International Journal of Academic Accounting, Finance & Management Research(IJAAFMR)
ISSN: 2643-976X
Vol. 9 Issue 7 July - 2025, Pages: 103-114

Brand Storytelling and Customer Loyalty in Fast-Food and Restaurant Firms

COKER, Preye Robert

Department of Entrepreneurship and Marketing, Faculty of Management Sciences, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State
cokerpr@fuotuoke.edu.ng

***Abstract**: This study investigated the relationship between brand storytelling and customer loyalty in fast-food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study focused on three core components of brand storytelling such as brand authenticity, brand relevance and brand consistency. A quantitative cross-sectional survey research design was adopted, and data were collected through structured questionnaires being distributed to 350 loyal customers of registered fast-food and restaurant brands in Yenagoa. A total of 315 valid responses were analyzed using Spearman rank correlation. The findings revealed that all three storytelling dimensions significantly influence customer loyalty, with brand relevance showing the strongest relationship, followed by brand authenticity, and brand consistency, which demonstrated a weak but significant association. These results suggests that customers are more likely to remain loyal to brands that reflect their values, provide honest brand experiences, and deliver consistent service. However, fluctuations in food quality and service delivery may weaken the power of brand consistency in fostering loyalty. The study offers practical implications for fast-food brand managers, emphasizing the need to tailor brand narratives to local values, ensure authenticity in communication and operation, and improve consistency in product and service delivery to retain and grow a loyal customer base.*

Keywords: Brand storytelling, brand authenticity, brand relevance, brand consistency and customer loyalty.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria's fast-food and restaurant sector has witnessed remarkable expansion in recent years, spurred by urbanization, evolving consumer lifestyles, and the rise of a younger, more dynamic middle class with growing disposable income. While bustling metropolitan hubs like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt often take the spotlight in market discussions, smaller but developing urban centers such as Yenagoa, Bayelsa State are increasingly becoming active players in the food service economy (Etale & Uranta, 2022).

In Yenagoa, the growth of fast-food and restaurant businesses ranging from national franchises to local startups reflects shifting dietary habits, time-saving preferences, and the desire for more modern dining experiences among residents (Ekankumo & Perearau, 2024). Though relatively modest in size, Bayelsa State’s urban areas are not immune to the trends and tensions shaping Nigeria’s broader food industry landscape.

However, the sector is not without its hurdles. Persistent infrastructure deficits, fluctuating supply chains, inconsistent regulations, and the ever-evolving tastes of Nigerian consumers present ongoing challenges (Omari, 2014). One of the most pressing concerns is customer loyalty, as diners increasingly explore new alternatives in a highly competitive environment.

Customer loyalty in this sector has emerged as a critical driver of long-term business success in today’s highly competitive marketplace. It refers to a customer’s consistent preference and commitment to repurchase a product or service, despite the availability of alternatives (Rai & Srivastava, 2024). Loyal customers are not only more likely to make repeat purchases, but they also tend to act as brand advocates, spreading positive word-of-mouth and contributing to a firm’s reputation and profitability.

In the fast-food and restaurant industry, where product offerings are often commoditized and customer switching costs are low, nurturing loyalty has become both a challenge and a necessity. Thus, to cultivate deeper emotional connections with customers, many fast food and restaurant firms have embraced brand storytelling as a strategic marketing tool (Vergara & Vergara, 2023). Unlike traditional advertising that focuses merely on product features or price promotions, brand storytelling seeks to humanize the brand by weaving compelling narratives around its origin, values, mission, and customer experiences (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2020). Perhaps through emotionally resonant stories, brands aim to differentiate themselves in saturated markets and forge bond that go beyond transactional relationships (Njelita, Anyasor & Marcus, 2020).

In the fast-food and restaurant sector, brand storytelling may take the form of highlighting the founder’s journey, showcasing community involvement, brand relevance, emotional appeal, brand consistency, celebrating cultural heritage or sharing authentic customer experiences (Aaker, 2014; Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; Escavas, 2014; Napoli et al., 2016; Rai & Srivastava, 2024; Vergara & Vergara, 2023). These narratives serve to evoke emotions such as nostalgia, love, trust, and belonging, which are known to influence consumer behavior and loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). As such, understanding how brand storytelling contributes to building and sustaining customer loyalty is essential for marketers and brand managers in this industry.

