customer satisfaction strategies are needed for repeat purchase of used automobile. On the strength of the conclusion, we recommend that automobile dealers should as a matter of urgency engage the services of a professional brand equity manager and customer relationship manager.*

KEYWORDS: brand equity, purchase behaviour, automobile market, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a major consumer of automobile. Statistics from the National Automobile Council reveals that Nigerians spend around ₦ 600 billion (about $3.83 billion) yearly on the importation of vehicles. In the year 2012, about 50,000 new vehicles and 150,000 used vehicles were imported into the country (NAC, 2013). There has been an upward surge in car importation into the country since 1999 (Owolabi & Olajide, 2014). The News Agency of Nigeria reported that port figures show that vehicle imports increased to 47,267 units between January and November of 2012 as compared to 32, 634 units of the same period in 2010 (NAN, 2013 as cited in Owolabi & Olajide, 2014).

Based on the above stated statistics and the fact that Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa with over $510 billion as the GDP (CBN, 2014 as cited in NAC, 2013), this is a pointer that various brands of automobiles would abound in the country. Hence, automobile manufacturers and marketers are trying to entice buyers by portraying their products' incremental utility or value-added from the brand name, and this is referred to as brand equity.

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According to Aaker (1991) as cited in Mkhitaryan (2014), brand equity is a phrase used in marketing industry which describes the value of having a well- known brand name, based on the idea that the owner of a well- known brand name can generate more sales from products with that brand name than from products with less well known brand names hence, brand equity can be seen as a set of brand asset and liability connected to a brand, its name and logo which add to or deduct from the value provided by a good or service to a company and/or to the company's consumers. (Aaker cited in Mkhitaryan, 2014).

At the consumer level, brand equity seeks to map the mind of the consumers to find out what association with the brand the consumer has, this approach seeks to measure the awareness and the overall associations that the brand has (Farris, Paul, Pfeifer, & Reibstein, 2010 as cited Mkhitaryan, 2014). Consumer- based brand equity focuses on the impact of the brand on the consumers' consciousness and the consumers' behavioural response to the brand (Teleghani & Almasi, 2011). Consumer based brand equity is the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to marketing activity with respect to that brand (Keller, as cited in Taleghani & Almasi, 2011).

According to Chen et al. (as cited in Taleghani & Almasi, 2011), consumer decision-making process is an avenue for consumer to make decisions from two or more choices when buying goods and services. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) as cited in Boohene & Agyapong (2011) recognize five stages of consumer decision process, such as need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. Linking this with purchasing behavior, consumers often have unlimited demand to meet their needs and satisfaction to get something newer or better. This can be attributed to the fact that each individual has his or her own behavior, attitude and thought when choosing products and making purchase decision (Osman et al. as cited in Vinynda & Sihombing, 2013).

Generally, purchase decision of a consumer will be to buy the most preferred brand (Vinynda & Sihombing, 2013). Purchase intention is one factor that can explain purchase decision. Particularly, consumers may form a purchase intention on the basis of factors like expected income, price and product benefits (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010 as cited in Boohene & Agyapong, 2011). From the foregoings, it can be said that intention to purchase may be seen as a reflection of real purchase behavior (Nasermoadeli as cited in Vinynda & Sihombing, 2013). The greater the purchase intention is, the greater a consumer's desire to buy a product is (Vinynda & Sihombing, 2013).

In the Nigeria automobile market, brand equity has gained much prominence for sustained competitive advantage. This is evidenced from the varieties of automobiles present in the country today, ranging from Honda products in the north, Mercedes products in the west and Toyota products dominate the eastern Nigeria (NAC, 2013). In Anambra state, automobile market is growing at an increasing rate with the establishment of vehicle assembly plants like Innoson Vehicle and Motors Ltd in Nnewi and the resuscitation of the moribund ANAMCO (NAC, 2013). This has led to monumental increase in the supply of automobile in the south eastern Nigeria hence, an urgent need for marketers and manufacturers of these automobiles to add values to their product in other to compete with other brands. Automobile manufacturers are now focusing on improving and sustaining the values of their products for customer satisfaction hence, purchase intention. For

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a consumer to purchase a product there must be an expected level of satisfaction with the product. For a product to satisfy a consumer, the product must be perceived to have added value compared to competitors' products.

The study of brand equity is increasingly popular as some researchers have concluded that brands are one of the most valuable assets that a company has. High brand equity levels are known to lead to higher consumer preferences and purchase intentions (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995 as cited in Lee & Yew-Leh, 2011) as well as higher stock returns (Aaker & Jacobson, 1994 as cited in Karbalaei, Abdi, Malmir, Dehghanan, Piruejad & Jafari, 2013). Besides, high brand equity brings an opportunity for successful extensions, resilience against competitors' promotional pressures, and creation of barriers to competitive entry (Farquhar, 1989 as cited in Ovidin, 2005). The concept of brand equity began to be used widely in the 1980s by advertising practitioners (Barwise, 1993 as cited in Jalilvand, Samiei & Mahdavinia, 2011). Important academic contributors throughout the 1990s were Aaker (1991), Srivastava and Shocker (1991), Kapferer (1992), and Keller (1993, 1998). However, in the automobile marketing literature, empirical studies on the nexus between customer-based brand equity and purchase behavior is still lacking especially in developing countries, at least to the best knowledge of the researcher.

