

Qualitative Perspective of Product Quality and Corporate Branding in Store Based Retail Outlet in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of product quality on corporate branding in selected retail businesses in Lagos state, Nigeria using thematic analysis. Qualitative method was used as a research design; the population was infinite as the study focused on customers of the 3 selected retail outlets in Lagos state, the study adopts multi-stage sampling technique. Face-to-face interview was used to collect the primary data; four respondents were interviewed for the study. The data was analyzed with Nvivo software version 12. Consequently, from the outcome of the qualitative analysis, there was significant relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables through the semi-structured interviewed held with the 4 participants. The study concluded with the observation that a well designed quality product that satisfies customer needs, serves its purpose and meet industrial standards will work creditably in building trust that would sustain corporate brand in retail business. The study recommends that the retail service providers should also create a sustainable corporate brand through quality product that would increase the customer traffic in the store. The essence of this is that, the more the customer traffic are recorded by a retail store means more customer patronage.

Keywords: Corporate Branding, Customer Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Product Quality, Service Providers.

Introduction

Customer service in retail business is like any other customer services in any customer-oriented service providers' firms. Improving service quality and product quality have been considered very necessary in the present complex business environment in enhancing customer satisfaction. Furthermore, for a retail business to achieve a significant success, it must be willing to improve the quality of its service in relation to the demand of their esteem customers.

Organisations with a sound quality services with quality products in their stores have significant edge in providing customer satisfaction and guarantee loyalty. Firm that can get necessary latest information about the needs of their customers by making use of an effective customer relationship strategy provides more satisfactory offerings than their competitors (Buttle & Maklan, 2015; Priyanka & Praveen, 2020).

Research surveys by AC Nielsen (2014) which has extensive presence in Nigeria reveals that between 2005 and 2010, the number of retail firms across the country increased by 36 percent. In Lagos state alone, there is total number of 903 shopping and specialty retail stores which also includes 79 online shopping lines (directory.org.ng, 2022). A remarkable

number of factors that are responsible for this rapid increase in retail business can be attributed to; (i) the country's population that is booming and becoming more cosmopolitan, (ii) government's unprejudiced policy on some aspects of traditional open market retail operations such as street trading which is making the environment less conducive for some retailers (iii) government's commercial objective, especially in Nigeria's urban cities to make retail more organized and taxable (iv) more families are now shopping together and the organized retail environment present the platform that accommodates that culture (Olaide, 2019).

Statement of the Research Problem

Improving product quality is another notable dilemma in improving service quality in retail business, As opined by Chen and Shaheen (2018), a significant number of managers collectively agreed that retail business success will heavily depend on improving the quality of the products and services in accordance with the demand of the customers. Product quality is a good place to start in providing customer satisfaction and ultimately gain customer loyalty. When quality products are provided on the shelves in the retail outlet it helps to maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty and also reduce the risk and cost of replacing damaged or spoilt goods. Retail business can build a reputation for quality by gaining recognized and notable quality standard.

Notable perspective to compete in today's turbulent marketing environment and increasing product performance that will enhance customer satisfaction in retail industry is to adopt a virile corporate branding strategy (Anisimova, 2007). Corporate branding provides an indispensable opportunity for organizations to build and sustain their distinctiveness through relating corporate features to products and services, thereby, allowing fascinating synergies to be developed. Due to the undisputable relevance of corporate branding, most of the retail firms involving in technology products ignore corporate brand strategy and largely rely on the assumption that constant product improvement will sell itself (Tickle, Keller & Richey, 2003).

Furthermore, the needs by the organisation to intimate their esteem customers about the uniqueness of their offering, that they are socially responsible and sell reliable and high quality product entails trust through corporate reputation (Taghian, D'Souza & Polonsky, 2015). The organization's reputation is one of the most inimitable valuable assets in achieving competitiveness. Reputation is the building of perceptions that are stored in the memory of company's stakeholders which also includes customers and company's employees. The way employees and customers perceive the company's reputation will influence their behavior and relationships with the organization. This is noticeable in-service businesses, where company's employees and customers interact very closely in the delivery of high-quality services. The company's image and reputation plays an important role in establishing relationships with customers.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to ascertain the extent of relationship between product quality and corporate branding in a store – based retail outlet in Nigeria from qualitative perspective using thematic analysis Nvivo software to test the hypothesis.

