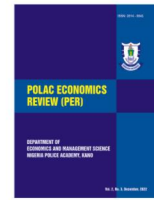




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THE EFFECT OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ON LOYALTY; THE SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Considering the intensity of competition coupled with the complexity and dynamism of today's marketing environment, several calls were made by scholars and industry experts to introduce some emerging constructs that will determine loyalty. Drawing from social exchange theory the paper investigated the effect of customer engagement on customer loyalty in the Nigerian context. The data were derived from 334 hotel guests in Kano state and analyzed by the use of PLS-SEM. Interestingly, all the dimensions of customer engagement comprising of; attention, enthusiasm, interaction, identification and absorption were found to predict customer loyalty. The study contributes to the theory by revalidating customer engagement measures in a developing nation and in an offline setting. It will also benefit management in developing strategies that will assist in retaining customers. Future studies are recommended to merge the construct with the well-known determinants of loyalty and equally involve a mediating and or moderating variable in the relationship.

Keywords: Customer Engagement, Customer Loyalty, Social Exchange Theory

Introduction

The prevalence of intense competition along with high and pressing demand and expectations from customers necessitate the need to have a powerful tie between service providers and clients. This, as argued by Alnawas and Hemsley-brown (2019) will ensure long lasting bond, and by extension loyalty will eventually enhance organizational growth and profit. Also, the complexity of today's marketing environment and advancement of information and communication technology, coupled with customers' sophistication with wide variety of options from competing organisations to choose, from necessitate the need for the inclusion some emerging constructs as predictors of loyalty. Specifically, Hapsari et al. (2017) believed that other constructs such as customer engagement (CE) needs to be considered as an important variable capable of predicting customer loyalty. Also, from the meta analytic work of Kandampully, Zhang and Tingting

(2015) in the context of hospitality domain, categorically recommended the inclusion of other determinants of loyalty, one of which is CE. Thus, this compels companies to re-adjust their strategies by finding other means of obtaining new customer, and importantly retain those already in existence.

The global hotel sector had been adversely affected due to the emergence of corona virus pandemic in the year 2019. Specifically, Bello and Bello (2021) having explored the resultant consequences of Corona virus pandemic with special reference to the hospitality domain in the Nigerian context, unveiled that hotel occupancy rate had severely dropped. They called researchers to attach more emphasis on innovative strategies that will hold on the customers.

Just of recent, researchers and practitioners have started paying more attention to customer engagement considering the dynamism and interactions surrounding

today's business settings. This might also be as a result of the concept's pivotal role towards enhancing customers' value and their experiences as argued by Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić, (2011). For example, CE was reported to have predicted loyalty among the airline customers. In fact, its predictive power surpassed those of service quality and customer satisfaction in the study conducted by (Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2017). However, scholars have observed paucity of empirical studies addressing the concept as a determinant of loyalty despite of its efficacy as an emerging concept as many studies were conceptual in nature (Hapsari et al., 2017; Gawuna et al, 2019). Moreover, more empirical studies of the concept will help in addressing some conceptual and measurement ambiguities associated with emerging constructs as suggested by scholars (Asperen, Rooij, & Dijkmans, 2018), hence, the intervention of this work towards enhancing and offering some methodological contributions.

Similarly, although CE had been widely studied in other field of studies like psychology, education along with information system, paucity of researches in the context of marketing has been admitted by Vivek, Beatty, Dalela and Morgan (2014) and Kandampully, Zhang and Tingting, (2015). In addition, majority of past studies regarding the concept were conducted in an online domain, So et al. (2012) believed that it can also be done in an offline settings. According to them, customers' opinions and their valuable advice can play a major role towards inducing their purchase decision. Furthermore, Harrigan, Evers, Miles, and Daly (2017) calls for the validation of CE scale and models in various cultures preferably using non convenient sampling technique in future studies.

