Brand Personality and Customer Loyalty of Beverage Firms in Rivers State of Nigeria

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Abstract: This study analyzed Brand Personality and Customer Loyalty of Beverage Firms in Rivers State of Nigeria, by means of a correlation investigation to determine the significant relationships between two popular dimensions of brand personality (Brand Excitement and Brand Sophistication) and two measures of Customer Loyalty (Customers' service and Customers' relation) adopted by this study. The population of the study consists of 935 academic staff of three Universities who are customers of beverage firms in Rivers State of Nigeria. The sampling technique used was the stratified sampling technique. A total of 295copies of questionnaire were distributed and retrieved after being answered correctly and fully. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Simple Regression and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) to establish the significant relationship between the various variables used in the study. The findings revealed that brand excitement has a positive and significant relationship with customer service and customer retention: brand sophistication has a positive and significant relationship with customer service and customer retention. The study therefore, concludes that a significant and positive relationship exists between the dimensions of brand personality and measures of customer loyalty, and that brand personality is positively influencing customer loyalty of beverages firms in Rivers State of Nigeria. It was recommended beverage firms should retain the policy of aligning their brands to reflect brand excitement and brand sophistication in improving customer retention and customer service

Keywords: Beverage firms, Brand personality, Customers' Loyalty, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

In recent time, crafting a brand that communicates the very essence of what the product represent is very important to practitioners. As with an individual,each person has a personality and so with customers' countless perception of a brand. This perceived differences have given some misconception of Brand personality as understood by

organizations in order to fulfill a multifaceted and multi-dimensional function of providing an identity to the organization.There are countless variables at play determining why a consumer chooses to purchase a single brand over another. Some consumers are highly influenced by social media branding which reflects the brand personality that is consistent with their own self-concept. This is because the bond between consumer and brand is sometimes based on their desired self-concept rather than their actual image. Where brand personality concentrate on the concept of adding human characteristics on brands, a customer's simply choose their brands the same way they choose their friends (Alhadid, 2015; Keller, 2008).

Different industries have various ways of measuring loyalty, but the most basic way is to look at the number of purchases over a customer's lifetime in a database. Repeat buyers are the most valuable customers. Though they may not be big purchasers, it is likely that over time, the revenue from firm will top revenue from big one-time buyers (Lister, 2019).Customer loyalty is the result of consistently positive emotional experience, physical attribute-based satisfaction and perceived value of an experience, which includes the product or services. Customer loyalty is becoming more complex to achieve as a result of increased competition. Companies are trying hard to keep their customers loyal and avoid means of making room for competitors to grab these customers (Alhadid, 2015).

Businesses require customers to be particularly loyal to their brand of products because it contributes greatly in reducing costs thus improving brand as well as company's profitability. For instance a company will gain profit when loyal customers provide free advertisement through positive word of mouth. Satisfied and happy customers recommend stores, products or services to their family and friends. Hadiza (2014) revealed that each satisfied customers tells nine or ten people about their happy experiences and their dissatisfaction to the company and its products.So it becomes inevitable for the brand managers of today to probe into the context of appropriate relationship between the constructs such as brand personality and customer loyalty. It costs less to serve loyal customers because familiarity with the company's products and services makes customers less dependent on its employees for help and information. In this study we assess the relative importance of various antecedents to customer loyalty, including brand personality.

Only a few researchers, such as Plummer (1985) and David Aaker (1996) have pointed out the importance of brand personality in building a competitive advantage and brand loyalty. Studies have been carried out on brand personality with several measures; De Chernatony 1996; Hadiza, 2014; Herbig and Milewicz, 1993).Based on the results from previous studies, it is concluded that there is divisive views over the results of investigations in this area. Some researchers state that the study of brand personality is still limited, especially in the beverage firms and some of them only explore the technological side, and not much research is undertaken on the personal aspect of the customer, which is part of the innovations, This present study presented an empirical framework for understanding of the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty of beverage firms in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem
Although some research efforts have been undertaken to explain brand personality in

