

Brand Capability and Customer Loyalty of Food and Beverage Firms in Port Harcourt

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between Brand capability and Customer loyalty of Food and Beverages in Port Harcourt. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey investigation. The population of this study comprised Twenty-Three (23) registered Food and Beverages firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. However, six senior managers of General Manager, Advertising Manager and Marketing Manager and three Supervisors were drawn from each of these firms giving sample size of 138.138 managers from Twenty- Three (23) registered food and Beverages firms in Rivers State were served copies of the questionnaire, out of which 132 of the copies of questionnaire were duly completed and retrieved and used for the data analysis. The hypotheses for this study were analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient statistical tool and aided using Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The study found that brand competence has significant and positive impact with customer loyalty. In conclusion, the empirical studies reviewed provide evidence for the positive relationship between brand competence and customer loyalty across various industries. Based on the findings, the study concluded that brand competence has a significant impact on customer loyalty. A strong brand competence that resonates with the target market can lead to higher levels of loyalty with respect to repeat purchase and positive word of mouth. Therefore, the study recommended that food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt should adopt brand competence in their dealings with customers to enable them to enhance in their operational and loyalty to the organization. It should also emphasize on the brand competence and the adequacy of such systems given the importance of such in enhancing the repeat purchase and word of mouth.

Keywords: Brand Capability, Customer Loyalty, Repeat Purchase, Positive Word-of-Mouth

INTRODUCTION

Brand capability refers to a company's ability to build, manage, and leverage its brand effectively. It encompasses various elements that contribute to the brand's strength and recognition among consumers.

The success of any company especially the food and beverages firm often depends on its marketing ability. Marketing has thus appeared to be a core function for a company, irrespective of the sector of operation. It is considered as a process that engages the expectations and satisfaction of customer need and those of such companies, where there is mutual benefit. Kotler and Keller (2015) maintain that a major component to the marketing process is insightful, creative marketing strategies and plans that control marketing activities. Developing the right marketing strategy over time, often involves a blend of discipline, flexibility and innovation the companies need to bear in order to achieve a competitive advantage. To enhance the competition requires concrete marketing knowledge with experience and accuracy (Lau & Lee, 2000). A company's positioning and the positioning of its products depend on the formulation and implementation of an intelligent and constructive marketing strategy which needs to be united to the overall business strategy. For the time being, the marketing environment has continuously developed (Hayes, 2018). These important changes have resulted in a renewed effort by marketing academics and practitioners to understand and serve the needs and wants of customers.

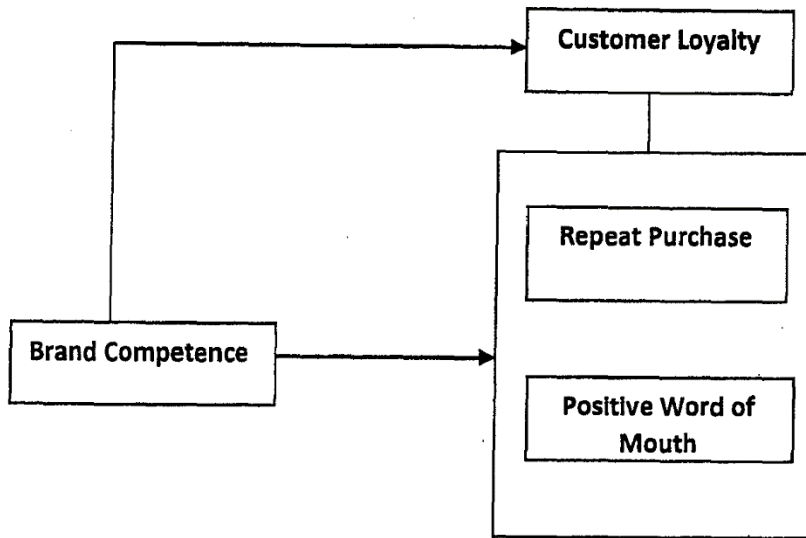
These renewed efforts have resulted in the improvement of several orientations to marketing such as the production, product, selling, marketing and societal marketing orientations. The above-mentioned renewed efforts, have resulted in a marketplace that is becoming concurrently more competitive, more specialized, more globalized and more technology driven. To succeed in today's challenging and competitive environment, successful marketing requires stability among creativity, innovation and knowledge with experiences. Branding has appeared as a more current orientation that provides marketers with that stability of creativity, innovation and knowledge with experiences. Branding has emerged as a prime tool used to differentiate a company's products from the rival's products.

