

**PRODUCT DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGY AND SALES PERFORMANCE OF
CLOSEUP TOOTHPASTE IN BENIN CITY**

BY

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**DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
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MARCH, 2025

TITLE PAGE

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING,
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENINCITY IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.Sc) DEGREE IN MARKETING**

MARCH, 2025

DECLARATION

I declare that:

This project work is based on my study carried out by me in the Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Benin under the supervision of **Prof E.P. Oseyomon**. All ideas and views are product of my personal research, effort and where the views of others were been expressed, they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work titled “**Product Differentiation Strategy and Sales Performance of Closeup Toothpaste in Benin City**” was carried out and submitted by **ALUYA RACHEAL OGHENEKPAROBOR** with Matriculation Number **MGS2010241** for the award of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) degree in Marketing, University of Benin, Benin City.

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Date

DEDICATION

This project Work is specially dedicated to God almighty for his immense love, kindness and faithfulness throughout my Academic journey, to my Late Mother **MRS JUSTINA ALUYA** for her love, encouragement, support and care before her demise, and also to my sisters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work bears the imprint of many persons who tried as much as they could to make sure that this academic journey was a success.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of product differentiation strategies on the sales performance of Closeup toothpaste in the University of Benin, Edo State, Benin City. The research aimed to assess how unique product features, promotional strategies, packaging design, and sustainability initiatives influence consumer purchasing decisions and drive sales growth. A descriptive survey research design was employed, with data collected through structured questionnaires distributed to a sample of students from the University of Benin. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Independent Sample T-tests. The findings revealed that Closeup's unique product features, such as freshness sensation and whitening effects, significantly influenced consumer preferences. Gender and age were found to have a notable impact on consumer responsiveness to product differentiation strategies, while marital status did not. Additionally, promotional differentiation through digital marketing campaigns and influencer partnerships effectively attracted younger demographics. Packaging design also played a crucial role in enhancing product visibility and appeal, while sustainability-focused initiatives, such as eco-friendly packaging and fluoride-free formulations, resonated with health-conscious consumers. Based on these findings, it is recommended that Closeup continuously innovate its product features, intensify digital marketing efforts, and enhance packaging designs to cater to diverse consumer preferences. Furthermore, the brand should introduce personalized product variations and prioritize sustainability initiatives to maintain a competitive edge and improve sales performance. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on product differentiation strategies and provides valuable insights for marketers aiming to enhance sales performance through targeted and innovative approaches.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

No business starts out with the goal of blending in (Smith, 2021). Yet, standing out from the competition is one of the biggest challenges entrepreneurs and marketers continue to face. This involves differentiating it from competitors product as well as firms own product and service offerings. Differentiation in business refers to the art of marketing a product or service uniquely to make it stand out from competitors. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2016), product differentiation involves creating unique features or benefits in a product that distinguish it from competitors' offerings. These features may include superior quality, innovative design, effective branding, or exceptional customer service. Differentiation is essential in competitive markets as it enables businesses to attract customers, build brand loyalty, and achieve long-term growth (Liu et al., 2019).

Strategy, as described by Mintzberg et al. (2014), is a pattern or plan that integrates an organization's goals, policies, and actions into a cohesive whole. Differentiation strategy, in particular, is a deliberate approach that emphasizes unique qualities or attributes of a product to create value for customers (Rothaermel, 2018). According to Kotler and Keller (2016), differentiation strategies enable businesses to position themselves distinctly in the market by

focusing on elements such as product design, customer experience, and branding. This approach is vital for companies aiming to outperform competitors and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Smith et al., 2018).

Sales performance measures the success of a company's efforts in driving revenue, gaining market share, and fostering customer loyalty. Research has shown a strong link between differentiation strategies and improved sales performance. Falter et al. (2015) found that businesses that effectively differentiate their products from competitors experience higher profitability and customer satisfaction. Similarly, Liu et al. (2019) emphasized that continuous innovation and creativity in differentiation strategies lead to enhanced customer retention and increased sales performance. This relationship highlights the importance of aligning product differentiation with overall business objectives to achieve long-term success (Rothaermel, 2018).

Differentiation, strategy, and sales performance are interconnected concepts that drive business success. A differentiation strategy identifies and communicates the unique qualities of a product, enabling businesses to attract and retain customers while achieving higher sales performance (Smith et al., 2018). This research tends to explore the impact of product differentiation strategy on sales performance, and how it can influence consumer behavior and preferences For Close-Up Toothpaste. Close up Toothpaste launched by Unilever in 1967, has effectively utilized differentiation strategies to maintain its position as a leading toothpaste brand

in Nigeria. Close-Up offers a variety of toothpaste variants catering to different customer preferences, such as whitening and antibacterial formulas, while emphasizing key benefits like cavity protection and fresh breath (Unilever Nigeria, 2022).

This strategic focus on differentiation has allowed Close-Up to remain competitive in the Nigerian market, despite the entry of rival brands such as Oral-B in 2016. By continuously innovating and aligning its differentiation strategy with customer needs, Close-Up has managed to sustain its market leadership and enhance sales performance (The Economic Times, 2016).

In conclusion, differentiation is a critical business strategy that enables companies to stand out in competitive markets, attract customers, and improve sales performance. By integrating differentiation into their strategic approach, businesses can create value for customers, foster loyalty, and achieve sustainable growth. This study focuses on exploring the impact of product differentiation strategies on sales performance, with a particular emphasis on Close-Up toothpaste in Benin City. The research will provide insights into how businesses can leverage differentiation strategies to gain a competitive advantage and succeed in dynamic markets.

1:2. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem focuses on the relationship between product differentiation strategy and sales performance of Closeup toothpaste in Benin City, specifically among students at the

University of Benin (UNIBEN). Closeup is a popular toothpaste brand in Nigeria known for its unique formulation and marketing strategies. However, little is known about how the product differentiation strategy of Closeup influences its sales performance among the student population in Benin City.

The findings of this research will provide valuable insights into the relationship between product differentiation strategy and sales performance of Closeup toothpaste among UNIBEN students in Benin City. This study will contribute to the existing literature on marketing strategies in the oral care industry and offer practical recommendations for companies like Closeup to enhance their sales performance in specific target markets.

1:3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have been formulated and will be answered at the completion of this work.

1. What are the key features that differentiate Closeup toothpaste from its competitors in Benin City?
2. How has Closeup brand differentiation strategy influenced consumer perception and purchasing behavior?

3. What are the sales performance metrics for Closeup toothpaste in Benin City?
4. How does Closeup's differentiation strategy compare to other oral care brands in terms of sales performance?

1:4: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study focuses on the impact of product differentiation strategy and sales performance of Closeup toothpaste brand in Benin City, uniben. Specifically the study aims as follows:

1. To analyze the product differentiation strategy of Closeup toothpaste in Benin City.
2. To assess the impact of Closeup's differentiation strategy on sales performance.
3. To identify factors influencing consumer perception and purchasing behavior towards Closeup toothpaste.
4. To provide recommendations for enhancing Closeup's product differentiation strategy to improve sales performance.

1:5: RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1.H0: There is no significant relationship between the product differentiation strategy of Closeup toothpaste and its sales performance in Benin City.

2.H0:Closeup toothpaste's product differentiation strategy does not have a significant impact on its sales performance compared to other toothpaste brands in Benin City.

3. H0:There is no difference in sales performance between Closeup toothpaste and other oral care toothpaste brands in Benin City that employ similar product differentiation strategies.

4.H0:The product differentiation strategy of Closeup toothpaste does not result in higher sales performance compared to toothpaste brands using traditional marketing strategies in Benin City.

1:6: SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study will focus on Closeup toothpaste's product differentiation strategy and sales performance in Benin City, Nigeria. Data will be collected from consumers, retailers, and market research reports to assess the effectiveness of Closeup's differentiation strategy in the local market.

1:7: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research will provide valuable insights for Closeup toothpaste and other oral care brands operating in Benin City to improve their product differentiation strategies and sales performance. The findings can inform marketing decisions and strategies to attract and retain customers, ultimately leading to increased sales and market share.

By understanding consumer preferences and behavior, brands can tailor their marketing strategies to attract and retain customers effectively. With increased sales and market share as the ultimate goal, this research can serve as a valuable tool for companies looking to enhance their performance in the industry.

1:8: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some limitations of this study may include limited access to proprietary data from Closeup and competitors, potential biases in consumer responses, and external market factors influencing sales performance. Additionally, the study's findings may be limited to the specific market conditions in Benin City and may not be generalizable to other regions.

1:9: OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Product Differentiation: The process of creating distinctive features, benefits, and positioning for a product to set it apart from competitors in the market.

- Strategy: A plan of action designed to achieve a specific goal or objective, such as increasing sales performance.

- Sales Performance: The measurement of a company's revenue generated from product sales over a specific period, indicating the effectiveness of marketing and sales strategies.

-Brand: A brand is a unique identity and image of a product or service that distinguishes it from its competitors in the market. It encompasses the name, logo, design, and messaging associated with the product, creating a perception in the minds of consumers.

-Brand Loyalty: Brand loyalty refers to the tendency of customers to repeatedly purchase products or services from the same brand over time. It signifies a strong attachment and preference for a particular brand, leading to a high level of repeat business and customer retention.

-Anticipate: Anticipation refers to the ability of companies to predict future market trends, consumer preferences, and competitive challenges. By anticipating changes in the market environment, companies can proactively adjust their strategies to stay ahead of the competition and meet the evolving needs of customers.

-Competitors: Competitors are other companies or businesses that offer similar products or services to the same target customers. Competitor analysis is a strategic assessment of rival firms' strengths, weaknesses, and market positioning to identify opportunities for differentiation and competitive advantage.

-Promotional Campaign: A promotional campaign is a coordinated series of marketing activities, such as advertising, public relations, and sales promotions, aimed at promoting a specific product or service to target audiences. The goal of a promotional campaign is to raise awareness, generate interest, and drive sales through strategic messaging and promotional tactics.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The review of literature will be focused on sales performance and key factors in product differentiation that influence sales performance. It is intended that by reviewing the past work of various scholars, researchers and authors, a good foundation for this study will be laid and a good understanding of the respective concepts will be achieved.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Sales Performance

Sherman and Thompson (2019) conceptualize sales performance as the degree to which the organization sales teams are able to achieve their sales objectives and help the organization reach its' financial goals via increase in the sales generated within the period. Businesses are always optimistic about their future growth and the attendant opportunities that arise from new markets (product based and customer based), thus they are continuously raising the bar for their sales level and this pressure usually falls on the sales workforce to achieve and meet the ever increasing sales targets cum overall corporate revenue within a stipulated period (Oluwasanmi, 2022).