developing economies (Pierre, Haythem & Dwight, 2011; Louis & Lombert, 2010; Huber & Herrmann, 2003), many of these research efforts do not provide answers to issues pertaining to the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty in the beverage industry. There are many problems militating against customer loyalty of beverage firms. Problems that manifests as dissatisfaction and unsophistication of products and services which may have perceivably impeded the loyalty of customers in these companies. Besides, achieving efficient and effective customer loyalty by an organization is difficult, as a result of the changing nature of customers, ambiguity and instability of environmental factors. Sound and robust marketing commitment on the part of organizations are imperative to their survival and growth. In order to formulate and implement effective and efficient brand personality programmes, beverage firms should have a thorough and continuous understanding of the extent of customer loyalty to their firms. In view of these, this current study determine the relationship between brand personality and customers' loyalty of beverage companies in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study
The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty of beverage firms in Rivers State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

i. To determine the extent of the influence of brand excitement on customers service
ii. To ascertain the extent of the influence of brand sophistication on customers' retention

Research Questions
However, from the objectives of the study, the following research questions guided the study.

i. To what extent does brand excitement influence customers service?
ii. To what extent does brand sophistication influence customer retention?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES
Brand Personality
Brands are omnipresent in today's society. They surround us in our everyday life (Kapferer 2007; Klein, Palmer& Conn (2000). But what exactly is a brand? According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition. From a different angle, brands are defined as intangible assets that are able to produce benefit for both the internal and external stakeholders of the company – such as employees, customers, suppliers or civil society organizations. Again another definition argues that brands are a set of perceptions (Kapferer, 2007). These definitions are only a few examples for the manifold angles from which researchers and practitioners approach the brand phenomenon. The diversity of brand definitions also suggests that different perspectives can be taken when exploring the world of brand, such as the legal, the management or the customer perspective.

From the legal perspective, the brand is the right that protects the use of a name, a logo

or a combination of them. The legal term for a brand is trademark. This trademark is used to identify the product or the service of a company and to differentiate it from offerings of competing manufacturers (Keller, 2008). However, even though brands legally exist from the day of their registration on, the company constantly has to build and manage the brand to defend it against a premature dissolution – there is no direct link between owning a brand and economic outcomes (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993). Thus, different brands although being protected in a similar legal manner may result in different market shares, cash flows or profit margins (Keller, 2008; Kerin & Sethuraman, 1998). The explanation resides in the fact that every brand has its positioning and that this positioning contributed to the emergence of brand-specific images in the minds of customer which, in turn, influence customers' purchasing decisions (De Chernatony 1999; Keller & Lehmann, 2003). The more unique a brand's positioning, and the closer this positioning gets to the ideal positioning a customer or segment expects in a given product category, the better the brand's economic performance. Therefore, from the company's perspective, branded articles are device to create some form of "imperfect competition". A product comprises non-distinguishing and distinguishing intrinsic attributes. For instance, pens can be used to make a note. But how do the different pens differ from each other? The brand name, the logo and other extrinsic attributes such as the price or the packaging are the components which are needed to create a brand. The brand summarizes what a company's offerings stand for and what they are like. Successful brands often manage to convince customers that the offerings sold under their name and logo are unique, or at least clearly different from other offerings on the same market. As a consequence, brands are increasingly considered to constitute critical resources allowing companies to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors (Keller, 2008). They are seen as intangible assets which contribute to the financial performance of the company. For instance, through higher prices or quick consumer responses to marketing activities, they lead to increased and faster cash flows. Also the vulnerability of cash flows is limited through customer loyalty towards a brand.

According to Keller (2008), there are four key dimensions of brand personality; this include Brand Excitement, brand sincerity, brand excitement, brand sophistication, and brand toughness.

Brand Excitement: The first dimension of brand personality is brand excitement. The attributes represented by this brand personality are intelligence, success, reliability and expertise, and itcontains such traits as playful, daring, imaginative and spirited.