Numerous studies have been carried out on brand equity (Lee and Yew Leh, 2011(a), Lee and Yew leh, 2011(b); Andervazh, Gaskari, Tarakmeh and Vafazadeh, 2013; Jalilvand, Samiei and Mahdavinia, 2011; Karbalaei, Abdi, Malmir, Dehghanan, Piruejad and Jafari, 2013; Chattopadhyay, Shivani and Krishnan, 2009; Teleghani and Almasi, 2011 and Ovidin 2005). All these studies have centered on brand equity generally and are alien to the Nigerian Automobile industry. Studies conducted by Umar, Nik Mat, Tahir and Alekam (2012) focused on brand equity in the Nigerian banking sector while the study carried out by Owolabi and Olajide (2014) focused on personality attributes and Nigerian Automobile users. No empirical investigation has been carried out at least to the best knowledge of the researcher, on the effect of brand equity on the purchase behavior of automobile users in the South-Eastern Nigeria in general and Anambra State in particular. In order to address this current deficiency in the brand equity literature, this study shall investigate the effect of brand equity on the purchase behavior of automobile users in Anambra state. The main objective of this study is to investigate the influence of brand equity on the purchase behavior among automobile users in Anambra state. In specific terms, this study seeks to:

a. Determine the effect of brand loyalty on the purchase of automobiles.
b. Ascertain the effect of brand association on the purchase of automobiles.
c. Know the effect of brand awareness on the purchase of automobiles.
d. Find out the effect of perceived quality on the purchase of automobiles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Equity

Brand equity has been defined as "outcomes that accrue to a product with its brand name compared with those that would accrue if the same product did not have the brand name" (Ailawadi,

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Lehmann, and Neslin 2003 as cited in Khan,2012), i.e., the benefits a product achieves through the power of its brand name. Keller and Lehmann (2003) as cited in Jalilvand et al. (2011) delineate three approaches for assessing brand equity: customer mind-set (e.g. Aaker 1996, Keller 1993), product-market (e.g., Park and Srinivisan 1994 as cited in Alamgir et al., 2010), and financial-market (e.g., Mahajan, Rao, & Srivastava, 1994 as cited in Umar et al., 2012). These approaches have different strengths and weaknesses (Ailawadi, Lehmann, and Neslin 2003 as cited Khan, 2012).

While financial-market measures theoretically capture current and future brand potential, they often rely on subjective judgements or volatile measures to estimate future value (Simon and Sullivan, 1993 as cited in Lee & Leh,2011). Product-market measures are more closely related to marketing activity but do not capture future potential (e.g., Kamakura and Russel 1993; Swait et al., 1993 as cited in Chieng et al., 2011). More importantly, both approaches have limited diagnostic value. Customer mind-set metrics, on the other hand, identify brand strengths and weaknesses (Keller, 1993). While these provide insights for strengthening brand equity, they provide little information about brand performance in terms of market share or profitability.

Keller (1993) focuses on customer mind-set equity, which he refers to as “customer-based brand equity.” According to Keller, “the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand”, i.e., the customer mind-set. He develops a theory that identifies two key elements of mind-set equity (see also Keller and Lehmann 2003 as cited in Khan, 2012): (1) awareness and familiarity, and (2) strong, favourable brand associations. It is therefore imperative that any customer mind-set measure of equity include both awareness/familiarity and brand associations.

Branding is an important decision when a new product is developed and it can add the considerable value when it is well renowned and has a positive image in the mind of the consumer. This concept is simply referred to brand equity. The concept of brand equity was emerged as the central concept in marketing over the past 20 years. From the managerial point of view, Farquhar (1989) as cited in Vinyncida and Shiombing (2013) defines brand equity as the “added value” with which a brand name endows a product and Aaker (1991) defines brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers. Brand equity is the intangible feature of a particular company or product that depends on associations made by the consumer. It is used to describe both the brand’s component values and the value of brand.

However, brand equity is concerning the positive side only when the consumers are willing to pay more for the same level of quality just because of the name attached to the product (Bello and Holbrook, 1995 as cited in Mkhitaryan, 2014). However, brand equity could be considered as a ruined if it is not properly managed. The poor product quality and deprived customer services could directly affect the brand image which would reduce the sales volume.

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Customer-based brand equity

Based on the previous literature review, brand equity can be approached from the perspective of the individual consumer. The basic premise with customer-based brand equity is that the power of a brand lies in the minds of consumers and what they have experienced and learned about the brand over time. The advantage of conceptualising brand equity from the consumer's perspective is that it enables managers to consider specifically how their marketing program improves the value of their brands. Though the eventual goal of many marketing programs is to increase sales, it is first necessary to establish knowledge structures for the brand so that consumers respond favourably to marketing activity for the brand. (Keller 1993).

Customer-based brand equity can be defined as the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand. There are three key ingredients to this definition: 1)"differential effect", 2)"brand knowledge", and 3)"consumer response to marketing". First, brand equity arises from differences in consumer response. If no differences occur, then the brand can essentially be classified as a commodity or generic version of the product. Second, these differences in response are a result of consumers' knowledge about the brand. Thus, although strongly influenced by the marketing activity of the firm, brand equity ultimately depends on what resides in the minds of consumers. Third, the differential response by consumers that makes up the brand equity is reflected in perceptions, preferences, and behaviour related to all aspects of the marketing of a brand. (Keller, 1993; Keller, 1998).

Conceptualizing brand equity from the consumer's perspective is useful because it suggests both specific guidelines for marketing strategies and tactics and areas where research can be useful in assisting managerial decision making. Two important points emerge from this conceptualisation. First, marketers should take a broad view of marketing activity for a brand and recognise the various effects it has on brand knowledge, as well as how changes in brand knowledge affect more traditional outcome measures such as sales. Second, markets must realize that the long-term success of all future marketing programs for a brand is greatly affected by the knowledge about the brand in memory that has been established by the firm's short term marketing efforts. In short, because the content and structure of memory for the brand will influence the effectiveness of future brand strategies, it is critical that managers understand how their marketing programs affect consumer learning and thus subsequent recall for brand-related information (Keller, 1993).

A brand is said to have positive (negative) customer-based brand equity when consumers react more (less) favourably to a product and the way it is marketed when the brand is identified as compared to when it is not. Thus, a brand with positive customer-based brand equity might result in consumers being more accepting of a new brand extension, less sensitive to price increases and withdrawal of advertising support, or more willing to seek the brand in a new distribution channel. Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some positive brand associations in memory. Favourable consumer response, in turn, can lead to enhanced revenues, lower costs, and greater profits for the firm. (Keller, 1993 ; Keller, 1998).