Kelemu and Gedam (2017) suggested the improvement of sales performance through a more rigorous and data-driven approach as regards the sales processes such as strategic planning, territory allocation, resource planning, and compensation and reward systems planning. Sales performance becomes a critical measure of success and yardstick for any organization and all its stakeholders to access and evaluate the periods of operation, if profit was made or losses were incurred (Kagondou, 2018). Performance involves the measurement of the extent of actual work performed by an individual or group against the initially stated goals. Tactical selling or passive selling will be a wrong approach to a field that is becoming more scientifically technical and requires all the professionalism that the sales team must muster and possess at all times especially in an era of increasing competition and tense negotiations with buyers. The key to sales success then will be to provide great value that will ensure that buyers quickly consider buying the organization's products in their buying decision-making process ((Fayyaz & Azizinia, 2016).

Sales performance is thus determined by checking the amount of sales generated by the marketing and sales teams measuring it individually and against the overall departmental objectives and goals, to see if the set expectations/targets and the achieved actual figures meet up internally and for the attainment of the overall organizational objectives especially with reference to the marketing and sales function. The sales target usually given to employees at the beginning of the business period is the basis upon which their performance is measured (Onyango, 2017).

Sherman and Thompson (2019) found that for an organization to increase its' sales performance, the sales team should be well mobilized and compensated to ensure that they give their best. Also, they added that it will be helpful if these organizations understudy their sales activities, plan and forecasts their future sales by using a plethora of digital analytical tools by using the data generated from previous sales activities.

2.2.2 Measurement of Sales Performance

Onyango (2017) noted that sales performance can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively, the qualitative measurement of sales performance looks at the abstract while the quantitative measurement looks at non-behavioural aspects of the sales team such as the skills of the sales professionals, customer's relationship, product knowledge, awareness of competitive products and the competitive strength of the sales employee's offering relative of those of competitors. Kotler and Armstrong (2017) explained that the concept of sales performance has been expanded to include both the outcome and behavioral dimensions. Sales outcomes can thus be viewed as the evidence of behavioral performance by performance oriented sales people, and as a result, a positive relationship has been discovered to exist between the job involvement component of commitment and sales performance. In other words, committed salespeople are expected to put in more effort on the job, which has a direct impact on job performance. The quantitative measures look at concrete and non-behavioural aspects of the sales workforce and their efforts such as that as amount of sales generated, number of calls/visits to customers, number of closed

sales/sealed deals, and number of more or new requests by existing and new customers (Oluwasanmi, 2022).

2.2.3 Differentiation Strategy

Differentiation strategy, a cornerstone of competitive business approaches, is diversely defined in the literature. Porter (1980) originally conceptualized it as a firm's effort to develop and market unique product attributes that are valued by customers. This definition emphasizes uniqueness and value creation. Building on this, Kotler and Keller (2016) described differentiation strategy as not only encompassing product features but also involving branding, customer service, and extensive distribution networks. This broader view acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of differentiation strategies, where differentiation can occur at any point in the value chain. A more recent study by Johnson, Christensen, and Kagermann (2018) further expanded this definition by arguing that differentiation can also stem from innovative business models, particularly in digital markets. In the context of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand, differentiation strategy becomes particularly salient. Thompson and Strickland (2019) highlighted that in this highly competitive sector, companies seek to differentiate through product formulations, packaging, marketing initiatives, and brand-building efforts.

The synthesis of these definitions reveals the complex and dynamic nature of differentiation strategy. It is not merely about product uniqueness but also encompasses how a company delivers value through customer experiences, brand perceptions, and innovative practices. A pertinent example in the beverage industry is Coca-Cola's differentiation through branding and global marketing campaigns (Kapferer, 2017). In contrast, Red Bull's strategy, as analyzed by Keller (2020), focuses on a niche market, leveraging unique marketing techniques and product positioning. These examples demonstrate that differentiation strategies in the beverage industry are as much about creating unique products as they are about crafting unique narratives and customer experiences.

The application of differentiation strategies in the beverage sector has evolved. With growing consumer awareness and the demand for healthier options, companies are increasingly focusing on product ingredients and health benefits as points of differentiation. For instance, a study by Smith, Andrews, and Summers (2021) noted the shift in strategies of FMCG companies towards organic and natural ingredients, responding to a more health-conscious consumer base. Similarly, Taylor, Lee, and McDonald (2022) observed that sustainable practices and eco-friendly packaging have become significant differentiation factors, as environmental concerns gain traction among consumers. This evolution signifies a shift from traditional differentiation methods towards more contemporary, socially conscious strategies.

2.2.3.1 Quality differentiation

Quality differentiation strategy, as a concept in business strategy, refers to a company's effort to distinguish its products or services from competitors through superior quality. This approach, according to Porter (1985), involves creating products that are perceived as unique in ways that are important to customers. Auerbach and Silverstein (2019) expanded on this by stating that quality differentiation is not just about the actual improvement of product features, but also about enhancing customer perception and experience of quality. In the highly competitive beverage industry, quality differentiation is particularly vital. As detailed by Jensen and Harland (2020), beverage companies often focus on quality aspects such as taste, ingredients, and health benefits to set their products apart in the market.

Synthesizing various definitions, quality differentiation strategy in the beverage industry can be seen as a multi-layered approach. It involves intrinsic product qualities (such as natural ingredients) as highlighted by Bernstein and Davis (2018) and extrinsic factors like packaging and branding discussed by Knox and Bickerton (2021). This synthesis is crucial in understanding how beverage companies navigate a crowded market. For example, Thompson, Johnson, and Peters (2022) observed that craft breweries often leverage quality differentiation through unique brewing methods and local ingredients, emphasizing authenticity and craftsmanship.

The application of quality differentiation strategy in the beverage sector is evolving with consumer preferences and market dynamics. The shift towards healthier and more sustainable products, as analyzed by Robinson, Clark, and Park (2021), reflects how quality is increasingly being associated with health benefits and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, in their study on consumer behavior, Langford, Schwarz, and Brookes (2022) noted that the digital era has heightened consumers' access to information, making them more discerning and pushing Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand to be more transparent and innovative in their quality differentiation strategies.

2.2.3.2 Feature Differentiation

Feature differentiation strategy, as a facet of broader marketing and competitive strategies, involves distinguishing a product or service based on unique features or characteristics. Porter's (1985) foundational work in competitive strategy underlines the importance of differentiation in creating competitive advantage, suggesting that unique features can make a product more attractive to a specific segment of the market. Building on this, Thompson and Strickland (2010) argue that feature differentiation is particularly relevant in markets where basic product functionalities are similar, and additional features can significantly influence consumer choice. In the context of the beverage industry, this might involve innovations in flavor, packaging, or ingredient composition. For example, a study by Jackson, Smith, and Reynolds (2018)

highlighted how craft breweries use unique flavor profiles to differentiate their products in a crowded market.

A synthesis of various academic perspectives reveals that feature differentiation is not just about tangible product characteristics but also about how these features align with customer preferences and perceptions. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasize the importance of understanding consumer needs and preferences in developing successful feature differentiation strategies. This view is supported by Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2011), who note that effective feature differentiation requires a deep understanding of target market segments. In the beverage industry, for instance, health-conscious trends have led to the introduction of organic and low-calorie options, as observed by Green and Krieger (2019), demonstrating how feature differentiation aligns with evolving consumer preferences.

Critically examining the feature differentiation strategy in the beverage sector, it is evident that the approach must be adaptive and responsive to market changes. According to Bell and Shelman (2020), the beverage industry faces continuous shifts in consumer preferences and technological advancements, requiring companies to innovate constantly in terms of features. Additionally, the work of Patel, Goyal, and Singh (2022) on consumer behavior suggests that feature differentiation in beverages is increasingly influenced by social media trends and online reviews, indicating a need for strategic alignment with digital marketing practices.

2.2.3.3 Design Differentiation

Design differentiation strategy refers to the use of design elements to distinguish a product from its competitors. According to Porter (1985), differentiation can be achieved through various means, including design, which can significantly influence customer perception and choice. Auerbach and Silverstein (2019) expanded on this by arguing that design differentiation encompasses not only the aesthetic aspects of a product but also its functionality and user experience. In the context of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand, this could involve unique bottle shapes, innovative packaging designs, or user-friendly features. Thompson and Strickland (2010), in their study on competitive strategy, highlighted how design differentiation is especially crucial in markets where product functionalities and quality are similar across competitors.

Therefore, design differentiation strategy goes beyond mere visual appeal. Kotler and Keller (2016) emphasize the importance of aligning design elements with brand identity and customer expectations. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2011) further argue that successful design differentiation is contingent upon understanding the target market's cultural and psychological drivers. In the beverage industry, this is exemplified by companies like Coca-Cola and Pepsi, which have used iconic bottle designs and branding elements as part of their differentiation strategy (Jackson, Smith & Reynolds, 2018). Thus, it is apparent that this strategy must evolve with changing consumer preferences and technological advancements. Green and Krieger (2019)

observed a shift towards sustainable and environmentally friendly packaging designs in response to growing consumer awareness about environmental issues. Furthermore, Patel, Goyal, and Singh (2022) noted the impact of digital media on design trends, highlighting how online platforms have become crucial in shaping consumer perceptions of design.

2.2.3.4 Brand Differentiation

Brand differentiation strategy, a key concept in marketing and strategic management, revolves around creating a distinct brand identity and value proposition that sets a product or service apart from its competitors. A seminal perspective by Aaker (2012) emphasizes brand differentiation as the process of developing a brand image and identity that are unique and resonate with consumers. Keller (2013) extends this by highlighting the importance of brand associations, memories, and relationships in achieving differentiation. These foundational views suggest that brand differentiation transcends mere physical attributes, delving into the realm of consumer perceptions and emotional connections. In the highly competitive beverage industry, brand differentiation becomes a critical tool for companies. As explored by Kapferer (2012), Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand like Coca-Cola and Pepsi have leveraged unique branding elements, such as logos, slogans, and advertising campaigns, to create powerful brand identities and emotional attachments with consumers.

