

ETHICAL MARKETING PRACTICES AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE OF NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between Ethical Marketing Practices and Business Performance of Non-Alcoholic Beverage Firms in Port Harcourt, with the objective of establishing if accurate product information and social responsibility relates to sales volume growth of nonalcoholic beverage firms. This study adopted correlational research design. The population for this study comprised of eight (8) nonalcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt. The researcher purposively selected five (5) respondents from each firm, therefore forty (40) respondents from these firms provided information for this study. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. 36 responses were used for the analysis using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS version 23.0. The findings revealed that the proxies of ethical marketing (accurate product information and social responsibility) have significant relationship with the measures of business performance (sales volume growth) of non-alcoholic beverage firms Port Harcourt. The study therefore concluded that ethical marketing, particularly through the dimensions of accurate product information and social responsibility, significantly impacts the sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt. The study recommended amongst others that Non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt should prioritize providing accurate and detailed product information on labels and marketing materials.

Keywords: Ethical Marketing Practices; Business Performance; Accurate Product Information; Social Responsibility; Sales Volume Growth

INTRODUCTION

The significance of ethical marketing has gained momentum in contemporary business practices, especially in sectors that directly impact consumer health and welfare, such as the non-alcoholic beverage industry. Ethical marketing refers to strategies that uphold moral standards, including truthfulness, transparency, and fairness, which are key to building consumer trust and long-term loyalty (Gbadamosi & Ilesanmi, 2023). In Port Harcourt, a major hub of commercial activity in Nigeria, firms within the non-alcoholic beverage sector are increasingly acknowledging the importance of ethical marketing as a means of enhancing their business performance. As consumers become more discerning, there is an expectation for firms to maintain integrity in their promotional, pricing, and product-related strategies.

Recent trends show that consumers are highly influenced by the ethical stance of companies, especially in industries related to food and beverages. According to Okoro and Ezeh (2023), businesses that adopt ethical marketing practices tend to enjoy improved brand loyalty, as customers are more likely to trust companies that align with their personal values. For non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt, this is particularly relevant, as the market is highly competitive, and consumer preferences are shaped not only by product quality but also by the perceived integrity of the companies. Ethical concerns related to marketing practices, such as

misleading advertisements or the environmental impact of production processes, can greatly influence customer decisions, thereby affecting overall business performance.

Moreover, the link between ethical marketing and financial performance has been increasingly supported by empirical evidence. Businesses that commit to ethical practices often benefit from stronger customer relationships, which translates into higher sales and market share (Chukwu & Nwankwo, 2024). For non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt, where consumer awareness of ethical issues is growing, companies that prioritize responsible marketing are likely to gain a competitive edge. Additionally, firms that avoid ethical missteps are less prone to reputational damage, which can have severe financial implications. Consequently, ethical marketing does not merely serve as a tool for enhancing public perception but also as a strategy for boosting profitability and sustainable business performance.

The societal expectation for ethical conduct extends beyond consumers to regulatory bodies and advocacy groups, making it critical for firms to align their marketing practices with ethical standards. In Port Harcourt, beverage companies that fail to adhere to ethical norms may face not only customer backlash but also stricter regulatory scrutiny, which can hinder business operations (Akinola & Ibikunle, 2023). Therefore, the relationship between ethical marketing and business performance is multi-dimensional, encompassing legal, social, and economic factors. As firms in the non-alcoholic beverage sector strive for market leadership, ethical marketing emerges as a crucial element in maintaining a positive brand reputation and achieving long-term success.

In light of these factors, this study seeks to explore the relationship between ethical marketing and business performance in the non-alcoholic beverage industry in Port Harcourt. Given the increasing focus on corporate responsibility and the growing demand for ethical transparency from both consumers and regulators, understanding this relationship is pivotal. By examining how ethical marketing practices influence key business performance indicators such as sales growth, market share, and customer loyalty, the study aims to provide insights into how firms can strategically leverage ethics to enhance their competitive positioning and ensure sustainability in a rapidly evolving market landscape.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of ethical marketing, many non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt continue to face challenges in fully integrating ethical practices into their marketing strategies. Consumers today are more informed and critical, yet several firms persist with misleading advertising, hidden product information, and unsustainable environmental practices. This disconnect between consumer expectations and business conduct poses significant risks to brand reputation and customer loyalty. Recent reports have indicated a rise in consumer distrust towards companies that engage in unethical marketing practices, which has, in turn, impacted their market performance negatively (Okoro & Ezeh, 2023). The dilemma for many non-alcoholic beverage firms lies in understanding how to balance profitability with ethical marketing practices without compromising business growth. Failure to address this gap may lead to continued consumer dissatisfaction, regulatory penalties, and potential loss of market share in an already competitive industry.

Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of empirical data that quantifies the relationship between ethical marketing and business performance within the context of Port Harcourt's non-alcoholic beverage sector. While global studies highlight the positive impact of ethical marketing on business performance, local firms may not have fully grasped the specific implications for their operations. Consequently, many businesses remain unsure about the financial returns of investing in ethical marketing practices, which hinders their willingness to adopt them. This

study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by exploring how ethical marketing influences key business performance metrics such as customer retention, profitability, and market competitiveness in Port Harcourt. By providing empirical evidence on this relationship, the study aims to equip non-alcoholic beverage firms with the insights necessary to strategically align their marketing practices with ethical standards, thereby enhancing both business performance and consumer trust.

Conceptual/Operational Framework

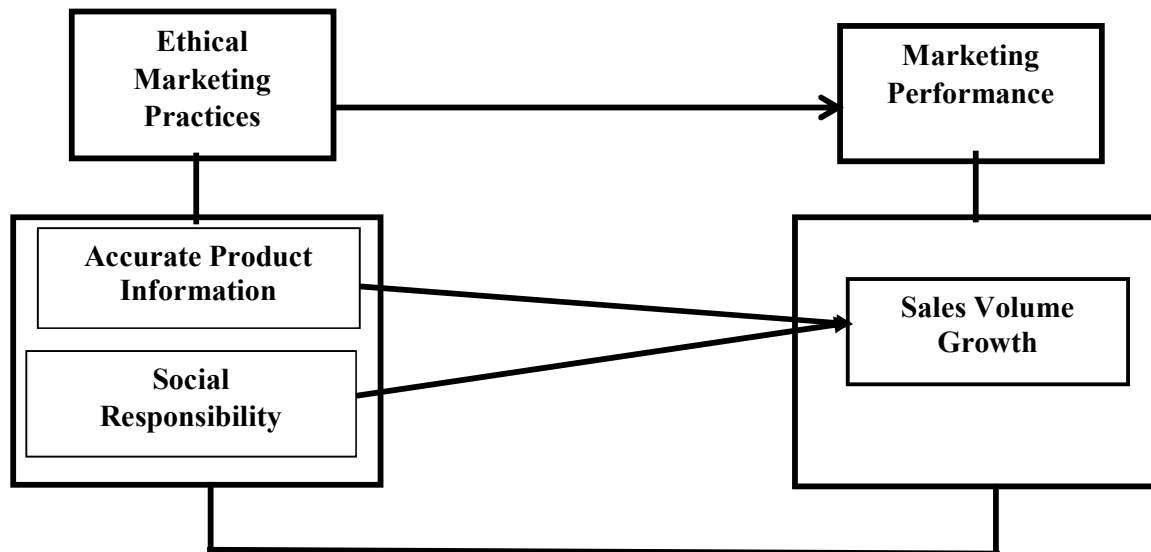


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the relationship between ethical marketing practices and business performance of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt

Source: Akinola & Ibikunle, (2023)

Objective of the Study

The aim of this paper is to empirically investigate the relationship between ethical marketing practices and business performance of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. examine the relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.
2. determine the relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this paper:

1. What is the relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt?
2. What is the relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested using the conventional 0.05 as a threshold:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.

Conceptual Reviews

Concept of Ethical Marketing Practices

Ethical marketing refers to the practice of promoting products and services in ways that uphold honesty, fairness, and responsibility toward consumers and society. This approach ensures that all marketing activities, including advertising, product information, and sales techniques, do not deceive or manipulate customers. In recent years, the rise of consumer awareness regarding social and environmental issues has intensified the demand for transparency and ethical practices in marketing (Okoro & Ezeh, 2023). Companies that engage in ethical marketing prioritize values such as sustainability, respect for consumer rights, and truthful representation of their products. This shift has been particularly noticeable in industries like food and beverages, where health, safety, and sustainability are of paramount concern to consumers.

One of the key components of ethical marketing is truth in advertising, where companies must provide accurate information about their products without exaggerating benefits or omitting critical details (Gbadamosi & Ilesanmi, 2023). Misleading claims about a product's effectiveness, ingredients, or health benefits can severely damage a company's reputation and consumer trust. Ethical marketing also involves respecting consumers' privacy and protecting their data, especially in a digital landscape where personal information is increasingly vulnerable. Non-alcoholic beverage firms, for instance, are expected to adhere to these principles by being transparent about the ingredients they use, their sourcing practices, and the environmental impact of their packaging.