Brand Sincerity: The second dimension of brand personality is brand sincerity. Genuine, honest, wholesome and cheerful come to mind when thinking of the traits associated with this dimension. With so many advertising outlets currently available to a brand from traditional print to marketing through social media, today's public is more skeptical than ever when it comes to a brand's true level of sincerity. Day in, day out, consumers are inundated with brand messaging throughout the day, social media activity streams flooded with special events promotions, discounts, and contests to win free products or services. Unfortunately, too many

of these brand messages provide very little value to consumers, thereby tainting public perception on whether brand sincerity is closer to being an oxymoron than an attainable personality trait for a brand.

Brand Sophistication: The third dimension of brand personality is brand sophistication. Common characteristics associated with this dimension include charming, refined, elegant and poise.

Brand Toughness: The final dimension of brand personality is brand toughness. Powerful, forceful, potent and outdoorsy come to mind when thinking of the traits associated with this dimension.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is the point at which customers experience affirmative mind-sets for and fit into place in encouraging behaviors in the direction of a company/brand. Customer loyalty is the end result of continuously optimistic emotional experience, substantial attribute-based contentment and professed value of an experience, which embraces the product or services. Customer loyalty is becoming more composite to realize as a result of augmented competition. Companies are trying hard to maintain their customers loyal and circumvent means of making room for competitors to take hold of these customers (Alhadid, 2015).

Hayes (2015) proposed a customer loyalty measurement framework that will be of practical value to business, helping them to understand how to conceptualize and measure customer loyalty.

Hayes (2015**)** notes that once created, these metrics can be employed by businesses in a multiplicity of ways to advance marketing, sales, human resources, service and support processes. The two general approaches he proposed in measuring customer loyalty are: 1) objective approach and 2) subjective (self-reported) approach.

Objective measurement approach consists of system-captured metrics that absorbs hard numbers concerning customer behaviors that are valuable to the company. Data can be acquired from historical records and other purposeful sources, including purchase records (confined in a CRM classification) and other online behavior. Examples of objective loyalty data comprise computer generated records of "time spent on the Web site," "number of products/services purchased" and "whether a customer renewed their service contract."

Subjective measurement approach engrosses soft numbers concerning customer loyalty. Subjective loyalty metrics comprise customers' self-reports of their mind-set regarding the company and behavior toward the company. Examples of subjective loyalty data consist of customers' ratings on standardized survey questions like, "How likely are you to recommend <Company> to your friends/colleagues?", "How likely are you to continue using <Company>?" and "Overall, how satisfied are you with <Company>?"

This objective/subjective dichotomy is intended to supply a first-rate structure for thrashing out measurement approach.

Empirical Review

Some empirical studies have investigated brand personality. For example, Roustasekehravani, Abubakar, Azam and Pooladireishahri (2014) investigated the impact of brand personality, customers' satisfaction and loyalty in the banking industry. The study adopts the comparative methods to collect data, and also analyzed with the aid of the SPSS and especially utilizing the independent t-test on the mean of three groups to determine that there was a significant difference between the variables studied.

Pierre, Haythem and Dwight (2011) examined the impact of brand personality and sales promotions on brand equity: Empirical study on commercial banks clients in Jordan, using two dimensions of competence: ruggedness and sales promotions on customer satisfaction. The statistical tools used were the simple regression analysis and t-test statistics. The results demonstrated that there is a statistical significant impact of the dimensions of brand personality.

Louis and Lombart (2010) studied the influence of brand personality and major relational consequences on customer loyalty of mobile telephone subscribers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia using a descriptive and cross-sectional method. The stratified sampling technique was employed and a sample of 321 was used in the study. The population consists of students and staff of faculty of Management, University of Technology, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (factor analysis, correlation and regression tests). The findings reveals that the influence of brand personality on customer loyalty within mobile telephone companies was both directly and partially moderated by firms responses and mediated by service quality.