Branding according to Lamb et al., has three main purposes: product identification and differentiation (brand), repeat sales (loyalty), and product development by considering customers level of expectation. Companies in the last decade have recognized the significance of branding on these three levels and have uncovered the advantages of retaining customers rather than looking for new ones. In this regard, companies have recognized the importance in building brand equity to enhance brand capability, following the emergence of market challengers in the food and beverage industry (Willems, et al., 2011). This paper presents a conceptual framework in the form of positive brand attitude, brand value and its links to repeat purchase rate and upsell ratio based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature. An attempt has been made in the discussion section to discuss the managerial implication of the concepts presented in this paper on the Food and Beverages Firms in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Study Variable/Conceptual Framework

This study is focused on the impact of brand capability and customer loyalty of Food and Beverages Firms in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The predictor or independent variable is brand

capability, while the criterion or dependent variable is customer loyalty.



Conceptual framework on the impact of brand competence and customer loyalty of food and beverages firms in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Gary *et al.* (2018). Brand personality: theory and dimensionality. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 27(2), 115-127,

Zhang *et al.* (2020). The impact of brand excitement on customer loyalty in the food industry: The moderating role of customer involvement. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 57, 102200-402200.

The following null hypotheses were developed for the study:

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between brand capability and repeat purchase

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between brand capability and positive word- of -mouth

Theoretical Foundation

Associative Learning Theory

This theory explains how consumers develop association for colours over time. The theory originated with the works of Thorndike (1911) and Pavlov (1927) of the two processes of associative learning, operant and classical conditioning (Wasserman & Miller, 1997), classical conditioning provides the best foundation for this study. Classical conditioning is a method of establishing associations (Grossman & Wisenblit, 1999), and the most well-known study of classical conditioning was undertaken by Pavlov (1927). Dogs in Pavlov's study quickly learned to associate the ringing of a bell with being fed. After a short time the dogs began to salivate when the bell was rung, even if food wasn't present, according to the associative learning theory, a connection can be created between any pairing of stimuli, not just animals and food, but humans and colours as well (Grossman & Wisenblit, 1999). Consumers learn

Concept of Brand Capability

Capability is an essential dimension of brand personality, which plays a vital role in shaping customer loyalty towards a brand. Malär *et al.*, (2011) defined capability as the brand's ability to provide superior performance and quality to its customers. Additionally, Kim *et al.* (2018) highlighted that competence is an essential attribute of the brand, which is linked to the customer's perception of the brand's reliability and expertise. The concept of competence has evolved over time. Initially, researchers focused on the functional attributes of a brand but later, the focus shifted towards incorporating the emotional and personality dimensions of a brand. Brand capability can be defined as consumers' considerations that a brand has the ability and skills to meet consumers' intentions, and it emphasizes on a brand's competitiveness, intelligence, and skills. A competent brand is reliable, intelligent, and successful. Brands within this dimension are confident thought leaders and responsible stalwarts of trust.

Brand capability is the ability of a brand to overcome consumer's problem and also fulfilling their needs (Lau & Lee, 2000). In the context of brand trust, the trust feeling will be appear from a consumer based on fact that a brand is able to fulfill his/her needs. Additionally, Kim *et al.* (2018) suggested that capability is one of the four essential dimensions of brand personality, which also includes excitement, sincerity, and sophistication. Capability is characterized by several key features, such as quality, reliability, expertise, and efficiency (Malär *et al.*, 2011). For instance, a capable brand is expected to deliver high- quality products and services, which are reliable and meet the customer's needs. In this regard, Apple Inc. is considered a capable brand, which has established a reputation for delivering high-quality products with a high level of expertise and reliability (Malar *et al.*, 2011). Despite the widespread acceptance of the capability dimension in brand personality, there are still some debates and controversies surrounding its use. For instance, some researchers argue that capability alone is not sufficient to create strong customer loyalty towards a brand.

Rather, a combination of different dimensions of brand personality, such as excitement and sincerity, is needed to create a more holistic brand personality that resonates with customers. The capability dimension of brand personality has several implications and applications in different fields and contexts. For instance, it can be used as a tool for creating a unique brand identity and establishing a competitive advantage in the market (Kim *et al.*, 2018). It can be used to enhance customer loyalty and drive business growth by creating a positive brand image and reputation (Malar *et al.*, 2011). All organizations want to build their competence in few key areas and to deal with their brand within these domains. It is a duty of every marketer to meet the exact demands of their customers who are related to their products. Organizations would not create suspicions in their customers mind about brand competence. Consumers must be persuaded to obtain a relation to the brand capability. Marketers should make good decision and use key opinion leaders who are viewed as authorities in particular areas, to present those personas of the brand.

