

Brand Appeal and Customer Patronage of Fast Food Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper was to examine the degree to which brand appeal influence customer patronage of fast food firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The simple random sampling technique was employed to select 130 respondents from 65 fast food firms to participate in the study. The study utilized structured questionnaire to collect primary data. The study obtained a 79.4 per cent response rate. The simple regression statistic was used to test the hypotheses. The results suggest that brand appeal has a significant and positive influence on customer patronage in terms of patronage intention, actual patronage and repeat patronage. The study concludes that brand appeal, if emphasized in fast food firms can increase customer patronage. The implication for management of fast food firms is that they should focus on higher levels of brand appeal practices to attain optimal customer patronage. The study recommends that managers of fast food firms should focus on brand appeal strategies to attract customer patronage in the form of patronage intention, actual patronage and repeat patronage.*

Key words: *Brand appeal, Customer patronage, patronage intention, repeat purchase*

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INTRODUCTION

Brand appeal is influential in the interaction between customers and firms (Harcourt & Ikegwuru, 2018; Ateke, Onwujiariri & Nnennanya, 2015; Adiele & Opara, 2014; Koll & von Wallpach 2014, Trump 2014, Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014); as customers' patronage behaviour is increasingly nudged by brand appeals (Hutchinson, 2000; Keller 1993, Alba). Brand image in particular is consequential to business performance because it modifies customers' attitude towards a firm (Ateke *et al.*, 2015). Studies (Ahluwalia, Unnava, & Burnkrant, 2001, Cheng, White, & Chaplin, 2012, Lisjak, Lee, & Gardner, 2012) suggests that customers who have vigorous relationship with a brand demonstrate non-negative reaction to adverse remarks concerning the brand. This is in view of the perception of customers that they have a peculiar association with the brand and that an injury or damage to the brand is injury or damage to their own personality (Trump, 2014; Cheng *et al.* 2012, Lisjak *et al.*, 2012).

As firms face difficulties in positioning and promoting their products, they contrive strategic options anchored on obtainable source of supply or support, potentialities, and other distinguishable faculties to address dynamic customer demands (Porter, 1985). Relatedly, Kuti

and Harrison (2012) in Amue, Adiele, and Nkoro (2013) remark that successful operation of firms require strategic designs that are appealing enough to evoke customer patronage. Several studies have been conducted in the fast-food industry internationally (Mattila, 2001) and in Nigeria to determine the connection between brand and branding and customer patronage from distinct perspectives (Ateke *et al.*, 2015; Adewuje, Ayinla & Bakare, 2014; Salami & Ajobo, 2012 among others). This study therefore, only joins the discourse as it attempts to investigate the influence of brand appeal on customer patronage in the fast-food industry in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Organizations are today facing challenges on how to out-perform one another. As the business topography becomes more and more undulating, firms such as fast-food companies continue to search for the right strategic bearing to navigate. On the other hand, customers' needs, desires and preferences remain the sole target of these firms. As customers' tastes change, accessing them through the right strategy becomes every firm's priority. Consequently, in an attempt to gaining sustainable differential advantage over competing firms, brand appeal comes in as a veritable tool. The activities of fast food firms in an economy borders on rendering need satisfying services that meet customers' expectation profitably. They accomplish this by turning in actions and ingenious eatery services that create value for customers, and empower the fast food firms to attain corporate objectives. In spite of the numerous plans and programmes put in place by these firms to satisfy customers, there is still evidence of low patronage. The question that begs for answer is: what could have begot the low customer patronage in the fast food industry in recent times? It seems that customer patronage might not be incoherent with brand appeal. In view of this incertitude and skepticism, this study investigates the nexus between brand appeal and customer patronage in the fast food industry in Rivers State of Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Brand Appeal

