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LOYAL CONNECTIONS: A DEEP DIVE INTO THE IMPACT OF PRODUCT, PRICE, PROMOTION, AND DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES ON BRAND LOYALTY WITHIN THE NIGERIAN TELECOMMUNICATION DOMAIN

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Abstract

Abstract: This study aims to examine the impact of marketing mix elements on brand loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. Through a descriptive survey design and stratified sampling technique, 100 employees and consumers were selected from selected telecommunication firms in Asaba, Delta State. The study found that distribution strategy has a significant relationship with product management and that telecommunication firms use an integrated marketing communications strategy as their major promotion strategy. The study concludes that telecommunication firms should use price promotion strategies, such as price discounts, free samples, and bonus packs, to increase customers' intention to purchase their products and hence, increase sales volume. The research questions and hypotheses explored in the study focus on the effect of each marketing mix element on brand loyalty. The article includes a literature review, discussion of the conceptual framework of marketing mix elements and brand loyalty, and data presentation and analysis which revealed the extent to which price, distribution, promotion, and product affect brand loyalty. This study provides insights that telecommunication firms can leverage to develop and implement strategies that enhance brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Marketing Mix, Brand Loyalty, Price Promotion, Distribution Strategy, Integrated Marketing Communication, Nigeria Telecommunication Industry.

INTRODUCTION

Over the recent years, the major version of concepts which are associated with the 4Ps (product, price, promotion and place), has been criticized from the fact that a wide range of marketing mix strategies has been proposed for the different marketing contexts. It can be noted that services differ from products due to the characteristic nature of the services—intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and also perishability. Gronroos (2010) improved on the early version of marketing mix for the services from the 4Ps to the 7Ps. The additional 3Ps are people, physical and processes.

Marketing efforts do not impact performance (product sales or market share) independently of each other. Marketing mix activities need to be coordinated because they interact to determine performance (Kiprotich, 2012). Organizations all over the world exist to provide products and services for the society. Unfortunately, some organizations are unable to manage their products and services. Such organizations seldom survive; they often collapse and are liquidated. To continue to existe, organizations must manage their products or services in a manner that will help them provide such products or services optimally to the society. Organizations achieve this through the combined efforts of their managers. The managers must through their performance of the basic functions of planning, organizing, directing and controlling ensure that whatever the organization produces is socially desirable and acceptable as anything to the contrary will result to doom for the enterprise. Furthermore, researchers in this stream are interested in understanding the demand elasticity of a specific individual marketing mix elements (such as price) in each market in the sample and not on investigating the average/relative effects of marketing mix elements across markets (Palmer, 2010; Saguti, 2015).

According to Kotler (2015), marketing strategies, product, price, place and promotion are strategies that organizations use to react to market and internal forces that will enable an organization achieve their objective. Ghouri, Khan, Malik and Razzaq (2011) assert that organizations that have implemented effective marketing strategies are able to increase their sales performance, market share and achieve a competitive advantage. Marketing mix refers to the 4Ps that organizations use in their marketing process to achieve organizational goals and meet customers' needs and wants. It is a set of tactical marketing tools that includes product, price, place and promotion that marketing managers are able to control to achieve the desired objectives (Shankar & Chin, 2011). It is therefore to this end that this study—Marketing Mix Elements on Brand Loyalty in the Telecommunication Industry—is germane in this time.

Statement of the Problem

Marketing mix elements have been an important aspect in achieving the objectives in most organizations. Organizations' decision making process on selection and implementation of appropriate marketing strategy makes it possible for them to adhere to the objectives easily; however, most of them do not meet their objectives while others venture into different strategies due to the competition in the market. It focuses on obtaining information about customers' needs and wants, taking action based on this information in order to satisfy the needs and wants. The 4Ps of product, place, price and promotion is a generic marketing mix that has been applied by many organizations and businesses to position themselves competitively in the market.

