

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & BRAND LOYALTY IN THE NIGERIAN TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

Akhigbe Jeffrey,^{*1} Felicia O. Olokoyo²

¹ *Department of Banking and Finance, Covenant University, Ogun State, Nigeria.*

Email: akhigbejeffrey@yahoo.co.uk

² *Department of Banking and Finance, Covenant University, Ogun State, Nigeria.*

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ABSTRACT

The existing literature on Corporate Social Responsibility with regards to consumer responsiveness towards the organization is currently split and filled with inconsistencies. This reality makes theory building quite difficult. Therefore, further studies will be necessary to build theory consensus and update the existing literature. This study attempts to evaluate the effects of corporate social responsibility on brand loyalty in a developing nation such as Nigeria, with special focus on its telecommunication industry. Data gathering was carried out through the distribution of 386 questionnaires to the customers of the four largest mobile telecommunication firms in Nigeria. Simple linear regression was used in testing the formulated hypothesis. Findings from the hypothesis testing reveals there is no significant relationship between corporate social responsibility and brand loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication sector. However, favorable price point, good quality service and good customer care were some of the attributes the customers emphasized on as regards to what determines their brand loyalty. Based on the findings from this study, recommendations were suggested on the ways Nigerian telecommunication firms can enhance their brand loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

The biggest segment of the Information and Communication sector in Nigeria is the telecommunication industry. The Nigerian telecommunication market is commonly referred to as one of the biggest in Africa. Overtime, the industry slowly morphed into an oligopolistic form of market structure (a relatively few number of companies decide the market prices and exert control over majority of the market). The Nigerian telecom industry is filled with multinational firms. These multinational firms include; MTN, this is a South African firm, Airtel, this is a strong multinational firm from India, Globacom, a Nigerian based multinational telecom firm, and 9mobile, this firm was formerly known as Etisalat. As Africa's biggest mobile telecommunication market, Nigeria currently has about 168 million active subscribers (NCC, 2019). The economic recession that swept Nigeria from 2015 to 2017 had a major role to play in the declining figure of internet users recorded in 2017, this fall was as a result of consumers reacting to the harsh economic realities. Consumers later jumped onto other OTT channels to meet their communication needs, another reason for the fall in figure of internet users is the regulatory policy which required all mobile operators to disconnect every single unregistered SIM cards on its platform, MTN NG was later fined heavily for not adhering strictly to this policy.

Table 1: Overview of the subscriber base of Nigerian GSM sector

S/N	Telecom Companies	Number of Subscribers
1	Globacom Nigeria	43,300,000
2	MTN Nigeria	66,900,000
3	9Mobile	15,400,000
4	Airtel Nigeria	43,100,000
	Total	168,700,000

Source: Nigerian Communications Commission, 2019

The 2019 Nigeria Communications Commission's report indicated that MTN is in peak position and controls the mobile market with 39.94% market share and 66.9 million active subscribers. Closely following MTN

NG in second place is Globacom NG with 43.3 million active subscribers and 25.23% market share. However, Airtel now controls 25.24% of the mobile market with 43.1 million active subscribers. While 9mobile currently controls 9.6% of the market share with 15.4 million active subscribers.

Considering the growth trajectory trend of the Nigerian mobile industry and also the high performance rate of the mobile industry operators, there is an expected influx of new operators into the mobile industry space in the future and with the existing operators frenetically looking for ways to maintain and also enhance their mobile market shares, this reality has made customer retention hugely significant for the firms' viability. Another reason why customer retention is increasingly very important in this highly competitive industry is the fact that gaining new customers is quite a difficult and expensive endeavor for any firm to undertake.