Similarly, the study will also re-validate the CE scale in the Nigerian context as solicited by some scholars (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). Moreover, CE as a construct is having conceptualisations and measurement issues especially in the context of marketing as argued by (Asperen, Rooij, & Dijkmans, 2018; So, King, & Sparks, 2012). According to So et al., (2014), the antecedents of CE were not expansively studied in the extant literature. Hollebeek, (2011) assert that CE was originally targeted to complement other conventional constructs that predict loyalty like satisfaction and service quality in view of high level of interaction involved in today's marketing domain. In

addition, Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, (2011) believed that CE improves the overall corporate performance as it enhances sales and organizational returns on investment. It also leads to positive word of mouth advocacy and recommending the organizational offerings to others. Perhaps, that is why (Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, & Morgan, 2014) believed that CE encourages not only the immediate purchasing of organizational offerings, but also involves customers' continuous interactions and connections with those organizations.

As argued by Mansur and Ali, (2017), CE represents the physical, emotional and cognitive connection existing among customers and their respective products/services leading to the formation of a deeper and attached relationship. Thus, a customer is believed to be engaged with an offering by being emotionally attached to a particular brand thereby becoming loyal to such organisation. Thus, the study aimed at determining the effect of customer engagement on loyalty in the context of Nigerian hotels.

Literature Review

Customer Loyalty

The concept of customer loyalty is being receiving attention not only in the academic sphere, but also among various practitioners as it offers substantial benefits to both the consumers and organisations (Jana & Chandra, 2016); Morgan & Govender, 2017). To the customers, it minimises the risks associated with choosing an organisation over others (Polo, Jamilena, & Molina, 2013), reduces the time required in searching and evaluating a product (Yang & Peterson 2004) as well as shunning the learning process which consumes significant part customers' time and effort. From the organisational perspective, loyal customers are believed to be cheaper to maintain, not always swayed by price increment and they normally spread positive word of mouth regarding organisational offerings (Cossío-Silva, Revilla-Camacho, Vega-Vázquez and Palacios-Florencio 2016). It is also viewed as organisational intangible assets which serve as an important competitive weapon. Nyadzayo and Khajehzadeh (2016) added that CL is a pivotal determinant of organisational successes.

It serve as a strategic weapon for achieving competitive advantage (Rai & Medha, 2013), and also improves organisational corporate image (de Leaniz & Bosque

Rodríguez, 2016). In addition, Tefera and Govender (2017) affirms that apart from enhancing positive word of mouth promotion, loyal customers are much cheaper to maintain (Kim, 2018). They equally enhance the overall organisational performance (Picón-Berjoyo, Ruiz-Moreno, & Castro, 2016) as well as enhance the achievement of market leadership positions (Ming-Lu 2016; Qiu, Ye, Bai & Wang, 2015). Similarly, CL aids organisations to realise their strategic goals Oyner, Olga and Korelina, 2016 (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh 2016; they are willing to spend more (Martinez, 2015, they are more profitable as the cost of attracting new customers exceeds the cost of maintaining an existing ones.

In the hospitality context, CL is assumed to be its future as it leads to the attainment of long-term relationship between the customers and service providers Purohit and Purohit (2013). In fact, (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015) maintained that focussing on the key predictors of loyalty becomes an important strategy for hotels' survival.

Customer Engagement

Today, the concept of CE is attracting attention from both academicians and practitioners due to its perceived role of attracting and retaining customers in our present dynamic and competitive settings (So, King, & Sparks, 2014; Hapsari et al., 2017; Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, & Morgan, 2014). This becomes possible perhaps because of the prevalent internet service availability where a new media channel is formed that connect customers with multiple organisations via various platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and the like. That is why there was a plethora of studies on CE within the on-line domain (Islam & Rahman, 2017; Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). However, other scholars assert that CE can also be can also practicable in an offline context (So, King, & Sparks, 2014), hence the intervention of this study.

Until recently, CE is a novel concept in the marketing arena. It was originally borrowed from the realm of human resources as an important psychological factor that enhances employee loyalty as argued by Hapsari et al., (2017). But, it is now receiving the desired attention from marketing researchers and other practitioners considering the intensity of interaction surrounding

today's business environment. This may not be unrelated with the concept's perceived role towards improving customers' experience and value (Brodie et al., 2011). Also, according to Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, (2017), CE has the capacity to boost organisational corporate performance through positive word of mouth referrals by recommending organisational offerings to others which will in turn enhance the sales volume and profits of organisations. Similarly, consumers on their part also stand the chance to gain when organisation implement CE as one of its strategy. Doorn et al. (2010) assert that customers will be emotionally fulfilled and achieve self-enjoyment and positive affect when they fully engaged with organisational offerings.

