

BRAND IDENTITY INITIATIVES AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY OF TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated Brand Identity Initiatives and Customer loyalty of Telecommunication Industry in Port Harcourt, with the purpose of establishing if brand identity has relationship with customer loyalty. This study adopted quasi-experimental research design. Based on the research objectives, hypotheses were formulated and 252 copies of questionnaire were distributed. However, 244 copies of the questionnaire were returned for analysis, using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS version 21.0. The findings revealed that brand identity has a strong positive association with customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt. The study therefore recommended that telecommunication firms should maintain the policy of aligning their brand position to positively reflect brand identity.

Key Words: Brand Identity Initiatives, Customer Loyalty, Telecommunication Firms, Communication synergy and Personification

INTRODUCTION

Deregulation, products innovations, improved service quality delivery, intense competition and the resultant changes in consumer's tastes and preferences have heightened competition in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria in the past two decades. Companies striving to achieve better results in the market over and above their competitors need to acquire and retain particular uniqueness that cannot be easily imitated and also capable of serving as building blocks for competitive advantage (Hanif, Sehrish, Adnan, 2010). Customers of telecommunications service providers in Nigeria are varied and their tastes, needs and expectations are also varied (NCC Press Release, 2007). User satisfaction is very important in today's business world as pointed out by (Deng, Lu, Wie and Zhang, 2009), the ability of a telecommunication firm to create high degree of satisfaction is crucial for product differentiation and developing strong relationship with the user. According to Hanif et al, (2010), satisfaction elicits loyalty from phone users loyal to telecommunication service provider. One strategic marketing initiative that can be utilized by telecommunication firm to survive amidst severe competition is brand identity. Unfortunately, some organization, in the course of brand identity initiation process, get caught up in what Aakar (1996), termed brand identity trap, thus chasing shadows instead of substance. According to Kapferer (2008) brand identity is defined as a combination of visual, auditory, and other sensory components that create recognition, represent the brand promise, provide differentiation, create communications synergy (between firm and customer), and are proprietary. In the branding literature, Kapferer (2008) suggests that brand is the memory of the product and should act as "a long lasting and stable reference". Within this context, enduring means 'long lasting and relevant'. The brand must maintain its identity, and in so doing, respects its "contract" (Kapferer, 2008) with itself, with its mission, and with its consumers. Some authors (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2008) suggest that, in addition to its uniqueness, an enduring brand identity must be resistant to change and imitation. The importance of strong brand identity cannot be overemphasized because it subconsciously shapes consumers' feeling about a service provider and its services or product from the moment consumers interacts with the identity; their feelings about a telecommunication firm are subconsciously reinforced.

Topalian (2003) states that brand identity is the articulation of what an organization is, what it stands for, what it does and how it goes about its business. A successful identity need to be "lived", it should be meaningful for leaders as well as employees and to other stakeholders (customers). Employees should understand and adopt the brand identity in such ways as to bring it to life for themselves, customers and other stakeholders, of course, to recognize and identify with the organization. (Topalian, 2003). Brand identity is all of the observable and measurable elements of a firm's uniqueness and distinctiveness which manifest in its comprehensive visual presentation of its name, logo, tagline, color palette and architecture. Brand identity also includes the firm's public behavior, expressed in its relationship with its customers, interactions with shareholders and suppliers (Allesandri, 2001). It needs to be submitted here that brand identity also includes organizational internal marketing commitments, namely, how it communicates with and motivates its workforce. Brand identity is a pressing issue for many companies since the question of identity, or of what the company stands for, cuts across and unifies many different company goals and concerns. A growing interest in identity issues among business managers and academics is probably due to their implicit assumptions about relationships across brand logo, reputation reputations, brand personification, brand colour, corporate communication and corporate performance. That is, a major goal for brand identity is to acquire a favourable brand reputation, which, in turn, can provide strategic benefits for a firm, for example, increased competitiveness, enhanced financial value, and support in times of controversy, (Greyser, 1998).

In telecommunication sector, brand identity is not just enough to retain customers. The most vital thing that shapes the performance of telecommunication firm is customer loyalty. Brand identity and customer loyalty has been one of the most studied and researched topic in recent times by academicians and businesses (Berens et al., 2005). The measures of brand identity include; brand image, brand reputation, brand communication, brand personification and brand logo. Several measures have been used to operationalize customer loyalty, some of which include, repeat purchase, advocacy, customer retention, customer commitment etc. Customers' loyalty is important for the continued growth of every industry. The concepts of brand identity and customers loyalty have been in existence for years and many purposeful researches have been carried out in this area. Earlier contributions to the study of brand identity and customer loyalty include the works of Behabadi (2009); Christian (2000); Gee et al., (2008). This area is given attention by researchers and scholars alike because of its continued relevance and centrality in the success of every firm. To corroborate this assertion, Holliday et al. (2008) asserted that a business is as strong as its unhindered customers, as loyal customers is the centre piece of every business that is hoping to do well. Empirically, Aaker (1996), found out that brand identification and customer loyalty are strongly interrelated to each other because brand identity enhances the memorable of a particular brand which invariably increases returns on patronage. Furthermore, Keller (2008) asserted that brand identity can be created via the association with attitudes, attributes and benefits respectively. Fombrum and Van Riel (2004) highlighted corporate image and corporate communication as an effective brand identity dimensions. Bartikowski et al., (2011b) highlighted brand reputation, organizational communication and corporate culture as the components brand identity. Bloomenthal (2019) and Yu et al., (2014) conceptualize the measures of customer loyalty to be customer satisfaction, customer repeat purchase, customer referrals, customer commitment, customer trust, retention and perceived value. No scholar has done any research on brand identity and customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.

