Determinants of Brand Evangelism in the Fashion Clothing Industry in Benin Metropolis

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Abstract

This study investigates the determinants of brand evangelism within the native fashion clothing industry in Benin Metropolis, Nigeria. As global brands increasingly dominate the Nigerian fashion market, indigenous fashion designers face mounting pressure to build sustainable customer engagement and loyalty. Brand evangelism—defined as customers' voluntary and passionate promotion of a brand—has emerged as a vital strategy for enhancing consumer advocacy and driving brand growth. The study adopts a quantitative approach, employing a structured survey design to collect data from a sample of 385 respondents, selected using Cochran's formula. A structured questionnaire was used to gather information on customer perceptions of service failure recovery, brand trust, brand love, brand identification, and opinion leadership, as well as their expressions of brand evangelism through positive brand referral, purchase intention, and oppositional brand referral. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS version 20. Findings reveal that service failure recovery significantly influences positive brand referral, while brand trust, brand love, and brand identification strongly predict purchase intention. Opinion leadership, though significant in influencing purchase intention, has limited effect on positive or oppositional brand referrals. These results highlight the pivotal role of emotional, cognitive, and experiential factors in driving customer advocacy. The study concludes that fostering trust, emotional attachment, and brand identification among customers can meaningfully promote brand evangelism. It recommends that local fashion brands enhance service responsiveness, develop emotionally resonant marketing, and actively engage influential consumers to cultivate brand loyalty and advocacy.

Keywords: Benin Metropolis, Brand evangelism, brand trust, brand love, fashion industry, service failure recovery.

Introduction

In recent years, the role of customers as active agents in brand communication has gained prominence, with brand evangelism emerging as a vital construct in contemporary marketing discourse. Unlike traditional loyalty, which focuses primarily on repeat purchase behaviour, brand evangelism encapsulates a deeper emotional commitment wherein customers not only patronise a brand but also actively promote it through personal endorsements, referrals, and the denouncement of competing brands (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). This phenomenon is often voluntary, and brand evangelists typically do not receive monetary compensation, making their advocacy perceived as more authentic and trustworthy (Kang, 2015). In the age of digital connectivity and peer influence, such behaviour has become instrumental in shaping brand equity and consumer perceptions. Within the Nigerian fashion industry, particularly in the context of native clothing, brand evangelism presents an opportunity to foster sustained engagement

and improve the visibility of local brands. Despite the sector's vibrancy and cultural relevance, native fashion designers face considerable competition from global brands, which are increasingly accessible to local consumers (Adeola et al., 2021). The influx of foreign apparel has not only diluted market loyalty towards indigenous products but also exacerbated the struggle for local fashion retailers to build sustainable customer bases (Effiong, 2018). Consequently, understanding how to stimulate customer-driven advocacy through brand evangelism could serve as a viable strategy to enhance the competitiveness of Nigeria's fashion clothing sector.

Previous studies have posited that brand evangelism is influenced by several psychological and behavioural factors. These include service failure recovery, brand trust, brand love, brand identification, and opinion leadership (Doss, 2010; Rashid, Ahmad and Hasanordin, 2017). Each of these variables plays a distinct role in shaping customer-brand relationships. For instance, service failure recovery – the manner in which a firm addresses and compensates for service lapses – has been found to impact customers' willingness to continue engaging with a brand and to speak positively about it (Riorini and Widayati, 2015). Similarly, brand trust, which relates to a consumer's belief in a brand's reliability and integrity, significantly influences advocacy intentions (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Brand love, a construct grounded in emotional attachment, further deepens consumer affinity, leading to affective loyalty and increased word-of-mouth promotion (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Brand identification, which is drawn from the social identity theory, describes the alignment of a consumer's self-concept with the perceived image of a brand. This alignment often results in stronger advocacy behaviours, especially when customers see the brand as reflective of their values or social group (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen, 2005). Additionally, opinion leadership, characterised by a consumer's capacity to influence others through interpersonal communication, can amplify the reach of brand messages when the consumer acts as a brand evangelist (Chakrabarti, 2013).

Although brand evangelism has been extensively explored in Western and Asian contexts, there is a paucity of empirical studies within sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Nigeria. Much of the existing research focuses on traditional customer loyalty and purchase behaviour, often overlooking the distinctive drivers of active brand advocacy (Igwe and Nwamuo, 2017; Anggarini, 2018). This gap is significant given the cultural, economic, and market-specific dynamics that characterise the Nigerian fashion industry. The limited attention to brand evangelism in local studies suggests the need for a more nuanced exploration of its antecedents within indigenous retail contexts.

