Role of Electronic Customer Relationship Management on Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in the Nigerian Telecommunication Sector: Pilot Study

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Abstract

This paper pilot tested the influence of electronic customer relationship management (eCRM) as proxied by Ease of use, E-service quality, Enjoyment and Usability on the customer's satisfaction and loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication sector. Thus, the instrument's reliability and validity were analyzed using small sample data. PLS path modeling using Smart PLS 3.3 M3 software was employed to ascertain the internal consistency reliability and validity of the constructs used in the pilot study. The results showed that the average variance extracted and the composite reliability coefficients, meanwhile, assessment of discriminant validity value of Heterotrait Monotraits (HTMT) is below 0.90. Hence it was concluded that the instrument is valid and reliable.

Keywords: Electronic customer relationship management, Customer loyalty, Customer satisfaction, Pilot test.

1.0 Introduction

Customers are presumed to be one of the most critical stakeholders in any business organization because without the customers, organizations are not likely to succeed. Knowledge of customer behavior goes a long way in ensuring effective marketing policies towards the interest of customers which eventually facilitates positive customer attitude towards the organization (Osagie, John, Geraldine & Ogemdi, 2021). Customer loyalty manifests itself in behavioral consequences including repurchase behavior, spreading positive word of mouth communication, resistance to counter persuasion and reduced product category search (Farid & Zulkifl, 2021). Businesses around the world spent 126 billion U.S dollars on customer management in 2019, out of which 75 billion U.S dollars was spent on loyalty management (Statista.com, 2021). Through the global report from 2020, it is described that 66% of customers spend more on brands that they're loyal to which shows a clear incentive for businesses to take the plunge into building a meaningful customer loyalty improvement program (Statista. com, 2021). Disloyal customers can amount to millions of lost revenue and profit. Customers intend to switch service provider when they are not loyal and satisfied (Hait, 2020).

In today's competitive and changeable market place, mobile phone service industry is gaining popularity and as mobile usage is growing rapidly, telecommunication marketers are developing new strategies to take advantage of the potential customers. Mobile phone is the most promising and high growth area of telecommunication, with more than 1.7 billion global subscribers and about 80% of the world's population covered by mobile networks (Robert, 2019). In Africa, declining customer loyalty seems to be a disturbing issue for most companies in spite of heavy investments in service improvement. This is because the consumers' pattern of expectation is evolving even faster accompanied by low satisfaction and high switching behavior (Gajanayake, 2019).

In Nigeria, one of the most populous countries worldwide, in the most recent measured period, there were over 100 million mobile users in Nigeria (Statista.com, 2021). In 2020, Nigeria had 99.05 million internet users. This figure is projected to grow to 108.27, 120.24, 131.68, 142.39 and 152.28 million by 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 respectively (Statista.com, 2021). Bello-Iman and Obadan (2004) and Obinna (2015) observed that the rapid diffusion of GSM services is accompanied by low satisfaction and high switching behaviour. Customer satisfaction is a fundamental goal of marketing as the purpose of marketing is to satisfy customers. Barriers to customer loyalty in Nigerian telecommunication sector and the problems lingers such as; complicated tariffs, lower customer satisfaction, inefficient service delivery, interconnecttivity problem, deceptive promotions, unsolicited promotions, unsolicited short messages (SMS), call drops, and unfairly and unjustifiable billings (Odunlami & Matthew, 2015). Therefore, the GSM providers in Nigeria are faced with the challenges of demon-strating customer-focused and continuous service improvement, as a way to ensuring customer satisfaction, brand supremacy and ultimately customer loyalty (Jide, 2020).

1.2 Research Problem

Technological change has shifted competition from price and core service to value-added services (Ozer, 2020). Due to the many alternatives available to customers, they can easily switch service providers. The telecommunication industry has one of the highest customer churn rates in the business world, often exceeding 40 percent annually (Statista.com, 2021). Furthermore, mobile phone service providers are losing 2 to 4 percent of their subscribers monthly; disloyal customers can amount to millions of lost revenue and profit. Theoretically speaking, customers intend to switch service provider when they are not loyal and satisfied (Jane, 2019).