In view of the above studies and other related ones, this research deviated from extant studies by introducing brand personification and brand logo as dimensions of brand identity. This research further deviated from other studies as it examined the effect of the above measures on customer

retention and advocacy as it relates to telecommunication in Port Harcourt which serve as point of departure.

Statement of the Problem

The market place is increasingly becoming complex with increased competition, globalization and changing customer needs/wants hence, the need for organizations to develop strategies for competitiveness and survival is non-negotiable. With this increased competition, telecommunication firms are turning to their brand identity as a source of competitive advantage which if well managed may impact positively on customer loyalty (Kim et al., 2011). In the ever hypercompetitive telecommunication industry, attracting a new customer and retaining has become a very difficult task because most customers are very loyal to a particular service provider. Despite scholarly evidence on the importance of brand identity on firms' overall success, some Telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt are yet to improve on their service offerings which have affected their overall performance. According to Woldie, (2003), most telecommunication customers are dissatisfied with the quality of services they pay for and keeping of promise which they stand for. Woldie (2003) explained that these dissatisfaction range from poor customer service delivery (network failure, unsolicited SMS, etc).

Furthermore, there has been the issue of ineffective usage of previous opportunities that will help in developing a sustainable telecommunication atmosphere in Port Harcourt. The Nigerian telecommunication sector and its employees have actually not displayed efficient customer service, their customers are being treated or attended to without courtesy and this has actually affected telecommunication brand personification in Port Harcourt and it has also formed a wrong perception in the mind of the customers and thereby destroying the corporate image of the firm. This can be traced to rapid change in consumer preferences, poor service delivery, faster technological progress, growing competitive rivalry and their inability to formulate brand identification strategies within their organizations to generate market information, analyze it, and respond accordingly.

Environmental changes have modified and changed how customers construct their visual identification of telecommunication brand. This is the main reason for telecommunication firms today to build a clear brand identity and a strategy for a strong brand logo and brand personification. Organizations in maturing markets needs to work on their uniqueness, something that cannot be imitated, which would give them an opportunity to find advantages compared to competitors. Meenaghan (1995) writes that it is more and more important for telecommunication firms to be aware of their identity as markets are maturing. The attention is shifting from physical and functional benefits to symbolic associations expressed from the brand and the brand identity (Meenaghan, 1995). Based on this, the researcher is incline to believe that the loyalty evidenced in the telecommunication sector in Port Harcourt in terms of low retention and purchase could be traceable to failure in attracting and retaining customers with appropriate branding strategies.

