Customer Enthusiasm and Brand Loyalty to Airlines Services in the Nigeria Aviation Industry

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ABSTRACT

This work is aimed at investigating the connection that exist amid customer enthusiasm and brand loyalty among airlines service providers in the Nigeria aviation industry. The specific objectives were to inspect the degree to which enthusiasm relates with product commitment and product support among airlines service providers in the Nigeria aviation industry. The populations of this study consist of customers of all airlines service providers in the Nigeria. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 299 customers of the airlines. Hypothesis for the study was tested and data for the work was analyzed to determine the mean, standard deviation. The statistical tool for social science version 22.0 was used. The analysis discovered that enthusiasm has optimistic and important relationships with brand commitment and brand support. In view of these findings, it was concluded that when customers of airlines are enthusiastic with the airlines brand they become loyal by way of showing brand commitment and support. Therefore, the study recommended that, airlines providers should make customers to be passionate and enthusiastic about their products and service, and constantly interact with customers to enhance loyal behaviour among its customers.

KEYWORDS: *Customer Enthusiasm, Brand Loyalty, Brand Commitment, Brand Support*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Globally, the growing commitment that customers in the aviation industry have for a particular brand or product is increasing at a very high rate. In Nigeria for example, fifteen airlines with nine being local carrier, among which two (Air Peace and Arik Air) are the largest and operates both internationally and domestically sees the need to have loyal customers. These two airlines provide more than a quarter of the domestic seats on a monthly base. This shows the degree of loyalty customers have for the airlines. Loyalty is associated with the perceived characteristics (brand value, brand equity, brand equality, satisfaction and trust) that the product or brand brings to her teaming customer population. As such, the aviation industry's customers get committed to aviation's products, such customers are likely to repurchase the product over time and in most cases make recommendations of the product or brand to new and potential customers by helping them build strong brand loyalty (Islam, Rahman & Hollebeek, 2017).Brand loyalty could be seen as the preference that a customer has over a product when compared with another. Hence, Coelho and Henseler (2012) offer in his claim that a customer should be seen as loyal to a product only such a customer has trust for the product. For Belás and Gabčová (2016) they identify two perspectives - attitudinal and behavioural perspectives from which customer-brand loyalty can be viewed.

Furthermore, when a customer feels that a particular product can meet up with its needs, such a customer becomes addicted and loyal to the product not even minding the price variations when compared to other products. As such, a customer that is addicted to a product will not only repeat the purchase of product that they seem necessary for their wellbeing, but will help encourage other potential customers make decision as it relates to the product (Kwon & Lennon, 2014). As a higher "customer loyalty implies a higher market share and an ability to demand relatively higher prices compared to those of competitors" (Hsieh & Kai, 2015).Loyalty is a process of retaining

or rising consumers' patronage over long term; thus, mounting the value of consumer to the company. Bowen and Chen (2001) in "support of the brand loyalty said selling products and services to new customers cost 3 to 6 times more than selling to existing (repeat) customers, thus, marginal increases in customer retention can lead to dramatic increases in profits". For this article, brand loyalty will be viewed from brand commitment and brand support identified (Simon& David, 2010).

On the other hand, customer enthusiasm refers to the joy ascribe to a product that allows the individual to have a repeat purchase, for example service provider/offerings (So et al., 2012). The actual understanding of the positive excitement that customers have toward a product is an essential guide that allows the aviation industry operators (airlines) to increase their level of engagement with their customer. As a matter of fact, brand loyalist tends to put customers in group on the base of their positive excitement. As technology has indeed created an avenue where businesses or firms can sell or reach their customers with ease. For this to be attained, some sort of new ideas or techniques that support customer orientation and awareness creation on the existence of new products is now on the fore front of modern day's organization (IBM Corporation, 2014).

