







ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: www.ijirss.com



Bolstering the moderating role of consumer perception on brand activism and consumer loyalty

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Abstract

In recent years, marketing has shifted as companies increasingly take clear ideological and social stances to establish authenticity and champion causes resonating with their customer base particularly in the global market. This change driven by evolving consumer culture in the Western world reflects consumers' growing expectation for companies to engage actively with social issues. However, this phenomenon of activist brands remains underexplored in Africa especially in Nigeria. Limited literature examines this within the Nigerian context where assumptions suggest that the average Nigerian consumer is indifferent to a brand's activities. This research investigated the influence of brand activism on customer loyalty and the mediating role of perception in this relationship. This study illustrates how brand activism can enhance a brand's positive image and how consumer perceptions of this image can bolster loyalty using the framing and theory of pollution and purity. The research employs a descriptive design and quantitative survey methodology. The results reveal that cause-related marketing significantly predicts repurchase intention. Conversely, corporate philanthropy shows no significant effect on customer advocacy. Additionally, the findings demonstrate a significant indirect effect of brand activism on consumer loyalty mediated by customer perception. This study demonstrates that brand activism positively impacts customer loyalty, supported by perceptual factors observed in Eat'n'Go's Domino's Pizza in Lagos. It is recommended that Domino's Pizza in Lagos, Nigeria consider implementing brand activism to enhance customer repurchase intentions. Future research should expand to other industry sectors and include multiple case studies to enrich the understanding of this evolving branding phenomenon.

Keywords: Brand activism, Customer loyalty, Customer perception.

DOI: 10.53894/ijirss.v8i1.4173

Funding: This study received no specific financial support. The APC was funded by Covenant University, Nigeria.

History: Received: 7 August 2023/**Revised:** 16 December 2024/**Accepted:** 30 December 2024/**Published:** 17 January 2025

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Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the Covenant University, Nigeria has granted approval for this study (Ref. No. CU/HRE/AFJ/431/24).

Publisher: Innovative Research Publishing

1. Introduction

Businesses adopt clear ideological and social positions to demonstrate authenticity and meet customer concerns especially globally. Mende and Scott [1] have stated that marketing must play a role in addressing the urgent challenges that brands face in this era coining the terms "better marketing for a better world" and "marketing as a force for good" which must be investigated to determine how applicable marketing is as a tool. Additionally, consumers are now more aware of different branding techniques which compel managers to implement fresh branding tactics that aim to influence customers. This is brought on by a change in consumer culture and society's increasing influence on business with consumers expecting corporations to address social issues.

When a corporation or a brand aligns its underlying ideas and vision with the support or promotion of social, environmental, economic and cultural causes it is known as "brand activism" [2]. The potential actions encompass crafting a public statement, engaging in lobbying efforts on behalf of the cause, contributing financial resources to support an institution or integrating a cause-centric message into marketing and advertising communications. This form of activism not only captures the target audience's interest but also creates visibility for such a company. Recently, businesses have incorporated social issues into their communications in a variety of ways to demonstrate their values and come across as genuine in their communications [3].

However, it has a positive influence on brands and organizations' earnings, equity and consumer loyalty among those who share common values and beliefs with a cause. In this environment of growing sensitivity to these issues, there is a strong need to discover new economic models in which companies are no longer spectators but protagonists, heroes capable of inspiring stakeholders particularly consumers by taking compelling and appealing actions. Moreover, consumers are increasingly demanding that businesses take a stand on social issues. Engagement is crucial since it not only reflects the community's response to the activism campaign (and also the brand's stance on an issue) but also helps the company determine how they are seen. Understanding how social media engagement connects to a campaign's characteristics will help a company to build a particular strategy where their engagement could possibly contribute to its return on investment with the rise of brand activism and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) values.

Prior studies have opined that brand activism is a comparatively recent term that has piqued the attention of marketers, researchers and brand managers worldwide. It's even been dubbed the "future of branding." Previous studies have demonstrated that customers anticipate companies to take a stand while there remains limited understanding of how authenticity is perceived by customers within the realm of brand activism and how it influences their inclination to maintain loyalty towards a brand. Subsequently, the way activist engagements by a brand are perceived by its customer base significantly affects the growth of the brand and indicates whether a cause is worth pursuing or not. Perception is often alluded to as how individuals interact with and observe a product using the five senses of touch, smell, sight, sound and taste. However, Cozer [4] articulates that it stands as a primary psychological determinant exerting influence over consumer behavior. Understanding the concept of perception is crucial for marketers in the modern day as customers' purchasing decisions are heavily impacted by how they view a product.

There are numerous ways of implementing brand activism and the dimensions would be further detailed in the study of which can be used by an organization. Brand activism practices could address environmental, political and social issues or more. The implementation can be done by integrating activism into a brand's campaign or it can be communicated through public relations communication [2]. However, the problem is that these activities can be misrepresented or misinterpreted by those who come across the communication and this internalization could rub off negatively on the brand which the study would examine how customers' perceptions of brand activism would affect long-term customer loyalty. This research intends to bridge the existing intellectual gap by providing answers to the following set of research questions:

- i. To what extent does cause-related marketing affect repurchase intention among consumers?
- ii. To what degree does corporate philanthropy affect customer advocacy of a brand?
- iii. To what extent does corporate socio-political advocacy play a role in customer commitment?
- iv. To what extent does the mediating role of customer perception affect brand activism and customer loyalty?

2. Literature review

2.1. Concept of Brand Activism

Today's consumer culture relies on brands to create an association based on the symbolic trade of their name, logo and other identifying features or even the product positioning [5]. According to Katsanis [6] brands are an organization's most valuable asset due to the positive sentiments and connections customers have with the business which creates value and attracts new customers. Customers' psychological and social needs are taken into account when a product or service's external aspects are addressed.

A brand is nothing more than a collection of recognizable features used to build a product, service or organization's name and reputation. Branding is a long-term strategy that includes everything from product creation to marketing communication to build a personal relationship between a brand and its customers.

The concept of brand activism constitutes a values-driven approach adopted by companies to advocate for and bring about positive societal changes tackling the most vital and pressing challenges faced by society. Sarkar and Kotler [7] two leading marketing academics define brand activism as the endeavors undertaken by a company to either endorse, obstruct, or steer social, economic, political or environmental change or inertia to facilitate or impede societal development. Thus, Sarkar and Kotler [7] view the concept as a logical progression of corporate social responsibility as a method for positively

influencing a firm's reputation. However, they argue that CSR is driven by the goals of the company while brand activism is driven by society.

