

BRAND AUTHENTICITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the relationship between components of brand authenticity and customer loyalty within the hospitality industry in Edo State, Nigeria. Adopting a cross-sectional survey research design, data were collected from a sample of 138 hotel customers selected from a population of 210 using the Taro Yamane formula and simple random sampling. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data measured on a five-point Likert scale. It was validated for content and face validity and tested for reliability using the test-retest method. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that brand message consistency ($\beta = 0.165$, $p = 0.008$), perceived customer value ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.000$), brand transparency ($\beta = 0.394$, $p = 0.000$), and brand experience ($\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.040$) all have significant positive effects on customer loyalty. The study concludes that brand authenticity is a critical driver of customer loyalty in the hospitality sector. It recommends that hotel operators should focus on consistent brand messaging, delivering customer value, enhancing transparency, and improving customer experiences to build lasting customer relationships and sustain competitive advantage.

Keywords: Brand Authenticity, Brand Message Consistency, Customer Loyalty, Perceived Customer Value, Brand Transparency, Brand Experience

INTRODUCTION

In the current competitive and experience-oriented economy, cultivating and maintaining customer loyalty is essential for corporate success, especially in the hospitality sector. Customer loyalty goes beyond mere repeat consumption; it signifies a profound emotional bond between consumers and brands, frequently yielding favourable word-of-mouth, enhanced customer lifetime value, and a durable competitive edge. Customer loyalty is frequently influenced by the authenticity and consistency of a brand's identity, communication, and service delivery amidst numerous available options.

Brand authenticity has become a crucial factor in fostering consumer loyalty, particularly in the service industry, where trust and customer experience significantly influence brand views. Consequently, several brands evoke authenticity via ads and product packaging. Examples encompass Adidas' commitment to being "once innovative, now classic, always authentic," Coca-Cola's assertion of being "the real thing," and Nike's declaration of "authentic athletic performance" (Safeer & Liu, 2023). Cinelli and LeBoeuf (2020) define brand authenticity as an assessment of the

veracity of a brand's image. Genuine brands are typically perceived by consumers as trustworthy entities that demonstrate consistency in their communications, transparency in their operations, and a sustained commitment to delivering meaningful value, all of which shape stronger perceptions of authenticity. These attributes are especially crucial in the hospitality sector, as patrons rely heavily on brand reputation, past experiences, and perceived integrity when making service-related decisions.

Consumer desire for genuine brands has risen due to misleading corporate activities and the abundance of indistinguishable brands (Moulard et al., 2021). Certain brands frequently commit errors, resulting in prompt reactions in most instances. The issue over Gucci's blackface jumper (Garrett, 2019), Pepsi's contentious advertisement with Kendall Jenner (Dan, 2020), and Peloton's bike debut in a prominent television series (Swant, 2021) are notable events that have generated adverse press. Amidst a scandal, people are inclined to pay a premium and demonstrate loyalty towards a company they regard as more genuine. Furthermore, people assign increased accountability to real brands and diminished responsibility to inauthentic brands (Guevremont & Grohmann, 2018). Consequently, favourable impressions of a brand serve as a defence against adverse publicity, allowing customers to swiftly revert to their pre-scandal attitudes (Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021). Conversely, elevated levels of brand authenticity can promote forgiveness and mitigate damage.

In Nigeria, where the hotel industry is rapidly expanding due to heightened urbanisation and tourism growth, comprehending the impact of brand authenticity on consumer loyalty is both pertinent and crucial. The research examined four primary elements of brand authenticity—consistency of brand messaging, perceived customer value, brand transparency, and brand experience—to analyse their individual and cumulative impacts on consumer loyalty within the hotel sector. Consistency in brand messaging guarantees that the brand conveys a unified identity across all interactions. Perceived customer value denotes the customer's assessment of advantages obtained in relation to costs incurred. Brand transparency emphasises the degree to which a brand interacts with its customers in an open and honest manner. Brand experience includes the complete emotional and functional engagement between the consumer and the brand.