Magin, Algesheimer, Huber and Herrmann (2003) examined brand excitement and customers' satisfaction of customers of internet service providers in media industry, Johannes Gutenberg. The study used an expo facto method and adopts the questionnaire to gather data. The Spearman's rank order correlation was used for data analysis and it was found that brand excitement has a strong positive interaction with customers' satisfaction. The study concludes that customers' satisfaction is significantly influenced by brand excitement as a viable trait of brand personalization and recommends that ISP promote friendly and polite and honest customer service to solidify customers' relationship with the firm.

From the review of literature, the following operational model of brand personality and customer loyalty was designed:
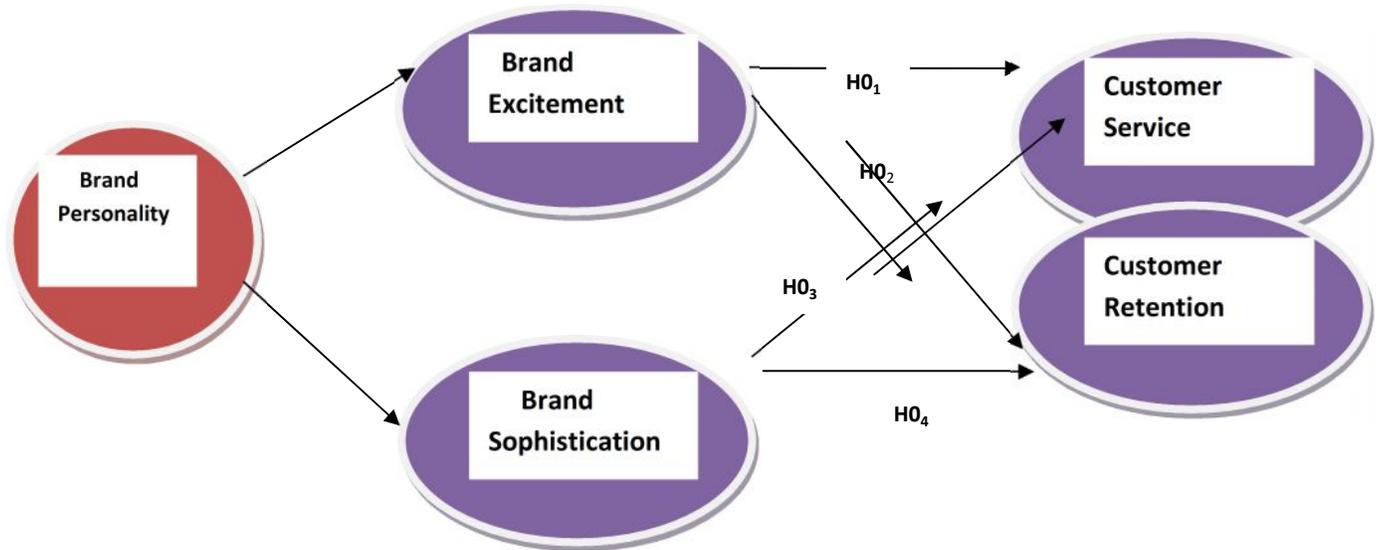
OPERATIONAL MODEL

Figure 1: Operational Model of Brand Personality and customer Loyalty

From the operational model, the following hypotheses were formulated and te[s]
of significance.

Ho₁. There is no significant relationship between brand excitement and customer service.
Ho₂. There is no significant relationship between brand excitement and customer retention.
Ho₃. There is no significant relationship between brand sophistication and customer service.
Ho₄. There is no significant relationship between brand sophistication and customers' retention.

