

**ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR MARY KAY BRAND OF COSMETIC PRODUCTS IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA- NIGERIA**

**BY**

**EKE, DONATUS IZUOGU PhD**  
DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES  
AIRFORCE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, KADUNA  
ekedonatusizuogu@gmail.com  
+2348037203621

**LABBO AMINA**  
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES  
AIRFORCE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, KADUNA

**MADI YUSUF**  
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES  
NATIONAL DEFENSE ACADEMY, KADUNA  
yusufmafi204@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper examined consumer preference for Mary Kay brand of cosmetic products. The specific objective was to determine whether physical outlook, price condition, and quality content influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand. The paper was anchored on the theory of rational choice theory. The descriptive survey method was basically used in the study which covered the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Nine (9) major outlets of Mary Kay brand sellers were discovered in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Topman's formula for sample size determination was used to generate 288 respondents based on the proportion of the patronage in each outlet. Structured questionnaires on 5-point Likert scale were used to elicit data from the respondents. The results showed that the physical outlook, price condition, and quality influence customer preference for Mary Kay brand in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja( $p > 0.05$ ). It is an expensive product mostly preferred by high class people like rich students and politicians to distinguish their status. Its packaging and long lasting fragrance are very attractive. The implication of the study is that the company should continue to monitor the market so that they will always use the right strategies to sustain consumer preference for their product. It is recommended that the producer of Mary Kay cosmetics should maintain and further enhance the quality of their product to sustain its preference by its customers in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja*

**Keywords.** Consumer Preference, Cosmetic Products, Physical Outlook, Price, Quality

## INTRODUCTION

The use of the word 'preference' in management science discipline however differs with how the concept is used among the pure science related subjects. It is against this backdrop that one explains how it is used particularly in this paper as well as how it affects consumer behaviours. According to Lichtenstein and Slovic, (2006) the word Preference can be defined to mean the attitude of individuals with regards to their interest which must be in accordance with the decision making process. Preference is customer's attitude towards one object in relation to another.

Devasena (2012) pointed out that buying preference is determined by factors such as satisfaction (derived by consumers), price and environment. According to Kayleigh, (2012), consumer's preference for a particular product can make or mar a company. Kayleigh goes on to say that if consumers show likeness for any product, it can stay around for years and sell and on the contrary if the consumers do not like a product of any type, it could disappear very quickly if the company cannot determine how to fix the problem. One may be wondering why consumers prefer some products to another. Consumers prefer certain types of goods or services when they derive the needed satisfaction. Kyle (2011) also noted that the ignoring of consumers preference is at the peril of whomever that does that.

Customers prefer or accept a product that has the desired value or high-level of quality for their money, performing well and gives satisfaction. Product preference is determined when there has been a comparison between two different brands of products and consumer priority and taste are met up with (Okpara, 2002). This could serve as a yardstick for continuous use of a particular product or service. The brand that matches the preferred attributes more than others is likely to be accepted first for purchase and a relationship between the consumer and a production firm is established. The relationship is so important for the customer that makes maximum efforts to maintain it (Rechheld, 2003). Hence, initiating and enhancing customer relationship increases brand preference (Kotler 2003).

Mary Kay, Inc was founded in 1963 and specializes in cosmetic products. These cosmetics include Mary Kay Timewise Matte Wear Liquid Foundation, Mary Kay Foundation Primer, Mary Kay Oil Mattifier, Mary Kay Lash Love Mascara, Mary Kay Medium Coverage Foundation, Mary Kay Time Wise Micro dermabrasion Bundle, Mary Kay Concealer Beige, Mary Kay Ultimate Mascara, Mary Kay Sheer Mineral Pressed Powder, among others. The idea of Mary Kay cosmetics products for potential customer satisfaction is very important because it is one of the leading names in cosmetics all over the world and has to do everything within its power to maintain the lead. Mary Kay as an organization for that matter, that sells not just a product, but what it is really selling is the satisfaction, use or benefit that consumer wants (McCarty and Perreanlt, 1982; cited in Ozo, 2005).