Conceptual Framework

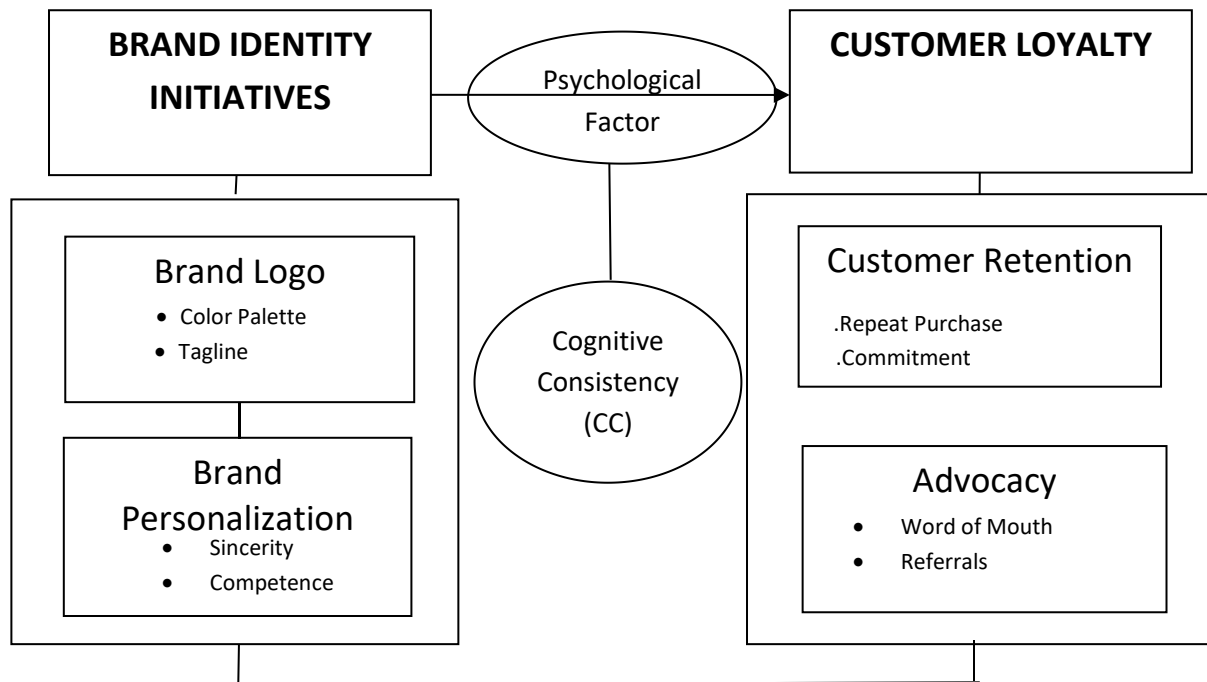


Figure 1: Conceptual frameworks on brand identity initiatives on customer loyalty of telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt

Source: Adapted from Zhu & Zhang (2010); Abdulahi (2009); Ibok (2012); Osgood et al., (1957)

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of brand identity on customer loyalty of telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt. Based on this, the sub-objectives are as follows:

1. to examine how brand logo relates to customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
2. to examine how brand logo relates to advocacy in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
3. to examine how customer retention relates to brand logo in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
4. to examine how customer retention relates to brand personification in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
5. to determine the moderating role of cognitive consistency on brand identity and customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

- (1) To what extent does brand logo relate with customer retention in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt?

- (2) To what extent does brand logo relate with advocacy in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt?
- (3) To what does brand personification relate with customer retention in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt?
- (4) To what extent does brand personification relate with advocacy in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt?
- (5) What is the moderating role of cognitive consistency on brand identity and customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt?

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated in the course of this study:

- Ho₁:** There is no significant relationship between brand logo and customer retention in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₂:** There is no significant relationship between brand logo and advocacy in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₃:** There is no significant relationship between brand personification and customer retention in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₄:** There is no significant relationship between brand personification and advocacy in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.
- Ho₅:** Cognitive consistency does not moderate on the relationship between brand identity and customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.

Literature Review

Theoretical framework

This study underpinned on the theory of self-congruity. According to Aaker (1996) some brands tend to be used as vehicles to express a part of self-identity. The theory of self congruity suggests that self-concept image and brand image are described through shared constructs. Further expressed that, there can be a degree of congruence between self-concept and product concept since consumers tend to choose products that reaffirm their self-schema (Sirgy, 1982). According to Hong & Zinkhan (1994), self-schema denotes a knowledge construct, which conceptually relates to information about oneself. External stimuli compatible with self-schema would tend to be willingly accepted and retained, in comparison with those external stimuli that are not compatible with self-schema. Therefore, because of the influence of self-schema, the self-identity of a consumer should be congruent with the personality of the brand they consume. Hence a brand with a reliable brand identification that is congruent to the consumer can play the role of a partner or a friend that the consumer is familiar and comfortable with (Phau & Lau, 2000). For example, consumers who possess unique features that reflect excitement will be more comfortable associating with friends who are exciting. In the same vein, brands with such an identity would also be a preferred companion making the self-congruity a theoretical framework for the present study.

Brand Identity

Brand identity is defined as an organization's inherent character; that which it is, what it stands for and can be held accountable for, and it encompasses the vision and values of the organisation which effectively distinguish it from other organizations – its unique identity (King & Whetten, 2008). Brand identity are those attributes that enable a brand to be remembered. It is defined as the degree to which a specific product/service is recognized from its product/service class/category. It is the major element of customer mindset which is an important part of the value creation for the brand. Associations are not the reason why people buy; rather, they give acquaintance and differentiation that cannot be copied. That is, where the perceived qualities of a

brand is associated with a known entity. Moreover, positive brand identity enables organization to gain good will and stops the competitors from entering into the market. And these positive brand associations are created when the brand is durable, marketable, desirable and customers are convinced that the brand carries the features and attributes that will satisfy their needs. Therefore, for customers to relate your brand to being positive, it should be associated with something positive. This is why it is important to choose a brand name that will provide strong attributes and benefits that will lead to product positioning. Brand identities are formed on the following basis: customers contact with the organization and its employees, advertisements, word of mouth publicity, celebrity / big entity association, quality of the product, product class/category to which the brand belongs, Pop (point of purchase) displays, etc

The brand management develops identity as a function of interaction with the targets. Following Goffman's insights (1959), one should separate the intentional form of brand expression from its unintentional part (i.e., the ungovernable aspects of brand expression). The intentional part of the brand face, which consists of exhibiting the impressions of the brand that management wishes the target to perceive, in association with the brand management performance. There are two factors that influence the strength of brand identity; they are personal relevance and the consistency of how it is presented overtime. As the consumer deeply thinks about any brand information and relates it to existing knowledge in memory, the brand association becomes stronger, strong associations are always remembered faster and they make consumers to pay attention to the brand (Heding et al., 2009).