Highly qualified engineers for technical tools and well known physicians for pharmaceutical products are examples of key opinion leaders. Competent brand consists of crucial elements for solving consumers issues. Utilization of brand is only one way to be brand capability (Lau & Lee, 1999). Consumers can find out brand's capability through direct usage or word of mouth. Good

brands are able to satisfy consumer needs and their attributes must be compatible with consumer needs.

Concept of Customer Loyalty

Loyalty is therefore an attitude or behavior that customers explicitly vocalize or exhibit. Loyalty has both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions. The behavioral repurchase consists of repeated purchase of product while attitudinal loyalty refers to attitudinal commitment or favorable attitude toward a product resulting in repeat purchasing behavior. It is a biased purchase response resulting from an evaluative attitude favouring the purchase. Customer loyalty is very significant in the creation and maintenance of competitive advantage in the service industry. Customer loyalty research has mainly centered on the loyalty consumers display towards tangible products that is often referred to as brand loyalty. Although, the concept of customer loyalty to tangible goods (brand loyalty) has been studied extensively by marketing scholars, relatively little empirical research has examined loyalty to service organizations (service loyalty). Significant gaps exist in marketing literature in explaining what leads customers to become loyal to service organizations. Customer loyalty is a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive purchasing of the same brand, despite situational influences and marketing efforts. It can also be defined as the degree to which a customer exhibits repeat purchasing behavior from a service provider, possesses a positive attitudinal disposition toward the provider, and considers using this provider when a need for this service arises. This feeling incites customer for acquiring a good or service repeatedly. Subsequently this generates sizeable and better financial outcomes for the firm.

Customer loyalty is the most important goal of implementing relationship marketing activities. Oliver (1999) defined customer loyalty as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts have the potential to cause switching behavior. Customers are the driving force for profitable growth and customer loyalty can lead to Customer Advocacy. For a customer, loyalty is a positive attitude and behavior related to the level of re-purchasing commitment to a brand in the future. Loyal customers are less likely to switch to a competitor solely because of price and they even make more purchases than non-loyal customers (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998).

Loyal customers are also considered to be the most important assets of a company and it is thus essential for vendors to keep loyal customers who will contribute long-term profit to the business organizations. Attempt to make existing customers increase their purchases is one way to strengthen the financial growth of a company. Furthermore, organization's financial growth is dependent on a company's ability to retain existing customers at a faster rate than it acquires new ones. Managers should understand that the road to growth runs through customers-not only attracting new customers, but also holding on existing customers, motivating them to spend more and getting them to recommend products and services to the other people.

Customer loyalty is a vital concept in marketing and has received significant attention from scholars and practitioners alike. According to Oliver (1999), customer loyalty refers to a "deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences

and marketing efforts having, the potential to cause switching behavior.” Customer loyalty can be described as a psychological state involving an effective response to consistently meet a customer’s expectations.

Parasuraman and Grewal (2000) argue that customer loyalty involves a “deeply ingrained and deeply held commitment to re-purchase or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behavior. “Customer loyalty has undergone significant historical development. In the past, customer loyalty was primarily viewed because of habit, convenience, or inertia. However, scholars have recognized the importance of building strong customer relationships through satisfaction, trust, and commitment to increase customer loyalty. Some Scholars have posited that customers who are more satisfied with their experiences are more likely to remain loyal to a particular brand.

The key features of customer loyalty, include commitment, trust, and satisfaction. Commitment refers to a customer’s intention to continue doing business with a brand in the future, while trust involves the belief that a brand will deliver on its promises. Satisfaction refers to a customer’s positive evaluation of their experiences with a brand. For example, a customer who repeatedly purchases from a brand, despite the availability of other options, can be said to be loyal. Current debates on customer loyalty include the challenge of measuring and managing it effectively. Some scholars argue that customer loyalty should be viewed as a multi-dimensional construct that includes attitudinal and behavioral components.

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Additionally, some researchers have questioned the use of loyalty programs as a means of building customer loyalty, arguing that they may have a limited impact on actual customer behavior (Sharp *et al.*, 2013). The implications and applications of customer loyalty are far-reaching, with potential benefits for firms, customers, and society. For instance, loyal customers are likely to generate positive word-of-mouth, leading to increased brand awareness and customer acquisition. Moreover, firms that prioritize customer loyalty can achieve cost savings.

