Perceived Quality and Competitive Advantage in Beer Products In Kabale District, South Western Uganda

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ABSTRACT : *Perceived quality is customer perception to the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with the intent to expect respect. Perceived Quality ensures the organisation defines and delivers the requisite levels of satisfaction desired by their various target customer segments. Competitive advantage has been approached by looking at the external environment of the firm that is how the economic power of firms can be used to create competitive position in an industry. This study focuses on Resource Based View a model that provides a framework for identifying unique set of resources and this perspective shifts the approach of assessing competitive advantage from the external to the internal environment that is the resource power. This study, therefore, set out to determine the effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale district. The specific objective of the study was to (i) To determine the effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products in Kabale district. The study used a descriptive survey research design. The target population was 1783 including wholesalers, retailers, customers and brand and marketing managers of Nile Special Lager, Eagle Lager, Senator Extra Lager, club and Bell beer products in the District of Kabale, South Western Uganda. Multistage sampling techniques were used in this study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select alcoholic beer products and producers. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to sample shopping center to collect consumer information. Shopping centers were selected based on a marketing investigation. Primary data were used and collected using questionnaires. The descriptive analysis involving computing the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of percieved quality and competitive advantage variables was conducted. The inferential analysis was conducted using multiple regression analysis and the t-statistic and the p-value were adopted to test the hypotheses of the study. The study used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) as a tool to process and analyse data. The study found out that perceived quality has positive effect on competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products in Kabale district, South Western Uganda, at the 5% percent significance level. The study concludes that producers of high quality beer brands have a competitive edge over those that produce poor quality beer products. The researcher recommends that beer brand Managers of EABL and UBL must position their beer brands in Kabale district to target customers through: attributes such as high quality, high prestige; functional and emotional benefits.*

Keywords: Perceived Quality, Competitive Advantage, Beer Products, Kabale District

I. INTRODUCTION

Perceived quality is the customer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority that is different from objective quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Objective quality refers to the technical, measurable and verifiable nature of products/services, processes and quality controls. High objective quality does not necessarily contribute to brand equity (Anselmsson *et al.* 2007). Since it's impossible for consumers to make complete and correct judgments of the objective quality, they use quality attributes that they associate with quality. Perceived quality is hence formed to judge the overall quality of a product/service. Boulding and other researchers (1993) argued that quality is directly influenced by perceptions. Consumers use the quality attributes to infer quality of an unfamiliar product. It is therefore important to understand the relevant quality attributes with regard to brand equity.

For consumers, a brand can signal a certain level of quality which makes it easier for a consumer to know the level of satisfaction he/she will obtain when buying a given brand. It will also decrease time spent during shopping since a brand represents a given set of associations in the minds of the consumers (Aaker, 2014).

Competitive advantage is an advantage gained over competitors by offering customers greater value, either through lower prices or by providing additional benefits and services that justify similar or possibly higher prices. Advantage falls into only two categories, something that you own that is a barrier to competition or

something that you do very well that effectively bars competitors. So competitive advantage is somehow correlated with value added and the constructs of confidence

Firms in Uganda compete in marketing various brands of locally produced beer and the beer market seem to be flat. There is a lot of alcohol consumed in the market in south western Uganda which is not branded and some of it the traditional brew like muramba, toto, marwa, kwete and spirits like Kasese make up about 60% of the market. There are many challenges faced by beer companies in Uganda including; so many brands in the market, increasing advertising costs, low sales, low market penetration and lowering of prices by other firms among others. This means the potential in branded alcohol is still very big since there is a very big portion of the untapped market and the challenge is for beer companies in South Western Uganda to come up with quality product strategies to create positive brand perception in the mind of consumers. This study aimed at investigating how beer producers can enhance their competitive advantage through improving perceived product quality attribute of brand equity

The objective of this paper was to determine the effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale District in South Western Uganda. The findings of this study are important to existing and prospective alcoholic beer producers in Uganda, regulators of alcoholic products, and to future researchers. The producers of beer products, for example, will understand how perceived product quality drives competitive advantage. The findings will further enrich existing knowledge on perceived quality and competitive advantage as well as provide literature for future researchers on perceived quality and competitive advantage.This study investigated whether perceived quality from the customer level can lead to competitive advantage. The study surveyed among consumers of beer products in the District of Kabale. A part from the consumers of beer products, the study also drew from the sellers (wholesalers, distributors and retailers) of beer products operating in the District of Kabale.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Quality and Competitive Advantage

Perceived quality is the extent to which a brand is considered to provide good quality products can be measured on the basis of the following five criteria: **(1)** The quality offered by the product/brand is a reason to buy it. **(2)** Level of differentiation/position in relation to competitng brands. **(3)** Price (as the product becomes more complex to assess, and status is at play, consumers tend to take price as a quality indicator). **(4)** Availability in different sales channels

(Consumers have a higher quality perception of brands that are widely available). **(5)** The number of line/brand extensions (this can tell the consumer the brand stands for a certain quality guarantee that is applicable on a wide scale).