The term "*appeal*" represents "*the power to attract, please, stimulate, or interest*". *Appeal borders on how entice customers and then keep them coming back and sharing the brand experience.* An appeal can also be described as the persuasive framework selected by the advertiser to make an item attractive to customers. Wells, Moriarty and Burnett (2006) states that appeal is the particular way in which a commercial associates with specific tastes and preferences of customer; a linkage between the emotions or logic of the advertisement and the consumer's reaction to the advertisement (Bulbul *et al.*, 2010). A brand is generally designed to inform and appeal to consumers about a company and its products. Brand appeal constitutes one of approximately twenty advertising strategies marketing professionals adopt to convince customers to buy a product, donate to a cause, or in a different way be convinced (Middleton, 2018). A brand appeal alludes to the approach used to attract the attention of consumers in order to influence their feelings toward a brand. It attempts to remind people about a brand they are already familiar with, to appeal to their desire to continue with the brand (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Brand appeal is effective when a company's target audience is already very aware of the brand that is advertised. It is also good for audiences who feel a love or affection for a brand which requires reinforcing; as well inducing switching behaviour. Emotional appeal, fear appeal, humour appeal, rational appeal, sexual appeal and scarcity appeal are different types of brand appeal (Middleton, 2018; Belch & Belch, 2012).

Customer Patronage

Firms that crave sustained patronage in today's highly competitive business environment are required to have the satisfaction of their customership as a primary focus. Customer patronage represents the degree to which buying units concentrate purchases over time to a given product or brand based on positive reinforcement and expressed through repetitive buying behaviour (Nyakweba, Wesonga, & Bosire, 2015). Customer patronage also deals with the processes that customers engage in when selecting a product or brand among alternatives; as well as the factors and attributes used in the selection. Behavioral scientists thus propose that customer patronage results from a trial that gets reinforced through satisfaction, and leads to repeat purchase; while cognitive psychologists contend that customer patronage builds through mental processes, based on the belief that consumers engage in extensive problem solving behavior involving services (Nyakweba *et al.*, 2015). Customer patronage is essential to business sustainability in the fast food industry. Hence, marketers strive to determine customers' preference with a view to adapt or generate value that elicits customer patronage (Njite, Njoroge, Parsa, Parsa & van der Rest, 2015).

The phenomenon of brand switching makes customer patronage a topic of perennial concern to marketers; just as business sustenance in today's highly competitive business environment requires firms to win and keep the patronage of customers (Nwiepe & Ateke, 2016). Babin and Darden suggest that values, lifestyles, social class, and media habits are antecedent to patronage (Nwiepe & Ateke, 2016), and affects store attribute importance; which may be evoked by a stimulus that sets needs in motion, leading to patronage intentions and patronage behaviour. Hence, the phenomenon of customer patronage requires on-going observation, since social, cultural and economic changes affect patronage behavior (Nwiepe & Ateke, 2016). Extant literature links customer patronage to physical setting, business location, corporate identity and advancement inclination behaviour (Adiele & Opara, 2015; Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015; Chukwu & Uzoma, 2014; Ogwo & Igwe, 2012); and measures it as patronage intention, actual patronage and repeat patronage (Nwulu & Asiegbu, 2015); shopping enjoyment, satisfaction, time spent, number of items bought, money spent, share of wallet (Paswan *et al.*, 2010). In line with Nwulu and Asiegbu (2015) this study adopts patronage intention, actual patronage and repeat patronage as measures of customer patronage.

Patronage intention

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) see consumers purchase intention as an important indicator for predicting consumer behavior. Patronage intention explains the tendency that the consumer will be willing to buy a given product in the future. Zeithaml (1988) observes that merchandise value discernment trigger purchase intentions and purchase behavior in organizations. Hence, purchase intention is found to be influenced by product value. Consumers' aspiration to purchase can also be perceived as an association between their attitude towards a product and its exact purchase. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) gave three renowned measurement items for estimating purchase intentions: possible to buy, intended to buy and consider buying. Thus, service organizations such as fast food firms can enrich customers purchase behavior by generating value in product offerings to match customers' expectations and assuage their requirements.