This study aims to address a knowledge gap by empirically investigating the impact of brand authenticity components on customer loyalty, in light of the escalating competition and heightened expectations of hospitality customers in Edo State. Although empirical literature on brand authenticity has expanded and clearly demonstrates its positive impact on consumer intentions and behaviours, the processes behind these correlations remain mostly unexplored. In light of this deficiency, there are ongoing research appeals (Bartsch et al., 2022; Sodergren, 2021) for more advanced investigations of brand authenticity. The results are anticipated to assist hospitality managers, marketers, and brand strategists in formulating genuine brand strategies that enhance client engagement and promote enduring loyalty. This research seeks to enhance the broader discussion on customer loyalty by providing practical insights rooted in the local hospitality sector.

Statement of the Problem

The hospitality industry in Edo State is experiencing increasing competition as a result of rising tourism, urban development, and customer expectations. Despite this growth, many hospitality businesses struggle to build and retain a loyal customer base. Inconsistent brand communication, lack of transparency, and failure to deliver meaningful brand experiences often lead to customer dissatisfaction and low retention rates. While promotional strategies may attract first-time customers, the inability to establish a consistent and authentic brand presence can undermine long-term loyalty, ultimately affecting profitability and market share.

Moreover, customers are becoming more value-conscious and emotionally driven in their decision-making. They are no longer satisfied with superficial branding or generic service offerings; instead, they seek genuine experiences, transparency in operations, and consistent communication that aligns with the brand's promises. In Edo State, many hospitality brands have yet to fully understand or implement strategies that foster authenticity in a way that resonates with the modern consumer. As a result, the gap between customer expectations and brand delivery continues to widen, weakening customer trust and loyalty.

Despite the growing recognition of brand authenticity as a strategic asset, limited empirical research exists within the Nigerian hospitality context, particularly in Edo State, on how its components—brand message consistency, perceived customer value, brand transparency, and brand experience—individually and collectively influence customer loyalty. Without this insight, hospitality businesses may continue to adopt ineffective branding approaches that fail to retain customers. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by critically examining the effect of brand authenticity on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry of Edo State.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the effect of brand authenticity on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. ascertain the effect of brand message consistency on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State.
- ii. explore the effect of perceived customer value on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State.
- iii. determine the effect of brand transparency on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State.
- iv. evaluate the effect of brand experience on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Review

Theory of Brand Authenticity

The theory of brand authenticity emphasizes that consumers perceive a brand as authentic when it displays continuity (being true to itself over time), credibility (honesty and transparency), integrity (moral character), and symbolism (connection to consumers' personal values). Morhart *et al.* (2015) argue that brand authenticity is not just built through branding messages but through consistent experiences that align with the brand's core values and customer expectations. This theory is highly relevant to the hospitality industry, where service delivery, environment, and customer interaction shape the brand image. In the context of the present study, the theory helps to explain how brand message consistency, brand transparency, and brand experience influence customers' perceptions of authenticity. When these components are effectively managed, they strengthen customer trust and emotional bonds with the brand, ultimately leading to higher customer loyalty.

Customer Perceived Value Theory

The customer perceived value theory posits that the value a customer places on a product or service is determined by their overall assessment of the benefits received versus the costs incurred. Zeithaml (1988) posited that value is subjective and shaped by individual preferences, expectations, and experiences. In service sectors like hospitality, perceived value includes tangible aspects like room quality and pricing, as well as intangible factors such as emotional satisfaction, staff behavior, and brand trust. This theory directly supports the study's investigation into perceived customer value as a determinant of customer loyalty. If customers perceive that the benefits of engaging with a hospitality brand in Edo State outweigh the costs, they are more likely to return, recommend the service, and stay loyal over time. The theory provides a useful lens for analyzing how customers' judgments of value affect their loyalty decisions.

Conceptual Review

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity denotes the degree to which a brand is regarded as real, reliable, and aligned with its values, commitments, and identity. It includes a genuine dedication to providing genuine value, alignment between brand actions and consumer expectations, transparency in communication and operations, and consistency in brand message. Genuine brands resonate with consumers due to their perceived honesty and relatability, fostering deeper emotional ties and enduring loyalty, particularly in sectors such as hospitality where customer trust and experience are paramount.

