

Integrated Marketing Communications and Customer Loyalty in Nigeria's Telecommunications Industry

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Abstract

This study focused on integrated marketing communications and customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Lagos State, Nigeria constitutes the scope of the study being that it is the commercial hub of Nigeria and there resides a huge population of telecoms subscribers. Survey design was adopted for the study. Cross-sectional data were collected across the twenty local government areas in Lagos State with the aid of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire administered on 600 telecommunications subscribers yielded 82.3% response rate. Using descriptive statistics, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity, the data collected were analyzed. The findings reveal that integrated marketing communications (IMC) has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. The result further shows that each of the proxies of IMC studied influenced customer loyalty at varying degrees, ranging from high to weak extent. It can therefore be inferred that implementation of IMC in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria enhances customer loyalty. Some recommendations were made and the managerial implications highlighted.

Key words: Integrated marketing communications; Customer loyalty; Brands; Incentives; Telecommunications

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INTRODUCTION

Intense competition pervades the telecommunications industry in Nigeria sequel to the launch of Global System of Mobile (GSM) communications service in 2001, coupled with the privatization of Nigerian Telecommunications Ltd (NITEL) in 2003. Prior to this period, NITEL had enjoyed a monopolistic market as the nation's telephone service single provider. Omotayo, Abiodun, and Osibanjo (2011) posit that the degree of competition in the telecommunications industry all over the world and in Nigeria, in particular, is high and it is devoid of any period that can be designated as peak or off-peak. Mobile Telephone Network (MTN), Econnet Wireless now known as Airtel, and the privatized NITEL Ltd (M-Tel), Globacom now known as Glo Mobile, Starcomms, Multi-links, Visafone and Etisalat have been the major players in the privatized market. The telephone network and service providers design, offer, and aggressively promote different types of services and incentives to different segments of the market, among which are prepaid and postpaid packages. The market offerings are targeted to attract customers and stimulate trial and repeat patronage of products and services of the telecommunication companies.

Telephone services subscribers in Nigeria now have enhanced opportunities to freely choose their service providers and express their loyalty unlike what prevailed in the past. Many of the subscribers also do make use of telephone handset(s) with more than one brand of SIM card. The wide variety of products and services and promotional offers from the telecoms firms trigger more frequent customer switching behavior, thus making the goal of customer loyalty to a specific brand/firm difficult to attain. Clear evidences of brand switching behavior abound among the telephone subscribers in Nigeria (Aminu & Hartini, 2008; Oyeniyi & Abiodun, 2010).

Many organizations the world over strive to achieve customer loyalty because of the perceived potential

benefits associated with the concept. Customer loyalty has become a major concern of firms in today's competitive market (Oghojafor, Ladipo, Ighomereho, & Odunewu, 2014). Alrubiie and Al-Nazer (2010) posit that customer loyalty significantly drives long-term financial performance arising from increased sales turnover, increased market share, lower costs, higher prices, and so on.

As consumers largely control the communication landscape in today's marketing environment, many marketers focus on presenting clear, concise, consistent and compelling messages across different mediums and platforms primarily aimed to create awareness about the existence and availability of products and services, and to stimulate customers' preference for them. Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is an approach aimed to achieve the objectives of a marketing campaign through a well-coordinated use of different promotional methods that are intended to reinforce each other (Brindha, 2014). IMC seeks to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time in the right place to actualize the goals and objectives of an organization. According to Fennell (2014), effective marketing communications must reflect well-formed goals which may include greater brand awareness, generating sales, customer retention, repeat business, and so on.