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While considerable literature exists on customer loyalty and brand management, much of the existing research has concentrated on factors such as service quality, customer satisfaction, and price perception as drivers of loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Dick & Basu, 1994). In other words, there is a growing recognition that emotional engagement, particularly through brand storytelling plays a crucial role in influencing loyalty-related outcomes (Onobrakpeya & Okechukwu, 2024; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Escavas, 2014). Despite this empirical studies, exploring the relationship between brand storytelling and customer loyalty remain relatively limited, especially through components like brand authenticity, brand relevance and brand consistency within the fast-food and restaurant industry, where these components could strengthen emotional bond with customers and sustain loyalty.

Moreover, most existing studies (Crespo, Ferreira & Cardoso, 2023; Vergara & Vergara, 2023) are based in developed economies, focusing on global brands, with limited attention given to how brand storytelling practices influence customer loyalty in emerging markets such as Nigeria. This contextual gap is significant given the cultural diversity and unique consumption patterns in these markets, which may affect how brand stories are received and interpreted by customers.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the role of brand storytelling in shaping customer loyalty within fast food and restaurant firms, particularly from the perspective of customers in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State Nigeria. Thus, closing this gap will enrich the existing body of knowledge by offering fresh insights into how brand storytelling influences customer loyalty within the context of fast-food and restaurant firms, particularly in emerging markets. In addition, the findings will offer actionable strategies to craft authentic stories that resonate with customers, foster deeper emotional connections, and ultimately drive long-term loyalty in a highly competitive industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Storytelling

Brand storytelling refers to as a strategic marketing approach that uses narratives and storytelling techniques to create an emotional connection between the brand and its target audience, with the aim of enhancing brand identity, engagement and loyalty (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2020). According to Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2022), it is a purposeful communication of a brand's values, origin, and mission through structured narratives designed to engage consumers cognitively and emotionally, thereby influencing their perception and behavior towards the brand. Brand storytelling entails the process of leveraging storylines to establish an emotional bond between a brand and its customers.

Storytelling in branding is not a recent concept, advancements in technology and evolving consumer behaviour have heightened its importance. The increasing influence of social media and emphasis on customer experience have compelled brands to explore more creative and engaging ways to connect with their customers. As a result, storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool for achieving meaningful brand communication (Clarke 2013).

Brand Storytelling may be used to form and strengthen a brand's personality, as well as to communicate to customers a brand's values and beliefs (Green & Brock 2020). It has emerged as a powerful and effective marketing tactic that allows firms to engage with their target customers on a deeper level by building emotional links and immersive experiences with which consumers can identify (Escavas 2014).

According to a study by Lundqvist et al. (2013), engaging in brand stories enhances brand image and customer loyalty by making the brand more relevant and reliable. Impactful storytelling keeps consumers engaged with the brand over time. Frequently updated stories and narratives can sustain consumer interest and improve continuous interaction with the brand.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

