

Brand Trust and Brand Evangelism of Healthcare Firms in South-South Nigeria: The Moderating Role of Brand Love

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DOI: 10.56201/ijmcs.v7.no2.2023.pg1.16

ABSTRACT

When we consider that humans, plants and animals receive their wellness and wellbeing from medical products and services in modern society, we see that it is vitally important that firms in the healthcare ecosystem recognize and nurture customers' trust and love for their brands. This study carefully investigated the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria and the moderating role of brand love. In spite of the growing insight into customers' brand relationship and its impact on brand evangelism in developed economies, brand trust and evangelism for healthcare brands in south-south Nigeria, remains tenuous, revealing a significant gap in literature. Addressing this gap, we adopt the Commitment-trust Theory perspective to uncover how customers' trust in healthcare brands can impact on brand evangelism. A quantitative and exploratory research design was the methodological approach employed to investigate customers of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria. Due to the infinite nature of the population, the cluster probability sampling technique was used and the population divided into twenty (20) clusters of adults within the ages of 25-55years in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers State. Hence, one hundred (100) copies of questionnaire in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree were designed and administered to obtain primary data. With the aid of the International Business Machine (IBM), Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 23, multiple linear regression was used to determine the degree of impact brand trust has on brand evangelism while Andrew F. Hayes' PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 was used to determine the extent of moderation of brand love on the impact of brand trust (brand credibility and brand integrity) on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria. In view of the test results, we conclude that brand trust has substantial and positive impact on brand evangelism, however, brand love does not moderate the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria. The study recommends that healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria should establish themselves as trustworthy to be able to reap the rewards of patient loyalty and brand evangelists who become "the megaphones" of the brands' virtues.

Keywords: Brand Trust, Brand Evangelism, Brand Love, Brand Credibility, Brand Integrity, Commitment-trust Theory

INTRODUCTION

Health care is becoming a dominant social, economic and political issue in Nigeria because medical products and services directly impact the wellness and well-being of man, plants and animals (Ityavyar, 1983). Every so often, customers seek evidence-based information to make constructive decisions about medical products/services before, during and after purchase due to their delicate nature (Lee et al 2018). The credibility of any healthcare brand can effectually minimize the uncertainties experienced by customers in the process of purchase decision making as well as improve customers' belief in the integrity of the brand (Zhang et al 2020). The antithesis of this is that many customers of healthcare firms get dissatisfied because their purchase decisions were not preceded with adequate due diligence. According to Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán (2001), brand trust is a sense of security held by customers in their interactions with brands. TTEC (2023) indicates that brand trust is usually the main driver of consumer behavior in healthcare. Therefore, the most trusted firms in the healthcare ecosystem will positively influence their profit margin and build love for the brand. Brand love is a deep emotional attachment and affection that consumers develop towards a brand. It goes beyond functional benefits and involves a strong emotional connection, leading to brand loyalty and advocacy. Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, (2008) defined brand love as a profound emotional devotion and affection that customers develop towards a brand. Fournier & Yao (1997) suggest that customers' emotional connection with a brand breeds seamless disposition to buy consistently which increases market share and profitability. Thus, love is to a brand like scent to a rose because every brand needs to acquire and retain devoted, profitable, loyal customers to achieve sustainable success in the market. Fetscherin & Heinrich, (2015) suggest that brand trust and brand love are corresponding facets of customer-brand relationships. Brand trust provides a sense of security, which further deepens the emotional connection, leading to stronger brand love. This emotional bond created through brand love improves customers' confidence in the brand. Hence, brand trust and love conquer price variations and sometimes logic (Johnson 2015). In this sense, when trust and love for a brand cross-pollinates, they become the "new marketing currency" that drives topnotch marketing performance (Sanders 2021).

The synthesis of brand trust and love breeds brand evangelism. When customers experience brand love, they become passionate advocates who enthusiastically promote and defend the brand; brand evangelists. Brand evangelism is a marketing concept that describes the practice of customers who ardently advocate, protect and promote a brand, product, or service. Unfortunately, we have only but a handful of brand evangelists for healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria as many customers have experienced some major glitches. Ojekunle (2022) opines that nearly seventy percent (70%) of Nigeria's population live in rural areas; home to eighty percent (80%) of poor people. Given the poor economic status of most Nigerians in the South-south, the public sector is the main source of their health care products and services. And most healthcare firms in the public sector are understaffed, poorly equipped and dilapidated, many others that are partially running, are unable to cater for the needs of the growing population. Hopkins, (2017) identified the influx of fake drugs causing illnesses, disabilities and deaths. According to Punch Editorial Board, (2023), a report in Bayero University (2017) indicates that between forty-one and fifty percent (41&50%) of drugs in Nigeria are substandard. Therefore, many customers of healthcare firms in South-south Nigeria