Customers' preference for a firm's brand and their loyalty towards it could be a good measure of the success or otherwise of integrated marketing communications strategy of an organization. Consumer loyalty in relation to integrated marketing communication can be taken as an aspect of measurement metric (Potluri, 2008). This study, therefore, is focused on evaluating the influence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Integrated Marketing Communications

The varying perceptions held about integrated marketing communications (IMC) as both a concept and a process have made it difficult to arrive at a definition for it in the literature (Duncan & Everette, 1993). IMC seems to have passed through and still is passing through a conjectural storm as to its meaning and purpose (Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Jones, 2004; Fill, 2009). According to Arens, Weigold, and Arens (2013, p.22), some scholars perceive IMC as "one voice" (ensuring all elements of the marketing mix converge on a single idea); while others view it as integrated communications (that advertising can and should achieve both action and awareness objectives simultaneously); and to others still, IMC stands for coordinated marketing communications (ensuring that various marketing communication tools work together). Caywood, Schultz and Wang (1991) defined IMC as

a concept of marketing communication planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of variety of communication disciplines e.g. general advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion and public relations and combined these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) also offers a definition of IMC thus: "A planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time." Integration of the various marketing communications tools is necessary to achieve cost-effective promotion mix considering the fact that each tool has its unique strengths and weaknesses (Belch & Belch, 2011).

IMC is a strategic marketing process specifically designed to ensure that all messaging and communication strategies are unified across all channels and are centered on the customer (Kehinde, 2009; Brindha, 2014). Through the application of IMC, organizations gain lots of benefits and competitive advantage, increased sales and profits, cost savings and better time management as well as reduced stress. IMC stretches messages across various tools of marketing communications, thus creating more avenues for customers to become aware, aroused, and take purchase actions (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p.16). IMC helps management to avoid duplication, take advantage of synergy among promotional tools, and to develop more efficient and effective marketing communication programmes (G. E. Belch & M. A. Belch, 2009). Kotler and Keller (2012) posit that IMC is a strategic planning process which evaluates the strategic roles of various communication tools and combines them to provide clarity, consistency and maximum impact through messages integrated seamlessly.

The promotional mix is to be executed in a way that the elements work together to achieve the objectives of the organization (Jobber & Lancaster, 2009). Cravens and Piercy (2013, p.350) asserted that it is crucial for marketing management to plan and coordinate an integrated promotion strategy and also to select the specific strategies for each of the components of marketing communications. They, however, recognized that IMC execution in organizations is constrained by the fact that each component of promotion has specific objectives, and there are differences in the priorities and the determination of measures of effectiveness of each of the tools of marketing communications (Cravens & Piercy, 2013, p.358). Other factors that cause resistance in IMC implementation include the existence of functional silos arising from rigid organizational structures and managers who strive to protect their budgets and power base; stifled creativity due to conflicts between different professionals involved in a campaign planning; conflicting time horizons linked to the realization of the campaign objectives; and, a lack of management know-how about

IMC (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p.18). IMC is apt for the rapidly changing global market characterized by fierce competition, as organizations try to find the most efficient way to get their word out so that customers understand the benefits that can be obtained by consumption or use products or services (Clow, 2010). Vantamay (2011) indicated five factors for measuring the effectiveness of IMC programme: customer responses, market performance, brand exposures, communication effect and channel support.

1.1.1 Conceptualization of Integrated Marketing Communications Tools for Telecommunications Industry and Research Hypotheses

The scope of integrated marketing communication activities differs from industry to industry, from firm to firm and from product to product. A lot of approaches have been seen used by different telecommunications companies across the world, Nigeria inclusive. IMC considers all sources of brand or company contacts which a customer or prospect has with the product or service as potential delivery channels for future messages (Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Jones, 2004). This study, however, seeks to examine the extent to which IMC tools, particularly, advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, public relations and publicity, and direct marketing activities influence customer loyalty in Nigeria's telecommunications industry.

1.1.2 Advertising Activities as Tools of Integrated Marketing Communications

Advertising is a very important tool for companies whose products and services are targeted at mass consumer market (Abedin & Ferdous, 2015) which is the case with most telecommunication products and services. It is the most cost effective means for companies to reach large audiences (G. E. Belch & M. A. Belch, 2009). Advertising is a non-personal communication channel or mass communication channel that is usually paid for. It is basically used to create awareness, provide information, reminds consumers and to persuade consumers about a brand. Some of the weaknesses of advertising are that it is non-personal, one way communication and expensive. Some of the marketing activities that fit into the role played by advertising in the telecommunications industry are T.V. advertisement, outdoor advertisements such as road shows, bill boards, radio jingles, newspaper advertisements, online/internet advertisements (Brindha, 2014; Abedin et al., 2015). The customers' perception is a good basis for measuring the effectiveness and contributions of advertising activities of firms towards gaining customer loyalty.