This study, therefore, investigates the determinants of brand evangelism in the fashion clothing industry in Benin Metropolis, with a focus on native fashion brands. Examining how factors such as service failure recovery, trust, love, identification, and opinion leadership influence brand evangelistic behaviours, the research contributes to the growing body of literature on customer-based brand equity in emerging markets. Furthermore, the findings offer practical implications for local fashion retailers and policy-makers aiming to enhance brand competitiveness and foster home-grown brand ambassadors.

Literature Review

Brand evangelism, a concept derived from the convergence of consumer loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing, has garnered increasing attention in marketing literature due to its potential to transform satisfied customers into vocal brand advocates. It

refers to the behaviour of enthusiastic consumers who actively promote a brand to others, not merely through personal usage but by recommending it to peers, criticising competing brands, and displaying a long-term commitment to its success (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Unlike traditional loyal customers who may restrict their involvement to repeat purchases, brand evangelists go a step further by voluntarily endorsing and defending the brand, often without direct incentives (Kang, 2015; Doss, 2014). This heightened advocacy is driven by strong psychological and emotional bonds between the consumer and the brand, leading to what some scholars regard as a quasi-religious devotion (McConnell and Huba, 2003).

The construct of brand evangelism encompasses three key dimensions: positive brand referral, purchase intention, and oppositional brand referral. Positive brand referral involves consumers speaking favourably about a brand to others, usually friends, family, or acquaintances, thereby expanding its visibility and reputation through informal communication channels (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Purchase intention refers to the consumer's future behavioural inclination to continue buying the brand, which reflects a deeper attitudinal loyalty (Kotler and Keller, 2012). In contrast, oppositional brand referral entails negative commentary or active dissuasion against rival brands, which further reinforces the consumer's allegiance to their chosen brand (Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2013). These dimensions are collectively useful in assessing the behavioural outcomes of strong brand attachment and serve as indicators of a brand's emotional equity in the marketplace.

Several studies have attempted to examine the antecedents or determinants of brand evangelism. Among the most cited are service failure recovery, brand trust, brand love, brand identification, and opinion leadership (Rashid, Ahmad and Hasanordin, 2017; Beccera and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Kang, 2015). Service failure recovery refers to the actions taken by a firm to resolve issues after a service failure has occurred. It is often measured through frameworks of justice theory—distributive, procedural, and interactional justice—each addressing different aspects of fairness in rectifying a service lapse (Riorini and Widayati, 2015; Wen and Chi, 2013). When service failures are addressed efficiently and equitably, consumers are more likely to overlook the initial problem and develop a sense of trust and satisfaction, which may enhance their likelihood of recommending the brand to others (Gronroos, 1988; Rashid et al., 2017).

Brand trust is another pivotal factor. It reflects the consumer's belief in the brand's ability to deliver on its promises and act in their best interest (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Trust is both cognitive and emotional in nature, shaped by consistent brand performance and integrity. High levels of brand trust often translate into customer advocacy, as individuals are more inclined to recommend brands they believe in (Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011). In developing economies, where consumer scepticism towards local brands may be pronounced, trust assumes an even more critical role (Soomro, 2019).

Brand love, a concept stemming from psychological theories of interpersonal relationships, represents the emotional attachment consumers have toward a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). It includes elements such as passion, affection, and long-term commitment, mirroring the components found in Sternberg's (1986) triangle theory of love. Brand love has been shown to foster brand loyalty and increase the likelihood of word-of-mouth marketing (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012). When consumers love a brand, they tend to forgive its shortcomings, actively defend it in public discourse, and develop

lasting behavioural intentions toward its use (Riorini and Widayati, 2015).

Another relevant construct is brand identification, which is rooted in social identity theory. It describes the extent to which consumers see their identity reflected in the brand, or align themselves with its symbolic attributes (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen, 2005). When a brand resonates with a consumer's self-concept or social group identity, the individual becomes more likely to engage in pro-brand behaviours, including evangelism (Ashforth and Mael, 2009). In the context of the Nigerian fashion industry, brand identification may play a significant role, as clothing is often a marker of cultural, social, and personal identity (Igwe and Nwamuo, 2017). Thus, fashion brands that evoke cultural pride or reflect local values may have a higher chance of cultivating brand evangelists.

Opinion leadership completes the framework of determinants. Opinion leaders are consumers who possess the ability to influence others' purchasing decisions based on their expertise, social influence, or communication skills (Chakrabarti, 2013). In marketing, these individuals function as unofficial ambassadors for the brand, often disseminating product information and endorsing brand values in both offline and digital environments (Abidin, 2016). Their opinions carry weight and credibility, especially in tightly-knit communities or digital tribes where peer validation plays a central role in consumption behaviour (Nurfadila and Riyanto, 2020). When opinion leaders themselves become brand evangelists, their reach and impact are amplified, potentially generating a multiplier effect in brand advocacy.

