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Digitization and customer engagement in developing economies: Prospective research direction for sustainable B2B growth

Idongesit Oto Eshiett ^{1,*} and Oto Eyamba Eshietthor ²

¹ Department of Marketing, Awa Ibom State University, Obio-Akpa Campus, Nigeria.

² Department of Business Administration, ICT University, Messassi, Yaunde, Cameroun.

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Abstract

The essence of this study is to address the dearth in research on the dynamic pace of digital encroachment in the Nigerian Marketplace. The advent of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has dramatically switched end users from the traditional marketing perception to the new world of digitization in almost every aspect of business endeavor. Firms are faced with the herculean task of engaging customers and prospect within the globalized market reality. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of customer engagement marketing concept within the framework of an enlarges digital incursion in the marketplace. Basic issues this study intends to address includes; socio-cultural perception, technological infrastructural gap and the buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect. The study will adopt key developing discourse, concepts and theories of customer engagement. Descriptive research methodology using multiple regression analysis will be adopted; primary and secondary research techniques will be used to obtain information through personal interviews and from documented investigations conducted in this field of study, the outcome of the study analysis will form the core basis of the discussion of the findings. The conclusion and recommendations will be extrapolated from the study objective and the discussion of findings, further recommendation will address the need for industrialized nations should assist Business -to-Business B2B in Low- and Medium-Income Countries (LMIC's) augment digitally from its current position into the 21st century digital space and stakeholders should make adequate effort towards digital infrastructural provision in Nigeria, in order to reap from anticipated gains of digitization.

Keywords: Customer engagement; Digital technology; Socio-Cultural setbacks; Developing Economies; Sustainability; and Business to Business Relationship

1. Introduction

The continuum in derivable benefits of the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) is the proliferation and application of digital resources at homes and offices in all facet of human endeavor globally; but the skill, availability, adaptability and operational model amongst nations of the world; analogizes the existing wide gap in global developmental trend. In 2014, global GDP obtained from digital trade from (electronic; government, education, media, commerce, games, and other services) was estimated at USD2.8Trillion; USD3.8Trillion in 2019, with Low and Medium Income Countries (LMIC's) in Asia, Africa Middle East and Latin America sharing a trivial USD1Trillion; besides the devastating economic distortion caused by COVID-19 pandemic worldwide; the anticipated earnings from cross-border trade in data/electronic information is projected at USD11Trillion by 2025. [40]; [7], [20]; [21]; [79]; & [69].

The advent of critical research interest by marketing strategists on the emergence of marketing digitization at Boca Raton, Florida, USA titled 'The emerging impact of Information System - IS in Marketing' in 2001, there have been dramatic development and research effort to enhance adequate positioning of the marketing industry. Hence the need

* Corresponding author: Idongesit Oto Eshiett

to collaboratively create an engaging platform to enhance the conglomeration of customers using digital resources for the purpose of customer satisfaction. Marketing Science Institute, 2006). Customer engagement connotes a process whereby firms inspire customers and prospects towards becoming brand advocates [34]; [65]; on new product ideas [26], cost savings, marketing communication that precedes direct customer economic benefits [55]; [67]; & [51] and overall strategic plan for the firm [34]; [83]; & [72].

The essence of this study is to assess how effective customer engagement could be adapted in the Nigerian expanding digital marketplace; taking into cognizance the need to guide customers and prospects to decipher between traditional and digital marketing practices [28], the ever-pervasive effect of digital resources, on strategic impact in a globalized marketplace, and customer to partner engagement as practiced in global B2B relationships [85]. Sustaining the ever-increasing spread of digital penetration in LMIC's could be aided by holistic international to collaborative efforts donor agents towards ending the digital vacuum [40]. If the ideal of a globalized world is 'anything to go by' then efforts such as; 'Ending the digital divide' by the US National Commission for Artificial intelligence (NCAI) with the aim of digital resource capacity building, technological transfer [23], Cybersecurity, restructuring of digital policy framework, aimed at; enhancing receptiveness, equal treatments amongst participating countries, guaranteeing the security of participating countries digital environment and [82], with the aim of enhancing high valued energy projects in Africa. (Power Africa Annual Report, 2020). The foregoing if sustained will unlock the LMICs digital space [40]; [4]; and enhance extensive outreach of digitally engaging customer in Nigeria and by extension LMIC's. [73]. But prospective digitization must be enhanced by quality service delivery in energy sector [3], coupled with transparent energy billing processes that leaves no doubt in the minds of the customers [71].