Ho₁: Advertising activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

1.1.3 Sales Promotion

Sales promotion has been viewed as any activity intended to generate a temporary boost in sales which

includes several communications activities pursued in an attempt to provide added value or incentives to consumers, wholesalers, retailers, or other organizational customers (Blythe, 2006) to stimulate immediate sales either by trial, or repeat purchase (Cravens & Piercy, 2013). The added value or incentives provided by sales promotion to consumers and others could be in monetary and non-monetary forms (Adeniran, Egwuonwu, & Egwuonwu, 2016). Some sales promotional activities are communicated in the form of loyalty programs and prize contest (Chandon & Wansink, 2000); bonus offers and discount (Ndukwe, 2008) as they are observed being practiced by telecommunications operators around the world.

Ho₂: Sales promotion activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

1.1.4 Personal Selling

Personal selling serves as a face to face interaction with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making presentations, answering questions, and procuring orders (Kotler & Keller, 2012); and it creates the single most important link with the customer (Jobber & Lancaster, 2009, p.4). However, annual expenditures on personal selling are much larger than on advertising (Cravens et al., 2013).

Ho₃: Personal selling activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

1.1.5 Public Relations and Publicity

Kotler and Armstrong (2012) assert that public relations and publicity facilitate the building of good relations with a company's various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories, and events relating to such a company. Through dialogue and consensus, public relations and publicity greatly foster mutual understanding, and promote harmonious co-existence between people, groups and nations (Ajai, 2005). Consumers prefer organizations that portray credible image, and public relations seek to mirror such an image.

Ho₄: Public relations and publicity activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

1.1.6 Direct Marketing

Through the use of direct marketing techniques, marketers can create and sustain dialogue with customers, potential customers and other significant stakeholders without the use of intermediaries. It includes various media activities used to generate a series of communications and responses with an existing or potential customer (Fill, 2009). The scope also covers the distribution of products, information and promotional benefits to target consumers through interactive communication in a way that allows the

response to be measured. In Direct marketing, customers can be reached through activities and techniques such as direct mail, telemarketing, direct response advertising, catalogue marketing, mobile marketing, electronic media (Aremu, 2006), inserts (leaflets in magazines) and door to door leafleting.

H₀₅: Direct marketing activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

1.2 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined by Mei-Lien and Green (2010) “as a deep-held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product in the future despite situational influence and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour and recommending the product to friends and associates”. Loyalty is linked with the repeat business. Thus, a customer is loyal when he is frequently repurchasing a product or service from a particular provider (Angelova & Zekiri, 2011). Customer loyalty is closely related to the company’s continued survival and to strong future growth (Fornell, 1992; Rahim, Ignatius, & Adeoti, 2012). Customer loyalty is one of the outcomes of customer satisfaction (Bei & Chiao, 2001). Some studies, however, have shown contrasting findings as to what determines customer loyalty thus: customer satisfaction leads to loyalty (Aminu & Hartini, 2008); customer satisfaction is not enough to explain customer loyalty despite the fact that it is an important factor (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Lee & Cunningham, 2001; Jones & Farquhar, 2003; Irit & Barak, 2011).

Rahim et al. (2012) posited that loyal customers are apt to recommend company products and services to others; repeat purchases for a company products and services; purchase other products and services which the company offer; believe the company’s products and services are superior to those of competitors; not to actively seek alternative service providers; provide the company with opportunities to correct problems, and not to use such problems as a basis for compromising the relationship. Other indicators of customer loyalty are positive word-of-mouth and recommendation of a brand to family and friends. These attitudinal and behavioral tendencies attributed to customer loyalty served as the basis for the hypotheses in this study.