2.1.1. Essence of Brand Activism

Brand activism has two benefits to a brand taking a stance.

1. Demonstrating to your audience that you are knowledgeable and educated: A firm's commitment to integrity and trust is reinforced by its strong political stance. Additionally, it reminds clients that the firm supports a charitable cause. Specifically, when the original news of Brexit emerged, people demanded that corporations that performed extraordinarily well in Europe step up and express their opinions and large brands that wanted silence were ruthlessly attacked destroying consumer confidence.
2. Establishing rapport and establishing loyalty: When a business takes a political stance, it authentically reflects its company's values and ultimately aids in the formation of relationships and consumer confidence. By contrast, customer purchasing behavior is positively influenced by brand political advocacy. It is likely that the buyer would associate their beliefs with the brands. It should not be overlooked how powerful this relationship is since it gives customers an emotional connection to the brand. This entangled relationship extends much beyond the consistency or cost of commodities.

2.2. Customer Loyalty

In an era of globalization and a highly competitive market, one of the primary concerns of businesses is customer retention which is inextricably linked to consumer loyalty which is viewed as a factor influencing market performance and capable of increasing sales and market share. Businesses perceive "loyalty" in a comparable manner leading them to devise strategic marketing and advertising initiatives focused on cultivating a connection between itself and their clients [8]. Marketing scholars have adapted various definitions of customer loyalty to align with their specific research objectives and contextual settings. For instance, Casidy and Wymer [9] characterized customer loyalty as the emotional attachment one feels towards the loyalty object distinct from mere repetitive economic transactions.

Loyalty has two aspects. The first is behavioral loyalty which is often quantified in terms of repurchase rate and the second is attitudinal loyalty (relative attitude) which entails an emotional attachment to and preference for items or brands. Borishade et al. [10] posited that customers who demonstrate a proclivity towards a particular brand by purchasing products or services on a consistent basis demonstrate behavioral loyalty to that brand but not necessarily an attitude towards it as if a better offer becomes available, the customer will immediately switch to another brand. Similarly, a person might have a favorable view of a brand and see themselves as loyal while actively purchasing things from rival companies Omotayo et al. [11] and Worlu et al. [12]. Dick and Basu [13] proposed classifying loyalty into four distinct forms using the previously mentioned dimensions of relative attitude and repeat purchase. These four loyalty types are organized as a) no loyalty, b) loyalty, c) latent loyalty and d) spurious loyalty.

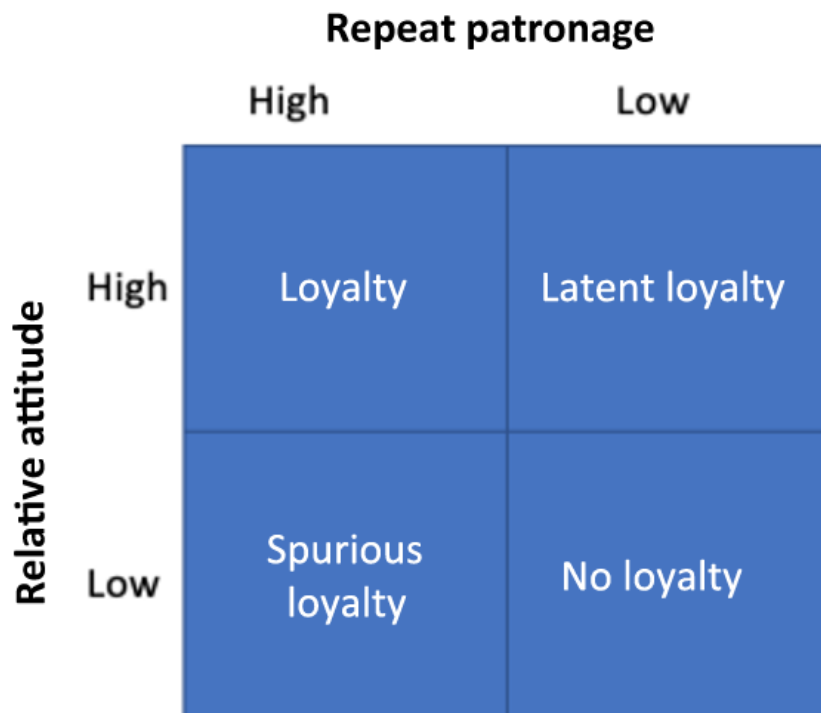


Figure 1.

Loyalty matrix.

Source: Dick and Basu [13].

According to Figure 1, the juxtaposition of a diminished relative attitude and infrequent repeat patronage signifies an absence of loyalty (no loyalty) in a consumer. This might occur under several market conditions. First, a low relative attitude could mean a new product or that a brand's benefits have not been made clear while repeat patronage alludes to the frequency in which a product is purchased. Latent loyalty is the type of loyalty that occurs when a customer has a high relative attitude but limited repeat business. Conversely, spurious loyalty arises when a customer demonstrates low relative attitude but engages in frequent repeat purchases. Therefore, loyalty becomes evident when a consumer exhibits a high relative attitude and engages in frequent repeat purchases towards a product.

2.2.1. Levels of Customer Loyalty

The ladder of customer loyalty illustrates the depth of connection a consumer has established with a brand as well as the willingness of an individual to invest effort in sustaining and contributing to the company's advancement. The loyalty of ladder illustrates all gradually greater degrees of loyalty; the further up the ladder, the more invested the client is in the firm which provides businesses with a framework for determining the appropriate allocation of time and resources to cultivate customer relationships.