For Companies to sustain and nurture their customers, they need to go beyond mere concentrating on customers' re-purchase behaviour in today's marketing setting, but rather focus on other customer-based metrics for them to prosper instead of relying on the quality and value of the product alone (Doorn et al. 2010).

According to Doorn et al. (2010 p 254), "Customer engagement behaviours (CEBs) go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers." They maintained that such behavioural expression can be favourable or otherwise. In effect, they view CE behaviours to be the behavioural attachment of the customers towards a given company to the extent of encouraging or even driving people to such organisations. This could be through recommendations, blogging or word of mouth referrals.

Brodie et al. (2011 p. 260) provides a comprehensive definition of the concept. According to them,

"CE represents a psychological condition that occurs by virtue of interactive, cocreative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service associations. It occurs under a specific set of context dependent conditions generating differing CE levels; and occurs as a dynamic, iterative process in the service relationships that co-create value. It plays a central role in a nomological network governing service relationships in which

other relational concepts (e.g., involvement, loyalty) are antecedents and/or consequences in iterative CE processes. It is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural dimensions”.

This definition reiterates the need for organisations to establish a psychological connection with their clients in view of the dynamic and complex nature of the current environment coupled with the sophistication of today’s consumers.

Conceptualisation of Customer Engagement

The Marketing Science Institute (2014) referred CE to be the attachments consumers have towards a brand beyond mere purchase prompted by some motivational drivers including word of mouth encouragement, contact, blogging and other similar activities (So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2016). Thus, they viewed CE from the behavioural Point of view, stressing that the CE represents consumers’ behavioural inclination towards a particular brand beyond purchase. This is in agreement with van Doorn et al. (2010) and Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft (2010) who postulated that CE represents a behavioural concept going beyond normal transactions among the consumers and their organisations of choice driven by some motivational factors. In fact, Hollebeek (2011) maintained that the dimensions of CE are generally context-specific.

According to Brodie et al., (2011), the construct ‘engagement’ can be better explained multidimensionally. Equally, other scholars are of the belief that customer engagement is to conceptualised bi-dimensionally, that is, behaviourally and psychologically (So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2014; Brodie et al., 2011b; Vivek, 2009). To them, CE ought to go beyond consumers’ behavioural trait. For instance, Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek (2013) maintained that a person may be engaged to a brand based on discussion he had with others which he believed will help him in reducing some perceived risks rather than his connection with the organisation alone. This emphasised that CE integrates not only a psychological association but also behavioural participation (multi-dimensional approach).

Equally, according to Vivek, Beatty and Morgan (2012), the concept CE contains cognitive, behavioural, social along with emotional components. Furthermore, So et al. (2014) conceptualised CE multidimensionally being customers’ connectedness to a particular organisation expressed in cognitive, affective, and behavioural response that goes beyond purchase. They conceptualised it as higher-order construct with five first-order factors involving; attention, interaction, enthusiasm (vigour), identification along with absorption.

Based on the conceptualisation of CE using the five dimensions established by So et al. (2014), enthusiasm signifies customers’ extreme excitement and interest to a brand. Attention indicates the level of attentiveness and how focused customers. Absorption denotes customers’ absolute concentration and absorption going to the extent of being emotionally attached to a particular brand. While interaction signifies the level to which customer participate with an organisation beyond purchase through online or offline engagement. While identification represents to the degree at which consumers belong to a given brand. According to them, these dimensions combined to form the behavioural and psychological components of CE.

On the other hand, Hollebeek (2011) believed that CE should be conceptualised through three dimensions. They are; passion (love), immersion (engrossment) and activation, which is willingness to devote enough time interacting with a brand. On their part, Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) came up with two dimensions, they are, personal and social interaction. Similarly, Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi (2012) also proposed two dimensions that conceptualise CE (experiential and social dimensions). While experiential dimension represents the hedonic attributes with respect to the usage or customers’ interaction with an organisation, social dimensions entails level of interaction or co-creation regarding the sharing of organisational values with others. Moreover, Doorn et al. (2010) established five dimensions of CE behaviours, which are:

‘**Valence**’, which deals with the categorisation of CE to either favourable denoting positive attitudes or unfavourable (negative). The positive CE involves all the dealings that may enhance the financial and non-

financial performance of the company whether in the short, or long-run. For example recommending firm's offering to others signifies positive valence, but if misfits between company's offerings and demand of customers occurs, negative valence is assumed to have occurred.

