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Brand Credibility and Customer Patronage: A Study of Selected Hotels in Port Harcourt, Rivers state, Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between brand credibility and customer patronage of selected hotels in Port Harcourt. The core objective was to evaluate the relationship between trustworthiness and customer patronage, brand image and customer patronage. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design and 268 customers of selected hotels were considered the population of the study. The study data was from a primary source of and data was collected with questionnaire which was designed in a well-structured closed ended 4-point Likert scale format and analysis of hypotheses was done with Pearson's product moment correlation. The findings of the study revealed that trustworthiness has a significant and positive relationship with customer patronage of hotels. The study also revealed brand image to have a positive and significant relationship with customer patronage. The study therefore recommended that brands should keep to their promises to their customers and also that brand managers should protect their image because a battered brand image will enjoy no patronage

Keywords

Customer Patronage, Brand Image, Brand Credibility, Trustworthiness.



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Introduction

Organizations are putting many efforts into marketing their services and products and these concentrated efforts are geared towards gain a competitive position. The fiery competition in the hospitality industry and multiplicity of hotels choice have informed the decision of hotel operators to focus on developing and harnessing every form of resources (tangible and intangible) available to them so as to stand out from the competition. In dealing with this fidelity, trustworthiness and delivering on promised products and services becomes critical in winning the brand war in the hospitality industry, hence the observation of credibility as a vital construct (Alam, Arshad & Shabbir, 2014).

Credibility is a vital distinguishing influencer of brand positioning (Horsefall&Ikegwuru, 2019). The construct of brand credibility could be traced to source credibility which was propounded (Ohanion, 1990) and it is concerned with the believability in uniqueness of a particular brand (product/service). Brand credibility will show a superior and more evenhanded representation of consumer decision processes. Brand credibility is defined as “Consistently delivering what is promised” (Malik & Ahmed), in which customers of a given brand (considered as being credible) would perceive the brand to have the necessary willingness and capability to deliver the promises (Malik & Ahmed, 2014). For any organization to met its organizational objectives, it must attract it must turn potential customers to actual customers. According to the concise Oxford dictionary (2008), customer patronage means the purchase of a product or service for consumption. Patronage is is the willingness and desire to be associated with an organization and for hotels to enjoy this customer association, they must trustworthy and met whatever promise they make to their customers. In a nutshell, they must present a credible brand capable of stimulating such commitment.

Overtime, there has been a great deal of studies targeted at investigating brand credibility and how it informs consumer behavior in terms of patronage, referral, loyalty etce.g is the study of Horsefall and Ikegwuru (2019) of brand credibility and patronage of table water firms in Rivers state. The scholars affirmed in that study that brand credibility has a very strong, significant and positive customer patronage. Ghorban (2012) study on brand credibility and customer behavioral intention asserted that brand credibility is associated with customer delight. Alam et al (2014) in their study on brand credibility, customer patronage and the role of religious orientation observed that trustworthiness is significant important in gaining customer patronage. The mainstream of previous studies focused on corporate credibility and its influence on attitude towards advertisement. Alongside, the obtainable literature does not make available any all-inclusive rationalization on the influence of brand credibility on customer patronage. Accessible literature is deficient in the investigation of brand credibility and its convinced influence in the hospitality industry. This study intends to fill these gaps and contribute to the existing literature on these specific issues by presenting a high-quality investigation that evaluates brand credibility and its direct influence on customer patronage within the hospitality sector in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA): This paper is structured on theory reasoned action. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) evaluates patronage intentions customers. The theory explains correlation among beliefs, attitudes, attitudinal dispositions and actual behaviour (Fishbein&Ajzen, 1977). Belleau, Summers and Pinel (2007) adopted TRA in determining elements that affects the services of

providers. Furthermore, it was claimed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) that extraneous variables that were not traced to TRA are likely to impact intentions and behaviour. Researchers extended TRA by including different factors that may influence purchase intentions.

The Theory of Reasoned Action integrates information quality and brand credibility into TRA in order to evaluate the influence of these factors on customer patronage intentions.

