

MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND LOVE ON SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN NIGERIA TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The telecommunication industry is a key sector that significantly contributes in growth and development; it also serves as the primary engine behind innovation and growth across various sectors of the economy. The telecommunication industry in Nigerian is experiencing intense rivalry, with subscribers' growth indicating frequent switching between networks. This makes customer loyalty in the industry crucial for retaining customers and for the firm's profitability. The study examined brand love's mediatory role in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. A cross-sectional study design was used and data was obtained using questionnaires administered to 768 MTN subscribers in North West Nigeria between December, 2023 and January, 2024. Structural Equation Model, Partial Least Squares modeling (SmartPLS) was employed for the analysis. The findings indicated direct relationship between service quality and customer loyalty as statistically significant, while brand love's mediatory role does not substantially improve the ability to predict customer loyalty. There was a clear imperative for telecommunication companies to prioritize the enhancement of service quality, and this can be achieved by adopting a multifaceted approach encompassing improvements in network quality, customer service and overall service delivery. Therefore, this study recommends for further investigation into the nuanced dynamics of these relationships.

Keywords: Brand Love, Customer loyalty, Service quality, Telecommunication Industry, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Telecommunication industry is a major sector that significantly contributes in growth and development of any economy. Its significance cannot be overstated, as it serves as the primary engine behind innovation and growth across various sectors (Muhammed, Ojeleye, Tunde & Taiwo, 2023). Particularly during the

COVID-19 pandemic, the telecommunications industry demonstrated its indispensable nature, playing a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects of the disease. With the widespread lockdowns and restrictions, the reliance on telecommunications services soared as remote work and online learning became the new norm. The sudden surge in demand placed immense pressure on service

providers to meet customer needs swiftly (Naz, Ayman, Ildikó & Róbert, 2021).

The Nigeria telecommunications market experiences intense rivalry, with GSM subscriber growth indicating frequent switching between networks (Adeleke & Aminu, 2012). This makes customer loyalty crucial for retaining customers, as existing customers are more profitable than new ones (Shahzad, Rana, Assunta, & Rohail, 2021). The term “customer loyalty” is a sought topic in marketing with notable antecedents in the marketing literature. However, Yaqub, Halim and Shehzad, (2019) observed inconsistency among researchers of marketing on conceptualization of the most significant antecedents. Service quality is one of such antecedents (Abu-Alhaija, Yusof, Hashim & Jaharuddin, 2018) and customer’s dissatisfaction with service will lead to customer loss despite a firm’s assumption of excellent service (Obe, Sangodoyin, & Chukwuemeka, 2019).

One major reason for telecommunication industry establishment is to meet customers communication needs and for the service provider to make profit. However, there are reports of customer’s complaint about service quality of mobile network operators in Nigeria. Also, despite telecommunication industry expansion in customer base in Nigeria, users continue to complain bitterly about the services. These include complains about high call rates, poor voice signals, illegal deduction of airtime for calls not made, poor network quality, connection errors, and poor interconnectivity with other networks, among others. Nigerians claimed that telecommunication service providers have failed to offer quality service despite the huge amount they are spending to obtain the services (Odunlami & Oludipe, 2022). Because of their dissatisfaction, this results in their frequent switch from one service provider to the other in search of a better offer and this affects customer’s loyalty

(Adebisi, Umukoro & Enyinnaya, 2019; Odunlami & Oludipe, 2022). It is important to know that customer’s loyalty does not happen by chance, but is largely dependent on quality of services received. Obe *et al.* (2019) and Onana (2018) confirmed the appreciable growth in Nigeria telecommunication industry and rating of service quality to be low as the growth trend does not support the claim that subscribers are satisfied with telecommunication services particularly that of MTN in the country.

A review of marketing literatures shows little attention given in examining the mediating roles in loyalty relationships. While researchers are advised to go beyond direct relationships in examining customer’s loyalty models (Ahmad, Raja, Haslinda & Nor, 2018; Abu-Alhaija, Yusof, Hashim & Jaharuddin, 2018), most of the studies on loyalty antecedents are mediated through satisfaction (Yew & Rahman, 2019; Yaqub *et al.*, 2019; Hadi, Aslam & Gulzar, 2019), researchers have given little attention to the mediating relationship of brand love. Brand love is of great importance; it has brought a major shift from transactional perspective to relationship perspective that sees interaction with brand as crucial for business success. Hence, brand love is used as a mediator in this study. This study examined the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the Nigeria Telecommunication industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is a central focus in marketing literature, with scholars highlighting its significance in gaining sustainable competitive advantages and financial growth (Moretta, Cavacece,

Russo & Granata, 2019; Mohamed, 2020). It entails a strong commitment to repurchase preferred products or services, driven by consistent satisfaction and a desire to maintain patronage despite potential alternatives (Kim, Choe & Petrick, 2018; Madeline & Sihombing, 2019). This commitment is reflected in various loyalty behaviors, including regular repurchases, recommending the product or service to others, and resisting persuasion from competitors (Griffin, 2006).

