

Advertising Appeal Strategies and Customer Loyalty in Oil Marketing Firms in Rivers State

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Abstract: *The study examined the relationship between advertising strategies and customer loyalty in oil marketing firms in Rivers State. The cross sectional survey design was adopted. The target population for the study comprise of the 105 top and middle level managers of five selected Oil marketing firms in Rivers State region of Nigeria. Thus, 105 copies of questionnaire were administered but 70 were duly filled and returned. Spearman rank correlation was used to test the relationship among the study variables through the help of statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 21.0. The study revealed that there exist a significant and positive correlation between emotional appeal and rational appeal with low customer defection and customer referrals respectively. The study recommends that Oil marketing firms should place more premium on emotional appeals as this has the highest positive relationship with customer loyalty. It also recommends that a continuous investment should be made on advertising as findings revealed that all its dimensions have a great impact on customer loyalty.*

Keywords: *Advertising Strategies, Customer Loyalty, Emotional Appeal, Rational Appeal, Customer Defection, Customer Referrals*

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INTRODUCTION

The oil sector provides over 80% of the main revenue and very critical to our natural surrounds. The oil and gas industry is usually divided into three major sectors: upstream, midstream and downstream; one of these three, provide the greatest challenge to delivery performance. The downstream sector is the refining and processing of petroleum crude oil, the marketing and distribution of products derived from crude oil and natural gas (Hamzi, 2002). This industry is highly competitive and helps in providing income, increase Gross Domestic Products, and employment which are significantly important for the citizens and the nation.

Similarly, advertising has become one of the most important commercial activities in the modern competitive environment (Tung, 2008). Companies spend a large part of their budget to produce and run advertisements to communicate information about their company and products. Companies hope that consumers will purchase their products due to advertisements and using the right appeals which deliver messages about a certain brand and its products that meet their needs. Thorson and Leavitt (1992) stated that the best prophet for purchase is advertising.

Furthermore, advertising appeal is an approach used to attract attention of consumers and/or to influence their feelings towards the product, service, or cause (Moriarty, 1991). Kotler (1997) as cited in Lin (2011) assert that appeal is the heart of an advertisement because of its driving force. Advertising appeal is capable of converting a potential customer and retains existing customers thereby making them loyal to the product but irrelevant and unfavorable advertisement appeal will lead to customer disloyalty irrespective of it seemingly message drive (Khuong, Hoa, and Nauyenm 2016). They concluded that, rational and emotional appeal influence customers switch and referral.

Consequently, Asemal and Edegoh (2013) assert that emotional and rational appeals persuade customers to make purchase and convert them into the funnel of loyal customers while Nwakwo, Aboh, Obi, Agu and Sedney-Agbor, Pratminingsih, Lipuongtyas and Rimerita (2013) opine that scarcity, music, snob and sex appeal influences customer loyalty but at varying degree. It is therefore, needful to identify the advertising appeal suitable in oil marketing firms.

Again, despite the evidence of attempts at continuous improvement in advertising, the need for change still exists; Customers today are highly informed and more demanding than before. Responsiveness to customer needs and changing market conditions has become more important for the success of firms and calls for the introduction of adequate means of advertising in creating awareness for a firm's product.

So far, there has been little research regarding the relationship between advertising appeal strategies and customer loyalty. Thus, the study is designed to fill this gap in literature.

Statement of the Problem

It seems clear that we are currently living in the midst of the boom of the use of oil in the country and as stated earlier, advertising appeal strategy, determines the character of the company's public face (www.ceicdata.com) In the corporate environment, one of the most important factors of sales is advertising (Shamdasani, Stanaland & Tan, 2001). All managers have always relied on advertising appeals as it helps to attract the attention of customers. To some extent their results have not been effective and positive in business performance. Considering the increasing complex nature of competition, new companies are formed on a daily basis, from small business, to internet based operation, to expanding global conglomerates originating from major take over and mergers.

In the face of these sophisticated and cluttered market conditions firms try to be heard. They attempt to speak with clear voices about the natures of their operations and the benefits associated with its products and services (Ting, 2009). At the same time, a wide variety of avenues beckon on company leaders to invest on advertising and marketing.

