

Digital Drivers of Competitiveness: Exploring the Moderating Role of ICT on Customer Communications Management and Brand Competitiveness in Nigeria's Three-Star Hotels

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Abstract

This study investigated the moderating influence of information and communication technology on the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria. The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design with explanatory cross-sectional survey research design. A correlational method of investigation was adopted and the theoretical foundation was the technological acceptance model. The population of the study was the one hundred (100) three-star hotels doing business in the South-south region of Nigeria. A census study was adopted where the population was fully studied. However, one hundred (100) marketing managers, one marketing manager in each hotel constituted the respondents of the study. One hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the marketing managers of the ninety five (95) copies that were returned only ninety (90) copies of the questionnaire were validly used for the analysis representing 90% of the total number of questionnaire distributed. The instrument reliability and validity were measured through pilot study, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient and confirmatory factor analysis. Data for this study were analyzed through univariate descriptive statistics and multivariate inferential statistics with the aid of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), version 25.0. The findings of the study revealed that information and communication technology positively and significantly moderates the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-south Nigeria. The study concludes that the presence of information and communication technology improves customer communications management for enhanced brand competitiveness among three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria. We therefore recommend that the management of the three-star hotels in the south-south region of Nigeria should make significant investment in information and communication technology for

workplace automation, real time customer engagement to reach wider and global customers. This will enhance brand visibility and competitiveness of the hotel brands in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Moderating influence, information and communication technology, customer communications management, brand competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry in the South-south region of Nigeria provides services which encompass lodging and relaxation event management, games, conferences, workshops and facility management services (Umenwaliri et al. 2021). Thus, the industry provides these services to different class of customers who are resident in the South-south cities and visitors from other regions of Nigeria, including clients from the diaspora (Umenwaliri et al., 2021). The industry contributes to the growth of the South-south regional economy in Nigeria in terms of employment generation, market for the agricultural industry's food supply chain, tax revenue generation to government, maximization of industry's shareholders; wealth and community service (Adda, Azigwe & Awumi, 2016).

Historically, the organizations in the three-star hospitality industry which are specifically hotel firms have performed well in terms of productivity, job creation, maximization of shareholders value and contribution to the economic growth and development of the South-south region and Nigeria's gross domestic product (Olabinjo, Ezenagu & Esoso, 2020). Hence, three-star hotel firms' operations in the South-south region of Nigeria have attracted economic growth by driving economic activities through co-creation of values among actors in the hotels' value delivery chain. Most recently, due to low patronage and delivery of business volume, some of the hotels in the industry are struggling to survive in order to continue in business with a view to meeting the expectations of stakeholders; employees, customers, suppliers, distributors, agents, community and the publics (Rizea & Parpandel, 2009).

Furthermore, competition in the industry is intense, this has led to some hotels losing their customers for the competition or peer brands in the industry (Ollor & Simon, 2020). Hence, customers switching from one hotel service brand to another is prevalent in the industry due to relative service qualities. The loss of market share experienced by hotels in the industry is occasioned by relative brands performances and customers' experience management (Shafique, Ahmad & Hussain, 2015). Thus, the loss of viable market share experienced by the hotels negatively influenced operational activities and performance outcomes such that, most of the hotels and their management are seeking various ways on how to mitigate customers' frequent transition or exit from their brands and ensure continuous performance and competitiveness of the three-star hotel organizations (Cyril, Samuel, Meshach & Reuel, 2019).

Brand competitiveness is the ability of a company to design, produce and commercialize brands that are unique, distinctive and continuously fulfill the needs and wants, preferences and perception of the market or customer group better than the competition (Zuniga-Collazos, Castillo-Palacio & Padilla-Degado, 2019). Hence, the scholars defined brand competitiveness

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as the design, development and implementation of a brand strategy not currently implemented by other brand offerings which provide superior value and satisfaction to the market. Brand competitiveness is the ability of a company or product brands to provide superior economic value for the market relative to competing brands in the industry. It is the superiority by which institutions provide brand offerings in the form of goods, services, ideas and persons which meet or exceeds customers expectation compared to competing brands in the market (Winzar, Baumann & Chil, 2018).