However, aresearch by IBM Corporation (2014) shows companies understands the relevance with which buyers interact with new products from their brand. And as a result, one cannot talk of brand, without considering the three basic brand loyalty of communication desired by consumer; willing to provide input for consumers and the degree of comfort with customers sharing personal data with the company(IBM Corporation, 2014). Most customers to an organization love to be informed of the existence of new goods in the market. Likewise, organizations have customers that want to always associate with new development (innovative ideas and techniques) in the industry. Finally, for most air service providers to stay relevant, they must be willing to share ideas with their customers and be willing to understand their customers in terms of their willingness to share their personal feeling about a product with them.

Despite the debates on the issue of customer enthusiasm and brand loyalty among customers of airlines in the aviation sectors globally, it has been discovered that scholars, professional and industry personalities on a daily bases tends to disagree as to what brand loyalty is and what constitute the enthusiasm of customers.As such, the issue of brand loyalty is addressed frombrand commitment and

brand support identified. These indicators will not only help address the lack of adequate excitement for service and brand provided among airlines in the aviation industry, but will provides solution to the lack of belongingness or perceived oneness among customers of these airlines in the aviation sector. Hence, the paper specifically examines the extent to which customer enthusiasm relates with brand loyalty of airlines in the aviation sector in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses
H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand commitment of airlines' customer in the aviation sector in Nigeria.
H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand support among customers of airlines in the aviation sector in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review
The congruity theory is the underpinnings upon which this study was anchored. The congruity theory believes that customers will get more attached to a product or brand only if they get a high level of satisfaction from the usage of the brand(Lee &Jeong, 2014).This theory further agrees with marketing relationship theory (Rather, 2018) and service dominant logic (Hollebeek, Conduit & Brodie, 2016).Both theories see customers as the main reason why businesses exist (Vargo & Lusch, 2017).That is why customers are seen to exhibit some sort of good behaviour when it has to do with goods and services that meet their express need (Raouf, Shehnaz & Shakir, 2018).

Customer Enthusiasm
As earlier define, enthusiasm refers to the joy shown toward a product by customers (Vivek, 2012; So et al., 2012). Although joy and a feel of excitement relates, brand enthusiasm goes far beyond just excitement but leads to repeat purchase of the products by the customer. As according to Michael (2018)"organizations must build their brands from the outside by identifying what their customers want, combined with what the brand value proposition is and delivering upon to truly become a passion brand". This is why some products or services rendered are seen as power brand. As products with the inscription of "power brand" gives lot of joy to customers on a daily bases. Their appreciation of the products is seen in manner with which the tell others about the existence of the brand. And even encourage others to advertise the products to other non-users of the said product(Michael, 2018).

Brand Loyalty
Loyalty refers to the continuous commitment to a product and its features. Brand reliability refers to a continuous faith that a customer has for a product

over others products of close substitute. A given customer can get commitment or loyal to a product if the product gives he or she the right type of satisfaction that the deserved or expect from the usage of the said product. According to Gunarathne (2014) a customer can become a brand loyalist if they get involve in what is seen as repeated buying, trust and attainment of satisfaction. If a customer consistently buys a product among the various brands available, one can say that the level of loyalty express by such a customer is intense. Customer's loyalty "happens when the consumer feels that the brand consists of right product features and quality at right price" (Gunarathne, 2014).

Brand Commitment

For an organization to determine the degree of loyalty to its brand, such a business must give consideration to how often customer repeat purchase of its products (Lariviere, Keiningham, Cooil, Aksoy & Malthouse, 2014).As the repeat purchase shows at a glance the extent of commitment among products users. Apart from satisfaction which is central issue on commitment, if a customer is not in love with a given product, their level of commitment and patronage will be severely affected. As such, the study by Ercis, Sevtap, Burcu and Hatice (2012)depicted that in addition to customer satisfaction, "brand trust and brand equityare important determinants of brand loyalty".