Purchase Behavior

Schiffman and Kanuk (as cited in Vinyncida & Sihombing,2013), defined consumer behavior as the behavior that consumers show while searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of goods and services. They further assert that consumers expect the behaviors will satisfy their needs. Consumer behaviors also center on how individuals make their decisions to spend their available resources on consumptions related items (Tripathi & Singh as cited in Vinynda & Sihombing, 2013). Therefore, consumer decision-making process is pivotal to consumer behavior.

According to Chen et al. (as cited in Vinynda & Sihombing, 2013), consumer decision-making process is an avenue for consumer to make decisions from two or more choices when buying goods and services. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) recognize five stages of consumer decision process, such as need recognition, information search evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. Linking this with purchasing behavior, consumers often have unlimited demand to met their needs and satisfaction to get something newer or better. This can be attributed to the fact that each individual has his or her own behavior, attitude and thought when choosing products and making purchase decision (Osman et al. as cited in Vinynda & Sihombing, 2013).

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Components of Brand Equity

Brand Loyalty

According to Boohene and Agyapong (2011), loyalty as a concept has its base from the consumer behavior theory and is something that consumers may portray to brands, services or activities. Loyalty has been defined early that it is the normal willingness of customer to maintain their relations with a particular firm or service/product (Kim & Yoan cited in Khan, 2012). According to Lovelock cited in Adeleke and Aminu (2012), loyalty is used to show the submissiveness of a customer to continue patronizing a firm's product over a long period of time and on a repeated and preferably exclusive basis, and voluntarily recommending the firm's products to friends and associates. Customer loyalty is the outcome of a firm's creating a benefit for customers so that they will maintain increasingly repeat business with the organization (Anderson & Jacoben cited in Adeleke & Aminu, 2012).

Brand loyalty is considered as one of the core components of the brand equity which affects the brand equity positively and directly (Atilgan et al., 2005). Because of the brand loyalty consumers continue to buy the brand, regardless of the superior features, prices and convenience owned by

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its competitors (Aaker, 1991). Consumers make the purchase as a habitual towards a particular brand just because of the reason that its prominence in stock and effective promotions. Loyalty is a core dimension of brand equity. Aaker (1991, p. 39) defines brand loyalty as the attachment that a customer has to a brand. Grembler and Brown (1996) describe different levels of loyalty.

Behavioural loyalty is linked to consumer behaviour in the marketplace that can be indicated by number of repeated purchases (Keller 1998) or commitment to rebuy the brand as a primary choice (Oliver 1997, 1999). Cognitive loyalty which means that a brand comes up first in a consumers' mind, when the need to make a purchase decision arises, that is the consumers' first choice. The cognitive loyalty is closely linked to the highest level of awareness (top-of-mind), where the matter of interest also is the brand, in a given category, which the consumers recall first. Thus, a brand should be able to become the respondents' first choices (cognitive loyalty) and is therefore purchased repeatedly (behavioural loyalty) (Keller 1998).

Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) mention that brand loyalty is directly related to brand price. Aaker (1996) identify price premium as the basic indicator of loyalty. Price premium is defined as the amount a customer will pay for the brand in comparison with another brand offering similar benefits and it may be high or low and positive or negative depending on the two brands involved in the comparison

Brand loyalty represents a favourable attitude toward a brand resulting in consistent purchase of the brand over time. It is the result of consumers' learning that only the particular brand can satisfy their needs. Two approaches to the study of brand loyalty have dominated marketing literature. The first, a behavioural approach to brand loyalty, views consistent purchasing of one brand over time as an indication of brand loyalty. Behavioural measures have defined loyalty by the sequence of purchases and/or the proportion of purchases. Repeat purchasing behaviour is assumed to reflect reinforcement and a strong stimulus-to-response link. But, such loyalty may lack commitment to the brand and reflect repeat buying based on inertia.

The second, a cognitive approach to brand loyalty, underlines that behaviour alone does not reflect brand loyalty. Loyalty implies a commitment to a brand that may not be reflected by just measuring continuous behaviour. A family may buy a particular brand because it is the lowest- priced brand on the market. A slight increase in price may cause the family to shift to another brand. In this case, continuous purchasing does not reflect reinforcement or loyalty. The stimulus (product) and reward links are not strong. We can conclude that some of the apparent limitations of the strictly behavioural approach in measuring brand loyalty are overcome when loyalty includes both attitudes and behaviour. (Assael 1992; Samuelsen – Sanvik, 1997 as cited in Li & Hong, 2013) Brand loyalty – which can reflect a range from the habitual buyer to the satisfied buyer to those that like the brand to the truly committed – generates value mainly by reducing marketing costs: retaining existing customers is much less costly than attracting new ones. It is also difficult for competitors to communicate to satisfied brand users because they have little motivation to learn about alternatives. The burden on the competitor brand is substantial. A common mistake is to grow sales by enticing new customers to the brand while neglecting existing ones. Loyal customers, in some cases, can also entice others by using the product or advising others to use it. (Aaker, 1992).

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Brand loyalty is a complex phenomenon. At least seven different types of brand loyalty can be distinguished. In emotional loyalty, unique, memorable, reinforcing experiences create a strong emotional bond with a brand. Positive word-of-mouth is likely to be very high. In identity loyalty, the brand is used as an expression of self, to bolster self-esteem and manage impressions. Branding prospects into related product categories are good. In differentiated loyalty, brand loyalty is based on perceived superior features and attributes. Here, demonstrations and trials are very important tools of marketing tactics. In contract loyalty, a consumer believes that continued loyalty earns him or her special treatment, but a competitor can question whether the consumer's trust is being exploited. In switching cost loyalty, a consumer is loyal because the effort involved in considering alternatives and adapting to a new alternative is not worth the expected return.