The determinants of customer loyalty encompass perceived service value, service quality, commitment, customer trust, and satisfaction (Kungumapriya & Malarmathi, 2018). Customer loyalty brings about numerous benefits for businesses, including reduced retention costs, decreased marketing expenses, and increased revenue through repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Imran & Ghulam, 2020). Furthermore, loyal customers tend to be less price-sensitive, contributing to sustained profitability and financial performance (Kungumapriya & Malarmathi, 2018; Zaid & Patmawati, 2021).

Three main approaches can be employed to measure customer loyalty, namely; the attitudinal, the behavioral and the composite approaches (Iryna, Oksana, & Volodymyr, 2019). The attitudinal approach focuses on customers' emotional attachment and positive attitudes towards a preferred brand, reflecting a psychological disposition for the brand (Kassim & Abdullah, 2010). In contrast, the behavioral approach, also known as transactional loyalty, emphasizes long-term relationships with businesses resulting in repeated purchases (Iryna *et al.*, 2019). However, this may not fully capture true commitment, as repurchases may be driven by convenience rather than genuine loyalty (Abu-Alhaija *et al.*, 2018). The composite approach integrates both attitudes and behaviors, recognizing that true loyalty

involves a combination of positive attitudes and repeat patronage (Dick & Basu, 1994). This study adopts the composite approach which is a holistic view that considers customers' feelings, emotions, and repurchase intentions, aiming to build genuine loyalty with high degrees of attitude and repeat patronages (Abu-Alhaija *et al.*, 2018).

Service Quality

Service quality is gaining much attention by academic practitioners since the last three decades, and is identified as a contentious area of service marketing (Akroush, *et al.*, 2019; Mohammed, 2020). The term "Service quality" originated in the 1980s as a result of marketers' realization that only product quality was not able to guaranteed competitive business advantage. Empirical evidence indicates that today's business world, service quality is critical for success and firm's sustainability (Meesala & Paul, 2018). Therefore, several researchers (Singh, 2019; Nihayah, Marwan, Nawras, Ahmad and Ahmad, 2021; Okocha *et al.*, 2021) focused their attention on service quality due to its positive impact on firm's profitability, customer's satisfaction, customer's loyalty and customer's retention, which brings about competitive advantage, increased markets share and return on investment, among others.

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), service quality is perceived to be a global judgment relative to the superiority of service or its degree of excellence; they viewed service quality in comparison between customers' expectations and the experienced service.

Gronroos (1984) considered Service Quality as an outcome of comparison; it compares customers' expectations before service and experience after service. Service quality plays a crucial role; it promotes strong and lasting relationship in

customers/service provider's relationship which has two-way value. When a service is qualitative, customers derive real value by being satisfied and loyal to the firm which is translated into value creation for businesses by enhancing profitability and sustainability. Opele *et al.* (2020) studied service quality and its influence on students' preference for GSM providers in Lagos State tertiary institutions. They concluded that increased GSM service quality led to increased preference for the service providers among students of tertiary institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Service quality is a multi-dimensional and abstract concept and the absence of objective measure of it makes the measurement a very complex issue that often rely on customers' perception to determine service quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Measuring and improving service quality according to Pankaj (2017) is more difficult than for products, as unsatisfactory services cannot be replaced or repaired and services being intangible in nature varies according to the service contact 'mood'. Service Quality in this study is referred to perceived feelings of customers and excellent judgment of superiority in service performance of telecommunication services.

Various studies on telecommunication service quality revealed differing dimensions. Abd-Elrahman (2018) identified eight common SERVQUAL dimensions globally that recur more which are reliability, tangibles, assurance, responsiveness and empathy (as functional service quality) while convenience, complaint handling and perceived network quality as (technical service quality). Abdullah and Sanad (2017) used functional quality and added network quality. Chee and Husin (2020) used pricing structure, customer service, network, mobile services, billing system and value-added services (VAS) to measure service quality.