Scholars have articulated that for brands to achieve competitiveness in the marketplace, several managerial choices should be adopted and operationalized. These strategies and choices include but not limited to customer communications management. The CCM is a laudable prescriptions for the effective management of customers brand experiences in the marketplace through effective communications of the company's brand and value propositions (Antora-Fani, 2016; Havis, 2016). Customer communications management is a construct that supports customers' interactions with a range of tools and processes. It is the marketing strategy employed to improve the creation, delivery, storage and retrieval of outbound communications. Customer communications management system in most organizations are traditionally seen as transmitting customer driven information which defines frictionless journey for a customer with a view to ensuring success of a company's product or service brand (Cesarini et al, 2006).

Customer communications management is the business process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling the transmission of messages and information that are outbound which are intended to improve customers' engagement and ensure broader visibility and market acceptance of the company's brands (Adeyemi, 2021). Hence, managing communications and outbound interactions with customers which are consistent are usually beneficial to the customers and the brands (Adeyemi, 2021). Thus, successful customer communications management for enhanced brand competitiveness in the market requires information and communication technology. Again, studies investigating the moderating influence of information and communication technology on the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness in the context of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria are limited in the literature.

However, Attri, Bhagwat and Agarwal (2020) studied the influence of technology on customer satisfaction. The study was conducted among 326 respondents with the employment of a quantitative research method. The findings of the study indicate that the role of technology is more prominent between zero moment of truth and customer satisfaction. Thus, technology positively and significantly enhances customer satisfaction. Ciobanu and Neamtu (2017) studied the impact and importance of new technologies in business development in the context of economic diversity. The study employed qualitative research method through focus group technique and the findings revealed that, new technologies; information and communication technology positively and significantly impact on business development. This is also corroborated with Noor and Ali (2009), the scholars evaluated technology, trust and e-banking adoption, the mediating effect of customer relationship management in the context of Malaysian banking industry. The study employed regression analysis and the findings revealed

that technology, trust and electronic banking significantly improves customer relationships performance in the context of banks in Malaysia.

Empirical literature on the moderating influence of information and communication technology on customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria is limited. This study aims to address this gap by adopting the technology acceptance model (TAM). Therefore, the objective of this study is;

- i. To investigate the moderating influence of information and communication technology on the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The philosophical underpinnings of this study are the technology acceptance model (TAM), which was propounded by Davis in 1989. This theory is employed to explain the individuals' acceptance, use and deployment of technologies (Surendran, 2012). Thus, two critical dimensions underpin this theoretical construct; the perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of making use of the technology which is important in the use of computer and the related characteristics of people taking advantage of the technology. The technology acceptance model (TAM) is of four dimensional variables; perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitudes and behaviours (Momani & Jamous, 2017; Dick & Nwosu, 2024).

The technology acceptance model's development adoption, acceptance and usage stems from three phases which include; adoption, validation and extension. In the adoption of technology, it is required that the technology will be tested, accepted and adopted based on several pertinent information system's applications. The validation of the technology, researchers articulated that, technology acceptance model (TAM) deploys objective measurement and evaluation of the use of technologies. The domain of extension introduce several research scholars and scientists unfolding new constructs, propositions and variables related with the TAM variables (Dick & Nwosu, 2024; Momani & Jamous, 2017). Hence, comprehending technology acceptance model from these premises will crop-up better simulation of the adoption and usage of emerging information resources. Hope in the adoption of technology enhance work-force control, competence and flexible leveraging of information. Thus, developing and deepening knowledge/skills in the workplace with lead to productivity (Chuttur, 2009; Sharp, 2007).

The development of technologies and acceptance by individual entrepreneurs or large scale businesses is rapidly increasing and touching all sectors and industries. Effective customer communications management should leverage information and communications technology. Hence, the relevance or implication of this theory to this study is that, technology adoption is significant to the implementation of customers' communications and relationships exchanges in the 21st century marketplace.

Concept of Customer Communications Management

The construct of customer communications management is the marketing communications functions of planning, organizing, directing and controlling the passage of information and messages which are outbound and intended to positively drive customers' engagement, relationships building, visibility and market acceptance of the organization, product or service brand (Nadube, 2021; Dick & Wilson, 2024). Customer communications management system in most workplaces are built for the transmission of information between the organization and the customers which ensures frictionless engagement with clients with a view to ensuring success for the market and the brands (Adeyemi, 2021; Nadube, 2021).

According to Cesarini et al (2006), the concept of customer communications management could be defined as the strategic focus of the organization to improve the creation, delivery, storage and retrieval of outbound communications with customers or the market. This encompass the management of the market. This encompass the management of the passage of messages or information within an organization or between the firm and organizational customers. The focus of customer communications management is to reach the company's audiences; customers, internal customers, venders, media stakeholders, suppliers and distributors (Antora-Fani, 2016). Hence, customers experience management is fundamental to the success of the firm and competitive advantage in the marketplace or industry.