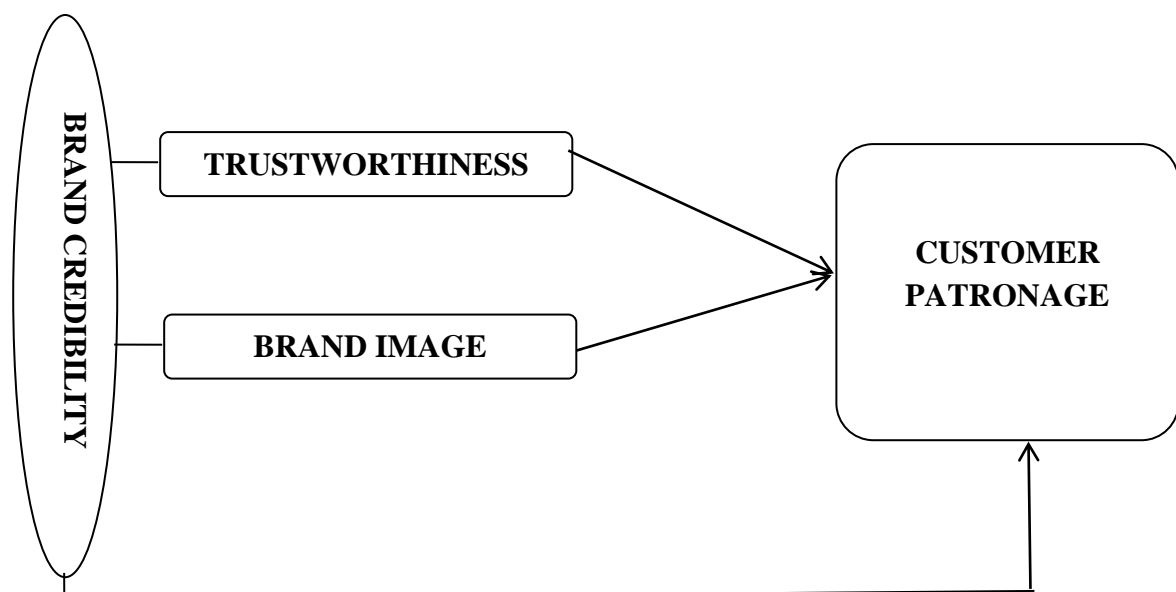
Brand Credibility

According to Ohanian (1990) source credibility is all about creating positive characteristics from sender that manipulates a receiver to accept the message sent by sender. This can also be regarded as brand credibility is validity of communication assertions or the believability of intentions of an article at a certain time. This sender can be person, cartoon, corporation and/or brand (Wang and Yang, 2010). Previous researches explored that the source credibility is a composite of three elements 1) trustworthiness 2) expertise 3) attractiveness (Erdem et al., 2004).

Brand credibility is considered an important factor impacting the brand's customer base and its market share (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Brand signaling theory also peeps into this significance by implying the relevance of brand credibility in fabricating brand equity (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Brand manufacturers are persistently in search of motivators that can yield, significantly, towards the augmentation of brand credibility. Having the trust that the brand warrants its publicized traits can build up a strengthened and long-lasting reliance between the manufacturer and its customers.

Malik et al., (2014) informed that brand credibility involves the extent to which a consumer perceives a brand a reliable source of information (trustworthiness), skills (expertise) and matches it with personality characteristics (attractiveness). Gilaninia et al., (2012) mentioned that brand credibility is believability of product status information, which is embedded in following brand, depending on consumers' perceptions of whether the brand has the ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised. It has been well known that brand credibility consists of two main components: trustworthiness and expertise.

Erdem and Swait (1998) defined brand credibility as the believability of product position information contained in a brand, which entails consistently delivering what is promised, and they informed that brand credibility has two dimensions, trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness means that it is believable that a brand will deliver what it has promised, and expertise implies that the brand is believed capable of delivering the promises.