H₀₆: IMC tools do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study relied on the responses of the telecoms subscribers regarding the extent to which the IMC messages of the telecommunications operators in Nigeria have influenced their loyalty to the telephone network and service provider(s) of their choice. Only individuals who have owned handsets and have been using any of the

GSM networks were considered as sampled customers for the study. The focus is to enable data collection from only respondents who can easily understand the focus of the research instrument. Considering the cosmopolitan nature of Lagos, the state was used for field data collection. Cross-sectional research design was used, hence the choice of data collection across the twenty Local Government Areas in the state. Non-probabilistic sampling techniques comprising of purposeful and convenience techniques were used in reaching respondents. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria (NBS) the number of telecoms subscribers was 148.74 million in the first quarter of 2016 (NBS, 2016). Out of this, the number of subscribers in Lagos State was 19.04 million representing the largest share of active voice subscribers. Using the Taro Yameni (1967) sample size formula, the sample size for the study is 400. Six hundred (600) questionnaires were distributed across the twenty local government areas in Lagos State. The questionnaire constructs were arranged in sections to enable respondents respond to the different areas conceptualized as IMC activities. Response options ranged from 6 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the research instrument and expert opinion for content validity. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity for the hypotheses tests.

3. RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Out of the 600 questionnaire copies administered for the study, 494 were completely filled and returned which represents 82.3%. Summary of personal data of respondents from the questionnaire that were completely filled and returned shows that 254 (51.4%) were male while 240 (48.6%) were female. Respondents between the age bracket of 21-50 years were 488 (98.9%) while 6 (1.2%) were from 51 years and above. Nigerians constituted 491 (99.4%) while 3 (0.6%) were non-Nigerians. Respondents who use single GSM network comprised 274 (55.5%) while 220 (44.5%) use two or more GSM networks.

Reliability test conducted on the internal consistency of the research instrument using Cronbach’s Alpha method showed that the reliability of the research instrument is 0.883. Content validity of the research instrument was based on expert opinions. Sampling adequacy test was conducted using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin method. Kaiser (1974) recommended accepting values which are greater than 0.50. The result of this study showed approximately 0.8 which is greater than the 0.50 benchmark. This indicated that the sampling adequacy fell in the range of being great (i.e. 0.8-0.9 are great) implying that factor analysis is appropriate for these data. The determinant of the R-matrix in the factor analysis conducted was greater than 0.00001, an indication that there was the

absence of multi-collinearity. In other words, there were no variables that correlate very highly (i.e. $R < 0.9$) in the correlation matrix. To sum up, all questions in the research instrument correlate fairly well and none of the correlation coefficients are particularly large; therefore, there is no need to consider eliminating any questions in the instrument.

3.1 Advertising Activities as Tools of IMC

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. deviation	Analysis N
TV advertisement	4.90	1.210	494
Bill board advertisement	4.44	1.183	494
Radio advertisement	4.32	1.171	494
Newspaper advertisement	4.22	1.182	494
Online/internet advertisement	4.32	1.314	494

The mean statistics in the above Table 1 showed that Television Advertisement ranks highest, followed by Bill Board and other outdoor Advertisements. Radio and Online Advertisements rank third while Newspaper Advertisement ranks last. This implies that each of the Advertising activities and messages as tools of IMC influenced customer loyalty differently in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

Table 2
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.786
	Approx. Chi-square	1116.784
Bartlett's test of sphericity	df	10
	Sig.	.000

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: Advertising activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

The above significant test result tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix which indicates that there are some relationships between the variables. For the data regarding the influence of advertising messages as components of IMC on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, Bartlett's test is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which implies that advertising activities and messages have positive influence on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

3.2 Sales Promotion as Tools of IMC

The mean statistics in Table 3 shows that bonus promotional offer ranks highest; followed by discount promotional offer; followed by prize promotional contest; followed by premium packages; while the last in the ranking is loyalty program. The implication of this finding is that sales promotional activities and messages as tools

of IMC do have varying degrees of positive influence on customer loyalty in Nigeria's telecommunications industry.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. deviation	Analysis N
Bonus offer messages	4.98	1.223	494
Discount offer messages	4.65	1.379	494
Prize contest messages	4.48	1.196	494
Loyalty program messages	4.31	1.067	494
Premium package messages	4.46	1.156	494

The mean statistics in the above Table 3 shows that bonus promotional offer ranks highest; followed by discount promotional offer; followed by prize promotional contest; followed by premium packages; while the last in the ranking is loyalty program. The implication of this finding is that sales promotional activities and messages as tools of IMC do have varying degrees of positive influence on customer loyalty in Nigeria's telecommunications industry.

