

The Impact of Product Branding on Consumer Purchase Intention of UNVDA Rice Ndop, Cameroon

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Abstract

Foreign brands equipped with sophisticated branding strategies, often overshadow local counterparts, leading consumers to prefer imported rice. As such, this paper seeks to investigate how different types of product branding (emotional, differentiatonal and premium branding) influenced consumer purchase intention. Using a quota sampling technique, this study uses a structural equation modeling (SEM), to analyze the effect of product branding on consumer purchase intention of UNVDA Ndop rice. The findings reveals that apart from emotional branding, differentiatonal and premium branding influence consumer purchase intention to varying degree. Differentiatonal branding had a positive and significant influence on consumer purchase intention of UNVDA Ndop rice, while premium branding had a positive and significant influence on consumer purchase intention.

Keyword: Agriculture, Product Brand, Purchase Intention, Cameroon

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Product branding plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing market dynamics. Defined as the process of creating a distinct and recognizable identity for a product, branding goes beyond mere labeling and packaging. Keller (1993) emphasizes the multifaceted nature of brand image, encompassing both functional and emotional attributes. In the realm of agricultural products, branding becomes a powerful tool for differentiation, allowing consumers to associate specific qualities and values with a particular product (Ishola 2022). This, in turn, influences their purchasing decisions, creating a competitive advantage for branded agricultural goods (Docherty, 2012). Product branding has witnessed a shift from traditional to modern approaches. Initially, branding focused primarily on product identification and differentiation through logos and names. However, contemporary perspectives, as highlighted by Kapferer (2012), emphasize the need for brands to convey a holistic experience, establishing a connection with consumers beyond the product itself (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2013). This shift is particularly pertinent in the agricultural sector, where consumers increasingly seek not only quality produce but also a narrative that aligns

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with their values, be it sustainability, ethical farming practices, or local sourcing (Kotler et al., 2016).

The impact of product branding on the marketability of agricultural products is intertwined with the global consumer trend towards conscious consumption (Chaturvedi & Sinha 2024). Research by Keller (1993) underscores the role of branding in communicating information about product origin, production methods, and environmental impact. In the context of agricultural product like UNVDA Ndop Rice, effective branding can elevate the perceived value of the product, contributing to increased market demand (Wiedmann et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant in an era where consumers actively seek transparency and authenticity in their choices, expecting brands to align with their values (Berthon et al., 2012).

In Cameroon, product branding has emerged as a critical factor influencing the marketability of agricultural produce (Shillie & Egwu 2020). Historically, the agricultural sector in Cameroon faced challenges related to market access, quality perception, and competition from imported products (Emmanuel, 2013). However, the adoption of strategic branding initiatives has played a transformative role. Brands like "Cameroon Tea Estate" and "Cameroon Highlanders Coffee" have successfully positioned themselves in the market by emphasizing the unique geographical origin and quality of their products (Hinzen et al., 2010). Research by Tomashuk, (2023) underscores the importance of creating a distinctive brand identity, especially for agricultural products, to stand out in a competitive market.

Furthermore, branding in Cameroon's agricultural sector extends beyond product differentiation to encompass sustainable and ethical practices. Brands that highlight environmentally friendly farming methods, fair trade, and community involvement have gained attraction over recent years (Ottman, 2017). The work of Fonjong & Taku (2019) emphasizes the role of sustainable branding in enhancing the marketability of agricultural produce in Cameroon. For instance, initiatives promoting organic farming practices and eco-friendly packaging not only appeal to environmentally conscious consumers but also contribute to a positive image for the entire sector, fostering trust among consumers (Zulfikar, 2024).