'Form' which is the modality part of CE represents customers' resource sacrifice either by their time or monetarily to push the organisation forward.

'Scope', being the third dimension can be temporal or geographic. By geographic scope, that is, CE can be viewed either as local or global. Local scope gives emphasis to a situation where positive word of mouth is personally delivered among customers, and global scope indicate a scenario where global website is used to project the organisation both within and outside. Temporal aspect of CE can be momentarily, on-going; hence the need to develop certain measures that will adequately monitor and address CE related issues.

'Impact' conceptualisation of CE denotes immediacy, intensity (longevity) and breadth. Immediacy deals with the speed through which CE behaviours affect the intended audience. The breadth emphasise how the people were reached and/or their size, and intensity indicates the extent or the level of concentration involves in influencing the target audience.

However, based on the assertion of So et al. (2012), that past studies did not do enough to offer a concise and wide-ranging measurement scale of CE, hence, their intervention to address the issue by conceptualising the concept and also came up with the scales that measured it. To this effect, they developed and validated a 25-item measurement scale with five factors that include; attention, interaction, identification, absorption and enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm; this focuses how excited consumers are with an organisational offerings. It signifies their positive affective condition with that organisation. It is assumed that engaged customers are enthusiastic and more passionate about a brand. Also, enthusiasm denotes consumers' vigour or their level of activation to a given product. Unlike satisfaction which deals with customers' prior experience with a product, engagement give emphasis on their endurance and the energy

exhausted during contact with a brand as captured by Macey & Schneider (2008). Thus, engagement is a function of enthusiasm. That is, hotel guests are expected to be engaged with a brand as result of their enthusiasm with it.

Attention is also a major component of engagement. Looking at it from the employee engagement view point, it portrays the duration or longevity workers focus on their tasks, and also how mentally they are engrossed with the assigned task. Vivek (2009) sees it as the extent at which customers become attentive to a brand by being attractive to all information regarding an organisation.

Absorption indicates consumers' absolute concentration that even compromises their time, intrinsic enjoyment and self-consciousness. That even makes them to be more absorbed and engrossed and by extension engaged to a brand.

Interaction emphasises customers' participation both online or offline with a particular brand. It involves sharing of ideas, experience or general information regarding an organisation. By being fully engaged, customers become active members of that organisation rather than passive.

Identification signifies how customers become identified with their chosen brand. It shows the intensity of customers' attachment to a brand. Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn (1995) assert that being a cognitive component, identification enhances CE behaviours, as it induces and also motivates people to recommend a brand to others.

Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić & Ilić (2011) is of the belief that CE boost the corporate performance of an organisation through enhanced sales volume that lead to higher margin

The study employed the measurement scale of CE of So et al. (2014) that has four dimensions, which are; absorption, enthusiasm, interaction and attention while at the same time adopting interaction as another dimension from Rather & Sharma (2017).

Theoretical Framework

The social exchange theory (SET) developed by Homans (1958) will serve as an underpinning theory of

this work. According to the theory, people engage in a relationship in anticipation of certain benefits which normally emerges in the form of either tangible or intangible resources (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Blau, 1968; Emerson, 1962). Anderson and Narus (1991) further maintained that, people engaged in a relationship anticipate the benefits derived from such exchange to be of higher value than their interaction with another party. As customer loyalty represents a deeply rooted relationship between two or more parties (Brodie et al. 2011), people normally become engaged in a relationship after thoroughly evaluating the benefits to be derived from such relationship (Harrigan et al. 2017). That is, guests will be engaged with their chosen hotels when they expected to get more economic and social value from them. Thus, CE involves continuous interaction between the customers (guests) and their favourite brands (hotels) caused the emotional, physical along with psychological investments of the customers (guests) towards such establishments (hotels) (Brodie et al., 2013).