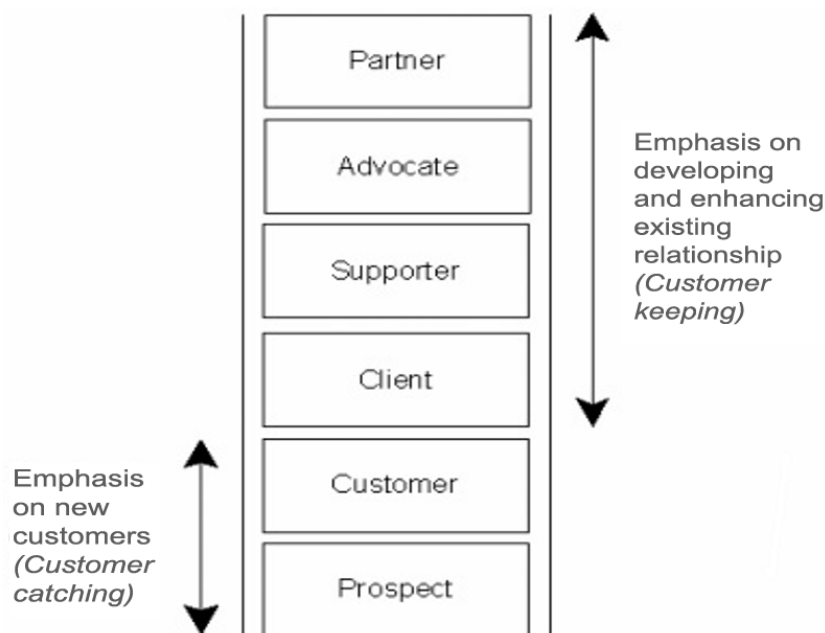


Figure 2.
Customer loyalty ladder.

Hill, et al. [14] proposed the following loyalty level model which is illustrated in Figure 2:

1. **Suspects:** In this category, no direct relationship exists between the customer and the company. The suspects possess some awareness of the company and its offerings but their understanding of the company's values remains vague. This group encompasses all potential buyers in the market. They could be either unaware of the product or service or exhibit a lack of inclination to make a purchase.
2. **Prospects:** The connection is in its initial phases. While the customer has not initiated their first purchase, they have undoubtedly contemplated it. It is now the responsibility of the company to ensure that the customer's expectations are fulfilled facilitating the transformation of the prospect into a customer. Prospects represent potential customers who hold an interest in an organization but have not yet taken the step of engaging in business transactions.
3. **Customers:** This group comprises individuals who will make purchases of products or services although their buying behavior is not consistently frequent. They engage as occasional buyers and lack a sense of emotional connection or affinity towards the organization.
4. **Clients:** This group consists of loyal clients who have favourable views about an organization. An individual graduates into client status when a company becomes their top preference and they place complete trust in the specific products or services they seek.
5. **Advocates:** These are clients who proactively endorse the organization by recommending it to others. A client evolves into an advocating customer when their contentment with the company and its offerings is absolute. Advocates hold significant value for companies as their profound satisfaction leads them to actively influence and persuade potential customers thereby converting them into new customers.
6. **Partners:** This represents the most robust manifestation of a loyal customer relationship sustained by the recognition of mutual benefits by both entities. When a customer becomes actively engaged in the company's decision-making processes, they assume the role of a partner. Collaborative endeavors contribute to the creation of enhanced customer value and facilitate the cultivation of stronger connections between customers and marketers.

2.3. Customer Perception

Numerous researchers and practitioners have demonstrated that customer perceptions of brands are positively connected to consumer pleasure, loyalty and purchase intention [15, 16]. It can be described as an expansive imagination that individuals formulate within their minds and subsequently interpret the concept into a more intricate and significant image [17]. On the other hand, a buyer generates an opinion on the goods based on their perceived value.

Customer perception is formed at the initial view of the product. Nevertheless, buyers establish an opinion about the product's value right before making a purchase. In addition, the way people think about a product is influenced by their previous experiences with a similar product [18]. It can be delineated as the act of recognizing and comprehending environmental cues by engaging the human senses of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch [4, 19, 20].

Cozer [4] further demonstrates that customers driven by their perceptions would purchase from firms that deliver the best consumer-perceived value. Thus, businesses try to change how people think about their products and services by improving their image and building long-term relationships with them. Perception as a marketing term indicates a consumer's opinion, cognizance, or consciousness of a business or its services. This term is used in this thesis to examine consumers' views of brand activism in connection to the level of loyalty they are willing to provide businesses.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

2.4.1. Framing Theory

The mass communication framing theory is based on the agenda-setting hypothesis. It pays attention to how information is delivered to the audience to influence their perspectives. This theoretical framework anchored in sociology and anthropology serves as a foundation for analyzing brand activism methods. Sociologist Goffman [21] in his groundbreaking 1974 seminal on frame analysis proposes that frames not only structure but also imbue our experiences with distinct characteristics. Goffman [21] says that people use mental frames and schemas to make sense of the world around them. These mental frames and schemas "create, define and evaluate acceptable actions."

Framing theory operates on the premise that the media guides attention towards specific events and subsequently provides them with contextualization. It consisted of two levels: a first level in which the audience was informed of what to think and a second level in which the audience was quietly coached on how to think about the information communicated. People make decisions about how they process information based on how something is presented to them or "the frame," in the words of framing theory. Robert Entman, a scholar in communication studies formulated frameworks that empowered academics to implement the concepts of framing theory in the analysis of specific communication instances. For example, Entman suggests that when appraising communication, it is essential to assess how particular frames elucidate matters, identify underlying reasons establish ethical evaluations and propose solutions within the text [22].

Hallahan [23] then discusses the various framing strategies used by persuasive communicators to achieve their intended impact. According to his paper (seven models of framing and implications for public relations), one way to frame issues around societal problems and conflicts is to look at how they may be described in different ways by competing parties aiming to have their chosen definition of a problem or scenario prevail.

2.4.2. Relevance of the Theory

Framing has predominantly found application within the realm of media studies and it goes beyond influencing the way news is portrayed effectively constructing a framework for the conveyed information. In the context of this study, the term "frame" pertains to the manner in which an organization endeavors to structure and present the concepts, occurrences, and subjects that hold their interest through the media to feed their customer base a positive "frame" on their brand. This particular dimension of framing theory can direct the study in critically examining the contemporary examples of brand activism.

2.4.3. Brand Activism on Consumer Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Consumer Perception

According to Eyada [24] businesses engage in marketing without making an effort to take into account all of their customers' perceptions of the brand. Brands should make it clear that not all customers can be satisfied to increase consumer loyalty through brand activism and sharpen their impressions of the brand. When brands concentrate on connecting with a specific market, they frequently concentrate on the wants and feedback of these consumers and successfully meet their needs. According to Belavadi's [25] research, brand activism is defined as customers favoring a brand that aligns with a cause or purpose and consistently purchasing said brand that contributes to a cause or aids people in need. At the same time, they will discontinue purchase from a brand if it engages in unethical activities.