By gaining insights into how sales are affected by the marketing mix elements, industry players are going to design their marketing campaigns better to reap higher profits while minimizing costs, hence improving on the efficiency.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the right marketing mix strategies, that will enable organizations to pursue their marketing objectives in the target markets and therefore achieve the organizational objectives, are not fully implemented. The application of the right marketing mix will ensure provision of the right product, at the right price, in the right place, thus ensuring that resources are efficiently and effectively utilized. The utilization of technology in promotions, pricing, distribution and innovation or product development ensures a match of products to customer needs. It is therefore in this light that this study seeks to assess this knowledge gap by focusing on examining the impact of marketing mix elements on brand loyalty in the Nigeria telecommunication industry.

Research Questions

The paper will attempt to answer the following research questions:

i. What is the influence of price on brand loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication industry?
ii. What is the effect of distribution of product on brand loyalty in the Nigeria telecommunication industry?
iii. What is the relationship between promotion and brand loyalty in the Nigeria telecommunication industry?

iv. What is the impact of product on brand loyalty in the Nigeria telecommunication industry?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The following are the hypotheses contained in this study:

HO_1: There is no significant relationship between price and brand loyalty.

HO_2: There is no significant relationship between distribution and brand loyalty.

HO_3 There is no significant relationship between promotion and brand loyalty.

HO_4 There is no significant relationship between product and brand loyalty.

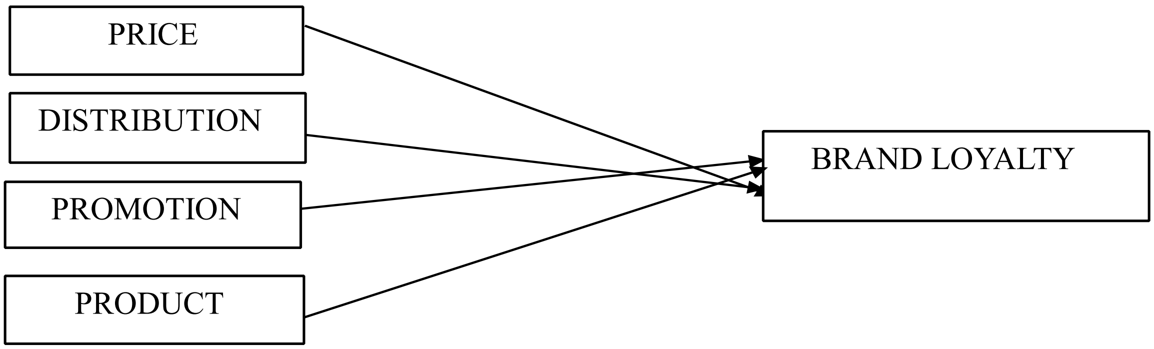
LITERATURE REVIEW Conceptual Review Concept of Marketing Mix Elements

Marketing mix is one of the major concepts in modern marketing. Kotler (2013) opined that marketing mix is the set of controllable, tactical marketing tools that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market. It consists of everything the firm can do to influence the demand for its product. The main possibilities can be grouped into four variables known as the "4Ps": product, price, place, and promotion. Product means the good and service combination the company offers to the target market. Price is the amount of money customers has to pay to obtain the product. Place includes company activities that make the product available to target consumers. Promotion means activities that communicate the merits of the product and persuade target customers to buy it. An effective marketing program blends all of the marketing mix elements for product (4Ps) and services (7Ps) into a coordinated program designed to achieve the company's marketing objectives. The marketing mix constitutes the company's tactical tool kit for establishing strong positioning in target markets (McCarty, 2011).

