CASE STUDY / PRODUCT CONCEPT RESEARCH

Choosing between two beer concepts when the scores tie

Combining a virtual shelf, claims analysis and shopper behaviour to make the call the headline metrics could not.

FOR	CPG and beverage brands
CLIENT	An Ontario beer brand
ROLE	Research lead, Summer 2025

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Statistically tied headline scores still required a decision

Two lager concepts, one built on strength and one on dependable quality at a value price, were tested with 600 Ontario beer buyers across a virtual shelf, a claims test and a shopper decision tree. On appeal and purchase intent the two were tied.

The recommendation came from three other lines of evidence: what each concept did to the shelf and the portfolio, whether each concept's weakness could be fixed, and how well each concept's likely buyer matched its positioning.

A clear direction, with the open questions named

Advance the quality concept and invest in communicating flavour, quality and origin.

The choice involved two different product promises

STRENGTH PROPOSITION

A bolder reward for effort

A higher-strength lager positioned as the reward after a long day. Already at 6.8% ABV. The research asked whether the product delivered the strength its buyers expected.

QUALITY PROPOSITION

Dependable quality at a value price

A smooth golden lager positioned on consistency, flavour and honest pricing. The research asked whether the promise was credible and where it could be developed further.

Three shelves, one control, and a shopper decision tree

01
Control shelf

A replica of a real retail beer shelf, built from in-store visits.

02
Test shelf A

The control assortment plus the strength concept.

03
Test shelf B

The control assortment plus the quality concept.

Level	What was measured	What it tells you
Concept	Conversion, units per buyer, revenue per visitor	Appeal and purchase behaviour in context
Brand portfolio	Change in revenue across the brand's existing SKUs	Cannibalization within the portfolio
Total shelf	Change in revenue per visitor for the whole shelf	Net gain to the retailer, and where volume came from

n=600 Ontario beer buyers. Respondents shop one shelf and fill a basket; baskets are simulated, not observed sales. Claims evaluation and channel-level shopper decision trees ran alongside.

The quality concept added more to the shelf and took less from the portfolio

Shelf measure	Strength concept	Quality concept
Shelf visitors who chose the concept	About 17%	About 14%
Units per buyer	1.00	1.19
Total shelf revenue per visitor vs control	+5%	+11%
Share of the lift that was new to the retailer	Roughly half	Nearly all
Interaction with the brand's own SKUs	Drew volume from an existing single-serve SKU	Minimal

READING THE BASKET

A concept's sales can come from four places: new spending, other brands, the brand's own products, or the shopper's overall basket. Separating these is what turns a shelf score into a portfolio judgment.

Both concepts roughly doubled brand revenue in the experiment. That reflects trial in a single simulated visit, so it was reported as a signal of interest rather than a forecast of sustained volume.

Claims analysis showed where each concept's purchase intent came from



HEADLINE METRICS, TOP BOX

	Strength	Quality
Likelihood to purchase	44%	40%
Overall appeal	40%	43%
Believability	43%	40%
Fit with the brand	37%	42%

None of the differences reached significance. The driver analysis regressed each claim on likelihood to purchase and plotted the standardized coefficient against top-box performance.

ACTION / DIAGNOSIS

One gap was a formulation ceiling. The other was a communication job.

STRENGTH CONCEPT

The promise the product could not easily keep

Its most important claim, delivering the strength buyers want, performed poorly. The product was already at 6.8% ABV, and about 5% of open-ended comments asked for still more strength. Closing that gap would likely mean a product change that is hard to achieve in a lager.

QUALITY CONCEPT

A gap that marketing can close

Flavour and quality claims mattered to purchase intent and underperformed, but the open-ends asked for taste, Canadian identity and brand storytelling rather than a different product. Nobody asked for more strength. In-store tasting, origin cues and packaging can address all three.

Taste was the top improvement request for both concepts, followed by price and packaging design. Open-ended coding based on n=600.

ACTION / BUYER FIT

The quality concept's likely buyer matched its positioning

Among likely purchasers	Strength concept	Quality concept
Weekly beer volume	Higher, spread across more occasions	Slightly lower, fewer occasions
Brand loyalty	Lower, more open to trying new beverages	Higher, less willing to switch
What they weigh	Less attention to ingredients or origin	Product origin and ingredient quality
Signature occasions	Social gatherings, outdoors, watching sports	Outdoors, social gatherings, after work
Demographics	Effectively identical	Effectively identical

Because the two buyer groups look the same demographically, positioning rather than audience is what separates the concepts. The quality concept's buyers already value what it claims.

Shopper behaviour set the activation plan

What the shopper decision tree showed	What it means for launch
Half of beer trips are fully decided before the shopper enters the store	Trial has to be won at shelf, in the section the shopper is already heading to
Most of the concept's simulated volume came from one competing brand	Place the concept adjacent to that competitor
Convenience shoppers weigh ABV unusually heavily	A channel-specific stronger variant may earn its place there
Grocery and convenience shoppers increasingly read nutrition and ingredient labels	Add them to the pack for those channels

Decision trees were built separately for each retail channel. Retailer names are omitted.

RESULT

Advance the quality concept, with the open questions named

Advance the quality concept and refine the attributes that mattered to likely buyers.

Priorities: flavour and quality communication, an origin story, and shelf placement next to the main competitive source of volume.

What the research settled	What only the market can settle
Which concept to develop first	Repeat purchase after trial
Where its volume would come from	Sustained portfolio effects
Which claims to invest in	Response to the final pack and price

The recommendation was written so the client could see both the direction and the limits of the evidence in one place.

RESULT / EXPERTISE

Sound judgment matters when the scores do not settle the choice.

I make the call when the headline numbers will not make it for you, and I show the reasoning so the client can stand behind it.

Experimental research	Evaluate a concept inside a competitive shelf, with a control.
Portfolio economics	Separate appeal from substitution, cannibalization and incrementality.
Judgment under uncertainty	Weigh the fixability of each option's weakness alongside its scores.

Discuss your project kenjfield@gmail.com

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

Client, brand names, pack formats, retailers and exact figures are generalized to protect confidentiality. Shelf results are from a simulated shopping exercise; no launch outcome or realized revenue is claimed.