have profound negative customer experience and doubt the integrity, credibility and authenticity of many healthcare brands. There is a growing literature analyzing consumer-brand relationships but none addressed the issues of customer distrust in the healthcare sector in south-south Nigeria. For instance; Ardhiyansyah, Setyawati & Yunanto (2021) analysed the “impact of brand trust on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty”, Liestyana & Risqiani, (2016) examined the “management of the brand through advocacy and its influences: A study in the hospital as healthcare providers”, Rao, (2012) analyzed “brand credibility and brand involvement as antecedents of brand equity”, Molinillo, Japutra & Ekinici, (2022) investigated “building brand credibility” and Abdullah & Usman (2012) studied “brand credibility, customer loyalty and the role of religious orientation”. Research relating to brand trust, brand love and brand evangelism in south-south Nigeria appears to be severely neglected in literature. It is on this basis that this study examines the impact brand trust on brand evangelism of quoted healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria and how the impact is moderated by brand love. The conceptual framework below illustrates the probable link between variables of the study.

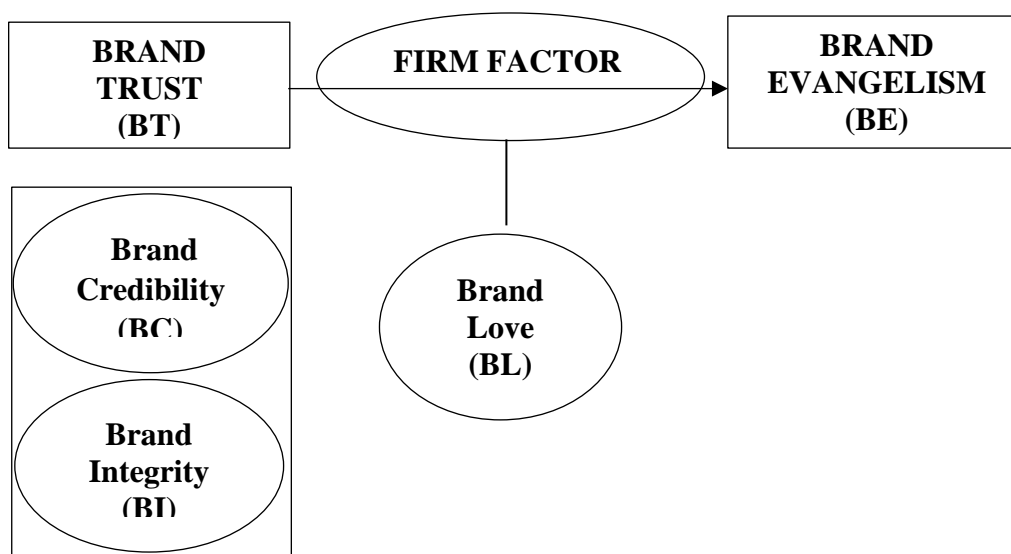


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of The Impact of Brand Trust on Brand Evangelism of Healthcare Firms in Nigeria: The Moderating Role of Brand Love.

Sources: Researchers’ Conceptualization (2023) as Adapted From (Shin, Amenuvor, Basilisco & Owusu-Antwi, 2019).

Theoretical Foundation

The Commitment-trust theory provides a solid grounding for this study and helps explain the research phenomena.

Commitment-trust Theory

In 1989, Denise Rousseau introduced the Commitment-trust theory to extrapolate the advancement and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. The theory is a social exchange theory that suggests that commitment and trust are the two substantial factors that influence the quality and

durability of relationships (Jepsen & Rodwell, 2010; Stan 2023). Commitment denotes the desire to preserve a valued relationship and trust is an inclination to depend on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman et al, 1992; Rotter 1967) as cited in (Kalafatis & Miller 1996). Therefore, we infer that commitment refers to a person's or firm's psychological attachment and devotion to a particular relationship or brand. Trust, on the other hand, refers to a person's belief in the reliability, honesty, and integrity of another party in the relationship. The commitment-trust theory suggests that commitment and trust are not mutually exclusive as commitment is considered a consequence of trust, and trust is cultivated and reinforced through commitment (Mirza, Mirza & Amin, 2018). When trust is consummated, the trustor develops commitment for the relationship or organization. Commitment encompasses a sense of responsibility, allegiance, and readiness to devote time, effort, and resources to the relationship (Basel & Issam, 2019).