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refer to consumers' attitude that directly influences the consumption decision and determines retailers' optimal pricing strategies (Bashan, 2011). He opined that in some models, brand loyal behavior can either be defined by the maximum price different consumers are willing to accept for a particular product of a high price, before switching to price reduced brands which is "degree of loyalty" or by the size of the loyal consumers' segments which is "extent of loyalty." Anderson and Kumar (2007) and Jing and Wen (2008) argued that branded products might differ with the level of loyalty or the size of their loyal consumer segment in the target market. Palmer (2011) showed that both branded products grant the same discount; the larger brand promotes less often. However, if the switchers are willing to pay a premium to one of the brands, a premium price brand will offer a higher discount and also promote more often, unless its share of the loyal segment is very large (Palmewe, 2011). Whetton (2011) posited that the two producers sequentially choose the normal price as well as the depth of the price. Thus, producers are able to react on each other's decisions. In his model, only one manufacturer (the stronger firm) has loyal customers who are willing to buy at anytime. The loyal customers' willingness to pay a premium for their loyal brand differs across consumers. In mixed strategy equilibrium, a weak brand pursues an **everyday low price** (EDLP) strategy with a low regular price and no price promotions. A strong brand chooses a high regular price and engages in price promotional activities. The outcome of the sequential game is both price setting strategies function as defensive tools to keep the loyal customers at the strong brand and the non-loyal consumers at the EDLP brand.

Independent Variable **Dependent Variable**
MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS **BRAND LOYALTY**



Source: Researcher's Model

Price and Brand Loyalty

According to Perrault and McCarthy (2002), managers must decide the right price. In price setting, the kind of competition in the target market and the cost of the whole marketing mix must be put into consideration. A manager must also try to estimate customers' reaction to possible prices. Beside this, the manager must know current practices like markups, discounts, and other terms of sale. If customers do not accept the price, all of the planning efforts get wasted. In the discussion on "relation of strategic policies to operational decision," they posited that the firm should maintain a "premium" price, but encourage retailers to make large-volume orders by offering discounts on quantity purchases.

Distribution and Brand Loyalty

Distribution strategy is the method a firm uses to get products and services to different channels and networks with the objective to reach the end customer, either directly or indirectly. The intermediaries include the agents, wholesalers, distributors and also retailers. These elements help in ensuring that a firm has provided the customers with quality customer service that has an influence on the level of customer satisfaction (Palmer, 2011). Customers require convenience for the product being offered, such as the physical access. Distribution channels are important in a firm's level of competitiveness. This is because they affect the time when the product reaches the customer as well as final price of the product. Through distribution strategy, an organization gets to understand the sales channels through enhanced knowledge, better segmentation on the distribution within the sales channels, the roles played by the intermediaries on the sales process, getting to understand centers of influence on the sales channel as well as the position of the firm in relation to the sales channel (Whetton, 2011).

Promotion and Brand Loyalty

Marketing mix, according to Busari, Olannye and Taiwo (2002), refers to the combination of decisions on controllable variables (product, price, promotion, distribution and mega marketing practices) that spell out the marketers strategies. The term "mix" implies that each of the elements of the marketing mix must blend and fit together in harmony with the other elements. The variables are controllable because the marketer decides what they should be. According to Perreanlt and McCarthy (2002) the third p (promotion) is concerned with telling the target market or others in the channel of distribution about the "right" product. We use promotion to tell the target customers (and others in the channel) about the product that has been designed for them.

Product and Brand Loyalty

According to Czinkota and Ronkainen (2010), the performance of the product or service includes reliability, durability, comfort and convenience. The product decision involves deciding what goods or services should be offered to a group of customers. An important element is new product development. As technology and tastes change, products become outof- date and inferior to competition, so companies must replace them with features that customer's value. Product decision also involves choices regarding brand names, warranties, packaging and the services which should accompany the product offering.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed research design for this paper is the descriptive survey design, which seeks to describe the existing status of what is being investigated; this will also help the researcher to know where the variables are obtained and how the objectives can be achieved. The study covered selected telecommunication firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area, Asaba, Delta State. This research work will take the form of a field survey, and it is expedient to mention that the population of this study was restricted to the MTN telecommunication firm in Asaba, Delta State. Therefore, the telecommunication firms in Asaba, Delta State will constitute the population. Hence, the population consisted of one hundred and thirty three (133) employees and consumers. As a result of the inability of the researcher to effectively study every single firm under observation, a representative number was chosen as the sample size population. Using the Taro Yamene Model, the sample size was determined to be 100. The study also employed the stratified random sampling method in the procedure that would eventually lead to the selection of the firms whose employees would participate. Multiple Regression Analysis via the use of (SPSS) Software, version 2, was adapted to analyze the data collected. In line with Nkeonye Asua (2011), the justification for the choice of regression analysis as the statistical tool for this work is that it will produce a robust and dependable result since it is highly efficient and technically reliable.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS Table 4.1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Characteristics	**Measuring group**	**No of valid responses**	**Valid percentages**
Gender	Male	37	37
	Female	63	63
	Total	**100**	**100**
Age	18–30years	50	50
	31–40years	40	40
	41–50years	10	10
	Total	**100**	**100**
Educational qualification	SSCE/GCE/NECO	-	-
	NCE/OND	45	45
	HND/B.Sc	46	46
	MBA/M.Sc.	9	9
	Total	**100**	**100**