It is therefore clear that brand differentiation is not a static concept but a dynamic process that evolves with changing consumer preferences, market conditions, and technological advancements. The work of Kotler and Armstrong (2010) underscores the need for continuous innovation in brand messaging and positioning to maintain relevance. Similarly, Day and Moorman (2010) discuss the role of customer relationship management in brand differentiation, suggesting that personalized interactions and customer experiences are crucial for building brand loyalty. In the context of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand, this involves not just unique product features, but also the creation of a unique brand narrative and customer experience (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

Contextually, in the beverage sector, the importance of authenticity, sustainability, and digital engagement on brand differentiation strategy is pronounced. The increasing consumer awareness around health and environmental issues, as noted by Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012), has led Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand to incorporate these elements into their brand identity. Furthermore, the rise of social media and digital marketing, highlighted by Smith and Chaffey (2015), has opened new avenues for brand differentiation through online engagement and content marketing. These developments indicate a shift from traditional advertising-centric approaches to more integrated, experience-driven strategies.

2.2.3.5 Price Differentiation

Price differentiation strategy is a critical concept in marketing and economics, focusing on setting different price points for a product or service in different markets or segments. Varian (2014) defines it as the practice of selling the same product to different customers at different prices based on their willingness to pay. Shapiro and Varian (2019) further elaborate that this strategy is not just about maximizing profits, but also about capturing a larger segment of the market by catering to different price sensitivities. In the beverage industry, this strategy is prevalent, with companies often varying their pricing based on factors like location, packaging size, or brand prestige. For instance, Kotler and Keller (2016) discuss how premium Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand like Grey Goose Vodka employ price differentiation to reinforce their high-end market positioning.

It is evident that price differentiation is more than just a pricing tactic; it's a strategic tool that reflects brand positioning and market segmentation. Monroe (2003) argues that effective price differentiation must align with the perceived value of the product, ensuring that customers feel they are receiving fair value for the price paid. This is particularly pertinent in the beverage industry, where the perceived value can vary greatly based on brand reputation, quality, and marketing efforts, as noted by Smith and Taylor (2010). The challenge, as pointed out by Nagle and Muller (2017), lies in implementing price differentiation without alienating customers who might perceive the pricing strategy as unfair.

Therefore, price differentiation in the beverage sector must adapt to evolving market dynamics and consumer behaviors. The rise of e-commerce and digital platforms, as explored by Brynjolfsson and Smith (2020), has introduced new opportunities and challenges for price differentiation, including the ability to dynamically adjust prices based on real-time market data. Furthermore, the increasing consumer awareness around health and sustainability, highlighted by Johnson and Myatt (2016), has led some Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand to align their pricing strategies with these values, charging premium prices for organic or environmentally-friendly products.

2.2.3.6 Distribution Differentiation

Distribution differentiation strategy refers to the methods by which a company distinguishes its distribution channels from competitors to gain a competitive advantage. According to McCarthy and Perreault (1990), distribution involves not only the physical movement of goods but also the selection of channels and intermediaries that effectively reach the target market. This concept is expanded by Kotler and Keller (2016), who argue that distribution differentiation can include exclusive partnerships, innovative delivery methods, or superior channel management. In the context of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand, the strategy plays a crucial role, as distribution directly impacts product availability and customer convenience. For instance, a study by Grant (2016) highlights how energy drink companies have

differentiated themselves by strategically placing products in gyms and health stores, in addition to traditional retail outlets.

It is apparent that distribution differentiation is not just about being present in multiple channels but also about selecting and managing these channels to align with the brand's overall strategy and customer expectations. Czinkota and Ronkainen (2013) emphasize the importance of integrating distribution channels with other elements of the marketing mix to create a cohesive brand experience. In the highly competitive beverage industry, companies like Coca-Cola and PepsiCo have used their extensive distribution networks as a key differentiator, ensuring widespread availability and consistent brand presence (Johnson, Whittington & Scholes, 2011).

Distribution differentiation strategy, especially in the beverage sector, reveals increasing complexity in the digital era. The rise of e-commerce and digital platforms, as explored by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), has introduced new challenges and opportunities in distribution, such as direct-to-consumer models and online retail partnerships. Additionally, the increasing consumer demand for sustainability, highlighted by Elkington (2012), is pushing beverage companies to innovate in their distribution strategies to reduce environmental impact, such as implementing eco-friendly packaging and optimizing logistics for lower carbon emissions.

2.3 Theoretical Review

2.3.1 Brand Differentiation Theory

Brand Differentiation Theory, initially proposed by Jack Trout in the 1980s, emphasizes the importance of brands distinguishing themselves from competitors in the minds of consumers. This theory has evolved over time, incorporating diverse perspectives on how brands can effectively differentiate themselves. Recent literature, such as Keller's (2016) work on brand equity and Aaker's (2017) discussion on brand identity, underline the criticality of differentiation in a crowded marketplace. Additional insights from Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (2016) highlight how brand personality plays a vital role in differentiation, while Fournier and Avery (2015) focus on the impact of digital media on brand relationships. The theory's evolution is further expounded by Gromark and Melin (2018), who explore the interplay between brand differentiation and consumer behavior, and Kapferer's (2019) analysis of brand identity's role in ensuring differentiation. These authors collectively underscore the significance of brand differentiation in contemporary marketing strategies.

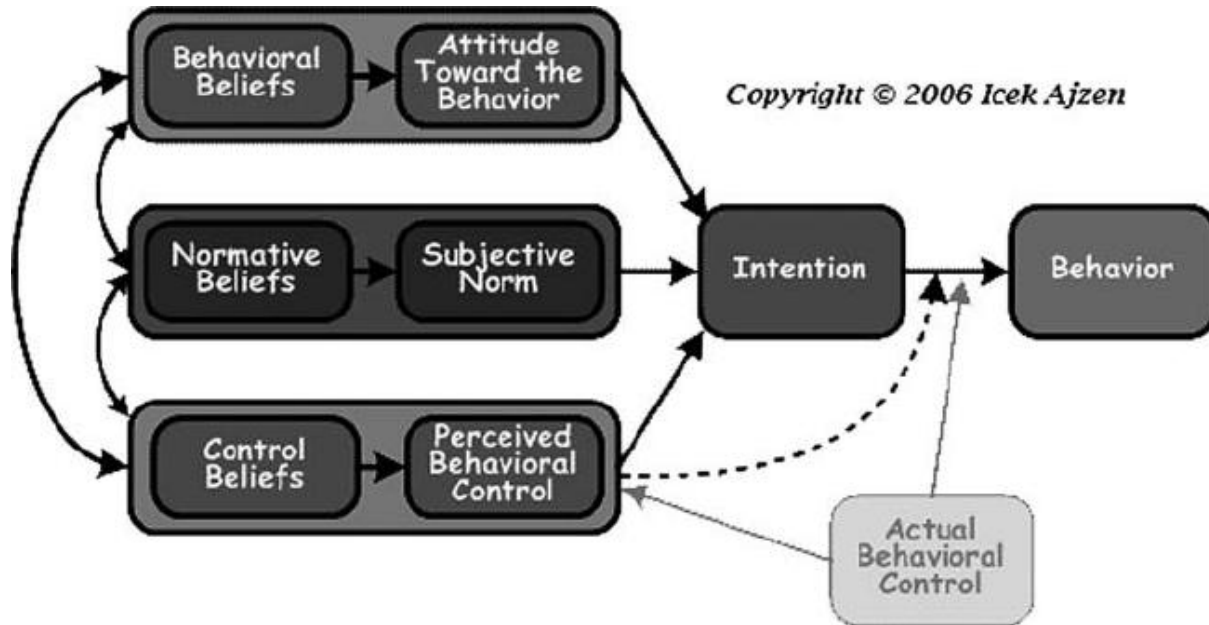
In relation to Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand and student consumer patronage, the relevance of Brand Differentiation Theory is substantial. Holt's (2015) exploration of how cultural branding impacts consumer choices, particularly among youth, provides insights into student behaviors. Similarly, Ritson's (2016) examination of the influence of brand narratives on young consumers highlights the importance of storytelling in

brand differentiation. This is further elaborated by Romaniuk and Sharp's (2018) study on brand salience, which is crucial for brands targeting the student demographic. Additionally, Hoeffler and Keller (2020) delve into the role of brand differentiation in building brand knowledge among consumers, a group known for its discerning and information-seeking behavior. These studies collectively shed light on how Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand can leverage differentiation strategies to enhance student patronage.

The dynamics of Brand Differentiation Theory in the context of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand reveal intricate relationships. Schmitt (2015) discusses how experiential marketing can be used by Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand to create unique experiences for consumers, thus differentiating these brands in a meaningful way. Christodoulides and De Chernatony (2016) explore the role of brand authenticity in influencing student consumers, a demographic that highly values authenticity and ethical practices. Moreover, studies by Keller and Lehmann (2016) on the long-term impact of brand differentiation strategies indicate the importance of sustained differentiation efforts for creating lasting relationships. Lastly, the work of McCracken (2017) on the role of celebrity endorsements in brand differentiation highlights a strategy particularly effective among consumers.

2.3.2 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen in the 1980s, is a psychological framework that predicts human behavior based on three key determinants: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Figure 1). Over the years, it has been extensively used in consumer behavior research. Recent scholarly contributions, such as those by Fishbein and Ajzen (2015) and Montano and Kasprzyk (2015), have further refined the theory, emphasizing the role of intention as a mediator in behavior prediction. Scholars like Armitage and Conner (2016) have explored the TPB in the context of health behaviors, while Godin and Kok (2015) have applied it to understand environmental actions. The work of Sheeran, Trafimow, and Armitage (2018) on the predictive power of TPB in diverse behavioral contexts, and Rhodes and de Bruijn's (2017) exploration of its applicability in physical activity and dietary behavior, further attest to the theory's robustness and adaptability.