Customer communications management leverages communication choices that are consistent, personalized, relevant, interactive and just-in-time. However, the implementation of customer communications management requires the use of the right resources to effectively and efficiently operationalize CCM to the advantage of the firm and the market (Nicoleta & Anisoara, 2017). Hence, the company should communicate effectively and efficiently with existing and potential consumers, staff, agents, distributors, suppliers and the publics (Adeyemi, 2021). Customer communications management is a more engaging strategies or choices in managing relationships in business.

Concept of Brand Competitiveness

The business space is dynamic and highly turbulent. Industries or sectors are in a state of intense competition among players or brands. This foregoing is informed by globalization and market liberalization which has resulted a world market (Opara & Adiele, 2014). Hence, globalization, market liberalization and the attendant information, communication and transportation technologies have forced a new wave of competition in the marketplace (Opara & Adiele, 2014; Kirmenia, Gakure & Waititu, 2014). Thus, the competitiveness of a company or a brand offering in the market in the new wave of competition, should have superior advantages in the launch of the marketing programme; product, price, promotion and physical distributions (Kirmemia, Gakure & Waitut, 2014). Hence, for a brand to be a dominants player of an industry, it must have competitive advantages by providing superior economic values better than the competitions' offerings in the market place (Kirmemia, Gakure & Waititu, 2014).

Today, most sectors in Nigeria, emerging and developed markets are facing both domestic and global competitions among players or brands. Organizations are expected to adapt their offerings to the challenges of their industries by offering better products and services compared to peers in order to attain competitive advantage and competitiveness in the industries (Claude, 2018). According to Claude (2018), brand competitiveness is the ability of product or service brands to create superior economic values; goods and services better than the competition in the market. This encompass a company's ability to design, produce, market and distribute superior value offerings relative to peers in the market (Claudo, 2018). Johannson (2003), posited that, competitiveness of a brand implies offering better value, high quality or low prices to the market. Hence, brand competitiveness is the ability of a brand offering superior value in the market relative to the competition in the market or industry (Johansson, 2003).

Concept of Information and Communication Technology

The concept of information technology is the use of any computers, storage, networking and other physical devices, infrastructure and processes to create, process, store, secure and exchange all firms of electronic data to support the proper functioning of the work organization. It is the activity that involves information processing and integrated communication through electronic equipment (Castagna & Bigelow, 2021). Thus, information technology encompasses all types of technologies that operate with information, whether in an information system, in the automation of an industrial system etc. Typically, information technology is employed for a wide variety of human lives; business operations, personal life, public governance, entertainment etc (Napoleon & Amaechi, 2021).

Information technology encompasses three major areas in the world of work. The information technology department of most established organizations ensures that the company systems, networks and data applications should connect and function optimally. The information technology team in the workplace takes care of the following; the deployment and maintenance of business applications, infrastructure and services; servers, networks and storage etc. The monitoring, optimization and troubleshoots the effective performance of applications, services and infrastructure monitoring and overseeing the security and governance applications, services and infrastructure (Napoleon & Amaechi, 2021).

Information technology bestowed different job roles for staff in the workplace. The IT unit has administrators, support staff, applications, compliance etc. administrators are IT personnel that handle the day-to-day deployment or execution and monitoring of information technology environment, systems, networks application system. The administrators also carryout software upgrade, training, software license, management, procurement services, data management and observation of business process and compliance requirements (Khawan, 2021). Again, the IT unit also has help desk staff who specialize in taking questions, collect data and information and direct troubleshooting efforts for the management of both hard and soft wares. Information technology support usually includes information technology asset and management of change, supporting administration with procurement, managing backups and data recovery and software applications (Prikhno, Kuksa & Mihaycou, 2021).

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Furthermore, business organizations rely on software to perform work optimally. Some software applications are procured, sourced and deployed from third party agents or institutions which include email server applications. However, most companies retain an employee of experienced and knowledgeable developers that create the applications and interfaces. Importantly, we also have employees or professionals in charge of compliance. Business organizations are under obligation to observe various government and industry driven regulatory and oversight requirements. IT employees play a major role in securing and monitoring access to business data and applications to ensure that such assets are employed according to prescribed industry and government policy that conform to industry standards or requirements (Bigelow & Castagna, 2021).