In conceptualizing this study on customer engagement, previous studies on this field were specifically examined; Customer engagement proposition, definition, and brand relationship conceptual framework on face-to-face and online platform [2] [37]; [17]; [13], engagement behaviors,, customer engagement in a digitally divided and civic space [4]; & [40]; & [73], engagement in economic crisis, brand community and social-media community engagement [33].

Table 1 Previous Conceptualization on Customer Engagement

Study	Conceptualization	Item Considered	Parameter of Measurement
Hollebeek, & Chen, 2014; Cheung, et. al. 2011; Brodie, et. al. 2011; Brodie, & Smith, & Wallace, 2010.	Definition of concepts	Engagement disposition	Empirical study: The Engagement propositions
Sim, et. al. 2022	Service providers Engagements	Engagement disposition	Empirical study: Theoretical basis for service adaptation
van Doorn, et. al. 2010	Engagement behaviours	Customer Engagement	Empirical Study; Theoretical foundations
Adeleke, 2020; & Ingram, 2021; Sinha, et. al. 2011; & Norris,2001	Digital divide; a global perspective	Civic Engagement	Empirical Study; Sustainable digital development
Sinha, et. al. 2011; & Sedley, 2010,	Digitization and the economy	Customer Engagement motivation	Empirical Study; Multiple theses examination
Habibi, et. al. 2014	Brand Trust	Community Engagement	Empirical Study; Social-Media as engagement tool
Kleinaltenkamp, et. al. 2021	Collective Synchronization and stabilization	Institutionalized Engagements	Empirical Study; Market shaping approach
Ogunbade; & Nwaizugbo, 2021; So, et. al. 2016; Kam, et. al. 2014; King, & Sparks, 2014	Customer loyalty and satisfaction	Tourism sectoral engagement	Empirical Study; Customer experience

Akindele, 2021 & Amodu et. al. 2019	Brand Trust; offline and online	Financial engagement	sectoral	Empirical Study; Customer buying decisions
Kim, et. al. 2013; Mollen, Kumar, et. al. 2010; & Wilson, 2010	Online consumer experience	Engagement undervalued and overvalued customers	of and	Empirical Study; Interactivity; managerial perspectives
Maslowska, et. al. 2016; & Malthouse, & Calder, 2011	Sustainable engagement ecosystem	Engagement disposition		Empirical Study; Gross engagement valuation

Other studies include; An industrialization process driven by customer engagement as basis for market penetration [48], service sector driven customer engagement, engagement performance and buying decisions in telecoms [42]; [44]; & [78], engagement with customers in the banking sector [5], engagement in corporate Content management using e-CRM tools [6], engagement motivation for mobile users, capturing undervalued and overvalued customers through engagement [43]; [70]; [54], and articulation on customer engagement experience within the framework of a sustainable ecosystem [67]; [68].

From the foregoing studies, the fundamental basis of harnessing digital penetration in the 21st century was not examined. This study in closing the existing gap in literature, specifically assessed the key factors that undermines digital spread in Nigeria and other LMIC's as socio-cultural perception about digital technology and the existing gap in digital infrastructural provision gap in Nigeria. This study is explicitly set out to underline the basic drawbacks to customer engagement in an expanding digital environment. These setbacks include; socio-cultural limitations, technological infrastructural gap and the buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect, then the presentation of a customer engagement theoretical model that is meant to complement the effect; and set the customer on the pathway of becoming firm's advocates.