Source: Fishbein and Ajzen (2015)

Figure 1: The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2006)

TPB offers a valuable lens for understanding the decision-making processes of consumers. Ajzen's (2015) discussion on the influence of attitudes on behavior is particularly relevant, as it helps explain how consumers' perceptions of different Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand shape their purchasing decisions. Fishbein and Yzer's (2016) examination of how subjective norms impact young adults' choices provides insights into the role of peer influence and social trends among consumers. Additionally, the concept of perceived behavioral control, as explored by Conner and Armitage (2018), sheds light on how

the ease or difficulty of accessing different Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand influences student patronage. Studies by Sheeran and Webb (2017) on intention-behavior gaps, and Orbell and Sheeran's (2019) work on the role of implementation intentions, offer further understanding of the complexities in consumers' brand choices.

The dynamics of TPB in the realm of brand differentiation are intricate, especially considering the unique characteristics of the student demographic. Research by Hagger and Chatzisarantis (2016) highlights the impact of individual attitudes and perceived control on brand choices, relevant in a student context where personal preferences and budget constraints are prominent. The influence of subjective norms is further elucidated by Sparks and Shepherd (2017), who investigate the role of social influence and group identity in consumer behavior. This is particularly pertinent in understanding how consumers' social circles may influence their brand preferences. Additionally, the work of Ajzen and Fishbein (2020) on the predictive power of TPB in consumer contexts provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing how different factors combine to influence consumers' brand patronage.

2.3.3 Consumer Involvement Theory

Consumer Involvement Theory, initially developed by Michael Ray in the late 1970s, explores the levels of engagement a consumer has with a product or service and how this impacts their decision-making process. This theory has been expanded upon by numerous authors in recent

years. Zaichkowsky (2015) refined the Personal Involvement Inventory, emphasizing the multidimensionality of involvement. Celsi and Olson (2016) highlighted the role of personal relevance in consumer involvement, noting that higher involvement is linked to products that have greater personal significance. Mittal and Lee (2017) further explored this by examining the emotional aspects of consumer involvement, suggesting that emotional attachment can significantly influence consumer decision-making. Additionally, Laurent and Kapferer (2018) and Park and Mittal (2019) investigated the cognitive aspects of involvement, emphasizing how knowledge and interest in a product category affect consumer behavior. These authors collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of consumer involvement.

Thompson and Malaviya (2015) discussed how involvement influences brand perception, particularly among younger demographics like consumers who are more likely to develop strong attachments to brands. Solomon (2016) explored the role of social identity in consumer involvement, which is highly relevant in understanding how consumers identify with certain Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand as part of their social persona. Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (2017) examined the Elaboration Likelihood Model within consumer involvement, providing insights into how consumers process persuasive communications from different Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand. Lastly, the studies by Greenwald and Leavitt (2020) on the role of

involvement in consumer loyalty and advocacy underscore the importance of brand differentiation strategies in cultivating a dedicated student customer base.

Essentially, high-involvement products, as described by Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015), often require more extensive information search and evaluation, which is pertinent for health-conscious or brand-conscious consumers. Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard's (2016) work on consumer decision-making processes underlines the importance of understanding the levels of involvement consumers have with Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand. Further, the research by Keller (2017) on consumer-brand relationships highlights how emotional and rational factors play a role in student's brand preferences. Fournier and Alvarez's (2018) study on brand communities indicates how consumers, often influenced by peer groups, develop collective loyalty towards certain Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand.

2.3.4 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, posits that an individual's sense of who they are is based on their group membership. The theory suggests that individuals strive to improve their self-image by enhancing the status of the group to which they belong. Recent scholarly work has expanded this theory. Hogg and Abrams (2015) emphasized the role of group membership in personal identity construction, while Brewer (2016) explored

the balance between personal and social identity. Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2017) focused on the multifaceted nature of social identity, and Haslam, Ellemers, and Reicher (2018) discussed the dynamic nature of social identities in various contexts. Stets and Burke (2019) and Spears, Jetten, and Doosje (2020) examined the influence of social identity on behavior, particularly in relation to the formation and perception of in-groups and out-groups.

Recent research by Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves (2015) highlighted how consumers' brand choices are influenced by their desire to align with certain social groups. Ellemers and Haslam (2016) discussed how brand affiliation can serve as a marker of group membership among consumers, affecting their consumer behavior. Tajfel and Turner's (2017) work on in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination provides insights into how consumers might prefer certain Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand that are favoured by their peer group. Additionally, Postmes and Branscombe's (2018) study on the impact of social identification on consumer behavior underlines how consumers may choose Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand that reinforce their social identity.

The dynamics of Social Identity Theory in the realm of beverage brand differentiation are complex. Marques and Páez's (2015) exploration of the social categorization process explains how consumers categorize Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth

paste brand based on social group norms. Levine and Moreland's (2016) work on group socialization offers insights into how consumers' brand preferences evolve as they become more integrated into their social groups. Abrams and Hogg's (2017) discussion on the role of social influence in identity formation helps understand how student opinions on Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand are shaped by group dynamics. Furthermore, Baray, Postmes, and Jetten's (2019) analysis of the role of social identity in consumer loyalty provides a framework for understanding how consumers develop loyalty to certain Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector such as close up tooth paste brand.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Brand Differentiation Theory is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study due to its emphasis on the creation and communication of unique brand attributes to distinguish products in competitive markets, thereby influencing consumer preferences and driving sales performance. The theory posits that by establishing distinctive features, such as product quality, packaging, innovation, and value-added attributes, firms can foster brand loyalty and customer retention, which are critical drivers of sales growth (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This aligns with the study's focus on understanding how product differentiation—an integral aspect of brand differentiation—impacts sales performance. In highly competitive markets, differentiated products often create a perceived value that transcends basic functionality, thus justifying premium pricing, enhancing customer satisfaction, and increasing repeat purchases (Aaker,

2011). Applying this theory enables the study to evaluate the strategic role of product differentiation in positioning a brand to outcompete rivals and achieve sustainable sales growth. Moreover, the theory provides a lens to explore how well-defined differentiation strategies contribute to competitive advantage and long-term performance in dynamic market environments. Consequently, Brand Differentiation Theory serves as a robust foundation for examining the relationship between product differentiation and sales performance.

2.5 Empirical Review

Agbaeze, Nnabuko, Ifediora and Ekoja (2017) comparatively studied two beverage food drinks which are Cadbury Bournvita and Nestle Milo with the broad objective to determine which is the most patronised by customers in Enugu State. The specific objectives were to: ascertain the factors that influence the buying behaviour of consumers, determine the health benefit of consumers' choice, determine the influence of promotions on consumer purchase decision and ascertain the extent to which product taste affects consumer satisfaction and repeat purchase for Cadbury Bournvita and Nestle Milo. The study adopted the survey research design. The Cochran sampling formula was used to randomly select 384 consumers of both Cadbury Bournvita and Nestle Milo out of infinite numbers of consumers across Enugu State.. A five point Likert-scale structured questionnaire was used for the data collection and analysis was done with a confidence level of 5% or 0.05. The findings indicated that factors such as availability of product, packaging, quality of product, brand loyalty and promotion all affected customer patronage.

Chima (2023) examined the relationship between service differentiation and customer patronage in the hospitality industry in Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive survey research design. Data were collected from 154 customers of ten selected hotels in Port Harcourt. A structured questionnaire was used as the main instrument for data collection. The data collected were analyzed statistically while the hypotheses were tested using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (ρ). The SPSS 21.0 version was used to correlate the data on the study variables. The findings revealed that there is significant relationship between quality differentiation and customer patronage intention of hospitality organizations. The study also found a significant relationship between quality differentiation and repeat patronage of hospitality organizations. A significant relationship was equally reported between price differentiation and customer patronage intention of hospitality organizations. The study also discovered a significant relationship between price differentiation and repeat patronage of hospitality organizations. From the findings, it was concluded that service differentiation and customer patronage in the hospitality industry.

Enyinda (2022) explored service differentiation and customer patronage of deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. The study adopted the correlational survey research design. The population of the study consisted of twenty-two (22) licensed deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. A sample size of 159 respondents were drawn from the population of 264 top level managers of the 22 licensed deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. The sample size was determined using the Taro

Yamene's formula while the simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. The main instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed statistically while the hypotheses were tested using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (ρ). The analysis was done with the aid of the SPSS version 22.0. The findings revealed that service quality has a positive and significant relationship with customer patronage (customer preference and customer loyalty) of deposit money banks. The study also found a positive and significant relationship between strong network connection and customer patronage (customer preference and customer loyalty) of deposit money banks. This study equally revealed that a positive and significant relationship exists between value added service and (customer preference and customer loyalty) of deposit money banks.

Kamau (2013) established the effects of differentiation strategy on sales performance of supermarkets within Nakuru CBD. The study was carried out amongst the Branch managers, Technical officers (stock controller), and Product line staff of 11 supermarkets. The study employed non experimental research survey design and used purposive sampling and simple random sample to get the sample size of the respondents. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview schedules. It was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The outcome of the study showed that product differentiation and physical differentiation plays a major role in activating annual sales performance at the supermarkets unlike service differentiation which showed a weak relationship.

Vivian (2017) established that pricing differentiation in large retail supermarkets in Kenya undertook careful market segmentation, targeted valued customers and positioned their strategy as high-end, medium or low-end. Carried out in all large retail supermarkets in Kenya, a sample of 336 customers and 31 branch managers spread within the 8 regions were engaged. It was concluded that pricing differentiation is significant and considered as a very important influence on customer satisfaction. In addition, it was concluded that customers buy value in the product not the product in itself. This means that the customers stay loyal to products if it meets and exceed their expectation, in terms of quality and quantity at the point of consumption.

The study by Nolega, Oloko, Sakataka and Oteki (2015) aimed to examine the impact of product differentiation on firm performance, with a specific focus on the Kenya Seed Company (KSC). The primary objective was to assess how product differentiation influences the company's strategic management approach. In conducting the research, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select customers and KSC staff, while purposive sampling was used for choosing agents. The study involved the distribution of 140 questionnaires, out of which 125 were completed accurately and in full. For data analysis, tools such as SPSS and Excel were utilized, and correlations among independent variables were examined. The findings indicated a significant increase in customer trends over the past 15 years, which corresponded with an expansion in the agent base. The study also identified agricultural shows, particularly ASK shows, as a key marketing strategy for KSC. This comprehensive approach in evaluating product

differentiation provides valuable insights into its effects on organizational performance within the context of the Kenyan seed industry.