Perceived quality is the customer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority that is different from objective quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Objective quality refers to the technical, measurable and verifiable nature of products/services, processes and quality controls. High objective quality does not necessarily contribute to brand equity (Anselmsson *et al.* 2007). Since it's impossible for consumers to make complete and correct judgments of the objective quality, they use quality attributes that they associate with quality.

Zeithaml (1988), Tang and Hawley (2009) affirm that Perceived quality is the customer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority that is different from objective quality and relates to customer's perception. Fayrene and Lee (2011) also agree with this assertion. Syzmanski & Henard (2001) assert that Perceived quality is one of the antecedents of customer satisfaction and has a positive effect on customers purchase intention hence leading to competitive advantage. Objective quality refers to the technical, measurable and verifiable nature of products/services, processes and quality controls. Since it's impossible for consumers to make complete and correct judgments of the objective quality, they use quality attributes that they associate with quality.

Perceived quality is the customer's viewpoint of overall quality of the brand's products or services. Customers form their perception of quality and value through assessing the performance, features, conformance, reliability, durability, serviceability, and style or design of the product and these elements of product or service can affect subconsciously on customer's attitudes and behaviour towards a brand positively or negatively. Aaker describes perceived quality as goodness of the brand which means when the perceived quality of the brand improves same thing happens to other elements of the brand. (Keller, 2012; Aaker, 2010)

Wijetunge (2016) empirical study on *Service Quality, Competitive Advantage and Business Performance in Service Providing SMEs in Sri Lanka* noted that by providing quality service, organizations are trying to face the challenge of gaining competitive advantage . Warraich *at.al* (2013) conducted a study using 320 companies in telecom sector in Pakistan; found that service quality is considered as a source of competitive advantage. The study reviewed the existing literature about the service quality, competitive advantage and the business performance and Further, it focused on how the businesses are offering service quality to gain competitive advantage and to ensure business performance. In order to address the above relationship the hypotheses were derived based on the empirical evidences of the service quality literature. The study selected the service providing SMEs in Colombo district in order to test the above hypotheses. The results of the data analysis showed that all the hypotheses are supported at 0.01 level of significance. The results provides meaningful insight for the owner/managers of service providing SMEs in Colombo district, Sri Lanka highlighting the importance of adhering to service quality. As long as they improve the level of service quality they can achieve greater competitive advantage and higher business performance in the long run, which in terns ensure the survival of the SMEs too.

Perceived quality is hence formed to judge the overall quality of a product/service. Quality is central to the development of strong brands because it enhances perceived superiority of the brands and helps to differentiate brands in markets as result leading competitive advantage (Low & Lamb, 2000; Yoo *eta.l*, 2000).

To achieve the objective of this study, the following hypothesis was tested:
Ho₁: Perceived Quality does not significantly affect competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale District.

III. METHOD

This study was conducted using primary data. The primary data were collected, self-administered questionnaires distributed to producers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers of alcoholic beer products in Kabale District, South Western Uganda. The questionnaire was selected as an instrument to collect the data because it is straight forward and less time consuming for respondents. The questionnaires were structured and were administered through drop and pick later method.

The target population of the study was 1783 including wholesalers, retailers, customers and brand and marketing managers of Nile Special Lager, Eagle Lager, Senator Extra Lager and club beer products in the Kabale District. The sample size was determined using the Slovene's formula below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(0.05)^2}$$

Where
Where; n=sample size;
N=target population;
0.05 level of significance.

Therefore with the target population of 1783 (N)

$$n = \frac{1783}{1 + 1783(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1783}{1 + 4.5}$$

n= 324
The sample size was 324 respondents

Therefore the minimum sample size chosen in this study was 324 respondents. Multistage sampling techniques were used in this study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select alcoholic beer products and producers. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to sample shopping center to collect consumer information. Shopping centers were selected based on a marketing investigation. The choice criterion was that the clubs/bars more than 20 customers per day. A total of 84 hotels, restaurants and bars were chosen for the study and in each of the hotels, restaurants, clubs and bars, 2 customers and 1 manager were chosen for the

survey. This is in line with Nworgu (1991) who stated that no fixed number is ideal, rather it is the circumstances of the study situation that determine what number or what percentage of the population that should be studied.