It is presumed that guests may be enthusiastic and attentive in their engagement with hotels when they anticipates certain benefits which will in turn make them to feel sense of belongingness to such hotels. Since CE is expected to occur as a result of repeated interaction between the guests and their chosen hotels which will likely buttress the psychological and the emotional ties between them. This coincides with Thibaut and Kelley (1959)'s affirmation that people normally evaluate the tangible along with the intangible benefits and cost associated with any relationship. Thus CE is said to be in existence when guests recorded higher benefits over costs in their dealing with the hotels over period of time. This is also in agreement with Harrigan, Evers, Miles & Daly (2017) who reiterated that customers normally become enthusiastic, attentive and at the same time have great sense of belonging to organisations when the benefits derived from their relationship exceeded the cost involved.

Similarly, based on the submission of Ali (2012), the SET model covers five main features. Among them is the doctrine of rationality, that is, peoples' behaviour is geared towards anything capable of maximising their rewards. They will be willing to switch to other sources (substitute) if their requirements were not met. Second, the relationship is expected to be reciprocal in nature,

where the concerned parties are to benefit. Third, the doctrine of principle for justice should prevail. Fourth, nay party involved in such relationship seek to maximise his gains at the expense of cost. Finally, there is no involvement with respect to the instrument of coercion, emphasizing that mutual consent should be the cardinal principle among the parties. From the foregoing, it is expected that guests will continue given patronage to those hotels that meet or exceed their requirements compared to the competing organisations. This will go a long way towards enhancing both the emotional and the psychological ties among them.

Relationship between CE and Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

As an emerging concept in marketing domain, there is paucity of empirical studies of CE (Grewal, Roggeveen, Sisodia, & Nordfält, 2017; Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2017). However, in the work of Hapsari, Clemes and Dean (2017) CE was found to have a direct effect on customer loyalty among the Indonesian airline passengers. Similarly, the study of So, King, Sparks & Wang (2016) confirmed that CE had a direct and positive effect on customer loyalty in the contexts of airlines and hospitality. In agreement with these Thakur (2016)'s work validated a model which confirmed that CE had a positive influence on loyalty in the domain of mobile device shopping.

Furthermore, Harrigan, Evers, Miles and Daly (2017) re-validated the measurement scale established by So, King, Sparks & Wang (2014). In their study the 25-item scale was replaced by the 11-items with 3-dimensional constructs in social media domain. The result also established that CE determined loyalty. However, according to the study of Skippari, Nyrrhinen and Karjaluo (2017) conducted in the grocery retail in context of Finland, found that an indirect influence between values and CE on patronage was established. Based on the outcomes of these studies, the current study hypothesised that;

H₁: Interaction has a significant and positive link with customer loyalty in the Nigerian hotel industry.

H₂: Absorption has a significant and positive link with customer loyalty in the Nigerian hotel industry

H₃: Attention has a significant and positive link with customer loyalty in the Nigerian hotel industry

H₄: Enthusiasm has a significant and positive link with customer loyalty in the Nigerian hotel industry

H₅: Identification has a significant and positive link with customer loyalty in the Nigerian hotel industry