Cosmetics are those products that can be applied to the human body for the purpose of beautifying or promoting the appearance of the skin. Consumers' preference for cosmetic differs. Reasons for the varying preference have therefore not been adequately explored. This paper therefore is an attempt to analyse the consumers' preference for brands of

cosmetics products.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The contemporary society is faced with the problem of complexity of preference due to numerous alternative products seen everywhere in the market. This is the case of women that use different types of cosmetics brands such as Mary Kay. This has posed a challenge to both the manufacturers and end users. On the side of the producers, they are thinking on how to survive competition while the users have the challenge on which brand of products to use that can give them the desired results and as well equal value for the money spent on these brands of cosmetics. These include preference according to the physical outlook of the product; preference according to the price condition of the product; preference according to the quality of the product; and preference according to the mode of advertisement of the product. It is against this background that the paper seeks to analyse the consumers' preference for Mary Kay products in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja metropolis.

### **Objectives of the Paper**

The broad objective of this paper is to analyze consumers' preference for Mary Kay product in Federal Capital Territory, *Abuja*; the specific objectives of the paper are:

- (1) To determine if physical outlook of cosmetics products influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand.
- (2) To determine if price condition of cosmetics products influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand.
- (3) To determine if quality of cosmetics products influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The hypotheses to be tested in this paper include the following:

$H_01$ : The physical outlook of cosmetics products does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand.

$H_02$ : The price condition of cosmetics products does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand..

$H_03$ : The quality of cosmetics products does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand.

### **Significance of the paper**

Cosmetics are substances used to enhance or protect the appearance or order of the human skin. It is also intended to beautify the body. The usage has become so popular to the point that it is as if women (even some men) cannot do without them. However, this study will be of significance to the manufacturers of Mary Kay as well as the users in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

This paper will be of great benefit to the cosmetics companies especially Mary Kay company whose cosmetic products are being studied. It will be a practical guide in retaining their market share. It will also help stimulate further investigations into this area of research. It will be educative and serve as a source of information for further research on related problems in this area. Those who stand to benefit from this study are

also the consumers of Mary Kay products in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, the distributors of Mary Kay products who would be encouraged to do more in their effort to see that Mary Kay maintains a lead in the market. The paper will also be of benefit to future researchers who would embark on research on similar topics.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The success of any industry offering either services or a product depends upon customer satisfaction. Consumer preference also keeps changing and business firms find it a must to update and upgrade themselves according to consumers' tastes. The 21<sup>st</sup> century Businesses are poised to overcoming the needs and wants of the millennium consumers and also recognising the fact that consumers are kings. In order to cope with changing customer needs and expectations, forward-thinking companies try to find how to integrate the voice of consumers' into the value chain. It could be observed in Nigeria generally and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja in particular that most consumers show preference for foreign cosmetic or products rather than the indigenous products.

When a company understands the behaviour of consumers, it would enable them to aim at the right target and be able to create the right and successful marketing strategies for the products.

### **Branding and Consumers Product Preference**

Branding applies to services as well as physical products (Cravens and Piercy, 2003). Brand is inseparable from business which is the foundation. In order to have consumer preference, marketers develop brand names that communicate products concepts and help position their brands in the minds of consumers. Onyeke and Nebo (2000) attested that branding helps the consumer to distinguish a fake product from authentic one and makes shopping easy; and to the manufacturers, it makes order processing easier and also helps them to segment their market.

### **Psychological Aspect of Consumer Brand Decision**

The impact of every product is determined by consumer perception of the product. Initial purchase or repeat purchase, which ensures brand preference are highly influenced by consumer perception of such product. Nnabuko (1998) states that identification of needs lead to perception which according to her, is the process by which people select, organize, and interpret stimuli into meaningful picture. He added that perception provides the screen which filters out unpleasant, undesirable idea/information.

Onyeke and Nebo (2000) simply defined perception as the meaning we attach to what we smell, hear, see, taste and feel. Ironically, a low product may appear in a nice and attractive package. The consumer may likely interpret the product as a high quality one. According to them, that is what is called perception, and perception therefore influences behaviour. However, from the above assertion the researcher agrees that perceptions are much more important to the marketer than their reality, because individuals take decisions and actions based on what they perceive to be reality.

### **Packaging and Consumer Product Preference**

Packaging helps consumers to understand the contents of product and usage. Consumer's packaging choice is generally an economic decision made by comparing costs and benefits ratio. However, packaging has not only functional utilities but also some important roles (Peter-Texeria and Badrie, 2005). Packaging can create competitive advantage for firms. Distinctive and innovative packaging with aesthetic presentation can intrigue consumers and change their interests. Innovative packaging impresses consumers with its colour, images, scent, design, etc.