Table 4
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.645
	Approx. Chi-square	534.302
Bartlett's test of sphericity	df	10
	Sig.	.000

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: Sales promotion activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

The above significant test result tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix which indicates that there are some relationships between the variables. For the data regarding the influence of sales promotional activities as tools of IMC on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, Bartlett's test is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which implies that sales promotional activities and messages are effective tools of IMC in influencing customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

3.3 Personal Selling as Tools of IMC Strategies

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. deviation	Analysis N
Retail selling messages	3.96	1.182	494
Field selling messages	3.81	1.200	494
Telemarketing messages	4.20	1.491	494

The mean statistics in the above Table 5 shows that bonus telemarketing messages rank the highest; followed

by retail selling messages; followed by field selling messages. This implies that personal selling activities as tools of IMC positively influence customer loyalty differently in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

Table 6
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.473
	Approx. Chi-square	44.371
Bartlett's test of sphericity	<i>df</i>	3
	Sig.	.000

Hypothesis 3

Ho₃: Personal selling activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

The above significant test result tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix which indicates that there are some relationships between the variables. For the data regarding the influence of personal selling messages as tools of IMC on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, Bartlett's test is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which implies that personal selling activities and messages are effective as tools of IMC in building customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

3.4 Public Relations and Publicity as Tools of IMC

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. deviation	Analysis N
Press release message	4.11	1.207	494
New product launch messages	3.60	1.403	494
Event sponsorship messages	4.38	1.226	494
Scholarship messages	4.66	1.195	494

The mean statistics in the above Table 7 shows that bonus scholarship messages rank the highest; followed by event sponsorship messages; followed by press release messages; followed by new product launch messages. This implies that public relations and publicity activities and messages as tools of IMC have varying levels of positive influence on customer loyalty differently in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

Table 8
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.596
	Approx. Chi-square	123.928
Bartlett's test of sphericity	<i>df</i>	6
	Sig.	.000

Hypothesis 4

Ho₄: Public relations and publicity activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

The above significant test result tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix which indicates that there are some relationships between the variables. For the data regarding the influence of public relations and publicity activities as tools of IMC on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, Bartlett's test is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which implies that public relations and publicity activities as tools of IMC positively affect customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

3.5 Direct Marketing as a Tool of IMC

Table 9
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. deviation	Analysis N
SMS marketing messages	4.19	1.301	486
Leaflet messages	3.85	1.208	486
Catalogue messages	3.72	1.310	486
Mails messages	3.70	1.387	486
Direct online interaction	4.17	1.203	486

The mean statistics in the above Table 9 shows that SMS marketing messages ranks the highest; followed by direct online interaction messages; followed by leaflet messages; followed by catalogue messages; and followed by mail messages. By implication, direct marketing activities and messages as tools of IMC have positive influence on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The influence each one of the activities has at various degrees.

Table 10
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.763
	Approx. Chi-square	728.303
Bartlett's test of sphericity	<i>df</i>	10
	Sig.	.000

Hypothesis 5

Ho₅: Direct marketing activities being tools of IMC do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

The above significant test result tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix which indicates that there are some relationships between the variables. For the data regarding the influence of direct marketing messages as components of IMC on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, Bartlett's test is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which implies that direct marketing

activities and messages are effective tools of IMC in generating customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

3.6 IMC Strategies and Customer Loyalty in Nigerian Telecommunications Industry

Table 11
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. deviation	Analysis N
Repeat purchases	4.37	1.162	494
Positive word-of-mouth	5.12	1.018	494
Voluntary awareness	4.71	1.039	494
Identifying with network provider	4.38	1.094	494

The mean statistics in the above Table 11 shows that integrated marketing communication strategies in the Nigerian telecommunications industry positively influence subscribers to show loyalty to the network providers first by positive word-of-mouth; followed by voluntary awareness creation for the services of network providers; followed by proudly identifying with particular network providers; followed by repeat purchases. This implies that each of the strategies of IMC positively influences customer loyalty in different ways in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