A robust insight into consumers' behavior is a tool every firm needs to aim itself with, especially in this highly competitive Nigerian mobile industry. This insight or robust understanding of consumers' behavior will aid the operators to remain connected with every development in the mobile market, thus, helping them to deliver quality services to its customers and thereby ensuring the firms survival chances. The available literature on consumer behavior is ever expanding, in today's market environment, holding onto acquired market share has become a challenge and a task firms must weather to maintain relevance and viability. (Craig, 2012) argued that customers play a significant role in keeping an enterprise a going-concern. His argument was hinged on the notion that customers are the revenue generating elements of the firm, by patronizing, and using word of mouth to influence others to patronize the concerned firm as well. Therefore, firms are forever eager to understand the psychology behind consumers' buying decisions. Therefore, study of consumer buying behavior is gate way to success in the market. (Crane et al., 2013)

Firms all over the world are now being tasked by its customers to be more socially responsible. This social responsibility awareness on the part of the consumers has lead firms to think beyond their economic interests. Some of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that firms undertake include; manufacturing aerosol products by utilizing technologies that are environmentally-friendly, being vigilant to employees' welfare, satisfaction and empowerment, establishing recycling and pollution prevention policies, and pushing for the prosperity aim of the community organizations (e.g. working closely with groups). (Mcwilliams & Siegel, 2001).

The social identity theory and the consumer-company identification study reveal that there exist tremendous advantages for firms seen to be socially responsible by its stakeholders. With regards to community engagement, firms that make meaningful impact through its CSR activities have a higher chance of gaining favorable reputation and positive

corporate image perception amongst the community members where the firms carry out their operations. Several studies have linked active and immersive CSR participation to increased favorable consumer perception, higher propensity to pay at premium prices. Therefore, it is believed to be in the firms' self-interest to actively participate in CSR activities, as these CSR participations can possibly strengthen the corporate image of the firms and subsequently bring to reality the enviable achievement of 'triple bottom-line'

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept is when firms seek to affect the society positively, this includes the environment and the business community. The main objective of the triple bottom line is to engender sustainability through the careful juggling of the economic, environmental and societal objectives. With the Nigerian telecommunication industry growing at a fast rate, firms are always looking for new strategies to attract and retain customers, such strategies include corporate social responsibility, CSR affords firms the opportunity to gain and maintain their grounds while simultaneously developing the host communities and by extension the country at large. (Ionnis & George, 2010) affirm that firms that actively practice corporate social responsibility are getting positive commendation, which was not the case in previous years, therefore, this has prompted analysts to attribute higher value to CSR strategies. They went further to add that researchers such as (Freeman, Harrison and Wicks, 2007) are proponents of the stakeholder's management theories which they opined that CSR strategies could lead to higher performance through the protection and the strengthening of corporate reputation.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Overtime, a significant amount of studies was undertaken to determine if corporate social responsibility has any influence on consumers' buying behavior. However, these studies revealed split reports on the impact of CSR on consumers' buying behavior. A significant amount of studies that were undertaken in this subject tend to take the firms' perspective, however, fewer studies have taken the perspective of the consumers. This study intends to deepen existing literature on the influence of corporate social responsibility and its effect on brand loyalty. The controversial nature of the existing literature has made theory and general consensus building difficult. Hence, the need to undertake more studies in different conditions and settings to further deepen the literature. (Adepoju et al., 2017). Argued that given the competitive nature of modern business environments and how difficult it is to attract and retain customers, which has pushed many firms to actively engage in corporate social responsibility as a means to strengthen their customer base, theoretically as well as practically speaking, it becomes important to find if such CSR engagements has actually helped achieve the stated objective. Studies have revealed that there is still a lot to be learnt as regards the link between corporate social responsibility and its effect on consumers'

behavior. Researchers have opined that due to varying economic, business and organizational systems and with various cultures necessitating different customers' expectation of business behaviors, therefore, the results from the western countries regarding the impact of corporate social responsibility on brand loyalty will likely not be suitable to developing nations such as Nigeria. Another justification for this study is that it examines corporate social responsibility from the perspective of developing nations such as Nigeria, thereby helping to validate theories and deepen the existing literature in the subject.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is viewed by (Wood, 1991), as a firm's principles of social responsibility, its social responsiveness, and policies with regards to the firm's social relationships. (Posk, Omotesho, Tsoho and Ajayi, 1999), view corporate social responsibility as holding firms accountable for its practices and the attendant effects on people, and the environment. So the general view is that corporate social responsibility is the connection between a firm and the society it operates in.