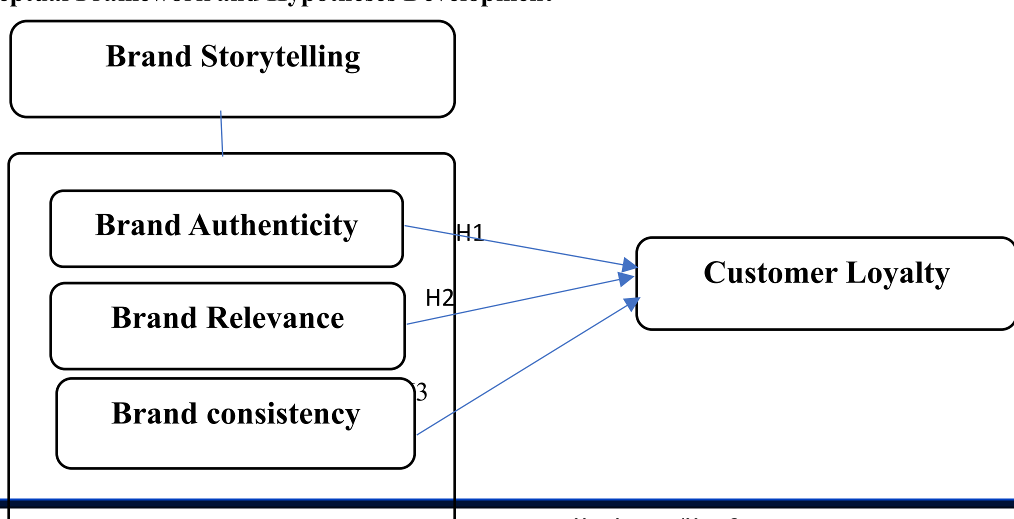

Figure 1: Conceptual framework on brand storytelling and customer brand loyalty

Source: Researcher's Model (2025) as adapted from the works of Napoli et al. 2016; Guevremont et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2020; Oliver, 1999.

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as genuine, trustworthy, and true to its values, promises, and heritage (Napoli et al., 2016). According to Campagna, Donthu and Yoo (2022) describe authenticity as the extent to which consumer perceive a brand to be faithful and true towards itself and its customers, and to support consumers being true to themselves, characterized by qualities such as genuineness, uniqueness, openness, honesty and resilience over time. It involves different dimensions, such as the transparency of the brand's operations, the consistency between its messaging and actions, and its cultural and ethical alignment with its audience's values.

Authentic brands are often perceived as more valuable because they appear trustworthy and reliable. This perception of value improves loyalty. This is because when consumer believe that a brand is honest, they are more likely to build a strong emotional bond with it, leading to increased loyalty (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015). For instance, Bruhn, Schoenmueller, and Schäfer (2012) found that emotional brand attachment significantly mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and customer loyalty. According to Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn (2017), brand authenticity helps in creating a distinct brand identity that enhances customer loyalty by aligning with customer values and lifestyles.

Based on the above discussion, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: There is significant association between brand authenticity and customer loyalty.

Brand Relevance

Brand relevance refers to the extent to which a brand is perceived as meaningful, important and aligned with the evolving needs, values, and lifestyles of target consumers (Iyengar, 2020). In similar vein, Guevremont et al (2020) describe brand relevance as the extent to which a brand resonates with consumers' values, identity, aspirations, and broader societal concerns, making it meaningful and important in their lives. It involves how well a brand addresses the changing trends and demands within its market segment. A brand that stays relevant is one that continuously adjusts its offerings and messaging to meet the changing preferences and expectations of customers. This relevance is important for sustaining competitive edge and making sure that the brand stay top-of-mind for consumers when making buying decisions.

According to Aaker (2014), brand relevance is the ability of a brand to resonate with customers by offering value propositions that are impactful and unique in terms of their needs and wants. Brands that fail to stay relevant risk becoming outdated as customer preferences shift and new competitors appear with more meaningful value propositions.

Moreover, a study by Baldinger and Rubinson (1996) suggests that there is a strong relationship between brand relevance and brand loyalty. Their research shows that any brand being perceived as more relevant by consumers tend to have higher levels of loyalty.

Based on the above discussion, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H2: There is significant association between brand relevance and customer loyalty.

Brand Consistency

Brand consistency refers to the delivery of brand messaging in line with the brand's core identity, values, and visual presentation across all touch points, creating a unified and reliable experience for customers (De Chernatony, 2020). According to Islam et al (2021), brand consistency is the degree to which a brand sustains clear and uniform communications, behavior, and experiences over time, thereby building customer trust and recognition. It is the practice of making sure that all the firm's outputs have a common visual appearance. This means maintaining uniformity in visual elements such as logos, fonts, colours, and other design features to present the brand in a clear and easily identifiable way.

Brand consistency ensures that a company's core values, messaging and identity are conveyed in a cohesive and easily recognizable manner. Making the brand easily recognizable across all channels or platforms, which could help to create a more positive experience for customers, as well as improving trust, brand awareness and mental availability (Tacconi, 2022). Thus, having a straightforward and dependable brand management approach is essential for maintaining brand consistency.

