

Corporate branding and consumer loyalty in the telecommunication industry: A case study of MTN Ghana

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ABSTRACT

In a fiercely competitive business environment such as the mobile services industry, it is a marketplace reality that the ability of firms to attract and retain customers ultimately determines their growth and survival prospects. This study, therefore, investigates how corporate branding in the form of brand name, brand logo, brand color, customer satisfaction and the size of customer base of MTN determine customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry of Ghana. A total of 250 valid respondents completed a questionnaire survey in the ten regional capitals of Ghana during the Spring break. The questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS and Pearson correlation was used to establish the relationship between the dependent variable (customer loyalty) and independent variables (brand name, brand logo, brand color, customer satisfaction and size of customer base). The results of the empirical study reveal that brand name had the greatest impact on loyalty. Brand color and brand logo also have a positive correlation on customer loyalty, while size of customer base had lower correlation on customer loyalty. The results also show that customer satisfaction is a direct antecedent of customer loyalty. We suggest that managers of MTN should pay much attention on the color, logo and customer satisfaction as their marketing strategy weapons, while consolidating the market size to prevent customer switching to other competitors.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, corporate branding, telecommunication industry.

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INTRODUCTION

The important role of branding has been studied extensively as it relates to the telecommunication industry which is fast growing in homogeneity. Technology and innovation are becoming a standard. Commoditization is growing more and more difficult to differentiate service offerings in this industry. Telecom operators are finding it increasingly difficult to distinctly differentiate their offering and consumers are continuously looking out for a differentiated reliable service they can identify with. The popular view has been that brand has positive impact on consumer behavior. The effective branding strategies and its subsequent influence on consumer decision according to Davies et al. (2001) depends on developing new organizational norms, so that the brand would report

directly to the top of the organization; creating new organizational entities, such as responsible for branding; motivation and reward system for employees and effective internal communication. According to Aaker (1991), measuring the influence of branding strategies largely depends on brand loyalty which is a measure of the attachment the customer gives to a brand. Aaker (1991) maintains that what influences customers most include treating the customer right by fulfilling customer expectation, staying close to the customer through creating customer culture, measuring and managing customer satisfaction, creating switching, and providing some unexpected extra services for the customer. This assertion by Aaker (1991) seems to suggest that

branding can be considered an effective tool to influence consumer behavior only as a supporting strategic tool. This makes it difficult for one to understand the exact influence branding has on consumer behavior.

This study therefore aims at studying the uncertainty surrounding the exact impact of branding strategies of consumer purchase preference in the mobile telecommunication industry in Ghana, with particular attention in the Accra metropolis.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Ghana's telecommunication industry and MTN (marketing strategies)

The spread of mobile phone technology has varied significantly between countries with majority of mobile subscribers in the developing countries (ITU World Communication, 2013). In 2013, statistics from the International Telecommunication Union revealed that the penetration rate of mobile phone subscribers is 96.2 per 100 inhabitants globally and the report also suggests that there are now more mobile phone users in the developing world than in the developed world (ITU World Communication, 2013). Moreover, customers are becoming harder to please, they are smarter, more price conscious, more demanding, less forgiving, and they are approached by many more with equal or better offers (Hamel, 1996; Kotler and Keller, 2012). The challenge now is far beyond producing satisfied customers as competitors can do it too; the challenge is to produce delighted and loyal customers (Keller et al., 2011; Kotler and Keller, 2012).

In 1996, the telephone density of Ghana was 0.26%; this translate to 2.6 telephone lines per every one thousand (1000) people, including thirty-five pay phones in the entire country out of which 32 were located in Accra, the national capital. This was one of the lowest in Africa. In recent times, there is one phone for every four Ghanaians ([www.voanews.com/ Report-Africa](http://www.voanews.com/Report-Africa) is the fastest growing). This tremendous increase in the telephone density resulted from the establishment of the National Communication Authority (NCA) in 1997, and the subsequent deregulation of the telecommunication industry. Deregulation and reduced entry barriers into the Ghanaian Mobile telephone industry have led to intense competition as the number of operators swell-up to contend for market shares (Frempong, 2002). Mobile operators are engaging various marketing strategies to retain and attract new customers. There are already six competitors in the industry, namely, Mobile Telecommunications Network (MTN), Tigo, Vodafone, Glo, Airtel and Expresso.