History of Corporate Social Responsibility

The evolution of CSR began as early as the 1930s (Carroll 1979). Stating that corporate social responsibility is usually viewed from varying perspective depending on the literature, some earlier views of CSR were concentrated on strictly the benefits of CSR to the community, others on the accountability perspective of CSR; where corporate social responsibility is explored on the basis of its accountability to stakeholders. There was a rapid increase in corporate social responsibility awareness level in the 1990s, this was due to privatization, less government interference, mergers and acquisitions in the 1980s, as capital flows became more entrenched due to globalization and better communications technology. This lead to informed stakeholders demanding for more accountability from the firms, and thereby actively rewarding firms that were more socially and environmentally conscious and subsequently punishing firms that do not practice or integrate corporate social responsibility initiatives into the firm's core operations. Over the last two decades, the influence of corporate social responsibility momentum is quite evident through the current business language, such as; corporate citizenship, sustainability; triple bottom line etc. The language is ever evolving, fine-tuning and expanding.

Nigeria's Telecommunication Sector: Current Corporate Social Responsibility Practices

A study by Leal-Filho (2009) it revealed that a lot of firms generally focus their corporate social responsibility endeavours in areas such as healthcare, infrastructural development, communities' empowerment.

In line with the above study, Eranda and Abeysekera (2011) showed that a lot of firms in Nigeria still practice philanthropic model of CSR, which encompasses CSR activities that consider social issues generally, rather than CSR, which is in line with business strategy. This is generally due to the present state of decadence in several sectors of the Nigerian economy; the despicable road and rail system, the outdated educational system. Majority of CSR activities engaged in Nigeria are thus primarily targeted at filling institutional gaps.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted both the Stakeholder's Theory and Institutional Theory. (Mitchel, Wood and Agle, 1997) argue that, the stakeholder theory is hinged on the proposition that a firm ultimately strive to provide a balance among the interests of its numerous stakeholders with the aim of ensuring some degree of satisfaction amongst them. A primary proposition of the stakeholder's theory is that firms should voluntarily agree to be socially and environmentally responsible, thereby avoiding stakeholders' pressures, and ensuring that their responsibility is not forced upon them by the law or the union contracts (Camilleri, 2012). The stakeholder's theory maintains that the firm's obligation extends beyond the traditional responsibilities to the shareholders, and that the responsibilities of the firms should extend beyond the shareholders to other stakeholders such as customers, employees. (Jones, 1980; Camilleri, 2012)

The most common stakeholders highlighted in the stakeholder's theory and their respective needs are as follows;

- i Customers: Satisfy customer needs
- ii Employees: empower the employees and treat them respectfully
- iii Government: meet the stipulated legal requirements
- iv Communities: empower and develop the communities
- v Shareholders: realize profits for the investors
- vi Environment: Avoid environment degradation

Institutional Theory

The concept of CSR de-emphasizes its dominance found in the west, as regards the concept and its operation when applied in societies that are characterised by institutional and deficiencies, as observed in developing countries such as Nigeria. (Amaeshi et al., 2015) argued that CSR is context based, such that CSR engagements in developing countries are deployed with the ideology of filling institutional gaps.

This assertion is supported by this institutional theory, which states that the structural development of a firm can strongly be influenced by its institutional environment. (Muthuri & Gilbert, 2010)

Empirical Framework

Majority of the studies carried out agree that firms should carry out corporate social responsibility practices. The studies also suggested these CSR practices ought to be heavily advertised to the general public because

of the positive effect it has on consumer behaviour. One of the researchers in support of this notion is (Abdeen, 1991), who states that active engagement in corporate social responsibility practices increases consumer retention. Another empirical evidence to this narrative is (Daughtery, 2001) suggesting that firms should make its philanthropic practices more known to the general public, in order to illustrate its commitment to the community and thereby gain competitive advantage in marketplace.