Table 12
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.691
Approx. Chi-square		381.111
Bartlett's test of sphericity	<i>df</i>	10
	Sig.	.000

Hypothesis 6

H₀₆: IMC strategies do not influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

The above significant test result tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix which indicates that there are some relationships between the variables. For the data regarding the influence of IMC strategies on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, Bartlett's test is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected which implies that IMC strategies are effective in building customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The descriptive statistics result in Table 1 shows the mean scores for the different platforms by which advertising messages have been passed to customers in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria as components of integrated marketing communication strategies of network service providers to generate customer loyalty. Out of the five advertising platforms studied, T.V. advertising influences customer the most to be loyal having showed

a mean score of 4.90. This was followed by bill board advertising with a mean score of 4.44; followed by radio advertising and online/internet advertising showing mean scores of 4.32 each while newspaper advertising ranked the lowest with a mean score of 4.22. If the ranking on advertising platforms is taken further in relations to the Likert scaling used in the questionnaire, the descriptive statistics results can further be narrowed down. The T.V. advertising mean score of 4.90 can be approximated to 5.0 which fall under "Agree" scaling. The highest scaling was 6.0 for "Strongly Agree". The mean scores of 4.44, 4.32, 4.32 and 4.22 for bill board; radio, online/internet and newspaper advertising respectively can be approximated to 4.0 which fall under "Partially Agree" scaling in the research instrument. The implication of this is that, customers' perceptions on T.V. advertising would influence their level of loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria more than would the other advertising platforms. The result of hypothesis 1 in Table 2 however shows that advertising activities and messages are effective components of integrated marketing communications strategies for gaining customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. However, this result can also be linked to the above summary of the descriptive statistics findings for further narrowing down. That is to say that the effectiveness of advertising activities as tools of integrated marketing communications strategies for influencing customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria is greatest with T.V. advertising which shows an approximate clearer and higher response scaling when compared to the other advertising platforms which do not show approximate clearer but lower response scaling. In other words, the result of hypothesis 1 notwithstanding, the specific pattern depicted in Table 1 has shown the direction and extent in which the different advertising platforms (in terms of customer media preference) can attract customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The above findings one way or the other support Brindha (2014) and Abedin et al. (2015) which states that some of the marketing activities that fit into the role played by advertising in the telecommunications industry are T.V. advertisement, outdoor advertisement (such as road shows, bill boards) radio jingles, newspaper advertisement and online/internet advertisement.

The descriptive statistics result in Table 3 shows the mean scores of different sales promotional activities which are applicable in communicating to customers and gaining their loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Bonus offer activities and messages influence customers to be more loyal having showed a mean score of 4.98. This was followed by discount offer messages and activities with a mean score of 4.65; followed by prize contest with a mean score of 4.48; followed by premium package messages and activities

with a mean score of 4.46 and lastly followed by loyalty program messages and activities with a mean score of 4.31. On the Likert scaling, the descriptive statistics results reveal thus: the bonus offer mean score of 4.98 and that of discount offer of 4.65 can be approximated to 5.0 which fall under “Agree” scaling. The highest scaling was 6.0 for “Strongly Agree”. The mean scores of 4.48, 4.46 and 4.31 for prize contest; premium package, and loyalty program respectively can be approximated to 4.0 which fall under “Partially Agree” scaling in the research instrument. The implication of this is that, customers’ perception on bonus offer and discount offer would influence their level of loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria more than the other promotional platforms would. The result of hypothesis 2 in Table 4 clearly shows that sales promotion activities and messages are effective components of integrated marketing communications strategies for gaining customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. However, relative to the summary of the descriptive statistics findings, it can be seen that sales promotion activities can only be effective as components of integrated marketing communications strategies for attracting customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria to the extent of bonus and discount offers which show an approximate clearer and higher response scaling when compared to the other sales promotion platforms which rather show lower response scaling. In other words, the result of hypothesis 2 notwithstanding, the specific pattern depicted in Table 3 has shown the direction and extent in which the different sales promotion platforms (in terms of customer perception) can influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The above findings one way or the other align with findings of Chandon and Wansink (2000), and Ndukwe (2008) which show that sales promotional activities are communicated in the form of loyalty programmes and prize contests; bonus offers and discount as they are observed being practiced by telecommunications operators around the world.