In this study, service quality will be described using Network quality (Wang & Lo, 2002; Wang, Lo & Yang, 2004; Asiegbu *et al.*, 2015). The researcher chose network quality dimension owing to its peculiarity in the telecommunication industry and considered it as the main mobile telecommunication dimension. Customer will always be interested in the quality of the network they are subscribing to and once there is quality in network all other dimensions will fall in place. Network quality indicates the performance of network in terms of call drop rate, quality of voice, and network congestion (Sharma & Ojha, 2004; Rahhal, 2015).

Brand love

Brand love, a novel construct in marketing is pivotal in consumer-brand relationships (Bigne *et al.*, 2020; Joshi & Garg, 2020; Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). Rooted in emotional attachment theories, it denotes intense affection for a brand, prompting a desire to defend and remain loyal (Robertson *et al.*, 2022). Zhang, Peng, Peng, Zhang, Ren and Chen (2020) described brand love as a very strong feelings and affection for a brand that brings about desire to defend the brand and stay with the brand. Initially explored by Ahuvia in 1993, brand love signifies a profound connection akin to human affection (Cho & Hwang, 2020). Antecedents of brand love encompass brand trust, identification, quality, uniqueness, and perceived value (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bairrada, Coelho & Coelho, 2018) and ultimately, brand love engenders brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012).

In the marketing paradigm, brand love has brought a major shift from transactional perspective to a more relational perspective relationship perspective (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2020). The response of a satisfied customers in undesirable situations differs

from that of a brand lover; forgiveness/non-complaint is a means brand lover often use to cover for faults of loved brands (Amani & Fend, 2022) which is not found with satisfied customers. This study extends the established knowledge of loyalty by focusing on brand love (a relational-specific dimensions) as a mediating variable to loyalty. Brand love is therefore seen as happy feelings and a very strong emotional attachment for a given brand that leads to defending a brand, building strong customers' relationship with a brand and repatronizing intention.

Service quality and Customer loyalty

Service quality is widely recognized as a crucial determinant of customer satisfaction, leading to positive experiences and increased customer loyalty and profitability (Hapsawati, 2019; Dam & Dam, 2021; Putra, Jayadi & Steven, 2021). Studies across various industries, including telecom, consistently show service quality as a key predictor of customer loyalty (Rana *et al.*, 2019). Research indicates that good service quality enhances perceived value and fosters positive attitudes toward products/services, indirectly influencing customers' intentions to repurchase (Yaqub *et al.*, 2019; Harazneh *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, customer satisfaction is a significant factor in driving loyalty and organizational performance (Ahmed & Abdulrab, 2017; Harazneh *et al.*, 2020). Despite extensive literature on service quality (Asyraf, Zainudin, Norfadzilah, Hazimi, & Puspa, 2019; Pakurar, Haddad, Nagy, Popp & Olah, 2019; Mutinda, 2020; Dam & Dam, 2021; Putra, Jayadi & Steven, 2021), there is a notable gap in understanding the relationship between service quality, customer loyalty among MTN subscribers in north west Nigeria. From this review, hypotheses one is stated as follows:

H0₁: Service quality does not positively and significantly affect customer loyalty

among MTN subscribers in North-west Nigeria.

Brand love and customer loyalty

Marketing literature underscores the positive impact of brand love on company loyalty, translating into customer loyalty (Fernandes & Inverneiro, 2021; Santos & Schlesinger, 2021). Study by Riri, Widhy and Titik (2023) found a positive and significant influence of brand love on brand loyalty. Also, Study by Wijekoon and Fernando (2020) demonstrated a complementary partial mediation of brand love in the establishment of connection between brand experience and loyalty. The study concluded that brand love plays major and significant role in establishing strong connection between brand experience and loyalty. Ghorbanzadeh, and Rahehagh (2021) in their study confirmed that brand love is a strong antecedent of brand loyalty and also authenticates mediatory role of emotional brand attachment and love in the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. Thus, the findings demonstrated the relevance of brand love in building customer's loyalty. These studies do not consider the mediatory role of brand love on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, highlighting gaps that this research aims to address. Hypotheses two is stated as follows:

H0₂: Brand love does not mediate the relationship between service quality and MTN customer's loyalty in North-west Nigeria.

