Branding as a Tool for Increasing Customer Loyalty in the Telecommunication Industry in Nigeria

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Abstract
This study unraveled the influence of branding on customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. The survey research design was adopted using the cross-sectional survey approach. Data were generated by the use of a structured questionnaire from 400 respondents drawn from the customers of the four major telecommunication firms (MTN, GLOBACOM, AIRTEL, 9MOBILE) in Imo State. The study revealed, among others, that all the five constructs (brand identity, brand personality, brand image, brand benefits and brand satisfaction) statistically and significantly predicted customer loyalty. Based on this finding, the study recommends among others that telecommunication firms should be quality conscious so at to enhance customers' perception of their brands, thereby improving customer loyalty.
Keywords: Brand identity; Brand personality, Brand image; Brand benefits; Brand satisfaction; Customer loyalty
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1. Introduction

Wireless communication technology, particularly cellular networks, has rapidly extended throughout the Nigerian economy in recent decades, making it the primary mode of communication in the country. According to Khizindar, Al-Azzam, and Khanfar (2015), one example of this is the shift from analogue to cellular system phones, with the proportion of analogue against digital users continuously decreasing. The Nigerian telecommunications business, which began in 2001 as a market reserved for the privileged members of society, with the cost of a SIM and a mobile phone being out of reach for the lower class, has undergone exponential expansion in the last eighteen years (Onwuka, 2018; Agu et al., 2020; Agu et al., 2013). As of the end of August 2018, it had grown from 400,000 active telephone subscribers and a teledensity of 0.04 percent to over 160 million active telephone subscribers and a teledensity of 114.92 percent (Onwuka, 2018).

The telecom market in the country has been recognised as one of the fastest expanding in the world. The government's strong policy, which fully liberalised the sector approximately a decade ago, when the sector's story of prosperity and development began to unfold, is the driving force. The sector is highly competitive, and it is the responsibility of each participant to build a competent marketing strategic plan that will allow them to capture a significant portion of the market. The existing state of the market indicates that it has already reached saturation. Unlike when the business was first deregulated, the majority of potential customers already have one or two phone lines. Getting customers into the business isn't enough; you also need to turn them into loyal customers. The real fight right now isn't for new consumers, but for keeping the ones you already have. If a company wants to stay in business, it needs to adjust its marketing strategy away from attracting new clients and toward retaining existing ones. Many companies with strong brands in the market all over the world always have a competitive advantage over those with weak or no brands at all. Most consumers are drawn to companies with great brands because of the benefits they will receive from them. Some marketers distinguish between the psychological and experimental aspects of a brand. The brand experience is the sum of all points of contact with the brand, and it is the experimental aspect (De Chernatony, 2013).

A brand is a set of feelings about an economic producer in marketing. Feelings are formed as a result of a series of interactions with the brand, both directly related to its use and indirectly through advertising, design, and media commentary. Many definitions of branding have been proposed by various authors, and a variety of justifications for the use of branding as a marketing technique have also been proposed by various experts. In the eyes and minds of consumers, branding is the attachment of a special and unique image or attribute to a certain product that distinguishes it from other items (Ehikwe, 2005). According to the definition of branding given above, a brand provides a benefit to the physical product in addition to the core product. These could be aesthetic, emotional, psychological, or philosophical values that customers hold in their hearts and minds. A brand, according to the definition, is a product plus the value-added that distinguishes it from the main product.

Anyanwu (2003) summarized McCarthy and Perreault's (1985) definition of branding as "the use of a name, term, symbol, or design, or a mix of these, to identify a product." This phrase implies that branding identifies and connects the product to branding and product design for the consumer.

A brand, according to the American Marketing Association (2011), is a name, word, design, symbol, or device adopted and used by a manufacturer or merchant to identify and distinguish his goods from those sold by other manufacturers, or in the case of services done by others. A brand can be a name, a sign, a symbol, a colour combination, or a phrase, among other things. A brand is a symbolic representation of all the data associated with a company's product or service. A brand's purpose is to establish associations and expectations among a producer's products. The psychological aspect, also known as the brand image, is a symbolic construct created within people's minds and consists of all the information and expectations associated with a product or service. It often includes an explicit logo, fonts, and colour schemes, symbols, which are developed to represent implicit values, ideas, and even personality (Caurana, 2015). The best way to establish a brand is to think about the conceptual framework of brands, businesses, and people. A brand is a name, word, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, that identifies the producer or seller of a product or service (Kotler, 2014). A brand is seen as a vital aspect of a product by consumers, and branding can add value to a product. Consumers give brands meaning and form relationships with them.