Conscious companies develop market products that enhance consumer proximity to authenticity (Audrezet *et al.*, 2020). Brand authenticity is essential for fostering consumer trust, utilising both iconic and existential dimensions (Huang & Guo, 2021; Srivastava *et al.*, 2020). Brand authenticity

is recognised for enhancing brand equity and augmenting consumer experience (Sodergren, 2021). Consumers highly appreciate authentic brands. Consequently, organisations possessing authentic brands in their portfolio enhance consumer value perceptions, as these brands are congruent with the company's primary purpose, corporate practices, message (Vredenburg et al., 2020), and heritage (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). A recent systematic research (Sodergren, 2021) indicates that brand authenticity generates positive brand-related assessments and emotions, enhancing purchase intentions and brand loyalty.

Brand Message Consistency

Brand message consistency denotes the coherence and alignment of a brand's communication across all customer interactions and channels (Sitinjak & Ariyani, 2024). It entails conveying a consistent core message, tone, and values across advertising, customer service, online presence, and in-person interactions, ensuring that customers perceive a coherent and dependable brand impression. In the hospitality sector, a consistent brand message cultivates familiarity, strengthens trust, and elevates client confidence in service quality, eventually promoting loyalty. A brand that consistently conveys its identity and value proposition is more likely to be regarded as reliable and genuine by its customers.

Quach et al. (2022) assert that consistency in social media material is crucial for customers' comprehension of the information and attributes offered by brands in diverse contexts. Content consistency refers to the uniformity of information attributes across diverse media (Lee et al., 2019). Content consistency is an additional characteristic that aids clients in assimilating new knowledge. Social media users frequently subscribe to certain accounts (e.g., liking a page on Facebook or following individuals on Twitter) to obtain continuous updates. Small enterprises can gain from improved content uniformity across all aspects, both significant and little. Brands can identify the optimal levels of low- and high-arousal emotionality, informativeness, and creativity for their positioning strategy and subsequently sustain those levels (Becker & Gijsenberg, 2023).

Impact of Consistency Message on Brand Perception

Sitinjak and Ariyani (2024) outlined the following as the impact of a consistent message on the perception of the brand.

- i. Brand identity stability: Message consistency supports brand identity stability, creating a solid foundation for brand perception.
- ii. Reliability and trust: Consistency creates an impression of reliability that strengthens consumer trust in the brand.
- iii. Ease of brand recognition: Consistent messaging facilitates brand recognition, allowing consumers to quickly identify and understand brand values.
- iv. Influence on consumer experience: Consumers tend to have a more positive experience when the messages they receive are consistent with the brand image they have been exposed to beforehand.

Perceived Customer Value

Perceived customer value denotes the customer's assessment of the whole value of a product or service, based on the advantages obtained in relation to the expenditures incurred, including monetary expenditure, time, and effort. In the hospitality sector, perceived value is shaped by elements such as service quality, comfort, convenience, personnel conduct, and the emotional gratification derived from the encounter. Customers are more inclined to return and exhibit brand loyalty when they perceive substantial value for their investment. Consequently, augmenting perceived customer value is essential for fostering enduring customer loyalty in a competitive service-oriented landscape. Favourable customer perceptions of a brand cultivate a robust engagement with it. This association enhances both attitudinal and behavioural brand loyalty (Zhang et al., 2020). The advantages derived from products are evaluated based on the costs incurred or perceived sacrifices (Almeida et al., 2022). Previous literature has categorised PV according to two motives. Functional motivations prioritise tangible necessities such as price, convenience, and quality, while nonfunctional motivations focus on abstract aspirations, including social and emotional demands (Chen & Hu, 2010).

Brand Transparency

Brand transparency denotes the degree to which a brand candidly conveys its values, operations, policies, and decision-making processes to its customers in a forthright and comprehensible manner. It entails transparency on service offerings, pricing, corporate processes, and the management of customer feedback. In the hospitality sector, brand transparency cultivates trust by diminishing uncertainty and indicating honesty, particularly when customers select between rival service suppliers. A transparent hospitality brand fosters trust and strengthens emotional relationships with guests, hence improving consumer loyalty. Transparency is frequently defined as a strategy for knowledge sharing that enhances the clarity and comprehensibility of informational signals (Lambillotte et al., 2022). Brands that prioritise transparent communication provide stakeholders with comprehensive information to ensure they are informed and to cultivate trust-based relationships (Schnackenberg et al., 2020).