Table 2: Selected Empirical Studies on CSR and Consumer Behaviour

Author(s)	Key Results
Abdeen (1991)	Concluded that the advertisement of CSR practices of firms enhance customer retention.
Alexandris et al. (2002)	The study revealed that CSR has a positive influence on customers' retention.
Mohr et al. (2001).	The study concluded that CSR has a significant influence on consumers' buying behaviour.
Ali (2011)	Ali revealed that a significant positive relation exists between CSR and consumer buying intentions.
Kolkailah et al. (2012)	The study revealed a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate image.
Yu et al. (2005)	This study revealed positive link between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.
Girod and Michael (2003)	This study revealed CSR helps maintain brand loyalty.

Author(s)	Key Results
(Nevine Eshra et al., 2017)	It was revealed that there is no significant relationship between consumer buying behaviour and CSR.
In contrast, Imran Ali et al., (2010)	Found no linkage between CSR practices and customer purchase intentions.
(Nevine, Noha, 2017)	Another study carried out in Egypt finds that CSR has no significant effect on consumers' buying behaviour
Imran Ali et al., (2010)	Another study revealed that CSR has no significant influence on consumers' purchase intentions.

METHODOLOGY

Explanatory stratagem was adopted to examine and analyse the effect corporate social responsibility has on brand loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. To obtain and measure the consumers' responses, the four leading telecommunication firms in Nigeria were selected. The reason behind the selection of the cellular industry is partly due to the systemic role it plays in the entire country. Another reason behind the selection of the telecom industry is due to its high penetrative rate in the country, leading to huge customer base. That huge customer base is now being used to test brand loyalty with CSR serving as the predictor. The Nigerian cellular industry has been growing at a rapid rate since its inception in the year 2001. (Nigerian Communications Commissions – NCC). The subscriber base of the industry is currently estimated to be 168 million subscribers. The study has used the information from the firms' CSR to determine their effect on brand loyalty.

Sample

Taro Yamane formula was applied in determining the sample size of the study. Based on the findings from the calculations, 400 questionnaires were distributed to customers of the four major telecom firms in the

country across multiple cities. These firms are MTN, GLO, AIRTEL & 9MOBILE.

Out of the 400 distributed questionnaires, 386 were retrieved back, amounting to 96.5% response rate.

Measurement

A 5-point Likert rating scale was applied in measuring the key variables of the study. The 5-point scale was applied in the measurement of customers’ perception towards the firms’ various corporate social responsibility practices. The customers were exposed to the various CSR actions of the firms; this was done to really determine if such CSR engagements can significantly affect the consumers’ brand loyalty.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The survey instrument was subjected to face and content validity. The primary data sources for this research were the responses from customers extracted from the administered questionnaires to the customers of Mtn, Glo, 9Mobile and Airtel. The questionnaire for the customers was adopted to gain data to evaluate the research questions. The questionnaire is divided into two sections: A&B. Section A contains background questions, Section B consist of questions that are related to the study, that is, the effect of corporate social responsibility on brand loyalty, as it relates to information available to the customers.

PROCEDURE FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistic was used to collect and analysed data. frequency count, and simple percentage were used to interpret demographic data and other univariate variables while simple regression and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

H₀ Corporate social responsibility has no significant influence on brand loyalty.

Table 3: Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	CSR ^b	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: brand loyalty

b. All requested variables entered.