It can also be defined as a consumer's level of loyalty to a particular brand, as seen by their repeated purchases, regardless of marketing pressure from other brands. According to Gerpott et al. (2000), as referenced by Amin, Ahmad, and Hui (2012), the main prerequisite for protecting subscriber base in the telecommunication business is to earn customer loyalty, which is a vital requirement for the long-term survival of the brand. They thought that in a hard and competitive market, a customer's long-term relationship with a service provider is more important to a company's success.

Customer loyalty is defined as a company's ongoing and consistent patronage in the face of competing economic activities and attempts to destroy the connection. Customer loyalty frequently leads to other benefits for the company, such as brand advocacy, direct recommendations, and price aversion. When an organization earns the ultimate reward for the way it interacts with its customers, it is known as customer loyalty. Customers who are loyal buy more, stay longer, and refer more people. Consumer loyalty is divided into three sections, according to Jones and Sasser (1995): repurchase intention, main behaviour, and secondary level behaviour. According to Jones and Sasser (1995), re-buy intention refers to a customer's future intention to buy the product or service again; primary behaviour refers to a customer's practical re-visiting behaviour; and secondary-level behaviour refers to a customer's willingness to recommend the product to others and enhances customer loyalty through human relationships (Chen, Chen and Hsieh, 2007).

As a result, this study was conducted employing customers of telecommunication enterprises in Imo State, Nigeria, to evaluate the impact of branding on customer loyalty in the telecoms industry. This study looked at branding from five different perspectives: brand identity, brand personality, brand image, brand benefit, and brand satisfaction. Customer loyalty, on the other hand, was investigated in terms of repeat patronage, referrals, and recommendations.

Statement of problem:

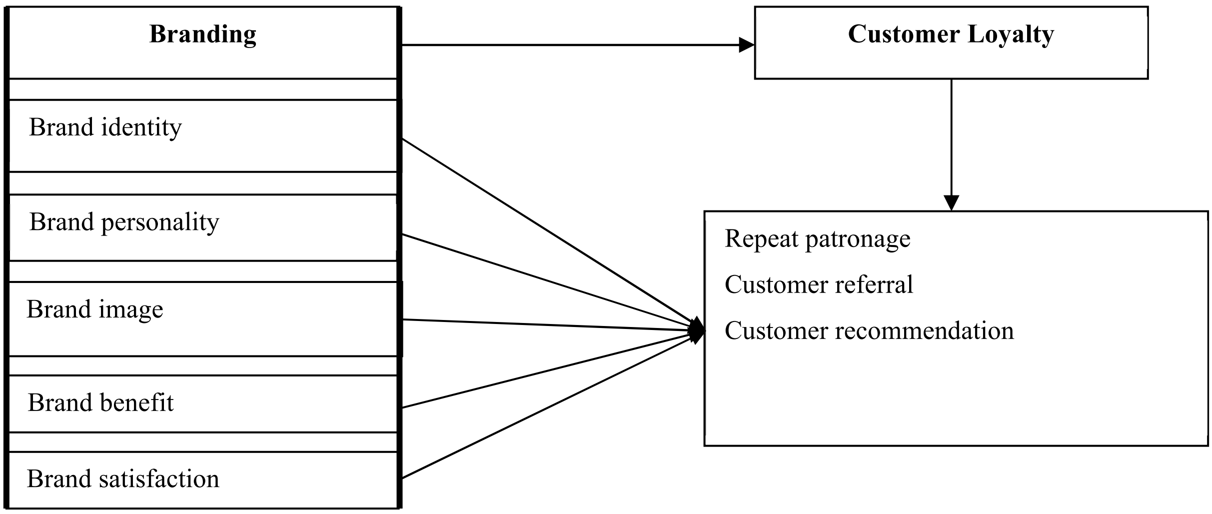
It costs five times as much to acquire a new customer as it does to maintain and retain a profitable existing one (Ghaxami and Olyaei, 2012). Marketers recognize that every effort put into marketing communication is geared at gaining new customers and providing them with greater and long-term value (Kotler and Keller 2006). Thus the interest of the researcher was to reveal product branding as a tool for increasing customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria.