Transparency policies can address significant concerns pertinent to several stakeholders, such as the disclosure of compensation information (Brown et al., 2022) or performance in environmental, social, and governance areas (Reber et al., 2022). By prioritising transparency in their competitive approach, these brands successfully established enduring customer relationships, fostered trust, and developed new pathways for differentiation (Keller, 2020; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Nonetheless, the implementation of transparency may elevate operational expenses and render brands vulnerable to the disclosure of proprietary information, resulting in undesirable external scrutiny (Suddaby & Panwar, 2022). Moreover, consumers may experience information overload, resulting in inadequate processing of available evidence, which can subsequently impair the quality and effectiveness of decision-making (Branco et al., 2016). Consequently, although transparency has the potential to serve as an intangible differentiator for brands (Keller, 2020), managers generally lack awareness regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of transparency initiatives in positively shaping customer brand perceptions.

Brand Experience

Brand experience denotes the cumulative impression and emotional reaction a client develops through both direct and indirect experiences with a brand over time. It includes all touchpoints—such as reservation procedures, staff interactions, atmosphere, service execution, online engagement, and post-stay follow-up—that influence the customer's perception. In the hotel sector, a favourable brand experience encompasses memorable, personalised, and seamless service that fulfils or exceeds customer expectations. A consistently gratifying brand experience enhances emotional connection, promotes repeat business, and cultivates enduring customer loyalty. Contemporary consumers acquire things and services not only for their functional attributes and advantages but also for the enjoyable experiences derived from their purchases. Brand marketers consistently advocate for novel strategies to cultivate outstanding brand experiences that enhance the advantageous link between the brand and consumers (Kim & Han, 2020). A distinctive brand experience fosters a sense of belonging among consumers and enhances their self-connection with the brand, hence facilitating brand-self connection (Gao & Shen, 2024).

Sensory experiences are essential precursors to tourists' connection and identification with a site. Positive sensory experiences associated with a destination enhance visitors' reliance on and affiliation with that destination (Ai et al., 2022). A favourable sensory experience will enhance the brand relationship (Hwang et al., 2021). A robust cognitive and emotional connection between consumers and brands fosters favourable intentions towards a brand, hence markedly enhancing loyalty (Jang, 2021). The sensory brand experience positively influences brand loyalty (Beig & Nika, 2022; Hwang et al., 2021). Sensory experience positively influences both WPM (Willingness to Pay More) and RI (Repurchase Intentions) (Ong et al., 2018). The sensory aspect of destination brand experience positively influences tourists' intention to visit (Lin et al., 2023; Martins et al., 2021). The online sensory experience of a destination positively influences consumers' intention to visit offline (Li et al., 2023). A retail study examining a virtual tour in relation to brand experience demonstrated that sensory experiences significantly enhanced intentions to visit the store (Baek et al., 2020).

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to a customer's consistent preference and commitment to a particular brand over time, often demonstrated through repeat patronage, positive word-of-mouth, and resistance to switching to competitors. In the hospitality industry, customer loyalty is influenced by service satisfaction, trust, emotional connection, and perceived value. Loyal customers are more likely to return for future stays, recommend the brand to others, and forgive occasional service lapses. Building and maintaining customer loyalty is essential for long-term profitability and competitive advantage in a service-driven sector like hospitality.

Review of Empirical Literature

Empirical research on brand authenticity, brand experience, and perceived value consistently demonstrates that these constructs are central to the development of brand loyalty and related behavioural outcomes. However, rather than operating in isolation, recent studies show that their

effects are interdependent, context-sensitive, and often mediated or moderated by psychological, cultural, and relational factors.