RESEARCH METHODS
A cross- sectional survey was selected for this study because it was easy to embark on and the result from the sample can be extrapolated to the larger population. The study adopted the correlational survey design to determine the extent of the relationship between brand personality and customer loyalty. The target population in the study was 1121 academic staff of three Universities in Rivers State (Rivers State University (RSU), Port Harcourt, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), Rumuolumeni, and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic (CEAP). Rumuola) who consumes beverage firms' products domiciled in Port Harcourt. Harcourt and Ikegwuru (2018) used similar method. The cluster sampling technique was employed to select the respondents for the study. To obtain sample size of the academic staff from the population of 1121, Taro Yemen's Formula for sample size determination was used. The formula is $S = N/(1 + Na^2)$.

Table 1:   **Distribution of Respondents in Institutions of Higher Learning in Rivers State**

Institutions	Frequency	%	No of respondents
RSU	519	46	136
IAUE	310	28	82
CEAP	292	26	77
Total	**1121**	**100**	**295**

Source: Survey Data, 2020.

Further, the instrument used for data collection was the "Brand Personality Scale". The brand personality scale constructed was short, easy to administer and consists of 12 items. The questionnaire was pre-tested using respondents in three higher Institutions in Rivers State to substantiate its reliability. The analyzed data was presented using descriptive statistics, frequency tables, Simple regression and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Descriptive statistics permit the generalization of the data to furnish an explanation of the configuration or the characteristics of the population as symbolized by the sample. The simple regression and Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the data generated for the study. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05% level of significance (95% confidence interval) with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: To what extent does brand excitement influence customers' service?

Table 1: Summary of Regression on the extent of the influence of brand excitement on customers' service

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	Sd	R	R^2	Adjusted R
Brand excitement	295	63.1	2.50			
				0.70	0.4900	0.012
Customers' service	295	60.7	1.78			

$$R^2*100 = 0.4900* 100 = 49\%$$

Brand excitement scores of the respondents account for 49% of the variance in the respondents' customers' service. That is to say that brand excitement can predict customers' service by 49% provided by the beverage firms.

Research Question 2: To what extent does brand sophistication influence customers' retention?

Table 2: Summary of Regression on the extent of the influence of brand sophistication on customers' retention

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	Sd	R	R^2	Adjusted R
Brand sophistication	295	58.9	2.53			
				0.73	0.5100	0.012
Customers' retention	295	56.5	1.74			

$R^2*100 = 0.5100* 100 = 51\%$

Brand sophistication scores of the respondents account for 51% of the variance in the customers' relation. That is to say that brand sophistication can predict customers' retention by 51% provided by the beverage firms.

Test of Hypotheses

The researchers had formulated four hypotheses in order to test the relationship between dimensions of brand personality and measures of customers' loyalty. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient is calculated using the SPSS 23.0 version to establish the relationship among the empirical referents of the predictor variable and the measures of the criterion variable. Correlation coefficient can range from -1.00 to +1.00. The value of -1.00 represents a perfect negative correlation while the value of +1.00 represents a perfect positive correlation. A value of 0.00 represents a lack of correlation. In testing hypotheses one to four, the following rules were upheld in accepting or rejecting the null hypotheses: All the coefficient values that indicate levels of significance (* or **) as calculated using SPSS were rejected and therefore our alternate hypotheses accepted; when no significance is indicated in the coefficient r value, we reject our alternate hypotheses. Our confidence interval was set at the 0.05 (two tailed) level of significance to test the statistical significance of the data in this study.

Relationship between Brand Excitement and the Measures of Customer loyalty

Table 3: Correlations for Brand Excitement and measures of Customer Loyalty

		Brand Excitement	Customers Service	Customers Retention
Brand Excitement	Pearson Correlation	1	.650**	.730**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	295	248	295
Customers service	Pearson Correlation	.650**	1	.626**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	295	248	295
Customers Retention	Pearson Correlation	.730**	.626**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	295	248	295

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

Table 3, illustrates the test for the first two previously postulated bivariate hypothetical statements. The results show that for:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between brand excitement and customer service.

From the result in table 3, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a positive relationship between brand excitement and customers' service. The *correlation coefficient* 0.650 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at p 0.000<0.05. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between brand excitement and customers' service offered by beverages firms in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Ho₂. There is no significant relationship between brand excitement and customer retention.