According to Pappu and Quester (2016), a consistent brand presentation significantly leads to brand equity, thereby enhancing customer loyalty. As Srivastava and Rai (2018) note, consistent brand experiences trigger customers' trust and commitment, resulting to higher levels of loyalty. Additionally, brand consistency significantly helps in setting clear expectations. Customers who experience a predictable and consistent brand interaction are more likely to develop a preference for that brand, as it meets their expectations repeatedly. Keller (2009) argues that consistent branding reduces the perceived risk of purchase and improves customer satisfaction, both of which are important for increasing loyalty.

Based on the above discussion, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: There is significant association between brand consistency and customer loyalty.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that might cause switching behavior (Oliver, 1999). Accordin to Khan and Rahmani (2022), customer loyalty refers to the emotional and behavioral attachment a customer has towards a brand, leading to repeat purchases and advocacy based on satisfaction, trust, and perceived values. Loyal customer make purchase on a regular basis, buy off line of products / services, recommends the product to others, and indicates immunity of appeal of similar products from competitors.

Customer loyalty requires a consistent relationship between the consumer and the firm’s product. It is widely recognized as a key driver of competitive advantage, as loyal customers tend to be less sensitive to price changes. Soderlund (2016) has opined that re-patronage intentions and word-of-mouth intentions are a subset of loyalty intentions. Retention. Perhaps, enhancing and sustaining customer loyalty involves adapting services to meet the evolving needs and lifestyles of existing customers, thereby fostering long-term.

Rosenberg and Czepiel (2014) indicated that expense of keeping an existing customer is less than one sixth of winning a new customer. Customer loyalty now is one of the key factors that can help a company win long-term success. Customer loyalty contributes to cost reduction and enhances overall business performance. It reflects the strength of the connection between a customer’s attitude towards a brand and their likelihood of repeat patronage. While customer satisfaction remains essential, it alone is insufficient to elevate a business to peak success. Satisfaction does generate positive financial outcomes, particularly through repeat purchases. However, in today’s highly competitive and demanding market environment, building and sustaining customer loyalty has become more challenging than in the past.

3. METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research methodology, utilizing a cross-sectional survey design to gather data from a sizable population of fast-food and restaurant customers at a single point in time through the use of structured questionnaire. This approach was considered suitable for capturing a broad snapshot of respondents’ views efficiently. Furthermore, a correlational design was integrated to examine the direction and degree of monotonic association between the key variables under investigation.

Population and Sampling Procedure

This study focuses on a target population comprising loyal customers who frequently patronize registered fast-food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. These firms include both national chains and local brands. Thus, the selection of loyal customers as the focus of this study aligns with the objective of examining the influence of brand storytelling on customer loyalty.

Given the open-ended and fluid nature of the customer base, where customers are numerous and not fixed, the study treats the population as large and infinite. In line with the recommendation by Crouch and Housden (2003), who suggest that a minimum of 300 to 400 respondents is adequate for shoppers-based surveys to achieve representativeness, the study aims to sample 350 respondents, which is within this range to ensure sufficient data for analysis and generalization.

To identify and select the respondents, the study employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling. This approach was adopted due to the need to deliberately target individuals who meet specific criteria, those who demonstrate repeat patronage and customer loyalty within the selected registered fast-food and restaurant firms. This technique is appropriate because it allows the researcher to focus on a subgroup that possesses relevant experiential knowledge and attitudes necessary to address the research questions effectively.

Sources of Data

This study relied on primary data as its main source of information. Primary data was collected directly from loyal customers of the selected fast-food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The data collection was done using structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents’ perceptions of brand storytelling, specifically in terms of brand authenticity, brand relevance and brand consistency and its influence on their loyalty behavior. The primary data was deemed most suitable for this study because it's context-specific in nature, allowing the researcher to gather firsthand insights directly from the target population. This ensures that the findings reflect the actual experiences and attitudes of loyal customers within the fast-food and restaurant sector in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

However, no secondary data sources were used for the empirical analysis, but relevant academic literature, journal articles, industry reports and online materials were reviewed during the theoretical grounding and conceptual framework development stages of the study.