NCA (2011) introduced a project known as the mobile number portability, which means that a subscriber can move from one mobile network to another and still retain your existing telephone number if they are dissatisfied

with any aspect of the services provided by their current mobile network or the customers just want to take advantage of offers, features or pricing available on a different network (www.nca.org.gh). According to NCA (2013) the number of data subscribers in Ghana increased to 10,564,180 at the end of August, 2013 from 10,344,322 at the end of July 2013, showing a growth rate of 2.1%. Also the overall penetration rate in the country increased from 40.0 to 40.7% as at the end of August 2013. The subscriber base for mobile voice telephony has shown a growth rate of 0.1% from 27,244,579 subscribers recorded in July 2013 to 27,511,659 as at the end August 2013. The market share of mobile operators (telecom voice) in Ghana for the month of August 2013 is MTN 46.31%, which is the market leader, followed by Vodafone 21.21%, Tigo 13.76%, Airtel 12.24% Glo 5.92% and at the bottom is Expresso 0.57% (NCA, 2013).

Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN): Scancom which has transitioned to Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN) is the first private telephone operator to have been licensed in Ghana to provide GSM services. Initially, its coverage was restricted to the major cities and the mining communities in the country but to date it has a nationwide coverage.

In its bid to maintain the leading position in Ghana's telecommunication, MTN has over the years invested hugely in expansion works to improve quality of service delivery. Figures released by the NCA over the years from the year 2010 indicates that MTN has the highest number of subscribers.

The continued growth of MTN's market share is also linked with continues introduction of new products. MTN was the first telecommunication provider to launch 3.5G technology system in Ghana making it a dominant player even at the international level. As the first mobile phone service providers to introduce the 3.5G service in Ghana gave it subscriber the opportunity to transmit both data and voice on the network at a greater speed. The strategy of introducing new products and services into the communication industry is believed to be the contributor to MTN's high and increasing subscribers over the years.

Moreover, MTN has carved a positive public image for itself through corporate social responsibility and other sponsorship initiatives. Notable among these are the Black Stars of Ghana Sponsorship deals, the football premier league sponsorship deal and brand ambassadors.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study sought to explore the impact of corporate branding on the sale of goods and services in the telecommunication industry. The use of questionnaire was therefore the best instrument for this research. This provided a means of acquiring primary data that was quantified to be used in the analysis process in order to draw

conclusions based on the sample. In designing the questionnaire, questions were kept short, simple and clear to ensure proper understanding of the questions and ease of answering the questions.

A self-completion questionnaire with closed questions was developed for primary data collection. According to Bryman and Bell (2003), closed questions have some advantages: it is easy to process answers; it enhances the comparability of answers, and makes them easier to show the relationship between variables. The questionnaire was composed of two parts and total 24 statements. The first part was about individual characteristics with two questions by asking respondents' gender and the name of the mobile telecom operator they are using currently. The second part contained all four constructs as suggested by Peng and Wang (2006). Several items on each construct were developed and adopted from relevant literatures. All of the items were measured by using a five-point Likert-type response scales, anchored at 5 strongly agree and 1 strongly disagrees. The author and research assistants personally administered questionnaires to all participants and received 250 valid responses out of 275 questionnaires in September to October 2013. They helped those who needed assistance in understanding the questions.

The questionnaire had 3 parts; the first part consist of the demography of the respondents, the second part finds out the extent the respondent is uses MTN network and the final part also examined the extent to which respondents can match the message or concept to the brand, the extent to which respondent has favorable opinions of the brand and the likelihood of respondents considering purchasing the service of a brand.

The researcher also did interviews, including face to face, and telephone interview. A critical observation was also made as to the subject matter of the research. Secondary data was also used to assess the market shares of the telecommunication networks.

Pre-testing was used as a valuable indicator to find out the effectiveness of the questionnaire. This involved selecting, approaching and interviewing a small segment in the same manner which was followed in the full scale operation. It helped the researcher to know whether the replies or questionnaire responses provided the type of information needed or respondents were misinterpreting any of the questions. In addition, results obtained in the pre-test could suggest new ideas or questions worthy of further examination. 50 questionnaires were tested on a sample of 45 respondents in order to eliminate any ambiguities and improve clarity in all questions.

Data collection

The target population was telecommunication stakeholders including staff, management, and subscribers. The study sample consisted of 250 respondents, comprising of 25 subscribers from the 10 regional capitals of Ghana, as well as interviews with some key managements and staff from the headquarters of MTN.