In the context of UNVDA Ndop rice, the branding of Ndop Rice has become a significant factor influencing the marketability of this agricultural product. Ndop Rice, cultivated in the North West Region of Cameroon, faced challenges related to market recognition and competition with imported rice (Mbondji & Engwali, 2024). However, UNVDA has strategically implemented branding initiatives to address these issues. The creation of a unique brand identity for Ndop Rice, with a distinct logo, packaging, and marketing materials, has played a crucial role in differentiating it from other rice varieties. This aligns with the research of Kapferer (2012), emphasizing the importance of creating a consistent and recognizable brand image to enhance the market positioning of a product.

Moreover, UNVDA has integrated the cultural and geographical aspects of Ndop Rice into its branding strategy. The use of traditional symbols, storytelling, and highlighting the region's unique agricultural practices contributes to a sense of authenticity and pride associated with Ndop Rice (Clement & Lucy, 2021). Scholars like Aaker (1991) argue that incorporating cultural elements into branding fosters a deeper connection with consumers, especially in the

agricultural sector where the origin and production methods are integral to the product's identity. This cultural branding approach not only enhances the marketability of Ndop Rice but also contributes to the preservation of local traditions and heritage.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In an ideal scenario, the marketability of agricultural products, exemplified by Ndop Rice, is intrinsically connected to effective product branding. Past research, such as Keller (1993) examination of consumer perception and Berthon et al. (2012) insights into the impact of marketing strategy, highlights that a robust brand plays a pivotal role in influencing consumer behavior and buying behavior. The ideal situation envisions agricultural products benefiting from well-crafted branding strategies, allowing them to distinguish themselves in the market and convey key attributes that resonate with consumer needs and values. However, the reality often deviates from this ideal in the agricultural sector. Many products, including UNVDA Ndop Rice, encounter challenges associated with inadequate branding which limits their marketability. Foreign brands such as Chinese and Thailand Rice, equipped with sophisticated branding strategies, often overshadow their local counterparts, leading consumers to prefer imported rice (Mbondji & Engwali, 2024). This discrepancy poses a significant obstacle for local agricultural products, hindering their potential for market success. Research by Onyango et al. (2019) emphasizes the need for effective branding in the agricultural sector to foster connections with consumers and marketability. To capture consumer purchase decision, Berthon et al. (2012) suggested that branding should extend beyond tangible attributes to encompass differentiatinal, emotional and premium branding.

2.1 Conceptual Literature and Hypothesis development.

2.1.1 Product Branding

Product branding is a fundamental concept in marketing that involves creating a unique and identifiable identity for a product or service. It encompasses various elements such as the product name, logo, design, packaging, and messaging, all aimed at differentiating the product from competitors and eliciting positive associations in the minds of consumer (Alvar, 2024). Thus, highlights the importance of consumer perception and the role of branding in shaping these perceptions. In essence, product branding goes beyond mere identification; it contributes to building relationships with consumers, fostering loyalty, and driving purchase decisions. Additionally, Keller (1993) highlight the role of branding in consumer perception, stating that branding influences how consumers perceive the quality, reliability, and credibility of a product (premium branding). Consumers often use brand cues as indicators of product attributes and benefits, shaping their purchasing decisions.

Branding also extends beyond tangible attributes to encompass emotional and experiential elements that resonate with consumers on a deeper level (Berthon et al., 2012). Brands tell stories, evoke emotions, and create connections with consumers, ultimately influencing brand loyalty. Research by Kapferer (2012) emphasizes the importance of building strong brandidentities that evoke specific emotions and associations, contributing to brand resonance and long-term success. This emotional branding approach involves creating meaningful experiences for consumers that go beyond functional benefits, fostering a sense of attachment

and loyalty to the brand. According to Keller (2008), emotions are powerful drivers of consumer behavior, influencing purchase decisions, brand preferences, and loyalty. By tapping into consumers' emotions, such as joy, nostalgia, or belonging, brands can foster strong emotional bonds that drive consumer purchase intention. In the case of agriculture, emotional branding can differentiate products based on community, tradition, and environmental stewardship which appeals to consumers' desire and purchase intention for the product.