Marital Status	Married	65	65
	Single	35	35
	Total	**100**	**100**

Source: *Field work, 2023*

Table 4.1 shows the demographic information of the respondents. The table revealed that 37 (37%) of the respondents were males and 63 (63%) were females. In terms of age, 20 (20%) of the respondents were in the age group of 18–30 years, 70 (70%) were in the age group of 31– 40 years, while 10 (10%) were 41–50 years. In terms of educational qualification, 50 (50%) were NCE/OND, 40 (40%) were HND/B.Sc, while 10 (10%) were MBA/M.Sc. holders. More so, on marital status of respondents, 65 (65%) were married, while 35 (35%) of the respondents were single.

Table 4.2: Correlation Matrix between Studied Variables

		Price	Distribution	Promotion	Product	Brand loyalty
Price	Pearson correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	100				
Distribution	Pearson correlation	.324**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	100	100			
Promotion	Pearson correlation	.275**	.121**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	100	100	100		
Product	Pearson correlation	.232**	.298**	.535**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	100	100	100	100	
Brand loyalty	Pearson correlation	634**	.300**	.395**	.532**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	100	100	100	100	100

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

The result in Table 4.2 shows that the tested variables showed an overwhelming positive correlation ranging from (.121 to .634), implying that there is a significant positive association between the variables of marketing mix elements and brand loyalty.

Table 4.3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.633[a]	.401	.392	1.6811

a. Predictors: (Constant), price, distribution, promotion and product b. Dependent Variable: brand loyalty

Source: Research Data (2019)

Table 4.4: Regression Analysis of Marketing Mix Elements and Brand Loyalty Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	3.037	1.130		2.688	.008
	Price	.472	.055	.461	8.623	.000
1	Distribution	.236	.058	.227	4.094	.000
	Promotion	.292	.057	.289	4.616	.000
	Product	.199	.052	.187	3.812	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

The B-values of marketing mix elements—price ($\beta = .461$, $p < .001$ distribution ($\beta = .227$, $p < .001$), promotion ($\beta = .289$, $p < .001$) and product ($\beta = .187$, $p < .001$)—had exhibited positive effects on brand loyalty. The p-value calculated of price (.000 < .0.05), distribution (.000 < 0.05), promotion (.000 < 0.05) and product (.000 < 0.05) had predicted brand loyalty with a statistically significant at 0.05.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS Price and Brand Loyalty

Data analyzed revealed that there was an overwhelming positive coefficient value among the variables that measured price suggesting that they were all affected by price. Furthermore, the result of tested HO_1 indicated that there is a significant statistical relationship between price and brand loyalty. Therefore, price serves as an important player in influencing brand loyalty. The findings are consistent with Nagle and Holden (2002) who stated that value pricing is the price of a customer's next best alternative plus the value of differentiating features. Value based pricing is product driven and price is based on perceived product value. According to Perreanlt and McCarthy (2002), managers must decide the right price. Price setting must consider the kind of competition in the target market and the cost of the whole marketing mix. A manager must also try to estimate customer reaction to possible prices.