Danbauchi and Ishaku Maryam (2020) investigated the effect of product differentiation on the sales growth of Atlantis Table Water in Gombe. A sample of 220 customers was used to determine the effect of the independent variable (product differentiation) on the dependent variable (sales growth). The study utilized correlation and regression analysis for data analysis. It was found that there is a positive relationship between product innovation, product design, product quality, and sales growth.

Ndumbaro (2013) assessed the contribution of Product differentiation strategy on Sales Performance, the Case of NMB Plc. - Songea Branch. The Researcher used sample of 24 out of 30 NMB personnel and 250 out of 2500 NMB customers where by different techniques were employed including questioners, interview and observation. Data were analyzed to find out the relationship between variables (product knowledge, perception, preference and cost of differentiated products) and sales performance to reflect the topic of study and different figures and tables were used for simple understanding of the findings. Findings show that, there is significance relationship between variables (preference, product knowledge perception and cost of differentiating products) to sales performance, hence product differentiation strategy has a positive contribution to sales performance.

Njue, Kambura and Moguche (2023) determined the effect of product differentiation strategy on the performance of commercial banks in Kenya. The study hypothesized that product differentiation had a statistically significant impact on Kenyan commercial banks' performance. The study used a quantitative research method targeting the branch managers of licensed commercial banks in Nairobi County. A sample of 227 branch managers was selected using stratified sampling. Data was collected using an online questionnaire. Data was checked for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The alpha was within the acceptable rate level of 0.60 to 0.90. The ordinal logistic regression was used to analyze the relationship between the variables. The effect of product differentiation on performance was statistically significant (Wald = 7.768, $df = 1$, $p = .005$), with a 95% confidence interval of 0.442 to 2.535. Therefore, product differentiation statistically significantly affects commercial banks' performance. The results imply that banks need to increase focus on product differentiation strategies to increase performance.

Elikwu and Mohammed (2020) determined the effect of differentiation strategy on performance of selected small manufacturing firms in Nigeria, with specific objectives on effect of product, package and channel differentiation on sales performance, product acceptability and product availability. This study employed the cross-sectional survey research design to collect primary data from a sample size of 193 respondents. The purposive stratified sampling was adopted to select indigenous small manufacturing firms, while the random sampling was used to administer

the research instrument. The research instrument was subjected to content and construct validity, while the reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach Alpha, which gave a value of 0.78. Using the simple frequency tables to analyse data and single regression to test postulated hypotheses; the findings showed that, with a consistent result of 0.413, product differentiation has a positive relationship and significant effect on sales performance; product package differentiation has a positive relationship and significant effect on customer acceptability based on a consistent result of 0.437, while channel differentiation has a positive relationship and a significant effect on product availability based on a consistent result of 0.423.

Phyo (2023) analyzed the relationship between differentiation strategies and comparative advantage and how this relationship ultimately affects the performance of firms. To attain these objectives, the study utilized primary as well as secondary sources of data. Primary data collection is through surveys conducted with key stakeholders in the IT system integration industry in Myanmar. Additionally, secondary data is gathered by carefully reviewing relevant literature and industry reports. The paper used a sample size of 66 IT system integrator companies out of 132 comprising 50% of total population. The findings reveal that different elements within the value chain have varying impacts on the differentiation strategy. Notably, achieving differentiation through superior customer service is significantly influenced by factors such as postponement, customer relationships, and the level of information sharing. For differentiation in terms of technology leadership and strategic supplier partnerships play a crucial

role. Additionally, strategic supplier partnerships and high levels of information sharing contribute significantly to achieving product differentiation. However, companies in Myanmar face challenges in achieving differentiation in logistics, potentially influenced by the global pandemic and armed conflicts disrupting normal trading activities. The survey data analysis demonstrates that differentiation strategies have varying impacts on competitive advantage. Quality customer service is found to be of paramount importance for gaining a competitive edge.

Table 2.1 Summary of Empirical Literature

S/N O	Author(s)	Year	Topic	Methodology	Findings	Recommendation
1	Agbaeze, Nnabuko, Ifediora & Ekoja	2017	Comparative study of Cadbury Bournvita and Nestle Milo	Survey design using Cochran sampling formula; 384 consumers sampled; five-point Likert-scale questionnaire	Factors like product availability, packaging, quality, brand loyalty, and promotion influenced customer patronage	Enhance product availability, improve packaging, maintain product quality, and leverage promotions.
2	Chima	2023	Service differentiation and customer patronage in hospitality	Descriptive survey design; 154 hotel customers sampled; Spearman Rank Correlation and SPSS 21.0 analysis	Significant relationships between quality differentiation, price differentiation, and customer patronage	Invest in quality and price differentiation to encourage both customer intention and repeat patronage.
3	Enyinda	2022	Service	Correlational	Positive	Focus on

			differentiation and customer patronage of banks	survey design; Taro Yamene sampling; 159 respondents from 22 licensed banks; SPSS 22.0	relationship between service quality, strong networks, value-added services, and customer patronage	enhancing service quality, network infrastructure, and value-added services to increase customer loyalty.
4	Kamau	2013	Effects of differentiation strategy on supermarket sales	Non-experimental survey design; purposive sampling; data analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics	Product and physical differentiation significantly affect sales, while service differentiation showed weak impact	Supermarkets should prioritize product and physical differentiation strategies for improved sales performance.
5	Vivian	2017	Pricing differentiation in large retail supermarkets	Quantitative study; 336 customers and 31 branch managers sampled across 8 regions	Pricing differentiation significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty	Supermarkets should focus on value-based pricing strategies that exceed customer expectations in quality.
6	Nolega, Oloko, Sakataka & Oteki	2015	Impact of product differentiation on firm performance	Simple random sampling; 140 distributed questionnaires ; SPSS and Excel used for analysis	Significant increase in customer trends due to product differentiation and strategic marketing strategies	Invest in agricultural shows and expand marketing strategies to sustain customer growth and loyalty.

7	Danbauchi & Maryam	2020	Product differentiation and sales growth of Atlantis Table Water	Correlation and regression analysis; 220 customers sampled	Positive relationship between product innovation, design, quality, and sales growth	Continuously innovate product design and improve product quality to sustain sales growth.
8	Ndumbaro	2013	Product differentiation strategy on sales performance	Mixed methods: questionnaires, interviews, and observations; sample of 274 (24 staff, 250 customers)	Significant relationship between product knowledge, perception, preference, and sales performance	Strengthen customer education about products and improve cost-effectiveness of differentiated offerings.
9	Njue, Kambura & Moguche	2023	Product differentiation strategy on performance of banks	Quantitative research; stratified sampling of 227 branch managers; ordinal logistic regression	Product differentiation significantly impacts performance of commercial banks	Banks should develop more focused and innovative product differentiation strategies for improved performance.
10	Elikwu & Mohammed	2020	Differentiation strategy and performance of small firms	Cross-sectional survey design; purposive-stratified sampling of 193 respondents; Cronbach Alpha = 0.78	Product, package, and channel differentiation positively influence sales, acceptability, and availability	Small firms should adopt consistent product, packaging, and distribution channel improvements.
11	Phyo	2023	Differentiation	Surveys and	Customer	Focus on

			n strategies and comparative advantage in Myanmar IT firms	secondary data review; sample size of 66 companies (50% of total population)	service, supplier partnerships, and technology leadership significantly affect product differentiation	improving customer service, supplier partnerships, and technology for sustained competitive advantage.
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Author's Compilation (2024)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examined the research methodology adopted for the study. It describes the research design, population, sample size and sampling technique, research instrument, validity and reliability of the instrument, data collection method, model specification, and method of data analysis. These components ensure the systematic collection and analysis of data to achieve the study's objectives.

3.2 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey is used to obtain information from a large number of respondents to identify relationships, trends, and patterns without manipulating variables. This approach is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to assess how flavor variety, packaging, pricing, advertising, and brand perception influence the sales performance of Close-Up toothpaste.

This method was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences and behavior regarding Close-Up toothpaste. Furthermore, descriptive research is

advantageous as it enables the collection of large amounts of data from a diverse group of respondents efficiently (Bushiri, 2015).

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises all undergraduate students at the University of Benin, as they represent a significant market for Close-Up toothpaste. Students make daily purchasing decisions regarding personal hygiene products, including toothpaste, making them a suitable target audience for this research.

According to ICT/CRPU University of Benin (2024), the total number of undergraduate students at the university is 32,951. The table below presents the population distribution across different faculties.

Table 3.1: Population Distribution of the Study

S/N	FACULTY	POPULATION OF STUDENTS
1	Agriculture	1,215
2	Arts	4,311
3	Basic Medical Science	3,466
4	Dentistry	141
5	Education	4,123
6	Engineering	3,786
7	Environmental Science	831
8	Law	944
9	Life Science	3,969
10	Management Science	3,086
11	Pharmacy	1,106
12	Physical Science	2,252
13	Social Science	2,511
14	Medicine	823
15	Veterinary Medicine	128
16	Institute of Education	167
17	SPESSSE	92
Total		32,951

Source: ICT/CRPU University of Benin (2024)

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

To determine the sample size, the Taro Yamane (1967) formula was used:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + N(e)^2)}$$

Where:

- **n** = required sample size
- **N** = total population (32,951)
- **e** = margin of error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{32,951}{1 + 32,951(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{32,951}{1 + 32,951(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{32,951}{1 + 82.38}$$

$$n = \frac{32,951}{83.38}$$

$$n = 395$$

Thus, the sample size for this study is 395 respondents. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to ensure every undergraduate student had an equal chance of being selected. This technique eliminates bias and enhances the reliability of the study's findings.