The descriptive statistics result in Table 5 shows the mean scores of different personal selling activities which are applicable in communicating to customers and gaining their loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Out of the three personal selling platforms studied, telemarketing influences customer the most to be loyal having showed a mean score of 4.20. This was followed by retail selling with a mean score of 3.96; followed by field selling showing mean score of 3.81. The descriptive statistics on personal selling platforms results based on the Likert scaling used in the questionnaire indicate that three platforms by approximation have 4.0 mean scores which fall under “Partially Agree” scaling with the highest scaling being 6.0 for “Strongly Agree”. The implication of this is that customers have

a low perception on personal selling activities and messages as tools of integrated marketing strategies for influencing their loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the result of hypothesis 3 in Table 6 still shows that personal selling activities and messages are effective components of integrated marketing communications strategies for gaining customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Linking the summary of the descriptive statistics findings, it can be said that that the customers surveyed are not too sure of the extent of influence that personal selling activities as tools of integrated marketing communications strategies have on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The result of hypothesis 3 notwithstanding, the specific pattern depicted in Table 5 has shown the direction and extent in which the different personal selling platforms (in terms of customer perception) can influence customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria.

The descriptive statistics result in Table 7 show the mean scores of different public relations and publicity activities which are applicable in communicating to customers and gaining their loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Out of the four public relations/publicity platforms studied, scholarship activities and messages influence customer the most to be loyal having showed a mean score of 4.66. This was followed by event sponsorship with a mean score of 4.38; followed by press releases showing mean score of 4.11; and lastly, by new product launch activities and messages. The descriptive statistics results indicate that the scholarship platform’s mean score of 4.66 (approximately 5.0) falls under “Agree” in Likert scaling where the highest scaling is 6.0 stands for “Strongly Agree”. The mean scores of 4.38, 4.11 and 3.60 for event sponsorship; press releases, and new product launch respectively can be approximated to 4.0 which fall under “Partially Agree” scaling in the research instrument. This implies that telecoms subscribers perceive that scholarship activities and messages have more influence on their level of loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria than do the other public relations/publicity platforms. The result of hypothesis 4 in Table 8 shows that public relations/publicity activities and messages are effective tools of integrated marketing communications strategies for gaining customer loyalty in Nigeria’s telecommunications industry. Judging from the summary of the descriptive statistics findings, it is evident that scholarship activities and messages which show an approximate clearer and higher response scaling when compared to the other public relations/publicity platforms have greater influence on customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. In other words, the result of hypothesis 4 notwithstanding, the specific pattern depicted in Table 7 has shown the direction and extent in which the

different public relations/publicity platforms (in terms of customer perception) can attract customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The above public relations/publicity platforms studied confirms the scope enumerated by Brindha (2014) and Abedin et al. (2015).

The descriptive statistics results in Table 9 show the mean scores for the different platforms by which direct marketing activities and messages have been passed to customers in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria as components of integrated marketing communication strategies of network service providers to attract customer loyalty. Out of the five platforms studied, SMS marketing influences customer the most to be loyal having showed a mean score of 4.19. This was followed direct online interactions with a mean score of 4.17; followed by leaflet messages with a mean score of 3.85; followed by catalogue messages with a mean score of 3.72 while mail messages ranked the lowest with a mean score of 3.70. Considering the descriptive statistics results, all the five platforms have approximately 4.0 mean score which fall under "Partially Agree" scaling on a maximum scale of 6.0 for "Strongly Agree". The implication of this is that there is a low perception on the part of telecoms subscribers regarding how direct marketing activities and messages as components of integrated marketing strategies influence their loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The result of hypothesis 5 in Table 10 however shows that direct marketing activities and messages are effective components of integrated marketing communications strategies for gaining customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Summarily, the customers surveyed are not too sure of the extent to which direct marketing activities as tools of integrated marketing communications strategies for customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The result of hypothesis 5 notwithstanding, the specific pattern depicted in Table 9 has shown the direction and extent in which the different direct marketing platforms (in terms of customer perception) can attract customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The scope of direct marketing platforms studied is in agreement with the opinion of Aremu (2006).