According to Morgan & Hunt, (1994), commitment and trust have been reputable as fundamental factors in understanding consumers and organizational buying behaviors. Hence the growing research interest in both variables. The commitment-trust theory has been found to be relevant in different range of business activities, such as: channel conflict (Mohr & Spekman, 1994), organisational buying behaviour in changing times (Thompson, Mitchell & Knox, 1998), Market intelligence dissemination across functional boundaries (Maltz & Kohli, 1996), Trust and commitment in the United States and Japan (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). In the realm of brand trust, brand evangelism and brand love, the interrelated notions of commitment and trust could be associated with passionate, positive collaborative benefits that causes the senses of individuals and organisations to align for their common good.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Brand Trust

A brand means different things to different people; be it a current customer, prospective customer, employee, employer etc. Chikere & Poi (2021) opine that a brand is an organization's logo, name, representative, sound, message, or an experience that allows the business to function and thrive in the market. A brand is also an individual's sixth sense about a product, service, or organization (Lloyd 2018). Meanwhile, trust is the expectation that arises about an entity within a community of honest and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms about values, standards and codes of behavior (Fukuyam, 1996). According to Neeley as cited in Resnick, Sawyer & Huddleston (2015), trust is one's willingness to embrace the proposals, suggestions and views of an individual or group of individuals because one believes they are truthful and favourable, all of which depend on one's personality, who they are, and your perception of them. In the business sense, Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, (1992), defined trust as the willingness to depend on an exchange partner with assurance. Drawing from Moorman, *et al* (1992), Chaudhuri & Holbrook, (2001) defined brand trust as customers' disposition to count on a brand. Brand trust is the customers' inclination to count on a brand keeping in mind the expectations that the brand will instigate positive experience(s) (Algammash, 2020). In the customers' perspective, brand trust replicates a considerable level of hubris that he or she can depend on the seller to deliver promised goods and services (Agustin & Singh 2005). Brand trust is the confidence that customers have in a brand's capability to fulfill customers' needs and wants as promised (Qualtrics 2023). Therefore,

to develop brand trust, organizations must consistently create customer satisfaction with respect to high quality product(s)'availability and efficiency in delivery (Poi & Moko 2023). Fukuyam, (1996) indicates that the prevalence of brand trust can increase social capital and the acquisition of virtues like loyalty, dependability and honesty. To this end, brand trust reflects the customers' expectation that a brand aligns with the promises the firm has made to its customers to be honest, dependable and benevolent. The trust in a brand may also be considered leverage of its integrity and creditability (Azizea, Cemal, & Hakan, 2012; Shin *et al* 2019). Thus, brand trust is the degree of reverence and loyalty customers have for a brand which is a function of how they strongly believe it can deliver on its promises.

Brand Credibility

The term credibility entails depending on a firm's commitments and promises in terms of efficiency and effectiveness at a specific period of time (Herbig & Milewicz 1995) as cited in (Methaq 2015). Brand credibility is an indicator of brand trust, engrained in the consumers' attribution to the brand a level of expertise based on the consumers' practical expectations for the satisfaction of his/her needs and wants (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna 1985; Moorman, Zaltman & Deshpande 1992). According to Blackshaw (2008) as cited in Rao (2012), brand credibility is a multiple-characteristics concept that describes the truthfulness of the brand in the eyes of its target market. Some scholars have allotted reliability, authenticity, attractiveness, transparency, responsiveness and affirmation as characteristics of brand credibility (Daniel, Michael & Tezra n.d). Malik & Ahmad (2014) indicated that brand credibility is the degree to which consumers consider brand a dependable source of information (trustworthiness), know-how (expertise) and matches it with its attributes (attractiveness). However, Pechinski (2022) opines that brand credibility is a psychological factor that prompts the consumers' buying impulse. He defined brand credibility as a brand's reputation and capability or ineptitude to convert that psychological prompt into sales. Brand credibility or incredibility is decided and concluded in the minds of the customers when the behavior of the firm in future is predictable by its present actions (Methaq 2015). According to (Sterthal & Craig, 1982; Erdem & Swait, 2004) as cited in Abdullah & Usman (2012), brand credibility refers to the brand's ability to meet the terms of exchange relative to customers' expected performance. In consonance with Abdullah & Usman, (Erdem & Swait, 2004) as cited in (Molinillo, Japutra & Ekinici, 2022), brand credibility is the extent to which an individual believes in the trustworthiness and expertise of a brand. Brand credibility reflects the brand's capacity to align with the terms of exchange relative to customers' expected performance (Shin *et al* 2019). Since, the customers' expected performance of a brand is the footing of customer satisfaction Kotler & Armstrong (2013) as cited in (Poi & Okwandu, 2021), brand credibility springs out based on the degree to which a brand satisfies customers' needs and wants over a period of time. Therefore, brand credibility is simply the plausibility of the product information personified in a brand in terms of dependability, know-how, and appeal.