Measures of Customer Loyalty

Repeat Purchase

Repeat Purchase which most scholars also refer to as Behavioral loyalty is a key concept in customer loyalty. It refers to the repeated purchasing behavior of customers towards a particular brand. Different authors have defined behavioral loyalty in different ways. For instance, Oliver (1999) defines behavioral loyalty as “the degree to which a consumer repeatedly purchases a brand out of habitual response, a sense of comfort, liking, or feeling of commitment, resulting from satisfying experiences with the brand”. Similarly, Kim and Park (2013) defined behavioral loyalty as “the extent to which a customer continues to purchase from a particular brand and recommends it to others”. Other authors such as Jacobsen and Munar (2012) have also defined behavioral loyalty as the degree of customer’s repurchasing behavior of a brand.

Repeat purchase can be described as the placing of order after order by a consumer from the same organization; it can also be seen as the buying of a product or services by a consumer of the same brand. Repeat purchase customers are customers who are satisfied emotionally, intellectually, physically with an organization offering which could be in the form of a product which exceeds their expectations. Repeat purchase in another context could be referred to as “re-patronage intentions,” according to Wirtz & Lwin (2009) it is the willingness of an individual to re-patronize a service organization. In a relationship built on trust, commitment is engendered and then becomes a major predictor of future purchases. Customers regularly visit a particular firm based on their perception of trust-that is, they believe that the company has their best interest at heart when providing a service.

A repeat purchase is often a measure of loyalty to a brand by consumers, higher repeat purchase value means a well retained, satisfied customer, also higher repeat purchase value drives higher customer value, which means a better top line in the loyalty ladder. Higher repeat purchase value can mean higher profitability as it does not include new customer acquisition costs; an organization can take some actions to ensure repeat purchase of either their products or services by listening to customer comments, suggestion, feedback, complaints, about the product or services they are offering, by also providing value adding services to the customer experience. Repeat purchase is the prime goal a company can set for its products since it is a consumer reference to purchase a given brand in a product category. Customer repeat purchase is a good indicator of a long term business sustainability and profitability of an organization; this is because it points to customer satisfaction and retention (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015)

Positive Word- of- Mouth

In the past, consumers used to talk to other people when looking for opinions on a particular brand, product or company. This became known as word of mouth (WOM) in the marketing literature. WOM is probably the oldest mechanism by which opinions on products, brands, and services are developed, expressed, and spread. A spate of recent articles and books in popular press already notes an increasing interest in word of mouth. There are several definitions of WOM. Early scholars defined it as an oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service.

Word-of-mouth marketing is identified as one of the reasons customer loyalty is believed to be invaluable (Didia & Otite, 2017). Word-of-Mouth refer to strong recommendations and praises customers make about a brand or its products to potential consumers (Didia& Otite 2017). Potential customers see information from friends or even strangers as more unbiased and reliable than those of an economic entity (Didia & Otite, 2017; dramatized the importance of word-of-mouth by stating that increasing loyalty is achieved by maintaining customers while increase in market share is achieved through word-of mouth. Word-of-mouth is considered one of the strongest marketing methods. Empirical test proves that positive word- of-mouth enhances companies' ability to acquire new customers and maintain the loyalty of existing ones (Didia & Otite, 2017; Peter *et al.*, 2013).

Empirical review on Brand Competence and Customer Loyalty

Brand Capability is a crucial factor in building customer loyalty as it helps consumers to develop a connection with a brand beyond its functional benefits. Several empirical works have been conducted to explore the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty. In this section, we will review some of these studies, focusing on competence and its impact on customer loyalty.

Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) examined the impact of brand capability on customer loyalty in the hotel industry. Their study found that brand competence had a positive influence on customer loyalty through the mediating effect of brand trust. This suggests that hotels should focus on developing their brand capability to increase customer loyalty. Similarly, Lee and Moon (2020) investigated the role of brand capability in the relationship between perceived value and customer loyalty in the airline industry. They found that brand capability moderated the relationship between perceived value and customer loyalty. Specifically, when perceived value was high, the effect of brand capability on customer loyalty was stronger. Therefore, airlines should aim to enhance their brand capability to increase customer loyalty.

This highlights the importance of fashion brands focusing on developing their capability to increase customer loyalty. Again, Zeng and Lu (2021) investigated the relationship between brand competence and customer loyalty in the smartphone industry. Their study found that brand competence had a significant positive impact on customer loyalty, partially mediated by customer satisfaction. This suggests that smartphone companies should focus on developing their capability to increase customer loyalty.