A key strand of literature emphasises the experiential foundations of brand authenticity. Gao and Shen (2024) demonstrate that sensory brand experience significantly enhances brand loyalty through both direct and indirect pathways, with brand attitude emerging as a stronger mediator than brand-self connection. This challenges the assumption that emotional self-brand connection is always the dominant mechanism of loyalty formation. However, Rodrigues *et al.* (2024) provide a complementary but more context-sensitive perspective, showing that perceived brand authenticity (PBA) mediates the relationship between brand experience (BE) and brand love (BL), and is further shaped by relationship intensity and self-authenticity. This creates a conceptual tension: while Gao and Shen (2024) suggest emotional self-brand connection may be less crucial in some contexts, Rodrigues *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that self-authenticity and relational intensity significantly strengthen authenticity outcomes, particularly in culturally diverse settings. Together, these findings suggest that emotional attachment is not uniformly essential but may be contingent on cultural and relational conditions.

A second major stream of research conceptualises brand authenticity as a multidimensional construct influencing loyalty and related behavioural outcomes. Sun *et al.* (2024) identify consistency, originality, reliability, naturalness, and advertisement veracity as key sub-dimensions of brand authenticity, with originality exerting the strongest influence on brand attachment, loyalty, willingness to pay a premium, and forgiveness. Similarly, El-Naghi *et al.* (2023) confirm that brand authenticity exerts a significant positive effect on brand evangelism in athletic footwear, reinforcing its role in driving consumer advocacy behaviours. However, Oenica and Maulida (2024) present a more conditional view, showing that brand authenticity directly influences brand loyalty for local brands but not for global brands, where perceived value becomes a necessary precursor. This divergence suggests that authenticity may function as a direct driver of loyalty in culturally embedded or local contexts but operate indirectly in global or psychologically distant brand environments.

The mediating role of perceived value introduces further complexity and inconsistency. Femina and Santhi (2024) show that hedonic and symbolic value dimensions significantly influence attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, while functional value shows no significant effect. In contrast, Fan and Zainol (2022) find that perceived value positively influences both customer satisfaction and loyalty without distinguishing between value dimensions, suggesting a more uniform effect. Papadopoulou *et al.* (2023) further extend this debate by demonstrating that perceived value mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand forgiveness, which subsequently influences purchase intentions, highlighting a sequential mediation pathway. These mixed findings indicate a lack of consensus on whether perceived value should be conceptualised as a multidimensional construct with differential effects or as a generalised predictor of loyalty outcomes.

The relationship between brand experience and brand authenticity is also marked by both convergence and divergence. Tran and Nguyen (2022) establish that brand experience significantly enhances perceived brand authenticity and contributes to customer satisfaction, brand equity, and brand loyalty. However, Almohaimmeed (2020) provides a more nuanced view, showing that while

sensory, emotional, and behavioural brand experience dimensions significantly influence satisfaction and electronic word of mouth (eWOM), intellectual experience has no significant effect. This suggests that not all experiential dimensions contribute equally to brand outcomes. Xu *et al.* (2024) further complicate this relationship by showing that product transparency influences brand perceptions such as innovation and reliability, but these effects are moderated by product typicality, product claims, and regulatory focus. This implies that authenticity-related perceptions are not only experiential but also situationally constructed.

Beyond loyalty and satisfaction outcomes, several studies highlight broader relational and behavioural consequences of brand authenticity. Tanaka *et al.* (2024) show that brand authenticity enhances positive word-of-mouth, particularly when mediated by perceived commitment to brand origin and amplified by consumers' evaluation of craftsmanship passion. Similarly, Xu *et al.* (2021) demonstrate that green brand authenticity influences electronic word-of-mouth intention through brand trust, with self-concept consistency acting as a moderator. These findings reinforce the importance of trust and identity alignment as key mechanisms through which authenticity operates. Al Meshal *et al.* (2020) also confirm significant relationships among brand authenticity, perceived value, social influence, and purchase intention, suggesting that authenticity is embedded within broader social and normative consumption frameworks.

Despite these contributions, the literature reveals several unresolved tensions. First, there is no consensus on whether brand authenticity operates primarily as a direct determinant of loyalty (Sun *et al.*, 2024; El-Naghi *et al.*, 2023) or as an indirect influence through mediators such as perceived value, trust, and forgiveness (Papadopoulou *et al.*, 2023; Xu *et al.*, 2021). Second, the role of emotional attachment remains contested: while Rodrigues *et al.* (2024) and Sun *et al.* (2024) emphasise strong identity and emotional bonds as central to authenticity outcomes, Gao and Shen (2024) suggest that loyalty can still emerge without strong self-brand connection in certain contexts. Third, there is inconsistency in how perceived value is conceptualised, with Femina and Santhi (2024) emphasising differentiated value dimensions, while Fan and Zainol (2022) treat it as a unified construct influencing both satisfaction and loyalty.

