

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF PRODUCT BRANDING ON CONSUMER LOYALTY IN THE NIGERIAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

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Abstract

In Nigeria's fiercely competitive and saturated telecom market, operators focus on reducing costs, attracting new customers, and, most importantly, retaining existing ones. This study aimed to examine the relationship between product branding and consumer loyalty within the Nigerian telecommunication industry. A survey research design was employed, utilizing primary data collected through questionnaires administered to customers of MTN, Airtel, and Globacom residing in Lagos State. Out of a population of 172, a sample size of 120 was determined using a simple computation method. Statistical tools such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation coefficients, and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23.0 were employed for data analysis. The findings confirm that product branding significantly affects consumer loyalty, aligning with existing literature. The study highlights a strong relationship between product branding and consumer loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. It recommends that telecommunication firms enhance network coverage, improve service quality, and provide seamless access to other networks domestically and internationally. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on product branding and customer loyalty, emphasizing the critical role of branding in determining market success and consumer retention. It concludes that Nigerian telecom providers must prioritize product branding as a core aspect of their marketing strategies to achieve sustained success and foster customer loyalty.

Keywords: Product Branding, Consumer Loyalty, Telecom Industry, Marketing Strategy, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian telecommunication industry faces intense competition, making it essential for industry players to craft effective marketing strategies to secure a substantial market share (Okpara, 2002; Anyanwu, 2003). Unlike the early days of deregulation, most customers now own one or more telephone lines. As a result, the challenge has shifted from acquiring new customers to converting them into loyal customers (Adeleke & Suraju, 2012). The primary focus in the industry has

evolved to emphasize retaining existing customers rather than solely pursuing new ones (Olakunori, 1999). For any telecom company to survive, it must prioritize customer retention as part of its marketing strategy (Keller, 2003; Choi, 2013). Customer loyalty encompasses a mix of qualities driven by satisfaction and the customer's commitment to maintaining a long-term relationship with a brand or company (Lee et al., 2012). It combines attitudes such as recommending the brand, resisting competitors, and buying additional products and behaviors, including

repeat purchasing and promoting the brand to others. Nebo (2004) noted that customer loyalty is vital for a brand's success, turning customers into ambassadors who share positive stories about the brand (Kumar, 2002). Satisfied customers significantly contribute to a brand's image and market position (Alireza & Aran, 2011). Customer loyalty involves creating meaningful connections at every interaction point, fostering a more intimate brand experience (Anjum et al., 2013). Telecommunication companies must focus on product branding to achieve such loyalty. Branding, as defined by numerous scholars, is the process of assigning a unique and distinguishing identity to a product, making it exceptional among competitors in the minds of consumers (Ehikwe, 2005; AMA, 2011). Beyond the physical product, branding adds emotional, psychological, and philosophical values that resonate with consumers (Ahmad, Hassan & Rajput, 2015). Branding thus serves as an identifier and an enhancer, enriching the product beyond its core functionality. Phan and Lan (2001) described branding as an essential element of product strategy, while Lee (2013) highlighted that a product achieves completeness only when it has a name, mark, or symbol. These attributes not only identify the product but also add value that fosters consumer loyalty. Kuo et al. (2013) asserted that branding is a critical tool for increasing consumer loyalty in competitive markets like telecommunications. To this end, the following hypotheses were postulated and tested in their null forms:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between product branding features and customer patronage for telecommunication products.

H₀₂: Product branding has no significant effects on consumer loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Product Branding, Product Level and its Importance

A product is everything that is considered inclusive of satisfaction and utilities that the buyer obtains in the purchase (Malik et al.,