Validity of Research Instrument
To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, expert opinion and content validity index (CVI) were used. The instrument was validated by four experts: Two experts in measurement and evaluation and two content experts. The four experts measured the face validity of the instrument, ensuring that the item/statements addressed the research purposes and questions, as well as the adequacy of the constructs used in the questionnaire. All their criticisms, corrections and suggestions gave birth to the final copy of the instrument used for data collection. The content validity index (CVI) was computed to determine the content validity of the instrument. Amin (2005) notes that the overall CVI for the instrument should be calculated by computing the average of the instrument and for the instrument to be accepted as valid the average index should be 0.70 or above. The CVI was computed in equation below. The CVI was estimated as follows:

$$CVI = \frac{Number\ of\ questions\ declared\ valid}{Total\ number\ of\ questions}$$

$$CVI = \frac{Number\ of\ questions\ declared\ valid}{Total\ number\ of\ questions}$$

$$CVI = \frac{79}{84}$$

$$CVI = 0.94$$

A CVI value of 0.94 is greater than 0.7 minimum CVI required for a valid instrument. Hence the instrument is valid.

Reliability of Research Instrument
In order to ensure that the research instrument is reliable and can consistently produce reliable data when administered, the researcher adopted are test-retest, split half and Cronbach's alpha. The test-retest reliability method measures the stability of the research instrument. It intends to determine the extent to which a measure, procedure or instrument yields the same result on repeated trials. This was done by administering the research instrument twice on the same set of respondents at different times. The questionnaire was given to 30 respondents. Same instrument was re-administered to the respondents after two weeks. Data collected from the two intervals were estimated with correlation coefficients (Pearson *r*). Hence a reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained and presented below. This indicates that the instrument was reliable for the study. According to Maduabum (2004), an instrument is considered reliable when it has a coefficient ranging from 0.60-0.99. Split-half method measures the internal consistency of the instrument. In this method, research instrument was split into two equivalent halves and the test score correlated together (Oyerinde, 2011). This study employed split halves method to measure the degree to which the items that made up the scale were all measuring the same essential attribute. This was estimated with correlation coefficients (Pearson *r*) and Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Correlation coefficients range from 0.00 to 1.00. Correlation coefficient of 0.00 means no correlation, while correlation coefficient of 1.00 means perfect correlation. The results of the split-half presented in Table 1 indicate that the instrument was reliable for the study. Similar to the test re-test and split-half methods, Cronbach's coefficient alpha is the measure of scale's internal consistency. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient greater than 0.7, is commonly acceptable, as a rule of thumb, as internal consistency of research instrument. As can be seen in the results of the reliability tests presented in Table 1, the Cronbach's

Results of Reliability Tests for the Survey Scale

Number	Type of Reliability Test	Value	Remarks
1	Cronbach's Alpha	0.929	Very Reliable
2	Split-half	Part 1 =0.886	Very Reliable
		Part 2 =0.884	Very Reliable
3	Correlation Between Forms	0.870	Very Reliable

4	Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length=0.824	Very Reliable

Source: Field Study 2017

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Response rate is usually conducted to ascertain the percentage of the targeted respondents that actually responded to the questionnaire. From the results presented in Table 2, notice that out 324 targeted respondents who were given questionnaires, 312 of them filled and returned the questionnaires. This represents a response rate of 96%. This percentage was considered high and good enough to represent the target population, given the busy schedule of the targeted population. This high response rate was achieved due to marking-up of the minimum sample size by 20% (64), which resulted in distributing 388 questionnaires. The essence of the mark-up is to minimize the problem associated with non-return of questionnaire by some respondents. The questionnaires returned from the field were assessed and found to be duly completed for use in this study.

Response Rate

Targeted respondents	Actual respondents	Responses as percentage of targeted respondents
324	312	96%

Source: Response rate analysis (2017)

The study presents the demographic profiles of the respondents below. From below notice that majority of the respondents were males with 80.1%, and 19.93% of the respondents were females. The gender of respondents shows that more males consume alcoholic beverages in Kabale, Western Uganda. It also shows that the finding of the study does not suffer from gender bias.

Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	250	80.1
Female	62	19.9
Total	**312**	**100**

Source: Demographic analysis of respondents (2017)

Notice also, from the Table below, that that majority of the respondents were aged between 36 – 45 years of age (37.8%), followed by those aged between 46–55 (26.3%). The least of the respondent were those aged between 18 – 24 years (4.5%). These indicate that the respondents were adults. Ages of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-24	14	4.5
25-35	73	23.4
36-45	118	37.8
46-55	82	26.3
55 and above	25	8.0
Total	**312**	**100**

Source: Demographic analysis of respondents (2017)

The study requested the respondents to indicate their level of education. Notice from the Table below that diploma education is the level of education with the highest response rate. From the table, 36.2% of the respondents indicated their highest education level as diploma. This is followed by bachelors and certificate education, with 30.8% and 17.3% respectively. The respondents with masters' degree are the least sampled with 5.1% response rate. Table 2 indicates that all of the respondents sampled in this study have formal education.

Level of Education of Respondents

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
high school	33	10.6
Certificate	54	17.3
Diploma	113	36.2
Bachelors	96	30.8
Masters	16	5.1
Total	**312**	**100**

Source: Demographic analysis of respondents (2017)

Data was collected from the respondent on their beer brand. From the Table below, see that majority of the respondents take Nile beer (29.5%), closely followed by Club beer with respondents rate of 27.9%. The least brand of alcohol consumption according to the respondents was local beer with a 9.3% response rate. These imply that Nile beer is the favorite for respondents sampled. The lowest respondents were local beer with a 9.3% response rate. These imply that Nile beer is the favorite for respondents sampled.

Beer Brand of Respondents

Beer brand	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Eagle	70	22.4
Nile	92	29.5
Club	87	27.9
Senator	34	10.9
Bell	29	9.3
Total	**312**	**100**

Source: Demographic analysis of respondents (2017)

Descriptive statistics for Perceived Quality on competitive advantage among beer products in Kabale district, SouthWestern Uganda

The table below shows the descriptive statistics of the perceived quality and competitive advantage variable of alcoholic beer products and producers in Kabale district in South Western Uganda. As shown in the Table below, the average of perceived quality is (**3.8**) and the corresponding standard deviation is 0.5 respectively.

These indicate minimal variability from the mean responses. Skewness and kurtosis represent the nature of departure from normal distribution. In a normally distributed variable, skewness is zero (0) and kurtosis is three (3). Positive or negative skewness indicate asymmetry in the variables and kurtosis coefficient greater than or less than 3 suggest peakedness or flatness of the data (Decarlo, 1997). The skewness values for perceived quality are (**0.07**), and competitive advantage (**0.05**), are close to zero. These imply that variables of this study are approximation of normal distribution. The implication is that there are normal changes in the variable as predicted by normal distribution. Similar to skewness, the kurtosis coefficients for all the variables are approximately 3, thus provide support for normal distribution in the variables (Wilcox and Keselman, 2003).

Descriptive statistics for Perceived Quality variable and competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale district, South Western Uganda

Variable	Mean	Std Dev.	Kurtosis	Skewness
Perceived Quality	3.4894	.37680	2.665	.073
CompetitiveAdvantage	3.6355	.36519	3.856	.057

Source: author's computation (2018)

Analysis of Multicollinearity in Perceived Quality Variable

Multicollinearity exists whenever two or more of the predictors in a regression model are moderately or highly correlated. It is a state of very high intercorrelations or inter-associations among the independent variables. It is therefore a type of disturbance in the data, and if present in the data the statistical inferences made about the data may not be reliable (Gujarati, 2003). In the presence of high multicollinearity, the confidence intervals of the coefficients tend to become very wide and the statistics tend to be very small. It becomes difficult to reject the null hypothesis of any study when multicollinearity is present in the data under study (Tsay, 2005). The presence of multicollinearity in study was evaluated using Tolerance levels and the Variance Inflation Factor

(VIF). The decision rule for the Tolerance level is to accept absence of multicollinearity if the tolerance level is greater than 0.5. Similarly, there is absence of multicollinearity if the VIF if less than 3. Notice from the Table below that the Tolerance level is greater than 0.5 in the variable of perceived quality. These indicate evidence of absence of multicollinearity in the predictor variable. Hence, provide support for the absence of multicollinearity shown by the Tolerance level. Consequently, there is no existence of multicollinearity in the predictor variable. They are therefore good for empirical analysis.

Collinearity Statistics

Construct	Tolerance	VIF
Perceived Quality	0.678	1.476

Source: author's computation (2018)

Inferential Analysis of the Effect of Perceived Quality on Competitive Advantage in Beer Products in Kabale District, South Western Uganda

The F-statistics indicate that all coefficients (that is brand equity variables, and product innovation), excluding constant, are not zero. This is evident in the p-value (0.00) of f-statistics is less than the critical value (0.00). Standard error of estimate represents the imprecision of the regression equation in fitting the data.The closer the coefficient of standard error of estimates to zero, the better and more reliable the analysis. From Table 4.9, coefficient of standard error of estimates is close to zero (0.01). This suggests that the regression equation is properly fitted the data. More so, the Durbin-Watson coefficient (1.97) indicates that there is absence of serial correlation in the residual of the regression estimate. This is because the Durbin-Watson value is near to 2.