Moreso, information technology adoption in a company helps in revolutionizing business organization. IT infrastructure of a company enhance business operational effectiveness (Araasteh *et al.*, 2011). According to these scholars, information technology could be defined as the use of computers to create, process, store, retrieve and exchange all kinds of electronic data and information for organizational and individual effectiveness. Following from this premise, it is noted that, information technology is an enabler making organization's work force and its processes and operations to be effective and time efficient (Napoleon & Amaechi, 2021). Thus, information technology has great impact on society and businesses. Historically, office and business management were operated manually or traditional. This traditional approach incurs so much man hours, business operations were not effective and timely, the introduction of information technology enhance productivity and efficiency in the workplace (Hawash & Lang, 2010). Thus, it enhance workers skills and improve the efficiency of production.

The information technology introduction in the workplace provide growth and productivity of the company and its employees who have access to the technology and ability to use same. This foregoing has made a considerable trend of research underpinning information technology industry investments in order to measure its contribution to individual, corporate and public governance growths and development in economies nations (Hawash & Lang, 2010). Information technology today is highly laudable as it help in driving business organizations, institutions of all kinds and resulting significant successes to these entities. Today, there is no individuals and organizations that can make significant progress without information technology adoption. Their system must be IT driven, wared with information technology. This will provide the grounding base for individuals and institutions to communicate with their clients both in the domestic business environment and the global business space (Hawash & Lang, 2010). The next section discusses communication technology that draws extensively from the infrastructure of information technology.

Communication technology is the transfer of messages and information among people and or machines through the use of technology. Communication technology aids individuals and organization to make decisions, solve problems and control machines through radio, television, blogs, websites, live video, social media technologies, email communications etc (Jackson, 2022; Ratheeswari, 2018). Thus, communication technology is any communication devices or equipment which encompass mobile phones, computer and network hardware, software, the

internet, satellite systems employed to transmit messages/information among people, organizations, institutions, community and nations (Ratheeswari, 2018). Today communication technology is an enabler, successfully driving both individual and commercial activities and helping business around the world to transact effectively and efficiently.

According to Jackson (2022) communication technology could be defined as all equipment such as telephone, internet, radio, television etc employed to transmit information and messages among people for personal and business transactions. Communication technology is a key factor in driving the development of virtually all sectors in the economy of nations. It has significant impact on all business especially services business such as banking, transportation, logistics, wholesale and retail business etc (Tomar, 2021). Individuals and businesses can be in different locations and exchange information to drive their logistical and critical business decisions in workplaces.

Communication technology is applied for the improvement of social, economic and political development of nations. To this end, members of society are given the opportunity to have access to communication technologies which are cellphone, the internet wireless network, and other communication medium which help to drive their individual businesses and translate their quota to economic growth and development in real time with business partners in different geographic locations employing these communication technologies such as telephone, messaging, voice and video conferencing, social media, websites etc.

Communication between people takes different forms. When an individual stand before an audiences to make presentation orally, that is communication but not communication technology. When people are talking face to face, they are not using communication technologies. However, communication technology involves the use of written notes, instant messaging, telephone, email, internet, social media etc (Chen, Castillo & Ligon, 2015). Hence, when individuals transfer messages/information among people, community, institutions etc through the employment of these evolving technologies, communication technology is operationalized to take effect. It is therefore pertinent to note that communications technology brings about effectiveness and efficiency in human activities and work organizations.

Communications technology comes with attendant benefits, it improves the quality of human life as it is deployed as learning and education media, the mass communication media promoting and campaigning practical and important issues such as the health and social dimensions (Jones, 2012). Communication technology provides wider knowledge and can help in gaining and accessing messages and information. It is more efficient, faster method of communication in emergencies, able to communication from anywhere in the world. Again, long distance communication is made easier (Jones, 2012). Communication technology facilitates communication between individuals or groups who are not physically present at the same geographic locations.

Communication technologies such as telephones, telex, internet, radio, television, fax, videos etc are usually employed for effective and efficient communication. again, computer based technologies such as electronic data interchange and emails are also employed (Sala & Mignone, 2014). Thus, these technologies have significantly improved the lives of individuals

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and businesses around the world. However, inspite of the benefits and advantages associated with communications technology, we have disadvantages or limitations inherent in this technology. Notable limiting factors are lack of privacy, potential for misunderstanding, distractions from real life and a major decline of English grammar and spelling (Talebian, Movahed & Rezvanfar, 2014). The next section discusses the empirical literature of this study.