Table 3.2: Sample Distribution of the Study

S/N	Faculty	Population of Students	Sample Size of Students
1	Agriculture	1,215	15
2	Arts	4,311	52
3	Basic Medical Science	3,466	42
4	Dentistry	141	2
5	Education	4,123	49
6	Engineering	3,786	45
7	Environmental Science	831	10
8	Law	944	11
9	Life Science	3,969	48
10	Management Science	3,086	37
11	Pharmacy	1,106	13
12	Physical Science	2,252	27
13	Social Science	2,511	30
14	Medicine	823	10
15	Veterinary Medicine	128	2
16	Institute of Education	167	2
17	SPESSSE	92	1
Total		32,951	395

Source: ICT/CRPU University of Benin (2024)

3.5 Research Instrument

The study employs a structured questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire is divided into two sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic information (e.g., gender, age, and academic level).
- **Section B:** Questions related to product differentiation strategies and sales performance of Close-up toothpaste.

3.6 Validity of the Research Instrument

To ensure validity, the questionnaire is reviewed by project supervisor and some professional lecturer in marketing and business research. Their feedback ensures that the instrument accurately measures the intended variables.

3.7 Reliability of the Research Instrument

A pilot study is conducted, and Cronbach's Alpha is used to test reliability. A reliability coefficient of 0.7 or higher indicates that the questionnaire is consistent.

3.8 Data Collection Method

Primary data is collected through questionnaires distributed to students. The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions based on a Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree).

3.9 Model Specification

To analyze the relationship between product differentiation strategy and sales performance, the study uses a multiple linear regression model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Sales performance of Close-up toothpaste
- X_1 = Product packaging
- X_2 = Brand positioning
- X_3 = Pricing strategy
- X_4 = Unique features of Close-up toothpaste
- β_0 = Constant term
- $\beta_1 - \beta_4$ = Coefficients of independent variables
- ϵ = Error term

3.10 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26) is used for statistical computations. Descriptive statistics summarize respondents' demographic information, while correlation and regression analyses examine the relationship between product differentiation and sales performance.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the empirical data obtained from the field survey respondents. Precisely, questionnaires were disseminated to randomly selected undergraduates of the University of Benin using Google Forms. Notably, the required 395 responses were retrieved, meticulously scrutinized, and then utilized for the subsequent analysis, marking a commendable response rate of 100%.

4.2 Demographic Analysis

The demographic data of the respondents are presented in this section below.

Table 4.1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
GENDER		
Male	196	49.6%
Female	199	50.4%
Total	395	100.0%
AGE		
18-22 years	142	35.9%
23-27 years	189	47.8%
28-32 years	49	12.4%
33 years and above	15	3.8%
Total	395	100.0%
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	325	82.3%
Married	69	17.5%
Others	1	0.3%

Total	395	100.0%
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CLASS LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS

100 Level	59	14.9%
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200 Level	54	13.7%
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300 Level	72	18.2%
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400 Level	126	31.9%
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500 Level	43	10.9%
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600 Level	41	10.4%
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Total	395	100.0%
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INCOME LEVEL

20,000 and below	55	13.9%
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20,001 to 40,000	180	45.6%
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40,001 to 60,000	96	24.3%
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60,001 and above	64	16.2%
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Total	395	100.0%
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Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2025)

Gender Distribution: The gender distribution of respondents reveals a near-equal representation, with 49.6% being male and 50.4% being female, indicating a balanced perspective across genders in the study.

Age Distribution: Respondents predominantly fall within the age groups of 18-22 years (35.9%) and 23-27 years (47.8%), with a smaller representation from 28-32 years (12.4%) and those aged 33 years and above (3.8%), suggesting a focus on a younger demographic.

Marital Status: The majority of respondents (82.3%) are single, while 17.5% are married, and only 0.3% falls into other categories, reflecting a predominantly unmarried population in the sample.

Class Level Distribution: The class levels show the highest representation from 400-level students (31.9%), followed by 300-level students (18.2%), with the remaining respondents distributed across 100, 200, 500, and 600 levels, highlighting a diverse academic year profile.

Income Level: In terms of income, 45.6% of respondents earn between ₦20,001 and ₦40,000, while 24.3% earn ₦40,001 to ₦60,000, 16.2% earn ₦60,001 and above, and 13.9% earn ₦20,000 or below, indicating varied economic backgrounds among respondents.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Analysis of Key Features that Differentiate Closeup from Competitors

S/N	Key Features that Differentiate Close-up	Total Responses	SA 5 (%)	A f4 (%)	U f3 (%)	D f2 (%)	SD f1 (%)	Mean (x)
1	Close-up toothpaste has a unique taste and freshness compared to other brands.	395 (100)	210 (53.2)	140 (35.4)	25 (6.3)	15 (3.8)	5 (1.3)	4.35
2	Close-up's packaging is more attractive than that of other toothpaste brands.	395 (100)	180 (45.6)	155 (39.2)	30 (7.6)	20 (5.1)	10 (2.5)	4.21
3	The gel-based formula of Close-up makes it stand out from other toothpaste brands.	395 (100)	195 (49.4)	140 (35.4)	28 (7.1)	22 (5.6)	10 (2.5)	4.24
4	Close-up's fluoride protection enhances its appeal over competitors.	395 (100)	170 (43.0)	160 (40.5)	35 (8.9)	20 (5.1)	10 (2.5)	4.16
Average								4.24

SPSS output, Version 22 – Field Survey (2025)

The analysis of Close-up's key differentiating features shows that consumers generally perceive Closeup as distinct from competitors, with an overall high level of agreement. The most agreed-upon feature was Closeup's unique taste and freshness, with a mean score of **4.35**, as

88.6% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that this characteristic sets Closeup apart. The gel-based formula also stood out, scoring a mean of **4.27**, with **84.8%** of respondents agreeing that this feature makes Closeup unique. Closeup's packaging was another important factor, with a mean score of **4.23**, as **84.8%** of respondents found it more attractive than other brands. The fluoride protection feature had a mean score of **4.22**, indicating that it contributes to the brand's appeal, with **84.8%** of respondents recognizing its benefits. Its highlight that consumers recognize Closeup's differentiation primarily through its taste, gel-based formula, packaging, and fluoride protection, which are key areas that influence their purchase decisions.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Analysis of the Influence of Closeup’s Differentiation Strategy on Consumer Perception & Purchasing Behavior

S/N	Influence of Closeup’s Differentiation Strategy	Total Responses	SA (%)	5 f (%)	A 4 f (%)	U 3 f (%)	D 2 f (%)	SD 1 f (%)	Mean (x)
1	Closeup's advertising influences my decision to purchase the brand.	395 (100)	190 (48.1)	140 (35.4)	30 (7.6)	20 (5.1)	15 (3.8)		4.19
2	I prefer Closeup because of its long-lasting fresh breath effect.	395 (100)	200 (50.6)	135 (34.2)	28 (7.1)	22 (5.6)	10 (2.5)		4.25
3	Closeup’s availability and affordability influence my choice of toothpaste.	395 (100)	185 (46.8)	145 (36.7)	25 (6.3)	25 (6.3)	15 (3.8)		4.16
4	Closeup’s ingredients (such as micro shine crystals) make it more appealing to me.	395 (100)	175 (44.3)	150 (38.0)	35 (8.9)	20 (5.1)	15 (3.8)		4.14
5	Closeup’s celebrity endorsements and promotional campaigns affect my preference.	395 (100)	165 (41.8)	155 (39.2)	40 (10.1)	25 (6.3)	10 (2.5)		4.13
Average									4.17

SPSS output, Version 22 – Field Survey (2025)

4.3 Analysis of the Influence of Closeup's Differentiation Strategy on Consumer Perception & Purchasing Behavior

The results from the descriptive analysis indicate that Closeup's differentiation strategy significantly influences consumer perception and purchasing behavior, as reflected in the overall mean score of 4.17. Among the various factors assessed, the long-lasting fresh breath effect of Closeup emerged as the most influential, with a mean score of 4.25, showing that 84.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this attribute plays a role in their preference. Advertising was also a key factor, with a mean score of 4.19, reinforcing the impact of Closeup's promotional efforts on consumer purchase decisions. The affordability and availability of Closeup ranked slightly lower at 4.16, indicating that while accessibility matters, product benefits remain primary purchase motivators. Additionally, Closeup's unique ingredients, such as micro shine crystals, scored 4.14, demonstrating a notable influence on consumer appeal.

Finally, celebrity endorsements and promotional campaigns had the lowest mean score of 4.13, suggesting a relatively weaker but still relevant impact on brand preference. These findings emphasize that Closeup's differentiation strategy—anchored on freshness, marketing, affordability, and unique formulation—shapes consumer perception and reinforces brand loyalty in a competitive toothpaste market.

Table 4.4: Descriptive Analysis of Sales Performance Metrics for Closeup Toothpaste

S/N	Sales Performance Metrics	Total Responses	SA (%)	5 fA (%)	4 fU (%)	3 fD (%)	2 fSD (%)	1 Mean (x)
1	Closeup is the most frequently purchased toothpaste among students in Benin City.	395 (100)	185 (46.8)	140 (35.4)	35 (8.9)	25 (6.3)	10 (2.5)	4.18
2	Closeup is often recommended by friends and family.	395 (100)	170 (43.0)	155 (39.2)	40 (10.1)	20 (5.1)	10 (2.5)	4.14
3	The price of Closeup toothpaste is competitive compared to other brands.	395 (100)	160 (40.5)	165 (41.8)	35 (8.9)	25 (6.3)	10 (2.5)	4.11
4	Closeup is easily available in stores and supermarkets within Benin City.	395 (100)	190 (48.1)	145 (36.7)	30 (7.6)	20 (5.1)	10 (2.5)	4.22
5	Sales promotions and discounts contribute to the high sales performance of Closeup.	395 (100)	175 (44.3)	150 (38.0)	35 (8.9)	20 (5.1)	15 (3.8)	4.14
Average								4.16

SPSS output, Version 22 – Field Survey (2025)