Instrumentation and Measurement

To collect data for this study, a structured questionnaire was developed using previously validated measurement scales sourced from established literature on brand storytelling and customer loyalty. The questionnaire was divided into two sections such as section A and B. Section A gathered respondents demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, qualification and frequency of purchase, while section B focused on core variables of the study such as brand authenticity, brand relevance, brand consistency and customer loyalty.

Each construct in section B was assessed using four items, measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. This scale was suitable for capturing ordinal data that reflects respondents' perceptions, levels of agreement, and attitudinal responses to the study constructs.

The measurement items were carefully adapted from the works of Napoli et al (2016) for brand authenticity, Guevremont et al. (2020) for brand relevance, Islam et al. (2020) for brand consistency and Oliver (1999) for customer loyalty in order to suite this present study. The scale items are stated below:

- **Brand Authenticity**: This fast-food brand delivers on what it promises. This fast-food brand is true to its values. This fast-food brand is honest in its communications. I believe this fast-food brand is genuine and sincere.
- **Brand Relevance**: This fast-food brand fits well with my lifestyle. This fast-food brand addresses my personal needs. This fast-food brand align with my taste and preference. This fast-food brand reflects what matter to me.
- **Brand Consistency**: This fast-food brand's message is consistent across all platforms. I always know what to expect from this fast-food brand. The responsiveness of this fast-brand in service delivery is consistent. The quality and taste of this fast-food brand remain the same over time.
- **Customer Loyalty**: I will continue to patronize this fast-food brand in the future. I would recommend this fast-food brand to others. I consider myself a loyal customer of this fast-food brand. I will choose this fast-food brand over others, even if they offer similar products.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the quality and accuracy of the research instrument, both validity and reliability assessment were conducted. Thus, content validity was established through a thorough review of existing literature and adaptation of well-validated scale items from prior studies. Each item in the questionnaire was carefully selected to reflect the theoretical definitions of the constructs, brand authenticity, brand relevance, brand consistency and customer loyalty. The draft instrument was also reviewed by experts in marketing and consumer behavior to assess its clarity, relevance and alignment with the research objectives. Feedback from the experts informed minor adjustments to the wording and structure of items, ensuring that the instrument accurately captured the intended concepts.
Face validity was further supported through a pilot test involving a small group of 20 respondents drawn from the target population. The pilot ensured that the questions were comprehensible, appropriately worded, and culturally relevant to customers of fast-food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.
To assess the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was computed for each construct. A threshold value of 0.7 was adopted as the minimum acceptable reliability coefficient, in line with the recommendations by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The pilot test results in table 1 showed that all constructs had Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding this threshold, indicating that the items within each scale reliably measured the same underlying concept.
However, this preliminary reliability check supports the instrument's suitability for full-scale data collection and statistical analysis in assessing the relationship between brand storytelling dimensions and customer loyalty.

Table 1: Summary of Reliability Statistics

S/No.	Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha
1.	Brand Authenticity	4	0.715
2.	Brand Relevance	4	0.729
3.	Brand Consistency	4	0.704

4.	Customer Loyalty	4	0.738

Source: SPSS Output, 2025.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained through the structured questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Meanwhile, descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were utilized to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and provide a general overview of their responses.

To examine the association between the variables, the study employed Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho). This statistical technique is appropriate because it measures the monotonic association, strength and direction between ordinal variables.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Analysis of Response Rate

Out of the 350 questionnaires distributed to loyal customers of selected fast-food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, and a total of 315 were correctly filled and returned, resulting in a response rate of 90%. This high response rate is attributed to the use of on-site, and face-to-face administration of questionnaires, often at the point of service or immediately after purchase, actually encouraged immediate participation and reduced non-response. Such a strong response rate enhances the credibility and representativeness of data collected, thereby strengthening the validity of the study's findings.