Conceptual Framework of Study Variables and Hypothesis Development

The independent or predictor variables customer communication management. The dependent or criterion variable is brand competitiveness while the moderating variable is information and communication technology. This is demonstrated in the model

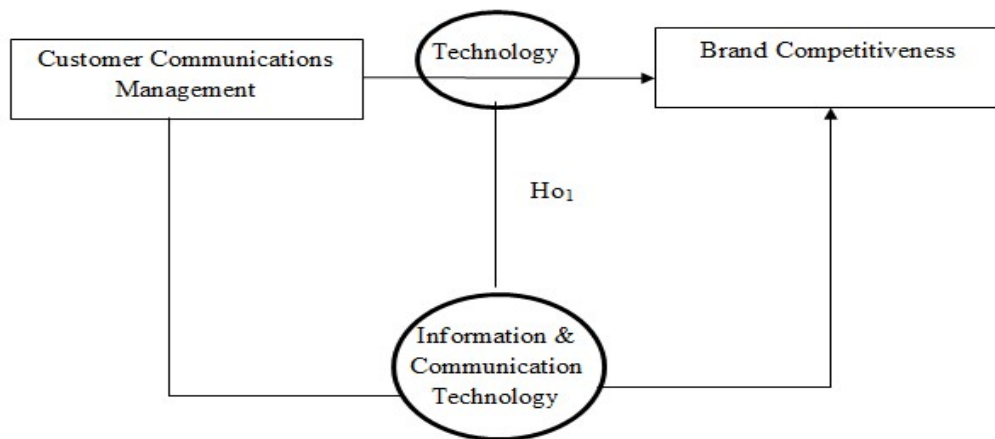


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of Study Variables

Source: DIma (2017); Gupta, Gauear, Rudd and Foroudi (2020)

Moderating Influence of Information and Communication Technology on Customer Communications Management and Brand Competitiveness

In the 21st century business management, organizational processes and activities are largely driven by technologies in order to successfully manage the interface between business process and external stakeholders. This foregoing is highly supported with empirical works Attri, Bhagwat and Agarwal (2020). The scholars investigated technology as a mediator to enhance customer satisfaction. This study was carried out among 326 respondents and the study employed a quantities research design. The finding of the study indicates that, the role of technology is more prominent between zero moment of truth and customer satisfaction. Thus, technology positively and significantly enhances customer satisfaction.

The incorporation of technology in business management successfully improves business operations. Ciobanu and Neamtu (2017) studied the impact and importance of new technologies in business development in a context of economic diversity. The study employed qualitative research method through focus group method and the findings of the study indicates that, new technologies; information and communication technologies positively and significantly impact on business development. This finding is corroborated with the works of Wahab, Noor and Ali (2009), the authors evaluated technology trust and e-banking adoption, the mediating effect of customer relationship management performance in the context of Malasian banking industry. The study employed the regression analysis and the finding of the study revealed that technology trust and electronic banking significantly improves customer relationship performance in a context specific of banks in Malaysia.

Information and communication technologies positively drive the value delivery of all sectors and businesses. Nikhashemi, Paim and Tarofder (2013) studied internet technology, customer relationship management and customer loyalty, customer retention and satisfaction perspective. The study employed a quantitative research design and the findings of the study revealed that, internet technology significantly improves customer relationship management. Again, internet technology positively and significantly enhance scustomer loyalty, retention and satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the empirical works of Raji, et al (2017), the authors evaluated the determinants of e-logistics customer satisfaction and the mediating role of information and communication technology in the context of e-logistics users. The study employed a quantitative research method and the finding of the study indicates that e-payment, website design have significant and positive relationship with e-logistics customer satisfaction.

The analysis of the effect of information and communication technologies brings about customers' attraction. This foregoing is validated with the works of Boroujeni (2022), the scholar carried out an analysis of the effect of ICT on the customer attraction with mediating role of organizational intelligence. The study employed a quantitative research methodology and the finding of the study indicates that information and communication technology positively and significantly influences customer attraction. Again, the effect of ICT on customers' attraction is mediated by organizational intelligence. This study finding are corroborated with the empirical study of Hector and Rudy (2022), the authors studied the adoption of ICT as an enabler of frugal innovation to achieve customer satisfaction with the mediating effect of frugal innovation. The study was domesticated among SMEs in Colombia and the study employed the structural equation modeling. Finding of the study revealed that ICT adoption has a significant influence on both frugal innovation and customer satisfaction. Again, greater level of frugal innovation increase customer satisfaction. However, the frugal innovation demonstrated to play a significant partial mediating effect on the relationship between information and communication technology adoption and customer satisfaction.