Peng (2000) opines that the failures of many businesses have always been as a result of poor advertising appeal strategies or methods employed in attracting customers or keeping existing ones. This situation may have contributed to huge losses in revenue of oil marketing firms in general. It is often quoted in marketing that "good products sells its self" and considering the fact that oil firms are in a competitive environment makes the researcher wonders if advertising appeals actually have any effect on customer loyalty. It is against this backdrop that this research work is initiated and it is therefore aimed at investigating the relationship between advertising appeal strategies and customer loyalty of Oil marketing companies in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between advertising appeal strategies and customer loyalty. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. to investigate the relationship between emotional appeal and low customer defection in oil marketing firms in Rivers State.
- ii. to determine the relationship between emotional appeal and customer referrals in oil marketing firms in Rivers State.
- iii. to examine the relationship between rational appeal and low customer defection in oil marketing firms in rivers state.
- iv. to ascertain the relationship between rational appeals and customer referrals in oil marketing firm in rivers state.

Study variables and Research Framework

This study focuses on advertising appeal strategy (predictor variable) with its dimensions as emotional and rational appeal while customer loyalty (criterion variable). With measures as low customer defection and customer referrals.

Operational Framework of the Study

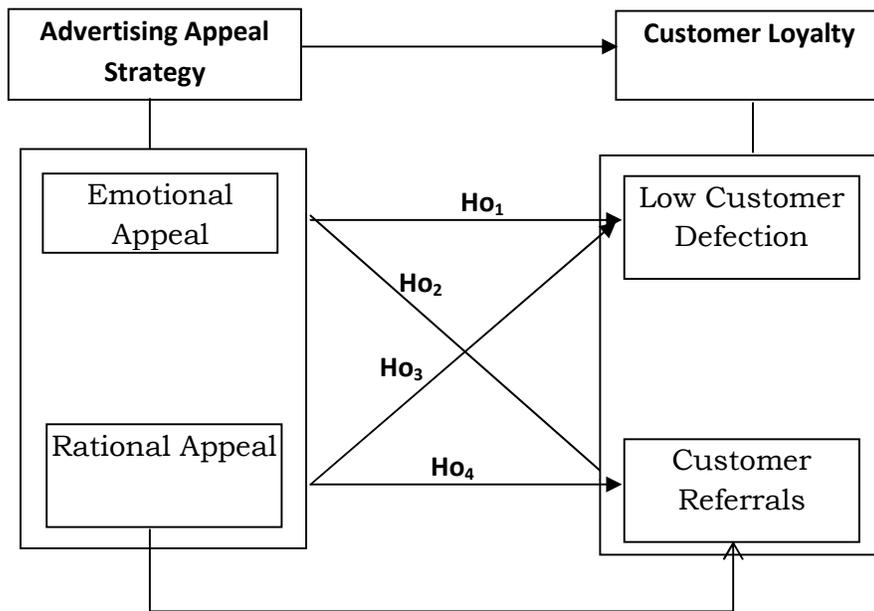


Figure 1: Operational framework of the Relationship between Advertising Appeal Strategy and Customer Loyalty of Oil Marketers in Rivers State.

Source: Desk Research, 2019.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. To what extent does emotional appeal affects low customer defection?
- ii. To what extent does emotional appeal affects customer referral?
- iii. To what extent does rational appeal affects low customer defection?
- iv. To what extent does rational appeal affects customer referral?

Hypotheses

The following are hypotheses formulated based on the research questions above and are in null form;

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between emotional appeal and low customer defection.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between emotional appeal and customer referrals.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between rational appeal and low customer defection.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between rational appeal and customer referrals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frame Work

This study was anchored on Theory of Reasoned action (TRA) which was proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). This theory considers the attitudes as well as subjective norm which people hold as predictors of their future behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen further proposed that an individual's intention to engage in any behavior or transaction is the most important factor which determines the success of marketing activities. Every purchase originates from the mind and there is need for marketers to communicate with the mind of such customers in order to make them buy the product.