The study Conceptual Model as adapted from Leila et al (2013) and Malik, & Ahmad (2014)

Trustworthiness: Trustworthiness refers to the willingness of firms to deliver what they have promised. A trustworthy brand is the brand which keeps up to its promises, of providing value and quality, on a consistent basis (Ballester & Aleman, 2005). Trustworthiness may also be referred to as the expectation or reliability of an individual towards something (brand in our case) (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Riker, 1971). This trust may lead to the belief in the words of mouth of the manufacturer and promotions of the brand; thereby playing role in the decision making process facilitating the utilization of the product (McAllister, 1995). Trustworthiness in a brand leads to the credibility of the brand (Keller and Aaker, 1992). This means that on the basis of prior experience of the customers, they develop a sort of trust in the product and then start valuing it.

Trusted brands also have the leverage of the acceptance of their new extensions. Since the trustworthiness and expertise of a brand are based on the cumulative impact of all previous marketing strategies and actions taken by a brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998), it is not surprising that brand credibility reflects the consistency of the marketing mix through brand investments such as advertising. And consumers form brand loyalty based on several reasons, including satisfaction, risk reduction, or trust.

Brand Image

Aaker (1997) defined brand image as the perception about a specific brand that can be remembered by the public. Saleem and Raja (2014) explained brand image as certain characteristics of product or service that stayed in customer mind. In a simple word, when the customers assess a brand name, they spontaneously think some attributes of its product or service. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), brand image is a good impression of a brand. A unique advantage, good reputation, trustworthy and willingness to provide the best service could create a positive brand image. A company with a favorable image, definitely would gain a better position in the market, (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986).

Therefore, measuring brand image is an important part because it would help marketers to identify the customers' perceptions toward their product or service. Image is defined as the sum of all thoughts, associations of ideas which are connected with the person to a particular product, brand, company, and person. Brand image is the overall impression in consumers' mind that is formed from

all sources. Consumers develop various associations with the brand. Based on these associations, they form brand image. An image is formed about the brand on the basis of subjective perceptions of association's bundle that the consumers have about the brand. Volvo is associated with safety Brand image is nothing but an organization's character. It is an accumulation of contact and observation by people external to an organization. It should highlight an organization's mission and vision to all. The main elements of a positive brand image are- unique logo reflect an organization's image, slogan describing the organization's business in brief and brand identifier supporting the key values.

Customer Patronage

Patronage is defined as the level to which a customer displays repeat purchase behaviour from a service provider, possesses an affirmative, enduring outlook and temperament concerning a service provider (Grenler & Brown, 1996). From the observation of Oliver (1999), customer patronage is defined as a profoundly held dedication to repurchase a firm's products at the cost of a competitor's offering. Customer patronage is an amalgamation of psychological factors that impacts on purchase behaviour (Burnkrant, 1982); and these factors are well thought-out important by consumers (Moye & Giddings, 202); and used as a criteria in influencing which firm to patronize (Ogbuji, Onuoha &

Abdul, 2016). Customer patronage has been measured by an assortment of authors in diverse magnitude, as well as store traffic flow (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1996); willingness, word-of-mouth and repurchase (Baker et al, 2002); repeat purchase, customer retention and customer referrals (Awah, 2015); and customer satisfaction and referrals (Ogbuji et al, 2016). These dimensions of customer patronage were used by these authors to explain that the continued existence of any business is a utility of the rate of patronage. This pictures the outlook of Ogwo and Igwe (2012) that the foremost motivation for erecting a business is to engender customers. Consequently, and in corroboration with earlier studies, this study adopts store traffic flow and customer referrals as the measures of customer patronage, and scrutinizes customer patronage as the means of a respondent's evaluation for his or her firm's store traffic flow and customer referrals level.

Empirical Review between Brand Credibility and Customer Patronage

Baek, Kim and Yu (2015) investigate the combinatory mechanism of brand credibility and brand prestige on multiple product categories. By means of six latent constructs tested with structural equation modeling analysis, the findings show that both brand credibility and brand prestige positively influence brand purchase intention through perceived quality, information costs saved, and perceived risk under different product categories representing the high and low self expressive nature.