Information and communication technologies adoption successful drives business success including customer satisfaction. Imran, Hamid and Hameed (2019) studied the contributing factors towards e-logistics customer satisfaction and the mediating role of information technology. The study adopted a quantitative research method and the finding of the study indicates that e-logistics enhance customer satisfaction through the mediating role of

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information technology. This finding is consistent with the empirical works of Xu, Thing and Venkatesh (2022), the scholars investigated the effect of ICT service innovation and complementary strategies on brand equity and customer loyalty in the context of consumer technology market. The study employed a quantitative research design and the finding of the study revealed that, ICT service innovation significantly improves brand equity and customer loyalty. The innovation of information and communications technology at work enhances brand equity and successfully drive customer brand equity and successfully drive customer loyalty and retention in the market.

Electronic business transactions implemented by workplace management improves business performance in terms of service quality and customer retention. This position is in agreement with the study of Langat, Bonuke and Kibet (2021), the authors evaluated mobile banking service quality and customer retention and the moderated mediation model of customer perceived value and perceived corporate image. The study was conducted in the Kenyan banking industry, the research method adopted was quantitative research design and the finding of the study revealed that mobile banking service quality significantly improves customer retention. Again, customer perceived value and perceived corporate image significantly mediate the relationship between mobile banking service quality and customer retention of 400 consumers of mobile banking services in Kenya.

Information and communication technology adoption in the work organization improves business performance. This position is validated with the empirical works of Setiowati *et al* (2015), investigated the effect of ICT adoption on marketing capabilities and performance in the context of Indonesian SMEs of the fashion sub-sector. The study made use of descriptive quantitative research method and the finding of the study revealed that ICT adoption has positive and significant influence on SMEs marketing capabilities. Again, marketing capabilities positively and significantly influence SMEs performance in the Indonesian small and medium fashion designers companies. Information and communications technologies adoption successfully improves marketing capabilities both within the organization and in the marketplace and bring about business performance.

In the 21st century business management, information and communications technology adoption can only be avoided to the detriment of the smooth operations and success of the organization. Corporations are therefore, expected to make significant investment in information and communications technologies. Ong *et al* (2016) examined the relationship between ICT adoption and business performance in Malaysia and Indonesia, a comparative examinations. The study employed structural equation modeling and the finding of the study indicates that ICT adoption positively and significantly correlates with business performance in the nations of Malaysia and Indonesia women entrepreneurs. Thus, women entrepreneurs in both nations are encouraged to be more involved in the use of ICT to continuously drive their businesses.

Information technology integration in the work organization improves business performance. Mwithiga, Njihia and Iraki (2017), the scholars studied information technology integration and firm performance in the context of microfinance banks in Kenya. The study employed a mixed

research method and the finding of the study revealed that information technology integration positively and significantly correlates with business performance. Integrating information and communications technology systems and operationalization improves business performance of companies in most industries and sectors. The finding of the foregoing empirical works revealed that information and communication technologies are laudable mediators for successful business operations. From the revelations above, information and communication technologies adoption by the three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria will significantly and positively moderate the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the cross-sectional survey research design. The explanatory or hypotheses testing research design was adopted with a correlational method of investigation. The population of the study was the one hundred (100) three-star hotels operating in the South-south region of Nigeria. A census study was employed, hence the population was fully studied. However, one hundred (100) marketing managers, one marketing manager in each hotel constituted the respondents of the study. Primary data were collected for the study, one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the marketing managers. The study instrument was pilot-tested, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient and the confirmatory factor analysis were used for instruments reliability and validity respectively. All the variables were within the recommended threshold. The study instrument also satisfied face and content validities. Data for the study were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 25.0.