The results of this study further support [26] that brands should unquestionably view consumer perceptions and opinions published on various social media platforms as a window to promote what their customers are interested in. This makes it possible for customers to view companies as being supportive especially when those brands speak the truth. Additionally, customers expect their favourite brand to support social and political causes by publicly taking a position adding that customers want to see the big brands speak up and support causes other than their financial interests [27].

3. Methodology

The research methodology centered on examining the influence of brand activism on customer loyalty with a specific focus on the mediating role of customer perception. The study population consisted of customers of Eat "n" Go Domino's Pizza in Lagos. A sample size of 600 was determined using a formula suitable for populations of indefinite size. A

convenience sampling was adopted to select participants and data was gathered through a questionnaire comprising 27 items. The reliability of the research instrument was substantiated with a high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.848 (equivalent to 84.8%). For descriptive analysis, SPSS was employed while Smart-PLS was used for the structural equation modeling. Ethical considerations were observed, ensuring participants' voluntary involvement and safeguarding the confidentiality of their responses.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

This segment showed the demographic profile of the respondents (consumers) of Domino's Pizza, Lagos State.

Table 1.

Demographic profile.

Demographic variables	Construct	Percentage	Total
Gender	Male	396	67.6
	Female	190	32.4
Total		586	100
Age	Below 20 years	221	37.7
	21 - 30 years	270	46.1
	31- 40 years	67	11.4
	41 -50 years	28	4.8
	Others	0	0
Total		586	100
Religion	Muslim	188	32.1
	Christian	278	47.4
	Others	104	17.7
	Traditional	16	2.7
Total		586	100
Education	Primary	28	4.8
	Secondary	51	8.7
	OND	98	16.7
	BSc/ HND	353	60.2
	M.Sc.	56	9.6
	Others	0	0
Total		586	100
Occupation	Unemployed	153	26.1
	Employed	99	16.9
	Civil or public servants	24	4.1
	Private employee	236	40.3
	Others	74	12.6
Total		586	100

Source: Researcher's survey, (2022).

Results shown in Table 1 depict the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Gender: A high percent of respondents are males 396 (67.6%) while there are 190 (32.8%) of female respondents.

Age: Two hundred and twenty-one (37.7%) respondents under this research turn out to be below 20 years of age, 270 respondents (46.1%) are under the ages 21-30 years, 67 respondents (11.4%) fall under the age range of 31-40years and 28 respondents (4.8%) are 41-50 years and above.

Religion: A high percentage of respondents are Christians (47.4%), 188 (32.1%) Muslim respondents while 104 (17.7%) respondents fell under the "others" category and 16 (2.7%) traditional respondents.

Education: The majority of respondents (353) under this research have a BSC qualification, 51 (8.7%) respondents have secondary school, 28 (4.8%) respondents have been in primary school, 98 (16.7%) respondents have an OND/NCE while 56 (9.6%) respondents have MSC qualification.

Occupation: A high percentage of respondents are private employees (40.3%), 153 (26.1%) unemployed respondents, 99 (16.9%) respondents fell under the employed category, 24 (4.1%) respondents fell under the civil or public servants' category and 74 (12.6%) "other" respondents.

4.2. Test of Hypotheses

4.2.1. Hypothesis One:

H_0 = No significant relationship exists between cause-related marketing and consumer loyalty (customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers' commitment).

This hypothesis consists of one exogenous variable (cause-related marketing) and one endogenous variable (consumer loyalty broken down into customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers' commitment).

Table 2. Factor loading for cause -related marketing on consumer loyalty: customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy, and customers commitment on Domino's Pizza in Nigeria.

Indicators	Factor loading	Error variance	Composite reliability	AVE	Cronbach alpha	No. of indicators
	> 0.7	< 0.5	≥0.8	≥0.5	≥0.7	
Cause-related marketing						
CRM1	0.704	0.296	0.829	0.619	0.713	3
CRM2	0.817	0.183				
CRM3	0.834	0.166				
Repurchase intention						
RPI1	0.870	0.13	0.866	0.685	0.769	3
RPI2	0.861	0.139				
RPI3	0.747	0.253				
Consumer advocacy						
CA1	0.891	0.109	0.895	0.740	0.825	3
CA2	0.845	0.155				
CA3	0.845	0.155				
Customer's commitment						
CC1	0.733	0.267	0.815	0.595	0.681	3
CC2	0.801	0.199				
CC3	0.739	0.261				

The established criteria were derived by Frenkel and Bednall [28] for all scales and measuring objects. It was stipulated that the factor loading should surpass the minimum threshold of 0.60. Moreover, the composite dependability should attain a value of 0.80 or higher. Additionally, the estimate for the average variance extracted (AVE) within constructs should exceed 0.60. Lastly, the instruments' reliability necessitates a Cronbach's alpha value equal to or exceeding 0.70.

From Table 2, it is evident that all constructs related to cause- related marketing and customer loyalty exhibit values surpassing 0.70 and 0.8 for composite internal consistency and Cronbach's alpha reliability respectively except for customer commitment. The factor loadings for the measures within the constructs ranged from 0.704 to 0.891. The instrument is deemed both reliable and valid given that the essential criterion for the degree of suitability has been satisfactorily met. However, factor loadings of 0.6 or above indicate that the variable has a moderate effect on the factor.

4.2.2. Evaluation of the Inner Structural Model

In structural equation modelling, the structural model is the inner model. The structural model can be computed by using the values and their corresponding significance of the path coefficients (r^2) [29, 30]. The findings in Table 3 also depict 31.5% variance of customers repurchase intention explained by cause related marketing, 14.0% variance of consumer advocacy is explained by cause related marketing, 4.3% variance of customers' commitment is explained by cause related marketing. The R-value or variance represents the correlation between the dependent variable (consumer loyalty, customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers' commitment) and the independent variable (cause-related marketing). Therefore, cause-related marketing exhibits a strong correlation with repurchase intention and a weaker correlation with customer commitment.

Table 3.

Path coefficients for cause-related marketing on cause-related marketing on consumer loyalty, customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers commitment on Eat'n'Go service in Nigeria.