The empirical evidence suggests that brand authenticity is a multidimensional and context-dependent construct whose effects on loyalty are mediated by experiential, cognitive, and value-based mechanisms. However, most studies have been conducted in luxury goods, technology, tourism souvenirs, and Western or Asian markets, limiting their applicability to service-intensive and developing economy contexts.

Accordingly, the present study builds on and departs from existing literature in three key ways. First, it integrates brand message consistency, perceived customer value, brand transparency, and brand experience into a unified model of brand authenticity within the hospitality industry. Second, it responds to inconsistencies in prior findings by simultaneously examining both direct and indirect effects of brand authenticity on customer loyalty. Third, it extends Brand Authenticity Theory and Customer Perceived Value Theory by applying them to the hospitality sector in Edo State, Nigeria, thereby contributing a context-specific and service-based extension of existing theoretical frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The cross-sectional approach is appropriate because data were collected from respondents at a single point in time to examine the relationship between brand authenticity components and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. The survey research design enables the researcher to collect large amounts of data from a defined population efficiently and cost-effectively. It also allows for the use of structured instruments such as questionnaires, which are suitable for quantitative analysis and hypothesis testing.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises 210 customers of selected hotels in Edo State. These customers were considered suitable for the study because they possess firsthand experience and knowledge of the hotels' branding practices and service delivery. As active consumers of hotel services, they are in a better position to assess how brand authenticity influences their loyalty and continued patronage. Therefore, customers serve as reliable sources of information for examining the relationship between brand authenticity and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. The hotels included in the study were selected from four-star and five-star hotels in Edo State. These categories of hotels were chosen because they maintain established branding practices and standardized service delivery. The selected hotels are registered and operational hotels that were also accessible to the researcher and willing to permit data collection.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for the study was 138 respondents, determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula. A simple random sampling technique was employed to give each hotel customers an equal chance of being selected, thereby ensuring objectivity and representativeness of the sample. This method reduces selection bias and enhances the generalizability of the results within the study area.

Methods of Data Collection

Data were collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire, which was developed based on the research objectives and existing literature. The structured questionnaire format allows for uniformity in responses and facilitates easy coding and analysis. The questionnaires were self-administered with the assistance of trained research assistants who ensured that respondents understood the questions and provided honest answers. The data collection process was conducted in person to maximize response rates and data completeness.

Measurement of Variables

All variables in the study were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (5)*. This scale was chosen because it is simple to use, easy for

respondents to understand, and effective in capturing the degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The key variables measured include: brand message consistency, perceived customer value, brand transparency, brand experience and customer loyalty. The Likert scale enhances the quantification of subjective opinions and facilitates statistical analysis using parametric tests.

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, both content and face validity were assessed. The questionnaire was reviewed by academic experts in marketing and hospitality management to ensure it adequately covered the research variables and aligned with the study's objectives. Their feedback was incorporated to enhance the clarity and relevance of the instrument. Reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method, whereby the questionnaire was administered twice to a small group of respondents (not included in the final sample) at an interval of two weeks. The results from both administrations were compared using the Pearson correlation coefficient. A high correlation (above 0.70 in Table 1) indicated that the instrument consistently measured what it intended to measure.

Table 1: Reliability test for all items in the Questionnaire

S/N	Variables	Alpha (α) value	No of Items
1	Brand Message Consistency	0.74	4
2	Perceived Customer Value	0.73	4
3	Brand Transparency	0.75	4
4	Brand Experience	0.81	4
5	Customer Loyalty	0.77	4

Source: Analysis of field Survey, 2026

Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and percentages were used to summarize and describe the demographic characteristics and general response patterns. To test the research hypotheses and examine the relationship between brand authenticity variables and customer loyalty, multiple linear regression analysis was employed. This inferential technique is appropriate because it assesses the predictive power of multiple independent variables on a single dependent variable. The use of regression analysis also allows for the determination of the strength and direction of each relationship, which aligns with the study's objective of identifying which components of brand authenticity significantly influence customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State.