Research framework

The framework of the present research is illustrated in figure 1 below

Customer Engagement

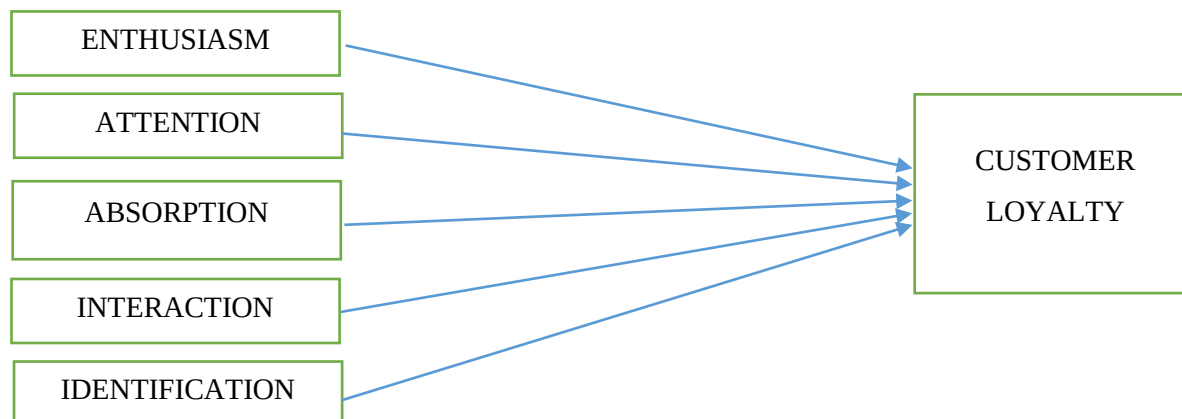


Figure 1; Research framework

Methodology

As the study seeks to determine the guests' perceptions and opinions regarding their engagement and/or intentions to be engaged with the hotels offerings as well as their willingness to remain loyal to such hotels, a cross-sectional survey approach was deemed to be the most appropriate (Lancaster, 2005). Thus, data was retrieved from the respondents and correlation design was used to establish connections among the variables of the study. PLS path modelling with the aid of Smart

PLS 3 is used in testing the hypotheses (Hair, Jr. et al., 2017). The entire guests patronising the services of 82 hotels operating in Kano that registered with the state Ministry of Commerce Industry, Cooperative and Tourism made up the population of the study. Being an infinite population, a sample size of 384 guests (Krejcie & Morgan 1970) which was increased to 410 based on the suggestion of Mason, Tideswell & Roberts, (2006) was considered. Multi-stage cluster sampling where the hotels were clustered based on their star-ranking (from 1 to 4 star) was employed

Table 1: Sample Distribution

Star Ranking	Number of Hotels	Calculation	Sample size per hotel
1-Star Hotels	32	$32 \div 82 (384) = 150. 150 \div 32 = 5$	5
2-Star Hotels	21	$21 \div 82 (384) = 98. 98 \div 21 = 5$	5
3-Star Hotels	19	$19 \div 82 (384) = 89. 89 \div 19 = 5$	5
4-Star Hotels	10	$10 \div 82 (384) = 49. 49 \div 10 = 5$	5
	82	383.99	

Source: Field Survey (2022)

From the table above, five guests were choosing from all the 82 hotels involved in the study. Based on the above computation, five guests were selected using a method (mall-interval) method during high traffic periods (Fridays to Sundays) for the administration of the instruments. The scales used in this work were

found to be empirically valid in prior studies. A 24 item scales developed and validated by So et al., (2014), Rather & Sharma, (2017) and Hapsari et al, (2017) to measure the five dimension of CE was used in the study. While 8 items from the work of (Al-Rousan & Mohamed, 2010; de Leaniz & Bosque Rodríguez, 2016) were used to measure customer loyalty. The items

captured both the attitudinal along with the behavioral dimensions of loyalty. A 7-point likert scales that ranges from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was employed

Result and Discussion

Partial least square structural modeling (PLS-SEM) path model was used in testing the hypotheses. Specifically, Smart PLS 3.0 was employed in the study (Ringle et al., 2015). In examining the appropriateness of the scale, the study used Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability as well as the average extracted variance (AVE). The minimum factor loading achieved is 0.746 while the highest is 0.911 as shown in figure 2, this meets the threshold requirement of 0.5 (Hair, et al., 2017). Similarly, values of Cronbach's alpha coefficient

and composite reliability ranging from 0.743 to 0.889 and 0.851 to 0.923 respectively are both in excess of acceptable minimum requirement of 0.7 as shown in table 2. This evidence affirmed that the reliability of the scales used in the study meet the acceptable requirement. Also, the AVE values that range from 0.630 to 0.751 satisfy the required value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker 1981), testifying that the convergence values are within the required standard (Table 2). The results further indicated that discriminant validity requirement is met, as the square root of the AVE is in excess of the correlation coefficient of other variables as depicted in table 3. The results of the hypothesized relationships were shown in table 4, and were found to be positive and significant.