The "Consumer-Brand Relationship" (CBR) theory of Fournier, (1998) with emphasis on affection best explain the mediating role of brand love on relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunications

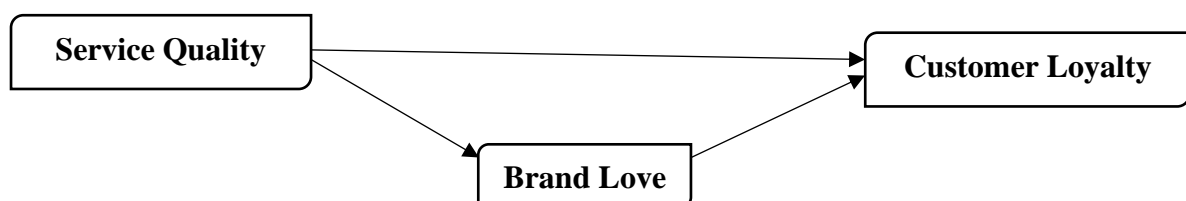
industry. Fournier (1998) emphasizes that customers' affectionate ties with brands help as a connection to customer commitment also the connection that exist between customers and their brands bring about consumer-brand relationship. The theory posits that consumers develop emotional attachments to brands, similar to the emotional bonds formed in human relationships (Fournier, 1998). According to this theory, when consumers experience high levels of service quality from a brand, it can evoke positive emotions and feelings of affection towards the brand. These emotional attachments, in turn, influence consumer loyalty by strengthening the bond between the customer and the brand.

In the context of the relationship between service quality, brand love, and customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry, the theory suggests that when customers perceive high levels of service quality from their telecommunication service provider, it can evoke positive emotions and feelings of attachment towards the brand. This emotional attachment, referred to as brand love, then mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Essentially, the theory suggests that strong emotional connections fostered by

positive service experiences lead to increased brand love, which subsequently enhances customer loyalty.

Research Model

From the review of concepts, the research model depicted a sequential relationship among service quality, brand love, and customer loyalty in the context of the Nigerian telecommunications industry. It suggests that higher levels of service quality provided by telecommunication service providers lead to the development of brand love among customers. This brand love, characterized by positive emotions and a strong emotional attachment to the brand, then serves as a mediator between service quality and customer loyalty. In other words, when customers perceive high levels of service quality, it evokes positive emotions and fosters affection for the brand, ultimately enhancing customer loyalty. Thus, the model illustrates how positive service experiences contribute to the formation of brand love, which in turn influences customer loyalty within the telecommunications sector in Nigeria.



SQ→CL = Direct relationship

SQ→BL→CL = Indirect relationship

Figure 1: Research Model

Source: Researcher's Illustration, (2024)

METHODOLOGY

The study was a cross sectional in nature and the data collected with pretested questionnaires administered to MTN subscribers in North west geopolitical zone

of Nigeria. Primary data was obtained through questionnaires and secondary data was gotten from reports of Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) and National Bureau of statistics (NBS).

The study focused on MTN voice subscribers in Nigeria's North-western states, targeting a population of 15,409,539 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Using Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's formula, a sample size of 384 was calculated and then doubled to 768 to cover non-response rate (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Dillman *et al.*, 2014). Purposive sampling was used, with proportions from each state matching their subscribers' strength. The sample sizes for

each state were determined proportionally, ranging from 47 to 269 respondents (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022) which ensured representation across states, acknowledging the varying subscribers' densities. In this study, service quality (network quality), brand love and customer loyalty were reflective constructs and they were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagreed to strongly agree.

Table 1: Summary of Measures and Measurement Scale

S/no	Construct	Dimension	Item	Construct Source
1	Service quality			
	(Network quality)	1	7	Wang & Lo (2002); Wang, Lo & Yang (2004) and Asiegbu <i>et al.</i> (2015)
2	Brand Love	1	7	Carroll & Ahuvia (2006)
3	Customer loyalty	1	8	Lim <i>et al.</i> (2006), Madeline & Sihombing (2019)

Source: Author Design, 2024

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before conducting the primary analysis, it was ensured that the assumptions of normality and multicollinearity were met, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2017). Subsequently, the acquired data underwent analysis using Partial Least Squares modeling (SmartPLS). Following the methodology proposed by Hair *et al.* (2017), the validation and evaluation of the model employed in this study were carried out through a two-stage assessment process: measurement models (external models) and structural models (internal models).