2012). According to Ching (2007), a product is the basic ingredient in the exchange process. The expectation that satisfaction will be realized through exchange is what a product represents; it is the focus bringing buyers and sellers together to make exchange. The marketer sees it as a good or service that most closely meets the requirements of a particular market or segment and yield enough profit to justify its continued existence, while the economist sees it as goods (physical) and services (intangible), while has the ability to give utility to the consumer or user (Edward, 2010; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). According to Kotler and Keller (2009), there are five different levels of product that must be well understood in order to produce a product that will satisfy the needs of the targeted market. Nebo (2004) classified product into four pairs: durable and non-durable categories –this classification reflects the life expectancy of a product; perishable and non-perishable ones – the factor of perishable ability here can be psychological as well as physical; and also as necessity and luxuries ones – necessity are essential, while luxuries are those that match wants more than needs; and finally, those product that are price elastic and those that are price inelastic. Marketers see the variation of products and brands as going through a life cycle that begins with commercialization and ends with removal from the market place. This is defined in terms of two dimension, sales volume and time (Juwan, 2011; Kotler, 2010; Chaudhuri, 2001; Reichheld, 2003). The product life cycle is divided into five stages: introduction or pioneering stage – here, product has not been accepted by the market; rapid growth or market acceptance stage – here, sales rise at an increasing rate as consumers accept and demand the product; slow growth or turbulence stage – here, sales climb high but at a decreasing rate; saturation or maturity stage – here, sales level off and everyone seems to have the product; decline or obsolescence stage – here, sales turn downward, profit usually decreases and competitors leave the scene (Choi et al., 2006; Keller, 2002; Back & Packs, 2003).

Many definitions of branding have been offered by different authors and a lot of reasons have also been deduced by different

authorities as justifications for the adoption of branding as a marketing strategy (Chung et al., 2006). What is more, the popularity of a brand has often been said to be a direct push for sales turnover (Dobers, 2009; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). Not minding the vagaries of definitions of branding, the fact still remains that it is an important aspect of every firm's marketing activity that cannot be overlooked. Branding has been said to be as important as a child's naming ceremony and as old as man/creation (Okpara, 2002; Ahmad, Hassan & Rajput, 2015). Branding is a fixation of special and unique image or attribute to a particular product, which makes it to be exceptional among other products in the eyes and minds of consumers (Ehikwe 2005; Chakraborty & Sengupta, 2014). From the above definition of branding, it means that a brand has an added value to the physical product beyond the core product. These may be aesthetic, emotional, psychological and philosophical values that are embedded in the minds and hearts of consumers. Based on the definition, a brand is a product and the value-added, which personifies it beyond the core product. Onah and Thomas (2004) identified the various types of brands as manufacturer's brand and private brands.

They posited that branding helps to facilitate the performance of various other Marketing Management functions like New Product Introduction, Advertising and other Promotions, Pricing and so on. It is strongly speculated that most times, what consumers buy is name and not quality or functionality or performance. Djupe (2000) captured the very essence of branding when he described it as an integral and intimate part of a product strategy. This suggests that a product is not complete until it is given a name, mark or symbol. From the foregoing discussions, it is obvious that the essence of branding is to create a distinctive and unique product, whose name rings a bell and commands the influence of consumers positively in terms of one's purchase behaviour (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Fraering & Minor, 2013). This against the backdrop for a bigger and more resonating name, for a better perceived name, certain consumers will be willing to pay a little more. Consequently, it is safe to extrapolate that branding

distinguishes the product or service of a manufacturer(s) from that of other manufacturer(s) of the same or similar products. This distinctive element is particularly crucial for the repeat purchasers and first-time buyers or prospects of malt drinks. Van Auken (2007) compiled a list of characteristics of leading brands as follows: has very high awareness, increases customer loyalty, decreases price sensitivity, results in increased market share, especially for the target customers. In this list of characteristics, of great importance is that it reduces price sensitivity, commands customer loyalty and commands positive perception among consumers or customers. This goes to probably suggest why branding may influence consumer purchase behaviour. Levitt (1983) opined that branding is usually a way of distinguishing a company's product from the competing products. It should be an assumption that companies, particularly those starting new and those not sure of what the consumers' reaction to their products would be, would approach the branding exercise with a lot of ambivalence (De Bakker et al., 2005). The resultant name, term, sign, symbol or any combination is what comes out as the brand. This means that a brand can come in the form of a name or mark (Nebo, 2004; Kumar, 2002; Edward et al., 2010).