Brand Integrity

Brand integrity refers to the dependable alignment and devotion of a brand to its core values, promises, and uniqueness throughout all facets of its business operations (Hennig, 2021). Brand integrity covers the inclusive perception, dependability, and credibility of a brand among its stakeholders (Johanna 2023). Larkings, (2020) indicates that a brand is said to have integrity when

every contact a customer has with the brand creates a good impression of its identity. It is about being consistent in every interaction with the customers both online and offline, in person and from afar. Houlihan & Harvey, (2020) opine that brand integrity is achieved by using all the branding mechanisms to send a consistent message; in terms of goods and services quality. When a brand's message is inconsistent, it confuses customers and could lead to defects. These brand messages could be communicated through brand image, brand promise, brand positioning through the logo, name, font, label, colors, package, signage and written messages. Lau, (2022) advises that brands with strong, uncompromising integrity can be compared to individuals with high morals, values, and actions that match those beliefs and commitments. It is the foundation of a brand's reputation and success. By maintaining core values, consistency, and delivering excellent customers' experiences that builds trust and credibility among stakeholders, customer loyalty, competitive advantage, long-term sustainability and crisis resilience. According to (Kotler et al., 2010) as cited in Cambier & Ingrid, (2020), brand integrity incorporates brand credibility, promise fulfillment, and trustworthiness, as perceived by customers. We can infer that the integrity of a brand is dominant within the jurisdiction of the customers.

Concept of Brand Evangelism

The term "evangelism" was derived from a Greek verb *kerusso* which means, "to proclaim" widely used in the religious contexts to describe the act of spreading faith beliefs. An evangelist tells others the good news about his/her beliefs (Don, 2023). Similarly, in the business context, brand evangelists act as enthusiastic promoters of a brand, spreading positive word-of-mouth, defending the brand against criticism, and sharing their positive experiences with others. Brand evangelism is customer's devotion and passion about a brand, stimulated by an emotional connection (Stemler, 2020). Riorini & Widayati, (2015) indicate that brand evangelism demonstrates customers' commitment to a brand. Doss (2010) added that the concept of brand evangelism is communicating positive information, notions, and feelings about a brand without restrictions, and passionately, to others to influence purchasing and consumption behavior. In agreement with Doss, Goldfayn, (2012), Goldfayn, (2012) defined brand evangelism, as customers' fervent ways of spreading positive sentiments in a view to passionately persuade others to engage with a brand. Brand evangelism is a strong method of brand support behavior, unpaid sales-force which constantly circulate favourable brand-related word-of-mouth; (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Purohit, Das, Hollebeek & Sigurdsson, (2023) suggests that brand evangelism is stimulated first through a customer's positive experience with a brand. It is a higher form of word of mouth marketing in which a firm brings customers who believe strongly in their products/services and attempts to passionately persuade others to purchase or consume it. Brand evangelism includes, but goes beyond, positive word-of-mouth about a brand, support or referral behavior to comprise of customers' defense of the brand against any perceived attack and strong loyalty to the brand (Harrigan et al., 2020; Aljarah, et al.2022; Sohaib, Wang, Iqbal & Han, 2022). Hence, we deduce that brand evangelists are loyal customers who passionately spread positive word-of-mouth about a brand in a bid to persuade and advise others to patronize it.