Variables and cross leading			Path coefficient (O)	Std. dev (STDEV)	T-statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
Cause-related marketing	→	Repurchase intention	0.561	0.091	6.133	0.000
Cause-related marketing	→	Consumer advocacy	0.374	0.122	3.057	0.002
Cause-related marketing	→	Customer's commitment	0.206	0.100	2.060	0.040
					R-square (R ²)	R-square (R ²) adjusted
Cause-related marketing	→	Repurchase intention			0.315	0.308
Cause-related marketing	→	Consumer advocacy			0.140	0.033
Cause-related marketing	→	Customer's commitment			0.043	0.033

4.2.3. The Path Coefficients (β) and T- statistics Estimation

The Partial Least Squares (PLS) method was employed to establish the path coefficients and standardized β coefficients. The significance of the hypotheses was evaluated using the β value. A higher β value indicates a more pronounced impact on the endogenous latent construct. In a nutshell, the connection between cause-related marketing on consumer loyalty (including customer repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customer commitment) within

Eat'n'Go services has been verified as directly significant substantiated by the beta values of constructs in Table 3. This analysis also highlights a robust level of correlation particularly in the case of customer repurchase intention.

All the path coefficients held practical significance given that their significance levels were below 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis should be rejected. The R-value denotes the correlation between the dependent variable (consumer loyalty encompassing customer repurchase intention, consumer advocacy, and customer commitment) and the independent variable (cause-related marketing). Once again, since their significance levels remain below 0.05, the null hypothesis should be rejected due to the path coefficients' practical importance.

4.2.4. Hypothesis Two

H_0 = No significant relationship exists between corporate philanthropy and consumer loyalty (customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers' commitment).

This hypothesis consists of one exogenous variable (corporate philanthropy) and one endogenous variable (consumer loyalty broken down into customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers' commitment.) The path coefficient, t-statistic value coefficient, determination (R-squared), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance of the model and the predictive relevance of the model index were the fundamental criteria used for assessing the structural model.

All the research variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale through a structured questionnaire. The latent variable, corporate philanthropy comprised 3 items while each sub-variable within the endogenous variable consisted of 3 items as detailed in Table 4. The data collected for this research was subjected to analysis at both the organizational and model levels, and these were integrated using the technique of partial least squares-structural equation modeling for data analysis. PLS-SEM is often used for analyzing small sample sizes due to its lack of reliance on distribution assumptions. The second hypothesis is illustrated through structural equation modeling with standardized estimates showcasing the impact of corporate philanthropy on customer repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customer commitment. Moreover, this influence is statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance as indicated by Nordhoff et al. [31]. The data in this research was analyzed both at the organizational and model levels employing the partial least squares-structural equation modeling technique for data analysis following the approach outlined by Gerbing and Anderson [32] and Arejiogbe et al. [33].

Table 4. Factor loading for corporate philanthropy on consumer loyalty, customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers commitment on Eat'n'Go service in Nigeria.

Indicators	Factor loading	Error variance	Composite reliability	AVE	Cronbach alpha	No. of indicators
	> 0.7	< 0.5	≥0.8	≥0.5	≥0.7	
Corporate philanthropy						
CP1	0.892	0.108	0.836	0.635	0.714	3
CP2	0.842	0.158				
CP3	0.633	0.367				
Repurchase intention						
RPI1	0.857	0.143	0.865	0.683	0.769	3
RPI2	0.887	0.113				
RPI3	0.725	0.275				
Consumer advocacy						
CA1	0.881	0.119	0.895	0.740	0.825	3
CA2	0.848	0.152				
CA3	0.852	0.148				
Customer's commitment						
CC1	0.757	0.243	0.814	0.595	0.681	3
CC2	0.707	0.293				
CC3	0.844	0.156				

Source: Researcher's survey (2022).

Based on Table 4, it can be inferred that all constructs within corporate philanthropy and employee loyalty display values exceeding 0.70 and 0.8 for composite internal consistency and Cronbach's alpha reliability respectively except for customer commitment. The factor loadings for specific measures within the constructs range from 0.633 to 0.892. The instrument is deemed both reliable and valid as it satisfactorily meets the fundamental requirement for fitness. However, factor loadings of 0.6 or higher indicate that the variable has a moderate effect on the factor. Although CP3 is below 0.7, the remaining items within the construct exhibit factor loadings greater than 0.7.

4.2.5. Evaluation of the Inner Structural Model

The structural model is referred to as the inner model within structural equation modeling. This structural model is computed by utilizing the values and their corresponding significance of the path coefficients (r^2) [30]. The findings in Table 5 also depict a 21.0% variance of customers repurchase intention explained by corporate philanthropy, 6.0% variance of consumer advocacy explained by corporate philanthropy and 7.7% variance of customers' commitment is explained by corporate philanthropy. The R-value or variance represents the correlation between the dependent variable (consumer

loyalty, customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers' commitment) and the independent variable (corporate philanthropy). Hence, corporate philanthropy has a high relationship with repurchase intention and a low relationship with consumer advocacy.

Table 5 indicates the predictive power of the relationship between variables. The result established that holding the variables constant, the unit change in corporate philanthropy will lead to a 45.9% increase in customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy by 24.4% and customers' commitment by 27.7%. This shows that corporate philanthropy contributes more to repurchase intention while consumer advocacy has the least predictive power.

Table 5.

Path coefficients for corporate philanthropy on consumer loyalty, customers repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customers commitment on Eat'n'Go service in Lagos, Nigeria.

Variables and cross-leading			Path co-efficient (O)	Std. dev (STDEV)	T-statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
Corporate philanthropy	→	Repurchase intention	0.459	0.095	4.844	0.000
Corporate philanthropy	→	Consumer advocacy	0.244	0.131	1.861	0.063
Corporate philanthropy	→	Customer's commitment	0.277	0.080	3.475	0.001
					R-square (R ²)	R-square (R ²) adjusted
Corporate philanthropy	→	Repurchase intention			0.210	0.203
Corporate philanthropy	→	Consumer advocacy			0.060	0.050
Corporate philanthropy	→	Customer's commitment			0.077	0.068

4.2.6. The Path Coefficients (B) and T- Statistics Estimation

The path coefficients and standardized β coefficients were computed using Partial Least Squares (PLS). The hypothesis's significance was assessed using the β value with a higher β value indicating a stronger effect on the endogenous latent construct. In a nutshell, the association between corporate philanthropy and consumer loyalty (encompassing customer repurchase intention and customer commitment) within Eat'n'Go services has been validated as directly significant as indicated by the beta values of constructs mentioned above (except for consumer advocacy). This observation underscores a robust level of correlation particularly in relation to customer repurchase intention.