Most previous researches indicated electronic customer relationship management on customer loyalty. These include: Mang'unyi and Govender (2017), Mehdi and Mohammad (2017), Mohammad and Sahar (2019), Pushpender and Anupreet (2019), Muhammad, Muhammad and Muhammad (2020), Hadeer, Abdelaty and Heba (2020), Desia and Anas (2021), Slamet, Mirza, Denok, Nurjaya, Humairoh, Ahmad, Sedarmayanti, Heri and Marissa (2021) Aini, Riska and Michael (2021), Fariborz and Maryam (2021), Jennifer and Millie (2021), Sameh and Romdhane (2021), Farid and Zulkifli (2021), Tasya and Dudi (2021). Although recommended studies are needed to elaborate more findings for instance: first, Pushpender and Anupreet (2019) recommended that the employees point of view should be taken into account and the model can be expanded from banks' perspectives also. Generalizability is lacking and other variables may also be used to measure E-CRM. Second, Jennifer and Millie (2021) suggested the evaluative features of E-crm and the effect of loyalty concerning customers in older age groups through a study to be conducted with respondents from different origin and also focus on the pre-, at- and post –purchase features of E-crm from a business perspective. Lastly, a study conducted by Slamet et.al (2021), justified the conduct of future research in other places or countries and other independent variables to get new results that are relevant in a study related to increased consumer loyalty.

Based on this review, this study seeks to adopt a multidimensional construct of Electronics customer relationship management to include four dimensions of (Ease of use, E-service quality, Enjoyment and Usability). Anuriza and Kusuma-wardhani (2021) recommended that future study may add or replace more variable that are more specific with the e-CRM program. The identification of various factors on similar studies has been done on the basis of the outcomes of numerous studies conducted in various contexts and cultures, and the suitability of these factors should be empirically examined in future research.

From the methodological angle, an overall review of the literature on electronic customer relationship management on customer's satisfaction and customer loyalty is expected to be carried out with broader range of respondents with bigger sample size from the points of view of both the company and their customers (Anuriza & Kusumawardhani, 2021). To fill the gap therefore, the current study adds larger sample size to improve the generalization standard of finding. Therefore, in line with previous research and suggestions, customer satisfaction stands as a mediator because it is considered as a major determinant for building loyal customers (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Maslow (1970) implied that companies can achieve a consistent customer loyalty by focusing on consistent innovative practices in products and services development. The implication of the above discussion is that with high customer satisfaction, GSM customers are attracted, made happy, satisfied, and have an increased propensity to stay longer with their GSM service provider. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the relationship between electronic customer relationship management and customer loyalty of Telecommunication sector in Kano metropolis.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as quality of being loyal or faithful, that is, one's loyalty to an object. According to Jumaev and Jalal (2012), customer loyalty refers to situation where a customer does not only repurchases goods or patronizes services again but also has positive commitment and attitude towards service companies, for example by recommending others to buy. Furthermore, according to Velnampy & Sivesan (2012), customer loyalty is a habit of repetitive buying behavior, high connection, and affiliation in their choices, and is characterized by external information seeking and alternative evaluation. Oliver (1997) defined customer loyalty as a sincere commitment towards buying a particular brand of product or service repeatedly in near future despite marketing efforts and situational factors which have the potential to change the customer's switching behavior. It is termed as the measure of achievement of the supplier in maintaining and retaining long last mutual relationships with the customers (Alhaio et al., 2012; Oumar et al., 2017). Customers are loyal with those companies who provide better high end services, quality customer support, convenient and trusted privacy policies (Leverin & Liljander, 2006). Customer loyalty tends to generate more profit to the organization (Khan & Khawaja, 2013) as it costs less to retain existing customers than to acquire a new customer (Reichheld, 1996). Customer became loyal because of the experience they gained from their transactions with their companies (Pine &

Gilmore, 1999). Loyal customers provide positive word of mouth by recommending their companies' products/services to their friends and relatives (Mulyono & Situmorang, 2018). Customer loyalty is an outcome of trust and commitment. The higher the trust and commitment towards a particular product/service or a brand, the higher is the customer loyalty (Sudhahar et al., 2006; Maroofi et al, 2012). Loyalty of customer towards a particular organization is an important aspect for various organizations by which organizations become more profitable. Hence, it is vital for an organization to handle the grievances of customers so that customers remain attracted to the organization. Customer loyalty is simply a buyer's deeply held commitment to stick with a product, service, brand or organization consistently in the future, despite new situations or competitive overtures to encourage switching. Loyalty is measured by taking into account the probability of repurchase (Gursoy, Chen & Kim, 2005).