Source: SPSS Output version 23, (2019)

Reporting

This table 3 shows the variable used to predict another variable. As such it can be deduced that the corporate social responsibility is used to predict the brand loyalty.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.052 ^a	.003	-.002	.45725	.003	.525	1	192	.470

a. Predictors: (Constant), CSR

Interpretation

From the model summary in the table above, the coefficient of determination (R^2) which measures the proportion of the dependent variable variance and how best it fits to the regression line. The r^2 of 0.003 simply connotes that 0.3 of the variability can be explained while 99.7% are explained by external variables. Thus, there is no strong goodness of fit as 0.3% of the values falls along the regression line. This simply connotes that there are many outliers along the regression line.

Table 5: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.110	1	.110	.525	.470 ^b
	Residual	40.143	192	.209		
	Total	40.253	193			

a. Dependent. Brand loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), CSR.

Interpretation

From the ANOVA table, the probability value of 0.470 is greater than 0.05 level of significance which from the rule of thumb the study rejects the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis. Findings from the study revealed that the Nigeria’s telecom firms’ participation in corporate social responsibility activities does not have a significant influence on customers’ brand loyalty ($r^2=0.003$, $0.470>0.05$). This implies firms’ corporate social responsibility engagement in Nigerian telecom industry is not a key determinant in brand loyalty decision by consumers. Cultivating brand loyalty is an important aspect of a business strategy, brand loyalty can aid in keeping an enterprise a going-concern. This enables a firm to plan for the future, it significantly helps during production by knowing or having an estimate on the required production volume.

Corporate social responsibility is one way of ideally ensuring brand loyalty, helping to fill the institutional gap by erecting infrastructure for example can go a long way in convincing the community of the good

intentions of the firm, which should ideally lead to more patronage and eventual loyalty to that particular firm.

Empirical findings from the study revealed that majority of the customers are willing to move to a different telecom provider with better prices or rates and service quality at any given opportunity. With Nigeria being a developing nation and a large portion of its citizens falling within the low income bracket, the consumers do not have the luxury of being loyal to a particular firm. The consumers need to take advantage of any favourable price point in the market. This finding is supported by (Nevine Eshra et al., 2017) revealing that Egyptians consumers do not consider CSR in their buying decisions. There exists an insignificant relationship between consumer buying behaviour and CSR. The study revealed that Egyptians do not consider CSR in their buying decisions because of the low level of income they earn.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has analyzed the effect of corporate social responsibility practices on brand loyalty in the Nigerian telecommunication sector. The study revealed that customers from developing country such as Nigeria with relatively low income households are usually not big on brand loyalty. The study showed some customers do indeed believe that firms that engage in meaningful corporate social responsibility actions could influence their brand loyalty, but a large number of the respondents categorically affirmed that CSR do not influence their brand loyalty. This culture of not being loyal to any brands in this part of the world is revealed to be due to the customers' constant search for substitute goods with more favourable price points. The economic reality on ground in Nigeria dictates that prices and quality of service trumps other factors when it comes to making buying decisions. CSR in developing countries such as Nigeria essentially means filling the institutional gaps left by the government. This is carried out by the firms' involvement in infrastructural projects.

The results from this study are important to the cellular operators in staying competitive by designing products with competitive price points to meet the needs of Nigerian consumers. The study helped to deepen the existing literature on the effects of CSR on brand loyalty in an emerging economy. The study has a limitation, this research attempted to view corporate social responsibility as a predictor of brand loyalty in Nigerian telecommunication firms, also noting the role of CSR in filling institutional gaps in developing countries; however, the use of one country poses a limitation to this research, as Nigeria has its peculiar challenges that make it insufficient to generalize the results of this study to other developing countries.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The lack of specific CSR measures is a major recurring issue on the existing CSR literature. While this study attempted to measure CSR based

on the stakeholder's theory, the stakeholders adopted to this study was limited to the consumers. The use of other stakeholders such as the government, employees etc. would like to a more robust research on corporate social responsibility in the confinement of the stakeholders' theory. In the study of corporate social responsibility as it fills institutional gaps in developing countries, further research will do better to carry out a comparative analysis between CSR practices in two or more developing countries, rather than drawing conclusions based on an individual country. As each country has its country specific challenges.

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