The relevance of ethical marketing to business performance is growing, as consumers increasingly favor companies that align with their values. Recent studies indicate that businesses that commit to ethical practices often experience greater customer loyalty, improved brand image, and long-term profitability (Chukwu & Nwankwo, 2024). For non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt, adhering to ethical marketing standards can differentiate them in a competitive market, fostering trust and loyalty among health-conscious consumers. As ethical considerations shape purchase decisions, firms that maintain integrity in their marketing practices are more likely to enhance customer satisfaction, reduce the risk of reputational damage, and achieve sustainable business success.

Dimensions of Ethical Marketing Practices

Accurate Product Information

Accurate product information refers to the truthful and transparent communication of a product's features, benefits, ingredients, and usage instructions. It is a critical aspect of marketing that ensures consumers are well-informed about what they are purchasing, allowing them to make educated decisions. In recent years, consumer demand for authenticity and transparency has increased, with more customers seeking detailed and clear information about the products they buy, particularly in the food and beverage sector (Okoro & Ezeh, 2023). Non-alcoholic beverage firms, for example, are expected to disclose accurate details about ingredients, nutritional content, and health benefits, which help build trust and prevent misleading expectations.

Providing accurate product information also mitigates the risk of false advertising, which can lead to reputational damage and legal consequences for firms. Misleading claims regarding a

product's performance, origin, or environmental impact not only erode consumer trust but can also result in regulatory penalties. Recent studies have shown that businesses that prioritize accuracy in product information are more likely to develop long-term relationships with customers, as transparency fosters credibility and enhances consumer confidence (Gbadamosi & Ilesanmi, 2023). This is particularly important for non-alcoholic beverage firms, where consumers are highly conscious of health and wellness, making accurate labeling and product descriptions essential.

Furthermore, accurate product information plays a crucial role in shaping consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Customers who feel that a product has delivered on its advertised promises are more likely to remain loyal to the brand and engage in repeat purchases (Chukwu & Nwankwo, 2024). For non-alcoholic beverage companies in Port Harcourt, providing clear and accurate information on ingredients, sourcing, and health benefits can enhance the customer experience, increase brand loyalty, and ultimately improve business performance. By aligning their marketing practices with consumer expectations for honesty and transparency, firms can maintain a competitive edge and avoid the pitfalls associated with misinformation or deceptive marketing.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility refers to the ethical obligation of businesses to contribute positively to society and minimize their negative impact on the environment and communities in which they operate. Companies are increasingly expected to go beyond profit-making and engage in practices that address social, environmental, and ethical concerns. This trend is driven by a growing awareness among consumers, regulators, and advocacy groups who demand that businesses play a more active role in tackling societal issues such as environmental sustainability, fair labor practices, and community development (Akinola & Ibikunle, 2023). For non-alcoholic beverage firms, this may involve adopting eco-friendly packaging, supporting local communities, and ensuring fair wages and working conditions throughout their supply chains. The importance of social responsibility is particularly evident in industries like food and beverages, where production processes often have significant environmental and social impacts. Non-alcoholic beverage companies in Port Harcourt, for example, are increasingly expected to reduce their environmental footprint by managing water use, minimizing waste, and sourcing ingredients responsibly (Gbadamosi & Ilesanmi, 2023). Firms that engage in socially responsible practices are more likely to attract ethically conscious consumers who prefer to support brands that align with their values. Social responsibility also helps companies mitigate risks, as failure to meet societal expectations can result in boycotts, reputational damage, and increased regulatory scrutiny.

Moreover, social responsibility has a direct correlation with business performance. Recent studies indicate that companies with strong social responsibility initiatives tend to experience enhanced customer loyalty, brand reputation, and employee engagement, all of which contribute to long-term profitability (Chukwu & Nwankwo, 2024). In the non-alcoholic beverage industry, where consumers are increasingly looking for brands that support environmental sustainability and community welfare, businesses that integrate social responsibility into their operations can differentiate themselves in the marketplace. For firms in Port Harcourt, aligning business practices with social responsibility can lead to improved customer satisfaction, stronger brand equity, and sustainable business growth, ultimately benefiting both society and the company.