In today's internet era, consumers are looking for online information in order to make brand purchase decision and share their experiences about a particular brand by using a global computer network (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). In the telecommunication sector, the service providers are trying to improve in their relationship with customers by offering quality services and strong brand which is the key to stay competitive in the market. For marketers, producing goods and services and delivering them to the prospective target market is not enough, the main thing is for them to let the target market know that such brand exists and to make its brand name to look so important in the minds of the consumers through online marketing (Eze, 2013). When consumers have unique, strong and favorable identity with a particular brand, they will see the brand as preferred choice because this association have given the consumer better reasons for choosing the brand. For many organizations like telecommunication industry, building a strong brand is seen as a top priority and it provides so many financial rewards to the firms. Brand identity can create positive attitude that can be linked to the brand. Celebrity endorsers, symbols and slogans when used well can stimulate positive feelings about the brand. Example: Nike used Michael Jordan as an endorser, Nokia slogan "Connecting people" is used to stimulate people's feeling, etc. Therefore, organizations tag important features to their brand which they use as strategic business assets in order to gain relevant competitiveness in the market (Bertilsson, 2009). We are measuring brand identity with these dimensions: Brand logo and brand personification.

Brand Logo

Logos can be termed as symbols, emblems or designs that are used by organizations as unique identifiers. Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) argues that logos serve as the official visual representation of a company and send thousands of information of an organization to outsiders beyond what firms can think of. The role logos play within organizations cannot be overemphasized despite the seemingly not so loud nature logos carry as compared to other assets organizations have at their disposal. However, some individuals and/or organizations pick such symbols/logos without considering the effect it will have on the image and ultimately performance of the organization. A symbol can also be termed as a logo. Although a logo is just one element of branding, it is safe to say that its effect on the image of a company is very strong. Consumers

easily remember the logo/symbol of a company than the color of its office or buildings. Different companies may have similar/same color being used as part of their branding, but no two companies can have the same logo/symbol. Therefore, logos play a very important role in corporate identity and should be given a serious look when being chosen. Various studies have shown that remembering a company's logo can increase the recognition of its name (Silver and Roast, 2016). There are two elements relevant to logo recognition. First, correct recognition and second, recall. Correct recognition concerns how a customer remembers a logo. The focus here is on the design aspects of the logo which can then lead to false recognition. In the case of false recognition, the customer thinks he/she has observed the logo when he/she has apparently not. The second element, recall, is necessary so as to remind the customer of the particular brand or company.

Brand Personification

Brands possess unique personalities on their own (Dolatabadi et al., 2012), the human's conscious as well as the subconscious mind feels a need as in personifying the objects to interact with the intangible world. It is considered that most of the direct and interactions that the consumers have with a brand can affect the perceptions on personality (Plummer, 1984). It is convenient for consumers to connect with brands that possess with human qualities as opposed to a claim or a benefit in becoming familiarized with a brand. This becomes more important in the context if the brand is specifically something which is personally attached to a person. Thus, personification gives brands a unique identity, and enables the consumers to build relationships with them (Bensi, 2015). Brands personification are sets of human characteristics such as competence, excitement, sophistication, ruggedness, etc. associated with a brand, which makes it unique, compared to other brands (Aaker, 1996). Brand personification embodies all the qualities it has to offer over and above its primary attributes and its functional objectives" (Patterson, 1999). The ideas that brands possess some human uniqueness and that the relationship between consumers and brand personification is very significant for success are regarded as the most important concepts in the fields of marketing as a discipline (Freling & Forbes, 2005).

Customer Loyalty

Customers are those who frequently patronize a firm's offering (goods or services) provided by companies are customers at the expense of other firms. In other words, a customer is a stakeholder of an organization who provides payment in exchange for the offer provided to him by the organization with the aim of fulfilling a need and to maximize satisfaction. The term customer according to Bloomenthal (2019) is a business or individual that buys the goods or services of another company. So a customer patronizes a business, and his perception towards a product or services matters a lot because if he perceives a product or services has been bad that business will die a natural death since his patronage generates return on investment. Hence, customer satisfaction is a key objective of any business that wants to survive in this dynamic business environment. The importance of customer loyalty for service industries and firm's overall development has been recognizes by many researchers underline its potential effect on the development of sustained competitive edge for the service organization (Carunna 2002). Customer loyalty suggests a commitment to doing business or repurchases a brand of an organization on a continuous basis. Thus, scholars such as Allama and Aymanh (2001) described customer's loyalty as a strong commitment to repurchase a company's product or services despite potential distractions from competitors. In a more succinct sense, it is defined as a repeat buying behaviour of a product or brand. Abdulahi (2008; 2009) and Ibok (2012) described customer loyalty as an investment that has long term enduring effect on the performance of corporate organizations. Accordingly, Beerli et al., (2004) defined the concept of customer loyalty as a deep or strong commitment to repurchase a product or service of an organisation in the future despite potential

impact of marketing efforts by competitors. Customer loyalty not only ensure repeat purchase and positive publicity with greater value in terms of reliability, it also lead to host of other significant benefit such as cross buying intention, exclusive and priority based preference to the company and it product / service, greater share of wallet and so on which provide a competitive edge to the company.