Lee (2013) stated that branding helps to supplement advertising and personal selling. Branding seeks to provide a prospect that has been notified through advertising, the means of identifying the product in the market place. Therefore, brand name is another product attribute that can contribute to consumer acceptance of a product. It can be extended to refer to the visual features such as package, colour, typography design or slogan, which should assist in stimulating and maintaining demand (Kuo et al., 2013; Choi, 2013). A branded product once acceptable to the consumer can lead to brand loyalty, good brand image, and thus, greater market acceptance of such a product. Because branding adds to the value of products, market acceptance and achieve competitive edge over others market, designation of branding include brand name, brand mark, trade mark copyright, family branding, individual branding, manufacturers brand, distributor's brand, primary brand, secondary

brands and so on (Reichheld, 2003; Adeleke & Suraju, 2012). There is a need for differentiation that gives rise to the branding of products as mark of identification,

Role of the Brand

According to Okpara (2002), the role of branding is multifaceted, affecting consumers and manufacturers in distinct yet interrelated ways. For consumers, product branding is instrumental in facilitating the identification and selection of preferred products. It provides an immediate visual cue that helps buyers quickly distinguish their desired items among a myriad of alternatives in a crowded marketplace. Moreover, strong brands often serve as status symbols, imbuing users with a sense of prestige and belonging. In the case of new products, the presence of an established brand helps consumers evaluate the likely quality and suitability of a product based on the reputation of its owner. For manufacturers, the benefits of effective branding are equally significant. A well-crafted brand affords exclusive legal protection for the manufacturer's unique efforts and distinctive product features, safeguarding them from competitive imitation. It is also crucial in differentiating products for varied market segments that cater to diverse preferences, purposes, and personalities. Additionally, branding enhances product visibility on retail shelves and provides manufacturers with a strategic means to mitigate the challenges of price-based competition, ultimately bolstering market positioning and consumer trust.

Intermediaries, including wholesalers, retailers, agents, and jobbers, also derive considerable benefits from robust product branding. When manufacturers invest in advertising their brands, it eases the selling process for intermediaries who rely on effective marketing support to drive sales. Well-known brands simplify product description and location for shoppers, making the retail experience more efficient and satisfying. Promotional materials centered around established brands are often provided as incentives, helping intermediaries to attract and retain customers. These branded assets not only enhance the overall shopping environment but also lend credibility to the distribution channels, reinforcing the trust

differentiation and recognition in the presence of so many products that have similar outlook (Anyanwu, 2003; Olakunori, 1999).

between consumers and the sellers. In essence, a strong brand acts as a common language that unites the interests of manufacturers and intermediaries, streamlining operations and creating a cohesive market presence that benefits all parties involved.

Customer Loyalty

Alizera and Aram (2011) stated that customer loyalty is a composite of a number of qualities. It is driven by customer satisfaction, yet it also involves a commitment on the part of the customer to make a sustained investment in an ongoing relationship with a brand or company. Customer loyalty is reflected by a combination of attitudes (intention to buy again and/or buy additional products or services from the same company (Kumar, 2002; Malik et al., 2012; Dobers, 2009). Customer loyalty is one major attribute that brands need to thrive in the market place. When customers are loyal to a brand, they become ambassadors by mouthing good stories about the brand (Lee, 2013; Choi, 2013; AMA, 2011). It is a basic truth that when customers are happy, they go to a large extent to promote the good image for the brand (Gronhold et al., 2000). Customer loyalty is all about relevance and meaning throughout every customer touch point. It is all about making the brand experience a more intimate relationship with the customers (Minarti & Segoro, 2014). Brand loyalty is the situation in which a consumer generally buys the same manufacturer-originated product or service repeatedly over time rather than buying from multiple suppliers within the category (Kuusik, 2007; Phan & Lau, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a survey research design. Consumers were purposefully selected, with 172 respondents chosen from three telecom firms—MTN, Airtel, and Globacom. This approach ensured that all consumers had an equal opportunity of being selected, given that the actual population of telecom consumers could not be precisely determined.