TRA believes that an individual's intention towards a particular behavior is a function of his attitude towards engaging in such behavior as well as the subjective norm which relates to what the customer feel others think about his purchase behavior. This theory fits into this work because consumers of oil products must be attracted to the firms, sometimes through rational appeal and other times through emotional appeal. All these advertising appeals are for the ultimate purpose of influencing the mind of customers towards purchase.

Concept of Advertising Appeals

The advertising appeal refers to the approach used to attract attention of consumers and/or to influence their feelings towards the product, service, or cause (Moriarty, 1991). An advertising appeal can also be viewed as 'something that moves people, speaks to their wants or needs, and excites their interest'. The creative execution style is the way a particular appeal is turned into an advertising message presented to the consumer as part of a creative strategy.

Weilbacher (2004) opines that appeal can be said to form the underlying content of the advertisement, and the way in which that content is presented. Advertising appeals and executions are usually independent of each other, that is, a particular appeal can be executed in a variety of ways and a particular means of execution can be applied to a variety of advertising appeals. Advertising appeals tend to adapt themselves to all media, whereas some kinds of executioner's devices are more adaptable to some media than others.

Over the years, advertisers have attempted a wide variety of advertising approaches. Seven major types of advertising appeals have been the most successful. Advertisers usually select from one of these types of appeals as they develop the advertisement:

- Fear
- Humor
- Sex

- Rationality
- Emotions
- Musical
- Scarcity

The particular appeal to use should be based on a review of the creative brief, the objective of the advertisement, and the means-end chain to be conveyed. The actual choice depends on a number of factors, including the product being sold, the personal preferences of the advertising creative and the account executive, as well as the wishes of the client. In determining the best appeal to use, it is often a question of what appeals would be inappropriate. Advertising experts know that certain appeals are less effective at various times. For example, some research indicates that sex appeals are not effective for goods and services that are in no way related to sex (Asiegbu, 2012).

Customer Loyalty

Numerous studies have pointed out that two of the most effective means of generating customer loyalty are to delight customers (Oliver, 1999; Lee, Lee & Lawrence, 2001) and to deliver superior customer value derived from excellent services and quality products (Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000). In addition, some scholars argue that satisfaction, is a key moderating variable, and can significantly influence customer loyalty through such determinants as referrals (Fornell, 1992; Oliver, 1999; Lee, Lee & Lawrence, 2001) and perceived value (Woodruff, 1997).

Customer loyalty can be defined as the adherence of customers to a company. Even if businesses make mistakes, loyal customers will not leave. Kincaid (2003) defines customer loyalty “as a consumer behavior, built on positive experience and value, which leads to buying products, even when that may not appear to be the most rational decision” . Furthermore, the concept was later divided into behaviouristic and non-behaviouristic dimensions where the latter is more focused on the underlying causes of customer loyalty and attitudes of consumers (Peppers & Rogers, 2004). So, in the investigation of customer loyalty, it is valid to explore two fields: the behavior of consumers and their intentions (Schweizer, 2008).

Stone, Aspinall and Nancarrow (2000) posit that customer loyalty is also dependent on a number of customer related factors, i.e. how customers perceive the business rather than what the business really does. Given all these benefits, it is only natural that businesses should turn to a diverse range of tools to develop customer loyalty. And every company seems to have a different formula for making that loyalty happen. Such initiatives include creation of valuable customer experiences, creation of resonant brand, proactive marketing initiatives, quality control processes, and customer relationship management.

Customer loyalty means that the customer is loyal to the company and only turns to a competitor in exceptional cases. For example, when customers are loyal to a specific oil marketing firm but the oil firm does not have a subsidiary in the area where customers are. Customer loyalty is not a permanent thing. If the customer value decreases to such a level that it becomes obvious to customers that offers from competitors are better, customers will engage in the others instead.

Low Customer Defection

Customer defection is a function of brand or product dissatisfaction experienced (Wanningayake & Chovancova, 2019) and concluded that customer loyalty is mostly measured by customer behaviour- number of repeat purchases. Prominently and frequently promoted brand with a better advert message drive positive attitude and reduces customer switch or defection (Keller, 2006), but Wanninayake and Chorancova (2019) argued that some buyers repeat purchase of same

brand not because of advertisement rather because of the level of satisfaction derived from purchase and consumption experience. Attitude induced by advertising appeals shapes the purchase behaviour of customers and their defective level towards a brand or an offer (Malik & Tanveer, 2018). Customer experience with a product is the time factor of customer defection (low or high customer defection).