Concept of Business Performance

Business performance refers to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of a company in achieving its objectives, which may include profitability, market share growth, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency. It is a multidimensional concept that evaluates a firm's success in both financial and non-financial terms. Key indicators of business performance include revenue, profit margins, return on investment, and sales volume growth (Okoro & Ezeh, 2023). In addition, non-financial aspects such as customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are increasingly recognized as critical components of overall business success. For non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt, measuring business performance holistically helps ensure they remain competitive, especially in an industry where consumer preferences and regulatory standards constantly evolve.

The financial dimension of business performance focuses on profitability and growth metrics, which are essential for sustainability and shareholder value. Strong financial performance is usually the result of effective pricing strategies, cost management, and market penetration efforts. Non-alcoholic beverage firms that successfully manage production costs while expanding their customer base tend to see significant improvements in profitability and sales growth (Gbadamosi & Ilesanmi, 2023). Moreover, innovations in product offerings and marketing strategies can contribute to improved financial outcomes by attracting new customers and retaining existing ones. For firms in Port Harcourt, maintaining competitive pricing while delivering quality products that meet consumer demands can drive strong financial performance, even in highly competitive markets.

Measure of Business Performance

Sales Volume Growth

Sales volume growth refers to the increase in the quantity of products or services sold by a company over a specific period. It is a critical indicator of business performance, reflecting a firm's ability to attract and retain customers, expand market share, and increase revenue. Sales volume growth can be influenced by various factors, including product quality, pricing strategies, marketing efforts, and consumer demand. In highly competitive markets, such as the non-alcoholic beverage industry, achieving sustained sales volume growth requires companies to continually innovate and adapt to changing consumer preferences (Akinola & Ibikunle, 2023). For firms in Port Harcourt, this could involve launching new product lines, adopting dynamic pricing strategies, and enhancing distribution channels to reach a wider audience.

Marketing plays a significant role in driving sales volume growth. Companies that invest in targeted marketing campaigns, such as digital advertising or influencer partnerships, can generate increased brand visibility and consumer interest, translating into higher sales (Gbadamosi & Ilesanmi, 2023). Additionally, offering promotions, discounts, or loyalty programs can incentivize repeat purchases and boost sales volume. In the non-alcoholic beverage industry, where consumers are highly responsive to health trends, firms that effectively communicate the health benefits of their products, or their commitment to ethical practices like sustainability, are more likely to experience sales growth. A strong marketing strategy that resonates with consumer values can significantly impact sales volume, especially in an increasingly competitive and health-conscious market.

Theoretical Review

This paper was anchored on the theory of planned behavior.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), posits that individual behavior is guided by three key factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. According to this theory, a person's intention to engage in a particular behavior is the most immediate predictor of that behavior. Attitude refers to the degree to which an individual has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior. Subjective norms are the perceived social pressures to perform or not perform the behavior, while perceived behavioral control reflects an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, which is influenced by past experiences and anticipated obstacles. TPB asserts that when individuals form a strong intention to behave in a certain way, coupled with favorable attitudes, supportive subjective norms, and high perceived behavioral control, they are more likely to act on their intentions.

In the context of ethical marketing and business performance of non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt, TPB is highly relevant. Ethical marketing behaviors by firms are often shaped by management's attitudes towards ethics, perceived industry norms, and their perceived control over implementing ethical practices within the firm's operational environment. For instance, if managers perceive ethical marketing as beneficial for long-term profitability and customer loyalty, and if industry norms favor ethical conduct, the firm is more likely to adopt these practices (Chukwu & Nwankwo, 2024). Additionally, perceived behavioral control, such as having the necessary resources, knowledge, and support to execute ethical marketing strategies, will further influence the firm's ability to act on these intentions. Therefore, TPB provides a framework for understanding how non-alcoholic beverage firms' internal and external factors shape their ethical marketing behaviors and, consequently, their business performance. Moreover, TPB's emphasis on intention and perceived control is particularly useful in analyzing how ethical marketing can drive business outcomes. The theory suggests that if consumers perceive a firm's marketing practices as ethical and aligned with their personal values, they are more likely to exhibit favorable purchase intentions toward the firm's products (Gbadamosi & Ilesanmi, 2023). These purchase intentions, shaped by consumers' attitudes toward ethical conduct and social norms regarding responsible consumption, directly impact the business performance of non-alcoholic beverage firms. Therefore, TPB offers valuable insights into the mechanisms through which ethical marketing influences consumer behavior and business success, highlighting the importance of fostering positive attitudes, supportive norms, and perceived ease of ethical practice adoption within the firm and among its customers.