Sometimes, the consumer may even be dissatisfied but will remain loyal because a competitor is perceived to be same. Competitors can undermine loyalty by making it easy to switch through, e.g., product design, training and terms. In familiarity loyalty, brand loyalty is the result of top-of-mind brand awareness. This kind of loyalty is defended and attacked by constant, attention arising advertising that builds top-of-mind brand awareness. Finally, in convenience loyalty, brand loyalty is based on buying convenience. This type of loyalty may be attacked by the expansion of a competitor into convenience channels. It can be concluded that some types of loyalties are relatively easy to change because the habit is only superficial, sustained by buying convenience or the fact that the brand is the first to occur to mind. (Dickson, 1994 as cited in Li & Hong, 2013).

The brand loyalty of the customer base is often the core of a brand's equity. It reflects how likely a customer will be ready to switch to another brand, especially when that brand makes a change, either in price or in product features. As brand loyalty increases, the vulnerability of the customer base to competitive action is reduced. There are at least five potential levels of loyalty. These levels are stylised, and they do not always appear in the pure form. These five levels do, however, provide a feeling for the variety of forms that loyalty can take and how it impacts upon brand equity. (Aaker, 1991)

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the ability of a potential consumer to recall and recognize the brand, linking the brand with its corresponding product class (Aaker, 1991). To know about the product and to be aware of that is important for the potential consumers so that it could be one of the purchasing choices to them. This is because of the fact that the product needs to enter the awareness set before it comes to the consideration set (Blackwell et al., 2001 as cited in He and Song, 2007). The increase in brand awareness is conductive to a higher chance of entering the later set (Nedungadi, 1990 as cited in Khalifa & Liu, 2007). So, the brand with higher awareness would be more likely to be purchased (Yasin et al., 2007 as cited in Mouakket, 2009). Although there are different views about the satisfaction attitude relationship, they suggest that strong brand awareness positively affects brand satisfactions to shape favourable attitude.

Awareness is a key determinant identified in almost all brand equity models (Aaker 1991, Kapferer 1991, Keller 1992, Agarwal and Rao 1996, Krishnan 1996, Na, Marshall and Keller 1999, Mackay 2001 as cited in Lee & Leh, 2011). Keller (2003, p.76) defines awareness as " the

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customers' ability to recall and recognize the brand as reflected by their ability to identify the brand under different conditions and to link the brand name, logo, symbol, and so forth to certain associations in memory". Aaker (1996) identifies other higher levels of awareness besides recognition and recall (Aaker 1991). He includes top-of-mind, brand dominance, brand knowledge and brand opinion. Brand knowledge is the full set of brand associations linked to the brand (Keller, 1993). According to Aaker (1996), for new or niche brands, recognition can be important. For well-known brands recall and top-of-mind are more sensitive and meaningful. Brand knowledge and brand opinion can be used in part to enhance the measurement of brand recall. Similar measures are used by the Y&R and Total Research efforts. Aaker (1991) conceptualizes brand awareness must precede brand associations. That is where a consumer must first be aware of the brand in order to develop a set of associations (Washburn and Plank 2002 as cited in Owolabi & Olajide, 2014).

Brand awareness consists of brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition relates to consumers' ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the brand as a cue. In other words, brand recognition requires that consumers correctly discriminate the brand as having been seen or heard previously. Brand recognition is the minimal level of brand awareness.

It is based upon an aided recall test. Brand recognition is particularly important when a buyer chooses a brand at the point of purchase. The next level of brand awareness is brand recall. It relates to the consumers' ability to retrieve the brand when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or some other type of probe as a cue. In other words, brand recall requires that consumers can correctly generate the brand from memory. Brand recall is based on unaided recall, which is a substantially more difficult task than recognition. The first-named brand in an unaided recall task has achieved top-of-mind awareness. The relative importance of brand recognition and recall depends on the extent to which consumers make decisions in the store versus outside the store. Brand recognition may be more important to the extent that product decisions are made in the store. (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness can be characterized according to depth and breadth. The depth of brand awareness concerns the likelihood that a brand element will come to mind and the ease with which it does so. A brand that can be easily recalled has a deeper level of brand awareness than one that only can be recognized. The breath of brand awareness concerns the range of purchase and usage situations where the brand element comes to mind. The breadth of brand awareness depends to a large extent on the organisation of brand and product knowledge in memory. (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness creates value in different ways. Brand awareness provides the anchor to which other associations can be linked. Recognition provides the brand with a sense of familiarity and people like the familiar. In the absence of motivation to engage in attribute evaluation, familiarity may be enough. Brand awareness can be a signal of substance. The first set in the buying process often is to select a group of brands to consider. Brand awareness can be crucial to getting into this group. (Aaker, 1991).

Brand Association

A brand association is "anything linked in memory to a brand" (Aaker, 1991). Aaker (1991) argued that a brand association has a level of strength, and that the link to a brand (from the association) will be stronger when it is based on many experiences or exposures to communications, and when a network of other links supports it. Brand associations may reflect characteristics of the product. Product associations and organizational associations are taken as the two mostly referred categories according to Chen's (2001) as cited in Khan (2012) brand association typology. Further, Aaker (1991) suggested that brand associations could provide value to the consumer by providing a reason for consumers to buy the brand, and by creating positive attitudes/feelings among consumers. Rio et al. (2001) proposes that brand associations are a key element in brand equity formation and management. In this respect, high brand equity implies that consumers have strong positive associations with respect to the brand. A brand association is the most accepted aspect of brand equity (Aaker 1992).