Customer satisfaction had a significant impact on management thinking. In fact, the realization that understanding, meeting and anticipating the needs of customers was probably the most important source of sustained and competitive advantage for a company that had a decisive effect on the setting of corporate priorities and practices (Vilares *et al.*, 2001).

A broad definition of customer satisfaction is that it is an emotional response to the use of a product or a service: and it is also a complex human process, which involves cognitive and affective process, as well as other psychological and physiological influences (Chu, 2002).

Kotler *et al.*, (2006) asserts that customer satisfaction depends on a product's or a service's perceived performance in delivering value relative to the buyer's expectations. If the performance of the product or service does not correspond to the customer's expectations, the buyer is dissatisfied. If performance matches expectations, the buyer is satisfied. If the performance exceeds expectations, the buyer is pleased. Customer satisfaction is customers' overall evaluation of the purchase and consumption experience with a product, service or provider (Johnsson & Gustafsson, 2000). Achieving customer satisfaction is the primary goal for most service companies today. Customer satisfaction is explicitly linked to the success of companies in hotels, banks, tourism and other similar line of businesses (Chu, 2002).

Customer Referrals

Every marketer spends millions of money when it comes to marketing and advertising their product (Schweizer, 2008). From conventional marketing techniques like television, radio, newspapers to latest trends like direct mail, internet selling website, companies make sure to get into all fields of advertising to make their visibility in the market which could eventually lead to sales but when it comes to branding and sales, nothing can beat referral marketing.

Customer referral is the new buzz around and its power is unbeatable (Ennewvd, 2000). This is an unpaid form of promotion which is done directly by the consumers. A happy and satisfied consumer steer dozens of new consumers by talking good about the company and the product. Referral is the more authentic and credible form of advertising as a consumer expresses its experience and spread positivity about the brand which results in conversion of non-users to users. Referral is a cost free promotional strategy and it takes place when a product or services exceeds the customer expectation graph and then the satisfied customer refers their family and friends to the organization (Stone *et al.*, 2000). While making a purchase every customer does hold some aspirations about the experience they will face and if their experience exceeds their expectations, it results in referral. It is most credential form of advertising because it is done directly by the users of the product. It is often rated as unbiased and true form of information (Kincaid, 2003).

Advertising Appeal and Customer Loyalty

Advertising appeal strategies and customer loyalty entails looking at the various contribution (investment) made into a firm and seeing how these strategies has improved the level of activities in terms of the relationship between oil marketing companies and their customers (host communities) in term of giving them the adequate satisfaction which will foster their loyalty. It is the overall goal of organizational management. In doing this, the key responsibility of the

marketer is to make sure, to whatever degree is possible, that the appeal is the right choice for the brand.

Emotional Appeal and Low Customer Defection

Emotional appeals relate to the customers' social and/or psychological needs for purchasing a product or service. Many consumers' motives for their feelings about a product or firm can be more important than knowledge of its features or attributes (Ogilvy & Raphaelson, 2014). Many advertisers believe appeals to consumer's emotions work better at selling brands that do not differ from competing brands (Agres, 2001). Keller (2006) opines that advertising appeals influence customer defection and retentions depending on its influence on the buyer.

Marketers use emotional appeals in hopes that positive feelings they evoke will transfer to the brand and/or company in dealing with host communities as in relation to their royalties. Research shows that positive mood states and feelings created by advertising can have a favourable effect on consumers' evaluation of a brand (Asiegbu, 2012) and customer brand defection (Malik & Tanveers, 2019).

As mentioned, emotions can be tied with humor, fear, music, and other appeals to make a compelling case for a product. The same adverts can influence a consumer both emotionally and rationally. The goal of the creative is to select the most appropriate emotional appeal for the product and company which is in this case the oil marketing companies.