Two out of three path coefficients hold practical significance due to their significance level being below 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis should be rejected. The R-value reflects the correlation between the dependent variable (consumer loyalty encompassing customer repurchase intention, consumer advocacy and customer commitment) and the independent variable (corporate philanthropy).

Moreover, all the path coefficients bear practical importance considering their significance levels are below 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis should be rejected. However, if the exogenous variable of corporate philanthropy is weighed by the endogenous construct of customer advocacy, the null hypothesis would be accepted as customer advocacy has a P-value of 0.063 which is above 0.05.

4.2.7. Hypothesis Three

H_0 = Customer perception does not have any significant effect on the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty.

The primary objective of examining a mediating variable is to ascertain its influence on the connection between the dependent and independent variables. In this research hypothesis, the intention is to determine whether the mediating variable (customer perception) exerts either a positive or negative impact on the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty. The predictive relevance (path coefficient) for the endogenous, exogenous and mediating variables was calculated in Figure 3 while bootstrap was presented in Figure 4.

Table 6.

Factor loading for customer perception as a mediating variable on the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty on Eat'n'Go service in Nigeria.

Virginia						
Indicators	Factor loading	Error variance	Composite reliability	AVE	Cronbach alpha	No. of indicators
	> 0.7	< 0.5	≥0.8	≥0.5	≥0.7	
Brand activism						
CP1	0.763	0.237	0.843	0.529	0.767	5
CP2	0.669	0.331				
CRM1	0.733	0.267				
CRM3	0.808	0.192				
CSA3	0.614	0.386				
Consumer loyalty						
CA1	0.802	0.198	0.895	0.589	0.860	6
CA2	0.747	0.253				

CA3	0.768	0.232				
RPI1	0.835	0.147				
RPI2	0.764	0.236				
RPI3	0.677	0.323				
Consumer perception						
BA1	0.774	0.226	0.829	0.549	0.731	4
BA2	0.737	0.263				
SI1	0.706	0.294				
S12	0.745	0.255				

Source: Researcher's survey, 2022.

Based on Table 6, it can be observed that all constructs within brand activism, consumer loyalty and consumer perception exhibit values exceeding 0.70 and 0.8 for composite internal consistency and Cronbach's alpha reliability, respectively. The factor loadings for particular measures within the constructs range from 0.677 to 0.835. The instrument is deemed both reliable and valid as it adequately fulfills the fundamental requirement for fitness.

However, factor loadings from 0.6 upwards indicate that the variable has a moderate effect on the factor. Although RPI3 and CSA3 are below 0.7, the remaining items within the constructs exhibit factor loadings greater than 0.7. The outcomes of the inner structural model are presented in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

a. Evaluation of the Inner Structural Model

The findings in Figure 3 revealed a predictive relationship between the variables while finding the mediating effect on the exogenous and endogenous. The findings confirmed that while maintaining the variables at a constant level, a direct one-unit change in brand activism would result in a 9.8% increase in consumer loyalty, an indirect unit change in consumer perception and brand activism will lead to a 66.8, % increase in consumer loyalty and a direct unit change in brand activism will result in a 56.9% increase in consumer perception.

It can be depicted that when all the constructs of brand activism are weighed on consumer loyalty, its effect is low compared to when the sub-variables of consumer perception are weighed against consumer loyalty. According to Cohen [34] $R^2 > 0.02$ is classified as a modest effect in the social and behavioural sciences, $R^2 > 0.13$ as a medium effect and $R^2 > 0.26$ as a large effect.

However, for variance (R-square), when there is an indirect effect on consumer loyalty through brand activism and consumer perception, the impact on consumer loyalty is 53.1%. This figure also depicts that brand activism has a direct effect on consumer perception at 32.4%. According to Cohen [34] the impact on each variable tends to be high.

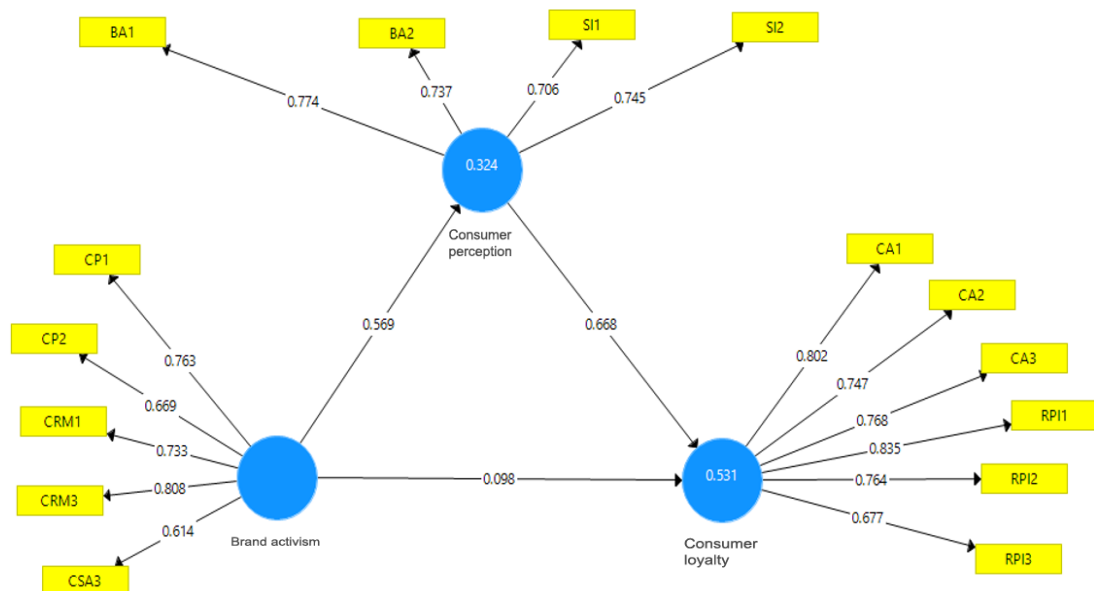


Figure 3.

Predictive relevance (Path coefficient) for mediating role of consumer perception on the relationship between brand activism and consumer loyalty on Eat "N" Go services in Nigeria.

Source: Researcher's survey, 2022.

Figure 3 expresses that when consumer perception is weighed as a mediating variable in the relationship between brand activism and consumer loyalty, it contributes positively and increases the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables by 53.1% as opposed to the direct relationship between brand activism and consumer loyalty which has a predictive value of 9.8%.