Brand Support

Brands should be doing everything possible to promote customer loyalty. If customers to a product do not show its satisfaction on the usage of the product, the will not communicate the existence of the products to other potential customers (Karmarks, 2005). So for a brand to be promoted, such brands need to be communicated and the behaviors of the products most correlate with the brand. This will encourage other buyers to believe in the features and the uniqueness of the products (Karmark, 2005). As Karmark (2005) brand support can only be seen from the values and the norms that customers show or exhibit to a product..

Customer Enthusiasm and Brand Loyalty

Rather and Sharma (2017) looks at customers involvement in aiding customer trust in hospitality industry in India. To carry out the research work, they apply the descriptive forms of research and also apply correlation and regression analysis. As such a sample of 230 service customers were served the copies of questionnaires. Sample is made up of 4 stars airline and 5 star airlines products in India. The work discovered that with absorption, enthusiasm, attention, interaction and identification a magnificent impact do exist between customer's loyalty and affective commitment.

Jan, Raphael and Achim (2014) carried out a study on customer satisfaction and customer enthusiasm from the perspectives of small retailers in the organic market in Germany. After the application of the statistical techniques, the association between customer's satisfaction and shop data confirm with the economic effects. The work entails an analysis of 948 customers of 12 organic food shops in Germany. The regression analysis shows a strong connection and this connection indicate that customer satisfaction account for 32% of the overall sales of the organization. Irrespective of these findings, we hypothesize that:

H_{01}: There is no substantial affiliation among customer enthusiasm and brand commitment of airlines customers in the aviation sector in Nigeria.

H_{02}: There is no note worthy connection amid customer enthusiasm and brand support of airlines customers in the aviation sector in Nigeria.

3. METHODS

The research design adoptedfor this report is a cross sectional survey.The cluster technique was used for the report. Accessible population of airlines in the aviation industry in Nigeriawas considered. The data for the study was collected from primary and secondary data sources. The instrument for data collection used for the study is the questionnaire. The data collected was aanalyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tool.

Findings
Data Analysis

This part of the study involves analysis of each of the variables. In the same vein, the hypotheses stated were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Univariate Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Enthusiasm

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
I am passionate about this airline product	299	1	5	903	3.02	1.497	2.241
I am enthusiastic about this airline product.	299	1	5	1024	3.42	1.327	1.762
I feel excited about this airline product	299	1	5	1052	3.52	1.329	1.767
I love this airline product	299	1	5	1065	3.56	1.247	1.556
I am heavily into this airline product	299	1	5	1021	3.41	1.389	1.928
Valid N (list wise)	299						

Source: SPSS Output from Survey Questionnaire, 2022.

As shown from the results of the analysis on Table 1, the high mean scores indicate that customers of airlines in the aviation industry sector affirmed to a high extent and very high extent that they are enthusiastic about their airlines. Specifically, question 4 has the highest sum of 1065 and hence the highest mean score of 3.56.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Brand Commitment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
I get excited when I think of traveling in this airline product.	299	1	5	1101	3.68	1.469	2.157
I feel rewarded when I patronize in this airline product.	299	1	5	1110	3.71	1.485	2.206
I do not feel personally satisfied when I travel in this airline.	299	1	5	1102	3.69	1.452	2.109
I feel emotionally attached to this airline product.	299	1	5	1129	3.78	1.232	1.517
Using this airline product gets me to think about luxury	299	1	5	1143	3.82	1.305	1.703
Valid N (list wise)	299						

Source: SPSS Output from Survey Questionnaire, 2022

As shown from the results of the analysis shown on Table 2, the high mean scores indicate that customers of airlines in the aviation sector affirmed to a high extent and very high extent to the questions concerning brand commitment. Specifically, question 5 has the highest sum of 1143 and hence the highest mean score of 3.82.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Brand Support

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
I would recommend this airline product to someone who seeks my advice	299	1	5	1145	3.83	1.188	1.410
I would encourage friends to do business with this airline product	299	1	5	1141	3.82	1.180	1.392
I would say positive things about this airline product to other people	299	1	5	1161	3.88	1.320	1.741
I would do more business with this airline product in the next few years	299	1	5	1073	3.59	1.339	1.793
I am a loyal customer of this airline product	299	1	5	1031	3.45	1.099	1.208
Valid N (list wise)	299						

Source: SPSS Output from Survey Questionnaire, 2022

As shown from the results of the analysis shown on Table 3, the high mean scores indicate that customers of airlines in the aviation sector affirmed to a high extent and very high extent to the questions concerning brand support. Specifically, question 3 has the highest sum of 1161 and hence the highest mean score of 3.88.