Despite the growing interest in brand evangelism globally, there remains a dearth of context-specific studies within sub-Saharan Africa. Much of the extant literature is Western-centric, with only a handful of empirical investigations addressing brand evangelism in African markets (Anggarini, 2018; Adeola et al., 2021). The limited scope of these studies often excludes indigenous brands, thereby neglecting the socio-cultural dynamics that might influence consumer-brand relationships in African contexts. In Nigeria specifically, fashion brands struggle with negative perceptions, often attributed to inconsistent service delivery, weak brand positioning, and low consumer trust in domestic products (Falode et al., 2016; Soomro, 2017). These contextual realities necessitate a localised exploration of how brand evangelism can be harnessed to revive the fortunes of indigenous fashion brands.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive survey approach, to investigate the determinants of brand evangelism among customers of native fashion clothing in Benin Metropolis, Nigeria. The choice of survey design was based on its effectiveness in enabling researchers to gather quantifiable data from a defined population in order to explain relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014). It allowed the researcher to observe phenomena in a natural setting without manipulating the environment or participants, thereby ensuring the reliability of the results.

The target population comprised customers who purchase locally made fashion clothing (native attire) in Benin Metropolis. This population was selected due to its relevance in assessing the behavioural intentions and emotional connections of consumers toward indigenous fashion brands. To determine the sample size, the Cochrane formula for infinite population was applied, yielding a total of 385 respondents, which was deemed adequate to ensure statistical representativeness and generalisability of findings (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).

A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into sections

covering demographic characteristics and constructs related to brand evangelism, including service failure recovery, brand trust, brand love, brand identification, opinion leadership, and brand evangelism dimensions such as positive brand referral, purchase intention, and oppositional brand referral. The items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, which is widely recognised for capturing attitudinal and perceptual data in social science research (Bryman, 2016).

To ensure validity and reliability, the instrument underwent expert review and pre-testing. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated for each construct, with all values exceeding the 0.70 threshold, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Hair et al., 2020). The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 20). Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesised relationships between the independent variables (service failure recovery, brand trust, brand love, brand identification, and opinion leadership) and the dependent variable (brand evangelism).

This methodological approach enabled the researcher to examine not only the strength of relationships among variables but also the predictive power of each determinant on brand evangelism, thereby providing empirical insights into consumer-brand dynamics within the fashion clothing industry of Benin Metropolis.

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical analysis based on data collected from customers of fashion clothing brands in Benin Metropolis. The results are organised under four main sections: demographic analysis, variable descriptions, hypotheses testing, and discussion of findings. The objective is to determine the predictors of brand evangelism using descriptive and inferential statistics.

DemographicAnalysis - The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analysed to understand the distribution by gender, age, and educational qualification. These demographics offer insight into the sample structure and provide contextual understanding of the respondents' perspectives on brand-related behaviours.

Table1:Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	193	50.1
Female	192	49.9
Total	385	100

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25 years	112	29.1
26–35 years	148	38.4
36–45 years	87	22.6
Above 45 years	38	9.9
Total	385	100

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary School	45	11.7
OND/NCE	98	25.5
HND/Bachelor's Degree	174	45.2
Master's and above	68	17.7
Total	385	100

The demographic profile indicates a fairly even distribution across gender, with the majority of respondents aged between 26 and 35 years and having at least a bachelor's degree.

Variable Descriptions - Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements measuring constructs such as positive brand referral, purchase intention, oppositional brand referral, service failure recovery, brand trust, brand love, brand identification, and opinion leadership.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs (n = 385)

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Positive Brand Referral	3.89	0.71	High
Purchase Intention	3.97	0.65	High
Oppositional Brand Referral	3.52	0.78	Moderate
Service Failure Recovery	3.81	0.69	High
Brand Trust	4.01	0.62	High
Brand Love	3.94	0.68	High
Brand Identification	3.88	0.74	High
Opinion Leadership	3.76	0.80	High

These values indicate that respondents generally exhibited high levels of trust, love, and identification with their preferred clothing brands. There was also a strong tendency toward brand advocacy and future purchase intentions.

Hypotheses Testing

To examine the influence of independent variables on the components of brand evangelism, multiple regression analyses were conducted. Each sub-dimension of brand evangelism (positive brand referral, purchase intention, oppositional brand referral) was treated as a dependent variable in separate regression models.

Table 5: Regression Analysis: Service Failure Recovery and Positive Brand Referral

Predictor	β	t	p
Service Failure Recovery	.412	7.86	< .001
R^2 = .27, F(1, 383) = 61.76, p < .001			

The result indicates that service failure recovery significantly predicts positive brand referral, explaining 27% of the variance (p < .001).