Malik and Ahmad (2014) examined the relationship of brand credibility and consumer loyalty in the food sector, with attitude towards brand as mediator, and using college/ sub campuses students and staff members from banking institutions in D. G. Khan as samples. By means of descriptive statistics, factor loading, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis as well as model summary and ANOVA, the results demonstrated that brand credibility and consumer loyalty are the most significant factors. Furthermore attitude towards brand as mediator plays a significant role.

Ahmad, Ahmad and Nadeem, (2014) examined methods of brand loyalty through brand credibility and brand awareness. Data collection was effected by means of simple random sampling method and structured questionnaire and the findings indicated that brand loyalty has positive association with brand credibility and brand awareness.

Wang and Yang (2010) studied the impact of brand credibility on consumers' brand purchase intention in emerging economies, focusing specifically on China's automobile industry. The results suggest that brand credibility positively influences consumers' brand purchase intention.

Brand image and brand awareness positively moderate the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' brand purchase intention. Sheeraz, Iqbal and Ahmed (2012) investigated the association of brand credibility and consumer values with purchase intentions of consumers in Pakistan. Data was gathered from 102 students from different universities. A questionnaire was engaged to bring together data from respondents by way of convenient sampling. The results indicate that brand credibility and consumer values are significantly and positively associated with consumer purchase intentions.

Spry, Pappu, and Bettina, (2011) investigated the impact of celebrity credibility on consumer-based equity of the endorsed brand, under the mediating role of brand credibility and the moderating role of the type of branding. Data were collected by means of a mall-intercept approach at a shopping centre from a sample of consumers in a metropolitan Australian city. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling and the findings show that endorser credibility has an indirect impact on brand equity when this relationship is mediated by brand credibility. This mediating relationship was moderated by type of branding. On the other hand, the "endorser credibility-brand credibility" and

“endorser credibility-brand equity” relationships did not differ corresponding to the type of branding engaged.

Hanzaee and Taghipourian (2012) investigated the effect of brand credibility and prestige on consumers’ purchase intention under different levels of product involvement. Using structural equation modeling, the result reveals that Personal Involvement Inventory model indicated that brand credibility and brand prestige have positive impact on perceived value for money, perceived quality and information costs saved but a negative impact on perceived risk under low and high involvement product category. In general, compared with brand prestige, brand credibility was significantly extra successful in influencing brand purchase intention process when the product is low involvement

Trustworthiness and Customer Patronage: Leila et al (2013) conducted a study on the influence of brand trust and customer satisfaction on customer patronage by SEM. The purpose of the research was to investigate the relationship of customer satisfaction and brand trust on customer patronage. A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed to Iranian Automobile consumers. The survey was distributed at Mahshahr and Abadan cities in Iran). 25-items scale was taken into account for brand trust(8- items), customer satisfaction(8-items)and customer patronage(9-items).construct with a five likert scale ranging from1(strongly disagree)to 5(strongly agree). The proposed relationships have been tested using structural equation Modeling (SEM) with LISREL. The research results showed that there is positive and significant relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust on customer patronage. The objective of the analysis to find out whether is significant relationship between the variables. Results from the survey showed that the relationship between brand trust and customer patronage is positive and also there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer patronage.

Fathorrahman et al (2020) conducted a study on Brand Satisfaction, Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty. This study was conducted to investigate the mediation function of the variable brand trust on the relationship between brand satisfaction with brand loyalty; as well as to discover the attributes of brand trust that has the greatest role in strengthening customer satisfaction and establish brand loyalty. The research will be focused on testing the influence of brand trust and in particular the relationship with the antecedent elements held once a major asset on brand loyalty. Many empirical studies prove that it has an influence brand satisfaction on brand loyalty. However, the mediation function of brand trust on the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty are not a lot of attention of researchers, whereas brand trust is conceptually a picture of the emotional aspect of a customer to a brand that is consumed. Object of research in this study is consumers using the iPad in Surabaya. This study proves that brand trust has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between brand satisfaction with the brand loyalty and proves that brand trust has a direct influence on brand satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Anton and Kussudiyarsana (2015) investigated brand trust and brand loyalty, an empirical study in Indonesia consumers. The research analyzed the effects of brand reputation, brand predictability, brand satisfaction, brand liking, brand experience, trust in the company and brand competence to brand loyalty, with trust in a brand as a mediating variable. This model use a model proposed by Lau and Lee (2000). Lau and Lee (2000) used the model to measure consumer’s loyalty in a low involvement product. This research uses a different setting. The setting was in a high involvement product, which was cellular phone consumer. The research uses non-random sampling methods (convenience sampling) in order to gain data. The study collected 150 respondent, but only 134 questionnaires were completed. After it conducted an out layer test left only 109 respondent to analyze. To analyze the data, the research used hierarchical regression analyses. The result showed