Distribution and Brand Loyalty

Distribution showed an overwhelming positive coefficient value among the variables. Furthermore, the results of tested HO_2 reported that there is a significant (.000) statistical relationship between distribution and brand loyalty. The finding is consistent with the distribution strategy of Whetton (2011) who stated that an organization gets to understand the sales channels through enhanced knowledge, better segmentation on the distribution within the sales channels, the roles played by the intermediaries on the sales process, getting to understand centres of influence on the sales channel, as well as the position of a firm in relation to the sales channel. These elements help in ensuring that a firm has provided the customers with quality customer service that has an influence on the level of customer satisfaction (Palmer, 2011). Customers require convenience for the product being offered, such as the physical access. Distribution channels are important in a firm's level of competitiveness.

Promotion and Brand Loyalty

From the results of data analyzed, the result exhibited a favourable positive coefficient value among the variables that measured promotion; this suggested that they were all affected by promotion. More so, the result of tested HO_3 revealed that there is a significant statistical relationship between promotion and brand loyalty. The finding is consistent with Jobber (1998) who stated that exceeding the value offered by competitors is key to marketing success. Consumers decide upon purchase on the basis of judgment about the values offered by suppliers. Once a product is bought, customer satisfaction depends upon its perceived performance compared to the buyer's expectation. According to Ekakitie and Gbandi (2010), for a firm to attract and retain customers, it must put in place some customers attraction strategies which should include targeted promotional strategies to endear the product/brand and its quality to the market segment at a competitive price.

Product and Brand Loyalty

From the results of data analyzed, the result of tested HO_4 revealed that there is a significant statistical relationship between product and brand loyalty. This finding is consistent with Perreanlt and McCarthy (2002) who posited that there are many possible ways to satisfy the needs of target customers. A product might have many different features. According to Jobber (1998), the performance of the product or service includes reliability, durability, comfort and convenience. The product decision involves deciding what goods or services should be offered to a group of customers. An important element is new product development. As technology and tastes change, products become out-of-date and inferior to competition, so companies must replace them with features that customer's value. Product decision also involves choices regarding brand names, warranties, packaging and the services which should accompany the product offering. The firm should ensure that the customers are satisfied with the service they provide for them, knowing well that only satisfied customers will come again for another purchase. They do this through meeting their customers' expectations in terms of good taste and avoidable prices coupled with a serene environment of production. All these are done to ensure that their customers are not lacking at all.

CONCLUSION

Price has a significant relationship with brand loyalty. This strategy increases the brand awareness as well as aiding in informing, reminding and assuring the customers of the organizations' products and services. The study concludes that in terms of prices, telecommunication firms normally post the same prices in the retail segment but often offer promotional discounts to their customers.

Distribution has a significant relationship with brand loyalty. The study also concludes that telecommunication firms use three distribution strategies through which products for commercial activities are directly supplied to the customers.

Promotion has a significant relationship with brand loyalty. Telecommunication firms offer a variety of products and services which are specific to the demands and tastes of specific customers.

Product has a significant relationship with brand loyalty. Telecommunication firms use integrated marketing communication strategy as their major promotion strategy, which is designed to make all aspects of marketing communication, such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing, work together as a unified force, rather than permitting each to work in isolation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Telecommunication firms should use price promotion strategies, such as price discounts, free samples, and bonus packs, to increase customers' intention to purchase their products and hence increase sales volume.

ii. The marketing mix strategies adopted by telecommunication firms should be more emphasized in order to have a greater influence on performance. In addition to price leadership strategy, formula based pricing strategy and fixed pricing strategy on retail stations, firms can also have psychological pricing strategies in various market segments.

iii. Firms should venture into telecommunication firm products and green energy to boost sales revenues.

iv. Firms should ensure that the customers are satisfied with the service they provide for them, knowing well that only satisfied customers will return for another purchase. They do this through meeting their customers' expectations in terms of good taste and avoidable prices coupled with a serene environment of production.

v. Firms should attract and retain customers by putting in place some customers' attraction strategies which should include targeted promotional strategies to endear the product/brand and its quality to the market segment at a competitive price.

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