According to Kumar (2011), Lucas (2005), and Luk (2008), when GSM was first introduced in Nigeria in 2001, subscribers had to pay expensive prices to acquire and use the services. Furthermore, consumers of these services had limited options due to restricted suppliers, coverage, and knowledge of information technology and GSM, so they were willing to accept the service as it was. However, as the year progressed, new network providers entered the market, and customers gained a greater understanding of both information technology and Mobile Number Portability (MNP), subscribers began to demand better services and better value for their money. As a result, users of telecommunication networks are fed up with network outages, dropped calls, expensive tariffs, poor service quality, bad customer support, and unsustainable marketing. Consequently, in the telecommunications business, these characteristics have an impact on customer loyalty. To keep customers in the face of severe competition and a saturated market, telecom operators and service providers must work hard to establish marketing strategies that will not only attract but also retain customers. It is the attachment of a special and distinct image or attribute to a product that distinguishes it from other items in the eyes and minds of consumers (Ehikwe, 2005; Agu, 2016). Based on the foregoing, the extent of the relationship between branding (brand identity, personality, image, benefit, and satisfaction) and customer loyalty must be identified and measured (repeat patronage, referral, and recommendation).

Objectives of Study:
The major purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of branding on increasing customer loyalty in the Nigerian telecoms industry, particularly in Imo State. The following objectives relevant to the study are to:
- Determine the effect of brand identity on customer loyalty to telecom firms.
- Ascertain the effect of brand personality on customer loyalty.
- Measure the extent to which brand image influences customer loyalty.
- Determine whether brand benefit influences consumer loyalty.
- Examine the effect of brand satisfaction on customer loyalty.

2. Empirical Review
2.1 Conceptual Framework
According to Symth (2004), research framework is a framework that builds from a combination of a wide range of ideas and theories and helps studies identify problems, develop questions and search for relevant literature. The conceptual framework for this work is depicted in **figure 1.** The model included six variables, five of which were independent (brand identity, brand personality, brand image, brand benefit, and brand satisfaction) and one dependent, name customer loyalty.

Figure 1:



2.1.1Concept of Product Branding
Many products in the market must be branded, and branding is one of the components of a company's product planning operations. It has to do with a company's efforts in selecting, developing, presenting, and building its own product brand(s). Due to the growing recognition that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that businesses have, branding has been a top management concern in recent decades. Companies are recognizing the value of strong branding (a brand name) in establishing rapid consumer recognition of their products. In such a competitive market, branding (brand name) may be the vendors' last attempt to sway purchasers.

Many definitions of branding have been proposed by various authors, and a variety of justifications for the use of branding as a marketing technique have also been proposed by various experts. Furthermore, the popularity of a brand is frequently cited as a primary driver of sales turnover (Ogbuji, 2008). Regardless of the various definitions of branding, the truth remains that it is a critical component of any company's marketing strategy and must not be overlooked.

Many scholars, including Okpara (2002), Kotler and Keller (2009), Ehikwe (2005), Anyanwu (2003) Onah and Thomas (2004), Mccarthy and Perreault (1985), have extensively reviewed product branding and its importance. According to Okpara (2002), branding is as essential as a child's naming ceremony and as old as man/creation. According to Kotler and Keller (2009), a brand is a product or service whose dimensions distinguish it from other products or services aiming to meet the same demand in some way. The distinctions could be functional, rational, or tangible or intangible in relation to the brand. It entails making judgments that build a product's identity in order to set it apart from the offerings of competitors. In the eyes and minds of consumers, branding is the attachment of a special and unique image or attribute to a certain product that distinguishes it from other items (Ehikwe, 2005). According to the definition of branding given above, a brand adds value to a physical product in addition to the core product. These could be aesthetic, emotional, psychological, or philosophical values that customers hold in their hearts and minds. A brand, according to the definition, is a product plus the value-added that distinguishes it from the main product. Manufacturer's brand and private brand are two categories of brands described by Onah and Thomas (2004). They said that branding aids in the execution of other Marketing

Management responsibilities such as New Product Introduction, Advertising and Other Promotions, Pricing, and so on. It is widely assumed that most buyers buy a brand name rather than quality, utility, or performance.

Anyanwu (2003) summarized McCarthy and Perreault's (1985) definition of branding as "the use of a name, term, symbol, or design, or a mix of these, to identify a product." This phrase implies that branding identifies and connects the product to branding and product design for the consumer.