Analysis of Respondents Demographics

Table 2: Demographic Statistics

Section A: Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	1) Male	217	68.9
	2) Female	98	31.1
Age (in years)	1) 20 -30	74	23.5
	2) 31 - 40	83	26.4
	3) 41 - 50	65	20.6
	4) 51 – 60	48	15.2
	5) 61 and above	45	14.3
Level of Education	1) PhD	15	4.8
	2) Master Degree	36	11.4
	3) BSc.	102	32.4
	4) HND	61	19.4
	5) OND	54	17.1
	6) O' Level	47	14.9
Marital Status	1) Single	187	59.4
	2) Married	113	35.9
	3) Divorced	15	4.8
Occupation	1) Civil Servant	85	27
	2) Politician	44	14
	3) Business man	67	21.2
	4) Private sector	55	17.5
	5) Student	64	20.3
Frequency of purchase	1) Daily	18	5.7
	2) 2-3 times a week	45	14.3
	3) Once a week	64	20.3
	4) 2-3 times a month	96	30.5
	5) Once a month or less	92	29.2

Source: Field survey (2025)

The demographic profile of the respondents in table 2 reveals that male participants were dominant, accounting for 68.9%, suggesting a higher male engagement with fast food and restaurant services in the study area. The modal age group was 31-40 years representing 26.4% of the total participants, indicating that the most loyal customers fall within the economically active age bracket. In terms of educational qualification, a majority held a B.Sc. Degree (32.4%), reflecting a relatively educated customer base. Meanwhile, single individuals represented the highest proportion of respondents at 59.4%, highlighting strong patronage among unmarried customers. The most common occupation was civil servants (27%), possibly due to the concentration of public institutions within Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Regarding purchasing behavior, the modal frequency of purchase was 2-3 times a month which is 30.5% of the total participants, suggesting a fairly regular engagement with fast-food brands among loyal customers.

Test of Hypotheses

The relationship between the study variables was assessed using Spearman's rank-order correlation.

Test of Hypothesis One (H1):

Ho_1: There is no significant association between brand authenticity and customer loyalty

Ha_1: There is significant association between brand authenticity and customer loyalty.

Table 3: Correlations for Brand Authenticity and Customer Loyalty.

			Brand Authenticity (BA)	Customer Loyalty (CL)
Spearman's rho	BA	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.413**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	315	315
	CL	Correlation Coefficient	.413**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	315	315

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
b. Listwise N = 315

The analysis in table 3 above revealed a correlation coefficient (rho) of p = 0.413, based on a sample size of 315. The correlation was found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This result indicates a moderate positive monotonic association between brand authenticity and customer loyalty. In other words, as perceptions of the brand authenticity increase, customer loyalty tends to increase as well. This means that as customers perceive a brand to be more authentic, genuine, true to its values, and trustworthy, their loyalty to the brand tends to increase among fast–food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

The significance level ($p<0.01$) implies that the likelihood of this relationship occurring by chance is less than 1% suggesting a strong statistical basis for rejecting the null hypothesis. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is a significant association between the variables is supported.

Test of Hypothesis Two (H2):

Ho_2: There is no significant association between brand relevance and customer loyalty

Ha_2: There is significant association between brand relevance and customer loyalty.

Table 4: Correlations for Brand Relevance and Customer Loyalty.

			Brand Relevance (BR)	Customer Loyalty (CL)
Spearman's rho	BR	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.621**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	315	315
	CL	Correlation Coefficient	.621**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	315	315

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
b. Listwise N = 315

The analysis in table 4 revealed a correlation coefficient (rho) of p = 0.621, based on 315 respondents. The relationship was found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This result indicates a strong positive monotonic relationship between brand relevance and customer loyalty. In practical terms, it means that as customers perceive a brand to be more relevant to their needs, values, and lifestyle, their level of loyalty to that brand increases.

The significance level ($p<0.01$) confirms that the relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance, providing strong statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that brand relevance is significantly associated with customer loyalty. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Test of Hypothesis Three (H3):

Ho_3: There is no significant association between brand consistency and customer loyalty

Ha_3: There is significant association between brand consistency and customer loyalty.