Table 2: Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Interaction	0.877	0.907	0.710
Absorption	0.889	0.923	0.751
Attention	0.854	0.895	0.630
Customer Loyalty	0.868	0.904	0.655
Enthusiasm	0.848	0.897	0.686
Identification	0.743	0.851	0.656

Source: field work (2022)

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criterion							
	INT	ABS	ATT	LOY	ENT	IND	
Interaction	0.842						
Absorption	0.163	0.867					
Attention	0.033	0.054	0.794				
Customer Loyalty	0.235	0.783	0.199	0.809			
Enthusiasm	0.113	0.112	0.637	0.266	0.828		
Identification	0.153	0.704	0.037	0.689	0.074	0.810	

Source: field survey (2022)

Table 4: Path Coefficients

	(β)	STD	T Stat	P Values	Decision
Interaction -> Customer Loyalty	0.085	0.032	2.630	0.009	Supported
Absorption -> Customer Loyalty	0.563	0.042	13.300	0.000	Supported
Attention -> Customer Loyalty	0.077	0.034	2.297	0.022	Supported
Enthusiasm -> Customer Loyalty	0.124	0.038	3.263	0.001	Supported
Identification -> Customer Loyalty	0.267	0.045	5.889	0.000	Supported

Source: field work (2022)

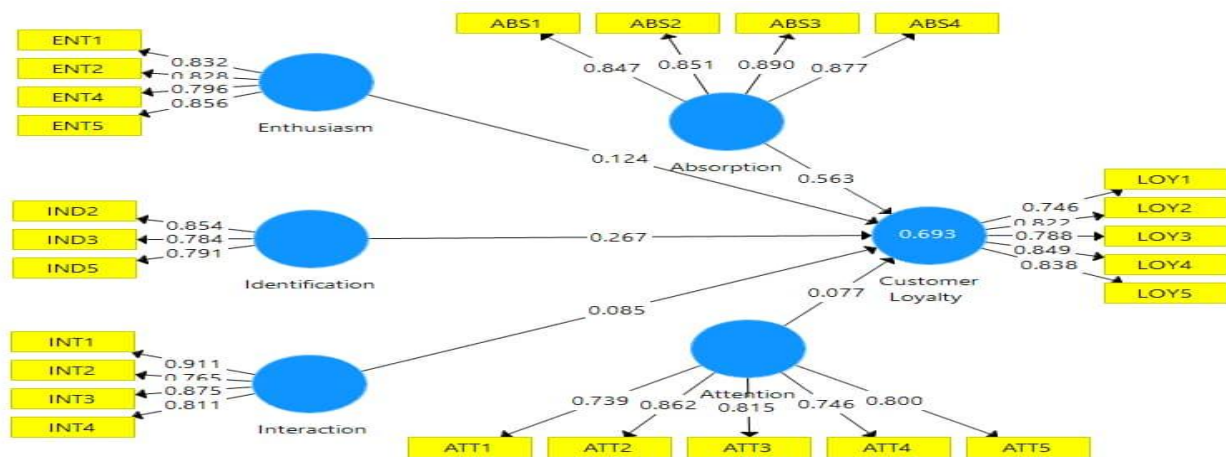


Figure 2: Models Diagram

Source: field work (2022)

Conclusion and Recommendations

As argued by Adzoyi, Blomme, & Honyenuga (2018) the ability of hotels to earn profits and achieve competitiveness in Africa lies on their capabilities to retain their guests. Especially now where the breakthrough in information technology resulted to a scenario where the guests have abundance of alternatives easily accessed via internet and other social media channels. The intervention of this study is timely imperative as Hapsari et al. (2017) posited that there is a dearth of studies relating to the concept of CE in marketing fields. Also, the construct of customer engagement used in the study as an emerging concept that predicts customer loyalty as argued by Kandampully et al. (2015) which was looked at from an offline perspective as most studies used the concept from the online point of view.

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This study empirically tested a model on the link between CE and loyalty, and found that all the dimensions of CE predicted loyalty. Hence, CE which is achieved through paying sustained attention can be realized by 'involvement' and 'absorption' where the guests will be fully 'absorbed' and engrossed with the hotels. This will lead them to stick to the hotels and also recommend them to others. Similarly, pleasurable interaction that will lead to emotional engagement should be encouraged.

Hence, the submission that customer engagement is an important predictor of loyalty. Organizations should also pay extra attention to meet the requirements of their guests this will make them to be involved and be highly occupied with their services. Similarly, through determining the effect of CE on guests' loyalty this has contributed to theory advancement and practice. Future studies are therefore suggested to merge this emerging construct with the well-established variables that trigger loyalty. Equally, the use of moderating or mediating mechanism in the model is strongly solicited in future studies

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