### **Price and Consumer Brand Preference**

According to Agbonifoh, Ogwo, and Nnolin (1998) pricing as the process of price determination or price fixing is the money worth to be paid in exchange for a product (goods or services). Nwaizugbo (2004) noted that price is value expressed in monetary terms. In other words, it relates to the utility or usefulness the buyers or consumers attach to the product. On the other hand, utility creates value measured as price. This shows that the price of any product should reflect the total value of the package the producer is hoping to pass on to the buyer.

### **Quality and Brand Preference**

Quality is a crucial factor in shaping consumer preferences for brands (Aakar, 1991). Consumers tend to associate high-quality products with positive brand experiences, leading to brand loyalty and preferences (Kotler, 2003). A study by Zeithami (!988) found that quality is a key driver of consumer satisfaction, which in turn influences brand preference. Brand preference is also influenced by perceived quality, which is shaped by factors such as product performance, features, and reliability (Keller, 1993). A study by Erdem and Swalt (1998) found that perceived quality has a significant impact on brand choice and preferences.

In the context of cosmetic products, quality is a critical factor in determining brand preferences (Quester and Lim, 2003). Consumers tend to prefer brands that offer their needs and expectations.

### **Empirical Review**

Ugwu (2001) in her study on "Causes of Poor Patronage Towards Locally Made Cosmetics: A case of Nigeria Urban Areas", supports this view when she stated that consumers in urban areas form the majority of consumers of cosmetics but they tend to prefer foreign cosmetics to locally made ones mainly because of lack of confidence consumers express towards locally made cosmetics. The result showed that consumer's attitude was more favourable towards foreign cosmetics than local cosmetics on the basis of price and perception of colour, fragrance and size.

Devibala and Rangaswamy (2011) conducted a research on consumer preference for cosmetics among college girls in KellaVallanadu District. A sample of 150 girls students were selected on basis of stratified random sampling method as respondents. The result of the analysis showed that consumers differed in preference for cosmetics. The preference of the majority of the girl students were Lux, toilet soap, ponds sandal powder, fair and lovely face cream, Eva body spray, and clinic all clear shampoo. The

goal of the study was to find out the consumer preference for cosmetics among college girls with reference to Tirunelveli Thoothukudi, to analyse and understand whether they were satisfied with the present price of cosmetics. Findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents were spending less than R.5.500 per month on cosmetics. Quality was the dominant factor for brand preference by majority of the respondents.

Valli (2012) conducted a study on factors influencing specific brand preference using ponds Talcum powder as a reference point. The objective of that study was to examine the various factors that influence consumers' preference to ponds Talcum powder brand as opposed to other brands. The study adopted survey research design while relevant data used for the study was sources from primary means with the aid of interviews. The study investigated the characters of cosmetics consumers in terms of five categories including fashion, brand, service, price and quality. The participants were selected from a famous commercial district. Chi-square test was used and the results revealed the differences on fashion, brand service, quality and price between the two consumer groups ( $P<0.05$ ). Quality was given utmost preference by the women consumer. Women were found to be more brands specific and quality was the most important criterion for preference of cosmetics.

### Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on **rational choice theory**. Gary (1992) propounded the rational choice theory also known as choice theory or rational action theory. This theory is usually used to undertake and model social economic behaviour. The theory is anchored on the notion that consumers weigh the expected costs and benefits of different actions and choose those actions which are most beneficial or least costly to them. Rational choice theory attempts to explain all (conforming and deviant) social phenomena in terms of how self-interested individuals make choices under the influence of their preferences. It treats social exchange as similar to economic exchange where all parties try to maximize their advantage or gain, and to minimize their disadvantage or loss. Rational choice theory uses a specific and narrower definition of rationality simply to mean that an individual acts as if balancing cost against benefits to arrive at action that maximizes personal advantage.

### Assumptions of rational choice theory

The basic idea of rational choice theory is that patterns of behaviour in societies reflect the choices made by individuals as they try to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs. In other words, people make decisions about how they should act by comparing the cost and benefits of different courses of action. Rational decision-making is choosing an action given one's preferences; the actions one could take and expectation about the outcomes of those actions. Actions are often expressed as a set, for example a set of I exhaustive and exclusive actions.

$$A = \{a_1, a_2, \dots, a_j\}$$

For example, if a person is to buy either Mary Kay, Nivea or abstain, their set of possible purchase actions is

$$A = (\text{Mary Kay, Nivea, abstain}).$$

Assumption about individuals' preferences for actions:

Rational choice theory makes two assumptions about individuals' preferences for actions.