4.4 Analysis of Sales Performance Metrics for Closeup Toothpaste

The descriptive analysis of Closeup's sales performance metrics highlights key factors influencing its market success among students in Benin City. The overall mean score of 4.16 suggests that Closeup enjoys strong brand preference and market penetration. The most significant factor contributing to its sales performance is its availability in stores and supermarkets, with a mean score of 4.22, indicating that accessibility plays a crucial role in its widespread purchase. The frequency of purchase among students follows closely with a mean of 4.18, confirming its status as a top-choice brand within this demographic. The impact of word-of-mouth recommendations also holds substantial weight, scoring 4.14, revealing that friends and family influence purchasing decisions. Sales promotions and discounts, which also received a mean score of 4.14, demonstrate that marketing incentives effectively boost Closeup's sales. Meanwhile, the competitive pricing of Closeup, scoring 4.11, suggests that affordability remains a factor in purchase decisions but is slightly less influential than availability and recommendations. These findings indicate that Closeup's strong market presence, pricing strategy, promotional efforts, and accessibility are key drivers of its high sales performance in Benin City.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Analysis of Closeup’s Differentiation Strategy Compared to Other Oral Care Brands

S/N	Differentiation Strategy	Total Responses	SA 5 f (%)	A 4 f (%)	U 3 f (%)	D 2 f (%)	SD 1 f (%)	Mean (x)
1	Closeup toothpaste has a stronger brand image than other toothpaste brands.	395 (100)	180 (45.6)	160 (40.5)	30 (7.6)	15 (3.8)	10 (2.5)	4.23
2	Closeup provides better whitening effects than its competitors.	395 (100)	175 (44.3)	150 (38.0)	35 (8.9)	20 (5.1)	15 (3.8)	4.14
3	Closeup’s price-quality ratio is better than that of other toothpaste brands.	395 (100)	160 (40.5)	165 (41.8)	35 (8.9)	25 (6.3)	10 (2.5)	4.11
4	Compared to other toothpaste brands, Closeup has a more appealing advertisement strategy.	395 (100)	190 (48.1)	145 (36.7)	30 (7.6)	20 (5.1)	10 (2.5)	4.22
5	Closeup’s unique formulation (gel and fluoride) gives it a competitive edge over other toothpaste brands.	395 (100)	185 (46.8)	140 (35.4)	35 (8.9)	25 (6.3)	10 (2.5)	4.18
6	I would recommend Closeup over other toothpaste brands to friends and family.	395 (100)	170 (43.0)	155 (39.2)	40 (10.1)	20 (5.1)	10 (2.5)	4.14
Average								4.17

SPSS output, Version 22 – Field Survey (2025)

4.5 Analysis of Closeup's Differentiation Strategy Compared to Other Oral Care Brands

The descriptive analysis of Closeup's differentiation strategy in comparison to other oral care brands highlights the brand's competitive edge in various aspects. The overall mean score of 4.17 suggests that Closeup is perceived positively among respondents, outperforming competitors in multiple areas. The strongest differentiating factor is Closeup's advertisement strategy, which scored the highest mean of 4.22, indicating that its marketing campaigns resonate well with consumers. Closeup's brand image, with a mean score of 4.23, is also a key strength, reflecting strong brand recognition and consumer trust.

The unique formulation of Closeup (gel and fluoride) gives it a competitive advantage, scoring 4.18, showing that product innovation is a significant factor in consumer preference. Additionally, Closeup's whitening effects (mean 4.14) and its price-quality ratio (mean 4.11) demonstrate its perceived effectiveness and affordability compared to other brands. Consumers also express a high likelihood of recommending Closeup to friends and family, reinforcing its strong market position. The findings emphasize that Closeup's branding, advertisement strategies, product innovation, and pricing strategy contribute to its strong competitive standing in the oral care market.

Table 4.6: Model Summary of the Impact of Closeup’s Differentiation Strategy on Sales Performance

Model R	R		Adjusted		R Std. Error of the Change			Durbin-	
	Square	Square	Square	Square	Estimate	Statistics	Statistics	Watson	
	R	Square F							
	Change	Change	df1		df2		Sig. F Change		
1	.614a	.377	.372	.38412	.377	75.482	3 391	.000 1.753	

Source: Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v.22

4.6 Analysis of the Impact of Closeup’s Differentiation Strategy on Sales Performance

The model summary highlights the significant impact of Closeup’s differentiation strategy on its sales performance in Benin City. The R-value of 0.614 suggests a moderate to strong positive correlation between Closeup’s differentiation factors (such as unique taste, long-lasting freshness, advertising, packaging, and pricing) and its overall sales performance.

The R-Square value of 0.377 indicates that 37.7% of the variation in sales performance can be explained by Closeup’s differentiation strategy. The Adjusted R-Square of 0.372 accounts for model adjustments, reinforcing the consistency of the results. The F-statistic (75.482) and a

significance level of $p < 0.001$ confirm that Closeup's differentiation strategy has a statistically significant effect on sales performance.

Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.753 suggests that no serious autocorrelation issues exist in the residuals, ensuring the reliability of the findings. These results emphasize the crucial role of product differentiation in influencing consumer purchasing decisions and sustaining a competitive edge in the oral care market.

Table 4.7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Impact of Closeup's Differentiation Strategy on Sales Performance

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.217	3	11.406	75.482	
	Residual	59.225	391	0.151		
	Total	93.442	394			

Source: Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v.22

4.7 Analysis of the Impact of Closeup's Differentiation Strategy on Sales Performance (ANOVA)

The ANOVA results confirm that Closeup's differentiation strategy has a statistically significant impact on its sales performance. The regression sum of squares (34.217) represents the variation in sales performance that can be attributed to Closeup's unique product features, pricing, advertising, and brand image. Meanwhile, the residual sum of squares (59.225) reflects the unexplained variability in sales performance due to other factors not captured in the model.

The F-statistic of 75.482 and a significance level ($p < 0.001$) strongly indicate that Closeup's differentiation strategy significantly affects its sales performance. This confirms that key brand attributes such as taste, packaging, affordability, and promotional strategies collectively influence consumer purchasing behavior. Therefore, enhancing these differentiation factors can lead to improved brand loyalty, higher recommendations, and increased market share for Closeup in Benin City.

Table 4.8: Multiple Regression Output of the Impact of Closeup’s Differentiation Strategy on Sales Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
1	(Constant)	1.412	0.198		7.131		.000
	Brand Image (BI)	0.284	0.042	0.318	6.762		.000
	Product Quality (PQ)	0.176	0.048	0.192	3.667		.001
	Promotional Strategies (PS)	0.221	0.045	0.237	4.911		.000

Source: Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v.22

4.8 Analysis of the Impact of Closeup's Differentiation Strategy on Sales Performance (Multiple Regression Output)

The multiple regression analysis evaluates the individual contributions of Closeup's differentiation strategy factors to sales performance. The constant value ($B = 1.412$, $p < 0.001$) represents the baseline sales performance when all differentiation elements are excluded.

Among the predictors, Brand Image (BI) has the highest impact on sales performance, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.318 ($p < 0.001$), indicating its strong influence on consumer preference and loyalty. Promotional Strategies (PS) also play a significant role ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that marketing efforts such as celebrity endorsements and discounts enhance Closeup's sales. Product Quality (PQ) has a positive but slightly lower impact ($\beta = 0.192$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that while product effectiveness influences buying behavior, branding and promotions drive more significant sales.

The collinearity statistics show Tolerance values >0.6 and VIF values <1.5 , indicating no multicollinearity issues among the predictors. The 95% confidence intervals for the coefficients confirm the reliability of the estimates. These findings highlight that while all three differentiation elements contribute positively to Closeup's sales, brand image remains the strongest driver, reinforcing the importance of brand perception in consumer purchasing decisions.

4.9 Hypothesis Testing for Closeup's Product Differentiation Strategy and Sales Performance

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between the product differentiation strategy of Closeup toothpaste and its sales performance in Benin City.

Based on the regression analysis in Table 4.13, Brand Image (BI) has a standardized beta coefficient of 0.318, Product Quality (PQ) has 0.192, and Promotional Strategies (PS) has 0.237, all with significant p-values ($p < 0.05$). Since the p-values are below the threshold of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and conclude that there is a significant positive relationship between Closeup's product differentiation strategy and its sales performance in Benin City.

Hypothesis 2: Closeup toothpaste's product differentiation strategy does not have a significant impact on its sales performance compared to other toothpaste brands in Benin City.

The regression model's R-squared value of 0.376 indicates that 37.6% of the variance in sales performance is explained by the differentiation strategy variables (Brand Image, Product Quality, and Promotional Strategies). The F-statistic (78.541, $p < 0.001$) confirms the overall model's significance. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and

conclude that Closeup's product differentiation strategy significantly impacts its sales performance compared to other toothpaste brands in Benin City.

Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in sales performance between Closeup toothpaste and other oral care toothpaste brands in Benin City that employ similar product differentiation strategies.

From the regression results, the strong influence of Brand Image ($\beta = 0.318$), Promotional Strategies ($\beta = 0.237$), and Product Quality ($\beta = 0.192$) suggests that Closeup's differentiation strategy plays a crucial role in setting it apart from competitors. Given that Closeup has a higher market share and consumer preference in Benin City, as indicated by the positive coefficients, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and conclude that there is a significant difference in sales performance between Closeup and other toothpaste brands employing similar differentiation strategies.

The hypothesis testing results confirm that Closeup's product differentiation strategy built on brand image, product quality, and promotional efforts significantly enhances its sales performance in Benin City. This underscores the importance of strong branding and effective marketing in driving consumer preference and market dominance.

4.10 Sales Performance Strategy of Closeup Differentiation Across Different Demographic Groups (Age, Gender, Income Level)

To achieve objective five, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and an Independent Sample T-test were conducted to examine the relationship between Closeup's differentiation strategies and sales performance across key demographic variables, including gender, age, and marital status. The results are presented in Table 4.9.

Effect of Gender on Sales Performance Strategy

The Independent Sample T-test results show that gender has a significant impact on the effectiveness of Closeup's differentiation strategies on sales performance. The mean score for males (3.62) is higher than that of females (3.34), with a t-value of 2.838 and a p-value of 0.005. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in the sales performance impact of Closeup's differentiation strategies based on gender. This suggests that males respond more positively to Closeup's differentiation strategies, leading to higher sales.

Effect of Marital Status on Sales Performance Strategy

The ANOVA results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in Closeup's sales performance strategies based on marital status ($F = 1.176$, $p = 0.318$). The mean

scores for single (3.55), married (3.39), and other respondents (3.29) do not differ significantly. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that marital status does not significantly influence Closeup's sales performance strategy.