Literature Review

Concept of Product Quality

As opined by Sambo, Ukpata, Atiga and Fumba (2022), product quality is one of the important elements in the business word in providing value to customers which does not only include objects that are tangible but also objects that are intangible, which includes packaging, service characteristics, brand name as well as performance quality. Product can be conceptualised as anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Zeithaml (1988) conceptualize quality as superiority or excellence, while Ehsani (2015) posit that quality of product is the customer's perception of the overall quality or originality of the product or service, with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) further assert that quality is the characteristic of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied customer needs.

It is important to note that the quality of the product is not reviewed by the company standpoint, it is seen from the perspective of the customer. Associated with that, it raised two important factors that affect the quality of the product, namely the expected product quality and the perceived product quality. In details, if the perceived product quality is in line with the expectation, then the customer will perceive the product quality as a good quality and also feel satisfied. Conversely, if the perceived product quality is not as expected, then the quality of the product as the customer perceived is qualified as a bad product quality. Thus, the qualification of both bad and good product depends on the ability of the company to meet the customer expectations.

Razak, Nirwanto and Triatmanto (2016) emphasised the importance of product quality as not determined by the company standpoint. But originate from the perspective of the customer needs and wants. In relation with that, it generates two important factors that affect the quality of the product, the expected product quality and the perceived product quality. If the perceived product quality is in consonance with the expectation, then the customer will perceive the product quality as a good quality and also feel satisfied. In contrast, if the perceived product quality did not perform as expected, then the quality of the product is perceived by the customer as product with bad product quality. In spite of this, the judgments of both bad and good product depend on the ability of the company to meet the desired customer expectations.

Garvin (1987) consequently developed a system of thinking about the quality of products by analyzing the basic elements of product quality in eight dimensions. (Garvin, 1987) and Foster, Wallin and Ogden (2011) posit that quality is multidimensional and that each of its

dimensions can be used strategically to gain competitive advantage. The following are Garvin's eight dimensions of product quality;

1. Performance: refers to a product's primary operating features.
2. Features: additional features that enhance the appeal of the product to the customer. These are the additional parts of performance.
3. Reliability: probability that a product will not fail within a specific time period when put in use.
4. Conformance: assurance that the product or service meets the specified standards.
5. Durability: measures the length of a product's operating life.
6. Serviceability: the speed, ease and costs with which the product can be put back into service when it breaks down.
7. Aesthetics: how the product looks, feels, sounds. It is a matter of personal judgment and a reflection of individual preference.
8. Perceived quality: the quality attributed by the customer, noting that perception is not always a reality.

Concept of Corporate Branding

Corporate approach to branding contrasts with classical line of branding (Harris, Drury & de Chernatony, 2001). With the latter, a product line or product is the primary brand (Berry & Seltman, 2007), branding tends to focus on consumers employee interaction with customers is not quite notable whilst values tend to be enacted via advertising, distribution, user imagery or the physical product and its packaging (De Chernatony, Drury & Segal-Horn, 2004). However, in the aspect of corporate branding, values are largely enacted through employee behavior (Boston & Isberg, 2009; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2004) to a broader range of stakeholders.

For service brands, it is particularly important that employees' behavior should be in consonance with how the organization wants the brand to be perceived by the consumers (de Chernatony, Drury & Segal-Horn, 2004; Hulberg, 2006; Keller, 2008). More importantly, company's employees play a crucial role in initiating and building of the brand as part of the corporate branding process (Berry & Seltman, 2007). Consequently, corporate branding can be regarded as more inter disciplinary in scope than traditional product based branding given marketers 'need for corporate brands to engage in human resource activities that foster employee behavior to propagate the brand.

The integrated marketing communications of corporate brands, which is aimed at multiple stakeholders, has to reflect the organization's value to stakeholders outside the organization (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Hulberg, 2006; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). It is widely believed that one of the most valuable strategic resources that a firm has is the corporate brand which if properly and sensibly managed can help a firm to create a sustainable competitive advantage (Aaker, 1996). With a well planned approach, employees are more likely to understand brand objectives and their respective roles in building the corporate brand of their firm (de Chernatony, 2001). While Einwiller and Will

(2002) on their side view planning as the most important aspect in building a corporate brand.