2.1.2 The Concept of Brand Identity

Brand identity, in the most basic sense, is the core and authenticity of any brand. As a result, it is frequently perceived or viewed as a company's image of its product or product category. Strong brands have a distinct, well-defined, and well-explained brand identity. According to Aaker (2002), as cited by Ibok and Etuk (2015), brand identity provides a foundation for brand integration. As a result, brand identity is defined as a distinct set of brand connections that a firm strives to establish in the marketplace. These linkages represent the brand and the promises it makes to customers. According to Kostehjk and Erik (2008), the essence of every brand is to create a unique identity in the market – implying that companies should create brands that are strong, powerful, desirable, and unique, and that they should be formulated based on three qualities of a good brand: durability, consistency, and realism. Scholars like Silverman (2001) and Taylor et al. (2004) asserted clearly that brand satisfaction and brand commitment play a mediating function in customer loyalty. Strong brands, they claim, contribute to increased brand satisfaction, which leads to brand commitment and loyalty.

2.1.3 The Concept of Brand Image

According to Keller (2014), brand image refers to a specific frame of reference with which a consumer associates a particular brand. A positive image increases the brand's value in the eyes of the consumer by increasing its likeability or desirability and distinguishing it from competing brands (Hsieh, et al., 2014). The result of the positive image is an increase in brand loyalty, equity, consumer buying behaviour, and overall performance (Keller, 2014). Brand image is measured in terms of the benefits a brand provides, as well as some of the brand's qualities and usage.

Customers' current ties with companies, including their products and services, are typically impersonal, yet they are nevertheless significant in branding since they shape a company's image. The corporate name, brands, well-known company personalities, and other people who represent the company's attitudes all contribute to its image. Several scholars have attempted to quantify various dimensions of loyalty. Typically, loyalty has been viewed as a multifaceted phenomenon with multiple components, some of which can be recognized through customer behaviour and others through psychological processes. As a result, according to Rundle (2015), it should be quantified by individualizing attitudinal loyalty, which is defined as a customer preference for a brand.

2.1.4 The Concept of Brand Satisfaction

According to Kotler (2005), consumer satisfaction with a brand is defined as the degree to which a product or brand actually meets the customer's expectations. Customer satisfaction is defined by Janal and Maser (2002) as the customer's after-purchase feeling or attitude toward a product or service. As a result, Beerli and Quintana (2004) come to the conclusion that brand satisfaction is the positive emotion associated with a product or service. As a result, satisfying or exceeding a customer's expectation or outperforming a product's performance creates emotions. As a result, consumer happiness or discontent with a brand is determined by the link between customer expectations and product or brand performance (Dadkhah, 2009). As a result, it is the desire to repurchase based on previous experiences. As a result, Oliver (1999) claimed that brand happiness leads to client loyalty as well as a reduction in switching behaviour.

2.1.5 Concept of Customer Loyalty

Many academics have recognized the importance of customer loyalty in business. In the marketing and service literature, customer loyalty is one of the most frequently addressed topics (Eshghi et al., 2007; Heskett and Sasser, 2010; Agu et al., 2017; Agu, 2008). In the existing literature, there are numerous definitions of loyalty and/or customer loyalty. Customer loyalty refers to a customer's intention to purchase a given product or service again in the future (Jones et al., 1995). It's about making customers feel committed: if the benefits are valuable to them, they'll stick around (Grossman, 1998). Loyalty is defined as a customer's propensity to patronize a company's goods and services over a long length of time and on a regular, preferably exclusive basis, as well as voluntarily referring the company's products to friends and associates (Lovelock, 1996). Customer loyalty is the consequence of an organization providing a value to customers that encourages them to stay with the company and do business with it again and again (Anderson and Jacobsen, 2000). As stated previously customer loyalty in the GSM market refers to the length of time and frequency with which customers stay and remain on a network. The longer a consumer stays on a GSM network and the more regularly he or she uses it, the more loyal that customer becomes. As a result, all GSM companies in Nigeria want to keep a significant proportion of their customers on their networks.

Customer loyalty is the bedrock of a company's long-term competitive advantage. Various studies have backed up why creating customer loyalty is good to businesses, particularly GSM providers. In order for a company to expand and operate well, it must develop and increase loyalty (Reichheld, 1996). (Lee and Cunningham, 2001).

Customer loyalty is one of the most important components in a company's long-term success (Andres, 2007). Customer loyalty is important since it is linked to the company's long-term existence and great future growth (Fornell, 1992). As a result, a defensive approach aimed at retaining existing customers is more vital than an aggressive strategy for a company to maintain a consistent profit level when membership levels have reached saturation point, the industry is mature, and competition is intense (Fornell, 1992 and Ahmad and Buttle, 2002).