- i. Completeness – all action can be ranked in an order of preference (indifference between two or more is possible).
- ii. Transitivity – if action  $a_1$  is preferred to  $a_2$ , and action  $a_2$  is preferred to  $a_3$ , the  $a_1$  is preferred to  $a_3$ .

Together these assumptions form the result that given a set exhaustive and exclusive actions to choose from an individual can rank them in terms of his preferences, and that his preferences are consistent.

### Methodology

Descriptive survey method was used for this paper. The population of the study consisted of all the buyers and users of Mary Kay cosmetics brand from the nine major selected outlets in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Topman's formula for sample size determination was used to determine a sample of 288 from the unknown population while stratified sampling technique formula was applied to guide the distribution of the questionnaires to the respondents accordingly.

A total of twenty-three (23) questions were contained therein with 5-point Likert scale structure. Primary data was used and questionnaires were administered directly to the respondents in the nine major selected outlets of Mary Kay cosmetics brand in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Data were analyzed using simple frequency tables, percentages, 5-point Likert scale and one sample t-test with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

### Results

**Table 1: The Physical Outlook of Cosmetics that Influences Consumer's Preference for**

<b>Mary Kay brand</b>												
S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Sum	Mean	Decision		
a.	Size	44	51	7	82	92	276	701	2.5	Rejected		
b.	Shape	37	46	12	59	122	276	645	2.3	Rejected		
c.	Colour	21	34	19	64	138	276	564	2.0	Rejected		
d.	Packaging	84	96	13	39	44	276	965	3.5	Accepted		

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Sum	Mean	Decision
e.	Long lasting fragrance	10 7	114	9	27	29	276	1101	3.8	Accepted
Grand mean										2.82

Table 1 shows the physical outlook of cosmetics that influences consumer's preference for Mary Kay brand. From the results, items a, b and c which are size, shape and colour respectively were rejected as the physical outlook of cosmetics that influences consumer's preference for Mary Kay brand (mean value < 3.0).

**Table 2: The price condition for cosmetics that influences consumer's preference for**

Mary Kay brand										
S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Sum	Mean	Decision
a.	Moderately reduced price.	29	39	18	83	10 7	276	628	2.3	Rejected
b.	Special offer.	31	44	21	84	96	276	658	2.4	Rejected
c.	Alternative payment condition.	45	62	8	87	74	276	745	2.7	Rejected
d.	Expensive and limited product.	74	81	11	47	63	276	884	3.2	Accepted
Grand mean										2.65

Table 2 shows the price for cosmetics that influences consumer's preference for Mary Kay brand. From the results, items a, b and c, which are model at reduced price, special offer and alternative payment condition were rejected as the price condition for cosmetics that influences consumer's preference to Mary Kay brand (mean value < 3.0).

**Table 3: The Quality of Cosmetics that Influence Consumer's Preference to Mary Kay Brand**

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Sum	Mean	Decision
a.	Instantly hydrates	51	65	13	64	83	276	765	2.8	Rejected
b.	Locks in moisture	86	77	19	49	45	276	938	3.4	Accepted
c.	Purifies	69	101	9	53	44	276	926	3.4	Accepted
d.	De-stresses	49	57	13	73	84	276	742	2.7	Rejected
e.	Nourishes	81	79	11	44	61	276	903	3.3	Accepted

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Sum	Mean	Decision
f.	Calms	63	94	21	57	41	276	909	3.3	Accepted
g.	Firms	49	117	5	68	37	276	901	3.3	Accepted
h.	Smoothes	93	75	24	36	48	276	957	3.5	Accepted
i.	Softens	63	48	17	71	77	276	777	2.8	Rejected
j.	Minimizes pores	74	91	12	47	52	276	916	3.3	Accepted
Grand mean		3.18								

Table 3 shows the quality of cosmetics that influence consumer's preference for Mary Kay brand. From the results, all the items were accepted as the quality of cosmetics that influence consumer's preference for Mary Kay brand (mean value  $> 3.0$ ), except instantly hydrates, de-stresses and softens (mean value  $< 3.0$ ).

### Results of Hypotheses1:

Grand Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	Df	P-value
2.82	0.7855	-0.512	4	0.635

From the result of hypothesis 1 on the physical outlook of cosmetics does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand, the grand mean of physical outlook that influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand, which is 2.82 was tested with the cut-off point of 3.0, and the difference was not significant ( $P>0.05$ ). This means that  $H_0$  is rejected and concluded that the physical outlook of cosmetics influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand.