Associations represent the basis for purchase decision and for brand loyalty (Aaker 1991). Brand associations consist of all brand-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, attitudes (Kotler & Keller, 2006 as cited in Umar et al., 2012) and is anything linked in memory to a brand. Other researchers (Farquhar & Herr 1993, Chen, 1996, Brown & Dacin 1997, Biel 1992 as cited in Ovidiu, 2005) identify different types of association that contribute to the brand equity. Chen (2001) categorized two types of brand associations - product associations and organizational associations.

Product associations include functional attribute associations and non-functional associations (Chen, 2001 as cited in Khan, 2012). Functional attributes are the tangible features of a product (Keller 1993; Hankinson and Cowking 1993, de Chernatony and McWilliam, 1989 as cited in Rio et al., 2001). While evaluating a brand, consumers link the performance of the functional attributes to the brand (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995, Lassar et al. 1995 as cited in Alamgir, 2010). If a brand does not perform the functions for which it is designed, the brand will has low level of brand equity. Performance is defined as a consumer's judgment about a brand's fault-free and long-lasting physical operation and flawlessness in the product's physical construction (Lassar et al. 1995 as cited in Ovidiu, 2005). Non-functional attributes include symbolic attributes (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Farquhar & Herr 1993, Chen, 1996 & Park et al. 1986 as cited in Owolabi & Olajide, 2014) which are the intangible features that meet consumers' needs for social approval, personal expression or self-esteem (Keller,1993; Hankinson & Cowking, 1993; de Chernatony & McWilliam, 1989; Pitta & Katsanis 1995 as cited in Khan, 2012).

Organizational associations include corporate ability associations, which are those associations related to the company's expertise in producing and delivering its outputs and corporate social responsibility associations, which include organization's activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations (Chen, 2001). According to Aaker (1996), consumers consider the organization that is the people, values, and programs that lies behind the brand. Brand-as-organization can be particularly helpful when brands are similar with respect to attributes, when the organization is visible (as in a durable goods or service business), or when a corporate brand is involved. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) must be mentioned as another concept that is influencing the development of brands nowadays, especially corporate brands as the public wants to know what, where, and how much brands are giving back to society. Both branding and CSR have become crucially important now that the organizations have recognized how these strategies can add or detract from their value (Blumenthal and Bergstrom 2003 as cited in Mkhitaryan, 2014).

CSR can be defined in terms of legitimate ethics or from an instrumentalist perspective where corporate image is the prime concern (McAdam and Leonard 2003 as cited in Mkhitaryan, 2014).

The success of a marketing program is reflected in the creation of favourable brand associations, i.e., consumers believe the brand has attributes and benefits that satisfy their needs and wants, so that a positive overall brand attitude is formed. The strength of brand associations depends on how the information enters consumer memory and how it is maintained as a part of the brand image. Thus, the more actively a consumer thinks about and elaborates on the significance of product or service information, the stronger associations are created in memory. This strength, in turn, increases both the likelihood that information will be accessible and the ease with which it can be recalled. The presence of strongly held favourably evaluated associations that are unique to the brand and imply superiority over other brands is crucial to a brand's success. Yet, unless the brand has no competitors, the brand will most likely share some associations with other brands. Shared associations can help to establish a category membership and define the scope of competition with other products and services. The favourability and strength of a brand association can be affected by other brand associations in memory.

Congruence is defined as the extent to which a brand association shares content and meaning with another brand association. In general, information that is consistent in meaning with existing brand associations should be more easily learned and remembered than unrelated information. The congruence among brand associations determines the cohesiveness of the brand image. The cohesiveness of the brand image may determine consumers' more holistic or gestalt reactions to the brand. (Keller, 1993).

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is another important dimension of brand equity (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality is not the actual quality of the product but the consumer's subjective evaluation of the product (Zeithaml, 1988). It is a competitive necessity and many companies today have turned customer-driven quality into a potent strategic weapon. They create customer satisfaction and value by consistently and profitably meeting customer's needs and preferences for quality. Kotler (2000) draws attention to the intimate connection among product and service quality, customer satisfaction, and company profitability.

Perceived quality is viewed as a dimension of brand equity (Aaker 1991; Kapferer 1991; Kamakura & Russell 1991; Martin & Brown 1991; Feldwick, 1996 as cited in Bhattacherjee, 2001b) rather than as a part of the overall brand association.

Perceived quality is the customer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority that is different from objective quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Objective quality refers to the technical, measurable and verifiable nature of goods/services, processes and quality controls. High objective quality does not necessarily contribute to brand equity (Anselmsson, et al. 2007 as cited in Andervazh et al., 2013). Since it's impossible for consumers to make complete and correct judgments of the objective quality, they use quality attributes that they associate with quality (Olson and Jacoby 1972, Zeithaml 1988, Ophuis and Van Trijp 1995, Richardson et al. 1994;

Vol.8, No.3, pp.43-64, June 2020
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Acebro´n and Dopico 2000 as cited in Andervazh et al., 2013). Perceived quality is hence formed to judge the overall quality of a good/service. Boulding (1993) as cited in Chattopadhahy et al. (2009) argued that quality is directly influenced by perceptions. Consumers use the quality attributes to 'infer' quality of an unfamiliar product. It is therefore important to understand the relevant quality attributes are with regard to brand equity. Zeithaml (1988) and Steenkamp (1997) as cited in Atilgan et al. (2005) classify the concept of perceived quality in two groups of factors that are intrinsic attributes and extrinsic attributes. The intrinsic attributes are related to the physical aspects of a product (e.g. colour, flavour, form and appearance); on the other hand, extrinsic attributes are related to the product, but not in the physical part of this one (e.g. brand name, stamp of quality, price, store, packaging and production information (Bernue´s et al.2003 as cited in Adeleke & Aminu, 2012). It's difficult to generalize attributes as they are specific to product categories (Olson and Jacoby 1972, Anselmsson et al. 2007 as cited in Andervazh, 2013). Perceived quality is valuable in several ways. In many contexts, the perceived quality of a brand provides a pivotal reason to buy. It is influencing which brands are included and excluded from the consideration set and which brand is to be selected. A principal positioning characteristic of a brand is its location within the dimension of perceived quality. A perceived quality advantage provides the option of charging a premium price. The price premium can increase profits and/or provide resources with which to reinvest in the brand. Perceived quality can also be meaningful to retailers, distributors and other channel members and thus aid in gaining distribution. Channel members are motivated to carry brands that are well regarded. In addition, the perceived quality can be exploited by introducing brand extensions, using the brand name to enter new product categories. A strong brand with respect to perceived quality will be able to extend further, and will find a higher success probability than a weak brand. (Aaker, 1991).