A sample size of two hundred and fifty (250) respondents was selected based on Saunders et al. (2007) 95 percent confidence level. Saunders et al. (2007) indicates that for a population size between 2000 and 5000, a sample size that revolves around 250 will indicate a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A proportionate stratified random sampling was also used. This technique was chosen because the population consisted of sub-groups of suburbs in the metropolis. Finally, a simple random method was used to select respondents for each of the sub-groups. Conscious effort was made to select only literate people as respondents because of the nature of the study, which required minimum level of knowledge to appreciate the study.

The data collected was based on the impact of corporate branding on consumer loyalty in terms of the sale of goods and services in the telecommunication industry in Ghana with MTN as

the case study. The main source of data was from the selected tertiary in the capitals of the ten regions of Ghana. Primary data was mainly collected and analyzed for the purpose of this research through the use of questionnaires, as well as secondary source was also incorporated.

Data analysis method and measurements

SPSS was the software used to analyze the results for this research. With the help of this tool, data was presented as proportions (%), pie chart, tables and graphs to compare and analyze the responses to some of the questions asked.

The study employed a cross-sectional, qualitative and quantitative approaches which were appropriate for seeking the opinion of the target population about a phenomenon, with a researcher designed questionnaire for data collection to answer the research questions (Cooper and Schindler, 2006). This is a descriptive study into customer loyalty among users of mobile telecom services and the design is a quantitative research. The research was studied from customers' point of view and so the population was expected to involve the people who are consuming mobile services from the six mobile telecommunication operators in Sunyani the capital city of ten regions in Ghana.

The decision about the size of the sample was taken considering time and cost, the need of precision and a variety of further considerations (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Due to the limit of time and costs, the population was narrowed to mobile phone users in Sunyani. The sample selected was not bias towards one particular group of users, the units included people with diverse demographics and employment status, ranging from unemployed, traders, artisans, professionals, students, public and civil servants, among others. The sample used was determined by convenience sampling.

From the hypothesis the independent variables are brand logo, brand color, brand name, size of subscribers and customer satisfaction and the dependent variable is customer loyalty.

Statistical analysis

The field data was processed by editing, coding, classification and tabulation to present a clearer view for analysis. The coding was necessary for efficient analysis of data. For this research, coding decisions were taken at the designing stage of the questionnaire.

The response categories in Likert scales have a rank order and therefore could be referred as ordinal because ordinal scale of measurement is one that conveys order (Jamieson, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows the summary demographic characteristics of the respondents. Table 1 gives a summary of respondents' bio-data. It displays that, majority of the respondents contacted during the study were males. 102 respondents representing 40.8% were females and 148 representing 59.2% of the 250 respondents interviewed were males. It is also reflected on the table that majority of the respondents interviewed had formal education. 73 (29.2%) of the people interviewed had CERT/ DIP/ HND/ DBS education, 75 (30%) of the people interviewed had first degree and 48 (19.2%) had above first degree

Table 1. Summary of respondents' demography.

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	148	59.2
	Female	102	40.8
Age grouping	30 years and below	107	42.8
	Above 30 years	143	57.2
Educational status	High school and below	54	21.6
	Cert/Dip/HND/DBS	73	29.2
	On First Degree	75	30
	Above First Degree	48	19.2

N = 250.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Customer loyalty	250	4.06	0.709					
Logo	250	4.04	0.402	0.879**				
Brand color	250	3.97	0.632	0.727**	0.133			
Brand name	250	4.04	0.724	0.762**	0.038	0.267		
Size of subscribers	250	3.23	1.07	0.201	0.103	0.011	0.265	
Customer satisfaction	250	4.08	0.52	0.992**	0.012	0.312	0.031	0.086

Significance at: ** $p \leq 0.01$ (2-tailed).

education. And less than a quarter 54 representing 21.6% of the sample interviewed had SHS and below education.

Hypothesis testing

Table 2 shows the correlation between logo, brand color, brand name, size of subscribers, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The result shows a strong positive correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable with exception of size of subscribers. There is a strong positive relationship between customer satisfaction (tariffs and promotion) and customer loyalty $r = .992$; $r = .879$ for brand logo and customer loyalty, $r = .727$ for brand color and customer loyalty, $r = .201$ for size of subscribers and customer loyalty, $r = .762$ for brand name and customer loyalty. However, the correlation between the size of subscribers and customer loyalty was not significant with $r = .201$. This finding indicates that, an increase in customer satisfaction, brand logo, brand color and brand name will lead to an increase in customer loyalty. Otherwise, an increase in the size of subscribers will not have a considerable effect on customer loyalty. Given this analysis, the alternative hypothesis for H_1 , H_2 , H_3 and H_5 are accepted against the null hypothesis.