Variable	B	Std. error	t-stat.	p-value
Perceived Quality	0.179	0.072	2.496	0.013
R=0.75; R^2=067; Std. error=0.01; Durbin-Watson=1.97; F(7, 304) = 16.24 [0.00]				

Source: author's computation (2018)

Effects of Perceived Quality on Competitive Advantage in Beer Products in Kabale District, South Western Uganda
The results of the regression model estimates of the effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale district, South Western Uganda. From Table below perceived quality has positive effect on competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products in Kabale District, South Western Uganda, at the 5% percent significance level. This can be seen in the coefficient of the t-statistic (2.496) which is greater than the theoretical t-statistic (1.96); and the p-value (0.01) which is less than the significance level (0.05). This finding of positive effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage is in agreement with the theoretical postulation and *apriori* expectation outlined in the methodology. Theoretically, perceived quality is supposed to enhance competitive advantage (Aaker, 2003; Keller , 2013).
Results of perceived quality and competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale district, South Western Uganda

Variable	Coefficient	T-Statistics	Significance
Perceived quality	0.179	2.496	0.013

Source: author's computation (2017)

H$_{01}$ Perceived Quality does not significantly affect competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products and producers in Kabale district, south western Uganda.

Decision: The finding presented above contradicts **H$_{01}$** stated in above, since the calculated *t*-statistic (2.496) of the perceived quality coefficient is greater than the theoretical *t*-statistic at the 5% significance level (1.960). Similarly, *p*-value of the effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage (0.01) is less than the significance level (0.05), hence we reject the null hypothesis 4 of no significant effect. This implies that perceived quality have significant effect on competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale district, South Western Uganda. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis that perceived quality does not significantly affect competitive advantage in beer products in Kabale District, South Western Uganda at the 5% significance level. Consequently, **H$_{01}$** is rejected.

V. DISCUSION

Discusion of Perceived Quality on competitive advantage in beer products and producers in Kabale District, South Western Uganda

The study set up to determine the effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage in beer products and producers in Kabale Distict, South Western Uganda and this was done through testing the hypothesis (Ho1): Perceived Quality does not significantly affect competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products and producers in Kabale district, South Western Uganda. The results of the regression model on the effect of perceived quality on competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products and producers in Kabale District, South western Uganda indicate that perceived quality has positive and significant effect on competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products and producers in Kabale district, South Western Uganda, at the 5% percent significance level. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis that perceived quality does not significantly affect competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products and producers in Kabale district, South Western Uganda at the 5% significance level.

The above results are consistent with findings reported on perceived quality and competitive advantage variable in previous studies as indicated below:

The findings by Cheng (2017) found out that Perceived quality was having significant effect
on purchase intention. In the same vein the findings by Gokhan and Ulengin (2015) on the *Effect of Brand Equity on Firms' Financial Performance in Consumer Goods Industries*, Perceived quality appears to be the primary dimension of CBBE that should be improved upon for enhancing financial performance.

The findings by Wijetunge (2016) also agree with the results of this study in respect with this specific objective of perceived quality and competitive advantage. The results of the data analysis showed that all the hypotheses were supported at 0.05 level of significance and that as long as they improve the level of service quality they can achieve greater competitive advantage and higher business performance in the long run. In addition Katarina Persson (2015) findings also support the results of this hypotheses by indicating that is possible to create sustainable competitive advantage by adding unique value to ordinary food products. Adrián (2017) findings also support this study by showing a high correlation between brand image and perceived quality. These findings are consistent with Kamakura *et al.,* (1999); Bamert *et al.,* (2005); Anselmsson *et al.,* (2006) indicating that perceived quality has a positive relationship with competitive advantage.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that producers of high quality beer brands can gain a competitive edge over those that produce poor quality beer products and conclude further that improvement in perceived quality enhances firm's competitive advantage in alcoholic beer products in Kabale district, south western Uganda.

The research recommends that beer brand Managers of EABL and UBL must position their beer brands in Kabale district to target customers through: attributes such as high quality, high prestige; functional and emotional benefits.

Beer producers should aggressively engage in activities that communicate, promote and educate the consumers on the quality of their products in order to improve the consumers' perception on their brand equity and should aim to further improve their perceived quality.

The researcher recommends that beer producers should maintain product quality consistently so that consumers, retailers and wholesalers will be loyal because they believe the quality of their products.

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