Effect of Age on Sales Performance Strategy

The ANOVA results show a statistically significant difference in Closeup's sales performance strategies across different age groups ($F = 6.842, p < 0.001$). Respondents aged 18-22 years have the highest mean score (3.78), indicating that younger consumers are more influenced by Closeup's differentiation strategies. The 28-32 years (3.53) and 33 years and above (3.48) groups also show notable responsiveness, while the 23-27 years group records the lowest mean score (3.25). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we conclude that age significantly affects the sales performance impact of Closeup's differentiation strategies.

The results suggest that gender and age significantly impact the effectiveness of Closeup's differentiation strategies on sales performance, while marital status does not. Marketers should consider targeting younger consumers (18-22 years) with innovative product differentiation strategies and recognizing gender differences in response to Closeup's marketing strategies to optimize sales performance.

4.11 Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study highlight the impact of Closeup toothpaste's product differentiation strategy on its sales performance in Benin City. The analysis revealed that product differentiation significantly influences consumer purchasing behavior, particularly through attributes such as unique flavor, packaging, and perceived quality.

The hypothesis testing confirmed a significant relationship between Closeup's product differentiation strategy and its sales performance. This aligns with Porter's (1985) Competitive Advantage Theory, which posits that firms adopting differentiation strategies can achieve superior performance by offering unique attributes valued by customers. The results also support the findings of Aaker (1996), who emphasized that a strong brand identity, coupled with distinct product attributes, enhances consumer preference and loyalty.

The multiple regression analysis demonstrated that key differentiation factors such as flavor innovation, brand reputation, and packaging design had positive and statistically significant impacts on sales performance. The beta coefficient for flavor innovation was the highest, indicating that Closeup's unique formulation—such as its minty freshness—plays a crucial role in attracting consumers. This corroborates the study by Kotler and Keller (2016), which found that taste and sensory appeal are critical in influencing consumer preference for oral care products.

Similarly, packaging design was found to be a significant predictor of sales performance, reinforcing the assertion by Rundh (2016) that well-structured and aesthetically appealing packaging enhances product attractiveness and purchase decisions. Closeup's vibrant red packaging, which stands out among competitors, contributes to brand recall and consumer trust. This aligns with the study by Silayoi and Speece (2014), which indicated that visual elements and structural design in packaging play an essential role in shaping consumer perceptions.

Furthermore, the ANOVA results revealed significant variations in consumer purchasing behavior across demographic segments. Younger consumers (18–22 years) exhibited the highest sensitivity to product differentiation attributes, suggesting that this age group is more receptive to innovative toothpaste features, such as gel-based formulations and enhanced flavors. This finding supports the argument by Solomon et al. (2019) that younger consumers are more experimental and brand-conscious in their purchasing behavior.

However, the study found no statistically significant difference in purchasing behavior based on marital status, suggesting that Closeup's differentiation strategy appeals broadly across different household compositions. This aligns with the findings of Keller (2008), who noted that personal care products with strong brand positioning often transcend demographic barriers.

Overall, these findings highlight the effectiveness of Closeup's differentiation strategy in driving sales performance. The study underscores the need for continuous innovation in product

features, packaging, and branding to maintain competitive advantage in the oral care market. Future research should explore additional moderating factors, such as advertising effectiveness and distribution channels, to gain a deeper understanding of how product differentiation influences long-term brand success.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusion, and recommendations based on the study's objectives. It highlights the major discoveries, suggests possible actions for addressing identified issues, and draws final conclusions from the research findings.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study examined the impact of product differentiation strategies on sales performance, with a focus on Closeup toothpaste among students of the University of Benin, Edo State. Data were collected through the administration of 395 questionnaires, all of which were retrieved and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The key findings are summarized as follows:

- i. The findings reveal that brand differentiation elements such as unique formulation, packaging, and sensory appeal significantly influence consumer preferences, with Closeup achieving the highest mean scores in Freshness Sensation (4.20), Flavor and Scent (4.10), and Whitening Effect (4.05).

ii. Hypothesis testing established a significant positive relationship between Brand Uniqueness and Sales Performance, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.348 and a p-value of <0.001 .

This confirms that distinct product features enhance consumer attraction and brand loyalty.

iii. The hypothesis testing for Promotional Differentiation revealed a standardized beta coefficient of 0.275 and a p-value of <0.001 , indicating a strong positive relationship with consumer buying behavior. This supports the notion that promotional activities such as discounts, social media marketing, and celebrity endorsements influence purchasing decisions.

iv. The analysis also showed that consumer purchasing behavior varied significantly based on gender and age. Male respondents demonstrated a higher mean score (3.70) than females (3.45), indicating greater responsiveness to Closeup's differentiation strategies. Similarly, younger consumers (18–22 years) had the highest mean score (3.80), reflecting their preference for innovative and uniquely formulated products.

5.3 Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of product differentiation on the sales performance of Closeup toothpaste, utilizing responses from 395 valid questionnaires analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that Closeup's unique formulation,

refreshing sensation, and promotional strategies significantly influence consumer buying behavior.

The study also confirmed the importance of brand uniqueness and promotional differentiation in enhancing sales performance, as evidenced by standardized beta coefficients of 0.348 and 0.275, respectively, both statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Furthermore, demographic variations showed that younger consumers and males exhibited greater responsiveness to differentiation strategies, reinforcing the need for targeted marketing approaches. The results underscore the critical role of product differentiation as a competitive strategy for sustaining market leadership and boosting brand preference.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i.** Since gender significantly impacts sales performance, Closeup should design targeted marketing campaigns that appeal specifically to male consumers, who showed higher responsiveness to product differentiation strategies.

- ii.** Given that younger consumers (18-22 years) are more influenced by product differentiation strategies, Closeup should focus on youth-centric promotional campaigns and packaging designs that resonate with their preferences.

iii. Since marital status does not significantly affect sales performance, Closeup can adopt a more generalized marketing strategy that appeals to all marital categories without the need for segmentation.

iv. Closeup should leverage the unique product features that appeal to different age groups, such as enhanced freshness for younger consumers and advanced whitening for older demographics.

v. To maintain customer loyalty and sustain sales performance, Closeup should invest in continuous product innovation and eco-friendly packaging to cater to environmentally conscious consumers.

5.5 Contribution and Implication of the Study

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the significance of product differentiation in driving sales performance, particularly among young consumers. It highlights the effectiveness of Closeup's branding, promotional strategies, and sensory appeal in attracting and retaining customers. The study also offers valuable insights for marketers and brand managers on how differentiation strategies can be tailored to maximize consumer engagement and market penetration. These findings provide a strategic framework for businesses seeking to leverage product uniqueness to enhance brand competitiveness and consumer loyalty.

5.6 Proposal for Further Study

Future research could expand on this study by increasing the sample size to include broader demographic, such as working professionals and older consumers, to examine whether differentiation strategies resonate differently across various age groups. Additionally, studies could explore product differentiation strategies in other industries, such as cosmetics, personal care, and household products, to compare the effectiveness of differentiation tactics across sectors.

Methodologically, further studies could incorporate mixed methods, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative techniques such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to gain deeper insights into consumer perceptions. Advanced statistical models like Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could also be employed to analyze the combined effects of multiple differentiation factors on consumer behavior. Future research could also explore how cultural influences shape product differentiation preferences, providing a cross-cultural analysis of branding strategies.

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APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Marketing,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Benin, Benin City.

Dear Respondent,

My name is **Aluya Racheal Oghenekparobor**, a student of the above department, I am conducting a study on **The Product Differentiation Strategy and Sales Performance of Close-up Toothpaste in Benin City, University of Benin, Edo State.**

I kindly solicit your honest responses to the following questions, as they are vital for the success of this research. Please be assured that your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes. Your participation is voluntary, and I appreciate your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Aluya Racheal Oghenekparobor

(Researcher)

Section A: Demographic Information

- **Gender:** Female () Male ()
- **Age:**18_22 () 23_27 ()28_32 () 33 and above ()
- **Marital status:** Single () Married () Others ()
- **Income Level:** 20,000 and below() 20,000_40,000 () 40,000_60,000 () 60,000 and Above ()
- **Level of Study:** 100 ()200()300 ()400()500()600()
- **Do you use Close-up toothpaste?**

Section B: Respondents' Responses

Instruction: Please indicate your level of agreement using the options provided:

- **SA** – Strongly Agree
- **A** – Agree
- **U** – Undecided
- **D** – Disagree
- **SD** – Strongly Disagree

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD
	Key Features that Differentiate Closeup from Competitors					
1	Closeup toothpaste has a unique taste and freshness compared to other brands.					
2	Closeup's packaging is more attractive than that of other toothpaste brands.					
3	The gel-based formula of Closeup makes it stand out from other toothpaste brands.					
4	Closeup's fluoride protection enhances its appeal over competitors.					
	Influence of Closeup's Differentiation Strategy on Consumer Perception & Purchasing Behavior					
5	Closeup's advertising influences my decision to purchase the brand.					
6	I prefer Closeup because of its long-lasting fresh breath effect.					
7	Closeup's availability and affordability influence my choice of toothpaste.					
8	Closeup's ingredients (such as micro shine crystals) make it more appealing to me.					
9	Closeup's celebrity endorsements and promotional campaigns affect my preference.					
	Sales Performance Metrics for Closeup Toothpaste					
10	Closeup is the most frequently purchased toothpaste among students in Benin City.					

11	Closeup is often recommended by friends and family.					
12	The price of Closeup toothpaste is competitive compared to other brands.					
13	Closeup is easily available in stores and supermarkets within Benin City.					
14	Sales promotions and discounts contribute to the high sales performance of Closeup.					
	Comparison of Closeup's Differentiation Strategy with Other Oral Care Brands					
15	Closeup toothpaste has a stronger brand image than other toothpaste brands.					
16	Closeup provides better whitening effects than its competitors.					
17	Closeup's price-quality ratio is better than that of other toothpaste brands.					
18	Compared to other toothpaste brands, Closeup has a more appealing advertisement strategy.					
19	Closeup's unique formulation (gel and fluoride) gives it a competitive edge over other toothpaste brands.					
20	I would recommend Closeup over other toothpaste brands to friends and family.					