Customer Retention

Customer retention is the action or movement an organization undertakes for the main purpose of reducing consumers' anxiety and fear about a product or service in order to increase the lifespan of a customer. The success in achieving customers' retention begins with the needs identification (Kassim & Abdullah, 2010), the level of satisfaction which continues throughout the entire lifetime of a relationship (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). The ability of every establishment of organization to entice, retain current customers and attract new customers is not only connected to its item for consumption or services, but essentially associated with the image and reputation it creates within and across the marketplace. Customer retention goes beyond satisfying the present expectations of the customers instead it is helpful in anticipating their expectations so that they become loyal supporters and promoters for the company's brand. To survive in a global and competitive environment, it becomes imperative for organizations to offer and deliver a consistent high standard of customer service.

Han et al., (2008) posited that the simplest way to develop a business is to maintain and keep the customers. Business development and expansion is determined by how best an organization can keep and retaining their current customers (Gee et al., 2008). Ehigie (2006) asserted that customers retention will become a distant dream if the following are not taken into consideration: relieving customers from anxiety and fears (Naeem & Saif, 2009); demonstrate by actions that the organization cares for them; paying urgent attention to customers' needs and requirements (Oyeniya & Abiodun, 2008); proving that the organization values, recognizes and respect them (Petasis & Opoku-Mensah, 2009); maintaining a consistent contact, paying quick attention to their complaints (Saunders & Petzer, 2010); acknowledging them and keeping them informed (Patterson, 2004); commitment to customer fulfilment by every member of staff (Lee & Hwan, 2005); dependable on-time delivery; error-free-delivery process and employing exceptional persons to deliver better customer service (Kassim & Abdullah, 2010), etc.

Advocacy

Advocacy involves passing information between a non-commercial communicator (i.e. someone who is not rewarded and a receiver concerning an outlet, brand, product, or service). The most effective types of marketing programmes that firm adopt are those that cost nothing, or next to nothing, and prevent work. Word of mouth advocacy are one of such marketing tactics that are commonly used by firms to aid their marketing efforts. The term advocacy is used to describe a situation whereby existing satisfied customers voluntarily commend a firm within their circle of trust. Advocacy is an oral person- to - person communication between a receiver and a communicator, the person being seen as independent from the brand, product, or service (Petasis & Opoku-Mensah, 2009; the above definition entails face -to- face, oral involvement between a communicator and a receiver. The internet is a readily available source of recommendation and complaint communication. Advocacy also can be the individual customers' contribution to a service providers' goals as a result of satisfaction derived from success (Walsh et al., 2008).

Advocacy extinguishes immediately it proceeds forth due to the spontaneous way it occurs and disappears. In a similar manner, e-mail faxes and letters may stand for an outlet for advocate. The communicator is not attached to the product or service under consideration. A positive WOM may appear to have more influence than a well-researched printed source of product information (Ladhari et al., 2011). There is a general acceptance by researchers that positive WOM has a

tremendous influence on behavior than other marketing communication source. Word of mouth advocacy is a method of promoting the products of a firm to new customers through mostly voluntary and spontaneous positive WOM from existing satisfied customers to the firm. Research has revealed that referred customers are both more profitable and loyal than existing customers. Customer advocacies have a higher contribution margin, a higher retention rate, and are more valuable in the short and long run. The information may be positive or negative (Walsh et al., 2008).

Brand Identity and Customer Loyalty

Empirically, Aaker (1997), he found out that brand identification and customer patronage are strongly interrelated to each other because brand identification enhances the memorability of a particular brand which invariably increases returns on patronage. Furthermore, Keller (1993) asserted that brand identification can be created via the association with attitudes, attributes and benefits respectively. It has been established that corporate management identity has significant positive relationship with customer loyalty. This is evidenced in the works of; (Alire, 2007; Beerli et al., 2004; Behabadi, 2009; Gee et al., 2008; Richards and Jones, 2008; McCormack & Cogan, 2004). Amidst all these empirical research, however, there is no study relating brand identity and customer patronage in Port Harcourt. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature which has informed our study on brand identity and customer loyalty in telecommunication in Port Harcourt. Logo is a key element in branding and the core element of a successful brand is to perceive how the brand identity is created and developed (Laforet, 2010). Also, there is a positive relationship between brand logo and customer patronage. Changes in logo may lead to suspicion of stability and constancy as well as on honesty of brand, which in turn can decrease the intensity of the relationship between target customers and brand. Hence, it can be said that brand logo is a substantial factor in creating committed relationships and reputation has a positive correlation with trust (Behabadi, 2009). Furthermore, the results of previous studies surrounding brand identity indicate that a strong identity leads to customer trust (Berens et al., 2005).

Brand personified as human representatives act as pre-sales consultants to firms. They become useful when firms need to authenticate their association with the brand and to impart product and brand knowledge to the consumer. By contributing value to relationships, brand personified tries to develop an element of trust between the company and the customer. Brand personified as a representative is the face of the company in the marketplace (Aaker, 1997). This face of the brand as a real interface between brand and customers also helps in solving marketing issues related to the brand. Brand personification, with the features, the proposition will help to establish the relationship between brands and customers (Bilgili & Ozkul, 2015). Consumers often make purchases on products that may provide a specific meaning. The meaning of a brand can be an essential factor in the consumer's purchasing. "The brand can satisfy the consumer's desire for sensory pleasure, and cognitive simulation generates an emotional value" (Ahmad & Tyagaraj, 2015). Customers sometimes animate brands through endowing them all by personality traits and often marketers reinforce and create these mentioned perceptions by means of brand positioning (Ahmad & Tyagaraj, 2015). Brand personification according to Nofle & Shaver, (2006) is the key factor in building strong relationships with consumers, which translates into patronage of a brand. This is because branded offerings characterized by personification appeal to consumers before they are purchased (Aaker et al., 2004; Pollalis et al., 2011).