Empirical Review

Chigwende and Govender (2020) conducted a research study to examine the effect of corporate brand image and switching behaviour with a case study of mobile telecommunication customers in Zimbabwe. The study made use of cross-sectional survey with the convenience sample of 385 through Rao software sample size calculator. The sample size was determined from the population of 1,973,906 inhabitants. The data for the study were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and were also tested for reliability and validity using SPSS version 20. Through the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the results showed that mobile network service providers' brand image positively affects customer satisfaction; a positive relationship exists between mobile network service providers' brand image and consumer brand switching behavior; customer satisfaction positively affects their loyalty.

Usir, Ishraq, Hussain, Abubakar and Ahmed (2020) conducted a research work to investigate the effect of product quality, quality of service and perceived value on customer satisfaction. The study also finds out the relationship shaped by customer perceived value as a key mechanism and its interaction with social media usage. A total number of 300 respondents were selected through judgmental sampling procedure from Dhaka city in Bangladesh through structured questionnaire. The collected data was analysed with CB-SEM (AMOS-v24) and SPSS. The findings of the result shows that product quality and service quality have positive effect on customer satisfaction, service quality affects by product quality does not affect customer perceived value.

Suchnack, Richter and Kralova (2014) conducted a study to presents an analysis of product quality, customer satisfaction and business performance in food industry. The main objective of the research is to determine the influence of quality on customer satisfaction and on business performance and competitiveness. The research managed to find a correlation between the main factors, although partial results were significant while other factors were found to be statistically insignificant.

Abioro and Odunlami (2021) conducted a quantitative study to assess the implication of product branding on customer's patronage. The specific objectives of the research were to evaluate the effects of brand perception, service quality and customer relationship management on customers' patronage. A survey research was designed for the study, with a structured questionnaire administered to collect data from the firms' customers. The inferential statistical tool of regression analysis was adopted to analyze the formulated hypotheses. Findings revealed that brand perception has a significant effect on customer patronage ($R^2 = 0.308$, $P=0.000$), it also shows a significant effect of service quality ($R^2 = 0.623$, $P=0.000$) on customer patronage, and a significant effect of customer relationship management ($R^2 = 0.585$, $P=0.000$) on customer patronage. The study concluded with recommendations that product branding if properly managed can influence customers'

patronage, and also having the ability to increase the customers' base and profitability of the firm.

Methodology

This research work adopted qualitative method to assess the influence of product quality on corporate branding. The qualitative data was collected and analyzed to reflect the interpretation of human behavior in the study. Survey method was also adopted through a semi-structured interview guide to enable the researcher to determine the opinions, attitude, and features of target beneficiaries. The population of the study is infinite while the number of 4 respondents (customers) was interviewed from selected retail stores in Lagos State, Nigeria. The studies equally used Nvivo software for qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

Table 1: Participants' Background Information (Qualitative Interview)

S/N	Participants' Codes	Location of retail store	Years of Patronage	Date of Interview
1.	Info 1	Ikorodu	3 years	10 th September, 2022
2	Info 2	Ikeja	2 years	18 th September, 2022
3.	Info 3	Victoria Island	2 years	15 th October, 2022
4	Info 4	Festac	3 years	16 th October, 2022

Source: Researchers field survey, 2022

What is the Relationship between Product Quality and Firm's Corporate Branding?

Based on the interview discussions with the participants, relevant Product Quality themes and sub-themes that relates to corporate branding emerged as a way through which the service quality can enhance customer loyalty.