Table 5: Correlations for Brand Consistency and Customer Loyalty.

			Brand Consistency (BC)	Customer Loyalty (CL)
Spearman's rho	BC	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.274**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	315	315
	CL	Correlation Coefficient	.274**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	315	315

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
b. Listwise N = 315

The analysis in table 5 yielded a coefficient of p = 0.274, based on N =315 respondents. This relationship was found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The result indicates a weak positive monotonic relationship between brand consistency and customer loyalty. This suggests that while there is some level of association, it is not particularly strong in the study context. The relatively low correlation may be explained by inconsistencies in the taste and quality of food offered by fast-food and restaurant brands in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

However, the field reports and respondents feedback suggest that the taste of food is not always dependable, it may be enjoyable during one visit and disappointing on another. Such variations in product experience weaken the perception of consistency, thereby limiting its influence on long-term customer loyalty. Thus, while brand consistency does contribute to customer loyalty, its influence appears minimal in settings where consistency in product delivery, especially taste and quality is not assured. The hypothesis is therefore supported, but the relationship is weak due to operational inconsistencies observed in practice.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the relationship between brand storytelling and customer loyalty in fast-food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The Spearman rank correlation statistics was conducted to ascertain the monotonic association between the variables. The first hypothesis (H1) revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between brand authenticity and customer loyalty, with a Spearman's rank correlation of $p = 0.413$ ($p<0.01$). This suggests that, within the fast-food and restaurant sector in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, customers tend to show greater loyalty to brands they perceive as genuine, trustworthy and true to their brand values. Thus, this findings aligns strongly with Morhart et al (2015), who argued that perceived brand authenticity enhances emotional brand attachment, brand trust and love. This finding also corroborates with that of Napoli et al. (2016) who confirmed that quality, commitment, sincerity and brand heritage, which are key components of brand authenticity significantly contribute to consumer trust and repeat patronage.

However, the relationship is moderate, not strong, indicating that while authenticity matters, other factors also shape loyalty in this sector. It is possible that operational limitations, such as occasional lapses in service delivery or brand behavior inconsistent with customer expectations, may dilute the perceptions of authenticity. Moreover, customers in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State might not be explicitly aware of authenticity as a construct but intuitively reward brands that feels honest and culturally grounded. As such, fast-food brands in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State that consistently uphold values such as honesty, transparency, and cultural relevance are more likely to build a loyal customer base.

The result of the second hypothesis (H2) revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between brand relevance and customer loyalty in the fast-food and restaurant industry in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, with a spearman rank correlation coefficient of $p = 0.621$ ($p<0.01$). This implies that customers are more loyal to the brands they perceive as meaningful, relatable and aligned with their values and lifestyle. This finding aligns closely with the work of Aaker (2014), who argues that a brand's relevance is critical to maintaining its competitive strength and consumer preference as well as securing loyalty.

This finding is also in agreement with the work of Safeer et al (2021) who confirmed that brand relevance is a dominant factor in driving brand love, which precedes customer loyalty. In similar vein, insights from EY Malaysia (2025) and Internet Retailing (2024) suggest that in turbulent or highly competitive markets, consumers do not simply seek recognizability or quality, they seek brands that matter to them personally. This relevance is what drives connection, repeat purchase and long-term loyalty.

The third hypothesis (H3) revealed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between brand consistency and customer loyalty, with a spearman rank correlation of $p = 0.274$ ($p<0.01$). This suggests that while consistency contributes to loyalty, its influence is relatively limited among customers of fast-food and restaurant brands in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. This weak association may be attributed to irregular experiences, especially in food taste, service delivery and customer satisfaction. Respondents noted that at times the food tastes excellent, while at other times it falls below expectations, highlighting inconsistencies in brand performance that could erode consumer trust.