Additional basis for customer engagement is illustrated based on empirical evidence on factors that could link customers to the digital resources in Nigeria. The essence of customer engagement marketing is to transmute customers from being mere end receivers of digital resources, to becoming digitally loyal customers [28], and active participants in expanding the outreach of digital penetration within the community [61]. The perceived disconnect between customers and providers of the expanding digital resources could be bridged through a thorough review of existing literature to test possibility of engaging customers 'using digital resources. The outcome of the study shows significant relationship between customer engagement and the expanding digital resources in Nigeria.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Review of Related Literature

2.1.1. Concept of Customer Engagement Marketing

The concept of customer engagement has its basis in the behavioral sciences [36]; this is an extraordinary situation in buyer-seller dyad [41], in which the customer goes beyond the immediate economic benefits in their transactions with firms' brand, not minding the associated cost accruable in it., for the purpose of establishing a long-term relationship with the firm [38]; & [12], creating B2B actor engagement behavior beyond triadic settings [41], also for actor engagement as core basis for micro-foundation for value co-creation. Some scholars have described customer engagement marketing as an augmentation of the features of relationship marketing [14]. The differentiating factor between customer engagement and customer engagement marketing is; Whereas customer engagement involves strategic effort by firms to motivate and woo their customers to associate with the brand. customer engagement marketing on the other hand is a strategy that is specifically driven by the customers without the influence of the firm [37].

Conceptualization by scholars on customer engagement has generated piles of researches with diverse views on discourses and definitions deployed in examining this concept. [53]. The inability to have a convergent position on this precept, makes it an onerous task in establishing an acceptable position on its conceptualization and by extension operationalization. According to [56], customer engagement is the interconnectivity amongst customers' vis-a-vis the firms' brand [36], posited that customer engagement is the emotional and psychological drive within a customer to

invest time, money and expertise voluntarily on the firm's brand; [41], also posited customer engagement to mean the 'extra mile' taken by customers in propagating the firms' brand through investment of time, money and emotions.

Customer engagement is described as the volitional sacrifice made by customer to co-develop product brand with firm, posited customer engagement to connote customer involvement in building firms' brand beyond the initial transactional process [13], also posited that customer engagement is the emotional drive to intensify relationship with firm for the purpose of brand augmentation. [55], posited customer engagement to explain the additional inputs made by customers outside their purchase arrangement.

Customer engagement could be posited as a combination of effort by customer to co-produce brand, contribute to shared benefits [9], assist firm in competitive game-plan, suggest ingenious customer-driven product ideas and enhance in-depth relationship with the firm, and [28], also posited customer engagement to connote the psychological attachment to product brand beyond the normal transactional process. Thus, customer engagement marketing is a holistic commitment by customers to undertake a long-term relationship towards augmenting firms' brand.

Concept of Digitization

Digitization could be explained as the processes involved in transforming data into a form that could be understood by the computer., these documents, images or representations will be translated from analogue into codes (Binary numbers of 0' and 1 [16]; & [45], that is digitally readable by the computer [11]. Digitization is sine-qua-non in the 21st century marketplace because of the huge demand for data collection, processing, repository, and dissemination into information required for business transactions in public and private domain, Mc Quail, (2000). Digital information has the capacity to be retrieved, edited, deleted and shared to a wide spectrum of audience effectively with speed and accuracy [15]. This development has resulted in the dynamic growth and development of digital resources, to enhance ease of access to relevant information required by individual and organizations globally [19].

Digital conservation is a crucial step in the sustainable preservation of digitization for future generations [60] & [35], specifically, by ensuring the wellbeing of global communities of users of digital resources [8]. The development of digital storage resources such as; libraries, gallery, dossiers and other digital storage resources such as; servers, hard drives, disc, memory cards to safe-keep vital information for ease of access by users [36]. Development in digital technology has created an enlarged diversification in expertise, with the urge to proffer solution to daily life challenges [81]. In recent times, retrieval of information stored in various analogue devices are monitored to ensure that such contents are digitized in order to safeguard vital public and private information [39]. In spite of the overwhelming benefits of digitization, certain setbacks such as; the training process for experts, the huge cost of acquiring digital resources, the gender question, possible distortion of cultural heritage and the existing wide digital divide between industrial nations and LMIC's. [4]; [39].