According to Ndubisi (2005) and Pfeifer (2005), serving a loyal customer costs five or six times less than serving a new customer. According to Walsh et al. (2005), it is preferable to take care of existing customers before obtaining new ones. From the foregoing, it is clear that a telecom company that fosters customer loyalty stands to gain a lot. The saturated state of GSM expansion in Nigeria, along with fierce competition, has left operators with no choice except to try to keep their present consumers and keep them loyal. The majority of these companies' current marketing activities are geared at keeping and gaining consumer loyalty.

Customer loyalty, according to Ibok and Etuk (2015), implies a commitment to doing business or repurchasing an organization's brand on a regular basis. Customers' loyalty, according to experts like Allama and Aymanh (2001), is defined as a strong commitment to repurchase a company's product or services despite possible competitors' diversions. In a nutshell, it is defined as a product or brand's repeated purchasing behaviour. As a result, researchers list the advantages of loyal consumers as minimizing customer insensitivity to pricing changes, acquiring life-time customers' worth, lowering the cost of acquiring new customers, and overall decrease in marketing expenses. Customer loyalty, according to Ibok (2012), is an investment that has a long-term, persistent impact on organizational performance.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

According to Sekaran (2005), a theoretical framework comprises of concepts, their definitions, and current theory/theories that are employed for the specific study, as quoted by Omwono and Mugambi (2017). Resource-based theory and brand relationship theory are the theories discussed in this work.

2.2.1 Resource Based Theory

Penrose (2015) proposed the resource-based hypothesis, which claims that organizations have resources that enable them to gain a competitive edge and achieve superior long-term performance. Resources that are valuable and scarce can help you gain a competitive advantage. To the extent that the firm is able to protect against resource restriction, transferor substitution, and other factors, that advantage can be preserved over extended periods of time (Christine, 2015). Many of the characteristics of dynamic capabilities may be found in information system resources, which can be beneficial to businesses working in a fast-changing environment. Although information resources may not directly contribute to a position of superior sustained competitive advantage, they may be crucial to a firm's long-term competitiveness in uncertain situations if they assist it in developing, adding, integrating, and releasing other key resources over time (Wade & Hulland, 2014).

In a continuously changing environment, resources like as appropriate financing and qualified human resources are critical for the effectiveness of market entrance strategy management methods (Wade & Hulland, 2014). The dynamic capabilities, which are made up of activities and processes for managing resources in the generation of value, allow businesses to better manage their activities. It is assumed that a company with sufficient finances will have more control over their product's branding approach.

2.2.2 Brand Relationship Theory

Gummesson, (2015) proposed this hypothesis, stating that human beings have relationships with one another. As a result, customers define the brand relationship from their own unique viewpoints, and the brand relationship and relational value in their thoughts are highly individualized. Individual relationships are formed by customers' individual perceptions of brand value, meaning, and experiences. Customers, in other words, appear to be individually creating the brand through their conversations in various circumstances (Lindberg, 2015).

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2016) investigated the development and evolution of consumer-brand connections over the course of two months. They discovered that two factors: the severity of the violation and the brand's personality, had a substantial impact on developmental form and dynamics.

Brand loyalty, according to Aaker (1999), is defined as a creative mindset on the part of a brand that leads to continued purchases of the brand over time. He also wrangles that brand loyalty is an important factor to consider when valuing a brand because loyalty may generate profit. According to Yoo et al.,(2000), brand loyalty is at the heart of a brand's worth. Furthermore, Strategic Marketing and Research Techniques (2008) discovered that consumer loyalty and brand image have a strong beneficial association and bonding. Brand loyalty has been shown to be a behavioural response as well as a result of and function of psychological processes (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973). Loyalty is described as a deeply held commitment to continuously repurchase or repertories a preferred product/service over time, despite situational variables and marketing efforts that may have a prominent reason for switching behaviour (Oliver, 1999).

2.3 Empirical Study

The empirical review would be restricted to research that focused on the variables in the conceptual framework. The link between business image and customer happiness and loyalty has been proven empirically.

"Brand Identity and Customers Loyalty: Evidence from the Nigeria Telecommunication Industry," according to Ibok and Etuk (2015). The study's major goal was to look at the connection between brand identity and customer loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunications market. Primary data was acquired through a survey of 207 consumers drawn from four major telecommunication carriers operating in Akwa Ibom State using a mixed sampling method. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. They discovered that there is a strong positive and substantial association between brand identity and consumer loyalty based on regression and correlation study results. Based on their findings, they advocate, among other things, the use of identity management in conjunction with various promotional packages to increase long-term customer loyalty among telecommunications consumers.