The Relationship between Brand Equity and Purchases Behavior

Although empirical evidence indicated that brand equity can affect purchase behavior in various contexts (Ashil and Sinha, 2004 ; Chang and Liu, 2009 as cited in Lee & Leh, 2011), the number of studies which apply Aaker's brand equity model to measure the effect of its dimensions on purchase behavior is limited. According to Keller (1993), brand awareness plays an important role in consumer decision making by bringing three advantages; these are learning advantages, consideration advantages, and choice advantages. Brand associations represent basis for purchase decisions and also create value to the firm and its customers. Aaker (1991) has listed benefits of brand associations as follows: helping to process/retrieve information, differentiating the brand, generating a reason to buy, creating positive attitudes/feelings, and providing a basis for extensions. Similar to brand associations, perceived quality also provides value to consumers by providing them with a reason to buy and by differentiating the brand from competing brands. According to the literature, while the definitions of brand loyalty based on the attitudinal perspective emphasized consumer intentions to be loyal to the brand, the definitions based on a behavioral perspective accentuated consumer's actual loyalty to the brand as reflected in purchase intention. Thus, we conceptualize brand loyalty based on a behavioral perspective. In sum, this study investigates whether consumers' purchase behavior is associated with brand awareness, brand associations, perception of quality and brand loyalty.

Statement of Hypotheses

H_1: There is a significant relationship between brand loyalty and purchase of automobile.

H_2: There is a significant relationship between brand awareness and purchase of automobile.

H_3: There is a significant relationship between perceived quality and purchase of automobile.

H_4: There is a significant relationship between brand association and purchase of automobile.

Theoretical Framework

Aaker's Customer-Based Brand Equity

Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as "a set of five categories of brand assets or liabilities linked to a brand's name or symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a good or service." These brand assets help consumers to interpret, process, and store information about products and brands by adding or subtracting its values. From Aaker's view point, brand equity is "customer-based" instead of "financial based". Therefore, customer-based brand equity would be more important for service industries such as restaurants and hotels rather than financial-based brand equity.

Brand equity in Aaker's model consists of five dimensions: brand awareness, brand perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty and brand assets such as patents, trademarks, and channel relationships. These five categories are considered the main bases for brand equity measurement from a consumer-oriented perspective. Aaker (1996) emphasized the fact that brand value to the firm (the firm-based brand equity) can be improved by the customer-based brand equity. High brand equity, including customer-based and firm-based brand equity, allows the brand or product to compete with differentiating brands or products. Thus, brand owners are able to charge a premium price as well as promoting customer's brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991, 1996).

Empirical Review

In a study conducted by Jalilvand, Samiei and Mahdavinia (2011) among 242 Iranian automobile consumers using structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses, they found out that brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty and perceived quality have a significant impact on consumer's intention to purchase products. Also, Taleghani, Largani and Mousavian (2011) in a similar study conducted on 258 respondents in Tehran, Iran found out that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

More so, in a work done in Tehran by Karbalaei et al. (2013) using a sample of 318 customers and structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as data analytical tool, they found out that customer satisfaction has positive influence on brand loyalty and brand awareness. This supports the findings of Jalilvand et al. (2011) and Taleghani et al. (2011).

International Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Research
Vol.8, No.3, pp.43-64, June 2020
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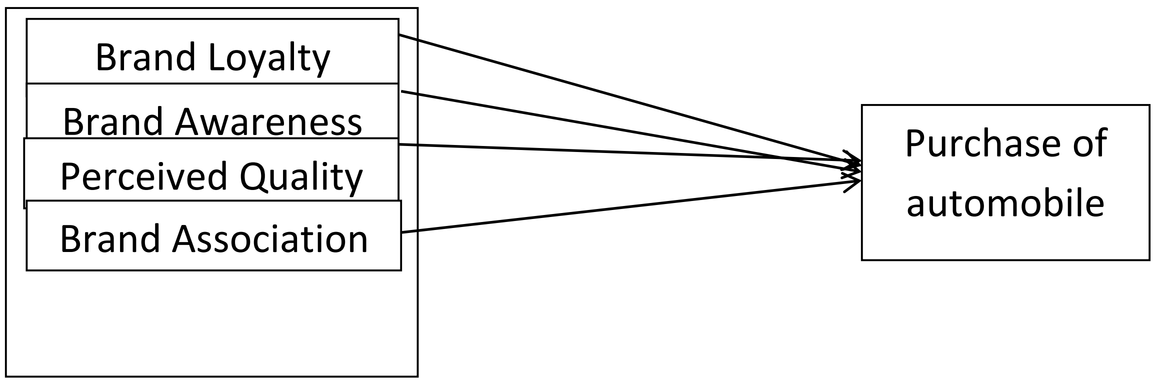
In similar vein, Alamgir, Shamsuddoha and Nedeleda (2010) carried out a study on 100 car owners in Bangladesh, using descriptive statistics. They discovered that customers prefer to purchase a well known branded car and that they do not want to try new or unknown branded cars because they have not much information about the lesser known brand.

Furthermore, in a work carried out in south- western Nigeria by Owolabi and Olajide (2014) among 110 automobile users using ANOVA and independent t- test to test the hypotheses. They found out that some level of personality dimensions have significant effect on consumer satisfaction towards automobile.