Cognitive Consistency

The cognitive consistency emphasizes that affect (liking or disliking) is a hypothesized function of beliefs related to the perceived instrumentality of object or concept in attaining or frustrating a set of relevant valued states, weighted by the relative importance of those valued states (Osgood et al., 1957; Rosenberg, 1960; Day, 1973). The phenomenon therefore is that man holds information

or knowledge, which reflects his beliefs or evaluations about stimuli. Such knowledge, opinions and beliefs about stimuli constitute his cognition. Day (1973) observes that cognitive consistency theorists share the basic assumption that individual strives to achieve consistency within and between his cognition. Thus, man seeks to maintain cognitive consistency irrespective of the circumstances. Further, this concept assumes that inconsistency among cognitions creates psychological tension or discomfort (motivational state), which is disturbing in much the same way as any other drive state, such as thirst, and thus forces drive reduction action(s). Graham (2007) shuns situations where two or more elements of cognition are in disagreement. The resulting tension of such disagreement is the motivational force leading to efforts to modify or change the cognitive system. The Need for Consistency scale has been applied mainly to social phenomena. For instance, one of the consequences of a strong need for consistency is that individuals tend to orient their attention to the past more than to the present, in order to achieve a better match between past behavior and a current choice. Another consequence of a high preference for consistency is a stronger inclination to punish transgressions of laws. The concept of cognitive consistency is built around the theory of hedonism. The theory posits man to be a calculative and pleasure seeking animal that chooses alternative courses of action that are capable of giving him the maximum pay-off. It also follows Thorndike's law of effects, which emphasizes that behaviour that yields positive outcomes will be reinforced or repeated. Festinger (1964) reports that inconsistency arousal and effort to reduce/eliminate it and ultimately return to *fit* or *consonance* takes place only after a decision; thus, consequences flow from the decision.

Empirical Framework

Abd-El-Salam et al. (2013) work on the impact of corporate image and reputation on service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty where survey data was collected from 650 customers of an international service company showed that there was a significant positive relationship between corporate image and reputation and customer loyalty which ultimately impacts on an organization's performance. Souiden et al. (2006) empirical study on corporate branding dimensions on consumers' product evaluation that was based on a sample of 218 Japanese and American consumers established that corporate image was a mediator of the corporate name's effect on consumer's product evaluation. Similarly, Amini et al. (2012) study on effectiveness of marketing strategies and corporate image on brand equity as a sustainable competitive advantage where data was collected from 317 consumers of Video and Audio Products of Samsung in flower bazaar of Imam Reza in Tehran city revealed that marketing strategies affect brand equity indirectly through corporate image implying that Corporate image mediates the relationship. Kheiry¹ et al. (2012) studied University intellectual image impact on satisfaction and loyalty of students (Tehran selected universities) involving a sample of 989 students from selected universities. The study concluded that image of university has direct and positive effect on satisfaction of students hence impacting on performance. This view is supported by Binsardi and Ekwulugos (2003) work on students' perception of UK universities. They observed that elements such as faculty members and facilities on campus were critical factors in determining students' perceptions of the image or reputation of a higher education institution.

Methodology

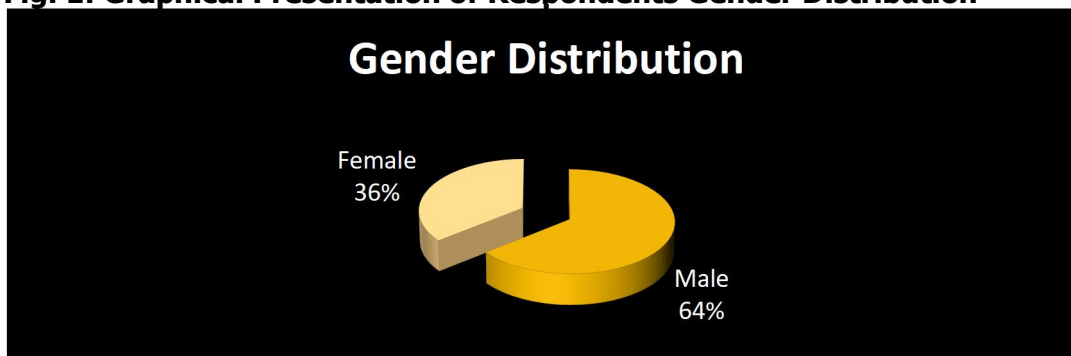
This study employed quasi – experimental research design, which investigates the behavior, opinion or other manifestations of a group of people by questioning them (Anyanwu, 2000). This was done through the use of questionnaire. According to Nigerian Telecommunications (Services) Sector Report of first Quarter of 2020, there are four (4) major registered Telecommunication Firms (MTN, GLOBACOM, ETISALAT, and AIRTEL) in Rivers State with a total of Five Million and Eighty Four Thousand (5.84) active subscribers representing 3.93% of the entire nations subscribers. Considering the population size, the accessible population of this study were teaching