The merits of digitization in societal transformation through; reduced poverty, entrenchment of all-inclusive economic growth, capital through education, skill acquisition, empowerment of rural communities and the gender inequality question. [76]. Statistically, about 3.6 billion people in LMIC's are not accessible to digital resources, Gender-wise, women have been marginalized in terms of digital connectivity with over 327million having access to digital resources, the worst hit is LMIC's with only (17.8 % to 22.8 %) of women have access to digital resources [40]. In retrospect, engaging customers in Nigeria with the expanding digital penetration in the global space, remains a pipe dream due to the outlined debilitating factors inhibiting access of Nigerians to digital resources.

2.1.2. Conceptual Framework of Customer Engagement Marketing

Customer engagement marketing in this study shows a developmental process in engaging customers, by adapting technological tool in engaging customer, the process involves a three-step approach of; motivating customers, authorizing customers to engage in specific marketing efforts and evaluating value-added by customers to firms' marketing effort [34]. In order to establish a theoretical basis for the study, two types of marketing approach are identified to include; i) task-based customer engagement marketing and ii) Experiential customer engagement marketing. But for the purpose of this study, the Experiential customer engagement marketing.

Experiential customer engagement marketing was necessitated by the observable shortcomings of the Task-Based customer engagement initiative which premised on firms' effort to proactively invigorate engagement of customer through Word-Of-Mouth, (WOM) [50], Customer Relationship Management, (CRM) [66], innovative contribution on product development [18]. This effort was more of a 'Push' marketing strategy by firms in order to engage customers, this extrinsic approach could impair customer-firm relationship [63], increase initial revenue and reduce cost, but not sustainable. Because of the limitations of the Task-Based customer engagement initiative, the adoption of Experiential

customer engagement marketing was necessary to create a long-term customer-firm relationship that is premised on emotional attachment of customers to firm marketing effort. [2], with in-depth satisfaction and commitments to firms' goals and objectives. (Van et. al. 2004). This approach ensures that firms' relationship with customers' transforms from mere buyer –seller dyad; to apparent desire by customers to contribute immensely towards marketing efforts of the firm as illustrated in figure 1, using technological channel as engagement to manage challenges.

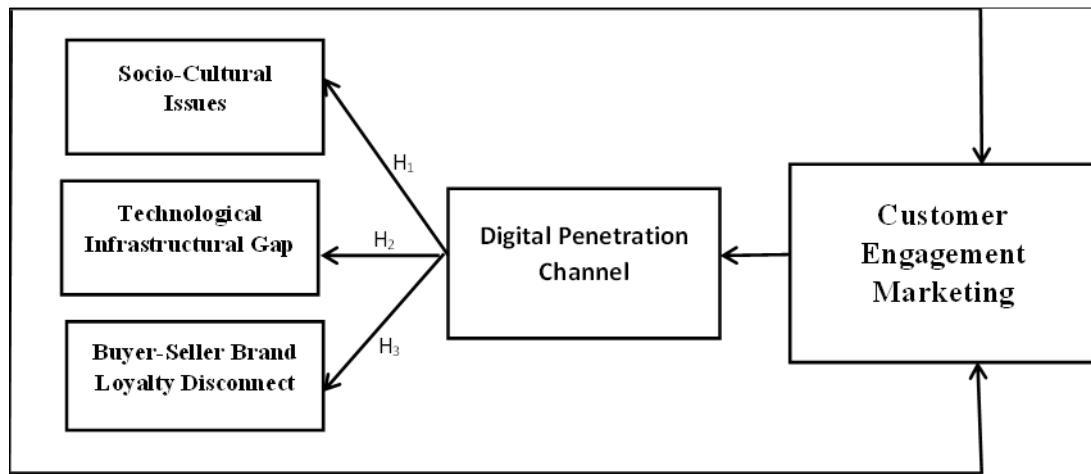


Figure 1 Customer Engagement Marketing and Digitization Issues

The narrowing gap between firm and customers in the 21st century is mainly due to the adaptation of technological channels in handling customer issues, in developing countries, technological penetration seems to have quite a few challenges, and these challenges as highlighted in this study include; socio cultural challenges, technological infrastructural gap and buyer-seller customer disconnect.