H₀: There is a significant relationship between logo, brand color, brand name, and customer satisfaction with customer loyalty of MTN Ghana.

Table 3 depicts the summary results of the regression model formulated for the independent variables: logo, brand name, brand color, customer satisfaction and size of subscribers as well as the dependent variable, customer loyalty. The model derived a correlation coefficient of $R = .994$ which indicates a strong linear relationship between the criterion variable which is customer loyalty and the predictor variables: logo, brand name, brand color, customer satisfaction and size of subscribers. The coefficient of determination derived ($R^2 = .989$) indicating approximately 98% of the total variability in the criterion variable is accounted for by the predictor variables. In other words, logo, brand name, brand color, customer satisfaction and size of subscribers can explain approximately 98% of the amount of variation (either an increase or a decrease) in customer loyalty of the telecommunication industry. The calculated Adjusted R square derived .988 indicates that, approximately 98% of the impacts on customer loyalty in the MTN Company is explained by the model, whilst 2% variability in the criterion variable is explained outside the model. This shows that 2% of the factors influencing customer loyalty in the MTN is explained by other factors like social

Table 3. Model summary.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	.994 ^a	.989	.988	.079

ANOVA						
Model		Sums of squares	Df.	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	129.178	6	21.530	3491.992	.000 ^b
	Residual	1.498	243	.006		
	Total	130.676	249			

Dependent variable: Customer loyalty. Source: field data.

Table 4. Coefficients predicted.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% confidence interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	-.293	.038		-7.773	.000	-.367	-.218
Brand logo	.039	.015	.039	2.643	.009	.010	.069
Brand color	.069	.012	.069	5.779	.000	.045	.092
Brand name	.058	.010	.058	5.489	.000	.037	.078
Size of subscribers	.053	.014	.053	3.912	.109	.027	.080
Customer satisfaction	.768	.005	.812	6.260	.000	.159	.177

Anova						
Model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	357.382	3	119.127	937.037	.000 ^b
	Residual	31.274	246	.127		
	Total	388.656	249			

Source: Field data. a. Dependent variable: Customer loyalty. b. Predictors: (Constant) brand logo, brand color, brand name, size of subscribers, customer satisfaction.

responsible and others rather than logo, brand name, brand color, advertisement, customer satisfaction and size of subscribers.

Table 4 displays the coefficients of the predictors of Customer Loyalty in the MTN telecommunication company. Logo, brand name, brand color and customer satisfaction were proved to be significant predictors on Customer Loyalty with the exception of size of subscribers ($b = .053$, $t = 3.912$, $p > .05$), explains that the size of subscribers of MTN is not a significant predictor of Customer Loyalty and that the slope of the size of subscribers on Customer Loyalty is no different from zero. The coefficients derived for the remaining individual predictors disputes the null hypothesis that, the slopes of Logo, Brand name, Brand color, Advertisement, and customer satisfaction are equal to zero ($H_0: \beta = 0$) on the dependent variable and that, the predictor variables cannot predict Customer Loyalty of the MTN. This implies that, the model displays logo, brand name, brand color, size of subscribers and customer satisfaction as significant predictors of customer loyalty in the MTN company. $\beta = .039$, $t = 2.643$ for Logo explains that approximately, MTN logo can predict 3% of the total

variability in customer loyalty when all other predictor variables are constant and given an error rate of .015. Also, $\beta = .069$, $t = 5.779$ for Brand Color implies that, approximately 6% of the total variability in customer loyalty in MTN could be explain by the Brand Color of the company given an error of .012 when all variables are held constant. While $\beta = .058$, $t = 5.489$ for Brand Name implies that, approximately the Brand Name of MTN can have a 5% effect on customer loyalty with an error of .010 when other predictor variables are constant. Again, the beta coefficient of size of subscribers ($.053$, $t = 3.912$) implies that, approximately, 4% of the total variability of customer loyalty in MTN could be explain by size of subscribers given an error of .092 when all other variables are constant. The beta coefficient for customer satisfaction ($b = .812$, $t = 36.260$) evinces that, approximately 81% of the total variability in customer loyalty of MTN could be explain by customer satisfaction with an error of .005, given that, all other variable are held constant.

The results analyzed above goes to support the perception that, logo, brand name, brand color, advertisement and customer satisfaction are positively

related to customer loyalty and that, as any of the predictor variable increases, customer loyalty also increases.