H1: Emotional branding will have a positive influence on consumer purchase intention.

Moreover, branding plays a crucial role in product differentiation, helping products stand out in crowded markets and command premium prices (Aaker, 1996). By highlighting unique features, benefits, and values, branding enables products to carve out distinct identities and appeal to specific target segments (Duarte et al., 2024). This differentiation not only attracts consumers but also mitigates competitive pressures and enhances brand resilience. In the context of agricultural products, differentiation branding allows producers to highlight specific qualities, such as organic certification, sustainable farming practices, or regional provenance that appeal to target consumers (Munteanu, 2024). By emphasizing these unique attributes, agricultural brands can attract consumers seeking products that align with their values and preferences. Additionally, differentiation branding enables agricultural products to stand out in crowded markets, where commoditization and price competition are prevalent (Docherty, 2012). According to Phillips & Peterson (2004), brands that effectively differentiate their agricultural products can command premium prices and capture greater market share. As such, differentiatonal branding will create unique attributes that sets the brand apart, thereby making it more desirable to target consumers.

H2: Differentiatonal branding will have a positive influence on consumer purchase intention

Additionally, Premium branding in the context of agricultural products involves positioning products as high-quality, exclusive, and superior to competitors, thereby commanding premium prices and targeting discerning consumers. Premium agricultural brands invest in building strong brand images that convey qualities such as trust, reliability, and excellence (Oberholzer, 2014). For example, premium agricultural brands may offer specialty varieties, limited edition products, or exclusive packaging formats that appeal to luxury-seeking consumers (Jin & Qi, 2024). These value-added features elevate the product experience and reinforce the brand's premium positioning, enabling brands to command higher margins and generate greater profitability. As such, premium branding will create unique attributes that sets the brand apart, thereby making it more desirable to target consumers (Kim et al., 2020). In terms of agriculture, premium branding attracts consumers who prioritize quality, authenticity, and ethical sourcing in their purchase decisions.

H3: Premium branding will have a positive influence on consumer purchase intention

2.2.2. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the tendency for the consumer to take actual purchase action about the product (Chenggang et al., 2023). In this way, it helps consumer gets a clear knowledge of the product, compares it with other products and make final decision on

purchasing the product. Purchase intention is being influenced by multiple components such as, individual needs, the perceived value of the goods, social influence, previous experience and brand reputation (Shuwen Chen, 2024). In the context of Cameroon, rice is considered as a staple food where consumers are aware of their welfare especially towards the product quality. Onyango et al. (2019) emphasize the significance of branding in the agricultural sector, highlighting its role in fostering connections between consumers and products. Agricultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, and grains, often face challenges related to commoditization and lack of differentiation (Chenggang et al., 2023). Effective branding strategies can help overcome these challenges by highlighting unique attributes (Subbarayalu, 2022). This strategic approach to branding enhances the competitiveness of agricultural products in both domestic and international markets, driving growth and profitability for producers.

In this case, rice is considered a high-risk product that might cause consumer to lost trust and doubt its quality thereby affecting their purchase intention (Batra & Sinha, 2000). In this regard, the purchase intention of Ndop rice has been hindered by inadequate branding which has limited their marketability. As such, this study intends to look at how emotional branding, differentiatinal branding and premium branding will influence consumer purchase intention of Ndop rice.