2.1.3. Socio-cultural challenges

The socio-cultural perception connotes an individual or group having a pre-determined concept about a specific activity within a given community ranging from; interpersonal, religious, economic and political issues [77]. Digitized firms should encourage impartiality and interactivity within a specific community where business operations are located [58]. The essence of encouraging interrelationships irrespective of diversities such as religious [4], though this tool has also been proven as being inimical to societal development [24]. Such engagements could enhance value-added contribution to firms' growth, and act as pro-digital penetration strategies for LMIC's. [34]. Hence, marketing strategist should be able to effectively adapt product ideas on existing socio-cultural tenets, to enhance effective customer engagement marketing.

2.1.4. The Infrastructural Gap

The conceptual framework outlines the strategic elements of engagement in developing countries, based on various challenges firm may have to resolve in enhancing effective customer engagement process. The core basis of industrialization setback is the non-existence/slow pace at which ICT infrastructures are deployed to drive the perceived 4G digital age. The non-availability of these infrastructures is a key inhibition towards digital penetration in the society. It is important to state that; marketing strategist can only engage customers and prospects based on availability of digital resources. Some very important strategic action embarked upon by the United States Government to bridge this gap in Nigeria include; [82]. Additional effects of low pace of digitization is the inability to deploy current tech resources (Robotics and Artificial Intelligence) in production and service delivery processes [23], with this infrastructural gap resulting in massive agricultural produce wastages.

2.1.5. Buyer-Seller Brand loyalty disconnect

The need for effective buyer-seller dyad has become the key element in enhancing customer loyalty [64]; [32], but the need for firms to take 'a step further' in relationship management, that could harness customer deep trust in firms; activities, and as such becoming more engaged with firms' brand [84], to the extent of becoming advocates [34], and by committing own personal resources, towards developing firms' product brand [34]; [65].

Bridging the gap by engaging customers to be loyal to firms' brand could; enhance customer satisfaction [78], improve customer relationship management, [29], and in increasing firms overall profitability based on formidable buyer-seller dyad [41]. In a developing economy such as the study domain, firms have unexplored market share and rare competitiveness with rivals, effective engagement strategy using technological channels could be of mutual benefit to all concerned parties [62].

Effective customer engagement marketing could increase customers desperation to look beyond immediate economic interrelationship with firm [59], thereby narrowing the 'trust gap' and enhance brand loyalty. This could result in 'knock-on-effect' that increases sentiments such as; (awareness, enthusiasm, interaction, activity and extraordinary experience) amongst other customers of the brand [28]. In retrospect, the experiential customer engagement approach based on its long-term benefits, could harness the expanding penetration of digital resources in the country.

2.2. Research Methodology

This study evaluates the impact of experiential engagement approach on customer engagement marketing (Saunders, et. al. 2009). This approach connotes sacrifices made by customer in their own volition to co-create firms' product brands beyond the framework of a specific purchase transaction. The study objective is to assess how customers could be engage within the framework of an expanding digital penetration by selected Information Technology (IT) firms in Lagos, Nigeria. The quantitative research design was adopted using survey method in which; questionnaires were designed and administered to employee and customers of selected IT firms in Lagos. Questionnaires were used as effective survey approach for obtaining illustrative [57]; & [20] and descriptive data on behaviour and attributes, [80], before analysing the data [30] & [31]. Pre-survey letters were initially issued to selected IT firms and customers via the customers' email contacts [21].