Proposed Research Model



Source: *Researcher's own Elaboration*

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted survey research design. It consists of asking questions, collecting and analyzing data from supposedly representative members of the population at a particular time with a view to determining the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables under investigation. The population of this study comprises users (owners) of automobile in Anambra state. The study population comprises of automobile users in Awka, Onitsha and Nnewi representing the three senatorial zones in Anambra State. This population is unknown (infinite) since the researcher cannot obtain a sampling frame for the population. Since the population of study is unknown (infinite), the researcher used a formula that estimates the representativeness of the sample on certain critical parameters at an acceptable level of probability. The formula is given as;

$$N = \frac{z^2\ (p)(Q)}{e^2}$$

Thus,

Z = @ 95% confidence level is 1.96 (read from the standard- normal distribution table).

P = 70% (0.70) from the pilot study.

Q = 1 – 0.7 = 0.3

e = 0.05 (since we have chosen 95% as our confidence limit)

$$:.\ N = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.70)(0.30)}{(0.05)^2}$$

= 322.69.86 ≈ 323

The sample size is 323 automobile owners.

This study employed quota sampling technique. The purpose was to ensure that respondents from the various demographic characteristics are involved in the sample. Quota sampling involves the selection of potential respondents according to pre- specified quotas for either demographic features or specific behaviors though disproportionately (Okeke, Olise & Eze, 2012). Questionnaire was adopted as the data collection instrument. The study made use of 5- point Likert scaled questions. The questionnaire comprises two sections. Section A comprises demographic profile of the respondents while section B comprises questions on the main constructs of the study namely, brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and purchase behavior. Draft copies of the questionnaire were given to the supervisor and other lecturers as well as some research experts who went through and made comments that were used in drafting the final questionnaire, this was carried out to conduct face and construct validity tests. For reliability test, Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was adopted. With a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.6 and above was acceptable for the study.

International Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Research
Vol.8, No.3, pp.43-64, June 2020
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Descriptive and inferential statistics were adopted for data analysis. Collected data were first structured into grouped frequency distributions, factor analysis was used for data reduction which aim at bringing out the few variables that can absorb other variables and, any factor loading below 0.5 was deleted while any factor loading above 0.5 was retained (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2006). Multiple Linear Regressions (MLRs) was used to test the significance of the hypotheses earlier formulated i.e. to test the effect of brand equity dimensions- brand association, brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived quality on purchase behavior of automobile users. Multiple Linear Regressions provide a means for identifying predictors of a particular dependent variable on the basis of statistical criteria.

Proposed Measurement Model

Purchase behavior = f (Brand Loyalty, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand association).

Thus,

Purbehav = $a + brndloy_{1x1} + brndAwrn_{2x2} + Perqual_{3x3} + Brndasso_{4x4} + e_i$

Where, $a =$ Constant.

$e_i =$ Error margin

International Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Research
Vol.8, No.3, pp.43-64, June 2020
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Analysis and Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
brand loyalty 1	281	1	5	3.21	1.232
brand loyalty 2	281	1	5	2.89	1.250
brand loyalty 3	281	1	5	3.98	1.163
brand loyalty 4	281	1	5	3.51	1.205
brand awareness 1	281	1	5	3.22	1.132
brand awareness 2	281	1	5	2.91	1.113
brand awareness 3	281	1	5	2.86	1.365
brand awareness 4	281	1	5	2.72	1.387
brand association 1	281	1	5	3.52	1.293
brand association 2	281	1	5	2.81	1.492
brand association3	281	1	5	2.97	1.504
perceived quality 1	281	1	5	3.38	1.233
perceived quality 2	281	1	5	3.71	.886
perceived quality 3	281	1	5	3.95	.975
purchase behaviour 1	281	1	5	3.92	.995
purchase behaviour 2	281	1	5	3.69	1.193
purchase behaviour 3	281	1	5	3.91	1.143
Valid N (listwise)	281				

Mean and standard deviations are used for descriptive analysis and the Table 4.2 above show that all the items have mean above 2.5 which is agreement and standard deviation above one except for 3 items. This implies that even with agreement, there high level variations in the respondents responses. The next is the reliability analysis.

Reliability Test

Cronbach Alpha statistics was used to check for the reliability of items and the results are shown in the table below.

Table 2

Variables	**Number of Items**	**Cronbach Alpha**
All	17	0.927
Brand loyalty	4	0.817
Brand awareness	4	0.854
Brand association	3	0.764
Perceived quality	3	0.612
Purchase behaviour	3	0.908

As shown in the table above, all the variables pass the 0.6 threshold and are therefore reliable and merit further analysis. Factor analysis was used data reduction and to conduct further reliability test and the results are shown below. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy is .743 which is above the .5 threshold; while the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity has approximate Chi Square value of 4348.3 and is highly statistically significant at .000. This shows

Vol.8, No.3, pp.43-64, June 2020
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that the test is dependable and reliable. The Factor analysis extracted five components which explain 75.195% of total variance.

Table 3: Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
brand loyalty 1	1.000	.573
brand loyalty 2	1.000	.733
brand loyalty 3	1.000	.806
brand loyalty 4	1.000	.669
brand awareness 1	1.000	.592
brand awareness 2	1.000	.845
brand awareness 3	1.000	.871
brand awareness 4	1.000	.710
brand association 1	1.000	.741
brand association 2	1.000	.640
brand association3	1.000	.776
perceived quality 1	1.000	.809
perceived quality 2	1.000	.655
perceived quality 3	1.000	.857
purchase behaviour 1	1.000	.882
purchase behaviour 2	1.000	.809
purchase behaviour 3	1.000	.816

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 3 above show the communalities, that is the extractions from the various items used to measure the variables of the research. As shown in the table all the items loaded very well above the .4 threshold. This means that the items pass international consistency and are therefore reliable.