"Factors Contributing to Customer Loyalty Towards Telecommunication Service Provider," Amin, Ahmad, and Hui (2012) investigated. The study's goal is to figure out what factors influence consumer loyalty to telecommunication service providers in Malaysia. A self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain data from 185 university students who utilize telecommunications. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement, in order to find elements that influence customer loyalty. The relevant elements of customer loyalty were investigated using multiple regression analysis. Customer loyalty is positively correlated with switching costs, trust, business image, and perceived service quality, according to the research. The most important element determining users' customer loyalty was determined to be perceived service quality.

"Impact of Brand Identity on Customer Loyalty and Word of Mouth Communications, Considering Mediating Role of Customer Satisfaction and Brand Commitment," according to Kazemi, PaEmami, Abbaszadeh, and Pourzamani (2013). (Case Study: Mellat Bank Customers in Kermanshah)." The study was an applied research, with a descriptive – survey as the data gathering approach. Customers of Mellat Bank in Kermanshah were used as a statistical population in this study. The sample size was estimated using the Cochran formula to be around 384 participants who were chosen at random. Data was gathered via a questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha testing and university professors both affirmed the questionnaire's reliability and validity. All assumptions were validated, and there was a substantial association between brand identity, customer loyalty, and word of mouth advertising when the mediating role of customer happiness and brand commitment was taken into account.

"The impact of brand image on customer loyalty towards private label brands: the mediating effect of satisfaction," Sulibhavi and Shivashankar (2017) investigated. Karnataka's Hubli-Dharwad composite city. The study's goal was to demonstrate the link between brand image, satisfaction, and customer loyalty to private label brands in Hubli-Dharwad. A total of 186 valid questionnaires were used in the investigation. The model was tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step mediation method, which includes satisfaction as a mediator between brand image and satisfaction. The link between the dependent and independent variables was measured using the liner regression approach. The findings reveal that there is a link between direct brand image and customer loyalty, as well as a link between brand image and satisfaction, satisfaction and customer loyalty, and satisfaction mediates the link between brand image and customer loyalty.

3. Methodology

The survey research design was adopted in the study using the cross-sectional survey approach. The sample size of 400 respondents was used. The sample consists of the customers of the four major companies (MTN, GLO, AIRTEL, and 9MOBILE) that provide GSM services in the selected geopolitical zones (Owerri, Orlu, and Okigwe) in Imo State. Structured questionnaire was the main research instrument used. There were two sections to the questionnaire (demographic information and research questions about the study's objectives. Respondents' perspectives on the effect of the indicated characteristics on their brand loyalty were captured using Likert scale questions with five options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and undecided. The study's population was calculated from total GSM active voice per state (Q4-2017). 332 of the 374 copies of the questionnaires retrieved were useful for analysis, which accounted for 89 percent of the total number of copies retrieved. Collected data were analyzed using tables, charts and simple percentages for easy and fast interpretation. Stated hypotheses were tested using simple and multiple regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance in statistical software package known as SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 21 using the guideline by Anyanwu et al. (2021).

Research Instrument Validity and Reliability

The power of accuracy is demonstrated by the constancy, dependability, and predictability of measuring tools (Onwumere, 2006). The Cronbach Alpha test was used to determine the instrument's reliability on the likert scales for the independent variables. This was done based on the responses of ten people who were given the questionnaire as part of a pilot test. The Cronbach Alpha test result and factor loading for consumers are shown in the table below.

Table 3.3:Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

S/NO	Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha	Factor Loading
1	Brand Identity	3	0.7026	0.7341
2	Brand personality	4	0.8256	0.6881
3	Brand Image	4	0.8311	0.6232
4	Brand Benefits	3	0.8414	0.7542
5	Brand satisfaction	5	0.7001	0.6453
6	Customer Loyalty	3	0.7341	0.6282

Source: SPSS Output

Because all variables are up to 70% (0.70), the result reveals that they all met the minimal acceptability level (Kotler, 2013). Furthermore, existing investigations have proven the validity of these characteristics (Bitner et al, 1990; Warden et al, 2008; Agu & Okpara, 2015).