Rational appeal and customer Referrals

Rational advertising appeal are those appeal which focus on consumer's practical need of organizations products and such appeal only concentrate on the products, its uses as well as how it would benefit customers (Kotler, 2003). Such appeals are often advertised on print media and it also requires high level of involvement as well as attention. Rational appeal often concentrates on products characteristics and those consumers who would purchase the product would have been satisfied by the features listed in the product. Because the message consumers receive have the ability of influencing their behavior and purchase intention, rational advertising appeal covers more of product information as well as why such products are better than their rivals.

According to Chu (1996), rational appeal as a means of advertising has high influence on the purchase intention of consumer.

Empirical Review

There are several empirical studies on the study but few will be mentioned.

Ateh and Reth (2014) carried out a study on advertising and customer satisfaction. An empirical relationship between advertising and customer's satisfaction of fast food industry in Rivers State Nigeria. They adopted quantitative method of data collection. The causal survey design was adopted and data were generated from 185 respondents (employees and managers) of the fast food studied. They employed the use of regression model and spearman rank correlation contained in SPSS version 15.0. Their findings reveled that there is a strong relationship between rational appeal, musical appeal and customer satisfaction.

Jamine (2009) also reviewed advertising strategic perspective of firms: A critical review carried out in India. They adopted quantitative method of research. They employed the use of regression model. Their findings revealed that organization that employ an advertising strategy compete favorably in the business environment.

Apeksha Nirmali, MohdShukri Ab Yajid and Ferdous Azam (2001) carried a study on advertising campaign and organizational performance in Malaysia. They adopted the causal

survey design and they employed the use of spearman rank correlation. Their findings revealed that there is positive relationship between advertising campaign and organizational performance.

Literature Gap

This study tends to bridge the knowledge gap of other research. Firstly, the study capitalizes on advertising strategies (independent variable) and customer loyalty (dependent variable) which there has been little study covering both the two variables. Secondly, the dimension (emotional appeal and rational appeal) and (satisfaction and referral) employed has distinct the work from other research. Thirdly, the location and the population of the study may has been used but not with the variables under study.

Finally, the sample size is also another distinctive factor from other research study. Therefore the study serves as a knowledge gap.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, a descriptive survey research design was adopted. The design is suitable for the study because it involves the behaviour of firms in relation to their performance. The study explored and established the existence of relationship between advertising appeal strategies and customer loyalty. The population is made up of the major five (5) operational oil marketing firms in Rivers State. Our choice is made through convenience which means that we contacted people that we found available. Convenience choice means that the respondents are chosen because they are available (Bryman & Bell, 2005). Therefore, we sample 105 respondents (5 each from the selected oil marketing firms) and they were asked to participate in a self-administered questionnaire. Thus, 105 questionnaires were delivered but 70 were duly filled and returned. A five point likert-scale by (Levitt & Walton, 1975) was used to design the questionnaire. Kendall Tau-B was used for the analyses.

List of some selected oil marketing companies in Rivers State are:

- Mobile Oil Nigeria Plc.
- SO Energy Plc.
- Conoil Plc.
- Oando Plc
- Forte Oil

Table 2: Questionnaire Administered

Items	Questionnaire Distributed	Response Completed and returned
Number	105	70
Percentage	100%	67%

Sources: Researcher's Desk, 2019.

Decision rules

The strength of association and statistical significance decision are made and interpreted based on the following table 3 below;

Where (+) stands for positive relationship and (-) means negative relationship.

Table 3: Decision table For the Strength of variable relationships

S/N	Statistical Significance	Association/ Relationship
i.	± 0.0 – 0.19	Very Weak
ii.	± 0.2 – 0.39	Weak
iii.	± 0.4 – 0.59	Moderate (Significant)
iv.	± 0.6 - 79	Strong
v.	±0.8 – 1.00	Very strong

Source: Desk Research, 2019

Hypothesis One

HO₁: There is no significant correlation between emotional appeal and low customer defection.

		Emotional Appeal	Low Customer Defection
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.769**
	Emotional Appeal Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	70	70
	Correlation Coefficient	.769**	.**
	Low Customer Defection Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	70	70

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, September, 2019, SPSS Output

Decision: From the SPSS table above, the probability value is 0.000 (PV < 0.05) while the correlation value is 0.769 which implies very strong positive relationships between emotional appeal and low customer defection. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between emotional appeal and low customer defection.