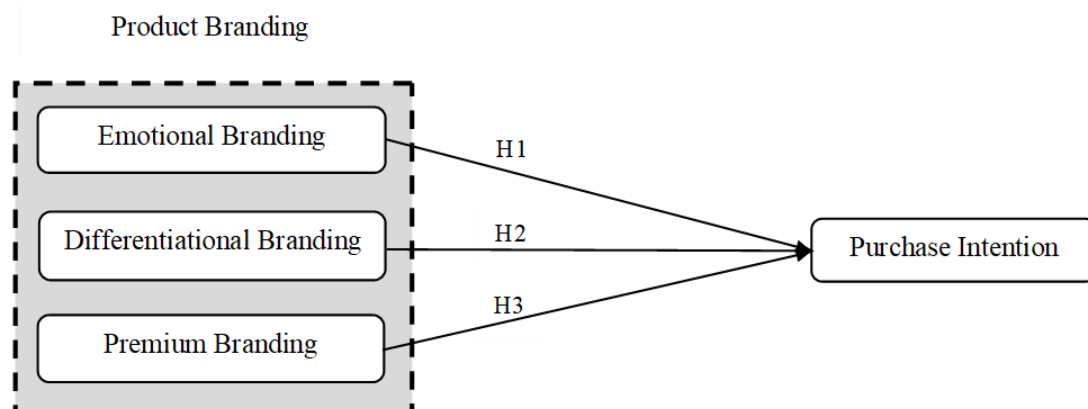


Figure 1: Model Conceptualization and Hypothesis

3. Method and Material

3.1 sampling Technique

This study seeks to investigate how different types of product branding (emotional, differentiatinal, and premium branding) influences consumer purchase intention. As such a survey questionnaire was conducted in February and Match of 2025. To make sure the measurement items were free from wrong and difficult expressions, preliminary questionnaires were used. To collect information about individual characteristics and multiple items for each construct, a structural questionnaire was used. Base on this study, the respondents were chosen base on their interest and consumption of UNVDA Ndop rice.

To collect data relating to age, gender, occupation, educational level and income level, a quota sampling technique was used. The quota sampling technique is made up of two steps.

The initial step is to chose the city of Bamenda (that is the capital of the North-West Region) in Cameroon from which the survey was conducted. This region was selected because it is the headquarter of UNVDA (Upper Nun Valley Development Authority) and easily accessible. Also, UNVDA is the second largest producer and marketer of rice after SEMRY in the far North region of Cameroon (JICA, 2009). Respondents that consume rice from UNVDA were selected as research targets on the basis of their rich experience consuming UNVDA rice. The respondents were asked to answer the questions base on their experience consuming UNVDA Ndop rice. Through offline, a total of 314 questionnaires were distributed, and 301 questionnaires were considered valid for the analysis. 13 questionnaires were not answered correctly and as such, they were excluded.

3.2 Construct and measurement items

To gather the necessary information, a structural questionnaire was design to capture respondents' characteristics (gender, age, educational level, occupation, and income level) and product branding. Previous studies were use to construct the measurement items in this study. The questionnaires relating to the constructs consist of five points Likert scale with anchors ranging from "strongly agree (=5)" to strongly disagree (=1)". Except for 5 demographic variables, 19 items were designed from 4 constructs. Measurement items from previous studies were modified to match the current of this research appropriately as shown in table 1.

Items measuring emotional branding were created from those developed by Malar et al. (2011) and Thomson et al. (2005). Measurements of differential branding were generated on the basis of the concept introduced by Zhou, & Nakamoto, (2007) and Tran et al. (2014). Measurement items from Kim et al. (2020) were use to measure premium branding. To measure purchase intention, three questions were generated based on the concepts from Dall'Olmo Riley et al. (2015)

Table 1. Measurement Items

Construct	Measurement items	Researcher
Emotional Branding	My feeling towards this brand can be characterize by love	Malar et al., 2011; Thomson et al., 2005
	My feeling towards this brand can be characterize by affection	
	My feeling towards this brand can be characterize by passion	
	My feeling towards this brand can be characterize by connection	
	I would have feeling if I no longer consume this brand	
Differentiatinal	The brand (UNVDA)Ndop rice are very different from other brands especially	Zhou, & Nakamoto, (2007); Tran et al.,

Branding	imported brand	2014
	This brand is distinctive from other brands	
	This brand can be easily distinguished from other brands	
	Compare to other brand in its category, this brand stands out.	
	This brand (UNVDA Ndop rice) is unlike other brands available in the market	
	This brand offers a superiority taste as compare to other brands	
Premium Branding	The brand is very prestigious	Kim et al., 2020
	This is a well- known brand.	
	This brand has high status.	
	This brand represent top quality	
	This brand has a good reputation.	
Purchase intention	I am willing to recommend this product to other people	Dall’Olmo Riley et al., 2015
	Would consider buying this product n the future	
	With respect to other foreign brand of rice, my purchases for UNVDA Ndop rice is more frequent.	