Concept of Brand Love

The term "love" is a multifaceted notion that means different things to different people, Jakes, (2000) defines love as the divine, affectionate, erotic and abstract feeling of the heart shared among

humans and animals. Brand love is a concept used to describe a profound emotional affinity and solid attachment that customers develop towards a brand. According to Cho & Hwang, (2020), the concept of brand love was instigated by emotional attachment theories (affection theory) of consumer behavior. Rajeev, Aaron & Richard, (2012) opine that it transcends sheer brand preference, satisfaction, loyalty and reflects a fervent and warm relationship between customers and the brand. It is based on the effect of customers' deep-seated emotional connection with a brand Energise Marketing Agency (2023) indicate that brand love integrates engagement, loyalty, effective customer service management and positive customer experiences into one extremely powerful marketing strategy. Rightfully so, Albert & Merunka, (2013) argued that brand love positively impacts on brand loyalty and enhances positive word-of-mouth behavior among consumers. On the one hand, Carroll & Ahuvia, (2006), identified some antecedents and consequences of brand love, they include: brand personality, brand trust, self-brand affinity, brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Fournier (1998) suggests that brand love is characterized by a solid emotional attachment, personal commitment, and affinity between the customers and the brand. Muñiz Jr. & O'Guinn's (2001) proposed a conceptual framework showing six indicators of brand love, they include; self-connection, nostalgia, joy, respect, security, and bonding. Hence, brands that are able to induce positive emotions and connections with customers on an emotional level are more likely to stimulate brand love than their counterparts. We can therefore infer, that brand love is one of the most valuable assets for business organizations as it can lead to improved customer retention, loyalty, brand equity, goodwill and profitability.

Empirical Review

Malik & Ahmad, (2014) investigated the impact of brand credibility on consumer loyalty of customers of banking services in Saudi Arabia. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents, of which thirty (30) copies were incomplete. Hence, one hundred and twenty (120) copies of questionnaire, in a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree were used to obtain responses from the respondents. Path analysis was carried out and it was established that brand credibility has a positive effect on brand commitment.

Shin *et al* (2019) examined the effect of brand trust on brand commitment and brand loyalty and the mediating and moderating roles of brand commitment and brand reputation of smartphone consumers in South Korea. Judgmental sampling technique was adopted and data were collected from four hundred and twelve (412) smartphone consumers in South Korea. The structural equations modeling technique was used to test the hypotheses and the results show that brand trust and brand commitment have positive and significant influence on brand loyalty.

Purohit *et al.*, (2023) studied the effect of customers' brand experience on brand evangelism. The study adopted the Service-Dominant logic/Consumer Culture Theory perspective for six five-star hotels with the aid of a qualitative comparative analysis (n=396 five-star hotel customers). The results disclosed that human interaction-based hotel attentiveness/caring and emotion-based indulgence are important conditions for brand evangelism.

Albert and Merunka, (2013) examined the role of brand love in consumer-brand relationships to recommend and test a model of brand love that comprises of both its antecedents and outcomes.

The conceptual model and associated hypotheses were tested with a sample of one thousand, five hundred and five (1,505) consumers. The partial least squares structural equation modelling was used to test the data. And results establish strong relationships between the two antecedents (trust and identification) and brand love, and between brand love and its consequences (brand commitment, positive word of mouth etc. These give credence to the hypothesized relationship between brand trust and brand evangelism. Therefore:

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Brand credibility has no significant impact on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria.

H₀₂: Brand integrity has no significant impact on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria.

H₀₃: Brand love does not moderate the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria.

Research Methodology

A quantitative and exploratory research design was the methodological approach employed to investigate and generate insights and ideas on the impact of the study variables. The population of the study was customers of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria. Due to its vastness and unbounded nature, the population size was considered infinite. Thus, the cluster probability sampling technique was used and the population divided into twenty (20) clusters of adults within the ages of 25-55years in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers State. Hence, one hundred (100) copies of questionnaire in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree were designed and administered to obtain primary data. To uphold the integrity and credibility of the study, construct and content validity was evaluated and established through expert judgment. The reliability of the research instrument was guaranteed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. From the one hundred (100) copies of questionnaire distributed, only ninety-two (92) copies were retrieved and used for data analysis. With the aid of the International Business Machine (IBM), Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 23, multiple linear regression was used to ascertain the degree of impact brand trust has on brand evangelism while PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 was used to determine the extent of moderation of brand love on the impact of brand trust (brand credibility and brand integrity) on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria.

Results and Interpretation

Reliability Test

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to estimate the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire to ensure that they accurately measure the intended constructs. Cronbach's alpha ranges between 0 and 1, with higher values demonstrating higher internal consistency. The regularly used rule of thumb is that an alpha value of 0.70 or above is measured acceptable. The reliability test results are summarized in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Brand Trust, Brand Evangelism and Brand Love Scale Reliability Statistics

Constructs	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha
Brand Credibility	3	0.800
Brand Integrity	3	0.950
Brand Evangelism	3	0.892
Brand Love	3	0.891

Source: (SPSS Output of Data Analysis 2023)

The result of the Reliability test above indicates a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.800, 0.950, 0.892 and 0.891 respectively; outstanding internal consistency for Brand Trust, Brand Evangelism and Brand Love.