Results and Discussions

Univariate Analysis

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Field Report		
Questionnaire distributed	100	100
Questionnaire returned	95	95
Questionnaire used	90	90
Gender		
Male	79	87.8
Female	11	12.2
Total	174	100
Age Distribution)		
21-38 years	4	4.4
39-49 years	63	70.0
50-59 years	23	25.6
Total	90	100
Marital Status		

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Married	71	78.9
Single	19	21.1
Total	90	100
Educational Status		
HND/1 st Degree	73	81.1
Masters Degree	15	16.7
Ph.D	2	2.2
Total	90	100
Years of Working Experience		
5-10	36	40.0
11-15	41	45.6
16-20	5	5.6
21-25	8	8.9
Total	90	100

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 1 provides explanations for the marketing managers’ demographics of three-star hotels in the South-south region of Nigeria. The field report shows that one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the marketing managers, only ninety five (95) copies were returned representing 95% of the total number of questionnaire distributed. After coding, editing/data cleansing, only ninety (90) copies of the questionnaire representing 90% of the total number of questionnaire distributed were validly used for the study’s analysis. Managers demographics in terms of gender revealed that seventy nine (79) respondents representing 87.8% were male marketing managers, only eleven (11) respondents representing 12.1% were female marketing managers. The age distribution of the managers shows that four (4) managers were in the age range of 21-38 years representing 4.4% of the total number of respondents. Sixty three (63) marketing managers representing 70.0% were in the age range of 39-49 years. However, twenty three (23) marketing managers representing 25.6% were in the age range of 50-59 years. Thus, the three-star hotel industry in South-south, Nigeria constitutes more of young marketing managers.

The respondent’s demographics in terms of marital status shows seventy one (71) marketing managers representing 78.9% were married while nineteen (19) managers representing 21.1% were single. The educational status dimension indicates that, seventy three (73) marketing managers representing 81.1% were HND/first degree holders. Fifteen (15) respondents representing 16.7% were master’s degree holders. In contrast, only two (2) marketing managers representing 2.2% were holders of the Ph.D degree. Data revealed that the industry’s marketing managers are highly educated. Measurements of the years of managers’ working experience revealed that thirty six (36) managers, representing 40.0% have 5-10 years working experience, forty one (41) marketing managers representing 45.6% have 11-15 years of working experience. Five (5) respondents representing 5.6% have 16-20 years working experience. Again, eight (8) marketing managers representing 8.9% have 21-25 years working experience.

Thus, the marketing managers in the three-star hotels industry have sufficient years of working experience.

Multivariate Analysis

Test of Hypothesis 1

Ho₁: Information and communication technology does not significantly moderate the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria

H_{A1}: Information and communication technology significantly moderate the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-South, Nigeria

Table 2 Correlation for Customer Communications Management, Brand Competitiveness, Information and Communication Technology

Control Variables			Customer Comm. Mgt	Brand Competiveness	Information Technology
-none ^a	Customer Communications Management	Correlation	1.000	.934	.337
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	.001
		df	0	88	88
	Brand Competiveness	Correlation	.934	1.000	.266
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	.011
		df	88	0	88
	Information Technology	Correlation	.337	.266	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.001	.011	.
		df	88	88	0
Information Technology	Customer Communications Management	Correlation	1.000	.830	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	
		df	0	87	
	Brand Competiveness	Correlation	.830	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		df	87	0	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Source: SPSS Output, Version 25.0 (2025)

Table 2 provides an explanation for the moderating influence of information and communication technology on the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness in the context of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria. From the model it was revealed that the correlation coefficient in the absence of information and communication technology is 0.934 when information and communication technology was imposed, the correlation coefficient shifted to 0.830 indicating a positive and significant influence of information and communication technology on the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness. Again, the probability value is 0.000 which is less than the critical value of 0.05. We therefore reject the hypothesis at the 95% confidence level. Thus, information and communication technology significantly moderate the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the moderating influence of information and Communication technology on the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria. The result of the study revealed that information and communication technology significantly and positively moderate the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness in the context of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria. This finding is corroborated with the empirical works of Ciobanu and Neamtu (2017), the authors investigated the impact and importance of new technologies in business development in the context of economic diversity. The study employed qualitative research method through focus group techniques and the findings of the study indicates that new technologies, information and communication technologies, positively and significantly impact on business development.

Furthermore, the finding of this study is in agreement with the works of Attri, Bhagwat and Agarwal (2020), the scholars investigated technology as a mediator to enhance customer satisfaction. The study was carried out among 326 respondents and the study employed a quantitative research design. The findings of the study indicates that the role of technology is more prominent between zero moment of truth and customer satisfaction. The study concludes that technology positively and significantly enhance customer satisfaction. This is also in agreement with Wahab, Noor and Ali (2009) the authors evaluated technology trust and e-banking adoption, the mediating effect of customer relationship management performance in the context of Malaysian banking industry. The study employed the regression analysis and the findings of the study revealed that technology trust and e-banking significantly improves relationship performance in a context specific of banks in Malaysia.