4. Results

4.1 Characteristics of the sample population.

This study was conducted using a structural questionnaire. The study had a total of 301 respondents who consume Ndop rice in the North-West Region of Cameroon. The survey lasted for a period of one month. The participants for this study were mostly consumer. This is because consumers have a rich experience with brand preference, especially in the case of Cameroon where local produce of rice (Ndop rice) face tough competition from foreign product (Chinese rice, Thailand rice, Vietnam rice) (Mbondji and Fon 2023). Table 2, present the characteristics of the samples. According to the questionnaire, the gender difference is not large with 152 male (50.4%) and 149 female (49.9%). Regarding the age group, majority of the respondent were between 25–34 years (38.5%), followed by those between the age of 18-24 (20.2%) years. In addition, 58 participants (19.3) were between 35-44 years, 41 respondents (13.6%) were between 45-54 years and lastly, 25 participants (8.3%) were 50

years and above. As for the educational level, 121 of the respondents (40.2%), had bachelor degree, 65 respondents (21.6%) had master degree, 48 respondents (15.9) had high school diploma, 41 respondents (13.6%) had less than a high school diploma and 6 participants (2%) had doctorate degree.

Table 2: Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	152	50.4
	Female	149	49.6
	Total	301	100
Age	18-24 years	61	20.2
	25-34 years	116	38.5
	35-44 years	58	19.3
	45-54 years	41	13.6
	55 years plus	25	8.3
	Total	301	100
Educational level	Less than high school diploma	41	13.6
	High school diploma	48	15.9
	Bachelor's degree	121	40.2
	Master's degree	65	21.6
	Doctorate degree	6	2
	Total	301	100
Occupation	Student	78	26
	Employed full-time	101	33.6
	Employed part-time	40	13.3
	Self-employed	62	20.6
	Total	301	100
Income level	Under CFA 50000	74	24.6
	CFA 51000-100000	56	18.6
	CFA 101000-150000	64	21.3
	CFA 151000-200000	46	16
	CFA 201000 above	61	20.27

	Total	301	100
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For occupational category, full-time employer was the highest 101 (33.6%), student

4.2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations Matrix.

Table 4 presents the correlation among construct with mean and standard deviation. The result shows that all correlations among construct are significant at 5% level. Regarding the construct, differential branding has the highest correlation with emotional branding ($r=0.549$, $P<0.01$), followed by differential branding and purchase intention ($r=0.479$, $P<0.01$). Differential branding and premium branding had the lowest correlation ($r=0.280$, $P<0.01$),

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

	Purchase intention	Emotional branding	Premium branding	Differential branding
Purchase intention	1			
Emotional branding	0.345**	1		
Premium branding	0.389**	0.472**	1	
Differential branding	0.479**	0.549**	0.280**	1
Mean	3.414	3.575	3.020	4.497
Std Deviation	1.144	.978	1.108	1.204