Actual patronage

Significantly, purchase action by a customer subsumes psychological principles that have been evolved to exploit an understanding of consumers' needs so that products can be designed, developed and communicated in a justified manner that can mirror the applicable and substantial

requirements of consumers. Consumer decision making is a process comprised of five stages that people experience when deciding on what products to buy (Grewal & Levy, 2010). Conventionally, consumer decision making has been delineated into five refined stages known as: need recognition; information search; evaluation of alternatives; purchase decision; and post purchase processes. All decision-making are channeled towards a determination of a purchase action. Accordingly, Baker *et al.* (2002) observed that consumers' choice impact shoppers' discernments of commodity value and consequently their aspiration to constitute a purchase act.

Repeat patronage

Repeat purchase describes customers' propensity to returns to a particular firm for more business after an initial trial (Nwiepe & Ateke, 2016). It is the willingness of individuals to re-patronize a firm (Wirtz & Lwin, 2009). Repeat patronage can be pictured as the positioning of a series of orders by a consumer from a distinct company; or the buying of a product by a consumer of the same brand. Repeat purchase customers constitute customers who attach satisfied emotional, intellectual, physical connection to a company's offerings which surpasses their contemplations. Wirtz and Lwin (2009) suggest that repeat purchase is a measure of a consumer loyalty to a specific brand and that it is a principal goal companies strive to attain. Caudill and Murphy contends that repeat patronage in buyer-seller relationships is built on trust, commitment and mutual respect; since customers revisit firms based on their belief that the firm will conduct its business in a manner that protects their interest (Nwiepe & Ateke, 2016). Repeat patronage is thus reinforced by favourable purchase experience, meaning that customers will continue to return to a firm for further business as long as they (the customers) get a favourable experience with the firm (Nwiepe & Ateke, 2016).

Based on the above, the study formulates the following hypotheses and develops the conceptual framework in fig. 1.

H₀₁: Brand appeal does not significantly influence patronage intentions.

H₀₂: Brand appeal does not significantly influence patronage action.

H₀₃: Brand appeal does not significantly influence repeat purchase

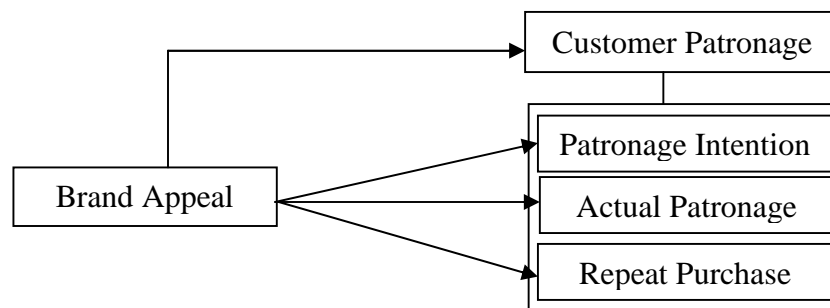


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of brand appeal and customer patronage

Source: Proxies of dependent variable adopted from:

Nwulu, C. S., & Asiegbu, I. F. (2015). Advancement inclination behaviors and university academic staff patronage of deposit money banks in Port Harcourt. *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management*, 2(6), 94-104.

METHODOLOGY

The examination of the influence of brand appeal on customer patronage is the focus of the study. The study adopted a quantitative research approach to test the influence of brand appeal on components of customer patronage. A simple random sample of 130 marketing and sales managers of 65 fast food firms was used for the study. The marketing and sales managers were chosen because these two categories of management staff have job roles relating to brand appeal. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. The questionnaire's reliability was determined via the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Table 1 below presents the summary of the result of test of reliability. The simple regression analysis was employed to test the three null hypotheses, relying on SPSS version 22.0.

Table 1: Summary of Result Test of Reliability (n=130)

S/N	Dimension	Number of Item	Reliability Coefficient
1.	Brand appeal	5	0.761
2.	Patronage intention	5	0.822
3.	Actual patronage	5	0.712
4.	Repeat patronage	5	0.912

Source: SPSS 22.0 Window output (based on 2019 field survey data).