that only to variables have significant effect to patronage, they are consumer's trust in a company and brand satisfaction.

Zafar Ullah et al (2015) examined Brand trust, customer satisfaction and Brand Loyalty-a cross Examination. In the cross sectional research, the study investigated the effect of service quality, perceived quality, perceived value, brand trust and customer satisfaction on brand loyalty. The service quality, perceived quality and value were determined to be input variables; brand trust and customer satisfaction were determined to be intervening variables; and brand loyalty was determined to be the output variable. Conceptual model was designed to explain the factors on brand loyalty. Data were collected from 150 respondents who were users of certain international brand. The study results provided a better understanding about brand loyalty among customers of a certain brand.

Brand Image and Customer Patronage

Verina (2018) examined the impact of brand image on customer satisfaction : A study of Maxx coffee in Surabaya. The study examined the relationship between brand image and customer satisfaction. A hundred customers were used as the research sample, and the data was extracted using online questionnaires distributed to Maxx Coffee customers within Surabaya area. The data was then analyzed with Linear Regression and was processed using SPSS 20.0. The result indicated that brand image positively affect customer satisfaction at Maxx Coffee brands in Surabaya. However, the results imply that brand image has only little contribution to customer satisfaction.

Nischay and Shilpa (2014) conducted a study on effect of brand image on customer satisfaction & loyalty intention and the role of customer satisfaction between brand image and loyalty intention. Intention directly and indirectly based upon hypothetical model in the current study for a cosmetic brand (Fair lovely) at Gwalior (M.P) in India. The measures were reconstructed and re-standardized to make it suitable for the purpose of the study. Numbers of factors were identified through exploratory factor analysis for all the variables. The results of multiple regression revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between brand image and loyalty intention, While, the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty intention was found to be less weak. This indicated that there might be a mediation effect of customer satisfaction between brand image and loyalty intention. For evaluating the mediation effect Sobel test was applied and the result of the Sobel test was found to be positive. Hence, a mediating effect of customer satisfaction was found between Brand Image and patronage. The measure of brand image was constituted of Functional, Social, Symbolic, experiential and appearance enhance. A survey was carried out on 200 respondents. The results also indicated that overall satisfaction does influence customers' loyalty which implies that marketers should focus on brand image benefits to achieve customer patronage.

Rashid (2013) examined The purpose of the study was to check the effect of brand image on brand loyalty and the moderating role of customer satisfaction in it. Brand attributes and Brand benefits were studied as dimensions of Brand Image. Quantitative study was conducted in wireless Telecommunication sector of Pakistan. Sample of 150 students and teachers, from different colleges and universities of Sahiwal, were selected and surveyed through questionnaires. Pearson Correlation and Regression were run to analyze the data. Finding reveals that positive and significant relation exists between Brand Image and Brand loyalty and Customer Satisfaction also has a positive moderating effect on this relation.

Methodology

Nachmias (2009) defined research design as the blue print which enables a researcher to develop solutions to problems and guides him/her in different phase of the research. This study is an investigative research and cross-sectional survey method is adopted as research design. A cross-sectional survey is a s type of research design in which data is collected from many different individuals at a single point in time. This survey technique is used to measure specific characteristics through structured questionnaire from a representative sample, so that the result can be generalized for the entire population (Henning, van Rensburg & Smith, 2004). As it applies to the present study, the study adopted survey method to examine the between brand credibility and customer patronage of hotels in Rivers state. This survey design was deemed appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to obtain information from respondents considered to be representatives of the entire population (Creswell, 1998).