Hypothesis Two

HO₂: There is no significant correlation between emotional appeal and customer referrals.

Correlations

		Emotional Appeal	Customer Referrals
Spearman's rho	Emotional Appeal	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.833**
		N	.000
	Customer Referrals	Correlation Coefficient	70
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.833**
		N	.000
		70	70

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, September, 2019, SPSS Output

Decision: From the SPSS table above, the probability value is 0.000 ($PV < 0.05$) while the correlation value is 0.833 which implies very strong positive relationships between emotional appeal and customer referrals. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between emotional appeal and customer referrals.

Hypothesis Three

HO₃: There is no significant correlation between rational appeal and low customer defection.

Correlations

		Rational Appeal	Low Customer Defection
Spearman's rho	Rational Appeal	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.851**
		N	.000
	Low Customer Defection	Correlation Coefficient	70
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.851**
		N	.000
		70	70

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, September, 2019, SPSS Output

Decision: From the SPSS table above, the probability value is 0.000 ($PV < 0.05$) while the correlation value is 0.851 which implies very strong positive relationships between rational appeal and low customer defection. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between rational appeal and low customer defection.

Hypothesis Four

HO₄: There is no significant correlation between rational appeal and referral

Correlations

		Rational Appeal	Customer Referrals
Spearman's rho	Rational Appeal	1.000	.912**
	Correlation Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	70	70
	Customer Referral	.912**	.
	Correlation Coefficient		**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	70	70

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, September, 2019, SPSS Output

Decision: From the SPSS table above, the probability value is 0.000 ($PV < 0.05$) while the correlation value is 0.912 which implies very strong positive relationships between rational appeal and customer referrals. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between rational appeal and customer referrals.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The study was structured on an operational frame work that shows the variables with four hypotheses stated and tested. The result from the first hypotheses indicated that there exist a significant and positive correlation between the emotional appeal and low customer defection as there correlations from the SPSS table were showed ($r= 0.769$; $p=0.000$; $p < 0.05$), this hypothesis was rejected. Based on that, it was therefore concluded that emotional appeal influences low customer defection.

Also, the second hypothesis examined the relationship between emotional appeal and

customer referral. Thus, it was tested and the results showed ($r= 0.833$; $p=0.000$; $p <0.05$) the null hypothesis was also rejected. Based on that, it was therefore concluded that emotional appeal influences customer referrals.

The third hypothesis examined the relationship between rational appeal and low customer defection. Thus, it was tested and the results showed ($r= 0.851$; $p=0.000$; $p <0.05$) the null hypothesis was also rejected. Based on that, it was therefore concluded that rational appeal has a strong influence low customer defection.

The fourth hypothesis examined the relationship between emotional appeal and customer referrals. Thus, it was tested and the results showed ($r= 0.912$; $p=0.000$; $p <0.05$) the null hypothesis was rejected. Based on that, it was therefore concluded that rational appeal influences customer referrals.

CONCLUSIONS

After data analysis, we had results that lead to our findings and the following are conclusions: advertising appeal strategies and its dimensions significantly relates with customer loyalty and oil marketing firms in Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions we recommend as follows:

1. Oil marketing firms should improve their performance in the turbulent business environment and keen attention should be placed on emotional appeals as this has the highest positive relationship with customer loyalty.
2. More also, continuous investment should be made on advertising as findings revealed that all its dimensions has a great impact on customer loyalty.
3. Finally, quality product and effective service delivering should be given to customers as to make them loyal and refer family and friends.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

From the review of related literature very few studies contrasted advertising appeal strategies and customer loyalty of oil marketing firms in Rivers State, hence the study provided a new framework that would serve as a guide to marketing practitioners and students in the same field of study. In addition, other scholars should carry out a study in other region and variables. This also serves as the dissertation's contribution to knowledge.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study only adopted Spearman rank Correlation as the analytical tool with the aid of SPSS. Thus, other scholars should endeavour to adopt statistical tools like Product Pearson correlation coefficient, Kendalls, Chi-square with the aid of E-views and other related statistical packages to check if the correlation will vary.

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