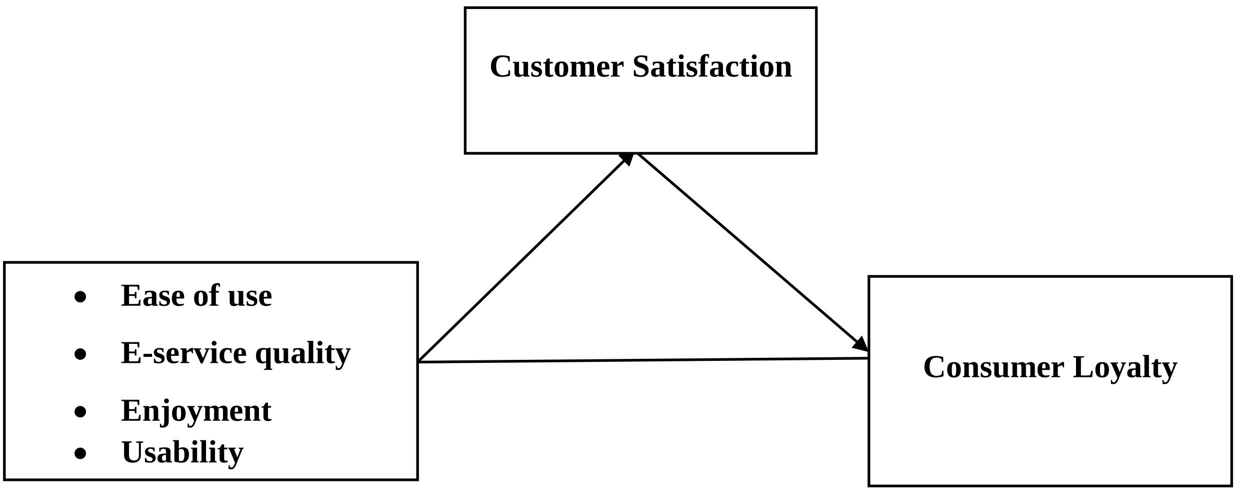
2.2 Electronic Customer Relationship Management (E-CRM)

E-CRM is defined as the combination of hardware, software, application and management commitment (Dyche, 2001). The evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has changed the behavior of customers towards business strategies (Daud & Aziz, 2019). Internet technology provides opportunities to market services and build deeper relationships with their customers (Fjermestad & Romano, 2003). The traditional customer relationship management is a process of identifying, creating and retaining profitable customers by maintaining long lasting customer relationships over the time. When these activities are delivered with the help of internet, then E-CRM is applied (Hendriyani & Raharja, 2018). E-CRM refers to the marketing activities, tools and techniques which are delivered over the internet using various technologies such as websites, emails, data mining and data warehousing with the aim of building and improving long lasting mutual relationships with customers (Kelley et al., 2003). In the mid1990s, there was rapid advancement in internet technology which has led to the development of E-CRM. E-CRM encompasses all the forms of customer relationships which can be managed over the internet with the help of web browsers or various electronic touch points (Bataineh, 2015). It is the latest technique which companies are using to enhance and increase their marketing skills and capabilities (Al-Dmour et al., 2019). Through E-CRM, customers can have direct access to their services as it provides multiple electronic channels, thus, termed as customer-facing or outward facing technology (Bernett & Kuhn, 2002). Electronic CRM is more technical oriented and adopts advanced ICTs tools whereas traditional CRM is more human oriented and based on personal approach (Bhatnagar & Saxena, 2013).

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been considered as an important aspect of organization's success in today's highly competitive environment. Oliver (1997) defined customer satisfaction as a pleasurable moment which the customer feels while they consume something. It is the state of mind of the customers towards a product or a service that he/she uses in return of customer's expectation. Customer satisfaction is the difference between what the customer expects from the product/ service and what he/she actually gets from that product/service (Farhadi et al., 2012). Thus, customer satisfaction is termed as the trade-off between the customer's expectation and the performance achieved. The higher the performance as compared to expectation, the higher would be the customer satisfaction (Mulyono & Situmorang, 2018). Customer satisfaction is not an end itself as previous research advocated that customer loyalty is the direct outcome of customer satisfaction. If a customer is satisfied with the product or service, the probability that he/she uses that product or service increases (Chuang et al., 2012). Also, a highly satisfied customer provides a positive word of mouth for the product/services/company/ brand (Bataineh, 2015). Satisfaction has primarily been conceptualized as resulting from a comparison of the actual delivered performance with customer expectations. Satisfaction is defined as a person's feeling of pleasure or contentment from comparing his expectations with the provided products, outcomes and perceived performance (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.4 Conceptual Framework