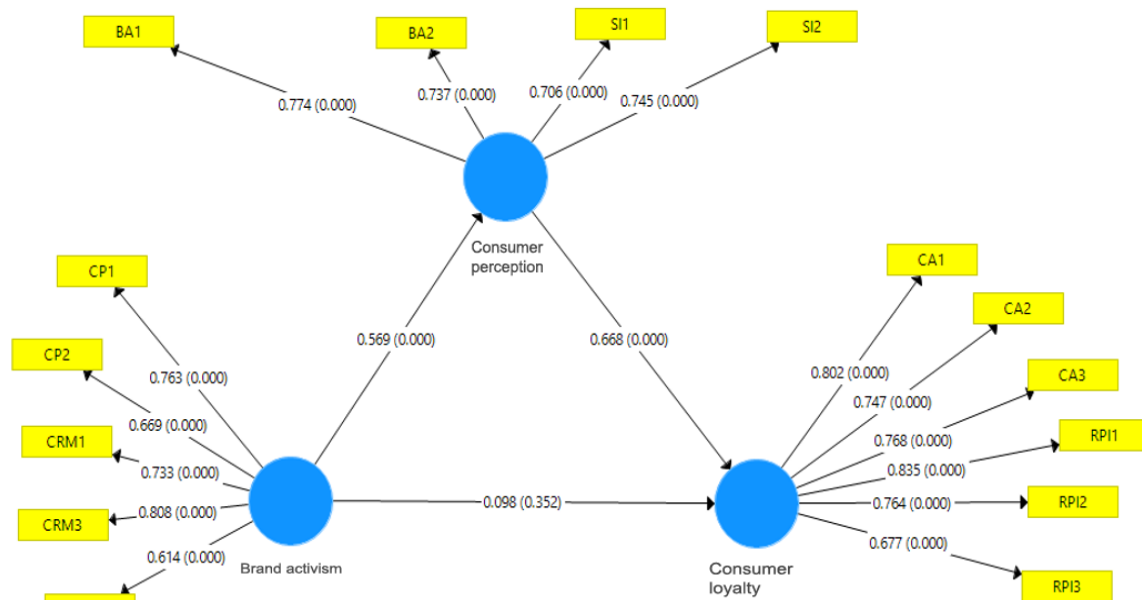


Figure 4. Path co-efficient and P-values for mediating role of consumer perception on the relationship between brand activism and consumer loyalty on Eat “N” Go services in Nigeria.

4.2.8. The Path Coefficients (β) and T- statistics Estimation

The path coefficients and standardized β coefficients were calculated using Partial Least Squares (PLS). The significance of the hypothesis was assessed using the β value where a higher β value signifies a more pronounced impact on the endogenous latent construct. Additionally, the bootstrapping analysis for consumer perception regarding the relationship between brand activism and consumer loyalty was illustrated in Figure 4.

Table 7. Path coefficients for the mediating role of consumer perception on the effect between brand activism and consumer loyalty on Eat’n’Go service in Nigeria.

Variables and cross leading			Path co-efficient (O)	Std. dev. (STDEV)	T-statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
Brand activism	→	Consumer loyalty	0.098	0.105	0.931	0.352
Brand activism	→	Consumer perception	0.569	0.088	6.462	0.000
Consumer perception	→	Customer’s loyalty	0.668	0.087	7.688	0.000
Brand activism >> Consumer Perception>> Customer’s loyalty			0.380	0.089	4.254	0.000

Source: Researcher’s survey, 2022.

In Table 7, the results revealed that while testing the direct effect between the exogenous and endogenous variables, there was a positive, direct and non-significant effect ($b=0.098$, $t=0.931$, $p>0.05$). This indicates that there is no statistically significant effect between brand activism and consumer loyalty.

Nonetheless, a direct and significant effect is observed between brand activism and consumer perception as well as between consumer perception and customer loyalty. The research findings reveal that consumer perception significantly influences the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty.

This means that the perception can help to raise the level of customer loyalty, even though the brand activism has increased. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected as it has been demonstrated that customer perception plays a significant role in influencing the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty. The outcomes of this research diverge from the findings of prior empirical studies which suggest that customer perception has a substantial complementary mediating impact on the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty.

5. Empirical Findings

This was based on observations and results made by the researcher while carrying out the research work, the empirical results used the frequency table and multiple regression approaches to test four hypotheses. On this basis, the empirical results are shown below:

1. *Hypothesis One: Cause-related marketing has no significant effect on customer loyalty (customer’s repurchase intention, customer commitment and customer advocacy).*

The findings in Table 3 also depict that cause-related marketing has an effect on customer repurchase intention, customer commitment and customer advocacy. However, organizations in the Eat “N” Go sector should improve their strategies on cause-related marketing. This study’s findings attest to that of Belavadi [25] who upon analysis of their research indicated that millennials exhibit a preference for patronizing brands that endorse a cause or purpose. Moreover,

their inclination to continue supporting a brand is linked to its contributions towards a cause or assisting those in need. Conversely, if a brand engages in unethical behavior, millennials tend to stop buying the brand.

According to Benner [35] despite instant feedback through social media, consumers continue to discuss relevant events and situations affecting their lives and the world at large which can be useful for a brand to discover cultural or trending topics and issues that are relevant to the brand's demographic market.

To provide further elucidation, when a substantial social movement garners participation from a multitude of target consumers, brands recognize a chance to interject themselves into these dialogues as a means of establishing a connection with consumers [35]. Consequently, the viewpoints and sentiments shared by consumers on social media undeniably contribute to the escalating prevalence of brand activism. While brands have the potential to exchange insights, acquire knowledge and capture the interest of fresh consumers, it can also be detrimental for brands to embrace brand activism if the support provided fails to align with a substantial portion of their intended audience.

Nevertheless, findings under this hypothesis depict a strong significant level of consumer loyalty, especially repurchasing intention. Millennials are more aware and knowledgeable about contemporary topics and concerns as well as more impacted by them due to their exposure to digital media and the internet. Additionally, because millennials have become more marketing smart and have been exposed to an abundance of advertising featuring unrealistic brand promises, they are wary of the lofty claims made by brands and corporations [25]. Consumers possess the authority to convey both favorable and unfavorable viewpoints. Therefore, if a brand's stance and response to public sentiment, including instances of boycotts and backlash are construed negatively, the adopted position might be perceived unfavorably. Hermann [36] suggests that companies should consider brand activism as an active, constructive and involving approach to constructing brand identity, motivating consumers, and effecting change.