Since studying the entire telecom consumer population in Nigeria was impractical, the researcher focused on users of these three firms. The sample was drawn from various customers of the selected telecom firms, and a simple computation method was used to determine the sample size. Consequently, an approximate sample size of 120 respondents was utilized for the study. Secondary sources, including journals, textbooks, reports, and periodicals, were consulted to provide additional insights. The sampling frame consisted of consumers of the selected firms, and both stratified and purposive sampling techniques were employed to select respondents.

Cronbach’s Alpha was used to assess the reliability of the data, while sampling validity was employed to evaluate the validity of the data. This validity measure ensured that the study covered a broad range of areas within the research concept through an appropriate sample size (Cresswell et al., 2003). Statistical tools such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and correlation coefficients were applied to test the research hypotheses where necessary. Responses from the questionnaire were sorted and coded, and data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.0.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents and response rate

Respondents Occupation	Questionnaire administered (sampled)	Percentage of total response (%)
GLOBACOM Consumer	27	27.0
AIRTEL Consumer	20	30.0
MTN Consumer	53	53.0
Total	100	100.0
Gender/Category	Questionnaire administered (sampled)	Percentage of total response (%)
Male	46	46.0
Female	54	54.0
Number of Returned	100	83.3
Number of Not Returned	20	16.7
Total Number of Questionnaires	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2. The Descriptive statistics of Product Branding and Consumer Loyalty in the Telecommunication Industry

Product Branding Features and Customer Patronage for Telecommunication Products	Mean
Product branding and features determine customers' choice and patronage of telecommunication products	4.86
Product branding may influence consumer purchasing behaviour	3.99
Most telecom firms use product branding as their promotional tool	3.88
Product branding increases the level of productivity	3.65
Product branding is necessary for the survival of any business and its product, especially in the highly competitive Nigerian telecommunication industry	3.96
There is a significant relationship between product branding features and customer patronage for telecommunication products	3.88
Product Branding and Consumer Loyalty in the Nigeria Telecommunication Industry	Mean
Customer loyalty helps to relate to the future purchase intention of the customer to repurchase the desired product.	3.89
Product branding determines consumer's loyalty and a better branding leads to increased customers loyalty.	3.98
Product branding helps customer to differentiate the product from other product in the same industry.	3.88
Product branding helps to make awareness of a product in the market	3.76
Products branding are designed to satisfy customers according to their needs.	3.92

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Hypothesis One

H₀: There is no significant relationship between product branding features and customer patronage for telecommunication products.

Results

Table 3. Correlation matrix (Source: Authors’ computation)

		Product Branding	Product choice and customer patronage
PRODUCT BRANDING AND FEATURES	Pearson Correlation	1	0.203*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.043
	N	100	100
CUSTOMER PATRONAGE	Pearson Correlation	0.203*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.043	
	N	100	100
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)			

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Result: Pearson Correlation Value of the hypothesis is 0.203 having the r value of 0.001 (in which p- value is lesser than 0.01), it shows that the correlation result is considered to be significant at 0.05 level. This shows a correlation between the dependent and independent variables with the value of 0.203 at a significance level of 0.05. Hence, it

Hypothesis Two

H0: There is no significant effect of product branding on consumer loyalty in the Nigeria telecommunication industry.

is concluded that there is a significant relationship between product branding features and customer patronage for telecommunication products. Therefore, the decision would be to reject the null hypothesis (H0), and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1).

Table 4. Model summary (Source: Authors’ computation)

Table 4 : Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.349 ^a	0.122	0.116	1.703	1.997
a. Predictors: (Constant), PRODUCT BRANDING					
b. Dependent Variable: CONSUMER LOYALTY					

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5. ANOVA (Source: Authors’ computation)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	63.476	1	63.476	21.897	0.000 ^b
	Residual	458.024	158	2.899		
	Total	521.500	159			
a. Dependent Variable: CONSUMER LOYALTY						
b. Predictors: (Constant), PRODUCT BRANDING						

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The result from the model summary table revealed that the extent to which the variance in customer loyalty can be explained by product branding is 12.2%, that is, (R square

= 0.122). The ANOVA table shows the Fcal 21.897 at a significance level. The table shows that both variables are significant at a significance level of 0.01.