staff of public tertiary educational institutions in Port Harcourt. The choice of these class of persons is hinged on the fact that they predominant customers to these telecommunication firms. According to the information made available by Rivers State Ministry of Education, there are four (4) public tertiary institutions in Port Harcourt with a teaching staff strength of Three Thousand, Seven Hundred and Thirty One (3,731). Adopted the Krejcie and Morgan Sampling Size determination formula, the accessible population which is Three Thousand, Seven Hundred and Thirty-One (3,731) were placed on the sample size table which produced a sample size of Two Hundred and Fifty (250). Based on this knowledge, Two Hundred and Fifty (250) became our sample size in this study. Furthermore, to avoid any form of bias, cluster sampling technique were also introduced for fair and equal allocation and distribution of respondents. Recall that the there are four (4) institutions under study, in the light of this, sixty-three (252) respondents were drawn from each of the institution which gave us a total of Two Hundred and Fifty-two (252). The questionnaire was structured using a Five-Point Likert scale from SA=Strongly Agree (5), A=Agree (4), U=Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to test if the independent variables are associated with the dependent variables.

Data Analysis and Results

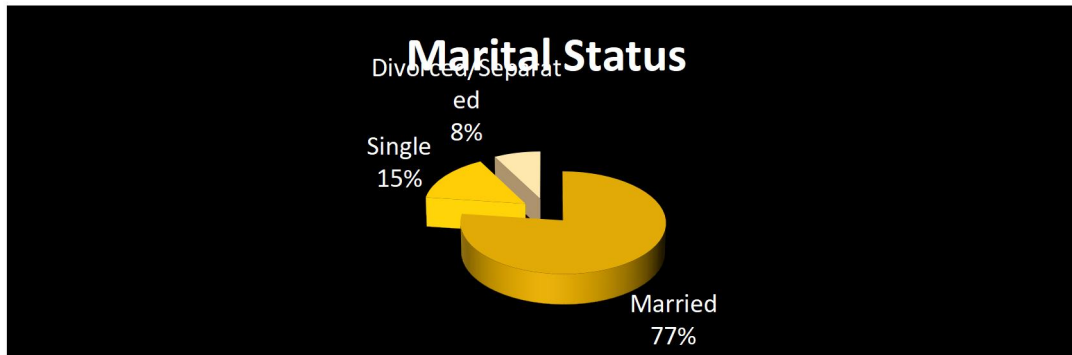
Two hundred and fifty-two (252) copies of questionnaire were distributed amongst the four higher institutions in Port Harcourt. 244(97%) copies were accurately filled while the remaining 8(3%) contained certain inconsistencies, and thus not valid for analysis. Therefore, the analysis was based on 244 copies accurately filled.

Fig. 1: Graphical Presentation of Respondents Gender Distribution



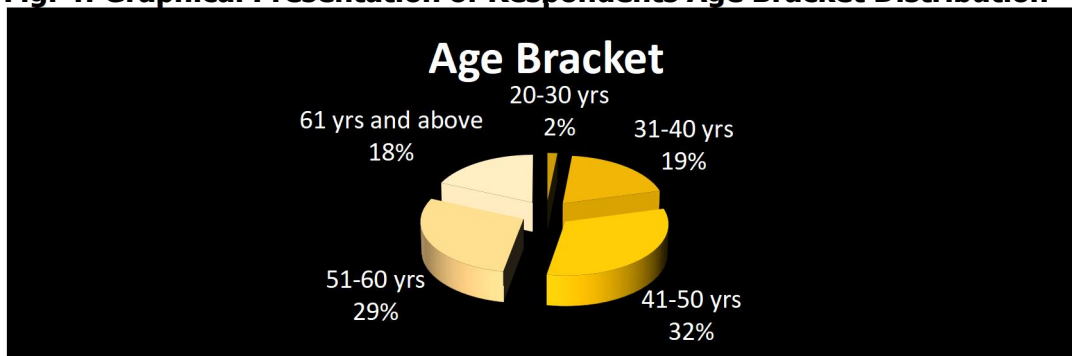
Based on the figure above, majority of the survey's respondent were males with 157(64%) while the remaining with 87(36%) were females. Since it was not about household product, majority of the decision making were made by males.

Fig. 3: Graphical Presentation of Respondents Marital Status Distribution



Based on the figure above, majority of the respondent were married with 188(77%), next were single respondents with 37(15%) while the remaining with 19(8%) were divorced/separated.

Fig. 4: Graphical Presentation of Respondents Age Bracket Distribution



Based on the figure above, 4(2%) respondents fell within the age bracket of 20-30 years, 47(19%) respondents fell within the age group of 31-40 years, 78(32%) respondents fell within age bracket of 41-50 years, 70(29%) were within age range of 51-60 years while 45(18%) were within 61 years and above.