Table 1 shows the reliability coefficients of brand appeal and the measures of customer patronage. In view of the standard requirement, we expect the reliability coefficients of each variable to be equal to or exceed the 0.70 threshold. From the Table, this requirement is satisfied for brand appeal (.761). The requirement is also satisfied for patronage intentions (.822), actual patronage (.712) and repeat patronage (.912). This implies that data on which this study's results are based are reliable. Consequently, the study assumes reliable conclusions.

Test of Hypotheses

Influence of Brand Appeal on Patronage Intentions

Table 2: Influence of brand appeal on patronage intentions (n=130)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate	Sig
1	.810	.656	.653	.50668	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand appeal

b. Dependent Variable: Patronage intention

The Coefficient of correlation (R) can be considered as a measure of the quality of the prediction of the independent variable. The value of 0.810 indicates a good level of prediction. The Coefficient of determination (R-square) is the proportion of variation in the dependent variable (patronage intention) that is explained by the independent variable. Hence, 65.6 percent of patronage intention can be explained by the independent variable (brand appeal) in the model. The adjusted R-square is used to test the overestimation of R square. The estimates show an error of .50668, which cannot be considered as very large. The brand appeal variable exact significant influence on patronage intention in fast food firms in Rivers State, since the sig. (or p-value) is .000 which is below the 0.05 level of significance.

Influence of Brand Appeal on Patronage Actions

Table 3: Influence of brand appeal on actual patronage (n= 130)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate	Sig
1	.983	.963	.963	2.6751	0.000

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand appeal
- b. Dependent Variable: Actual patronage

The Coefficient of correlation (R) can be considered as a measure of the quality of the prediction of the independent variable. The value of 0.983 indicates a good level prediction. The Coefficient of determination (R-square) is the proportion of variation in the dependent variable (actual patronage) that is explained by the independent variables. Hence, 96.3 per cent of actual patronage can be explained by brand appeal. The adjusted R-square is used to test the overestimation of R square. The estimates show an error of 2.6751 which cannot be considered as very large. The brand appeal variable exact significant influence on actual patronage in fast food firms in Rivers State, since the sig. (or p-value) is .000 which is below the 0.05 level of significance.

Influence of Brand Appeal on Repeat Patronage

Table 3: Influence of brand appeal on repeat patronage (n=130)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate
1	.776	.603	.553	.08878

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand appeal
- b. Dependent Variable: Repeat patronage

The Coefficient of correlation (R) can be considered as a measure of the quality of the prediction of the independent variable. The value of 0.776 indicates a good level prediction. The Coefficient of determination (R-square) is the proportion of variation in the dependent variable (repeat patronage) that is explained by the independent variables. Hence, 60.3 percent of the patronage actions can be explained by independent variables in the model. The adjusted R-square is used to test the overestimation of R square. The estimates show an error of .08878 which cannot be considered as very large. The brand appeal variable exact significant influence on repeat patronage in fast food firms in Rivers State, since the sig. (or p-value) is .000 which is below the 0.05 level of significance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the influence of brand appeal on customer patronage. Customer patronage was measured as patronage intention, actual patronage and repeat patronage. Based on the statistical analyses, the study realized a significant positive influence of brand appeal on the components of customer patronage (patronage intention, actual patronage and repeat patronage). The results show that brand appeal is more influential on actual patronage (.983) and then on patronage intention (.810) and repeat patronage (.776). This implies that customer patronage increases as the effectiveness of activities of brand appeal is enhanced among fast food firms in Rivers State. Hence, there is material substantiation that customer patronage of fast food firms in Rivers State is largely influenced by brand appeal. This finding is in conformity with that of Dunn and Haag (2014) who examined the impact of fear on emotional brand attachment and found a significant interaction between consumption and emotion. Based on the empirical tests carried out and the discussion of findings, this study concludes that brand appeal, if emphasized in fast food firms can improve customer patronage. The implication for management of fast food firms is that they should focus on higher levels of brand appeal programmes to attain optimal customer patronage. Based on the findings and conclusion reached, the study recommends that: Managers of fast food firms should consider brand appeal as a powerful strategy for achieving customer patronage.

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