Additionally, personal interviews were conducted to obtain additional information from respondents, in areas which was not covered by the questionnaire effectively. The internet avails the opportunity of obtaining information such as; comprehensive internet-enabled interviews on email, where delays in response by email were observed, instant messaging on social networks such as; (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and blogs) were adapted to obtain information from respondents, this reduced the rigours of having to wait endlessly for responses by email from respondents [49]. This approach enhanced the ease in obtaining other detailed information precisely on; employment status and customer brand perception within an expanding digitally-driven environment were also obtained.

Data collection for both pre and actual study were obtained by email, social networks and blogs, this was the safest means of distributing questionnaires because of the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic, effects on supply chain management [27], hence, cost savings approaches were adopted in conducting the research. Respondents selected for the study were (employee and customers of selected IT firms) were advised to tick the coded 5-step likert scale questions of (Strongly Agree – SA=5, Agree – A=4, Undecided – U=3, Disagree – D=2, and Strongly Disagree – SD=1) in Appendix B; as well as fill Appendix A on their individual demography [30]. and psychological attachment with the IT firms [12]; [54], and the impact of the expanding digital penetration [40].

Table 2 Respondents Rate Table

Questionnaires	Number of questionnaires	Percentage of questionnaires
Returned	230	81%
Rejected	26	9%
Not returned	29	10%
285	285	100%

A breakdown of the data collation in table 2. shows that the total number of questionnaires issued were (285) questionnaire administered to the respondents within a population range of 1,100. [52]. The total number of questionnaires which were returned, rejected and not returned are analysed thus; 230 questionnaires representing (81%) were valid and useful for the study, 29 respondents representing (10%) were not returned at all, while 26 respondents representing (9%) were rejected due to error and mutilation by respondents. The valid/useful data was collated and analyzed using multiple Regression analysis (Saunders, et. al. 2009) and the outcome is presented for each hypothesis for Model summary and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tables below;

2.2.1. Test of Hypotheses – Regression Analysis

Hypothesis One: There is no significant impact of socio-cultural perception on customer engagement marketing in Nigeria

Table 3 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.511 ^a	0.572	0.593	11.627	0.409	15.058	1	284	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Socio-cultural perception									
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement									

The outcome of the Regression analysis in table 3 shows that socio-cultural perception impacts significantly on customer engagement with the level of significance of 0.000 which is less than the standard 0.05 levels of significance. The computed Regression R value of 0.511 reveals that the impact of socio-cultural perception on customer engagement is acceptable; Regression Square is 0.572 and Adjusted R ratio is 0.593 are all higher than the acceptable benchmark of 0.4000. This shows that customer’s engagement is significantly impacted upon by the level of reliability. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that socio-cultural perception has no significant relationship with customer engagement should be rejected.

Table 4 ANOVA ^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1528.004	1	1528.004	15.058	0.000 ^b
	Residual	35104.291	283	102.084		
	Total	36632.295	284			
a. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Socio-cultural perception						

Table 4; shows the significance impact of the analysis of variance on socio-cultural perception on customer engagement. The outcome shows that the F-value of 15.058, and the level of significance Sig =0 .000, this shows that p<0.0005.

Hypothesis Two: Technological Infrastructural gap has no significant impact on customer engagement marketing in Nigeria

Table 5 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.494 ^a	0.429	.411	10.025	.502	12.149	1	284	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Technological Infrastructural gap									
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement									

The outcome of the Regression analysis in table 5 shows that Technological Infrastructural gap impacts significantly on customer engagement with the level of significance of 0.000 which is less than the standard 0.05 levels of significance. The computed Regression R value of 0.429 reveals that the impact of Technological Infrastructural gap on customer engagement is acceptable; Regression Square is 0.494 and Adjusted R ratio is 0.411 are all higher than the acceptable

benchmark of 0.4000. This shows that customer’s engagement is significantly impacted upon by the level of Technological Infrastructural gap. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that Technological Infrastructural gap has no significant relationship with customer engagement should be rejected.