Measurement Model

To assess the measurement model used in this study, the researchers looked at the reliability of the individual items measuring each potential construct, the internal consistency reliability (i.e., composite reliability and Cronbach Alpha), discriminant validity, and convergence validity for each construct (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). Although Hair *et al.* (2017) presented a scale of development indicator, an outer loading of 0.60, an AVE of 0.50, and a Composite Reliability/Cronbach Alpha of 0.70 are dependable and acceptable. The table below summarized the validity and reliability findings

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Table 1: Items loading, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Constructs	Indicators	Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Love	BL1	0.76	0.83	0.88	0.59
	BL3	0.73			
	BL4	0.73			
	BL5	0.75			
	BL6	0.86			
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.86	0.88	0.91	0.58
	CL2	0.77			
	CL3	0.74			
	CL4	0.84			
	CL5	0.64			
	CL6	0.76			
	CL7	0.71			
Service Quality	SQ1	0.90	0.88	0.91	0.62
	SQ2	0.81			
	SQ3	0.76			
	SQ4	0.68			
	SQ5	0.73			
	SQ6	0.84			

Source: Field data computation (2024)

As can be seen in table 1, each of these constructs is reliable because their composite reliability and Cronbach alpha values exceeded the 0.60 threshold level. Again, all constructs showed indicator reliability and convergence validity, since each structure has an AVE value more than 0.50.

Additionally, Duarte and Amaro (2018) developed an additional methodology for determining discriminant validity: the

Heterotrait-multimethod (HTMT) matrix. Hamid *et al.* (2017) noted that, in comparison to the HTMT criterion, the standard Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading are insufficient and insensitive for detecting the effectiveness of the identification. As a result, the discriminant validity of the HTMT matrix is determined.

Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	Brand Love	Customer Loyalty	Service Quality
Brand Love			
Customer Loyalty	0.76		
Service Quality	0.60	0.80	

Source: PLS3.0 Out-put

As illustrated in Table 2, the HTMT statistics are calculated using the correlation of their construct. Due to the fact that the HTMT value is less than the 0.85 recommended by (Hair et al., 2017), this study's reflective latent structure has discriminant validity.

Structural Model

After the measurement model's conditions are satisfied, the structural model is evaluated. The first step in evaluating structural models is to examine theoretical relationships. Specifically, a typical 5,000 bootstrap was used on a sampled instance of 768 to determine the significance of path coefficients for the correlations (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

Table 3: Hypotheses Test

Relationship	Beta Values	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Service Quality (Network Quality)-> Customer Loyalty	0.69	0.18	4.05	0.00
Service Quality (Network Quality)-> Brand Love -> Customer Loyalty	0.18	0.15	0.89	0.38

Source: PLS3.0 Out-put

The table presents findings from hypotheses testing regarding the relationships between service quality, brand love, and customer loyalty. The first hypothesis examined the direct link between service quality and customer loyalty, revealing a substantial positive relationship with a beta value of 0.69 and a statistically significant t-statistic of 4.05, supported by a p-value of 0.00. This suggests that higher service quality positively influences customer loyalty. The positive and significant effect of service quality on customer loyalty is also in agreement with some empirical past studies such as (Turaga, Salaka, Jeeban & Turaga, 2021; Farheen, Ayman, Ildikó & Róbert, 2021; Mohammed, 2020) which was contrary to the findings of Sitorus and Yustisia (2018) that found out that service quality had no positive influence on customer's loyalty in five biggest Indonesia foreign exchange private banks.

However, the second hypothesis, which explored the indirect path through brand love, showed a weaker association. The mediatory role of brand love was not significant in the study, this is in contrast with other studies (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021; Riri, Widhy & Titik, 2023).

While service quality had a positive beta value of 0.18 regarding its impact on brand love, the subsequent effect on customer loyalty seems less significant, indicated by a lower t-statistic of 0.89 and a notably higher p-value of 0.38, suggesting a less conclusive relationship between service quality, brand love, and customer loyalty. These findings imply that while direct service quality positively affects customer loyalty, the intermediary role of brand love might not significantly bolster customer loyalty in this context, warranting further investigation into the nuanced dynamics of these relationships.