Table 4: Showing the degree and direction relationship between enthusiasm and brand commitment.

		Enthusiasm	Brand Commitment
Enthusiasm	Pearson Correlation	1	.564[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	299	299
Brand Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.564[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	299	299
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: SPSS Output, 2022.

Results of the SPSS output in the correlation model on table 4 showed the strength and direction of relationship between enthusiasm and brand commitment. The correlation coefficient(r) shows the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. As shown in the model, correlation coefficient(r) is 0.564 which means, the relationship between enthusiasm and brand commitment is moderate. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the valid number of questionnaire used in the model is 299 represented by N, i.e. N = 299, and the probability value (i.e. Sig.) is less than the critical value (i.e. $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between enthusiasm and brand commitment (r = 0.564, N = 299, p = 0.000 < 0.05). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand commitment to airline service in the aviation sector in Nigeria; and accept the alternate the hypothesis. In other words, there is a significant relationship between enthusiasm and brand commitment:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand commitment in the aviation sector in Nigeria.

Table 5: Showing the Degree and Direction Relationship between Customer Enthusiasm and Brand Support

		Customer Enthusiasm	Brand Support
Customer Enthusiasm	Pearson Correlation	1	.638[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	299	299
Brand Support	Pearson Correlation	.638[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	299	299
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: SPSS Output, 2022.

Results of the SPSS output in the correlation model on Table 5 showed the strength and direction of relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand support. The correlation coefficient(r) shows the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. As shown in the model, correlation coefficient(r) is 0.638 which means, the relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand support is strong. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the valid number of questionnaire used in the model is 299 represented by N, i.e. N = 299, and the probability value (i.e. Sig.) is less than the critical value (i.e. $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand support (r = 0.638, N = 299, p = 0.000 < 0.05). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand support to airlines service in the aviation sector in Nigeria; and accept the alternate hypothesis. In other words, there is a significant relationship between enthusiasm and brand support:

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between customer enthusiasm and brand support in the aviation sector in Nigeria

Discussion of Findings
Results of the analysis on the association amid enthusiasm and brand support and commitment. The findings of this study confirmed findings of previous studies. For example, our study results corroborated the findings of Rather and Sharma (2016) who investigated the relationship between customer engagements in strengthening customer loyalty in hospitality sector in India. The findings suggest that absorption, enthusiasm, attention, interaction and identification have impact on brand loyalty. More so, our findings are agrees with the report of Jan et al. (2014) that carried out a study on customer satisfaction and customer enthusiasm from the

perspectives of small retailers in the organic market in Germany. In view of these previous studies that are in line with the findings of our study, it is clear that when customers of airlines in the aviation sectors are enthusiastic with the airline brand they become loyal by way of showing brand commitment and support.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the report from the tested hypotheses and consistency with previous reports, it is concluded that; when customers of airlines in the aviation sector are enthusiastic with the airlines brand they show their loyalty through constant commitment and support. The report recommended that:

1. The Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority should sets out policy that will regulate the way and manner that these airlines renders services to their customers as this will make its customers to build more trust and confidence on the aviation sectors and its brands.

2. Airline should make customers to be passionate and enthusiastic about their products and service the render on a daily bases if they want to sustain their patronage.

3. Airlines should make customers feel like they are part owners of the business as this will make them brand ambassador to the airline and also encourage new customer to patronize the product.

4. Airlines should consider customer participation as an important component of co-production to elicit brand commitment and brand support.

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