Note. ** $P<0.01$

4.3 Measurement and Validation.

To validate the research model and hypothesis, a structural equation modeling was applied. The study performed a reliability test to guarantee reliability of the construct. A reliability coefficient of 0.6 and ideally at 0.7 or higher indicates that each measure account for about 50% or of the variance within the latent variable. The results show that all loadings were significant at $P<0.001$, thereby demonstrating convergent validity. To assess the measurement model, we applied the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). To test for internal consistency (reliability), the Cronbach's alpha α and composite reliability (CR) were employed. In table 3, the Cronbach alpha is greater than 0.7 for each of the construct, meeting the accepted threshold recommended by Hinkin(1995). While on the other hand, the composite reliability for the entire construct exceeds 0.70 indicating a commonly acceptable level for confirmatory research (Nunnally, 1994). As table 3 represents, the composite reliability ranges between 0.89 and 0.95, Cronbach Alpha ranges between 0.88 and 0.93. The convergent validity was examined using confirmatory factor analysis with AMOS v23. As shown in table 3, the average variance construct (AVE) was at least 0.68. Signifying that more variance was explained than unexplained in the variables associated with a given construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5. Confirmatory factor loading of constructs.

Items	Construct	Factor Loading	S.E.	t-value	Std Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach alpha
PI1	← Purchase intention	1			0.874			
PI2	← Purchase intention	0.82	0.058	14.227***	0.787	0.77	0.91	0.90
PI3	← Purchase intention	1.142	0.06	18.887***	0.967			
EB1	← Emotional branding	1			0.819			
EB2	← Emotional branding	1.123	0.076	14.788***	0.887			
EB3	← Emotional branding	0.983	0.081	12.206***	0.77	0.68	0.89	0.88
EB4	← Emotional branding	1.043	0.081	12.866***	0.8			
EB5	← Emotional branding	0.817	0.08	10.211***	0.672			
PB1	← Premium branding	1			0.911			
PB2	← Premium branding	0.908	0.043	20.987***	0.903			
PB3	← Premium branding	0.949	0.039	24.394***	0.95	0.78	0.95	0.91
PB4	← Premium branding	0.926	0.039	23.846***	0.943			
PB5	← Premium branding	0.73	0.063	11.644***	0.672			
DB1	← Differential branding	1			0.932			
DB2	← Differential branding	0.985	0.042	23.471***	0.911			
DB3	← Differential branding	0.952	0.04	23.543***	0.912			
DB4	← Differential branding	1.078	0.033	32.789***	0.988	0.72	0.94	0.93
DB5	← Differential	0.717	0.065	10.999***	0.636			

DB6	branding						
	Differential branding	0.727	0.066	10.966***	0.634		

Note. ***P<0.001

4.4 Empirical results

With the help of AMOS, this study uses a structural equation modeling to validate this model. The results for the model with sample of n = 301 produced a list of goodness-of-fit indices, including Chi-square/degrees of freedom $\chi^2=235.251$, df=101, Goodness-of-fit Index (GFI) =.855, Adjusted Goodness-of-fit Index (AGFI) =.812 Comparative Fit Index (CFI)=.948, IFI =.948, and Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA) =.08. A very good fit is normally deemed to exist when GFI and CFI are greater than 0.90 (Hair et al., 2010), Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA) is around 0.1, and AGFI is greater than 0.80. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis show that χ^2/df in this study was under 3 (235.251/101). R^2 for purchase intention is 31%. The values were acceptable, indicating that the model fits the data. From the data (301), the structural equation model was examined to test the relationships between product branding and purchase intention.