In other words, given a significance level of .05, there exist enough evidence to conclude that, the slopes of all the predictor variables are not zero and that they are useful in predicting customer loyalty in MTN. Comparison of the beta weights given by the regression coefficients indicates that, customer satisfaction has greater effect in explaining customer loyalty of the MTN than does brand name, brand color, advertisement and logo. Again, brand color explains greater effect on customer loyalty compared to the brand name, advertisement and logo of MTN.

Similarly, the above analysis could be interpreted from a predictive standpoint, in that, given a 95% confidence level, for every single unit increase in MTN customer satisfaction, the average customer retention margin will increase between .159 and .177 when all other variables are constant. Again, at 95% confidence, every single unit increase of brand color will increase the average customer loyalty margin between .045 and .092 with other variables being constant. While at 95% confidence, MTN brand name increases the average customer loyalty margin between .037 and .078 holding other variables constant.

Given this analysis, the null hypothesis for H_5 is partially rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

Corporate branding and customer loyalty has become one instrument businesses use in marketing their product. The competition in the telecommunication industry in Ghana is very keen (NCA, 2014), hence the players in the industry are using several marketing strategies to survive in the market (Grace and O'Cass, 2003). Therefore, this study was conducted to find the relationship between corporate branding and customer loyalty of MTN. Although the study is limited to MTN, the findings have implications on the other stakeholders in the industry.

The variables under corporate branding (logo, color, size of subscribers, customer satisfaction and brand name) were subjected to hypothesis test, and the results matched with existing theories (Barsky, 1995; Besterfield, 1994) and empirical research findings (Kanji and Moura, 2002), before recommendations were made.

The results showed a positive correlation between logo, color, and brand name of MTN and customer loyalty, which follows the research findings of Frempong (2013) in a similar research. This means that, corporate bodies can use branding as a tool to market their product and stay in the game, in the midst of stiffer competition, since customer loyalty relates positively to the branding (Kotler and Keller, 2012). There was a lower correlation between

the size of the subscribers and customer loyalty, signifying that, companies should not rely too much on the size of the market as a tool to market their product. This finding though negates the economics of scale theories, yet it holds in the telecommunication industry in Ghana, as the statistics on the market share of individual companies in the industry depicts (NCA, 2014).

In all, there was a significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, which means that, the corporate bodies in as much as to use branding as a marketing tool, should try to satisfy their customers, based on their basic needs (competitive pricing, good network, and customer service) by Aydin and Ozer (2005).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research provides both theory development for academics and practical implication for corporate bodies marketing.

Theoretical implications

Based on previous marketing research theories (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Frempong, 2013) regarding branding and competitive marketing, this study showed clear relationship between the branding variables (logo, name, slogan, color) and quality customer loyalty. In the nutshell, this research supports the theory of positive relationship between branding and customer loyalty.

Practical implications

The findings of this research also provide important evidence for marketing managers in dealing with competition and cost cutting marketing strategies. It is helpful for marketers in understanding the effectiveness of relationship corporate branding and customer loyalty from both demand and supply sides.

The MTN company in Ghana, should capitalize on the love Ghanaian community have for the color yellow, and paint commercial buildings such as markets, drinking bars and food joints with their color and logo.

Customer services should be improved alongside serving the specific needs of the people, rather than banking on the fact that, MTN has the highest number of subscribers in the country, since the impact of the market size had little impact on customer loyalty.

Firms using branding as a tool to improve customer base and sales, should also innovate in their branding approach, bearing in mind the significance of innovation since commitment to innovation leads to competitive advantages among other factors.

Limitations and future research

This study investigates the relationship between corporate branding and customer loyalty using survey method. Looking at the variables of branding, the researcher was limited to selecting only a few, because of time constraints and data source limitations.

Customer loyalty is very subjective, hence very difficult to measure, this called for the use of self-intuitions and simulations. Due to stiffer competition in the telecommunications in Ghana, for the fear of trade secret leakage, managements were not ready to release certain information, forcing the researcher to rely heavily on secondary data from the National Communication Authority's website, which was not up to date.

There were, and still few local literature on the subject matter, for most literature on branding and customer loyalty were on developed countries where their markets are well developed, so inferring from such literatures were not too relational.

This study was into corporate branding and customer loyalty, but it did not go further to customer retentions, there is therefore the need to investigate what happen to the loyal customers in the future, will they continue to patronize the products based on the branding? So the researcher propose corporate branding, customer loyalty and retention.

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