Table 2:**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.965 ^a	.932	.931	.14188

a. Predictors: (Constant), BTrust (Brand Credibility, Brand Integrity)

Table 3**ANOVA^a**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24.733	1	24.733	1228.618	.000 ^b
	Residual	1.812	90	.020		
	Total	26.545	91			

a. Dependent Variable: Bevang

b. Predictors: (Constant), BTrust

Table 4:**Coefficients^a**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.041	.099		10.470	.000
	BTrust	.807	.023	.965	35.052	.000

Table 5:

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.9930	.9861	.0042	2078.4700	3.0000	88.0000	.0000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	.2124	.3560	.5966	.5523	-.4950	.9198
BTrust	.1429	.1111	1.2867	.2016	-.0778	.3637
BLove	.8190	.0820	9.9927	.0000	.6561	.9818

Int_1 -.0005 .0208 -.0245 .9805 -.0419 .0409

Product terms key:

Int_1 : BTrust x BLove

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
X*W	.0000	.0006	1.0000	88.0000	.9805

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

95.0000

----- END MATRIX -----

The R value of .965 on Table 2 shows that the model has a very good degree of the quality to predict the criterion variable, the R2 value of .932 shows that our independent variables explain 0.932% of the variability of our criterion variable and the Adjusted R2 value of .931 which is not far off from .932 expresses the suitability of the regression model with the addition of more independent variables (dimensions). The *F*-ratio in the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results in Table 4 illustrates that the regression model is appropriate for the data. The independent variables statistically significantly predict the dependent variable, $F(1, 90) = 1228.618$, $p < .0005$ (i.e., the regression model is a good fit of the data). Table 4 illustrates the *P values* (quoted under Sig.) as .000 and .000, all lower than the acceptable level of significance, that is below 0.05 for 95% confidence interval. With a 1% increase in brand credibility and brand integrity, Brand evangelism will increase by 0.807% (B value). More so, Table 5 shows that the regression coefficient of the impact brand trust on brand evangelism is 0.9930 and it is significant ie $p = 0.000$ regardless of the presence of the moderating variable. Thus, the null hypotheses H_{01} and H_{02} earlier formulated are rejected. The PROCESS Procedure output on Table 5 also shows that the interaction effect is not significant showing that brand love is not a moderator of the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism as -0.005 and $p = 0.9805$. Hence, H_{03} was accepted.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the impact of Brand trust on Brand Evangelism of Healthcare firms in South-south Nigeria. The analyses show that Brand trust have a positive and statistically significant impact on Brand evangelism. However, brand love is not a moderator of the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism. These findings are agreement with Purohit et al., (2023) who examined the effect of customers' brand experience on brand evangelism and found that human emotion-based indulgence are important conditions for brand evangelism. Additionally, the findings are in consonance with Shin *et al* (2019) who studied the effect of brand trust on brand commitment and brand loyalty and the mediating and moderating roles of brand commitment and brand reputation of smartphone consumers in South Korea. The results show that brand trust and brand commitment have positive and significant influence on brand loyalty. Finally, the findings align with the commitment-trust theory which proposes that the fundamental factors in understanding consumers

and enhancing consumers' buying behaviors is to build commitment and trust in the brand not necessarily love for it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the south-south Nigeria, most people are becoming more discerning about their healthcare choices, brand trust seems to be the foundation upon which successful healthcare firms are created and sustained. Patients and clients are not only looking for medical products and services; they are seeking credibility and integrity in their healthcare journeys. The study examined the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in South-south Nigeria. The empirical data was gathered through copies of questionnaire distributed among clusters of adults within the ages of 25-55years in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers State who are customers of the firms under review. The results indicate that with a 1% increase in brand trust, brand evangelism will increase by 0.807% (B value) and brand love is not a moderator of the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism as -0.005 and $p = 0.9805$. Therefore, we conclude that brand trust has substantial and positive impact on brand evangelism, however, brand love does not moderate the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism of healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria. The study recommends that healthcare firms in south-south Nigeria should establish themselves as trustworthy to be able to reap the rewards of patient loyalty and brand evangelists who become "the megaphones" of the brands' virtues.

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