From the result in table 3, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a positive relationship between brand sophistication and customers' retention. The *correlation coefficient* 0.730 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at p 0.000<0.05. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on statistical evidence the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between brand sophistication and customers' retention of beverage firms in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Relationship between Brand Sophistication and the Measures of Customer loyalty

Table 4: Correlations of Brand Sophistication and measures of Customer Loyalty

		Brand Sophistication	Customers' service	Customers' retention
Brand Sophistication	Pearson Correlation	1	.722**	.715**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	295	295	295
Customers' service	Pearson Correlation	.722**	1	.626**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	295	295	248
Customers' retention	Pearson Correlation	.715**	.626**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	295	295	295

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Ho₃. There is no significant relationship between brand sophistication and customer retention.

From the result in table 4, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a positive relationship between brand sophistication and customers' retention. The *correlation*

coefficient 0.722 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at p 0.000<0.05. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between brand sophistication and customers' retention of beverage firms in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Ho$_4$. There is no significant relationship between brand sophistication and customer service.

From the result in table 4, the correlation coefficient (rho) shows that there is a positive relationship between brand sophistication and customers' service. The *correlation coefficient* 0.715 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at p 0.000<0.05. The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. Thus, there is a significant relationship between brand sophistication and customer service of beverage firms in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Discussions
The first and second hypotheses sought to determine the relationship between brand excitement and customers' service of beverage firms in Rivers State of Nigeria using the Pearson's product moment correlation analysis. The hypothesis was statistically tested and rejected. The alternative hypothesis that brand excitement is positively related to customers' service was accepted. The concept of brand excitement as measured in this study dealt with issues that bothered on trust and belief held towards the brand. To satisfy customers and make them loyal is judged by customers excitement on services rendered. Magin, *et al*. (2003) posit that customers service focuses on the construct that customers have the intention to buy a given product repeatedly after deriving satisfaction from initial use or experience. Given that the customer experience service failure or inadequate product, their level of excitement is attributed to the brand. From the study's findings, we understand that when brand personality is positively related to customer loyalty, the concerned organization reaps from it. Our findings agree and supports the findings of Magin, *et al*, (2003); Louis and Lombart (2010) and Pierre, et al (2011) who found that brand personality influence significantly customers loyalty.

It was hypothesized in the third and fourth hypotheses that brand sophistication does not positively relate to customers retention, the outcome of the test revealed that brand sophistication moderately, significantly and positively relates with customers retention. It is possible to argue that brand sophistication triggers customers retention of a specific brand over others, and this is based on subjective judgment. Our findings is not consistent with Roustasekehravani, Abubakar, Azam and Pooladireishahri (2014) findings that brand sophistication had no effect on subject's re-patronage intentions or in their relations. This is a more than sobering realization for brand sophistication, since it implies that their efforts to improve their customers' satisfaction in order to bring about loyalty might be lost if companies does not relate well with customers who are in search of variety of alternatives to satisfy

themselves, and by so doing repatronize the company. , since customers portray better patronage toward brands (Harcourt & Ikegwuru, 2019) . Therefore, it is noted that brand sophistication is another potential determinant of customer loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings indicate that the dimensions of brand personality has a considerable association with the measures of customer loyalty such that the more efficiently an organization manages brand personality, the better the employees will perform and offer better services to the consumers. The study therefore, concludes that a significant and positive relationship exists between brand personality and customer loyalty, and that brand personality is positively influencing customer loyalty of beverages firms in Rivers State of Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations provided herein emanate from the facts presented in the study, and therefore, in line with its findings and conclusions recommends as follows:

i.   Beverage firms should retain the policy of aligning their brands to reflect brand excitement and brand sophistication in improving customer retention and customer service.

ii.   Beverage firms should inculcate brand excitement in their planning, development and implementation strategy to spur appreciable growth in sales as well as meeting customers taste appeal.

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