This finding aligns with Brakus et al (2009), who argue that consistency in sensory and behavioural brand experience reinforces emotional engagement and customer loyalty. Thus, when customers receive a predictable and uniform experience, it strengthens their connection with the brand. Inconsistent delivery, however, disrupt this experience and weakens brand associations. Similarly, this finding is corroborated by Keller (2009) who emphasized that coherent brand messaging and performance are essential for building and maintaining strong brand equity. When a brand's promise is not consistently fulfilled, customers may question its reliability, leading to reduced loyalty over time.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the influence of brand storytelling components like brand authenticity, brand relevance and brand consistency on customer loyalty within registered fast-food and restaurant firms in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The findings provide evidence that all three components significantly contribute to customer loyalty, although their strength of association varies.

However, among the dimensions investigated, brand relevance emerged as the strongest predictor of customer loyalty. This suggests that when fast-food brands aligns their offerings with the personal values, preferences, and lifestyle of consumers, they are more likely to foster repeat patronage and emotional attachment. Meanwhile, brand authenticity also demonstrated a moderate but meaningful influence, showing that customers value honesty, originality, and sincerity in how brands represent themselves and deliver on promises. On the other hand, brand consistency, while significant, showed a relatively weak relationship with customer loyalty, likely due to inconsistencies in service delivery and product quality observed among these brands in the local market.

Overall, the study reinforces the idea that effective brand storytelling is not just about communicating a message, but about delivering consistent, relevant, and authentic experiences that customers could relate with.

Drawing from the conclusion, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Fast-food and restaurant firms should continually adapt their menus, pricing, and communication strategies to reflect the cultural values, preferences and socio-economic realities of consumers in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Offering locally inspired meals, promoting community-based campaigns and reflecting customers' lifestyles in advertising will help strengthen emotional connection and loyalty.
2. Managers should ensure that their brand promises are consistently upheld in everyday operations. This includes transparent communication, genuine customer service, and maintaining the brand's original vision. This is because, brands perceived as sincere and trustworthy are more likely to enjoy long-term loyalty.
3. Fast-food and restaurant firms should invest in regular staff training, enforce quality control measures, and adopt standard operating procedures across all outlets to ensure uniformity in taste, service speed and cleanliness. Consistent experiences reduce customer disappointment and increase the likelihood of repeat purchase.

Practical Implications

1. Fast-food and restaurant firms should craft stories and messages that reflect the real-life experiences, aspirations and identities of their target customers.
2. Inconsistencies in taste, service delivery or staff behaviour negatively impact loyalty. To address this, brands must embed consistency into daily operations by setting service standards, monitoring customer feedback and implementing quality assurance systems.
3. Fast-food brands should always remain authentic by staying true to their values, being transparent with customers, and engaging in socially responsible practices in order to stand out and retain loyal customers over time.

Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to a few limitations, including:

1. This study was conducted solely within Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, a relatively small and developing city in Nigeria. As a result, the findings may not fully reflect customer behaviour in larger, more commercially developed cities like Kano, Lagos, Abuja or Port Harcourt. This restricts the extent to which the findings could be generalized to broader contexts.
2. The study only targeted loyal customers of registered fast-food and restaurant brands. Although this method yielded meaningful insights into the connection between brand storytelling and loyalty, it excluded occasional or first-time customers whose perceptions might differ significantly.
3. The data were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire, which may introduce response bias.
4. A cross-sectional research design was utilized, capturing data at a single moment in time, thereby restricting the ability to assess shifts in customer loyalty or perceptions of brand storytelling over an extended period.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Future study should replicate this research in larger urban centers such as Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt or Abuja to examine whether the relationship between the variables differs across more competitive and diverse markets.
2. While this study focused on loyal customers, future study could include first-time buyers, occasional customers, and disengaged consumers to gain a more holistic understanding of how brand storytelling affects different levels of customer engagement.
3. A longitudinal study could help track changes in consumer perceptions and loyalty over time, especially in response to evolving brand communication strategies or changes in service consistency.
4. Future research could explore other components of brand storytelling such as emotional appeal, narrative coherence, or cultural relevance, which may offer deeper insights into consumer's brand relationships in local markets.
5. Integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative approaches like interviews or focus groups may offer richer data and uncover underlying motivations behind customer loyalty that are not easily captured through structured questionnaire.

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