RESULTS

Data Presentation

Out of the total 138 questionnaires distributed, 135 were returned and found usable for analysis. This represents a response rate of approximately 97.8%. The high response rate indicates a strong level of participation and engagement from the respondents, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the study's findings. The exceptionally high return rate was attributed to the use of trained research assistants and the on-site administration and retrieval of questionnaires within the selected hotels, which helped to minimize non-response and ensure that most respondents completed and returned the instrument promptly. Consequently, the high response rate reduced the likelihood of non-response bias and ensured that the sample adequately represented the target population in the hospitality industry in Edo State.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 135)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	60.7
	Female	53	39.3
Age Group	18 – 25 years	24	17.8
	26 – 35 years	47	34.8
	36 – 45 years	39	28.9
	46 years and above	25	18.5
Educational Qualification	SSCE	9	6.7
	Diploma/NCE	23	17.0
	Bachelor's Degree/HND	70	51.9
	Postgraduate Degree	33	24.4
Years of Experience	Less than 1 year	19	14.1
	1 – 3 years	47	34.8
	4 – 6 years	41	30.4
	Over 6 years	28	20.7

Source: Analysis of field Survey, 2026

The demographic profile of the 135 respondents in Table 2 presents the characteristics of customers of selected hotels in Edo State. The results show a relatively balanced gender distribution among customers, with 60.7% male and 39.3% female, indicating that male customers slightly dominate the sample. In terms of age distribution, the majority of the customers fall within the 26–35 years category (34.8%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (28.9%). Customers aged 18–25 years account for 17.8%, while those aged 46 years and above represent 18.5%. This suggests that hotel patronage in the study area is largely driven by young and middle-aged adults who are typically more active in hospitality consumption. Regarding educational attainment, more than half of the

customers hold a Bachelor's Degree or Higher National Diploma (51.9%), while 24.4% possess postgraduate qualifications. Those with Diploma/NCE account for 17.0%, and 6.7% have SSCE. This indicates that the customers are generally well-educated, which may influence their expectations and perceptions of brand authenticity in hotel services. In terms of experience with hotel patronage, 34.8% of the customers have 1–3 years of experience, 30.4% have 4–6 years, 20.7% have over 6 years, while 14.1% have less than one year of experience. This distribution shows that most respondents are not first-time users but have moderate to long-term exposure to hotel services.

Table 3: Brand Authenticity and Customer Loyalty

Model	Coefficients ^a					Collinearity Statistics	
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
	B	Std. Error	Beta				
1 (Constant)	-.306	1.326		-.231	.818		
Brand message consistency	.182	.068	.165	2.687	.008	.755	1.325
Perceived customer value	.294	.066	.282	4.452	.000	.711	1.407
Brand transparency	.378	.072	.394	5.268	.000	.509	1.964
Brand experience	.157	.076	.162	2.078	.040	.470	2.126

a. Dependent Variable: Customer loyalty

Source: Analysis of field Survey, 2026

The results from the regression analysis in Table 3 indicated that all four independent variables—brand message consistency, perceived customer value, brand transparency, and brand experience—have a significant positive effect on customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. Specifically, brand message consistency ($\beta = 0.165$, $p = 0.008$), perceived customer value ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.000$), and brand transparency ($\beta = 0.394$, $p = 0.000$) show strong positive associations with customer loyalty, with brand transparency having the highest standardized coefficient, indicating it has the greatest impact among the variables. Additionally, brand experience ($\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.040$) also significantly influences customer loyalty. The tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values suggest that multicollinearity is not a concern, as all VIF values are below the critical threshold of 10.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

		ANOVA ^a				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	191.996	4	47.999	55.330	.000 ^b
	Residual	112.775	130	.867		
	Total	304.770	134			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer loyalty

b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand experience, Brand message consistency, Perceived customer value, Brand transparency