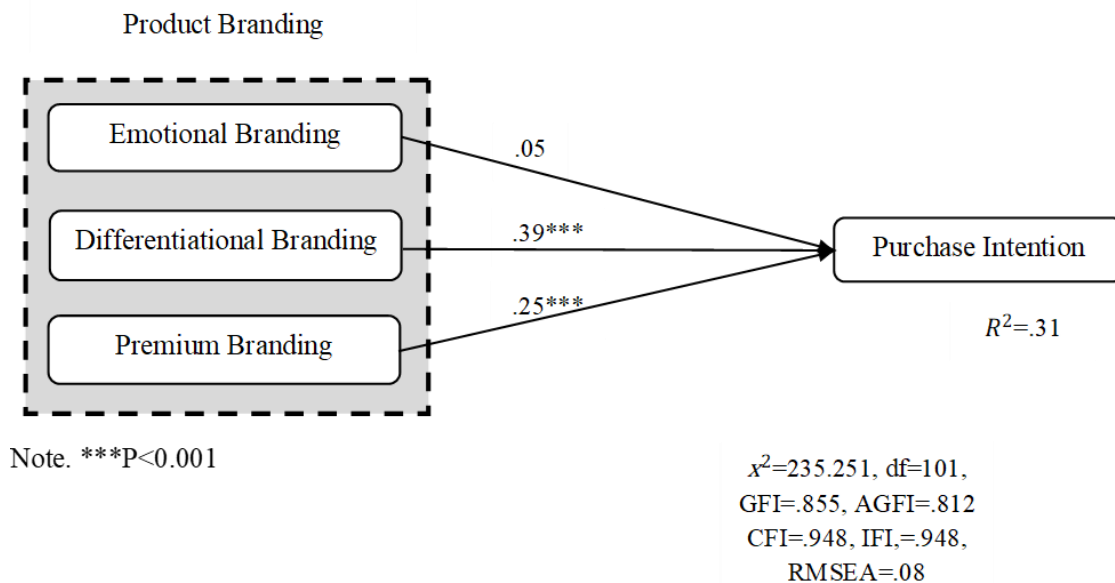


Figure 2: Results from SEM analysis.

As shown in table 6, differentiatinal and premium branding has a positive and significant relationship with purchase intention, while emotional branding is positive but insignificant. Consistent with previous studies (Cuong, 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2021), differentiatinal branding exert the strongest positive effect on consumer purchase intention ($\beta = .39$, $p < 0.01$), thus confirming hypothesis H1. Premium branding was found to have a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase intention ($\beta = .39$, $p < 0.01$) thus providing support for H2. This is aligned with (Kurt and Kara, 2024) that premium branding has a significant influence on consumer purchase decision. Emotional branding has no significant effect on consumer purchase intention; therefore, the data does not support H3.

Table 6: Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	Std Error	Results
H1	Emotional branding → Purchase Intention	.048	.099	Not supported
H2	Differentiation Branding → Purchase Intention	.391***	.075	Supported
H3	Premium Branding → Purchase Intention	.254***	.064	Supported

Note. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

5. Discussion

The goal of this paper is to investigate the effect of product branding on consumer purchase intention of UNVDA Ndop rice in the north-west region of Cameroon. This study explores product branding into three perspectives which is emotional, differentiation, and premium branding. The outcome of the findings reveals that the model was a good fit. Our findings reveal that differentiation branding and premium branding are significant antecedents of consumer purchase intention.

The strongest effect of branding can be seen on differentiation branding on consumer purchase intention of UNVDA Ndop rice, that is, UNVDA Ndop rice creates a distinctive attributes such as quality, nutritional benefit and taste that aligns with customer's values and preferences. More so, additionally, differentiation branding will enable UNVDA Ndop rice to stand out in crowded markets, where commoditization and price competition are prevalent. By continuously differentiating their products, UNVDA Ndop rice can stay ahead of their competitors, capture new market opportunities, and sustain long-term growth and profitability from consumer purchase intention (Chang et al, . 2008).

On the other hand, premium branding has a significant relationship with purchase intention of UNVDA Ndop rice. Thus customers will easily be targeted since premium branding involves positioning UNVDA Ndop rice as high-quality, exclusive, and superior to competitors. Premium branding in the context of agricultural products involves positioning products as high-quality, exclusive, and superior to competitors, thereby commanding premium prices and targeting discerning consumers. Jin and Qi (2024) argued that premium branding in agricultural product offers specialty varieties, limited edition or exclusive packaging formats that appeal customers and generate greater profitability. In this regard, premium branding will foster brand loyalty, word-of-mouth advocacy and purchase intention of UNVDA Ndop rice, thereby fostering long-term profitability and sustainability.

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