The Determination Coefficient (R^2), the Effect Size (F^2) and the Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

The coefficient of determination or R-square level was calculated to determine the amount of variation explained by exogenous latent variables over endogenous latent variables. Chin (2010) defines R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 as substantive, moderate, and weak,

respectively. The two numbers indicated the possible effect or impact of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable using a criterion of 0.02, 0.15, or 0.35 to designate small, medium, or big (Cohen, 1988). However, the predictive correlation (Q^2) of external latent factors was assessed in this study using cross-validated redundancy criteria, which reflect endogenous latent variables, as shown in Table 4 below

:Table 4: R-Square, F-Square & Q-Square

Indicator	R square	Adjusted R square
CL	0.786	0.776
Indicators	SI	Effect Size
BL	0.04	Small
SQ	0.12	Small
Indicator	SSO	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
CL	2145	0.2411

As illustrated in Table 4, The table provided metrics assessing the goodness of fit and predictive power of the model. The R-square (R square) and adjusted R-square (Adjusted R square) values offer insights into the proportion of variance explained by the model. In this case, the model exhibits a relatively high R-square of 0.786 and an adjusted R-square of 0.776, indicating that approximately 78.6% of the variance in customer loyalty (CL) can be accounted for by the predictors. This suggests a strong overall fit of the model to the data.

Additionally, the table includes indicators of effect size (SI) for the predictors, namely brand love (BL) and service quality (SQ). Both indicators showed small effect sizes, with BL having an effect size of 0.04 and SQ with an effect size of 0.12. While these effects are small, they contributed to the overall predictive power of the model.

Furthermore, the table presented the sum of squares total (SSO) and the Q-square (Q^2), which measure the predictive relevance of the model. The Q-square value of 0.2411 indicated that the model has predictive relevance, suggesting that it is able to predict customer loyalty to a reasonable extent based on the included predictors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings indicate that the direct relationship between service quality and customer loyalty appears to be robust and statistically significant. The high R-square value (0.786) indicates that the model accounts for a substantial amount of variance in customer loyalty, with service quality playing a significant role in explaining this variance. This suggests that

investing in improving service quality can lead to increased customer loyalty. However, the indirect path through brand love seems to have a weaker impact on customer loyalty. The effect size for brand love (BL) is small (0.04), indicating that while it contributes to the model, its influence on customer loyalty is relatively minor compared to service quality. Additionally, the Q-square value (0.2411) suggests that while the model has predictive relevance, the inclusion of brand love as a predictor does not substantially improve its ability to predict customer loyalty beyond service quality alone.

Based on the findings regarding the mediating role of brand love between service quality and customer loyalty in the Nigeria telecommunication industry, several strategic recommendations emerged. Firstly, there is a clear imperative for telecommunication companies to prioritize the enhancement of service quality. This involves a multifaceted approach encompassing improvements in network quality, customer service, billing system, value-added services, responsiveness, and overall service delivery. By investing in technology infrastructure, training customer service representatives, and implementing stringent quality control measures, companies can elevate service quality to meet and exceed customer expectations. This proactive approach not only directly impacts customer loyalty but also sets the stage for fostering brand love, as positive experiences with service quality lay the foundation for emotional connections with the brand.

Secondly, companies should actively cultivate brand love as a complementary strategy to enhance customer loyalty. While service quality serves as a pivotal driver of loyalty, the indirect effect through brand love underscores the importance of building strong emotional connections with customers. Telecommunication firms can

achieve this by delivering consistent brand messaging, fostering positive brand experiences, and engaging customers through meaningful interactions. Loyalty programs, community events, and social media engagement can all contribute to humanizing the brand and fostering deeper connections with customers. By nurturing brand love, companies can amplify the impact of service quality improvements, creating a more resilient and loyal customer base.

Furthermore, integration is key to maximizing the synergistic effects of service quality and brand love initiatives. Telecommunication companies should align efforts aimed at enhancing service quality with strategies designed to cultivate brand love. For instance, employees should embody the brand values in customer interactions, ensuring that every touchpoint reinforces a positive brand experience. Likewise, communication of service quality improvements should be framed in a way that resonates with the brand identity, further strengthening brand love. Continuous monitoring and measurement of key performance indicators related to service quality, brand sentiment, customer satisfaction, and loyalty metrics are essential for assessing the effectiveness of these strategies and identifying areas for refinement.

LIMITATION AND SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study does not consider other technical dimensions of service quality such as billing system, network coverage, value-added services (VAS) as only network quality was used to measure service quality. Also, the functional aspect of service quality was not considered which can be added in subsequent studies therefore, more service quality dimensions could be captured in subsequent studies. The present study dwelled on cross-sectional data;

longitudinal approach may be required in further studies to examine customers' long-term loyalty towards telecommunication services with emphasis on MTN subscribers. This study was conducted in North-west Nigeria, similar study could be replicated in other geo political zones of Nigeria to aid comparison and generalizability.

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