Moreso, the findings of our study is highly supported with the works of Boroujeni (2022), the scholar carried out an analysis of the effect of ICT on customer attraction with mediating role of organizational intelligence. The study made use of quantitative research methodology and the finding of the study indicates that information and communication technology positively and significantly influence customer attraction. Again, the effect of ICT on customers' attraction is mediated by organizational intelligence. This finding is also supported with

Hectow and Rudy (2022) the authors studied the adoption of ICT as an enabler of frugal innovation to achieve customer satisfaction with the mediating effect of frugal innovation. The study was domesticated among SMEs in Colombia. The study employed structural equation modeling and the findings of the study revealed that ICT adoption has a significant influence on both frugal innovation and customer satisfaction.

In addition, our empirical study finding is consistent with the works of Xi, Thing and Venkatesh (2022), the scholars investigated the effect of ICT service innovation and complementary strategies on brand equity and customer loyalty in the context of consumer technology market. The study employed quantitative research design and the findings of the study revealed that ICT service innovation significantly improves brand equity and customer loyalty. The study concluded that innovation of information and communication technology at work enhance brand equity and successfully drive customer brand equity, customer loyalty and retention in the market. Again the works of Setiowati *et al* (2015), is highly supportive. The scholars investigated the effect of ICT adoption on marketing capabilities and performance in the context of Indonesian SMEs of the fashion industry. The study employed descriptive quantitative research methods and the findings indicates that ICT adoption has positive and significant influence on SMEs marketing capabilities.

In the same vein, the study of Mwithiga, Njihia and Iraki (2017) is in agreement with our study finding. The scholars studied the integration of information technology and firm performance. The study adopted a mixed research methods and the findings of the study revealed that information technology integration positively and significantly correlates with business performance. This is also supported with the works of Ong *et al.* (2016), the scholars examined the relationship between ICT adoption and business performance in Malaysia and Indonesia, a comparative examination. The study made use of structural equation modeling and the findings of the study indicates that ICT adoption positively ad significantly correlates with business performance in the nations of Malaysia and Indonesia women entrepreneurs. Thus, Raji *et al* (2017) is highly supportive. Information and communication technology influence business performance such as e-payment, e-logistics, e-banking, e-government etc. Information and communication technology significantly influence the relationship between customer communications and brand competitiveness in the context of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the moderating influence of information and communication technology on the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness of three-star hotels in South-south Nigeria. From the empirical results and discourse, we conclude that information and communication technology positively and significantly enhance the relationship between customer communications management and brand competitiveness in a context specific of three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria.

The following recommendations were made;

- i. The management of the three-star hotels in the South-south region should make significant investment in information technology. This will enhance real time engagement with customers, drive brand visibility and bring about competitiveness of their brands in the marketplace.
- ii. The three-star hotels in the South-south region of Nigeria should leverage communication technologies to even reach a wider global customers for customized solutions for customers' needs and preferences. This will significantly drive their brands competitiveness in the industry.
- iii. Management of the three-star hotels in the South-south region of Nigerian should invest in the automation of their business systems. This will ensure effective and efficient real time transaction exchanges with customers, enhance brand visibility and significantly improve brand competitiveness in the market.

Contribution to Knowledge

Studies have been conducted on the influence of information and communication technologies on businesses and their performance (Attiri, Bhagwat & Agarwal, 2020; Ciobanu & Neamtu, 2017; Noor & Ali, 2009). These studies were conducted in different contexts. However, the moderating influence of information and communication technology on the relationship between customer communication management and brand competitiveness in a context specific of three-star hotels in South-south region of Nigeria is limited in the literature. This study was able to fill this gap in the empirical literature of customer communications management, brand competitiveness, information and communication technologies.

Theoretical/Practical Implications

The theoretical implication of this study is that, this research output will be a companion for students, academics and scholars in the fields of information and communication technology in business, customer communications management, relationship marketing, customer relationship management, brand management and competitive strategy. The practical or managerial implication is that practitioners of digital technology application in business, customer and brand performance management will be well guided in their business operations.

Suggestions for Further Studies

This study is limited to the three-star hotels in South-south, Nigeria. Future research efforts from scholars should domesticate this study in other hotel classes in the South-south region of Nigeria. Again, researchers can also replicate the study in the three-star hotels in other regions of Nigeria and other nations. This study can also be carried out in other industries or sectors of Nigeria including other countries. This is to measure whether potential studies will birth similar, the same or different results from our study.

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