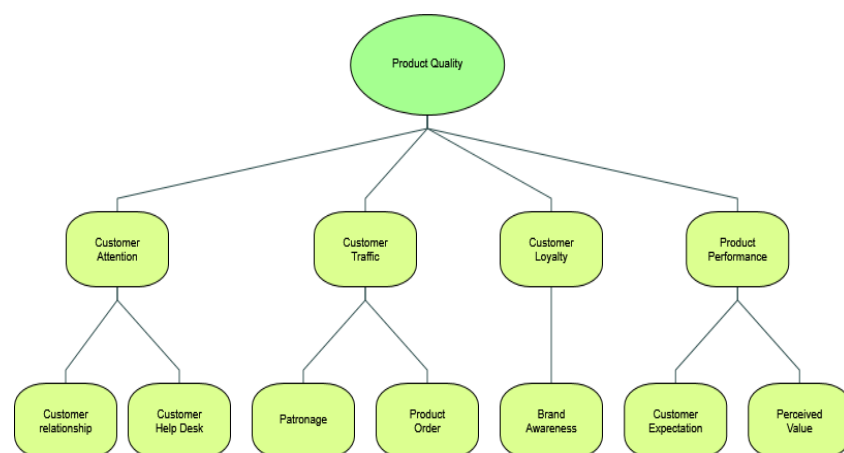


Figure 1: Thematic representation of Product Quality

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2022.

Customer Traffic

Customer traffic is a term used in business to describe the magnitude of number of customers that enters or patronize a store, mall, or location. Foot traffic numbers are heavily monitored by store officers to determine the levels of customers patronizing the stores. This is important for retail firms because it shows the presence of customers in the store and the reflection of it is that the higher the foot traffic means the higher sales. It is noticeable that common retail traffic counting uses sensors at the entrance area of the store. Most of the other retail stores use infrared technology to register customers that are coming in and out of the store each time a beam is broken.

Customer Patronage

According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2008) cited in Adiele, Grend and Chinedu (2015), the word customer or consumer patronage mean a person or thing that eats or uses something or a person who buys goods and services for personal consumption or use.

Customer return patronage intention is defined as "the possibility that a current customer of a retail store expects to return in the future for a shopping experience (Young, Clark, & McIntyre, 2007). As one of the most important factors of return patronage intentions, customer satisfaction has received a great deal of consideration. With a different set of retail store options available, customers have freedom to make choices over various available options, while retail outlets must ensure that customers are as satisfied as possible if they want the customers to come back (Ali, Kim, Li, & Jeon, 2016; Darley, Luethge, & Thatte, 2008; Jones & Sasser, 1995). Fowler (2003) posits that return behavior can be easily compromised and difficult to regain if lost. Meanwhile, literatures suggest that truly satisfied customers tend to return frequently, spend more, spread positive word of mouth, and remain loyal instead of switching to a competitor (Homburg, Koschate, & Hoyer, 2005; Mohsan, Nawaz, Khan, Shaukat, & Aslam, 2011). Thus, the success of a firm is largely dependent on enhancing customer satisfaction and ensures future patronization.

Patronage arises out of a desire to be obligated to an organization either based on its service quality or perceived service qualities. In spite of this, the extent to which a customer will patronize the services of a retail store will depend on how the customer perceives the store's physical environment (services cape) and how the customer also thinks and feels that the condition of the service environment is in tandem with his / her personality.

The essence of repeat customer patronage is that an increase in sales volume will ultimately and significantly impact on the company's profitability level (Adiele, Justin & Gabriel, 2013). For example, **INFO2** corroborated the above that;

"More so, the durability of the products purchased in the store most especially technical product has increases my continuous patronage".

Substantiating this, **INFO3** hold a similar view;

"the store is reputed to be known as a store that quality products and exceptional customer

service are found, this has motivated me to increase my patronage and refers friends and other family members to the store".

In another perception, **INFO4** supports the above thus;

"the perceived service quality and availability of quality products in the store has not only build satisfaction but loyalty, retention and repeat customer patronage which I belief would have contributed significantly into the firm's profitability"

The responses of the informants, by implication, suggest that the customer traffic of any retail stores would be conditioned by how fascinating the customers can continuously patronizing the store. This, therefore, goes to show that the customer repeat patronage emanated from satisfaction in retail service is a factor for customer loyalty. The above responses can be evidently confirmed by the empirical work of Usir, Ishraq, Hussain, Abubakar and Ahmed (2020) conducted to investigate the effect of product quality, quality of service and perceived value on customer satisfaction with the finding that product quality and service quality have considerable and positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Product Performance

In marketing, product performance (KPI) is necessary in order to keep a business successful and to make sure if the products or services are selling or not. The performance of a product is usually achieved through the performance of its components. The analytical aspect of product performance could be viewed as the collection and strategic analysis of data metrics pertaining to the purchasing of how many times visitors viewed a particular product, how many times did product is left unattended to by the customers etc. The essence of this is to avoid stock out, understand and plan marketing efforts and identify opportunity to boost revenue.