The study adopted the cross-sectional survey approach so that responses can be retrieved at a single point in time. The study used small sample of population in which 60 questionnaires were distributed to all academic staff of Kano state polytechnic which comprises: School of Environmental Study, School of General Studies, School of Management, School of Rural Technology and Entrepreneurship and School of Technology. This is to bridge the existing gap because there seems to be slight or no empirical study that examined the underlying issue within the study area. In stratification, the strata are formed based on members' shared attributes or characteristics, different schools of education like school of environmental studies, school of general studies and school of management. The study used stratified sampling because of its advantage of error of estimation produced will be reduced, and then, would be produced when using simple random sampling. Additionally, stratified random sampling was chosen over other sampling technique in order to achieve the goal of inferences about the strata within the population of the study so as to draw conclusions effectively, A PLS path modelling using Smart PLS 3.0 M3 software (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005) employed to ascertain the internal consistency reliability and construct validity of the constructs used in the pilot study. In particular, PLS Algorithm (Geladi & Kowalski, 1986) was calculated to obtain the average variance extracted and the composite reliability coefficients. Bagozzi and Yi (1988) as well as Hair et al. (2011) suggested that the composite reliability.

S/NO	Schools	No of Staff
1	School of Environmental Study	55
2	School of General Studies	62
3	School of Management	108
4	School of Rural Technology and Entrepreneurship	45
5	School of Technology	280
	Total	**550**

Source: Directorate of Academic Planning (2022)

3.1 Results

Reliability refers to the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides stable and consistent results (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Reliability is also concerned with repeatability. For example, a scale or test is said to be reliable if repeat measurement made by it under constant conditions will give the same result

(Moser & Kalton, 1989). Composite reliability using Smart PLS Version 3.3 is conceptually related to Cronbach' alpha in that it assesses reliability via a ratio of the variability explained by items compared to the total variance of the entire scale (Bentler, 2007; Geldhof et al., 2014; Raykov, 1997a, 1997b, 1998). In current study, the reliabilities of each construct are above 0.70 which suggests that contract data in the present study are reliable, because according to Hair et al. (2011) the acceptance range of Cronbach alpha values is from 0.81 to 0.95. Therefore, on the basis of current findings, all learned contract values are > 0.70. About the composite reliability, the acceptance range varied from 0.81 to 0.95, so our results explain that it is higher than the recommended cutoff value of 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table. 3.1: Reliability of Constructs (*n*=60)

Latent construct	No. of indictors	Average variance Extracted	Composite reliability
Customer loyalty	5	0.72	0.86
Ease of Use	5	0.82	0.89
E-Service Quality	5	0.79	0.92
Enjoyment	4	0.88	0.81
Usability	4	0.76	0.95
Customer Satisfaction	5	0.89	0.82

Source: Researcher (2023)

Validity of measuring instrument refers to the extent to which the instrument is measuring what is intended to be measured. It explains how well the collected data covers the actual area of investigation (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Applying Construct validity method which comprises an exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis that are carried for determining the construct validity and also used to confirm items loading on the correct factors as known by the researcher (Venkatraman, 1989). Previous researcher used Fornell and Larcker (1981) for assessing the discriminant validity. However, recently, Henseler (2015) disapproved the Fornell and Larcker criterion. They found out that the previous criterion is still lacking in establishing the uniqueness between constructs that encouraged them to recommend a more robust approach that could capture the discriminancy among the constructs under study. Heterotrait-monotrait's (HTMT) criterion has high sensitivity and specificity in detecting discriminant validity problems and more empirical evidence is needed to use this approach. However, to measure discriminant validity, model setup along with how conservative, the researcher wants to be in measurement of discriminant validity should also be kept in view (Henseler, 2015). If the HTMT value is below 0.90, discriminant validity has been established between reflective constructs.

Latent variables		CPI	EU	E-SV	EN	USB	CS
1	Consumer loyalty	-					
2	Ease of Use	0.69	-				
3	E-service	0.62	0.72	-			
4	Enjoyment	0.57	0.56	0.79	-		
5	Usability	0.63	0.53	0.56	0.69	-	
6	Customer Satisfaction	0.27	0.56	0.60	0.84	0.87	-

HTMT Results

Source: Researcher (2023)

If the HTMT value is below 0.90, discriminant validity has been established between reflective constructs.

Conclusion

This study is ongoing research as a master's dissertation on the influence of electronic customer relationship management (Ease of use, E-service quality, Enjoyment and Usability) on customer's loyalty with the mediating effect of customer satisfaction of telecommunication sector in Kano metropolis.

Kano was specifically chosen for the study because it was recognized as one of the largest cities that engage in different types of businesses in Nigeria, as recorded during the 2006 National Census exercise.

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