4. Results and discussions

The demographic characteristics of the respondents based on the three hundred and thirty two (332) responses revealed that there were 189 (57%) male respondents and 143 (43%) female respondents. A total of 113 (34%) respondents, 127 (38%) respondents, 57 (17%) respondents, and 35 (11%) respondents were between the ages of 18 – 20, 21 – 26, 26 – 30, and 31 years and above, respectively. In addition, 220 (66%) of the respondents were single, 91 (27%) were married, while 21 (6%) had different marital situations.

All the hypotheses were analyzed using the multiple regression at 0.05 level of significance in the statistical software package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 21.

Hypothesis 1: Brand identity influences customer loyalty to telecommunication products.

The R-value in the model summary table shows a simple correlation of 0.920, which shows a very strong positive correlation. The R^2 value shows how much of the total variation in the independent variable (brand identity) that can be explained by the dependent variable (customer loyalty). The table shows that 84.6% variation in the brand identity can be explained by customer loyalty. This is equally high. With a sig (p-value) of (0.000) which is less than Alpha (0.05) and a t value of 5.706, the overall regression model, therefore, statistically predicts the outcome of the variables (That is, it is a good fit).

On the individual variables, brand uniqueness (BU) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.000, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 12.606. On the other hand, brand vision recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.046, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 1.999. Again, brand reliability (BR) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.018, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 2.387.

Since the p-value (0.000) is less than Alpha (0.05), that is 0.000<0.05, and t calculated (5.706) is greater than t tabulated (1.960), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which implies that brand identity has significant effect on customer loyalty to telecommunication products in Imo State. Again, all the individual variables (brand uniqueness, vision and reliability) are statistically significant predictors of customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 2: Brand personality has significant influence on customer loyalty to telecommunication products.

The R-value in the model summary table shows a simple correlation of 0.888, which shows a very strong positive correlation. The R^2 value shows how much of the total variation in the independent variable (brand personality) that can be explained by the dependent variable (customer loyalty). The table shows that 78.8% variation in the brand personality can be explained by customer loyalty. This is equally high. With a sig (p-value) of (0.000) which is less than Alpha (0.05) and a t value of 4.908, the overall regression model, therefore, statistically predicts the outcome of the variables (That is, it is a good fit).

On the individual variables, brand availability (BAv) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.005, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 2.827. In addition, brand sincerity recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.000, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 17.589. Again, brand affordability (BAf) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.008, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 2.263.

Since the p-value (0.000) is less than Alpha (0.05), that is 0.000<0.05, and t calculated (4.908) is greater than t tabulated (1.960), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which implies that brand personality has significant effect on customer loyalty to telecommunication products in Imo State. Again, all the individual variables (brand availability, sincerity and affordability) are statistically significant predictors of customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 3: Brand image has significant influence on customer loyalty to telecommunication products.

The R-value in the model summary table shows a simple correlation of 0.882, which shows a very strong positive correlation. The R^2 value shows how much of the total variation in the independent variable (brand image) that can be explained by the dependent variable (customer loyalty). The table shows that 78.8% variation in the brand image can be explained by customer loyalty. This is equally high. With a sig (p-value) of (0.000) which is less than Alpha (0.05) and a t value of 11.001, the overall regression model, therefore, statistically predicts the outcome of the variables (That is, it is a good fit).

On the individual variables, brand trustworthiness (BT) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.000, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 7.952. In addition, brand quality (BQ) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.015, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 2.443. However, brand consumerism or consumer protection (BCP) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.275, which is greater than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 1.087, which is less than 1.960.

Since the p-value (0.000) is less than Alpha (0.05), that is 0.000<0.05, and t calculated (4.908) is greater than t tabulated (1.960), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which implies that brand image has significant effect on customer loyalty to telecommunication products in Imo State. Again, two of the individual variables (brand trustworthiness and quality) are statistically significant predictors of customer loyalty. On the other hand, brand consumerism is not a predictor of customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 4: Brand benefit has significant influence on customer loyalty to telecommunication products.
The R-value in the model summary table shows a simple correlation of 0.918, which shows a very strong positive correlation. The R^2 value shows how much of the total variation in the independent variable (brand benefits) that can be explained by the dependent variable (customer loyalty). The table shows that 84.3% variation in the brand benefits can be explained by customer loyalty. This is equally high. With a sig (p-value) of (0.001) which is less than Alpha (0.05) and a t value of 3.488, the overall regression model, therefore, statistically predicts the outcome of the variables (That is, it is a good fit).

On the individual variables, brand Accessibility (BAc) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.000, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 5.281. Again, brand consistency (BC) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.008, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 2.679. However, brand sensitivity (BSen) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.255, which is greater than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 1.140, which is less than 1.960.