Hypothesis Two: Corporate philanthropy has no significant effect on customer's repurchase intention.

Corporate institutions, especially those in the west, recognize and visibly partake in philanthropic acts. The disposition is that consumers, particularly millennials and gen z's are favorable towards brands that support a cause as opposed to those that do not. The distortion though is that brands view their actions under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility. Research on the reasons household brands include their voices in such topics generally points towards the reputation of the brand, market growth or financial performance but there has been little work done exploring the likelihood of customer advocacy with respect to a brand's philanthropic contribution.

For most businesses operating in Nigeria whether small or large, local or national, the benefit-cost of indulging in any form of activism is quite unpredictable. Thus, brand activism should function as a marketing strategy that brands employ to modify the political characteristics typically associated with social activism within their brand communication. Through this approach, brands willingly adopt a position on matters they perceive as beneficial for society and subsequently convey aligned public statements [37].

Based on hypothesis findings, Domino's Pizza works on their commitment to cooperate philanthropy practices and has shown to a large extent and resulted in benefits such as consumer loyalty in terms of commitment, and intention to repurchase. These practices have been seen to create a framework that builds on the strategic objectives long-term basis leading to the growth and benefit for all stakeholders and Shareholders. However, with this built, Domino pizza as well as other restaurants can have to create room to improve corporate philanthropy, as new competitors come in with new and fast-selling ideas every now and then.

Hypothesis three: Customer perception does not have any significant effect on the relationship brand activism has on customer loyalty.

The study established that customer perception mediates the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty. The results illustrated that with the mediating variable present, the relationship between brand activism and customer loyalty would have a positive effect and increment. These results indicate that brand activism can encourage increased customer loyalty with the help of customer perception. Consumers who are satisfied with the brands and the services provided will be able to foster loyalty.

In the work of Eyada [24] companies go into marketing without trying to put into consideration all of their consumer's perceptions of the brand. Brands should have it set out that all consumers cannot be satisfied, this alone is a start to enhancing consumer loyalty through brand activism whilst sharpening their perceptions about the brand. When brands focus on communicating with a particular market they tend to focus on the needs and feedback of these consumers and efficiently satisfy the consumer's needs.

The findings indicated that brand activism has an impact upon analyzing the study's data. Consumers tend to favor purchasing a brand that aligns with a cause or purpose and they maintain their loyalty if the brand contributes to a cause or supports those in need. Conversely, consumers are inclined to discontinue their patronage if a brand engages in unethical behavior. This study's findings also confirm with Kumar [26] who opined that consumer perception and thoughts shared through different social media undoubtedly should be seen as a window for brands to promote what their consumers are in line with. This enables consumers to perceive brands as supportive especially when the brands speak what is right. Consumers also want their preferred brand to take the stance and actively participate in social and political causes. Furthermore, consumers express a desire to witness prominent brands adopting a stance and endorsing causes that transcend mere corporate profits.

Businesses must make trade-off choices. They do not have unlimited resources to address all societal, political, environmental and cultural issues. Most businesses sell goods and services to generate profits that allow them to invest in such issues.

It's also important to understand that general population research may not be applicable to understanding a specific company's customers. If general population managerial research is not representative of the customer base, don't use it.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

With the exploration of brand activism and its effect on the dependent indicators for customer loyalty the research established that customer perception is a key mediating variable that engenders customer loyalty. The study's findings lead to the following recommendations:

Domino's pizza should take steps in prioritizing cause-related marketing which is indicative of communicating its continuous and future contributions to slum to school and other programs since it would improve the repurchase intention of consumers. It has also proved to have a positive effect on customer loyalty. Similarly, Domino's Pizza should increase corporate philanthropy and socio-political advocacy activities as both would also increase the repurchase intention since the majority of respondents agreed to it reflecting an aspect of themselves and it indirectly improves brand image. While corporate philanthropy does have an increasing effect on repurchase intention and customer commitment, it should be substituted for another strategy as it does not account for customer advocacy.

Likewise, cause-related marketing increases customer advocacy and repurchase intention. It should be replaced with another strategy to have a tangible effect on customer commitment. In regards to how Domino's Pizza is perceived, the brand should avoid trying to satisfy all individuals and focus on their demographic market because it could negatively affect consumer loyalty as humans would always have different perceptions. The brand should make efforts in managing a positive brand image as well as be perceived as authentic since it indirectly promotes customer loyalty especially if it aligns with the key customer base in order to have an edge among competing firms in its industry. In a bid to significantly maximize the affiliation with brand activism, the Domino's brand should participate more in corporate social-political advocacy since it indirectly improves brand image. They should also improve or increase their communication of cause-related marketing content as it proved to have a positive effect on customer loyalty.

7. Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis added to the marketing literature by looking at how consumer perception acts as a link between brand activism and customer loyalty at eat-and-go restaurants. However, findings from this study are of significant importance to brands, consumers, academic bodies as well as marketing professionals.

The contributions of this study are as follows:

1. Academically, it created an increase to the preexisting bodies of literature through the evaluation of how consumer perception strengthens or weakens the relationship between brand activism and consumer loyalty specifically on eat and go services in the quick service restaurant industry.
2. Professionally, it suggests to marketing managers that cause-related marketing be considered and included in creating marketing strategy as it has been proven to increase the repurchase intention of customers.
3. This study has also created awareness among consumers of the power they wield in affecting the activities of an organization through their purchasing power by demanding brands get involved in issues that affect them in their daily lives.
4. This research has been able to establish that consumer perception seems to be the key aspect to consider when attaining consumer loyalty especially with brand activism. If an organization fails to understand the differences in cultural, social, political and religious beliefs of its general audience and how that plays a role in their perception of the brand, it could lead to negative associations. Since it has been established in this research that consumer perception does serve as a key factor in strengthening brand activism and consumer loyalty, there is a need to explore different strategies and outcomes in the quick service restaurant (QSR) Nigerian marketplace.

8. Limitations and Further Studies

1. Geographically, this study was limited in scope because it only focused on consumers in Lagos, Nigeria.
2. This study is limited to the scope of organization as only one brand in the quick service industry was used so findings cannot be generalized to all other brands.
3. Future researchers should consider brand activism and consumer loyalty in other sectors such as institutions, oil, and gas, the agricultural sector, fintech etc. to see if the findings could be replicated.

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