Reliability Test

Reliability analysis shows the value of Cronbach's alpha as 0.791 for brand logo, 0.781 for brand personification, 0.811 for customer retention, 0.795 for advocacy and 0.827 for cognitive consistency which lies between the accepted ranges of .05 to .09. Hence the questionnaire administered has enough reliability to proceed further for analysis

Hypotheses Testing

Decision rule: Reject null hypothesis if $p < 0.05$ and above = Positive relationship; +.1 and above = Negative relationship -.1

Using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient

Table 4.1: Brand Logo and Customer Loyalty

		Brand Logo	Customer Retention	Advocacy
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.803**	.898**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
	N	244	244	244

Customer Retention	Correlation Coefficient	.803**	1.000	.892**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
	N	244	244	244
Advocacy	Correlation Coefficient	.898**	.892**	1.000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	244	244	244

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021 (SPSS output)

The result shows that brand logo has a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with customer retention at a rho = 0.803 and Pv = 0.000; brand logo also strongly and positively correlates with advocacy at a rho = 0.898 and Pv = 0.000. The result presents brand logo to have significant and positive impact on customer loyalty. Therefore, we reject the two null hypotheses relating to brand logo with customer retention and advocacy, because the Pv (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4.2: Brand Personification and Customer Loyalty

		Brand Personification	Customer Retention	Advocacy
Brand Personification	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.844**	.821**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
	N	244	244	244
Spearman's rho	Customer Retention	.844**	1.000	.892**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
	N	244	244	244
Advocacy	Correlation Coefficient	.821**	.892**	1.000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	244	244	244

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2021 (SPSS output)

Evidenced from the result table shows brand personification to have a strong significant relationship and positively correlates with customer retention at a rho = 0.844 and Pv = 0.000; brand personification also strongly and positively correlates with advocacy at a rho = 0.821 and Pv = 0.000. The result presents brand personification to have significant and positive impact on customer loyalty. Therefore, we reject the two null hypotheses relating to brand personification with customer retention and advocacy, because the Pv (0.000) < 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4.3: Partial Correlation Analysis showing the Influence of Cognitive consistency on the relationship between Brand Identity and Customer Loyalty Partial Corr.

Correlations		
Control Variables	Brand Identity	Customer Loyalty

Cognitive Consistency	Brand Identity	Correlation	1.000	.577
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000
		Df	0	242
Customer Loyalty	Customer Loyalty	Correlation	.577	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.
		Df	242	0

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2021, SPSS 21 Output

Decision: This table explained the moderating influence of cognitive consistency on the relationship between brand identity and customer loyalty. Cognitive consistency had a moderate but positive relationship with brand identity and customer loyalty at 0.577. Therefore, we accept the assertion that there is a moderating influence of cognitive consistency on the significant relationship between brand identity and customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt.

Discussion of Findings

The outcome from the test of analysis identified brand logo as having a significant impact on customer loyalty and as such enhancing outcomes such as customer retention and advocacy. On this basis, the null hypothetical statements were rejected as the result revealed that there was a significant relationship between brand logo and customer loyalty. The result showed that brand identity which involves brand logo contributed towards the degree to which telecommunication firm is able to adopt better competitive advantage to help in delivering of service and as well create good reputation and positioning. This result agreed with the findings of Laforet, (2010) that there is a positive relationship between brand logo and customer patronage. The evidence on the nexus between brand personification and customer retention and advocacy were observed to be significant; with brand personification having a significant impact on the measure of customer loyalty: customer retention and advocacy. As such the null hypotheses of no significant relationship were therefore rejected. This indicates that brand personification contributed significantly as a predictor of customer loyalty and that it enhances its feature such as customer retention and advocacy. These results concurred with the works of Jafarnejad et al. (2012) who found that brand personification has a significant impact on customer loyalty. Premised on table 4.4, it shows the moderating influence of cognitive consistency on brand identity and customer loyalty. This means that telecommunication firms should create a balance of cognition on customer's acceptance of their offerings.

CONCLUSION

This section was to ascertain the effect of brand identity on customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt. The study considered two dimensions of brand identity – brand logo and brand personification (independent variables) and two measures of customer loyalty –customer retention and advocacy (dependent variable). Analysis was done using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient. Based on the results of the analysis, the study concludes that brand identity strongly and positively relates with customer loyalty in telecommunication industry in Port Harcourt. In order words, brand identity creates a means of attachment with management which leads to customer loyalty that most times leads to customer retention and advocacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following are recommended:

- i. Telecommunication firms in Port Harcourt should consider brand identity as a strategic weapon to outwit their rivals.
- ii. Brand identity should be incorporated into the operational and strategic plans of Telecommunication firms. This includes brand logo, brand personification, brand image, brand reputation and corporate communication.
- iii. Telecommunication firms should maintain the policy of aligning their brand position to reflect brand logo and brand personification.
- iv. Telecommunication firm should use brand logo to differentiate her brand from that of the competitor.
- v. Objectives of brand identity include, among others, retaining and attracting customers. In view of this, Telecommunication firms should ensure that adverts on their brands are designed and written in a manner that persuade individuals to patronize the brand offered for sale to enhance the profitability of the firm involved.

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