Lastly, Chen and Lin (2021) examined the relationship between brand capability, trust, and customer loyalty in the banking industry. Their study found that brand capability positively influenced customer trust, which in turn positively influenced customer loyalty. Therefore, banks should aim to enhance their brand capability to increase customer trust and loyalty. In conclusion, the empirical studies reviewed provide evidence for the positive relationship between brand competence and customer loyalty across various industries. Companies should aim to develop their brand capability as a key strategy to increase customer loyalty, as it may also mediate or moderate the relationship between other factors and customer loyalty, such as perceived value and trust. In view of the findings of these studies it is possible that brand competence would enhance customer loyalty of food and beverages firms in Port Harcourt. However, it is hypothesized that:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant impact of brand capability on repeat purchase.
H₀₂: There is no significant impact of brand capability on positive word of mouth.

Methodology

This research made use of the survey research design. The population of this study comprised Twenty-Three (23) registered Food and Beverages firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. These are functional, operational, and registered with the confectionary association of Nigeria, Rivers State branch and the Port Harcourt chamber of commerce, industry and tourism (PHACCIMA), (2018). However six senior managers of General Manager, Advertising Manager and Marketing Manager and three Supervisors were drawn from each of these firms giving sample size of 138. 138 managers from Twenty Three (23) registered food and Beverages firms in Rivers State were served copies of the questionnaire, out of which 132 of the questionnaire were duly completed and retrieved and used for the data analysis. The hypotheses for this study were analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient statistical tool and aided using Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25

Analysis and Result

Test of Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between Brand Capability and Repeat Purchase of Food and Beverages Manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 1: Correlation for Brand Competence and Repeat purchase

		Brand Competence	Repeat Purchase
Spearman's rho	Brand Competence	Correlation	1.000
		Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.865**
	Repeat Purchase	Correlation	1.000
		Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.865**
N		132	132

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

Source: SPSS Output 2023)

From the result in Table 1, it is shown that a very strong positive relationship exist between brand capability and repeat purchase. The rho value 0.865 indicates this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000. Thus, the null hypothesis stated is hereby rejected. The study thus establishes that, there is a significant positive relationship between brand capability and repeat purchase of Food and Beverages Manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between brand capability and positive word of mouth of Food and Beverages Manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation for Brand Competence and Positive Word Of Mouth

Correlation			Brand Competence	Positive Word of Mouth
Brand Competence	Correlation		1.000	.743**
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
Spearman's rho	N		132	132
	Positive Word of Mouth	Correlation	1.000	.743**
		Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)		
		N	132	132

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

Source: SPSS Output 2023)

From the result in Table 2, it is shown that a strong positive relationship exist between brand capability and positive word of mouth. The rho value 0.743 indicates this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000. Therefore, based on the empirical findings the null hypothesis stated is hereby rejected. Indicating that there is a positive and significant relationship between brand competence and positive word of mouth of food and beverage companies in Rivers State

Discussion of Findings

The study broadly reviewed empirical literature on the concepts of brand competence and customer loyalty. Most of the findings in the empirical studies revealed that brand competence motivate interactions that occur and making purchases from the companies. The study also found that brand capability has significant and positive impact with customer loyalty.

These findings are in line with the findings of Chen and Lin (2021) examined the relationship between brand competence, trust, and customer loyalty in the banking industry. Their study found that brand capability positively influenced customer trust, which in turn positively influenced customer loyalty. Therefore, banks should aim to enhance their brand capability to increase customer trust and loyalty. In conclusion, the empirical studies reviewed provide evidence for the positive relationship between brand capability and customer loyalty across various industries. Also, the work of Zeng and Lu (2021) investigated the relationship between brand competence and customer loyalty in the Smartphone industry. Their study found that brand competence had a significant positive impact on customer loyalty, partially mediated by customer satisfaction. This suggests that Smartphone companies should focus on developing their capability to increase customer loyalty.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that brand competence has a significant impact on customer loyalty. A strong brand capability that resonates with the target market can lead to higher levels of loyalty with respect to repeat purchase and positive word of mouth.

Recommendations

The study recommended that food and beverage firms in Port Harcourt should adopt brand capability in their dealings with customers to enable them enhance in their operational and loyalty to the organization. It should also emphasize on the brand competence and the adequacy of such systems given the importance of such in enhancing the repeat purchase and word of mouth.

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