Table 6 ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	94.006	1	94.006	12.149	0.000 ^b
	Residual	32629.517	283	100.532		
	Total	32723.523	284			
a. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Technological Infrastructural gap						

Table 6; shows the significance impact of the analysis of variance on Technological Infrastructural gap on customer engagement. The outcome shows that the F-value of 12.149, and the level of significance Sig = 0.000, this shows that $p < 0.0005$.

Hypothesis Three: Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect has no significant impact on customer engagement marketing in Nigeria.

Table 7 Model Summaryb

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.604 ^a	0.611	0.625	9.6200	.511	8.430	1	284	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect									
b. Dependent Variable: Customer engagement									

The outcome of the Regression analysis in table 7 shows that Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect impact significantly on customer engagement with the level of significance of 0.000 which is less than the standard 0.05 levels of significance. The computed Regression R value of 0.604 reveals that the impact of Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect on customer engagement is acceptable; Regression Square is 0.611 and Adjusted R ratio is 0.625 are all higher than the acceptable benchmark of 0.4000. This shows that customer’s engagement is significantly impacted upon by the level of Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect has no significant relationship with customer engagement should be rejected.

Table 8 ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	849.006	1	849.006	8.430	0.000
	Residual	46201.527	283	106.814		
	Total	47050.533	284			
a. Dependent Variable: Customer engagement						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect						

Table 8; shows the significance impact of the analysis of variance on Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect on customer engagement. The outcome shows that the F-value of 8.430, and the level of significance Sig = 0.000, this shows that $p < 0.0005$.

3. Results and discussion

The result of the findings is based on study objectives, the outcome of the hypothetical test, the empirical literature and the theoretical basis of the study. Based on the study objectives which examined the impact of customer engagement market, other sub-objectives considered include; impact of socio-cultural perception such as denying women equal opportunity and access to digital resources, [75]; & [74]; the infrastructural technological gap has been the bane of industrial development and by extension digitization in Nigeria [40], and the buyer –seller brand loyalty disconnect is a challenging issue in the face of global competition with reduced product cost and the high production cost of manufacturing within the country. Managers should encourage the adherence to promotional strategies as a means of marketing digital products effectively [2].

The outcome of the regression analysis on the three hypotheses of the study has shown in each scenario significant relationship between the variables of the construct. For hypothesis One, the outcome of the Regression analysis in table 2 shows that socio-cultural perception impacts significantly on customer engagement with the level of significance of 0.000 which is less than the standard 0.05 levels of significance. The computed Regression R value of 0.511 reveals that the impact of socio-cultural perception on customer engagement is acceptable; Regression Square is 0.572 and Adjusted R ratio is 0.593 are all higher than the acceptable benchmark, and The outcome shows that the F-value of 15.058, and the level of significance Sig =0.000, this shows that $p < 0.0005$.

In Hypothesis two; the outcome of the Regression analysis in table 4 shows that Technological Infrastructural gap impacts significantly on customer engagement with the level of significance of 0.000 which is less than the standard 0.05 levels of significance. The computed Regression R value of 0.429 reveals that the impact of Technological Infrastructural gap on customer engagement is acceptable; Regression Square is 0.494 and Adjusted R ratio is 0.411 are all higher than the acceptable benchmark of 0.4000. This shows that customer's engagement is significantly impacted upon by the level of Technological Infrastructural gap. The outcome shows that the F-value of 12.149, and the level of significance Sig = 0.000, this shows that $p < 0.0005$.

In hypothesis three; The outcome of the Regression analysis in table 6 shows that Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect impact significantly on customer engagement with the level of significance of 0.000 which is less than the standard 0.05 levels of significance. The computed Regression R value of 0.604 reveals that the impact of Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect on customer engagement is acceptable; Regression Square is 0.611 and Adjusted R ratio is 0.625 are all higher than the acceptable benchmark of 0.4000. This shows that customer's engagement is significantly impacted upon by the level of Buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnect. The outcome shows that the F-value of 8.430, and the level of significance Sig = 0.000, this shows that $p < 0.0005$.