Since the p-value (0.001) is less than Alpha (0.05), that is 0.000<0.05, and t calculated (3.488) is greater than t tabulated (1.960), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which implies that brand benefits has significant effect on customer loyalty to telecommunication products in Imo State. Moreover, two of the individual variables (brand accessibility and consistency) are statistically significant predictors of customer loyalty. However, brand sensitivity is not a predictor of customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 5: Brand satisfaction has significant influence on customer loyalty to telecommunication products.
The R-value in the model summary table shows a simple correlation of 0.918, which shows a very strong positive correlation. The R^2 value shows how much of the total variation in the independent variable (brand satisfaction) that can be explained by the dependent variable (customer loyalty). The table shows that 84.3% variation in the brand satisfaction can be explained by customer loyalty. This is equally high. With a sig (p-value) of (0.000) which is less than Alpha (0.05) and a t value of 10.039, the overall regression model, therefore, statistically predicts the outcome of the variables (That is, it is a good fit).

On the individual variables, brand satisfactory experience (BSE) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.008, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 2.903. Again, brand customer care (BCC) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.000, which is less than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 5.310. However, brand market segmentation (BMS) recorded a sig (p-value) of 0.000, which is greater than Alpha (0.05) and t values of 18.824.

Since the p-value (0.000) is less than Alpha (0.05), that is 0.000<0.05, and t calculated (10.039) is greater than t tabulated (1.960), we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which implies that brand satisfaction has significant effect on customer loyalty to telecommunication products in Imo State. Moreover, all the individual variables (brand satisfactory experience, customer care and market segmentation) are statistically significant predictors of customer loyalty.

Discussion of Findings

The hub aim of this study was to investigate the influence of branding on customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry using customers of telecommunication firms in Imo State. Five hypotheses were tested in this study to investigate the influence of the five specific variables (brand identity, brand personality, brand image, brand benefits and brand satisfaction) on customer loyalty. Each of the five variables had three sub-variables under them. In all thirteen of the variables, including uniqueness, vision, reliability, availability, sincerity, affordability, trustworthiness, quality, accessibility, consistency, satisfactory experience, customer care and market segmentation statistically and significant predicted customer loyalty.

5.1 Summary of findings

Based on the analysis of collected data, the following major findings were made:

1. In Imo State, the study found that brand identity had a considerable impact on customer loyalty to telecommunication products. Customer loyalty to a telecommunication product is influenced by the distinctive nature of a brand, its mission, and how trustworthy it is to customers.
2. Customer loyalty to telecommunication products is influenced by brand personality, according to the study.

Customer loyalty can be developed when a telecommunication brand is always available and affordable, and services are provided with sincerity.

3. Customer loyalty to telecommunication products is also influenced by brand image, according to the study. In other words, buyers' loyalty to a product is determined by how trustworthy it is and the quality it depicts.
4. Customer loyalty to telecommunication products was significantly influenced by brand benefits. This suggests that customer loyalty to a company is influenced by how accessible and consistent a telecommunication network is in a certain area.
5. Customer loyalty to telecommunication products was significantly influenced by brand satisfaction. To put it another way, telecommunication companies should ensure that customers have positive exchange relationships, increase customer service features, and segment their brands to appeal to different economic groups in order to maintain customer loyalty.

5.2 Conclusion

After conducting this research on the impact of branding on customer loyalty, the researchers came to the conclusion that in order for a service provider to assure client loyalty to their products, they must be able to produce distinguishable product features with outstanding characteristics. Customers will be loyal to a brand once the image of the brand has been formed in their thoughts. Brands that offer outstanding benefits and have satisfying exchange relationships are more likely to attract client loyalty than those that do not.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the outcomes of this study:

1. Telecommunications companies should make every effort to strengthen their customer touch point base in order to provide customers with sound and stress-free experiences with their services.
2. Telecommunication companies are encouraged to follow current National Communication Commission (NCC) requirements while supplying product features to clients through their numerous branches.
3. Telecommunication companies should pay greater attention to their consumers' perceived values, as they want a low price and quick service for the network services they buy.
4. Globacom, Airtel, and 9Mobile can advertise their brands by giving away presents to potential consumers in order to attract more customers and influence their propensity to make their networks the number one option of customers.
5. Telecom companies in Nigeria should regard customer happiness as a critical aspect in their management and decision-making. This will help them expand their consumer base and boost their profit margins.

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