Source: Analysis of field Survey, 2026

The ANOVA results in Table 4 indicated that the overall regression model is significant in predicting customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. The *F*-statistic of 55.330 with a *p*-value of 0.000 confirms that the model as a whole explains a significant portion of the variance in customer loyalty. This suggests that brand experience, brand message consistency, perceived customer value, and brand transparency collectively have a meaningful impact on customer loyalty.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.794 ^a	.630	.619	.931

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand experience, Brand message consistency, Perceived customer value, Brand transparency

Source: Analysis of field Survey, 2026

The model summary in Table 5 revealed that the regression model has a strong fit with the data, as indicated by the R-squared value of 0.630. The R-squared value of 0.630 means that approximately 63% of the variation in customer loyalty can be explained by the model, demonstrating a good level of explanatory power. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.619, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, also supports the model's robustness.

Discussion of Results

The results indicated that brand message consistency significantly enhances customer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State ($\beta = 0.165$, $p = 0.008$). This corresponds with Gao and Shen (2024), who highlighted that a constant sensory brand experience directly and indirectly fosters brand loyalty. While emphasising sensory elements, their conclusion highlights that uniformity in brand representation enhances brand trust and loyalty. Tanaka et al. (2024) demonstrate that consistent

messaging grounded in brand authenticity amplifies word-of-mouth, a behavioural dimension of loyalty, particularly when it underscores the brand's cultural and historical foundations.

Research indicated that perceived customer value significantly enhances customer loyalty within the hospitality industry in Edo State ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.000$). Oenica and Maulida (2024) discovered that perceived value mediates the connection between brand authenticity and loyalty for international brands. Femina and Santhi (2024) demonstrated that hedonic and social value aspects positively affect both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty within the luxury automobile sector, affirming the multifaceted nature of customer value. Papadopoulou *et al.* (2023) further established that functional, emotional, and social values modulate the influence of authenticity on purchase intention and forgiveness, which are critical indications of loyalty.

The results indicated that brand transparency significantly enhances consumer loyalty in the hospitality industry in Edo State ($\beta = 0.394$, $p = 0.000$). Xu *et al.* (2024) conducted a series of tests demonstrating that product transparency enhances brand attitude, perceived innovation, and perceived reliability, which are antecedents of brand loyalty. El-Naghi *et al.* (2023) discovered that perceived brand authenticity, which encompasses transparency, fosters brand evangelism, a behavioural aspect of loyalty.

The findings indicated that brand experience significantly enhances consumer loyalty within the hospitality industry in Edo State ($\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.040$). Gao and Shen (2024) demonstrated that sensory brand experience directly and indirectly influences brand loyalty, particularly when mediated by brand attitude and brand-self connection. Rodrigues *et al.* (2024) established that brand experience affects perceived brand authenticity and brand affection, hence enhancing loyalty to high-tech firms. Ligaraba *et al.* (2024) observed that brand authenticity and image, influenced by experiences, affect brand choice, a precursor to loyalty, among luxury shoe purchasers.

Conclusion

The study concludes that brand authenticity—through message consistency, perceived customer value, transparency, and customer experience—plays a critical role in enhancing customer loyalty in the hospitality sector in Edo State. Each of these components contributes significantly and positively to customers' perceptions of and commitment to hospitality brands. Therefore, maintaining an authentic brand presence is essential for building long-term customer relationships and for competitive advantage in the industry. However, the study was limited to data obtained from customers of selected four-star and five-star hotels in Edo State, without incorporating the perspectives of employees or management staff who are directly involved in implementing branding strategies. As such, future studies may replicate the research using employee- or management-sourced data to corroborate, extend, or provide deeper insights into the present findings regarding brand authenticity and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry.

Recommendations

- i. Hospitality businesses should ensure consistent and coherent brand messaging across all communication channels to build trust, reinforce brand identity, and maintain a unified customer perception.
- ii. Hotels should continuously deliver and communicate customer value through personalized services, loyalty programs, and customer-centric innovations to enhance customer satisfaction and foster repeat patronage.
- iii. Management should prioritize brand transparency by openly sharing company values, service standards, and business practices to build credibility and emotional engagement with customers.
- iv. Hotel operators should invest in enhancing the overall customer experience by training staff, upgrading facilities, and integrating customer feedback into service improvements to strengthen brand perception and loyalty.

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