Customer Expectations

Customer Expectations are customers' assumption about a brand, product, or services and the level of care the customers need to receive throughout their journey in the consumption of that product, service, or retail store. Information about customer expectation is very important because it influences the customer behaviour as management within their limited resources should try as much as possible to manage the expectations of the customers (Ali, Leifu, YasirRafiq & Hassan, 2015). In order to investigate the difference between the customer's experiences and customer's expectations towards the customer service, both the customer's expectations for the service level, and their fulfillment by a specific organization need to be properly evaluated at the same time (Nasim & Janjua, 2014; Pakdil & Aydin, 2007; Tseng & Hung, 2013). Identification of the customer's expectations for the service level, and their fulfillment by a company, are two important steps which allow for recognizing the quality aspects of the customer service (Meybodi, 2012).

From interviewed informant "2, 3 and 4", basic product quality elements are harnessed to build corporate branding. Therefore, effective management of customer traffic through

want satisfying quality products to increase customer patronage and product order, merchandising of products that conform to product specifications that would arouse expectations in customers and increased perceived value are an essential constituent which supports product quality and Customer loyalty. However, the supremacy of management of customer traffic and building of customer expectations and perceived value was supported by Info2, Info3 and Info4. This eventually shows that merchandising of quality product is one the major considerations in achieving customer loyalty. Moreover, Info2 was of the opinion that the durability of the products purchased in the store most especially technical product has increases my continuous patronage and build customer loyalty. Meanwhile, Info3 and Info4 emphasized the relevance of merchandising of durable goods that would generate repeat patronage to enhance customer loyalty.

In relation to the above assertions, **INFO1** expresses that;

"the first thing that the management of the retail store did in order to meet his expectation as a customer is the establishment of who their esteem customers are through a clearer picture by going beyond necessary demographic information like age, gender, and location. The store management truly understands their customers like they understand their products"

Supporting the above notion, **INFO4** posit that;

"the firm have been able to conduct effective marketing research to discover who their customers are, and properly designed marketing efforts in reaching them at a minimal cost so as to encourage them us to indulge in repeat purchases that will make us to be loyal to the store and also recommend to other potential customers."

INFO3 further added that;

"The management team of the firm has also worked considerably in meeting my expectations by hiring qualified support team that understands the onion of retail management in the area of excellent customer service. That's not withstanding continuous training of the sales team to meet up with current challenges in area of retail marketing is also appreciated."

Similarly, **INFO2** also has this to say;

"My expectation on the firm was able to be reinvigorated through the customer education that the customers are benefiting from service provider on how we can derive utmost benefit and value from the products that we are purchasing from the store. This is done through their transparent posture on pricing information and support from the sales team whenever I need assistance."

Discussion of Findings

By implication the responses of the participant shows that customer expectations has significant relationship with customer loyalty, this occurs when a retail firm is noted with parading quality products on their shelves. In relation to this, the firm's brand will be seen as a quality brand in relation to other retail stores. The above assertions can be correlated with the empirical work of Almsalam (2014) conducted with the primary goal of analysing the relationship between two of the most important antecedents of customer satisfaction, namely customer expectation and perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. The

finding of the study shows that customer expectation and perceived service quality have a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- The study shows that a well designed quality product that satisfies customer needs, serves its purpose and meet industrial standards will work creditably in building trust that would sustain corporate brand in retail business.
- The study recommends that the retail service providers should also create a sustainable corporate brand through quality product that would increase the customer traffic in the store. The essence of this is that, the more the customer traffic are recorded by a retail store means more customer patronage.

Suggestions for further studies

This study focused on the product quality and corporate branding in selected retail businesses in Lagos state, Nigeria in qualitative term.

- This study suggests that further studies could be carried out in this area by using customer satisfaction as a mediating variable.
- Future researchers could also endeavor in developing new variables that can have more reasonably high percentage in the model summary of the hypotheses testing.
- Furthermore, the scope of the study could be wider in term of geographical coverage than what is obtainable in this study by future researchers.

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