Empirical Reviews

Okoro and Ezeh (2023) conducted a study to explore the relationship between ethical marketing practices and the business performance of beverage companies in Nigeria. The primary objective was to determine how ethical considerations in marketing, such as truthfulness, transparency, and fairness, impact customer loyalty and profitability. The study adopted a survey research design, with data collected from 150 marketing managers and sales representatives across major beverage firms in Lagos using structured questionnaires. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between ethical marketing and business performance, with firms practicing ethical marketing reporting higher levels of customer retention and profitability. The researchers recommended that companies integrate ethical considerations into their marketing strategies to improve long-term business performance and sustain customer trust.

Gbadamosi and Ilesanmi (2023) focused on the impact of ethical marketing on consumer trust and brand loyalty in the food and beverage sector in South-West Nigeria. Their study aimed to

examine whether transparent communication of product information and ethical advertising practices influenced customer retention and brand perception. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and quantitative analysis of survey data from 200 consumers. The findings indicated that brands that engage in ethical marketing practices, particularly regarding truth in advertising and responsible product labeling, experienced higher levels of brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. The study recommended that firms should adopt clear and honest communication strategies to enhance consumer trust and strengthen business performance.

Chukwu and Nwankwo (2024) investigated the influence of ethical marketing on the financial performance of non-alcoholic beverage companies in Port Harcourt. The study's objective was to analyze how ethical advertising, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and transparent product information contribute to financial success. Using a correlational research design, they gathered data from 120 marketing executives in the beverage industry through structured questionnaires. Their findings showed that ethical marketing positively affects business performance, particularly in terms of profitability, market share, and consumer loyalty. The authors recommended that firms integrate ethical practices into their marketing plans and embrace CSR initiatives, as these actions contribute to higher financial returns and improved market competitiveness.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population for this study comprised on eight (8) registered non-alcoholic beverage firms. The same eight (8) non-alcoholic beverage firms made up our sample size due to the fact that the population is very small. The researcher purposively selected five (5) respondents from each firm, therefore forty (40) respondents from these firms provided information for this study. A researcher design instrument titled; Ethical Marketing and Business Performance Questionnaire (EMBPQ) was used as the yardstick to measure the degree of connection among ethical marketing and business performance nonalcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt. The methods of data analysis that was employed for this study is the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) with the aid of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis of this study, forty (40) copies of the questionnaire was produced and distributed to non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt, however only thirty-six (36) copies was retrieved and used for the analysis.

Testing of Hypotheses

Research Question One: What is the relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.

Table 1: Relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt

Correlations		
	Accurate Product Information	Sales Volume Growth

Accurate Product Information	Pearson Correlation	1	.689**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	36	36
Sales Volume Growth	Pearson Correlation	.689**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	36	36

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS output, 2025.

The SPSS output on Table 1 shows that a Pearson product moment correlation was run to assess the relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt using a sample of 36 respondents. The strength and direction of the relationship between the variables are indicated by the R-value is 0.689. This means there is a strong and positive relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt. Furthermore, significance of the relationship is shown by the probability value which is 0.000 less than the threshold of 0.05 indicating that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. In other words, there is a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between accurate product information and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt

Correlations			
		Social Responsibility	Sales Volume Growth
Social Responsibility	Pearson Correlation	1	.244**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	36	36
Sales Volume Growth	Pearson Correlation	.244**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	36	36

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS output, 2025.

The SPSS output on Table 2 shows that a Pearson product moment correlation was run to assess the relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt using a sample of 36 respondents. The strength and direction of the relationship between the variables are indicated by the R-value is 0.244. This means there is a very weak and positive relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of

non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt. Furthermore, significance of the relationship is shown by the probability value which is 0.000 less than the threshold of 0.05 indicating that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. In other words, there is a very weak, positive and statistically significant relationship between social responsibility and sales volume growth of non-alcoholic beverages in Port Harcourt.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that ethical marketing practices, has a significant strong relationship strong relationship with business performance of non-alcoholic beverage firms in port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Non-alcoholic beverage firms in Port Harcourt should prioritize providing accurate and detailed product information on labels and marketing materials. Clear communication about ingredients, health benefits, and production processes will foster consumer trust, leading to increased sales and customer loyalty.
2. Firms should actively engage in and promote social responsibility initiatives, such as environmental sustainability, community development, or charitable contributions. By aligning with causes that resonate with consumers, these firms can strengthen their brand image and encourage repeat purchases.

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