Hypotheses Testing

Regression Analysis: purchase behaviour versus brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association, ...

Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Adj SS	AdjMS	F-Value	P-Value
Regression	4	1229.79	307.447	60.25	0.000
Error	276	1408.36	5.103		
Total	280	2638.14			

Model Summary

S	R-sq	R-sq(adj)	R-sq(pred)
2.25892	46.62%	45.84%	44.70%

Coefficients

Vol.8, No.3, pp.43-64, June 2020
Published by ECRTD-UK
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Term	Coef	SECoef	T-Value	P-Value	VIF
Constant	1.340	0.684	1.96	0.051	
brand loyalty	0.0412	0.0604	0.68	0.496	3.04
brand awareness	0.0890	0.0425	2.10	0.037	1.73
brand association	-0.1332	0.0616	-2.16	0.031	2.62
perceived quality	0.889	0.104	8.51	0.000	3.29

Regression Equation/model

purchase behaviour = 1.340 + 0.0412 brand loyalty + 0.0890 brand awareness - 0.1332 brand association + 0.889 perceived quality

Durbin-Watson Statistic
Durbin-Watson Statistic = 2.05014

The multiple ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions results are shown above and the first information is the model summary. The R-square or the coefficient of determination is 46.62%; the adjusted R-square which adjusts downwards taking cognizance of error is 45.84% while the predicted R-square is 44.70%. This means that between 46.62% and 45.84% of variations in the dependent variable are accounted for by the independent variables. In terms of prediction, the independent variables (brand equity variables) can predict 44.70% of purchase behaviour in the automobile market. The regression ANOVA value is 60.25 with a ῥ value of .000. This shows that the correlation value or square root of R-square which .683 is significantly different from zero. The information in the global statistics is Durbin-Watson statistics and this has a value of 2.05 which is well within the 1.5 to 2.5 bench mark hence no variable need exclusion. One important assumption of the OLS regression is normality and this was checked using the histogram and normal P-P plot and these show that the data pass the normality test. Based on these we proceed to interpret the coefficients.

Brand loyalty has a coefficient of 0.0412 and a ‘t’ value of 0.68 with is not significant. Based on this and because of the coefficient there is a relationship that is not significant hence the first hypothesis is partially accepted that there is a relationship (albeit insignificant) between brand loyalty and purchase of automobiles. The second hypothesis states that there is a relationship between brand awareness and repurchase of automobiles. Brand awareness has a positive coefficient of .0890 and a ‘t’ value of 2.10 which is significant at .037 hence the second hypothesis is fully accepted and validated. Brand association has a coefficient of .1332 with a ‘t’ value of -2.16 which significant at .031 below the .05 margin of error; and based on this we accept the forth hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between brand association and repurchase of automobiles. Finally, perceived quality has a positive coefficient of 0.889 with a ‘t’ value 8.51 which is highly significant at .000 hence we accept the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between brand association and purchase of automobile.

DISCUSSION

Based on the research objective 1, the study found out that brand loyalty as a dimension of brand equity has a significant relationship with automobile purchase behavior. This is in congruence with the studies of Jalilvand et al. (2011), Taleghani et al. (2011). Also, the research objective 2 was

International Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Research
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asserted when the study found out that there exist a positive and significant relationship between brand awareness and purchase behavior of automobile users in Anambra. This finding was supported by study carried out by Jalilvand et al. (2011) and Taleghnai et al (2011). This finding was also supported by Owolabi and Olajide (2014).

More so, Brand association as a dimension of brand equity was found to have significant effect on purchase of automobile in Anambra State. This finding was in consonance with the study done by Owolabi and Olajide (2014), Taleghai et al. (2011) and Jalilvand et al. (2011). Lastly, perceived quality was found to be statistically significant to purchase behavior of automobile users in Anambra. This finding was supported by the work done by Taleghani et al. (2011), Jalilvand et al. (2011) Karbalaei et al. (2013) and Owolabi and Olajide (2014).

CONCLUSION

Out of the four hypotheses formulated for the study one on brand loyalty was partially validated, while the remaining three on brand awareness, perceived quality and brand association were fully validated. The means that the four variables: brand loyalty; brand awareness; brand association and perceived quality influence consumers' intentions to repurchase automobiles. This is confirmed by the regression ANOVA which gave a result of 60.25 which is highly statistically significant at .000 well the .05 margin of error. Out of the four independent variables used in the study, brand association has a coefficient of -0.1332 which means that it relates negatively with purchase behaviour of automobiles. The other three independent variables have positive coefficients. Perceived quality has the highest positive coefficient of 0.889 and this means that it has the highest positive effect on purchase behaviour of automobiles. This is followed by brand awareness with a positive coefficient of 0.0890. Brand loyalty is the last with a positive coefficient of 0.0412 and this equally implies that the brand loyalty is positive related to consumer purchase intention for automobiles in Anambra State.All the dimensions of the brand equity model as used in this study play important roles in consumer decision making model as it relates to consumers' purchase of automobiles and related products. They also help in processing and retrieving information and differentiating one brand from another.

Recommendations

This study found that there is a positive but insignificant relationship between brand loyalty and consumer purchase of automobile and based on this it is -recommended that dealers of automobiles should rely more on well-known brands. The study also found a significant and positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase of automobiles. This study also found out that brand association and perceived quality have significant relationship with purchase of cars. This calls for consumer education more so perceived value is an important factor in consumer purchase decisions. Perceived quality helps in differentiating one brand from another and in making value judgements about competing brands. Brand association is an important factor especially for the Igbos who rebrand vehicles just for ego satisfaction. Examples are SUVs are branded O***kwuOto***, while brands of Honda are associated and rebranded as "Honda Halla, Honda Bulldog, Honda

Babyboy, End of Discussion; Discussion continues; and Spirit, Toyota Orobor, Toyota tiny light, Toyota Big for nothing, Toyota Spider" among others.

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