Table 6. Regression coefficients

Regression Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.617	1.504		7.061	0.000
	Product branding	0.396	0.085	0.349	4.679	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: CUSTOMER LOYALTY						

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The coefficient table above shows the simple model that expresses the relationship between customer loyalty and discount. The model is shown mathematically as follows:

$y = a + bx$, where y is customer loyalty and x is discount, a is a constant factor and b is the value of coefficient. From this table, therefore, product branding = $10.617 + 0.396$ customer loyalty. It shows that both tested variables are at a significance level of 0.01, which means that there exists a significant effect of product branding on customer

loyalty. Therefore, for every 100% increase in customer loyalty, product branding contributed 39.6%.

The significance level below 0.01 implies that a statistical confidence of above 99%. This implies that there is a positive significant relationship between product branding and customer loyalty. Thus, the decision would be to reject the null hypothesis (H_0), and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that there is no significant relationship between product choice and customer patronage for telecommunication products. However, a significant relationship exists between product branding and customer loyalty within the Nigerian telecommunication industry. The research highlights that elements of product branding, such as network coverage, service quality, tariff structure, customer service, promotions, value-added services, and access to other networks, play a crucial role in influencing customer choice and patronage. These factors underscore the importance of branding strategies in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences.

Product diversification and innovation also emerge as key determinants of customer patronage. Features like prepaid airtime, mobile banking, mobile internet, mobile cable TV, video conferencing, SIM backup, and improved caller tunes significantly drive customer engagement and loyalty. The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between product branding and consumer loyalty, suggesting that effective branding efforts lead to higher customer retention and satisfaction. Enhanced branding strategies enable businesses to build stronger connections with their customers, ensuring loyalty in a competitive market.

Based on these insights, it is evident that product branding is vital for the success and survival of businesses in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. Branding not only helps in attracting new customers but also in retaining existing ones, which is increasingly important in today's market dynamics. The focus has shifted from merely acquiring new customers to fostering long-term relationships with existing ones while seeking new markets. This dual focus is essential for achieving sustained growth and competitive advantage.

To maintain customer loyalty and improve profitability, telecommunication firms in Nigeria must invest in robust branding initiatives. Quality branding not only

repositions a company's product offerings but also differentiates them from competitors in the marketplace. Such strategic efforts will enable businesses to thrive in the highly competitive Nigerian telecommunication sector, ensuring customer loyalty and long-term success.

In view of this research, it is recommended that:

- i. Telecommunication firms need to prioritize expanding their network coverage and enhancing service quality, as these factors significantly influence customer loyalty. Customers value reliable and widespread connectivity, and addressing these needs is essential for retaining their trust and commitment to the brand. Efforts should be directed toward reducing network disruptions and ensuring consistent service delivery, as this will improve the overall user experience and satisfaction.
- ii. In addition to network quality, maintaining competitive and affordable tariffs is crucial. High pricing often drives customers to switch to alternative providers offering more cost-effective plans. Telecommunication companies in Nigeria should focus on designing pricing models that are customer-friendly, ensuring affordability without compromising on profitability. By doing so, they can strengthen customer loyalty and reduce the likelihood of brand switching.
- iii. Furthermore, providing seamless access to other networks, both locally and internationally, is vital. Customers expect smooth communication across different platforms and regions, making this an important aspect of service delivery. Improving interconnectivity ensures that users can reach others without restrictions, thereby enhancing their overall experience and loyalty to the provider.
- iv. Lastly, firms should adopt a customer-focused approach, integrating feedback and addressing concerns promptly. By understanding the needs

and preferences of their users, telecommunication companies can implement strategic changes that align with customer expectations. This will not only increase satisfaction but also foster long-term loyalty and positive brand reputation in the competitive market.

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