In order to measure the extent of the various indicators by which there is customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, the descriptive statistics result in Table 11 was used. Out of the four indicators measured, positive word-of-mouth with a mean score of 5.12 is mostly used by customers to express their loyalty; followed by voluntary awareness creation with a mean score of 4.71; followed by identifying with the network service providers with a mean score of 4.38; and finally followed by repeat purchase with a mean score of 4.37. Taking the ranking further in relation to the Likert scaling used in the questionnaire, the descriptive statistics results can further be narrowed down. The positive word-

of-mouth mean score of 5.12 and voluntary awareness mean score of 4.71 can be approximated to 5.0, which fall under "Agree" scaling. The highest scaling is 6.0 for "Strongly Agree". The mean scores of 4.38 and 4.37 for identifying with network providers and repeat purchases respectively can be approximated to 4.0 which fall under "Partially Agree" in the response scaling. The implication of this is that, all the components of integrated marketing communications in this study elicited different levels of customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. Customers express their loyalty more by positive word-of-mouth and voluntary awareness creation. Customers' expression of loyalty by repeat purchases and identifying with network provider was not very clear from the above approximated 4.0 response. The result of hypothesis 6 in Table 12 however shows that integrated marketing communications strategies are effective for gaining customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. However, this result can also be linked to the above summary of the descriptive statistics findings for further narrowing down. That is to say that IMC can only be effective for attracting customer loyalty in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria to the extent positive word-of-mouth and voluntary awareness creation. In other words, the result of hypothesis 6 notwithstanding, the specific pattern depicted in Table 11 has shown the direction and extent customer loyalty (in terms of customer perception) in the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. This result agrees with the attitudinal and behavioural tendencies of customer loyalty as highlighted by Rahim et al. (2012).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it has been found in both the literature and the empirical findings that there is a positive link between integrated marketing communications and customer loyalty. From the findings in this study, it was affirmed that the identified tools of integrated marketing communications have significant positive influence on customer loyalty in Nigeria's telecommunications industry. It was also ascertained that the proxies of IMC do not influence customer loyalty equally being that some do to a high extent while the influence of the others are at low degrees. The findings further revealed the specific customer loyalty indicators which the Nigerian telecommunications customers showed toward the industry, with the implication that telecoms subscribers do not express their loyalty equally on the identified indicators of customer loyalty.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

All the above findings have opened up several implications for managers in the telecommunications

industry in Nigeria to focus attention on. In view of the findings with respect to advertising activities and messages as components of IMC for gaining customer loyalty, allocation of resources on advertising should focus more on T.V. and Bill boards advertising than on the other mediums. Market research is needed to identify the market segments that specifically favour radio and online/internet and newspaper mediums before resources are allocated to them. Sales promotional activities and messages should also address specific segments rather than being made general. This is because the same promotional activities may not appeal to all customers in the different segments. Personal selling and direct marketing activities and strategies should be reviewed to assess their contributions to customer loyalty in the industry. If they are found not to be too effective, resources should not be wasted on them. Finally, individual network providers need to work more on their IMC strategies with a view to focusing on the ones that are relevant to the industry and which are capable of attracting customer loyalty beyond the positive word-of-mouth and voluntary awareness creation found in this study. The 44.5% of respondents who are using two or more telecommunications network are an indication of high rate of customer switching. This finding aligns with the position of Aminu and Hartini (2008); Oyeniyi and Abiodun (2010) which state that there are clear evidences of brand switching among the telephone subscribers in Nigeria which may be due to different reasons. This further shows that a lot more needs to be done to improve on IMC strategies if customer loyalty must also improve beyond the current level revealed in this study.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As spelt out by Vantamay (2011) and Potluri (2009), there are several factors for measuring the effectiveness of IMC programmes. This study actually focused on one of them which is customer loyalty. Future researchers can dive into other measures of the effectiveness of IMC in the same industry. Moreover, the study focussed on the industry as a whole which does not cover the extent of customer loyalty enjoyed by individual telecommunications network providers in the country. This has provided a direction for future researchers to work further.

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