Table 6: Regression Analysis: Brand Trust,Love, Identification and Purchase Intention

Predictor	β	t	p
Brand Trust	.289	6.22	< .001
Brand Love	.267	5.89	< .001
Brand Identification	.238	5.33	< .001
R^2 = .48, F(3, 381) = 117.42, p < .001			

The model demonstrates that brand trust, love, and identification all significantly influence purchase intention, jointly accounting for 48% of the variance.

Table 7: Regression Analysis: Opinion Leadership and Brand Evangelism Dimensions

Dependent Variable	β	t	p	R^2
Purchase Intention	.244	5.15	< .001	.19
PositiveBrand Referral	.108	1.92	.056	.01
Oppositional Referral	.097	1.67	.096	.009

The results reveal that opinion leadership significantly predicts **purchase intention**, but its influence on **positive brand referral** and **oppositional brand referral** is statistically weak (p > .05).

Discussion of Findings

The findings support the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Consistent with justice theory, service failure recovery was positively related to positive brand referral, highlighting the importance of fair and responsive service delivery in influencing customers' willingness to advocate for a brand (Rashid et al., 2017; Wen and Chi, 2013). Similarly, brand trust, love, and identification emerged as strong predictors of purchase intention, corroborating earlier studies that suggest emotional and cognitive alignment with brands drives future behavioural intentions (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012).

Notably, while opinion leadership significantly influenced purchase intention, its weak impact on brand referrals suggests that influence-driven behaviour may not always translate to vocal advocacy. This implies that while opinion leaders may guide purchasing decisions, their tendency to publicly recommend or criticise brands is more reserved, possibly due to social or reputational considerations.

The results confirm that emotional bonds (brand love and trust), cognitive alignment (identification), and experiential factors (service recovery) are instrumental in shaping brand evangelistic behaviours among consumers in the Benin fashion clothing industry.

Conclusion

This study investigated the determinants of brand evangelism within the native fashion clothing industry in Benin Metropolis, with a particular focus on service failure recovery, brand trust, brand love, brand identification, and opinion leadership as key influencing variables. Drawing upon established theoretical frameworks such as justice theory, social identity theory, and the triangle theory of love, the research provides empirical insight into the mechanisms that drive consumers to engage in brand evangelistic behaviours—namely positive brand referrals, purchase intentions, and oppositional brand referrals.

The findings revealed that service failure recovery significantly contributes to positive brand referrals, underscoring the relevance of effective customer service management in building goodwill and advocacy. Similarly, brand trust, brand love, and brand identification emerged as strong predictors of purchase intention, aligning with prior literature which highlights emotional and cognitive engagement as essential to customer loyalty and advocacy (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

Interestingly, opinion leadership was shown to have a statistically significant influence on purchase intention, but not on brand referrals. This suggests that while opinion leaders may influence the purchasing decisions of others, they may be less inclined to vocalise support for brands unless aligned with their personal identity or social role (Chakrabarti, 2013). This nuance points to the complexity of evangelistic behaviour and reinforces the importance of understanding consumer motivation beyond transactional engagement.

The results support the notion that brand evangelism is not merely a function of satisfaction or habitual loyalty but is deeply rooted in emotional connection, identity alignment, and reciprocal brand experiences. For indigenous fashion brands seeking to compete with dominant foreign labels, these insights offer a strategic pathway to foster stronger consumer-brand relationships and drive grassroots brand promotion.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for fashion retailers, marketers, and policy makers within Nigeria's fashion clothing industry:

1.Fashion businesses should invest in efficient complaint handling and recovery systems. When service failures occur, timely and fair redress—through compensation, apologies, or corrective actions—can turn dissatisfied customers into vocal brand supporters (Riorini and Widayati, 2015).

2.Consistency in product quality, transparency in communication, and integrity in brand operations are essential for developing trust. Local designers should deliver on promises and ensure that their brand communicates reliability, thereby fostering deeper consumer confidence.

3.Brands should engage consumers emotionally through storytelling, brand experiences, and culturally relevant content. Emotional branding that resonates with consumers' lifestyles and aspirations can enhance attachment and advocacy behaviours.

4.Fashion brands should align their identity with consumers' personal and social values. Using culturally significant motifs, narratives, and symbols in branding can enhance consumer identification and loyalty, particularly within communities that value tradition and heritage.

5.Although opinion leaders may not always vocalise brand preferences, they possess influence over consumer decisions. Engaging them through influencer marketing, product trials, or ambassador programmes can help amplify brand reach and desirability, especially on social media platforms.

6.Agencies such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) should provide training and support to local fashion entrepreneurs on customer relationship management and brand strategy, enabling them to cultivate long-term consumer engagement.

In conclusion, fostering brand evangelism requires more than product availability or promotional effort; it necessitates a deeper understanding of consumer psychology and relational marketing. For local fashion brands in Benin and beyond, this study offers a practical framework for achieving sustainable brand growth through consumer-driven advocacy.

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