The population of this study consisted of hotels operating in Rivers state. The selected hotels were chosen based on their size, service offered, years of operation, employee number and popularity. The sample size of this study will be determined mathematically using the Taro Yamane’s formula. The study will adopt primary data using questionnaire with closed ended questions and will be administered using drop and pick later method. Self-administered copies of questionnaire adapted from the work of Kansakar et al, (2018), consisting of closed ended questions designed to elicit specific responses for quantitative analysis was adopted as a method of data collection. The questionnaire will be structured on four (4) points Likert scale. Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the demographic profile of respondents and also study variables. Analysis to determine the relationship between brand credibility and customer patronage was done using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The initial data analysis will be conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 23

Results and Discussion of Findings

Table 1 Correlations

		Trustworthiness	Customer Patronage
Trustworthiness	Pearson Correlation	1	.768**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	268	268
	Pearson Correlation	.768**	1
Customers’ Patronage	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	268	268

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

Table above reveals that there is a good deal of positive relations between Trustworthiness and customer’ patronage of hotels in Port Harcourt. This is because the Pearson Correlation Co-efficient is 0.768 while P. value (2-tailed) is 0.001. Since P-value of 0.001 is less than 0.05, hence the rejection of the null hypothesis and the alternate accepted. with r^2 value of 42% shows that 58% of customer patronage can be determined by brand trust, leaving other factors as contributory elements. This finding is in line with the results of Leila et al is (2013) who posited that there is positive and significant relationship between customer satisfaction and brand trust on customer customer satisfaction and loyalty of customers. This study also agree with the findings of Fathorrahman et al (2020) who submitted that brand crdeibility attributes like trustworthiness has an influence brand

satisfaction on brand loyalty. The findings of this study after a statistical examination can be relied on by managers to brand to position their businesses to perform whatever brand promise or contract they have with not only their customers but with other critical stakeholders in the business chains especially the ones they can control like the suppliers, intermediaries, the general public to enhance both brand performance in terms of patronage, recommendation, loyalty and repurchase intention while improving their credibility rating.

Table 2 Correlations

		Brand Image	Customers' Patronage
Brand Image	Pearson Correlation	1	.687**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	268	268
Customers' Patronage	Pearson Correlation	.687**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	268	268

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

Table above reveals that there is a fair degree of positive relationship between brand image and customer patronage of hotels in Port Harcourt. This is because the Pearson Correlation Co-efficient is 0.687 while P. value (2-tailed) is 0.000. Since P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05, hence the rejection of the null hypothesis and the alternate accepted. With r^2 value of 687% shows that 47% of customer patronage can be determined by brand trust, leaving 53% to other factors as contributory elements. This finding is in line with the results of Verina (2018) who found that brand image positively affect customer satisfaction which is a function of patronage. The study also adopts the findings of Nischay and Shilpa (2014) to be true. the scholars in their findings approved that positive brand image does influence customers' patronage which implies that marketers should focus on brand image benefits to achieve patronage and customer patronage. The finding of this study a great reminder to business owners to maintain a flawless and blameless business ethics and their reputation will be at risk if their services does not match consumers expectation because word of mouth can ruin or make a business and the later should be the primary concern of any serious business enterprise

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between brand credibility and customer patronage of selected hotels in Port Harcourt. Credibility is an intangible asset that every organization should have and protect. Customers want to deal with, associate with and patronize organizations whose fidelity is not in doubt or questionable as this will improve their confidence and trust in the organization. The findings of the study is well rooted in the theory of reasoned actions which postulates that consumers consumers are reliant on information they gather about an organization before making their purchase decision. This information if not suitable or makes them uncomfortable, casts doubt about the credibility and ability to perform a given promises will affect their patronage intention.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the study then recommends that;

- i. brands should keep to their promises made to their customers
- ii. brand managers should protect their image because a battered brand image will enjoy no patronage

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