Theoretically; The adaptation of the developmental theory of customer engagement marketing by [34] has enhanced the contribution of this study to the full development of theory based on the infrastructural gap objections raised for LMIC's as a debilitating factor for these countries to be part of the digital drive in the 21st century [40]. The customers must first have to interact with digital resources and experience its workability before engaging with IT firms. Where these resources are out of the customers' reach, industrialized countries should strategies on how to close the digital gap [40].

Empirically; In the list of empirical evidence accessed in the process of this study, most of the studies done in Nigeria have been on; engagement in tourism brand loyalty and satisfaction [25]; [78], engagement performance and buying decisions in telecoms [5], engagement with customers in the banking sector, [6], engagement in corporate Content management using e-CRM tools, [29]. Brand Page Content in Online community. In order to establish an empirical basis, this study augmented the empirical gap by examining the buyer –seller brand loyalty disconnect, by examining the challenges faced by brands in Nigeria in the face of a global competitiveness and how realistic the concept of experiential customer engagement is practicable.

3.1. Implication of the Study

The socio-cultural perception of the people is quite vital for firms to incorporate into their strategic plan as a tool in aiding the process of effective B2B engagement, by adapting their sociocultural ideals into product concepts, ideas and innovation. Understanding the socio-cultural norms will facilitate the process of encouraging users of firms' product to

co-opt brand perception as acceptable product value chain addition [80]. The effective implementation of this ideals by firms' will boost societal acceptability of firm, increase its drive towards profitability in its line of business, while ensuring that sustainable processes are embedded all its activities such as; (acquisition of raw materials, production, packaging, distribution and sustainable waste disposal), contributes toward socio-cultural advancement of its host communities, and preservation of the ecosystem [16].

The existing technological infrastructural gap in Nigeria and Africa by extension must be addressed; for a meaningful customer engagement process. Increased provision of technologically enabling resources by critical stakeholder (Government, Donor Agencies), will create positive value-addition to end users through positive engagements in B2B relationships, this will result in; improved standard of living through tech-driven skill acquisition, reduce societal poverty, wealth creative/innovative ideas amongst technology end users

Additionally, effective engagement through digital penetration could motivate customers towards becoming ambassadors to firms' product brand and in business leadership [1], this could be achieved by firm taking pragmatic steps towards ensuring that products ideas are customer-driven, technologically viable, globally competitive and sustainable, this will improve buyer-seller brand loyalty disconnects [22]; & [28]. In B2B relationship, such firms, could adapt customer engagement tenets towards expanding its digital penetration, and become core brand that could withstand global competitiveness by rivals.

4. Conclusion

This study examines experiential customer engagement and the expanding digital penetration for B2B relationship in Nigeria; Customer engagement connotes a process whereby customers are basically brand advocates for firms' without expecting any form of benefits. Firms on the other hand should encourage engagement through the provision of quality product/service offering that appeals to customers' needs and wants. In empowering customers, firms must guard against possible risk involved in allowing customers free hand; without control at every stage of developing the engagement relationship. Firms should also refrain customers from saying negative things about product brand as this may erode the confidence built in the engagement process. A formidable customer engagement process should customers to initiate innovative ideas and implement such to complement firms' effort in quality service delivery. Firms should engage customers using the basic steps in the scale of customer engagement framework and implement each step with a concrete feedback process to make possible adjustments where necessary.

In Nigeria, policy makers should create a digital friendly environment where firms can fully engage customers to enhance speedy penetration of digital resources. The existing infrastructural gap is negatively affecting customer engagement using digitised platforms in Nigeria. Hence, the need to establish and upgrade existing infrastructures needed to drive available digital resources. For customers to be engaged, firms must engage in customer enlightenment programs that informs customers about firms' product offering; and what role the customer should play in realizing set objectives within digitized framework. The existing gap in relationship between firms and customers must be closed because; effective customers relationship management by firms is the beginning of sustainable B2B and B2C engagement.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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