### Hypothesis 2

Grand Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	Df	P-value
2.65	0.4041	-1.732	3	0.182

From the result of hypothesis 2 on the price condition of cosmetics does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand, the grand mean of price condition that influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand, which is 2.65 was tested with the cut-off point of 3.0, and the difference was not significant ( $P>0.05$ ). This means that  $H_0$  is rejected and concluded that the physical outlook of cosmetics influences consumer preference to Mary Kay brand.

### Hypothesis 3

Grand Mean	Standard deviation	t-test	Df	P-value
3.18	0.29364	1.938	9	0.085

From the result of hypothesis 3 on the quality of cosmetics does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand; the grand mean of quality that influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand, which is 3.18 was tested with the cut-off point of 3.0, and the difference was not significant ( $P>0.05$ ). This means that  $H_0$  is rejected and concluded that the quality of cosmetics influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand.

## **DISCUSSION**

The result revealed that long lasting fragrance and packaging of Mary Kay brand are always unique, which distinguish it from other brands. It was found that packaging value perception of consumers was related with three components of the models, which were price, brand value perceptions and consumer satisfaction. The result revealed that the price condition of cosmetics that influences consumer's preference for Mary Kay brand also show that the consumers were willing to pay for Mary Kay brand of cosmetics even when it is expensive.

The result revealed that the quality of Mary Kay brand of cosmetics is highly distinguished from other cosmetics. The result of hypothesis 3 on the quality of cosmetics does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand was rejected ( $P>0.05$ ) and concluded that the quality of cosmetics influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand. Quality was given utmost preference by the women consumer. Women were found to be more brands specific and quality was the most important criterion for preference of cosmetics.

The result revealed that the quality of Mary Kay brand of cosmetics is highly distinguished from other cosmetics. The study investigated the characters of cosmetics consumers in terms of five categories including fashion, brand, service, price and quality. The participants were selected from a famous commercial district. Chi-square test was used and the results revealed the differences on fashion, brand service, quality and price between the two consumer groups ( $P<0.05$ ). Quality was given utmost preference by the women consumers. Women were found to be more brands specific and quality was the most important criterion for preference of cosmetics.

### **Summary of Findings**

The result revealed that long lasting fragrance and packaging of Mary Kay brand are always unique, which distinguish it from other brands. The hypothesis 1 on the physical outlook of cosmetics does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand was rejected ( $P>0.05$ ) and concluded that the physical outlook of cosmetics influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand. It was found that packaging value perception of consumers was related with three components of the models, which were price, brand value perceptions and consumer satisfaction.

The price condition of cosmetics does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand was rejected ( $P>0.05$ ) and concluded that the price condition of cosmetics influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand. The result revealed that the quality of Mary Kay brand of cosmetics is highly distinguished from other cosmetics. The result on the quality of cosmetics does not influence consumer preference for Mary Kay brand was rejected ( $P>0.05$ ) and concluded that the quality of cosmetics influences consumer preference for Mary Kay brand. The study investigated the characters of cosmetics consumers in terms of five categories including fashion, brand, service, price and quality. Further results revealed the differences on fashion, brand service, quality and price between consumer groups ( $P<0.05$ ). Quality was given utmost preference by the women consumer. Women were found to be more brands specific and quality was the most important criterion for preference of cosmetics.

## Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the major findings of this study:

1. The physical outlook of cosmetic products influences customers' preference for Mary Kay brand in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; especially its packaging and long-lasting fragrance.
2. The price condition of cosmetics products influences customers' preference for Mary Kay brand in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; it is an expensive product mostly preferred by high class people like expensive students and politicians probably to distinguish their status.
3. The quality of cosmetic products influences customers' preference for Mary Kay brand in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; it is a high quality product that functions effectively as needed by its consumers.

## Recommendations

It is recommended as follows

1. Since the packaging as a physical outlook of a product plays a vital role in influencing preference for Mary Kay cosmetic products in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, it should be strictly maintained. New idea on packaging should be sourced to attract more consumers to the products.
2. It is recommended that the price should not be compromised irrespective of any prevailing situation in the market.
3. Since the quality of Mary Kay product adds value to its customer preference in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, it is recommended that the manufacturers of Mary Kay should ensure that the product maintains its quality and strategies adopted to ensure it is safe from being adulterated.

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